



A ROMANTIC SUSPENSE FOR EVERY MONTH OF THE YEAR

CLARE REVELL

*Forget-me-nots
in September*

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Dedication

For Gail
and to all other military families, who sacrifices much
to support their loved ones in their chosen career
paths.

What People are Saying

Wednesday's Child...must hide for protection... Oh, the heartbreak that starts this story makes you wish it is only a dream. Poor Liam. And talk about "destiny"...Liam and Jacqui, although the sparks fly from the start (that's not necessarily a good thing) are clearly meant to be together. The time they spend together is so sweet! But when the past rears its ugly, evil head, only God can lead them to peace and forgiveness. This story is truly a depiction of good vs. evil — and we all know how that story will end! Great story! Loved it! ~ Donna B Snow

*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*

*Forget-me-nots in September are on the front line of
fear*

You are my hiding-place; you will protect me from
trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.
Psalm 32:7

1

His back flat against the rocky overhang, Lieutenant Colonel Bev King sucked in a deep breath. His unit was cut off from the forward operating base, and he had a man down. Gunfire ricocheted in front of his men, and there was no sign of the chopper he'd requested. Radios were down, so maybe his call had never been received. Sending up prayers that he knew would be heard, Bev made the only choice he could under the circumstances. He had to get his team to safety, and if that meant laying down his life to do so, then that is what he'd do. Without question, hesitation, or pause.

Retreat was their only option.

Bev glanced up and down the overhang, before making rapid signs to his team. Getting nods that they understood, he gripped his gun and turned. Standing just enough for a clear line of sight, he laid down covering fire at the insurgents. "Go," he yelled.

Bullets flew around him. Adrenaline flooded his

system as he returned fire, trusting his team were doing as instructed. Chopper blades sounded from somewhere to his right. A loud explosion and bright light filled the air. The blast sent him flying backwards. He slammed into the ground, stars surrounding him.

“Boss...boss, are you all right?”

Bev pushed the female medic attached to his unit aside and sat up. “I’m fine,” he said doing a quick mental tally of arms and legs. Nothing hurt more than it should. “Just need to get everyone out of here.”

“Chopper’s waiting.”

“Then let’s go. Everyone, move. Now.”

~*~

Back at the main base, Bev sat in the container that passed for his office and put the final touches to his report. Frank was being treated and would be airlifted home as soon as he was stable enough to withstand the ten-hour flight. But the outcome could have been so different.

This was Bev’s third tour. He knew what to expect, but today had been a close call. Too close. For an instant he wasn’t sure if the chopper had blown up or if he was dead, or both. He buried his head in his hands, pushing his fingers through his close cropped hair, and offered up a prayer of thanks for the fact that all his men had come back alive.

“I hear it was intense out there.” The clipped voice of his CO, Brigadier Charles Hereford-Jones, accompanied the knock on the door frame.

Bev glanced up. “We were ambushed. They knew we were coming.” He held out the report.

“We’re already looking into it.” Brigadier

Hereford-Jones took the document and held out an ebluey. "You missed mail call. Are you signing up for those dating agencies again?"

Bev gave him a wry smile. "It's a parcel sending service. Everyone is well vetted by the Ministry of Defence. These men and women don't expect a reply, though I try to send at least one letter. We get letters and parcels every so often. You should try it."

"My wife sends me parcels."

"Yes, but does she send paddling pools and blow up Santas? Or is she a tea, coffee, hankies, and BO basher person?"

"She is and the deodorant comes in very handy out here. Wait a second. Blow up Santas? Seriously?" Brigadier Hereford-Jones tilted his head in amusement.

"Oh, yeah. Smudge got light up boxers in his last box. Along with the normal tea, coffee, soap, and toothpaste. We also get soup, noodles, and ketchup. It's a touch of home out here in the desert. Most of the adopters who send boxes are married with six kids, but it gives them a chance to show their support and let us know we're not forgotten out here. Besides, I don't have time for romance. The military is a jealous mistress at times."

"Never say never." Brigadier Hereford-Jones ran his fingers over his wedding band.

"In all seriousness, sir, try it." Bev pulled a leaflet from his drawer and held it out. "Several of the married lads do it. The 'adopters', as they're known, aren't allowed to send photos of themselves, not even if we ask. Actually, they have a whole list of stuff they're not allowed to send. And if we get stuff we don't want, we share or swap it with the others."

"I'll think about it. Thanks for this." He waved the

report. "Debrief in an hour, OK?"

Bev stood as his CO left the office, then sat back in his chair. He raised a hand to rub the back of his neck. His gaze caught the return address on the letter. *Jude Travis, 82 Raggleswood Crescent, Headley Cross*. An address he knew all too well, and not just because it was opposite Gran's house.

"Small world," he muttered.

"What is, boss?"

Bev looked up. Steve Blackwood, his sergeant, stood in the doorway. "New adopter. She lives opposite Gran."

"I got a letter, too. From somewhere in the Lakes. You could always drop in on yours when you go home for R and R."

"And if she's forty, fat, and frumpy?"

"You'd get along like a house on fire. Come on, cheffo's got the kettle on for a brew before the debrief."

"I'll read this first..."

"No, you won't. Blokes need you more than some letter does."

Bev tucked the letter into his jacket pocket and stood, following Steve out into the blistering June heat.

Hours later, Bev was about to drop into bed when he remembered the letter. Tearing off the edges, he read by torch light.

Hi, Lt. Col. King.

My name is Jude Travis, and I've been given your name, rank and serial number by the Adopt a Squaddie service. I'm about to pack up and send out your first parcel. We're allowed to send six boxes per tour, plus an extra one at Christmas. I try to send one every three weeks, as we can't send six weeks before the end of your tour. So you'll probably get them all at once the day you leave as the post is rubbish

here at times. I sent my cousin in Scotland a birthday card last month and it still hasn't arrived!

Anyway, like I said I'm Jude, just about the right side of thirty and married to my job. I work in a shop, well, actually, it's a bakers, well, actually, I run it, hence the being married to it bit. Early starts, late finishes, but I love it. What else can I say before this page shuts on me and I lose everything again? I dance, sing (not very well, but I do sing, and not just in the shower either), go to samba classes, and I'm thinking of taking up belly dancing—purely for the shock value in church.

If you want anything in particular sent out just ask, and I'll do my best to get ahold of it and post it to you. Stay safe and I'll write again soon. Jude.

~*~*

Jude Travis checked the street in both directions before she unlocked the front door to her rented house. She dived in fast, shut the door, and almost stepped on the pile of mail on the mat. Bending down to retrieve it, she stroked the cat behind its ears. "Hello, Chesterfield. Did you miss me? Are you hungry?"

The cat meowed and tried to trip her up as she made her way into the kitchen. She checked the mail, tossing the envelopes one by one to the counter. Junk...junk...pay slip? It couldn't be. She didn't send herself pay slips through the post. Turning the letter over, she caught sight of an address on the top left. Strange. Return addresses normally go on the back of letters. It must be from abroad.

Looking closely, she almost jumped out of her skin. It was a BFPO address! It must be from her squaddie. With trembling fingers, she fed the cat that

seemed determined to kill her if she didn't, and then shoved her dinner in the microwave.

Finally, she settled down to read. Her whole body tingled with excitement as she tore off the strips of paper sealing the edges.

Hi, Jude.

Thanks for the letter. It came after a really bad day and made me smile. Especially the part about belly dancing in church. That would have made me laugh out loud if I hadn't been afraid I'd wake the rest of the lads.

Jude's cheeks burned hot. She hadn't meant that at all. Had she really put that? What else had she put that she shouldn't have done? She returned to the letter.

Although it does say somewhere about David dancing semi-naked before the Lord, I don't think the UK is warm enough for that. And my church definitely wouldn't approve any more than David's wife did.

What can I tell you about me? I'm a career soldier, in at eighteen and still here now, obviously, else neither of us would be doing this. I like football, support the Biscuit Men because someone has to even if they don't win much...

Jude frowned. She didn't follow football, but the Biscuit Men were Headley Wanderers—the local team. Did that mean Lt. Col. King was a local lad? What were the chances of that happening?

I love peppermint tea, chocolate and cheese and onion crisps. There is one thing I've been craving—aside from a decent book to read—and that's sweets. Do you remember penny sweets? Things like black jacks and parma violets. I loved those, but I haven't seen them in years. Anyway I'd better go as it's late and we have PT at 5 AM every morning. The unit CO is particularly tough on his men when they're late, so I'd better be on time or I'll never hear the end of it. It would be nice to have someone to talk with

via e-bluey, now that we've connected by post. I'll send my information to you so that we can connect via Internet.

Bev. (Said unit commander.)

Jude grinned. Ten parcel sending tours and no one had ever replied. Not even a thank you, so she had no idea if the parcels ever arrived. Her microwave beeped and she ate while composing a shopping list. She could shove a few extra bits into the box waiting to be sent in the morning. She glanced at the clock. Ten minutes before the corner shop shut. Grabbing her bag and keys, she ran out of the door and down the road.

"Hey, Jude." Kevin grinned at her. He'd been her brother's best mate. The three of them had been inseparable as kids and she knew Kevin carried a torch for her, but she wasn't interested. She liked him, sure, but not in that way. Just a shame he never got the hint and backed off. If there was another shop close enough to the house to use, she would.

She rolled her eyes. "Aren't you sick of that one yet?"

He shook his head. "Nope."

"Just be grateful your name isn't Jack, else everyone would be coming in going 'hijack' and boring you silly." She shot him a quick smile. "Can I have three quids worth of black jacks, parma violets and fruit salads?"

"You'll rot your teeth. Do you want toothpaste with that?"

"Why not? Spearmint."

"Sure. Do you want a quid's worth of each?"

Jude gave a nod and gazed around. What else would her squaddie like? "Please. The same bag is fine for all the sweets. I'm filling my squaddie box. Do you have any water bombs?"

“Yup. Got a new box of them in this morning.”

“Great. Five packets, please. And a red Frisbee and pack of custard creams.” She glanced over at the crisps and grinned. “And a big packet of cheese and onion crisps.”

Back at home, she logged into the site, found Bev’s confirmation to e-mail with her, and typed.

Hi, Bev.

Thank you for your letter. It came today. I’m here watching the most amazing sunset, but taking the time difference into account, you’re probably doing your PT about now. I can’t believe it’s almost July. Where’s the year gone? And did I really put belly dancing and church in the same sentence? I didn’t mean I was planning on dancing in the aisles—that might just kill a few of the little old ladies in the back row. I’m not exactly thin and sylph like. My brother called me plumpy and frumpy. It’s kinda stuck over the years.

Thank you again for replying. No-one’s done that before so it means a lot. On the FB page, other people said they hear several times a tour and it’s hard not to be jealous. I tell myself you’re all out there to work and not socialize, but at least now I know I have your address right and the parcels will get there. I’m posting it tomorrow. The PO is next to the bakery, so I’ll sneak out and post it during a lull. Stay safe. Jude.

She hit send and within a few minutes got the e-mail alert to say it had been sent. Closing the browser window, she leaned back in her chair as her brother’s image filled the screen. Jayden, her twin, older than her by fifteen minutes, looked at her from the desktop wallpaper. His air force hat was perched at a jaunty angle, trademark grin on his face, eyes twinkling. His blue uniform looked smart, buttons gleaming.

Jude's heart swelled with pride and then broke with the sense of loss. Her eyes filled and she kissed her fingers before touching them to the screen to his face. "Night, bro. Miss you."

~*~

A day off consisted of cleaning weapons and training. Bev caught up on his reports and ignored the shouts of mail call. If he got mail, someone would come and find him. Sweat trickled down his back, and he shifted in his seat. July had come with a vengeance. The small fan made no difference at all.

Photo attachments weren't allowed on the e-blueey system, but that didn't mean he couldn't search for Jude on a social media. At least he assumed it was her, as her profile was totally locked down. He'd sent a friend request, but wasn't expecting her to accept it.

The door opened. "Boss, you have mail."

Bev stood. "Thanks, Smudge. I'll be right there." He strode through the heat over to the group who stood around the mail sacks. He was given two boxes and three letters. One box was covered in stickers and smiley faces. He flipped it over and smiled. Jude. She decorated boxes the way her letters sounded. He took it back to his office and left it until last. There were letters from his parents and a couple of people from church. A parcel from his grandmother contained socks, hand knitted jumper, slippers, and the usual long letter. He didn't have the heart to tell her that slippers and sand didn't really mix. He'd much rather she sent flip flops. They'd be of much more use in the desert than carpet slippers.

Then he opened Jude's parcel. Piles of blueeys sat

on the top. Under that a red and black striped woolly hat and matching gloves, table tennis set, coloring pens, puzzle book, packet of biro pens, tea bags, coffee sachets, soup, a huge bag of sweets, sugar, jam pots, marmite, a Frisbee, crisps, biscuits and five packets of water bombs. Something soft wrapped in tissue paper turned out to be a Christmas Elf. Obviously handmade, he had red and white striped arms and legs and a green and gold outfit.

A handwritten note was wrapped around a packet of toothpaste and a new toothbrush. *Hey there! Don't eat all the sweets at once. I'm going to the bookshop at the end of the week and will get you a nice sappy rom/com or maybe chick lit. LOL. No seriously, I'll find something I hope you'll like. Enjoy.*

Bev grinned. How could she possibly fit so much into the one box? Tucking the box under his bed, he headed down to the common room with Elf. The rest of the team sat on the chairs and floor opening their mail. "Hey," he said. "Look what I've got." He held up Elf to a host of cheers. "Unit mascot, perhaps? You blokes have been saying for weeks we needed one."

"Great idea, Boss," Smudge said. "Give him here."

Bev tossed him over. "Just don't hurt him. He's mine."

"I know." Smudge turned him over and then reached into a box on the shelf. He pulled out a spare unit patch and pinned it to Elf's shirt with a safety pin.

Bev shook his head. The antics of his unit never ceased to amuse him, yet they followed him with unswerving loyalty and more than a sense of duty.

"There, now he's one of us, look." He made Elf salute. "I promise to do everything the Boss tells me. But only after he's said it half a dozen times."

Bev grinned. "Give him back." He caught Elf and tucked him under his arm. "As you were. I need to go and tell his previous owner about Elf's new job. Oh, he needs a rank. Any suggestions for what rank we give him?"

Smudge grinned. "Higher than you, boss. Hey why don't we make him a four start general and put the Brigadier out of a job?"

Bev rolled his eyes, not needing to say anything.

"Nah, make him a private," Smudge decided. "He can have candy duty."

"Sounds good to me." Bev trotted back to his office, trying to dispel the feeling of disquiet hanging over the base. It was quiet. Far quieter than normal. He pulled over his laptop and logged into the ebluey site. He typed fast. His gut was telling him something was out of place and that was never a good sign.

Hi, Jude. Just a quick note to say thank you for the parcel. Mail call just came and I'm staggered at how much you managed to fit in one box. Thank you so much. The unsettled feeling in his stomach grew and tightened. He typed faster. How did you know I needed toothpaste? Someone borrowed mine night before last and I haven't seen it since. Base shop was out, I checked. Private Elf, to give him his new name, has been adopted as the unit mascot. He's cute. And he's promised to do everything I ask him. Hopefully the first time not the tenth.

Alarms began blaring. Bev's stomach knotted. He hated being right. *Gotta go. Thanks again. Bev.*

He hit send and slammed the laptop closed, standing in the same movement. Shouts and the sounds of gunfire came from outside as he ran to the door. He prayed for safety as he sprinted for the armory.