

★ WAVES *of* FREEDOM • I ★

THROUGH
WATERS
DEEP

A N O V E L

SARAH SUNDIN


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To our youngest son, Matthew,
my research buddy, bodyguard,
and enthusiastic reader.

1

Boston Navy Yard; Boston, Massachusetts
Tuesday, March 18, 1941

On a platform by the bow of the USS *Ettinger*, Mary Stirling prepared supplies no one would notice unless they were missing.

While nautical pennants snapped in the sea breeze and the band played “Anchors Aweigh” for the ship-launching ceremony, Mary set down a box containing rags, a towel, a whisk broom, and a first aid kit. Then she nestled a bottle of champagne in a silver bucket.

Something crinkled. Odd.

Mary picked up the bottle in its decorative tin shield that prevented shattering. Yesterday, she’d tied red, white, and blue ribbon around the neck. Now the ribbon didn’t lie flat, the bow was lopsided, and the foil around the cork seemed loose and wrinkled, as if someone had taken it off and replaced it.

Why? Scenarios zipped through her head, each more ludicrous than the one before. “Too much Nancy Drew in junior high,” she muttered. And too many spy and saboteur stories in the press lately. With the United States clinging to

neutrality in the war in Europe, tensions between isolationists and interventionists had become sharper than the prow of the *Ettinger*.

Mary stroked the sleek red hull of the new destroyer towering above her. "Into the wild Atlantic you go."

"That is a bad year."

Mary smiled at the French accent and faced her roommate and co-worker at the Boston Navy Yard, Yvette Lafontaine. "I doubt the *Ettinger* cares about the champagne's vintage."

"She should." Yvette narrowed her golden-brown eyes at the ship, then lit up and grasped Mary's shoulders. "But you look *très magnifique*."

Mary knew better than to argue. "Thank you for helping me choose the hat. I love it." The shape flattered her face, and the fawn color blended with her brown hair and the heavy tweed coat she wore. It would also go well with her spring coat—if winter ever ended.

Yvette fingered the puff of netting on the brim. "I still prefer the red one."

"Not red."

"Sometimes a woman needs to . . . to accent, not match." The glamorous brunette tapped Mary's nose. "You listen to me. We French know fashion, wine, food, and love. Obviously we do not know war." Her voice lowered to a growl.

Mary puckered one corner of her mouth in sympathy. Poor Yvette had been studying at Harvard when the Nazis trampled her country in May and June of 1940. Almost a year ago. Stranded in the States after graduation, Yvette took a job at the Navy Yard.

"I'll see you at the apartment. I must find Henri and Solange." Yvette trotted down the steps.

"See you later." Mary spotted her boss, Barton Pennington, next to the platform. She leaned over the railing draped with red, white, and blue bunting. "Mr. Pennington!"

He smiled up at her and folded his gloved hands over his broad belly. “Ah, Miss Stirling. All ready?”

“Yes, but . . .” She held up the champagne bottle. “The foil is loose and the ribbon is disturbed. It looks like someone tampered with it.”

Mr. Pennington gave her the amused fatherly look he wore whenever she fussed over something trivial. “I’m sure it’s nothing but rough handling.”

“Very rough.” She smoothed out the wrinkles and her worries and settled the bottle in its bucket.

“You’ve done a great job again. And look at all the people.” Mr. Pennington gestured to the crowd. At least a hundred naval personnel and shipyard workers milled about.

Nausea seized Mary’s belly. But why? None of the people looked at her. None of them had come to see her. She hadn’t put herself on display. Yet logic and panic never listened to each other.

“I—I’m all done, Mr. Pennington.” Mary gripped the banister and scurried down the stairs, each step quelling the nausea.

“I’ll see you after the launching.”

Mary waved over her shoulder and headed toward the back of the crowd to watch the ceremony. To one side, a cluster of shipyard workers praised President Roosevelt’s newly signed Lend-Lease bill to send billions of dollars of aid to Britain. To the other side, another cluster of workers denounced the legislation as nothing but warmongering.

Although Mary certainly didn’t want American boys to die in another European war, the images of bombed-out London wrenched her heart. The United States had to do something or Britain would fall.

A laugh filtered through the noise, a familiar male laugh, tickling at her memory.

Across a parting in the crowd, she saw two naval officers in

navy blue overcoats and caps—“covers” in the naval jargon. One man had fair hair and one had dark.

The dark-haired officer had a friendly, open face, very much like Jim Avery from back home in Vermilion, Ohio. Except Jim was tall and scrawny, and this man was tall and . . . not scrawny.

Jim had attended the Naval Academy, and Mary hadn't seen him since high school. A lot could happen to a person in five years.

Mary inched closer, and with each step the officer looked more like Jim Avery, except he held himself straighter, with more assurance.

He laughed at something his friend said, and in a flash, Mary was sitting around a table at the soda fountain with her best friend Quintessa Beaumont, Quintessa's boyfriend Hugh Mackey, and Hugh's best friend, Jim. All of them enraptured by Quintessa's effervescence.

Jim's gaze drifted to her, and he gave her the mild smile men gave silver girls like Mary, without the spark reserved for golden girls like Quintessa.

Oh, why had she come over? How silly of her. She returned the mild smile and angled her path away.

But Jim peered at her and took a step in her direction. “Mary? Mary Stirling?”

He actually remembered her? “Jim Avery?”

With a grin, he strode forward and gripped her hand. “Well, I'll be. What are you doing in Boston?”

“I work here. Almost four years now.” She gestured to the grand expanses of scaffolding. “I'm a secretary.” No need to go into prideful detail.

“Isn't that swell?” In the icy sunshine, his eyes were clearly hazel.

Had Mary ever noticed that before? “I assume the Navy brought you to town?”

Jim beckoned to his companion. “Mary, this is my friend, Archer Vandenberg. Arch, this is Mary Stirling from Ohio. Arch and I went to the Academy together, and we’ve just been assigned to the *Atwood*.”

“Oh yes.” The Gleaves-class destroyer had been launched at the shipyard in December and had almost completed the fitting-out process before commissioning.

“A pleasure to meet you, Mary.” Arch spoke with the measured tones of upper-crust New England, but the shine in his blue eyes said he didn’t deem a Midwestern secretary beneath his acquaintance. “Four years in Boston, did you say?”

“Yes.”

“Say . . .” Jim nudged his friend.

Arch crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes at Mary. “Yes, she’ll do quite nicely.”

She drew back. “Pardon?”

Jim laughed. “Never mind him. We were just talking about how we’re new to town and wish we knew someone to show us around.”

The thought of an excursion lifted her smile. “I could do that. I love exploring this city. So much history.”

“Swell. I had visions of Jim and Gloria and I walking into the harbor while trying to navigate.” Arch held up the launching program as if it were a map and squinted at it.

Jim dipped a partial bow. “And you’ll save me from being the third wheel. Again.”

What fun. Although Yvette was a dear friend, she socialized with French refugees, and Mary didn’t speak French. “How about this Sunday? You could join me for church or meet me afterward.”

“A real church with pews? That doesn’t rock with the waves? Count us in.” Jim pulled a pen from the breast pocket of his shirt. “Arch, you have something—”

“I have a notepad.” Mary always did. She wrote down the church’s address and sketched a map.

The band stopped playing. Mary passed Jim the slip of paper and turned to watch the ceremony under a bright blue sky. If only the temperature hadn’t dipped to sixteen degrees, one detail Mary couldn’t control.

The *Ettinger* filled her sight, sleek as an arrow, 348 feet in length and 36 feet across at the beam. Above her red hull, everything was painted gray. A string of colorful pennants swooped from her prow up to her mast and down to her stern.

Mary pressed up on her toes. What a joy to watch ceremonies as keels were laid down and ships were launched. Thank goodness her grandfather and Mr. Pennington had become fast friends in school.

The dignitaries climbed onto the platform. Then the band played the national anthem, while Mary pressed her hand over her heart and Jim and Arch stood at attention and saluted.

After the anthem, Mr. Pennington approached the microphone and thanked a list of people. He adjusted his glasses. “Today I realized I’ve been remiss. Never once at a launching have I thanked the person who works behind the scenes, making sure every little detail is in place, from the programs in your hands to the supplies at my feet.”

Mary’s breath rushed in and turned to bile. He wouldn’t. No, he wouldn’t. She eased behind Jim, behind the shield of his navy blue back.

“That person is my lovely secretary, Miss Mary Stirling. Miss Stirling, would you please join me on stage?”

No, no, no. She pressed her hand over her stomach, willing it to settle. Why hadn’t she made some mistake, forgotten some detail, missed some deadline?

“Mary? What’s the matter?” Jim looked over his shoulder at her, the visor of his cap hiding his expression.

“I can’t. I just can’t.”

Silence. Then he nodded and faced the stage. His shoulders stretched even broader. “I haven’t seen Mary, have you, Arch? Not a sign of her.”

“Who? Never heard of the girl.”

Mary took slow, even breaths, grateful for her inconspicuous hair and hat and coat, for Jim’s height and protection and whatever miraculous physical fitness they taught at Annapolis.

“Miss Stirling?” Mr. Pennington called over the buzz of the crowd. “Well, she must be hard at work. Let’s get on with the launching.”

Mary peeked around Jim’s shoulder as Mr. Pennington introduced Massachusetts state senator Ralston Fuller and his wife, Dorothy, the *Ettinger*’s sponsor. The mahogany fur on Mrs. Fuller’s coat danced in the breeze.

Senator Fuller gave a speech, the chaplain intoned the “Prayer for Our Navy,” and the commandant, Rear Adm. William Tarrant, presented the bottle of champagne to Mrs. Fuller.

She held the bottle aloft. “In the name of the United States, I christen thee *Ettinger*. May God bless her and all that sail in her.” She smashed the bottle over the hull, and the crowd erupted in applause.

The destroyer slipped down the ways and into Boston Harbor, sending giant roaring wings of water arcing on each side.

Mary’s delight flowed out in her sigh, forming white curls in the frosty air.

Up on the stage, Mrs. Fuller yelped, jumped back, and swatted at her coat.

Chuckles swept the crowd.

“Must have gotten champagne on that fancy fur coat,” Jim said.

But everyone on stage stepped back, staring at the champagne spill. “Put out your cigarettes!” someone shouted.

The men flung down their cigarettes, stomped on them.

What was going on? Mary stepped out from behind Jim.

Senator Fuller dropped his cigar, and tiny orange flames flickered around it. Mrs. Fuller screamed. Mr. Pennington tossed down Mary's rags and smothered the flames.

A murmur started at the stage and rolled out through the audience. "Gasoline."

The word slammed into Mary's chest. "The bottle."

"The bottle?" Jim frowned at her.

"The champagne bottle. I knew something was wrong. The foil was loose. Thank goodness no one was hurt."

"You think someone . . ."

"Poured out the champagne and put in gasoline. Then replaced the cork and the foil."

"But who? Why?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out." She almost smiled at the intrigued look on Jim's face. "Excuse me, but I think the police will want to talk to me."

"I'll see you Sunday." Jim winked at her. "Unless you're in jail."

"I won't be." Her fingerprints on the bottle would be expected, and since she'd called Mr. Pennington's attention to the tampering, she wouldn't be considered a suspect.

As she worked her way through the crowd to the stage, her Nancy Drew theories seemed more and more plausible.

She'd discounted her instincts, but she was right. If only she'd pressed Mr. Pennington further and investigated more.

Who would do such a thing? And why?

Did a political rival want to harm Senator Fuller or his wife? Did someone hope to keep the *Ettinger* off the seas? Did someone want to discredit the Boston Navy Yard? Was it a saboteur?

A thrill tingled up her spine. Not only did she have an excursion to anticipate, but she had her very own mystery.