

A Promise Kept
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(excerpt - not for print or distribution)

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The tick of the second hand rounding the face of the grandfather clock jarred the sudden silence in the small church anteroom. Josephine Miller stared at it, praying it could somehow speed up. Her wedding would start in a matter of minutes, the thought was wonderful. Why did time slow and each second seem to take a minute when all she wanted to do was sweep out of the room and race down the aisle? .

In the middle of these crazy, uncertain times, Art Wilson had swept her off her feet and made her feel cherished in a way that blocked out everything.

She turned to look in the mirror where it stood against the wall, fingers fidgeting with the pleats as she scanned her appearance. Her white gown flowed around her like a dress designed for a princess. Mama had managed to tame her hair into a sleek upsweep, so different from how she looked most days. Her mother sighed, and Josie caught her gaze in the mirror's reflection.

“You look so beautiful.” Mama smiled and pressed her handkerchief to the corner of her eyes. “The gown fits you perfectly.”

Joy bubbled around the butterflies filling her stomach. The day she'd longed for had arrived. Only one thing would make her joy complete. They'd make their first home in Dayton.

Her smile faltered in the mirror. How she wished Art hadn't accepted a position miles from Dayton and home. She knew the job would provide a strong start for them, an opportunity Art hadn't found in Dayton. Her dreams they'd start life in a small apartment near Mama and Daddy had evaporated. Instead, they'd head to Cincinnati. She'd longed for an adventure, and this move fit the bill. The chance to launch their life on their own was reality. While it might not have been her initial dream, a tingle of excitement edged the glow of anticipation she felt when she thought about her new life with her husband. Husband. She rolled the word around in her mind again and again. Heat flushed her cheeks as she thought of everything the word meant. God had blessed her!

“Josephine Miller, you'll be late to your own wedding if you don't move.” Her younger sister Kat's sharp words pulled Josie from her thoughts.

Josie cleared her throat. “Isn’t that Mama’s line, Kat?”

Mama laughed as Josie fiddled with the bottom of her lace jacket. It topped a floor length, lace covered gown that made her feel like a movie star or wealthy socialite.

Kat stood in the glow of colors flowing through the stained glass window that accented her athletic form and the bruise she’d acquired in her latest game with the boys. Josie shook her head. You could clothe Kat in a dress but that wouldn’t make the girl any less of a tomboy. Kat caught her stare and rolled her eyes. “Fine. Just remember I’m the one who told you Art was interested.”

The door groaned on its hinges as it pushed into the room, making way for Carolynn Treen. Carolyn had done an amazing job pulling together the wedding of Josie’s dreams. Josie’s breath caught at the thought.

Carolyn shut the door behind her. “Are you ready, Josie? The organist is waiting for her cue.”

“She’s ready.” Kat played with Josie’s small bouquet before placing it back in the vase. “She can’t stop fidgeting.”

“I’ve waited a long time for this moment.” Friendship followed by a courtship. Josie had known before Art asked that he was the kind of man she wanted to marry. His firm character and commitment to God made him the one she could imagine spending the rest of her life with.

“Only a few more minutes.” Carolynn laughed and motioned her hand in a circle. “Twirl, Josie. Let me absorb your beauty.”

Josie lowered her chin demurely as she obeyed.

“Hmmm. Art is a lucky man.” Carolynn squeezed Josie and squealed. “Can you believe it? You’re getting married!”

A lopsided smile stretched Kat’s face. “About time. Now I get my own room.”

“When you put it that way, I’m surprised you didn’t push me out sooner.” Josie tried to make her expression match her stern words, but couldn’t. Tickles of joy pulsed through her.

It was here.

Her wedding.

The tickle turned to full-fledged, gut-splitting happiness.

She'd dreamed someday she would find a man like Art Wilson. But with the war consuming Europe, matters like love seemed trivial. She'd tried to be content helping Mama take care of the house and Daddy, Kat, and her brother Mark. Then she'd met Art at church...

Kat snorted. "Ugh. You're thinking about him again. Let's get this wedding over. You are way too focused on him."

Oh, to be thirteen again with unlimited wisdom.

Carolynn's sweet laugh filled the room as she ruffled Kat's curls. "Someday you'll understand. You won't be thirteen forever."

The look on Kat's face telegraphed she sincerely doubted she'd ever be as crazy about someone as Josie was for Art.

Carolynn tugged a corner of Josie's veil. "There. You look perfect. Well, I'd better get back out there and let them know you're ready."

Josie hugged Carolynn, then brushed the top of the comb holding the veil back in place. Artificial pearls dotted the top, hiding the stems of the baby's breath lining the veil.

The first notes of Amazing Grace filtered through the door. Mama tucked her handkerchief in her sleeve and smiled. "I'd best head in. Let them usher me to my place." She kissed Josie on the cheek and hugged her lightly, the sweet scent of violets filling the air around her. "Love you, Josephine."

Josie sucked in a deep breath and eased it out as Mama slipped from the room. She loved Art to the very core of her being. She'd been amazed to realize one could know something so important in a matter of days. He treated her like a treasured gift, someone he couldn't believe he'd wooed.

"Where's Daddy?"

"I'm here, darling." Louis Miller strode into the room looking dapper, if professorial, in his best suit. He buttoned the final button on his double-breasted jacket eased across his ample belly. "You look beautiful, Josephine. Art is lucky to have won your heart."

Peace filtered into her heart. Daddy would only give his blessing to her marriage to a man he believed would care deeply for her. "Thank you." She took a deep breath. "I can't believe I'm getting married."

"My happiest days were the day I married your mama and the days each of you kids were born. Serve and love him with all you have." Daddy's Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed. "My prayer is you will have a love that transforms your life like your Mama's has for me."

The music changed to the sweet strains of *It is Well with My Soul*. It might not be everybody's idea of wedding music, but every time she heard it the words spoke to her soul. She longed to race through the door and up the aisle of the community church. Art and the minister would stand at the front, waiting for her.

Daddy swallowed then offered his arm. "It's time, Jo."

"I'm ready." She slipped her hand through his arm and closed her eyes. When she opened them, Kat slipped past her. Kat's green dress highlighted her pale complexion and reddish highlights. Kat had taken after Mama's Irish heritage, while Josie looked more like her daddy's mother. Carolynn squeezed her hand before she moved out the door and to the sanctuary. How could she say good-bye to Carolynn? The friend who had cried and dreamed with her?

Daddy tucked her closer to his side. Together they stepped toward the sanctuary and her future.