

★ WAVES *of* FREEDOM • 2 ★

ANCHOR  
IN THE  
STORM

A NOVEL

SARAH SUNDIN



*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Sarah Sundin, *Anchor in the Storm*  
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To Zander and Anna Cameron—

What a joy to watch the pursuit, the resistance, the persistence, the melting—as our daughter slowly fell in love with one of her brother’s best friends. Many blessings to you in your marriage.

# 1

## **Vermilion, Ohio**

**Sunday, December 7, 1941**

Lillian Avery's dream couldn't have come true at a worse time.

In the pale afternoon sun slanting through the kitchen window, Dad sat at the table building a model ship while humming "On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand," and Mom gathered kitchen gadgets.

"Here. A flour sifter." Mom added it to Lillian's pile on the counter.

"Remember, Mary Stirling said I didn't need to bring anything for the apartment in Boston."

Mom rummaged through a cabinet. "But do they have a flour sifter? You'll need one. And last Christmas Jim gave me a new one." Her voice cracked.

Lillian's heart clenched. At the table, Dad stopped humming and gave Lillian a look that said, "At a time like this, take the flour sifter."

Mom already had reason to be anxious, with the United States tilting on the brink of war and the three oldest Avery

boys serving as naval officers. But now? Two weeks after Jim's destroyer—a neutral ship!—had been sunk by a U-boat? Two weeks of not knowing if he was alive or dead?

How could Lillian leave home at a time like this?

She squeezed the handle of the flour sifter so it made the “shugga-shugga” sound she loved. “Sure, Mom. But if you fill my trunk with gadgets, I won't have room for clothing and I'll have to walk around Boston naked.” She winked at Dad.

He smiled and resumed humming and tinkering.

“Lillian Avery! What am I going to do with you?” Mom extracted herself from the cabinet, her hazel eyes misty. “Rather, what am I going to do without you?”

“You'll manage, same as you did when I was at Ohio State.”

“I know.” Mom tucked a graying lock of hair back into the roll at the nape of her neck. “But I do wish you'd found a job closer to home.”

Lillian suppressed a groan. Even excellent grades hadn't shielded her from six months of unemployment. Thank goodness Jim had found her a position in Boston. Of course, she'd still have to prove herself. In the acceptance letter, Cyrus Dixon had stated he didn't want to hire a girl pharmacist but that the peacetime draft limited his choices. She could imagine how he felt about hiring a cripple.

“I'll be fine, Mom.” In time, she'd win over crotchety Mr. Dixon.

“I know. You have my spunk.” Mom squinted at a turkey baster.

“I don't know, Erma.” Dad tied a miniature sail to a miniature mast. “With Lillian's spunk and Mary Stirling for a roommate, she could get in all kinds of trouble.”

“Isn't that something?” Lillian plucked the turkey baster from her mother's hand and slipped it into the drawer. “I didn't know her well growing up, but she was always so quiet and sensible, and off she goes—”

“And catches a saboteur.” Mom stashed the baster in Lillian’s pile. “Well, young lady, see you don’t get caught up in such shenanigans.”

“I’m working at a drugstore, not an ammunition plant.” To distract her parents from the truth that drug addicts did rob drugstores, Lillian grabbed the baster, held it to her mouth like a trumpet, and squeezed the rubber bulb in rhythm to her words. “Don’t make me go to Massachusetts. That’s where Thanksgiving started. Do you know what they do to turkeys there?”

“Goofy girl.” Mom laughed. She actually laughed, for the first time since the telegram came. “But what if you need—”

“They have stores in Boston. I—”

The doorbell rang.

Everyone sucked in a breath. It was only three-thirty. Lucy and Martin weren’t arriving until five. Who else would come on a Sunday afternoon?

A telegram would.

“I’ll get it.” Lillian kept her voice light. She turned too fast, and her prosthesis pinched the skin around her knee, but she moved at a steady and calm pace for her parents’ sake.

“Oh, George.” Mom’s voice wavered.

Grasping the doorknob, Lillian squeezed her eyes shut. *Lord, please let Jim be all right.*

Her two younger brothers, Ed and Charlie, pounded down the stairs behind her.

Lillian twisted the doorknob and faced the boy from Western Union and whatever news he had. After she tipped him and he departed, she leaned against the doorjamb, the door wide open, chilly air nipping at her good leg.

“Read it,” her father said, deep and firm.

She slipped a shaky finger under the lip of the envelope. How could one tiny slip of paper hold the power to change their lives forever?

Lillian scanned it, read it, read it again to make sure she comprehended, her breath chuffing out faster and faster, pushing up a smile. “It’s from Jim.”

“Yes . . . ?” Mom said, her eyes anxious.

“No, Mom. Not from the Navy. From Jim. He’s alive.”

“Oh, hallelujah.” She sagged against the wall, eyes shut, hands clasped under her chin.

Dad grabbed the telegram. “Here you go. ‘Alive and whole. Back in Boston. Thirty-day survivor’s leave. Might come home for Christmas. Might bring Arch.’”

“He’s alive, and he’s coming home.” Mom smiled toward heaven.

“Might come home, he said.” Lillian tugged her old maroon sweater tighter around her.

“He’s bringing Arch,” Dad said. “Such a nice young man.”

“Might bring him.” Lillian hadn’t met Jim’s best friend, Archer Vandenberg, who came with a pedigree as hoity-toity as his name, but she didn’t relish the thought of sharing Christmas with some snooty society boy.

At the base of the stairs, Ed and Charlie sang about the unsinkable Avery boys and danced a bad jig with their too-big feet and their too-long legs and their too-deep voices.

A smile burst onto Lillian’s face. Why was she fussing about Christmas? Jim was alive, and nothing else mattered.

She reached outside to pull the screen door shut. Martin Freeman’s Chevy parked on the driveway, and Lucy opened the car door and dashed up the walk.

Lillian frowned. Lucy never opened a door for herself.

Her identical twin sister’s dark blonde hair bounced around her shoulders as she trotted up to the porch, her hazel eyes round, her face pale and drawn. “Did you hear?”

They must have seen the Western Union car and followed it. Lillian smiled to ease her sister’s fear. “It’s good news. Very—”

“How could you?” Lucy’s face twisted and reddened. “You’ve always been coldhearted, but this—”

“Lucy.” Dad set his voice down like a rock and clamped his hand on Lillian’s shoulder.

At that moment, Lillian’s heart felt anything but cold. “Jim’s alive.” Her tone came out clipped. “I suppose it is coldhearted of me to consider that good news.”

“Lillian.” Dad squeezed her shoulder.

Lucy’s lips parted, and her gaze swam between family members. “Jim . . . he’s alive. Well, that explains . . . but haven’t . . . oh, you aren’t listening to the radio.”

Martin stepped to his wife’s side. “You need to sit down, sweetie.”

“Oh yes. In my condition.” She curved one hand around her belly.

Lillian’s shoulders softened in Dad’s grip. After four years of marriage, Lucy was finally carrying a child into her fourth month of pregnancy. With her emotions in turmoil, outbursts were expected. Still, would an apology be too much to ask for?

Martin guided Lucy to a wing chair as if she were fragile and precious.

Familiar jealousy wormed inside. Men never treated Lillian that way. Since she was already shattered, they gaped at her in shock, then swept her into the corner and walked on past. She would never be precious.

Lillian thrust the door shut and left her self-pity outside in the cold.

“Such news,” Lucy said. “So awful.”

Ed fiddled with the radio knobs, and voices broke through the static, somber and strident.

The Avery family gathered in the living room as words organized into sentences, and sentences clarified into truth. Horrible truth about the tropical land of Hawaii and the

naval base at Pearl Harbor and Japanese planes with blood-red spots and American ships in flames. Ships sinking. Lots of ships. Good strong ships. And men killed. Lots of men. Good strong men.

Lillian's oldest brother, Dan, was on a cruiser somewhere in the Atlantic. The second-oldest brother, Rob, served in San Diego. Jim was back in Boston after surviving a sinking. What would happen to them now?

"We're at war," Lucy said with a sob.

Mom leaned on Dad. Lucy gripped her belly and Martin's arm. Charlie sat on the rug by the radio, his back straight as a gun. Ed's good strong hand formed a fist on top of the radio cabinet.

And Lillian tugged her blood-red sweater around her, knowing she could never wear it again because it would bring back memories of that day.



**Friday, December 19, 1941**

Arch couldn't shake the dream.

He shifted in the train seat and stretched his eyes wide. Anything to stay awake and avoid the nightmare. Conversation would help, but Jim Avery and Mary Stirling sat across the aisle, cooing at each other. How could Arch complain? It had taken months for the couple to admit their love, and now they reveled in it.

His eyes drifted shut. No, he couldn't fall asleep. Not in public.

With a solid shake of his head, he adjusted the jacket of his newly tailored dress blues. He'd lost most of his possessions when the *Atwood* went down.

The shudder of the torpedo piercing the destroyer's skin. The shouts of the men in the engine room as they fought

to keep the ship underway. The second torpedo. The list to starboard. The call to abandon ship.

As an officer, Arch had insisted his men get out first, but the watertight hatch was stuck. Could they open it in time?

No, he wasn't trapped. He was on a train in Ohio, but his fingers trembled in his lap.

Arch rubbed his hands together, as if cold. He'd lick this. He had to. His future depended on it.

"Here we go—Vermilion, Ohio." Jim leaned over and grinned at Arch. "Ready for a home-cooked supper?"

"Absolutely." Why hadn't he noticed the train's deceleration? He fetched his coat from the overhead rack. Two weeks in the heartland should set his head back on straight.

Better than two weeks at the Vandenberg estate in Connecticut, with long-legged Elizabeth "Bitsy" Chamberlain working her wiles on him. He'd spent three days at home after the sinking, and that was three days too many.

Arch buttoned his coat.

Ironic that Bitsy had broken up with him in high school when he insisted on attending the Naval Academy, but now her interest had reignited, potent and deadly. With the United States at war, landing a naval officer had risen in status in their society. But Arch knew her. After the war ended, she wouldn't rest until she'd trapped him in a position at Vandenberg Insurance, trapped him in the mansion she deserved.

He'd rather go down with the ship.

Arch followed Jim and Mary off the train. The evening cold stole his breath. Not as brisk as the North Atlantic convoy route, but close. On the platform, puffs of steam from the engine glowed in the lamplight.

A middle-aged couple dashed forward, laughing, and pulled Jim into an embrace and a session of face-patting, as if to affirm he was really alive.

Then Mrs. Avery embraced Mary, a girl she'd known from

childhood, exclaiming how happy she was that Mary was willing to put up with her Jim.

Mr. Avery shook Arch's hand. "Good to see you, Arch. It's been a while since we saw you at graduation. We're glad to have you."

"Thank you, sir. I'm glad to be here."

"Let's get the luggage." He led the way. "Lillian's keeping the car warmed up, Ed and Charlie are back at the house, and Lucy and Martin promised to come by and make sure the boys left us some dinner."

Arch chuckled, but his head spun. As an only child, how was he going to keep the Avery clan straight? Seven children! He knew Dan and Rob, Jim's older brothers, from the Academy, but he hadn't met the others, and he never could remember the names and relationships.

Out on the street, Mr. Avery opened the trunk of a late-model Pontiac sedan, large and serviceable, and they loaded the luggage. Then Arch slipped into the backseat on the driver's side, with Mary in the middle and Jim on the right.

On the passenger side, a light-haired young lady leaned over the front seat in an awkward embrace with Jim. "So glad you're alive. What would I do without you?"

"I got you a job. You'd be fine."

The girl grasped Mary by the arm. "I can't wait to join you in Boston."

Arch squinted. Boston. Yes, the sister who was a pharmacist, of all things. Thank goodness Mr. Avery hadn't shut the front door and snuffed out the overhead light, because she was a rather pretty pharmacist, with a delicate face and large dark eyes.

Jim set his hand on his sister's shoulder. "Lillian, you haven't met my friend Arch."

"How do you do, Lillian? It's a pleasure to meet you." He put on his best smile and stretched out his hand.

She gave him a brief handshake. “How do you do?”

Mr. Avery sat in the driver’s seat. “Home again, home again—”

“Jiggety jig!” Jim and Lillian said in unison and laughed.

What would it have been like to grow up with a large family like this? A normal middle-class family in normal middle America?

Lillian twisted around in the front seat. “Mary, tell me about the apartment.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Avery said from beside her daughter. “Do you have everything you need?”

“A flour sifter? A turkey baster?” Humor ruffled Lillian’s voice.

“Oh, you.” Her mother nudged her.

“I think so,” Mary said, a smile visible in the dim light.

“See, Mom. I told you Boston was civilized.” Lillian looked back over her shoulder. “Jim, tell me more about Dixon’s Drugs. How big is the store? Is it clean and modern? How many employees? Do they have a soda fountain?”

Jim put his arm around Mary’s shoulder. “Yes, no, yes, yes.”

“Smart aleck,” Lillian said.

“I can be of some help.” Arch leaned forward. Time to turn those large eyes his way. “It’s rather old-fashioned, like stepping back to the turn of the century.”

“Yes,” Mary said. “I shop there because it’s on the way home from the El station, but sometimes I have a hard time finding things.”

“Good.” Lillian seemed to grow a few inches. “That means I’ll have a job to do. I learned so much in school, and I can’t wait to apply it.”

She went on to describe things she’d learned, proper practices for running a store and serving patients. Her voice was low in tone and precise in pace, her words intelligent and informed, and her bearing lively without giddiness.

A pleasant sense of warmth filled Arch's chest. Jim had held out on him. Never once did he mention his sister was so bright and lovely.

Mary patted Lillian's shoulder. "Before you make too many plans, wait and see the store and get to know Mr. Dixon."

Jim grumbled. "He does seem set in his ways. I told you—"

"I know. He doesn't want a woman pharmacist, but the draft is siphoning off the men, so now I have a chance to fulfill my dream."

"A chance?" Arch put his full charm into his words. "I'd say it's a done deal."

The car stopped at an intersection, and a streetlamp cast light on Lillian's strained smile.

His charm didn't . . . charm her? Arch sat back, but then that warmth stirred into full appreciation.

This woman wasn't like the society girls angling for the best husbands or the shopgirls digging for gold.

Not Lillian Avery. She'd gone to college to learn, not to snag a man. She had a career and plans and dreams and didn't need Archer Vandenberg or his wealth. And his good looks and charm didn't seem to affect her.

If he could win the heart of a woman like her, it wouldn't be due to his name or looks or money, but due to who he was inside.

That would mean something.

Mr. Avery pulled to a stop in front of a modest-sized two-story brick home.

Now was the time to act. Arch bolted from the car and circled to the passenger side, careful not to slip on the icy pavement. He opened the door and bowed his head. "Miss Avery."

She glanced up with those large eyes. Guarded eyes. She swung one leg out. A shapely leg.

My, he liked a good set of legs on a lady.

Then she swung out the other leg. A strange line stretched below her knee. Her leg looked stiff. Fake. An artificial leg?

Jim's plethora of stories bounced around in Arch's head. Something about a sister who lost a leg and never let it slow her down. This sister?

Oh no. He was staring.

He shifted his gaze to Lillian's face. Her cool, appraising face.

"Jim didn't tell you."

Arch wiped his hand over his mouth, wiped away gaping rudeness. "I—well, he—I think—"

She closed her eyes, shook her head, and marched away, a slight hitch in her step.

Arch's breath turned to icicles. Win her heart? At this point he'd be happy to make peace.