

IF HE WANTS TO INHERIT MILLIONS, HE HAS 40 DAYS  
TO DANCE HIS WAY INTO HER HEART

# CLARE REVELL



Married by  
Easter

Clare Revell

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**Married by Easter**

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## *Dedication*

In memory of Fiona,  
who loved the idea of this story.



## What People are Saying

### *November Charlie*

Clare Revell's *November Charlie* is a unique and fun story! If you like comedic adventures in the vein of *The Mummy* or *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, than this one's for you. ~ Katie C

### *Times Arrow*

I stand in awe of Revell's ability to pack an entire novel's worth of action and emotion into so few pages.  
~Delia Latham





*How much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of  
your perfumes than any spice!*  
~Song of Solomon 4:10

# 1

*Day 1*

*Shrove Tuesday February 13*

Dr. Nigel Turner loosened his tie and shifted uncomfortably on the chair. It was stiflingly hot inside the lawyer's office, despite the freezing cold winter's day outside the tall, imposing building. His father's will had turned out pretty much as he'd imagined.

His brother, as the second son, had been left a large amount of money and the microchip company. The valet had been left a small sum in return for thirty years loyal service. And the house, grounds, and fortune of several million had been left entirely to him as the eldest son.

No, there were no surprises whatsoever. Not even his father's sudden death at fifty-seven from a heart attack, given the fact he'd never had a day off and worked every hour he could do. Their relationship had been tempestuous at best, frosty at worst. Even so, the house was empty without the stern presence of his father.

Mr. Jacobs, the family lawyer, peered over the top of his glasses. "However, your father did add a stipulation which has to be adhered to. Before you

receive any money from the estate you must be married."

Nigel sat bolt upright in his chair. His heart thudded and breath caught in his throat. "*What?*"

He couldn't believe his ears as the lawyer read the codicil again in detail which included that the fortune would be given in its entirety to the Blethyn Memorial Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Dogs, and the house to the Heritage Organization if he did not marry his girlfriend by Easter. He swallowed hard. "Is this a joke?" he managed. "Is it April Fool's Day or something?"

His brother, Archie chuckled beside him. "You should be so lucky."

Nigel bit back the reply '*we don't do luck.*'

"No, it's no joke," Mr. Jacobs assured him. "Protecting the family and keeping the name going was something your father felt very strongly about."

Nigel pushed to his feet and paced across the room. "So you're saying that I have to marry by Easter or *all* the money goes to the dog's home? I'll contest the will. I mean, what if the will was being read on Good Friday? Easter is six weeks away. I can't marry that quickly. The banns alone take four weeks now."

"Technically, Easter is in seven weeks. Contesting the will would take months," the lawyer said dryly. "And you'd lose. The will is quite watertight, I assure you, Dr. Turner. Easter this year falls on March twenty-seventh. That gives you forty-eight days."

Nigel's stomach tied into a tighter knot. His loosened collar still wanted to strangle him. "I need more time," he protested. "Forty-eight days isn't long enough to organize a wedding."

"Then you'd better hurry and set a date," Archie

said. "I mean, you've made no secret over the fact you have a girlfriend. Even if we haven't seen her in the year you've been dating. All you have to do is propose. I'm sure she'll agree when she knows how rich you are. It's not as if we can't afford a wedding anyway. Even without your inheritance you're rich by most people's standards."

Nigel stopped short of blurting out the truth. Instead he balled his hands into fists and studied the lawyer. "Tell me one more time."

"Either you marry before Easter Sunday or you lose everything."

"We'll see about that. Good day." Nigel shoved the door open and left, not bothering to close the door behind him. Now what did he do? His web of lies had finally come back to catch him out.

He'd invented the girlfriend to get his father off his back for the last year. His father had kept going on about marriage and the lack of women around the place, so in a moment of utter frustration, Nigel made up someone. He gave his father very good reasons why she couldn't visit or stay over for the weekend. He had no idea it would come back to bite him like this.

As a Christian, he should have known better. Lying was wrong. Pure and simple. There was never a justifiable reason to lie. The small fib had snowballed exponentially, until there had been no going back. He'd been about to tell his father he'd broken up with his "girlfriend," a lie to compound the lie, but he'd died before Nigel had the chance.

He looked at the chauffeur. "Home, James," he quipped.

James smiled as he always did. "Yes, sir."

Archie caught up with them and opened the car

door. "Perhaps now we'll get to meet the elusive Chloe."

"I don't know why you're so happy." Nigel scowled. "It's not like you get the house and money if I don't marry."

"It doesn't matter. I've got the company. You lose everything. Home, money, the lot."

Nigel froze, half way into the car. Was Archie really that small minded? "It's not as if I don't have a source of income of my own. And I only live in the house because someone had to make sure Dad..." He paused. "Do you own the dog's home just out of interest?"

Archie shook his head. "No, you couldn't pay me to work with animals. I reckon Mr. Jacobs does. You've had your head stuck in a cloud for so long now you haven't noticed anything. Stop concentrating on the dead and focus on the living for a change."

"I prefer looking after the dead," Nigel replied. He loved his job and wouldn't change it for the world. He settled back into the seat. "I know you and Dad don't understand it, but working for the Home Office as a pathologist is fascinating, not to mention worthwhile. We always manage to find the truth, no matter how well it's been hidden."

The reality of that statement hit him in the gut. How could he have been so stupid?

What had he done? He'd always prided himself on his honesty and now? He paused as he reached for his seatbelt. His words haunted him. Maybe he should just own up and get it over with. He opened the car door. "James, on second thoughts I'll walk back. I need to clear my head."

"Very good, sir."

Outside in the cold air, he closed his eyes and drew in a deep calming breath. He'd go to the church. He needed to pray.

Brisk steps took him through the alley and down several side streets to the church. How was he supposed to find a wife in the forty-eight days before Easter? Never mind one called Chloe.

When he reached his destination, Nigel sank onto the steps and closed his eyes. "I'm in such a mess, Lord. My fault for lying, I know that. I wish there was a simple way out of this web of lies I've woven. How do I find a bride in six weeks? If only kidnapping weren't illegal."

"But it is."

Nigel jumped and looked up. "Forgive me. I hadn't realized I was speaking aloud."

The stranger smiled. His blond hair brushed his shoulders whilst his intent blue gaze held Nigel captive, seeming to bore into his very soul. The man leaned his suit-clad form against the lamppost, one long thin hand sliding into his pocket. "You seem like a man with a lot on his mind. Praying is a good way to solve problems. The Lord takes delight in His children talking to Him. Perhaps I could offer some guidance."

Nigel seriously doubted that, but something compelled him to speak. "My father's will was read today. He stipulated that I have to marry by Easter or I lose my inheritance." He laughed bitterly. "I know Dad and I never really got on, but this? The irony is, I brought it all upon myself."

The stranger raised an eyebrow.

"He owned...well, I own..." He paused. "No, that's not true either. Dad owned Thornhill Abbey." He looked up at the sky. "I could contest the will, but

there isn't any point."

"Is the money really what is driving you? It clearly isn't making you happy."

"No, that house is my birthright, and it was promised to me. It may not be a kingdom, but I'm the rightful heir. And unlike Esau I don't intend to be cheated out of it."

"Once you marry."

Nigel bit his lip. "Because of my lies I have to find a woman and marry her in the next six weeks."

"Lying is a sin."

"I know and it started off with a tiny one, but it grew and now there is no way out of this mess."

"A lie is a lie. Just as a dog is a dog, small or large, it doesn't alter what it is. You need to pray." The stranger's deep voice struck a chord in Nigel's heart.

"I was."

"*Properly*. Put the whole thing into God's hands and trust Him to give you the answer. Maybe marriage is the answer. Maybe your path lies somewhere other than with the house and wealth your father owned."

"Are you saying this is a test?"

"I'm saying you must face the consequences of your actions. You have reached a crossroads. It's only with God's help you'll choose the right path to take."

Nigel buried his head in his hands, fingers tugging through the tight curls. Groans tore from him as he prayed. When he looked up, he was alone. By his feet lay a discarded flier. He reached out and picked it up, intending to put it in the next bin he passed, but the words at the top of the page caught his eye. *Rent-a-bride*. He glanced heavenward for a long moment then back down at the colored paper. There were no more details, just a website and a couple of pictures of

women in long white wedding dresses.

Was this his answer?

Once home he locked himself in his bedroom and sat at the desk with the laptop. The website was a simple affair. It gave no clue as to how much it cost to actually rent a bride. It simply said they charged a joining fee, and there was a connection fee for forwarding mail to the women. It was then up to the individuals if further contact was made.

Nigel didn't hesitate. He joined the site and once his password came, he had access to the database. He just hit random links until the unthinkable happened.

There she was. Chloe.

She looked almost exactly as he'd imagined. Long brown hair which fell past her shoulders. A smile to die for. Brown eyes that seemed almost the same shade as his own. She was pretty...oh, so pretty.

"Lord, is this from You?" he asked. "Is this really the way You want me to go?"

No immediate answer came, but then he wasn't expecting a lightning bolt or something along those lines. What did he have to lose? This was purely business, nothing more.

Nigel clicked on the link below Chloe's name and started to write.

## 2

Chloe Wilkes looked at her brother in horror. "You. Did. *What?*" she managed.

Caleb grinned. "Joined an agency for you. You have a cute photo, adorable profile and about sixty hits already."

She looked from him to his wife, Vicky, then back to Caleb. "How dare you?"

"Come on, Clo. We're a family. We do everything together. Well, most things. And Vicky hasn't anything to do with this, so don't blame her."

"Just because you're married, doesn't mean I have to be," Chloe snapped. "I've only been single a year. What's more, I am perfectly capable of making my own decisions, and joining a dating agency isn't one of them."

"It's not a dating agency. It's called Rent-a-Bride. You cut out the dating all together, which you're no good at anyway, and just marry them."

Chloe groaned. "I don't believe you. Please, tell me you're kidding."

Caleb shook his head, bringing up the site on his tablet. "See, such a cute picture."

She looked at the image on the screen. At least he'd picked one of her in normal clothes, rather than her work outfit. She should be grateful for small mercies, but that didn't dispel her frustration. "I hate

you," she muttered, reaching for her coat.

"Hate is a mean word. I'll tell."

"Oh, for Pete's sake, Caleb. How old are you? For once, why can't you act like my older brother and stand up for me rather than tease me all the time?" She shoved her arms into her coat. "I'm going home."

"Oh, come on, Chloe," he said. "It's Shrove Tuesday, pancake day. We always spend it together."

"Not this year, and you know what? I'm giving *you* up for lent."

"Chloe, please," Caleb began.

Chloe grabbed her bag and headed out, letting the front door slam behind her. How dare he? Rent-a-bride? Just the thought made her sick to her stomach. Was she to be sold because she'd broken off her engagement to Leon?

Her former dance partner became a different man once he'd had a few drinks, which was way too often. She'd blamed the countless falls on her misjudging the jumps, but it was hard to work with a partner who wasn't sober. After the last time he missed and she'd broken her leg, she'd realized the drinking wasn't ever going to get better unless he wanted to stop, and Leon didn't want to change.

So, in one decision, she'd changed her career and become single. She was happy in her choice. OK, so it wasn't where she'd ideally wanted to be at this point in her life, but if God wanted her married, then he'd send Mr. Right to sweep her off her feet. It wouldn't happen because Caleb decided to interfere.

Once home, Chloe deadlocked the front door and logged onto the Internet. She found her profile and read it. Caleb had listed her to a tee—likes, dislikes, hobbies, and even her faith. She tried a couple of

passwords, but neither worked. She wasn't about to ring Caleb and ask him for it.

Well, at least she couldn't pick up the messages if she couldn't log in. That was a blessing. Her email chimed and she pulled it up. Once the page loaded she looked at it in despair. Seven emails, all from Rent-a-Bride.

Shaking all over, her breath ragged, she opened the first email. *"Hi, my name is Shane. I red yer profile an I think your smoking hot. Mebbe we cood get together an..."*

She shook her head. "And you, my friend, need to learn to spell." She deleted it. The next one was graphic in the intentions of the sender and left very little to her imagination.

Swallowing hard, she hit delete and then got rid of the rest of her inbox. She buried her head in her hands. "Caleb, Caleb, Caleb. What have you done? I'll have to change my email address and that will cause no end of trouble. Or I just send all these to spam and ignore them. Or both."

She would have to call him and ask him to delete her account. So much for saying she wouldn't talk to him for six weeks. She drummed her fingers on the table and reached for her phone.

Another email arrived. Chloe moved the mouse to delete, but instead opened it. She sighed. *"Hello, Chloe. My name is Nigel. I read your profile and am contacting you as we are both Christians and have a lot of other things in common. I find myself in a bit of a fix and am hoping we can come to a mutually beneficial agreement. I've attached a picture of myself and hope to hear from you soon. Yours faithfully, Nigel Turner."* The email ended with a verse. *The joy of the Lord is my strength. Nehemiah 8:10.*

She scrolled down the page and looked at the

photo.

*"Wow."*

Close cropped wavy brown hair, a neat trimmed beard and the most amazing brown eyes she had ever seen. He wore a grey suit and brown tie with a bright white button-down shirt. She picked up the bottle of water on the desk and drained it. *Be still my heart, the bloke is a hunk. And a Christian.*

But still a bloke, nonetheless. How did she know he wasn't a creep like the other emails she'd received?

She probably shouldn't do this, but she would reply. *"Hello, Nigel. I don't make it a habit to advertise on sites like this, and I have no desire for a mutually beneficial anything with anyone. Especially when I know next to nothing about you. This is real life, not some trashy romance novel and a casual hook up."* She hit send.

Chloe shoved the chair back, stood, and headed into the kitchen. Baking always calmed her nerves and it *was* Pancake Day after all. Setting up the tablet computer on the work top, she hit the music app. Country music filled the air.

She pulled out the ingredients for batter and started beating them together. The griddle was almost hot when her email chimed again.

*"Hey, Chloe. Sensible woman. After all I could be the modern day Jack the Ripper looking for my next victim. But I can assure you I'm not. I have a firm faith in God, and have done for the last fifteen years. Perhaps we could meet in a public place to talk? Or you might feel more comfortable talking on the phone. Or if you prefer to pick the time and place that's fine by me. I'm based in England. Distance no problem. I'll come to you. How about Saturday?"*

Chloe bit her lip. She hated to admit she was lonely and this guy — "Oh, why not? If we're in public

and he is a creep I can leave. Caleb, you should know by now not to dare me to do anything. Signing me up to this site is the biggest dare of them all." Her hands reached for the keyboard. She typed rapidly, hit send and then turned back to the griddle, pouring several pancakes onto the sizzling hot surface.

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Nigel's breath hitched again as an email arrived from Chloe. To reply so fast she must be in the same time zone as him. Not that money was an option if she lived in Europe.

*"Nothing ventured, nothing gained,"* he read. *"OK, a public place. How about the Three-Sixteen café in Headley Cross, Berkshire? It's on the High Street. I can't do this weekend as it's my birthday and my parents are taking me out somewhere. So, how about three o'clock, next Saturday?"*

Part of him couldn't believe it. Berkshire was a mere eighty miles inland. Not far at all. But a week on Saturday? That was almost two weeks into his timetable. But what choice did he have?

One email later and everything was set. Why'd she pick Headley Cross? Did she live there? If he went there tomorrow when he was free would he find her? Would this crazy idea even work?

### 3

*Day 2*

*Ash Wednesday Feb 14*

Nigel watched the scenery pass as James drove him on a fact finding mission to Headley Cross. His primary reason for going was to find out where this café was for the meet in a fortnight. The drive only took two hours and once James parked in the town center, Nigel told him to entertain himself for a couple of hours. Maybe he should have driven himself. Oh well, too late now and at least he'd know where to go next time.

He set off walking through the streets of the quaint town. It really was lovely.

He was almost two weeks early, but had the day off work and there were never any lectures scheduled for a Wednesday. If he should happen to bump into Chloe, then so much the better; if not, then Saturday week would have to do.

He found the café relatively easily and stood outside. It looked busy. His fingers ran over his jacket pocket, assuring himself the photo he'd printed off was still there. Nigel headed inside and ordered coffee before sitting by the window with the cup in hand. His phone rang. The ringtone indicated it was his brother without the need to look at the screen. "Hello, Archie."

"So, have you told Chloe yet? Set a date for the