

COURAGE TO DREAM
BOOK 2

A WORTHY HEART

SUSAN ANNE MASON



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Susan Anne Mason, *A Worthy Heart*
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*To my mother-in-law, Barb,
who has been such a cheerleader in my life,
especially with respect to my writing!*

*And to my mother, Irene,
who doesn't quite understand this whole
publishing thing but is happy for me anyway!*

“Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have
called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine.”

Isaiah 43:1

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THERE SHE IS! The Statue of Liberty.”

The eager cry of a child caused a ripple of excitement among the crush of passengers as the steamship inched its way into the New York Harbor.

Maggie Montgomery craned her neck to get her first glimpse of the famous landmark. When the crowds shifted enough for her to see the giant arm holding the torch aloft, a thrill of anticipation shot through her, as sharp and biting as the wind that tore at the kerchief covering her hair. America’s symbol for freedom. For new life.

Maggie’s new life.

She clutched her brother’s arm. “Can you believe it, Gabe? We’ve made it to America.”

Gabe nodded, his gaze fixed on the wonder of the immense

statue before them. “’Tis a grand sight, to be sure.” He spoke in a reverent whisper almost drowned out by the wind.

She squeezed his coat sleeve, knowing her brother was as moved as she. Never in her wildest imaginings had she dared envision this moment—that her long-held wish to travel and see other parts of the world could actually come true. Now here they were on an extended trip to visit their older brother, Rylan, and his family in New York. What adventures would await her here?

Gabe took her by the elbow. “Let’s move to the other side and get a look at the dock. Maybe Rylan will be there waiting for us.”

Being a big lad, Gabe had no trouble maneuvering Maggie and himself to a spot at the far side of the rail. Maggie could feel the anticipation rushing through the passengers as they chatted and laughed—many, like Maggie, seeing the tall buildings of New York for the first time.

Breathtaking was all Maggie could think. So different from their tiny village in Cork. The vastness of the scene before her made her feel as insignificant as an ant on the ground, and though grateful for Gabe’s arm around her waist, anchoring her to the rail, she couldn’t suppress the shiver of nerves that ran through her body.

Gabe pulled her closer. “Are you cold, love?”

“No. Just excited.” *Nervous, more like*. But Maggie wasn’t about to let her overprotective brother in on that tidbit of information. “It’s been so long since we’ve seen Rylan. I hope he’ll recognize us.” She paused to look into Gabe’s gray eyes, so similar to her own. “Do you think he’s changed?”

The stiff wind whipped Gabe’s dark hair about his forehead. He’d stuffed his cap into his coat pocket, since it would never stay put, battered by the ocean breeze. “No fear of that. Now that he’s married to the love of his life and has adopted wee Delia, I think Rylan will be his same jolly self.”

The fact that Rylan and Colleen had taken in one of the

children from the orphanage Rylan directed made Maggie love her brother all the more. “Delia must be seven or eight by now.”

“Just the right age to be impressed with her Aunt Maggie’s beauty and spunk.” Gabe tugged playfully at a loose curl that had escaped her head covering.

She swatted him. “Away with you. I’m no beauty. Not by New York standards, anyway.” She smiled. “I’ve been reading some American magazines to prepare me for what the ladies wear over here.” She plucked at the sleeve of her serviceable brown overcoat. “I’m afraid I’ll be painfully out of style.”

“Not to worry. You’ll have Colleen and the other O’Learys to help with your wardrobe. I’m sure they won’t mind lending you a dress or two.” Gabe grinned, revealing dimples in each cheek.

Maggie’s heart swelled with love for her handsome brother who had long been her protector. She knew Gabe had not been keen to come on this voyage, that he was doing it at the request of their mother. The rest of her family had all agreed that she and Gabe would stay in America until the end of the summer. Long enough, her mother hoped, for Gabe to forget about the political uprisings in Ireland. And long enough for Maggie’s former beau to forget about her and get on with his life.

In the emotional aftermath of her failed betrothal to Neill Fitzgerald, Mum had given Maggie the money for her passage without a moment’s hesitation. But when the time had come to go, leaving her mother had been the hardest thing Maggie had ever done.

“Hey now, why the sour expression?” Gabe elbowed her. “You look like someone kicked your cat.”

She gave a discreet sniff and lifted her chin. “Just missing home is all. ’Tis a far cry from this, isn’t it?” She gestured to the ever-nearing shoreline.

“That it is.” Gabe gave her another squeeze and a knowing

look. “Mum will be fine with Paddy and Claire and the grand-kids. You have nothing to feel guilty about.”

Nothing except the secret she held close to her heart. But no use dwelling on that now.

Loud shouts from the upper decks created a wave of movement among the crowd.

“Looks like we’re docking. We’d best gather our bags.”

As soon as the crew lowered the gangplank, the eager passengers scurried to disembark. Swept along with the rush, Maggie clutched her bag with one hand and Gabe’s arm with the other. How would they ever find Rylan in all this confusion?

Her legs shook with her first steps on solid ground in nearly seven days. She concentrated on staying upright, scarcely able to take in the scope of the wharf and the crowds of people bustling about her. The rancid odor of raw fish and ripe bodies met her nose.

Gabe guided her to an open spot by a wall, setting their bags on the ground beside her. “Wait here and rest a minute. I’ll try to find Rylan.” He took his cap out of his pocket and slipped it over his unruly hair. “Don’t move ’til I return. Promise?”

“I promise.” She had no intention of going anywhere, content to watch the flurry of activity on the docks—the men unloading the ship and the rest of the passengers pouring off. Maggie untied the knot of the kerchief under her chin, pulled it off, and stuffed it into the pocket of her coat. How she yearned for a bath and a shampoo for her hair. She’d kept her long, dark curls braided and wrapped tight to her head for the whole voyage, fearful of contracting lice or some other hideous contagion.

“Maggie! Is that you?”

Maggie’s head swiveled in the direction of the elated voice. A wide smile broke over her face while unbidden tears of joy filled her eyes. “Rylan!”

Her older brother bounded toward her, heedless of the bags

and the crush of people, and scooped her into his arms. She squeezed him hard as he kissed her on both cheeks.

“Ah, Maggie. You’re even lovelier than the last time I saw you.” Rylan wiped moisture from his eyes.

Maggie loved that her exuberant brother never tried to hide his emotions, but experienced every one full out. “You’re a charming liar. I look a wreck after a week on that bobbing cork.” She laughed out loud at the sheer pleasure of seeing him again. “You, on the other hand, look wonderful. Marriage must agree with you.”

He winked and grinned. “With a wife as beautiful as my Colleen, how could it not?”

She gave him another hug. “I’m so happy to see you. I’ve missed you something terrible.” She pressed a kiss to his cheek. “I can’t wait to see my sister-in-law and my niece.” She’d met little Delia three years ago when Rylan had brought his new family to Ireland on his rather unconventional honeymoon. After finalizing Delia’s adoption, Rylan and Colleen took the little girl with them everywhere.

“And Colleen is just as eager to see you.” He straightened and scanned the immediate area. “Where is Gabe? He shouldn’t leave you alone.”

“Searching for you. Did you not see him?”

“No.” He frowned. “I hope he’s not run into any trouble. There are some unsavory characters around here, looking to pick the pockets of unsuspecting travelers as they disembark.”

“No need to fear, brother. My pockets are still intact.”

Rylan grinned and turned to clasp Gabe in a huge hug.

“It’s been far too long.” Gabe clapped Rylan on the back.

Rylan nodded. “You have no idea how good it is to have family on this side of the ocean. Come on. Colleen will be worrying if we don’t get back soon.”

The men picked up the suitcases, and the threesome set off

toward the main street leading into the city. Feeling steadier, Maggie soaked in every detail of the colorful surroundings—the magnificent buildings, so tall she couldn't find the tops, the vibrant clothing in many different styles, and the interesting speech patterns of the people passing by.

They'd traveled about two blocks when Rylan stopped. "We'll catch the streetcar here. It will take us within a block of my home." He set the luggage on the ground beneath a sign. "Since we don't own a motorcar, we walk or take the streetcar."

"No need to explain, Ry. You know we walk everywhere at home."

Maggie smiled. "A streetcar will be a luxury for me."

As is this whole trip.

The only thing marring her excitement was the persistent niggles of guilt that continued to plague her. Everyone believed she was here for a summer sojourn, but in truth she had no intention of returning to Ireland. The opportunity to come to America, to escape the restrictions of her small village and to seek her fortune in the big city, was a dream Maggie was not willing to sacrifice. Even if it meant leaving her beloved mother behind forever.



Twenty minutes later, after an unsettling ride on a tram car that jostled worse than their ship over the waves, Gabe helped his sister step down. He set his bag on the ground and paused a moment to catch his breath.

The sights along the route had made Gabe's pulse race in a way he hadn't anticipated. With the political unrest increasing in Ireland, he hadn't wanted to leave home. The only reason he'd agreed to this trip was to ease his mother's anxiety about Maggie traveling alone. Perhaps unfairly, Gabe had been prepared to detest everything about New York, yet he'd almost

fallen off his seat when they'd passed a local fire station and he'd caught a glimpse of a gleaming red fire truck inside the open door. Other than spending time with Rylan and his family, Gabe looked forward to learning how the New York Fire Department operated. He hoped to bring ideas back to his rather rustic station in Cork. Any methods of improvement would be welcome in their small town.

After a few minutes of walking, Gabe slowed when Rylan stopped at the foot of a cement staircase.

"This is it," Rylan announced, starting up the steps to a tall, brick house.

Compared to their mother's cottage back in Ireland, Rylan's home seemed as large as a castle. Yet Gabe wouldn't trade the lush green meadows surrounding their thatched house for anything. He scanned the street lined with row upon row of similar structures and not a blade of grass in sight. Where did Delia run and play?

"Quit gawking and get in here," Rylan said with a laugh.

He pushed open the front door, and they entered a long, narrow hallway. Quick footsteps sounded in the distance, and almost immediately a girl ran toward them.

"Mama, hurry up. They're here!" The blond tyke raced over to Rylan and launched herself into his outstretched arms.

Rylan beamed at the girl. "You remember Uncle Gabe and Aunt Maggie, don't you?"

Delia nodded, ducking her head. "I remember Aunt Maggie 'cause she's so pretty."

Gabe held back a snort.

Maggie ignored him and plucked the child out of Rylan's arms. "Not as pretty as you, sweet girl. What I wouldn't give for hair as fair as yours." She rained kisses on the girl's cheeks, causing an eruption of giggles.

Rylan winked as Colleen came up beside him. "There's my

lovely wife. I was beginning to think you'd been captured by leprechauns."

Colleen swatted her husband's arm. Three years of marriage had not dimmed her fiery hair and violet-blue eyes.

"Hush," she scolded her husband as she stepped forward to hug Gabe.

He kissed her cheek. "Grand to see you again, Colleen."

"We're so pleased you could come and visit. Rylan gets so lonely for his family."

The love shining on her face made Gabe's breath catch. What would it be like to have the devotion of such a fine woman? So unlike the fickle Brigid, who'd thrown him over for another fire-fighter. Gabe turned his thoughts firmly away from his ill-fated romance and concentrated on his brother's family.

Colleen hugged Maggie. "You must be exhausted after your voyage. Make yourself at home in the parlor, and I'll boil the water for tea."

Rylan took their overcoats and hung them on a hook, then led them through a door on the right into a cozy living area where a cheerful fire burned in the hearth. A sofa and two armchairs flanked the fireplace.

Maggie plopped onto the settee, little Delia still clinging to her neck.

"Can I get you a nip of Irish whisky?" Rylan asked.

Gabe shook his head. "No, thank you. One too many hang-overs cured me of that vice. Tea will be lovely."

Rylan took the seat opposite Gabe. "How was Mum when you left? Was she really all right with you two coming here?"

"Aye. She wished she could come, too, but her health still isn't the best. Paddy and Claire will look out for her while we're gone. Tommy and Eileen will help, as well."

A trace of sadness crept over Rylan's features. "I wish I could get away for a month or so to go home for a visit, but the or-

phanage is bursting at the seams lately, and I wouldn't leave Colleen to manage on her own."

"Oh? Any news we should know about?" Maggie winked at Rylan over Delia's blond curls.

Gabe had half-expected to see Colleen ripe with child when they arrived, yet her slim figure belied the arrival of a niece or nephew anytime soon.

A frown darkened Rylan's brow. "No, and it's a bit of a sore subject, so I'd appreciate it if neither of you mentioned it, unless she brings up the topic."

"So, Rylan," Gabe said, taking the opportunity to change the subject, "any chance you can get me a tour of the nearest fire station tomorrow?"

"Is that all you ever think of?" Maggie rolled her eyes. "Can you not forget about fires for once?"

"Not when it's in Gabe's blood, sister dear." Rylan stood to poke at the fire. The logs hissed as a flame shot upward. "As a matter of fact, I know Chief Witherspoon quite well. He inspects the orphanage on a regular basis. I could arrange a tour, if you'd like."

"That would be grand. The sooner the better."

Rylan laughed. "Being cooped up on that boat has made you itchy, I see. Not to worry. I'm sure I can spare a few minutes tomorrow to take you over."

A thrill of excitement quickened Gabe's pulse. With inside knowledge of New York's renowned stations, Gabe could return home a hero and hopefully earn a promotion at work.

That thought brought a smile to his face and made this unwanted trip to America a great deal more bearable.