

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Death Trap



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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

When Edward Townes — famed writer of novels about knights and maids, and castles and conquering — attends a medieval launch party for his latest book, he arrives ready to do more than celebrate. But party night brings a blizzard, a once-in-a-century storm that sees Townes staggering home, alone ... only to be found dead the next day. With Cherringham cut-off and the blizzard still raging, Jack and Sarah start investigating. Their questions reveal that many of those still stranded in the dark village have secrets. And Townes' killer is still in the village ...

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.

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1. A Big Chill

The snowy billows that had greeted Jane Ellingham as she walked out of the door of the Bell Hotel had — seemingly with each step — grown fiercer, thicker; turning from puffy white flakes to something heavier, colder.

And as she took her uncertain steps down Cherringham High Street, she could see that what had been just a thin layer of white was already deepening.

I'm too old for this, she thought.

With the weather reports turning more dire by the hour, she couldn't believe that publisher Humphrey Lane hadn't just *cancelled* the damn event.

What was he thinking — with people trekking from London, intending to get back tonight? What hope for them arranging for a last-minute room in the Bell Hotel (now fully booked, she imagined)?

If the predictions were accurate, there was worse to come, and this snow — constant, fed by steady gusts — was only just beginning.

And for what? A book launch for Edward Townes.

She might be his agent, but weren't his book launch days long gone?

With such steadily declining sales figures for his rather tired historical series — *The Outlaw Knight* — why this party in Townes's home village? In Cherringham of all places? Probably charming and all that — during daylight, on a summer's day — but not now with a blizzard on offer!

No. This particular gala was shaping up to be torture for all involved.

But then, as she took a turn by the medieval church — its upper spire now almost hidden by the fog created by the

swirling snow — she wondered if Humphrey Lane had some other motivation for this party.

And was that the reason why he hadn't cancelled — fired off a text to all and sundry, saying, '*stay at home, nice and warm*'?

If he had, then maybe she could have weathered the storm back in London, with a gin martini — extra olives please — always done to perfection at the Charlotte Street Hotel bar.

And with the city probably less likely to get the brunt of the storm.

I mean, she thought, it is London after all!

What storm would even dare!

She took her steps carefully, until she stopped, glanced at the printout of the small map Lane had sent ahead.

And there, not too far from the church's graveyard — cheery place that! — Astley Hall. The barn-like building had been transformed into a miniature castle, complete with a faux turret — she guessed — at its top, pennants flapping wildly in the wind.

And Jane, now reaching out to the nearby stone wall that lined the path, was nearly there. Late for the party. Her coat thick with snow ...

*

She pushed open the heavy wooden door, and, she had to admit, it was a surreal moment.

A quick gust of blessed warmth from inside, a young woman — a girl, really — ready to take her coat, her bag, her broad-brimmed hat (also with a good quarter inch of snow on top).

But not just the heat, the light — candles *everywhere*, with the regular hall lights dimmed down.

And music ...

She guessed that's what it was. Hard to tell, as it competed with the usual hundred-decibel output of the gossiping book world.

More like someone with a bag of cats, alternately squeezing and prodding them to produce some bleating noise and howls; accompanied by others in costume thumping at tubby drums and tambourines.

Probably *completely* authentic, musical tastes being what they were in fourteenth century England. *Who knew?*

But after the sombre walk from the Bell Hotel to here, the sound, the candles — all rather bizarre.

And then, relieved of her coat, she looked around. The hall — all ancient beams and high ceiling. Stone pillars. Faux medieval tapestries on every wall. Even a couple of knights in armour standing in the corners.

And underfoot — a hard stone floor.

No way I'm dancing on that tonight, she thought, remembering the launch party she'd been to in Bloomsbury last week. God, her feet had hurt next morning.

As had her head.

She looked around at the crowd, sizing them up with all her forty years' experience of such events. A lot of locals, she guessed, but also many Londoners for sure, people she knew in the biz, and wenches — if that word was still in any way acceptable — in full low-cut costume, circling with champagne flutes and hors d'oeuvres.

King John's court: famous for its prosecco and canapés, of course. This crowd probably not so keen on authentic swan gizzards.

And before she could spy the honouree and perform her usual ritual of warmth and friendship — at least as much as any agent could summon after forty years of dealing with him — the host, Humphrey Lane had turned ...

And spotted her.

Dressed perfectly, dark blue suit — fashionably thin cut, and pulling it off despite his own advanced age. Vivid

yellow tie.

Bright eyes, big smile.

His party after all.

And now, looking over at her, eyes wide, as if she had simply materialised, unexpected.

A delight — his smile seemed to say, broadening as he hurried over to her.

And Jane Ellingham's first thought, *I really should tell him just how dreadful the weather is getting out there!*

*

"Jaaaane! You're here, darling!"

Obviously ...

"I was about to send the king's men out on a search party. Trouble finding us?"

She forced a smile. She and Humphrey Lane went way back — decades, not years.

Not for the first time, she noted that he looked, well, *good*, in that rather unfair way. Men got to wear their age so much more easily.

Dapper. Groomed.

Like Colin Firth playing the romantic lead with ingénues when middle-aged. All the sassy Helen Mirrens of the world did little to restore her own confidence, the years sapping away both shape and skin tone.

"Humphrey, have you looked outside?"

"Um, no. Got here early. Had to get the band and players sorted, food arranged, and all that."

"Players?"

"Oh, part of the entertainment! Some re-enactors to perform one or two little scenes of knight errantry!"

She was tempted to suggest that the added stage show might be less errantry and more error.

Still, *she* wasn't footing the bill.