

Quilt To Be

by Susan E. L. Lake

Miranda's ire flooded the bedroom. "Robert, how could you do it? How could you tell her?" Tears shined in her gray eyes. She sank into her beloved tapestry chair, her long fingers sliding down its elegant arms. The nubbinness of the fabric offered no comfort today although the physical beauty of the blended colors soothed her.

Robert's distress was visible. "You couldn't keep it a secret forever."

"You don't understand." Closing her eyes, Miranda shut out his concerned expression.

"What don't I understand?"

Miranda's answer was more sigh than response. "Your mother will tell everyone."

"What's wrong with that?"

"It's none of their business."

"Honey, just give her a chance."

Her eyes flew open and wide. "Chance! She's had ten years. How many more chances does she need? I can't stand it. I can't stand being the subject of every one of your mother's little coffees as if our private life is some daily soap opera. It's none of their business. None of them."

"You are making too much of this. Tell her how you feel. She'll understand," soothed Robert.

Miranda swiped away the tears puddling on her cheeks. Robert hugged her awkwardly, but the wings of the chair blocked him. She pushed him away and pulled her legs up blocking any more of his efforts.

Shaking his head, her husband started for the door. "I'm going to have Mom come in to talk to you."

She jerked herself from the chair. "Don't you dare!" Each word took on a life of its own. And with each one, Miranda's eyes darkened more.

Robert's shoulders slumped with anxiety and then straightened with determination. "Until you are willing to talk to her, nothing will get better. I'm going out there right now. You'll have to find a way to handle this." He walked out of the room.

Slumping back into the chair, Miranda grit her teeth and pounded on the arm of the chair in frustration. She had tried. She really had. When they moved here from Dallas, she wanted so much to be part of the life of this small town that Robert had talked about incessantly during their courtship.

But it hadn't been what she had expected. Everyone knew everything about her. She heard snippets of conversation often enough to know that they talked about her frequently. Even if she hadn't overheard them, the gossip that her mother-in-law exchanged told her what people talked about. And it made her crazy. She hated it.

Now everyone in town would be talking about the long awaited pregnancy. She knew they had spent years discussing why she and Robert had not had children, with her mother-in-law Lavinia right in the middle of all the busybodies.

Getting up from the chair, she smoothed the pillows on her bed and straightened the pale silk comforter. It tended to slide off, but she loved its texture. She smiled to herself as she thought of the word comforter. That's what it was - a comforter wrapping her in softness when she most needed it.

She didn't notice the door opening slowly. Lavinia walked in quietly and watched Miranda run her hand across the smoothness of the spread. The older woman shook her head only a little and broke into Miranda's thoughts. "I agree. It is truly beautiful. I'm glad you were able to find the right color. You looked long enough. I would have given up. But you didn't."

Miranda startled. How could anyone read minds the way her mother-in-law did? "Oh, thanks." She searched for something to add. "Your birthday money made the difference. There's no way I could have done it without your help. Even on sale it cost too much." She could feel herself rambling, but it was something to say. Something to say rather than the subject she didn't want discussed.

Her mother-in-law wouldn't let her escape, however. "Miranda, we were so pleased when Robert told us. It's been a long time since we've had a new baby. Nearly three years now since my niece's. Even longer since Esther's."

Miranda gave her a smile that she hoped would look convincing. It didn't help that she could hear Lavinia's account to her friends. "Why, we were so excited. I had about given up hope. But Robert told us just last night . . ." She pushed away the anger.

"So the baby is due in October. That will make for a long summer for you. Have you been feeling sick?" inquired Lavinia.

"No, not really. I'm just tired." Miranda hated to admit that. It seemed like revealing a weakness. She didn't want to give Lavinia that much power. But she couldn't decide why. Even to herself it seemed silly.

"Have you told your parents yet?"

"No, I thought I'd wait. They're so far away. It won't make any difference. They can't come or anything like that. Dad's assignment in Saudi won't be up for another eighteen months." Lavinia would think she was whining. But she wasn't. She was just trying to be rational - to accept that at the time when she needed her family, there would be no one.

"I'm sorry. I know you would like to have them come, but you still need to let them know. I'd want to."

Miranda smiled instead of yelling at her mother-in-law for this intrusion into her business. She had spent ten years doing that. She was good at it. "I will."

She wanted to break off this awkward conversation. "Well, what have you heard from Esther? Is she enjoying California?"

"It seems like it. I imagine we will have to watch a night's worth of slides. Why she takes so many I will never know. Then she just crams them into a drawer. She must have an entire desk full by now. But I guess she takes after me. I never could get organized. Why, when Esther and Rob were little I'd have to buy new gloves for both of them every winter because I could never keep up with their mittens."

Lavinia's words filled the room with disorganized prattle. Miranda straightened the Escher print hanging over her bed and centered on the nightstand the copy of Time magazine she would read that night.

"Miranda, have you thought about furniture for the baby's room. I know it's early, but you can't start too soon on those kinds of things. It takes a while."

Trying to suppress the image of the kind of dime store tacky her mother-in-law had in mind, Miranda answered with forced patience. "No, I imagine we will go into the city in a few weeks to look."

Ignoring the rebuff, Lavinia tried again. "Would you like me to make a quilt? If you decide on a color or theme, I could start right away. It seems to take me longer than it used to. I got my niece's done in a month, but it took me nearly a year to get the last one finished for her daughter."

Suddenly, it was too much. The innocent words were acid. They burned into Miranda. Anger that she had never before let take control washed over her. She could feel it, but she couldn't stop it. The words splashed out, hissing as they hit the air. "I don't want a quilt. I don't need it. I'm sure we will buy what we do need. Thank you anyway."

Lavinia took a step back to avoid the assault. She shook her head in sympathy. "I understand. Of course, we don't have to do a quilt. I just thought since I'd done one for all the others that you would like one too. That was thoughtless."

This time Miranda took a step back.

Her mother-in-law's words soaked up the anger pouring out between them.

For a moment, she looked at the woman standing before her - the woman she had spent ten years trying to hide from. And instead of exotic silk she saw cotton squares lovingly tied one to another, squares joining each member of the community one to another.

As the image formed before her eyes, grief replaced her anger, and she began to cry. She cried for a baby that would have a home and a place in the world. She cried for her own place. And Lavinia held her - rocking slowly back and forth crooning a mother's song for a daughter found.