

# Coming Home to *Mercy*

COMING HOME SERIES - BOOK ONE

MICHELLE DE BRUIN



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*To all the dear people in my life who have ever welcomed me home.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.  
Psalm 23:6*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What a fun story this was to write. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of innovation and progress. To write this book, I researched all kinds of items from telephones, to flying machines, to Model T Fords, bandstands, and even the art of building a ship in a bottle. The attitudes of the era fascinate me. People felt the same way one hundred years ago as we feel today about new inventions and the changes they make in our lives.

The freedom to invent and sell, to drive and to pioneer is so American. Writing a story highlighting these many inventions gives us a nostalgic glimpse into the perspectives and the bravery that has made us what we are today.

I watched many videos, read books and articles, and visited websites. Among the diverse materials I learned from, there are three sources that I would like to mention.

The first one is the NOVA documentary from PBS about the Wright Brother's Flying Machine. This show gave me a fantastic window into history so that I could write this story more accurately. The crash in the trees was a huge disappointment to the team of builders in the documentary, but it was a great help to me in increasing my understanding of the early biplanes and the dangers.

The second resource is *The Curtiss Aviation Book* printed in 1912 by Glenn Hammond Curtiss. This manual was published for pilots of the Curtiss brand of flying machines and was helpful in learning about the overall field of aviation.

The third resource is the website of the Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company. There is a vast collection of fascinating information on this website including photos and descriptions of the aircrafts manufactured by the Wright Brothers.

I would also like to thank some people, including my family, my husband, and my readers. Thank you for supporting me in so many ways.

Thank you, Tom, for answering my questions about motors and about machinery, and for listening to me read sections of the story to you. I appreciate your help in developing the plot line for this story.

Thank you to Linda and Elena at Scrivenings Press for helping me get this book ready to publish.

The writing and the reading of a book is a conversation. The messages of faith found in this story are ones I have lived and feel are worth sharing. They are my side of the conversation giving testimony to God's work. I trust that the words you read help you move deeper in your conversation with God as you pray and listen to him.

I also like to keep in touch with my readers, so please stop by and visit my website at [michelledebruin.com](http://michelledebruin.com) Let's continue the conversation about life, about faith, and about the work God is doing in our lives.

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

### *The Millerson Family from Chicago*

- Margaret—Margaret Millerson
- Henry—Henry Millerson, Margaret's brother
- Fran—Fran Millerson, Henry's wife
- Julia—Julia Bauman, Margaret's youngest daughter
- Arthur—Arthur Bauman, Julia's husband
- Ben and Sam—Julia's two sons, Margaret's grandchildren

### *The Citizens of Oswell City*

- Matthew Kaldenberg—the town's doctor
- Logan De Witt—the local pastor
- Karen De Witt—Logan's wife and Margaret's oldest daughter
- Paul and Lillian Ellenbroek—the town's mayor and his wife
- Artie and Cornelia Goud—the owners of the jewelry store
- Alex and Mildred Zahn—the owners of the bakery

- James and Grace Koelman—the town’s lawyer and his wife
- Jake Harmsen—the editor of the town’s newspaper
- George Brinks—the owner of the hotel
- Helen Brinks—George’s sister-in-law and housekeeper at the orchard
- Clara Hesslinga—an elderly woman who lives alone
- Eva Synderhof—the owner of the dress shop
- Conrad Van Drunen, Markus and Betje—a widower and his young children
- Ezra and Martin Barnaveldt—the brothers who sell Ford cars





*Chicago*  
*April, 1913*

Margaret Millerson glanced away from the mountain of buntings on the table and sought encouragement from Julia. Bright, cheery Julia. She always had a positive word on her tongue and a happy look about her eyes and mouth. If anyone could assure Margaret she hadn't taken on too much by providing decorations for the Library's Charity Ball, her younger daughter could bolster her once again.

"You'll finish in plenty of time, Mother. Look how far we've gotten this morning." Julia smiled, melting away a degree of Margaret's tension.

Margaret shifted her attention to the white rosettes piled on the drawing room sofa taking shape under Bertha Reynold's skillful hands. The woman looked up and smiled at her friend.

"Yes." Margaret couldn't quite smother the note of hesitation in her voice.

"And look at all those tablecloths Isabel hemmed." Julia gestured to another of Margaret's close friends serving on the committee.

Isabel paused her work with the needle and thread. “Only five more left.”

“But the ball is tomorrow.” Margaret held her breath against a sigh and looked at Julia.

“Which gives us the rest of today to finish, and tomorrow morning to set up.” Julia picked up a candlestick and polished it.

“I haven’t heard from the florist. I need those flowers for centerpieces.” The idea of hosting the grand event with no flowers to provide the perfect touch of elegance stole her breath away. “How will I know they will be ready in the morning if I haven’t heard from them?”

“I’ll stop and check in there this afternoon. But, Mother, don’t worry. Everything will be just beautiful.” Julia smiled again and worked on another candlestick.

The sigh slipped out. Margaret smoothed her hair and gathered a length of blue fabric into a swag. She must put her energy into her work and not into fretting.

The grandfather clock ticked away the minutes. Sounds of traffic in the street drifted through the open window on this mild spring day. Clatters of pans and the general hum of a well-run household echoed from the back part of the house. Margaret’s breathing returned to normal. Life would somehow go on, even if her part of the charity event failed.

The telephone rang. Margaret glanced down the hall where the wooden box hung near the kitchen door. To think of talking into a wooden box. She was still trying to grow accustomed to the new device her brother Henry had installed last winter. Most calls were for him on the subject of some business matter or another. Margaret returned her attention to the fabric in her hand. This call was probably another one for Henry, and someone would have to tell the caller that he wasn’t home.

Hurried footsteps grew closer. Ida, the housekeeper, stood in the doorway. “It’s Logan.”

The announcement stilled Margaret’s movements. She couldn’t think why her busy preacher son-in-law would call long

distance on a Monday morning and ask for her, unless he delivered bad news. Surely nothing had happened to her daughter or to that precious baby the whole family anticipated. But Karen's due date lay three weeks into the future. Logan couldn't possibly be calling about anything related to the baby.

Margaret roused from her concerns, laid the fabric down, and hastened down the hall. "Hello?" she said into the receiver.

"Mother." Logan's warm voice held a hint of urgency.

"Yes, Logan. What's the matter?" Margaret licked her lips and glanced into the kitchen of the Millerson mansion. Household staff ceased their work and watched her.

Logan chuckled. "Nothing is wrong. I have good news."

Margaret's eyes widened. "Really? What is it?"

"Karen has had her baby. It's a boy!" Logan's voice rang with enthusiasm.

"What? Already?"

"He arrived on Thursday. Karen and I haven't had a chance to tell our families until today because the doctor has been keeping a close eye on him. You remember Doctor Kaldenberg, don't you, Mother?"

Of course she remembered Matthew Kaldenberg, the handsome and professional-looking man who shook her hand in the receiving line at Logan's and Karen's wedding. Later that evening, he'd engaged her in conversation at the reception. Few days had gone by in the past year when she didn't see him in her thoughts.

Logan spoke again. "The doctor has been monitoring the little guy because he hasn't been eating enough. Dr. Kaldenberg wants to make sure he's gaining weight."

"Is he? I can understand, with such a premature birth, why a baby would be underweight."

"The baby is making progress even though it's slow. But here's the best part. He didn't come alone. He brought a brother with him." More enthusiasm rang in Logan's voice.

Margaret clutched her throat. "You mean—"

“Twins!”

Margaret knew her son-in-law well enough to believe that if he stood here with her delivering his news in person, a huge grin would claim his face and he might even lift her up and spin her around. She wanted to say something to let him know she shared in his joy, but no words came. Attempting to absorb this astounding news, she stood in silence staring at the wall.

“Mother? Are you still there? Hello?”

She must respond before Logan assumed a disconnection and hung up. “Y-yes, I’m still here. Your news surprised me. That’s all.”

“Understandable. The arrival of two babies has surprised all of us.” Logan chuckled again.

“But they are well? Both babies?”

“Healthy as can be.”

“And Karen?” Margaret’s voice trembled.

So did Logan’s. “Fine. Karen made it through the labor and delivery just fine.”

“Oh, thank God.” The whispered words slipped from her lips. She roused from her shock and turned practical. “What are their names?”

“One baby is named John after my father. The other one is named Simon after Karen’s.” Logan’s quiet voice brought tears to her eyes.

Out there in the world lived a tiny infant with the name of her late husband, a man whose right to respect was debatable. Now he had a grandson bearing his name. And Karen had chosen the name. Logan’s bit of news spoke volumes about the healing that had taken place in her daughter’s heart.

“Listen, Mother.” Logan’s voice now held a serious tone. “We’re having a special church service in two weeks to celebrate the birth of John and Simon, and we’d really love for our families to come to Oswell City for the occasion.” Logan paused. “In fact, if you wanted to come a few days early, we’d appreciate it. Karen has to spend time with the doctor when he comes for

examinations, and I need to be available at church during the day, so another person around to help out will really come in handy.”

“Oh! Why yes, of course.” Logan’s plea cleared her brain and roused her to action. “You may plan on me Thursday afternoon. I’ll leave Chicago as soon as I can that morning.”

“That’s great, Mother. Thanks so much. I’ll tell Karen. She’ll be glad to know.” He told her “good-bye” and hung up.

Margaret stared at the silent box on the wall for a moment. There was a party line. Nothing that came through on that telephone was private. The whole of Chicago would soon know that she was a grandma twice over and that she’d be traveling the end of this week. She’d better get busy spreading the word to her family.

The kitchen staff no longer stood watching, but their movements were quiet enough to allow them to easily overhear the phone conversation. She smiled at them and raised her voice.

“Julia. Bring everyone to the kitchen please.”

Within minutes, the decoration committee crowded around Margaret alongside the staff. A question hung in Julia’s eyes.

Margaret clasped her hands together and faced the group. “Friends, I have an announcement. That phone call was my son-in-law, Logan. He called to say that Karen gave birth to twins last Thursday. They are named John and Simon after their grandfathers. I am leaving on Thursday to go be with them until the following Sunday.”

The room erupted in cheers and congratulations, hugs and well wishes. A quick and light lunch gave the group more time to discuss the details Logan had shared over the phone. The women settled in to more work on the decorations in the afternoon while their conversation centered on Karen, Logan, and their life in Oswell City.

At the evening meal, Margaret shared the table with her brother and his wife. They’d been out of town on a trip for Henry’s steel business and had arrived home late that

afternoon. She laid down her fork, took a deep breath, and looked up.

“Henry. Fran. You’ll never believe the telephone call I received today from Logan. He called to say that Karen gave birth on Thursday to twin sons.”

Fran’s eyes widened and she paused in drinking tea, her cup hovering in midair. “Twins. Oh my goodness. Is the poor girl all right?”

“Logan said she pulled through just fine.” A smile spread across Margaret’s face. The shock of the news had worn off and now excitement took its place.

“Amazing news, Margaret. How are they? What are their names?” Henry stopped cutting his meat and glanced at her.

“Logan says they are doing well, but one baby is underweight. It sounds like the doctor is giving him extra attention. Their names are John after Logan’s father and ... well, um, Simon after Karen’s father.” Margaret gulped in some air. Henry had lost respect for her husband after he’d committed the crime of gambling with money that wasn’t his.

“Simon, eh?” Henry grimaced. Then he glanced at Fran and shook his head. “Well, a little tyke could do a lot worse than that for a name. He’ll be known to the world as Simon De Witt, won’t he? I guess carrying on his grandfather’s heritage will make up for the man’s mistakes.” Henry returned his attention to the food on his plate.

Margaret’s next breath caught in her throat. Henry hadn’t exactly pardoned her husband of his misdeeds, but her brother had been willing to see the reconciliation taking place in their family. Mention of baby Simon’s surname erased for Henry the possibility that the new baby would be a replica of his corrupted grandfather.

The smile claimed Margaret’s mouth once more. This announcement of the births was such good news. Better than she could have imagined.

“You’ll want to travel to see them. Did Logan invite you?” Fran refilled her teacup.

“Yes, he did. I told him I would come on Thursday.”

“You’ll go as soon as the charity ball is over.” Fran sipped her tea. “I’d love to see the babies too, and Karen as well. Her wedding was so long ago. We should make another trip to Oswell City.”

“Logan also invited you and Henry, as well as Julia and her family, to come. They are having a special service to celebrate the birth of the twins in two weeks. Logan and Karen want us all there. His family from Silver Grove will probably come too.” Margaret’s pulse sped up. How she’d love to see Logan’s mother, Sandy, again.

“Oh, yes of course. We’ll go, won’t we, Henry?” Fran turned to look at him.

“Karen has always been special to me. I wouldn’t miss it,” Henry said, a moment before poking a bite of meat into his mouth.

“I’m so glad. Thank you, Henry.” Margaret gave him a smile.

Henry nodded but kept his focus on his meal.

Margaret’s tense muscles relaxed. Henry’s opinions and preferences ruled in this household. He valued many good things, but if they should differ from Margaret’s priorities, he knew she would not speak up or act out against him. Her brother wasn’t a tyrant, but neither was he open to exploring new ways of thinking.

The effort of convincing him to do so had never proven worthwhile. He sulked or criticized until his world fell back into its predictable and comfortable order. Margaret wished to avoid unnecessary tension with her brother, but his quick acceptance of Logan’s invitation smoothed her way and heightened her excitement. She glanced at Fran and shared a smile with her. Their plans were made. Henry and Fran would soon follow her to the small town where Karen and those new grandsons lived.

“MOTHER, THE FLORIST IS HERE.” Julia’s voice rang through the ballroom of the Blackstone Hotel shortly before ten o’clock on Tuesday morning.

Margaret turned from the table spread with one of the tablecloths Isabel had hemmed and went to meet the visitors.

“Where would you like these, Mrs. Millerson?” A young man in a brown jacket asked from behind the fronds of a bushy palm.

“Right over there.” Margaret pointed to the corner near the table. “Let me help you.” She moved ahead of him and held the delicate trunk as the man settled the tree on the floor.

“Four more are coming. Show me where you would like those,” he said as he walked to the doorway.

Margaret followed him and gave directions on the placement of the small forest.

Another member of the florist’s company brought in lovely bouquets of flowers in hues of reds and creams. Julia directed the arrangement of these flowers in glass bowls on the tables.

“But where are the flowers for these pedestals?” Margaret pointed to the tall urns on each side of the doorway.

The helpers frowned at each other and shrugged. “Don’t know,” one of them said.

“But we must have them. They were a part of the order I placed last week.”

“We’ll check the truck.” The young man bolted out the door. He soon returned with a report. “There aren’t any more flowers included in this delivery.”

“Oh, dear.” Margaret smoothed her hair.

Julia grasped her arm. “Don’t worry, Mother. We’ll find the flowers. Everything will be just fine.”

“Let me check back at the shop. I’m sure we can get two more bouquets made for you.” The young man smiled at Margaret.



A nervous smile accompanied her nod as the florists hurried away.

“What do we do?” Margaret turned to Julia, hoping for more cheery encouragement.

Julia steered her to the refreshment table. “Help Bertha lay out plates to fill with these nice slices of white cake.”

Bertha looked up from the knife in her hand and gave Margaret a smile. She tried to return it, but her thoughts of the missing bouquets lingered.

Isabel placed more tablecloths on the tables while Julia attached the bunting to the woodwork. The ballroom took on a festive appearance and would have looked perfect, if not for those empty pedestals near the entrance.

Jobs completed, Bertha and Isabel went home. Julia stayed and kept watch at the window. “I see them coming.” She glanced at Margaret with a happy expression on her face and raced to the door.

The same young man, hidden behind a grouping of red roses and white glads, entered the room. “Here you are, Mrs. Millerson. Sorry for the delay. We are providing flowers for a wedding this evening and got their order confused with yours.” He set the bouquet on the pedestal and helped his friend situate the other bouquet.

“Thank you for bringing those.” Margaret clasped her hands before her.

The young man saluted and left with his coworker.

“Looks nice.” Julia stood with her hands on her hips and studied the room. “I think it will do just fine. We got it all done in time, didn’t we?” She smiled at Margaret.

“Barely.” She shared a laugh with Julia.

Margaret went home to put on her purple evening gown with shimmers in the fabric. Then she returned with Henry and Fran as strains from the string ensemble warming up filtered through the room. Friends of Margaret served a red beverage from the punchbowl and offered guests slices of cake.

City officials and colleagues of Henry arrived and milled about with their wives. Library staff and patrons joined the gathering as everyone enjoyed themselves dancing to waltzes, eating, and sipping punch.

Margaret stood near the entrance with Bertha and Archibald Reynolds, friends of the Millersons and business associate of Henry.

“Congratulations on the arrival of the new grandchildren.” Archibald smiled at Margaret. “Bertha arrived home yesterday all aflutter with the news. We are very happy for you.”

“Thank you.” Margaret settled her heartrate with a sip from her punch glass.

“When do you leave?” Bertha asked.

“The day after tomorrow. I can hardly stand to wait that long, but the delay will give me time to help you, Isabel, and Julia clean up from tonight’s ball.” Margaret gestured at the guests filling the ballroom.

“It is a wonderful success. The library will benefit greatly from your efforts. Well done.” Archibald praised her.

“Thank you. I felt as though I had taken on more than I could accomplish, and now that I must leave right away after the ball, I fear I am too distracted to do a very good job.” Margaret’s cheeks heated.

“Not at all. You’ve made us all proud of you, Margaret.” Henry gave her a brief smile in between sips from his punch glass.

The evening offered her many more chances to share her news with others from her social circle. Few of her friends had already heard about the birth of Karen’s babies. Margaret delighted in telling the story over and over again. Perhaps the new telephone was more private than she first believed. If Henry could carry on somewhat confidential business conversations on it, then perhaps she could trust it too.

THE NEXT DAY, she worked with Julia and the other women packing the decorations away. The flowers still looked nice, so Margaret set one of the centerpieces aside to take with her to Oswell City. Karen would enjoy a bouquet to brighten her dining room table.

Some cake was left over as well, so Margaret carefully laid several slices in a dish towel. These would also get packed so they could travel with her.

That evening, as Margaret selected various pieces of her wardrobe, a visitor arrived. She descended the stairs to find Miss Rose, her seamstress from the downtown dress shop, waiting in the foyer.

"I've brought something for you." Miss Rose's brows rose as she smiled.

Margaret hadn't placed any orders for clothing, only for one baby gown to be ready three weeks from now. "What is it?"

Miss Rose lifted the lid off of a rectangular box. A white gown with delicate little pleats and embroidered designs across the bib lay in the tissue.

"Oh, Miss Rose, you don't mean to tell me that you finished it!" Margaret rested her hands on her cheeks.

"Not just one, but two." Miss Rose lifted the small gown out of the box to reveal a second, identical one, nestled in the tissue underneath.

"Oh!" Margaret drew in a long breath as caressed the gown in Miss Rose's hands. "How ever did you get these both sewn in time? I didn't tell you until Monday afternoon."

The seamstress smiled. "I had some spare time last night."

Margaret gave her a mock frown. "Don't tell me you stayed up all night."

Miss Rose laid the baby gown back in the box. "The point is, they are both finished. Now take them along to your grandsons and enjoy dressing them in their new clothes."

Margaret shook her head. This woman before her was a wonder. "I don't know how to thank you."

“It was all my pleasure. Have a good trip.” Miss Rose let herself out the door.

In a state of awe, Margaret reached into the box. Holding each little gown out before her, she imagined an infant outfitted in them.

Ida walked by. “Aren’t those just darling?” She lifted the hem of one gown and admired it.

“I can’t wait to see them on those new babies. The moment that I get to meet John and Simon can’t come soon enough.” Then she’d hold both babies and know for herself that they were healthy.

With Ida’s help, Margaret packed the new little garments carefully away. She returned to her suitcase and added a few more garments to her collection, envisioning the activities that would fill her remaining hours in the city.

In the morning, Hank, the family’s chauffeur, would drive Margaret to the station. Then she would board the train and settle in. Only a few hours of travel across the vast Midwestern farmlands stretched between her and her family in Oswell City. The train ride would go fast, and then she would be with Karen and the new grandchildren.