

MICHELLE DE BRUIN

TOMORROW SERIES ~ BOOK THREE



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

www.ScriveningsPress.com



Logan leaned against the trunk of an oak tree, thankful for its shade from the afternoon sun. A breeze rustled his collar. Leaves fluttered overhead. Townspeople sat in chairs and on blankets along the main street. Children clapped and pointed to the sights, adding to the cheer of the holiday. The parade inched down Main Street, featuring decorated wagons and a marching band assembled of men from town playing drums and brass instruments.

The smells of roasting meat wafted on the warm breeze as a reminder of the picnic planned for the supper hour. He'd stay downtown to enjoy the meal and socialize instead of returning to his desk. Tuesdays, he usually spent long hours studying, but he'd covered enough material that morning to allow him the rest of the day to enjoy the outdoor festivities.

The last entry in the parade, a horse-drawn cart decorated with red and blue paper and filled with elderly Civil War veterans, rolled by. Logan waved. Several of the men occupied the pews of the Oswell City Community Church sanctuary on Sunday mornings. A young girl carrying the flag followed. Soon people meandered in every direction.

“Sure was nice to see the band get back together again.” A person on his right commented.

“The parade gets better every year,” another replied.

“I agree. The Fourth of July parade is one of my favorite events.” Logan followed them in a large crowd to the downtown square where Paul Ellenbroek, the town mayor, would give a speech.

A line formed at the stand where Alex Zahn sold cookies and doughnuts. They looked too delicious to resist. Logan took a place in line and spoke to the couple ahead of him.

“I’m looking forward to your father’s speech.” He smiled at Lorraine Koelman, who, along with her lawyer husband, was expecting their first baby. She was the daughter of the mayor, and a young woman he’d thought about courting. But that was before he met Karen. She was a thousand times better suited for him than Lorraine ever could have been. Logan offered the Lord a silent *thank you* for his guidance over the past year.

“He’s worked hard on it. These are exciting times for Oswell City. New people arrive daily. Downtown is thriving. Father feels the need each year to welcome new residents and cheer on the businessmen.” Lorraine’s gaze shifted from his face to somewhere in the distance behind him.

“Pastor Logan!” The impatient voice belonged to Cornelia Goud.

He turned around.

She shook her finger at him as she approached. “You’re late!”

He couldn’t imagine what she meant. No one had asked him to officiate a wedding today, and no deaths had occurred requiring his services at a funeral. He stared at a total loss of how to respond.

“The Miss Independence Day pageant?” Cornelia gave him a look as if he grew dumber by the minute.

“What about it?” Dread crept into his gut.

“You’re on the list as an escort.” She shoved a clipboard at

him revealing a list of names on the paper fastened to it and pointed to his name. We need you to come. Now.”

“Oh, but I—” He shook his head.

Cornelia grasped his sleeve. “Everyone is waiting for you.”

He wanted to eat a fresh doughnut and attend his friend’s speech, not pair up with someone who wasn’t his fiancée.

“The pageant will start as soon as the mayor finishes his speech.” Cornelia’s gaze traveled over him. “Why, you aren’t even wearing a suit coat. Oh, dear. We need to find you one and get you ready to appear on the stage. Whatever are we going to do?” She clutched her throat.

Cornelia mentioned the third thing he didn’t want to do, wear a suit coat in the heat of the day. The disadvantages fast outweighed the benefits of his original plan of staying in the park with thoughts of Karen on his mind instead of lending himself to an event where he’d end up with a young woman on his arm.

“Oh, good.” Florence jogged over. “You found him.” She slid her hand down the length of his arm. “You’re spending the afternoon with me.”

Blood boiled in his veins. Florence hadn’t listened to a word he’d said, ignored every last one of his protests, and put his name on her list of escorts.

“Ladies, I’m sorry.” He took a step back. “But I cannot act as an escort for the pageant.”

Cornelia’s eyes took on a glazed look as she glanced at Florence. “It’s too late for anyone to back out. He has to do it.”

“One of the other men didn’t make it into town. His sister is in the pageant and said he decided to put up his hay today.” Florence managed to keep her hands on him even though he now stood farther away from her.

Logan stifled a groan. Some men had all the luck. How he’d love to have a hay crop as an excuse to desert Florence right now.

“You have to come, Pastor Logan. One of our young ladies is

already without a partner. We can't afford to have that happen to any more of them." Cornelia shook her head with enough energy to make her hat bounce.

Paul Ellenbroek approached the podium and looked out over the crowd. "Good afternoon. Welcome to Oswell City's Fourth of July festival."

"Oh, dear." Cornelia's eyes widened. "The mayor is starting his speech. We don't have much time."

Florence grasped Logan's hand and tugged on him while Cornelia pressed his side. He needed to either go with these women or run the risk of creating a scene. Paul didn't deserve that sort of distraction. Neither did he want the townspeople believing their pastor an uncooperative, unsupportive influence. They would wish for him to participate in the celebration alongside them. For the sake of the town, he could tolerate Florence's company for a few hours.

He allowed the women to herd him down the street and into a tent bustling with activity. Young ladies in evening gowns scurried about, trailed by their mothers, who worked at straightening sashes and tucking last-minute hairpins into place. When the trio entered, activity halted. Mothers and daughters surrounded him while Cornelia attempted to arrange the other young men into a line.

Questions came at him from every direction, all of them demanding the same answer. Who would be the lucky woman to pair up with him? Hopeful faces gazed up at him while a couple of the young women maneuvered closer to his side.

Logan's heart pounded. Before he left town to stay on the farm with his mother and sister, he couldn't secure dinner dates or attract a woman's attention at all. But now that he'd returned, girls actually worked hard to gain his interest. His mouth dropped open. He really should explain about his engagement, but Cornelia tossed him a suit coat.

"Try this on. Hopefully, it fits well enough for you to wear

during the pageant.” She stood behind him and helped him ease the jacket over his shoulders.

Applause and cheers came from outside the tent.

“The mayor is finished.” Cornelia stood in front of him, matching the buttons of the jacket with their buttonholes. “That’s our cue.” She looked over at her granddaughter. “Pearl, start the Victrola.”

The grade-school girl followed her grandmother’s instructions while Cornelia hustled everyone away from him and assigned them to other partners. Logan breathed in a sigh of relief. At least he was no longer the center of attention. He moved to the back of the tent to form the end of the line. The farther back he stood, the longer he could wait before fulfilling his role. Maybe Cornelia would discover she had enough partners for the women, after all.

His hopes took a nosedive the moment he dared to entertain them. Florence walked over and slipped her arm through his. She smiled up at him as if she was the one he consulted on wedding plans.

“Ready?” she asked.

No. He’d never be ready to appear with her on a stage or anywhere else. He barely had time to shake his head before she adjusted a cluster of fabric roses on her skimpy neckline. His gaze darted away. Those new spectacles really should have stayed at home today. He couldn’t imagine why he thought they’d do him any good.

Cornelia motioned to him. Florence’s moment in the sun had arrived. He moved forward and offered her his support, just like any true gentleman would as she ascended the stairs. Once she found her place in the line of contestants near the front of the stage, he stood in the back with the other men. He followed this pattern three more times as she got invited onto the stage to answer questions, sing a song, and model her dress.

Finally, the moment came to announce a winner. Judges narrowed the group down to three. Florence was among them.

Logan stood in the back with his ears fully tuned in to the voice of Dr. Kaldenberg, who had agreed to do the announcing. He had the attention of every last person in the crowd when he said Florence's name.

Logan's eyes widened. She'd actually won the contest. This meant he would need to join her at the front of the stage while she received her crown and then escort her down the simple runway and over to the booth where the newspaper photographer waited. Surely he wouldn't need to get his picture taken with her. Good grief. This afternoon was going from bad to worse.

The man behind the camera took pity on him and flashed half a dozen poses of Florence alone, wearing her Miss Independence Day crown and holding her bouquet of flowers. In one of the photos, she looked away from the camera. If that picture happened to find its way into the newspaper, only Logan would know the newly crowned royalty had her eyes on him.

Heat crept up his neck. Now was a good time to get rid of his borrowed jacket.

Florence finished with the photos and swept through the crowd, shaking hands and receiving hugs.

Then she came over to him and reached for his hand. "Thanks for escorting me today."

How could he respond? Never would he say it had been his pleasure. But he did have to admit that joining in the town's festivities with a companion was nice. If only that companion was his own beautiful Karen.

"Are you thirsty?" He asked in typical pastor fashion. "Would you like to get something to drink?"

"Please. Let me take these flowers to the tent so Aunt Clara can put them in water."

He followed her through the crowd and waited at the tent's entrance. In the park, he paid Alex Zahn for doughnuts and lemonade for both of them. Florence talked with a group of admirers while Logan once again sought shade beneath a tree.

A cluster of pageant contestants gathered around a nearby table, their conversation floating to his ears.

“Do you think he’d ever ask to court me?” One of them asked her friend.

“Maybe. He’s been single for a long time. A man would have to start getting tired of that by now,” the friend answered.

“He might decide to ask me,” another woman in the group said.

“Or me,” a third young lady spoke up.

“Didn’t he look so handsome in that suit coat Mrs. Goud found for him? Too bad he didn’t wear one of his own. But even in a borrowed jacket, Pastor Logan is one of the most handsome men in town,” said the young lady who’d brought up the subject of courtship.

“And a bachelor. Don’t forget that.”

All the women laughed.

Logan’s jaw dropped. The women at that table were discussing him! They thought him handsome, and they also believed they might have a chance to secure his attention. Something must be done. The time had come to get his engagement out in the open. He’d planned to make a formal announcement to his congregation in December, giving them enough time to get used to the idea, but not so much time for them to make elaborate plans.

A quiet, simple ceremony with only family present would suit him just fine. His wedding didn’t require large amounts of pomp anyway. All he wanted were a few witnesses as he made his vows before the Lord to honor and cherish Karen until death parted them.

Florence returned. She stuck close to his side throughout the evening meal and fireworks display. Apparently, securing a guy as her escort for one event gave her special rights to his attention for the rest of the day. Logan tried not to sigh as he lounged in the park with his eyes on the sky, watching the explosions of color and sparkle above them.



DURING THE FOLLOWING DAYS, Florence stopped at the church three times. On each visit, she accomplished her mission of cornering him with no avenue of escape.

Friday afternoon, Logan took his Bible and his books to his house where he could lock the door and hide.

Pacing his parlor practicing his sermon, he noticed the same young women from the Independence Day pageant on the sidewalk in front of his house walking in pairs, meeting up with friends, or strolling alone. Either the homes farther down the street had an unusually large number of social gatherings planned for the weekend, or these girls were spying on him.

Maybe they hoped to find him in the yard or meet him on the sidewalk. Then they'd be in the right place to receive an invitation to dinner or accept his initiation of a courtship. Or at least, that line of thinking is what made sense based on the conversation he'd overheard. Even though he'd disappoint their expectations, he must break the news to them his heart was taken, and he'd already made plans to share his life with someone else.



SUNDAY MORNING, Logan instructed the congregation to sit down after the last hymn.

Instead of offering the blessing, he continued. "I have an announcement I'd like to share with all of you. This past year while I farmed in Silver Grove, I met a young woman I've asked to be my wife. She accepted, and we're engaged. Here is her picture." Logan held up the framed image of Karen he kept on his mantle. She'd had the picture taken shortly after her return to Chicago and mailed him a copy.

People leaned forward in their pews for a better look.

"We're planning to be married in January." Unsure what to

expect in response, Logan scanned the group. Many of them smiled at him. But some, mostly the young women who'd been in the pageant along with their mothers, looked disappointed. He raised his arms for the benediction before he went to the back of the sanctuary to greet people when they left.

“Congratulations, Pastor Logan! We’re so happy for you.”

Smiling people shook his hand. Over and over again, he heard the same enthusiastic response.

“Best wishes on your future.”

The same young ladies who had talked about him in the park and spent extra time spying on his house offered these words as well, but they were said with sadness.

These women would get over him eventually. He really wasn't that great of a catch. Shy and studious, Logan was the last person to offer a woman an exciting courtship. Amazing that Karen was willing to marry him, especially considering the long-distance engagement she must endure. If these girls only knew.

Florence pouted at him with a warning in her eyes that said she may still try to change his mind. She'd get nowhere, and he'd remind her as often as necessary. He left the sanctuary and went to his study, passing the members of the Ladies Mission Society on the way.

Bits of their conversation reached him, confirming his worst fears. His wedding dominated their discussion. Oh, boy. With these ladies intently making plans, he didn't stand a chance of a quiet, simple start to his new marriage.