

KAREN
COGAN

FORGET
ME NOT

Other White Rose Publishing Books
by Karen Cogan

Fragile Dreams
Love Never Lies

FORGET ME
NOT

Karen Cogan

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FORGET ME NOT

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Dedication

Kathryn Smith, Alzheimer victim and beloved mother.

Praise for Karen Cogan

FRAGILE DREAMS

Karen Cogan has created a lovely story that is as full of romance as it is of lessons about Christian faith. If you love a sweet inspirational romance, you must pick up *Fragile Dreams*. It was a joy to read.

~ *Rio, for TwoLips Reviews*

This is a well written historical novel, that keeps the reader interested. The author writes descriptively, as she must to have a good historical novel. The characters were wonderfully drawn, and the plot superb. This story shows that with faith you can overcome all obstacles. We also see clearly that there are good and bad in all situations and people, regardless of whether they are from the North or the South. If you're a fan of American historicals, you won't go wrong by picking up this book to read!

~ *Sunflower, for Long And Short Reviews*

1

Miranda stuffed the last memo into a teacher's drawer. In a few minutes the bell would ring. Streams of children would pour in the doors.

She moved to her desk to make sure the morning announcements were in order and noticed two pages were unstapled. A two-second task turned into exasperation as the stapler jammed. "Don't cross me today," she threatened, prying the staple with her fingernail. She whacked the stapler across the desk after her first approach succeeded only in breaking her nail.

A male voice broke the silence. "I hate those things when they don't work."

She spun around. She surveyed the tall blond man who stood at the counter, impressed by the good natured face and most intense blue eyes she had ever seen. She felt cheeks flush at the knowledge that the fit of temper had been observed.

He smiled and a small cleft appeared in his chin. He looked like the outdoors type.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see you standing there. May I help you?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm Paul Green. I'm here to see Mrs. Walters. I believe she's expecting me."

Miranda buzzed the principal.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Green is here to see you."

"Send him in." Came the cheerful reply.

"She can see you now." She caught a scent of his aftershave as she closed the door. Her curiosity flamed. She lingered near the door for a moment, hoping to make out words.

Reluctantly, she went back to her task of unjamming the balky stapler, wondering what brought Mr. Green into the office this morning.

He was probably a parent. The thought of him belonging to another woman was oddly disturbing. For the few seconds their gaze met, she wanted to keep looking forever, to take in every detail of his well-structured face. Paul Green had deep blue eyes, short-cropped blond hair, a cleft in his chin, and a slightly mischievous grin. Why were the good ones always off-limits to her?

Hearing him chuckle, she wondered if he discussed his child with Mrs. Walters and if the child had those same blue eyes. What would it be like to have a child who reminded one of a handsome husband? She gave the stapler a disgusted bang on her desk, wondering if she'd ever find out.

The door opened and Paul walked out with the principal.

Miranda felt her pulse quicken.

"Have you met our school secretary, Miranda Wilkins?" Mrs. Walters asked.

"Not officially. Miranda is a pretty name. It suits you." Paul smiled at Miranda.

"Thanks." She felt the flush again.

"Paul's starting an after school athletic program two days a week for our extended day kids," Mrs. Walters continued. "He's the baseball and P.E. coach at

the high school.”

The opening bell rang and a teacher walked in holding two scuffed-up boys by the arms. “They were fighting again. I told them their parents would have to be called.”

“Right. I’ll take care of it,” said the principal. She turned to Miranda. “Would you show Paul to the gym and introduce him to the PE teachers? They’re expecting him.”

“Okay, sure.”

He wasn’t wearing a ring. Maybe he didn’t like rings or perhaps it was dangerous to wear one when teaching sports. Maybe, though, he was single.

Stop being an idiot, she told herself firmly as she took a deep breath. She was just showing him to the gym. She led him down a corridor full of children and saw him glance along the walls at the student papers and artwork.

“This takes me back. I remember how excited I was the first time I got a gold star on a math paper. The teacher put it up on the wall,” he said.

“I know what you mean. I had a third grade teacher who used to put my art papers up.”

“Do you still like art?” He looked down at her, full of genuine interest.

“Yes. I love to paint.” She caught the scent of his aftershave. The cinnamon was more pleasant than the pine cleaner that lingered on the linoleum floor.

One of the P.E. coaches, was busy loading kickballs into a wire carrying case. When she saw Miranda, she paused expectantly.

“Jean, this is Paul Green,” Miranda said. “He’s here to talk to you about the after school athletic program.”

"Oh yes. Come on in. I'll show you our equipment."

"Thanks for guiding me." Paul smiled at Miranda, touching her lightly on the shoulder before he strode off across the gym floor. As she turned to walk back, she could still feel the pressure of his fingertips on her shoulder and was filled with a school-girl sense of anticipation. Why, she wasn't sure.

Back in the office, she noticed Emilie, the attendance clerk, had arrived. She was a stout woman in her mid-thirties, divorced and re-married, with two young kids who attended the school. She was plagued by problems with her new husband, as well as the ex-husband.

"I thought I'd never get the car to start this morning. It needs work, but Ed's running late with child support again and there's not enough money for repairs."

"It must be hard for you and the kids." Miranda said in sympathy.

"I try not to talk about him in front of them, but its hard when things like this happen."

Miranda and Emilie got back to work and the hours flew by in the busy office. Soon it was time to go home. Miranda cleared the paperwork off her desk and waved as Emilie departed.

She glanced up to see Mrs. Walters lock her office door. "I hope your plans for tonight are more fun than mine," she told Miranda as she patted her satchel full of paperwork.

Paul's face danced in the back of her mind. Blond hair, blue eyes, and an engaging smile she could not erase from her memory. Would she see him tomorrow?

She hoped she would.

2

When she walked into work, Miranda knew the warnings about flu season were warranted.

"It's you and me, kid. Emilie called last night and said she was sick and two more teachers just called this morning. Grab the sub list and see who you can find for third and fifth. " Mrs. Walters greeted her briskly.

Miranda pulled the list from her drawer. After several calls, it was apparent it wouldn't be easy to find anyone who wasn't sick or already committed to substitute.

She glanced at the clock. Only a half-hour until the morning bell. She raced through the numbers and finally managed to find a sub for third grade. With a sigh of relief, she attempted to fill fifth. There was no one else to try and only ten minutes before the bell.

Mrs. Walters stuck her head out of her office. "How's it going out there?"

"We've got a sub for third but nobody for fifth." She waved the list in the air. "Is there anybody else I could call?"

"No. We'll have to wing it. We'll combine a couple of classes. With so many kids absent, it won't overload the rooms. By the way, I have some forms that need to be faxed downtown by nine o'clock. Do that first and then whatever else you can get done. Did I tell you I'm glad you're here, today? Don't you dare get sick."

Miranda flashed a quick smile. "It's nice to be needed."

"You may regret those words before this day is over."

Miranda struggled to field phone calls from parents who were calling their children in sick. Absences mounted. After a half-hour of confusion, the bustle of activity slowed. Miranda glanced at her watch. It was eight-forty five. The fax had to be in by nine. She sighed, missing Emilie's capable presence. This would be a difficult day. She punched the numbers into the fax and was pleased to hear it go through.

The rest of the morning went by quickly. Just after lunch, Mrs. Walters poked her head out the door. "I've got a meeting with the counselor at one o'clock. Think you can hold things down for an hour?"

"Sure. It can't be worse than this morning."

The principal smiled. "That's what I like about you, your positive attitude."

"That could change if anybody else gets sick."

Mrs. Walters nodded. "I know what you mean. I feel like the last of a dying species."

Alone in the office, Miranda looked up from the word processor to see Sharon, one of the second grade teachers, walk in.

"I'm feeling awful. I know everybody is out today and I hate to call it quits, but I have to go home. I left the class working on an assignment. Susan's watching them. I hope you can get somebody to fill in."

"We'll work something out. You go home and get some rest. And get well."

There was still an hour and a half until school let out. And they had one second grade teacher watching

two classes. While she was debating what to do, Mrs. Walters rounded the corner. "This government red tape drives me crazy. All these forms we have to fill out just to get kids in the programs they need."

"Sharon Frazer had to leave a few minutes ago. She looked awful. Susan's watching her class."

Mrs. Walters sighed. "How many kids in those classes today?"

Miranda looked at the attendance roster. "Eighteen in Susan's and fifteen in Sharon's."

"I hate to combine that many second graders but I doubt we can get a sub. Would you mind filling in until the end of the day? You shouldn't have any problem with Sharon's lesson plans."

"Sure I'll fill in." It had been a while since she'd taken over a class. After the hassles of the day, she welcomed some time away from the office. At least in the classroom there was no phone ringing.

"You're my right hand man."

"Right." Miranda headed toward the second grade hallway. Since she kept their records, she was familiar with the children

"Okay guys, if you work hard and we finish math and spelling I'll spend the last twenty minutes reading this book." She held up a copy of a mystery story their teacher had been reading each day.

There was a murmur of agreement from the class as fifteen small heads bent to work. The remainder of the day went smoothly. She wondered how well Mrs. Walters had fared alone in the office.

At three o'clock, she walked the children outside. Just as she rounded the corner of the building, she walked headlong into a broad chest. She drew back quickly and looked up into the deep blue eyes of Paul

Green.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I should watch where I'm going," she gasped.

He steadied her. "Miranda, right?" He smiled down.

"Right."

His smile penetrated her heart, making her feel warm.

"You must be a woman of many talents. I thought you were the school secretary. Now it seems you're a teacher, too." He nodded at the children scattering toward the sidewalk.

"I'm filling in for the afternoon. Everybody has the flu and we can't get enough subs."

"I know. It's taking a toll at the high school, too."

"Hopefully, the worst will be over soon. The attendance clerk was out today, and when I left to sub, Mrs. Walters was alone in the office."

Paul grinned. "When I signed in, she was holding the phone with one hand and signing a note with the other."

"I guess I better get back and give her some relief."

"Take care of yourself. Anyone who does the job of two people is too important to get sick."

"I'll tell that to Mrs. Walters."

"Tell her I said so."

She flashed a parting smile and headed to the office. Her shoulders tingled from his firm grip and she felt a shiver up her spine at the memory of his touch. His hands were warm and gentle, strong and masculine.

It was an accident, not a hug. And yet she wondered what it would feel like to have Paul embrace her. *It's time you got your mind back on your job.*

"I'm glad you're back," Mrs. Walters greeted her. "These schedules have to be entered into the computer before tomorrow morning. I need a copy for each classroom."

"I'll do it now," Miranda replied. She set to work, hardly glancing up until she finished entering the new academic schedules. A dull headache began. She rubbed her forehead, trying to massage it away. At five o'clock she felt worse. *Not the flu*, she begged, bones aching as she finished some typing.

At five thirty, Paul entered the office to sign out.

"You look pale. Are you feeling OK?"

"A little achy. I think I'll go home and try to shake it off."

Mrs. Walters popped up from the file cabinet in which she was rummaging. "Are you sick, Miranda?" She came around the desk to peer at her. "You do look pale."

Miranda tried to smile. "I'll be okay once I rest." She stood up and was hit by a sudden spell of dizziness. She clutched the desk for support.

Paul moved toward her and grasped her elbow. "I don't think you should be driving. I'm on my way home. Suppose I drop you off?"

"I couldn't put you to so much trouble. I'll be OK." She took a deep breath and felt a little better. "I can make it."

Mrs. Walters shook her head. "Better take a ride. You don't look very steady."

"What about my car? It's here at work."

"I'll give you a ride when you're ready to come back," Mrs. Walters offered.

"Come on. I really insist," Paul said, offering his arm.

She clutched it gratefully, leaning against him as they walked slowly out of the building and across the parking lot. "I really hate to be such a bother."

"You're no bother. I can't think of a better use of time than helping a lady in distress."

He put his hand on her waist and lifted her into the passenger seat of his pick-up. "Where to?"

"I live at the Manor Apartments on Davis Street."

"I know where they are. You just relax and I'll have you there in a few minutes."

She leaned back and closed her eyes to shut out the swirling scenery. *It was nice to be taken care of*, she thought hazily as she drifted into a half-sleep.

She roused as the truck slowed to a stop. She saw the familiar red-pink bricks of the building. All she had to do was get inside. Then she could fall across her bed and wait for the aching to go away. She reached for the door handle. "Thanks for giving me a ride."

"Let me come around and help you."

"I can manage."

Paul was there before she opened the door. He took an arm and steadied her as they walked upstairs. She unlocked the door and smiled at him.

His eyes were full of concern. "You're still pale. Are you sure you'll be OK?"

"I'll be fine. I just need to rest."

"Well, you call me if you need anything. I'll give you my number."

He pulled a pen and a slip of paper from his shirt pocket. He stuck the cap of the pen between his teeth while he wrote the phone number.

She looked at the paper. "From the desk of Paul Green?"

"I use it to send home notes about my students."

You call me if you need anything, you hear?"

She nodded as she closed the door. "I will. And thanks."

He was sweet, the sort of man she had always wanted. So why, when she longed to impress him, did she get the flu?

She trudged to the bathroom and took her temperature. One hundred and two. She took two pain tablets and headed for the couch where she leaned back and flipped on the news. Trying to concentrate on world affairs proved pointless as names and places became a blur in her fevered mind. She flipped off the set and slipped into an uneasy sleep.

It was totally dark when she awoke and tried to remember why she hurt all over. *Oh yes, the flu.* She pushed up on her elbow and turned on the lamp. Its soft glow lit the room in eerie shadow. Clearing her dry throat felt painful. She trudged to the kitchen and opened her last soda. Taking it back to the couch she sank down and drank from the can, then dozed off.

The next morning, she didn't bother to call in sick. Mrs. Walters didn't expect her and she was too hoarse to talk. She flipped through a magazine, napped and watched television. Late in the morning, she nibbled toast made from the last piece of bread and wished she'd waited to get sick until after she'd gone to the store. Somehow, she'd have to get by until she felt like getting out.

The afternoon dragged on. Her temperature, down in the morning, hovered again at one hundred and two. *When would this go away?*

That evening, the doorbell rang. She pulled a bathrobe tight and looked out the peephole. She was surprised to see Paul's good-natured face. Seized by