Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM
A COSY CRIME SERIES

Snowblind

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT
(He remained kneeling. Didn’t want to get up until he knew where he was going.)

Or to the left! Right! *There’s* a path, narrow, but yes he could see it, the trees with their snow-covered limbs so close, trying to hide it.

No.

Straight ahead was the way. Of course. *That* was the path. Just need to keep going in the direction he was going.

He looked around for something to grab to help pull himself to a standing position.

A craggy bush nearby. Dried berries still on its branches. He grabbed at a twisted handful of the bush’s branches and pulled, using it to get off one knee.

He had the thought: *what if I can’t get up?*

*What if I end up staying here?*
And that thought made Archy’s gnarled hands grab as tight as he could, hold the branches fast, as he struggled to a standing position again.

Then, as if rewarded for his great effort, he stood shivering, shaking and he saw lights ahead. Two lights! There — and then gone.

Then again.

The village!
The pub!

Close now. Close.

And Archy Fleming stumbled ahead, letting branches swipe at his face since he knew he had to go fast, not caring about the painful scratches.

He was close to the village. And all he had to do was keep going straight.
“Getting bad out there, Jack?” Ellie said from behind the bar, looking at the pub’s front windows, to the snowstorm outside.

Jack turned and looked at the near-empty pub. “Where is everybody?”

“Not used to big snowstorms I guess. Everyone getting all cosy at home. Fancy another?”

“No. It really is coming down. I better get back to the Goose.”

Ellie looked at two old men sitting off in a corner. “Think I’d better tell that lot over there to get going as well. Time to close up and head to my own fireplace. They say it’s going to be a real blizzard.”
Jack turned back to her. “Good idea. You know, all that snow outside ... reminds me of home. We get storms like this all the time.”

“I’ve heard. So then you’re used to it. Know when to get out the snow-ploughs, salt, right? Not sure how little Cherringham will fare.”

“It’ll be interesting.”

Jack pulled on a cloth cap and buttoned up his pea coat. He had worn his wellies so he’d have no problem walking through the slushy stuff.

But driving? That could be a different story.

“Be safe, Ellie.”

“You bet,” she said, as she stepped out from around the bar and started turning lights off, finally making the two — what would the locals call them? — geezers start moving.
Hope they don’t have far to go, Jack thought.

As the line goes … *t’aint a fit night out for man nor beast.*

And, as he quickly discovered, not a fit night for his Sprite.

Back in New York, he had driven a big SUV that had no trouble handling ice, snow, rain — *whatever.*

And though he had put winter tyres on his small sports car, he knew it didn’t have a lot of weight to get through the snowy roads.

As he backed out of the Ploughman’s car park, he could feel those tyres struggling with the snow.

*Think I was a bit too cavalier about this,* Jack thought.

Back in NYC, he actually liked it when a big storm came. Brought out the best in the