



Brunch at Bittersweet Café

Carla Laureano

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Sweet dreams take flight between a pastry chef who's lost her way and a pilot looking to avoid a relationship in *Brunch at Bittersweet Café*. Carla Laureano's second title in the Supper Club series melds Christian romance with culinary insights, highlighting Denver's independent spirits.

When Melody Johansson, a thirty-year-old who dreams of starting her own bakery, meets Justin Keller, a stranger whose family history leads him to doubt God, the pair sets out on a course that seems bound to fail. He's leaving for an opportunity in Florida. She's learning to put down roots in her beloved city. Neither knows what the future will hold. Both are in love.

Out of uncertainty, miscommunication, shifting impressions, and growing admiration, a charmed story on faith unfolds. Melody and Justin display enough raw emotion and mistakes to keep the plot tense, even as perfect timing points toward God's familiar hand. Amid the drama of finding a partner, heartening side stories gather force: parent-child relationships in need of healing; unresolved fears; and the pull between loyalty to loved ones and personal desires.

Instead of waiting for a fairy tale, Melody embraces a new venture. Lush descriptions of baking highlight the importance of using one's talents while living out faith in community. Scenes with friends who challenge her emphasize how Melody's otherwise carefree life is grounded in sisterhood. An arc that sees Rachel—the protagonist of the first series title—finding a resolution is a satisfying tie-in to Melody's story, and the lead characters' passions for patisserie and aviation result in sharp, clever parallels.

Carla Laureano folds joy and pain into *Brunch at Bittersweet Café*, a warm portrait of taking chances.

KAREN RIGBY (March/April 2019)

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