

Where Treetops Glisten

Three Stories of Heartwarming Courage
and Christmas Romance During World War II

Tricia Goyer
Cara Putman ▸ Sarah Sundin

Praise for
Where Treetops Glisten

“What a treat—three of my favorite novelists have joined together to write a compilation of compelling World War II stories. The Turner family in *Where Treetops Glisten* captured my heart, and if you enjoy reading inspirational romance, I know these stories will capture your heart as well!”

—MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *Chateau of Secrets* and *The Courier of Caswell Hall*

“These are three wonderful Christmas stories filled with period details that 1940s fans are sure to love and with characters whom readers will remember long after they close the cover. I laughed and cried with each new story. All three were wonderfully woven together to make a cohesive whole. Sarah Sundin, Cara Putman, and Tricia Goyer are sure to make your Christmas a little brighter.”

—LIZ TOLSMA, author of *A Log Cabin Christmas* Collection

“The fragility of life, the certainty of loss, the daring of love... *Where Treetops Glisten* skillfully weaves a family’s poignant loss with enduring faith and the sweet surprise of Christmas love reborn.”

—CATHY GOHLKE, award-winning author of *Saving Amelie* and *Promise Me This*

“Rich with faith and deep love, *Where Treetops Glisten* is a must-read for your Christmas season.”

—CINDY WOODSMALL, *New York Times* best-selling author of the Amish Vines and Orchards series

“Any book by Cara Putman is an automatic read. *Where Treetops Glisten* is a hometown World War II book that captures your heart with its charm. It made me wish I could experience Christmas in that era. Highly recommended!”

—COLLEEN COBLE, author of *Seagrass Pier* and the Hope Beach series

*Where
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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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In many ways this is a story of siblings surviving and finding love during World War II. I've been blessed to share my life with three siblings. To Janna, Joshua, and Joel: I'm grateful we shared our childhoods, but even more that I can count you as friends today. And I'm delighted that each of you have found the love stories God wrote for you.

—Cara Putman



In loving memory of my grandmother, Grace Potter Powell, 1915–2014, with deep gratitude for sharing her love of words and story and history.

—Sarah Sundin



To Maaïke van Beek, my sweet Dutch friend who shared her Uncle Arie's story and allowed his final letter to be used within the novella Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas. And to all the dedicated women and men in World War II—from Army nurses to those in the Dutch Underground—who sacrificed their lives, and their immediate happiness, to serve and care for others.

—Tricia Goyer

Winter Wonderland

by Sarah Sundin

December 24, 1941
Lafayette, Indiana

Even her morning rheumatism couldn't stop Louise Turner from decorating for Christmas.

Louise rubbed her sore hip. She'd been born the day the Civil War ended. Her husband, Henry, had fought in the Spanish-American War. Her son, Robert, had served in the Great War. And now her grandchildren faced another world war.

"War or no war, we simply must celebrate Christ's birth. Isn't that right, Ferdinand?"

Her black-and-white cat didn't even blink in response. He sat on yesterday's *Journal & Courier*, his front paws tucked in neatly, covering the horrid headlines that screamed death and destruction and panic.

After the cruel attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had been barreling through Thailand, Malaya, and the Philippines and across the Pacific, taking another island every day, it seemed. The Germans loomed at the gates of Moscow, and in Libya the British and Australians battled the Germans and Italians.

The world was a horrible place.

Louise set her jaw. Gloom and despair led to defeat. Victory could only be achieved with faith, hope, and resilience. She'd learned that lesson well in her seventy-six years, and now she'd pass it on to her family.

She inspected the Christmas tree in the bay window. Thank goodness Robert and his wife, Rose, had set it up before Pearl Harbor, because after the declaration of war, all holiday preparations had screeched to a halt. Louise had been paralyzed like the others, but that would end. Today.

Humming "Winter Wonderland," she crossed into the dining room, opened the door that led to the side porch, and dragged in the box of greenery she'd paid the little neighbor boy to collect.

The song, a huge hit from a few years back, had been perky and festive during the ravages of the Great Depression. Now her family could use some cheer to get through the recent tragedies and coming trials.

Louise shut the door against the predawn iciness and pulled a chair to the transom separating the dining room from the living room. Robert would tan her hide if he saw her climbing onto the chair. That was why she'd gotten up early.

Louise peered through her thick glasses. Yes, the nails were still in place to hang the greenery. She stuck several lengths of string in her mouth, gathered an armload of pine boughs, and worked her way up onto the chair, gripping the doorjamb for balance. If she fell and died, at least she'd go out having fun.

"Grandma!"

Louise met the brown eyes of her grown-up grandson Pete, who burst into laughter.

He'd probably never seen his grandmother with string hanging from her mouth like the tongue of an anteater. Louise smiled around the string and wiggled her eyebrows.

Pete strode over to her in his bathrobe, his wavy dark hair mussed from sleep. He looked so much like her Henry fifty years ago. "Get down from there," he said. "I'll take your place. I'll even let you boss me around."

Sometimes good sense had to prevail. Louise took Pete's hand and eased her way off the chair.

Pete plucked the string from her mouth. "What are you doing?"

"Decorating. It's Christmas Eve, and the house looks forlorn."

"It's four o'clock in the morning."

"When else can I work in privacy?"

"You mean, when else can you work without getting caught?"

She patted the young man's rough cheek. "Ah, to be twenty-nine again and know everything."

Her oldest grandchild leveled his lawyer gaze at her. "I know you're sneaking around."

"And you know why." Louise motioned Pete up onto the chair. "The family is in mourning—the whole country is. No one feels like decorating, but if I do it, no one will rip it down. They'll know it's the right thing to do. Turners don't let anything get them down, not even another war."

Instead of climbing onto the chair, Pete nosed around in the box of greenery. He pulled out a sprig of mistletoe. "Maybe so, but we need to set aside one Turner tradition this year. For my sisters' sakes."

"Oh dear." Louise rummaged in the box. "I told the boy no mistletoe. Poor Abigail. Poor Meredith."

Abigail's high school sweetheart had been killed at Pearl Harbor, and the girl was in the depths of grief. Then Meredith had come home from nursing school in Miami Beach, devastated. Instead of receiving an engagement ring for Christmas, she'd received a broken heart.

Pete grabbed a pine bough and climbed the chair. "Well, the British get through all that bombing with cheer and a stiff upper lip. If it works for London, it'll work for Lafayette, Indiana."

"That's the spirit."

He angled a smile down at her. "I'm just glad I can get in the fight."

Her heart lurched. Instead of aiming those fine dark eyes at judge and jury, Pete would be scanning for enemy aircraft. He'd done the right thing by

enlisting, but as a pilot? It was so dangerous. At least when Robert did his duty in the Great War, he served as a lawyer in the army.

But the Lord would see the Turners through. He always did. He had seen Robert and Rose through miscarriages, a stillbirth, and the deaths of two precious children. Even if the worst happened, the Lord would hold them up by His mighty hand.

“Next?” Pete opened and closed his hand in front of Louise’s face.

She blinked and passed him another bough and piece of string.

“Grandma! It’s wet.”

Louise chuckled. “Serves you right for interrupting me.”

“Interrupting what?” a new voice asked. Abigail ambled in with Merry, both wrapped in red bathrobes and blue sorrow.

“Your parents’ surprise.” Louise gave the pretty brunettes a soft smile. The surprise was also for her granddaughters, to show them life went on even when your heart was torn to shreds.

“Oh.” Merry’s dull, dark gaze skimmed the boughs, and she joined her older sister on the couch.

Going back to school and keeping busy would be best for both girls. Abigail’s studies in education across town at Purdue University would occupy her focused mind, and over time she would heal.

Merry had a year and a half left of nursing school in Miami Beach. She hadn’t said a word about joining the Army Nurse Corps, but the need for nurses would be as great as in the last war, if not more so. How could a girl with Merry’s adventurous spirit resist the call of her country?

Would she end up overseas with her big brother? Both of them in danger? Witnessing death and destruction?

Louise hefted up a smile to heft up her spirits. “One more bough should do it, Pete.”

“This time, give me the dry end of the string first. Please.”

Oh, but the damp end was so tempting. But she’d better be good. It was Christmas Eve after all.

“Well, well, well . . .” Robert shuffled in with his arm over Rose’s bathrobe-covered shoulders. “Memories of Christmas past. Our children making a racket before dawn.”

Rose tapped her chin. “Except as I remember, it was always Christmas morning—not Christmas *Eve* morning.”

As one, the three grandchildren pointed accusing fingers at Louise.

She batted innocent eyelashes. After all, someone had to bring color into this household.

Last year, when she’d moved into her son’s home—into a first-floor bedroom, nonetheless—she thought she’d taken one step closer to the grave. She couldn’t have been more wrong. She had so much to give her family, and she relished doing so. Now she knew every day meant one step further into abundant life.

The next few years would bring turbulence to her family. They needed her faith. They needed her wisdom. And they needed her joy.

White Christmas

by Cara Putman

Thursday, October 29, 1942
Lafayette, Indiana

*T*ackle your greatest fear?

Professor Plante had smiled as he issued his challenge, as if the assignment was easy to achieve. Even a privilege. Yet five minutes after class ended, Abigail Turner remained frozen at her desk. A school project worth twenty-five percent of her grade tied to her greatest fear? And one that had to be developed and completed before the holidays? The professor called it a simple way to overcome the past by focusing on the future. A way to explore the principles they'd discussed and apply them to their own lives before trying the ideas on future clients. Didn't he see how tied the two were? How there was nothing simple about confronting dark moments in the past that were best avoided?

Abigail pushed back from the desk and joined the last students streaming through the door to the hall. She didn't notice anyone else who had broken into a cold sweat at the professor's instructions. In fact, most joked and bantered like another week of school was almost over, leading to another weekend of studying, Purdue football, and any odd jobs they worked. Maybe her fellow students didn't carry the fears and weight of the past as tightly as she did.

She tried to shake it off as she'd done over the years. She still had weeks to create the right experience for the project—at least until the end of the semester. Professor Plante had even made it sound like the students could have longer if they didn't mind an incomplete on their transcript.

As Abigail entered the hallway of Purdue's University Hall, she froze. The October wind gusted through the door and toyed with her hat, but that didn't account for her inability to move. No, she could only blame that on the reality that if she was truly to do this assignment, she had to find a way to open her heart to someone else. How could she make Professor Plante or anyone else understand that she couldn't do that? Not when it risked someone else leaving her.

"I have to get to work." She whispered the words as she tightened her grip on her bag, which was loaded down with textbooks, then forced her legs to move.

What would her life be like if Sam Troy, her high school love, hadn't enlisted and then died that terrible day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor? With his death, her carefully constructed dreams for the future crashed into an abyss, one she couldn't seem to climb from.

She glanced at her watch and frowned. If she dawdled any more, she'd miss the bus that would carry her down the hill, across the Wabash River, and to downtown Lafayette in time for her shift at Glatz Candies. With the weekend approaching, she looked forward to a couple of days to concentrate on the confections that made the restaurant and candy shop known around town. Soon she'd learn the secret to making the popular candy canes. Maybe she could coax the owner into teaching her the tricks to the twisted sweet that night.

"Slow down, Abigail."

Abigail grinned as her classmate Laurie Bertsche hurried up, her polo coat buttoned to her throat. Abigail nudged her friend in the shoulder. "It's not cold enough for that coat yet."

"I'm from Florida. We don't do cold."

"Then why pick Purdue?"

"It picked me, since it was as far away from home as I could afford." Laurie shuddered and gripped the coat around her throat. "What do you think of that

assignment?" She rushed on before Abigail could interrupt. "It should be fun to think of something. There are so many people who need help." Laurie paused, frowned for a moment, then shrugged. "I'm not sure what I'll do yet. Do you have ideas?"

"Not yet."

"You're so intense; I know you'll come up with something brilliant." Merriment danced in Laurie's green eyes. "I need a favor tomorrow night. One of the guys I know from town asked me to a movie and dance. I said yes, but the problem is he has a buddy. Say you'll join us."

"You know my stance on boys."

Laurie singsonged as they waltzed through the doors. "No dating until this war business is over." She paused and a serious glint entered her expression. "This isn't a boy like you'd see here. He's not a student, but a man supporting his family."

"I can't, Laurie. If he's not in the military yet, he will be any day. Life is too uncertain to risk even friendship." Abigail had certainly learned that lesson between Sam, her brother Alfie, and her sister Annie. Professor Plante wanted her to confront her fears by acting in opposition to those very fears that life had branded into her. How could she do something and then write an essay explaining how the action had changed her? What if she did something and found she was still afraid of losing someone she loved? Should she help the military boys in some way? Or should she focus on children? Would either satisfy her professor?

"You mean you *won't*." Laurie's words jarred Abigail from her thoughts. "I intend to have a great time with Joey, but I wish you'd come. Joey's friend seems nice, and you don't need to worry that it will be for more than one night. Now if something develops with Joey, that's just icing for me."

"Try ice on the Wabash," Abigail mumbled. "The kind you fall through." The kind that broke your heart into shattered pieces, like the fragile ice coating the wide river, and left you frozen inside when you fell into the cold current.

Laurie shook her head. “Too early for that kind of ice. I’ll have enough fun for the two of us. Call if you change your mind. If not, I’ll see you in class Monday.”

The rumble of the bus on State Street warned Abigail she’d better hurry.
Don’t leave! I can’t be late for work.

She waved frantically as the driver shifted the bus into gear. She rushed into State Street, waving. Brakes screeched and someone tugged her back to the curb right before a car whizzed by, horn blaring. Her heart stuttered in her chest. She’d come too close to landing under the wheels of that car.

“You all right, miss?”

“Thanks to you.” She turned to her rescuer, and his gaze captured her, a mix of sadness and concern swirling in his eyes.

“You coming? Or standing out there all day?”

Heat flooded Abigail’s cheeks at the bus driver’s barked words. After checking for traffic, she hurried across the street, then tripped up the stairs, thrust a token into the box, and stepped down the aisle, barely noticing the young man who had rescued her following with a slight limp. The grinding gears and the bus’s accompanying lurch pushed her down the aisle, and she collapsed onto an empty seat. The young man took the one opposite her.

She glanced at him under her lashes, noting the broad shoulders that indicated a life of work. There was something about him, as if his dog had just died, that made her want to reach out.

He slouched in his seat, hands clasped in his lap, shoulders slumped forward. A hat was crammed on top of dark hair that curled at the nape of his neck, longer than the regulation cuts worn by enlisted men. There was something familiar about him, yet she was certain they’d never been introduced. Abigail shrugged off the feeling. Even in the United States’ heightened war machine during 1942, Purdue’s campus flowed with men. The difference was many wore a uniform. This one didn’t. Why? Could it be whatever had caused his limp?

His glance rose, colliding with hers. Caught. He’d discovered her staring.

Still she couldn't look away, not when such uncertainty resided in the pools of his hazel eyes. Something inside her froze, caught between wanting to help and distancing herself from the pain she saw reflected in the depths of his gaze. Maybe the pain was what she recognized.

She swallowed around a sudden tightness in her throat. "Thank you for what you did out there."

"You're welcome." His deep voice made it sound like it was nothing. He simply took heroic actions every day.

"I'm Abigail. Abigail Turner."

"Jackson Lucas." He looked back down at his hands.

Abigail felt the chill of the disconnection. She yanked a psychology text from the bag at her feet and opened it to the next chapter. The short ride would be better used preparing for Monday's class than wondering about the man seated across the aisle from her.

Her vow to avoid romantic relationships, no matter how casual, had not been some fly-by-night decision. She had carefully considered her course after Sam's death.

The war that had torn the world apart had arrived in the United States. Sure, it hadn't physically touched the nation since Pearl Harbor, but to see the war's effect, all one had to do was look at the men in uniform walking the streets or notice the blue and gold star flags hanging in homes across town. The war had touched so many lives, even in this sheltered city. She would never forget the pain that stabbed through her each time she drove by the Troys' home and saw the gold star flag hanging in the front window. Such a simple symbol that communicated so much senseless loss.

Abigail forced her gaze to remain firmly on the page even as her thoughts wandered. She'd made the right choice. She was certain. Nothing was worth risking the pain of losing more people she loved. Not when her big brother Pete was finishing requirements to be a fighter pilot while her sister Merry was training to be an army nurse. She couldn't bear the thought of losing them, and she

wouldn't risk opening her heart to anyone who could be taken by the vagrancies of war.

Jackson Lucas felt the weight of the envelope shoved inside his jacket as if each page were a solid plank of the heaviest walnut rather than smashed wood pulp. When had he started comparing weight to wood? His heritage belonged to a farm, not a plant, yet he'd moved to Lafayette to work in a factory rather than sell the farm and force his mother and sisters to move. He'd worked hard and saved every extra penny, all in an effort to fix what the lean years, the thirties, had stolen from them.

Now it was clear he shouldn't have moved away, even if it had meant earning the money his family needed to keep the farm.

The papers inside his jacket proved he'd failed in that effort. Somehow even after all his work and focus, his family would still lose the only home his sisters had known. What would Mother do now? How could he provide for them without the farm?

What a mess.

He studied his hands. The calluses had shifted—similar but not the same—as his work had changed. He raised a hand and twisted his wrist, examining every line, smudge of oil, and mark.

If only he could trace his thoughts as easily.

Without the sun shining on him, he felt different. Like one of the cardboard cutouts his employer transformed into toys that thrilled children. He had nobody to thrill, not when he was as lifeless and bland as the cardboard before the adhesive and pictures were applied.

The bus rumbled to another stop, and a young woman hurried on board. This one wasn't as clumsy as the previous gal, Abigail. Jackson glanced her way again. What had she seen when she studied him?

Did she find him wanting too?

He shook his head. He had to clear his thoughts, or he might as well not

go on the date his buddy had set up. Why had he agreed to it? The words of the letter threatened to derail any chance he had of salvaging the evening, but Joey had refused to listen when Jackson argued he wasn't interested. He guessed he'd complained one too many times that Lafayette would never feel like home. His friend had lost patience and ordered him to appear at the Glatz Candies shop downtown on Friday night to meet a local girl.

"Nobody likes being alone." Joey's words couldn't have been truer.

"Excuse me?"

Jackson jolted as the gal across from him leaned into the aisle, the thick textbook in her lap threatening to tumble to the floor.

"Did you say something?" Her eyes danced as a curl slipped free of her headband.

"I don't think so." Surely he hadn't repeated Joey's words out loud.

Her smile widened. "Oh."

"Oh?"

"You're one of those." She tapped a page of the textbook as the bus lurched through another gear, chugging across the bridge that separated Purdue's campus and Lafayette.

"I don't understand."

"One of those men who likes to deny he might have a feeling." She eyed him a moment, then turned back to her textbook. "That's what my professor likes to claim, anyway. All men deny their emotions. I find his statements rather overbroad and all-inclusive. Don't you?"

Jackson felt his collar tighten as if someone had yanked back on it. How had he landed in the middle of this conversation? "I don't know."

"I'll admit my father and brother don't walk around spouting emotion." She paused as if caught in a thought, and her face twisted in a way that indicated it wasn't pleasant. "Still, they don't exactly hide what they're thinking. How about you?"

"I have sisters. Three of them."

"Oh."

After an uncomfortable moment, Jackson felt the bus grind to another stop. “Looks like this is me. Nice to talk to you, miss.”

“Miss Abigail Turner,” she said again. The smile that accompanied her name warmed him. “This is my stop too. Thanks again for your help.”

Jackson nodded and waited for her to move ahead of him. She slipped past and then off the bus. He looked at her seat and saw a black book lying near the window. Picking it up, he noticed her name on the cover. By the time he stepped off the bus, book in hand, she’d disappeared.

How could he find her to return it? He cracked the cover and noted it was a calendar that included an appointment today at Glatz Candies. Since it wasn’t out of his way, he could take the book there and try to catch her. He tucked it into his deep jacket pocket, and his fingers brushed the envelope.

Jackson’s thoughts moved faster than his feet as he trudged toward the corner, weighed down by the words that filled the envelope. He pushed its message to the side, and his thoughts turned to the events on campus. Could a young woman like that ever give him a second glance? He doubted he compared favorably to the men she saw on Purdue’s campus every day. At one time he’d dreamed of studying a subject like agriculture or engineering, using an education to get off the farm or improve it. After Dad died, he thought studying might give him techniques to improve the farm. Now he knew just what a pipe dream he’d fostered. He shoved his hands deep in his trouser pockets as he waited for the bus to move on and traffic to clear.

He crossed the street and headed up Main to the shop. It hadn’t taken many days in Lafayette to realize Glatz’s was a popular lunchroom and candy store, a favorite of locals and college students. Maybe on the way he’d find a convincing reason for why he’d agreed to this foolish date or a way to talk Joey out of including him. The bus ride served as exhibit A for why he shouldn’t pretend to be suave and talk to young women he didn’t know.

Who did he think he was? Cary Grant?



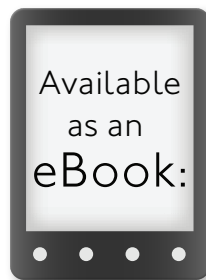
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