

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

The Secret of Brimley Manor



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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

Brimley Manor, home to an eccentric museum of oddities from its owner's lifetime of exotic travels also holds dark secrets. And when a suspicious fire breaks out, the biggest question must be ...was it just an accident? Sarah and Jack think not and as they begin to explore the history and people of Brimley Manor, they soon learn that this very curious place might also be quite deadly ...

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 Secret of Brimley Manor



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This ebook contains an excerpt of "A Shot in the Dark" (1st episode of the cosy historical series MYDWORTH MYSTERIES) written by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards.

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1. The Night Shift

Charlie Barrow got up from the simple wooden chair inside the small stone room — once an old coal cellar, he imagined.

Now, though, it was a place to pass the hours between his nightly walks through Brimley Manor. The room, dank and humid in summer, like it was now, but damp and chilly in the autumn and winter. Even with a portable heater it was almost unbearable in January or February.

Unbearable, that is, if Charlie hadn't had his own little supply of personal anti-freeze.

Not *too* much, he knew.

Just a little nip, here and there.

Harder for Clifford, the gardener-cum-daytime-custodian, a considerably older fellow who, with kids often mucking about in the property, probably couldn't hide away in here and have a dram of Famous Grouse now and then.

No, this night shift suited Charlie.

And the fact that he had to be up all night?

Not a problem at all. He could sleep while *the wife* was up, freed from her incessant chatter and the endless chores she was always discovering — or more likely, creating — for him in their little cottage on the other side of Cherringham.

The cottage — not much of a place but, like this job, perfect for him.

Charlie grabbed his torch, a large silver item packed with four hefty batteries. Tight in his hand, it looked more like a lethal truncheon. The light cast a bright, strong beam.

He slipped his small silver flask into his pocket, always aware of how many sips he had taken.

Needed to make it last till dawn.

Have that last blissful drop as the sun came up.

That is, if it wasn't overcast. The weather was so mixed up lately that sometimes there was no sun to be seen while Charlie waited for Clifford to appear. The old fella, bleary-eyed from just waking up, paper cup of coffee in his hand as Charlie tipped an invisible hat and sailed off to his cottage.

Bit of a hike away, on the edge of Cherringham.

But again, that also suited Charlie just fine.

Leaving the car there, meant *the wife* could go off and busy herself with an errand of some sort.

Plants! That was her latest thing.

As if the bloody cottage wasn't *totally* surrounded with all that God deemed fit to grow in this lovely corner of the world.

Never enough for my Edna, he thought.

Charlie quickly slipped his phone into his pocket. No walkie-talkie needed here since, well, the old Brimley manor house was his purview alone.

"My *purview* ..." he said, liking the sound of the word. The meaning — he guessed — would stump anyone from the current dimwit generation with their Facebooking, and Twitter-this, Insta-that.

"Bollocks, all of it," he said aloud.

He enjoyed the company and comfort provided by his own words.

And then — all ready — he marched up the three stone steps, from the small pseudo guardhouse and out into the humid night air.

Charlie certainly didn't hurry as he made his way through what had been — back in the manor house's prime — some sort of a sunken garden.

Now, it was just another neglected and overgrown spot. These days, more pressing areas received the attention of the overworked Clifford and that young lad that helped

him. Those two — barely able to keep the grounds from looking like a dump.

And he had to marvel — imagine! — this place, managed by the mighty Conservation Trust!

“Managed,” he said, his voice low, muttering. “If this is bloody *managing*, no wonder the whole country’s going to hell in a handcart!”

More steps.

Handcart. *Now, just what is that?* Charlie thought. *Some kind of wheelbarrow?*

More steps rose up from the sunken flat area of weeds and dead flowers to the gravel path that led to the manor house.

It was dark, save for a few lights outside that barely outlined the hulking shape of the big house and the other outbuildings.

No impressive “sound and light” show taking place here nightly, he thought. Not like some of the Trust’s properties in the area.

Oh no. Brimley Manor? Way down the spending list — for years.

As he reached the top of the steps, he turned and looked left to the small farmhouse, part of the estate, just a couple of minutes’ walk down the roadway that led from the east end of the building. That house, probably no larger than Charlie’s own modest cottage.

But where — apparently — the lone surviving heir of the Brimley “fortunes” lived.

The Honourable Peregrine Brimley.

Honourable? That was a bit of a moot point.

Not that Charlie had ever seen him.

That cottage must have been, he thought, part of the deal for letting the Conservation Trust take over the manor house and run it as — what? — a museum?

Some place of historical value?

Charlie shook his head at the thought — it was hardly either one of those.

Another glance down the roadway, to the small farmhouse. A few warm yellow lights on. That house attached to some fields, a vegetable patch, couple of pigs, a chicken coop.

Not *much* of a farm to speak of, but apparently the Brimley heir was able to get by, selling whatever he grew to the local shops and restaurants.

Charlie, having seen about every inch of the manor house, often wondered just what kind of nutter was Peregrine Brimley?

Was said offspring — grandchild or whatever — as off his rocker as the original Brimley?

Well, as long as Charlie's duties were confined to night time, he doubted he'd ever get the chance to find out.

Charlie turned his attention back to the house looming above him in the darkness, the walls thick with ancient ivy.

Up ahead, a flight of broad stone stairs. The stone, a traditional Cotswolds yellow, like the manor house itself.

Leading to massive wooden doors, as if ready to permit entry to amazing visitors from important places — the great and the mighty.

But why on earth would they ever visit this place?

"A mad house." That's how Charlie described it to his mates when he met them at the Ploughman's on his one night off a week. "Stuff in there," he'd say, "well, you just wouldn't believe it."

And his friends, couple of pints in, all said they should come visit, on the one day a month that it was actually open to visitors!

Fat chance of that happening.

Charlie paused at the top of the stairs and fished out a plastic card, his key that opened those great doors. A small concession to modernity that the cash-strapped Trust seemed to have been able to afford.

Things were mighty tight these days.

Never more so than inside here, Charlie thought.

The door *popped* open.

Up to his right was one of the few CCTV cameras recording whoever was about to enter.

Every 24 hours, the recording erased. No high-tech security system or monitoring taking place here.

Just a handful of cameras.

To protect all its treasures. Ha!

And then — knowing that as close as the air was out here, inside, was going to be even worse — he entered Brimley Manor.

2. Something in the Air

Once inside, Charlie knew that he'd better look dutiful, as he shut the door behind him tight, and slipped on the light of his massive torch.

No house lights on — those were the rules. Dodgy wiring at night too much of a risk, he guessed.

Look sharp now! he thought. *You're being recorded,* He knew that above him sat another CCTV camera designed to catch anyone upon entering. But now it was seeing only Charlie, off to begin his nightly rounds.

Three times a night, same drill.

Why three times? Wouldn't one check in the dead of night suffice?

Still, they *were* paying for his services, so why complain?

Not that it was such a princely sum. The funds allotted to his salary were at the same measly level as the other facilities in the house.

Like the cheap and scarce cameras.

Only four of them in the whole place. Though that fella from the Conservation Trust, Mr Jessop, had said "next year, expect the full Monty!" Cameras — linked to a security service — in each room. Maybe even motion sensors, inside and out.

All of which would most likely make Charlie's services he imagined, redundant.

Torch light on, Charlie took a breath. The rule was always to begin on the first floor, and work his way down, following the same trail.

Through the rooms filled with Brimley's weirdness.

And Charlie had to admit, not a night went by during that slow walk through what was dubbed “the collection” that didn’t unsettle him.

You’d have to be made of stone, he thought, *not to get a little rattled*.

All that old and strange junk in every room?

And that funny feeling he sometimes got that he was being ... well ... *watched*.

Impossible, he knew. Come six o’clock, all the daytime staff cleared off home, sharpish: that new girl doing the research, Clifford the gardener, the young lad helping him ...

And anyway — you needed one of these fancy plastic keys to get in these days and they were like gold dust. So no way could there be anybody actually *in* the house at night.

Although ...

Couple of times these last few months he could *swear* he’d seen a figure just out of the corner of his eye, disappearing down the corridor.

Or a shape — moving — reflected in one of the glass cabinets.

And once he thought he heard footsteps. Even a low voice, muttering, barely audible.

Not that he’d told anyone, mind. Only Edna.

And she’d had a good laugh about it. Tried to spook him for a week after — popping up behind him and saying “boo!”

Not worth the bother, reporting that to the Trust either. They’d only think he’d lost his marbles and get someone else for the night shift.

Maybe I have lost it? he thought, laughing to himself. *I’d be the last to know, wouldn’t I?*

He reached the broad staircase, the deep maroon rug only looking red where his torchlight hit it. The rest, murky black, the hand rail barely visible.