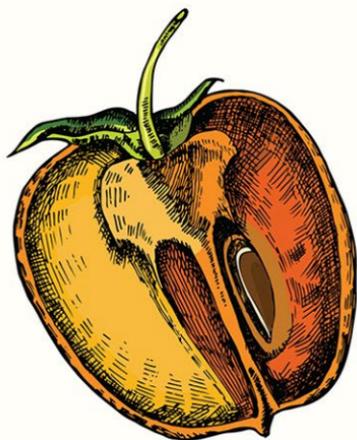


Persimmon Moon



a quilting story by

FRANCES
O'ROARK
DOWELL

Also by Frances O’Roark Dowell

BIRDS IN THE AIR

* * *

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF GIRLS

THE KIND OF FRIENDS WE USED TO BE

THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE, ONLY REALLY FAR AWAY

* * *

ANYBODY SHINING

CHICKEN BOY

DOVEY COE

FALLING IN

THE SECOND LIFE OF ABIGAIL WALKER

SHOOTING THE MOON

TEN MILES PAST NORMAL

TROUBLE THE WATER

WHERE I’D LIKE TO BE

* * *

PHINEAS L. MCGUIRE . . . BLASTS OFF!

PHINEAS L. MCGUIRE . . . ERUPTS!

PHINEAS L. MCGUIRE . . . GETS COOKING!

PHINEAS L. MCGUIRE . . . GETS SLIMED!

* * *

SAM THE MAN & THE CHICKEN PLAN

Persimmon Moon

A QUILTING STORY

BY

FRANCES O'ROARK DOWELL



Milton
Falls
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Milton Falls Media, Inc.
2608 Erwin Road, #148-152
Durham, N.C. 27705
www.miltonfallsmedia.com

For information about purchasing Milton Falls Media books, please write to the publisher at: sales@miltonfallsmedia.com.

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Persimmon Moon

Amanda has counted twenty-seven pumpkins in all, and twenty-seven seems like a lucky number. It's not a prime number, but two is prime and so is seven, and in Amanda's opinion, twenty-seven is close enough to a prime number to be considered lucky, if you consider prime numbers lucky, which she does.

"We could have used thirty," her sister Lucy says when Amanda walks into the kitchen to report the news. Lucy is carefully measuring vanilla into a mixing bowl. Lucy is always carefully measuring something into a mixing bowl, and she doesn't believe in lucky numbers. There is only one bit of superstition Lucy holds onto, and it's the worst kind, the kind that leaves her stuck exactly where she is.

"But twenty-seven is good," Amanda insists, "and the pumpkins are all perfect and almost ready to be picked. Vonnie said she wanted the pies for the Harvest Festival next Saturday, and she'll have them, and we'll have lots of lovely money in exchange."

"Not lots of money," Lucy says, cracking an egg into a blue ceramic bowl. "A little bit of money. Not enough money."

"But we'll be on our way to having enough money." Amanda leans across the counter and steals a piece of

shaved bittersweet chocolate from the cutting board. All this money talk is making her nervous, and when Amanda gets nervous, she eats. She eats a lot in the fall, because fall is when their money gets tight. Fall is when the crowds at the farmers market begin to thin, as does Lucy's cutting garden. The asters and toad lilies are still blooming, and so are the Russian sage and the colchicum. But now Amanda and Lucy can sleep until six thirty on market days, whereas in the summer they had to be up at four to have enough time to clip and arrange the abundance of flowers the garden provided.

"I think we should plant an apple tree out front," Amanda says. "We could sell apple pies this time of year, or jars of applesauce. People like apples."

"By the time an apple tree matures, we will have sold the house and moved to an apartment on Barkley Street," Lucy says. "We'll both work in horrible office jobs and spend all day on computers."

Both sisters shudder. They have never had a computer in their house nor ever desired one. A few years ago, Lucy broke down and bought a smart phone because businesses that carried her baked goods insisted they be able to reach her via email or text, but that was as far into the computer age as either sister has ever been willing to venture. Amanda believes strongly that any device with a screen is dangerous and possibly soul-sucking, although sometimes she sneaks over to her best friend Emily's house to watch black-and-white movies on Friday nights. She makes sure to sit as far away from Emily's television set as she can, just to be on the safe side.

"Well, if we're not going to plant an apple tree, why don't

we plant blueberries? Everyone loves blueberry preserves.”

Lucy sighs, and Amanda doesn’t push any further. Besides, she already knows about blueberry bushes, how they take three or four years to mature. She and Lucy don’t have three or four years. They are three or four months from running through the last of their inheritance, and when that happens they will have no choice but to put their house on the market. The irony is, Amanda thinks, that if they sold their house, they’d have enough money to stay in their house. More than one realtor has come to sniff around, dropping hints about what a cottage as charming as theirs might get from an eager buyer.

Lucy pours the eggs into the mixing bowl and begins whisking in a way that seems aggressive to Amanda, as though her sister has a bone to pick with her batter. “Your cake is going to turn out tough if you don’t lighten up,” she says, and Lucy stops and takes a deep breath.

“Amanda, I know you don’t want to talk about this, but we have to. If we don’t do something, we’ll have to put the house up for sale in January. I’ve looked at the budget every way possible, but even if we had a hundred pumpkins for a hundred pies, even if our sunflowers bloomed through the winter, we’d come up short.”

Amanda sits down at the kitchen table. She wishes she had a cup of peppermint tea. She wishes her cat Gretel was curled purring in her lap, and she wishes she knew how to knit, because it would be so lovely to drink peppermint tea and knit with a cat curled up purring on her lap, and not have to worry about selling the only house she has ever lived in or ever wanted to live in.

“I was born in this house,” she says to Lucy, and Lucy rolls

her eyes. Lucy turned thirty-two in May, and Amanda thinks that's much too old to still be in the eye-rolling stage of life.

"Well, the way things are going, you won't die in this house," Lucy says. "At least that's some consolation."

"It's not," Amanda says and has to keep herself from pouting. She herself has recently turned thirty, and she feels that pouting past age twenty-nine is undignified.

Lucy walks around from behind the counter and takes a seat across the table from Amanda. Wisps of ash blonde hair have escaped from her ponytail and curl delicately around her face, softening its sharp angles. Amanda has never been able to understand how a woman who spends half of her day baking can stay so thin. It must be that she spends the other half of her day out in the garden with a hoe in her hand.

"Honey, you have to listen to me," Lucy says, reaching her hand across the table and putting it on top of Amanda's. "It's time. If you want to stay in this house, you've got to start selling your quilts."

Amanda pulls her hand back and shakes her head as hard as she can. "I don't quilt for money. Not any more."

"You had one bad experience, and really, it wasn't that bad." Lucy's tone makes it clear she thinks her sister is over-reacting. Is always over-reacting. "And you can do things differently this time. You could find another way."

"I can't make a quilt with colors that don't speak to me. I can't use other people's patterns or follow their ideas. Melinda Blanchette wanted stars, and I was in the wrong place to do stars. And she wanted me to use yellow at a time when yellow was the farthest thing from my mind. It was an awful experience."

“But Melinda loved those stars, whether you did or not,” Lucy insists. “And she still talks about that quilt every time I see her at the market. She’s got a daughter getting married in the spring, and she wants you to make her a Double Wedding Ring quilt. How hard would that be?”

“That would be — impossible.” Amanda is near tears. “I can’t think of anything more terrible.”

“And you know what?” Lucy continues as though she hasn’t heard her sister. “Every time I stop by the inn, Vonnice tells me someone has asked to buy that quilt you gave her. You know how she has it on the armchair by the fireplace? All people have to do is touch it — just lean back against it — and suddenly they’re happy. All their burdens disappear.”

Amanda nods. “It’s a healing quilt. I made it for Vonnice when she was going through chemo. Of course it makes them feel better.”

“My point is, you could sell all the quilts you wanted through Vonnice. And you could charge whatever you wanted.”

“It doesn’t work when you’re doing it for money.”

“What doesn’t work?”

Amanda leans forward and whispers. “The magic.”

Lucy leans forward and whispers, “Who cares? People want to buy your quilts, and we need their money.”

Amanda is quiet for a moment. What she’s about to say isn’t fair, and she knows it, but it’s the only card she has to play. “If we need money so badly, marry John. With both of your incomes and the money from my dressmaking, we’d have enough. John loves the house, so we wouldn’t have to sell it.”

Lucy’s face darkens. “You know I can’t.”

“I know you can. And I know you want to. And he wants to. And you’d be so happy together!”

“I need to put the cake in the oven,” Lucy says, standing.

“So that’s it? That’s the end of the discussion?”

“End of discussion.”

“You have a degree in biochemistry!” Amanda is standing now, too. “How can a person with a degree in biochemistry be so superstitious?”

“How many times do I have to say this?” Lucy is leaning down to turn on the oven and doesn’t even bother to look at Amanda. “I am only superstitious in this one regard. If anything happened to you because I got married, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself. I’d have to jump into the river with rocks in my pockets.”

“Nothing would happen.”

“Aunt Lucinda said it would, and I believe her.”

Amanda can’t listen any more. She stomps out of the kitchen and heads for her sewing room. Of all the stubborn people in the world, Lucy Whitfield is the stubbornest. The queen of the mule-headed. Queen Elsie — no, Elsie was a cow. Queen Francis! That’s it. Queen Francis the Talking Mule.

If only Lucy hadn’t been named after Aunt Lucinda, then maybe she wouldn’t feel like she had to pay attention to an old woman’s words of warning. Of course it didn’t help that Lucinda had been right about other things, terrible things. She’d predicted their mother’s death, and done it at their father’s funeral! “Five years,” Aunt Lucinda had whispered to Lucy and Amanda as they watched their mother drop a handful of dirt onto their father’s casket. “That’s all she has left.” Amanda had despised her for it — despised her at the

time for making the prediction and despised her five years later for being right.

Aunt Lucinda’s final prediction had been at their mother’s deathbed. Hannah, her body wasted by cancer, had summoned the last of her strength to call Lucy to her side. Amanda and Aunt Lucinda had taken a few steps back as Lucy sat on the stool next to the bed. “Promise me you won’t marry until after Amanda does,” Hannah had rasped into Lucy’s ear. “I know you’re older, but Amanda needs someone to take care of her.”

“I’ll be fine, Mama,” Amanda said over Lucy’s shoulder. “Please don’t worry about me.”

Lucy turned and shushed her, then looked at her mother. “I promise, Mama. I’ll wait until Amanda marries.”

“If you don’t, Amanda will die,” Aunt Lucinda pronounced in a loud voice. “Gone a week after you take your vows.

“Oh, Cindy, don’t say such a thing,” Hannah had wheezed from her pillow. “It can’t be true.”

“I don’t say things if they’re not true,” Aunt Lucinda said, pulling herself to her full height of five feet one inch. “If Lucy marries before Amanda, Amanda will die.”

“Please don’t worry, Mama,” Lucy said as Hannah’s eyes fluttered and then closed. “You have my word.”

“I should hope so,” Lucinda said. “She’s your mother, after all.”

“I know who she is,” Lucy hissed at her aunt. “You don’t have to tell me.”

Aunt Lucinda is the worst person on the face of the earth, Amanda remembers thinking, and although Lucinda died only a few months after Hannah, and that was six years ago, Amanda thinks it still.

* * *

At the time of Lucinda's warning, Amanda assumed getting married in a timely fashion would present no problem at all. She was twenty-four, by all accounts pretty (if a little plump), and had had scores of boyfriends from seventh grade on. Nobody serious, although she longed for a deep, romantic love. An artist might do the trick, she'd thought in college, or a poet. But for reasons she could never understand, the artists weren't drawn to her and the poets left her alone, even when she was the only one who came to their readings. On the other hand, lacrosse players and political science majors rang her phone off the hook. But Amanda found them dull. They bought her beer when she longed for champagne, and not one of them dreamed of going to Paris or stealing kisses on top of the Empire State Building.

When she moved back home to help care for her mother, Amanda set her sights lower. Milton Falls was not known for its bohemian scene or literary salons. It was a scenic little river town with two inns and a proliferation of fall foliage that drew in the tourists from the end of September through mid-November. Young people left Milton Falls in droves after high school graduation and then returned in their middle years to raise their children on its neatly laid-out blocks, the schools all within walking distance of the neighborhoods they served. Unmarried men Amanda's age were few and far between. There had been that pleasant young school librarian, Joe Stillwell, who'd had such clean fingernails and a silver ring in his ear. If only he hadn't smelled of library paste and peanut butter! If only he hadn't constantly quoted his favorite lines from "Napoleon Dynamite."

“You’re too picky,” Lucy always said, and Amanda supposed she was right. She’d dated and rejected all sorts of suitable men. Jason Boyd, for instance, had been perfectly nice, and he was the assistant city manager, so he knew lots of good gossip about the mayor and the members of the city council. Emily had squeaked like a mouse when she’d heard he’d asked Amanda out. “He’s a catch, Ammie!” she’d declared. “Remember how we all had crushes on him in high school?”

But Jason Boyd was a fingernail-biter and a spitter. On their first and only date, they took a walk down to the river, and he’d spit every five feet. How could Amanda spend the rest of her life with a man so full of saliva?

After Jason came Andrew Cross, who had a thriving law practice, but chewed with his mouth open and said “ek-specially” instead of “especially.” Then there was Martin Grangerfield who sold insurance and was always reciting statistics about what activities were most likely to result in “personal mortality.” That was his phrase, “personal mortality,” and after he’d used it three times in ten minutes on their third and final date, Amanda feigned a fainting spell just to make him stop.

Now, at age thirty, Amanda has more or less given up. “It’s you and me, Gretel,” she’s said to her cat more than once, and she says it now, walking into her sewing room and flipping on the light switch. She spent the last two days reorganizing, pressing and folding fabric, rounding up scissors and rulers and returning them to their proper places, tucking books back into bookshelves and poking pins into pincushions, and at this very moment, her sewing room is not just her sewing room, it’s her idea of what a sewing

room should look like, a combination of artist's garret and fabric shop — swept hardwood floors and one wall almost entirely made of windows, panes sparkling after a good polishing, a sewing machine on a long table mirrored in the glass. Another wall is home to a six-by-six foot design wall and a cabinet of cubbies bursting with brightly patterned stacks of fabric. In the middle of it all sits an island with surfaces for cutting and ironing.

A marriage of true minds, Amanda thinks as she looks around the room, because she believes rooms do have minds. She believes that rooms — some rooms — are *enspirited*. They have feelings about the people who occupy them. Amanda believes her sewing room loves her as much as she loves it.

Stacked in the middle of the island is a tower of fabric sent to her from Paris by Aunt Tilly, the youngest of her mother's sisters, the one who said to Amanda when she was very young, "Don't think of me as your aunt; think of me as your fairy godmother." Aunt Tilly always sent the best presents from her apartment in the 3rd arrondissement, fairy wands and princess tiaras, hand puppets with reddened cheeks and silly noses, and dolls that wore expressions of perfect sympathy and understanding. When Amanda turned twenty-one, Aunt Tilly sent fabric from Sophie Hallette, the most divine fabric shop in the world, she'd explained in her note. *You mustn't sew dresses with this, though you might well be tempted. Use it to make art. Use it to make quilts. You will be surprised by the results.*

Amanda had never thought of herself as an artist — she had made dresses for years, beautiful dresses, but she didn't consider them art — yet as soon as she held the beautiful

linens and toiles in her hands, she knew exactly what to do. She hadn’t felt the least twinge of fear before cutting into the fabric and then sewing the pieces into constellations of stars. It was as though the fabric had known from the beginning what it wanted to be and had simply guided Amanda’s hands to make it so.

She’d gone on to make dozens of quilts over the years, most of them perfectly ordinary. But the quilts made from fabric sent by Aunt Tilly were special, and Amanda chose their recipients carefully. Toward the end of Hannah’s illness, when she’d had trouble sleeping, Tilly sent Amanda a package of ocean green and pearl gray silks. Covered with the quilt Amanda had composed from the elegant yardage, Hannah’s eyes grew heavy, her breathing deep. She slept.

The quilt she’d sewn for Vonnie was made from lustrous purple and teal batiks that Tilly had purchased at Brin de Cousette on rue Richard Lenoir. The first day Vonnie had lain beneath it, her nausea dissipated, never to return. By the third day, her hair began growing back and before long Vonnie could pull it into a ponytail.

The fabric that sits on the island is so gorgeous Amanda almost can’t bring herself to touch it. She’s afraid if she gets too close, she’ll end up draping herself with the gold and persimmon prints, the luscious pumpkin yardage, and then run outdoors to traipse beneath the rising moon, much to the consternation of the neighbors. Tilly sent it more than two weeks ago, and Amanda has been waiting for the feeling, the one that tells her who the quilt will be for and how to start. She can’t rush the feeling, can’t force a revelation. All she can do is circle the fabric slowly several times a day, hold her hands

over it, and occasionally caress it if it doesn't feel too dangerous to do so.

Amanda sits on a stool across the fabric and stares at it. *Tell me what to do*, she thinks, certain that the fabric can read her mind. Her hands so badly want to be buried in the folds, want to shake out each piece, lovingly run an iron over it. Will she use scissors or a rotary blade to cut it? Only the fabric knows what it wants. Only the fabric can tell her.

She is on the verge of giving up and heading back to the kitchen to steal some chocolate from Lucy's secret stash when a flash of light forces her head back. On the ceiling, she sees it. A quilt made of twelve wheels, each wheel cut into twelve wedges, each wedge like a ray of light shining out from the center. When done, the quilt will be luminous, a moon for any room it lives in.

The quilt will be for Lucy, Amanda suddenly realizes. It is what will allow Lucy — finally, finally — to give herself over to love.

* * *

She begins to cut right away — with scissors, it turns out, so that the circles are imperfect, which makes each one unique. Each circle will carry its own light, pour it out onto the world as it sees fit.

As always, Amanda works in a fever dream, the world outside the windows falling away, day slipping into night, night's dark deepening and then lifting with the early morning birdsong. Amanda takes naps in a nest of quilts, steals to the kitchen for bread and apples and hurries back to her sewing room, not wanting the spell to be broken by talk. She keeps the radio tuned to the classical station where no

one ever speaks, as though all its employees have taken a vow of silence.

At the end of the second day, the top is nearly finished. This is the point where Amanda begins to consider the quilting, what designs will work best, where the shapes and lines will shift and evolve and then return to themselves. She is tired now, and knows better than to keep sewing. She will drink tea, ponder, make sketches, sleep.

The moon is shining brightly through the kitchen window, no need for Amanda to turn on the light. As she fills the teakettle, she thinks about Lucy and how this quilt will change her. Amanda believes her sister is already in love with John Freeman; love is not the issue here. It's Lucy *allowing* herself to be in love, allowing herself to be open and vulnerable, to get past superstition and fear.

Amanda has a moment of panic. What if it's too late? What if John Freeman has given up, found someone else to be in love with? She hurriedly puts the kettle on the stove and turns the flame on high. She'll make orange pekoe instead of peppermint, get a bump of caffeine in her blood, and finish the quilt top before sunrise. After that, a little sleep, and then the quilting. If she works through this night and the next, the quilt will be done by Friday. Lucy can sleep beneath it, and in the morning, when she sees John at the farmers market, love will take its course.

Hurrying back to her studio, Amanda imagines what she'll wear as Lucy's maid of honor. Something shimmery and periwinkle, she decides. She will be the background against which Lucy shines. She wonders if Aunt Tilly will come from Paris for the wedding. Just imagine how much fabric she could carry in her suitcase, Amanda thinks as

she lifts up the quilt top and slips it over her shoulders. Just imagine the quilts I could make for Lucy's babies...

* * *

What wakes her first — the smell of smoke or the shriek of an alarm? Or is it the sensation of being lifted as though she were once again a small child, her father carrying her out to the backyard to see the lunar eclipse?

"We'll have you out of here in no time, ma'am," a man's voice says, and Amanda opens her eyes. She is in the arms of someone she's never seen before. He's dressed like a firefighter, and it takes Amanda a moment to realize he *is* a firefighter, complete with a yellow helmet with a badge that declares "Firefighter," in case there's any question.

The alarm seems to have risen an octave in its insistence that something is wrong. How could Amanda have slept through it? Usually the tiniest sounds wake her. *I must be exhausted*, she thinks, and rests her head against this stranger's shoulder.

"Your sister and your cat are already outside," the fireman says, and Amanda lifts her head again. Lucy and Gretel! She feels a retroactive wave of alarm surging through her. Who else needs saving? What else is in danger?

Lucy's quilt.

Amanda tries to scramble out of the fireman's arms. "I have to go back and get the quilt!" she says, pushing against the man's chest. His grasp is strong, though, and she gets nowhere.

"Would that be the quilt you're wearing, ma'am?" the fireman asks as they reach the front door. "Because that's the only one you're saving."

Amanda looks down. The unfinished quilt top is still wrapped around her shoulders. “Oh, thank goodness!” she sighs. And then she looks up into the fireman’s face. His cheekbones are high, his nose large and slightly crooked. He has the kindest brown eyes she has ever seen. “Do I know you?” she asks, not sure what she hopes the answer will be.

“You do now,” the fireman says with a smile.

“I guess I do,” Amanda replies.

* * *

His name, Amanda learns the next day, is Wesley Bell. He has come back to check on the house, to make sure that the fire is completely out. “Things spark up where you least expect them,” he explains as he pokes through the debris of the kitchen. “You think the fire has been extinguished, but it’s just waiting for you to turn your back.”

The kitchen is where most of the harm was done. Smoke has stained the walls throughout the house, and there is significant water damage in the front parlor. But the house itself has survived what Lucy is referring to as their tempest in a teapot. The kettle that started it all sits on the blackened stovetop, charred almost beyond recognition.

“I’m afraid the fire was my fault,” Amanda feels the need to confess to Wesley Bell. “I was working on a quilt and needed a cup of tea. Only I fell asleep before the water boiled.”

She knows she should be embarrassed or feel terrible, but in fact Amanda is giddy. She’s so happy to have a reason to talk with Wesley Bell that she thinks she might set something on fire every day, just so he’ll have to come over.

“A lot of fires start that way,” Wesley says. “Midnight snacks. Grilled cheese sandwiches have started more fires

in this county than lit cigarettes. Of course, that's mostly because people don't smoke much anymore."

"I love grilled cheese sandwiches," Amanda says. "With bacon. And sweet potato fries."

Wesley Bell smiles. His teeth, Amanda notes, are perfectly straight, except for left lateral incisor, which overlaps the front tooth in a way that Amanda finds adorable.

"I just got into sweet potato fries a couple of months ago," he says, leaning back against the counter. "Now it's like I have to have them every other day." He holds out his arm. "Do I look like I'm turning orange to you?"

"Maybe a little bit," Amanda says. Is she flirting? She's pretty sure she is, and she's pretty sure he is, and now they look at each other and smile, like they don't even have to talk if they don't want to. They're happy just to be in the same room.

"Wes! Let's head out," a voice calls from the front hall. "We have twenty pages of paperwork to fill out before lunch."

Wesley Bell straightens up, looks official and serious again. "I'll check in this afternoon," he says. "In the meantime, call us if you smell or see smoke."

"I will," Amanda says, following him out of the kitchen. "I promise."

The quilt top is draped over the newel post at the bottom of the stairs. Amanda doesn't remember hanging it there. In fact she's sure she took it back upstairs this morning. Has Lucy brought it downstairs to air it out? How odd! Lucy treats Amanda's sewing space as sacrosanct. She never enters unless invited.

"Good luck getting the smell of smoke out of that," Wesley Bell tells Amanda. "Sometimes putting stuff in a

bag with dryer sheets for a few hours works.”

Amanda lifts the quilt top to her nose. “It doesn’t smell like smoke at all,” she says. “Isn’t that odd?”

“That’s really weird,” Wesley Bell says. He leans over the quilt and sniffs. “It smells like cinnamon. It’s nice — I mean it’s a nice quilt. I always liked those colors.”

“Pumpkin?” Amanda asks.

“And persimmon,” Wesley Bell says. He glances at the quilt top again, and then looks back at Amanda. “Do you make a lot of quilts? Because I had the weirdest dream the other night — I was covered up in quilts, but it wasn’t like I was smothering. It felt — well, it felt like being in love.”

His face reddens at this admission, but he doesn’t look away.

“I make a lot of quilts,” Amanda says. “And I give most of them of them away, which makes this quilt unusual.”

“How so?” Wesley Bell asks.

“Because,” she says, suddenly realizing that she’s known it all along, “this quilt is for me.”

“Wes!” the voice from outside is insistent, and Wesley Bell shoves his Milton Falls Fire House #7 cap on his head and nods.

“I’ll be back this afternoon,” he tells Amanda. “You’ll be here, right?”

“I’ll be here,” Amanda says. She watches Wesley Bell run down the sidewalk and hop into the truck. He leans over and punches his partner on the arm, grinning like he just won a big prize.

Lucy comes up and puts her arm around Amanda’s shoulder. “So, do you think everything is okay?” she asks. “I mean, with the house?”

Amanda takes her sister's hand. "I don't think we have anything to worry about," she says. "I think we're safe now."

The End

About the Author

Frances O'Roark Dowell's books include *Dovey Coe*, which won the Edgar Award and the William Allen White Children's Book Award; *Where I'd Like to Be*; the bestselling *Secret Language of Girls* trilogy; *Chicken Boy*; *Shooting the Moon*, which received a Christopher Award; the *Phineas L. MacGuire* series; *Falling In*; *The Second Life of Abigail Walker*; *Anybody Shining*, *Trouble the Water*; and the teen novel *Ten Miles Past Normal*. Her most recent book — her first for adult readers — is the quilting novel *Birds in the Air*.

While she is best known for her novels, she also hosts the popular "Off-Kilter Quilt" podcast, where she talks about her latest quilt projects with friends and fellow quilters around the globe. Her own little corner of the globe is Durham, North Carolina, where she lives with her husband, two sons, and a dog named Travis. Connect with her online at FrancesDowell.com.

For more of the quilting life on the written page, please visit QuiltFiction.com.