

NEIL RICHARDS
MATTHEW COSTELLO



MYDWORTH MYSTERIES

A Shot in the Dark



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Mydworth Mysteries

Mydworth Mysteries is a series of self-contained novella-length mysteries, published in English and German. The stories are currently available in e-book across all formats and will soon be available as audiobooks in both languages.

About the Book

Sussex, England, 1929. Mydworth is a sleepy English market town just 50 miles from London. But things are about to liven up there, when young and handsome Sir Harry Mortimer returns home from his diplomatic posting in Cairo, with his beautiful and unconventional American wife, Kat. No sooner have the two arrived, when a jewel robbery occurs at Harry's aunt's home - Mydworth Manor. The police are baffled and overwhelmed with the case. But Harry and Kat have an edge in the hunt for the dangerous culprit: not only do they have certain useful "skills" they've both picked up in service of King, President and Country, they also have access to parts of English society that your average bobby can't reach.

Main Characters

Sir Harry Mortimer, 30 – Sir Harry, born into a wealthy English aristocratic family, is smart, funny, romantic, adventurous. A pilot in World War One, he was shot down, wounded and transferred to military intelligence. War over, he served ten years in the Foreign Office, with postings around the world: his position as a diplomat just a cover for his true role in intelligence. A posting to Cairo led to his meeting a young woman from the Bronx – also working for her country – Kat Reilly. The two fell in love, and, after a whirlwind romance, they married and returned to his family home in England, expecting to live the quiet life together.

Kat Reilly – Lady Mortimer, 29 – Kat grew up in the Bronx, right on Broadway. Her mother passed away when she was only eleven and she then helped her father run his small local bar The Lucky Shamrock. But Kat felt the call to adventure and excitement, first as a nurse on the battlefields of France, then working a series of jobs back in New York. After finishing college, she was recruited by the State Department, where she learned skills that would more than make her a match for the dashing Harry. To some, theirs is an unlikely pairing, but to those who know them both well, it's nothing short of perfect.

The Authors

Matthew Costello (US-based) is the author of many successful novels published around the globe, including *Vacation* (2011, in development for film), *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*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and, with Neil Richards, *Planet of the Apes: Last Frontier*.

Neil Richards (based in the UK) 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 30 video games including *The Da Vinci Code* and *Planet of the Apes*, and consults around the world on digital storytelling.

Matthew Costello
Neil Richards

MYDWORTH MYSTERIES



A Shot in the Dark

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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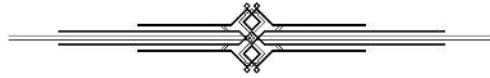
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For information about the authors and their projects please visit:

www.facebook.com/Cherringham

Sussex, England, 1929

Prologue



Lady Lavinia Fitzhenry turned the page of the novel she was reading – the latest from the American, Hemingway.

Always fun to read a book written by someone you've met – and even shared more than a few drinks with.

Sitting up in bed – Mydworth Manor so peaceful, the staff below all quiet – to read like this was such a pleasure.

She had brought a glass of port with her to bed – now sadly gone – and certainly it was late enough to think about turning the light off. Plenty to do in the busy days ahead, the house soon to be filled with weekend guests down from London.

Gossip. Music. Cocktails every evening before dinner. What fun!

She placed the book on her bedside table and put the light out. The bedroom now in darkness. She started to drift off, plans running through her mind.

But then...

A noise.

She opened her eyes. Another sound: *a rattle*. Not close, clearly somewhere down the wide upstairs hallway.

A sound that, well, perhaps a door or a window might make in response to a stiff breeze. Except this was a perfectly still night. Barely a breeze.

There it was again. The rattle louder.

Lavinia had never been one to sit and wait. Her response to fear throughout her entire life had remained exactly the same.

If you are afraid of something, you face it.

She put the light on, and, in one quick move, slid out from under the covers, slipped on her dressing gown, and headed out onto the landing.

*

Lavinia stood motionless outside her bedroom, listening.

The sounds seemed to have stopped.

Slowly she moved along the dark hallway, ears straining.

Past the grand staircase that led down to the entrance, where she saw the glow of the entryway light that was kept on all evening.

Warm, yellow, reassuring.

Down the hallway, until she came to the row of bedrooms that would house all her guests in just a few days.

She stopped. There was nothing but quiet.

Clearly time to go back to bed, she thought. She turned.

There was a *crack*.

The sharp, brittle sound of something *snapping* in the room directly to her right.

Door shut. Secure – as it should be. These rooms were cleaned and prepared days ago.

Lavinia grabbed the doorknob – cold to the touch.

A twist, an audible click, the door opened – and she slowly entered the dark room.

With her eyes already adjusted to the dark, she didn't need light to see that all was in order here.

The door that led into the dressing room stood half open. She felt – the barest sense of it – a cold draught coming from the room. A chill that shouldn't be there.

Taking a deep breath, she grasped the door handle, pulled the door wide – and entered the room, to see... the window wide open.

She hurried over, ready to slam it shut, and end this late-night adventure. As she started to pull the window closed, her eyes were drawn for a second to the lawn as the moon momentarily found a gap in the clouds.

And she stopped. Frozen.

A figure was walking slowly away from the house towards the woods.

As she watched, the figure stopped. Turned.

Looked up at her...

Lavinia's heart, at peace only seconds ago, now pounded. She backed away from the window, thoughts racing, searching for explanations that did not come.

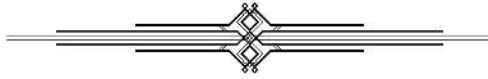
She took a deep breath – and then stepped back to the window again, eyes straining.

But the figure had gone. As if it had never been there.

And now, as she peered into the darkness, a feeling of foreboding came over her.

A feeling that this weekend wasn't going to bring fun at all...

1. An English Homecoming



Kat Reilly watched her husband Harry shield his eyes from the morning sun as he studied the unloading process of the cross-channel ferry at Newhaven dock.

She knew him well enough to see that he was concerned.

The Pride of Sussex had berthed an hour late, and, in the frenzied hurry to turn the ship around, Kat had already seen one precious cargo slip from its net and smash on the quayside.

While the steamer belched smoke into the sky, hordes of trucks, horses and carts, and hand-barrows swarmed around the dock-side, as passengers called instructions, and customs men tried to intervene.

So much for all the English politeness and decorum she'd been expecting to see on this, her first trip to Britain!

Though, in truth, Sir Harry Mortimer seemed as ever to typify the calm, unruffled English gentleman.

Tall, slim, his black hair longer than she'd ever known it, jacket slung nonchalantly over one shoulder, white cotton shirt sporting a dashing red tie.

All he needed was a tennis racquet to complete the look.

Or should that be - a cricket bat?

He turned back to her. "Hmm... just going to have a quick word with those chaps over there. Make sure they, er..."

She grinned at that. "And how will that go?"

Harry – with one of his great smiles – nodded.

"You think they won't welcome my advice?"

"With open arms, I'm sure. That or clenched fists."

"Hmm. That is my car they're about to drop on the quay."

"*Your* car?"

"Ah, right. Sorry – old habits. I mean *our* car. Thing is, she may not be a Bugatti, but that Alvis is damned precious to me."

"Good luck. Back in New York nobody argues with the longshoremen."

"Well, I fancy we're a tad more *civilised* over here, hmm?"

"Civilised? Nine o'clock and I'm still waiting for that coffee you promised."

"How about we stop in at a local hostelry *en route* and celebrate my return to the motherland, and your first visit, with a slap-up breakfast?"

"Slap-up?"

"Forgot you don't quite speak the lingo yet. Means 'large'. The works!"

"Sounds delicious."

He grinned, and she watched him walk over to a man on the dock who was dressed in blue overalls, cap on his head. From his stance, hands on hips, the man looked as if he might be the foreman – or whatever they called the guy in charge over here.

She saw Harry gesture to where, only now, their car – that beautiful and so-sleek example of English hardware – was starting to rise out of the ship's hold, swinging perilously on ropes and chains.

The man in the cap nodded. No smiles there. But she guessed Harry was doing something she had seen him do so often. A few words here and there, and suddenly people *wanted* to help him.

Doubtful he introduced himself as 'Sir', though Kat wondered whether, with the dock workers, any of that 'Lord and Lady' stuff would carry much weight.

Harry walked back.

"All tickety-boo. Er, I mean, sorted. Just explained to him what was hiding under those tarps. Asked if they had ever handled a car like that."

"And?"

"Seems he rather prefers a Bentley. Rolls Royce at a push. Though he did say if I was offering him a drive, he'd happily take it for a spin."

"Funny guy, hmm?"

"Salt of the earth."

"Well, me - I'd just slip him some money."

"Oh, see, there you go! That would *never* work here. An upstanding professional like that? He'd take it as a proper insult."

Kat doubted that. Ten years posted to American embassies from Istanbul to Tokyo had taught her one thing - a handful of dollars never failed to make the world run more smoothly.

She turned to see the Alvis roadster steadily being lowered. Slowly, she was glad to note. And - now - nothing to be alarmed about.

She turned back to Harry, watching their steamer trunks being off-loaded, to be transported to Mydworth by truck.

Lorry - not truck, she thought.

And then they would drive to their new home. "New", at least for Kat, but not to Harry. Mydworth: the small town where he grew up; a world he knew - but had been away from for so long.

Suddenly Harry wasn't checking the unloading.

"Hmm," he grunted.

"What?" she said, as he turned to look over to where the cars and taxis pulled up to pick up passengers.

Sitting there, a sleek sedan. Not a cab, but a very serious looking vehicle. And stepping out of it, now looking this way, a man crisply dressed in what looked like a chauffeur's uniform.

"Something wrong?" she said to Harry.

"Don't *know*. But I think we're about to find out."

The driver held a white envelope in his hands. He walked over directly – even urgently – to where she and Harry stood.

*

Harry always prided himself on having extremely good instincts. They'd served him well back in '18 in the skies over Belgium. Also, in his various postings abroad for the Foreign Office. A few times they'd helped him avoid getting hurt.

Once even *killed*.

His every instinct told him that the envelope the man carried was unlikely to be good news.

"Sir Harry Mortimer?"

Less a question than a confirmation.

Harry gave a quick nod back. He felt Kat looking at this scene as well.

He guessed she had to be thinking: *Well, what is this about?*

The chauffeur presented the envelope to Harry. "Urgent from Whitehall, sir. I'm to wait."

Harry took the envelope, giving Kat a half grin.

"Wait, hmm? Wait for *what?*"

He opened the tucked but unsealed envelope and removed a single piece of paper.

He recognised the crest on the paper, the address.

The message pithily brief, but also direct.

"Harry... what is it?"