



And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD
was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.
~1 KINGS 19:12, KJV

AFTER THE FIRE

CLARE REVELL



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Dedication

For my daughter Ceryn.

Thanks also to Pastor David for his very timely sermon on Romans; to Donna and JoAnn for their tireless critiquing; my editor Jamie for having faith in the story. But most of all to the Lord from whom my inspiration comes.

Praise for Clare Revell

Season For Miracles

Kyle and Holly came to life in this book with so much ease they hardly sounded fictional and so real. The pain and fear that Holly goes through is heartbreaking but I loved that with Kyle anything is possible. This is definitely a book worth reading for it has everything just right for the season: God and hope.
~ *Lena - Happily Ever After Reviews*

If you enjoy romantic suspense, you'll love this fast-paced read. Suspense elements kept me turning pages and the well drawn characters touched my heart. I read *Season For Miracles* in one sitting, snow bound and cozy. Delicious. I recommend this book to anybody who enjoys a well written and balanced, inspirational romantic suspense. I can't resist a story that celebrates God's love and its miraculous power. ~
KM Daughters - author

Saving Christmas

'Clare Revell does it again with this beautiful story of hope and redemption. *SAVING CHRISTMAS* packs a lot of story into a limited number of pages, and draws the reader in from the very first line. It's a wonderful respite from the hectic holiday to-do list. ~
Mary Manners - author

1

And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 1 Kings 19:12

Private Investigator, Freddie Flynn walked into her office to a laugh from her personal assistant.

“Ms. Flynn—can’t you stay away?”

Freddie looked at Patsy and laughed with her. “Nope—actually I forgot something. So, I’m not here, I’m still on leave. I’ll be in and out in a jiffy.” She walked past the desk into her own office, freezing in the doorway as Patsy spoke again.

Did Patsy just say what I think she did? Freddie closed her eyes for a moment, wishing she had gone straight to Cornwall and not come in to pick up her spare inhaler. She worked alone for a reason and didn’t need or want a partner—especially if that partner came in the handsome form of Vice President Jason Bryant.

Freddie sucked in a deep uneven breath. *No, thank you.* She knew from personal experience that being around Jason was like kindling tossed on a fire. She’d gotten too close and ended up burned.

If that wasn’t reason enough, everyone knew the last few people that Jason—Mr. Bryant, she corrected, had come into contact with, had ended up fired. The man seemed to be working his way through the rank

and file, stream-lining the private investigation company, Jones Associates, as if it was his personal mission. No one person or department was safe from his scythe. Her stomach churned and for a moment she was afraid she'd throw up. Was she next on his list? What had she done to merit this?

Freddie straightened her glasses, and took another deep breath, before turning in the doorway. She looked at her personal assistant, hoping she was wrong. "Please tell me I misheard you, and they're not putting me on a case with him."

"I'm sorry, Ms. Flynn." Patsy Kennet sounded as contrite as she looked. She held out the overstuffed file in her hand. "Mr. Bryant was here when you rang to say you'd be popping in. He insisted you wait so he can nip back to discuss the new assignment with you. Here's the case file. He asked that you familiarize yourself with it."

Do I really need a new assignment? She already had a huge caseload— the Rafferty case being the one she was concentrating on the most. Surely he and the boss weren't planning on taking her off any of them in favor of this one. She took the outstretched file and managed a smile. "I'll do that, thanks."

She didn't want anyone's help, especially Jason Bryant's. In fact, she'd rather not see him at all if she could avoid it. She was due in Cornwall by five, and really didn't want to delay leaving. Maybe if she just left and... She shook herself mentally. *That won't help. Meet him, get it over with. Let him brief me and arrange to start the new case next week when I get back from holiday. Just because I don't like the guy doesn't mean I can brush him off. He is my boss, after all.*

She took a deep breath. This wasn't Patsy's fault.

Best not to shoot the messenger. "Could you do me a favor? Ring Mr. Jones and see if he has some time available within the next twenty minutes or so. I may as well give him the Cassidy case as I'm going to be here a while."

Patsy nodded. "Sure." She lowered her voice, despite the fact they were the only ones in the room. "Honestly, I don't blame you for not wanting to work with Mr. Bryant. He does have quite a reputation."

As a heart breaker. Freddie pulled out her hair band and retied her ponytail. Her personal feelings aside, Mr. Bryant was the boss and demanded respect from the staff. "The new vice president is good at his job and leaves no stone unturned. He wouldn't have been appointed to the job if he wasn't. He's also as straight as an arrow."

Hmmm...when did I start defending him?

"I'll see if Mr. Jones is free." Patsy turned to go. "Oh, Mr. Bryant asked for you by your first name—almost as if he knew you."

Freddie managed a tight smile. He knew her very well, but that was in their past and not for public debate. The last thing either of them needed was that particular piece of gossip doing the water cooler circuit. "Of course he does, he knows everyone on the staff. No doubt some people better than others. Thanks for this, Patsy. Let me know when I can go up and see Mr. Jones."

The door clicked shut, and Freddie dropped the file to the desk. Closing her eyes, she tried to push aside the grief filling her. Fifteen years since she had seen or spoken to him, yet as soon as Jason joined the company seven years ago, she'd recognized his name, and skillfully managed to avoid him. It helped that he

was at the smaller office ten miles across town. She even went as far as missing the Christmas party several years running to avoid him. Hearing his name was painful enough—seeing him would be unbearable.

Glancing around the office, Freddie perched on the edge of her desk and rubbed her face. Her varied work as a Private Investigator for Jones Associates, took her the length and breadth of England. She loved it and had worked hard to get where she was now. There was a partnership opening soon, and she planned to put in a bid for it. The Rafferty case could make or break her chances, and she wasn't going to allow anything to stand in the way of that. That included her emotions *and* her past.

The phone rang and she grabbed it. "Hello?"

"Ms. Flynn, the boss says he has a few minutes and he can see you now."

"Thanks, Patsy. I'm on my way."

Freddie pulled the Cassidy file out of the filing cabinet. She made her way down the corridor and up two flights of stairs to the huge fourth floor corner office occupied by Edwin Jones. His secretary waved her straight in. The office decor left a lot to be desired, and as always, Freddie wished she had shades on when she entered. The lime green and orange were nauseating. "Sorry for descending on you like this, boss."

"Not a problem. Come on in." Edwin Jones smiled at her. Tall and balding, with hideous horn rimmed specs that were a throwback to the seventies perched on his nose, he looked a lot older than his fifty years.

The chair in front of the desk swung around. A tall man wearing jeans, white shirt and leather jacket sat there, one leg crossed over his knee. His leather boots

shone in the bright room. Shards of emotion sliced through her. He'd always been particular about his boots. Dark wavy hair, as untidy as ever, framed his face. A pair of mirrored shades hooked over his shirt pocket and an all too familiar smile lit the brown eyes that took her in and swallowed her whole—Jason.

A solid wall hit her, knocking the breath from her lungs. The office walls closed in on her at the same time her throat did. Her knees weakened, her stomach flip-flopped, her heart raced, and for a second she was a teenager again.

Oh no, not now, please not now. I don't need this. I'm not ready for this. How can he still affect me like this after all this time?

Freddie turned to Mr. Jones, burying her instant reaction to Jason's unexpected presence in the office and hoping her makeup hid the growing heat on her cheeks. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't realize you were busy. Your secretary said to come straight in."

"It's fine. We're not busy, just chatting over coffee. I don't believe you've been formally introduced to the new vice president, Jason Bryant. Jason, this is Freddie Flynn. She's one of the best PI's we have, but of course you already know that, as you've read her file. Just don't call her Miss. She prefers Ms."

"Hello, Mr. Bryant. It's a pleasure to see you again after so long." Freddie stuck out a hand. She could do this. He was her boss, nothing more.

Jason got to his feet. Freddie felt her face burn as his slow gaze covered her body. His smile widened, recognition dancing in his eyes. He stood there for a moment, before grasping her hand too firmly, his familiar touch sending ripples of sadness through her. Her knees weakened, and it took every ounce of

courage she had not to show emotion on her face.

"Likewise, Ms. Flynn. Your file makes impressive reading."

"Thank you."

"I take it you two know each other?"

Glad for the escape, she pulled her hand back and turned away from Jason. "We were at university at the same time, sir." Freddie spoke before Jason had a chance to say anything. "It's been about fifteen years now."

Actually, it's been exactly fifteen years, four months and ten days...but who's counting?

She took a deep breath and stepped forwards, putting the file on his desk. "I don't need much of your time, sir. I just want to brief you on this. I'm not actually here today—I'm on leave until the middle of next week."

Jason's laugh was as rich as she remembered it. "So you're just a figment of our collective imaginations then?"

"Something like that." She smiled. "I popped in to pick up my spare inhaler."

Mr. Jones indicated the second chair by his desk. "Have a seat."

Freddie sat down and crossed her legs. Jason sat next to her, his foot knocking against hers as he hooked his ankle over his knee. He shot her a smile of apology, and then turned to look at the boss.

"I'm glad the two of you are both here. It means that I can kill two birds with one stone. Freddie, something important has cropped up, and I'm reassigning your entire case load. Sadie's team will be taking them on. I'd like you to collect all the files and give them to Sadie personally before you leave the

building. You can brief her on their current statuses."

Shock filled Freddie as the boss spoke. *He's reassigning all my cases? Have I done something wrong?* She knew some people resented her ability to work five cases at once and keep all the facts straight, but to just hand them over? Swallowing hard, she looked aghast at him. "Sir?"

"I am assigning both you and Mr. Bryant to the Constantine case. Your PA should have the file for you to read. John Constantine has reason to believe his wife is—" He broke off as Freddie's phone beeped. His eyes narrowed.

"Sorry, sir." Freddie pulled the phone off her belt. She hated being interrupted as much as he did, but Patsy wouldn't have done it if it weren't important. At least she no longer had the "na-na-na-na-na" message tone. She looked down at it, and read the text twice, her brow furrowing slightly. Normally she'd ignore this, but under the circumstances, she'd better deal with it. She sighed.

"Problems?" Jason asked.

"You could say that." She hooked the phone back onto her belt. "I'm really sorry, sir. An emergency has cropped up with the Clark case. Ordinarily it could wait, but if Sadie's taking charge of my cases, I ought to sort it out before I hand this one over. Is it all right if we do the Constantine briefing later?"

Mr. Jones nodded. "Of course. I hope you sort out whatever is wrong. Make sure you explain to Mr. Clark that Sadie will be handling the case from today. We'll reconvene in half an hour. That should give you more than enough time. I don't want to delay your holiday any longer than need be. Make sure you put today's hours down on your time sheet."

"Thank you, I'll do that. See you in thirty minutes. Sir, Mr. Bryant." Freddie got to her feet and left the room.

She shut the door carefully and headed past the secretary, nodding as she passed. Once in the corridor, she walked quickly to the stairs, annoyed for letting Jason get to her after all this time. He was in her past and that was where he had to stay.

Jason watched her go. The years hadn't faded her lustrous mane of long red hair or taken the sparkle from her green eyes. Despite his best intentions, he hadn't been prepared for the onslaught of emotion seeing Freddie again had produced in him. He sat there silently, looking down at his boots.

My feelings for her haven't changed one bit. Lord, is this really where you want me? Wouldn't I be of more use back on the other side of the world on the mission field, flying planes? Anywhere, but here.

Edwin's voice jarred him from his thoughts. "There's a lot of tension between you two."

"That's hardly surprising given what happened." Jason massaged the palm of his hand with his fingers, before looking at the man he'd grown up calling Uncle Edwin, an old family friend he owed his current job to. "Honestly, I've been dreading this moment since I started working for you." *Promotion and huge pay rise aside, working across town suited me much better. At least there I could avoid her.*

Edwin's pen tapped out a slow rhythm on the desk. "Maybe this was a mistake."

Jason shook his head. His heart ached and wanted

to burst into a million tiny pieces. *I really don't want to work with her. I don't think I can manage. I need Your help here, Lord. Show me what to do.*

"I made the mistake fifteen years ago when I left her, sir. Let's face it, she's never going to forgive me and quite honestly, I don't blame her. I had my reasons, but I didn't give either of us the chance to explain. I just left."

"Fifteen years is a long time. Maybe she's over you."

"Yeah, maybe." Jason looked at his hands. He doubted it. He sure wasn't over her.

"Jason, as vice president you need to set personal differences and relationships firmly to one side. If you can't do that, then you're not the man for this particular job. I'll find someone else. Leave your desk a little longer until you can work with her without letting your emotions get in the way. Being vice president is a huge change from an agent in the field—even with seven years' experience. There's a lot more responsibility for one thing. And for another—"

Jason shifted in his seat and stared back. He shook his head. "I can do this. Yes, most of my experience is field work, but you know I'm good at that. I may only have been vice president for three weeks, but in that time I think I've shown you I can deal with just about anything. I can manage. I know you want me to work with as many people in this office as possible, and I can't get away from the fact that Freddie also works here, so I may as well just do it and get it over with."

Edwin looked at Jason long and hard, making him feel as if he were sitting in the principal's office. For a moment he considered taking his brave statement back and begging to be assigned elsewhere, but that wasn't

his style.

"All right, show me you can. No doubt she'll get her PA to give Sadie the files and try to leave on holiday as soon as possible. So, I'd like you to go and see her and send her back here. I'll brief her on the Constantine case and explain why I'm reassigning her caseload. Once she's on her way up here, get your things and wait by her car, just in case she does a runner without seeing me."

"Look, sir. I know Freddie pretty well. Yes, she's hot-headed, but she said she'd be back. If there's one thing I know about her, it's that she keeps her word."

Edwin opened the drawer and pulled out a red file. He held it out to him. "You need to read this."

Jason took it. Freddie's name was on the front cover, but it wasn't the file he'd read previously. He glanced up, then back down and opened it. As he read, his stomach plummeted and bile rose in his throat. He swallowed hard, desperate to control his feelings. He raised his gaze in shock. "You've got to be kidding me? Freddie?"

"Everyone has their price, Jason. Just keep tabs on her, make notes and if there is the slightest doubt about her loyalty, you know what to do." The ice in Edwin's voice froze the blood in Jason's veins. He tried to read his boss's expressionless face and failed.

"This is Freddie we're talking about. Not some clerk from accounting or some rookie fresh out of training. Yes, she's got a maverick reputation, but she does the job well and gets results. She's the last person who'd betray you."

"If you can't stay professional about this, Jason, then I'll assign someone else."

"There's no need for that. Just promise me that if

my findings don't agree with yours, you'll take my word over some report that crossed your desk written by someone who's jealous of her talents."

"If you can promise me that those findings will be unbiased."

"Of course they will be. I'll see you later." Jason closed the folder and stood. He left the office still dazed. He didn't want to believe what he'd glimpsed in the file. As he walked down the corridor, he opened it again and skimmed the pages. His stomach roiled. There had to be some mistake. He knew Freddie. There was no way she'd be capable of this. Or was there?

Everyone has their price, Jason...

The question was, what was Freddie's? Maybe she'd changed. Perhaps he didn't know her at all. He closed the file and headed to his office. Throwing a few things into his briefcase, he left a note for his secretary and headed out.

2

Freddie reached her office, and smiled at Patsy. "I don't want to be disturbed for a bit while I deal with those calls." She shut the door, walked swiftly to her desk and grabbed the phone. It took her precisely three minutes to deal with the Clark case. Then she dealt with the second matter the text mentioned. Setting down the phone, she sat in shock for a moment. She didn't want to believe what she'd just been told.

Corruption within the company wasn't something she could just ignore and hope it went away. The head in the sand method might work for an ostrich, but in her line of work it meant something only came back and bit you hard, usually sooner rather than later. If Mrs. Rafferty was wrong and it was a genuine mistake, Freddie had to clear his name. If it wasn't, then she had to see justice done.

Either way, it was now more vital than ever that she continue with the Rafferty case and find the truth. If it was true, the consequences would no doubt reach much further than she wanted to consider or could imagine.

Freddie reached across the desk and hit the intercom, drumming her fingers as she waited for a reply.

"Yes."

"Patsy, could you alert security for me, please? I'm

going down to the locked storage and I need to sign something out."

"Sure, will do. Are you going down there now?"

"I need about fifteen minutes or so to finish up, and then I'm heading out. Sadie is taking over the current cases. I'll drop the files in on my way down."

"Sure. What about your appointment with Mr. Bryant?"

Freddie glanced over at the window. Working with him, being anywhere near him, was going to be hard, if not impossible. But, she had to convince him to let her finish this case first—without telling him why and without him firing her on the spot. That was a chance she had to take, because, if this new information was right, she might not have a career to come back to. She pinched the bridge of her nose. Why did things have to get so jolly complicated all of a sudden?

"Ms. Flynn? Are you all right?"

Freddie allowed herself a small smile at the concern in Patsy's voice. She'd never had a more dedicated PA, or one who knew her so well. "Yes, I'm fine. Don't worry about Mr. Bryant. I'll go and see him before I leave."

"All right, Ms. Flynn."

"Thanks, Patsy." Freddie pulled open the bottom drawer of her desk and removed her rucksack. Moving over to the filing cabinet, she pulled out the folders she needed. She tucked them under her arm and locked the filing cabinet. Putting the files in a neat pile on the blotter, she rummaged through her desk. She tossed a few things into her rucksack, including the Rafferty file and the inhaler that had started this whole mess. She closed the rucksack, slung it on her shoulder and