

COMING HOME SERIES - BOOK TWO

Coming Home
to *Truth*

MICHELLE DE BRUIN



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*To young women on the adventure of discovering who they
really are.*

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.
Luke 1:47-49*

LIST OF CHARACTERS

The Jones Family from Silver Grove

- Lacy—Lacy Jones
- Roy—Roy Jones, Lacy's father
- Maria—Maria Jones, Lacy's mother
- Cal—Cal Jones, Lacy's brother

The Citizens of Oswell City

- Agnes Rose Harper—Lacy's best friend
- Conrad Van Drunen, Markus and Betje—The town carpenter and his children
- Logan De Witt—the local pastor
- Karen De Witt—Logan's wife and Lacy's former teacher
- Matthew and Margaret Kaldenberg—the doctor and his wife
- Dan and Ruth Van Drunen—Conrad's brother and his wife

- Nick and Hannah Van Drunen—Conrad's brother and his wife
- Eva Synderhof—Seamstress and owner of the dress shop



Silver Grove, Iowa

July, 1917

“**R**eady to celebrate?” Lacy Jones’s brother, Cal, wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Grandpa and Grandma have arrived.”

“Almost. I need a few more minutes to myself. So many memories of my senior year of high school are here. I have this feeling that everything is about to change.” Lacy glanced at the pennant on her bedroom wall proudly displaying the name of the Bridgewater Springs High School. “Look at this.” She pointed to a cluster of flowers. Dried and faded, the corsage she’d worn to the senior banquet hung nearby. The tassel from her graduation cap dangled from another pin.

“It’s the photos that impress me.” Cal gestured to the pictures that covered the top of the dresser. “I can’t believe you took all of these. You are quite talented.” In one of the photos, Mama and Dad stood in front of the house, dressed in their best on her graduation day. Another photo displayed friends

from her graduating class. More photos captured the landscape.

She sighed. "If only I had frames to put them in. But frames are expensive." She'd seen the prices on the various frames available for sale at Carter's General Store in Silver Grove. They had a particularly lovely line that Lacy adored. Tillie Carter had explained to her that they were a brand known as Angel Frames. Made of smooth dark wood with a little ornament in the shape of an angel situated in one corner. Lacy wanted one in every size.

Her shoulders slumped as she studied the pictures. As a farm girl, she had no way to put her hard-won education to use making enough money to buy such an extravagance.

"Lacy? Cal? Are you coming? We're waiting." Maria Jones's call rang down the hallway to Lacy's bedroom.

Cal released his hold on her shoulders. "Mama's looking for us."

She'd better heed Mama and stop dallying in her room. But today, the day she turned eighteen, marked the end of all she'd ever known. Childhood was behind her. High school was behind her. Most of these summer months since graduation were behind her. The time of her life had come to discover a direction and decide what she should do.

"Happy birthday!" Shouts from her cousins filled the farmhouse's large kitchen.

Grandma Jones came forward and placed a kiss on Lacy's cheek. "You've grown into a lovely young lady."

"Thank you, Grandma." Heat warmed Lacy's face, but she managed a smile.

"Here's a seat for you." Cal pulled out the chair next to his.

Agnes Harper, Lacy's best friend from high school, prompted from across the table. "It's time to blow out your candles."

Lacy glanced up in time to watch Mama set the birthday

cake before her. Eighteen reminders of her age blazed on top. The group sang while she inhaled. With one breath, she extinguished every flame. Her guests cheered.

Mama reached for the knife and cut the white cake into even slices. Dad produced a cooler of homemade ice cream and added a scoop to each plate.

“It’s so nice of you to come for my party.” Lacy smiled at the group as they ate. Plain country people. Every one of them.

“We’re happy to help you celebrate. Eighteen is a turning point in a young lady’s life.” Grandma smiled back.

Her grandparents lived on a nearby farm. So did her aunts and uncles. Even Agnes and her family lived in a simple little house on the edge of a tiny town. Her father worked at a mill instead of farming like Lacy’s father did. But Agnes’s family didn’t have much more than Lacy’s.

Maybe that’s why the two girls discovered a friendship in high school. Few of their country school classmates had gone on to town to pursue a high school education. Lacy had been relieved to find a friend who understood scarcity.

“Tell us about Bible College. What are you studying?” One of Lacy’s uncles directed his question to Cal.

He laid down his fork and answered with fancy words Lacy couldn’t begin to comprehend. “I have one more year left.”

Serving a church had been Cal’s dream ever since his eighth-grade year. Tillie Carter’s brother had lived in Silver Grove during that time and had influenced Cal. Tillie’s brother had also married the best teacher Lacy had ever known.

Miss Karen Millerson had tutored Lacy through sickness and given her extra instruction so that she could keep up with her classes. Lacy would never have gotten to high school without her help.

“Time to open gifts.” Mama worked to clear Lacy’s plate away and then set a stack of presents in front of her while her cousins cheered.

"I'll start with this one." Lacy picked up a small square package.

"It's from us," one of the little girls said.

Lacy unwrapped it and found a pretty pin with blue, pink, and green rhinestones on it. "Thank you," she said to her small cousin, and the girl beamed.

Lacy continued to open her gifts. Grandparents gave her clothes. The girls gave her handkerchiefs. Agnes gave her a lace dresser scarf.

Cal's gift came next. She opened it to discover a brown box inside. It looked much like the one she'd bought used. "A new camera!" Her voice rose as weightlessness filled her chest. "How did you ever afford it?"

He laughed. "That's a secret. But the one you have now is starting to look worn out. With so many flowers in bloom and green leaves on the trees, I'm sure you will find plenty of uses for a new one."

"I will. Thank you." Flowers and leaves. Clouds and birds. Friends and family. Lacy would certainly find uses for her brand-new treasure.

She reached for the last package and unwrapped it. Her breath froze in her lungs as she held the contents up and studied it.

After several quiet moments, Mama spoke. "What's wrong? Don't you like it?"

Lacy glanced at Mama. "Like it?" Her words came in a whisper. "I love it. I've always wanted one. It's beautiful."

"Mrs. Carter over at the store calls it an Angel Frame. She said they're made right here in Iowa. With all your picture takin', your dad and I figured you could find somethin' to put in it."

Lacy traced her finger along the edges of the shiny angel in the corner. Tiny wings etched with a lace design shimmered in the light from the windows.

Her stomach tightened as she looked around the room. Repurposed flour sacks made into curtains hung at the windows. Furniture older than Lacy filled the rooms. Worn rugs covered the floors near the sink and the doorways. Mama's dress, and Lacy's, too, were faded and washed thin in places. The new, sparkly Angel Frame was a luxury far out of place in these surroundings.

Lacy pushed the frame away. "I'm not sure I should keep it. Maybe I should return it and use the money for other things." She gulped at the thought of parting with the beautiful creation.

Mama and Dad exchanged a meaningful glance with each other before Dad cleared his throat. "Lacy, we want the best for you that we can possibly give. Keep the frame and enjoy it as a special gift from us on our daughter's eighteenth birthday."

She blinked back tears and nodded.

Tears glistened in Mama's eyes, too, but she stood and wiped them away. "Now that Lacy has opened her gifts, let's move this party outside so the kids can play."

Others around the table followed Mama's lead. Soon plates were stacked on the counter and silverware was soaking in the sink. Lacy carefully lifted her new camera out of its wrappings and ran outside.

"Let me take your picture," she said to aunts chatting with Mama on the porch. Then she asked the same from cousins playing games in the yard. She worked her way over to Agnes who lounged in the shade of a tree.

"I suppose you'll want me to pose for you." Agnes sat straighter.

"No. Stay right there. I want a picture of you just as you are." Lacy held her camera to her eye and clicked a photo.

"Don't show that to my mother. She'll get upset with me for not looking like the proper lady she raised me to be." Agnes gave Lacy a teasing glare.

Lacy laughed. "I won't. But this picture captures you. Agnes Harper from Meadow Creek. Confident. Relaxed. Happy."

Agnes chuckled. "I'd be happier if people would remember to call me by my middle name."

Lacy frowned. "What do you mean?"

"My full name is Agnes Rose Harper. I'm named after two great-grandmas with old-fashioned Victorian names. Why a mother would do that to a person I don't know. Who names their little girl Agnes?" she said the name like it was a disease.

"I think it is a pretty name." Lacy shrugged.

"It makes me sound old. I like Rose better. Now that I'm out of high school and all grown up, I'm going by my middle name. People may call me Rose." Agnes, or rather, Rose, sat up with a straight back and lifted chin as if to defy anyone who dared to default to her first name.

"I'll try my best to remember." Lacy lowered herself to the grass and leaned against the tree trunk.

Rose pulled a folded paper from her pocket. "A letter came from my aunt Helen today."

"What did she say?" Lacy asked.

"Do you know that I've been accepted to the college at Clear Brook to study to become a teacher?"

Lacy nodded.

"Well, my parents couldn't afford the full tuition. If the school was close enough for me to live at home, I could hold a job and still attend school. Aunt Helen learned of my predicament somehow. She and Uncle Lester live in Oswell City, the nearest town to Clear Brook."

"I remember you telling me they moved away from here a few years ago." Lacy polished the lens on her camera before setting it down on the grass.

"In her letter, Aunt Helen invited me to live with them during the school year." Rose smiled.

Lacy frowned. "How will you get to the college if it is in another town?"

"Aunt Helen says several other young people from Oswell City travel together to the college. I can ride along with them." Rose's smile grew wider.

"That sounds like a wonderful plan." Lacy fought the slump that wanted to dominate her. If she was smart enough, she would train to become a skilled seamstress, or a writer, or maybe even a journalist for a newspaper. She stifled a sigh. So many possibilities, but she had so many limitations.

"Maybe I'll meet Miss Millerson again. She moved to Oswell City, too, didn't she? It's because of her that I want to become a teacher. She helped Mama save my life one night when I was sick with a fever. The trouble is, I don't remember her married name. Maybe I won't be able to find her again." Rose picked at the grass near her skirt.

"De Witt." The name burst from Lacy's mouth.

"What?" Rose glanced at her.

"Miss Millerson's married name is De Witt. She married a preacher. His sister is Mrs. Tillie Carter at the store in Silver Grove."

"Oh, yeah. I remember now. He was friends with my dad. Helped him quit drinking. It worked. Well, most of the time." Rose lowered her head and went back to picking at the grass.

Lacy watched her friend with an ache in her heart. She'd been the only other girl in the high school who knew Rose's painful secret. Their classmates could boast of fathers who were businessmen, lawyers, and leaders. Rose's father was a struggling drunk. He'd do well for weeks and months at a time, not even looking at a bottle. But then he'd go home and surprise Rose, her mother, and her two brothers with the smell of whiskey on his breath.

Rose had always appeared perfectly groomed with no

evidence of bruises or battering. Lacy never could bring herself to ask Rose if her father ever physically harmed her.

Lacy shuddered. Her family might be poor, but at least her father didn't drink. She couldn't imagine what life must be like with a father who did.

"Hey, you know what?" Rose leaned closer.

Lacy shook her head.

"You should come with me."

Lacy blinked. "What, me?"

Rose nodded. "Yes, of course, you. We both want to see Miss Millerson again, don't we?"

"Well ... yes ... sure."

"Here's your chance." Rose lounged again, propping herself up on one arm.

"Rose ... I ... I don't know. This scheme would be too much of a surprise to Mama. And well, my family doesn't have the money to send me anywhere. They can barely scrape enough together to keep Cal in school."

Rose shrugged. "Then get a job when you get there. You've always hoped to be independent and make your own way."

"Yes, I have. But I ... I mean ... you know I'm not smart enough to do anything very important." She glanced at her camera. Too bad picture taking didn't count. "I'm just an ordinary girl from a poor farm family. I struggled so much with schoolwork that decent grades were almost impossible. As much as I want to, I don't see how I can break out of ... out of ... this." At a loss for a better explanation, Lacy gestured at the scene before her.

Her mother wore a patched apron, even on this special occasion. The barns and small house were all weather beaten and in desperate need of fresh coats of paint. Poverty and the limited opportunities that went along with it—those were her destiny.

Rose sat up again and held both of Lacy's hands. "It's the

same for me. But this invitation from Aunt Helen is my one chance. It might be yours too. Let's do it."

Lacy glanced away from her friend and looked at the farmstead she'd always known. Going along with Rose meant leaving home. Is that what she wanted? What awaited her on the other end? Did Oswell City have any opportunities for a girl like her, someone weak in academics? What work could she do?

"Where would I stay?" She turned her attention back to her friend.

"Aunt Helen would give you a room. She works at some large house where people live until they find a home of their own. It would be perfect for you."

"Well, I guess. If I have a place to stay it might work." Lacy lowered her gaze to the ground. If she didn't have to shell out the money for a hotel, she could see her parents cooperating a little better with this plan.

"Say you'll come with me." Rose squeezed both of Lacy's hands.

"Let's talk to my parents first." Lacy stood and led her friend across the yard. "Mama, could I please talk to you and Dad?" Lacy tugged on her sleeve to interrupt the conversation with the other women.

"I suppose. Where is he?" Mama shifted her attention to the cluster of men.

"He's getting ready to go to the barn with the others." Lacy shielded her eyes from the sun and waved to her father with her other hand.

"Roy!" Mama called.

He lifted his head to look in their direction.

"Come here!" She joined Lacy in waving at him.

Dad tipped his hat to one of the other men and left the group. His long strides carried him to the place where Lacy stood with Mama and Rose.

“Lacy says she wants to talk to us.” Mama looked at her.

She licked her lips and dove in, unable to meet the gazes of her parents. “Agnes, I mean Rose. She wants to go by her middle name now. Anyway, she got a letter from her aunt in Oswell City inviting her to stay with them so that she can go to college. Oswell City is where Miss Millerson lives. You remember her, don’t you, Mama? Rose and I both want to see her again, so Rose asked me to go with her. May I?”

Dad leaned away from her and looked to the sky.

Mama’s hand fluttered to her chest. “Oh, my. I never thought that plans to leave us would be part of your birthday party.” She looked at her husband. “What do you say?”

Dad sucked in a deep breath. “I don’t know. Is this what you want, Lacy?”

Her insides tingled. “I never really thought of it before Rose mentioned the idea. But I can see that it might be fun.”

“Where would you stay?” Mama asked.

“Aunt Helen would give her a room.” Rose shrugged.

“Have you checked with your aunt?” Mama gave Rose a stern look.

“No, not yet. But I will. I’m sure it won’t be any problem.” Rose waved her hand around as if to dismiss any difficulties.

“How will you travel?” Dad’s gaze bore into Rose.

“On the train.”

Dad’s attention shifted to Lacy. “Where will you get the money for your ticket? You know all of our extra funds are tied up in Cal’s schooling.”

“She’ll get a job when she gets there and pay you back.” Rose’s announcement carried a high level of assurance.

“A job!” Mama’s eyes grew round as she looked at Dad.

Lacy held up a hand to silence her friend. “I got some money for my birthday. I could use that. It would cover most of the cost. Maybe you could make up the difference.”

Dad folded his arms across his chest. "Now, Lacy. You heard what I said. We have to pay for Cal's school."

"I know." Lacy hung her head.

"What's this I hear about Lacy needing money?" Grandma asked from her place on the swing.

"It's nothing, Ma. We'll take care of it." Dad's eyes narrowed.

"How much do you need?" Grandma turned around and pushed her glasses up.

"Two dollars," Lacy ventured to answer in spite of Dad's frown.

"Grandpa could help you with that. What are you buying?" Grandma's brows rose.

"Lacy wants a train ticket so that she can travel with her friend to visit a former teacher." Mama's tone declared the idea as risky.

"That sounds like fun. Let me talk with Grandpa and see if he can't loan you two dollars." Grandma patted Dad's arm as she passed him.

He blew out an exasperated breath.

"Does this mean she can go?" Mama looked at him.

He ran his hand through his hair. "I suppose. She's eighteen now. If she has the money and a traveling companion, I don't have the right to hold her back."

Rose squealed.

"Thank you, Dad." Lacy gave him a hug, but he remained stiff in her embrace.

Grandma returned and placed two bills in Lacy's hand. "Two dollars straight from Grandpa's wallet."

"Ma, really. You didn't have to do that." Dad growled. A softness in his eyes undermined his words. He might be angry with Grandma, but his love for Lacy shone through. His words from earlier that day came back to her. *We want the best for you that we can possibly give.*

Lacy's heart constricted. Mama and Dad sacrificed so much for her to have nice things.

"Nonsense. Consider it part of your birthday gift. Now go and have a good time." Grandma patted her shoulder.

"Don't stay away too long. Only take enough time for a good visit with your teacher." Mama shook her finger. "Then come home."

Lacy nodded.

Rose tugged on her arm. "Come on. Let's go take a look at your dresses. You have the perfect hat for traveling that will look nice with the jacket you wear on Sundays."

Dread threatened to twist her stomach, but she willed it away and followed Rose to her room. She was eighteen now. Grown up. She should look forward to this first venture into the wide and waiting world.