

Praise for *Saving Mrs. Roosevelt*

Full of intrigue and historical detail, Patterson brings to life the little-known women's SPARs who deserve to have their story told as part of the Greatest Generation. Drama and faith seamlessly blend together with just the right amount of romance to delight any WWII fan.

—J'nell Ciesielski, bestselling author of *The Socialite*

In *Saving Mrs. Roosevelt*, Candice Sue Patterson has crafted a home front story of WWII that will satisfy fans of Lynn Austin and Amy Lynn Green. Filled with intrigue and drama, the hero and heroine must work together to infiltrate a spy ring that is determined to harm Mrs. Roosevelt. Along the way you'll enjoy the setting and supporting characters. This is an engaging story with a layer of romance that I enjoyed.

—Cara Putman, bestselling, award-winning author of *Flight Risk* and *Lethal Intent*

HEROINES OF WWII

SAVING
MRS.
ROOSEVELT

CANDICE SUE PATTERSON


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Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



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In memory of
Seaman Joseph Franklin Patterson,
United States Navy
(Grandpa Joe)
and
Seaman Turner Lee Ridge,
United States Navy
(Grandpa Turner)

You are missed.

≡ CHAPTER I ≡

*Lubec, Maine
December 1942*

Shirley Davenport was a breath away from dying.

Of boredom.

She lowered the newspaper to her lap. Why did men get to have all the fun?

Brows arched, Daddy looked up from the boat he was cleaning and held out the scraper. "I'm sorry. Did you want to remove the layers of crust? I wouldn't call it fun."

Embarrassed, Shirley bowed her head. She hadn't meant to voice her thoughts aloud, but she did that sometimes.

"I was speaking of the war, Daddy."

The heater surged beside them, warming a small bubble of space in the massive barn. The scent of hay and dust and kerosene wasn't a pleasant one, but she'd rather be working in a cold dank barn any day than in a stuffy kitchen.

Her father winced and stood from his crouched position, hand bracing the pain she knew lived in the curve of his back. "I know."

A gust of winter forced its way between the cracks of the old structure. Christmas was over, and a new year awaited. While two of her brothers were scattered across the globe, fighting for freedom and justice, she was stuck in a little town by the frozen sea, doing the same things she'd done since childhood.

And would probably do every year for the rest of her life.

Daddy's footsteps shuffled remnants of straw on the dirt-packed

floor. Easing onto an upturned bucket beside her, he grimaced. As much from exasperation with her as from the pain, no doubt. “War is never fun, Shirley Jean.”

Guilt pricked her as she recalled the gruesome stories of the World War he used to tell her and her brothers while they lounged by the fireplace after dinner. They’d hung on every word. Their mother didn’t care to hear the tales, but she’d told Shirley it helped him to talk about them. Her mother would hum church hymns to block him out while she mended clothes on the other side of the room.

Shirley had liked the gory parts as much as her brothers, not understanding everything her father recalled. Older, she understood now. “I’m sorry. I only meant that I’m left here, helpless to do anything for the cause, while men all across the country are free to sign up and fight.”

He frowned at her, bulging his auburn walrus mustache threaded with gray. “They called the draft. Not all men were willing to go.”

His comment was beside the point. She passed him the newspaper. “Have you read about the Doolittle Raid? It’s amazing.”

He pointed his nose to the rafters and closed his eyes. “Sure, there’s great victories. But there’s also death and destruction. When war is over, nothing’s the same. *Nothing.*”

Restless, she stood and toed a pile of straw. “I can’t sit by and do nothing either. It’s my country too. There’s got to be something I can do to help.”

“There is. You can ration, write to your brothers, sew blackout curtains, get married, and have children. Maybe then you wouldn’t be so discontented.”

She pointed to the newspaper curled in his grip. “I’m restless because I want to be with them. I hate sewing, I already write to James and Thomas once a week, and all the young, decent men are off fighting.”

The man she’d spotted in town yesterday sprang to mind. Younger than Daddy, he was much older than Shirley but still handsome enough. The interested way he’d looked at her, almost as if he could see inside her, had made her nervous.

Shirley plopped down beside Daddy and noted the frayed hem of her trousers and her scuffed boots. “Even if there were eligible men my age, they’d not want me.”

“Hush now.” His big hand landed on her shoulder. “When it comes to young ladies, you’re the finest kind.”

She refrained from rolling her eyes. “That’s not true, and you know

it. I don't possess one feminine skill. All I know is fishing and lobstering, boat repair, and how to build a fire. Hardly duties that will help protect my country. Or catch me a husband."

Her dearest friend, Joan, had once told her boys liked girls who were approachable, weaker. Girls who looked soft. Not girls who could keep up with them in a boxing match.

Daddy nudged her with his elbow. "Someday the right man will come along and appreciate your resourcefulness."

The pathetic description was accurate. Resourceful, never desirable. Not that such a thing mattered to her. Well, it did. She wanted to be soft. She wanted to be wanted. To marry and have children someday. But first—before she spent the rest of her life cooking meals, cleaning house, and changing diapers—she wanted to do something grand.

Over the course of time, she'd seen the young women in this town fade beneath the weight of homemaking and childbearing, like Mama. Shirley loved her mama, but she didn't want to *be* her mama. Shirley had ambition and a desperate need to make her mark on the world. She wanted to live in a world where she was free to do so. Was that too much to ask?

If nothing was the same when war ended, then she hoped after this one such a world for women would exist.

She looked up at Daddy. Deep lines etched his weathered skin and traced a path into his gnarly beard. She smiled, showing teeth, the way she had when she was a child trying to persuade him to her way of thinking. "Assembling airplane motors and stuffing bullets is resourceful too."

He chuckled and pulled her to his side. "Shirley Jean, your patriotism is honorable. I understand your need to help. I truly do. But you're my little girl. There's no need for you to go traipsing off to the big city for a factory job. You're taken care of right here. Aid the effort like the other local women until this is all over."

Twenty-two hardly qualified as a little girl.

"I want to go to Washington too, Daddy."

He crossed his ankles. "I know you do. My word from last week stands firm—if you go, you're getting there on your own. I'll not take part."

Disappointment settled like a boulder in her chest. Hundreds of women were flocking to Washington, DC, upon hearing Eleanor Roosevelt's request for clerical workers and switchboard operators. Shirley didn't have enough money saved to sustain her travel and living expenses for more than a few weeks. Until she saved enough for at least

a month—in case finding a job was harder than she thought—she'd be scraping boat bottoms, hauling pots, and building fires.

She reached for the scraper in the front pocket of her daddy's overalls and began scraping where he had left off. Dried barnacles and crusted algae fell to the floor.

Daddy released another sigh and rubbed his forehead. She didn't mean to be so exasperating. It came naturally, according to her brother Walter.

The barn door burst open behind her, sending a cold shock to Shirley's backside.

Joan stepped in and tried to tug the door shut, but the cantankerous hinges didn't like winter any more than Daddy's joints. Daddy waved her into the barn and tugged the door to seal them in.

"Thanks, Mr. D. Have you seen this, Shirly?" Her best friend held out a crumpled paper in her red glove. Joan's cheeks were nearly the color of her scarlet coat, and clouds of breath escaped from her mouth and nose.

Shirley took the paper and smoothed the edges. A colored printing of a woman in a dark blue uniform raising an American flag stared back at her. "*Enlist in the Coast Guard SPARS. Release a man to fight at sea.*"

Joan's radiant smile almost reached her ears. "It's a new female-only reserve of the Coast Guard. The president approved its establishment last month. We'd be taking over duties on the home front to release the men to fight."

"We?" Shirley's heart raced at a pace that made her dizzy.

Joan shook her arm, rattling the paper. "This is what we've been waiting for," she whispered.

The advertisement trembled in Shirley's hand. She looked to Daddy, who shook his head and turned away.

Eleanor Roosevelt's words from her last "My Day" column played in Shirley's memory. "*Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you'll be criticized anyway.*"

Joan raised a brow at her, clearly confused as to why Shirley seemed torn after months of their dreaming of an opportunity like this. She took the paper from Shirley, turned it over, and pointed at the writing. "A Captain Webber is going to be recruiting single females or married women whose husbands are not members of the Coast Guard at the town hall in Machiasport tonight at six. If we really want to help our country, here's our chance."

A rhythmic *scritch* filled the silence that followed. Daddy had

retrieved another scraper and gone back to work. Shirley didn't want to abandon her family or defy Daddy's wishes, but she was a grown woman. The independence that had been pounding at her heart's door since childhood shoved forth into the light.

For herself and for her country, she'd be the first in line for Captain Webber or perish.

■ CHAPTER 2 ■

Captain Leonard Webber's anger ran as red as the sun setting against the harbor. Machiasport Town Hall was stifling, unlike the frozen tundra outside. His breath made the glass fog, hindering his view of the water.

The thought of water brought his brothers to mind, and his stomach seized. Lonnie had loved the ocean from the moment he'd first spied it on their trip to Bridgeport, around the age of five, if Leo remembered correctly. That would've made Leo ten. Watching the sheer joy on Lonnie's face was like Leo experiencing it for the first time himself.

Donald had been the opposite. He'd feared the powerful waves but had loved the music and attractions of Pleasure Beach. Leo's younger brothers may have been identical twins, but where one left the womb ready to take on the world, the other had a cautious, sensible nature.

How he missed them.

Leo swallowed down the memories and stepped back to let the fog on the window dissipate. The vapor was so light, so thin, yet it had the power to completely obstruct the beauty lying beyond.

Like the disaster at Pearl Harbor. A vapor of false security, of assumption that the blip on the radar screen was only a group of American B-17s arriving from California and not two hundred of Japan's best pilots flying loaded.

Leo's hands balled into fists. More than half of the country's Pacific Fleet had been moored in that harbor. Why hadn't someone been more vigilant? Why had Japan's alliance with the Germans come as a surprise to the United States? Why hadn't American informants discovered that the Japanese were modifying their torpedoes to navigate the shallow waters of Pearl Harbor and sent warning?

Despite what men said, there were no rules to war. Mistakes were made, sometimes people betrayed their countries, and there were times when the other guy won.

He rubbed away the pressure that built behind his eyes. The pain was too fresh, and his thoughts were too loud in the silent room. A room that would soon be filled with exuberant women lining up to serve their country.

Women.

Not that he was against their help. By all means, they were just as capable as the men—in some respects more so—but hadn't they suffered enough already by sending their loved ones to war? By taking over the running of the household? By answering the knock at the door where a telegram awaited that would alter their lives forever?

Like his mother.

Three children out of four deceased. His sister—stillborn. The navy was doing its best to make sure Leo remained alive. The reason his superior had pulled him from commanding his own ship and landlocked him recruiting women for the SPARs. The government didn't wish to rob a mother of all her children. Honorable, but the enemy had poked a sleeping bear when they'd murdered his brothers, and Leo lusted after justice.

Something touched his elbow, yanking him from the dark path his mind liked to travel of late. Commander Dorothy Stratton frowned. "Captain, are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Got a little lost admiring the view, is all."

She peered out the same window he'd been blindly gazing out for who knew how long. "Yes, that's. . . quite a sight."

Said view was nothing more than a giant stack of lobster traps, ropes, and spare boat parts covered in a layer of snow tinted orange by the sunset.

She studied him a moment longer. More questions were simmering beneath the surface, but thankfully she wasn't the prying type.

"Recruits should start arriving within the hour," she said. "Everything is set up and ready to go. Do you need anything? The secretary has coffee, tea, water."

Leo blinked away the remaining haze of memories. "Coffee. I'll get it myself though. Thank you."

She tilted her head to an acute angle. "I'll fetch it for you, Captain. You enjoy your. . . view."

The commander retreated on sturdy shoes, spine as straight as a flagpole. Though he hadn't been thrilled with his reassignment, he'd been

impressed with Commander Stratton from the day they'd met, when she'd been a lieutenant commander in the WAVES, the Navy Women's Reserve. The former dean of women at Purdue University had a repertoire to rival any man's. A bachelor of arts degree, a master of arts in psychology, and a doctorate in philosophy. Every accomplishment made her uniquely her and the perfect woman to direct the SPARs.

It was her psychology degree that made him uncomfortable, however. He was proud of his ability to tuck away emotion. To do what was needed without feeling. Feelings could be processed later. Stratton had the ability to see straight to his core and spot every worm that feasted on his rotting insides.

That scared him to death. Like a bulldog, she also smelled fear, which was most disconcerting.

If even a handful of the women enlisting were as intuitive as Stratton, the coalition's chances of winning this war would skyrocket. That's what he prayed for—victory for the United States and her allies. Victory for all who valued human life.

If all the death and destruction and evil in this world made Leo this sick, it must make the good Lord vomit.

The squeaky leather of Stratton's shoes warned him of her return. "Here you are, Captain."

He took the offered mug and watched the swirls of steam curl as they lifted into the air, then disappeared. So like life. A vapor.

Leo pasted on a smile. "I hear Mainers are a hearty breed. I look forward to seeing who enlists."

The corners of her lips twitched. "I wouldn't speak such thoughts in front of the recruits, Captain. No matter how tough or resilient we may be, remember, at the end of the day, we're still women and would like to be thought of as such."

Her scolding was soft and every bit as effective as his mother's. He supposed she was right. He'd been around men for too many years to recall the sensitivities of the female nature. His dreams of a wife and children had burst like a torpedo with the declaration of war.

And the loss of his brothers.

Stratton mimicked his stance at the window. "A view, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. My grandfather used to write to me at college and tell me what a beautiful view he had from his hospital window. Glorious sunrises and sunsets, lush green fields with cattle dotting the pasture. After midterm exams, I caught the fastest train I could home

to visit him before he passed. By the time I arrived, I was too late. What shook me more than his death was his view from that window.”

Leo waited while she reminisced.

“There were no windows in the room, Captain. All my grandfather could see from his bed were the painted brick walls.”

The declaration hit him square in the chest.

She smiled. “Hang in there, Captain. For one day, our view will be much different.”

☰ CHAPTER 3 ☰

The excitement surging through Shirley's veins created enough friction that she barely felt the sting of Old Man Winter frosting her father's Buick. He'd insisted on driving them to Machiasport, even though Shirley knew well how to navigate a vehicle. He'd made it clear his gesture was not in support of her endeavor but for protection since she insisted on going. She only hoped the old car didn't let them down the way it did last fall on their way to Boyden Lake.

Her father turned into Joan's driveway and parked in front of the house. Light glowed in every window, casting pale reflections in the yard. Joan was the oldest of six children, and the Fischer house was always abustle.

"I'll hurry." Shirley left the car and tiptoed through the icy patches to the front porch, not wanting to twist an ankle. Not that a twisted ankle would keep her from enlisting, but it wouldn't make the greatest first impression.

Laughter and childish squeals emanated from the home. Shirley pulled off one glove and knocked hard enough to be heard over the noise. A few seconds later the door opened. Joan's little brother Maxwell peeked his head out, revealing his toothless smile.

Shirley bent to inspect his mouth. "All four?"

"Ayuh. *Daed* says it must be an omen to lose all my front teeth at the same time right before a new year."

Shirley didn't think baby teeth held any kind of prophetic significance, but the tiny white nubs poking through Maxwell's gums definitely made him look more impish than usual. "Is Joan ready?"

Maxwell shrugged and then yelled, "Joan, are you ready? Shirley's here."

“*Ach*,” his mother scolded and opened the door wider. “Stop yer yelling afore your *daed* takes a spanking to ya.” She shooed him down the hall. “Come in, Shirley, come in.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Fischer.” Shirley stepped on the faded rug and closed the door behind her. “I’m here to pick up Joan. Is she ready?”

“*Ach*, you know that girl. She thinks she has to look exactly like that Carole Lombard woman before she can leave the house. She’ll be at least another hour.”

Joan had been unnaturally shaken by the actress’s death announced earlier that year—a plane crash while on tour helping raise money for war bonds.

Shirley looked at her watch. “If we don’t leave now, we won’t make it in time. May I fetch her?”

Mrs. Fischer looked down at Shirley’s wet boots and backed away. “You stay here. I’ll hurry her along.”

The woman swayed down the hall and ascended the stairs. A high-pitched scream ripped through the house, followed by stomping. “Give me that,” a little voice yelled.

Boyish laughter filled the next room, and then Ike plowed into Shirley as he ran backward, taunting his little sister by holding her dolly out of reach. Shirley steadied the boy by his shoulders.

Ina, all of four, balled her hands into fists and punched them onto her hips. Her little mouth screwed into the meanest face Shirley had ever seen. Ina flared her nostrils and breathed heavily for intimidation. “Give me back my dolly, you yellow-bellied, one-eyed snake.”

Shirley covered her chuckle with a cough.

Ike shook the doll in the air. “Come and get it, you gimpy shrimp.”

Ina’s mouth dropped open.

Incensed that Ike would attack his sister’s handicap, Shirley grabbed the boy’s wrist and wrestled the doll from his grip. Her gaze flicked to the movement in the corner. A man entered the room.

The man she’d seen in town yesterday.

The handsome one with the dark eyes that seemed to probe inside her soul. Her presence appeared to take him by surprise as well, but he recovered quickly.

He nodded.

Shirley passed the doll to Ina and scolded Ike for picking on someone younger than himself. Ike stuck his tongue out. The man rattled off something in German that made the boy wince.

Ike turned regretful eyes to Shirley. "Sorry."

"Thank you. I accept your apology. Now apologize to your sister."

The man silenced Ike's protest with raised brows and a tip of his chin.

Ike sighed. "Sorry, Ina," he mumbled.

The man said something else, and both children left the room. The hallway seemed to shrink under his watchful stare. She wondered what he'd said to the children, but her German was limited. Her family had migrated to America nearly a hundred years ago, and the language wasn't spoken in her home anymore.

Smiling, the man took a step toward her. She fought the urge to back against the door. Warning alarms blared inside her. She was being silly. He wouldn't be allowed inside the Fischers' home if he wasn't a nice man. Still, she couldn't shake the cornered-animal feeling.

Joan bounded down the stairs. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

She grinned at Shirley and palmed her perfect pin curls secured with a pearl clip. "What do you think? Do I look like I belong on the big screen?"

"Uh"—Shirley looked from Joan's brown hair to her clasped hands to the man across the hall—"yes. Very Hollywood."

Joan grabbed the lapels of Shirley's coat and spread them open. "Oh, my dear, you're not wearing that."

Shirley assessed her loose fabric overalls and striped shirt. "What's wrong with my clothes?"

They were clean, even if a bit worn.

"We're trying to convince military officers we're the right women for these jobs. Part of our duties will be to boost morale. Nothing lifts a man's spirit like beautiful, well-dressed women!"

A grunt ensued from the corner. Joan turned. "Uncle Ernst."

She tugged the man by his elbow closer to Shirley. "Tell my friend Shirley that she'll have a much better chance wooing an officer in stockings and heels than she will a pair of overalls with dried lobster guts on the knee."

Shirley kicked out her leg for inspection. "It's a turpentine stain, and my overalls are clean."

Uncle Ernst mumbled something in German that made Joan laugh.

Uncomfortable, Shirley reminded her friend they needed to leave. "We're not going to woo officers. We're going to be of service to our country. Besides, if the purpose of a SPAR is to free the men to fight,

there won't be anyone to woo."

"They're not all leaving the country. And what greater service is there to mankind than procreation?" Joan slipped her arms into the coat her uncle held out for her. "Being attractive helps to set it in motion."

Heat filled Shirley's face. Her friend's obsession with the Hollywood elite had also made her brash. Joan reasoned her behavior by saying that everyone should take the artists' cue in forward thinking and speaking, that it was a more honest approach to life.

Shirley believed in honesty, but she also believed in tact.

Shirley caught the man gawking at her, and she hastened to button her coat. Joan stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. "Goodbye, Uncle Ernst. We'll talk later."

She hooked her arm around Shirley's elbow and pulled them through the door. "No time to worry about your appearance now. Just smile like I taught you, the way that makes your dimples more pronounced, and you're sure to win them over."

Joan slipped on frost coating the bottom step. Shirley kept her upright. At least one of them had worn sensible shoes. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were embarrassed to be seen with me tonight."

"Nothing could be farther from the truth." Joan tightened her hold on Shirley's arm as they approached the car. "I'm proud to know you, Shirl, you know that. But if we're ever going to get out of this town and do something *really* great, we have to use every tool at our disposal. Allure is one of those tools."

"Huh?" Shirley reached for the door handle.

Joan shoved her hand away. "Appeal. Magnetism." She tipped her head to the side. "You have been taught about the birds and the bees, haven't you?"

"Of course I have. I'm just failing to understand what it has to do with the Coast Guard." Shirley moved her friend's hand, opened the door, and gestured for Joan to slide in first.

Halfway in, Joan stopped and looked at Shirley. "It's how we get our foot in the door in a man's world. *Then* we stun them with our intellect."

Did Joan ever consider that the abuse of feminine wiles might account for the reason men didn't take women seriously from the start?

After Joan was settled next to Daddy, Shirley got in and closed the door. "What's the way in the door? And what door?" Daddy asked as he drove away.

Shirley cringed. She was not discussing sex appeal with her father.

“Food.” Joan nudged Shirley’s arm and offered Daddy her sweetest smile. “The fastest way to a man’s heart.”

Daddy nodded his approval. “Have you found a young man?”

“Me?” Joan laughed. “Not around here. However, I’m sure there are plenty of eligible men in Washington.” Her sigh was long and dramatic. “As Shirley was so practical in pointing out, though, we’ll be far too busy for such things.”

“I didn’t know you had an uncle Ernst.” Shirley unbuttoned her coat and relaxed for the long ride. “When did he arrive?”

“Oh, he isn’t really my uncle. He’s. . .well, it’s complicated. He’s been here for a couple of weeks now.”

“Who’s this?” Daddy turned onto the main road leading to Machiasport.

Joan adjusted her floral dress over her knees. “Ernst Schultzheimer. He’s a relation ten times removed or something like that. He’s from Germany and staying with us for a while until he can find a permanent place to live.”

“I’ll have to come over and introduce myself. Have him over for dinner soon.” Daddy swerved to avoid hitting a hole, sending Joan straight into Shirley.

“I’m sure he’d like that.” Joan readjusted her clothing. “He’s looking for work, and Miss Neilson has agreed to teach him English.”

“Sounds like he plans to stay then,” Daddy said. “We’ll make him feel most welcome. Won’t we, Shirley Jean?”

“Of course,” she mumbled. Though she’d avoid him as best she could until she was sure what she thought of the tenth-removed relation.

Joan went on to talk about the latest *Life* magazine and an article about Clark Gable’s effort in the war. She mentioned a few actors who were suspected of being spies. Actors Shirley had never heard of before. Shirley enjoyed going to the movies as much as the next person, but she didn’t get into the glitz and glamour of the Hollywood lifestyle. The way she saw it, at the end of the day when all the costumes and stage makeup were put away, the actors were average, everyday people too.

An hour later, they parked at the curb of the Machiasport Town Hall. Women of various ages in various states of dress milled along the street and sidewalks, all heading in the direction of the enlistment site.

Sweat dotted Shirley’s upper lip and her pulse raced. Joan nudged her. “Come on, Shirl. What are you waiting for?”

What was she waiting for?

Stomach clenching, Shirley eased open her door so as not to hit a group of three women walking past.

The cold air was a relief. Women chattered. The door of the town hall groaned with every push and pull.

Joan's heels clicked on the pavement. She looked at Shirley and arched her perfectly sculpted eyebrows. Not wanting any more disapproval over her appearance, Shirley met Daddy's steady gaze from behind the wheel.

"I'll wait there," he said, and pointed to the parking lot at the side of the building. Dread mingled with pride shone from the gray depths.

Joan prodded Shirley with her purse. With one last glance at her current surroundings, she shook off the guilt Daddy's sad eyes produced and helped Joan maneuver over the snow mounded against the sidewalk. She opened the door to the town hall, and together they stepped inside.