



Beloved

Book 3, Where the Heart Lives

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:11 NASB

Prologue

Spring 1881

A lump formed in Diana Brennan’s throat and tears pooled in her eyes. She missed her ma. She missed their tenement flat in Chicago. She missed Hugh. She missed her da, though she couldn’t remember much about him. Not even what he looked like. She wanted things to be like they used to be. She wanted to go home. She didn’t like it here.

Diana—at six years old the youngest of the children on the stage of the grange hall—sat in a chair, her feet dangling a good ten inches off the floor. The large room was full of adults, milling about and talking to one another. Fear made her cold. It didn’t matter that similar scenes had played out in recent days as the children from Dr. Cray’s Asylum for Little Wanderers traveled west, looking for people who were willing to take them in and give them new homes. She was still afraid.

Her older sister, Felicia, leaned toward Diana. “It’s okay, Di. I’m right here. Nothing bad’s gonna happen.”

Diana wanted to believe Felicia, but she couldn’t. Not anymore. Not since their big brother Hugh had been taken off the train without them. Deep down inside, she knew nobody

was going to take two girls home with them. Little as she was, she knew it was true.

“Hello, there.” A man with a beard stopped in front of her chair and leaned down so he could look straight into her eyes. “What’s your name, child?”

She blinked back the tears.

“Her name’s Diana,” Felicia answered for her. “She’s six. I’m her sister, Felicia. I’m ten.”

“Hello, Diana.” The man had a nice smile. “Nice to meet you, Felicia. My name is Mr. Fisher.”

Diana nodded, still unable to make herself talk.

He motioned with his right hand, and a woman joined him. “This is my wife. Gloria, this is Diana. She’s six.”

Mrs. Fisher had a nice smile too. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Diana. My, but you have beautiful hair.”

“Thank you,” Diana whispered at last, remembering her manners. She wanted to add that her red hair was just like her ma’s, but the thought made her want to cry again.

“What do you think, my dear?” Mr. Fisher asked his wife.

“Yes, darling,” she answered. “Oh, yes.”

Chapter 1

Boise City, Idaho

May 1900

To say the least, it was inconsiderate of Diana's almost-dead husband to show up at her engagement party.

Conversations around the dinner table in the Calhoun dining room fell silent as guests began to notice the tall, dashing stranger standing in the doorway, his gaze fixed on Diana Applegate. He wore formal evening attire, as if he too had been invited to the festivities. But this was no guest.

Brook Calhoun, Diana's soon-to-be fiancé, leaned toward her. "Who is he? Do you know him?"

"Yes," she answered, disbelieving the word as it came out of her mouth. "It's Tyson."

"Tyson... *Applegate*?"

"Yes."

"Great Scott!"

Tyson smiled at her from across the room, but there was nothing friendly about the expression. An odd humming started in Diana's ears, and she felt as though she was observing the moment from a distance. Was any of it real? Was *he* real? This couldn't be happening. It couldn't be.

Get up. Get up and go talk to him. Make him leave. Get him out of sight. But her body refused to obey her mind's demands. *Do something. You must do something. Now. Now!*

She heard the ticking of the clock on the mantle, even though time itself seemed to stand still. Someone cleared his throat. Ice tinkled against crystal. A chair leg scraped the hardwood floor. Then something in Tyson's gaze told Diana he was tired of waiting for her to go to him. He was about to come to her. This at last spurred her to action.

To Brook she whispered, "I'll speak with him." She pushed back her chair from the table and, as she rose, said to their guests, "Please, everyone. Go on with your dinner. I won't be but a moment." Somehow she managed to sound normal, unconcerned. What a lie!

She hurried toward the entrance, avoiding eye contact with her mother. Her heart raced and skipped, and her thoughts scattered in a hundred directions at once.

"It's good to see you, Diana," Tyson said when she reached him.

She felt everyone's gazes on her back. Watching her. Watching the two of them. They were wondering who he was, how she knew him, what business he had with her. A chill

shuddered through her.

“We need to talk,” he added in a low voice.

This was no mirage. He was real. She felt his body heat upon the skin of her arms.

“Not here. Co—” Her voice broke. “Come into the library.” She moved past Tyson and hurried down the hallway, trusting he would follow her to the room at the far end.

He did—and closed the door.

Moving across the room, Diana stared into the fireplace, still unable to calm the tangle of her thoughts. How could this be happening? Tyson Applegate was supposed to be dead. Missing on the battlefields of Cuba, his body never found. The court was scheduled to declare his death a fact tomorrow morning. But now, on the eve of her expected freedom from the husband who’d abandoned her, he’d returned.

Very much alive.

Not injured. Not frail. Not sickly.

She turned around. “You...you’re supposed to be dead.” The words came out a whisper—and she hated herself for sounding weak.

“I know. Sorry to disappoint you.” Tyson gave his head a slow shake, and his expression seemed to say he regretted his flippancy. “When I learned that you were about to publicly announce your engagement to Mr. Calhoun, I realized it was important that I stop you.”

The words didn’t quite make sense to her. They should but they didn’t. She turned her back to him again and covered her face with her hands. This was a nightmare. Surely it was a nightmare and she would wake up at any moment to find Tyson Applegate gone once more. Dead, the way everyone—including her and his father—had thought of him for the past two years.

“You deserve an explanation, Diana, but perhaps here and now isn’t the time or place for it. I imagine you and Mr. Calhoun will have a few things to talk over.”

A few things to talk over. She wanted to laugh at the understatement.

“Diana.” Tyson’s voice was low and near. Too near. “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be unkind. This wasn’t the best way for you to find out that I’m still among the living. But when I learned the reason for this dinner party, I felt I had no choice but to come at once.”

If he touched her, she wasn’t sure what she would do. Scream. Cry. Faint. Perhaps all three.

“Here, Diana. This is where you’ll find me.”

She looked over her shoulder. He held a calling card for her to take.

“Please come and see me in the morning. There is much we must sort out.”

Another understatement. She took the card.

“Until tomorrow.” He turned and left the library.

Suddenly weak in the knees, Diana sank onto the nearby sofa. The shaking started deep within and worked its way out to her fingertips and toes. She hugged herself lest she shatter.

Tyson was alive. He was alive and he'd returned. But for what purpose? To save himself from embarrassment. It certainly couldn't be because he wanted her. He'd never wanted her.

"Never," she whispered to the empty room.

The door to the library opened again. This time it was Brook who entered. Wordlessly he sat beside her, but he didn't touch her. Didn't put a hand in the small of her back or an arm around her shoulders. Didn't offer any sort of comfort. Just sat there in stiff silence.

It was a few moments before she had the strength to look at him. "Brook, I...I thought he was dead. His father thought he was dead. All this time without a word from him."

"What did he say to you?"

She drew in a shaky breath. "He wants me to see him in the morning." She held up the calling card. "At this address."

"And?"

"He said there is much we must sort out."

"Ah."

That wasn't the response she wanted. She wanted him to hop to his feet and swear he would never let her go. She wanted him to promise to fight a duel rather than let her return to the man who had forsaken her so cruelly. Love might not have a place in her relationship with Brook, on either side, but there was a shared affection. They'd made plans for the future. Their future. She wanted him to demand that she divorce Tyson so they could marry. She wouldn't be the wealthy widow he'd proposed to, but everything else about her would be the same. Surely that would be enough.

She looked down at the card she held in her right hand. "I have no choice but to meet with him." *Say you'll go with me. Please, Brook. Say you want to go with me.*

"Yes, you must." He stood. "I think it best if I make your excuses to our guests. The less said now, the better. Don't you agree?"

"Yes," she whispered, fighting the lump rising in her throat.

A short while ago, she'd been seated at a table surrounded with well-wishing friends. But there would be no congratulations tonight. There would be no champagne toasts to Brook and his fiancée. Not now. Brook was ending their engagement before it officially began. What else could he do? She wasn't free to marry. Not him. Not any man. The only way she would be free was if she obtained a divorce. And few, if any, men of good society were willing to marry a divorcée.

That included Brook Calhoun.

"I am sorry, Diana. About...everything."

She continued to stare at the card in her hand. "I know."

“I envisioned this evening much differently.”

Me too.

“Would you like me to send your mother to you?”

“Please.” She drew in a ragged breath.

“Goodnight, Diana.”

“Goodnight, Brook.”

After the door closed, she covered her face with her hands and wept.

Tonight, Tyson Applegate had ruined her life for the second time.

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Tyson leaned back in the carriage and closed his eyes, picturing Diana as she'd stood before him in a gown of shimmering gold. He hadn't expected that she would be even more beautiful now than she was on their wedding day. But she was. Stunningly beautiful with her pale, flawless skin and her fiery red hair and eyes the same green as the forests of deepest Africa.

Beautiful and hurt. Hurt by his actions.

Again.

He groaned, shame washing over him.

He'd used Diana Fisher abominably. That hadn't been his intention at first, of course. At first he'd simply been a young man attracted to a sweet, beautiful girl who adored him. But then his father had objected, had forbidden Tyson to ever see her again. She was a nobody. An orphan. Not the kind of girl suitable to become the wife of Jeremiah Applegate's only son. Not a proper wife for a future congressman or senator.

His father's disapproval had been what sealed their fates, his and Diana's.

Lord help him. The things he'd done out of defiance to his father. It was painful to remember. Remembering heaped guilt and mortification on his shoulders until the weight threatened to break him.

He drew a deep breath and opened his eyes. He was a different man today than the spoiled, rebellious, angry one who'd left home and family years ago. He'd come back to Idaho to prove it—to his wife, to his father, to himself.

The carriage drew to a halt in front of the house Tyson had purchased, sight unseen, before coming to Boise. He'd hoped Diana would be willing to furnish it, to purchase those things they would need to set up not just housekeeping but entertaining. He'd hoped she would be willing to give him another chance to be a good husband to her. He'd hoped she would want to help him in the new life he'd planned for himself. Why hadn't it occurred to him that she would have moved on with hers? What had he expected?

The truth was until earlier this year he'd given little thought to the wife he'd left behind. And even when he had, he'd thought she would still be waiting for him. One more example of

the selfish man he'd been—and could yet be if he wasn't careful.

He didn't wait for the driver to dismount and open the carriage door. No need for that. It wasn't as if he didn't know how to take care of himself. He'd had no valet, butler, or footman tending to him when he climbed mountains in Asia or went on safari in Africa or when he fought beneath the relentless sun in Cuba. In fact, he still had no valet, butler, or footman to wait on him. Not yet. But if all went as planned, within a week he should have a full staff hired for home, grounds, and stables.

He entered the house through the front door and made his way in the dark up to the largest of the six bedchambers on the second floor. Once there, he lit a lamp, then slipped off his suspenders and removed his necktie and stiff collar before sitting in a wing-backed chair near the cold fireplace. Though there was a chill in the spring night air, he didn't bother to set a fire.

Memories from his adventurous past, both good and not so good, paraded through his mind. Those weeks in Cuba with Roosevelt and his Rough Riders were among the latter kind.

Tyson had learned many things in war. He'd learned he was a good soldier. He could follow orders, ride fast, shoot straight, and get by on lousy grub and little sleep. He'd also come to believe that war wasn't the better answer, even if sometimes it was the necessary one. Now he wanted to use those lessons he'd learned for the benefit of others.

Which was why he, at last, had returned to Idaho.

Amusing, in an odd sort of way, that the very thing his father had wanted most for him was what he now sought for himself.

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August 1885

As he had done many times for as far back as he could remember, Tyson stood before his father's massive desk in the library, awaiting the lecture he knew would come. He was eighteen. A man. But his father always made him feel like a small boy.

"We will *not* have this conversation again," his father said, cold steel in his words. "You *will* study the law. Knowledge of the law will give you an advantage when the time comes for you to run for public office."

Tyson had no intention of running for public office. He had no intention of living the life his father had planned for him since birth. But he didn't waste his breath saying so. Not again. Jeremiah Applegate didn't tolerate disobedience. Not from his wife. Not from his son. Not from his employees. Not from anyone. But the day would come when Tyson would tell him to—

"Go see your mother. She is waiting to tell you good-bye." His father looked down at some papers on his desk. "I'll expect good reports of your progress at Harvard."

The assumed reply stuck in his throat for several heartbeats before he managed to force the words out. "Yes, sir."

Someday...