

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

# CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

## The Gentleman Vanishes



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# **Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series**

“Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series” is a series made up of self-contained stories. The series is published in English as well as in German, and is only available in e-book form.

## **About the Book**

Bernard Mandeville loves trains. Every Sunday, the elderly and frail Bernard, in perfect attire, purchases a ticket on the Great Cotswold's Steam Railway, takes a seat in First-Class, and revels in a journey from the past. But on one particular Sunday, in the midst of that short trip, the impossible happens. Bernard vanishes without a trace ... The family reaches out to Sarah and Jack who must make their own remarkable journey on the rails ...to track down the vanished gentleman!

## **Main Characters**

Jack Brennan is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife three years ago. Being retired, all he wants is peace and quiet. Which is what he hopes to find in the quiet town of Cherringham, UK. Living on a canal boat, he enjoys his solitude. But soon enough he discovers that something is missing — the challenge of solving crimes. Surprisingly, Cherringham can help him with that.

Sarah Edwards is a web designer who was living in London with her husband and two kids. Three years ago, he ran off with his sexy American boss, and Sarah's world fell apart. With her children she moved back to her home town, laid-back Cherringham. But the small town atmosphere is killing her all over again — nothing ever happens. At least, that's what she thinks until Jack enters her life and changes it for good or worse ...

## The Authors

Matthew Costello (US-based) is the author of a number of successful novels, including *Vacation* (2011), *Home* (2014) and *Beneath Still Waters* (1989), which was adapted by Lionsgate as a major motion picture. He has written for The Disney Channel, BBC, SyFy and has also designed dozens of bestselling games including the critically acclaimed *The 7th Guest*, *Doom 3*, *Rage* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Neil Richards has worked as a producer and writer in TV and film, creating scripts for BBC, Disney, and Channel 4, and earning numerous Bafta nominations along the way. He's also written script and story for over 20 video games including *The Da Vinci Code* and *Starship Titanic*, co-written with Douglas Adams, and consults around the world on digital storytelling.

His writing partnership with NYC-based Matt Costello goes back to the late 90's and the two have written many hours of TV together. *Cherringham* is their first crime fiction as co-writers.

Matthew Costello  
Neil Richards

# **CHERRINGHAM**

## **A COSY CRIME SERIES**



**The Gentleman Vanishes**



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This ebook contains an excerpt of 'Murder at the Mousetrap' (1<sup>st</sup> episode of the  
cosy mystery series BUNBURRY) by Helena Marchmont.

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# 1. The Great Cotswolds Steam Railway

Reg Syms reached into the narrow pocket of his waistcoat, and slid out his Elgin, a classic timepiece whose impractical size made it all the more attractive — and appropriate — for a proper “stationmaster”.

Just at that moment, the side door to his office — his “domain” as he liked to call it — opened, and in walked, well ... *the new person*.

A trainee who had jumped all the hurdles and passed through all the hoops that the all-volunteer organisation of steam engine enthusiasts put in the way of anyone wanting to join them; weeding out the merely idle and curious.

No, working for this very special (albeit short) train line, a genuine relic of a century ago, required knowledge, passion, dedication and — to be sure, for a train line — punctuality.

And, as Reg kept his eyes on his timepiece, showing 8:30 am precisely, he heard the new person say, “Good morning, Mr Syms.”

Reg looked up. A bit of an inspection as he looked over Tim Waite’s garb: jacket, tie, waistcoat — the standard uniform — all in order, neatly folded handkerchief, bright red of course, in jacket pocket.

“On time. Good, good,” he said. “First run of the day — must be on our mettle.”

And Reg leaned forward to look out of the ticket window at the leaden sky above the historic station buildings.

“Rather grey and gloomy today. It’ll be busy nevertheless, and you’ll have plenty to attend to,” the next part he totally loved saying, “on the Great Cotswolds Steam Railway. Now — let’s to it!”

And Reg Syms began busying himself with, well, truth be told, mostly waiting for customers, as Tim Waite looked on.

\*

While his trainee watched, “shadowing” as the younger man referred to it, Reg greeted customers old and new alike, issuing receipts and handing stiff cardboard tickets through the little hole in the glass.

*Proper customer service!*

Eventually the first rush for tickets ended and — as the passengers scurried off down the platform, past the waiting carriages, to watch the locomotive building up steam — Reg turned back to the new trainee.

Though new to the railway, Waite was no young man: mid-forties, and probably quite eager to escape the humdrum of home, wife and kids for this ... adventure.

*Who wouldn't?*

“Note well, Mr Waite, the smile, the greeting — all so important.” He raised a finger in the air. “Think of this little office, the platform here, the great locomotive sitting out there — the *whole* experience — as a wonderful time machine. We take people back to a completely different time. I dare say, a better time!”

Waite nodded. “I’ll be sure to—” he started to say.

But just then Reg heard a familiar sound. The throaty roar of a Mercedes engine.

And he knew *exactly* who that would be.

*Bernard Mandeville* — his arrival as reliable as this antiquated line’s timetable.

Wouldn’t be a Sunday morning without Mr Mandeville stepping up to the window, buying a return. “Just one please,” he’d say in that gentle sing-song voice of his, purchasing the ticket as if this wasn’t the hundredth time he had done so.

And Reg's response — always the same as well: the smile and a tip of the hat, as if welcoming someone to the great experience for the very first time.

The trainee stood right at Reg's shoulder as the elderly Mr Mandeville walked slowly along the platform to the ticket office window.

"One of our absolute best and most loyal passengers," said Reg, "so, do pay attention now."

And he waited for Bernard Mandeville, none too fleet of foot these days, or fleet of *anything*, as he made his way to the Cherringham Junction ticket office.

\*

"Good morning, Reg," Bernard said.

The familiarity in this case — quite appropriate.

At least ... on the customer's side.

"Mr Mandeville — so very good to see you."

As if it was a surprise. An unexpected pleasure.

Bernard was dressed, as ever, in perfect sync with the whole heritage railway experience: long tweed coat, classic grouse hat, herringbone three-piece suit, and even a carnation in his boutonniere. As if the train might deposit him in Paris instead of the station at Cheltenham Racecourse — a mere twenty-five miles away.

The great locomotive powerful but — by today's dizzying standards — chugging its way ever so slowly.

Bernard ordered his ticket, as if following a carefully drawn script.

"Ah yes," Reg said. "One return to Cheltenham. Here we are."

And as Bernard dug out his wallet to extract a twenty-pound note, as usual, Reg could see behind him ...

Perhaps his son, Reg imagined?

He never knew which one of Bernard's relatives — there appeared to be three — would show up to drive the man to

the station, and wait for his return.

Today, this one was smoking a cigarette, looking a tad impatient, with Reg thinking: *He'd better not even dream of tossing that onto the platform.*

"Ah — here we are then," Bernard said, passing the crisp note. "These new notes, so slippery! Plastic or something, hmm? More signs of the times. Good British money turned into cellophane!"

Reg slid Bernard the little cardboard ticket, and then his change.

"Enjoy your trip, Mr Mandeville," he offered.

To which Bernard said, "Always do, Reg, always do."

And then the man turned and slowly made his way to the first-class carriage where his relative waited at an open door. Reg watched as the young man supported Mr Mandeville and helped him climb the step into the carriage.

No real classes on the train — one could sit absolutely anywhere — but Reg imagined Bernard Mandeville would always be most at home in the warm and worn confines of the once-pricey and glamorous first-class compartment.

And when he boarded, Reg looked on until he spotted him in a compartment, seated close to the window, facing forward. His relative folding a blanket over the old man's legs.

Tim was certainly curious.

"So, that chap, Bernard—"

"Mr Mandeville."

"—takes the train every Sunday, to Cheltenham Racecourse and back?"

"Like clockwork. Hasn't missed a Sunday since the operation began running."

"Amazing. He must love the train!"

"Oh, yes. In fact, if it wasn't for his various ailments, I imagine he'd be one of us, you know, volunteering and all."

"Ailments?"

“Oh, nothing I know a great deal about — only that the doctor visits regularly. Must be something pretty serious. I’ve a feeling his one real pleasure is this little outing each week.”

“And what about that chap?”

Reg saw the young man step down from the carriage and make his way down the platform.

“His son, I believe.”

Reg nodded. *Topic closed*, he thought, and began to tally up the number of passengers for the morning’s first service.

“Seemed rather sullen, I thought,” Tim Waite offered.

Reg was never one for prying into other people’s affairs. Still—

“Sullen? Possibly. There’s three of them. You’ll get to see them all, once you’re a regular on the roster. Two women — sisters, I imagine.”

Reg dug out his pocket watch.

*Enough of this Q&A*, he thought.

Then — a great blast of the locomotive’s steam whistle. So *rich* — full.

*A basso profundo*, Reg thought, compared to the shrieks and shrill sounds of modern trains.

He flicked his eyes up at the great railway clock that hung from the platform roof — yes, accurate to the very second.

He turned to Waite — an important, even essential, part of the tradition was about to occur.

“Shall we?” Reg said simply, as if what they were about to do was clearly obvious.

He stood up, motioned Mr Waite to the door, then followed him out onto the platform, shutting the door to the stationmaster’s office behind them.

Then he turned, inhaled deeply of the pungent smoky air, looked left towards the guard’s van, then right down

the platform to where the great locomotive waited — steaming, smoking, a beast straining at the leash.

As he took in the swirl of activity — the last passengers scurrying aboard, heavy old doors slamming loudly, chattering children crowded at compartment windows, faces pressed against the glass, he heard another great toot on the whistle and saw a hiss of steam billow from beneath the engine—

And that familiar thrill of the imminent departure rushed through his veins and he thought to himself: *This is what it's all about!*

*The living, breathing age of steam!*