

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Cliffhanger



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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 a hiker falls from a cliff edge while walking the Cotswolds Way, it seems like no accident. The more Jack and Sarah investigate the walkers on the trail that day, the more likely it seems that danger is still afoot. Is there a potential killer in this Cherringham tour group? And when will he or she strike again?

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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case!

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1. A Jolly Day Out

Will Goodchild pulled up in his eight-seater minibus right outside Huffington's, and checked his watch: 07:58 precisely.

He waited before turning the engine off — the day's weather forecast was just finishing on the radio. He listened carefully while scanning the sky for signs. So far so good — deep blue sky and light wind.

But he knew that his whole schedule for the day depended on clement weather.

"And most of the Midlands can expect sunny intervals with just the odd chance of a shower later..."

Perfect! he thought, turning off the engine. Nothing there to dampen the enthusiasm of my little band of walkers, for sure.

He climbed out of the driving seat, pausing for a second to enjoy the early warmth of the May sun, then walked round to the back and unlocked the rear double doors.

Even now, some two months into his new venture, it still gave him a thrill of pride to see the perfectly stencilled words on the vehicle: *Goodchild's Heritage Tours — Personally Guided Walks through Cotswolds History.*

Business so far had been positively booming — indeed, he was booked up right until the end of the summer.

At last it seemed, amazingly enough, that he'd found a way to make a living out of his passion for Cherringham's history. Much as he enjoyed writing books and pamphlets for the local tourist board, the meagre fees hardly covered his rent.

He pulled the doors wide, leaned into the van and opened the crate containing the special walkers'

backpacks, each one embossed with the *Goodchild Tours* logo.

"Morning Mr Goodchild," came a woman's voice from behind. He turned — to see Katie, one of the young waitresses from Huffington's, carrying a bakers' tray filled with wraps and sandwiches.

"Ah, Katie, wonderful timing," he said, taking the tray from her and resting it on the floor of the minibus. "No problems with the order?"

"Should all be there," said Katie. "Lunch for eight. The gluten-free and the vegan choices all marked. Cakes in the foil packs. Today's special — chocolate walnut. Think you said no nut allergies, so good there. And still warm!"

"Sounds delicious," said Will. "See you tomorrow, same time?"

"I'll be here," said Katie. "Beautiful day for a walk — do wish I could come with you!"

"Full house today," said Will. "But I'm thinking of doing some one-off Sunday specials in the summer — get a few more locals involved."

"Count me in," said Katie.

"I certainly will."

"Bye then," she said, and Will watched her head back to the little café which was already filling up with Monday-morning customers. He turned his attention back to the lunches.

Ten minutes later, and he'd labelled and packed each backpack with the correct lunches (as requested on the detailed email he had sent to his guests), water bottles, a quality Silva compass, maps, notes and finally — the new purple waterproofs (though with luck they wouldn't be required today).

He checked his watch again — 8.20. Ten minutes to rendezvous time.

He took out his clipboard with the names of this week's walkers.

An odd mix — but on the evidence of last night's drinks at the hotel, not a bad one. No obvious awkward customers and no peculiar behaviours that he felt were beyond his handling.

He ran through the list, putting faces to the names. First, the four Americans who had all elected to stay in the Bell Hotel: Danny and Julie Klein, and Steve and Melissa Arnold. *Ah yes*. Danny: the real estate man, all slick, shiny, with a laugh like a big dog barking. And Julie: his wife, rather weak smile, stupendously unfit, and clearly long-suffering.

That could be a bit of a problem.

Then their good friends Steve and Melissa. Steve: retired apparently, morose-looking, and a tad clingy. *Wants to talk golf all the time*. Melissa: younger, bit — well — brassy, and (he'd noticed straight away, couldn't miss it!) a talent for putting away the martinis, apparently not doing much damage in the process.

Wandering hands too, thought Will, remembering how she touched everyone she spoke to. Not that anyone's hands ever wander my way, he thought. That will be the day, hmm, Will?

Next, the German woman, Stephanie Bruckner.

Will had resurrected his schoolboy German briefly the night before, in her honour, but it was clear that Stephanie's English was far superior — albeit, and interestingly — with a slight Irish accent. The two had chatted about her home town of Gelnhausen, a charming medieval centre which (to her surprise) Will had actually visited years ago as a student researching 11th-century German kings.

She also seemed to have a connection to Ireland though he hadn't quite figured out what. *Curious*.

Doubtless as the week progressed he'd learn more.

Will was always relieved to find somebody like Stephanie in the group — cheerful, happy to chat, and so

interested. In truth, he suspected she was also a bit of a party animal (if that was a phrase young people still used).

But as long as everybody turned up on time in the mornings Will didn't care about that.

Stephanie had chosen the cheaper option of staying at the Buckland twins' bed and breakfast, as had the other single traveller, a Ms Heidi Blake from Florida.

Will hadn't had much of a chance to talk to Heidi at the welcome drinks. But she, too, seemed genuinely informed about English history and keen to know more.

Just the kind of guest he liked!

And though, on the surface, Heidi seemed like the kind of pleasant, retired, suburban American who did their bit in the community and went to church on Sunday and all that, there was something about her that suggested she'd had an interesting past.

He suspected there was more to Heidi than first appeared, and he made a mental note to get to know her better during the week.

Which left just one guest at the end of the list — a local woman apparently, but not a name that Will had recognised: Susan Braithwaite. She'd signed on at the last minute, and given few details about herself apart from the basics demanded by the booking form.

So, a woman of mystery, he thought, putting the clipboard back in his own backpack and turning to look across the square to see if any of his group were approaching.

As he did so, he noticed a man across the street by the Angel, standing in the shadows of the alley that ran beside the pub, watching him.

A tall man in a tightly zipped winter jacket and hat.

Hmm. On a warm day like this.

There was something odd about the man, but Will couldn't quite put his finger on what.

Was it the way he was standing, staring?