



CLARE
REVELL

(ALL HALEY JO WANTS IS)

a Mummy
for Christmas

A Mummy for Christmas

Clare Revell

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Dedication

For Mum and Dad. For always being there, from when I was small, and still being there now. And for the wonderful memories the word Christmas evokes.

What People are Saying

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. ~ T. Suckoo

Other titles:

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

Christmas Eva

Keepsake

Battle of the Flowers

November Charlie

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“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Stan Fuller looked at Mrs. Johnson in despair, desperately praying he’d heard the woman wrong. “I mean, there must be someone more suitable. I’m really busy in the run up to Christmas, and I’ve always made it perfectly clear to Haley-Jo that there is no such person as Father Christmas. So having me portray the bloke would be more than a little hypocritical, don’t you think?”

Mrs. Johnson, head of Baxter Street Primary School, shook her head. “She doesn’t have to know it’s you. And you’d be getting me out of a huge fix. Our normal Father Christmas, Mr. Franklin from over the road, had a heart attack last week. He’s done every Christmas party for years, and this’ll be the first one he’s missed. And when I discussed our dilemma with the staff, your name came up several times as the best man for the job.”

Stan shifted on his chair. This really wasn’t what he’d been concerned about when he’d found the letter in Haley-Jo’s book bag summoning, well, inviting him to a meeting in the headmistress’s office this morning. He’d imagined Haley-Jo was in trouble. Admittedly she wasn’t an easy child. She was eight and precocious, whilst he was a single parent, having to utilize both breakfast and after school clubs to fit in with his day job. Not to mention a succession of holiday clubs over

the summer when his mother couldn't look after her.

His job as an airline pilot wasn't really conducive to childcare. He only did one or two international flights a month, sticking mainly to the domestic routes, so he'd be home each evening. His mother did a wonderful job on the occasions he was away, and Haley-Jo didn't appear to mind too much. Gifts eased things considerably.

He gazed up at the headmistress and realized that Mrs. Johnson was waiting for an answer. He cleared his throat. "Well, maybe just this once."

"Thank you. The party is the day after tomorrow, and we'll have the costume here ready for you."

Stan nodded. He'd been railroaded into this, but the school needed his help. What was a bloke to do, but agree? "What time do you need me?"

"Half-past one. That will give you time to change."

He rose to his feet. "I'll double check with the flight schedule and let you know for sure later today. Now, if that's all, I really do need to be getting into work. I have a flight this afternoon."

Mrs. Johnson stood and held out a hand. "Thank you again for agreeing to do this."

"You're welcome." He kept the smile plastered on his face as he took her extended hand.

"I've arranged for the local newspaper to cover this. The parents like to see pictures of our activities in the paper, and the kids always love a Christmas party. The photos will also be up on the school website."

"That's great." The last thing he needed was his face in a Father Christmas suit plastered all over the evening paper and the Internet. The flight crews would tease him for a year and a day over it.

He followed the head teacher down the hallway,

hoping he wouldn't see Haley-Jo as the classrooms began to empty for playtime, because that would only cause more questions.

"Daddy?" The enquiring voice rang above the other voices.

Stan sighed. So much for that idea. He turned and made sure the smile was still on his face. "Hey, sweetheart, fancy seeing you." He hunkered down and hugged her.

"What are you doing here?"

Stan looked at Mrs. Johnson for a way out. She'd gotten him into this mess after all.

"I needed your father's help," Mrs. Johnson said. "I had an important question to ask him."

"About airplanes?" Haley-Jo asked. "He's a pilot. He knows a lot about airplanes."

Stan kissed her. "You go off and play, and I'll see you tonight. I should be home before you go to bed. Don't forget Gramma is collecting you this afternoon."

"I won't. She's promised to make toady hole, mash, and sketti for dinner. Shall we save you some?"

"Yes, please." He stood as she ran off with her friends, stifling a grin as a teacher told them to walk in the corridor. Nothing changed over the years.

Five minutes later he was in the car. Making sure the phone was on hands-free mode, he hit the speed-call button as he headed out of the car park. "Ray, it's Stan," he said as soon as the call connected. "I need to rearrange my flight for Thursday. I have to be at the school in the afternoon."

"Have you any idea how hard it'll be to get someone else at short notice?"

Stan ignored the irritation in his boss's voice. "Yeah, well, this isn't my idea of fun either. Tell Frank

I'll do his London to New York on the fourteenth, if he'll do my domestic on Thursday. It'll mean missing the Sunday services the following day, but he's been trying to swap for a while. It's his wedding anniversary, and he wants to spend it with his wife rather than a plane full of strangers."

"I'll ask him. Are you on your way in now?"

"Yes. Traffic permitting, I should be there in half an hour. I'm not due to take off until two, so there is plenty of time."

"Don't forget Chrissie Anders starts today. She'll be your co-pilot. We thought we'd break her in gently."

Stan stifled a groan. "How come I always get the newbies?"

"Because you're the best there is, Stan, you know that. Drive safe and I'll see you when you get in."

~*~

Carly Jefferson pushed her chair away from her desk. She needed coffee and lots of it. What was it about Christmas that brought all the crazies out of the closet? She thought she'd seen the last of that when she left Cardiff for somewhere more provincial. Apparently not.

Bramley, a tiny little village in the middle of the English countryside, seemed to have as many nut jobs as anywhere else. The only thing it lacked was murders and burglaries. The most exciting things that happened around here were cheating in the bake off at the village fete, the ongoing theft of garden gnomes, and the recurrent issue of dog poop in the wrong places.

Today's front page consisted of...well, nothing

she'd written. As always her stuff was confined to page seven or page fifteen. Page seven was a thrilling article on the history of the local library. And page fifteen was what her mother called the hatched, matched, and dispatched. Or births, marriages, and death announcements.

For once she'd like a story she could get her teeth into. Something dramatic and heart rending like finding the child she gave up for adoption. That was why she'd become a reporter.

But who was she trying to kid. She stood the same chance of finding her daughter as she did repairing the shattered relationship with her mother, which was as likely as an asteroid strike. She just needed to get on with her life as it was. Single. Alone. But with a career she could be proud of. Well, kind of proud. A career, at any rate.

Carly refilled her cup and leaned against the counter. Her gaze roamed around the newsroom. Everyone sat busy at their desks, trying to make their deadlines.

"Slacking off?"

She jumped as the chief editor, Marc Delfraitus, appeared beside her. Was the bloke omniscient or something? "No, just a quick coffee. My articles are both done, early as it happens, and in your inbox on your desk, and in your e-mail."

"Good. I have another assignment for you. The primary school is having Father Christmas visit on Thursday. Take a camera. I want lots of photos and a nice write up. And see what the kids want for Christmas. Maybe we can make one of the wishes come true."

"Such as?"

"I don't know. See what the kids ask for. We can't grant everything, but see what happens on the day. The budget might run to a bike or princess dress or something. Make a note of their names and what they ask for. Or get them to write letters to the big guy in the red suit. Bring them back here, read them, and make sure you get photos of the ones we might be able to help."

"OK."

He nodded. "Start by doing some background on the school, get an interview with the head teacher, that kind of thing. We run that tomorrow and then the big article on Friday. You might even get center spread if it's good."

Carly's heart leapt. "Really? Center pages?"

"It might even go to four pages. Just get the story and photos."

She nodded, barely able to contain her excitement. "Sure." She hurried back to her desk, feet not even touching the ground. This was big. No, more than big. This was huge, with a capital *H*. The school often used the paper to cover events—harvest festival services, summer fairs, and so on. If she did a good job now, then maybe the school would use her again.

Bringing up the school website on her computer, Carly browsed quickly and then picked up the phone. First port of call would be the head teacher for a background story and photos of the Christmas decorations and so on up in the school already. Then prepare for her *piece de resistance*. The Christmas party.

What kinds of things did kids want for Christmas anyway? She wouldn't know.

Dolls or bikes maybe? Computer games. The latest in CDs or DVDs or clothes. Mobile phones probably.

Carly closed her eyes. The child she'd never seen and never held would be eight by now. She pressed her fists into her eyes, determined not to cry. There was nothing she could do about it. She'd lost her husband and daughter without a chance to say goodbye to either of them. And once she'd found out her mother's part in the whole sorry affair, she'd effectively lost her, too. They hadn't spoken in the years since and never again would be too soon for her liking.

The voice on the other end of the phone brought her back to the present with a jump.

"Yes, I'm here, sorry. My name is Carly Jefferson, and I'm calling from the *Bramley Herald*. I was wondering if I could come over and have a few words with Mrs. Johnson about the history of the school for an article I'm writing in the run up to your Christmas party on Thursday. And if possible, speak to some of the children about what they want for Christmas."

She tapped her pen on the desk and then grinned at the head mistress's response.

"I'll be right over. Thank you so much." Slamming down the phone, she grabbed her bag and notebook. Slinging the camera strap over her head, she headed for the door. She might even make the three o'clock deadline for tonight's press run.

~*~

Stan sat on Haley-Jo's bed and looked at her. "So how was school?"

"There was a reporter this afternoon. She was pretty."

He smiled. "You think most women are models of

some description."

She giggled. "That's because we are all pretty inside. You know that. She asked all sorts of questions about Christmas and what we wanted or hoped Father Christmas would bring."

His interest piqued. "Really? And what did you ask for, because I have no idea what to get you."

Haley-Jo shook her head. "Not telling, and I didn't tell her either. But I did point out that Christmas was Jesus' birthday, and I'd be going to church with you if you weren't working."

Stan hugged her. "I have the whole of Christmas off once I get back from work on the twenty-third." He paused. "Do you believe in Father Christmas?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. You always said he's a myth. Believing in an invisible God is one thing, and I do have an invisible unicorn, too, but everyone else says it's safer to believe in Father Christmas even if it's just in December in case he didn't leave any presents. I really don't want to be the only person in the world who wakes up to nothing."

He tweaked her nose. "Not that that's likely to happen."

She tilted her head. "But is that like believing in God just in case you die in surgery or in a car wreck like Mummy?"

Stan caught his breath. He had no idea what to say. Talking about Julie was hard on a good day, but when asked bluntly like that was impossible. His insides curled up into a tight ball. "You shouldn't believe in God just in case. God is for life, not just for Christmas."

She smiled. "And better than a dog."

Stan nodded. That child paid way too much

attention to things she'd heard on the TV. "Exactly. Now say your prayers." He watched as she obediently put her hands together and closed her eyes. His eyes stung and he rubbed a hand across them. Oh, if only he had the faith of a child. It'd make things so much easier at times.

~*~

Stan eased the red coat over the padding around his stomach and sighed. He looked a total prat. Never mind felt like one. He really hoped no one with a camera was going to be there. Only there would be. He'd forgotten for a moment that someone from the press was coming.

He pulled the belt tight. "OK, there are Dasher and Dancer, Prancer and Vixen, Cupid and Comet, Donner and Blitzen and...." He paused counting on his fingers. "I thought there were nine. That's only eight."

"There *are* nine. You forgot Rudolph." A Welsh voice from behind him almost rang with laughter. "Some Father Christmas you'll make if you can't remember all your reindeer."

He spun around to find himself face to face with a woman almost his height.

Her long dark hair hung over her shoulders, brown eyes sparkled, and her ample figure was highlighted by her red Christmas jumper, black jeans, and knee length boots.

"First day on the job," he said holding out a hand. "I normally fly planes not sleighs. Stan Fuller."

"Carly Jefferson." Her touch was cool and short. Her smile showed a tiny gap between her front two teeth. "Reporter. I'm here to cover the party and your

encounters with the children. All the parents have signed releases for the photos—”

“Have they?” he interrupted, knowing he’d never received a letter about this.

The reporter nodded. “Yes. Either signed by parents or guardians. Mrs. Johnson made sure of that. I’m assuming you don’t have any objections to me using your photo?”

He sighed. It didn’t look like he had a choice. “Just make sure I’m in full costume, Miss Jefferson.”

“Please, call me Carly.”

“OK, Carly. I can’t afford anyone finding out it’s me underneath this costume. Especially my daughter.”

“What’s her name?”

“Haley-Jo. She’s eight.”

Carly nodded. “I remember meeting her a couple of days ago. Really cute kid. She told me that Christmas is about Jesus, not presents.”

Stan grinned. “That’s my girl.” He pulled on the hood and the beard. “How do I look?”

“Fine. May I?” She waved the camera at him.

He nodded and, shoving down any embarrassment he felt, posed for her while she took a few photos.

Carly smiled. “Thank you. OK. I’d best get out there. Now the reindeer are?”

Stan recited them perfectly, including Rudolph, and then took a deep breath. Flying a fully laden jet liner was much easier than this. He could hear the children’s voices echoing down the hallway, screaming and calling in delight as they played party games in the hall. He hoped Haley-Jo’s princess hat had remained intact. He’d had to staple the streamers in twice before she’d left for school, and he’d only make the cone hat

the previous evening.

Mrs. Johnson put her head around the door. "Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be." He swung the sack over his shoulder and took a deep breath.

"OK. We'll sing 'Jingle Bells,' and then when we've finished, you ring your bell and come in."

Stan nodded, following her down the corridor to the hall. His stomach was in turmoil and his palms were damp beneath the white gloves. He prayed for a calm voice, that Haley-Jo wouldn't give the game away when she figured out it was him, and that he wouldn't fall flat on his face and make a complete idiot of himself.

This was definitely the first and last time.

If he'd wanted to be an actor, he'd have gone to stage school.

Sixty voices in unison started singing, and despite himself, Stan found himself humming along. Then, as they paused, he rang his bell and entered the hall to squeals of delight.

Mrs. Johnson led him to a throne set on the stage. "Look who's here, children," she said.

Stan smiled below the beard, praying it wasn't going to fall off. "Hello, boys and girls."

"Hello, Father Christmas," they all chorused back.

"Are you having a fun party?"

"Yes..."

He did a couple of "ho, ho, ho's" and got the children to guess the names of his reindeer, who were currently up on the roof of the school. Then in dribs and drabs the children came up to receive a wrapped gift. Some were so shy he could barely hear their names, while others, bolder, sat on his lap and gave