

RICHARD OSMAN



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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
**The Thursday
Murder Club**

We Solve Murders

We Solve Murders



ALSO BY RICHARD OSMAN

The Thursday Murder Club

The Man Who Died Twice

The Bullet That Missed

The Last Devil to Die



We Solve Murders



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To Janet Elizabeth Wright 1946–2024
With love to fill a lifetime

We Solve Murders

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 this email as 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



**From the
New Forest
to
South Carolina**

1

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 dreamed 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 beginning 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 pickup 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, makeup 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."