

WELCOME TO

TYLER

WHIRLWIND

NANCY MARTIN

A

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**Special thanks and acknowledgment to Nancy Martin
for her contribution to this work.**

**Special thanks and acknowledgment to Joanna Kosloff
for her contribution to the concept for the Tyler series.**

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"I'M NOT LEAVING TIMBERLAKE, SO FORGET IT!"

Cliff couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"I need a place to crash for a while," Liza continued. "I'm not here because of you, Forrester, so stop thinking I'm hot for your body or something, because I'm not—even if you're hot for mine!"

"You are the most exasperating woman—"

"Oh, cool down," Liza said with an impish grin. "I think you could use some exasperation. You've gotten too comfortable up here all by yourself." She tossed her head pertly. "I've heard about you, Forrester."

"Exactly what have you heard?"

"You've got quite a reputation around town. You're a hermit or a lone wolf. Some people even think you're dangerous."

A few things began to clear up in Cliff's mind. "That's why you've come dancing in here this way, isn't it, you get your kicks out of dangerous men."

"Where I get my kicks is none of your business," she replied.

"I'm curious about you, that's all. You're a mystery man, Forrester, and I love a mystery."

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TYLER

WHIRLWIND

Nancy Martin

BRIGHT HOPES

Pat Warren

WISCONSIN WEDDING

Carla Neggers

MONKEY WRENCH

Nancy Martin

BLAZING STAR

Suzanne Ellison

SUNSHINE

Pat Warren

ARROWPOINT

Suzanne Ellison

BACHELOR'S PUZZLE

Ginger Chambers

MILKY WAY

Muriel Jensen

CROSSROADS

Marisa Carroll

COURTHOUSE STEPS

Ginger Chambers

LOVEKNOT

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?

WHIRLWIND

This pattern, which resembles a child's whirligig toy, captures the unceasing prairie wind that was the bane of many frontier women's existence. The vivid triangles and squares dancing against a contrasting background are reminiscent of the dust devils that whipped across the untamed plains.

Dear Reader,

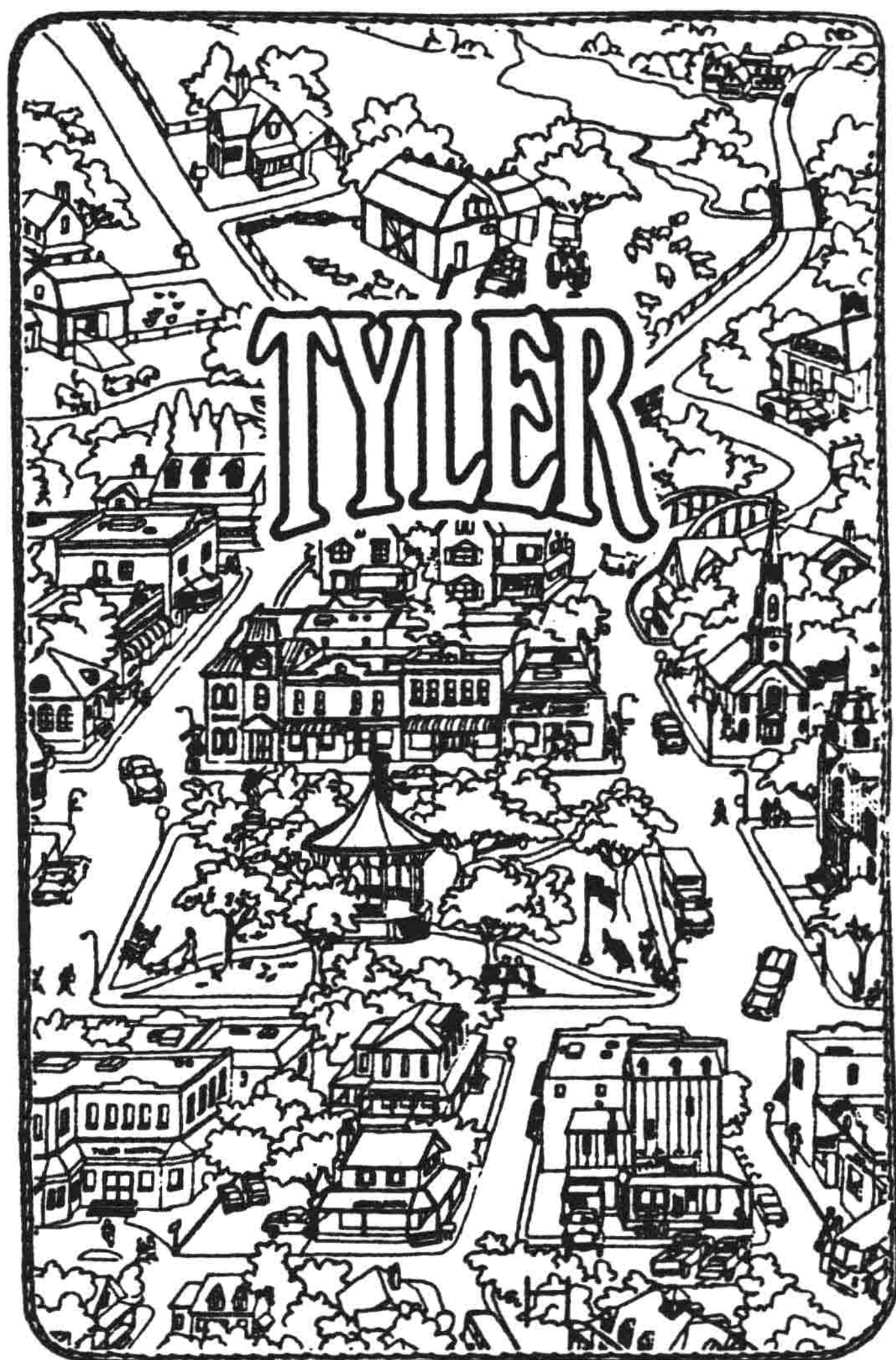
Welcome to Harlequin's Tyler, a small Wisconsin town whose citizens we hope you'll soon come to know and love. Like many of the innovative publishing concepts Harlequin has launched over the years, the idea for the Tyler series originated in response to our readers' preferences. Your enthusiasm for sequels 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 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 profoundly affect 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. When spitfire Liza Baron returns to town, the fireworks begin. So join us in Tyler, once a month, for the next twelve 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



CHAPTER ONE

FAILURE DROVE Liza Baron home.

She went one cool summer night in a vintage Thunderbird convertible, the last personal possession she still owned free and clear. She started out in a rage in Chicago about midnight and drove toward no particular destination at first. It just felt good to go, with her hair whipping in the wind and the radio blasting rock and roll.

But around four in the morning, after aimless driving along highways she'd never known existed, Liza found herself in Wisconsin just ten miles from Tyler. After that, it was like automatic pilot. In the dark, she drove the white car up to the lake and her grandfather's lodge, which she figured would be empty. Liza didn't want to see anybody. The last thing she needed was a damned heart-to-heart with some well-meaning family member. Or worst of all, her mother.

Liza just wanted to be alone.

The sky began to lighten as she turned into the lane marked by two brick columns and started up the hillside under the canopy of century-old trees. The air was hushed. Magical, really. A dreamy white mist eddied upward from the lake and engulfed the car in a kind of swirling cloud. Someone who didn't know the road might have plunged off into the trees or blundered into

the rocks, but Liza drove confidently, her heart suddenly beating fast with anticipation. The Thunderbird's tires crunched and spun in the gravel at the turns, until at last the car burst out of the mist, and the rooftops of the lodge appeared through the trees.

Timberlake, it had been called in its heyday. A grand name for a grand place—a summer house, a hunting lodge, the site of lavish prewar entertainments—and a few romantic intrigues, if the family tales could be believed. At night they used to turn on the tiny lights they'd strung through the oak trees and barbecue whatever game had been killed that day. Once there'd been a wedding on the veranda, and a swing band of ten played in the grand hall long into the night.

Liza caught her first glimpse of the lodge's twin chimneys and her throat constricted queerly. They were crumbling now, and loose shingles hung crookedly on the steep-pitched roof and five gables. She saw the sagging shutters and dozens of ghostly black windows, some with broken panes. Seeing it all for the first time in many lonely years caused a great swell of sadness to sweep up from inside Liza Baron, blinding her for a split second.

Which was when the T-bird slammed into a fallen tree.

Liza fought for control, crying out as the car thumped over a branch and crashed straight into the tree trunk that lay across the drive. The impact threw Liza against the steering wheel, knocking the breath from her body.

"Dammit!"

She killed the Thunderbird's rumbling engine with a shaky hand, and suddenly there was no sound—just the majestic, eerie silence of the forest and the forgotten lodge. The cool, soundless air enveloped Liza. The crisp scent of pine surrounded her, washing her with memories. She sat for a minute, wondering if her heart had stopped, if the whole world had ceased and she'd been transported to a magic place between heaven and earth. A place for ghosts.

But then Liza tasted blood, and she checked the rearview mirror to see how badly she'd cut her lip. The moment snapped, and she felt normal again.

"Not bad," she said to her reflection. Reaching for the door handle, she muttered wryly, "As usual, you do everything in a big way, Liza."

She got out of the car to have a look at the damage. The convertible's nose was a mess, badly dented and half-embedded in the fragrant branches of the fallen tree. Liza tottered a few steps in her high-heeled suede shoes and climbed onto the trunk of the car despite a very short skirt. Perched there, leaning one elbow against a white tail fin, she crossed her long legs, lit her last cigarette and contemplated the ruin of the lodge. And her own life.

"You're fired," Sara Lillienstein had said, rather helplessly it seemed, as she sat behind her antique desk in Chicago. "I'm sorry, Liza, but you just don't fit in here."

"But I've been doing my best work!"

"We're losing money on your projects, dear. You're just too slow when it comes to the details."

"But the details are everything!"

Sara sighed. It was an argument they'd had a dozen times before. "Take my advice, Liza, will you? Stop fighting your own personality. Take your skills to a smaller place. Try opening your own firm. Why not? You're very talented. I'm sure you'll be a success someday. But not here. At heart, you're still a small-town girl."

A small-town girl? Liza should have laughed at such a suggestion, except the whole situation wasn't funny at all. Nobody knew how desperately she wanted to escape Tyler—the town, the attitudes, the life-style and, yes, her own family. Oh, she'd cut those ties with a very sharp knife indeed, made her own way through school, scraped by in one lousy job after another until landing the right spot at the top interior design firm in Chicago. Once there, she'd fought her way into some of the best assignments.

And blown it.

Now, it seemed, her subconscious mind had brought her home. Close, anyway. The old lodge was easier to handle than the staidly elegant Victorian house in town where the whole clan was ensconced now. Yes, the abandoned lodge suited Liza's state of mind. It was big enough and empty enough to throw a first-class breakdown in, and nobody needed to know.

As the dawn grew lighter, Liza smoked her cigarette down to the filter and threw it into the tall grass by the edge of the lane.

"Careless, aren't you?"

His voice shattered the moment, a low growl less than three yards away, behind her. Liza whirled around and cursed, scrambling off the car to meet her assailant head-on.

“Who the hell are you?”

A dark figure stepped out of the dappled shadows. He had materialized soundlessly from the forest and stood larger than life on the drive. Having bent into the dewy grass, he'd come up with her still-smoldering cigarette, which he held out to Liza as if it were Exhibit A. “You want to start a forest fire?”

“Damn,” Liza said, still instinctively clutching her fist to her chest as if to start her breathing again. “I didn't hear you coming. What did you do? Beam down from a spaceship?”

He was tall and toughly built, wearing a shabby, unzipped mountain parka over a faded black T-shirt and jeans. In one large, capable hand he carried a fishing rod and a string of slick bass, the latter dangling from his grip. With the other hand he extended the cigarette, but he might as well have been pointing a lethal weapon at her. His menacing body language said as much.

His face was arresting—sharply cut around the jaw and cheekbones, with the rest of his features blunt. A few steely-gray hairs to the left of his widow's peak blended into the remainder of his thick, somewhat shaggy dark hair, combining with the lines in his face to allow Liza to guess his age somewhere just shy of forty. He was probably ten or twelve years her senior.

It was his voice rather than his appearance that most commanded Liza's attention, however. It began as a powerful rumble deep in his chest and finished in a controlled, deceptively quiet growl. It was the voice of a man who'd never need to shout to make his point.

He said "I don't like your cigarettes in my grass, honey. In fact, I don't like you here at all, so turn your fancy car around and get the hell out, all right?"

"*Your grass?*"

"I'm in no mood for conversation this morning, so—"

"Neither am I, honey," Liza snapped. "But I'd like an explanation just the same. Who are you? Does my grandfather know you're trespassing up here?"

"Grandfather," he repeated, and something dawned in his hooded, black eyes—something akin to recognition as he looked into her face for the first time. His eyes were very dark and full of shadows, quirking at the corners as he studied her standing there in the first break of sunlight.

"I see," he said, dropping the cigarette onto the gravel and grinding it out with the heel of his boot. "I suppose you're Liza."

That surprised the heck out of her, but Liza put up a brave front just the same. "How do you know my name?"

"Educated guess," he replied, meeting her gaze again with a penetrating, sidelong look. "Your grandfather talks about you. Liza's the reckless one. The black sheep. The pain in the ass with the smart mouth."

"Well," she said tartly, "it's nice to know I'm remembered kindly in my old hometown. What else do you know about me?"

He seemed for a moment on the verge of telling her, but something held him back. He leaned his fishing rod against the passenger door of the T-bird and dug