

# **RICHARD OSMAN**



**Bestselling  
author of  
The Thursday  
Murder Club**

# **We Solve Murders**

**\*\*\* A BRAND NEW SERIES \*\*\***

## About the Author

Richard Osman is an author, producer and television presenter. His first four novels, *The Thursday Murder Club*, *The Man Who Died Twice*, *The Bullet That Missed* and *The Last Devil To Die*, were multi-million-copy record-breaking bestsellers around the world. *We Solve Murders* is the first in a brand new series, while the Thursday Murder Club gang enjoy a brief holiday. He lives in London with his wife, Ingrid, and their cat, Liesl. The movie adaptation for TTMC, produced by Amblin Entertainment, will start filming in 2024.

**BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

**The Thursday Murder Club**

**The Man Who Died Twice**

**The Bullet That Missed**

**The Last Devil To Die**

Richard Osman

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WE SOLVE MURDERS



*To Janet Elizabeth Wright 1946–2023*  
*With love to fill a lifetime*

*You must leave as few clues as possible. That's the only rule.*

*You have to talk to people sometimes; it's inevitable. There are orders to be given, shipments to be arranged, people to be killed, etc., etc. You cannot exist in a vacuum, for goodness' sake.*

*You need to ring François Loubet? In an absolute emergency? You'll get a phone with a voice-changer built-in. And, by the way, if it's not an absolute emergency, you'll regret ringing very soon.*

*But most communication is by message or email. High-end criminals are much like millennials in that way.*

*Everything is encrypted, naturally, but what if the authorities break the code? It happens. A lot of very good criminals are in prison right now because a nerd with a laptop had too much time on their hands. So you must hide as well as you can.*

*You can hide your IP address – that is very easy. François Loubet's emails go through a world tour of different locations before being sent. Even a nerd with a laptop would never be able to discover from where they were actually sent.*

*But everyone's language leaves a unique signature. A particular use of words, a rhythm, a personality. Someone could read an email, and then read a postcard you sent in 2009 and know for a fact they were sent by the same person. Science, you see. So often the enemy of the honest criminal.*

*That's why ChatGPT has been such a godsend.*

*After writing an email, a text, anything really, you can simply run the whole thing through ChatGPT and it instantly deletes your personality. It flattens you out, irons your creases, washes you away, quirk by quirk, until you disappear.*

*'ChatGPT, rewrite in the style of a friendly English gentleman, please.'*  
*That is always Loubet's prompt.*

*Handy, because if these emails were written in François Loubet's own language, it would all become much more obvious. Too obvious.*

*But, as it stands, you might find a thousand emails, but you would still have no way of knowing where François Loubet was, and you would still have no way of knowing who François Loubet is.*

*You would, of course, know what François Loubet does, but there would be precious little you could do about it.*

## Part One

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FROM THE NEW FOREST TO SOUTH  
CAROLINA



It had *finally* happened.

Andrew Fairbanks had always known he would be famous one day. And that day – a quiet, sunny Tuesday in early August – had, at last, arrived.

The years of Instagram fitness videos had given him a following, sure, but nothing like this. This was *insane*.

There had been an on-off relationship with a minor pop singer, which had seen his picture in the papers from time to time. But not on the front pages like today.

The notoriety Andrew Fairbanks had chased for so long was finally his. His name on lips around the world. Trending on social media. That selfie on the yacht was everywhere. Andrew, shirtless and tanned, winking into the camera, the warm sun winking along behind him. His bottle of Krusher Energy Drink raised in a happy toast.

And the comments beneath the photo! The heart emojis, the fire emojis, the lust. Everything Andrew had ever dreamt of.

Some of the other comments might have dampened his spirits a little, however. ‘Gone too soon’, ‘So fit, RIP’, ‘So haunting to see that photo when you knew what was about to happen’ – but you couldn’t argue with the volume. Impressive traffic. In the offices of the *Love Island* production team, his photograph was passed around, and there were discussions about how perfect he might have been if only, well, *you know*.

Yes, finally, everybody knew Andrew Fairbanks. Or, as he was now more commonly known, ‘Tragic Instagram influencer, Andrew Fairbanks’.

So it wasn’t all upside. And, in fact, even that slim upside is starting to dim. It is Wednesday afternoon by now, and his name is already beginning to slip down the rankings. Other things are happening in the world. A baseball star has driven his pick-up into his ex-wife’s swimming pool. A

beauty vlogger has said something inappropriate about Taylor Swift. The conversation, like the tide, is turning.

Andrew Fairbanks had been found dead: shot in the head, tied to a rope and thrown from a yacht bobbing about in the Atlantic. There was no one else on the yacht, and no sign that anyone had ever been there, with the exception of a leather bag containing nearly one million dollars.

But none of this gives you the right to be famous more than a day or so. One day, perhaps, there might be a podcast about the case or, better still, a Netflix true-crime documentary, but, for now, Andrew's limelight is turning to dusk.

Soon Andrew Fairbanks will be just a figure in a photograph, holding a purple energy drink in front of a blue sea, a corpse in a South Carolina mortuary, and the odd 'Remember that guy that died on that yacht with all that money?'

Who killed him? Who knows? Someone or other, certainly, and social media has a lot of opinions on it. Why did they kill him? No idea – someone must have had their reasons, mustn't they? Jealous partner? Instagram fitness rival? Could be all sorts of explanations. Can you *believe* what this vlogger has said about Taylor Swift?

Just for the one day, though, what a ride it had been. If Andrew had still been alive, he would have been looking for a full-time manager. Get me a few more deals, protein bars, teeth-whitening clinics, perhaps I could launch my own vodka?

Yes, just for a day, everybody had wanted a piece of Andrew Fairbanks. Although, after the sharks had finished with him, there weren't that many pieces left.

And that's showbusiness.

‘What don’t you like about yourself?’ asks Rosie D’Antonio. She sits on an inflatable chair shaped like a throne, in a swimming pool shaped like a swan. ‘I always ask people.’

Amy Wheeler is sitting, bolt upright, on a garden chair at the poolside, the sun in her eyes and her gun within easy reach. She likes South Carolina. This hidden offshoot of it, at least. Early morning and the temperature in the nineties, an Atlantic breeze, and nobody, for the time being, trying to kill her. She hasn’t shot at anyone in a while, but you can’t have everything.

‘My nose, I suppose,’ says Amy.

‘What’s wrong with your nose?’ asks Rosie, sipping something green through a non-recyclable straw, her trailing hand rippling the water.

‘Don’t know,’ says Amy. She is impressed that Rosie D’Antonio is in full, perfect make-up while in the pool. How old is she? Sixty? Eighty? A mystery. The age on her file reads *Refused to disclose*. ‘It’s just wrong, when I look at it. It’s off.’

‘Get it done,’ says Rosie. ‘Bigger, smaller, whatever you think you need. Life’s too short to not like your nose. Hunger and famine are problems, or no Wi-Fi; noses aren’t a problem. What else?’

‘Hair,’ says Amy. She is in danger of relaxing. Feels it creeping up on her. Amy hates relaxing. Too much time to think. She prefers to *do*. ‘It never does what it’s told.’

‘I see *that*,’ says Rosie. ‘But it’s easily fixed. There’s a hair technician I use. She flies in from somewhere. Chile, I think. Five thousand dollars and your troubles are over. I’ll pay.’

‘And my ears are lopsided,’ says Amy.

Rosie tilts her head and paddles herself towards Amy, considering her very carefully. ‘I’m not seeing that. You have great ears. Like Goldie Hawn’s.’

‘I measured them with a ruler once,’ says Amy, ‘when I was at school. It’s only a millimetre, but I always see it. And my legs are too short for my body.’

Rosie nods, pushing herself back into the middle of the pool, where the sun is hitting hardest. ‘More to the point, though, Amy, what do you *like* about yourself?’

‘I’m English,’ says Amy. ‘I don’t like anything about myself.’

‘Yawn,’ says Rosie. ‘I used to be English too, and I got over it. Pick something.’

‘I think I’m loyal,’ says Amy.

‘That’s a good quality,’ agrees Rosie. ‘For a bodyguard.’

‘And my short legs give me a low centre of gravity,’ says Amy. ‘So I’m very good at fighting.’

‘There you go,’ Rosie nods. ‘Loyal, and very good at fighting.’

Rosie raises her face to the sun.

‘If someone does try to shoot me this week, do you have to dive in front of the bullet?’

‘That’s the idea,’ says Amy, without conviction. ‘Though that’s mainly in films.’

It’s hard to dive in front of a bullet, in Amy’s experience. They go very fast indeed.

‘Or in books, sure,’ says Rosie. ‘Would you like a joint? I’m going to have one?’

‘Best not,’ says Amy. ‘Maximum Impact gives us mandatory blood tests every three months, company policy. A single trace of any drug and I’m fired.’

Rosie gives a ‘fair enough’ grunt.

It’s not the most exciting job Amy has ever had, but it’s sunny, and she likes the client. Rosie D’Antonio, the world’s bestselling novelist, ‘if you don’t count Lee Child’. Her Spanish-style mansion on her own private island just off the coast of South Carolina. With her own personal chef.

For various operational reasons Amy once had to spend the best part of a month living inside an abandoned oil pipeline in Syria, so this is a step up. The chef brings her a plate of smoked salmon blinis. He’s not really a chef – he’s a former Navy SEAL called Kevin – but he is learning fast. Last night his bœuf bourguignon was a triumph. Rosie’s regular chef has been

given two weeks' leave. Amy, Rosie and Kevin, the Navy SEAL, are the only people on the island, and that's how it's going to stay for now.

'No one's allowed to kill me,' says Rosie. She has paddled over to the side of the pool, and is now rolling a cigarette. 'Except me.'

'And I won't let you,' says Amy.

'But someone might try to shoot me,' says Rosie. 'Given one never knows any more, the world being as it is and so on. So, if they *do* try, no jumping in front of the bullet, okay? Not on my account. Let them kill the old woman.'

Maximum Impact Solutions, Amy's employer, is the world's biggest close-protection agency, possibly the second biggest since Henk van Veen left and took half his clients with him. If someone steals from you, or someone wants to kill you, or if there is discontent among your private army, they are the people to call. Maximum Impact Solutions has many mottos, but 'Let them kill the old woman' is not one of them.

'I'm not going to let anybody kill you,' says Amy.

Amy remembers watching Rosie on the communal TV when she was growing up. Those shoulder pads, that attitude. It had meant a lot to Amy, seeing how strong a woman could be, while she slept each night curled up in a ball under her bed and dreamt of better days. Rosie will not die on her watch.

'What's that accent?' asks Rosie, taking the first drag on her joint. 'It's cute. Is it Manchester?'

'Watford,' says Amy.

'Eesh,' says Rosie. 'I've been gone too long. Tell me about Watford.'

'It's a town,' says Amy. 'In England.'

'I know that, Amy. Is it pretty?'

'It's not the first word I'd use,' says Amy. She is looking forward to ringing her father-in-law, Steve, later. It's a Friday, so he should be around. He'll get a kick out of hearing about Rosie. Strong women had certainly been his thing. Maybe they will be again one day.

Thinking about strong women makes Amy think about Bella Sanchez. And thinking about Bella Sanchez makes her think about Mark Gooch. And thinking about Mark Gooch makes her ...

And that's the problem right there, Amy, isn't it! When you relax, you *think*. None of that stuff is her business. Stop thinking: it never works out

for you. Hit things, drive fast, defuse explosives, but, for the love of God, don't *think*. Life isn't *school*.

'England is nuts,' says Rosie. 'In the eighties they loved me, then in the nineties they hated me, in the noughties they forgot me, in the twenty tens they remembered me, and now they love me again. I haven't changed a jot in all that time. You ever read any of my books, Amy the bodyguard?'

'No,' lies Amy. Everyone has read one of Rosie D'Antonio's books. Amy has been reading her books since she was a teenager. A social worker once handed one to her, a finger on their lips to warn Amy that this contraband was their little secret. And what a secret. The death, the glamour, the clothes, the blood. Shoulder pads and poison. But it's important not to fangirl a client. A bullet doesn't care how famous you are. Which actually *is* one of Maximum Impact Solutions' mottos.

Amy had been rereading *Death Pulls the Trigger* on the plane up here yesterday. They'd made a film of it with Angelina Jolie, but the book was better. Lots of sex with millionaires, lots of guns. Stuff Amy could relate to.

'You married?' Rosie asks. 'Kids?'

'Married, no kids,' says Amy.

'He a good guy? The husband?'

'Yeah, he is,' says Amy, thinking of Adam. 'As good as I am, anyway. I like him.'

Rosie nods. 'That's a good answer. Does he worry about you?'

'He doesn't like it when I get shot at,' says Amy. 'And once, in Morocco, I got attacked with a sword, and he cried.'

'Did you cry?'

'I haven't cried since I was twelve,' says Amy. 'I learnt not to.'

'That sounds healthy,' says Rosie. 'Can I put you in a book? Five six, blue eyes, blonde, never cries, kills bad guys?'

'No,' says Amy. 'I don't like publicity.'

'I promise not to mention your ears.'

Amy and her father-in-law try to talk every day. They've never really discussed it; it's just become a habit important to both of them. Well, it's a habit important to Amy, and she hopes it's important to Steve too. Occasionally they'll miss a day. For example, Amy had to stay completely quiet for twelve hours in that oil pipeline, on account of a hit squad, so on that day she had to make do with texting. Steve understands. The job is the job.

‘Do you get to choose what you wear?’ Rosie asks. ‘Or is it a uniform?’ Amy looks down at her combat fatigues and faded Under Armour T-shirt. ‘I choose.’

Rosie raises a questioning eyebrow. ‘Well, nobody’s perfect.’

Amy doesn’t like to leave it too long between calls, because you never knew what Steve was eating, if he was looking after himself. It is illogical, in her opinion, to eat poorly.

She should probably ring her husband too, but she worries less about Adam. And, besides, what would they talk about?

‘When you came in,’ says Rosie, ‘there was a copy of *Death Pulls the Trigger* at the top of your bag. Thumbed through to about halfway.’

Amy nods. Busted.

‘So you *have* read one of my books? You said you hadn’t?’

‘Client research.’

‘Bullshit,’ says Rosie. ‘You like it?’

‘There was nothing else to read.’

‘Course you like it, I see you. You read the bit where she shoots the guy on the plane?’

‘That’s a good bit,’ says Amy.

‘Yeah, that’s a good bit,’ says Rosie, nodding. ‘A pilot I was seeing let me shoot a gun on his plane for research. Have you ever done that?’

‘Shot a gun on a plane? No,’ lies Amy.

‘Nothing really happens,’ says Rosie. ‘They had to replace the calfskin on one of the sofas, but that was it.’

‘If it had pierced the fuselage, the cabin could have depressurized and you could all have died,’ says Amy. Amy had once parachuted out of a plane after exactly such an incident. She had spent the next five days evading rebel forces in Burkina Faso. Actually a lot of fun in the end. Amy finds adrenaline good for the soul, and very good for the skin. Sometimes she watches skincare tutorials on Instagram, but there’s not a single one that will do for your skin what being shot at and then jumping out of a plane will do. Perhaps she should do her own videos? Again, she finds that she is thinking, and so she stops.

‘Lucky it didn’t, then,’ says Rosie, knocking back the rest of whatever goop is sitting in her glass. ‘I’m getting itchy feet, Amy. Can’t we go somewhere on the mainland? Have a drink? Raise a bit of hell?’

Rosie's troubles had started when she had included a character in her most recent novel, *Dead Men & Diamonds*, very clearly based on a Russian chemicals oligarch named Vasiliy Karpin. Vasiliy, it seemed, had lacked the sense of humour one usually associates with chemicals billionaires, and, after a bullet in the post and a botched abduction at a Nashville book-signing, Rosie had called in the professionals, and was confined to barracks for the foreseeable future.

People are talking to people. Jeff Nolan, Amy's boss, has reached out to some of Vasiliy's colleagues in London. Conversations are ongoing. Vasiliy will be persuaded to drop this particular vendetta soon enough. Maximum Impact Solutions has clients who could do him a few favours. An accommodation will be found, Vasiliy will be placated, and Rosie will be free to go about her business again. And, if not, Amy will be ready.

Until then, Amy and Rosie are stuck on this idyllic island, with their hastily trained executive chef. Amy could definitely use a few days here, probably needs the rest if she's being honest, but she'll have to be back on the move soon. No one is going to kill Rosie D'Antonio, so Amy is essentially just a very expensive babysitter. And where's the fun in that for either of them?

'We're going nowhere for the moment,' says Amy. 'You might get murdered.'

Rosie rolls her eyes and starts to roll another joint. 'Oh, Amy, I'd rather be murdered than *bored*.'

And on that point, Amy Wheeler, who spent so much of her childhood trying to be as quiet and as small as possible, is inclined to agree.