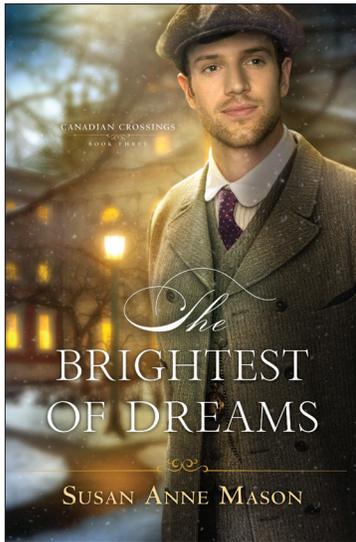




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH SUSAN ANNE MASON



The Brightest of Dreams

CANADIAN CROSSINGS #3

by Susan Anne Mason

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1. This story centers around the British Home Children who came to Canada in the early twentieth century. Can you tell us a little more about the subject?

I'd be happy to. When this topic was suggested as a possible subject for a book, I confess I'd never heard of the British Home Children before. After doing some research, I was surprised to learn the role they've played in my country's history. From the late 1860s to about 1948, more than one hundred thousand children of all ages were sent from the United Kingdom to Canada to be used as indentured workers, mostly on Canadian farms. The intention was that the orphans would have a better life in the wide, open spaces of Canada until the age of eighteen, at which time they would receive a decent amount of money to start them on their own path in life.

The sad reality is that many children were abused, both physically and emotionally. Often the children were not orphans at all but victims of hard times, whose parent had placed them in the home temporarily, hoping that when their situation improved they would reclaim their offspring. However, by the time this occurred, the children had already been shipped off to Canada. This is the plight of Quinten Aspinall's younger siblings in *The Brightest of Dreams*. When Quinn returns from the war, he is devastated to learn that his mother is in a workhouse and his three siblings have been sent to Canada. Thus begins his journey to find them and to ultimately reunite his family.

2. Tell us a little more about your hero in *The Brightest of Dreams*.

Quinten Aspinall is one of my favorite heroes. He's protective, driven, honorable, and fiercely loyal, almost to a fault. When his father died, he made Quinn promise to provide for the family and keep them all together. For nine years, Quinn tried his best to do so, working as a valet for an earl and sending every shilling home to his mother for his younger siblings. When WWI broke out and Quinn was sent off to war, he had no idea that his mother was in such dire straits or that she surrendered the children to one of the Barnardo Homes. When he learns that Becky, Cecil, and Harry have been sent to Canada as indentured workers, Quinn is devastated and vows to bring them home where they belong. Of course, I had to include a little romance in the mix, so I added Julia Holloway—a young woman who has “run off” with a Canadian soldier. Quinn is asked by her uncle to look for her while he's overseas, promising that if he manages to bring her home, he'll be in for a handsome reward.

3. Can you tell us a little more about Julia and her story?

Without giving away too much, Julia is in dire straits when Quinn finds her living in the slums of Toronto. She came to Canada to help a wounded soldier, but circumstances changed and she is left with no money, nowhere to live, and no way to get back to England. She ends up living in the worst conditions with a less than scrupulous landlord and soon finds herself running out of options. Thankfully, Quinn arrives just in the nick of time and though Julia hates to be indebted to Quinn, she can't afford to refuse his help. Things just start to look up for her when she receives news that will change her life forever. (Is this enough of a tease to read the book?)

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4. It looks like Quinn and Julia will have an interesting journey to love. Is there another romance in this book?

Yes, there's a charming secondary romance between the widowed boarding house owner, Mrs. Chamberlain, and Reverend Burke, the wise pastor. Mrs. Chamberlain and the minister have been friends for years, supporting each other through the deaths of their spouses. But unbeknownst to Mrs. Chamberlain, the good pastor has been harboring romantic feelings for the indomitable woman. Quinn's arrival at Mrs. Chamberlain's doorstep brings back horrible memories from her childhood, and Reverend Burke helps Mrs. Chamberlain find the closure she never received back then. I didn't plan on Mrs. Chamberlain having been a British Home child herself, but the story just evolved on its own and has a fitting tie-in with this last book in the series.

5. Is this a standalone book or part of a series, and what else would you like us to know about it?

The Brightest of Dreams is the third book in the CANADIAN CROSSINGS series, but it is most definitely a standalone book. I did this on purpose so that each of the three books could be read independently of the others. The protagonists of all three stories meet on the ship coming to Canada, each with their own reason for making the voyage. Their individual stories are told separately, but there are a few overlapping characters in all of the books, such as Mrs. Chamberlain and Reverend Burke. It's a fun touch that adds a nice consistency to the series.

6. What is the overall theme of the book?

I think the main theme is learning to rely on God to get us through life's hardships. Quinn tries too hard to fix all of his family's problems on his own and soon learns that he can't control the actions of others. Instead, only through prayer and trusting in God's plan for those he loves can he accept the outcome that occurs.

This story deals with some somber topics, such as abuse, but I felt the need to portray the events as realistically as possible—without being graphic—in order to do justice to what the real British Home Children went through.

I hope readers will love the twists and turns of Quinn and Julia's story as much as I did!