

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Trail of Lies



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Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series

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

About the Book

Last year at Cherringham High, and for three girls that means facing the School Summer Challenge, a grueling fifty-mile hike across the Cotswolds, through thick woods, over steep hills, camping each night under the stars. But when one of them disappears in the middle of the night and is found dead in the morning, most believe a terrible accident has taken place. Was it really an accident? Jack and Sarah aren't convinced — and soon discover that secrets and lies can have terrible consequences ...and always leave a trail ...

Main Characters

Jack Brennan is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife three years 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. Three 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 ...

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.

Matthew Costello
Neil Richards

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Trail of Lies



»be« by BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT

Digital original edition

»be« by Bastei Entertainment is an imprint of Bastei Lübbe AG

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Germany

Written by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards

Edited by Eleanor Abraham

Project management: Kathrin Kummer

Cover illustration © shutterstock: Volodymyr Baleha | suns07butterfly; ©

iStockphoto: Raylipscombe

Cover design: Thomas Krämer

eBook production: Jilzov [Digital Publishing](#), Düsseldorf

ISBN 978-3-7325-5309-9

www.be-ebooks.com

Twitter: [@be_ebooks_com](https://twitter.com/be_ebooks_com)

www.facebook.com/Cherringham

1. Homeward Bound

“You can do it, Holly! Just *don’t* look down — look straight at me, I’ll grab your hand.”

Holly Wilson stared ahead, eyes locked onto her friend Amy — already at the other end of the flimsy rope bridge — the girl looking so small against the towering trees.

Amy — smiling, so confident, so reassuring.

Just a few short steps away. Like crossing a room, really. What could be easier?

But then she looked down, through the knotted grid of swaying rope — in truth, not a massive drop, twenty feet or so — into a shallow stream.

But enough to hurt if you landed badly. Twisted ankle, knee banged up.

And then this hike would suddenly change.

And twenty feet might just as well be a hundred if you were as scared of heights as she was.

Holly could already feel her heart rate climbing — and her breathing coming faster.

Last thing she needed now was one of her panic attacks.

Bad enough when one hit as she walked the corridors of their school.

But here ... now?

She shut her eyes, reaching into herself for all her strategies that she had been taught, that — sometimes — could keep the beast at bay.

Breathe deep and slow. Focus. Take control of the fear. Own it. Don’t even try to push it away.

“Oh, *do* come on, Holly! God! It’s not exactly the effing Amazon rainforest, now is it?”

Jasmine's voice, from right behind her. "And you're hardly likely to slip through the gaps, are you?"

Jasmine.

Just what she didn't need. That voice in her ear.

Holly turned, just in time to see Jasmine, hands on hips, rolling her eyes. Then — a taunting grin.

"Oh — sorry — I mean, with your backpack and everything, there's no way you can fall through. Right?"

Holly saw another eye-roll. Jasmine's nasty smile broadened.

Nice attempt at a recovery, thought Holly. But I know what you meant, Jasmine.

You meant "Holly you're so fricking fat you couldn't fall through that bridge if you tried."

Then, another voice, pulling her back from Jasmine's cruel words.

"Come on, Holly," said Amy. "You can do this."

Holly turned back to look at Amy. Good, reassuring Amy — on the other side of the stream.

"Think of all the other scary stuff we've got through on this trip. Stuff you've aced. And this is the last bit — okay? Here on in, it's just woodland trails, couple of hills ..."

"And one more night in the sodding tent," said Jasmine.

"One more night of your cooking too," Amy shouted back.

"Ooh, nasty, Amy — no chocolate or biscuits for you tonight," said Jasmine.

"Keep your chocolate," said Amy. "Do I care?"

"Got other treats hidden away, hmm?" said Jasmine.

"Me to know, you to cry over," said Amy.

Holly looked from one girl to the other, trying to keep up with this little exchange, feeling that there was stuff between the two that she didn't know about.

But also, with the distraction, now feeling her panic subsiding, as the focus switched away from her onto Amy.

It was always so hard to have people looking at her.

*Imagining what they thought; what they whispered.
And knowing most of it, all in her head.*

She took a deep breath, checked the straps on her backpack — though they certainly didn't need a re-check.

And then, excuses for any hesitation gone, she stepped forward onto the wobbly bridge.

That first brave step.

"Hey! Way to go!" said Amy. "Go Holly! Go Holly!"

One step. Then another. Eyes locked on Amy.

Hands gripping the guide ropes tight.

The bridge now really swaying with every step, below her water rushing over rocks.

The panic back ... full-on ... rising again.

Oh God, I'm going to fall, I'm going to fall and die.

"Just two more steps and you're home, Holly. Look at me. Look at me," said Amy.

Holly forced her eyes back up from the rushing stream and focused on Amy again — so solid, so confident, like a real explorer, one hand locked onto a tree trunk, the other hand reaching out to her now.

Mechanically, Holly shuffled her feet once more, moving her hands along the rope guides, nearly there, just one more step ...

Releasing the rope guide. Reaching out.

And then her hand locking onto Amy's hand, as she stepped forward onto the rock, feeling Amy's arms wrap around her, Amy's cheek pressed against hers. Amy's beautiful long hair across her face.

"Go girl!" said Amy, pulling back.

Holly looked into her grinning face — those eyes so dark and deep and trusting — and smiled back.

"About bloody time," said Jasmine, hurrying behind her.

Holly turned to see Jasmine already across.

"Oh, sorry. Just kidding," she said. "Um, nice one, Holly. Now then, get the bloody map out. And how about we figure out where the hell we go now?"