

ORIGINAL WATTPAD STORY

CLAIRE

is it really

love?

GRACE GERVAS

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CHAPTER 1

Claire Levy; beautiful, smart and intelligent. She was an only natural child to Mr. William Levy; one of the best architects in the country. Claire's life wasn't the one to call perfect, but she was happy, at least as long as her mother was alive, and her family was intact. But then her mother died, and Claire was just twelve. Her life suddenly became tinted; the father, who was a friend to her, turned into a workaholic that couldn't even notice when she had turned into a woman. She hated him for that. He'd also married another woman, a year later, who never treated Claire fairly at all, but she never complained; she learned to be strong, bold, and a fighter of her own battles. She hated Cinderella for being too good to be true, for she'd always retaliate when she felt the need to. All the talk about have courage and be kind, was a total absurdity in her opinion.

Fortunately, Claire met Denis when she was in high school; a son of her father's business partner, and a childhood friend at some point. Denis was the youngest teacher and Claire's private tutor; they fell in love but broke up after few months later, and he had to quit teaching when his family moved abroad. Once again Claire lived her solitary life as before. She did well, however, in her studies, but never had friends; she always believed they'd have to leave her sooner or later. But during college, she met Gena, and the two became best friends since then; perhaps because of their similar background, for Gena was an adopted child in her family.

During her Junior college year, Claire lost her father from a car accident and that was the last time for her to hear the word family. However, She never got a chance to tell him how much she despised him at times, but still loved him regardless; it was her only regret. The battle left behind was the fight over inheritance. Her stepmother wanted her son, Jorge, to take over the company although to Claire, the company was like a disease that she wanted to get rid of; she had no interest on the subject whatsoever. Seasons went by, and years increased in numbers.

It was one beautiful night; the graduates of Lisbay university were having an after party, a day after the graduation ceremony. Claire was sitting at one of the tables watching attentively other ex-students who seemed busy with dancing, talking and taking photos while some guys were looking at her flirtatiously. She smiled and stared at her cool mojito for a moment before taking a sip calmly, ignoring any attention. She took her phone out and started browsing the photos of when she was a little girl; she looked so happy with both her parents. They often used to go to Montesby during vacations, or a simple weekend getaway, where they had a beach house by the sea. It was always like a beautiful dream being there. She knew she had to go there; sooner the better.

"Aren't you joining us? Come on don't be shy girl, its only for today!" it was Gena's voice that surprised her from her deep thoughts, she was still shaking her hips in a dancing mode.

Claire stared at her bestie, all startled, then laughed "No, I'm leaving soon." she replied while finishing her drink. Gena

was surprised hence asked if she was alright, which was returned agreeably. "I'm spending the weekend at the beach house, would you like to come?" She asked Gena after hesitating for a while.

"I'd love to! who would miss the adventure? Shall I take our group?" Gena asked anxiously.

"Um-- I think it's a nice idea, it'll be cool! Invite them." she consented.

And the next day, just as agreed, they arrived at Montesby three hours later after a nice van ride. It was a beautiful town with attractive natural scenery, like a tropical paradise; foreigners never missed the chance to go there when they visit the country. They got off the van; they were seven in total, and got welcomed by an old man who was taking care of Claire's country house.

"Claire! What a surprise, you have gotten tall my child, I nearly forgot you." The charming old man regarded her with a hug.

"I will take it as a compliment grandpa! How are you?" Claire returned happily and all the others did the same.

They were escorted inside by that old man and found a table full of food and drinks for breakfast, ready for them.

"Wow! When did you prepare all these?" Gena asked while the rest kept the ecstasy.

He smiled cordially. "Just enjoy the taste of our food here

kids, call me if you need anything." he replied happily and they all thanked him.

"Thanks Grandpa, I don't know what I would do without you." Claire said and smiled at him while marching outside, hand in hand.

"What took you so long to come child?" He asked her in a low tone of voice, on their way to the sea shores just few metres from the front yard.

Claire looked at him and sighed with a little forced smile. "I was just waiting for the perfect time, I'm sure my stepmother called here, Didn't she? she thought there must be something precious in here, I really pity her! Why can't she just be satisfied with the company?" Claire uttered contemptuously.

"Cry if want to cry, you can curse if you want to, It's the only way to throw your bitterness towards your father!" He smiled tenderly. "Your father never forgot about you, trust me my child" he told her.

Claire stared at him, surprised; it's like he knew how repressive she had been. "That's not comforting grandpa, please don't try to make me see him differently." she said, her eyes filled with tears.

"He is my son, although he is not my flesh and blood, but I saw him growing up since I started working here; He was sorry for neglecting you when you needed him the most, he knew how you lived but all he wanted was to prepare a better future for you!" This time he was taking a seat on the brown sand,

watching the sea waving. Claire followed his lead. "I'll give you something later, I hope you will try to understand him." he added.

They talked for a while and head back to the house, where her friends were walking aimlessly around. She hinted them about the beach and showed the way, before turning to Gena.

"Gena, I'm going somewhere," she said. "so please take care of them, and ask grandfather for anything you need."

"Okay but . . . are you alright? You look sad." Gena asked.

Claire forced a smile. "I'm okay, don't worry, we'll talk later; I won't take long." She told her and walked away.

She grabbed a taxi afterwards, that took her to the cemetery within half-an-hour. Once arrived, She took few steps ahead hesitantly while looking around the place. Nothing had changed, she thought. It had been four years since her father died, and that was her first visit since the burial. She sighed deeply and walked slowly towards the cemetery gate, where she went straight ahead towards her father's grave. She stood up in front of it with a pensive look; as though she had a lot of questions with no answers.

"How am I supposed to understand what grandpa told me today? Did you really neglect me for my own well-being?" She uttered; She knew it was pointless blaming the dead, yet she needed to vent. No matter how hard she tried to understand the life she'd led by far, she couldn't. It felt unfair. "I'll try to find

peace in my heart for you dad, so please help me forget everything; my anguish and hatred." she sobbed. She wished he was there for her; saying he was proud of her on her graduation day like all other students; but she was all alone, now and even then.

While leaving, a bit later, Claire spotted a man on the way, doing something with his camera. She didn't pay any attention and continued walking past him, but surprisedly, she heard him talking;

"Are you feeling better now?" He asked while kept on checking his camera.

"Pardon?" Claire snapped. "Are you talking to me?" She added.

He looked at her smilingly; he was handsome enough, with funky curls, in his mid-twenties or so; tall with a cheerful personality, even in a first glance. "Yes you." He nodded his head, approvingly.

Claire looked at him, puzzled. "I'm not sure if I'm supposed to receive that from a stranger, but thanks for your concern anyway." she replied to him casually and turned to where she was heading.

The man continued. "I'm sorry if I've offended you, I should've introduced my self first, maybe? Hi I'm Bruno." he said, in a teasing manner, whilst letting out a killer smile that could've driven any woman crazy; but not Claire.

She paced few steps back towards him, nonchalantly, and stopped. "Are you a journalist by any chance? Because I don't have any scoop for you, in case that's your issue."

Bruno bursted out laughing. "A journalist? My God! No, I just saw you in there and I felt concerned that's why I couldn't ignore you." he said.

"Oh really? How sweet of you! You should stay here and do the charity job then! Thank you for your concern Bruno, but it wasn't necessary, trust me." she snapped. He stared at her tenderly, which made her loosen a bit, and asked why he was looking at her that way.

"I'm sorry if I was rude, but you honestly looked devastated there, but well, I can see you are full of energy now; so I'll take my leave." he said calmly and waved goodbye to her.

As he was turning around, Claire looked at him for a while, and decided to stop him. "Wait," she urged. Bruno turned his head, blushing, before he resumed his composure. "I . . . I'm sorry! I'm Claire, and thank you, sincerely!" she said softly and smiled.

She was very much aware of her faulty social skills, but this time she wanted to make an effort; she never had people worrying about her except her friend Gena; she didn't know how it felt to be protected by someone else.

"Apology accepted!" He beamed, and she returned as much. "So are you new around here? I've never seen you before."

"Oh aren't you a know-it-all? How can you know that I'm new?" She replied and he laughed. They were already outside the cemetery.

"Well you can say that loud. I know everyone around, but this is the first charming face to meet the eyes." He flattered her and she blushed.

"Oh so that's how you get into them ladies huh?"

He laughed again. "You're funny Claire!"

A little chat led into the invitation for a coffee at the nearest restaurant, and Claire didn't see any reason to decline. They rode in his red sport car that's been parked away. Apparently, There was a terrific restaurant that Claire hadn't know about. The car pulled over, and they went to one of the empty tables. Some of the people there greeted Bruno and some made funny signals to him, like a regular.

"You seem very popular here." Claire remarked casually

Bruno smiled. "That's because I live over there." he said while pointing a finger at the second floor of the building in a childish way.

She questioned him if they rented rooms there, and he said that he was the restaurant owner; she was impressed. It was her dream to have something on her possession that she worked hard for. She kept it to herself though. They talked everything and anything; for a change, she turned very happy for making a new friend capable of breaking her ribs in a short moment.

Nevertheless, Claire never stopped staring at Bruno when he talked or laughed. He was handsome, charming and boyish in manners. But that was all; she had no time to crush over some guy she'd just met in the cemetery.

Her phone buzzed suddenly, and it was Gena's call. "Hello?" She answered while looking at Bruno who was also looking at her.

"Hey, where are you?" Gena replied from the other end.

"Um-- with a friend, why? Do you need anything?"

"Which friend that I don't know about? you? Spill it, have you met some cute guy over there?" Gena asked her in a naughty way.

Claire blushed. "Stop it you sly! We'll talk later! Be there soon!"

"You better! Because I can't wait you know, and it's getting late so cut out your little romance." she said and hung up, Gena was so outgoing and charming, sometimes very naughty but she was a great friend.

Claire looked at her watch and her eyes changed. "Oh My God! It's already six and am still here! I've got to go Bruno." she stood up hastily and collected her things while he was finishing talking to one of his employees.

"Alright but-- take it easy Claire! I can give you a ride if you don't mind"

"Ah no, I don't want to trouble you; but thanks for the nice lunch. I've completely lost track of time." she said with a smile, and started to leave.

"But--" he started. "It's seems like it's going to rain soon." he muttered worriedly but Claire was already leaving.

The weather changed abruptly; the sky was too dark as if a very heavy rain was going to crash. Claire didn't care because she had an umbrella inside her backpack. She went to the main road and waited for a taxi. Ten minutes passed but there was no sign of any taxi. She decided to walk hoping that she'd find one on the way. After a short while, the rain started pouring. She felt so disappointed but she didn't have a choice since she had already started . She took her umbrella and opened it, then walked faster through the rain, but it was increasingly heavy. She tried to call Gena but there was no signal; her jeans and sneakers were all wet since it was quite windy.

"Crap!" She screamed, "I'm so damn tired and this stupid umbrella is totally useless!"

It was already dark and about thirty minutes had already passed. There wasn't any trace of a car, bus or even a taxi but she kept on walking. The geography of the place was terrible as far as heavy rainfall was concerned; it would easily get slippery, and a tremendous erosion would take part thitherto. She had to walk carefully, but one can't always be carefully enough. Suddenly she slipped and fell without noticing that she was walking onto a little slope. There was an eroded part that

formed a temporary reservoir in which rain water collected and cascaded away. Claire slid straight towards it and grabbed the tree branch which supported her balance, luckily.

Looking down she felt terrified; she tried to hold onto the branch tightly but it was so hard for her as water kept rippling past her, and onto the little railing bridge. She even tried to pull herself but still couldn't. She screamed for help but there was no one there , not even an animal passing. It was so strange and sudden; coming from a perfect nice day, and in a blink of an eye she was fighting for her life, in such a stupid manner. She even had to laugh a bit, while slowly losing her breath. She was cold, and the water wouldn't leave her in peace. Like an angel shining from a far, she glimpsed a dim light approaching from a distance, and screamed for help with the little zeal she'd left; her hands were already out of strength, her eyes were losing sight and she started to go blank as the glimpse of that dim light disappeared, Eventually she decided to let go of the tree branch, in case it got too hard.

CHAPTER 2

On such a stormy evening, Mr. Stevens and his grandson, Ryan were on their way home from the hospital after his healthy checkup. He was the founder of SK group, that included the largest real estate company in Lisbay. They owned several buildings, apartments and shopping malls among other things. Stevens had two grandsons, Ryan who was the CEO of SK real estate and the other who lived an adventurous life since the death of their mother, Emily. They two boys grew up in Montesby, but Ryan lived in the city by then.

The rain kept pouring intensely. Ryan was driving the large suburban carefully as Mr. Stevens took a bottle of whiskey and had a sip, before clearing his throat.

Ryan looked at him, and shook his head; he had told him many times to quit drinking as the doctor said, but that was almost impossible for Mr. Stevens, for he thought what's the point of living if one can't enjoy the little things life has to offer.

"We should've gone to your apartment son, this rain won't stop now; will you be able to drive in this weather?" Mr. Stevens asked worriedly.

"Don't worry, I know this road as the palm of my hand." Ryan said, confidently, and he meant it.

He was tall, athletic built and matured guy, with a bit cold personality, but rather attractive man in his early thirties; one of the most eligible bachelors with high profile. With eyes glued on the road, he suddenly hit the brakes and looked outside through

the window attentively.

"Oh you gonna give me a heart attack!" Mr. Stevens barked. "What's wrong?"

"Look over there!" Ryan pointed a finger while staring very carefully at the other side of the road.

His grandfather also turned to see what he was talking about, and immediately caught on. "It's a woman!"

"I guess."

"What are you waiting for? Go and help her son, she clearly needs a help!" The old man urged impatiently, and Ryan got off the car fast.

He run hurriedly to where that woman was about to fall, and grabbed her hand sharply. He pulled her up with a pair of his strong hands, took her bag and carried her in his arms, and with her eyes drowsy at the last minute, the girl went unconscious.

"I think she had a slip." Ryan suggested.

Mr. Stevens opened the back door and Ryan put that woman inside. "Is she okay?" He asked.

"I don't know, I think so!" he replied tensely, as he checked her pulse. They were all drenched. Ryan wrapped her with his jacket that was at the back seat before returning to the driver seat.

"What was she doing in this rain?" Mr. Stevens growled. He

was a very kind hearted and generous old man but sometimes very handy.

"Only she can tell!" Ryan looked at her without a word more, and started the engine.

It took about forty minutes to reach their house; it could've taken less, but the road hadn't been friendly at all. Hugo, one of the male employees opened the massive gate and the car entered, Ryan beckoned to his direction for help, and Hugo responded by assisting Mr. Stevens to get off, before heading inside the house. Ryan carried that lady who was still unconscious and followed them. He went directly to one of the rooms on the second floor and put her on bed. He then called Martha, an old lady who was the head housekeeper to tend the strange woman.

"How is she?" Mr. Steven asked as soon as Ryan dropped downstairs.

"I've just called Dr. Marcos, he will be here soon." Ryan replied. "She's still unconscious! And you should go get some rest!"

"No son, you go on ahead and change first, I'll wait for Marcos to arrive Mr. Stevens said.

Ryan went to his bedroom and quickly changed into a simple sweater and gym pants. After a while the doctor came. He examined the woman, and told them it was nothing serious; that all she needed was some rest and the medication he'd

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