



A ROMANTIC SUSPENSE FOR EVERY MONTH OF THE YEAR

CLARE REVELL

*Lily of the Valley
in May*

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Dedication

For Jess

because she says I love her and because she reckons she's my favourite child. She's right on one account.

Not going to say which one :)

What People are Saying

November Charlie

Revell always delivers on the suspense, and November-Charlie is no different, but I'm particularly impressed by the way she develops her characters and paints a very real portrait of YA life with all of its joys, insecurities, fears, sadness, and overriding determination. ~ M Evans

Cassie's Wedding Dress

Just when you thought that Cassie and Jack had finally settled into the truth of their love, turmoil erupts. I found myself wanting to dive into the story and help! ~Michael Duncan.

*Carnations in January shake the foundations
Violets in February are an aid to salvation
Daffodils in March bring betrayal and loss
Sweet peas in April consume all the dross
Lily of the Valley in May brings danger untold
Roses in June show hope in a heart filled with gold
Water lilies in July a town will submerge
Gladioli in August love from the ash will emerge
Forget-me-nots in September are on the front line of fear
Marigolds in October will test her career
Chrysanthemums in November show the burden of choice
Holly in December lets a broken family rejoice*

Lily of the Valley in May brings danger untold...

God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. ~Psalm 46:1

1

The gunshot ricocheted around the stone walls of the church.

Faith Chadwick jumped and clamped a hand over her mouth in an attempt to stifle her involuntary scream as the figure in front of the glass-paneled door leading from the choir stalls to the vestry slumped against it with a thud, and then slid to the floor. Faith flattened herself against the back wall, praying that whomever shot Father Haney didn't know that she was in the vestry waiting to go over the music for Sunday services.

"Rest in peace, Father."

The all-too-familiar voice shot rivers of terror through her, as blood oozed under the wooden door separating her from the dead priest and his killer. Her heart pounded, bile rose in her throat, along with a lump which threatened to choke her.

Please, God, don't let him realize I'm in here.

"He's dead."

Her heart beat louder. Surely he must be able to hear it. But what was Damien doing here? Surely he hadn't...

“What about your girlfriend, Damien? What if she blabs again? This time she may choose to confess to that cop brother of hers.” The voice came over the phone’s speaker.

Damien laughed. “She won’t say anything ever again. I’ll deal with her personally.”

Faith held her breath as the footsteps grew quieter and the door opened and shut again. She’d confided in Father Haney two days ago, asking his advice on what to do. But how had Damien found out?

The priest’s death was her fault.

She waited until there was the distinct sound of a car leaving the scene. She cracked the door open just enough to see the motionless body of the minister. She checked for a pulse, but there wasn’t one. Her fingers trembled as she pulled out her phone. Rick would know what to do, and if she got sent to prison as well, so be it. She was caught between a rock and a hard place and had no choice now.

“DS Rick Chadwick.” He answered on the second ring.

“Rick, it’s Faith. Father Haney’s dead. You were right about the diamond heist and the guard. Damien said if I told anyone he’d kill me.”

“Where are you?”

“St. Cuthbert’s Parish Church on Kelsey Street. Damien was here. He shot Father Haney. I didn’t know who else to call.”

“Just sit tight, and I’ll be with you soon as I can.”

More footsteps sounded as someone approached. “Someone’s coming—” She cried out as the door to the vestry flung open and the phone was knocked from her hand. Rick’s tinny voice echoed from it for a moment, before a foot smashed it.

“There you are, Faith.” The familiar silky voice made her jump. Dark, hollow eyes bored into her. “You should have kept quiet, mouse. Because now it’s not just Father Haney that has to pay for your sins—it’s you, too.”

The gun filled her field of vision.

“Wish I could tell you it’s not personal.” He slid the hammer back.

Something landed on her lap. She glanced down. A bunch of lily of the valley, a red ribbon tied around the stem lay there. She used to love the scent, but not anymore. These had been dyed black; the same way carnations were sometimes dyed blue or green.

She shuddered. He said lily of the valley emphasized her chastity and sweetness.

She knew all too well what the black flower meant. A bouquet of black flowers had been left at a number of murder scenes. She raised her gaze to his face, fear knotting her insides.

Damien’s eyes glinted and he smirked. “Love you to death, babe.”

He fired.

~*~

Faith’s left shoulder ached as Rick parked the car outside Grace’s house. It still seemed strange thinking of it as Grace’s and not Aunt Tilja’s; even though the entire house had been rebuilt since Grace moved in at the beginning of the year.

Faith sucked in a deep breath and rubbed her shoulder as she unfastened her seatbelt and eased from the car. The bullet had gone straight through, amazingly not hitting bone or anything vital, when

Damien had shot her a week ago. She'd been in hospital under police guard until that morning and against police advice had arranged somewhere to stay herself.

"Thank you."

"Welcome. I still would prefer you to take up my offer of protective custody."

Faith looked at her brother. He was never off duty. "Rick, he's locked up. He can't hurt me anymore. No one knows where I am, except you. Besides, this is a new start. Grace has set up an interview for a job for me tomorrow, and if it doesn't pan out, then I can always work in the shop with her."

He frowned as he pulled the cases from the boot. "You can't say anything to her about this—the real reason you've suddenly changed your mind about leaving Damien and coming to visit. I don't mean lie to her. Just don't tell her everything."

She frowned back. "I don't like that. Grace and I don't have secrets. I won't say he shot me, but..."

"I mean it, Faith. It's for your own safety, and hers. All it takes is for one word to get out and we'll have to move you again. You won't be safe here."

Patches barked and Faith let the dog out of the back of the car. "Oh, I'm sorry, did we forget you were there?" she asked, rubbing the top of his head. "You were so good in the car, despite Rick thinking you'd get hair all over his precious baby."

Rick shook his head in despair.

"Faith! You're here." Her older sister's voice screamed almost in her ear.

"Grace! I am." Faith yelled back and hugged her sister tightly.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. You worry too much."

"With good cause. I know what Damien's like."

"I don't want to talk about Damien. He's history. How are you and whatshisname? Let's see the ring."

Grace held out her hand.

Faith admired the diamond and turquoise stones set in a plain gold band. "It's beautiful. I want all the details. And I want to meet him."

"You will. Elliott's coming for dinner. He lives next door with his brother."

"He lives with his *brother*?" What kind of a bloke lived with his brother when he was over thirty?

"They're twins and pretty much inseparable." Grace finally turned to her brother and hugged him. "Hi, Rick. Long time no see. How's work? Can you stay for dinner?"

Rick returned the hug. "Afraid not, I have to get back. I'm on duty early tomorrow morning. Otherwise, I would. You and Faith have fun, but not too much. Take care of her for me." He looked at Faith. "And you behave yourself. Keep in touch."

"I will."

Faith waved as Rick drove off, not letting go of Patches lead, then looked at her sister. "Are you sure this isn't an imposition? I don't want to cramp your style."

"You won't." Grace led her inside the bungalow. It smelled of new paint and—well, just new everything. "I've put you in here."

"It's changed—but then it would with the rebuild. How long have you been back in here?"

"I moved in on the second of May, so three days. The layout is the same, but Elliott extended out the back a little so the kitchen and lounge are bigger. And I

have a conservatory and an attic room now." Grace put the bags in the second bedroom. She looked at Faith. "I want all the gossip and the real reason behind your sudden desire to come on an extended visit. Not that I mind having you here, I'm just curious."

Faith tilted her head. How did she get out of this one?

Change of pace? New start? Yes, a new start would do it. Grace knew she'd broken up with Damien, so she could use that as a reason to leave her home town of Ely and visit with her sister. Her shoulder injury she could brush off as the final fight—the reason she'd done what everyone had been telling her to do for several months. Perfectly true, but at the same time—

"Fine," she said. "But could we talk over a cup of tea and some of your flapjacks. And you have to return the favor. I want to know all about this Elliott of yours. How he saved your life and rebuilt your house. But first, I want a guided tour of your new home."

Grace winked. "I just told you, the layout is the same."

"Don't care," she retorted. "I'm a guest, and it's only polite for the hostess to show the guest where everything is."

Grace laughed. "Fine. This is your bedroom. This is the bed, wardrobe, dressing table..."

~*~

Joel Wallac sat at his desk and looked over the front garden. His bedroom in the house he shared with his twin brother, Elliott, also doubled as his office. The cursor blinked relentlessly on the open document. The

half-written story no further forwards now than it had been the day the phone rang two weeks ago, bringing the news that shattered him and turned his world upside down.

A fire that engulfed his ex-wife's home had left her and the bloke she lived with dead and his son fighting for his life. Joel rubbed his hands over his face, his broken heart once more fragmenting into a million tiny pieces. Bradley's injuries were too severe for him to survive. No one knew how much longer it would be and Joel was dividing his time between work and his son's bedside; on tenterhooks each time the phone rang, wondering if it would be the call he knew would come.

A pile of unopened mail sat by his computer screen—probably more sympathy cards, which could wait until later. He'd finally written a standard reply to send in response. He'd print more off and sign them. For an author, this was harder than it should be. The thing was, he didn't want or need the sympathy. Things had been over between him and Caroline for years and what love he had once felt for her lay long since dead and buried.

But right now, he needed to stop worrying about how long his son would hang on and get this book finished before it was too late. Time was a luxury he didn't have. He rubbed his eyes, tears perilously close to the surface again.

Elliott set a mug of coffee down on the desk. "How are you doing?"

"I'm not." Joel closed the word document. "I haven't written anything. I should be in Oxford visiting Bradley in the burns unit, but—"

"Then why aren't you?"

Joel watched the steam from the cup rise upwards, twisting and rotating. "I had a phone call from Caroline's solicitor half an hour ago. I'm still executor of her will, because she never got around to changing it after the divorce." He sighed heavily, tears burning his eyes. "If she really wanted to hurt me with her last breath, she succeeded. But what really hurts, is that I failed her. I knew the truth about God and I—"

"It's called free will," Elliott said gently. "All we can do is point people to Jesus, nothing more. I know you tried."

Joel looked at the photo on his desk. He ran his fingers over the smiling face of his son.

"Go to Oxford."

"I'll hit the rush hour traffic. I'll just head out first thing in the morning."

Elliott perched on the edge of the desk. "Joel, how old were you when you spent over a week in hospital with appendicitis?"

"Seven."

"And how many days did Mum and Dad miss a visit?"

He picked up the coffee, inhaling the scent. "None, but this is different."

"How so? He's a little boy, he's hurt, and he needs his father, now more than ever."

His brother's words ran deep, twisting the spear that still ran through him. "Don't try and make me feel worse than I already do. Bradley's dying, El. You and I both know that every moment could be his last."

"All the more reason to go and see him," Elliott told him gently. "Come on, I'll go with you."

"I thought you had a dinner date with Grace and her sister. You've been looking forward to meeting her

ever since Grace said she was coming to stay.”

“Grace will understand. Now on your feet and let’s go see your son.”

Joel held up the partly drunk coffee only for his brother to jerk the cup from his hands and set it on the desk. “Fine. Your car or mine?”

~*~

Unable to sleep, Faith was up at seven o’clock and desperate for a distraction. Just after nine thirty, she borrowed Grace’s car and headed to the supermarket. Her mind was going over this interview she had coming up as she shopped and then headed back across the car park. It was no small thing—a huge contract was in the offing, working with one of the biggest and bestselling authors in the UK. Not to mention her all-time favorite—Paul Darrow.

She had no idea how Grace knew him, but didn’t want to ask, unless her sister had told her and she’d forgotten. She had so much going on the past few days, that she was honestly surprised she remembered her own name at times. She’d tried hard not to be jealous when Grace said she not only knew Paul Darrow, but also had had dinner with him on numerous occasions. The closest she’d ever come to meeting him had been a book signing, but Damien had stopped her going at the last moment.

The creator behind Dirk Shepherd— the greatest crime fighter ever to come to life on the pages of a book, Paul Darrow had so far penned fifteen novels, each more exciting than the last. She owned all of his books, read each one more than three times, and couldn’t wait for the next one to come out. And he

wanted to look at her work.

More than that, *he* was coming to see *her*. That never happened, not with any of the authors she'd worked with—

Faith stopped with a crash. Glass crunched under her feet. The shopping cart had come to rest in the taillight of a car.

Her face burned with embarrassment and horror. Perhaps if she apologized enough, the owner wouldn't be too angry.

The driver got out, sunglasses obscuring his eyes. "What are you doing?"

"I really am so very sorry. I didn't see you."

"I noticed." His deep baritone voice oozed irritation and anger. He turned his attention to the car. Long tanned fingers examined the damage. "You walked right into me."

Faith swallowed hard, feeling sick.

He turned his head and pushed his sunglasses off, hooking them over his shirt pocket. His bright blue eyes glinted darkly at her from under a shock of brown hair. He looked very familiar, but where had she seen him before?

"I'll pay for the repairs."

"Too right you will. It won't come cheap, but perhaps it will teach you to pay more attention to where you're walking in future." His tone was abrupt and his diction exact.

Faith took a deep breath. "I really am very sorry. I'm staying with my sister. I'll give you her number because I don't have a phone." She wrote it down, along with her first name, and offered the piece of paper.

The stranger shoved it in his pocket without even

looking at it. "I shall be sure to call you. I wish I could say bumping into you has been a pleasure. Good day." He inclined his head a little and turned back to the car.

Taking that as a dismissal, Faith headed over to Grace's car, her heart very much in her boots. That would just be money she didn't have. Why did he look so familiar? Where had she seen him before? She loaded the bags into the car.

Nothing changes. I'm still an idiot, aren't I?

At least she could mail the cheque for the damage, and she would never have to ever see him again.

~*~

Joel finished taping plastic over the damaged brake light and sighed. He really didn't have time for this, or he might not have been so brusque to the very apologetic-looking woman. The meeting at eleven was too important to be late for. If this artist wasn't all she was cracked up to be, then the book would never be finished before Bradley...

And that wasn't an option. He needed it done and soon.

From that meeting he had to go straight to Caroline's funeral.

Heading inside the house, he stripped quickly and tossed his dirty shirt in the laundry hamper. He pulled a fresh white shirt and his black suit from the wardrobe, along with his black tie. As he fastened the buttons, he wondered about the mystery woman from the car park. The paper gave her name as Faith and a number that wasn't even hers. If he saw a penny of the repair money he'd be fortunate. Who didn't own a phone in this day and age?