

# SOUL TO TAKE



CLARE REVELL

SAY A PRAYER whodunit

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Clare Revell

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**Soul to Take**  
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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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Publishing History  
First Harbourlight Edition, 2020  
Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0283-4  
Paperback Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0284-1  
**Published in the United States of America**



## *Dedication*

For Nicola, editor in chief who still likes my books enough to publish them. Thank you for so many years of faith in my work. Even when I do manage to sneak the word snuck into a story... Haha—see what I did there :)

It's an honour, a privilege and a joy to call myself a Pelican author. Thank you.

## *What People are Saying*

### *Down in Yon Forest*

She writes books like Alfred Hitchcock and M. Night Shyamalan direct and produce engrossing and captivating movies. A hint of an answer here, a red herring there, light here, dark there—*Down in Yon Forest* shines a bright light on her skills as a storyteller.  
~ Marianne Evans

### *Vegas Vacation*

Between figuring out who done it, what exactly WAS done, what are the bad guys up to next, as well as the motives and motivations behind all that was going on, this was a rollercoaster (or a trip down the strip!) of a read. Add the perfectly flawed hero for a spoiled heiress who does want to be a better person and all you need is your own cup of tea and No Interruptions! ~ Sarah Sarber



*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

*Do not take away my soul along with sinners ~  
Psalm 26:9*

The long, far too hot summer turned from June into July without a break in the weather. Detective Constable Isabel York exited the bus, the wall of heat hitting her like a lorry full of bricks. A blast furnace would be a more apt description, not simply of the weather, but her professional life, too.

The Professional Standards Department had cleared her of any wrongdoing. Her boss, DI Holmes, wanted her in his office at nine o'clock on the dot tomorrow morning. She hoped and prayed that meant her suspension was over. That left one question uppermost in her mind. Where would he transfer her to?

Some backwater town, most likely. Or traffic. In the few weeks since she'd joined the murder investigation unit, or MIU, DI Holmes had sacked or transferred several officers. Each one had annoyed him or transgressed or broken one of his rules. He'd have no qualms about tossing her out on her ear.

The only thing that hadn't fallen apart was her personal life. Although, she had to admit to herself, since she had none, there was nothing to destroy.

But she also had to admit she was far happier without a boyfriend, particularly one who revelled in being cruel to her. Her spiritual life was on the up. She'd come to terms with the fact that her father was back in the picture and wanted to be a part of her life. Now she just needed to work out how big a part and let him know.

The fact he was the station's Chief Superintendent and that made him her overall boss would only complicate things, but she was sure there was a way around the issue somehow.

Isabel walked the short distance from the bus stop to Her Majesty's Prison Headley Cross, where her partner DS Zander Ellery had been incarcerated for three weeks—ever since he'd been arrested and charged with the nine Prayer Slayer murders. Since then, additional charges had also been laid of facilitating the murder of Mrs. Kowalski, her gran; Mr. T, her cat; as well as the theft of ten oil paintings, conspiracy, and perverting the course of justice.

For a while Isabel had expected some of the same charges to come her way. But to her relief, they hadn't.

Entering the prison, she submitted to the pat down search, handed over her bag, and walked through the metal detector. The Bible she'd brought in for Zander was taken away to be thoroughly X-rayed and vetted. Then she joined the line of other prison visitors.

Metal doors slammed. The sound echoed in the long hallways.

Keys jangled.

A bell rang.

The queue moved slowly. As Isabel reached the door and presented the pass she'd been given, she fully expected to be turned away as she had every other

time she'd tried to visit.

"Who are you here to see?" the guard demanded.  
"Zander Ellery."

"Table five." He handed her back the pass. "Don't touch him or put your hands over the yellow line."

Encouraged, Isabel nodded and moved into the large grey room. She found table five and sat, her stomach turning and her heart pounding. She'd interviewed men in prison before, but that was different. The air around her was thick with apprehension and anticipation as the tables filled with relatives.

Another bell rang.

The gates to one side were unlocked. An internal door beyond that opened and a line of prisoners in grey sweatshirts and jogging bottoms were shown in. Each wore a yellow band diagonally across their upper bodies as if they were about to divide into teams to play a game of netball at school.

For a moment Isabel didn't think Zander would come as the other tables filled before her own.

Finally, he appeared. He limped slowly across the room and lowered carefully into the chair. His normal short, neat hair was unwashed, untidy, and brushed his collar. His beard, now full, almost hid the split lip. His right eye was bruised, and he favoured one arm as he sat on the edge of the chair.

What other injuries was he hiding?

"You look..." she began, unsure how to continue.

"As good as I feel," Zander finished, his voice croaky and faint. "Why are you here, Is?"

"I've been trying to see you since they arrested you, but they kept refusing my application for a visitor's pass."

"No, they didn't. I did. I'm the one who refused to see you."

Incredibly hurt by that revelation, Isabel glanced down at the table. "Oh." She'd thought they were pretty close, really good friends, but maybe he figured she'd disown him as everyone else had. "You look like you've been in the wars. What happened?"

"Oh, they won't give me razor blades and I don't like electric razors."

"That's not what I meant. You're limping, bruised, in obvious pain."

"It's called being a cop in prison," he muttered. He leaned back in the chair, pain flickering in his gaze before he controlled it. "Move your hands away from the yellow line. The guard's watching."

"I brought your Bible in from your place. But I had to hand it in so they can make sure I didn't hide anything inside it."

"Thank you. How's work?"

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I got suspended three minutes before you got arrested. But the PSD finally cleared me, and I have to report to the Guv's office tomorrow. I'm expecting to be transferred to some small, backwater hamlet in the middle of nowhere and be back in uniform."

Zander's half smile turned into a grimace. "I'm sorry, Is. It's my fault."

"How'd you figure that one?"

"Guilt by association."

Isabel shook her head. "He's just doing his job, no matter how much we hate it. He'd be at fault if he didn't. Besides, if it's any consolation, I don't think you're the Slayer."

"Everyone else does."

"To be honest, there *is* a shed load of evidence stacked up against you. Even if some of it is circumstantial and you didn't exactly make it easy to clear you. Your car is a match for the one used in the murders. Right down to the carpet. Until it was burned out, along with the final body."

"My car was stolen, and I reported it."

"Yeah, but the problem is your story for that didn't work either. The timeline just isn't right. Besides which, you told me one thing, the Guv another, and then Grace said something totally different. Gramps backed her version of events. For at least three of the murders you should have been with me, but you vanished with no real explanation. Then you came back covered with blood, which matched the victim's blood type. I can't be your alibi when I know you're missing."

"I told you. Nosebleeds." Zander swiped at his nose, removing the trail of blood. "I would ask for a tissue, but better not."

Isabel fumbled in her pocket. She pulled out a hanky, shaking it and showing the guard before sliding it over the line.

"Thanks." Zander picked it up and dabbed his nose. "They took the meds away."

"Surely the prison doc can prescribe them or give them back to you."

He shrugged. "You mentioned blood type."

"Yes." She shifted on the hard chair. "The blood on your shirt matched the victims. There was never enough to get DNA from, but enough to match blood type."

"Which, of course, is the same as mine. You do realise, I'm not the only bloke in town with AB

negative blood, right?" He took a deep breath then winced in obvious pain. "Remind me not to do that."

"Don't do that," she shot back. "So who beat you up and why?"

"There is no point. Nothing will ever be done about it." He hissed. "There is a code of conduct amongst the prisoners. Certain crimes make you *persona non grata* and even the screws turn a blind eye." Zander paused. "That's a prison guard."

"I know what screws are in this context. I've watched enough TV drama for that. But what sort of crimes are we talking about here?"

"Kids, for one thing. Dirty cops for another. Especially when you're banged up with people you've helped put away."

Shock rocketed through her. "They put you in gen pop?"

"Oh, yeah. So if I ever see the Bible it'll be a miracle."

Isabel reached for his hand, but he pulled back sharply as a guard walked by the table.

"Don't cross the line, Is. So, what's happening in the outside world?"

"There are several wildfires on the moors up north. There's a huge one just south of Oxford that's been raging for a week now. It still hasn't rained. Gramps is back at your place. He and Grace fell out over his bedtime, would you believe?"

"My place?" Zander frowned and rubbed his beard. "Who's looking after him?"

"Me. The place is no longer a crime scene, although the garden is still taped off. It's way too hot to sit out there anyway, so we're not bothered." Isabel studied Zander as she spoke. "You really don't look so

good."

"It's not easy in here."

"You know, God never gives us more than we can handle."

He scowled. "That's not true. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that, despite the fact it's quoted verbatim as if it is scripture. He gives us no more than *He* can handle." He glanced across the room. "You should go."

"But time's not up. We have ten more minutes yet. And I still haven't told you about my—"

"Is, please, just go." Zander stood. He turned, lost his balance, and fell. He landed hard and didn't move, his eyes closing.

Isabel jumped up and rounded the table. "I need some help here." The alarm went off as she knelt by Zander. She felt for a pulse.

"Go," he whispered, grasping her hand for an instant.

The prison guards reached her side. "Everybody out now. You, too, miss."

Isabel slid her hand into her pocket. "Not until I know he'll be all right."

One of the guards shook Zander, and then glanced up. "I need the doctor in here."

Another guard hurried Isabel from the room along with the remaining visitors. Three more guards guided the prisoners the way they'd entered.

Isabel turned. "Please, you will let me know how he is once the doctor's seen him? I'm his partner."

"Next of kin?" the guard asked.

She thought fast. Work partner would ensure she didn't find out anything. She nodded. "Yeah, but I bet he didn't say that. I'll give you my name and mobile number for his records."

"Do it, and then I can get them on file." He held out a notebook and pencil.

Isabel wrote down the information and handed it back. "Thank you." Following the corridor back to the entrance, she recovered her phone and handbag. Then she headed outside into the hot sunshine and airless summer's day. After the coolness of the prison, the heat was a shock to her system. She pulled the bottled water from her bag and drained half of it.

She walked to the bus stop, sending up prayers for Zander. She hoped he was all right and wasn't so seriously injured that he'd genuinely passed out. Whatever he'd given her rustled in her pocket. Curiosity abounded, but she knew better than to look now. She was still within sight of the prison CCTV cameras. She didn't want to make things any harder for Zander than they already were.

She was almost at the bus stop when a car pulled up beside her. The window wound down. "Isabel, would you like a lift?"

She glanced at the man in the car. Chief Superintendent Clydesdale, the man who claimed to be her father, leaned across from the driver's seat. "I'm fine. I'm not working at the moment."

"I know. It's my day off and I was hoping to run into you. Please, get in the car. We could have a spot of lunch. Maybe talk away from the office."

She hesitated.

"We need to talk," he said. "You know that. And I have the DNA results if you need a reason to have lunch. I don't really want to discuss it in the office."

Her stomach rumbled. Maybe lunch would be a good way to do this. They could talk, in a public setting, and she could leave if things got too awkward.

"Thank you. That would be good."

As he released the central locking, Isabel opened the door, and slid into the gloriously air-conditioned car. Whatever was on the paper that Zander gave her could wait until she got home.

~\*~

Zander was still as the prison doctor, Wes Straus, examined the bruises on his face. He tried not to wince too much.

"When did this happen?" Dr. Straus asked.

"Last night. They don't like cops in here."

"You blame them?"

"Not really." Zander gasped as the doctor's hands moved to his chest.

Dr. Straus frowned. "That bad, huh? OK, take the shirt off."

Zander considered refusing but didn't. Instead he complied, his muscles stiff and complaining with every movement. He glanced down. His chest and stomach were a mass of bruises and boot marks. He bit his lip as Dr. Straus conducted a far more thorough examination. "Even if the ribs are broken you can't do anything. Just strap me up and send me back to my cell. Look doc, it's your first week here. You'll get used to the way things work soon enough."

The frown on the doctor's face deepened and he studied the notes beside him. "You've been here three weeks, and this is your sixth visit. I really think you should go and get an X-ray. Just to make sure that rib fracture hasn't punctured a lung."

A guard appeared at the door. "There's a DS Philips and DS Painter here to see you, Ellery. They

want you stat, so hurry up."

Zander eased upright, wondering why DI Holmes hadn't come himself. He tugged his shirt on, wincing as he did so. "Maybe next time, doc, because I'll most definitely be back. They're not overly fond of me in here." He followed the guard down several hallways to a large interview room. CCTV hovered in one corner, the camera following his every move as it had down each and every corridor.

"Sit." The guard pointed to the chair.

Zander eased his body down. Every muscle he knew about ached, right along with some he didn't know he had.

The door opened. Even if he hadn't been told they were police, the two men had cop written all over them. Zander knew DS Painter by reputation only. He'd seen him in church a few times but hadn't even said as much as hello. DS Philips he'd worked with for several years. He eyed the two officers suspiciously. "Do I need my brief?"

DS Philips dropped a cream folder on the desk. "Only if you want your lawyer here. We're just looking to tie up a few things." He frowned as he sat. "What happened to your face?"

"Same thing that happened to the rest of me," Zander deadpanned. "Cell mate doesn't like dirty cops. I offered to wash but it made no difference."

"Did you report it?" DS Philips asked.

"Screws don't like us either." Zander tapped his fingers on the table. "Isabel came by for a visit this morning."

"Did she?" DS Painter spoke for the first time.

Zander nodded. "She doesn't look well. You should give her a call."

DS Philips angled his head, eyes narrowing slightly. "I'll do that." He opened the file and pulled out several photos, laying them on the table. "I want you to look at these."

Zander sighed, rolling his eyes. He would lean back, but he hurt too much for that. "Do I have a choice?"

"Just look at them."

Zander scowled. "OK, keep your hair on." He glanced down at the photographs, frowning harder. Then he shoved them all together, making sure one was face upwards on top of the pile. "You know what? I think I'd like my brief here after all. So you go arrange that and I'll look at all the photos you want." He turned to the guard. "I'd like to go now."

DS Philips put the pictures back into the folder. "We can't help if you lawyer up."

"You can't help me anyway. The Guv's the one who put me in here." He pushed upright and moved around the table, lashing out at DS Painter, fist connecting with the officer's cheek with a resounding thud.

Agony seared through Zander's cracked ribs as someone restrained him, yanking his hands behind his back. An involuntary groan escaped, and he tried to bend over to ease the pain.

DS Painter rose, rubbing his cheek. "I'm fine. And no I don't want to press charges."

The guard dragged Zander back down the hallways to his cell and pushed him inside. He'd barely had time to catch his breath, when another guard appeared. "Get up. Room search."

"You're kidding, right? I've only just got back in here."