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“WHAT ARE YOU DOING, PATRICK?”

Pam frowned, uneasy under his gaze.

“I enjoy looking at you. Life is for enjoying, Pam, and I enjoy you.”

“Is life for enjoying, Patrick?”

He nodded. “I decided that it was some years ago, when I had to reevaluate my life after a big disappointment.”

So he, too, had known disappointment. Pam was curious, but she decided to keep the discussion impersonal.

“Disappointments that change our lives stay with us. At least, the lingering effects do.”

“Right now, I don’t want to think about past disappointments. It’s Friday night, I’m out with the loveliest woman in town, and all’s right with my world. How about yours?”

She warmed under his heated gaze. “My world’s pretty fine right now, too.”

He nodded toward the crowded room. “What do you say we blow this joint? I’d like to be alone with you.”

That sent her blood racing, but not with fright. With anticipation. Taking his hand in hers, she pulled him up and headed toward the door.

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stuffed book."

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for her contribution to this work.

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BRIGHT HOPES

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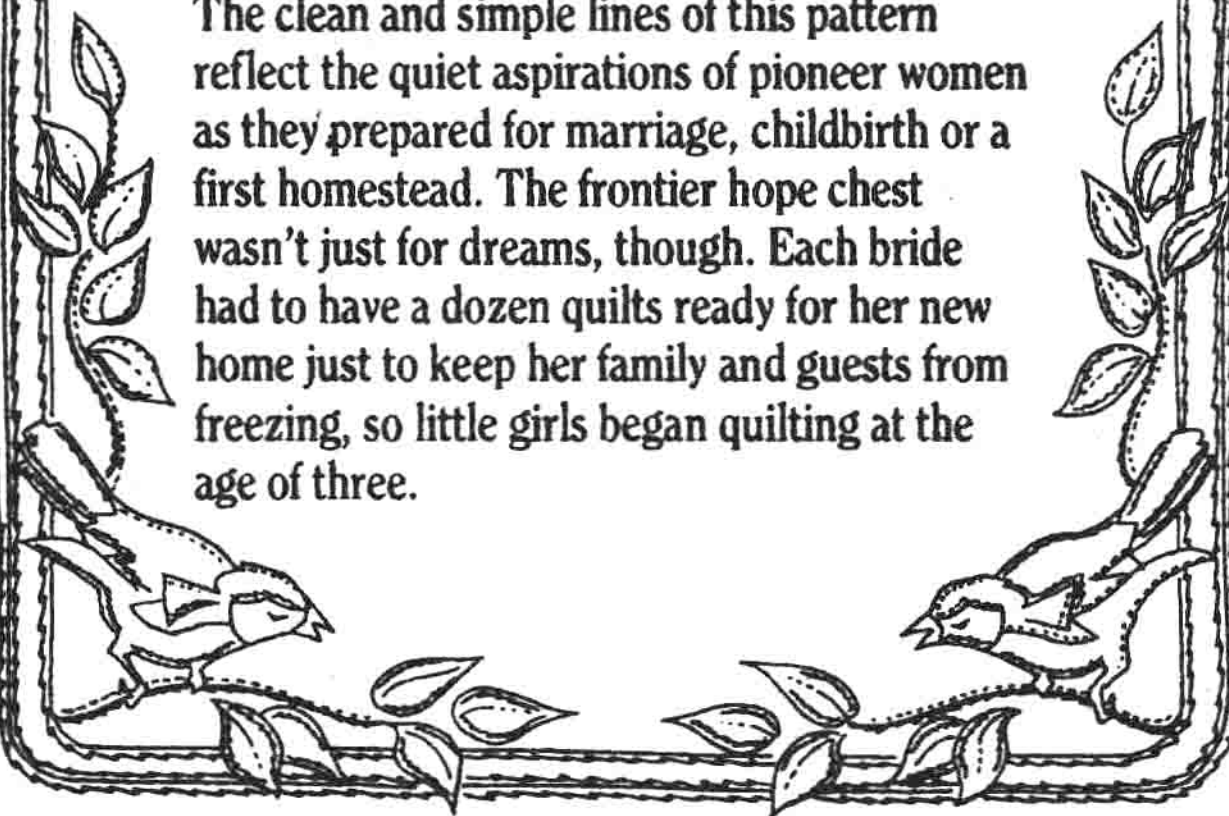
Marisa Carroll

TYLER

American women have always used the art quilt as a means of expressing their views on life and as a commentary on events in the world around them. And in Tyler, quilting has always been a popular communal activity. So what could be a more appropriate theme for our book covers and titles?

BRIGHT HOPES

The clean and simple lines of this pattern reflect the quiet aspirations of pioneer women as they prepared for marriage, childbirth or a first homestead. The frontier hope chest wasn't just for dreams, though. Each bride had to have a dozen quilts ready for her new home just to keep her family and guests from freezing, so little girls began quilting at the age of three.



Dear Reader,

Welcome to Harlequin's Tyler, a small Wisconsin town whose citizens we hope you'll soon come to know and love. Like many of the innovative publishing concepts Harlequin has launched over the years, the idea for the Tyler series originated in response to our readers' preferences. Your enthusiasm for sequels and continuing characters within many of the Harlequin lines has prompted us to create a twelve-book series of individual romances whose characters' lives inevitably intertwine.

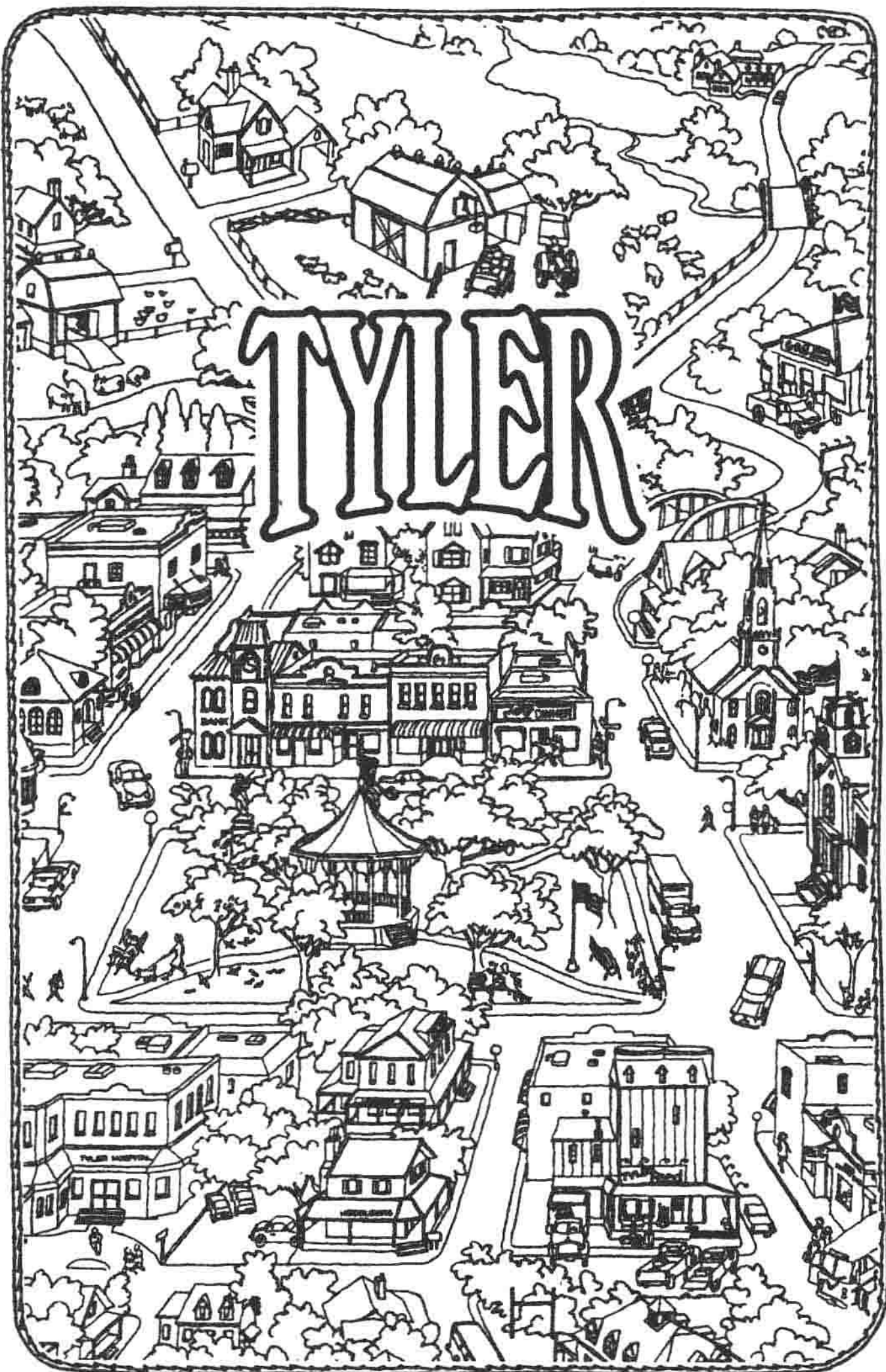
Tyler faces many challenges typical of small towns, but the fabric of this fictional community created by Harlequin will be torn by the revelation of a long-ago murder, the details of which will evolve right through the series. This intriguing crime will culminate in an emotional trial that profoundly affects the lives of the Ingallses, the Barons, the Forresters and the Wochecks.

Renovations have begun on the old Timberlake resort lodge as the series opens, and the lodge will also attract the attention of a prominent Chicago hotelier, a man with a personal interest in showing Tyler folks his financial clout.

Marge is waiting with some home-baked pie at her diner, and policeman Brick Bauer might direct you down Elm Street if it's patriarch Judson Ingalls you're after. The Kelseys run the loveliest boardinghouse in town, and you'll find everything you need at Gates Department Store. Pam Casals gives hometown favorite son, Patrick Kelsey, a run for his money when she hires on as Tyler High's new football coach. So join us in Tyler, once a month, for the next eleven months, for a slice of small-town life that's not as innocent or as quiet as you might expect, and for a sense of community that will capture your mind and your heart.

Marsha Zinberg
Editorial Coordinator, Tyler

TYLER



This book is dedicated to Lynn Soriano,
whose strength, determination and zest for life
inspire all who know her.

CHAPTER ONE

"A WOMAN FOOTBALL COACH?" Patrick Kelsey laughed out loud. "Come on, Miss Mackie. You've got to be kidding!"

Josephine Mackie sat back in her desk chair, adjusted her round, rimless glasses on her long, thin nose and looked up at the tall gym teacher. "Why, Patrick, don't tell me you're a chauvinist. Not with that superachiever mother of yours and three charming sisters."

Patrick ran a hand through his short, dark hair. That was the one drawback to growing up and living in a small town like Tyler, Wisconsin. Everyone knew you, your family and most of your business. Miss Mackie had been principal of Tyler High School when he was a freshman twenty years ago. She wasn't meddling so much as knowledgeable—about everyone. He flashed her what he hoped was a disarming smile.

"Not me. It's just that . . . well, these are guys, Miss Mackie. Young men, really. There'll be problems, like the locker room, for instance. They're going to hate having a female around when they're changing."

"I don't imagine she'll shower with the boys, do you?"

Patrick reached for patience, never his strong suit. "How about the game itself? I never heard of a woman who knows football inside and out."

"Really? Ever hear of Phyllis George, to name one? I thought she did a highly commendable job, and on national television at that. And now there's Pam Casals. Have you read her credentials?"

Patrick felt his irritation grow as he paced her small office. "I know she was a runner in the Olympics."

"A little more than a mere runner. She won a silver medal when she was seventeen, then returned and won a gold medal at twenty-one."

"Okay, so she can run. But does she know football?"

Disappointed in his reaction, Miss Mackie nevertheless continued unruffled. "She went on to become an exhibition performer, earned a degree in phys ed, was head coach at a college in the east and an Olympic coach for a year in Seoul. For a young woman who's just turned thirty, I would call that an impressive list of accomplishments."

Stopping in front of her desk, Patrick braced his hands on the edge and leaned forward. "I repeat, does she know football?"

"I would think so, having coached football at the college level. Surely she can manage high school boys." Josephine Mackie felt her gaze soften as she studied Patrick's stubborn features. She thought she knew exactly why he was so upset, and chose her words carefully.

"I realize that when I asked you to join our coaching staff ten years ago, Patrick, your dream was to one

day be football coach here at your alma mater. I believe you took on coaching basketball temporarily, thinking that when Dale McCormick retired, you'd shift over to football. But you've done such a tremendous job—guiding the basketball team from class B to class A status and giving us a championship season for the past two years. We don't want to lose you in that capacity."

Patrick's blue eyes were serious as he straightened. He'd figured that was what she'd thought, and the rest of the town, too. But they were wrong.

He'd been a star quarterback during his years at Tyler, and at the small Midwestern college he'd attended while earning his teaching degree. Then there'd been problems—serious problems—and he'd had to rearrange his dreams. When he returned to his hometown, he'd been pleased to be asked to coach basketball and assist Coach McCormick occasionally in football. Even now, what he really wanted was what was best for the Tyler High boys. But he knew that changing the thinking of a whole group of people who had their minds made up wasn't something he could do without revealing more than he felt comfortable doing.

"Miss Mackie, I'm perfectly happy coaching basketball. You're aware, I'm sure, that many of the boys on the football team also play basketball. I know these guys, and they aren't going to accept a woman coach."

She narrowed her pale gray eyes and zeroed in. "They will if you encourage them to accept her."

Settling into the old wooden chair facing her desk, Patrick scowled. "I don't know if I can do that, in good conscience."

Propping her elbows on her desk, Miss Mackie leaned forward. "Patrick, I don't have to tell you that this town gets greatly involved in our school athletics. And the football team's been on a long losing streak. Dale McCormick was a good coach once, back when you were playing for him. But for some time now, he's been merely coasting along, counting the days to retirement."

"I agree," Patrick admitted.

"The school board felt we needed new blood, someone to get the boys all stirred up. Of our six applicants, Pam Casals is by far the most qualified. I've talked with her on the phone and she's personable and intelligent. I've hired her on a one-season trial basis and she's arriving next week. Won't you open your mind and give her a chance?"

Miss Mackie was a good administrator, her judgment usually on target, Patrick felt. This time, though, she was wrong. "I have nothing against this particular woman, you understand. I just don't feel *any* woman can coach football. It's too rugged a game, too physical." He picked up Pam Casals' file and flipped it open, to where her picture was clipped to the inside front cover. "See how small she looks? She could get hurt out there."

Josephine Mackie sighed. Patrick Kelsey was an instructor who seldom gave her problems. He was making up for lost time today. Glancing at her watch, she stood, realizing she could debate this issue with Pat-

rick all day and neither would bend. "It's only the first of August. We have several weeks before classes start. During that time, we'll be observing Pam and her training and practice methods closely."

Picking up her purse, she walked around the desk. The school was deserted; she'd come in to get a head start on some paperwork and had been somewhat surprised when Patrick cornered her. "Why don't you study her file a bit more and then leave it on my desk? I have an appointment."

The gentleman in him had Patrick rising and smiling at the slim principal. "I don't mean to give you a hard time. But you know what these guys mean to me."

She smiled back at him. "They mean a great deal to me, too."

Patrick nodded. "You off to a board meeting?"

Josephine found herself blushing as she patted her sparse gray hair. "No, actually I have an appointment at the Hair Affair."

He grinned at her. "Big date tonight, Miss Mackie?"

Girlishly, she pursed her lips, turned from him and opened the door, choosing to ignore his question. "Please lock up when you leave," she said, then hurried down the hallway.

Chuckling, Patrick sat back down, wondering why Miss Mackie had never married. Too wrapped up in her job, he supposed. Few women could juggle work and children, and still maintain a happy marriage. His mother, Anna Kelsey, was about the only one he knew of. But she was one of a kind.

He opened the file again. Pam Casals did not look like his idea of a football coach. From the picture, she appeared to be of medium height and quite slender, with the muscular legs of a runner. Her shoulder-length brown hair, wind-tossed, framed an oval face, and her large brown eyes gazed directly into the camera. She didn't appear aggressive or arrogant, but there was a hint of determination to the angle of her chin. Still, if this woman could handle that rowdy group of high school boys, then he was the Easter Bunny, Patrick thought with a frown.

Quickly he read through her file. Like millions of people, he was always drawn to watch the Olympics. He'd heard countless stories of the dedication, perseverance, sacrifices and sheer guts it took to win a medal. She was a winner, he'd give her that. But could she make the Tyler boys into winners?

Doubtful, he thought, closing the file. He knew these boys better than anyone, certainly better than an outsider. And a woman at that. He would give her a chance, but he would remain in the picture. He'd keep an eye on her, check out her methods, look out for his boys. He'd mention to a couple of the guys—Ricky and B.J. and Moose—that he'd be interested in knowing what Coach Casals did during their training sessions.

It wasn't really spying, Patrick told himself as he placed Pam's file on the principal's desk. It was protecting.

Digging in the pocket of his jeans for his keys, Patrick left the office whistling.

A RAINBOW. Pam Casals glanced to the right as she drove along the country road, and smiled. Slowing, she pulled to a stop by a wooden fence bordering pastureland. Shifting into park, she slid out of her sporty white convertible and went to lean on the weathered fence.

It had been raining that morning when she set out from Chicago, a light drizzling summer rain. Wisconsin being north of Illinois, it wasn't quite as warm here. Fall would be along all too soon.

The rainbow shimmered in the sky, where the last of the clouds were moving off to the east. Rainbows were a sign of good luck—Pam remembered reading that somewhere. She certainly hoped so. It was time for a bit of luck.

On an impulse, she made a wish. "I wish that I might find happiness in Tyler," she said aloud.

A small herd of cows grazing nearby, brown shapes on a field of still-damp green grass, didn't even glance her way. She breathed in deeply, air so fresh it almost hurt to inhale. No automobile fumes, no pollution or even smoke. On the drive she'd passed dairy farms, many with large wooden barns, as well as cornfields, orchards and several horse farms. She'd taken the scenic route instead of the highway, enjoying the twisting rural roads and the lakes tucked in among rolling green hills. The clean country atmosphere was a welcome change from the city she'd left behind.

She'd left a lot of things behind, or so she hoped. Pain and confusion and doubt. Frustration and anger and broken dreams. And a shattered love affair. A few good things, too, like her father, Julian Casals, still

living in the family home in a suburb of Chicago. And her two married brothers, Don and Ramon, who'd taught her so much more than football.

Pam swung around, leaning her elbows on the fence. She was only a short distance from Tyler, and she hoped there were more two-lane roads like this one around. It was a perfect place to run—smooth black-top, very little traffic. And run she must, while she could. For her health and her mental well-being and the sheer, physical pleasure of it.

A low-throated bark drew her attention to her car, and she grinned. Her old, white, long-haired English sheepdog sat in the back seat, his head cocked in her direction, his pink tongue hanging low. "All right, Samson," she said, slipping behind the wheel again. "I know you're impatient to get going." With another glance at the rainbow, Pam shifted into drive. "I'm anxious to check out our new home, too."

Flipping on the radio as she pulled away, she heard Willie Nelson's unmistakable voice ring out. "On the road again..."

Pam glanced back at Samson, whose ears were blowing in the breeze. "That's us, pal. On the road again." Laughing for no apparent reason except a sudden happy sense of anticipation, she headed for Tyler.

IT WAS EXACTLY two o'clock when she arrived in the middle of town. There was a central square—an open, grassy area with huge old oak trees and well-maintained flower beds. The downtown business section consisted of a few blocks of two-story brick