

MICHELLE DE BRUIN

TOMORROW SERIES ~ BOOK THREE



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To Tom

*because we are two real hearts who share one True Love,
and because you waited a really long time.*

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*As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among young men.
With great delight I sat in his shadow,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his intention toward me was love.
- Song of Solomon 2:3-4*



*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art,
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
- Old Irish Hymn (translated)*



Oswell City, Iowa

June 1911

“*Y*ou must wear these at all times.” Dr. Kaldenberg tucked the curved ends of a new pair of spectacles around Logan De Witt’s ears.

The world came into sharp focus. Each vial on the shelf behind the doctor stood out in stark relief. Logan could even read the fine print on the labels.

Dr. Kaldenberg scooted away to jot a few notes in a folder. “Give these new glasses a try for a month and then come back for a follow-up appointment.”

Dizziness swarmed around Logan when he stood. His new and refined depth perception would take some getting used to.

The doctor handed him a slip of paper. “Your new spectacles will help you with reading and also with seeing objects in the distance.”

Both of those activities had grown more challenging since his return to Oswell City. No longer would he need to squint to make out the faces of those seated in the back pews on Sunday morning. Enjoyment should also return to his study time. He’d

sure appreciate the change if it meant he no longer had to crouch over his books to make out the words.

“Thank you, Doctor.” He shook hands with the doctor and headed out into the summer day.

Oswell City’s main street bustled with activity as Logan followed the sidewalk to the church. He waved at Alex Zahn, who placed a supply of pastries in his bakery’s display window. A whiff of sweet dough fresh from the oven carried into the street.

Walter Brinks swept the wide steps of his father’s hotel. “Hey, Pastor Logan! Nice glasses,” he called when Logan walked by.

“Good afternoon.” Artie Goud leaned against the second story of his jewelry store from the top rungs of a ladder where he worked to fasten a red, white, and blue striped bunting to the brick wall. “Fourth of July sales begin tomorrow. Stop in if you need a special gift.”

Logan smiled up at the man. He’d already spent an impressive sum of money in Mr. Goud’s store last Christmas when he bought Karen’s engagement ring. The businessmen downtown knew their pastor would do anything to support them, but a man also had to keep a little something in his savings. Mr. Goud would have to wait awhile before he saw Logan in his store again.

Passing the bank and the Koelman Law Firm, Logan turned the corner onto Fifth Street. The change in direction affected his balance, making one of his legs feel shorter than the other. His foot caught on the rounded curb of the asphalted street, but he grasped the trunk of a nearby tree and prevented a sprawl on the ground.

He stood still for a moment and sucked in a deep breath. Wearing these new spectacles every minute of the day would require his full attention for simple tasks he’d never given thought to in the past. Straightening his tie, Logan dared to take another step. He managed to place one foot in front of the other as he crossed the lawn and entered the church.

The door of his study hung open. He never left the door open when gone from the building. Maybe someone in need of their pastor was looking for him. He hastened down the hall.

Someone for sure had come looking for him, but she didn't appear one bit in need of a pastor. Her blue dress clung to her figure, and the neckline scooped quite low. The day was warm, but no one needed to expose that much skin to stay cool. Dark brown hair smoothed away from her fair forehead, and full red lips pouted at him. His restored vision was working far too well at the moment.

"Florence Mae Hesslinga." The sight of this young woman in his study opened the gate on a store of memories from seminary days. "What are you doing here?" He couldn't decide if he should celebrate the reunion or let his nerves take over at the way she strutted in front of him.

She trailed her fingertip across his chest. "I need your help." The invitation lingering in her words made his heart pound.

"Help ... with-with what?" His stutter had stayed behind in Silver Grove. Until now. He gritted his teeth, refusing to allow Florence any more proof of her ability to unsettle him.

"I'm staying with my aunt Clara for a few weeks."

"What about that man you married? I forget his name." Logan sought refuge in his desk chair.

"You mean Reuben? The cad. He only married me to gain a position in Father's business. Then he had an affair, and I left him. He died this spring in a drunk-driving auto accident. Aunt Clara is giving me a place to stay until I get my life in order." She claimed the corner of his desk, her clingy skirt barely covering her ankles.

Logan refused to look down. Those glasses had to go. He'd follow doctor's orders tomorrow. Blurry vision was the best thing that could happen to him right now. His ears hurt anyway. Logan slipped the spectacles from his face and laid them on his open Bible.

"Aunt Clara put me on the planning committee for the

Fourth of July festivities.” Florence leaned in and murmured with her throaty voice. “It’s my job to find escorts for the Miss Independence Day pageant contestants.”

“Why do you ask me?” Logan leaned back, way back, in his chair.

But Florence closed the distance. “The word on the street is Pastor De Witt is the most eligible bachelor in town. You’re perfect for the job.”

“I see.” Too bad he didn’t have an engagement ring to wear like his fiancée had. Then forward young ladies like Florence could see for herself that perhaps he wasn’t so eligible after all.

“I’m planning to enter as one of the contestants. Maybe you’d want to escort me.” Florence leaned over far enough Logan didn’t need his spectacles to catch a glimpse of what her neckline tried so hard to conceal.

He shot out of his chair. “Flora Mae.” Her nickname rolled from his tongue just like memories of their failed courtship rolled through his mind. “You have to understand. I’m engaged to be married. Escorting a young woman during the pageant isn’t exactly the sort of behavior I should be involved in.”

“Married? You?” Florence left his desk and cornered him near his bookshelf. “You always did try to make other interests more important than me. Burying your nose in all these books of yours. Running off to lectures on topics nobody but you seminary boys cared about. Still making excuses, aren’t you?”

Her accusation stole his breath. Karen was no excuse. She’d become the love of his life, at times dangerously rivaling the devotion he owed to the Lord alone. But how to make Florence understand? He hardly knew where to begin.

“Why does it matter to you so much whether I participate or not?” Logan asked.

She fingered his tie. “I’d hoped we might get back together again.”

“As you can see, I’m still pursuing a career you found impossible to live with.” Logan gestured at his study. The Bible

was open to a passage of Scripture surrounded by pages of notes he'd taken earlier that day. Walls lined with floor-to-ceiling shelves housed his collection of priceless study materials. Chairs awaited distraught visitors.

Even the clock ticking away the seconds served as a confirmation of the careful yet fruitful choices he'd made in the time that had passed since his last interaction with this woman.

"No one is better looking than you, Logan De Witt." Her attention shifted from his tie to smoothing his shirt over his shoulders. "I was the envy of all the girls whenever I went out with you."

Her caresses moved to his hair, which needed none of her assistance to respond to the humid summer day. If he didn't get away from her, he'd soon look like the loser of a wrestling match.

"I'm sorry." He maneuvered out of her reach and stood behind his chair. Not designed for militant use, the chair possessed no ability to deter an enemy, but it was his best weapon against any more of her advances.

She sat on the corner of his desk again. "I suppose this new woman of yours tried to talk you out of the life of a pastor and into something else like I did."

Logan shook his head. "She loves me for it."

"Does she live here?" Florence slid off the desk and approached him.

He turned his chair to block her, but she kneeled on the seat and thrust her face into his.

"No. Chicago is her home."

"When's the wedding?"

"January."

"Gives a man lots of time to change his mind."

"You won't change mine." Logan gave her a solemn stare as the image of Karen's golden blonde hair and sky-blue eyes delighted his memory. Her grace and refinement formed a sharp contrast to the edges of Florence's character that had grown rough over time.

She studied him while her lips parted as if she'd go ahead and make the most of this time alone with him.

Logan took a step back and smacked up against the wall. If Florence didn't get out of his chair, he'd be trapped again. She leaned over and planted a kiss on his cheek, the layers of lipstick smearing his skin. The effect must have met her approval because she smiled at him when she pulled away.

"Happy Fourth of July. I'll see you around." Florence put all the sway any woman could muster into her hips and took her time leaving.

This unplanned encounter had wreaked as much havoc as a tornado tearing through an oat field. He settled his hands on his waist and enjoyed the feel of taking deep breaths, something he hadn't done since entering his study. Daring to believe safety belonged to him once more, he reached for his spectacles and returned them to their proper place.

A haze of dark pink smudged his white cuff. Flora Mae's lipstick! The stuff must get removed as soon as possible. He reached into his pocket for his handkerchief and dabbed at his cheek. The poor square of innocent white cloth would be a wreck by the time he finished with it. At least Florence hadn't damaged anything else. He could get over a ruined handkerchief.



SUNDAY MORNING, Logan pointed to a page in his open Bible as he preached to a full sanctuary. "If we look closely at the Apostle Paul's writings, we notice in Ephesians 5 his encouragement to be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Amazing, his stutter stayed away today. Florence's visit still rattled him. He'd awakened twice in the night from the nightmare that he stood before his congregation this morning with her lipstick smeared all over his face. And the worst part of his dream was the fact that no matter how hard he scrubbed, the

smudges of color refused to come off. A shake of his head and a clearing of his throat helped him focus.

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s pray.”

He took a deep breath and asked the Lord to speak to the group gathered this morning. The words of the scripture he’d just read pricked him. If he took the passage seriously, he should give thanks for everything, including the discomfort Florence introduced into his life.

But he could still feel that smear of lipstick. Sometimes God really did ask the impossible from a man.

The sermon drew to a close, and he prayed once more. The congregation sang a hymn while he sat through the offering. He invited everyone to stand for the singing of the *Doxology*, and then Logan hastened to the back of the church.

Left with a few moments alone before a line of people formed to shake hands with him, he gave in to the temptation to feel his cheek. He had to know absolutely no lipstick still stained him. He studied his fingertips. Of course, he should have known they’d stay clean, but relief seeped into him anyway.

Thoughts of his fiancée helped him settle down even more. He missed Karen. Memories of the afternoons they partnered together to bring the word and worship to the congregation of Meadow Creek filled his mind. How he’d love to have her here serving with him and leading the singing. Only six more months remained, and then she’d be here with him always. He could hardly wait.

People filed out of their pews and shook hands with him.

“Good sermon today, Pastor Logan. Thank you.” Clara echoed the words of many who had come through the line before her.

He smiled in response, but when Florence made eye contact with him, the smile disappeared, and his hand shot to his cheek.

He couldn't help it. Heat crept up his neck. The fear that she might try to flirt again and kiss him in spite of all these people standing around took hold of him.

But she only winked. "See ya Tuesday," she whispered in a voice belonging to a young lady who didn't know how to take *no* as his final answer. Florence moved on behind her aunt and found a cluster of women to visit with.

He sucked in a deep breath as he remembered those words he'd read from Ephesians. Thankfulness didn't describe his feelings about this encounter with Florence, even though it had gone much better than the first one.

But gratitude did come close to his relief that at least she'd made no attempt to touch him or kiss him. The Apostle Paul had issued a simpler command to follow than he'd first thought. Or maybe God was helping him steer clear of traps that could ensnare him and drag him away from the fullest blessings.

"You appear to be getting along fine with your spectacles." Dr. Kaldenberg studied Logan when the line shortened, and his turn came for conversation.

"Yes, I am. I'm very glad to have them. Didn't realize how much I needed glasses until I started wearing them." Logan reached to shake hands with the gentle and patient middle-aged doctor.

Dr. Kaldenberg smiled. "That's usually the way it goes. Soon you'll hardly notice you're wearing them at all."

When the line ended, Logan made his way to his study. He'd welcome the day when he no longer noticed his spectacles. They needed pushed up far too often, and he was always cleaning them. But they helped him read and to see into the distance.

How nice if his spectacles could also show him what lay ahead, not only as he navigated the sidewalks of town and the church building, but as he prepared for his future. The Lord had good things in store for Karen and him. Logan was convinced of it. As long as he remembered that simple truth, his vision would serve him well in the months to come.