

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

The Secret of Combe Castle



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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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The Secret of Combe Castle



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Written by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards

Edited by Victoria Pepe

Project management: Lori Herber

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1. A Shocking Event

“Oswald!”

Oswald FitzHenry was about to pull off his wellies, still slimy wet. The mucky pools that always formed in the castle dungeons after a heavy rain were — if anything — getting worse.

Not that there was anything he could do about it.

Sealing up all that stone?

With their cash flow?

With receipts at the ‘Combe Castle Heritage site and House of Oddities’ plummeting?

No wonder the bank wants its pound of flesh at the end of the month, he thought.

Regular trips to London and dining out had long been sacrificed just to keep the place running and get food on the table regularly.

He sighed and turned to face his wife, Edwina. She sat propped up on pillows, clutching a hot water bottle, peering at him over the top of her reading glasses.

She had barked at him in a way that Oswald imagined would cause a stag to freeze in its tracks, ready for a welcome blast to the head.

Anything better than that voice aimed at you.

Oswald knew exactly what was coming. He was about to be rebuked for coming to the draughty bedroom in the castle ‘tower’ with his wet wellies.

“Just what on earth do you think you are *doing?*”

He smiled haplessly.

One thing Oswald had learned in his long years of wedded bliss was that it was not wise to use sarcasm in any riposte to his spouse.

“I was about to,” he said as if it was the wrong answer in a quiz, “take my wellies off. Still so bloody wet down there —”

“Oswald! Language, please! This is my *boudoir*.”

He nodded.

Of course it was. This was the only room that had heating on a dependable basis, the only room they could afford to heat.

He mumbled. “Sorry dear.”

“I mean, what in heaven’s name are you doing with those sopping wet boots anyway? You weren’t thinking of taking them off here, actually *leaving* them there, were you?”

Now Oswald searched his memory bank for the answer least likely to produce another vocal volley.

“Don’t know really, dear, I suppose ... I forgot. I can—”

Now Edwina leaned forward, her head and shoulder supported by the mound of pillows.

“Well you can jolly well take them straight downstairs again. Which is just as well, because I do believe I didn’t hear you check ‘the rooms’ tonight.”

He nodded.

He knew she would ask about that, about checking ‘the rooms.’

By ‘rooms’ he knew she meant ...

The Odditorium.

His pride and joy.

The warren of chambers devoted to the castle’s long and honourable history of incarceration, torture, and execution.

The rooms also featured the only bit of wiring that really needed to be checked each evening.

To confirm that things were indeed shut down.

They hosted the castle’s grisly electric displays during business hours. But at night it was a hell of a lot safer to have them totally off — if a fire broke out the whole building was a death trap.

“Did you forget?”

He shook his head as if disappointed in his own lapse.

“I — don’t know dear. I think I got caught up down in the dungeons, and ...”

“Well, what a stroke of luck you’ve still got your wellies on. Now go and check that the displays are properly shut down, timers, lights — everything.”

Oswald watched her fall back onto the pillows, her work done. “And then perhaps I can try and get some sleep. Though quite how, I really don’t know.”

Oswald knew what was worrying her.

He had shown her the latest notes that had come in the post.

Grubby things, he thought. *In fact — grubby people who keep sending them.*

People who either didn’t like the castle or simply wanted them to sell up so that something less grisly could take its place.

Something less grisly, he thought, *and probably less entertaining!*

A shopping mall! Retirement homes! Or worse — what did they call ‘em these days ...? Social housing!

Contradiction in bloody terms that was. Anti-social housing they should call it!

He raised a hand in the air, finger pointed to the turret roof of their bedroom — a sign of commitment.

“I shall go and check now.”

He knew those notes had really upset Edwina. So double-checking that the place was all shut down, nice and tight, would be even more important to her tonight.

Although — rather like removing the wet wellies — he didn’t quite share her concerns to the same extent.

They were only nasty notes after all. Sticks and stones

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