

AT HOME IN *Beldon Grove*
BOOK 3

THE
DAWN
of a DREAM

ANN
SHOREY



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Beldon Grove, Illinois
August 14, 1857

Luellen O'Connell aligned the edge of a flower-bordered tablecloth and stepped back to admire her handiwork. She wondered if Brendan would remember what day it was.

Whether her husband remembered or not, she still had tasks to complete before he came home. She hurried into their bedroom and gathered an accumulation of papers from the top of a bookshelf. For a moment, her eyes rested on an envelope from Allenwood Normal School. Luellen shook her head. Life was full of choices. She'd made hers. She dropped the papers behind a row of books.

A breeze lifted the curtains. Luellen removed her glasses and wiped perspiration that collected across the bridge of her nose. The past week had been unbearably hot. She hoped the evening would bring a cooling thundershower. Brendan returned home after each day's work out of sorts and silent. She could hardly

blame him—hauling freight in the blazing sun day after day would tire anybody.

After sweeping dust out the front door, she returned to the bedroom and opened her bridal chest. Her white dimity petticoat, trimmed with blue tatting, lay folded inside. Luellen smiled and slipped the garment on under her skirt. It was too hot to wear petticoats, but the memory of Brendan removing it on their wedding night sent an anticipatory tingle through her.

One more thing to do. In the kitchen she tested a cooling loaf cake with her fingertip, checking whether it was ready for frosting. The fragrance of cinnamon filled her senses while she beat sugar into egg whites. Humming, she spread the sweetened mixture over the cake and placed the decorated treat in the center of the table.

At the sound of jingling harnesses, she dashed to the door in time to see Brendan drive his freight wagon toward the barn. Luellen slipped her glasses into her apron pocket. She wanted to look especially pretty for him this evening.



Brendan shoved the last bite of cake into his mouth. From the time he stomped through the door, red-faced and sweating, he'd said less than two words. Now he pushed his chair away from the table and slapped the armrests. Thick cinnamon-colored hair matting his forearms made him look bearlike.

Tears swam in Luellen's eyes. She couldn't read his expression, but the tension of an unspoken message simmered between them. "What is it?" She fought to keep her voice from trembling.

"Got something to tell you." He leaned back and folded his arms.

Luellen took a breath and held it for a moment. "It must be terrible. Did you lose your job?"

"Still got the job." He took a swallow of tea. "I'm going to

Chicago. Tomorrow. Boss says he can use me there. More freight coming in on the railroads. More business.”

Luellen’s jaw dropped. “Is that what’s bothering you? I’m sure Papa will help me pack our household so I can join you.” She moved behind him and slid her arms around his neck, kissing the top of his head.

Brendan reached up and disengaged her hold. “Your father won’t be helping you go no place. I already got a wife waiting there.”

The room turned gray, then red. Luellen pivoted to face him. “You can’t be serious. You married me! A month ago today, in case you’ve forgotten.” She yanked her glasses from her pocket and put them on with shaking hands.

He stood, smirking. “’Twas no other way to get you into my bed, lass. You and those glasses—you should be happy you had this much time with a man.” He reached behind her head and jerked the silk net from her hair, spilling the long dark waves over her shoulders. “This hair is the only thing I’ll miss. ’Tis truly lovely.”

She slapped the net from his hands. Grabbing the rest of the cake, she dumped it over his head. “Get out! Now!”

Brendan wiped frosting out of his beard and glared at her. “I’ll get my things.” He turned toward the bedroom.

“You have two minutes. I want you out of this house, out of Beldon Grove.” Her voice shook with anger. “You’re a filthy, lying—” She sputtered to a stop, unable to think of a vile enough insult.

He banged into the bedroom, snatched his valise from under the bed, and stuffed in handfuls of clothing. On his way out the door, he picked up his razor and strop from the washstand and dropped them into the open bag.

“Time’s up. Go on with you.” Luellen’s hands clenched into fists.

He sent her his easy grin. “With your hair blowing wild like that and the roses in your cheeks, you’re a fetching sight. Maybe

the day will come you can find some other man.” Brendan turned on his heel and strode toward the stable.

She grabbed his shaving mug and threw it after him. It shattered on the ground. For the first time, she was glad their cottage sat far from the center of town. No one would notice when he drove away.



Thunder cracked. Wind flapped the bedroom curtains and the scent of rain filled the air. Luellen had no idea how much time had passed since Brendan left. She'd been too busy removing all traces of his presence from the cottage. Bedding lay in a heap on the floor, waiting for the wash kettle to heat. The kitchen felt stifling, but the bolted door represented safety. Nothing could hurt her as long as she stayed inside.

Jaw clenched, she opened the firebox on the stove, lifted her skirt, and jerked off the dimity petticoat, shoving the garment into the fire. Flames caught the lace tatting, then burst through the white skirt. Luellen stalked to the bedroom and snatched her ruffled nightdress from its peg on the wall. It followed the petticoat into the stove.

Her eyes landed on the Rose of Sharon quilt she and her mother had stitched for her bridal chest. What a great joke. No husband, but she still had the quilt. She gathered the red and green flowered coverlet into her arms, trying to roll it small enough to fit through the firebox door. The flames had subsided, smothered by the weight of her voluminous nightgown. By poking and shoving, she forced one end of the quilt over the gown. As she did, her eyes rested on the embroidered message her mother had stitched onto one corner. “*Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil . . .*”

“Oh, Mama.” Luellen pulled the quilt free of the firebox and slumped to the floor. A brown singe had eaten its way onto one of the roses, but the rest of the design was unharmed. “How can this be thoughts of peace and not evil?” Shattered, she buried her face in the soft folds and screamed her pain into the deserted room.



“Luellen?” Her younger sister Lily’s voice sounded outside. “Are you ill? Why is the door bolted?”

Luellen glanced around the cottage. Broken dishes swept up, bed remade with clean linens, stovetop shining with fresh polish. Everything looked normal . . . except no Brendan. She’d wondered how long it would take for her family to check on her. Usually she visited their house every day, especially with Lily’s wedding so near.

Feeling a hundred years old, she slid back the bolt and opened the door. Lily burst inside and hugged her.

“Thank the Lord. When you and Brendan didn’t come to church yesterday, Papa wanted to come see you, but Mama said you were probably enjoying each other’s company.” Lily blushed. “In another week, Edmund and I will be together too. I can’t wait.”

Luellen said nothing. Her sister’s happiness seemed to mock her own feelings of desolation and betrayal.

Lily stepped back. “You look terrible. What’s happened?” She glanced around the cottage, pausing at the open bedroom doorway. “Where’s your Rose of Sharon quilt?” Her gaze landed on the table standing against the kitchen wall. “And the embroidered tablecloth I made for you? Your new dishes—what did you do with them?” She placed a hand to her throat. “Something’s dreadfully wrong.” She took Luellen’s hand and drew her to one of the chairs next to the table. “Tell me.”

It seemed odd to her that Lily should be offering comfort. Luellen had always been the one to give advice and guidance. She clasped her hands in her lap and stared into Lily's brown eyes. "Brendan is gone." As she said the words, cold, hard shame stiffened her body. She'd given herself to a man who already had a wife. She was no longer pure. When word got out, she'd be humiliated in the eyes of the town.

Marry in haste, repent at leisure. Wasn't that what Mama said when she and Brendan told her they'd eloped? Repent at leisure was one thing. Being ridiculed was quite another.

Lily's voice drew her out of her thoughts. "What do you mean, gone? He hauls freight for the railroad every week. He's always gone."

"Gone for good. Back to Chicago." Luellen's voice cracked. "Lily, he already has a wife." She covered her face with her hands. "He just married me to have a woman to bed while he jobbed in our county."

"No. It can't be true."

"I wish it weren't." Tears slid down her cheeks. "How will I ever face Mama and Papa?" Her voice turned mocking. "I thought my job serving meals at the hotel made me a good judge of people. After all, we fed dozens of men a week. I could tell which ones were up to no good—or so I believed."

Lily knelt in front of her. "They'll understand. He fooled them too, with that handsome face and his charming ways. He fooled all of us."

Love for her sister filled her heart. Lily's wedding was days away. Luellen couldn't let her troubles spoil the event. She drew Lily to her feet. "Let's go home. I'm sure Mama has things for me to do." She squared her shoulders. "I need to tell them sooner or later. Might as well be now."

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Arm in arm, Luellen and Lily covered the distance to their parents' home, their footsteps loud on the boardwalk along Adams Street. A buggy rolled past and turned left at the corner of Monroe.

"Wonder who that was," Lily said. "Ever since the railroad came through, we get more strangers all the time." She clapped a hand over her mouth. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean Brendan."

"I know you didn't. But it's true. His was a new face—someone different than the boys I grew up with. I was so sure—" Her voice caught.

Lily squeezed Luellen's arm. "We're almost home. Take a deep breath. We've got to act calm. Mama's going to be beside herself when she hears."

Luellen slowed her steps when they passed the cabin where she'd lived most of her growing-up years. Now clapboarded and painted white, it held her father's medical office and infirmary. It still felt like home in spite of the sign facing the street that read *KARL SPENGLER, PHYSICIAN*.

"Maybe we could tell Papa, and let him talk to Mama."

"It would be best coming from you. She'd just want you to repeat everything, anyway."

Luellen sighed. "You're right."

They mounted the steps of the veranda and entered the front door of the spacious two-story house their parents built after Lily finished her schooling. The high-ceilinged entry felt cool after being out in the midday sun. Luellen removed her bonnet and fanned herself, gathering courage.

Their mother, Molly Spengler, stepped out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. "There you are. We missed you yesterday." The corner of her mouth twitched in a smile. "I expect you and Brendan decided to keep the weekend to yourselves."

Luellen released a slow breath. "Is Papa home?"

Mama stepped closer, frowning. "You don't look well. Your eyes are all red. Do you need Papa to give you a tonic?"

Her careful composure fled. "I . . . I need to talk to both of you." She felt herself tremble.

Mama rested a hand on her forehead.

"I'm not sick. Please. Get Papa."

Mama turned to Lily. "He's in the kitchen. Ask him to come in here."

When her parents were seated, Luellen bowed her head and pressed her hands together. "Brendan's gone . . . back to his wife in Chicago." She stuttered out the words. Tears threatened to spill when she saw the shock on their faces.

"No. It can't be." Mama jumped to her feet and circled Luellen with her arms. "My poor baby girl." She patted her on the back as though she were soothing a skinned knee.

Papa's face flamed with anger. "When?"

"Friday."

"Why didn't you tell us right away? I could've chased him down, brought him back."

She met his eyes. "To do what? He's married to someone else."

Her face burned. “How could I have been so easily deceived? Why on earth didn’t I wait until we knew more about him?”

“He was awfully charming,” Lily said in a small voice. “We all thought so.”

“Charming. Yes, that he was. Charmed me right into bed with him.”

“Luellen!” Mama said. “That’s no way for a lady to speak.”

“Am I still a lady? I’m ruined. How can I face people?”

“People. Oh my word. The wedding Saturday.” Mama rubbed her forehead. “We just won’t say anything. Who’s to know?” She paced the length of the room and turned. “That’s it. By the time folks realize he’s gone for good, we’ll have an explanation.”

Papa rose and took Luellen’s hands. “You’ll always be a lady. It’s what’s in your heart that makes you who you are. We’ll get through this—all of us together.”

Grateful, she leaned into the comfort of his arms.

“But first we have to think of Lily’s wedding.” Mama continued to pace. “We have guests coming. Edmund’s family will be here. We can’t have scandal ruining everything.”

“You sound like Ellie’s aunt Ruby, God rest her soul,” Papa said, referring to his sister-in-law’s aunt. “We won’t say anything for now, but we can’t present a lie to the community forever.” He squeezed Luellen’s shoulder. “Come stay with us. Everyone will think you’re here to be of more help.”

Dizzy, she sagged into a chair. After Saturday, then what?



Early Saturday morning, Luellen stepped into the decorated parlor to add fresh bouquets of daisies and maidenhair ferns to the mantel. Her uncle Matthew, pastor of Beldon Grove’s leading church, would stand before the screened fireplace to perform the wedding ceremony.

Glad for a few minutes of quiet before the guests arrived, she stepped back and surveyed the chairs to be certain they'd provided enough seating. She counted as she mentally ran through the expected attendees—Uncle Matthew's wife, Ellie, with their two youngest children, Sarah and Robert. Lily's fiancé's parents would be there, of course, as would Ellie's uncle Arthur, friends of the family from the community, and several of Lily's former schoolmates.

Luellen blinked back tears. Her sister's wedding would be beautiful—nothing like her own marriage ceremony before a judge in the county courthouse. Brendan had assured her it wouldn't matter. Now she knew why. She'd traded years of work toward a higher education for the persuasive promises of a man she hardly knew.

She wiped her eyes. "How could I have done such a thing?"

"Done what?" Papa walked up behind her and rested his hands on her shoulders.

She turned and met his gaze. "Made such a terrible mistake."

"Would it be easier for you to rest in your room during the ceremony? Having our guests question you about your missing husband is bound to be a trial."

"Thank you, but no. I want to be here for Lily."

He settled in one of the chairs. "It's too bad James will miss it, and Franklin, too, looks like."

"I knew James wouldn't be able to travel all the way from Philadelphia, but I'd hoped to see Franklin. It's been months." Luellen sat beside him and smoothed her rose-colored taffeta skirt. Sitting with Papa in the quiet room calmed her spirit. She knew these were likely to be the last peaceful moments they'd have today.

"Franklin must be off scouting. He didn't reply to your mama's letter, and she sent it in plenty of time." Sadness touched his eyes.

“You miss the boys, don’t you?”

Papa nodded. “And after the wedding Lily will be living in Springfield. Thankfully, we’ll have you at home with us.”

His words rang an alarm bell in her head. Would that be her future? To be the unmarried daughter spending her life at home with her parents?



Luellen paused inside the kitchen to gather courage before taking her seat in the parlor. She needed to hurry. Lily and Edmund would make their entrance at any moment.

A strong arm seized her around the middle. A hand covered her mouth. As she struggled to free herself, a masculine voice spoke in her ear. “Shh. Don’t say anything and I’ll let go.”

She nodded, and the hand withdrew. Her captor stepped in front of her, grinning.

“Franklin!”

“Quiet. I want to surprise everyone.”

Luellen grabbed her brother in a hug. “It’s wonderful to see you. Mama and Papa will be thrilled.” She stepped back, studying him, noting his tanned face and his dark hair worn at collar length. He wore wedding attire—gray trousers and a frock coat over his white shirt, but his feet were shod in moccasins.

“No wonder you crept up on me.” She pointed. “Shouldn’t you be wearing boots?”

“Don’t have to shine moccasins.” Franklin winked at her, then beckoned toward the open back door. “Come in, Ward.”

A man in dark blue Army dress stepped into the room. Shorter than Franklin by about four inches, and stocky where Franklin was lithe, he whipped off his black felt hat and bowed in her direction.

“This is Lieutenant Ward Calder, a friend of mine from Jefferson

Barracks. He's likable in spite of the fact he's an officer." Franklin shot a teasing glance in the lieutenant's direction. "Ward, this is my sister, Luellen O'Connell."

Lieutenant Calder bowed again. "A pleasure, ma'am."

Franklin rubbed his hands together. "Now that we've dispensed with the formalities, let's join the wedding party. If I figured right, isn't it almost time for Uncle Matthew to tie the knot on our little sister and her intended?"

Luellen nodded, amused. Franklin's cheerful outlook never failed to lift her spirits.

As they started toward the parlor, he whispered, "Is your husband already seated? I want to meet the man who changed your mind about marriage." He glanced at Lieutenant Calder. "My sister always swore she didn't want to marry, but O'Connell won her over."

Her momentary lightheartedness evaporated. "He couldn't be here today." She hurried forward and opened the door, standing aside so her parents could see Franklin.



The wedding breakfast covered the dining room table. Fresh peaches swam in a bowl of cream. On a round platter, sliced chicken surrounded fried sweet potatoes, and muffins were stacked in a pyramid on a footed glass plate. A sideboard under the window held the wedding cake. Luellen stood near the kitchen and helped with serving, hoping hunger would keep their guests from pressing her with questions about Brendan.

She couldn't help but contrast today's elegant meal with the contents of the dinner pail she and Brendan had shared on their way back to Beldon Grove to tell her parents of their marriage.

Cold ham sandwiches could have been a special memory between the two of them—if there were still two of them.

She gave herself a mental shake and forced a smile at Lily and Edmund, who stood near the sideboard, waiting for the cake to be served. “I imagine you’re eager to start on your journey,” she said as she inserted a knife into the fruit-laden pastry.

Lily blushed. “Yes. The train north will be here around two. We’re planning to stop in New Roanoke for the first night.”

Edmund looked down at his bride. “Long train trips are fatiguing. For Lily’s sake, we’ll make the journey in short segments.”



Once the cake had been shared among the guests, Lily hurried upstairs to change into her traveling costume.

Luellen joined her in the bedroom. “It was a perfect wedding.” She lifted her sister’s green and blue checked shawl from the bed. “Too bad Maria and Graciana had to miss it. You three have always been as close as sisters.”

“Those two.” Lily’s smile carried the fondness she felt for her cousins. “Marrying brothers, living next door to each other in Quincy, expecting their babies the same month. I wonder if their children will grow up as close as we were.”

“I don’t see how they can help it.” Luellen settled the shawl over Lily’s shoulders, arranging the fringe so it fell smoothly over her hoop-skirted, oyster-gray dress.

Lily turned and clasped Luellen’s hands. “Thank you for all you’ve done to make my wedding special. I know how hard it’s been for you to keep smiling.” She kissed her cheek. “God has something better planned for your life than Brendan.”



Luellen stopped, hand on the knob of the kitchen door. Voices from inside carried through the polished walnut panel.

“Did you see how she’s dressed? No hoops—just those heavy petticoats.”

“And those eyeglasses. She looks like she’s forty years old. No wonder her husband left.”

Luellen self-consciously tucked her glasses in her pocket. Her face burned. If Lily’s friends knew, the news had to be all over town. No wonder few of the guests had mentioned Brendan.

She pushed the door open and strode into the room. Two young women stood at the counter, washing dishes from the wedding breakfast. They sprang apart, their hoopskirts swaying.

“Luellen! We thought you were . . .” Abigail’s fair skin flushed scarlet.

“Mama’s resting. I told her I’d give you girls a hand.” Luellen gave them her sweetest smile. “Why don’t you join the others? My brother’s around someplace with that friend he brought with him. I’m sure they’d enjoy some fashionable company.”

“How kind of you. We’d love to visit with Franklin, wouldn’t we? He’s been away for ever so long.” Abigail preceded her companion through the doorway, tipping her hoops sideways to negotiate the narrow opening.

The other girl swept by with embarrassed words of thanks. They hurried through the dining room, past the table covered with the family’s best linen, and into the parlor where the last guests lingered.

Once they were out of sight, Luellen rested against the edge of the counter and leaned forward, eyes closed. At one time, she’d wanted more from life than a husband. Why did she ever let Brendan change her mind? She knew why. Loneliness. The flattery of

