

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Last Train to London



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Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series

“Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series” is a series made up of self-contained stories. A new episode is released each month. The series is published in English as well as in German, and is only available in e-book form.

The Authors

Matthew Costello (US-based) is the author of a number of successful novels, including *Vacation* (2011), *Home* (2014) and *Beneath Still Waters* (1989), which was adapted by Lionsgate as a major motion picture. He has written for The Disney Channel, BBC, SyFy and has also designed dozens of bestselling games including the critically acclaimed *The 7th Guest*, *Doom 3*, *Rage* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Neil Richards has worked as a producer and writer in TV and film, creating scripts for BBC, Disney, and Channel 4, and earning numerous Bafta nominations along the way. He's also written script and story for over 20 video games including *The Da Vinci Code* and *Starship Titanic*, co-written with Douglas Adams, and consults around the world on digital storytelling.

His writing partnership with NYC-based Matt Costello goes back to the late 90's and the two have written many hours of TV together. *Cherringham* is their first crime fiction as co-writers.

Main Characters

Jack Brennan is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife a year ago. Being retired, all he wants is peace and quiet. Which is what he hopes to find in the quiet town of Cherringham, UK. Living on a canal boat, he enjoys his solitude. But soon enough he discovers that something is missing — the challenge of solving crimes. Surprisingly, Cherringham can help him with that.

Sarah Edwards is a web designer who was living in London with her husband and two kids. Two years ago, he ran off with his sexy American boss, and Sarah's world fell apart. With her children she moved back to her home town, laid-back Cherringham. But the small town atmosphere is killing her all over again — nothing ever happens. At least, that's what she thinks until Jack enters her life and changes it for good or worse ...

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Last Train to London



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1. A Bump in the Night

Otto Brendl woke with a start.

He'd been dreaming, dreaming of home far away and a long time ago. But now he was wide awake, his head instinctively raised just inches from the pillow so that he could hear better, his eyes staring into the pitch darkness, trying to make out the shapes of his familiar bedroom.

He was sweating.

From fear? he asked himself.

No.

It's July - even here in England it gets hot in July.

But he knew it wasn't the summer heat that had woken him. He'd heard a noise downstairs. A creak on the floorboard in the kitchen. His little burglar alarm, that loose floorboard - he had never fixed it.

A good thing too. Living alone all these years, always afraid of a break-in, even though he never kept any of his stock in the house.

Slowly he swung his legs out from under the duvet and onto the carpet.

Reaching for his walking stick, he leaned firmly on it and stood up, his knees creaking. Now that his eyes were getting used to the darkness he could make out the familiar shape of the dressing table and the half-open door.

He picked up his house keys from the dressing table. Then he went through the doorway, bare feet padding silently on the carpet, and stood still on the landing, moving his head slowly from side to side trying to hear more. He held his breath and concentrated on the sounds of the house, listening out for anything unusual.

No sound. As if from nowhere a cool trickle of air caught the side of his neck: a draught. There was no doubt about it. A window had been opened. Or a door.

Downstairs.

So someone had tried to get into the house. Or maybe ... *they were still in the house.*

If it were burglars they would be disappointed. They would find no silver, no gold – although he was a jeweller by profession. He was old, but he wasn't a fool: he kept no valuables in the little cottage – no conventional valuables anyway. Certainly nothing the average thief would be attracted to.

But there were things that a burglar might take almost by accident, not realising the value they held – for Otto. Objects that had – what did they call it? – *sentimental* value. A burglar might take them, throw them in a bag, and tomorrow swap them for a few pounds in some backstreet junk shop. Leaving him weeping at their loss.

He headed for the stairs, suddenly determined that whoever was down there was not going to get away with it. He felt a rush of anger.

"Who's there?" he shouted, his voice filling the stillness. "I've called the police, they're on their way."

His hand firmly clasped on the smooth banister, he took the stairs as fast as he could, tapping the stick on each step in the darkness.

"I know you're down there," he called again as he reached the wooden floor of the hallway.

His hand fumbled for the light switch – he flicked it on, almost flinching at the brightness, half expecting a man to be there, readying himself for some violent attack ...

But the hallway was empty. He listened again. He could still feel the draught, but there was no sound.

He walked silently into the kitchen and turned on the light. The back door was just ajar.

Someone had definitely been in.

Perhaps they were still in the house?

Otto knew he had locked up before he went to bed. He had done every single night of the twenty-four years he had lived in Cherringham: as regular as clockwork – *well, I'm a jeweller, what do you expect?*

But someone – someone very clever, for these were good locks – had slipped into the house while he was asleep. Why? He must check on the *children*.

He gently closed the back door, then turned and headed back down the hallway.

"If you are in the house," he called out again, "There is still time to make your escape before the police come and we will say no more of it."

He said all this as much to strengthen his own spirits as to scare away the intruder.

At the end of the hallway was the sitting room. He switched on the light and scanned the room. Spotless, as usual. Nothing taken – not even the jar of pound coins he kept for the parking machine in the village. He turned and approached the most important room in the house – the little box room.

He tried the door handle. It was locked: a good sign.

Holding his ring of house keys in one hand, he carefully went through them until he found the right key. He inserted the key in the lock and opened the door.

He flicked the light switch, still prepared for the worst.

And then breathed a deep sigh of relief.

There on the shelves, in their velvet-lined cases, were his puppets, their glass eyes staring sightlessly back at him, their bright colours vivid in the electric light. His Kasperle, his Petrouchka, his wonderful Kersa King and Queen.

His children were safe.

Whoever had broken into his little cottage had not been interested in the puppets. His precious collection, gathered in markets and auctions across Europe over the years, was