



SOUL TO KEEP

CLARE REVELL

SAY A PRAYER whodunit

#2

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Say a Prayer #2

Clare Revell

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Dedication

For Jan - very much my crit partner in crime.

What People are Saying

[Turned] was a fantastic, well-written suspenseful novel with some romance thrown in. It really keeps you on your toes. It is based on Christian principles but not preachy. Very clean. It is based in England with English sayings and spellings. Highly Recommended!

~ Richard and Liz

Vegas Vacation

As the book progressed, I began to really feel for the spoiled aristocrat (think Mary on *Downton Abbey*), and rugged Martin has a good influence on her ladyship. Don't you just love it when the characters grow and change? It takes an excellent writer to make us care about the characters even before they're entirely lovable. And personally, I like a character who's a little flawed, because aren't we all?

~ Jan Elder

*Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
If I should live for other days,
I pray the Lord to guide my ways.
~ Traditional Child's Prayer*

1

Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared. ~ Proverbs 3:25-26

Detective Constable Isabel York jerked awake, wondering what had woken her. On the bedside cabinet, her phone rang loud and urgent. She reached for it, squinting through the early morning light as she swiped to answer. 4:30 AM. What did her partner want at this hour?

“This had better be important, Zander.”

“It is.” Detective Constable Zander Ellery sounded as tired as she did. “They’ve found another body. I’ll be with you in ten minutes.”

Isabel closed her eyes as the phone went dead.

Another body. That made four. It was the Prayer Slayer, as the press had named him. Otherwise someone else would have received the call. Each victim was left wearing white, gagged and bound as if in prayer. The word guilty was written on their foreheads and a stolen painting beside them, indicating which of the Ten Commandments they had ‘broken.’ They were going in order, and she already knew which one this was. Just as she knew where they were going—the

killer had told her in advance.

Isabel threw the covers back and reached for her clothes.

The killer was taunting her twenty-four hours in advance—sometimes a little more—with cryptic clues in the form of postcards depicting the crime scene and the relevant commandment. The cards arrived in sealed envelopes in her in-tray. Only they'd never managed to track down the photographed scene until it was too late. She hadn't realised that Headley Cross contained so many parks, lakes, and riverbanks.

To her they all looked the same. Green grass, playing fields, a river, all public areas with so much footfall, any prints were a dead end before they even started. This supposedly quiet corner of England had suddenly become anything but a green and pleasant land.

She dressed quickly and ran to the kitchen to put the kettle on. Hopefully she'd have time for a cuppa before Zander arrived. She tied her shoelaces as it boiled. Her phone beeped. Her heart sank. He was here and before her morning tea. Still, at least it was daylight. Isabel turned off the kettle, locked the front door, and ran to the car careful not to glance over at the burned out ruin on the other side of the road.

Zander leaned across from the driver's seat and opened the door as she reached it. "Morning."

"Too early." She climbed in and fastened the seatbelt.

"Tell me about it." Zander yawned as he pulled away from the roadside. "I haven't even had coffee yet."

"The kettle had just boiled when you arrived. Where are we going?"

"Howth Park, over by the secondary school." He turned left at the end of the road. "I'd hoped for a couple hours cramming time before I left this morning."

"What time's your exam?"

"Twelve." Zander glanced at her. "Then a short break before the last paper at two-fifteen. I'll be out of the office and uncontactable from eleven. We have to hand our phones in."

She snorted. "Uncontactable isn't a word. And even if it was, do they think you'd all cheat or something by looking the answers up on the Internet?"

"Probably. I intend to hand them my phone in a named, sealed evidence bag so *they* can't tamper with it." He grinned. "It does mean you'll be running the initial stages of this murder inquiry alone."

Isabel shrugged. "I can fill you in tomorrow." She glanced around in surprise as Zander parked. "Are we here already? We're only five minutes from my place."

"Yeah. Least it's not right on your doorstep."

She undid her belt and flung open the car door. "It might as well be. And look, SOCO are already here for once. They must live even closer. Maybe it's right on their doorstep."

"Miracles will never cease." Zander grunted and exited the vehicle.

Scampering to follow him, she signed in and ducked under the crime scene tape.

A uniformed officer came over. "Are you the detectives handling the case?"

"Yeah." Zander's eyes widened. "Tom? When did you make inspector?"

"About a month ago."

Zander pointed to Isabel. "Isabel York, my

partner. This is Tom Crane. He was my sergeant at my previous nick."

Isabel nodded. "Sir."

"What have we got?" Zander asked.

"Female, long dark hair, found in a white gown with wrists, knees, and ankles bound in duct tape. She has the word guilty written on her forehead."

"Who found her?"

"Two of my officers while walking the dog. That's why I'm here. They called it in, and as I'm the duty inspector I came out."

"Is the coroner here yet?" Isabel asked.

"On his way." The inspector paused as a news crew turned up. "She's down there. We don't have a name yet."

Isabel headed down the path and around the base of a huge green hill. Willow trees lined the path, long green branches bending over as if weeping for the victim. The dead girl knelt as the previous victims had done. Her head was bowed, long dark hair brushing her shoulders, obscuring her face from this angle.

Isabel turned, surveying the scene.

If he'd run true to form, the victim's bag and the painting would be somewhere close, but just out of sight. If it wasn't a copycat. Someone else mimicking the vicious Prayer Slayer murders was the last thing they needed. But part of this bloke's MO was a painting of one of the Ten Commandments left at the scene.

She moved around the victim and stopped. The painting lay on the ground beside her. Which struck her as wrong. Had it been moved? Or had the killer been interrupted and just left it?

"Found her bag," Zander called. "Checking for ID

now."

Isabel brushed the victim's hair back from her face. "Oh!" Her stomach and chest tightened. She swallowed hard, taking an involuntary step backwards. "Zander..."

Her partner glanced up. "What?"

"It's Brit. The girl from the coffee shop."

Isabel turned away, her stomach heaving. Good thing she hadn't eaten or drank anything yet this morning.

"What?" He leapt to his feet, shock etched on his face. "Are you sure?"

Of course she was sure. She knew the girl, but she wasn't about to snap and bite Zander's head off. Instead she lowered her voice. "Yes. I'm sure. I saw her Sunday. She served me lunch."

Zander reached her side, the dead girl's bag still clutched in his latex-covered hand. "The Three Sixteen is closed on a Sunday."

"I know. I ate someplace else. She was working there. I asked if she were moonlighting. She laughed, said it was her parent's café, and she was helping out as they were short staffed."

Zander opened the bag and pulled out the card holder. He thumbed through them. "Driving license confirms it. Not that I doubted you." He slid the card away and shoved Brit's handbag into a large, clear plastic evidence bag.

Isabel turned her attention to the painting. "He didn't bother to hide it this time."

Zander put a hand on her shoulder. "Getting ready for church by the looks of it."

"She wasn't there. She was working. Fits the..." She broke off. "What are we missing? We need to catch

him."

"Morning." The coroner, Arend Van Houten, arrived. "Do we know who she is?"

"Brit Yardley. We knew her."

"I'm sorry." Arend put the case down and opened it.

Zander turned to Isabel. "We need to talk to those cops who found her. And to Tom, uh, Inspector Crane, as well."

"Yeah." She sucked in a deep breath. "I'm sorry. If I'd done things differently—"

"Hey," Zander said sharply. "This is not your fault."

"She drove me home on Sunday." Isabel wrapped her hands around her middle, trying hard to remain professional and not give in to the surge of grief and frustration vying for control. "I was unwell in the café. Farrell turned up, and we had conversation that didn't end well. The headache got worse and I could hardly see. I went to pay and Brit insisted on driving me home. What if I was the last one to see her? If she'd stayed at work, she might have been safe."

"Take a deep breath. None of this is your fault." Zander rested his hands gently onto her shoulders and stared intently at her. His blue eyes flickered. "You need to focus here. Once you get back to the office, you can do a formal statement. For now, Brit needs you to concentrate on what she has to tell us. Can you do that?"

She looked away, afraid she would lose control.

Her partner turned her face back to his. "Can you? Because I won't be around today to help. If need be, I'll get the Guv to send someone else out."

Isabel wanted to tear her gaze away and hide, but

he had a point. She needed to step up and do this. She nodded.

"Is there a problem?" Inspector Crane asked.

"No, sir," Isabel answered. "We're good."

Zander nodded. "I'll give the Guv a call. Best he hears this from me than on the radio over his cornflakes or eggs on toast."

Her stomach growled. "Don't mention food."

He grinned and pulled out his phone. "Guv, it's Zander...Yes, sir." He checked his watch. "It's a little after four-fifty in the morning. There's been another murder. I really think you should be here." He paused. "Yes, sir. Howth Park, the Fuchsia Road entrance." He glanced at the phone and shrugged. "He hung up on me. He's not happy."

"No coffee for him either. Which is small comfort." Isabel turned to Arend. "What can you tell us?"

"Same as the others. Grey duct tape. Probably from the same roll, but I can confirm that later. The dress looks the same."

Zander tilted his head. "Where's he getting them from? Are there any labels?"

"They look homemade. Fairly simple in design. One long t-shaped piece of fabric, seamed at the sides, leaving a hole for head and arms."

"Looks like a baptismal robe," Isabel commented.

Zander frowned. "Huh?"

"When I was baptised, we all had to wear white towelling robes which were extremely heavy when wet—kind of a one-size-fits-all outfit. That's what it reminded me of when we found Iona. Just didn't want to say anything for fear of looking stupid, but the more we see this, the more it seems relevant."

"You were baptised back in the dark ages?"

Zander slanted his head. "I can't imagine you in one of those outfits."

"Different church," she said. "We had to sit in them the entire first half of the service as well. Not wet, I'll have you know. The blokes had to wear white shirts and dark trousers."

He chuckled. "Good. I would say I wouldn't be seen dead in one of those, but that would be rather tasteless under the circumstances."

She shot him a black look. "I'd pay to see you in one. Especially soaking wet."

"Wet towel or wet tee-shirt?"

Isabel smirked wickedly. "Take your pick."

"Thanks. Arend, are you siding with me on this one?"

"I'm keeping out of this." Arend turned his attention back to taking photographs. "I can give you more information on the tape and dress once I get her back to the morgue and can compare with the previous findings."

"How long has she been dead?" Zander asked.

"Not long. A couple of hours, if that, would be my guess. Again, I can give you a definitive answer later."

Zander nodded. "We'll be around for a while if you need us." He and Isabel headed over to where the two men sat on a bench, the dog sitting beside them. Pulling out his ID, Zander waved it in front of them. "DC Ellery, this is my partner, DC York. I understand you found her."

It wasn't a question. They were cops; they knew the score as well as he did.

The blond man nodded. "Yeah. Police Constables Robin Satyr and Bryan Mayhew — that's Bryan with a Y not an I." He shot Isabel a long glance. "Nice to see you

again, Isabel."

Isabel inclined her head slightly. "And you, Robin." She deliberately kept her voice flat, saying one thing and meaning something totally different. Hopefully Zander would pick up on it. The two officers she'd had the misfortune to work with, and had honestly hoped never to see again once she transferred stations.

"How's CID treating you?" Robin continued, voice dripping honey. "You landed on your feet with a big case, I see."

"It's certainly different." Isabel wouldn't allow herself to be side-tracked or drawn into pleasantries. The fake honeyed tone made her feel worse on top of Brit...the body...a few feet away. "When did you find the body?"

"About three fifty or just before," Robin said, not taking his gaze off her figure. "We're on an early and wanted to walk OT before shift began."

"OT being the dog?" Zander asked.

He took a step closer to Isabel, for which she was grateful. He must have picked up on the way the officers were ogling her. Not like they'd never seen her out of uniform before. But she'd put up with enough of their behaviour for too long. She wasn't admitting to anyone that they'd driven her out of her previous job. That it was getting this transfer or quit the police force entirely.

Robin kept his gaze on Isabel, even though it was Zander who'd asked the question. "Yeah. Oscar Tango or OT for short. We rang the nick as soon as we found her. We knew it was the Slayer from the news reports. They never mentioned the word 'guilty' though."

"We never release all the information to prevent

copycat killers. You should know that. We left that out deliberately and need it to stay that way," Zander said firmly.

"How did you get here this morning?" Isabel dragged the conversation back on topic.

"Drove," Robin said. "We parked just over there. There was us and one other car—a red sedan." He gave the model name. "The registration plate was filthy, so we couldn't read it. The back plate was missing. Well most of it. The first two letters are RG which doesn't really help much."

"Not really." Zander scribbled in his notebook. "That's virtually every single car in town including mine. What time did you get here?"

"Three forty-five. We parked over there," Robin pointed to a silver sedan. "Let OT out and followed him. He went straight here."

"And she was dead when you arrived?" Isabel asked.

"Yes." Bryan spoke for the first time. "That's when we called it in."

"What time did you call?"

Robin checked his phone. "Three-fifty. Like I told you a minute or so ago." He waved the phone under Isabel's nose to prove what he was saying. "Anyone would think we'd killed her."

She scowled. "Would you rather do this down the station? Did you see or hear anything?"

"No. The other car left as Bryan rang the nick. I didn't see the driver."

"So Bryan rang using your phone?"

"I left mine at home," Bryan said. "Didn't think I'd need it, 'sides which, it's still charging."

Isabel glanced at Zander. "We'll pull the CCTV

and see what that shows us."

He nodded and turned to face the two men. "The coroner doesn't think she's been dead long."

Robin angled his head. "Doesn't surprise me. She was still warm when I felt for her pulse. But we saw how she'd been left so we called it in." He checked his phone again. "We need to go. We're due on shift soon."

"Then go," Zander said, obviously losing patience with them. "But you'll both need to come by the station later to give formal statements. Ask for DS Philips. He'll take them."

The men nodded, rose, and headed towards the car as swiftly as they could.

Zander waited until they were out of range. He groaned in obvious frustration. "What a pair of absolute numpties. She's warm when they find her, but they don't attempt CPR? They just call it in."

"It's an obvious crime scene, to be fair."

"Don't defend them. That's beside the point." Zander shoved his hands into his jacket pockets. "If she was only just dead, they could have revived her, or at least attempted it. We know the Slayer is killing girls on site or just before. They probably interrupted him."

Isabel shuddered at the thought. She put a hand on his arm. "Hey, deep breath. We'll find him."

He scowled. "Since when did you become me?"

"Since I grew up and became older than you," she teased. But even that fell flat. "You need coffee. And lots of it."

"Tell me about it." Zander yawned. "And sleep, but neither of those things are happening any time soon. At least, not much before ten or eleven o'clock tonight. And here's the Guv."