

THE PROPOSAL

A marriage with a twist

Karin M Thompson

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Above all, love each other deeply because love
covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8 - NIV

CHAPTER ONE

DEREK Du Preez walked out of the boardroom with a frown set on his face. He had waited his whole life for this. It wasn't turning out the way he wanted it to. He'd spent every waking moment daydreaming of the time he would finally become the Managing Director of his father's Fortune 500 company, Ventro Civil and Structural Engineering. His father had groomed Derek from birth to take over the five generations' family business, which his great-great-grandfather had started in early 1900. Ventro Civil and Structural Engineering was a marketing leader in its field. Designing and building skyscrapers worldwide, they created some of the world's most famous buildings. Derek had played a key role in helping to achieve this. He always knew that he would become the next Managing Director once his father, Gordan Du Preez, stepped down. He wanted this position with his whole being. His only passion in life was Ventro. He breathed, slept, and lived for his job. It was all that mattered to him.

As a young child, his parents had decided he would be part of the family business. He was not fond of the idea. He felt he wanted to choose his path in life. But as he watched his grandfather and father develop the business, he realised that his heart was already there. So,

his path had been laid out clearly for him. He had given up a lot to invest in the company fully, and he didn't see that as a loss but as a win. Derek was happy and loved his job—well, until now, all he he had sacrificed wasn't enough.

The directors had decided they wanted a married man for the MD position, and Derek was still single. Not that he didn't like the opposite sex. He didn't have time for everything. The parties seemed trivial to him. Now it had returned to bite him. He had six months to find a wife, and get married, and then the job could be his. Failing to do this, someone else would be appointed.

He stormed out of the boardroom in a huff. How could this happen to him after all he'd done? But their decision was final. They wanted a stable, family-orientated person in the role, and that was that. All the earlier Managing Directors had been married, and they wanted to keep that tradition.

Derek didn't know where to find a wife. He didn't even like anyone, let alone love someone. He wasn't too old at thirty-five to get married, but he had wanted nothing else but Ventro. Having dated for a while, Derek had decided that women weren't for him. They wanted to party and talk about fashion and society, none of which appealed to him. Once they discovered he had money, they tried to help him spend it. Of course, being a wealthy bachelor had undoubtedly put a target on his head. Being six foot four with a muscular body, chestnut brown wavy hair, and piercing brown eyes made him a desirable bachelor. But his job always came before women. His career came before anyone or anything. He wasn't a people's person; he was quiet and

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reserved, with no time for pleasantries. There was a job to be done. He gave orders and expected them to be obeyed. Everyone was supposed to be dedicated to Ventro. He wasn't interested in excuses. He didn't need any distractions in his life. His parent's disastrous marriage was something that he had seen first-hand. His mother controlled him and his sister and constantly tried to change his dad. Seeing how this affected his father had put him off on the idea of marriage. Derek decided he would be fine on his own. He didn't need anyone.

Being fascinated with building and structural engineering drove him to want to design and build the next great skyscraper, to become a legend in the building industry. He studied engineering and architecture even when he wasn't working. But then Derek was always working.

He couldn't understand why his dad, Gordan, had not warned him before he had arrived at the meeting about this new hitch. Derek was very close to his father. Over the last few years, they shared in developing the company. He wanted to be like his dad and help him take the company into the next century. After spending much time together over the years, they developed a strong bond and became close friends. As he sat at his desk with his head in his hands, Derek wondered what would be next for him now.

Suddenly his office door opened, and in walked his dad. Gordan had always been so proud of his son. Out of his two children, he felt most connected to Derek. They felt the same about the company. Derek understood his drive and passion for his work. He

approached his son and placed his hand on his shoulder.

“I’m sorry, son. They voted that the next MD should be a married man a few minutes before you arrived. I had no time to warn you, which I suspect was their plan. I was against the vote, but unfortunately, I was outnumbered. You know how old-fashioned the board members are?”

Derek looked at his dad in despair. “Dad, what do I do now?”
“Come on, son. This is no time to give up. Think of something, make a plan.” Gordan squeezed his son’s shoulder. “I’ll see you later. I’ve got a few bones to pick with people now.” He closed the office door softly behind him.

Derek’s mobile rang. It was his best friend, Michael Nelson. They had been friends since they met at university. Derek was studying to become a civil engineer, and Michael was to be a lawyer. They shared a dorm and remained close friends all these years. Their friendship meant a lot to Derek. He knew Michael was the one person he could trust and rely on. Derek told Michael about his upcoming meeting the night before.

“How did it go? Michael asked. “Do you have the champagne ready?”

Derek let out a long sigh. “No, it will not happen.”

“What, why not? I thought it was in the bag?”

“Yes, me too, but apparently, they want me to be married before I can have the role.”

Michael let out a loud chuckle.

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“It’s not a laughing matter,” Derek shouted at him. “My whole life has just gone down the tubes, and for what?”

Michael could sense Derek was upset. “No, I’m not laughing about it. I’m laughing because who would have thought they would come up with that?”

“Yeah, who would have thought?”

“Well, don’t give up hope. We can devise a plan.”

“Look, pal, I’ve always appreciated how positive you are, but I think I’ve met my match this time. I don’t know who to ask to marry me. I don’t even know anyone; let alone anyone I want to marry.”

“Look, let’s think this over. Don’t give up now, you are so close.”

Derek said forcefully. “There’s nothing more to be done. I can’t become Ventro’s next MD.”

“Give it a few days, Derek. We’ll come up with something,” Michael assured him.

CHAPTER TWO

MICHAEL Nelson had been running his law firm for a few years now. It had grown into an extensive business, and he had hired two more partners to help him with the workload. He admired Derek. They had the same work ethic, making them very compatible friends. There was healthy competition between them to seal the next deal. Michael felt for his friend. He knew the effort Derek put into proving that he would make an excellent MD for Ventro. It was a blow to discover there was still an obstacle in the way, a major one. Michael believed there was a way to solve the problem.

Michael woke up early the following morning. He had found a plan for Derek. It had come to him at two that morning. Of course, it was so obvious it made perfect sense. He wanted to call Derek there and then but realised he must wait until later that morning.

Derek woke up to his mobile ringing. It was only five in the morning. Who could call at this hour?

As he looked at the screen on his phone, he saw it was Michael. “Hey, do you know what time it is?”

“Sorry, I’m so excited I can’t wait any longer. I’ve come up with a plan.”

Derek rubbed his eyes, half asleep. “A plan for what?”

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Michael threw his hand in the air. “For you to get married and become the next MD of Ventro, of course. I told you I’d come up with something.”

“Okay, hold your horses.” Derek yawned. “I’ll come over, and we can discuss it over a coffee.”



Michael opened the door before Derek even rang the doorbell.

“Wow, you are excited.”

“Yes, I’ve got the perfect plan, and I know it will work. Sit down. Let me tell you all about it.”

Derek made himself comfortable on Michael’s Grafton three-seater cream couch. He looked up at Michael and smiled, keen to hear what had got his friend so excited. “Okay, tell me all about it.”

“Right, but don’t interrupt till I’ve explained everything.”

Derek nodded in agreement.

Michael cleared his throat, took a deep breath, and let it all out. “This is my proposal. We find a woman. Don’t worry, I’ve got a plan for that too.

Derek opened his mouth to say something.

“No, hear me out,” Michael interrupted him. “Let me finish. We will draw up a three-year contract with this woman who will marry you. You will pay her a sum of money every month, still to be decided, to act like your wife. She will stay in your house but only act as your wife when you both are out in public. She could live upstairs at your house. You have plenty of room to give her a bedroom,

bathroom and sitting room. You both still live separate lives, but when you need to go out, you act like a happily married couple. She can be that role model for you. You know, a business arrangement. You will be legally married, but only committed to each other as a business plan. She will do it for the money, and you will have a wife on tap.” Michael smiled, feeling very pleased with himself.

Derek looked at Michael with a cold, blank stare. He was quiet for a while. Had Michael gone mad? “Tell me more,” he asked softly.

“We will advise her it is a business contract. She would be sworn to secrecy, unable to tell a soul. After three years, we can review the situation.”

“So, how do we find her? We can’t put an ad in the paper, can we?” Derek laughed.

Michael had to smile. At least Derek was responding positively. “Well, your company has how many single women in it? Why don’t we throw a party—say to celebrate single women, and you can spy out the land? Hopefully, there will be someone there you think you could seal the deal.”

“Hopefully,” Derek answered in a doubtful voice.

“We could call her to your office and offer our proposal to her.”

“Do you think it could work?” Derek asked, unsure.

“Why ever not? There must be someone that would love three years’ of free rent, get paid to look beautiful, wear designer clothes and wine and dine when needed, and still have their own life.”

“Well, when you put it like that, maybe it could work.”

Jumping up and down, Michael said. “There must be some rules,

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but we'll work out the finer points later. What do you think? Is this a plan or what?"

Derek smiled. He had to give it to him. Who would have thought of a plan like that? Would it work? He wondered. Would someone be willing to provide him with three years of their life to help him out? Would he be able to persuade someone?

CHAPTER THREE

EMILY Kelly felt like she was thirty going on fifty. She had the weight of the world on her five-foot-seven medium-built frame. Another email came into her inbox, informing her that payment was now due. She pulled on her long ginger ponytail. “What? I’ve paid for it already.”

The bills kept coming. It was difficult to stay on top of them. She felt she had aged over the last year, and she only had herself to blame. She was the one who had been gullible and deceived. To top it all off, she had done it with a smile. She met Ken Blackcroft at a club where she loved to let her hair down. They had danced the night away. She had an instant attraction to him. He made her feel special and loved saying the nicest things to her. No one had been that nice and kind to her. Looking back, she realised she had been ripe for the picking. Trusting him with her life, Ken saw that and took advantage of her. They started dating, and Emily fell head over heels in love. Hey, what was there not to love? He was intelligent, funny, and always said the sweetest things. The more time she spent with him, the more she relaxed and allowed him into her heart. But then the favours requests

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started. First, could he borrow a hundred dollars? Then it went up to five hundred dollars. He borrowed her new car, which was her pride and joy. Then the last straw, she agreed to co-sign for his new credit card. He had plans and was going to pay it, but he needed another signature for surety. They had been dating for over a year. She had no reason to doubt him. He was constantly speaking about this great deal he was doing and how it was all coming together.

“The credit card is only for a small amount,” Ken assured her. She smiled and let it go. She was in love and couldn’t see anything wrong with Ken. He filled a void in her life. It was nice to be wanted.

Then one night, she received a phone call. Ken had been in an accident and taken to the hospital. He had borrowed her car to go to a meeting to seal the big deal he had been talking about. He had been drinking and had crashed her car into a pole. It was a complete write-off, and she had only made four payments on it. The insurance company refused to pay her out, as she said she would be the only driver driving it. So, now she was still paying it off, even though it was sitting in the wrecking yard as a pile of metal.

Ken had only broken his arm and had a few sprains and a concussion. He was too drunk to remember anything. A few days later, when Emily visited him in the hospital, she found he had discharged himself, and she couldn’t find him anywhere. He disappeared into thin air. She looked everywhere for him. Then the reality hit her. It had all been a scam. She had been a fool. Now she was paying for her foolish mistake. After a while, all the co-signed bills started rolling in. Ken had maxed the credit card to \$20,000, and

she was now liable to pay it back with interest. The debt collectors were continuously phoning her until she made a five-year payment plan with them to pay back every cent plus the interest. There were bills she wasn't even aware of. Ken had forged her signature on several documents. Emily felt her life was over. Consulting a lawyer, she found she was stuck in a corner. Having signed the documents, she became liable. There was no proof that it wasn't her signature, even on the forged ones. She didn't have the money to go to court, and the lawyer said it could go on for years. Her best plan was to pay it back. It had been devastating and soul-destroying. She had spent the last year paying back as much as possible, but the amount never seemed to go down with the interest being so high. Every spare cent had gone on his bills. Embarrassed and humiliated, she sold everything she owned and moved from Queensland to Sydney, where no one knew her and how stupid she had been.

Friends tried to keep in touch, but she changed her mobile number and email address. She closed her Facebook and Instagram accounts, wanting to disappear off the planet. Of course, the bills followed her with every cent she owned; she paid them back as fast as possible. But no matter what, she couldn't get ahead of them. They forced her to take on a second job just to break even every month. She hated Ken, but she hated herself more for being drawn in by a con man. To heal, forgive, and forget is what Emily needed. She needed a miracle.

As an assistant to the contracts manager, Emily Kelly worked for Ventro. Her job wasn't rocket science, but it was enjoyable and kept her busy. It was a train trip to Sydney every day. She enjoyed the

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journey into the city, admiring the scenery. Ventro was based in the city overlooking the Sydney harbour. Since she was on the tenth floor, there were some beautiful views. One could never tire of looking at the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. It was now home to her, and she loved it. Having a home and stability was essential to Emily.

Her parents died in a car crash when she was eight, leaving Emily an orphan. She had no siblings or close family. Her uncles and cousins lived in Europe, and she had no connections with them. She spent most of her childhood in one foster home after another. Life had been tough for her. She dreamed of the day she could have a place of her own and be her own boss. Of course, Ken had changed all of that. She had lost her dreams, hope, and confidence. She longed for the day when she finally finished paying all the bills, then she could do something meaningful with her life.

The noticeboard by the kitchen was where she saw the Single Women's Party notice. It was not something she would go to. No, Emily had learnt her lesson about parties and men. She was not going down that road again. It made her heart sick to think about it. It would be over one day soon, she prayed, running her hand over her long ginger ponytail.

"So, are you going?" Wendy, her co-worker, asked, seeing Emily looking at the flyer on the notice board.

"Pardon?"

"To the party, everyone is talking about it. They say Derek Du Preez will be there."

Emily shook her head. “No, it’s not my thing.”

“Come on,” Wendy insisted, “It will be fun.”

Fun was the last thing on Emily’s mind. She had fun and looked at what it cost her. “I’ll think about it,” she told Wendy, hoping it would get her off her back.

“You should go. You are so intense all the time. It will be fun. Besides, the company is paying for it.” Wendy insisted.

“I’ve nothing to wear.”

“Nonsense, you could wear that lovely blue dress you have. It goes so beautifully with your blue eyes.”

Emily grinned. She knew Wendy wouldn’t stop till she said yes. “Alright, I’ll go, but I’m not staying long. I need to catch a train to get back home.”

“Great, the party is on,” Wendy said excitedly.

About the Author



Karin Thompson lives in Sydney, Australia, with her husband, James. They have two married sons and three adorable grandchildren. She writes Christian non-fiction and clean fiction romance genre.

After a nice long walk, Karin enjoys sitting back and reading an excellent novel. She especially enjoys reading to her three grandchildren.

Karin loves to write stories that puts a smile on your face. Books where you can sit back with a great cup of coffee and enjoy the adventures of her characters. Her books are a light-hearted escape full of endearing characters and a dash of romance, filled with humour, heart, and hope.

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