



# Ghosts of Cherry Street: And the Cumberbatch Oublette (Jack's Justice) (Volume 1)

*Michael Carrier*

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French words have a way of making everything seem better than just okay—perhaps even special. For instance, the mere mention of chocolate éclairs makes my mouth water. I don't think I'm alone in this regard. Something mysterious also happens when I hear a chef mouth the words crêpes Suzette or a cheese soufflé. How about some French wine? Perhaps some Champagne, a red Bordeaux, Beaujolais, or a cabernet franc? Those French words are, of course, all very pleasing—not only in the way they sound, but also in the concepts they convey. However, there are other French nouns that, while they sound lovely, paint a picture that is anything but pleasant. Guillotine is one of those words. If a person did not know what a guillotine was he might conjure up some sort of exotic French desert, or a fancy form of Parisian fashion. Oubliette is a word more along the line of guillotine—just not as familiar to North American English-speaking people. An oubliette is a place of dungeon-like incarceration, only worse. Like a dungeon, it also has its origin in the middle ages, but there are several notable differences. Generally, dungeons were constructed in the castle towers, and were not necessarily, or even usually, underground. An oubliette, on the other hand, would almost always be constructed below the surface. And, it would not have to be located in a castle tower. The word stems from the French verb, oublier, which means to forget, making an oubliette a forgotten, or a hidden room. Therefore, when a person was placed in an oubliette, he was virtually forgotten. His presence there might escape everyone's attention until his body began to stink. And if the oubliette were vented, as many were, all odors would be dispersed high into the air and never be detected. During medieval times an oubliette served primarily as a means of carrying out an agonizingly slow death sentence. Once a prisoner was consigned to an oubliette, he generally remained there for the rest of his usually short life. However, if the authorities believed a prisoner might have some valuable intelligence, they might use the oubliette to “water board” the information out of him. This torture aspect of an oubliette was in part accomplished by its architecture. There were no doors in an oubliette—prisoners were either lowered down into it on a rope through an opening in the ceiling, or simply dropped unceremoniously through that opening to crash on the bottom. Escape from an oubliette was made virtually impossible by incredibly high walls that led up to the access hole at the top. Often the bottom of the cell was so constricted that the prisoner could not even sit down. One fairly good example of a modern-day oubliette was shown in the movie “Silence of the Lambs.” In that movie serial killer, “Buffalo Bill” (AKA Jame Gumb), used an oubliette to detain his female prisoners until he was satisfied that their skin was softened up enough for him to harvest. While Buffalo Bill's oubliette looked more like a large dried-up well than a medieval torture chamber, given that it was located in the basement of his house and was accessible only from a hole high above its floor, it fits the general definition of an oubliette. But the architect of the Cumberbatch Oubliette carried the concept further, outstripping even the most sinister of his medieval counterparts. Cumberbatch built into his design an additional, perhaps even demonic, component—a diabolical instrument of death. In *Ghosts of Cherry Street*, Jack and Kate Handler are challenged as never before. If they are to rescue their loved-one from the clutches of the Cumberbatch Oubliette, not only must they outsmart a cunning serial killer, they have only hours to do so.

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