



CLARE
REVELL

HAPPILY EVER AFTER HAPPENS ONLY IN FAIRYTALES...OR DOES IT?

Fairytale
of
Headley Cross

A CHRISTMAS
ROMANCE

Fairytale of Headley Cross

Clare Revell

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Fairytale of Headley Cross

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Dedication

To all the pastors who balance home life with faithfully preaching God's word week in and week out.

Thanks to Marianne Evans and Fiona Chase for the beta reading and brilliant comments all the way through.

Praise for Clare Revell

Season For Miracles

This author definitely has talent and great imagination. Kyle and Holly came to life in this book with so much ease they hardly sounded fictional and so real. The pain and fear that Holly goes through is heartbreaking but I loved that with Kyle anything is possible. This is definitely a book worth reading for it has everything just right for the season: God and hope.

~ Lena, Happily ever after reviews

Saving Christmas

Clare Revell does it again with this beautiful story of hope and redemption. SAVING CHRISTMAS packs a lot of story into a limited number of pages, and draws the reader in from the very first line. It's a wonderful respite from the hectic holiday to-do list.

~Mary Manners

An Aussie Christmas Angel

Do you like to visit new places? Do you like Christmas themed stories? Do you enjoy a sweet romance? Then you might want to check out this tale, based on a condensed version of a true story as explained in the author's note at the end of the book. The major take-home value of this short story is a great one! God can use anything and all circumstances to bring about His purposes.

~JoAnn Carter.

1

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

~Mark 2:17

Christmas music played from the café radio as one of the baristas stood on a stool hanging tinsel decorations from the ceiling. There was no doubt as to the time of year, even if Maggie Turner's job as a primary school teacher would let her forget it.

Dropping her heavy bag to the floor, Maggie sank gratefully into the chair in a corner of the busy coffee shop and smiled at her two best friends, Jan Diamond and Patricia Kincaid.

"I need this coffee," she said. She pushed her long fringe out of her eyes and sucked in a deep breath. "I haven't stopped all day."

"What about lunch? Last time I checked Justin's school timetable, he had an hour for lunch every day." Jan raised an eyebrow.

Her perfectly coiffured hair was still in place, well befitting her self-defined post as an elder's wife, despite it being almost 3:50 in the afternoon. Oh, to have an office job and not be run ragged in a school room.

"Lunch was spent marking homework and trying to organize the school carol service. That way I could leave early for once." Maggie closed her eyes letting

the scent of the coffee fill her senses. She could almost taste it already. "Coffee with you guys, then home and get ready for this meal tonight is all I have planned for the rest of the day."

"Going anywhere nice?" Patricia asked. She was nearer Maggie's own age and, at times, easier to talk to than Jan.

"Wesley is taking me to Lancini's. I've got a new dress and new shoes especially. It cost the rest of this month's allowance, but it's so pretty. It's long and peach with one of those cinched waistlines. Hopefully Wesley will like it."

Jan's eyebrow shot up into her hair. "Allowance? Why not use your wages?"

"My money goes into his account. Wesley gives me so much a month. Most of it goes towards my rent, so I save up for things I need."

Jan frowned. "Hmmm. I wouldn't stand for that if Frank tried it. Is Wesley worth it? I mean, it's not like you're living with the bloke. You're not even engaged."

"It's Lancini's. I can't go there in something I've already worn. Besides, you know how particular Wesley is. I have to look my best at all times. Even in church when I'm teaching Sunday school. Just glad he can't see me now. Having spent the last hour decorating the classroom, I'm not exactly at my best."

Patricia smiled at her. "You look fine. Hey, speaking of church. Have you actually met the new pastor yet?"

"No. I'm always in Sunday school."

"They really do need to change the rota so you make a morning service. You're missing out on so much teaching and fellowship."

"I like working with the kids. Besides, it gives them some stability having the same person there each week. Plus we only have the one teacher...me."

"I know, but you teach all week. You can't do it every single Sunday as well. You need to refresh your own spiritual life, too. Jan, can't the elders do something about it?"

"You sound like my father." Maggie winked.

"It's fine how it is." Jan shushed. "If Maggie needs the help I'm sure she'll ask for it."

Maggie sipped her coffee. "But I make the evening services when I can. I just wish Wesley would come as well. So what's this new pastor like?"

Patricia laughed. "I can't believe you have to ask that question. Pastor Carson is single, dreamy, tall, dark, single, and he has a beard. Not one of these unkempt ugly beards, but a neat trimmed one. It suits him, complements his dark eyes. Did I mention the fact he was single?"

"I think you might have done. Just once or twice." Maggie laughed with her. "Do you like him then?"

"So does every other single woman of a certain age. You know he's only thirty."

"Younger than I thought he was." Maggie finished her coffee. "That hit the spot."

Patricia glanced at her watch. "I should go. Meeting a prospective client in fifteen. See you Sunday." She gathered her bags and was gone.

"Isn't that Wesley just come in?" Jan nodded to the doorway.

Maggie turned to look. She'd be surprised if it was Wesley. He'd never eat anywhere that didn't have at least one star if not two. Never mind allow her to do so. "Yeah, it's Wesley, but..."

She broke off. She'd never seen him dressed like this before. Normally his suit was expensive, his shirts immaculately pressed, tie pristine, shoes polished until he could see his reflection in them. But not now. Today his red hair was *au naturel* rather than slicked back, and in lieu of a suit, a white T-shirt tucked neatly into jeans peeked from under a leather jacket. Tan ankle boots completed the look.

Wishing she'd at least touched up her make-up, Maggie smiled as he sauntered across the café and passed her table without even acknowledging her, his eyes fixed on a brunette waving at him.

As he approached, the woman stood. Her close fitting tee, braids, and a skirt that would rather be a belt, made her look a lot younger than she probably was. "Wes."

Wes? The one time Maggie had called him that, he'd freaked out and told her it was Wesley, nothing else.

Wesley Crane wrapped his arms around the girl and kissed her on the lips. *Not his sister, then.* But any shred of doubt was cast aside shattered and torn by the next thing he did with his lips. "Hey, babe." His voice was unmistakable even across the crowded room. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, honey. How was your day off?"

Honey? Day off? He was meant to be in London in a meeting all day.

Jan touched her hand. "Maggie?"

Maggie shook her head, captivated by the two people across the café.

"Are we still on for tonight?" the woman was saying.

Wesley smiled. That smile he only kept for

Maggie, the one that knocked the breath from her and made her go weak at the knees, he was aiming at another woman.

Not to mention the googly eyes and caring touch. "Of course. I'm looking forward to it." He sat down with her.

"What about your sister? Weren't you meant to be seeing her tonight?"

"Margaret will understand. I'll send her a text." Wesley pulled out his phone.

Maggie stood, grabbing her bag, and ran from the café. The last place she wanted to be when her phone beeped was seated anywhere near him. She leaned against the wall, sucking in a deep breath.

"Maggie..."

She glanced at Jan who'd followed her out. "*How could he?* I feel so sick and angry right now. I have given up so much for him, and this is how he repays me!" Her text alert went off and she pulled out her phone. She read the message. *Hi. Can't make it tonight. Business dinner with important client in London. Will rearrange for next week.* "He's busy tonight. Funny that."

Where had he really been all those evenings she'd sat in and waited for him while he'd worked late—make that gotten caught up doing something with that other woman—and never made it? Had he ever been faithful? What had she done wrong?

"What are you going to do?" Jan's voice cut into her thoughts.

"Go home," she said quietly. "Via the bank to open my own account. I'll give work the new details tomorrow. Then I'm going to walk Gypsy."

"Good on you." Jan hugged her. "I'll ring you later on."

"I'll go to the prayer meeting. There's nothing to stop me now." She shouldered her bag and headed down the street to where she'd parked the car. Anger raged through her.

Was she a bad person? She had given him everything he'd asked for and more, well except one thing. Perhaps that's why he'd turned to another woman.

She unlocked her car and got in, slamming the door hard enough to make the whole vehicle rock. Fingers trembling she pulled her phone from her bag. Not bothering with the contact list, she dialed the number from memory, stabbing at the digits.

The call connected. Without waiting for him to speak, her anger let rip.

"I saw you this afternoon in the café. So much for you being in London. And as for me being your sister? How many other *business dinners* have you had recently? Don't think I'm going to let you get away with it."

There was a second or two of silence, before a deep, chocolate smooth voice replied. "I'd like to see you try."

That wasn't Wesley.

She'd called the wrong number.

Her cheeks burned and she didn't need the driving mirror to tell her how red her face was. "I'm sorry. Wrong number," she managed.

She ended the call and buried her face in her hands. What an idiot she was.

That's what she got for letting her anger take over and not handing the whole thing over to God in prayer first. She didn't even know what number she'd rung. It could have only been one digit wrong, but hopefully

she wouldn't run into the guy any time soon.

Pastor Carson Armitage replaced the now-dead receiver, sending up a telegram prayer for whoever the angry woman was. "Well, I wasn't expecting that," he told himself.

"Problems?" Trudi Restall the church secretary asked as she came back into the office.

"Just a wrong number. At least I assume so."

"Well, thank you for answering the call anyway. I only stepped out for a moment. It's always the way."

Carson reached into the pocket of his long black overcoat. "You're welcome. I came by to give you the hymn numbers and order of service for Sunday. Is there anything else you need?"

"No. And you didn't have to hand deliver them. Email would do just as well."

He smiled. She said that every single week. Truth was he enjoyed the walk between his home and the church. As did his black-and-white border collie, Pilot. "I'll remember that when it's raining. Or we're covered in six feet of snow."

Trudi smiled back. "What did this wrong number want?"

"Not much. I got berated for something I hadn't done. But despite her apparent disdain for whomever she thought she was talking to, I hope she's all right."

"Did you ring her back?"

Carson shook his head. "No, I didn't want to make her feel any worse. Well, I'm off. Pilot needs a long walk before the prayer meeting tonight." He headed outside and untied Pilot. "Come on then, let's go walk

in the park and see how many ducks we can terrorize this afternoon.”

As he walked, his thoughts returned to the phone call. He prayed once again for the woman he'd spoken to so briefly. Whoever she was, she needed help in her current situation. And although he himself was powerless to help, he knew Someone who could.

Pilot ran happily by his heels as he headed to the park. The usual dog walkers were already in the park, including the woman he saw most evenings—the lady who owned the gorgeous sheltie. She was early tonight, but then so was he. He studied her as he walked the same path towards her. Her blonde hair, usually done up in one of those fancy twists, blew every-which-way in the cold wind. She normally looked neat and tidy, but today seemed careworn and upset.

Should he stop and say something? As he took a step in her direction, her phone rang and the moment was gone as she turned off the path with her dog. No matter, he was bound to run into her tomorrow, if not sooner.

Pilot fetched the stick and brought it back, dropping it at his feet.

Carson looked at him as he bent to pick up the stick. “So what would you have done?”

Pilot panted and licked Carson's hand.

“Really? Lick her to death? I don't think so. Come on, time to go home.” He grinned as Pilot barked. “Protest all you want. But I have a service to go to, and I want to eat first.”

His grin turned into a chuckle as Pilot's ears pricked up at the word eat and the dog started pulling him along the path.

The church hall was already filling when Carson arrived half an hour early for the prayer meeting. He was still in awe of the fact he'd been called to serve here at all. He'd done his college placement here, and could hardly believe it when a job came up for a co-pastor of Headley Baptist Church. The church was everything he'd hoped for—evangelical, baptizing believers, and a member of the FIEC. He'd applied, not expecting to get a co-pastorship straight out of seminary school, especially as the advert wanted someone with more experience than he had and with a wife to help out with the ladies and children's work. He felt honored that they'd chosen him.

Sunday would mark the fifth week since his ordination, and he was still trying to put names to faces. Not an easy task with a congregation of over four hundred each week—three hundred of them members. He'd made a conscious effort to speak to almost everyone on the membership roll with a couple of exceptions. He planned to rectify that as soon as possible. He also wanted to organize a meeting with everyone involved in the different ministries of the church. Especially Maggie Turner. She taught Sunday school, and he hadn't managed to catch her at all.

He really could have done with a few more weeks spent with the other pastor, Jack Chambers. But Jack had gone overseas on a planned trip with his family and wouldn't be back until February.

Talk about being thrown in at the deep end.

"Pastor?"

Carson turned. "Hi, Trudi."

"You wanted to know who Maggie Turner is. She just came in. She's over there, long blonde wavy hair, knit dress, and knee length boots." Trudi smiled. "And you look years younger without the beard."

Carson ran his hand over his newly shaved chin. "Not sure that's a good thing. I'm younger than most of the congregation wanted."

"You got an overwhelming majority of the vote. Don't forget that."

Carson headed across the hall to the lady Trudi had pointed out. Too late he realized he didn't know if she were a Miss or a Mrs. And after last time, he wasn't going to call anyone Ms. Well, whatever her title, she was a stunning woman. Perhaps she was a little on the willowy side, but with curves in all the right places.

She looked familiar. He'd seen her before. *Well, obviously. In church on a Sunday*, he chided himself.

Carson sneaked a look at the woman's left hand as she draped her coat over the back of a chair. "Miss Turner?"

She turned and looked at him. "Yes?"

He held out a hand. Her voice sounded familiar, but he was sure he hadn't spoken to her before today. "I'm Carson Armitage. I understand you organize and teach the Sunday school classes for the children."

Her eyes flickered for a moment. He could almost see her mind whirling as if trying to place him. Just like the way his mind was trying to work out where he'd seen and heard her before. And it wasn't from church either. It was somewhere else.

"Yes, I do. It means missing the service each Sunday morning, but I try to make the evening ones."

"That's good to hear." He paused. "This is going to sound really corny, but have we met?"

“You have a dog,” she said absently. “I’ve seen you in the park. You’re Mr. Border Collie.”

Of course. The blonde woman who was so upset earlier that afternoon. “Miss Sheltie. But it’s more than that. I’m sure I’ve heard your voice before. Have we spoken on the phone or something like that?”

His voice died in his throat. That was it.

Color flooded her face. Had she made the connection at the same instant he had? “Oh, no. Please tell me I didn’t ring you this afternoon by mistake.”

“I wish I could, but, yes, I’m afraid you rang the church office, and I answered the phone.”

2

Maggie wished she could simply vanish. How much worse could the day get? It hadn't been just some random bloke she was never going to meet on the other end of that phone call. It was the new pastor. Someone she was going to have to work with for the next several years. And she was the Sunday school teacher and should know better. What must he think of her? Her cheeks burned so hot she could easily fry eggs on them.

On top of which, Patricia's description of him didn't even cover first base. The man was *beyond* attractive. But he was a pastor, more than that he was *her* pastor, and she was...well let's face it, she'd yelled at him on the phone for something he hadn't even done.

Every part of her wanted to get out of the church hall and run as far away as she possibly could. Surely it wasn't possible to be any more embarrassed than she was right now. In the space of a few short hours, she'd lost her boyfriend, her self-respect and now any chance of becoming friends with Pastor Carson Armitage.

But running was what cowards did. And she was *not* a coward. Her parents, and therapist, had taught her self-worth came from facing things and working through them, not from running away and sticking your head in the sand.

Finally, she found her voice. "I'm really sorry

about that. I was just so angry, and I dialed without thinking. I assumed Wesley picked up, and I let him have it. I'm sorry. If I'd known it was the wrong number..."

Pastor Carson's smile reached his eyes. "Not to worry. No harm done. Is everything all right now?"

"Not really." She sighed. "But there's nothing anyone can do about it."

"You can pray. It might not sound much, but it's the strongest weapon in the Christian's arsenal. And speaking of prayer, I must get this service started. Could we meet tomorrow at some point in the afternoon? I'm trying to talk to everyone involved in church work, and I have an idea to run past you at the same time. Are you free about four?"

Not really, but can't tell him that. Maggie thought quickly. If she did her planning at lunch, she could leave at three forty-five. "Sure."

"Good. I'm working out of my front room—unless you'd prefer to meet somewhere more public?"

"The manse is fine."

"OK. See you then."

Maggie slid into her seat as Pastor Carson headed to the front of the hall. Her face still burned. She'd never live down that first meeting. Ever. And he probably wanted to discuss it in depth tomorrow. She blinked hard. *I will not cry.*

Jan sat beside her. "I thought I was going to be late." She shrugged off her coat. "Are you all right?"

"Not really."

"What's up?"

Maggie shook her head as Pastor Carson rose to his feet. "Later."

"Good evening." His deep voice sent shivers