



Deck the Halls

Donna Alward

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With shades of *It's a Wonderful Life*, one man must face his past to find his future this Christmas.

In the last year, George's life has drastically changed. The formerly homeless veteran now has a job he likes, a family in the residents of Darling, VT, and for the first time in years, a home. But while his present is good, he's still haunted by the past, a past that appears shortly before Christmas when the older sister of his brother-in-arms hunts him down and finds him in Darling, working at the Ladybug Garden Center.

Amy's looking for closure for her family after her brother's death in the Middle East, but the serious man she finds working in Vermont doesn't resemble the soldier she remembers from years before. This man is hardened and yet somehow fragile, too, and in her desire to find out what really happened to her brother, she learns more about George than she ever expected.

With a little Christmas magic and the whole town supporting them, can these two bruised hearts make a future together?

Deck the Halls Details

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Author : Donna Alward

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From Reader Review Deck the Halls for online ebook

Nicola says

I am a huge lover of the *Darling, VT* series and was doing cartwheels when I discovered George was getting his story. And Donna Alward doesn't hold back: this story may be fairly short, but it touches your heart and I may have wiped a tear or two away as I made my way through the entire book in one sitting.

If ever there is a man who deserves a HEA it's George Reilly, a wonderful, gentle, proud man who fought for his country, lost everything, but with the help of Darling's finest, the Gallaghers, has been given a second chance. Things are meandering along for him quite nicely until Amy Merck arrives in town, the twin sister of his best-friend whose death he blames himself for, and old feelings are reawakened, good and bad.

"I wish it hadn't taken fifteen years for me to tell you that it's okay and that...I don't forgive you because there's nothing to forgive."

This is a story of two individuals who have lost, are still hurting and suffering years later, but together can bring a degree of closure and begin to help one another heal. Some aspects felt a little speedy—I think had this been a full length book then some real emotional issues could have been run with—and because of it's shorter length Amy came over as heavy handed to George's PTSD on occasion, but that can be forgiven as I did enjoy them together.

"...it's you I want. All of you, not just the easy bits."

George stole my heart from the moment we were introduced in the first book of the series, and he did so all over again.

Copy received courtesy of St. Martin's Press via NetGalley for an honest and unbiased opinion.

DJ Sakata says

Favorite Quotes:

Don't stare at me like you're an idiot. You're not, not really. Your thinking's pretty warped, but you're a smart guy.

As a foster kid he'd had more mothers than he'd had grade school teachers.

My Review:

Deck the Halls was an unexpectedly melancholy and angsty read - but then, not everyone is chasing rainbows, baking cookies, or watching for Santa during the holiday season. The emotive storyline spotlighted

the complications of unresolved grief, the niggling discomfort of unfinished business, and second chances; and occurred during a two-week interval leading up to Christmas. I had been curious about the character of the homeless man known as George in the earlier books and was thrilled to see his emergence and marked improvements due to large part to being forcefully rescued and craftily manipulated into gainful employment and daily interaction by his new employer, who also assisted him in finding housing and VA services. However, his forward momentum was put in jeopardy when the twin sister of his fallen best friend suddenly made an appearance and needing closure for her family, Amy pursued George for information about her brother Ian's death in Iraq, which being the antecedent of George's downward spiral, opened a Costco super-sized can of worms. Forcing him to deal with the heaviest of issues and a return of his nightmares was distressing, although Amy was also having a positive influence and impressing on George the difference between existing and living. Old sparks re-ignited, but the holiday season was not full of delicious eggnog, caroling, or party games for this couple.

Alison says

Bah humbug! While I love getting books before they are published in order to review them I H.A.T.E. reviewing Christmas books in September/ October, especially one after the other - note to self don't request them next time, d'oh!

I enjoy the Darling, VT novels so I was keen to read this novella set at Christmas, apparently loosely based around the film It's A Wonderful Life (which I have never seen) this concentrates on ex-soldier George who, until a year ago was a homeless man living on the streets (if that isn't an oxymoron). Anyway George is turning his life around but he still lives a very spartan life, almost like a monk, haunted by the death of his best friend Ian in the Middle East on a mission.

Amy is Ian's older sister, she has travelled to Darling, VT to see George and ask him to explain to Ian's family how he died, they don't want to blame, they just want closure.

Can George move past the memories of his friend's death and overcome his low self-esteem to find true friendship and love at Christmas?

This was a pleasant enough novella, slightly too saccharine for my tastes although kudos for not giving George and Amy a Hallmark "and everyone lived happy ever after, the end" ending.

Although it is set in Darling, VT it would be easy to read this novella as a stand-alone.

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in return for an honest review.

Irene says

4.5 Heartfelt Stars

I really enjoyed Deck the Halls by Donna Alward.

Kathryn says

Review to follow

Claire Robinson says

4 - "You gave me a wonderful Christmas gift." Stars!

We return to *Darling, Vermont* for a little seasonal catch-up, and Donna Alward gives George Reilly his deserved Christmas wish, with a second-chance encounter turning into the love he doesn't believe he deserves.

He was a stranger... yet not.

This is one of those novellas that you wish was a full length book, because if you have read the previous three books in the series you will know that George featured quite a lot in them as a secondary character and you could just tell he had his own story to tell, especially in Aiden and Laurel's book; *Somebody Like You*, where he started out as the homeless guy, that they looked out for, and by the end of the third book in the series, he had himself a job, accommodation, and a place in the town as someone worthy and not just someone you avoid eye contact with as you walk past them in the street.

"You were his best friend... Now you're my best friend."

Amy Merck comes back into George's life 15 years after their last meeting, her brother, was his best friend. They served together, but only one of them returned, and due guilt, PTSD and a few other issues, he never kept in contact with her or her family. Amy is looking for answers, and she's not leaving town until she can get George to open up about her brother's final days, hours and minutes. Something that George is reluctant to do, because revisiting those memories take him back to a time he would rather try and forget.

"There's nothing to forgive."

Second chances at life, second chances at love, redemption, forgiveness and learning to accept the things we cannot change, but to live our lives for those who have been lost, are the main themes that ran through this novella.

"You judge yourself far harder than anyone else does... Things mean nothing to me. Character does. And you've got that in spades."

Which with the Christmas Season being firmly in the forefront as well gave this story lots of emotional depth, which gave this reader a few smiles and a few tears, and the hope that the author will take us back to *Darling, VT* for more stories in 2018, because I really do love everything about this series.

ARC generously provided via Netgalley, in exchange for the above honest review.

Heather says

While this book is part of the Darling VT series it can totally be read as a stand alone holiday novella. Fans of the series will recognize George as the homeless veteran that Laurel helped in book one. George suffers from PTSD and has never been able to face the family of his fallen teammate. He has in fact blamed himself for years over Ian's death. So when Amy, Ian's twin sister, arrives in Darling it is all he can do to talk to her. Amy is looking for closure regarding Ian's death and hoping George can give her that closure. But perhaps George and Amy also need each other to heal.

Donna Alward has written the perfect heartwarming story to get you in the holiday mood.

I voluntarily reviewed an ARC of this novella.

Carrie says

George is a veteran that hasn't had the easiest of times coming back home after his time being deployed. With some heavy burdens in his past George has spent a lot of time being homeless since his return and just within the past year with a helping hand has started to get his life together. Working steadily at the Ladybug Garden Center in Darling, VT and getting his own apartment George has finally found some friends and gotten his life on track.

Amy is the twin sister of George's good friend that died in combat and when she shows up at his new job just weeks before Christmas George isn't quite ready to face the past. Amy's looking for closure for her family after the loss of her brother and only seeks out answers from George on just what happened. When the two confront the ghosts that haunt George they find themselves ruining their own friendship with the possibility of it becoming more now that the past is at rest.

Deck the Halls by Donna Alward is a contemporary romance novella that is part of the Darling, VT series. Each book in the series has featured a separate couple so they may be all read as standalones books if choosing to do so. I did notice that some of the previous characters are involved in the current book though so there would be updates on previous couple for those fans of the entire series.

This book really touched on the tough subject of veterans and just what happens to them when they return home and what is like to live with the horrors that they have seen while serving. I couldn't help but feel for George as soon as I learned his story and just wanted to give the man a hug so of course I was hoping for a happily ever after for him. With George and Amy sharing a past it was easy to see that the two would be drawn to one another and Amy be the one to help George fight his demons and move on.

Overall, this was a lovely little heartwarming novella that felt realistic not featuring just the latest good looking couple but people with real problems in their lives.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.wordpress....>

Catherine (The Sassy Bookster) says

George's story in the first book in this series was one of the more enjoyable parts of the series for me and I'm glad he got his own book. This story is quick and short but the message is very powerful and moving; it really captures the essence of Christmas as a season for new beginnings and will leave you in a reflective mood.

George Reilly returned from war a broken man who had lost everything, weighed down the horrors he witnessed and the guilt that he came back alive when many of his friends did not. After years of aimless drifting, he found a part of himself with help from the Gallaghers. Now with a job and a roof over his head, it's time to face his past, even if not by his own choice.

Amy Merck has mourned her brother for the last fifteen years, but losing him also cost her one of her close friends and now that she has found him, she is determined to get the answers that have eluded her for so long.

For George, reliving his past could destroy all the progress he's made and set him back by a lot, but it's also the only way he can move on. While Amy understands this, she also needs closure and is willing to give him all the time he needs.

This story is a tear-jerker and will have you rooting for George and Amy to finally find healing for the wounds that have been bleeding for so long even as they find love along with the healing and closure they need. My only complaint is that the story was not long enough to do justice to the emotional depths it plumbed.

Disclaimer: I voluntarily reviewed a copy of this book. All opinions stated are solely mine.

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Deanne Patterson says

What a beautiful touching story. This is my first book I've read by this author but I see this is a Christmas novella which is part of the Darling, VT series. I can't wait to read the other books! Darling, VT is a darling, picturesque town. Your neighbors are your friends and people want to look out for you and help out. After 15 years of being a homeless veteran George is ready to try to get his life back on track. Feeling worthless and unworthy he is trying to move on and overcome these feelings. He now has a job and feels so blessed to have been befriended by a local police officer and his wife who offers him a job in her floral nursery. He feels good that someone is willing to take a chance on him. But then..... he feels like his past has caught up with him just when he was getting back on track. His best friend, twin sister finds him and wants to ask some unsettling questions they have about how their son died. He was crushing on her 15 years ago but now he is a haunted man ever since his brother-in-arms died next to him. He feels responsible. He

must face his past to ensure a healthy and healing future . This book will make you feel good if you are down, it's a real pick me upper.

Pub Date 03 Oct 2017

Thank you to NetGalley and St. Martin's Press for a review copy in exchange for my honest review.

Mona says

Deck the Halls; A Darling, VT Story

Loved this book from beginning to end. It was beautiful, moving and touching.

George Reilly was getting his life back together working at The Ladybug Garden Center. He loved it there. When one day Amy Merck came to the lot, and brought memories of his old life back. The ghosts of his past he would rather forget. He was stunned to say the least. He couldn't talk to her, and not remember what happened to Ian her twin brother. It was because of him he didn't come back home.

Amy searched for George to get answers for her parents, and herself. The only thing was she shocked him with the way she showed up. She would stay in Darling to talk with him. She needed the closure.

What happens between Amy and George well you will need to buy the book to find out.

And also the others in this series:

1-Somebody Like You

2-Someone to Love

3-Somebody's Baby

Ann Lorz says

Reviewed for Romancing the Readers Blog: <https://romancingthereaders.blogspot...>

Don't you just love a review for a Christmas story with Halloween artwork on the page? I just think it's so funny. I was going to change the art work to match the fact that I'm reviewing a Christmas story but decided to keep it because it made me laugh.

I was so happy when I saw Deck the Halls come up for review. I have been really enjoying the Darling, VT series by Donna Alward. She's a newer author for me and I'm so glad that I started reading her.

Have you ever read about a character who isn't a main character and seems to be there only for the interactions of the main characters but for some reason you are drawn to them and hope you get their story? Well that's how I felt about George. He's one of those characters that yelled really loud at you even though he was only a supporting character.

I so badly wanted his story!

Imagine my surprise when I saw who Deck the Halls was all about? I was thrilled, here was one of my favorite themes (Christmas) with a character (George) that often made me think of him even as I read other books, come together!!! I was so happy and I just couldn't wait to read it!

If you haven't yet started this series (Darling, VT) get to it. It's a wonderful series with good, slightly flawed and damaged characters. It's like a Hallmark movie in a book.

Deck the Halls turned out to be everything I love in a Christmas story. You meet George in Somebody Like You and like I said, you want his story. He's one of those characters that you can't help but feel for. He's so down on his luck, you are so happy his life is coming together again. Amy might put a wrinkle in his now calm, pretty happy world, but I think it was needed.

You can't really heal until you face what you're healing from.

I'm guessing by now you kinda get the picture that this is a very emotional story. I did find myself tearing up now and then. I can tell you that the author did a wonderful job on George's story and that you'll be so happy (and a little sad) to read it.

Deck the Halls is what Christmas is all about!

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ARC received for a honest review

Arlena says

Title: Deck The Halls

Author: Donna Alward

Publisher: Swerve

Series Darling, VT

Reviewed By: Arlena Dean

Rating: Five

Review:

"Deck The Halls" by Donna Alward

My Thoughts.....

A well thought out contemporary romantic novella that is part of 'The Darling, VT series with some undercurrent of personal struggles. What a story this was as it presented 'the tough subject of veterans and what could happen when they return home only to have to live with the horrors what had happened will they were away serving our country.' This is definitely one of those stories that will touch ones heart. I liked how this author was able to get George who was a 'wonderful, gentle, proud man who had fought for his country, lost everything suffering from PTSD had finally been given a second chance. What will happen as the twin sister of his best friend [Ian] Amy Merck arrives and reawakens old bad feelings that had been so close to

him? For George had blamed himself for years over Ian's death. Will these two [George & Amy] be able to find some degree of closure and be able to help one another? With each other needing so much healing you will have to pick up "Deck The Halls" to see how this heartwarming emotional novella that will put you in a holiday seasonal mood.

♥ WishfulMiss ♥ says

I love second chance romances and if any two people deserve a chance at love again it was George and Amy. I fell in love with George with every snippet revealed about him in the past books and with every hard-earned grin or half smile that was coaxed out of him. He was a man with deep hurts that came from a deep heart.

He'd seen enough ugliness to appreciate beautiful things, no matter how small.

It's nearing Christmas time in Darling and George has finally started to feel almost human again. He's working alongside Laurel, has his own apartment now and has even started to make friends. Things aren't 100% but for the first time in 13 years, George is able to breathe a bit easier, his past no longer weighing him down with no end in sight.

But one look at Amy Merk and all the memories that haunt him come flooding back.

Amy has been searching for the last link to her twin brother that she has and when she finally finds George, she's determined to get him to provide her some closure. Thirteen years ago, George and Ian were inseparable but after Ian's death, George dropped off the face of the earth and the not knowing how Ian spent his last moments has slowly been eating away at her.

"Oh, George. How did we get to be so broken."

But seeing George again has Amy rethinking her own demands and instead she finds herself giving George a chance to finally put the past to rest. This was a sweet love story that springs from tremendous loss but also inspires hope and forgiveness.

What I liked:

George and Amy were really great characters. They were broken but resilient in their instinct to survive. There was a lot of sadness but it was balanced out with the genuine blossoming of their friendship and then later on, their love for each other.

Also it was a cute bonus to see Laurel and Willow, both sporting adorable baby bumps. I only have one gripe and that was the rushed ending. Given their recent separation, it felt like too much happened off page that the ending felt incomplete, almost. I wish we'd gotten more time with George and Amy as a couple.

* * * *ARC provided for an honest review* * * *

SAFETY (view spoiler)

Guilty Pleasures Book Reviews says

George is recently recovering from some very devastating blows, pushing his past further away from him and focusing on his future. When Amy shows up searching for answers for her family and her twin, George is unable to leave the past buried. Facing his fears and risking his heart, he bears his soul to Amy and learns some new Christmas traditions with her.

George and Amy is an adorable couple, who are learning to trust each other while sharing painful secrets, and finding love along the way. They are the couple that the whole town watches as they slowly fall head over heels for each other; and the towns has it figured out before they do. I want to read more and more about George and Amy; I could have read for hours about them. Darling, VT has a very charming quality, readers enjoy traveling back as much as possible! Anyone looking for a cute, sweet, holiday romance, grab a copy of Deck the Halls, its a great way to spend your afternoon!
