



Clare
Revell

IT ALL STARTED
WITH A TYPO. . .

Virtually Yours
at Christmas

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Dedication

It's been a strange year, so this is for everyone.

What People are Saying

Down in Yon Forest

She writes books like Alfred Hitchcock and M Night Shyamalan direct and produce engrossing and captivating movies. 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

1

*The Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in
whom I take refuge.*

Psalm 94:22

Carlyle Stevenson filled the kettle. He rinsed out his cup and sighed. He would be so wired by lunch time. But that was the new normal, a phrase he currently really objected to—right along with the current lockdown situation affecting the entire country. He worked in the office, Henderson and Sons Accountants, in the centre of Headley Cross, three days a week and from home the remaining two. He'd added "skilled at queuing" to his CV, along with adept at social distancing, and fully qualified in making video calls.

Not that he was planning on finding a new job any time soon. He just believed in keeping things up to date. And finding humour in the current situation. After all, if he didn't find something to laugh at most days, he'd go crazy.

He put two heaped spoons of instant coffee into

the cup, and then added sugar. Hmm, maybe he should cut down on the amount of sugar he added to each coffee. Or weigh each spoonful of sugar, because he probably used way too much. Never mind the three biscuits he added per drink. At this rate, by the time the gym reopened, he'd be several pounds heavier. If not a whole stone. And he'd need the clothes shops to reopen because nothing would fit him. Hmmm. Did his suit actually fit him at all now? He wasn't wearing it to work any longer as no clients came into the building.

If it weren't for the fact he had to walk his border collie, Max, twice a day, three or four times if the weather was nice, he probably wouldn't leave the house at all unless he had to. Or get dressed. Maybe.

The phone rang as the kettle boiled. He tucked the handset under his chin and poured the water into the cup. "Hello?"

"Good morning, Carlyle." The overly cheerful voice of his boss, Billy Dickson, boomed down the phone. "How's it going?"

"Good. On the third coffee of the morning and it's only 9:00 AM, but then I have been working since 5:00AM. I'm about to clean the flat and walk Max. Then I'm painting the lounge today. Once I've done the click and collect on the paint, that is. Tying that journey in with shopping for my parents."

"Hmmm. Working from home doesn't mean going on a jaunt, you realise that, don't you? It means you park your butt in a chair, turn on your laptop, and work from home for eight hours. Not skive. Have you done all those reports I sent you?"

Carlyle chuckled. "I'm guessing you haven't checked your email yet this morning. All done and

dusted. With the exception of the Kirsten Lawson case. She hasn't filed anything for the last several months. Nor has she responded to the last six or seven emails I sent her."

"Still?" Billy sighed. "You'll have to call her. A face to face would be better."

"If only it was legal, but there are still way too many restrictions on actually meeting someone." Carlyle added milk to his coffee and stirred. He took hold of the phone. "But, yeah, I'll call her."

Grabbing the cup, he sipped the coffee and padded through to the lounge. He set the coffee on the table next to his laptop. He clicked a few buttons. "OK, the last time she sent anything remotely useful was...five months ago. Before that she was pretty prompt. Why can't you call her? You normally deal with the late accounts."

"I would, but I have a full day of video conference meetings with other clients, the first of which starts in three minutes. I wouldn't use an audio call either. I suggest you contact Miss Lawson in the next few minutes, set up a video meeting and speak to her. Don't give her much warning, though. Send the invite and wait until she shows. Do it now rather than skive off somewhere."

Carlyle frowned. Which part of working since 5:00AM hadn't Billy heard? That was four hours done of his eight-hour working day already. Good job this wasn't a video call, or he'd get yelled at. A frown was the same as talking back in Billy's book. "Now? As I said, I have other obligations this morning."

"I'm not paying you to go shopping. Do this call and sort the situation out once and for all. You can do your chores on your lunch break. Or at the weekend."

The call ended abruptly.

Heaving a deep sigh, Carlyle opened the folder marked Lawson and pulled up the app on his laptop. He flicked through the pages to find the woman's email address. Making sure to use his work account, he typed in her address and sent the invite. He opened the meeting, picked up his coffee and sat back to wait for her to accept.

~*~

Kristen Lawson added three more drops of scent to the new batch of soy candles. She was experimenting with a new blend, alongside making the ones for the orders she'd received yesterday. She loved the way her business had picked up recently. Only ever operating online, her homemade candles and wax melts were proving especially popular right now. Along with the new line of electric wax warmers.

The one drawback was working alone. Right now, she was keeping up with the influx of orders, having stated on the website that delivery would now be seven to ten days rather than the usual three or four. However, most people understood that, as everything had slowed down considerably over the past few months.

Her phone chimed with an incoming email. She debated ignoring it but decided against doing so. Stirring the pot once more, she grabbed her phone and checked the app. Titled urgent, the email came from a firm of accountants. Not the one she used, but she knew her accountants were closing and passing on the

files to another firm. Perhaps this was the new firm, making contact for the first time. And maybe they said urgent so that people like her wouldn't simply delete the message unread.

Which to be honest, she did. A lot. Spam mail was the bane of her life. At least the work orders came direct from the website and not through social media or random emails.

Kristen opened the email. Short, simple and to the point, it read:

I need to talk to you urgently. Please click the link below for an immediate conference face to face meeting regarding your accounts. Carlyle Stevenson, Accounting Executive, Henderson and Sons.

Did she? Didn't she? Could she risk leaving the candle wax for however long this would take? Maybe she could multitask and take the call while she was working. Was it worth the risk? Oh, why not. She could always do what her sister had done the other night for a laugh if she had to leave in a hurry. Pretend to freeze and then hang up the call.

Kristen pulled the laptop across the small table and opened the mail on there. She took a deep breath and clicked the link to the conference call.

A second or two later, the call connected. An empty room greeted her. The red office chair stood in front of a tall bookcase. What she could see of the brown desk was cluttered with files and a steaming cup. So much for this being urgent. "Hello?"

No reply seemed forthcoming, so she turned away from the laptop and gave attention to her melting pot of wax. It smelled divine. She double checked she'd written things down correctly. There'd be no point in crafting this new scent, or putting it on the website, if

she couldn't recreate it.

"Hello. Sorry about that. The dog wanted to go out."

She smiled at the pot of wax and answered the man's voice coming from behind her. "I know how that goes. Give me a couple of minutes. I'm in the middle of something."

"I don't have time."

Biting back a rude response about how he'd been the one not there when she'd called, Kristen held up a hand. "I need to pour this into the moulds. Can we talk at the same time? Your email did say urgent. I'm assuming you need to talk to me about my accounts?"

"That would be why I set up the meeting, but I'm afraid I'll need your full attention. I'm Carlyle Stevenson."

Kristen turned around. The bloke on the screen in front of her was...fit. Short, spiky dark hair, five o'clock shadow, baby blue eyes, and obviously dressing down as he was in a shirt and jumper, rather than a suit. "Kristen Lawson. I'm assuming Viceroy's passed on my details to you. I've been with them up until now, but Mr. Viceroy is retiring and as he handles everything himself, the firm is closing. But then of course you know that, else you wouldn't be calling me."

"Ummm... No, there is nothing anywhere here from Viceroy's." The man frowned and checked the folder in front of him. "I'm after a Kirsten Lawson. Overdue accounts for the last five months."

Kristen shook her head. "Not me. I'm *Kristen* Lawson."

The cheeks of the handsome hunk on the other side of the screen turned a delicious shade of pink, and

tapping echoed from the speakers. "Can I ask your email?"

"How about you tell me which email you thought you'd sent the invite to?" Kristen hadn't come down in the last shower. She wasn't about to give her email out to any Tom, Dick, or Carlyle who asked. Even if he was the most exciting thing to have happened to her all week.

"It's not protocol. I can't give out confidential client information like that."

"Surely you have the email in front of you or a copy of it in your sent folder, but OK, fine. Kristen Lawson at..." She broke off as he held up a finely manicured hand. Wow. That she wasn't expecting. And he wasn't married, either. Unless he was one of these modern males who didn't do wedding rings.

"Can you spell that?"

"T-h-a-t," she shot back. Then quirking a brow, she continued. "Kristen, spelled K-r-i-s-t-e-n."

His cheeks turned even rosier. "Then I apologise, Miss Lawson. I typed the name wrong and put K-r-i rather than K-i-r. It wasn't you I needed to get ahold of at all. If you wish to make a complaint you can email the firm directly or call them. All the details will be on the email I sent you as I used my work account. Once again, my apologies for disturbing you. Have a good day."

The call ended abruptly.

Kristen didn't know whether to laugh or let the irritation build within her. A twenty-first century wrong number. But who would have imagined two similar names at the same email server? For a moment she wondered what the other woman looked like. Then she closed the laptop and turned back to where her pot

of wax waited to be poured into moulds. Some went directly into small plastic pots. Others into silicone moulds ready to be decanted once set.

An hour later, her email chimed again. She checked it. Her eyes narrowed at the screen. The same email as before. "What do you want this time, Mr. Stevenson?" She glanced at the dog. "Yes, Lucy, I am talking to my phone."

The dog barked.

"Yes, I know. We'll go for a walk as soon as I've finished up here."

Lucy whined and slumped down on the floor, thudding her tail against the concrete.

For the second time that morning, Kristen doubted her sanity as she opened the email.

Miss Lawson,

Again, I apologise for disturbing you this morning. I'm usually meticulous when it comes to work and never make mistakes like this. I hope I didn't ruin whatever it was you had going on in the background. Was that your garage?

Carlyle Stevenson.

Kristin shook her head. Did she reply? Oh, why not. He already had her email. If he got too familiar or creepy, she could send his emails to the junk folder and then block him for good measure.

Dear Mr. Stevenson,

Please don't worry. Nothing was ruined. And yes, I work out of my garage at the moment. I'm hoping to be able to expand soon, but the garage is bigger than the kitchen which is where I began my business. Other than my family, I haven't spoken to anyone for weeks. And all that contact is by video call. I live too far away from my parents to see them any other way. And the rest of my family are essential workers and have too wide a scope of contacts.

She looked at the screen. How did she end this? Settling for *have a good day*, she signed off with her full name as he had done.

Now she really did need to concentrate on work. These orders wouldn't fill themselves.

~*~

Carlyle was so glad he was at home. He honestly couldn't believe he'd done that. A simple typo and he'd got ahold of the wrong woman. A really pretty blonde, with long wavy hair, and gorgeous green eyes to be sure, but not the Miss Lawson he was meant to be calling.

When she had finally responded to the video invite, that particular Miss Lawson had more or less told him where to get off. He'd promptly terminated the conversation, rung Billy and told him to deal with it.

Then he'd fired off an apology to the original lady he'd called and prayed she wouldn't report him.

He'd intended to ask about Viceroy's, but that seemed like touting for business, and he wouldn't do that. At least not to her, and not yet. And why make the comment about her garage? Why shouldn't she be in it? If he had one, he'd probably hide there as well. With everyone grounded right now, it made perfect sense to spend time in different parts of the house. His younger sister, Mary, often joked she was catching the tube from the bedroom to the kitchen, whilst minding the cat.

His email chimed. Work. Nah. It could wait. He

closed the laptop. "Max. Let's go for a walk. Then I need to shop for the parentals. I can pick up the paint at the same time."

Max scampered into the hall and came back with his lead. He dropped it at Carlyle's feet and barked.

"Yes, she was kind of cute. And pretty. And will never want to speak to me again. She was being polite when she replied." He clipped on the lead. "Now I need my jacket and boots. Looks as if it might snow. Quick walk, then I need to go shopping and for that you have to stay here." He could have sworn Max pouted. "Hey, at least you'll be in the warm. Unlike some of us, who'll have to queue outside. For ages."

2

The following morning, Kristen sorted through the order sheets she'd printed off and released a heartfelt sigh. The number of orders she'd received yesterday and overnight would take her all day to make and pack. It would be another late night. Still, she shouldn't complain because so many small businesses had to close, and many possibly wouldn't reopen. So she'd spend all day melting wax and adding different scents to complete the orders without complaining and then tomorrow she could post them. Along with the ones that should really have gone yesterday.

Her phone chimed with an email alert. She glanced at the screen. Carlyle Stevenson— again. Now what did he want?

Well, he'd have to wait while she got this batch on. Otherwise she'd be playing catch up all day long. She ran her finger down the list. Fifteen peppermint kisses, twenty-four candy canes, and ten silver bells. That would do for now.

She measured the wax into three melting pots and reached for the bottles of red, green and blue colouring. She put ten drops of each into the wax and set the bottles down. She might need to add more depending on how pale they turned out. Next was the scent. To the green she simply added peppermint. For the candy cane she added peppermint, spearmint, and marshmallow. The silver bells were something new she'd invented around the end of October and were proving remarkably popular. Mixed spice, pine, and a dash of holly berry.

Ten minutes later, she washed her hands and turned her attention to the phone. Opening the email she read it twice. *Hi, Kristen. I was wondering if you had a few minutes at around eleven. Here's a link to the meeting room. See you then.*

Kristen glanced at the clock. It was exactly eleven now. Did she go find the laptop or ignore him? Well, he was kind of easy on the eyes, and what would it hurt? It wasn't as if he could step through the screen and attack her. Besides, the wax was fine for a few minutes and she wasn't leaving the room. She crossed back over to her desk, raised the lid of the laptop, and logged onto the meeting room. As she did, she noticed the invite email address was different. Oh, well, too late now.

The connection was almost immediate.

Carlyle beamed. "Hello. I wasn't sure you'd answer as I used my personal email not my work one."

"To be honest, I didn't notice until I'd clicked the link. I just saw your name and thought, well, why not? If you turn out to be creepy, I have a plan. I'll do what my sister did the other night. She stuttered, stuck a stupid frozen pose, counted to ten, logged off, and then

went for a bath.”

He roared with laughter. “I am so trying that on my boss the next time a staff meeting goes on way too long. Apart from the have a bath bit. Not in the middle of the day at any road. Anyway, how’s your day going?”

“Busy. Up to my eyeballs in work and slowly drowning.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m a candle maker. What’s even funnier is one of my sisters is a baker, and the other married a butcher and helps him with the home delivery side of the business.”

“Technically you ought to be a candlestick maker, but yeah, that is pretty funny.”

Kristen rubbed the top of Lucy’s head and the dog sighed contentedly. “So, to what do I owe the pleasure of this call?”

He raised an eyebrow. “At least you said I’m a pleasure and not an interruption.”

She chuckled. “Well, that too.”

“You mentioned in your email yesterday that you hardly talk to anyone. And it sounded rather lonely.” He shoved a hand through his hair, making it stick up further. “I wondered if you’d like coffee and a chat?”

Kristen tucked an errant strand of hair behind own her ears. It didn’t matter how many hairgrips she used, it would never stay put. “Coffee? And how will that work?”

“You make one. I make one. And we sit here and socially distance whilst drinking together.”

She angled her head, staring at the handsome man on the other side of the computer screen. What did she have to lose? “Why not? Coffee date, it is. Be right