

Redemption's Light *2*



To
Find Her
Place

Susan Anne Mason

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To all the dedicated social workers
who strive tirelessly to help
children in need in their communities.
May God bless you and them!



*Be strong and courageous; do not be
frightened or dismayed, for the LORD
your God is with you wherever you go.*

JOSHUA 1:9



1



September 1943

A'm leaving now, Mama. Are you sure you've got everything you need?"

Jane Linder glanced from her mother, seated in her favorite plaid armchair, to the wooden mantel clock and tried to ignore her rising anxiety. Today she needed to catch an early bus in order to attend an unexpected board meeting.

One that could affect the future of her job.

And today, of all days, Mama was having a bad morning.

"I'll be fine, Janey." Mama plucked at the fraying hem of her bathrobe sleeve. "Don't worry about me."

Jane pulled a napkin from the breakfast tray on the side table and set it on her mother's lap. "You have your toast and tea right here. And there's leftover soup for lunch. I'll come home at noon and check on you if I can."

Mama gave a wan smile that accentuated the bluish tinge to her mouth and pushed a lock of gray hair off her forehead. "I know it's an important day for you. I don't want you worrying about me. I'm sure I'll feel better soon."

"All right. I hope so." Jane made a quick scan of the narrow living room, ensuring the drapes covering the front window were

open no more than a few inches—enough to let in some light, but not enough that the neighbors could see inside. She also made sure Mama’s favorite floor lamp was on and that her crossword puzzles and *Good Housekeeping* magazines all sat within easy reach.

“If it’s too hectic and I can’t come home, I’ll call Mrs. Peters and have her come check on you.” Jane slid the telephone across the coffee table, closer to Mama’s chair. “In the meantime, if you start to feel worse, please call me at work.” She knelt and grabbed her mother’s thin hand. “Promise me you will. I don’t want you to worry about bothering me. Nothing’s more important than you.”

Mama’s thin lips trembled. “You’re such a good daughter. I couldn’t ask for anyone better.” Tears formed in her eyes, creating red rims around the edges.

Jane held back a sigh. Whenever Mama had a bad spell, she became overly emotional. And sometimes rather clingy, often begging Jane not to go into the office. At times, Jane gave in and stayed home, but then felt guilty about not living up to her commitment at work. There were even days Jane considered resigning her position at the Children’s Aid Society, but with her brother away fighting in the war, Jane’s income was the only real thing keeping them afloat.

Besides, the children were too important for her to quit her job. They were the reason Jane had become a social worker in the first place—so she could help disadvantaged children find a family to love them. It was a mission entrusted to her by God, she was certain. One she couldn’t in good conscience abandon. If it meant eventually hiring a nurse to stay with Mama during the day, Jane would find a way to do so.

But for now, she needed to be on time for this meeting.

“I have to go, Mama. I’ll see you later.” She kissed her mother’s papery cheek, whispered a quick prayer for the Lord’s protection over her, then grabbed her satchel and rushed out the door.



Jane's heels clattered on the tile floors as she hurried toward the conference room situated on the second floor of the municipal building. The interior of the stone structure remained cool, a fact that Jane welcomed. Dressed in her best green suit and ivory blouse, she wanted to make a good impression and not appear like a wilted flower.

The double doors of the meeting room stood slightly ajar, and a murmur of voices drifted outward. Nerves dampened Jane's palms as she paused to gain her bearings and take a breath.

She had a fair idea why the board wished to see her today. Her boss, Mr. Mills, had done her the courtesy of calling yesterday to let her know before it was announced that he had decided to retire and that the position of Managing Director of the Toronto Children's Aid Society would now be open.

For the past six months, Jane had been filling in for her ailing boss as acting directress, a position that carried a lot of responsibility. Yet she'd welcomed the chance to prove herself in the role, hoping to garner the board's favor. And today's meeting might be the culmination of that goal, since she fully intended to submit her application as a contender for the position. If Vera Moberly could successfully run the Toronto Infants' Home, there was no reason Jane couldn't do the same with the Children's Aid Society. As a caseworker, she'd longed to make policy changes but lacked the power to do so. Now, excitement bubbled through her at the potential good she could bring about for the children.

Focus, Jane. Don't get ahead of yourself.

She smoothed down her skirt, adjusted the sleeves of her jacket, and stepped through the door, making certain her best smile was in place.

A large oval table dominated the room. Several men and women were seated around it, while others stood by the coffee cart in the corner. She made a quick scan of the faces, trying to match the names with the various board members.

"Mrs. Linder. Thank you for coming in on such short notice."

Mr. Fenmore, the chairman of the board, approached her with a tight smile. For a man in his mid-to-late fifties, he was tall and fit. He wore a dark suit and thin silver eyeglasses that matched the color of his hair.

“My pleasure, Mr. Fenmore.” She shook his hand. “I hope I haven’t kept you waiting.”

“Not at all. You’re right on time. If you’ll take your seat, we can get this meeting started.”

Jane pasted on a pleasant expression, one she hoped hid her nerves, and took the chair Mr. Fenmore indicated, while the other board members returned to their seats.

Mr. Fenmore took his place at the head of the table and nodded to a woman at the far end. “Marcie, are you ready?”

The woman, obviously here to take the minutes, raised her head, pen poised over a notepad. “Yes, sir.”

He inclined his head. “Then I officially call this emergency board meeting to order.”

Jane swallowed. She’d been invited to a few board meetings in her six months as directress, but they hadn’t seemed quite this formal. The word *emergency* sent a chill of foreboding down her spine, but she told herself the term simply meant that the gathering was out of the ordinary from the group’s usual monthly meeting.

“Thank you again for coming, Mrs. Linder,” Mr. Fenmore said. “Although I could have come to your workplace, we felt that discretion would be better served if we met here.”

“I understand.” The foreboding chill spread down her legs to her toes. Why would they need such secrecy over Mr. Mills’s retirement? Everyone at the Children’s Aid would know soon enough.

The man shifted on his chair. “Mrs. Linder, I assume you are aware of the difficulties facing the agency right now—the additional workload, the lack of available foster families, and the decrease in funding, just to name a few.”

“I’m very aware of it, sir,” she said with quiet dignity. “I deal with these problems and more on a daily basis.”

Mr. Fenmore’s gray eyebrows rose slightly. “Of course you do. And you’re doing an admirable job in Mr. Mills’s absence. I only hope you don’t take offense to what I’m about to tell you.”

Jane’s stomach clenched. This did not sound good. And so far, it didn’t appear to have anything to do with Mr. Mills’s announcement.

“After going over the financial statements from the last several months, it has become evident that the agency is in worse straits than we imagined.”

“Considerably worse,” one of the other members added.

The man who’d just spoken up was Mr. Warren. He was the accountant, a rather surly man who always went over their financial records each month with a magnifying glass.

Jane’s shoulders stiffened as she looked around the table. Far from seeming sympathetic, some of the members were giving her hard stares that made her throat constrict. Surely they didn’t blame her for the conditions at the agency. Mr. Fenmore knew the problems stemmed from the effects of the war. What control could she have over that?

“It’s true,” she said carefully, “that the last few months have been particularly difficult. However, I’m confident this is a temporary problem that will rectify itself in short order.”

“We hope that is the case as well.” Mr. Warren spoke up again. “But to make certain, we would like to have access to the Children’s Aid’s financial statements for the last two years as well as any other pertinent records.”

“I see.” Her brain whirled with the logistics of gathering that much paperwork together.

Mr. Fenmore leaned forward in his chair. “These records will be made available to an independent advisor whom we have hired to make a thorough study of the organization. His name is Garrett Wilder, and he will examine not only the finances, but the

agency as a whole. We felt it would be beneficial to get an objective outside opinion about what we are doing right and what we could improve upon.”

Jane’s chest suddenly felt hollow, as though all the air had seeped out. An auditor? This could not have come at a worse time. She didn’t need an outsider casting judgment on her methods right when she planned to make a bid for the director’s job.

“Mr. Wilder will be arriving tomorrow morning.” Mr. Fenmore’s chair squeaked as he leaned back. “We would like you to provide him with an area to work and give him your full cooperation.”

An area to work? Where was she to find space when they were so overcrowded already?

“May I ask how long he’ll be spending with us?” Jane asked. Hopefully only a day or two. It would be tight, but they could manage.

“Likely several weeks.”

Jane leaned forward, her cheeks heating. Something wasn’t adding up here. Why were they doing this now? From that stony look Mr. Fenmore gave her, it made her suspect there was another reason for this audit. One he wasn’t willing to share with her.

“May I inquire about Mr. Mills?” she asked when she found her voice again. “I understand he has officially decided to retire.”

Mr. Fenmore nodded. “Yes. We learned that late yesterday. I assume he informed you as well.”

“He did. He felt it was only fitting that I know of his decision since—” she inhaled and did her best to slow her heartbeat—“since I intend to put my name forth as a candidate for the permanent position.”

A few murmurs went around the table.

Jane eyed some of the female board members, hoping for their support at least. But their stoic features gave nothing away.

“I see.” Mr. Fenmore stroked his mustache. “Well, we won’t be making any decisions until Mr. Wilder presents us with his

recommendations. At that point, we will be pleased to accept your candidacy, along with all the rest.”

A wave of relief washed over her. They weren’t opposed to her application. All she had to do was make sure Mr. Wilder found everything in tip-top shape and gave her a glowing report.

“I suppose it’s only fair to tell you,” Mr. Fenmore went on, “that Mr. Wilder plans to put his name forth for the position as well. In addition, with jobs being so scarce now, we’re likely to get dozens of other applications. I just want you to be aware of the level of competition there will be for the job.”

“I understand.” Jane did her best to keep her composure.

“However, for now, let’s take it one step at a time, shall we?” He looked around the table. “If we are all in agreement, I believe we can declare this meeting adjourned.”

As the board members began to file out, Jane’s stomach sank to her shoes, her anticipation turning to ashes.

If she were to get this job, she’d have some major hurdles to navigate first.

She only prayed she would be up to the challenge.