

MICHELLE DE BRUIN

TOMORROW SERIES ~ BOOK THREE



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Morning sunlight glistened on the yards of white satin cascading over the end of the ornate drawing-room table. Rolls of lace lay nearby. Mother picked up a wide swatch in an intricate pattern and held it to Karen's neck.

"This is lovely." Mother's eyes brightened.

"Very stylish. With your daughter's blonde hair and fair skin, this lace would make a perfect complement to her wedding gown. Women with her coloring should wear white, not ivory or creamier shades." Mother's personal dress designer stepped closer and tapped her chin.

Karen preferred the white fabric to the cream one. The white was her choice for the dress she would wear to marry Logan, but mother's choice of lace, beautiful as it was, didn't fit with her desire for simplicity.

"That lace is very nice, Mother, but it's too showy. What about this one?" Karen reached for a delicate strip featuring a combination of flower buds and scrolls.

Mother's lips scrunched together. "I suppose. What do you think, Miss Rose?"

The designer wore much the same expression as Mother. She'd been Margaret Millerson's dress designer ever since the day Mother's brother Henry offered his home to his sister and her daughter. With her new life came the fashion expertise and friendship of Miss Rose.

Karen didn't even know her last name. She'd always been the woman who appeared at their home from her boutique downtown to take measurements and confer with Mother whenever holidays or a change of seasons required the newest and latest styles.

"Elegant, but not quite the right touch for the bride from a prominent family. All the society weddings this summer are going with gowns that have intricate lace on the bodice and sleeves. You'll want to do that too."

"Oh, yes. And the veil. We mustn't forget to talk about the veil." Mother hastened to the sofa where a mountain of tulle billowed. She brought it over to Karen, and, with Miss Rose's assistance, draped it down her back and across the rug.

"That should be about the right length." Miss Rose's voice carried from what sounded like the other side of the spacious room.

Karen turned, unable to restrain the twist of her brow. The ridiculously long path of tulle would reach right down the street to Uncle Henry's downtown office. If Karen were to wear a veil of these proportions in Oswell City, the silly thing would stretch all the way down the church's aisle as well as most of Main Street.

Logan's letters acquainted her with the community she'd call home once they married. It was a small town, a close-knit group of folks out on the expansive Iowa prairie who knew the value of hard work and of doing it together. According to Logan's letters, their survival depended on it, which meant Oswell City residents didn't have the time or the need for extravagance.

If the bride of their pastor were to appear in a veil five miles long and wearing a lacy dress costing more than some of their houses, she'd cost Logan a degree of respect. Not to mention set herself up as belonging to another class—something Karen refused to do. As the wife of the local preacher, she wanted to fit in and serve alongside him the best she knew how.

“No. That’s too much.” Karen gathered the tulle, reeling it in to form a ball. She pictured Logan working with a rope tied around the neck of a calf that had wandered too close to the creek and must return to safety.

Miss Rose wasn’t exactly a Holstein calf, but she could use some convincing to return the proposed veil to a safer length.

“Right here. This is good,” Karen announced when the tulle barely grazed the floor.

Now it was Mother’s turn to look horrified. “But Karen, my dear, none of the brides among our friends are wearing veils that short. It won’t do. It just won’t do.”

Karen stopped her eyes from rolling just in time. “But Mother, I’m not getting married here in Chicago in a huge stone church among guests drawn from your elite circles. I’m getting married in Oswell City. From what I read in Logan’s letters, we need to keep my dress and the wedding simple. That’s what he would want anyway, and well, it works for me too.”

Silence drowned the room. Mother and Miss Rose looked at each other for a moment before Miss Rose gathered the tulle and returned it to the sofa.

“What about the style of your dress?” She released a deep breath. “Shall we talk about that today?”

“Let’s.” Mother nodded. “Settling on a dress style will help Karen make up her mind.”

Karen clenched her teeth. She’d already made up her mind, but since her preferences were in the minority at this meeting, they were deemed unacceptable.

“Your mother and I talked these over last week.” Miss Rose held drawings out to her.

Karen accepted the drawings and studied them. Full ruffles at the neckline and the hem. Fluffed skirts. Lace everywhere. She'd hoped for something a bit straighter and, of course, with simpler lace. But expressing her thoughts would only add to the tension between herself and the other women.

"I like the style in the neckline of this dress." She started in the least threatening place. "Maybe you could use this pattern for the dress's bodice but without that wide ruffle."

Miss Rose studied the picture Karen indicated. "I believe that will work. Shall I trim the neckline with the lace you chose?"

"Please. That would look nice. And make sure to give the dress long sleeves. Logan and I are planning on a winter wedding." Karen glanced at Mother.

She offered a smile. "Long sleeves are a good idea."

Mother's comment didn't exactly affirm Karen's suggestions, but at least she hadn't pressed for more expectations of a society wedding. Given the fact that Mother had participated in the creation of these gown ideas, Karen could understand that her changes may take some getting used to.

But really, a fancy, exclusively designed dress wasn't necessary. Karen had a white embroidered tea gown that would work just fine for what she and Logan intended to accomplish on their wedding day. Paired with a floor-length veil and a modest bouquet, Karen would make the loveliest bride her new husband could ever hope for, and that was all that really mattered.



AFTERNOON SUN SPARKLED on the lake waters. A breeze, warm with light and hope, tousled Karen's hair and rustled her skirt. She turned her face toward the current, allowing it to caress her skin, easing her nerves. The gentle wind blew over the expanse of water from peaceful shores beyond just like the wind in Silver

Grove swept across the unending fields and grasslands of Logan's native home.

The serenity of the sun sinking to the watery horizon refreshed her and restored her calm. Karen turned away from the scene with a sigh. She must arrive at home in time for dinner with her sister, her brother-in-law, and her two nephews. A late arrival would invite questions. Too many emotions swirled inside for her to offer any satisfying answers. Karen hastened across the beach as her thoughts turned to her fiancé.

Maybe Logan was also preparing at this moment for a dinner engagement. This thought perked her up a bit. Imagining Logan participating in similar activities to hers strengthened her connection to him somehow. Distance might separate them, but in the area of enjoying time spent with friends and family, they were very close.

Karen followed the streets the few blocks to the Millerson residence. As she walked, her imagination collected the facts he'd written to her about the town where he ministered, the place she intended to claim as her home. She pictured him in action among those he served.

What did he have planned for today, a Saturday afternoon in the summertime? Maybe he took a break from his preparation for Sunday morning to seek out a favorite hiding place to think of her like she did this moment, longing for him.

The street she followed intersected with the one that led to the train station. How she'd love to summon Uncle Henry's chauffeur this very minute to take her there so she might travel straight to Oswell City and marry Logan today. But she'd signed a contract to teach English at a ladies' college until the end of the year. She must see the work through to completion. Her salary would help Logan in establishing their household when they married.

Karen tore her attention away from the enticing street and kept to her route. The months marking their long-distance engagement worked in their favor. Both of them could save as

they planned for the big day when their lives joined as one. If she remembered to use this time as preparation, she'd survive.

When she arrived home, Karen let herself in the side door, the one that opened into the hallway from the dining room to the kitchen. Maids scurried with cutlery and crystal in their rush to set the table.

Rita, Aunt Fran's most recent hire, surveyed Karen with wide eyes. "Miss Karen, dinner is served in ten minutes. You need to dress for guests."

"I will." Karen smiled. "It's just my sister, after all. She won't care what I have on."

Still learning the ways of the wealthy household, the young maid gave Karen a wary glance. "Don't get in trouble," she whispered.

"Not a chance." Karen laughed. The Millersons may like to hold to convention and propriety, and Karen might participate in the formality, but the atmosphere could never undermine the visit Mother and Julia had made the De Witt farm earlier that year. Bonds had formed as they sat with Karen around the table in the farmhouse dressed in the simplest of gowns while feasting on homegrown fare.

On the surface, Karen and her sister were daughters of one of the most prestigious families in Chicago, but inside, they were members of a wider community of love, as offered to them by Logan and his acquaintances. Sandy, his mother. Tillie, his sister. Pete and Anna, his friends. How she missed them all. Warmth and true fellowship flowed whenever they'd been together.

Even Mother found her place in the circle. Skeptical of Logan's character, she'd soon accepted him as deserving of her daughter's affections.

"You're doing a good job." Karen patted Rita's arm. "Don't you go and get in trouble either."

"Tryin' my best," she said as she hurried away with a stack of linen napkins.

Following the black-haired maid's suggestion was a good idea.

Slipping around the corner, Karen climbed the wooden stairs at the back of the grand house and entered her room unseen to prepare for dinner. Her gown required only a light shake to remove sand from the hem in order to look presentable enough to appear at dinner with the family.

Moments later, she entered the dining room with her windblown hair smoothed down. Mother, Aunt Fran, and Uncle Henry gathered around the table, too interested in their topic of conversation to notice Karen's sun-warmed appearance.

She gave her skirt one more shake just in case Mother glanced her way.

"You've been to the lake again." Julia clasped Karen's shoulders and smiled at her.

"How can you tell?" The lakeshore served as her own personal retreat. Too baffled by her sister's insightful discovery, Karen didn't think to conceal her afternoon wanderings.

"You look relaxed and happy. The only other time I've seen you that way since your return to the city was at our picnic luncheon with Aunt Fran on the beach in June." Julia settled three-year-old Ben into a chair and then sat next to him.

"Oh." Karen claimed the chair beside her sister. Whatever defensiveness had crept into her voice a moment ago drained away.

She leaned forward and waved at Ben. "Hello there, young man."

He returned her wave and giggled.

"Missing him, aren't you?" Julia looked at her with concern.

"Terribly." Karen lowered her voice to a whisper. "I never wanted this teaching job. I only took it because the salary will give us a good start to our marriage."

"Very noble and worthwhile in the end. You'll see." Julia patted her knee below the table.

The word *noble* fit her fiancé much better than it did any of her actions. Logan was a hero, investing all of his savings in freeing his mother from debt during his stay on the farm in

Silver Grove. He never discussed finances in his letters, but he didn't need to. Karen knew enough about the sacrifices he'd made to believe that his return to Oswell City meant starting over, building his stability a little at a time until finally positioned to support a wife.

Not only was he noble and heroic, but he was handsome too. The wind at the lake today would have tousled his blond hair into a wave that fell over his forehead, giving him a boyish, mischievous charm that matched his usual good humor and twinkling blue eyes. Those same eyes could look right into her heart with a sensitivity that convinced her beyond words of his love for her.

Karen swallowed away the thickness in her throat and bowed her head when Uncle Henry began to pray.

As soon as the meal started, Mother turned the conversation to the disagreements earlier in the day. Karen's stomach tightened. Julia might side with Mother. If that happened, everyone in her family would be against her. Karen found herself languishing more and more outside the family circle, where perspectives on upholding the expectations assumed for a wealthy family were concerned.

"Julia, my dear, what is your advice? Karen instructed Miss Rose this morning to design for her a short veil, one that barely touches the floor. The styles this summer dictate something much longer."

After a glance at Karen, Julia replied. "Mother, you forget. Karen isn't having a summer wedding. Hers is in winter. The wedding isn't in the city anyway. It will take place in a small town. You remember our visit to Logan's farm this spring, don't you?"

Mother nodded, but she appeared a bit reluctant to concede to Julia's train of thought.

"The only ones wearing expensive, style-conscious dresses were you and me. I'm sure the people in Oswell City are much

the same,” Julia said with a flourish of her hand in Mother’s direction.

The tightness in Karen’s middle seeped away during Julia’s speech, but Mother still appeared reluctant, even a degree disappointed.

“I can believe things are done a little differently in Oswell City than here in Chicago.” Her trademark enthusiasm colored Julia’s voice. “We may have more adjustments to make. But we might like it. Maybe the folks in Oswell City will have such great ideas about how to pull off a wedding, we’ll be the ones looking to them for creative inspiration.” Julia laughed.

But Mother wore the same scrunched-lipped expression from their meeting with Miss Rose.

Karen laughed too. With Julia on her side in the matter, not only did she have an ally, but someone to count on to infuse fun into the wedding planning process. The relaxed, happy feeling from the lakeshore returned. She might actually enjoy herself in the months of waiting and planning that stretched all the way to Christmas.