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Ambitious Scotland Yard detective Sergeant Jack Gibbons hears about his latest case---the death of a middle-aged widower in Chipping Chedding, a small town in the English Cotswolds---and can't believe his good luck. His best friend, wealthy man-about-town Phillip Bethancourt, just so happens to be in Chipping Chedding already, accompanying his model girlfriend on a fashion shoot on a country estate. Since Phillip has helped Jack on numerous occasions, indulging his interest in a good mystery by aiding Jack in his investigations, it's natural for him to help them figure out what happened to Charlie Bingham.

Though at first Bingham's death appears to have been accident, tracing his movements on the evening of his death proves to be more difficult for Jack and Phillip than they expected, and they begin to suspect foul play. It seems Bingham was going to visit his girlfriend--but no one in the village, from the vicar to Charlie's chess partner (and Phillip's distant cousin) to Charlie's neighbors, knows who she is. And when it turns out that Bingham was in fact a very wealthy businessman who hid his enormous wealth from everyone around him, suspects begin to pop up, including his estranged daughter, who was in London on the evening in question, and an unhappy business partner who has no alibi.

Cassandra Chan shows her mastery of the traditional English mystery in this second charming novel to feature the investigative duo of Gibbons and Bethancourt, a modern-day Peter Wimsey.

Village Affairs Details

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From Reader Review Village Affairs for online ebook

Sarah Pottenger says

Jack Gibbons is a British detective who often calls upon the sleuthy abilities of his friend, gentleman Phillip Bethancourt (who is SO CUTE, by the way). I was bummed to find out that this was #2. Now I have to track down #1. The only qualm I have with it was that there were too many points of view. We really didn't need to hear from so many incidental characters.

Em*bedded-in-books* says

It was one of the coziest mysteries ever. A rich wanderer who finally has settled down in a small English village is found dead in his house - initially, heart attack is suspected, later high doses of sedatives are found in his blood. His daughter is a socialite who depends on his money for her life style and later, it is brought to light that he was engaged to be married to a rich filmstar whose children, who again depended on her for their livelihoods, were ensconced in a farmhouse in the village, with their faithful nurse. The mystery deepens with a second death. I liked the moderate pace of the book, and for once, the ending was plausible and not so dramatic. Overall, a good read.

Megan says

More accurately 2.5 I think.

I really wanted to like this, and considering some of my favorite books and TV shows are the classic small, English village murder mystery I really *should* have liked this. And honestly, it's not that there was one glaring flaw in the book, it really was just a bunch of small things that built up to make simply finishing the book more and more difficult. Let's take them one at a time:

The book is way too slow and dense for the information being conveyed. Each chapter felt like I had to slog through and I'd find myself getting tired halfway through. Eventually I gave up on reading a chapter at a time (my normal and I'd hazard how most of us read) and just read what I could. There's nothing inherently wrong in a densely written novel but I suspect it would have gone over better if the chapters had been shorter. One chapter might contain 2-3 major scene changes and if these had become chapter breaks you probably would feel more like you were being propelled along then trying to get through a swamp. This is really my primary complaint about the book, it just became so difficult to pick it up that I stopped reading altogether...

It was so predictable. I knew at about the 1/3 point who the missing girlfriend was, and therefore who had committed the murders and why they might have done so. The motive was switched out at the end, but not in an interesting enough way to make it feel like a surprise. It was hardly even a noticeable tweak. The fact that none of the 3 major detectives in this story even once thought of what was an easily arrived at motive for me ("But why would ___ have done it?") just feels like sloppy misdirection. Once my girlfriend guess was proved correct around the halfway point I got stuck on point #1 over and over again. Do I really want to plod through the whole rest of this book just to find out I already know who did it. This weekend I gave honest consideration to reading the end of the book and letting that be that - something I haven't done since I was

12.

The title "Village Affairs" and tagline "The Upper Classes Are Just Dying to be in Love" have **nothing** to do with the actual stories. No one was having affairs. No implications of a half dozen (or even 2) behind the scene affairs that are fogging up the storyline were ever even made. In fact, the only possible affair is vehemently denied as having happened by what is supposed to be our most astute detective. So... what? I read this cover and expected a seemingly quite small village to turn out to have all kinds of deceit and misadventure under the surface (ala Midsomer Murders) only to find this is a book about.... a perfect, small, English village. With the only thing near to trouble coming from out of towners. I'm sure I'd be much more inclined to rate this book the 3 stars I gave it if I hadn't felt like someone pulled a bait and switch.

And finally, the characters just. aren't. interesting. Ok. Our main detectives are quirk, but they aren't interesting. You can't really tell one from the other unless you notice the dog is in the scene. Now, if this series was about Carmichael and the Tothills I'd definitely read the next book. As it is, if you're looking for an interesting, well paced, rich buddy/detective series that you can't put down, Martha Grimes' Richard Jury novels have everything this book was supposed to deliver and none of the minor (or less than minor) flaws - go read those instead.

Susan says

Amateur detective Phillip Bethancourt is visiting the quiet village of Chipping Chedding when a popular newcomer is found dead. The man was known to have a bad heart, but circumstances make the police wonder just what did happen to Charlie Bingham. That brings Scotland Yard's Jack Gibbons, Phillip's best friend, and his inspector to the village, where things rapidly spin out of control. Chan's series is a charming update of the Golden Age novel.

Yune says

I'm re-reading the series, and remembering all the things I liked so much about it: gently witty dialogue, scenarios with a limited (and thus manageable) cast without seeming artificially constricted, and of course, the main duo, who work so well together despite their disparate backgrounds (one wealthy and dating a fashion model; the other a practical police detective).

I admit to being taken aback by the precipitous infatuation Detective Sergeant Gibbons developed for a murder suspect in the first book, but that's swept aside before the start of this book, and in retrospect I actually appreciate the way Chan integrates human personalities and relationships that are as vivid and unexpected as they are in real life. This village is populated with people whom I found intriguing for more than their potential roles in the murder; the vicar and his wife, for example, would have been the last on my list of interesting folk if described only as such, but they are young and vivacious and there's lingering drama from their past. Bethancourt's host isn't just an elderly coot, but a man who turns out to be as full of insight as culinary eccentricities. The murdered man's daughter, a celebrated socialite, carries her own undercurrents of old regrets despite a propensity toward expensive cars and hotels.

I'm the last person to judge a mystery's plot (I never manage to guess whodunnit), but I thought that the unraveling of the killer's identity was rather cleverly managed. From an older man's possibly accidental

death, the circle of suspicion widens, particularly when he turns out to have been rather rich.

Entertaining and more richly layered than one might expect from the easy reading it provides. I'd love to hear of any other contemporary mystery authors like Chan.

Ruth Feathers says

Cosy country mystery

Twists and turns abound in this book. Fun read, worth the time. Looking forward to reading the next mystery in the series.

Carla Bailey says

2nd book

I liked this book. It was easy reading, especially since I had read the first book and was familiar with the main characters. The story had an usual ending, and was entertaining right up to the end.

Nancy says

I should NEVER, ever, pay attention to publisher's promotional quotes. I am sure I would have enjoyed this book thoroughly if I had not read the "blurb" suggesting it is a homage to Dorothy Sayer's engaging Lord Peter Wimsey.

The conceit of using a sophisticated, worldly man of means as an amateur detective has been done so well by Marjorie Allingham and Dorothy Sayers that it is challenging for anyone who aspires to fill those shoes. Cassandra Chan created an intelligent, appealing character for this book in Philip Betancourt, but I never could get past the practical issue of the police accepting Betancourt as an adjunct to their homicide team. It just hovered in my consciousness as an unacceptable and unlikely scenario.

Betancourt's relationship with his girlfriend also hit a false note for me and when a book is so character-centric these issues were not minor. But, putting all that aside, Ms. Chan takes us to a charming English village and a house party gone mad with murder. She does a good job setting the scene and her descriptions of the culinary exploits of the Lord of the Manor (on the maid's night off) are reason enough to pick up the book.

Margot Jennifer says

I'm so glad there are several of these. I have been missing the Christie type mystery. These are entertaining, and gentle--no sordid details, mild language, no gratuitous scenes. I love a good mystery that can be done without making the whole world appear dark and evil. The characters are fun and appealing. I was hoping for

more development of the main characters, but I suppose reading subsequent books will enlighten. This a fun, easy to read book, perfect for an evening diversion.

Cris says

An improvement over the first novel in this series. Your basic contemporary British cozy mystery, especially those with amateur detectives. (Which is somewhat surprising since one of the main characters is a police detective.) Solid characterization, attentive attention to the details of small village life and an unusual mystery combine for an enjoyable, if unspectacular, read. Very strong sense of place (i.e. a contemporary small British village)

Possible Read-A-Likes: The first novel in the series, *The young widow* and several previously published short stories featuring the Gibbons and Bethancourt.

Margo Brooks says

A fun little mystery set in the English countryside. I agree with other reviewers that the Dorothy Sayers comparison is more in the imagination of the publisher than in the eye of the reader, but I enjoyed it. The only bit of tediousness was that the cops repeated the same suppositions so many times! That could be a bit monotonous, but I loved the characters. I'll read more of this series.

Emma (Miss Print) says

My mom reads mysteries, nothing else. Over the years, I've gained a fair bit of knowledge about the genre from performing reader's advisory for her to bring home books she would enjoy. When a book is especially enticing, I will also try to read it. Such was the case with Cassandra Chan's debut novel *The Young Widow* and, now, her second Bethancourt and Gibbons mystery *Village Affairs* (2006).

Detective Sergeant Jack Gibbons usually works on cases surrounding the London area under Detective Chiefe Inspector Carmichael. However, when a small town in the English Cotswolds delegates an investigation to Scotland Yard, Gibbons finds himself driving the Chipping Chedding to investigate.

Man-about-town Philip Bethancourt, Gibbons' close friend (though not close to Jack's social status), is in Chipping Chedding before the investigation starts accompanying his girlfriend, Marla Tate, on one of her fashion shoots. Already being on the scene, Bethancourt sees no reason to not try and help the police investigation along. Bethancourt has, after all, been known to help Gibbons in past cases--no matter how much his dealings with murder might enrage Marla.

In the beginning, the police are hard-pressed to even say there was a crime. The middle-aged victim, Bingham, appears to have suffered from an unfortunate accident rather than foul play. As Gibbons and

Carmichael go about tying up loose ends, they unearth more questions than answers. Who was the secret girlfriend that Bingham had driven to see on the night of his death? How had the quiet man managed to hide his vast fortune from all of his neighbors? Even though evidence is thin, it begins to seem that this routine investigation of accident is fast becoming a murder investigation.

The primary risk of a mystery series is that the plots, and on some level the characters, will veer toward the formulaic. Happily, Chan has no such problems. *Village Affairs* creates an entirely different plot and, to a lesser extent, a different tone than that found in *The Young Widow*. Even the landscape, Chipping Chedding instead of London, is unique.

While this novel continues to deal with Gibbons' and particularly Bethancourt's personal lives, Chan also dedicates a fair bit of time to creating entertaining characters to populate the story. A personal favorite is Clarence Astley-Cooper who acts as Bethancourt's gracious if eccentric host during the investigation.

My only qualm is that Jack Gibbons, my favorite of the duo, did not get as much "air time" during this installment as during *The Young Widow* though, of course, both characters were still extremely entertaining. Chan's unique verve and dry wit are once again present in her dialogue, once again providing a unique writing style in *Village Affairs*.

It was also interesting to see more about Philip and his girlfriend Marla, who actually plays an active role in the investigation this time. Their relationship, falling somewhere between ideal and dysfunctional, adds an interesting facet to Bethancourt's otherwise impeccably together character while acting as a foil to Gibbons (whom Marla hates). Unlike Bethancourt or Gibbons, Marla still seems to be proving herself as a character worthy of continuous appearances. Time will tell if her part will grow more prominent or less as the series continues.

While the core plot of *Village Affairs* is entirely self-contained, readers would be advised to start the series at the beginning as certain recurring themes might be spoilers if read out of order. Bethancourt and Gibbons can next be seen in *Trick of the Mind* (2008).

Angela says

Village Affairs, the second in Cassandra Chan's Bethancourt-Gibbons series, is the first to show signs of the series seriously getting its feet under it. It's not quite as strong yet as the third and fourth novels, but the pieces are all in place here, and all of them are starting to work well together.

This book kicks in not terribly long after the events of the first book--and Gibbons, unfortunately, is in sad straits. (More than that I won't say, so as to avoid spoilers.) But Bethancourt's girlfriend is doing a photo shoot in a small town in the English Cotswolds, and it just so happens that a murder has taken place there, providing Jack with an excellent opportunity to enlist his friend's aid. A nice tangled little murder investigation ensues, complete with the obligatory cast of colorful characters. In particular, the vital young vicar and his beautiful wife stand out for me as memorable.

Overall the actual murder investigation--which, at first, doesn't even necessarily seem like a murder--takes second place to me behind the characters. In particular, Bethancourt's stormy relationship with Marla holds a lot of interest, as Marla highly disapproves of his participating in murder investigations. Set off against Jack's depression over the events that have happened between the last book and this one, it makes for great

character development fodder for all three characters. You should definitely read the first one before reading this one, though, to pick up on the proper context for Jack's state throughout the plot.

Three stars.

Jenny C. says

Okay, I really wanted to like this book. I accidentally stumbled upon it at the local library. It had a very cute cover and boasted a great mystery. This novel does take you into the heart of a small town in England. I actually think Chan did a great job incorporating the English flair. However, the mystery itself was pretty slow-moving. Sometimes I think the reason why I can't figure out the murderer is because there are too many people around--there's all these mentions of different names and places. Small talk and habits are interspersed with actual action. Anyway, it was a decent mystery but not quite my cup of tea.

Lizabeth Tucker says

When Charlie Bingham is murdered in Chipping Chedding while Phillip Bethancourt is visiting there, Sgt. Jack Gibbons and Chief Inspector Wallace Carmichael find the amateur sleuth more than willing to help in the investigation.

A gentle murder mystery that explores the secrets of a small town. May I say that Clarence Astley-Cooper almost stole the book? Anyone with a fondness for Agatha Christie or Midsomer Murders should love this series. And the time period just adds panache. 3.5 out of 5.
