



**CORNWALL AT THE HOLIDAYS:
BEAUTIFUL.FESTIVE.DEADLY.**

*When four are found dead, all tidings of
comfort and joy seem far away*

BLUE CHRISTMAS
CLARE REVELL

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Clare Revell

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Blue Christmas
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Dedication

For Ceryn.

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

Chock-full of intrigue and suspense, **Dark Lake** forges into uncharted territory, chilling and thrilling with equal measure. With complicated characters, elements of sweet romance, and a surprise ending that satisfies, Clare Revell continues to write with imagination and panache. ~ Jan Elder, Author of Love, Lies, and Fireflies

Clare Revell has written a wonderful Christian mystery in **After the Fire**. From the beginning, I found myself drawn into the story. The descriptions brought the story to life, and the vibrant characters felt like they could step off the page. EA West.

1

May

Acting Detective Inspector Aidan Urquhart glanced at the file in his hands, then up at Superintendent Dowden. He'd put in for a permanent promotion, preferably the one here in Inverness that he was covering. So, although a part of him was jumping up and down at having received the permanent rank of DI, the rest of him wasn't, because what he hadn't envisaged was being sent far, far away from his native Scotland.

He took a breath before speaking. "St. Morien? Cornwall? Seriously? Nothing ever happens there. Never mind the fact it's the other end of the country and hundreds of miles away."

"It's a new unit." Dowden's stare bored into him. "The town is growing quickly and the population more than quadruples in size during the summer, and that doesn't take into consideration the number of day trippers. And with the folk festival planned this year to combine with the summer solstice and the total eclipse of the sun, there could be upwards of eighty-thousand people over the whole weekend."

"I see." Although, he didn't. What idiot decided to

combine all three events? He longed to ask but didn't dare. "And once that's over and the population reverts back to its normal three thousand, what then? And in the winter when you don't need more than a handful of officers?"

"They have three or four festivals a year, like most Cornish towns. Plus, numerous tourists all year around. St. Morien also has a large festival that lasts for two weeks in the run up to Christmas. As I said, this is a brand-new unit. The powers that be have decided the town needs a CID and you're to head it up. You'll be made a permanent DI."

Aidan shifted, file in hand, not sure what to make of this idea. "Without an interview?"

"There isn't currently a CID, so no, there will be no interview. You're being assigned on merit." Dowden paused. "There have also been two teenage girls go missing and the local cops haven't made any progress. Your presence might chivvy them up a little."

Aidan hmphed and studied the file. "And I suppose there are no other officers who can do it?"

Dowden coughed loudly. "No one as well qualified as you. They had several officers to choose from and picked you."

Wow. Really? He wanted to ask again just to make sure he'd heard correctly. Although he probably shouldn't if he wanted his head to stay on his shoulders. Or if he wanted to keep this job offer or ever hope to advance his career further in the future. "I cannae just up sticks and move down the other end of the country, just like that." He clicked his fingers. "My

life is here. My daughter's school is here. My childcare arrangements are here."

"They have schools and after school care in Cornwall."

Aidan massaged the back of his neck. As tempted as he was by the offer, it wasn't as simple as it would have been a few years ago. "That's no' the same thing and yer know it. After school care doesn't help with being called out at three in the morning. Or when yer daughter is sick. I'm a single parent."

"Are yer saying yer cannae handle the position?"

"No' at all, sir. Just thinking aloud." Huffing out a deep breath, Aidan's mind began to race with possibilities. A new unit, one that was his to shape and run from the outset as he saw fit. One where he wasn't constantly being compared to the previous DI who had been much loved, and evidently Aidan was unable to hold a candle to. "What about staffing? Can I pick my own officers?"

"Within reason, yes. There are four uniformed officers already there, a sergeant and three constables. You can have a couple of DC's and a DS. That will give you plenty of officers for a small town, even with the population increases. You'll be the ranking officer. It may not be the promotion you've been angling for per se, but you'll be in charge of the entire nick, not just the new unit."

"Oh, the uniforms will love that."

Dowden smirked. "It's no' been easy taking over from Nick Jordan the way you did after he died, and yer did extremely well. This will be yer time to shine,

show them what yer really made off. Without having the ghost of a well-loved officer tae deal with."

Aidan tapped his fingers on his thigh, mind whirling. "OK, I'll want Ray Short as my DS, along with DC Frank Lawrence. I've worked with them before, and they both live down south somewhere—Ray lives in Cornwall. I also want a female DC."

Dowden raised an eyebrow. "A woman?"

"Why not?" Aidan closed the file. "I'm assuming all the uniformed officers there are men?"

"There is one WPC on staff. She's a local girl, lived in the town all her life, knows the layout, the people and is more than competent."

"Glad to hear it. However, I still want a female DC. And before you ask it's no' for tea and sympathy. Some victims only feel comfortable talking to a female officer. And with another woman there, it'll balance things out a little. You know what all-male nicks are like, sir. I believe in everyone playing a part and doing all the roles equally."

"Including making the tea." Dowden laughed. "Yes, I've heard you made the new DCI make tea for the whole squad last week."

Aidan grinned. "The man was getting a little big for his boots, sir. Needed taking down a peg or two." He stood, tucked the folder under his arm, and headed to the door. He turned as he reached it. "Actually...there's a DC down in Wadebridge. I consulted with her on a complicated case last year. Sasha something. She'll do fine."

Dowden nodded. "I'll give her a ring, and arrange

a video chat, alongside ones with DS Short and DC Lawrence. After all, they might not want the posting. Take another look at the file, and then let me know as soon as possible. Preferably by the end of the day."

Aidan didn't comment. This would mean uprooting his whole world, but maybe that was a good thing. "Set up the meetings for after ten tomorrow morning and we'll talk to them together. I need to speak to my parents and my daughter before I give you an answer. I could call you at home before nine tonight if you want. When would you need me to start?"

"First thing Monday morning. And by all means call me at home before nine."

Aidan raised an eyebrow. "Next Monday? That's only a week. Were you that sure I'd take the transfer?"

Dowden eyed him. "Aidan, you've had a rough couple of years. This place holds way too many memories for you. Mebbe a fresh start is just what you need."

"It's not just me, Sir. There's Molly to consider as well." He headed out before his boss had time to reply.

He spent the next twenty minutes at his desk, reading the folder properly. He'd lived in the Highlands of Scotland all his life. He never even contemplated leaving. Ever. Not even after Ruma died and left him a single parent.

However, a new unit, one he could shape from the get-go was an enticing proposition. Ray knew how he worked, and vice versa, and would back him to the hilt with the uniformed officers, who wouldn't be too

happy about him walking in and taking command.

He grabbed the phone and dialled. "Hey, Mum, it's me. Something's come up at work. We need to talk." He almost winced as he spoke. Nothing good ever came from those four words.

~*~

Jenica Zimmerman looked over the rim of the cup at her much younger sister, Thea. The Reading train station was busy, despite the fact it was past rush hour, and they weren't waiting for a London bound train. As always, the railway tea was weak and tasted like water. She wasn't sure why she bothered to drink the stuff. A bottle of orange juice would have been a far better choice. "Are you really doing this, Thea?"

Excitement oozed from the younger woman. "Yes, Jen. I am. I never wanted anything more in my life."

Jenica hated the way people abbreviated her name. She preferred the way the full version sounded and wished her family, at least, would use it. She raised her voice over the noise of a train rushing past. "Let's just calm down a sec, here, and take a breath. You also really wanted to be a professional tennis player."

"I was ten."

She plunked the takeout cup onto the bench beside her, not wanting anymore of the tea. "And a nurse."

Thea laughed. "I was twelve and in love with that really hunky doctor on the telly."

"And a flight attendant."

"I was fifteen then. Half the girls in my year

wanted the same thing. Especially when a pilot came in to talk about his career along with this really glamorous flight attendant. I mean, who wouldn't want to fly all over the world, visit hundreds of different places, and get paid for it. Especially if all the pilots were as good looking as he was."

Jenica groaned. "And then at the grand old age of eighteen, you wanted to be a meteorologist, but not yet. So, after a gap year travelling the world, you went to university and lasted all of a year and a half. Now you're off again."

"What can I say?" Thea shrugged and tossed her disposable cup into a bin. "It's not what I expected. I want to do more with my life, not spend every hour with my nose stuck in a textbook or taking notes in yet another boring lecture on rain clouds."

Jenica handed Thea her cup to throw away. "You mean you want to achieve more than I have with my life."

"Face it, Jen. You're thirty-two, single, and for a living, you make sure people don't break stuff in stately homes. I don't want to settle for something like that. Or be a teacher like Mary, Anne, and Mike. I want more. I want adventure and purpose, and it's not as if the olds actually care about what I do. They never did and are probably just glad I'm not under their feet anymore. Or that they'll have to pay for another two years of university fees."

Jen sighed as a train pulled into the platform and stopped. She raised her voice slightly to be heard over the engines. "Three things. One: my name is Jenica, not

Jen, Jenny, or any other pet name. Two: working in a stately home as a tour guide involves a heck of a lot more than guarding the Ming Dynasty vases, by the way. And three: for your information I didn't *settle* on this job because I'm not clever enough to do anything else! When you were thirteen, I graduated university with a first-class honours BSc in Biology and Marine Biology."

Thea's jaw dropped. "Really? I never knew that. So why aren't you working in a zoo or an aquarium or on a beach somewhere hot and sunny with exotic sea creatures?"

"Because I happen to enjoy what I do." Jenica quickly turned the question around. "You still haven't told me exactly what you're dropping out of university to do."

"Something different." Thea frowned, and then glanced up at the tannoy.

"The train now standing on platform five is the nine-twenty departure for Newquay. Calling at..."

"Oh, that's me. I have to go." Relief at having the question circumvented exuded from Thea as she leapt to her feet and hugged Jenica. "I'll send a postcard."

Jenica hugged her back. "You do that. Preferably more than one, along with an address so I can write back. And take your phone app off ghost mode so I know where you are."

"Where's the fun in that?"

"Please? I know we aren't close, but Cornwall is a long way from Wokingham. You won't just be six miles down the road." She followed Thea to the train

and hefted the heavy suitcase into the carriage after her sister. That kid was late for everything, or would be given half a chance. She'd be late to her own funeral. Which was horribly clichéd but in this case entirely accurate.

Thea slammed the train door and yanked open the window. "I'll think about it." Her words were almost inaudible as the whistle blew and the train began to move. She waved madly. "Love you. Bye. Don't work too hard."

Jenica waved back. "Love you, too. Bye. Have fun." Once the train was out of sight, she tugged her phone free and called her parents. As always, she got the answer phone. "Hi, it's me. Just saw Thea off on the train. Heading to work now, so I'll call you tonight or tomorrow depending on what time I get home."

Leaving the station, Jenica headed to where she'd left her car, ready for the twenty-five minute drive to the stately home. She loved her job, well, most of the time. It was her choice to be working there rather than what her degree was in, and if no one else liked the idea it was just too bad. Even if the words "disgrace to the family name" did get hurled her way every so often. Just because she wasn't a teacher or a lawyer or a politician—or a practicing marine biologist. She was perfectly happy with her career choices, and more importantly completely, not to mention blissfully, unattached. At least she had a job. One she'd stuck at for several years. She also had her faith and somewhere to live. What more did she need?

Truth be told, so long as she had Jesus in her life,

nothing else mattered.

~*~

Aidan sat in his parents' small front room, cup of strong tea in hand. He could feel their displeasure from where he sat. Molly, her long black hair done in tight plaits today, sat beside him on the small couch, her head on his arm. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

His mother shook her head. "There's nothing to say."

"The thing is they need me in Cornwall next week. That leaves no time to arrange schools or somewhere to live or anything."

"Or childcare," Dad grumped. "Sounds to me as if you've made up your mind."

Had he? He'd been trying to paint both sides of the picture, pros and cons, from the list he'd very carefully made that afternoon. "I'd be the officer in charge of the nick, Dad. It's more money. More responsibility. A chance to start over. For the both of us."

His mother's bottom lip quivered.

Aidan touched her arm. "I'm no' leaving you. I would no' have made it this far without either of you. If you and Dad want to come as well, we could get one big house. Maybe with a granny annexe or something so you have your own space. You could keep your place here. Rent it out, get some income. I willnae need a mortgage, or no' a very big one. At least think about it?"

Molly tugged his sleeve, bottom lip trembling. "Daddy, are you going away like Mummy did?"

Aidan set down the cup and settled his daughter on his lap. He wrapped his arms around her and tugged one of her tiny plaits gently. "No, no, wee girl. Nothing like that. They want me to move down to the seaside in Cornwall and catch bad guys there. But I have to leave really soon. I need to be there by the weekend."

"What about me?"

Aidan's heart broke. He hugged Molly, kissing her forehead. "For the moment, you'd stay here with Gramma and Grandpa. But every holiday you'll come down and stay with me. Including half term in three weeks' time. I'll video call you every night, read you a story, and as soon as I can arrange it, you'll come and live with me properly."

"Will Gramma and Grandpa come as well?"

"If they want to. I'd like it if they did, but it's up to them. You can all come down in the summer, stay for the whole of the holidays. See what you think. And if you like it, we'll find a house and hopefully be in by October half term or mebbe Christmas."

"Will there be mountains and lochs?"

"No, but there are hills and a beach." He winked. "An all year 'round beach. Would you like that?"

Molly nodded shyly. "And I come visit every holiday?"

"Every holiday." He turned to his Mum. "I'll tell them I'll take it on a temporary basis. See how it goes. If I like it, if Molly likes the place once you all come

and visit, then I'll organise selling the house and finding schools and somewhere to live. But only then."

"Will your boss accept that?"

"He'll have to." Aidan hugged Molly again. "I won't uproot her unless it's right. It isn't fair."

Fortunately, the powers that be agreed with him.

Just after three o'clock on Friday afternoon, Aidan pulled into the car park outside St. Morien police station and found a space. He'd spent the best part of two days driving the whole length of the country; followed by an exhausting ninety minutes in the main county police station being issued with new ID. He exited the vehicle. The wind blew his hair backwards as the sun dipped lower on the horizon. He yawned and stretched before straightening his tie and buttoning his jacket.

Aidan locked the car and strode up the path to the one story, grey slate roofed building. Two concrete steps raised the building from the cobbled pathway. A bell jangled as he pushed open the main door.

Hmmm. Quaint.

A man in shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, no tie, and hair that didn't look as if it had seen a brush in days, appeared on the other side of the desk, coffee cup in hand. "Can I help you?"

Aidan raised an eyebrow. "I hope so. Is Sergeant Mainwaring around?"

"He's gone home for the night. I'll tell him you called. If you'd like to leave a message, I'll give it to him when he comes in on Monday."

Really hoping this wasn't based purely on his

accent, Aidan checked his watch. "A little early to go home, isn't it?" He pulled out his ID. "DI Aidan Urquhart, your new boss. And you are?"

The man straightened, slopping coffee onto the desk as he quickly plunked down the cup. "PC Nancarrow...Chris...Sir. We, we weren't expecting you until Monday."

"I can see that. Call Sergeant Mainwaring and get him back here. And put your uniform jacket and tie on, constable. What kind of a welcome is this for the public?"

First impressions counted for everything, and this one was, so far, abysmal.

PC Nancarrow nodded. He shoved a load of papers to one side, and lifted the arm of the counter to allow access to the rest of the station. "If you come this way, sir, I'll show you around. It won't take long."

Aidan jerked his head in response. "Thank you." He walked through the gap, noting the counter fall heavily behind him, and followed the constable into the back office.

While the constable managed to dress correctly and then placed the call, Aidan's keen gaze registered the mess on the front counter and in the entire office. He'd have his work cut out here, but that didn't put him off. He'd caught them on the hop, which is what he was hoping for. Obviously, they'd have tidied up before his planned arrival on Monday morning.

PC Nancarrow nodded to a young woman in uniform sitting at a desk surrounded by paperwork. "This is WPC Trevelyan. She's doing the week's

paperwork, and then the Sarge has her on patrol duty for when the kids leave school. Which will be any minute now."

Aidan held out a hand. "DI Urquhart. The new officer in charge here." WPC Trevelyan shook his hand, a firmer grip than he was expecting.

"Tressa Trevelyan, sir."

"You like paperwork, or are you just behind?" he queried.

"It's not mine, sir. I'm on top of that. I'm doing everyone else's."

"Really?" Determined that would change as from next week, Aidan held her gaze. "May I ask why?"

Before she had time to reply, the other officer chimed in again. "She does paperwork, school runs, and makes the tea. Also provides a shoulder to cry on occasionally. The Sarge says that's all women are fit for."

Aidan tried not to scowl, but it wasn't possible. "Does he now?"

The female officer's face mirrored his displeasure. "Along with a few other things, sir," she said as she rose. "And as Chris pointed out, I'm due on school run duty now. Welcome to St. Morien, sir."

"Thank you. We'll have a chat about your duties on Monday, if that's all right with you?" He wasn't giving her a choice over the chat, just the timing of it.

"Any time Monday is fine with me." WPC Trevelyan shot him a brief smile before she hurried from the room.

Aidan turned back to the other officer. "Shall we

continue?”

The tour of the station took ten minutes, by which point Sgt. Mainwaring still hadn't put in an appearance.

Not impressed with anything he'd seen or heard, Aidan left a message for the man to report in at half past ten the following morning, regardless of whether it was his weekend off. He also made a note of which of the three rooms out the back he'd be seconding for himself, along with a list of furniture he'd need. He wouldn't take the sergeant's office, as that would just rub salt into the wounds of him taking over. He'd take one of the others, probably the larger one which seemed to be a storeroom at the moment.

For now, CID could share with the uniformed officers. Once things were a little more established, they could have their own squad room. Unless he simply kept them all together.

And everyone would be responsible for their own paperwork. School patrol duty would be shared. Along with the night shift. Evidently everyone clocked off at five in the evening and didn't come back until nine in the morning. Aidan could already tell what sort of an officer Sgt. Mainwaring was, and he would get short shrift if he kept on that path. There was no way poor WPC Trevelyan would be left wiping tears all day long once he was in charge. Women were just as capable of doing the job as men. Else they'd never have made it through basic training.

Next Aidan strode the short distance to the small parade of shops, comprising chemist, estate agent, old