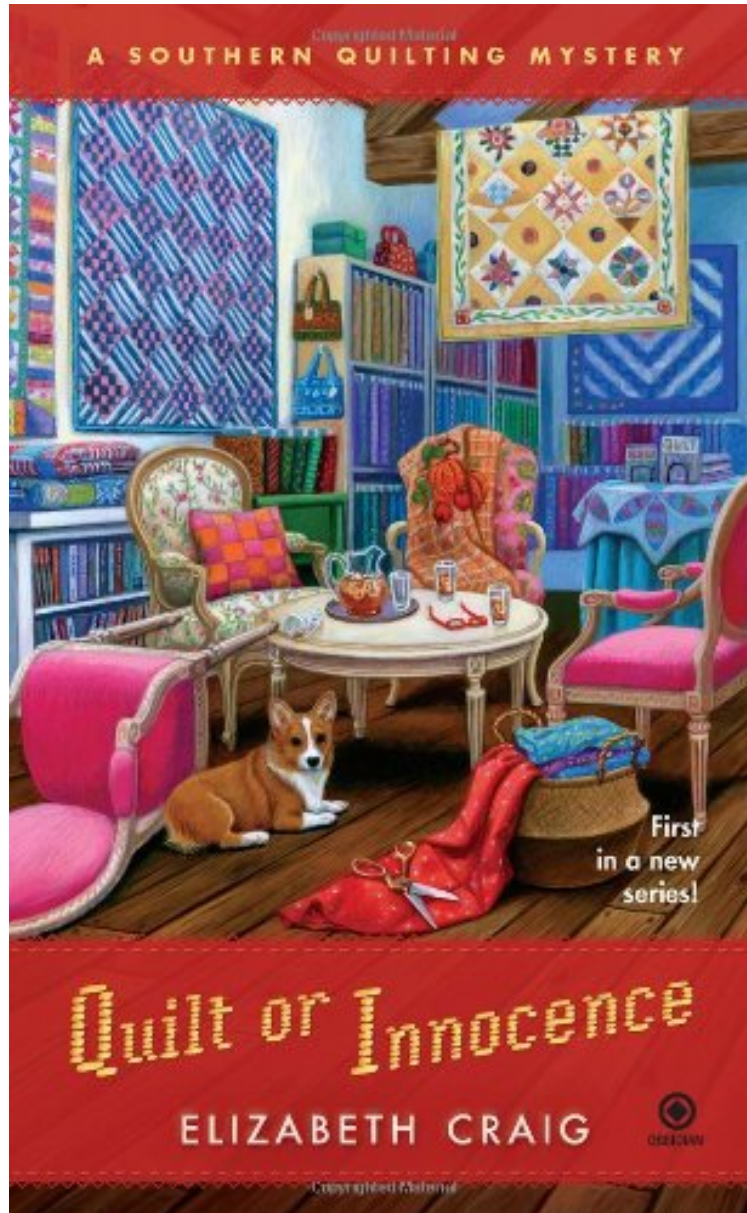


[FREE] Quilt or Innocence: A Southern Quilting Mystery

Quilt or Innocence: A Southern Quilting Mystery

Elizabeth Craig

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Elizabeth Craig : Quilt or Innocence: A Southern Quilting Mystery before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Quilt or Innocence: A Southern Quilting Mystery:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. I Fell in Love With this Novel By J L Rigod I was feeling emotionally fragile, having just viewed "Endeavor Morse" on PBS, then reached for this novel and found myself laughing out

loud. A recently retired museum curator from Atlanta, GA has moved to a small town, Dappled Hills, North Carolina to relax and enjoy her daughter who lives nearby. Beatrice Coleman is finding it hard to learn how to relax. No worries because, Beatrice has neighbors. Oh yes she does! The problem is, some of the neighbors are amusing, friendly, talented, and some are even deadly. When Beatrice and a new friend, Posy take their dogs for a morning trot, a body is found. Now the entire quilting guild is pointing fingers at each other. Can Beatrice find quiet in this town or will she die trying? I have made this vague on purpose as I do not wish to spoil a minute of this book for you. If you enjoy humor, true mystery, cozy styled, friendships and yummy food, well I can't recommend this book quickly enough. Ms. Craig has won me over! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I didn't like Quilt or Innocence by Elizabeth Spann Craig. This mystery book was too cozy for me. There wasn't enough depth of character or plot for me. I usually read non-fiction, but I thought I would branch out into a cozy mystery. I didn't finish the book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It was a great book! By Kindle Customer Beatrice is retiring! She has decided to move to Dappled Hills, North Carolina to be near her daughter Piper who is a teacher. She finds herself in a murder and tries to help the police solve it, but not before two other people get attacked including Beatrice. I enjoyed the story and look forward to reading more in this series I would recommend this book to all my friends.

Retired folk art curator Beatrice Coleman knows everything there is to know about quilts, except how to make them. But with her recent move to Dapple Hills, North Carolina, she's learning all sorts of new things including how to solve a murder. As the newest member of the Village Quilters Guild, Beatrice has a lot of gossip to catch up on especially with the Patchwork Cottage quilt shop about to close. It seems that Judith, the landlord everyone loves to hate, wants to raise the rent, despite being a quilter herself. But when Judith is found dead, the harmless gossip becomes an intricate patchwork of mischievous motives. And it's up to Beatrice's expert eye to decipher the pattern and catch the killer, before her life gets sewn up for good. Includes quilting tips!

About the Author Elizabeth Craig writes the Memphis Barbeque series as Riley Adams and the Southern Quilting mysteries under her own name. A lifelong resident of the South, she enjoys finding inspiration for the Southern Quilting mysteries in the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains of North Carolina. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 I've come to rescue you, said the wild-looking woman at Beatrice's front door. Beatrice, a recently retired art museum curator, gaped at the woman, completely flabbergasted. She certainly didn't need rescuing. In fact, she'd just brewed a relaxing cup of herbal tea to celebrate the fact that there were only ten more moving boxes to unpack in her new cottage. Besides, who'd want to be rescued by this woman, even if rescuing were in order? She looked like she needed rescuing herself . . . with her brightly colored, mismatched clothes and disorganized gray braid hanging to her waist. Beatrice made up her mind to briskly and firmly shut the door and try out the new bolts and chains and the alarm system . . . but then the woman held out her hand. Im Meadow. Your next-door neighbor. Welcome to Dappled Hills! Beatrice managed a smile and a handshake. She'd wondered who lived in the odd converted barn next to her country cottage. Beatrice's daughter, Piper, who lived right down the street, had warned her that her neighbor was a little different, and she saw exactly what Piper meant. Now Meadow clutched her arm and pulled her outside. Come on, Beatrice. You'll miss it! Beatrice pulled back. Wasn't this how kidnappings happened? How could she possibly be abducted in tiny Dappled Hills, North Carolina, when she'd been safe for so many years in Atlanta? Im sorry, Meadow, she said with dignity. (She would not be a victim!) But Im going to have to insist that I stay at home. I just brewed some chamomile tea and need to put my feet up after all the rigorous unpacking Ive accomplished . . . But her words were completely wasted on Meadow, and Beatrice found herself being propelled with surprising strength toward the bright red barn on the spacious property next door. And Meadow wasn't letting her slide a word in edgewise. Were all practically here, she said inexplicably. The unpacking is exactly what Im rescuing you from. And everything is set out. I have tea, too, but it's sweet. With great relief, Beatrice saw a police car pulling into Meadows driveway. Well, at least Dappled Hills had a very responsive police unit. She waved her free arm in what she hoped was an alarmed, help-seeking fashion. A short, balding man climbed out of the patrol car. He had a tired stoop to his shoulders and a stomach that had seen its share of heavy Southern cooking. Is there a problem here, ma'am? Beatrice blinked as Meadow leaned over and gave the policeman a peck on the lips. No problem, Ram-say. Except remember that I told you the guild is meeting here this afternoon. So don't devour our snacks, please. I put some pretzels in a Baggie for you. He shook his head wearily. I was asking if the other lady had a problem. Ma'am? Everything all right? Meadow, for pity's sake! Could you let her go for a minute? You've scared her half to death. Is this our new neighbor? Beatrice nodded, and the policeman held out his hand. Ramsay Downey. Im Dappled Hills police chief. Welcome to town. My job is to keep the citizens safe . . . from people like my wife, Meadow. He gave Meadow a dour look. Meadow was so singularly focused on propelling Beatrice inside her house or barn that she overlooked his jab. There's also a sandwich in the fridge for you, Ramsay, besides the pretzels. And I picked some berries today and sugared them they're in the fridge, too. And again she hurried toward the barn, turning around and gesturing at Beatrice. Come on! Beatrice looked helplessly at the policeman. Its no use resisting, he said in a resigned voice. Its how we

ended up marrying all those years ago. You might as well just follow her. Shes not quite as crazy as she looks, he added kindly. And youll learn a lot about quilting. Beatrice realized she must have seemed completely baffled when he chuckled and said, She didnt mention the quilting? Shes even more scattered than usual, then! The quilting guild is meeting this afternoon and she probably wants to introduce you to everyone thats all. And maybe give you a kit to complete a block, too, knowing her. With growing trepidation, Beatrice approached the barn. There was nothing like having your peaceful afternoon hijacked by a quilting nut. And she had no intention of doing any quilting. She knew a lot about the artistic merits of quilts, she could appraise one, and she could tell some of the likely history that went into a particular quilt, but she was happily ignorant of the precise methods of constructing them. And then all her thoughts left her as she entered the light-filled space of the converted barn. Shed thought it would be dark inside, but skylights scattered through the top of the roof and sides of the barn cheerily illuminated the space. What must have previously been a hayloft now looked like a sleeping loft and sitting area. And the high ceiling Beatrice stopped and tilted her head back. It soared up like a cathedral, with impressive exposed rafters and posts. There were vibrant-colored quilts, mostly with asymmetrical designs, hanging on the walls and the backs of chairs and any other available surface. Its beautiful, she breathed. Meadows face creased in a smile. I love it, too. She then shoved a tall glass of what looked like iced tea into Beatrices hands and continued urging her along. Ramsay had pulled his lunch from the fridge and found his little Baggie of pretzels and disappeared. Now Beatrice saw that there were two women across the big, open room. The kitchen, dining room, and living room were all one big area but it looked like there was a door that might lead to an attached master suite. On closer inspection, Beatrice realized the women were twins, although they looked a bit like a before-and-after photo. They were probably in their early thirties, but one of the sisters seemed a lot older. She had a beaky nose and stiff military-like comportment, and wore a long-sleeved floral dress, her thin hair drawn up in a bun. The other sister wore a pretty floral dress and had a much softer look. Fabric and scissors surrounded them, and baskets beside them were filled with quilting supplies and tools. The softer one spoke to her, beaming. Its an amazing house, isnt it? Except its a barn! Her sister frowned. But with no animals, she said, in the tone of one who demands perfect accuracy. Meadow put her hands on her generous hips with mock indignation. No animals, Savannah? Whats Boris, then chopped liver? At the sound of his name, a massive creature bounded up from behind the kitchen counter and bolted across the room. It galloped up and Beatrice flinched as it charged right at them. The quilters nonchalantly continued sewing their blocks. The dog jumped onto Meadow, putting its tremendous paws on both her shoulders. Meadow hugged it, crooning to it softly, then gently pushed him back down. What breed is Boris, exactly? asked Beatrice. Meadow said in a considering voice, Well, Ramsay and I think he might be part Great Dane, part Newfoundland, and part corgi. The minuscule part that was a corgi, thought corgi-owner Beatrice, was clearly cowed by the other genetic components. Beatrice started as Meadow gave her an impulsive hug. Were thrilled you could quilt with us this afternoon. More tea? Meadow automatically refilled Beatrices glass without waiting for a reply. Although, thought Beatrice with some irritation, she hadnt even taken a sip yet. Meadows eyes twinkled at Beatrice from behind her red-framed glasses. Savannah and I were just saying the other day Savannah, you remember my saying this, dont you? that we really needed another member in the Village Quilters guild. Savannah gave a jerking nod as she expertly stitched an applique with darting movements. And the very next thing I know, youve moved in next door, Beatrice! Its divine intervention. Meadow beamed at her again as she absently continued filling the others glasses with tea . . . even though, thought Beatrice as she squinted across the room, it appeared theyd been drinking water. The other two women didnt make a peep to stop her. Beatrice cleared her throat. Really, it was too much. Meeting new people in a new town, being expected to suddenly take up quilting . . . it was all a tremendous adjustment. But she had to admit that the people of Dappled Hills were nothing if not friendly. Meadow chuckled. Mercy, but you do look confused. Introductions are in order! Good thing we only have a few members here today. Fewer to boggle your brain with. Although it looks like your brain might not be the boggling type. Of course, you already know me! Im Meadow Downey, your next-door neighbor and new best friend. She bowed at Beatrice, eyes glittering. The plain woman with the stiff comportment gestured a needle at the pretty woman beside her. Were the Potter sisters. Im Savannah and shes Georgia. Savannah continued steadily stitching beautiful needlework with her bony fingers. Savannah, Georgia, murmured Beatrice weakly. Our mama just adored the city, said Georgia. It was all moonlight and magnolias to her. Mama, repeated Savannah gruffly, and both womens eyes grew misty. Meadow, apparently accustomed to these emotional displays, pulled tissues from a nearby box and dropped them neatly in the sisters laps as the doorbell rang. Thisll be Posy Beck, she said. And shes the final quilter Im expecting today. The door opened to reveal a tiny, bespectacled, older woman with wide blue eyes and a gentle smile who greeted the other ladies warmly. She settled on the sofa next to Georgia and pulled strips of cloth from her tote bag. Youre Pipers mama? she asked with a smile as she pulled on a fluffy cardigan, despite the warmth of the room. Beatrice nodded, and Posy said, I absolutely love your daughter. She didnt mention you were a quilter. I own Posys Patchwork Cottage right in the middle of town. Id love for you to pop by to visit. Beatrice shifted uneasily. No, actually. Im really not a quilter, Posy. That is, I worked on a group quilt once about twenty years ago. She winced at memories of stabbing herself with the needle, her crooked stitches, and the huge knots shed left on the back of the quilt. Ive researched quilts. Ive set up quilt exhibits. Ive even appraised some quilts. But actual quilting? She shook her head. Meadow snapped her fingers. Thats right! Piper told

me you were a museum curator in Atlanta. Weve got a Southern folk art expert right here in our midst, ladies! And dont worry. It wont take you any time to get into quilting again. Its just like riding a horse. Or a bike, she said with an absentminded frown, as if she knew she was mixing that up somehow. She poured a tall glass of tea for Posy, who smiled fondly at her. What Im actually a lot more interested in is what youre all working on, she said. Georgia beamed at her. Savannah and I are making a quilt together since weve already finished our blocks for the bee tomorrow. What do you think? Beatrice moved closer. The rich, earthy colors of fall made up the quilt and she saw it was actually autumn themed . . . with a medallion of apples and pumpkins and black cats appliqued onto the center of the vibrant plaid background. Beautiful, she proclaimed, softly. Absolutely beautiful. It looks like a quilt to curl up in on a cold night. With a mug of hot chocolate. Savannahs sharp features turned a mottled red at her praise. She continued briskly stitching. We do work well together. Dont we, Georgia? she said in a voice that brooked no argument. Although I usually favor geometric patterns, Georgia had her heart set on doing this one as soon as she saw the pattern. And it was her turn to pick. Georgia giggled. We do work well together, despite our different approaches. Poor Savannah is struggling to adjust to living with me still. And its been almost a year now since Ive invaded her kingdom. Georgia is divorced, said Meadow in a stage whisper that Beatrice supposed Meadow thought quiet. Georgia continued, Savannah is ultraorganized and Im an organizational disaster, so our living together has been like The Odd Couple. Shes got a thread organizer with thread divided by color. Then she has this huge plastic wall unit with drawers of fabric organized by manufacturer or season. And my stuff is pretty much a ragbag of fabrics and threads. Ive got blocks and tops and fabrics scattered everywhere. But when we make a quilt, were in perfect harmony. I can tell, said Beatrice, still studying the quilt. Then she glimpsed a notebook at Savannahs feet. Savannah saw Beatrice looking at the notebook and said, Ill admit that organization has its advantages. I put together this quilting bag and everyone has copied it. Except for Georgia, of course. She takes a more loosey-goosey approach to quilting supplies. She bobbed her head at Beatrice to pick up (and, Beatrice guessed, admire) the notebook. It is very cleverly arranged, thought Beatrice as she flipped through the plastic sleeves. A spot for notions of every kind. Each plastic pouch was attached to the notebook by Velcro so you could just carry the tools you needed. Ingenious. What are these? asked Beatrice, holding up a pouch of what looked like pizza cutters. A most marvelous invention for quilters: rotary cutters. I dont think I can even remember life without them! Ive blocked it all out! Its revolutionized cutting fabric, said Posy. Beatrice, you just put your ruler where you want to cut and then the rotary cutter slices right through it. The women settled into small talk about their families and neighbors. There was an air of camaraderie in the room that felt very genuine. This feeling of belonging wasnt something that Beatrice had come across very often, aside from her work at the museum. Even there shed frequently worked alone, just her and the art. She hid a smile as Savannah suddenly dispelled the harmony by hissing, Georgia! Watch your stitches! Georgia frowned ferociously at her applique as if to scold it into submission. Beatrice said, Posy, your quilt is gorgeous. Of course, I wouldnt expect anything less from a quilt-shop owner. Her quilt was a celestial riot of whimsical suns and moons and stars scattered on an inky background. Savannah stopped stitching at the mention of the quilt shop. Posy, tell us what youve found out about the shop. Did Judith back off on raising the rent? She reached over and rescued a pricey-looking pair of scissors that Georgia had absently picked up, and stowed them safely back beside her. Posy shook her head, looking down at her quilt. No, shes planning to go ahead with it. I honestly dont know what Im going to do. I just never imagined that Judith would try to force me out of the Patchwork Cottage. Beatrice frowned. Your landlady? Surely that doesnt make sense. Shed have to find another tenant for the space. Miss Judith has plans. Meadow said with a sniff. Her indignant tone made Boris growl menacingly at the unknown threat. Shes got some fancy womens boutique idea in her head, and apparently theres someone interested in the space. Judith is adamant she can get more rent. She snorted. Georgias face clouded over. But shes a quilter, too! Why would she want the Patchwork Cottage to close? Where would we get all our supplies? Where would she get hers? Her voice was tight with worry. I dont want to have to worry over getting supplies online its just not the same as running the fabric through my fingers and seeing all the colors in person. Everything will work out fine, Savannah said, fiercely stabbing her needle into her fabric. Judith is temporarily insane thats all. Shell soon come to her senses and realize that Dappled Hills isnt the right place for a designer boutique. Its the perfect place for a quilt shop. Judith is a sister quilter, but she makes me mad enough to spit sometimes, Meadow said. Shes forever making little digs at me. And I dont think she likes Boris, she added in a scandalized tone, reaching out to give the dog a sympathetic rub. Beatrice strained to hear Georgias quiet voice. Shes only making digs at you because she wanted to be the beekeeper. Meadow explained to Beatrice, Thats what we call the president of the quilting bee. Savannah frowned. Shes sniped at Georgia, and me, too. Although I guess that anyone who loves quilting as much as Judith does cant be all bad, right? No one is all bad, Posy said with certainty. When I have a chance to sit down and really talk to her about the shop and what I think it means to all of us, Im positive shell reconsider raising the rent. Savannah looked cross. Were quilting, ladies. This is our time to relax. Lets move on to a nicer subject. Yes! Lets move on, Meadow said enthusiastically. And we all should be eating! I knew there was something I was forgetting. Snacks make everything in life better. In a flash, Meadow was back with a huge platter full of food. Pimento cheesestuffed celery, sweet Vidalia onion dip and spicy fried pickles. She beamed at the happy murmur from the quilters. Beatrice wasnt sure what to make of the offerings. It was the kind of food that could either be very good or very bad. But, apparently, it was all

good. Posy leaned over and said in a confiding way, Meadow is the most fantastic cook. Everything on that platter is to die for! But make sure you try her pimento cheese. Its creamy-looking, but has a real kick to it with the jalapenos. I think she has a little cream cheese in there, and Im completely nuts over creamy cheese. And now, Beatrice, tell us a little about you. I want to learn more about our new quilting friend. Her eyes twinkled at Beatrice as she filled a small plate with fried pickles and celery. Beatrice fiddled with her napkin and cleared her throat. Well, lets see. She thought for a moment. Actually, theres nothing really interesting to share. They stared at her in disbelief. There really isnt. It was sad, but true. Her life in recent years had revolved around work. Except that she just moved in yesterday and shes already a member of the Village Quilters! bubbled Meadow. Ive waited for someone to move into that cottage next to me for ages. Ages! Its sat empty, and I kept thinking it was going to become a crack house or something else really dire. Posy gave a tinkling laugh. A crack house? In Dappled Hills? It was more likely to be turned into an art gallery or a church or a charming coffee shop. Posy was practically consumed by the huge polka-dotted pillows on Meadows sofa and hard to see. Or something. Or maybe the house would get rented out to a college student whod have wild keg parties and stagger drunkenly through my yard. Instead, Im blessed with a lovely older lady who quilts. What could be better? Beatrice opened her mouth to refute her quilting (and possibly her loveliness), but decided it was futile. Posy said, Shouldnt you amend the older lady, Meadow? If shes older, and she must only be in her early sixties, then what am I? Simply sensational, Posy. Didnt you know seventy is the new sixty? As for Beatrice, Im going to try desperately to get over the fact that she has pretty hair that apparently doesnt even have to be dyed! Meadow peered closely at Beatrices chin-length soft bob, and Beatrice resisted the urge to put a protective hand on it. That light blond, almost silver, sort of platinum color is way too natural-looking to come from a bottle. Life sure isnt always fair, is it? Meadow sadly lifted her own gray braid and stared reproachfully at it. I do have some highlights put in, said Beatrice, feeling almost guilty. Its the perfect hairstyle for your heart-shaped face, said Posy with a sweet smile. I bet its a low-fuss style, too. I have to go to the beauty parlor to get my wash and set every week. Its pretty easy to take care of. I didnt have a lot of time when I was working to worry over my hair, so I chose something simple, said Beatrice. The prettier sister, Georgia, said timidly, Savannah, Beatrices hair is the style I was thinking would look good on you. You have a heart-shaped face, too. Anything would look a lot better than the severe bun that Savannah sported. Savannahs heavy brows lifted. You know perfectly well that Im not preoccupied with my appearance, Georgia. Although I think Beatrice looks very nice. Im sure Beatrice was used to attending exciting events in Atlanta, where it was important for her to look stylish. I hope Dappled Hills wont be too boring for you, Beatrice, said Georgia shyly. Theres not nearly as much going on. But sometimes theres an amateur night at the theater thats usually a lot of fun. Well, the singing isnt as much fun, but I love some of the skits, and the local barber does a stand-up routine thats always hilarious. So there are things to do here. Sometimes, said Savannah in a repressive voice. Looking more cheerful, Meadow added, Oh, and since Beatrice just happens to be a folk-art expert, shell have to give a talk at one of our programs. Thatll take care of one of them, anyway. I have the dickens of a time trying to plan and schedule those. This was territory Beatrice felt a little more comfortable with. Im sure I could manage that, Meadow. Folk art wasnt my only focus, but I did get to arrange some wonderful exhibits at the museum. And so you left a big career behind to come to Dappled Hills? Savannah asked. And look after Piper, I guess. Her voice implied that looking after people was the most understandable motive of all. Oh, Piper does fine on her own, I think. Shes always been such an independent child. I was simply ready to retire. Id been thinking about slowing down for a while. And I thought it would be a nice change to move to a small town and be near Piper, of course. I didnt realize Id be directly across the street from her, but it was the perfect cottage. I fell in love with it as soon as I saw it. Meadow pursed her lips and gave Beatrice a considering look. Ive had a brilliant idea. My son Ash is here from California, visiting me this week. Hes absolutely gorgeous, she said, completely seriously, and a real gentleman. Ill introduce Piper to Ash at the quilting bee which is tomorrow! Let me call him. He was working on his laptop when I left. Oh, shoot! No, I remember . . . hes gone to lunch with an old friend from high school. But Ill bring him to the bee for sure. And youll need to come with Piper, Beatrice. Being independent is fine, of course, but its even better to have a soul mate. Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of her life! Beatrice was beginning to long for her little stone cottage and the soft gingham sofa in her tiny living room. She could read her new book, *Whispers of Summer*, to the dulcet sounds of her corgi snoring. Somehow shed pictured her retirement in quieter terms than quilting guilds and bees and quirky neighbors pulling her into a swarm of social activity. There was a knock at the door and Meadow popped up again like a jack-in-the-box, bouncing toward the front door, Boris dutifully giving a guard-dog-bark in a deep, growling, hellhound way. Posy smiled. Dear Meadow and darling Boris. So much energy! Beatrices daughter, Piper, was at the door, looking pretty as always with her dark hair in a pixie cut, her cute figure, and her gray eyes that matched Beatrices. Piper hugged Meadow. When I saw Mama wasnt home, I guessed you might have invited her over. Thanks for taking care of her for me. Did you know that if people dont drag Mama out of the house, then shed happily spend hours poring over dusty antiques or tomes on Early American furniture? She gave Beatrice an unrepentant grin and a fleeting kiss on the cheek. Well have to set Mama up with some quilting supplies, said Piper to Posy. Or she can do some blocks for the bee. I finished mine, so Im all set for tomorrow. Oh! said Meadow with a start. That reminds me that I need to get us set for our next project. She attempted to look official and businesslike, but the effect was somewhat ruined by the fact that she had picked up

the water pitcher to refill Beatrice's tea and was now gesturing so much that the tea sloshed over the sides. Y'all, this time I want us each to do a very personal quilt. Not one from a pattern book. I'd like each of us to come up with a block that shows something particularly meaningful for us and incorporate it in symbols on our blocks. Everyone in the group will create a 12.5-inch-by-2.5-inch block so that it will finish to 12-inch-by-12-inch when sewn together. I'll get in touch with the ladies who didn't make it today. I've got the background for the blocks, to unify the look and show we were working on a theme. Frowning, Savannah said, And we'll auction it off? Who is going to want something that's so personal, Meadow? It doesn't seem like it would be an interesting quilt for anybody but us. They'll love it, Savannah! They'll absolutely love it because it'll be the coolest quilt around. Savannah still looked unhappy. You just need to give it a go. I know you're practically married to your geometric designs. But life isn't just about Dutchman's Puzzles or Pieced Stars. You need to color outside the lines a little bit. Some of us need to color a little inside the lines, said Savannah, with a cross nod at the crazy quilts scattered through Meadow's house. Meadow either didn't hear Savannah or chose to ignore her. I've already officially invited your mama to the bee tomorrow, said Meadow to Piper. She turned and gave Beatrice an exaggerated wink to show she still had matchmaking on the brain. Beatrice, it'll be the best way for you to get up to speed with what's going on with quilting today. Beatrice stood up to leave. She was having visions of a fully booked calendar, courtesy of Meadow, if she didn't escape. Thanks so much for the tea and sandwiches. Really lovely to meet all of you. Of course we'll come to the bee tomorrow. She heard Meadow calling after her and chortling as she left. Be there or be square! Get it? Square!