



*Dreams of*  
SAVANNAH

ROSEANNA M. WHITE

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BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2020944634

ISBN 987-0-7642-3747-8 (paperback)

ISBN 987-0-7642-3820-8 (casebound)

ISBN 978-1-4934-3001-7 (ebook)

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover design by Koehler Peterson & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota/Jon Godfredson

Author is represented by The Steve Laube Agency.

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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# Chapter One

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SAVANNAH, GEORGIA  
MAY 1861

Cordelia Owens had dreamed of this day a hundred times. This moment. This story just waiting to happen. While the picnic was in full swing, she slipped away to her favorite spot in the backyard. The live oak towered here, its Spanish moss dripping inspiration. The music from Old Moses’s fiddle danced through the air, setting the stage perfectly. A better setting for a romantic tale she couldn’t possibly imagine. She swayed a bit to the music, relishing the feel of her hoops and petticoats moving along with her. She wore her favorite pale blue-green dress, with its tier of white lace matching her gloves.

Maybe today, finally, she would get to play the part of the heroine. Her true love would find her here and sweep her off her feet before he charged into battle, swearing that his undying devotion to her would see him through the months ahead.

Yes, it would make the perfect story. Only one thing was missing—the hero of the tale.

“Miss Delia.”

For a second—one glorious, heart-pounding second—she

thought it had really happened. That all the dreams, all the tales she'd whispered to herself when sleep was but a haze on the horizon of her mind, had finally come true. Phineas Dunn, newly signed up in the Confederate navy, had finally shown up to her family's annual barbeque, and he'd sought her out here in the back garden, just as she'd always wished he would. She'd turn around and find him in his beautiful uniform of pearly gray, his eyes positively gleaming . . .

She turned. And saw indeed a man in a gray uniform. But his hair was three shades too dark, his frame two inches too tall, and his girth a bit too burly. She sighed and pasted a polite smile onto her lips. "Thomas Bacon. How good to see you."

"Before I go, you mean." Thomas strode to her side. "I'm going to miss you so. But thoughts of you will get me through each battle. I'll imagine your beautiful face and be capable of anything."

The words were right. Perfect even. Nearly exactly what she'd imagined Phin saying to her. But the right words couldn't change the fact that it was the wrong man saying them.

Of course, Phin couldn't exactly deliver the right line of dialogue when he didn't even bother to show up, could he?

And now look at the pickle he'd put her in. How was she supposed to be kind to Thomas Bacon and yet make sure she didn't send him away with false hope? Somehow she'd have to give him a picture to cherish without either crushing his spirit or lifting it too high. She'd just have to act like Ginny, that was all. Her older sister never had a problem answering with that modest tone that left a man utterly clueless as to whether she was simply being polite or in fact felt some affection.

Delia attempted Ginny's demure grin, which was undoubtedly ruined by her squinting into the sun, since she had left her bonnet on the blanket. In her story, Phin had brushed his fingers through her golden curls and mentioned how they shone like the very sun—and now, of course, reality was making a mock-

ery of her imaginings. And, given a few more minutes, she'd probably break out into awful freckles, too, which would send Mama into a tizzy. She could already hear the admonition that would come. *Oh gracious, Cordelia, why can you not maintain clear skin like Lacy? Your sister's complexion is like magnolia blossoms, while yours is freckled as a strawberry.*

She turned to present her profile to Thomas, largely to relieve her eyes and also because that's what Ginny would do. Ginny never held a man's eye for more than a few seconds. "Oh, Mr. Bacon, you flatter me so."

He pivoted to face her again. "It would have to be untrue to be flattery."

*False.* He ought to have said it would have to be *false* to be flattery, the alliteration would have been—

"Oh!" Whyever was his head lowering toward hers with such determination? Thank heavens he hadn't dared to slip an arm around her waist. She sidestepped him and tried to head for the front garden again. Ginny never reported *this* happening.

He stepped into her path.

Cordelia planted her fists on her well-cinched waist. She didn't want to crush a poor young man's heart before he headed off to war, but to try to steal a kiss, then not allow her to leave? A true gentleman would relent. "Mr. Bacon, do remove yourself from my way."

"Now, Miss Delia, just one kiss is all I ask. To sustain me through the long war ahead." He gave her a smile he probably meant to be charming, though it made her wish she had stayed on the blanket with her sisters and not chased a silly dream.

"I'm afraid I'm not in the habit of giving out kisses to every young man who enlists." She lifted her chin and dared him to take a step closer to learn how hard she could slap. Not that she'd ever had to slap anyone, but she surely possessed surprising strength for someone of such small stature. A proper heroine always did. "Now, I suggest you make way. I don't *want* to

turn you into a villain, Thomas Bacon, but I will if I must—and best of luck finding another young lady to give you the time of day after I've finished my tale.”

“No need for that.” He backed up a step, a smile still teasing the corners of his mouth but with his hands lifted in surrender. “Can’t blame a fella for trying, though, can you? You *are* the prettiest thing in all of Georgia. May I walk you back to your sisters?”

Well. At least his good breeding had come to the surface again. “You go on ahead.” She’d stay here a moment and compose herself before returning to the picnic and its crowds of friends and neighbors.

Thomas gave her a short bow and hustled away, leaving her to draw in a deep breath. This was *not* the way she had hoped the afternoon would go. But then, nothing ever went like she imagined it would in her stories. Why, just once, couldn’t reality play along?

“Don’t you know you’re supposed to wait for your hero to rush to the rescue? I had it all worked out, but you handled it yourself too quickly.” This new voice came from the garden’s opposite entrance and sent a sweet trill of pleasure tripping through her veins.

So, Phineas Dunn apparently *had* deigned to come.

He stood under the trellis, sporting his new Confederate uniform. And, if she might say so, he wore it a far sight better than the dreadful Thomas Bacon. His hair glinted the perfect shade of honeyed cypress, and he stood at the ideal height—a full head taller than she, but no more.

Now *there* was a man worth telling a tale about. She had no need to force her grin as she sashayed his way—she couldn’t have stopped the lifting of her lips had she tried. “Why, Phineas Dunn. We were beginning to think you had already left for New Orleans.”

“Without saying good-bye?” The warm—no, no, *simmering*—

smile he gave her made anticipation dance a quadrille in her stomach. “You know me better than that. Even if you *did* just withhold the chance for me to play your hero.”

Oh, that would have been perfect. Her, distressed and desperate, him rushing in ready to duel for her honor. Not that her honor had been in particular peril, but still. “Well, had I known you were here . . .”

Perhaps the situation could yet be redeemed. While he sauntered toward her, she debated what pose she might strike to set *his* heart to pattering. Ought she to twirl one of the curls spilling over her shoulder? No, too flirtatious. She could fold her hands and wait quietly as Ginny was wont to do. But no, he would never believe that of her. Should she lean over to smell one of the few blooming roses? Worth a try, she supposed.

“Too studied.” Phin chuckled as he grabbed her around the waist and twirled her once so that she had no choice but to shriek with unladylike laughter. “There. Much better. You can tell all your friends that I swept you off your feet.”

Was it any wonder he filled her every dream? Cordelia laughed again as she tucked her arm into his. “Mama would faint dead away.”

He hummed and led her into the dappled shadow of the oak. “Luckily, she always has her smelling salts at hand.”

“Ah, but then she’d launch straight into a rant about how I hadn’t been sent to the Female Academy to learn daydreaming and childishness.” She bit her lips as she looked up at him, partly to tamp down the smile, partly so they would redden.

That mischievous light shone in his eyes, the one that had lured her into terrible scrapes when she was a girl. “No, you were sent there to learn how to catch a husband. Any success?”

Had he posed the question to Ginny, she would have demurred and recited something about how ladies never spoke of such things until a formal announcement could be made.

Utter fiddle-faddle, of course. And far too dull. “I’ll have

you know that I received a proposal just this morning, Phineas Dunn, from a . . . a *sultan*.”

His deep laughter made the garden gleam brighter, the colors more vivid. “A sultan, is it? What happened to that emperor you told me about last month?”

Oh, that tale had been one of her favorites. She had spent an entire day in her room writing it down, which had thrown Mama into a conniption. “He was reunited with the love of his youth, so I graciously stepped aside.”

The way Phin’s hazel eyes sparkled made her wonder if perhaps all those stories she had let herself imagine about him had a hope of coming true. “That’s my Delia, as gracious as she is lovely.”

His Delia? She could scarcely catch her breath. Never in her life had she fainted, but she felt downright lightheaded now. “See there, I *did* learn something at finishing school.”

With another chuckle, he wove their fingers together and gazed upon them for a long moment. “I’m going to miss you.” He angled his eyes up, a half-smile tilting his mouth. “When I get back, am I going to find you married to some planter’s son who can claim more slaves and acres than anyone in four counties?”

“I . . .” Was he asking her to wait for him? No, no, she mustn’t let herself get carried away. Though that would be a dream come true—Phineas Dunn dropping to his knee and proposing. They could marry before he left, under the magnolia blossoms . . .

Cordelia drew in as deep a breath as her corset would allow and hoped her smile didn’t wobble. “I shall miss you, too.”

He used their joined hands to pull her closer. She prayed her thudding heart wasn’t audible to him. “How much?”

As if a lady could answer such a question! As if there *were* an answer to it, a quantity one could assign. *I shall miss you two quarts and three-fourths a cup*. Her gaze moved from the

gleaming buttons on his coat down to the handsome gold braid at the cuff and landed on the sword strapped to his side. A shiver coursed up her spine. “Don’t go, Phin.”

He snapped upright, amusement and incredulity replacing the warmth in his gaze. “What’s this? I thought you would be happy to see me go off to war. Just think of all the stories I’ll bring home for you, Delia. All the Yankees I’ll outwit, and adventure on the high seas to boot, aboard the *Sumter*.”

She traced one of the loops of braid with a light fingertip. Happy? No. Proud, perhaps, but . . . “What good will that do me if your ship is blown to bits by cannonballs? Or capsized in a hurricane? Or attacked by a giant squid? Or . . . or eaten by a whale?”

“Eaten by a . . . Delia, really, that’s about as likely as me getting mauled by a tiger.”

Her eyes went wide. “Are there any of those around? I heard they are going to open a zoological park in New York. What if you end up fighting the Yankees up that way and some exotic creature escapes and stalks you?”

Phin chuckled and lifted her hand to his mouth, pressing a kiss to her knuckles that made them tingle. “I will be fine. And I will come home full to bursting with the most exciting tales you’ve ever heard.”

*I’d rather have you.* The words twisted themselves around her tongue. A lady would never set them loose, not outside the pages of a book, but neither could a more appropriate response squeeze past them. Though she probably looked like a complete ninny just staring at him, silent.

Her pulse hammered when he pulled her closer still and angled his head. His mouth remained turned up in that beautiful smile of his. “Are you going to pull away from me like you did Bacon?”

She should, to be sure. Much as she yearned to linger in his arms, it wouldn’t do to be caught, and there were far too

many guests clamoring about the barbeque tables to think this bubble of privacy would last long. Besides, Phin had no intention of marrying her before he headed to war, given that he left tomorrow.

Would it be such a terrible thing, then, to give him a farewell kiss to send him on his way? She hoped not, because she couldn't bring herself to pull away, and he drew slowly nearer.

"Delia? Are you back here? It's time for Daddy's announcement." Ginny's voice rang through the garden as light and clear as a chime. "Delia? Is that you?"

Cordelia pulled away so she could wave at her elder sister. "It's me, Ginny. I'll be right there."

Ginny stopped a few steps into the garden and smiled. Her radiance came, no doubt, because in moments Daddy would let it be known that his baby girl would marry Charlie Worth within the fortnight, before Charlie joined up. "Do hurry, Delie-Darlin. I'm too excited to wait a moment longer than necessary."

"I'm coming."

The promise was enough to send Ginny on her way, though Cordelia wasn't sure whether she ought to follow now or say something more to Phin.

He answered the question by catching her around the waist and pulling her against him. "Not yet, you don't."

That intoxicating smile of his flashed again. How would she survive without the promise of seeing it regularly? "Phin, we—"

"Shh." He brushed a thick curl over her shoulder and then slid his hand under the locks, anchoring her head. Oh, how she hoped he couldn't tell how he affected her. She tried to commit every detail to memory as he tilted her face up, inclined his own. The way his gaze tangled with hers and his lids half-shuttered his eyes . . .

But then their lips touched, and her mind went foggy and incoherent. She couldn't have said how long that first gentle kiss

lasted before he deepened it. All she knew was that no words in the world could have captured this magic, the feeling of a puzzle clicking into place at long last, the swell of a heart that hadn't realized until then what it meant to truly feel.

When he pulled away, it took her a moment to realize her arms had locked around his neck. And for the life of her, she could think of nothing clever to say.

Phin's smile looked adorably smug. "Will you save me a waltz?"

"Today?"

"Every day. Every ball. That ought to guarantee you remember me while I'm gone."

As if she could forget the man who embodied all her dreams. "*Every* waltz. But you had better come back to me, Phineas Dunn."

"I sure intend to." He spun her around like in a country dance and then caught her by the hand and pulled her toward the rest of the guests. "Will you wait for me?"

Not exactly a proposal, but the question nevertheless made her grin. She could only pray she managed to put a bit of sophistication in it. "You know I will."

"How long?"

The music from Old Moses's fiddle was joined by the rest of the band, who must have just arrived, earning a hoot of approval from the crowd in the front. Cordelia tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow. "Forever."

Hopefully that would be promise enough to deliver him safely through the war. And hopefully it would be over soon—she had no desire to wait forever for him to hold her again.