

CIMARRON CREEK  
TRILOGY • 2



AMANDA  
CABOT

  
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Amanda Cabot, *A Borrowed Dream*  
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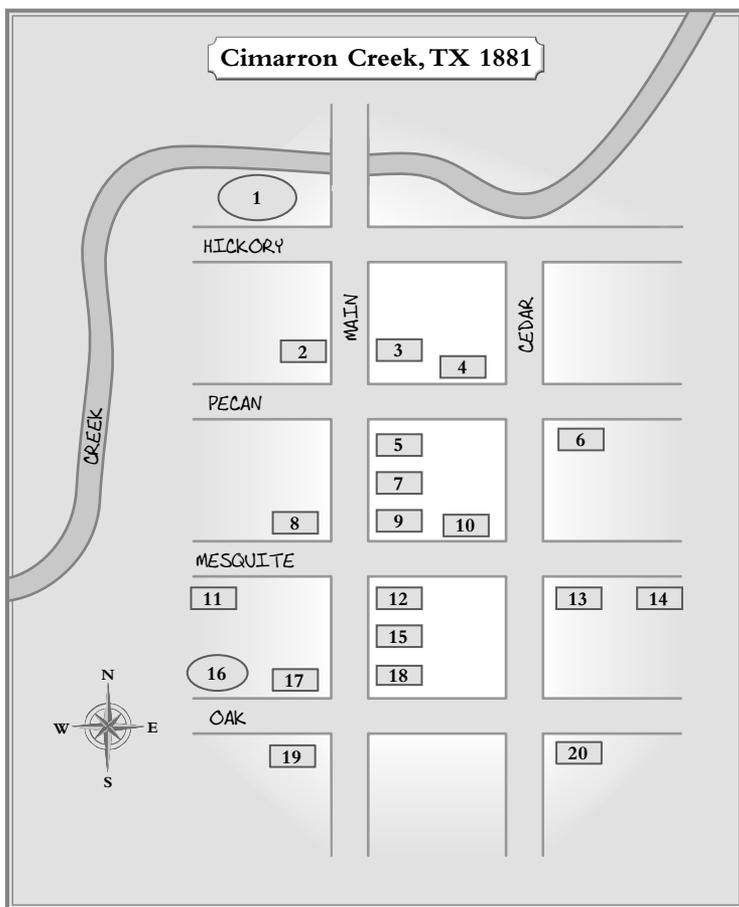
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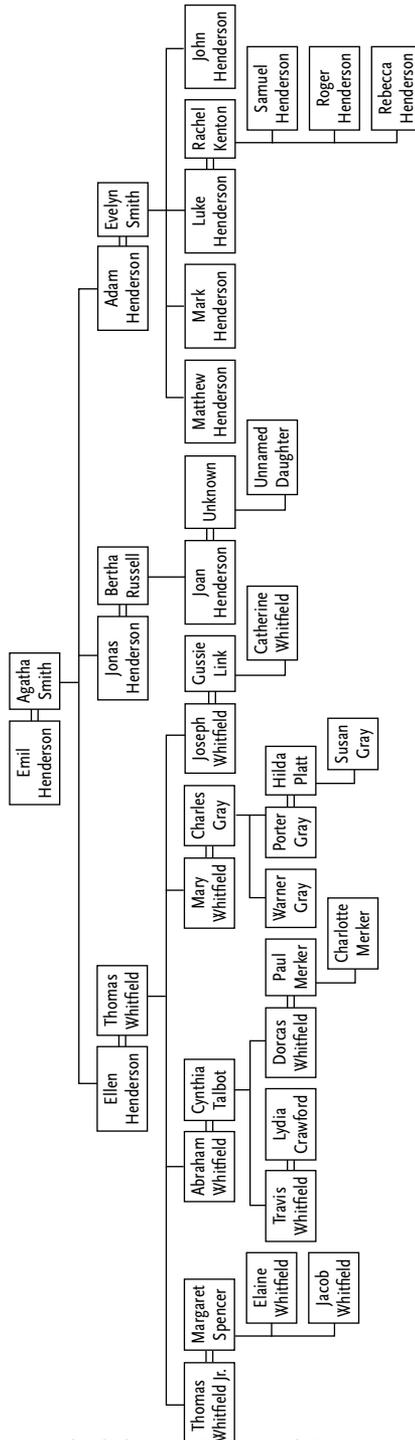
For the members of  
Front Range Christian Fiction Writers.  
It's a privilege to share learning, laughter,  
and an occasional lunch with you.  
Can you believe it's been ten years?





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|--|--|
| 1 – Town park                                      | 12 – Sheriff's office and jail                       |
| 2 – Silver Spur Saloon                             | 13 – Jacob Whitfield's home (a<br>Founder's house)   |
| 3 – Livery stable                                  | 14 – Charles, Mary, and Warner Gray's<br>home        |
| 4 – Vacant house                                   | 15 – Mayor's office/post office                      |
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| 6 – Lydia and Travis's home (a<br>Founder's house) | 17 – Church  |
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| 10 – Opal and Edgar's home                         |  |
| 11 – Catherine's home                              |  |

## Descendants of Emil Henderson





**JANUARY 3, 1881**

**I**t was only a dream. Catherine Whitfield fumbled with the lamp on her bedside table, taking a deep breath as light filled the room. There was no reason to be upset.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and took another deep breath. This was far from the first time she'd dreamed that she was in Paris, walking along the left bank of the Seine toward Notre Dame. She'd had that dream many times over the years, but never before had it ended this way. In the past, she had awakened with a smile on her face. Tonight . . .

Catherine took another breath, trying to calm the trembling of her hands as she opened her watch and stared at it. Though she had thought it no later than midnight, it was already five in the morning, only an hour earlier than she would normally rise. While school did not begin until 8:00, pupils started straggling in by 7:30, and she needed to have the building open and warm before the first one arrived.

It was foolish to go back to bed. With the memory of the dream reverberating through her brain, she'd never fall asleep. She might as well get dressed. Reaching for the skirt and shirt-

waist she'd laid out the night before, she paused. Was that the reason her dream had turned into a nightmare? Was she distressed over the thought of putting away her mourning clothes so soon?

Catherine shook her head as she fastened the last button. Mama wouldn't have expected her to wear black for a full year. She knew that Catherine had loved her and that in her heart she would mourn her for far more than a year. It was only the fact that others in Cimarron Creek might not be so progressive that had kept Catherine in unrelieved black for four months. Her pupils would appreciate the white shirtwaist and the navy skirt.

No, her clothing choice wasn't the reason the dream had ended the way it did. More likely it was the result of the stomach ailment that had plagued her all weekend. She had thought she was fully recovered last night, but perhaps some of the illness had lingered.

Catherine twisted her hair into a low chignon, forcing a smile to her lips. She wouldn't think about the dream. Instead, she'd make breakfast, then spend the extra time at the schoolhouse, preparing for the week ahead.

She had just removed the grounds from the coffeepot when the kitchen door swung open.

"Are you all right, Catherine?"

She turned at the familiar voice, and for the first time since she'd wakened, she felt peace settle over her. "I am now that you're here," she said as she hugged her early-morning visitor.

Though Lydia Crawford Whitfield had been gone less than two weeks, Catherine had missed her more than she'd expected. From the day she'd arrived in Cimarron Creek, the pretty blonde who was now the sheriff's wife had been Catherine's bulwark, her confidante, the sister she had always wanted, and with her away visiting her husband's family, Christmas had been dismal for Catherine. The new year was supposed to have been better,

but getting sick had not been an auspicious beginning, and then there was the dream.

Though Lydia settled into a chair while Catherine filled two cups with coffee, she kept her gaze fixed on Catherine.

“Tell me about your trip,” Catherine urged. Lydia’s stories would help banish the memories that refused to be dislodged from Catherine’s brain.

Her friend shook her head. “Not until I know you’re all right. I woke this morning feeling that you needed me, and then Opal mentioned that you missed church yesterday,” Lydia said, referring to the woman who helped her run the town’s confectionary.

Catherine wasn’t surprised that Lydia’s partner had noticed her absence or that she’d reported it to Lydia. Even when the candy store wasn’t open, the Cimarron Creek grapevine was active.

“I was sick all weekend,” she admitted. “I don’t know what it was, but I couldn’t keep anything in my stomach. Fortunately, I’m fine now. I even managed to eat a bit of toast while the coffee was brewing.”

“You don’t look fine. Are you sure you should go to school today? You might still be contagious.”

“It’s not that.” Catherine took a sip of the coffee, debating how much to tell her friend. “I had a dream—more like a nightmare—and I can’t forget it.”

Lydia stretched out her hand and clasped Catherine’s, the warmth of her palm reassuring Catherine as much as the concern she saw in her friend’s eyes did.

“Tell me about it,” Lydia said.

Though she was reluctant to put the dream into words, perhaps sharing it with Lydia would lessen its power over her. “I was in Paris, walking along the Seine,” she said slowly.

“That’s a good dream, isn’t it? You’ve told me that’s been your dream for years.”

“It was different this time. As I got closer to Notre Dame, I saw a woman staring at me. She looked a bit like me—the same dark hair and eyes—but she was taller and older, and her face . . .” Catherine shuddered, remembering how helpless she’d felt. “I’ve never seen such despair. When she turned away, I started to run toward her, but no matter how fast I ran, I never got any closer. I kept trying and trying. When she looked at me again and saw that I was coming, she . . .”

Catherine closed her eyes, not wanting to continue, but knowing she must. She forced her eyelids open and faced her friend. “Oh, Lydia, it was horrible. She jumped into the Seine.”

“And you woke up.” Though Lydia’s words were matter-of-fact, Catherine saw the concern in her expression.

“Yes.”

“So you don’t know if someone rescued her.”

Lydia was trying to lessen the horror of the dream, but she couldn’t. No one could.

“No one rescued her. I’m sure of that. What I don’t know is why my dream ended that way and why I couldn’t help her. There must be a reason.”

Lydia shook her head as she stirred sugar into her coffee. “Not all dreams are messages.”

“But some are. Think about how many there are in the Bible.”

Though she’d told herself she was going to put the dream out of her mind, Catherine had been unable to do that. While she’d ground the coffee and boiled water, the memory of the desperate woman had haunted her. She’d never before had a dream like this, one that lingered in her mind once she awakened. Memories of happy dreams would flit in and out, making her smile, but this one hovered, filling her with a sense of dread.

“Maybe this is God’s way of telling me I should give up my dream of visiting Europe.”

“And maybe it’s not. Maybe it’s just a dream.” Lydia was

silent for a moment, sipping her coffee with a contemplative expression. “I know you’re upset, but I think you need to focus on happier things. Promise me you’ll try.”

When Catherine nodded, Lydia said, “It seems we missed a big event at church yesterday.”

“You mean Reverend Dunn didn’t give his normal a-new-year-means-new-beginnings sermon?”

“Oh, he did, but I’m not sure how many people listened.” Lydia’s lips curved in a smile. “Opal was bursting with the news that we have a new family in the area. She didn’t get to meet them, but Mrs. Moore stopped her after the service to say she was hired to keep house for them. It seems the man bought the Saylor ranch. The way Mrs. Moore tells the story, he’s from Oklahoma and wanted a ranch of his own. Apparently, he’s a widower.”

Catherine couldn’t help smiling at her friend’s eager recounting of the news. “You’re starting to sound like Aunt Bertha with her long stories.” The woman who’d been Catherine’s great-aunt had been famous for her monologues. “Is there a special reason I need to know about this rancher?”

Lydia nodded. “According to Opal, he’s a good-looking young man. She’s sure every mother with a single daughter will be inviting him to supper.”

But Catherine no longer had a mother, and even if Mama were alive, she wouldn’t have engaged in such blatant matchmaking. “At least he won’t go hungry.”

“Catherine.” Lydia gave her a reproving look. “Don’t dismiss the man sight unseen. He might be almost as wonderful as Travis.” A sweet smile crossed Lydia’s face as she pronounced her husband’s name.

Travis Whitfield, the town’s sheriff and Catherine’s cousin, was a fine man and the perfect husband for Lydia. The new rancher was another story. Even if he were as wonderful as

Travis, he was a widower. That meant that whoever he married—assuming, of course, that he was interested in marrying again—would be his second wife.

Catherine took another sip of coffee, hoping the strong brew would clear her head. There was no point in arguing with Lydia. As a happy newlywed, Lydia believed every woman should be married. She wouldn't understand that Catherine had no intention of becoming the rancher's or any man's second anything. She'd learned that lesson last summer when Nate, the man she had expected to marry, had fallen in love with Lydia. Even though Lydia had done her best to discourage him, the damage had been done. Catherine would rather remain a spinster than be some man's second choice.

"Unless the widower comes to church, I doubt I'll ever meet him."

Lydia shook her head. "Oh, but you will. He has a school-age daughter."



Austin Goddard tried to ignore the anxiety that had been his constant companion from the moment he'd opened his eyes. There was no reason to worry, he told himself. Hannah would be safe. Of course, she would. That was why they'd come to Texas.

Forcing a smile, he looked at his daughter as she slid into the chair across the breakfast table from him. "You look nice this morning." Mrs. Moore had taken special pains with Hannah's hair, securing the ends of the braids with bright red bows that matched one of the colors in her plaid dress.

Though Hannah glanced at him, she remained silent, her expression more eloquent than words. Whatever Austin thought about school, his daughter did not agree.

When the three of them were seated, he closed his eyes and thanked the Lord for the food, adding a silent prayer for

his daughter. Mrs. Moore was right. School would be good for Hannah. He didn't need the housekeeper to tell him his daughter needed to leave the ranch and be around other children, that she needed to laugh and play. Austin knew it wasn't normal for a child to be so quiet, but then again, it wasn't normal for a child to be forced to leave everything familiar not once but twice.

Hannah didn't remember her birthplace any more than she remembered her mother, for she'd been less than a year old when the two of them had left Paris, but there was no doubt that she remembered their last home, even though she'd obeyed Austin's command and never spoke of it. Perhaps that was part of the problem. Perhaps he should have allowed her to talk about their former life, but he couldn't take that risk.

Though Austin tried to smile at his too silent, too thin daughter, his heart yearned for the girl who'd once giggled as she tried to convince him to let her have at least a spoonful of coffee in her milk. Now she accepted the glass of plain milk without comment, deepening Austin's distress. He could run the ranch. He was confident of that. He only wished he were confident that he could restore his daughter's happiness.

Almost as if she'd read Austin's thoughts, Mrs. Moore addressed Hannah. "You'll like school," she said as she poured syrup over her pancakes. The woman who'd become Austin's housekeeper as well as Hannah's nanny liked her sweets, a fact reflected in her plump hands and the extra rolls of flesh around her neck. Though she was in her early fifties, her light brown hair held only a few threads of silver, and her eyes had not lost their sharpness. Most importantly, she seemed genuinely fond of Hannah.

"Miss Whitfield is a good teacher," Mrs. Moore continued. "Firm but fair, or so I've heard. My boys were out of school long before she took over."

Hannah looked up from the piece of pancake she'd been chasing around her plate. "I don't want to go."

Though his heart ached at the pain he heard in his daughter's voice, Austin kept his own voice firm. "You'll like it once you get there. You'll find new friends."

A vigorous shake of the head was Hannah's only response.

Austin looked at her still-full plate. "You need to eat more than that." As far as he could tell, she'd consumed no more than two bites of pancake and one strip of bacon. His daughter had always been slender, but she'd lost weight since they'd come to Texas.

Hannah kept her gaze fixed on her plate. "I'm not hungry," she announced.

With a sympathetic look for Austin, Mrs. Moore turned to Hannah. "I packed you a good lunch. There are some extra cookies to share with the other girls."

Hannah made no response, simply continued to push the piece of pancake in circles around her plate.

Realizing there was nothing he could do short of force-feeding her, Austin rose. "Get your coat on, Hannah. It's time for us to leave."

Though she complied, she moved as if her feet were encased in cement, her displeasure evident in the scowl that marred her normally pretty face. This wasn't going to be easy.

When they emerged from the farmhouse that was now their home, Austin found the horse and wagon waiting by the side door. Mrs. Moore had not exaggerated when she'd said her son Kevin would make a good ranch hand. The man had more than earned his wages in the week since Austin and Hannah had arrived, seeming to know what Austin needed even before he asked for it. Today Kevin had somehow realized that Austin planned to buy supplies while he was in town and had harnessed the wagon.

“It’ll be all right, Hannah. You’ll see,” Austin said as he guided the horse toward Cimarron Creek. If only Hannah would adjust, it would be all right. They’d begin a new life here, a life where Hannah would be safe.

When they reached the main road, Austin’s mood lightened. This part of Texas was more beautiful than he’d expected, with rolling hills that were still green, unlike the brown grass he would have seen at this time of the year back East. Even better, the sky was a vivid blue, promising a clear day, not one of the gray, rainy mornings so common in Paris in January.

Austin nodded, his determination ratcheting up a notch. This might not be the life he had planned for himself and Hannah, but he would do everything he could to ensure that it was the best life possible. The first step was to get Hannah to school.

Fifteen minutes later as they reached the edge of Cimarron Creek, Austin turned to his still-silent daughter. “It’s a pretty town, isn’t it, Hannah?” Predictably, there was no response. Austin refused to let discouragement stop him. “Look at the way the trees shade the street. They’re like a canopy.”

He’d heard that the Texas Hill Country was beautiful, and it was. When he’d gathered his daughter into his arms that last night in Philadelphia, he’d had no idea where they would go, but each time they’d reached a fork in the road, Austin had felt an inner urging telling him which way to turn, where to spend the night, where to head the next morning.

They’d spent weeks traveling, meandering across the country as Austin tried desperately to ensure that no one was following them. When Hannah had asked where they were going, he’d attempted to reassure her but had refused to lie. The truth was, he didn’t know where or when they’d finally stop until the day he’d heard about a ranch for sale on the outskirts of Cimarron Creek. That day Austin’s doubts had disappeared and he’d been filled with the belief that they were meant to live on that

particular ranch. Surely it had been God's hand that had led them here.

The buildings lining Main Street were considerably smaller than the ones in Paris and Philadelphia, but that was to be expected. Cimarron Creek was a small town, not a big city, its population less than two hundred. Still, the stores and offices were attractive and well cared for, bearing witness to the residents' pride. That was one of the things Austin had noticed when he'd first driven through the town, yet another indication that this was the right place for him and Hannah to make their home.

He tugged the reins, stopping the horse in front of the stone building, its bell and the swing in the side yard announcing as clearly as a sign that this was the school. "We're here."

Hannah's eyes filled with tears, and when he lifted her from the wagon and placed her on the ground, she clung to his hand.

"There's no reason to be afraid," Austin said, his heart thudding at the realization that while his fears had diminished, his daughter's had not. "There'll be other girls your age." Some were already here. Though Austin had hoped to give Hannah a chance to meet the schoolmarm and settle in before anyone else arrived, he'd failed. Half a dozen children played outside the school.

Hannah glanced at them, her grip on his hand tightening as he led the way up the steps to the schoolhouse. "It'll be all right." Austin opened the door and ushered his daughter inside. If only Hannah would believe him.

The school was similar to the one he'd attended as a boy, the hooks on the wall of the first room identifying it as a cloakroom. He led his daughter through it into the main room. Like the one Austin recalled from his childhood, this classroom had a center aisle separating two rows of desks. Maps of Texas and the United States hung on one side wall, with portraits of President

Hayes and Governor Roberts on the other. As he'd expected, the teacher's desk was located between the pupils' desks and the blackboard that covered most of the front wall, and while there was no dunce stool in the corner, an adult-sized chair sat at one side of the teacher's desk. Perhaps that was the modern substitute for the stool.

Austin's gaze moved around the room again, noting the cleanliness and order, then returned to the woman who stood at the blackboard, writing today's Bible verse and assignments.

As if alerted by the sound of his footsteps, she turned, and he felt the blood drain from his face. The teacher had the same glossy dark brown hair, the same chocolate brown eyes as his wife, but Geraldine had been several inches taller than this woman, and Austin could not remember Geraldine ever wearing such a welcoming smile when she greeted a stranger. She had been reserved when she first met people, only warming to them after she'd come to know them. Hannah had apparently inherited that reticence from her mother.

Wrenching his thoughts from his late wife and her legacy to their daughter, Austin cleared his throat. "Good morning," he said, grateful that his vocal cords still functioned properly. "You must be Miss Whitfield. I'm Austin Goddard, and this is my daughter Hannah."

The teacher's smile broadened as she closed the distance between them. "Welcome to Cimarron Creek, Mr. Goddard. As you surmised, I'm Catherine Whitfield." She looked down at Hannah, her eyes radiating genuine warmth as she said, "I'm so glad you're here, Hannah. How old are you?"

Her hand still clutching Austin's, Hannah stared at the floor and said nothing.

"She's six."

Apparently unconcerned by Hannah's silence, Miss Whitfield nodded. "That's perfect. Rebecca needs a partner."

Up close, Austin saw that Catherine Whitfield bore little resemblance to his wife beyond the color of her hair and eyes. Her features were finer, her face heart shaped rather than oval, her skin slightly darker, perhaps because of the warmth of the Texas sun.

“I pair older children with the younger ones,” she explained. “That works well for both of them. The older ones learn responsibility, while the younger children have role models.” She bent down until she was at eye level with Hannah. “Rebecca will be so happy that you’ve come. She was the only girl without a partner.”

As if on cue, the door opened and several girls entered the schoolroom, giggling as they made their way toward their desks.

Miss Whitfield straightened. “Rebecca,” she said with obvious pleasure, “your prayer has been answered. Come meet Hannah Goddard.”

Austin gave the girl who would be working closely with his daughter an appraising look. He guessed her to be eleven or twelve, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a warm smile. Though he’d thought Hannah would make friends with girls closer to her own age, perhaps Rebecca would be able to break through the silence more easily than a younger child.

When Miss Whitfield had made the introductions, she nodded at Rebecca. “Please show Hannah her desk. I need to talk to her father.”

As the two girls headed to a desk on the right side of the room, Austin followed the teacher toward the front. “Hannah’s always been shy,” he told her, “but moving here has been difficult for her.”

Miss Whitfield nodded, her expression warm and sympathetic. “That’s only natural. And losing her mother . . .”

Before she could complete the sentence, the door opened and a gangly boy entered the room, his appearance silencing the

teacher. Austin could see that she registered the same things he did: the pallor, glassy eyes, and unsteady gait.

“Good morning, Seth.” To Austin’s surprise, the teacher’s voice did not reflect the alarm he’d seen in her eyes. This sounded like a normal greeting. Turning her desk’s side chair so that it faced the blackboard rather than the classroom and would give the boy a modicum of privacy, she gestured toward it. “Come here, please.”

Though Seth looked as if he were on the verge of collapsing, somehow he made it to the chair before he practically fell onto it. Slumping forward, he gripped his head with both hands.

“He needs a doctor.” Austin had no doubt that the boy, who appeared to be around thirteen, needed medical care. In addition to the symptoms he was exhibiting today, the dullness of Seth’s light brown hair and his extreme thinness told Austin he was not only underfed but also malnourished. That combined with the spasms that were now wracking his body could be dangerous. And then there were the bruises that marred his face. Although not caused by any illness, they were alarming.

Austin turned to the teacher. “If you tell me where to find him, I’ll fetch the doctor.”

Though he had expected her to agree with him, Miss Whitfield stared at him with what could only be called horror. Unlike the momentary alarm she’d shown when Seth entered the classroom, this was a deep-seated emotion, one she appeared unable to control.

“We need to do this,” Austin said, hoping his deliberately calm tone would allay her fears. “Seth needs a doctor.”

Catherine Whitfield’s reaction was instantaneous. “Never!”