

THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

RICHARD
OSMAN

The
Bullet
That



'Superbly
entertaining'

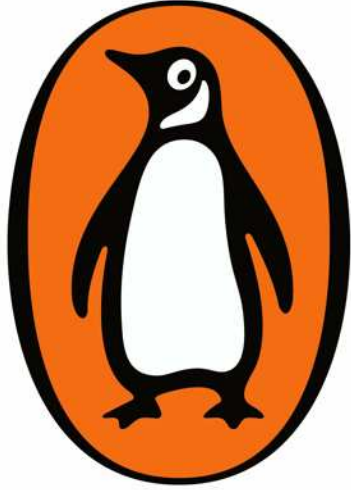
GUARDIAN

MISSED

'Twisty, witty fun'

SUNDAY EXPRESS

THE NEW THURSDAY MURDER CLUB MYSTERY



RICHARD
OSMAN

*The
Bullet
That*
MISSED



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About the Author

Richard Osman is an author, producer and television presenter. His first two novels, *The Thursday Murder Club* and *The Man Who Died Twice*, were multimillion-copy, record-breaking bestsellers around the world. *The Bullet That Missed* is his third book. He lives in London with his partner and Liesl the cat.

PRAISE FOR

The Thursday **MURDER** *Club*

‘Funny, clever and achingly British’

ADAM KAY

‘A warm, wise and witty warning never to underestimate the elderly’

VAL McDERMID

‘Funny, clever and compelling. Mystery fans are going to be enthralled’

HARLAN COBEN

‘Utterly charming and very, very clever’

SARAH PINBOROUGH

‘Full of brilliantly observed humour, spot-on dialogue and twists and turns aplenty’

NINA STIBBE

‘Robert Galbraith meets Tom Sharpe. Plot driven with great characters ...
I don’t ever want to finish this book!’

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‘A bundle of joy ... Absolutely loved it’

JANE FALLON

‘Endearing characters, a page-turning mystery and sudden throat-lump moments of tenderness’

ABIGAIL DEAN

‘I read the first page, then put all else on hold to devour this pitch-perfect book in one sitting’

JEFFERY DEAVER

‘Marvellous ... comfort, humour and smarts’

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‘This slick sequel will leave you buzzing’

THE TIMES

‘Balm for the soul’

DAILY EXPRESS

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GUARDIAN

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IRISH INDEPENDENT

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SAGA

‘Osman’s world is a soothing place to be’

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

‘Pure pleasure to read’

OBSERVER

‘This is the most perfect Sunday afternoon read’

RED

‘A joy’

WOMAN & HOME

‘Twisty, witty fun’

SUNDAY EXPRESS

‘Packed full of charm, warmth and a wonderful cast of characters’

MY WEEKLY

‘Clever, warm and very funny’

RICHARD AND JUDY, DAILY EXPRESS

To Ingrid. I was waiting for you.

Bethany Waites understands there is no going back now. Time to be brave, and to see how this all plays out.

She weighs the bullet in her hand.

Life is about understanding opportunities. Understanding how rarely they come along, and then rising to meet them when they do.

'Come and meet me. I just want to talk.' That's what the email had said. She has been playing it over in her mind ever since. Should she?

One last thing to do before she decides: send Mike a message.

Mike knows the story she is working on. He doesn't know the details – a reporter has to keep her secrets – but he knows it's a risky one. He's there if she needs him, but there are some things you have to do alone.

Whatever happens tonight, she would be sad to leave Mike Waghorn behind. He is a good friend. A kind and funny man. That's why the viewers love him.

But Bethany dreams of more, and maybe this is her chance. A dangerous chance, but a chance all the same.

She writes her message, and presses send. He won't reply tonight; it's late. That's probably for the best. She can hear his voice now: 'Who texts at ten p.m.? Millennials and sex pests, that's who.'

Here we go, then. Time for Bethany to spin the wheel of fortune. Will she live, or will she die?

She pours herself a drink, and takes one final look at the bullet. Really, she has no choice at all.

To opportunities.



Part One

AROUND EVERY CORNER, A
FAMILIAR FACE

‘I don’t need make-up,’ says Ron. He’s in a straight-backed chair because Ibrahim told him you mustn’t slouch on television.

‘Do you not?’ replies his make-up artist, Pauline Jenkins, taking brushes and palettes from her bag. She has set up a mirror on a table in the Jigsaw Room. It is framed by lightbulbs, and the glow bounces off her cerise earrings as they bob back and forth.

Ron feels the adrenalin pumping a little. This is the stuff. A bit of TV. Where are the others though? He told them they could come along ‘if they fancied, no big deal’, and he will be gutted if they don’t show.

‘They can take me as they find me,’ says Ron. ‘I’ve earned this face, it tells a story.’

‘Horror story, if you don’t mind me saying?’ says Pauline, looking at a colour palette, and then at Ron’s face. She blows him a kiss.

‘Not everyone has to be beautiful,’ says Ron. His friends know the interview starts at four. They’ll be here soon surely?

‘We’re agreed there, darling,’ says Pauline. ‘I’m not a miracle worker. I remember you back in the day though. Handsome bugger, weren’t you, if you like that sort of thing?’

Ron grunts.

‘And I *do* like that sort of thing if I’m honest with you, right up my street. Always fighting for the working man, weren’t you, throwing your weight around?’ Pauline opens a compact. ‘You still believe in all that, do you? Up the workers?’

Ron’s shoulders go back a touch, like a bull preparing to enter a ring. ‘Still believe in it? Still believe in equality? Still believe in the power of labour? What’s your name?’

‘Pauline,’ says Pauline.

‘Still believe in the dignity of a day’s work for a fair day’s pay, Pauline? More than ever.’

Pauline nods. ‘Good oh. Then shut your mush for five minutes and let me do the job I’m paid to do, which is to remind the viewers of *South East Tonight* what a looker you are.’

Ron's mouth opens, but, unusually for him, no words come out. Pauline starts on his foundation without further ado. 'Dignity, my arse. Haven't you got gorgeous eyes? Like Che Guevara if he worked on the docks.'

In his mirror, Ron sees the door to the Jigsaw Room open. Joyce walks in. He knew she wouldn't let him down. Not least because she knows Mike Waghorn will be here. This whole thing was her idea, truth be told. She chose the file.

Ron notices that Joyce is wearing a new cardigan. She just can't help herself.

'You told us you weren't going to have make-up, Ron,' says Joyce.

'They make you,' says Ron. 'This is Pauline.'

'Hello, Pauline,' says Joyce. 'You've got your work cut out there.'

'I've seen worse,' says Pauline. 'I used to work on *Casualty*.'

The door opens once again. A camera operator walks in, followed by a sound man, followed by a flash of white hair, the quiet swoosh of an expensive suit and the perfect, masculine yet subtle scent of Mike Waghorn. Ron sees Joyce blush. He would roll his eyes if he wasn't having his concealer applied.

'Well, here we all are, then,' says Mike, his smile as white as his hair. 'The name's Mike Waghorn. The one, the only, accept no substitutes.'

'Ron Ritchie,' says Ron.

'The same, the very same,' says Mike, grasping Ron's hand. 'Haven't changed a bit, have you? This is like being on safari and seeing a lion up close, Mr Ritchie. He's a lion of a man, isn't he, Pauline?'

'He's certainly something or other,' agrees Pauline, powdering Ron's cheeks.

Ron sees Mike turn his head slowly towards Joyce, slipping off her new cardigan with his eyes. 'And who, might I ask, are you?'

'I'm Joyce Meadowcroft.' She practically curtsies.

'I should say you are,' says Mike. 'You and the magnificent Mr Ritchie a couple, then, Joyce?'

'Oh, God, no, my goodness, the thought, no, heavens no. No,' says Joyce. 'We're friends. No offence, Ron.'

'Friends indeed,' says Mike. 'Lucky Ron.'

'Stop flirting, Mike,' says Pauline. 'No one's interested.'

'Oh, Joyce'll be interested,' says Ron.

'I am,' says Joyce. To herself, but just loud enough to carry.

The door opens once again, and Ibrahim pokes his head around. Good lad! Only Elizabeth missing now. 'Am I too late?'

'You're just in time,' says Joyce.

The sound man is attaching a microphone to Ron's lapel. Ron is wearing a jacket over his West Ham shirt, at Joyce's insistence. It is unnecessary, in his opinion. Sacrilegious, if anything. Ibrahim takes a seat next to Joyce and looks at Mike Waghorn.

'You are very handsome, Mr Waghorn. Classically handsome.'

'Thank you,' says Mike, nodding in agreement. 'I play squash, I moisturize, and nature takes care of the rest.'

'And about a grand a week in make-up,' says Pauline, putting the finishing touches to Ron.

'I am handsome too, it is often remarked upon,' says Ibrahim. 'I think perhaps, had my life taken a different turn, I might have been a newsreader too.'

'I'm not a newsreader,' says Mike. 'I'm a journalist who happens to read the news.'

Ibrahim nods. 'A fine mind. And a nose for a story.'

'Well, that's why I'm here,' says Mike. 'As soon as I read the email, I sniffed a story. A new way of living, retirement communities, and the famous face of Ron Ritchie at the heart of it. I thought, "Yup, viewers will love a bit of that."'

It's been quiet for a few weeks, but Ron is delighted that the gang is back in action. The whole interview is a ruse. Designed by Joyce to lure Mike Waghorn to Coopers Chase. To see if he could help them with the case. Joyce sent an email to one of the producers. Even so, it still means that Ron is going to be on TV again, and he is very happy about that.

'Will you come to dinner afterwards, Mr Waghorn?' asks Joyce. 'We've got a table for five thirty. After the rush.'

'Please, call me Mike,' says Mike. 'And, no, I'm afraid. I try not to mix with people. You know, privacy, germs, whatnot. You understand, I'm certain.'

'Oh,' says Joyce. Ron sees her disappointment. If there is a bigger fan of Mike Waghorn anywhere in Kent or Sussex, he would like to meet them. In fact, now he really thinks about it, he wouldn't like to meet them.

'There is always a great deal of alcohol,' says Ibrahim to Mike. 'And I suspect many fans of yours will be there.'

Mike has been given pause for thought.

'And we can tell you all about the Thursday Murder Club,' says Joyce.

'The Thursday Murder Club?' says Mike. 'Sounds made up.'

'Everything is made up, when you really think about it,' says Ibrahim. 'The alcohol is subsidized by the way. They tried to stop the subsidy, but

we held a meeting, a number of words were exchanged, and they thought better of it. And we'll have you out by seven thirty.'

Mike looks at his watch, then looks at Pauline. 'We could probably do a quick supper?'

Pauline looks at Ron. 'Will you be there?'

Ron looks at Joyce, who nods firmly. 'Sounds like I will, yeah.'

'Then we'll stay,' says Pauline.

'Good, good,' says Ibrahim. 'There's something we'd like to talk to you about, Mike.'

'Which is?' asks Mike.

'All in good time,' says Ibrahim. 'I don't wish to pull focus from Ron.'

Mike sits in an armchair opposite Ron and starts counting to ten.

Ibrahim leans into Joyce.

'He is testing the microphone level.'

'I had worked that out,' says Joyce, and Ibrahim nods. 'Thank you for getting him to stay for dinner – you never know, do you?'

'You never do know, Joyce, that is true. Perhaps the two of you will marry before the year is out. And, even if not, which is an outcome we must prepare for, I'm sure he will have plenty of information about Bethany Waites.'

The door opens once more, and Elizabeth enters the room. The gang is all here. Ron pretends he is not touched. Last time he had a gang of friends like these, they were being hospitalized by police riot shields at the Wapping print-workers' strike. Happy days.

'Don't mind me,' says Elizabeth. 'You look different, Ron, what is it? You look ... healthy.'

Ron grunts, but sees Pauline smile. That's a cracking smile, to be fair to her. Is Pauline in his league? Late sixties, a bit young for him? What league is he in these days? It's been a long time since he'd checked. Either way, what a smile.

It can be hard to run a multimillion-pound drugs gang from a prison cell. But it is not, as Connie Johnson is discovering, impossible.

Most of the prison staff are on side, and why wouldn't they be? She throws enough money around. There are still a couple of guards who won't play ball, however, and Connie has already had to swallow two illegal SIM cards this week.

The diamonds, the murders, the bag of cocaine. She had been very skilfully set up, and her trial date has been set for two months' time. She is eager to keep things ticking over until then.

Perhaps she will be found guilty, perhaps she won't, but Connie likes to err on the side of optimism in all things. Plan for success, her mum used to say, although soon afterwards she died, having been hit by an uninsured van.

Above all it's good to keep busy. Routine is important in prison. Also, it is important to have things to look forward to, and Connie is looking forward to killing Bogdan. He's the reason she's in here and, eyes like mountain pools or not, he is going to have to go.

And the old guy too. The one who helped Bogdan set her up. She has asked around, and found his name is Ron Ritchie. He'll have to go as well. She'll leave them until after the trial – juries don't like witnesses being murdered – but then she will kill them both.

Looking down at her phone, Connie sees that one of the men who works in the prison admin block is on Tinder. He is balding and standing next to what appears to be a Volvo of all things, but she swipes right regardless, because you never know when people might come in handy. She sees immediately that they are a match. Quelle surprise!

Connie has done a bit of research into Ron Ritchie. He was famous apparently, back in the seventies and eighties. She looks at the picture of him on her phone, his face like an unsuccessful boxer, shouting into a megaphone. Clearly a man who enjoyed the limelight.

Lucky you, Ron Ritchie, thinks Connie. You'll be famous again by the time I've finished with you.

One thing is for sure: Connie will do anything she can to remain in prison for as short a time as possible. And, once she is out, the mayhem can really begin.

Sometimes in life you simply have to be patient. Through her barred window Connie looks out over the prison yard, and to the hills beyond. She switches on her Nespresso machine.