



Christmas Eva

Clare Revell

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Dedication

Mrs. Johnson, my year 5 teacher, who encouraged me to write by her comment on a story about a horse I wrote when I was nine. "Lovely, keep it to read to your parent's grandchildren."

Other titles by Clare Revell

Season For Miracles

Saving Christmas

Cassie's Wedding Dress

Time's Arrow

Kisses From Heaven

After The Fire

An Aussie Christmas Angel

Monday's Child

Tuesday's Child

Wednesday's Child

Thursday's Child

Friday's Child

Saturday's Child

Sunday's Child

Fairytale of Headley Cross

Shadows of the Past

Turned

Vegas Vacation

Praise

Season for Miracles

The hero and heroine 'grow up' together in both faith and love, and they do battle against the monster of past demons that connect their lives. Marianne T. Evans

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

Fairytale of Headley Cross

I love being swept away through Revell's writing. She expertly sucks you in and allows you to fall in love with each character as God's love and grace shine brightly. I really enjoyed this short read. It includes romance, excitement, humour, a slight thrill and most importantly, God's word. Great Christmas read. TSuckoo (Amazon reader)

For there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. Psalm 137:3-5

1

April

The bright evening sun sent rivers of gold upwards as it set in the spring sky. Eva Anderson and her best friend since infant school, Sue Giles, ran up the steps from the underground station. Eva lifted the edge of her evening gown in both hands, not wanting to trip over it. "Hurry up. We're going to be late."

Sue laughed. "Chill. We have plenty of time. Besides, the Duke of Clarence Theatre is right at the top of the steps. We don't even have to cross a road."

"Good." As they burst onto the street, Eva assessed the tall building with its domed roof and granite columns. A huge sign saying *Full House* sat by the revolving doors. Billboards advertising the play and the cast hung from overhead. The display casings on either side of the theatre steps held posters listing the name of the play and the cast.

Her heart pounded faster as she read them, her gaze not getting any further than the lead actor's names.

The Tide Turns starring Bertram Williams, Hannah Daystrom, and Matthew Lyell.

Matthew Lyell. The reason she was here on what was forecast to be the wettest night of the year so far.

Eva climbed the remaining steps and entered the theatre lobby with Sue. Deep red carpets, dark brown woodwork, huge mirrors, gold lights and fittings all added to the opulence and rich ambience of the building. Eva felt underdressed, despite her full-length gown, suede jacket, and pearl necklace with matching earrings.

Her sister, Felicity, had laughed at her attire. But Eva had merely pointed out that this was an evening show on London's West End, and you didn't simply turn up in jeans and a crop top. It had to be formal wear and nothing less than the best would do. Felicity had then resorted to teasing about Eva dressing up for her favorite actor, but Eva had ignored her.

She bought a program and followed Sue inside the auditorium to find their seats. Front row, gallery, directly opposite the stage.

Sue nudged her. "Can I pick seats or can I pick seats?"

Eva grinned back. "Yes, you can." Of course, being in a theatre was nothing new to her. As a makeup artist she worked in one—or on a film set—almost every day. But front of house was a treat. A rare occasion to be treasured.

She settled into her seat, her excitement mounting like a little kid on Christmas Eve.

"This should be good." Sue put her bag by her feet and slid out of her jacket. "You want to try for his autograph afterwards?"

Eva caught her breath. *That was a silly question.* She'd do anything to get his autograph, never mind meet him. She'd always hoped one day to encounter

him on set, but so far, it had never happened. "How would we do that?"

"We go wait outside the stage door. Loads of people do it."

"Seriously?" She twisted in her seat, raising her eyes from the program and the full color photo of Matthew Lyell. "We just hang around outside the back of the theatre and hope he comes out before midnight?"

Sue nodded. "That's how I got Patrick Stewart's signature last year."

Eva sucked in a deep breath. "I guess we could try. So long as we don't miss the last train home." She looked back at the program. Matthew Lyell beamed up at her. His blue eyes, short brown hair, and strong jawline, set her heart pounding. Never mind the fact that Internet research told her he was single *and* a Christian.

She mentally shook her head at herself. *Felicity was right. You have a crush on the guy...* But what would she say to him if she ever did meet him?

Would she even be able to string three words together without sounding like a gibbering wreck or an idiot of the first degree?

The music started, lights dimmed, and the curtain rose. And there he was. Her favorite actor, mere feet away.

As the play progressed, she laughed and cried, all the while totally mesmerized by the fact *he* was on stage. Matthew Lyell brought the character to life so convincingly. Her heart fluttered and skipped beats almost rhythmically, while her stomach filled with butterflies. His voice thrilled her in the same way it did on the TV or in film.

Too soon the play was over, and Sue was dragging her around the building to the stage door.

"I can't," Eva protested as rain soaked her silver sandals. She rooted around in her bag for an umbrella and found one. "What do I even say to him?"

Sue rolled her eyes. "You hold out your program. You smile, say hi, and ask for his autograph. Oh, and tell him how great the play was. It's easy."

Eva swallowed, nerves running riot within her. "I can't." She glanced around. "I thought you said loads of people do this? There's no one here but us."

"Probably because of the rain."

Twenty minutes passed. Eva's feet were beyond wet. She was now standing in a puddle. "We should go or we're gonna miss the train. Or catch our death of cold."

"No one ever died of cold," Sue told her firmly. "And you can't get sick from it either. Not unless the rain contains a load of viruses. That's just a myth. Let's wait a few more minutes."

Before she could murmur OK, the stage door opened, and two figures emerged, laughing.

Eva's heart skipped a beat.

Matthew Lyell opened his umbrella and held it over Hannah Daystrom. He seemed at ease with the actress as he put his arm around her waist. He glanced up and headed towards Eva and Sue, that trademark smile lighting his eyes. "Hello. You girls look soaked."

"Not too bad," Sue said. "We loved the show, Mr. Lyell. Could we have your autograph, please?"

"Of course." He took her program. "And your name is?"

"Sue."

He signed it with a flourish and handed it to Ms.

Daystrom to sign. Then he fixed his intense gaze on Eva. "Hi, there."

Eva thought she was going to burst, and struggled to get words past the lump in her throat. "H-Hello."

His smile grew. "I'm not going to bite." He gently took the program from her hands. "Did you like the show?"

She nodded. "It was amazing. I actually felt every emotion possible, and you really made the part of Cedric come alive. Thank you."

He seemed taken aback, as if he wasn't used to being thanked. "You're welcome. What's your name?"

"Eva, but not with an A at the beginning. It's spelled E-v-a."

"Pretty name for a pretty girl," Mr. Lyell smiled. He signed the program and passed it to his co-star. "Have you got a camera?"

"I only have the one on my phone." Eva looked at him.

He smiled. "Would you like a photo?"

"I'd love one." She fumbled in her bag and withdrew her phone. She pulled up the camera app on the fourth attempt, her trembling fingers not wanting to co-operate.

"Allow me." Mr. Lyell took the phone. "Same as mine." He stood between the two girls and took selfies of them together and then took one with each of them alone.

Eva didn't even breathe as he slid his arm around her. She was sure she'd be smiling like a maniac.

"Have you got far to go?" he asked, handing back her phone.

"Wokingham."

"Not too far. Have a safe trip back." He put his

arm around the actress again and headed over to his waiting car.

Sue nudged Eva. "See—even he thinks you're pretty."

"He probably says that to all the girls." Eva slid the program and phone into her bag. "We should go, or we'll miss the last train home. I don't want to have to ring Dad and ask him to pick us up from here."

Sue nodded and together they ran the short distance to the tube entrance. The gates were locked.

"Now what?" Eva sighed.

"The main entrance is in the next street." Sue set off at a run towards the road.

Eva followed, slogging through the deluge. *Why had she worn such impractical shoes?* Low heels—or no heels at all—would have been much better.

It was still raining back in Headley Cross as they waited for the lights to change, before crossing to the taxi rank.

Sue dragged her across the road. Then, a bright light approaching too fast blinded Eva.

A screech of brakes hung in the air; a car horn blared.

A thud.

Was she flying?

Darkness folded around her, cutting off a brief instance of pain.

~*~

Three weeks later

Harry Matthew Lyell pounded the treadmill in his front room, hymns blaring from the MP3 player around his neck. He hummed along, knowing he was

out of tune, but not caring. After all, the Bible said *make a joyful noise unto the Lord*. It said nothing about it having to be tuneful.

Which was probably just as well.

He glanced at the wall clock. 9AM—way too early, but a lie-in compared with a three-thirty wakeup call on a film set. Early mornings were a killer, but they did have the advantage of getting the necessary evil of keeping his body in trim out of the way.

The phone resting on the front of the treadmill lit up—the display indicated his agent was calling.

Harry removed one of the earphones and hit *speaker*. “Hey, Frank. Kinda busy right now. Leave a message, and I might get back to you.”

“One of these days I’m going to believe you, Matthew, and I’ll hang up and you’ll miss out on a huge film deal.”

Harry laughed. He used his middle name as his stage name. That way he kept his two lives separate; besides, when he’d applied for his acting card, there was already a Harry Lyell registered with Equity. “Yeah, right. So, what can I do you for?”

“You got the audition for the role of DI Herrick—the lead in that TV series you wanted. Tomorrow at ten in Elstree.”

“Cool. I’ll be there. Did you hear back from the director of *Long Beach*?” He’d auditioned for the film over a month ago now.

He’d gotten the part, but the writer had mentioned some added scenes, so he’d had Frank look into it before signing a contract.

“I did, and he confirmed there will be sex scenes in it. Several, actually.”

Harry didn’t hesitate. “Turn it down. I don’t do

smut and you know it, no matter how essential to the plot the director says it is. Kissing, yes; shirtless or shower scenes if need be, but alone and half-dressed; sex, nope."

"That's why I already said thanks, but no thanks. He wasn't happy, but when I told him that you have a 'no nudity or sex scene' contract with me, there wasn't much he could do about it."

"Cheers."

"Welcome. You also have an audition for pantomime at the Adelphi Theatre in Headley Cross tomorrow afternoon. The panto director contacted me himself. Apparently, he's seen you in several things and is impressed with your stage presence. Insists you'll be an asset to his show and pull in the punters."

Not slowing a beat as he ran, Harry grabbed the bottle of water from the shelf and flipped off the lid. "I don't do panto and especially not in some backwater town I've never heard of."

"You'll love it. Anyway, the panto is Peter Pan, and they want you to play Captain Hook."

Harry chugged back the water and then wiped his face on the towel around his neck. "They want me to do *what*?"

"Captain Hook. He's a pirate."

"I know who he is." He paused. "A pirate?"

"It'll look good on your CV."

Harry scoffed. "It'll ruin my CV. Whoever heard of a Christian pirate?"

"It's called *acting*, Matthew. Something you're good at. So shut your larrup."

Harry chuckled. "My mother's favorite phrase."

"So, tomorrow the car will pick you up at nine to get you to Elstree for ten. It'll hang around and take

you from Elstree to the audition in Headley Cross at three. And have you back in London in time for curtain up. Are you at home or the gym?"

"Home—I prefer to work out away from cameras and teenage fans. But I have another three miles to run before I can do anything."

"OK. I'll send the scripts over by courier." Frank paused. "You had a letter this morning."

"I get hundreds of letters a week. Send a signed photo. I sent a load of new ones to you yesterday."

"This one's different. I'll send it with the courier as well, but you need to hear it now."

"Go on." Harry didn't let up running, watching the screen in front of him.

Frank began to read. *"Dear Mr. Lyell. Three weeks ago, my sister Eva came to see you in your play on the West End. She's long been a huge fan of yours and was looking forward to seeing you in real life as she put it. On her way home that evening, she and her friend Sue were in an accident. Sue was killed. Eva has been in a coma ever since."*

Harry stopped running. What was the name of that girl who'd stood in the rain waiting for him that night? He'd been unable to get her image out of his mind ever since.

"I know you're a busy man, but they say that hearing is the last sense to go. I was wondering if you'd have the time to record a short message we could play to her. Asking her to wake up, saying that her family misses her. I understand if you don't have the time to do this, but I didn't know what else to try. I don't want to lose her. It's signed Felicity Anderson."

"What was the girl's name again? The one who got hurt?"

"Eva."

“No, not Eva with a long e, it’s A-va.” Harry closed his eyes. He could see her now—long brown hair, blue eyes, beautiful blue dress, silver sandals, and matching bag. “It can’t be...”

“You all right?”

“Several weeks ago there were two girls outside the stage door, wanting autographs. One of them said her name was Eva. What are the odds of it being the same girl?”

“No idea. What do you want to do?”

He stepped off the treadmill. “Give me an hour to shower, change, and fight the traffic, and I’ll come to your office to record a message. I’ll pick the scripts up at the same time. Then, the courier can go and deliver the tape before lunch.”

~*~

That evening Harry sat in the makeup chair, the TV news playing in the background. He’d spent the afternoon reading and attempting to memorize the audition scripts, but he couldn’t get the message he’d recorded out of his mind. Or the image of those two girls standing in the rain. He prayed that the message would work, and the girl—whether or not she was the girl in the rain—would wake up.

But what if she *was* the same girl? She had made a lasting impression that rainy night. He’d thought about offering the ladies a ride home, but in his line of work he’d become very cautious. An offer he extended as a kindness could easily be misconstrued and end up in a tawdry tabloid, so he’d become distant, closed off.

The news reader mentioned his name, and Harry jerked up his head and gazed at the TV. “Turn it up for

me, please?"

The makeup girl did so, and returned to working on his makeup. Eva's picture was on the screen, along with his picture, and the theatre. His stomach pitted.

It *was* her.

"...see his play, *The Tide Turns*, at the Duke of Clarence Theatre in London's West End, three weeks ago. She and a friend were involved in a hit and run on the way home. Sue Giles died at the scene. Eva Anderson has been in a coma ever since. Her sister, Felicity, contacted Matthew Lyell's agent who arranged for the actor to record a message for Eva. This has been played at her bedside constantly since it was received early this afternoon, so far to no effect."

Harry winced. He'd said no press, but once again, Frank hadn't listened.

The camera changed to a young woman standing outside a hospital. "We are incredibly grateful to Mr. Lyell for recording the message and will keep playing it to her."

"Miss Anderson," one reported yelled. "How do you feel about the fact the driver who hit your sister hasn't yet been caught?"

Harry hissed under his breath. "How do you think she feels?"

The girl paused. "We're praying he or she does the right thing and comes forward, but our main concern right now is Eva."

Harry pulled his phone from his pocket and dialed his agent. He got the answerphone. "Frank, it's Matthew Lyell. Can you let me know what hospital Eva Anderson is in, please? Oh, and thanks for informing the media. I'm all over the evening news." He hung up and watched in the mirror as the girl