

WHERE COURAGE CALLS

A When Calls the Heart NOVEL



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Janette Oke and Laurel Oke Logan, *Where Courage Calls*
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*Dedicated with deepest affection
to some very special people.*

*Ashley Carolyn & Steve
Nathanael Edward
Jessica Brianne & Steve
Kathryn Louise & Jeff
Courtney Elizabeth
Jacquelyn Leigh & Daniel
Alexander Nicolas
Kristalyn Lorene
Emily Marie
Vladimir David
Connor Edward
Anastasia Kimberly
Brian Carl
Wesley Frederick
Curtis Craig*

And in loving memory of our little Amanda Janette.

*And yes, thanks to the blessings of our heavenly Father,
they are all ours.*

CHAPTER
1

THE ENTIRE FIRST FLOOR of the large stone house had become a hive of swarming bodies. With glasses of pink lemonade in hand and dressed to the nines in long gowns, beaded shifts, and formal tuxedos, the guests bumbled out from the formal drawing room onto the wide veranda in clusters of three or four, buzzing with fresh gossip as they went. As Beth pushed through the crowd it seemed that everyone who was anyone in Toronto society had arrived in high energy, boisterous greetings, arms reaching for polite hugs, and hands presenting unnecessary going away gifts. Father's more-than-ample home was quickly becoming stifling, though every window was thrown wide. But there was not a whisper of a breeze to lift the overpowering scent of Mother's lavish floral bouquets on this late-summer night.

For one with a gentle spirit and acute sensitivity, it was overwhelming. Beth felt she would smother if she were not allowed some space—some quiet, some fresh air—if only for a few minutes, until she was able to calm her heartbeat and ease the pulsing in her temples. If only she could slip away.

Then opportunity presented itself. Mr. Woodworth, a leading light in Canada's railroad industry, captured the crowd's attention. One hand on the grand piano as though to introduce an upcoming performance, the other waving in dramatic flourish, he began to spin one of his legendary tales. And with the crowd's eyes fastened on him, Beth was able to duck into the hallway unnoticed and find a place to catch her breath before she must face them all again.

Mother, in her enthusiasm, must have invited everyone they knew from the past and the present. But Mother had always taken advantage of any excuse for a party, and she was known among her peers as excelling in the art of the hostess. *At least she hasn't insisted on chaperoning party games on the veranda tonight.* Beth's habit of counting small blessings couldn't help but bring a smile to her lips. She was glad that even in her current agitation, she was able to see some humor. As her father reminded her on occasion, "A sense of humor is a requisite to surviving in our demanding world."

Beth took the final steps through a narrow door into her little haven of safety and solitude between the servants' stairway and the door into the yard. Leaning close to a small open window, she noted the scent of fresh-mown grass and the peaceful chirping of crickets under the porch steps, and gazed up at the moon climbing its way over the trees. This was exactly what she needed. If her absence could go undetected for a short while, she would survive.

"She means well," Father murmured behind her shoulder.

Before turning to face him, Beth's response was a disheartened sigh. "Yes, I suppose she does."

Beth was not surprised that her father had noticed her slip out from the crowd of well-wishers. He knew Mother's social events often stretched Beth beyond her personal sense

of ease. The number of guests, the elegant attire, the fussy refreshments, and the endless and overly loud conversations seemed to Beth to be shallow, superficial.

“It’s just that I’d told her I wanted a *family* dinner on my last night at home.”

“Yes, I know, my dear.”

In the sweet, close silence, Beth leaned her head against her father’s shoulder and attempted to sort through her thoughts aloud. “I’m not afraid of going away. I’ll just miss you all so much.” She thought of her sister’s baby, asleep upstairs. “And JW—how much will he have grown by the time I see him again?”

She could hear the smile in her father’s voice when he said, “Babies do grow up, Beth. It’s usually considered a marvelous thing.”

She raised her gaze to his. “Not when you’re the auntie who isn’t around to see it.” The pouty tone in her voice did not make Beth proud, but since only Father could hear, she gave in to the emotions of the moment. Her throat began to tighten and tears welled in her eyes.

Footsteps in the short hall brought Beth upright and quickly wiping her eyes. Father stepped aside in order to allow Emma to pass, but the young domestic paused at the bottom of the stairs, the basket she was carrying balanced on her hip.

“They’re looking for you, Miss Beth,” Emma cautioned under her breath.

“Thank you, Emma.” Beth drew herself up and did a quick check of her appearance, smoothing the lace collar of her dress, adjusting the wide silk band around her hips, and pinching her cheeks just a little for some color. She noticed Father smiling down at her and reached up to straighten his black bow tie.

His grin widened. “Do I pass inspection?”

“Always.” Beth pulled her shoulders back, gave him an appreciative smile, and forced herself back toward the laughter and voices in the crowded drawing room. The moment she appeared in the doorway she knew she had been spotted.

“There she is! The woman of the hour! Our daring adventurer . . .” And on and on the voices filled the air around her.

“Come here, Beth dear. Miss Thompson would like to hear about the town in which you plan to teach.”

“Yes, darling. Tell us all about your new school.”

Beth could not prevent her deep sigh. She hoped no one noticed. The truth was, she knew so little—well, practically nothing—about the new town or new school. That very fact caused much of the unsettled feeling in the pit of her stomach. The interrogation by those who crowded close, begging for details, pushed her distress even higher. In spite of it all, Beth knew she must respond in some way to the avalanche of questions she had grown painfully tired of hearing. Perhaps it wasn’t the repetitious answers that she had come to dread. More likely it was the familiar comments and quips that were sure to follow, particularly from the younger crowd with whom Beth had shared her growing-up years.

“But, Beth, you *do know* they haven’t any servant girls in the western wilds, don’t you?”

“Can you even cook for yourself?”

“Or boil water for tea?” More titters.

“And who will do your laundry?” This was always followed by a ripple of laughter. But she attempted to join in with the gaiety, hoping to deflect further jibes.

Edward Montclair, poised and impeccably garbed in full evening attire, pushed a wayward mop of dark hair from his eyes and grinned. “Better get yourself a pair of those Levi

work pants, Elizabeth—you know you can't wear your fancy dresses among those mountain miners."

Beth tried to hold on to her smile. Edward had been inserting himself into her conversations for all the years they had grown up together. She wished his whole family would just move away so she would never see him again, even if it damaged Father's business dealings with Mr. Montclair. And then a new thought emerged. *She* was leaving *Edward* behind! The revelation brought a genuine smile, but the conversation had continued on around her.

"I heard they don't even bother to learn English! How can you possibly be expected to teach their children?"

Another young man, conveying a self-proclaimed knowledge of any subject at hand, sagely added, "That's true. Most of the men who work in the mining towns are *foreigners*. You know, just here to make money off our land for their families back home. Sometimes they leave a wife behind and take another here in Canada."

Gasps followed his pronouncement.

Not everyone in the group was as quick to pass judgment, but it seemed to Beth that those who were the most disparaging had the most to say. Mercifully, Father extended a teacup to her, and Beth accepted it gratefully.

Truth be told, Beth had little interest in either the tea or Mother's fancy sandwiches and pastries, but it did give her an excuse to gradually pull away from the circle around her and, with nods and smiles, work her way toward the laden tables. She purposefully gave the spread her full attention as she carefully chose from the fruit and vegetable trays, taking also two small crackers with her favorite cheese and a rosemary-cucumber garnish.

She had not been nibbling at her selections long when, as if

on cue, her sister Julie stepped to the center of the room, waved an arm high, and called for everyone's attention. "Dear friends, a moment of your time, please." The conversations around them quickly faded. Julie turned dramatically, the pale green beaded fringe on her skirt whirling around her as she called out, "I know all of you are enjoying the refreshments that Mother has provided this evening." She waited just long enough to allow a respectful patter of applause. Then another graceful turn and a sweeping arm in Beth's direction. "And I hope you've all had a chance to converse with our guest of honor—dear Bethie—who shall be leaving us tomorrow on a train for the West."

Beth tried not to squirm, and instead smiled around the room. It was already getting late, with no end in sight for the festivities. Her train was scheduled to leave at ten o'clock the next morning, and she still had some final things to pack.

Julie continued, "I've been asked to explain that my sister has a great need for a good night's rest before embarking on such a journey. Reverend Collins has graciously offered to bless her travels with prayer, and then Beth will be retiring for the night." There was a collective murmur, then scattered nods of understanding. "But," Julie added, "you're all welcome to stay as long as you wish. There's so much more to eat. We need your help with that." This was met with laughter and nods, particularly from the row of young men toward whom Julie bestowed one of her coquettish smiles.

Reverend Collins stepped forward. Feet shuffled and all heads bowed.

Beth heard little of his prayer. She was occupied with one of her own. *Thank you, thank you, God* was all she could think of, and then added, *And bless Father for managing it*, overwhelmed by her unexpected emancipation earlier than expected, which she was certain he had engineered.

Even with her sister's announcement, it took almost half an hour for Beth to extract herself gracefully from all the well-wishers. When she finally slipped up the stairs, the list of last-minute things to do was spinning round and round in her mind. She pulled off the uncomfortable shoes—"to go with your lovely frock," her mother had insisted—and relished the feel of thick carpet under her tired feet. But as she hurried down the long hall, she could not resist a last visit into the nursery and a peek at JW.

As she tiptoed in, to her surprise she discovered the sweet-tempered baby was not asleep. He was lying quietly in the same crib that she and sisters Margret and Julie had used as babies. "Just for the times he will visit," Mother explained as she created a new nursery for this grandson. And, of course, for all of the brothers, sisters, and cousins she hoped would eventually follow.

In the moonlight Beth watched the baby's face light up in a smile of pleasure at seeing a beloved auntie appear above him. "Hi, darling." Casting a guilty glance over her shoulder, she scooped him up and moved to the rocking chair, ignoring the tears that started to slide down her cheeks. "And how is the nicest baby in the whole world tonight?" she crooned with a catch in her voice, settling back to rock with him for a while.

The sounds of guests were still drifting up from below when at last she pulled the door closed on the nursery and moved on to her own room, leaving the sleeping baby tucked among the soft blankets of his crib. Her mind was quiet enough now to sort through the remaining few items to fold and place in her suitcase. She tucked her Bible in last and checked to see that the suitcase would still shut.

How will I ever be able to carry it? she wondered, marveling that it could be so heavy when there were two additional

trunks already packed and strapped to the back of Father's Rolls-Royce. She got ready for bed, took down her hair, and brushed it out. So many of the young ladies she knew were cutting their hair short in the modern style, but she and Julie had not been allowed to do so. Mother was distrustful of the current fashion trends. Even their dresses were always a few inches longer than most of their friends. That was fine with Beth, but Julie found it nearly impossible to bear. So much so that Beth suspected when she returned she would find her younger sister had won the battle, bobbing her hair and shortening her skirts. The thought brought a small grin. How often had Julie been stifled with Mother's answer, "But Beth doesn't have any trouble with our rules."

And Julie would always retort, "Oh, yes she does! She just doesn't say so!"

As if knowing that Beth's thoughts had wandered in her direction, a quiet knock was followed by Julie's whisper at the door. "Bethie, you awake?"

"Come in, darling."

Julie entered, already in nightgown and robe. "Can I sleep in here—one last time?"

"Yes, but it's not the last time, silly. This trip won't last forever. You know the position they offered is only for one year."

Julie drew off her robe and threw herself into the thick feather bed and under the blankets. "I hope you're right," she mused. "But what if you meet some fine young man—a shopkeeper, perhaps?" She sat up, eyes wide. "Surely there are businessmen even in the West. And then you'll marry and settle down. You'll never come back if that happens."

"The trains travel in both directions, dear. It's not so isolated as it used to be. Please, don't be so dramatic."

“Hmph,” Julie answered, throwing herself back onto the pillow.

“I’m surprised at you, Julie.” There was a wink in Beth’s voice, and she turned to look over her shoulder at her sister. “You haven’t once suggested what I thought you would.”

Julie’s head popped up above the covers. “What’s that?”

Beth laid aside her hairbrush and rose to switch off the electric light.

“What do you mean?” Julie coaxed as Beth slid into the bed.

“Well . . . I would have thought—because you’re such a daring adventurer yourself—that you already would have asked Father to be allowed to—”

“Come visit you!” Julie scrambled upright again and clasped her hands together in delight.

“He might say yes.”

“Not Mother. She would never allow it.”

Beth moved closer, fluffing her pillow beneath her head and snuggling down into the warmth. “She might. After all, I would already be there—and she knows I’m able to restrain most of your foolish notions.”

“Hmph” was Julie’s answer once again, but she joined in with Beth’s chuckle and cozied down among the blankets. “You might be right. And anyway, it’s worth a try.”

As the grandfather clock in the hall called out periodic warnings of how quickly the night was slipping away, Beth and Julie whispered on in the darkness, forging plans and making promises.



Beth slid out of bed so as not to awaken Julie, then scrambled for her list, written in careful hand and laid beside her brush the night before. She skimmed it quickly, bathed, dressed,

and pinned up her long tresses with Emma's assistance, then hastened downstairs for breakfast. Margret and John had spent the night at the family home but would not be driving with the rest of them to the train station. So Beth held on to baby JW, her elder sister's little John William, until the last possible moment before releasing him into his father's arms and hugging Margret good-bye.

"Be careful, Beth." Then Margret forced a rather strained smile, cupped Beth's face in her hands so she could look deeply into her eyes, and corrected herself softly. "No, I already *know* you will be careful. So, little sister, I'll tell you to be *brave* instead."

Beth's tears spilled out, and she circled her sister's shoulders in a long embrace. "I love you, Margret," she whispered. "Take good care of baby JW for me," she added with a wobbly smile.

Father was propelling them all out the door before Beth felt she truly was ready. She waved back toward her home and the little group watching from the open doorway, then ducked into the sleek automobile. Julie slipped in beside her, followed by her mother, and then her father settled into the jump seat. He nodded toward their driver, and the car rolled forward. Beth strained around for a last look out the back window.

This would not be the first time she had traveled on the train. Grandmama and Grandpapa lived in a neighboring city, so she had been on several short family excursions for visits with them. And sometimes there were concerts or operas or lectures in nearby towns that Father felt merited a train ride.

But for the most part Beth had done little in the way of travel—and never unchaperoned. Even at a time when long summer vacations in the United States or even Europe were commonplace for many of those in their social circle, her family had remained at home. Now Beth wished she were more

familiar with the larger world—beyond the bits and pieces of knowledge she had gained from books.

But Father, whose business it was to travel—who had spent a great deal of Beth’s childhood away at sea building a notable import company—had taken care of everything. Nothing was left for Beth to manage but the cumbersome suitcase and the heartrending good-byes. With Mother’s careful planning, there was even time to sit in the station café to share a cup of tea before the first whistle announced Beth’s approaching departure.

On the platform, Father was the first to draw Beth aside and pull her close. He said, his voice low, “I won’t say much. I won’t be able.” He cleared his throat. “But I do want to give you this.” Drawing something from his overcoat pocket, Father produced a small brass piece.

Beth gasped. “Oh, I can’t, Father,” she said, her hand over her mouth.

“Please,” he insisted. “I want you to have it. I know you’ve always loved it.” That was true. Father’s compass had been special to Beth since she was a little girl, enamored by anything that had to do with her father’s work at sea—but this object more than any other was her delight. And it had been a symbol to them both of his love and guidance to his daughter.

Then her father added huskily, “So you will always be able to find your way home.”

Beth couldn’t breathe.

He cleared his throat again. “I wrote a Bible verse on a slip of paper inside. Don’t forget its words, Beth. They are absolutely true, and especially for you as you begin this . . .” But he couldn’t finish.

She threw her arms around his neck and struggled not to weep. When she felt a hand touch her back, Beth turned toward her mother and another painful good-bye.

“It’s so hard to let you go, darling,” her mother said, obviously doing her best to keep her voice steady. “Do try to get your rest, dear. And remember to take your Scott’s Emulsion daily. I worry so about your constitution being strong enough for this endeavor. And I shall be praying each day—you know that.”

How fully Beth knew that to be true. “I love you, Mother,” she told her, embracing her tightly.

“Yes, dear. I love you too.” Beth leaned back and saw rare tears forming in her mother’s eyes.

“Don’t forget, my darling, I shall want to know all about everything, and I will watch rather impatiently for each of your letters,” her mother added.

“Yes, Mother.”

“I’m sorry, Priscilla, but it’s time,” Father prompted solemnly. “We need to let Beth get on her way.”

Mother’s expression betrayed a pitiful sorrow. “It’s just for a year, I know. Yet that seems ever so long just now.” She dabbed at her eyes with a lace hankie, kissing Beth’s cheek one last time.

Then Julie pushed forward and flung her arms around Beth. “I’ll miss you! I’ll miss you so much!”

Emotions were threatening to overwhelm Beth now. She buried her face against Julie’s shoulder.

After a moment Father interrupted. “Come, Beth. The train is just about to pull out.”

Then everything happened at once. A porter took Beth’s case, and she turned to follow as directed. She climbed the steps into the train’s vestibule and, stopping to wave just once more to her beloved family, she turned the corner and entered the confining hallway. The porter had already disappeared around a bend not far ahead, and Beth hurried to catch up.

The man ushered her to a private sleeping compartment, and motioning toward each of its amenities, he explained their use. However, Beth was not in a state to understand a word of what he was saying, staring around her blankly. She finally moved to the window and drew back the thick velvet curtain, only to find she was looking out on the wrong side of the train to catch one more glimpse of her family, finding instead the looming windows of another motionless train.

Dutifully, Beth turned back to the porter and pulled out the coins Father had given her for a tip. The man doffed his funny little hat and pulled the door closed behind him.

She had never felt so alone.