

TOMORROW'S GARDEN

A NOVEL

TEXAS DREAMS • 3

Amanda Cabot



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2011 by Amanda Cabot

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cabot, Amanda, 1948–

Tomorrow's garden : a novel / Amanda Cabot.

p. cm. — (Texas dreams ; 3)

ISBN 978-0-8007-3326-1 (pbk.)

1. Women teachers—Fiction. 2. Texas Rangers—Fiction. 3. Texas Hill Country (Tex.)—Fiction. 4. Texas—History—1846–1950—Fiction. I. Title.

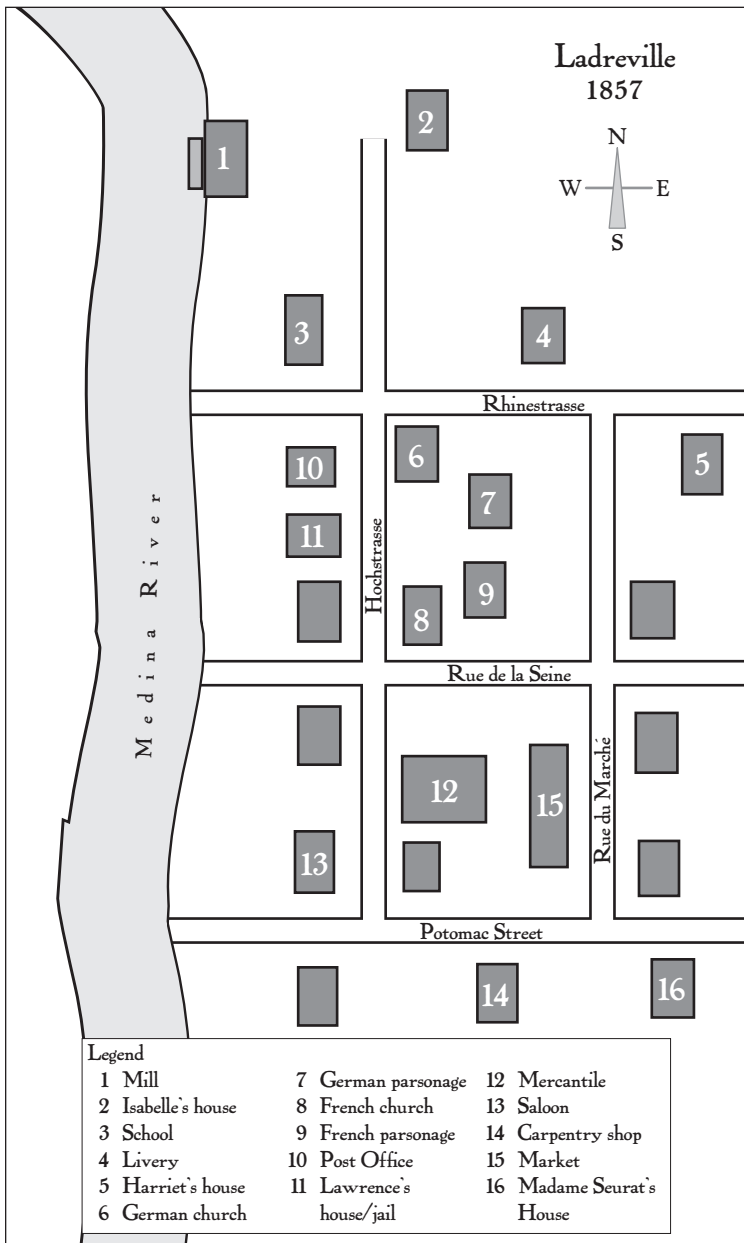
PS3603.A35T66 2011

813'.6—dc22

2010043467

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



1

August 1857

“Trouble’s coming.”

Harriet Kirk looked up from the crate of dishes she was packing. Though Jake’s words were ominous, her brother’s voice held a note of glee, as if he welcomed the visitor. What he probably welcomed was the break from carrying boxes and crates to the wagon. Even though it was only midmorning, the Texas sun was hot, a fact that Jake announced each time Harriet gave him a new load.

“It’s the parson.” Mary scurried from the window and buried her face in Harriet’s skirts. Harriet’s eight-year-old sister wasn’t normally so shy, but visitors to the Kirk home were rare. “Why’s he here?”

Why indeed? The Kirk children had lived in this small Texas town their whole lives, in this house for the past seven years. Not once in those seven years had the town’s minister paid a call on them, though there had certainly been events

that would have warranted a visit from the clergy. But today, when they were less than twenty-four hours from leaving Fortune forever, he had decided to visit.

“Good morning, Reverend Bruckner.” Reluctantly summoning the manners her grandmother had instilled in her, Harriet ushered the minister into the family’s tiny parlor and offered him one of the two chairs that held no boxes. The tall man whose dark hair was only lightly threaded with gray appeared uneasy, perhaps because of the chaos that surrounded him. Though she wished otherwise, the house looked as if a band of ruffians had ransacked it. There were no ruffians, of course, simply Harriet’s five sisters and brothers who, now that she was engaged in polite conversation with Reverend Bruckner, had fled the house and were, judging by their muffled shouts, attempting to load the wagon. Harriet tried not to sigh at the realization that she would have to rearrange the crates as soon as the minister left.

“May I get you a cup of coffee?” she asked, hoping he would refuse. The sooner he left, the sooner she could get back to work. Harriet didn’t want to think about the scene unfolding in the front yard. Though Ruth would try her best to control the younger children, she was no match for the three boys. With Jake as ringleader, there was no telling what mischief they were wreaking.

As if he’d read her thoughts, the minister shook his head. “I cannot stay long, but I would be remiss if I did not try to persuade you to remain in Fortune. The town needs you.”

If it wouldn’t have been unspeakably rude, Harriet would have laughed. Though the town needed a schoolteacher, she was not the one they wanted. The residents had made that abundantly clear. She might be Miss Kirk of the Fortune

Kirks, but once Jake's shenanigans had become public knowledge, few parents trusted her ability to maintain discipline in the school.

"I appreciate your concern, Reverend, but I've given my word." Joyfully, gratefully, irrevocably. Mr. Ladre's correspondence had been the one bright spot in an otherwise troubling spring.

The minister leaned forward, pursing his lips as he was wont to do when he reached the end of his sermon. "I wish there were some way I could dissuade you. The truth is, my concern is not simply for the town. It distresses me to think you're leaving because of my nephew. Perhaps if I had . . ."

So that was why he had come. Thomas. Though she had no kind words for his nephew, Harriet couldn't let Reverend Bruckner harbor guilt. "Thomas is not the reason we're going to Ladreville. I was intrigued from the moment I saw Mr. Ladre's advertisement for a schoolteacher." And that had been posted weeks before Thomas Bruckner had made her an object of the town's pity, telling everyone she was too hoity-toity for him to marry. "Did you know that Ladreville was founded by emigrants from Alsace? Most of them speak French and German with only a smattering of English." She was talking quickly now, trying to avoid thinking of the reasons she had decided her family should leave Fortune and travel more than a hundred miles to the Hill Country. "Living there will give my brothers and sisters a real-life education they could never get from books." That was true, but more importantly, they could start anew, for no one in Ladreville would know what had happened here.

The minister inclined his head, as if accepting Harriet's reasoning. "I've heard the Hill Country is beautiful. I must

confess, though, that I worry about you traveling all that way alone. Texas is a big state, you know. Dangerous too.”

She nodded. “We won’t be traveling alone. A family from Haven is going to San Antonio, and they’ve agreed to let us accompany them.”

“That’s prudent.”

Harriet was always prudent. Or at least she tried to be. “Mr. Ladre thought it would be a three-day journey on horseback. I’m allowing six because we’ll be pulling a wagon.” A wagon that even now was being loaded by her five enthusiastic but inexperienced siblings. She managed a bright smile. “Just think. By this time next week, my family will be in our new home.”

Once again the minister’s expression sobered. “I pray you’re not making a mistake, leaving this home.”

“I’m not.” Grandma always said that home is where your heart is. That was why Harriet knew Fortune was not her home and hadn’t been for a long time.



“There must be a mistake.” Blood drained from the petite blonde’s face, and her eyes darkened with what appeared to be horror.

Lawrence Wood gritted his teeth. There was a mistake, all right, and he was the one who’d made it. He must have been plumb loco to have come to Ladreville. It was one thing to agree to be the town’s sheriff. No one could deny that the years he’d spent with the Texas Rangers qualified him to catch cattle rustlers and deal with petty crimes. But mayor? He’d had no way of knowing that mayoral duties included dealing with a woman who regarded a perfectly

fine house as if it were a crumbling shack. She had seemed reasonable, if a bit brusque, when they'd met in his office, and she'd been almost cordial as they'd walked the two blocks to the house, her family trailing in their wagon. All that had changed when he pointed to the two-story house. What had she expected—a castle? There were none of those in Ladreville, Texas.

Lawrence gritted his teeth again as he forced his tone to remain civil. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but this is the only vacant building in Ladreville. It must be the one Michel Ladre intended for you." He should never have agreed to pick up the pieces when the town's founder left with no warning. That had been a mistake, a definite mistake.

The woman drew herself up to her full height, which couldn't have been more than five feet, and gave the house another appraising glance. Surely he was imagining apprehension in her expression. "It's unsuitable," she announced in a voice that was surprisingly melodic even though laced with asperity. "I specifically told Mr. Ladre that I required stone or brick accommodations for my family."

If that stipulation had been in the correspondence she'd sent Michel Ladre, Lawrence hadn't seen it. He'd read everything about the town's new schoolmarm, including the fact that Michel had promised her a furnished home suitable for her and her five siblings. Unfortunately, it appeared that Miss Harriet Kirk's definition of suitable differed from the previous mayor's.

Lawrence looked down the street, trying to marshal his annoyance. Michel Ladre had chosen well when he'd laid out the town that now bore his name. Though the buildings were only a dozen years old, the ancient trees gave them an

air of permanence, making it easy to believe that Ladreville had been here far longer than a decade.

“This house is stone,” he said as civilly as he could. He sure as shooting didn’t want to rile Miss Kirk, not when the town needed her so badly, but for the life of him, he couldn’t picture this woman in front of a classroom. Oh, it was true she looked as prim and proper as the teachers who had drummed learning into his head, with her silver blonde hair pulled back into a no-nonsense knot and spectacles perched in front of those gray eyes. The problem was, she was so tiny that her most difficult students would tower over her. How would she maintain discipline? If her pupils were as cantankerous as Lawrence and his classmates had been, she would have a tough row to hoe.

“It is only part stone,” she said in a voice that brooked no disagreement. “The second story is timber.”

Lawrence couldn’t dispute that. The building in question resembled many of the others in Ladreville and reflected the distinctly European architecture the town’s Alsatian emigrants preferred. When they’d left the Old Country, Ladreville’s French- and German-speaking residents had brought centuries of tradition with them. Though Lawrence deplored the enmity that occasionally divided the town, he admired the settlers’ fanciful house designs and their ability to farm even the rocky ground of the Hill Country. But, while he liked the half-timbered buildings and the ones like this that were a combination of stone and timber, it was clear that Miss Harriet Kirk did not.

“Ma’am . . .”

“Please do not address me as ma’am. I’ve already told you that my name is Harriet Kirk.”

It wasn't his imagination. The slight tremor in her voice told him she was distressed about something, and he would bet it wasn't his form of address. What could have bothered her? Lawrence gentled his tone as he said, "And you know my name is Lawrence Wood, but that doesn't change the situation. This is the sole place in town large enough for you and your siblings."

He looked at the wagon that held the five younger Kirks. Though their hair was golden, not silver, blond and their eyes blue rather than gray, they bore an unmistakable resemblance to Miss Kirk. Lawrence was no expert on children's ages, but he guessed the three boys were between ten and sixteen, while the youngest girl couldn't be more than seven or eight. She flashed him a sweet smile that turned his stomach inside out as he wondered if that was how Lizbeth would have looked at that age.

Tamping back the unwelcome thought, Lawrence focused on the other occupants of the wagon. The older girl, who ducked her head rather than meet his gaze, appeared to be full grown, maybe seventeen or eighteen. Miss Kirk, he knew from her correspondence with Michel, was twenty-three. Lizbeth would have been older than that. Lawrence took a deep breath as he tried to ease the pain that had lingered far too long. The sooner he got the Kirk family settled, the better. Once they were out of sight, the memories would fade.

He turned to the new schoolteacher. "If you don't like this house, the only alternative would be to board some of the children with other families. Perhaps the boys—"

"Absolutely not." The flash in her eyes underscored Miss Kirk's disapproval.

"Then, ma'am, er, Miss Kirk," Lawrence corrected himself

quickly, "I'm afraid this is where you'll be living. May I assist you in unloading the wagon?" Even though it was only mid-morning, the day promised to be another scorcher. Lawrence glanced down the street. Klaus could leave the livery for a few minutes. If he enlisted his help, they'd make short work of getting the Kirks settled.

Miss Kirk shook her head. The almost regal gesture appeared incongruous coming from a woman clothed in the ugliest dress Lawrence had ever seen. He gave the younger Kirks a quick glance. Their garb was unexceptional, but Miss Kirk's could only be described as deplorable. It wasn't simply that the mousy brown color failed to flatter her, but the design itself made her look dumpy. Lawrence's sister Lottie would be horrified.

Apparently oblivious to his assessment of her traveling suit, Miss Kirk shook her head. "No, thank you, Mr. Wood. My family and I can manage quite well."

He doubted that. Judging from the size of several of the crates in the back of the wagon, it would take more than three young boys to carry them. "If you say so."

"I do." Her eyes sparkled, and for the first time Lawrence thought he saw amusement in them, although he couldn't for the life of him figure out what she found amusing, any more than he could figure out what might have frightened her. "Are you an only child?"

It was absurd to feel as if he'd been ambushed. Miss Kirk had no way of knowing that her question deepened the pain that the sight of her youngest sister had revived. "I have an older sister named Lottie," he replied. That was the truth. If it wasn't the whole truth, well . . . Miss Kirk had no reason to know that. "Why did you think I was an only child?"

“Because if you were part of a family, you would recognize the power of sibling rivalry. You’d be amazed at how much my brothers and sisters can do. Size is not an indication of ability or strength.” The firmness in her voice left no doubt that she was a schoolmarm, accustomed to her word being law.

“If you say so.”

“I do.”

“Very well, then. I’ll return at half past four to escort you to the Bar C. Sarah and Clay Canfield have arranged a supper for you to meet their neighbors.” When she said nothing, Lawrence added, “Sarah was the town’s last teacher.”

Miss Kirk nodded as if she knew that. “I’m sure we can find our way alone. After all, we came from Fortune without your assistance.”

He ought to be glad to be rid of her. It was only foolish pride that made him resent her dismissal. “That may be true,” Lawrence admitted, “but Sarah was most particular that I escort you. My experience has been that Sarah Canfield is not a woman to cross.”

“Neither am I, Mr. Wood. Neither am I.”

“Oh, I can see that, Miss Kirk.” He touched his fingers to his hat brim as he nodded in farewell. “Until later.”

Lawrence spun on his heel and strode back toward his office, his long legs covering the distance in half the time it had taken to travel the opposite direction. Then he had tried to match his stride to Miss Kirk’s. There was no need for that now. What he needed was to put distance between himself and the town’s new teacher.

What on earth was wrong with the woman? Surely there was no reason for her to be so prickly. Miss Harriet Kirk might be a good teacher, and for the sake of Ladreville’s children Lawrence

hoped she was, but not even the most charitable person would describe her as friendly. Cold, aloof, possibly frightened. Those were the words he would have used, and the last surprised him.

Though he would have expected her to be apprehensive over moving to a new town, it appeared that what concerned Miss Kirk was the house, and that was a puzzlement. For his part, Lawrence couldn't imagine why anyone would object to the building. It was one of the largest and most attractive in Ladreville, situated on a quiet block of Rhinestrasse, only two blocks from the school. Miss Kirk didn't seem to notice that. All she noticed was the partially wooden exterior. For some reason that was enough to condemn the house.

Lawrence paused in front of the structure the town had designated as the mayor's residence and office, the one that was now his home. Undoubtedly Miss Kirk would approve of it, for all three stories were constructed of stone. Although he'd been aware of that, Lawrence had placed no significance on the building material, nor had he cared that it was considerably larger than he needed.

It was true that he hadn't been pleased with the house's proximity to the river. Though others, including Clay Canfield, who had pointed to it with pride, claimed the Medina was one of the most beautiful rivers in Texas, to Lawrence it was nothing more than water, and water was dangerous. Admittedly, after spending more nights than not sleeping under stars with a saddle for a pillow, anything that had four walls and a roof looked mighty good, but Lawrence would have been happier—a whole lot happier—if those four walls and roof had been located anywhere else. It wasn't simply the Medina, either. The last place on earth Lawrence Wood wanted to be was Ladreville, Texas.



“You didn’t have to be so mean to the mayor. He was only trying to help. Honestly, Harriet, sometimes I think you just don’t understand people.”

Harriet sighed as her sister’s words registered. She didn’t need more aggravation, but it appeared she was going to get it. Though Ruth was invariably shy around strangers, she rarely hesitated to voice her opinion when she disapproved of something Harriet had done. Right now it was clear Ruth disapproved of the way her sister had handled the housing situation and the man who had pitied her. Oh, he’d tried to hide it, but Harriet recognized pity when she saw it. Pity was what the townspeople had displayed when they’d stood in the Fortune cemetery as two coffins were lowered into the ground. Pity was what she had heard in their voices when she had moved herself and the younger children into a house that was far too small for six people. And pity was what Mr. Lawrence Wood had shown when he’d seen her reaction to this house. Harriet didn’t want pity. She wanted a place where her siblings would be safe.

“You weren’t supposed to be listening.” She tipped her head up ever so slightly as she chided her sister. Though five years younger, Ruth was a couple inches taller than Harriet and had inherited their mother’s beauty along with her golden hair and blue eyes. Harriet alone among the Kirk children had their father’s silvery hair and gray eyes. “I told you to keep the others occupied.”

Ruth shrugged. “That’s hard to do when you get riled. You both raised your voices.”

Grandma would have been appalled. When Harriet had been a child, her grandmother had insisted that a lady never

raised her voice and that she never, ever made a spectacle of herself outdoors. “The Kirk name is a proud one,” she had announced, her eyes steely with disapproval when she had discovered Harriet climbing a tree. “You must never let it be disgraced.” Harriet, it appeared, had done exactly that this morning. So much for setting positive examples for the younger children.

“I can’t undo the damage,” she said with another sigh, wondering whether the handsome blond man’s pity had been caused by her unmaidenly behavior. That had been one of Thomas’s complaints the day she refused his offer of marriage. He had claimed that, no matter how wealthy she was, Harriet would never catch a husband unless she adopted a more feminine demeanor. He had been wrong, of course. Not only was Harriet not wealthy, but she had no desire for a husband, if it meant one who turned out to be like Thomas Bruckner. Beauty, Grandma had claimed, was only skin deep. That had certainly been true of Thomas.

“Let’s see what the inside of the house looks like.” Harriet turned toward the wagon. As she’d expected, her brothers were slouched against the back, refusing to let Mary climb down. “Enough of that. Boys, you can start unloading our trunks. Leave them on the front porch until Ruth and I decide where they’re going. But first, help Mary down and give her the food basket.” Harriet smiled at her youngest sister, knowing how much the eight-year-old craved feeling useful. “I’m trusting you to keep the basket safe. It’s very important you make sure no one sneaks any of our dinner.”

Mary grasped the basket handle firmly before she flashed a warning look at her brothers. Though they wouldn’t be quiet, at least the four youngest children were occupied.

That would give Harriet and Ruth a chance to explore the house's interior.

Five minutes later, Harriet was back on the first floor, studying the parlor. Considerably more spacious than the one where she and her siblings had spent the last seven years, it boasted two wing chairs, a horsehair settee, and half a dozen upholstered chairs, all clustered around a brightly colored floral rug. Chintz curtains hung at the windows, their green pattern coordinating with the rug. It was an attractive room, large enough to accommodate all of them but not so fussy that Harriet would worry if the boys began to tussle. They could use a gathering room like this. Unfortunately, it was not possible.

"It'll be a bit cramped," she said with another sigh, "but if we move all the furniture out, there'll be room for three beds. Daniel won't be happy about sharing with Mary again, but it can't be helped."

Ruth pursed her lips. "I think you're being unreasonable. There are three perfectly good bedrooms on the second floor."

"And you know why we can't use them." It was a shame. If the exterior had been stone, the house would have been perfect. The first floor held a well-appointed kitchen along with a spacious dining room and the parlor. The second story, as Ruth had pointed out, boasted three large bedrooms. But nothing changed the fact that the second story was timber.

The sounds of raucous laughter followed by an ominous splintering of wood drifted in from the porch. When Harriet turned to learn what her brothers had broken, Ruth laid a hand on her arm. "There's no reason to think this house will burn," she said. "Besides, you saw the second stairway."

Harriet hadn't expected that. In addition to the interior

stairway in the back of the house, there was another set of stairs, this one on the exterior of the house. Because it was outside, it would provide a faster and safer egress from the second floor than relying on the main staircase.

“If something happened,” Ruth continued, “we could get out easily. I know you’re going to be busy getting everything ready for school, but I’ll make sure we all practice leaving. I’ll even wake the children up in the middle of the night the way you used to do.”

Everyone had hated that, but Harriet had had no choice. She had to ensure that her family knew what to do if their house caught fire. She couldn’t let them die the way Mother and Father had.

“I still don’t like the idea.” But, she admitted, it would be more comfortable for everyone if they used both the bedrooms and the parlor for their normally designated purposes.

“Please, Harriet.” Ruth tightened her grip on Harriet’s arm, keeping her from investigating the boys’ activity, despite Daniel’s nervous laugh and Jake’s clearly audible shushing. Whatever was happening on the porch was not good, and yet Ruth believed their sleeping arrangements to be more important than the damage the boys were wreaking. “I’ll share the back room with Mary,” she volunteered. “You can have the one in front for yourself.”

That was a major concession, for shy Ruth hated having others around her, even her younger sister. When they’d been crowded into the small house that had once been their grandparents’, she had slept on the floor in the dining room because it was the only place where she had had even a modicum of privacy.

Ignoring the boys’ hoots and the ominous silence that

followed them, Harriet considered her sister's proposition. If Ruth was willing to make what was for her a huge sacrifice, she must feel strongly about the safety of the second story. Perhaps it wasn't as dangerous as Harriet feared. The family would be less inclined to complain if they had more room, and there was no doubt about it: Harriet would enjoy having a room of her own. She knew from experience that it would be a welcome refuge after a day of teaching.

"All right, but we'll practice our exit before we go to supper today."

Ruth had the good sense to merely nod rather than grin triumphantly.

An hour later, the trunks had been dragged upstairs and everyone was gathered around the dining room table, acting as if it had been weeks rather than hours since their last meal. Mary preened over the fact that she'd kept the food safe, while the boys feigned ignorance of the broken crates. Fortunately, though the wood had been splintered, Harriet's precious books had suffered no damage, and so she had not scolded her brothers for their carelessness.

"I like this town," Mary said between bites of hard-boiled egg. "It's pretty."

Indeed it was. The half-timbered houses with flower-filled window boxes made it look like a scene from a storybook. That had been a pleasant surprise. Though Michel Ladre had touted the virtues of the town he'd founded, pointing out that it had French settlers as well as the Germans who were common in this part of Texas, he had neglected to mention Ladreville's charming architecture.

"The settlers came from Alsace. That's the area on the French and German border," Harriet said in her best schoolmarm

manner. “That’s why the houses are so different from the ones in Fortune.” With the exception of the house that her grandparents had constructed of stone to remind them of their home in England, Fortune’s other buildings were timber. “That’s also why the streets have unusual names.”

The settlers, apparently paying tribute to both their past and their present, had named the east-west streets after rivers: Rhinestrassen, rue de la Seine, and Potomac Street, while the north-south streets were called Hochstrasse and rue du Marché. As they’d ridden down Hochstrasse, the German version of High Street, on their entry into Ladreville, Harriet had been impressed with the cleanliness and prosperity of the town as well as the fanciful buildings that made her heart sing with joy. Looking at them, she felt as if she’d been transported inside the pages of one of her favorite books. That was more than she’d expected when she’d accepted the offer to teach here, for she had sought nothing more than a chance to start over in a town that knew nothing of the Kirk family history.

Ladreville was larger than Fortune, and, if Michel Ladre, the former mayor who had left so suddenly that he had not taken the time to notify her, had not exaggerated, was a more progressive community. Why, he had announced with pride in one of his letters, Ladreville had two churches, and as the town’s teacher, Harriet was expected to attend services at both, alternating between them. Though she would have preferred that her family have only one congregation, she had not told the mayor that lest it influence his decision. There were some things he did not need to know. Now that mayor was gone, replaced by Lawrence Wood, the big man who did not understand why this house was less than perfect.

“I don’t like the town,” Jake announced. It was a predictable reaction. At fourteen, Jake was convinced he was an adult and did not require Harriet in his life. That meant that anything his oldest sister did was wrong. “I don’t see why we had to leave Fortune.”

“You already know why. We had no future there. Besides,” she said with a stern look at Jake, “I’ll earn more money teaching here.” Ladreville offered its schoolteacher more than twice what she had been paid in Fortune. Perhaps more importantly, Jake would be away from the boys she had considered a pernicious influence.

“Money isn’t everything.”

“It is if you want to eat and have a roof over your head.” Though she had planned to wait a day or two before making her announcement, Jake’s belligerence goaded her into saying, “That’s the reason everyone’s going to work until school starts.”

Twelve-year-old Sam grinned. “I like to work.”

“Well, I don’t.” Once again, Jake’s response was predictable.

Ruth laid down her fork and looked at Harriet, a question in her eyes. “It depends on what you mean by work.”

“It’s simple. Everyone is going to contribute to this family.” No one would grow up like Father, believing that work was beneath his dignity. Harriet gave Jake a stern look before turning her attention to Sam and Daniel. “I imagine one of the farmers will hire you boys. There’s plenty to do in the fields.” And, unlike the people in Fortune, no one would look askance if the Kirk children took jobs. No one in Ladreville believed they were wealthy. Fortunately, there were no expectations—false or otherwise—here.

When Jake groaned, Daniel grinned as he said, “Maybe we can play with the animals. I liked those goats we saw.”

His brother shot him a scornful look. “Dummy. You don’t know anything. No one pays you to play with goats.”

Though Harriet had been refilling the children’s glasses, she plunked the pitcher on the table and fixed her gaze on Jake. “That’s quite enough, Jake. There’s no reason to upset your brother.” At ten, Daniel idolized his oldest brother, and the harsh words had brought a flush to his cheeks.

Harriet tried not to sigh. This was one of the problems she hoped their new home would resolve. Surely here Jake would revert to his former amiable self. The transformation, it appeared, would not be immediate.

“Why shouldn’t I upset him?” Jake demanded. “You upset me. First you drag me away from my friends, then you announce you’re selling me into slavery.”

On another day she might have been more patient, but today Harriet was tired and frustrated. It was one thing for Jake to be discontented, quite another for him to poison the others’ minds. “Not one more word out of you. Do you hear?”

Though his expression was sullen, Jake nodded. “Yes, ma’am.”

“What about me?” Mary asked, her little face contorted with confusion. “What am I going to do?”

“You and Ruth will take care of the house and cook the meals.”

The frown vanished, replaced by a brilliant smile. “Goody. Ruth can teach me to cook.”

It appeared that Mary was the only member of the Kirk family who liked Harriet’s plan, for worry lines appeared between Ruth’s eyes. “You mean I have to go to the market?”

Harriet had coddled Ruth, coddled all of them, for that matter, but it had to stop. "It's about time you did. Staying inside isn't good for you." Or for the rest of the family. Though Harriet knew her sister was only shy, someone in Fortune had started the rumor that Ruth was touched in the head, the result of which had been that the majority of Fortune's youngsters would no longer play with the Kirk children, lest they contract some unspeakable disease.

Ruth's lips tightened. "I wish we hadn't come here."

"Me too." Jake seconded his sister's declaration.

Though the others said nothing, Harriet sensed they were siding with Jake and Ruth. Had she made a mistake in believing they could start over here? It couldn't be a mistake. She wouldn't let it be, for there was no turning back.