



MESQUITE  
SPRINGS  
*Book Two*

DREAMS  
REKINDLED  
AMANDA CABOT



## Praise for *Out of the Embers*

“Cabot expertly combines suspense with a pleasant romance to create a moving and uplifting tale.”

*Booklist*

“Cabot transports readers to 1850s Texas in the enjoyable first installment to her Mesquite Springs series.”

*Publishers Weekly*

“If you like adventure, drama, danger, mystery, and a clean romance, then this is the book for you.”

*Interviews and Reviews*

“This shorter novel really packs a suspenseful punch! One of the most tastefully written books I’ve read in a long time, and I’m looking forward to reading more of Cabot’s works.”

*Bookworm Banquet*

“*Out of the Embers* is part prairie romance, part romantic suspense. I can’t remember when I’ve enjoyed a book more. Amanda Cabot has written an intriguing, chilling mystery, and she winds it through the pages of a sweet romance in a way that made me keep turning the pages fast to see what was going to happen next. An absolutely excellent read. And now I’m hungry for oatmeal pecan pie!”

Mary Connealy, author of *Aiming for Love*,  
book 1 in the Brides of Hope Mountain series

## Praise for Amanda Cabot

“Broad appeal for fans of historical fiction as well as romance and even westerns.”

*Booklist on A Tender Hope*

“Filled with complex emotion and beautiful prose.”

*Woman’s World Magazine on A Tender Hope*

“Another deftly crafted gem of a novel by a true master of the romance genre.”

*Midwest Book Review on A Borrowed Dream*

# DREAMS REKINDLED

Books by Amanda Cabot

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**Historical Romance**

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MESQUITE  
SPRINGS

*Book Two*



DREAMS  
REKINDLED  
AMANDA CABOT



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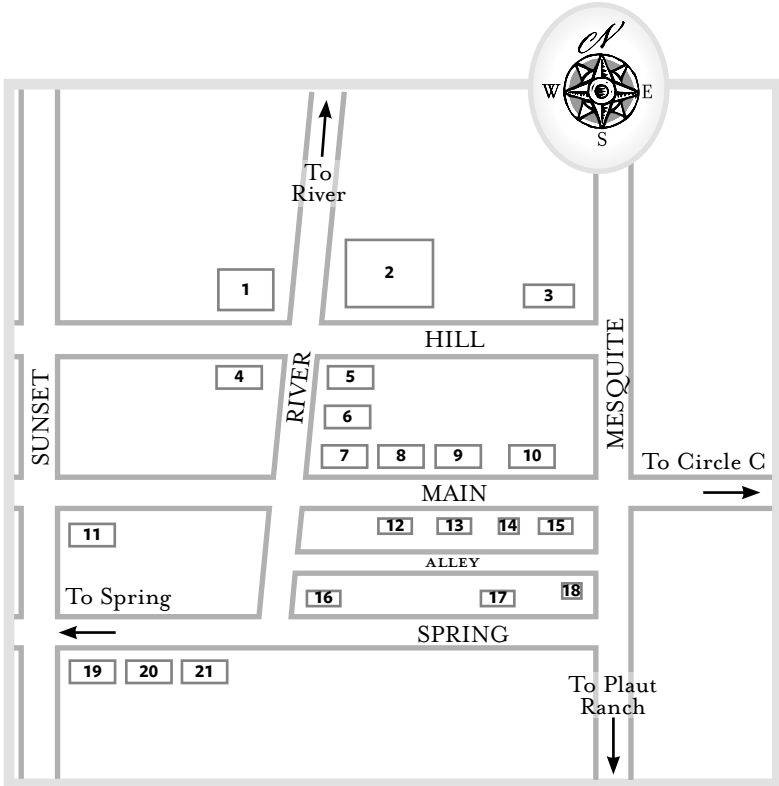
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For LeeAnne Patton,  
whose friendship  
has brightened my life.

Thank you!

And thanks, too,  
to Richard for sharing hundreds  
of his wonderful photos.  
I wish we lived closer.

# MESQUITE SPRINGS, TX



- |                                               |                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1 – Cemetery                                  | 11 – Saloon                                      |
| 2 – Park                                      | 12 – Mercantile                                  |
| 3 – Widow Lockhart’s House                    | 13 – Polly’s Place and Dorothy’s Home            |
| 4 – Downeys’ House                            | 14 – Post Office                                 |
| 5 – School                                    | 15 – Sheriff’s Office and House                  |
| 6 – Parsonage                                 | 16 – <i>Chronicle</i> Office and Brandon’s House |
| 7 – Church                                    | 17 – Boardinghouse                               |
| 8 – Mayor’s Office/Wyatt and Evelyn’s House   | 18 – Doc Dawson’s Office and House               |
| 9 – Sam Plaut’s Law Office (currently vacant) | 19 – Smiths’ House                               |
| 10 – Dressmaker’s Shop                        | 20 – Blacksmith Shop                             |
|                                               | 21 – Livery                                      |



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C H A P T E R

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*One*

NOVEMBER 10, 1856

“You’re the luckiest person I know.”

*She’s wrong. Totally and absolutely wrong.* Dorothy Clark tightened her grip on the fork as she continued to beat egg whites for today’s raisin pie. She was not lucky, and this was not the life she wanted. Not even having her best friend back in Mesquite Springs could compensate for the boredom and the knowledge that this was not how she was meant to spend her life. Running a restaurant might fill people’s bellies, but it did nothing to challenge their minds.

She doubted Laura would agree, so rather than rail at her, Dorothy answered as calmly as she could. “What makes you think I’m lucky?”

The pretty brunette who’d been her friend for as long as Dorothy could remember shrugged as if the answer were obvious. “Your mother lets you live here all by yourself. My mother would never agree to that.”

Dorothy wouldn’t dispute that. While she hadn’t found it easy to convince Ma to let her leave the ranch and live in town, even

temporarily, Mrs. Downey was more protective of her only child than Ma. Dorothy had been surprised—shocked might have been a better word—when the Downeys had sent Laura to an exclusive girls' school back East. Admittedly, Laura had not lived alone the way Dorothy now did, but she'd been more than a thousand miles from home.

"There's a simple reason Ma agreed," Dorothy told her friend. "We would have had to close Polly's Place otherwise. I may be over twenty, but Ma still doesn't want me riding by myself when it's dark outside."

Dorothy was the one who fired up the restaurant's ovens well before the sun rose and started preparing the midday meals she and Laura would serve customers. While she would never be a gifted chef like her sister-in-law Evelyn or as accomplished as Laura was now that she'd attended that fancy finishing school, Dorothy could get everything set out and ready before Laura arrived to prepare the more difficult dishes.

"Once Wyatt and Evelyn return," Dorothy continued, "I'll have to move back to the ranch." Unless she could find a reason to stay here. Having her own home, even if it was only a small apartment over her sister-in-law's restaurant, was wonderful. Though she loved Ma and hated to think of her being alone on the Circle C, Dorothy had discovered that she relished her independence. Here she was no longer Ma's daughter or Wyatt's younger sister. She was simply Dorothy, and that was good.

Laura looked up from the pastry she was fitting into the pie plates, a conspiratorial smile turning her face from pretty to almost beautiful. The intricate hairstyles Laura had learned in Charleston highlighted her hair, making the most of the blonde streaks in otherwise ordinary brown tresses, and drew attention to the eyes that Dorothy had always envied. Hazel was so much more interesting than her own plain brown. Her dark brown hair and brown eyes were just as boring as the rest of her life.

Dorothy lifted a forkful of egg whites, checking their consistency, as Laura said, “Maybe you’ll be married or at least courting before they’re home again.”

Marriage. Laura was convinced that was the answer to every question, the solution to every problem. Once again, she was wrong.

“That’ll never happen.” Dorothy knew that as surely as she knew the sun did not rise in the west. She set the now-stiff egg whites aside and began beating the butter and sugar together.

At the other side of the long table, Laura frowned. “I don’t think I’ll ever understand you. Every woman wants marriage and children.” Her normally sweet voice had turned steely with determination, and as she began fluting the edges of the first piecrust, her lips pursed as if she’d bitten into a lemon. “I wish I’d met the man of my dreams when I was back East. You know that’s why Mother and Father sent me to the finishing school, don’t you? They wanted me to find a husband.”

Unspoken was the fact that while Laura had fancied herself in love with Wyatt, he had viewed her as nothing more than his sister’s friend. Dorothy had suspected that the Downeys had sent Laura East to keep her from pining over Wyatt.

“But you didn’t.” Though the letters Laura had written during her year at school had been filled with stories of the men she’d met, each one had mentioned a different man, and each had made it clear that the man in question had serious flaws. One was too tall, the next too short. One’s moustache made Laura laugh; the next one’s smoothly shaven face made him look like a boy rather than a grown man. The litany of the men’s shortcomings would have been amusing if Dorothy hadn’t sensed Laura’s growing desperation.

Laura shook her head. “None of them made my heart beat faster. I know I disappointed my parents, but I couldn’t marry a man who didn’t excite me.” She set the pie plate aside and began to fashion the crust for the next one. “There’s a man who’s meant for me. I just need to find him.”

If she hadn't found the right man in a city the size of Charleston, Dorothy wondered what hope there was for Laura here, but she wouldn't say that. Instead, she sought to encourage her friend. "Mesquite Springs is growing. Perhaps the man of your dreams is already on his way here."

That seemed to brighten Laura's spirits, for she smiled. "I hope so, but what about you? If you don't marry, what will you do?" Her smile turned into a frown. "You don't still want to be a writer, do you? I thought that was a passing fancy."

"It's more than that, Laura. It's my dream. The problem is, I don't know how to make that dream come true." The article she'd written earlier this year had excited her, and for a few days, Dorothy had felt as if she had accomplished something worthwhile, but now when she looked into the future that had once seemed clear, all she saw was a wall of impenetrable smoke.

"The one thing I do know," Dorothy told her friend, "is that I won't marry." The risk was too high.



Brandon Holloway nodded solemnly as he guided the wagon down the main street of what he hoped would become his home. The article he'd read hadn't exaggerated. Mesquite Springs was both attractive and apparently prospering.

The stone buildings gave it a sense of permanence, even though he knew the town couldn't be much more than twenty years old. Before he'd headed toward the Hill Country, Brandon had learned what he could about it, including the fact that German immigrants had established many of the communities starting in the thirties. While he saw none of the half-timbered houses that proclaimed other towns' European influence, he doubted Mesquite Springs had been here longer than the more overtly Germanic settlements.

And, if what he'd read was accurate, there were no slaves. Since the rocky soil and the hilly terrain weren't conducive to growing

cotton, Brandon hadn't expected any, but he needed to be certain. If there was one thing he'd resolved when he left Xavier, it was that he would never again live in a county where men enslaved others.

As his eyes lit on a small sign, Brandon tugged on the reins. This would be his first stop. Ten minutes later, he emerged from the mayor's office, relieved that there had been no obstacles. Mr. McBride, who explained that he'd been mayor for decades and was now acting mayor until Wyatt Clark returned from his wedding trip, had confirmed that Mesquite Springs had no newspaper and—even more importantly—no barriers to starting one. He'd given Brandon a suggestion for a possible location, pointed him toward the town's only eating establishment, and told him that Widow Bayles had a vacancy at her boardinghouse.

As beginnings went, they didn't get much better. The only awkward moment had come when the mayor asked why Brandon had left Xavier.

"It was time for a change." That much was true. There was no reason to tell Mr. McBride that Brandon had lost everyone and everything he loved—first Ma, then Pa, finally his livelihood and his dreams. There had been no choice other than to leave. Even if he could have ignored what had happened to Pa—and he couldn't when he was responsible—Brandon had lost almost all his subscribers and every one of his advertisers. A man couldn't run a paper without them.

Life would be different here. Not only was the Hill Country different from East Texas, but Brandon himself was different. He would never again put others in danger.

In less than an hour, he had reached the boardinghouse, secured a room, and unpacked the things he'd need for a few days' stay. By the time he'd finished, his stomach had begun to rumble, reminding him that breakfast had been less filling than normal. It was time to see what the town's restaurant had to offer.

Brandon strode briskly down Spring Street, studying the well-cared-for buildings and the empty one on the corner of River that Mr. McBride had indicated might be a good location for the paper. It was large enough to accommodate the newspaper office and provide a temporary living space, and since it was on a double lot, he could build a home on the other half when the time came. The mayor was right. This building looked promising.

So did the rest of the town. The mercantile he passed on his way to Polly's Place had attractive displays in its windows, while the unexpectedly bright blue door of the restaurant not only caught his eye but seemed to welcome him. As he pushed the door open, the savory aromas made his mouth water.

"Welcome to Polly's Place."

Brandon had no sooner entered the dining room than a dark-haired woman of medium height greeted him. She wasn't the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, but the warmth of the smile that extended to her caramel brown eyes made him feel as if he were a long-lost friend who'd suddenly returned.

"If you don't mind sharing a table, I can seat you right away. Otherwise, there'll be a fifteen-minute wait."

Her voice was low and clear, as welcoming as her smile and as difficult to resist. Though Brandon had wanted his own table, he found himself agreeing to her suggestion. "That would be fine, Miss . . ." He let his voice trail off as he waited for her to identify herself. There was no reason to be so curious about her; after all, this was a small town. Within a week, he'd know many of the residents' names. And yet, he didn't want to wait that long.

"Clark."

"Any relation to the mayor?"

"He's my brother." She started to lead the way to a table. "Please call me Dorothy. Almost everyone who eats here does."

"Thank you, Dorothy. I'm Brandon Holloway."

She smiled again, and once again, he felt the warmth of that

smile. “Are you just passing through, or are you planning to stay in Mesquite Springs?”

“Staying. I’m a newspaper publisher.” He shook his head when he saw the glint of interest and possibly admiration in her eyes. “That sounds pretentious, doesn’t it? Actually, I’m the writer, editor, typesetter, and delivery man.”

“A factotum.”

“Exactly. If it needs to be done, I do it.” And most of the time, Brandon enjoyed the work, even the mundane tasks. Most of the time, he found fulfillment in the knowledge that words were powerful. Most of the time.

Dorothy stopped at a table for four, currently occupied by three men whom Brandon guessed to be twice his age, all eating pieces of pie that, if their large bites were any indication, they found delicious.

“Mr. Holloway is planning to start a newspaper in Mesquite Springs,” she said when she’d completed the introductions. “I’m certain you gentlemen have some suggestions for him.” She glanced at their now-empty plates. “Shall I bring you more pie? You wouldn’t want him to eat alone, would you?”

The man she’d introduced as Mr. Wilkins nodded. “Miss Dorothy, that raisin pie of yours is the best I’ve ever eaten.” He smacked his lips as if to confirm his praise.

“You can thank Evelyn when she returns. All I did was follow her recipe.” She continued addressing Mr. Wilkins. “Laura made the piecrusts. She has a light hand with them, doesn’t she?”

As he nodded, the other two men placed their orders for a second slice of pie. “Can’t let Chet and our newspaperman eat alone,” one said solemnly.

Brandon matched the man’s sober expression, though inwardly he was smiling. Miss Dorothy Clark was one impressive woman. Not only was she modest, refusing to take credit for the pie, but she was also the most persuasive person he’d met in a long time. She’d convinced him to share a table, and his companions now

thought it was their idea to order more pie. All that in a pretty package. Amazing!



Phil Blakeslee reined in his horse at the top of the hill and grinned as he looked down at Mesquite Springs. Yep. It was just the way he remembered it. The spring to the west, the river to the north. River! He scoffed at the term the residents used. It was nothing more than a stream, but that was all Mr. K needed.

“Good job,” the man had declared when Phil had returned from what Mr. K called his reconnaissance trip. Armed with a sketchbook and a thick journal to record his impressions, Phil had spent more than six months traveling through Texas, exploring the small towns as he searched for one that would meet his employer’s requirements. When he’d first seen Mesquite Springs, he’d found it as close to perfect as he thought possible and hoped Mr. K would agree.

“It looks promising,” his boss had said when he saw the sketches and read Phil’s notes. “More than just a good location. The new mayor will be so busy learning his duties that he won’t worry about anything else, and there’s no newspaperman to poke his nose into anyone’s business.”

No meddling minister, either. Though Phil hadn’t included that in his notes, he’d talked to enough of Mesquite Springs’s residents to know that the preacher was not one to condemn folks without good reason. “He’s quiet, no Bible thumping,” a rancher had told him. Phil had grinned. That was exactly the kind of minister Mr. K needed, one who wouldn’t interfere.

Mr. K had studied the map Phil had made and jabbed his finger at the river. “Here’s where I want you to start. You know what has to be done. Take that sketchbook of yours and get back to Mesquite Springs. If everything goes right, you’ll be a rich man, Philemon Blakeslee. I have big plans for you and that town.”



Even the memory of the man's use of his hated first name didn't make him cringe. Money—lots of money—made up for many things.

"C'mon, Dusty." Phil nudged his horse's flanks. "We've got work to do."



As she left the dining room, Dorothy pressed a hand to her chest, trying to slow her heartbeat. It was ridiculous the way it had accelerated while she was speaking with Brandon Holloway. Laura would say her reaction was a sign that he was the man Dorothy was destined to marry, but Dorothy knew better. Her heart wasn't pounding because Brandon was good-looking, though he was. The combination of blond hair and blue eyes was striking, and that square chin had caught her eye the moment he entered the restaurant. It spoke of determination, and that was something Dorothy admired.

But it wasn't the fact that Brandon Holloway was the most attractive man she'd met in ages that had excited her. No. Definitely not. His appearance had nothing to do with her racing pulse, nor did the fact that his voice was a tenor, as smooth as the caramel frosting she'd finally managed to perfect.

What intrigued Dorothy, what set her senses reeling, was the man's profession. He was a writer. As if that weren't enough, he ran a newspaper, which meant he had the power to shape people's opinions and to change their lives. Laura had claimed Dorothy was lucky, but Brandon Holloway was the lucky one. He was living the life she wanted.

"You seem flustered." Laura's eyes narrowed as she turned from the meals she was plating and looked at Dorothy. "Is something wrong?"

"No, no, not at all." She would never, ever tell Laura what had happened. They shared many things, but this silly reaction to the

blond newspaperman was not something Dorothy would ever confess. Surely now that she was back in the kitchen, her heartbeat would return to normal.

“I need three more slices of pie for table four and a large serving of the stew. That’s for a new customer, Mr. Holloway.” Thank goodness her voice did not betray her agitation. Though Dorothy’s heart had accelerated again when she’d pronounced his name, Laura didn’t seem to notice. That was good. In another minute or two, she’d be able to forget her ridiculous response to the newcomer.

As she busied herself arranging everything on a tray, Dorothy made a decision. The best route to recovery was to avoid the cause of her distress. “Would you mind taking these out there? I think I’d better sit down for a while.”

The furrows that appeared between Laura’s eyes testified to her concern at Dorothy’s deviation from their routine. Though Laura did the majority of the cooking and never failed to ask if there were something else she could do, this was the first time Dorothy had asked her to serve. “What’s wrong? Can I get you something? A glass of water?”

Dorothy shook her head. “I just need to sit.” Maybe then she would be able to convince her heart that Brandon Holloway was simply another man and that there was no reason for it to race.