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Neil Richards

# CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

## Murder on Thames



BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

left fork kept meandering its way down to the other villages that it lazily rolled by.

The mighty Thames, here but a sleepy river.

Brady had stopped. Once again, he had turned to stone. Standing stock-still, and looking across to the weir, his gaze was focused directly on the shallow waters where the stream frothed and bubbled.

She came abreast of her dog, reached down and gave his head a slow stroke.

“Don’t know what you see, boy. Maybe there are rabbits over there, on the other side, but—”

She stopped.

At first it was one of those moments, happening more now with age, where you see something and, as Lou increasingly knew, you say, “Oh, that’s a ...”

And you guess it's *this*, then, as you look at it closer, take a step nearer, you make another guess.

She did that now and saw what looked like a bit of cloth; shiny, sparkly, festive, glimmering even in this dull morning light, competing with the shimmering river water.

She moved closer and realized that she was looking at clothes.

A skirt of some kind. And something dull but still white. A blouse.

Her mind quickly filled in the details; perhaps a part of her even knew before she actually acknowledged it, what exactly she was looking at.

An area of muddy brown turned out to be a bowed head, chin to chest, face and eyes hidden.

And as that became clear, Lou slowly started to make sense of what she could see:

arms poking out of a blouse, one at a near horizontal to the body, fingers lazily pointing east, the other dangling in the rushing water, its hand hidden.

“Dear sweet God.” Lou said to herself.

Brady had been whimpering but at the sound of her voice turned to look at her. To Lou it seemed as though his eyes were sad, as if he knew this was wrong.

And though normally she would let her dog just bounce and gambol his way back to the village, racing to her small cottage just outside the main square, now she dug the leash out of her pocket and clipped it to Brady’s worn collar.

She wanted him beside her, even if he tugged and pulled as she made her way back to the village, to the police, to tell them what she had seen.

## 2. Sarah and Sammi

Sarah turned off the TV.

“All right you lot, now you’re late. Grab your bags, and lunches — fast — and let’s move.”

As she piled the cereal bowls in the sink, Sarah watched her two children, Chloe, thirteen, and Daniel, ten, drift slowly out towards the hall. Though they didn’t complain much about school, they certainly didn’t radiate eagerness in the morning.

And Chloe seemed to grow more secretive and quiet by the day.

*Reminds me of me*, Sarah thought. *What a handful I was*. She did a quick scan of the kitchen to make sure everything electric was off. Only a few weeks ago some little old

lady in one of the sheltered flats at the far end of the village had let a toaster turn her flat into ... toast.

She'd got into the habit of double-checking everything. *After all, look what happened to my lovely marriage. One minute a happy couple then all the cheating comes out, and suddenly here we are. A stereotype. Two kids. Single mum, of a certain age — whatever that was supposed to mean.* The children started trudging out of the little semi to the Rav4, one of the few things she was able to salvage from the wreck of her London life.

“You can have the car. And the remaining twelve payments,” Oliver had said with a grin. *Bastard.*

She pulled the front door tight and stepped over Chloe and Daniel's bikes. God, that lawn needed mowing. It was only a tiny