



HE CROSSED TIME FOR HER
NOW THEY FACE A BATTLE FOR THEIR SOULS

CONVERGENCE

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

CLARE REVELL

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Dedication

For all my readers

What People are Saying about Clare Revell

Dark Lake definitely gets the prize for her suspense storylines. It's extremely well-written, and the amount of research that went into it had to be daunting. But the author pulled it off with incredible results. ~ Delia Latham

[Clare Revell] writes books like Alfred Hitchcock and M. Night Shyamalan. A hint of an answer here, a red herring there, light here, dark there--*Down in Yon Forest* shines a bright light on her skills as a storyteller. ~Marianne Evans

Not your average holiday novella by a long shot, *Once upon a Christmas* charms and captivates bringing mesmerizing characters to life. Set aside a delicious day to race to the finish. You won't want to put it down until you find out just what lies behind Mr. Shade's mysterious facade. ~ Jan Elder, Author of the Moose Creek Series

Prologue

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

~Ruth 1:16

Yvetta ran down the stone hallway of the huge castle and stopped breathless as a tall boy with spiky yellow hair moved from behind the pillar to stand in front of her. His funny clothing looked weird, but somehow suited him—even if he was wearing tights with a long shirt over the top of them, and an even longer blue coat over that.

The boy hunkered down to her height, balancing easily on the balls of his feet. His strange eyes glinted in the torch light. One was green and the other one was brown. “Hello. I’m Blaize. What’s your name?”

“Yvetta May Graham. I’m eight.”

The young man smiled. “In that case, Yvetta May Graham, my name is John Blaize Smyth Kilpatrick.”

She squeaked out a nervous giggle. “That must take ages to write in school when they want your full name.”

“Which is why everyone calls me Blaize. At school they call me Smyth Kilpatrick, but that is just as much of a mouthful, and I really don’t care for it much.” He tilted his head. “It seems to me the last time we met you said your name was Etta.”

She nodded, twirling a long strand of hair around

her fingers.

"So, how about I call you Etta and you call me Blaize, and we forget the long names and formalities?"

She thought for a moment. He wasn't a stranger because she knew his name. Plus, she'd met him before, so it must be all right to talk to him. "OK."

"How did you get here?"

"I don't know. I was in my house, in my bedroom playing tea parties, and then I was here. Is this your house?"

Blaize nodded. "It is. Do you like it?"

"It's very big. Where are the carpets?"

"I don't have any."

She frowned. "Don't your feet get cold when you get out of bed first thing in the morning?"

Blaize chuckled. "Sometimes."

"I have red carpet in my bedroom."

He smiled. "I have a rug."

"Nanna has a white, fluffy rug. She lets me lie on it sometimes." She spun around, dancing and humming the same melody she'd been singing all day.

"Do you like dancing? We have a whole room with chandeliers and mirrors especially for dancing."

"Can I see it? Can you hear the music as well?"

Blaize stood and held out a hand. "Yes, I can. I think we must be two of a kind. It's this way."

~*~

Yvetta ran down the halls of the castle, her long skirts grasped in her hands. Her slippered feet tapped almost silently on the cold, stone flagged floor. Behind her she could hear Blaize counting to a hundred. Hide

and seek was one of her favourite games, even though she was no good at it.

She skidded around the corner, dodging past one of the serving girls and darted behind the suit of armour on the right. She wrapped her arms around her middle, chest heaving, heart pounding, gasping for breath.

His voice carried, and she could still hear him as he finished counting. "Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. Coming ready or not."

Yvetta couldn't contain her grin as she heard him searching and calling for her. His footsteps reached the corridor where she hid, and she jumped from behind the armour. "I'm back here."

Blaize grabbed her and swung her around. "You are meant to let me find you," he complained half-heartedly, a chuckle escaping. His long blond hair, pulled back into a ponytail, flicked around his face as he twisted her around several times.

Blaize's monkey, Mr. Kipper, chattered in annoyance and leapt off Blaize's shoulder onto the suit of armour. The furry animal tugged down his red waistcoat and wagged a finger at them, screeching furiously.

Blaize laughed, the happy sound ringing around the hallway. "See, even Mr. Kipper agrees with me." He tilted his head. "Or is he complaining that I made him dizzy?"

"Knowing him, I'd say probably both." She straightened the bunch of lace at Blaize's chin, pulling it back across his navy frock coat with the gold buttons. Today they had tiny little anchors on them. "Can we play again? You hide and I'll seek."

He checked his pocket watch, long fingers running

over the gold case as he inspected the time piece. He slid it back into his coat pocket, only leaving a small piece of chain visible, glinting in the light of the torches on the wall sconces. "Very well, we have time for one more game. No cheating this time. Come, Mr. Kipper; our turn to hide."

The monkey leapt back onto his shoulder, holding onto his collar.

"I never cheat." She put her hands over her face. "One, two, three, four, five, six..." She paused as his footsteps rounded the corner. Then she giggled. "Miss a few; ninety-nine, one hundred. Coming ready or not."

Gathering her skirts in one hand, Yvetta set off running after him. She flew around the corner, expecting to find him standing there, but this time he wasn't.

"I thought I told you not to cheat." His voice echoed down the corridor.

"Where are you?" she called. Not getting an answer, she ran, looking into each room as she passed. Searching the entire castle could take all day. The tower door was ajar, and she shoved it open, letting it hit the wall. The footfalls echoing along the stone walls of the castle gave away her friend's location.

A resounding clang vibrated as she began to climb the spiral staircase which led straight to the top of the tower. Blaize didn't like her going into this one. He always said the stairs were steep and dangerous and the room at the top too cluttered.

That had never stopped Yvetta sneaking up here in the past, however. She loved the boxes full of bits and pieces that once belonged to his mother. The dresses were so pretty and the bejewelled hair combs

beautiful. Her own long blonde curls were unruly at best and untameable at worst, yet those combs with the mother of pearl blades and sapphire butterflies on the end always made her look and feel like a princess.

Besides, she reasoned, if Blaize left the door open, then he must be up here and wanted her to follow him. She lost her footing a couple of times as she hurtled up the stairs. She pushed the door at the top open and burst into the room. "Found y—"

She broke off. The room was empty. Not even the usual clutter stood between her and the huge armoire and the tall mirror that she knew was hiding beneath the sheet. "Blaize?"

Yvetta flung open the doors to the armoire, in case he was hiding inside. Even though everyone knew never to shut oneself in a wardrobe, people were still silly enough to do it. She loved hiding in the wardrobe in her bedroom at home amongst the fur coats and old dresses her mother never wore, but couldn't bear to part with.

"Blaize?" She rifled through the clothes hanging on the rail, although it was obvious he wasn't hiding there. She looked behind the mirror; behind the curtains by the windows. Where was he? He was too good at this game.

Heading back to the door, she paused, as something scuttled behind her. She turned. "Hello?"

The sheet hanging over the mirror moved. Hairs rose on the back of her neck. "Blaize, is that you?"

Yvetta moved slowly to the mirror. The sheet moved again, yet no feet protruded underneath.

As if in a trance she reached out and grabbed the sheet, tugging hard. The white fabric fell away, exposing the mirror. A huge oval gilt frame

surrounded the clear surface. No finger marks covered it like the one in her bedroom. No dust speckled across either the frame or the glass.

Strange. Why hide a perfectly good mirror?

She turned away. Blaize wasn't here. She should go and look elsewhere, before he decided to search for her.

"Etta." The whisper came from behind her.

She spun around, expecting to see Blaize, but he wasn't there. Instead, smoke swirled from the armoire, snaking through the closed doors and across the floor towards her.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she managed, fear making her throat dry and her pulse race.

"Etta."

A hooded figure appeared in the mirror, but where the face should be there was nothing. Hands that seemed to come through the glass reached for her.

Yvetta put her hands over her face, screaming as she stumbled backwards.

Arms clad in blue silk enfolded her, pulling her from the room. Blaize spoke over her head, blotting out the persistent whisper behind her. "Etta. I told you never to enter this tower."

She looked up. "I'm sorry. The door was open. I heard someone going up the stairs. I thought you were hiding up here."

Anger glinted in his strangely coloured eyes, making them seem more odd than usual. "Why would I be hiding somewhere I explicitly told you never to enter? Never mind on your own." He slammed the door, tightening his grip on her arm. "We need to go downstairs."

"Etta!" The voice from behind the door came

again.

She shivered, fear paralyzing her. "I can't move."

Blaize swept her into his arms, his lips pressed against her forehead. "Then I'll carry you. You are safe with me, Etta. I'll protect you. I will always protect you."

She snuggled against his firm chest. His ponytail tickled her cheek where it lay over his shoulder. "Even when I'm old and grey?"

"Even then. No one can get you while I'm here." A faint smile crossed his lips. "Not even Mr. Kipper comes up here and especially not alone."

"Can we go dancing?" She looked up at him hopefully; no longer scared because he was there, holding her, protecting her.

Blaize turned his gaze to her for a moment, then back to the long, winding staircase. "For a few minutes."

She smiled. "My dancing boy," she said. He'd always been that, long before she'd learned his name.

He carried her to the ballroom and set her down. He bowed, low and deep, one hand before him, the other behind his back. "My lady, may I have the honour of this dance?"

Her cheeks burned as she curtsied the way that the maid had taught her. One foot crossed in front of the other, head inclined forwards, eyes downwards, over exaggerating every move.

The music began to play. It filled her mind, captivated her senses and lifted her spirit. Blaize's hand settled on her waist, the other resting against her palm. Her feet knew what to do, her steps mirroring his as they moved across the floor in perfect harmony. She vanished into his gaze, keeping her eyes fixed on

his face as they danced.

The music changed and other people joined them, some of them wearing masks. Her feet faltered and for a moment her mind went blank.

"You remember this one, don't you?" he asked. "I taught you the other week."

"I think so." She frowned. He'd taught her so many, how was she meant to keep them all separate?

Did he expect her to have a little card box in her mind, with each dance written out individually?

A lazy smile lit his odd coloured eyes. "One hand goes behind your back, the other palm rests against mine."

After a few steps she remembered.

"See?" He moved around her. "You dance as if you've been doing it all your life."

She gazed up at him. Maybe she had, but only with him.

1

Present day

Someone was following her. The steps were light, but audible on the large grey flagstones that lined the floor of the castle. It couldn't be Blaize. He'd had to go out, fulfil his duty as sheriff and deal with something in the village.

Yvetta didn't mind being alone. After all, as Blaize kept pointing out, with the amount of servants he had, she'd never be truly alone. What she objected to was being followed. She spun around, determined to have a go at whoever it was, but there was no one there. Shaking her head, she turned back to face the other way and crashed straight into a tall, black figure standing there.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you," she began.

The figure turned. The faceless, nameless one moved towards her. "Etta."

She screamed.

Terror filled her. She backed away. Her feet tangled in her floor length skirt, and she reached out, struggling to regain her balance.

Her outstretched palm caught the flame of the torch on the wall.

Pain seared as she fell.

Her arms flailed, legs kicked as she tumbled endlessly down, down, down.

Yvetta glanced at the clock as she stood in the kitchen waiting for the kettle to boil. Three AM; or stupid o'clock as she preferred to call it. She couldn't think, the music running through her mind made thought impossible. Her hands shook as she tossed a teabag into her favourite mug. Her hand hurt. She glanced down and ran her fingers over the vivid red mark across the palm. She winced. If she didn't know better she'd say she'd burnt it while she slept, but she wouldn't tell anyone it was happening again.

It was far safer not to.

The nightmare still floated on the corners of Yvetta's mind. She hadn't thought about him for years, never mind dreamed about him anymore—until tonight. But nothing had changed—not even the dream injuries transferring to reality. Music, dancing, the castle, and *him*.

Blaize—her Dancing Boy had grown to be a man. He was tall; easily over six feet now, but he'd towered over her even in her teens. He was a few years older than her, no more than five, but that hadn't mattered. His piercing gaze had shot straight through her, almost as if he could see her innermost thoughts, which on reflection, maybe he did because he always knew what she was thinking; and that wasn't necessarily a good thing, either.

Sometimes he wore his long, blond hair spiked up, sometimes it flowed loosely across his shoulders, but tonight it had been tied back with a simple, black velvet ribbon.

He was slimly built, but with an athletic body encased in fawn, old fashioned breeches, dark brown knee length boots, and a navy blue frock coat, with

gold buttons. He cut a dashing figure. His white shirt had a bunch of lace at his chin—like the highwaymen had in story books, but Blaize wasn't a scoundrel or cad—he was one of the nicest people she knew. He was always accompanied by a monkey, a tiny, ugly thing with a penchant for wearing clothes.

How long had it been since he'd crossed her mind? Blaize that was, not the monkey. She'd been seventeen, so almost half a lifetime, since she'd last seen him. Why now? Was it simply because, for the first time in almost as many years, she was dreaming again? At least, that meant coming off the dream suppressant meds had worked.

Yvetta made the tea and carried it in still trembling hands to the lounge. She flipped on all the lights and perched on the edge of the couch. She'd tried so hard to forget him. Forget the way he'd invaded her every thought and deed, the same way he'd done since they'd first met when she was eight.

She sipped the tea, and then set it on the arm of the couch. She remembered that meeting so well. She'd been on her way home from school and it began to rain. She didn't mind the rain and jumped in every puddle she could find. Then the thunder had started and she'd become scared.

A monkey jumped down out of a tree and sat on the path looking at her. She looked back, then jumped and screamed at another clap of thunder. She began to run, but slipped and fell. She cut her palms and her knee and sat on the ground, crying. The monkey scuttled over to her and jumped on her shoulder, rubbing her hair, almost as if it were trying to comfort her.

Then he was there. A boy crouched in front of her

studying her. "Are you all right?"

She shook her head. Her mother had taught her never to talk to strangers as it wasn't safe.

"And a very sensible mother you have, too." The boy smiled, answering her unspoken thought. "My name's Blaize. What's yours?"

"Etta." She whimpered again from pain and fear.

The monkey chattered, still stroking her hair.

Blaize smiled. "Mr. Kipper tells me you're scared of storms. Do you live near here?"

She nodded, wondering why the monkey had the same name as their cat. "My knee hurts. I want to go home, but I don't recognize this place. I'm lost."

Blaize lifted her into his arms. "Then I'll take you to mine."

He'd carried her to a castle and left her in the care of a woman, who'd fussed on about her school uniform, then tied a strip of cloth around her knee, before drying her off with rough towel.

It had been the first time she'd really got into trouble. Her mother had been frantic when Yvetta hadn't returned from school. A search party of neighbours and police had been out looking for her. Steve, her much older brother, found her sleeping under a tree, a good mile from the house. Except for the scraped knee, she was unhurt. Needless to say, for a long time after that, she hadn't been allowed to walk home from school or anywhere else alone.

For a week afterwards, Yvetta had drawn stick figures with long blond hair and odd coloured eyes, and always a monkey in a red coat on his shoulder.

She picked up the tea and sipped it, before setting it down again. Tonight it hadn't been just Blaize and Mr. Kipper in the dream. The nameless man had been

there as well. The one Blaize always protected her from.

The man with no face. She referred to him as the dark man. Blaize refused to name him at all. For to name him was to give him power and power meant control.

She shivered. Music echoed in her mind. Swirling, bubbles glistening, people laughing, and paper flowers tumbling around her.

Looking up, Yvetta glanced at the mirror. Her reflection blurred, twisted, and *he* was there, pulling her in. "Noooo..." she whispered. Going back was the last thing she wanted. She jerked away, pulling back, needing to hide somewhere she'd be safe. The sudden movement jolted the mug. Hot tea spilt over her hand. Pain jarred her; the fresh scald made the burn hurt more than it already did. Her eyes filled with tears. Such a stupid thing to do. She really did need to be more careful.

Should she call Steve and ask him what he'd do for the stinging burn? Doubtless he'd say cold water first. Yvetta grabbed her mobile phone and carried it to the kitchen.

She thrust her hand under the cold tap. If anything that made the pain more intense.

She wrapped her hand in a towel, then thought better of it and placed it gingerly back under the running water.

"Yvetta, speak to me."

Her half-brother's voice echoed from the phone. Steve, dressed in burgundy scrubs with a stethoscope slung around the back of his neck, gazed at her from the tiny screen. He had that overly concerned, brotherly look in his eyes. Why was he video calling