

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Death on a Moonlit Night



Contents

Cover

Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series

About the Book

Main Characters

The Authors

Death on a Moonlit Night

Copyright

1. A Shot in the Dark

2. Dinner at the Spotted Pig

3. Scene of a Crime

4. Pulled from the River

5. Where's Nick?

6. Ignoring Evidence

7. Closing Time

8. The Truth about Nick

9. A Bump in the Night

10. The Fugitive Confesses

11. To Catch a Killer

12. A Woman with a Past

13. Breakthrough

14. A Trip to Oxford

15. What Happens Next?

16. The Falling Out

17. Hardwick's

18. A Party at the Ploughman's

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

When the boss of the big local DIY outlet is murdered on a moonlit night, all the evidence points to the store's junior manager. And when police retrieve the murder weapon from the Thames, the manager goes on the run. But Jack and Sarah are not at all sure of his guilt. Can they uncover the real killer before it's too late for the runaway suspect?

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



Death on a Moonlit Night



»be« by BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT

Digital original edition

»be« by Bastei Entertainment is an imprint of Bastei Lübbe AG

Copyright © 2017 by Bastei Lübbe AG, Schanzenstraße 6-20, 51063 Cologne,
Germany

Written by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards

Edited by Eleanor Abraham

Project management: Kathrin Kummer

Cover illustration © shutterstock: jason2009 | suns07butterfly | Justin Black

Cover design: Thomas Krämer

E-book production: Urban [SatzKonzept](#), Düsseldorf

ISBN 978-3-7325-4554-4

www.be-ebooks.com

1. A Shot in the Dark

Lee Taylor hit “send” on his weekly sales analysis email, listened for the satisfying *whoosh*, then shut down his laptop. He walked over to the glass wall and looked down onto the shop floor.

From up here, face close to the glass, he could see not only the different departments — plumbing, lighting, tools, timber, kitchens, home furnishings — but also (*and so much more important*) his employees.

His *workers*.

Were they working? Working hard?

That was the important question.

What a stroke of genius from Hardwick (the company founder back in Texas) all those years ago, to clothe the whole workforce in bright pink polo shirts.

“What colour could be more joyous, more inclusive, more fun — than pink?” Hardwick used to say to journalists eager to discover the secret of the great chainstore’s success.

But Lee knew the real reason — had it on good authority from a senior exec on his last training course in the States.

The real reason — *workers can’t hide in a pink shirt*.

How brilliant that was! And how very true, even here in the English Cotswolds, thousands of miles away from Hardwick’s flagship store in America.

And even though it was nearly the end of the day shift, everybody tired, looking forward to the weekend — Lee could see if there was any slacking off, any lurking, any lazy chatting in dark corners.

I’ll have none of that, he thought.

It helped that his office — way up here in the cavernous warehouse building — was visible from every one of those dark corners. Helped too that each and every one of those workers *knew* that if they didn't deliver one hundred per cent every minute of the damn working day, they would be docked pay — no arguments, no talking back, no disputes.

No unions, of course, he thought, smiling to himself.

I'm judge and jury!

He ran his eye up and down the aisles, peering down the tall canyons of racks and shelves, looking for slackers.

Three pink shirts re-stocking external doors — and taking their time over it. In kitchens, the sales desk looked unmanned.

And down in the paint section, that pink shirt hadn't moved for at least a minute.

Dawdling ...

Not good.

Lee made a mental note to check names and rotas.

Then he did a quick head count of customers in the aisles. Not bad, he thought. A perfect June evening outside, but still the lure of do-it-yourself worked its magic, drawing the locals in for cut-price tools and home improvement.

All assisted by helpful, smiling workers who might have felt like being anything other than helpful, or smiling. But they knew they'd better — or else!

His glance flicked across to the bank of CCTV monitors: yes, the car park was filling up for the Friday evening rush. Weekend warriors about to attack so many summery projects!

Result!

That email — his fifty-second weekly analysis for head office since he'd taken over the Cherringham store — told the story of his success in clear, stark figures that the regional director couldn't ignore.

Overheads — mostly staff costs — *down* ten per cent. Sales *up* ten per cent.

In just twelve months! he thought. *Bloody genius that I am — even I didn't expect that.*

Another year here and he'd be sure to get Swindon or Gloucester. Or maybe even one of the big Birmingham stores. Who knows — London?

He grinned, then a voice behind him: "Mr Taylor."

He swivelled to see Nick Marston at the door.

"Nick."

He waited. Watched his young assistant manager blinking at him. He nodded to Nick to enter.

"Got the report on Bailey," said Nick, holding up a file of papers.

"And?"

"Don't you want to read it?" said Nick, offering the report.

"I trust you, Nick. It's why I made you my 'number two'. Just tell me what it says."

"Oh, right. Okay. Well, it's pretty clear he started it. Apparently, he was mouthing off in the pub at lunchtime, had a few too many, said he was going to come back and ..."

"Have a go at me, hmm?"

"Er, yes. Anyway, seems like he got into a scrap with one of the part-timers, and—"

"So, drinking, fighting on the premises — and we have witnesses, yes?"

"Yes."

"Fair enough. And more than enough. Where is he now?"

"Cooling off in the staff room."

Lee checked his watch. He really didn't need this.

He wanted to get home, watch the match, have a couple of single malts. And anyway, it was time Marston did some of the dirty work round here.

After all — that's why he'd promoted him.

“Nick — I haven’t got time for this now,” he said. “You deal with it. Go down there, hand him his notice. I’m not having that kind of behaviour in my store.”

He could see Nick taken aback at what he was being asked to do.

“Really?” he said. “Bit of trouble, yes. But Bailey’s been here since the place opened.”

“All the more reason to get rid of him,” said Lee. “Clear out the dead wood.”

“But, Mr Taylor, he’s very popular with the rest of the staff and the customers, you know, and we’ve already lost so many good people—”

“‘Lost’, Nick?” said Lee, smiling. “This isn’t about ‘who likes who’, who’s good, who’s funny, who’s popular. We’re a business. With a bottom line. You do get that, hmm?”

Nick nodded, looking uneasy.

“You’re the assistant manager. Do it.”

Lee knew he didn’t have to add “or else”. He guessed that Nick was smart enough to know that he was dispensable too.

“Anything else?” he said.

Nick shook his head.

“Good,” said Lee. Smile back on his face. “I’ll see you on Monday.”

He waited while Nick seemed to think this through. Then, finally, when he’d turned to go: “Don’t forget, Nick — this is your store tomorrow and Sunday.”

He watched Nick turn round again, run his hand through his hair nervously.

“I expect to see some really good numbers come Monday morning. And I don’t want any bullshit excuses like last week.”

He saw Nick step forward. “Wait a second. That’s really not fair, Mr Taylor. You know we had staff problems. No one in plumbing for hours — that wasn’t my fault—”