

After retiring from the army, John Williams tries to live a normal civilian life. But his dark secret makes this impossible; so he leaves his family in search of oblivion. However, he can't escape what happened, and as it begins to destroy him, he finds an unexpected path to salvation.

A SOLDIER'S JOURNEY HOME

by Carrie Olsen

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CARRIE OLSEN

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-016-2

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

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Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition

Chapter 1 – The First Few Days

Rising from the constant background hum of the truck stop, the first sound that caught John's attention was the low thrumming rumble of semi engines switching into drive. On the tail of this came the rush of sweet diesel exhaust. He looked at his watch – 5:53 a.m. His sixteen-wheeler neighbors had just begun their mass exodus, and he planned to follow their lead. After three nights sleeping in the back of his truck – the first night at that truck stop just north of Pueblo, and the last two here in Fountain – his back had knots like a climbing rope, and a deep, arthritic ache had settled in both knees. He was only forty-one, but twenty years in the army had taken a heavy toll on his skeletal system. And the bitter cold of mountain air in November did nothing to help.

Inside the truck stop restroom, he studied himself in the mirror. With his three-day stubble, blood-shot eyes, and disheveled clothes, he looked every bit the creepy drifter. He washed his face, wet his hair back, and brushed his teeth. It was an improvement, but he still looked like shit. He badly needed a shave and a shower. The truck stop had two pay-showers, but they were both out of commission – busted water line. A group of city workmen had started digging it up yesterday morning, but they hadn't made much progress since.

No matter. He planned to leave here as soon as he found a motel that wouldn't eat up too much of his meager supply of money. Then he could take as long a shower as he wanted.

Altogether, he had \$3,000 on a prepaid Visa debit card and \$4,213 in cash. When he'd started putting money away last year, it hadn't been with any concrete intentions. It had just felt like something he needed to do. And he never took anything from the household account. He donated plasma, sold a few things (his grandfather's pocket watch, some tools, a couple of hunting rifles), and, for a handful of months, cleaned up pretty well in online poker.

It had taken forever to put aside enough money, but he'd had no other choice. Anything less subtle would have alerted Kate.

His prepaid cell had died, so he asked the store clerk for a phone book. And miraculously, the truck stop still had a working pay phone; so he dug some change out of his middle console and called a handful of places.

The Motor Coach Inn on south Nevada turned out to be the cheapest, at \$39 a night. He knew it was probably a total shithole, but it still beat the truck bed. And it was probably the Hilton compared to some of the places where he'd laid his head during his many tours of duty.

Before heading out, he got himself a cup of coffee and a convenience store breakfast (overripe banana and a glazed doughnut). Ten minutes later, he pulled into the parking lot of his temporary new home. Check-in time wasn't for another three and a half hours, but the energetic, silver-haired Indian man behind the front desk seemed unconcerned with the rules of his establishment and gave him a room immediately. Based on the exterior of the place, with its peeling paint and half-

retouched graffiti, he expected the worst; but it wasn't so bad. His room was shabby and spare, but it was spotless.

After showering and shaving, he felt refreshed and famished. He'd only eaten half of the overripe banana, and the cardboard-textured doughnut had gone in the trash after one bite. And now that he'd returned to some semblance of humanity, he wanted to sit down somewhere and get a real, hot breakfast.

And suddenly, he thought of the diner where he'd taken Kate the night they'd met. They hadn't gone there since Amy was in first grade – he didn't even know for sure if it still existed. He couldn't recall the name of the place, but did remember that it was at the end of a strip mall off of Cheyenne Mountain Blvd, just west of Highway 115.

When he turned into the parking lot, he spotted it immediately. The Tasty Skillet. It wasn't even eight on a Monday morning, yet six cars already took up the front spots. When he walked in, he saw no open tables, so he grabbed a stool in front of the glass countertop display of homemade bakery items. The sign in front of the display advertised their fall specialties – cinnamon pumpkin bread with a caramel glaze and cranberry-orange bread with walnuts. They both sounded so good, he asked for a slice of each.

As he ate, a woman who had just come out from the kitchen beamed happily at his spontaneous vocalizations of pleasure. She was middle-aged – maybe mid- to late fifties – with a plump, rosy face and black hair pulled back in a thick braid that just grazed the back ties of her blue and white checkered apron.

“I take it you like those?” She teased, refilling his coffee cup.

“They’re delicious,” as he popped the last bite into his mouth.

“Glad to hear it. Those are some of my new recipes. You’re the first one to try them.”

“Well, ma’am, let me tell you – you are a magician. I haven’t tasted anything that good in a long time.”

Her already broad smile widened and she pulled two more slices out and set them on his plate. “Never been called a magician before. Figured that was worth a second helping, on the house.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“No problem, young man. You made my day.”

As she walked off to serve her other customers, he studied her closely. Everything about her seemed familiar – her hair, her smile, her voice...

Then it hit him. She had waited on him and Kate *many* times, all those years ago.

Had she recognized him? The more he thought about it, the more he felt sure that she had looked at him as if trying to place his face. The knot in his stomach tightened, and the lead weight of fear settled on his chest, making it hard for him to breathe. He had risked nothing, sleeping at the truck stop; but this place was a whole different story. He and Kate had been regulars here ever since they’d starting dating. In the beginning of their relationship, they’d eaten here pretty much every weekend, and even after getting married, they had still come twice a month. Then his father-in-law passed away, and they moved to Pueblo

so that Kate could be nearer to her mom. And they hadn't gone since.

So maybe, just maybe, she wouldn't remember him.

He watched her hustle back into the kitchen, and a moment later, she returned with his breakfast – huevos rancheros. A cold sweat broke out across his forehead. Huevos rancheros was what they had ordered ninety percent of the time; it was the best thing they had on the menu. She would surely remember him now.

“Honey, are you okay? You don't look too good.”

In just the brief instant it took for him to glance up and meet her intent, concerned gaze, an explosion of panic went off inside his head, and in a blind rush, he mumbled some excuse about not feeling well, threw a twenty down on the counter, and left. A moment later, he found himself bent over the grass median in front of his truck, hyperventilating and fighting with all his might to hold down those four pieces of breakfast bread. After five or so minutes, the nausea passed and his breathing returned to normal; but he was shaking, and his knees had turned to jelly. He sat down on the curb along the edge of the grass, ran a hand over his forehead to the back of his neck, and realized with a shock that his hair was soaking wet.

He got up and opened the passenger door of his truck, ripped off a handful of paper towels from the roll he kept there, and dried his face and hair. His panic had subsided, and now he just felt like an idiot. On top of all that, the rush of adrenalin brought on by his temporary state of hysteria had passed, leaving behind that gnawing, hollow hunger of complete physical depletion. For two and a half days and three nights,

he'd eaten a sad combination of cold canned food, soggy sandwiches, and beef jerky for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This would have been his first hot meal since Friday morning, and he'd gone and ruined it by letting some ridiculous fear get the better of him. By now, that beautiful breakfast that he'd just wasted twenty dollars on was probably in the trash. He was so pissed off at himself.

Might as well go back to the motel and eat another can of pork and beans, he thought bitterly.

He got back in his truck, and had just started to back out of the parking spot, when a sudden knock at his window made him hit the brakes. He shifted into park and turned to find the woman from the restaurant staring at him with an unreadable look on her face.

Dread rose in him as he rolled down the window. "Yes, ma'am?" In his panic, had he left a ten instead of a twenty? He suddenly couldn't remember.

She breathed a sigh of relief. "You had me worried there. At first, I thought maybe you were having a heart attack. I ran out after you, but I couldn't see you anywhere. Then I saw you by your truck – you seemed okay, so I went back inside. But then I realized you'd way overpaid, and you didn't even eat one bite of your breakfast." She held up a plastic to-go container. "Even if you don't feel like eating it right now, you might want it later."

Without a word, he took the container from her hand.

She smiled, reached into her apron pocket, and pulled out a small collection of dollar bills and coins. "Your bill was only \$11.24; here's your change."

“No, no, you go ahead and keep it, ma’am. You’ve been really nice, and I appreciate it. But I’ve got to leave now.”

She studied at him a moment longer; then asked a final time, “You sure you’re okay?”

“I’m sure.” And he rolled up his window, abruptly ending the conversation.

As he pulled out of the parking lot and back onto the street, he caught a glimpse of her. She was still standing there, watching him, her right hand unmoved from its position of offering. For as long as he could see her, she remained, just so.

Once back inside his motel room, he placed the ‘do not disturb’ sign on the outside handle, locked the door, and turned off the lights. And there he spent the rest of the day, in the dark, watching TV half of the time and staring at the ceiling the other half. He didn’t leave again until evening, and then, it was just to run to the nearest liquor store and buy himself a bottle of Jack Daniels and a liter of Coke. He usually had no more than a couple of beers at a time, but tonight, he planned to get drunk.

By midnight, he had downed a little over one-third of the bottle, and, along with the ham sandwich and bag of Doritos he’d eaten for dinner, the whiskey was now part of the orange-brown mess at the bottom of his toilet. But for just a short while, after those first three or four drinks hit his bloodstream, he’d felt a warmth and a pleasant, forgetful calm. For the first time since he’d taken all those pills, his racing thoughts had stopped. However, where the pills had made him feel foggy and unable to function, the booze made him feel back in control. He knew it was a false control – that nothing had really changed – but it didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was that for a

couple of hours, he felt normal. Even after he vomited, that feeling made him see why so many of his combat buddies had turned to alcohol.

Then he found himself thinking about Pete.

The last time he'd seen Pete was the night he'd gone and picked him up from that bar on the southeast side of town, almost a year and a half ago. At one in the morning, a call coming from Pete's cell woke him, and when he answered, a frazzled female voice on the other line begged him to come get his friend. Pete had gotten so drunk, he could hardly stand (he'd sat outside drinking in his car for who knows how long before even entering the bar); and after they refused to serve him, he became belligerent and combative.

John got there as fast as he could, but it was too late; they'd already called the police. Because Pete had only made some minor threats, and because the bartender was an understanding woman and the one cop a long time veteran, he did not get arrested that night. But after that, it seemed his buddy was on a mission; and soon enough, they charged him with drunk and disorderly conduct, destruction of private property, and attempted assault on a police officer.

After that, the army gave Pete a dishonorable discharge.

And while his friend spiraled out of control, John desperately tried to keep it together by taking the medications prescribed to him by the army psychiatrist. They had begun to help, somewhat, but every day was a struggle; and because of that, he found it really difficult to be around Pete.

So eventually, they lost touch.

Four months later, Pete was dead. The police found him in a motel room with a bullet through his heart. And the moment John found out, he stopped taking the medications. He told Kate that he couldn't handle the side effects, but that was a lie. He stopped taking them because he'd let those stupid pills become more important than a friend in desperate need. They were nothing more than a bandage, anyway. It was all bullshit. Pete's world had fallen into fucking shambles, and no pill could make that better. His only relief was that tiny bit of steel that had ripped through the meat in his chest and stolen away his life in an instant.

He'd just turned thirty-two.

Those first months after Pete's suicide were the worst; John's guilt, combined with the sudden withdrawal of his psych meds, sent him sinking into a deep depression. During that time, he barely spoke to Kate or Amy, and at one point, even considered taking the same out as Pete. But as he imagined it, how and where he would do it, all he could see was his wife's face, distorted by the shock and pain of finding him. Or, God forbid, his daughter found him – something like that would ruin her forever. And that had been enough for him to realize that suicide would never be an option.

But the depression lingered.

And then, for just a handful of weeks at the beginning of January, things got better.

Kate had started running, and was training for her first half-marathon. She had found something to help her cope, something to keep her mind off of her screwed up husband. And he was super proud of her, proud of her strength and determination. On his good days, he even ran with her. On one such morning, after a ten-mile run, they came back to the house and made love. Amy was still sleeping, and all the endorphins released by the run, combined with an eyeful of his wife's sweaty, naked body as she took off her clothes and jumped in the shower, made him long for her like he hadn't in months. For a couple of hours, his sadness was replaced by an aching, insatiable need to run his hand along the soft, tender skin of her inner thighs, and to kiss the back of her neck. He didn't even wait for her to get out of the shower; and after the shower, they christened the bed, twice.

That had been a good day, but it didn't last; and three weeks later, he left her and Amy for the first time. That night, he got as far as a motel in downtown Pueblo. He returned home the next day and found that Amy didn't even know he'd left. Kate hadn't told her, and she made him swear to pretend that he'd been away on a job. He kept up the charade, and Amy remained blissfully unaware. That night in bed, after a long day of suppressing her anger and keeping her many questions inside, Kate unleashed her fury. She didn't want to yell and make Amy suspicious, so instead, she went at him physically; she began to hit him on the chest, and was about to slap him across the face, when he grabbed her hands, pushed her down on the bed, and climbed on top of her, pinning her arms under his knees. After a few minutes of struggle, she relented,

becoming a limp rag beneath him. He got off of her and got back under the covers, and she turned away from him and pretended to sleep.

They lay like that for over an hour, until her deep, steady breathing told him she was actually asleep. As he listened to her soft exhalations, the image of her hitting him, and of her fighting as he held her down, began to arouse him. Without waking her up, he climbed on top of her and was inside of her before she was even fully awake. This was nothing like the last time; it was forceful, and almost brutal. He devoured her with an aggression that could not be controlled, and, as he looked into her eyes, he could see fear behind her excitement.

After it was over, and he returned to his senses, he felt sick to his stomach. As he lay there, picturing forcing himself on his wife like some kind of dirty animal, the bile rose in his throat, and he ran to the bathroom and vomited. And right then, he swore to himself that he would never lay a hand on her again. He couldn't be trusted.

Not long after that, she caught him masturbating. He knew she was on the other side of the door; he could feel her. But that didn't stop him; he was a man possessed. As he came, it was almost like a piece of him had been ripped away, and he moaned with equal pleasure and agony. When he finally left the bathroom, she was again pretending to be asleep, but he was pretty sure neither one of them actually got one moment's rest that night.

And that was the last time they had shared the same bed. From then on, he had carried out all of his illicit self-pleasuring in the basement bedroom.

But here, alone in this motel room, he didn't have to hide his deviant inclinations. He could indulge in whatever fantasy popped into his screwed up brain. Along with the alcohol, he'd bought himself a porn magazine, and as the need to vomit passed, and he began to feel the good drunk again, he lay back on the bed and thumbed through the pages. It was a highly graphic one, with absolutely nothing left to the imagination. One woman in particular, with long black hair and hazel eyes (the exact opposite of Kate, who had short blonde hair and brown eyes), caught his attention. She wore only a half corset in pale pink, and her hair was done up in pigtails tied with matching ribbons. As he unzipped his pants and began touching himself, he imagined tying the woman to his bed. She had a blindfold on, and her black hair was no longer in pigtails. With a large pocket knife, he cut off her corset, and proceeded to run the blade lightly around her breasts and down her belly. When he looked up from what he was doing, she no longer wore the blindfold, and her face had changed. She was darker, and she looked about ten years younger. The very moment this particular face came into his head, he jumped up from the bed, tore the magazine in two, and threw it across the room. He then tried to pour himself another drink, but his hands shook so badly, half of the whiskey splashed down the side of the cup; so instead, he took a long swig right from the bottle.

Then another. And another.

Less than two inches of whiskey remained in the bottle when he passed out, which was around two, and by 3:30, he had

puked three more times. But the booze did the trick, and he did not see the girl's face again.

The next morning, he woke with a blinding headache, a sour stomach, and a putrid taste in his mouth. Even after showering and brushing his teeth, he felt no better. He had nothing for his headache, so he had to force himself to drive down the street to the nearest grocery store. There, he bought a bottle of Excedrin, some antacid, three 32-ounce bottles of Gatorade, and a nine-pack of Ramen noodles. For most of the day, he lay in bed, sucking down pills and electrolytes, and chewing on tabs of calcium carbonate in between cups of noodles.

By early afternoon, he began to feel human again, so he decided to get out. He drove around the downtown area for a while; then headed over to Garden of the Gods. After circling the entire place twice, he found a spot to park and climbed an unoccupied rock.

And there he sat until closing, thinking about Kate and Amy. And Pete.

The sun had set by the time he got back to his room, but the bed was still unmade, and shreds of magazine still lay scattered all over the floor. Then he remembered – the *do not disturb* sign. He removed the sign and cleaned up. He then poured the remaining Jack Daniels down the sink.

“I’m sorry, Pete. I should have been there for you,” and he threw the empty whiskey bottle into the bedside trash can.

Chapter 2 – Discovery

November 8, 2015

John's left us. I thought writing it down in here would make it seem more real, but I still feel like I'm in the middle of a dream. And I can't wake up.

He's been gone nine days already, but I just found out yesterday. So maybe that's why it doesn't seem real. I know he left us before, but that was only one night, and he swore up and down it was the biggest mistake he'd ever made. Obviously he was lying. I should've known.

All I remember about that time is walking into the kitchen after my run and finding the note. After that, it's a total blank. Which is crazy, because I remember everything. I remember we met on June 8, 2000. I even remember the smell of the bowling alley where we met. It was this weird combination of cigarette smoke, new carpet, and some kind of super sweet cleaner. I can close my eyes right now and it's like I'm there. Even after fifteen years.

There was no note this time. Maybe that's why I can't accept it. I just keep thinking he'll come through our front door any minute now, and I'll be able to breathe again. Amy still doesn't know. She still thinks he's on his hunting trip. And here I am, trying to figure out how the hell to tell her that he left us nine days ago. I can't do it. I just can't.

Don't do this to me, John. Please come home.

Suddenly, Katherine heard movement coming from the room next to hers, so she quickly closed her journal and shoved it back into the drawer of her bedside table. The crack of sky visible through her mostly closed bedroom curtains was still black and alive with stars, so she looked at her bedside clock. It was only 5:13; what the hell was Amy doing up? That little girl liked to sleep late, and it usually took a noise level comparable to a Metallica concert at a shooting range to wake her before ten.

She poked her head out into the hallway and called, “Amy, honey, are you up?”

Katherine could see the empty, disheveled bed through the open doorway at the end of the hall, but Amy remained out of sight. So she tiptoed over and carefully peeked inside the room. Amy had been known to sleepwalk on occasion, and she did not wish to startle her awake if that were the case.

The room was mostly hidden in deep darkness, but she could hear her daughter moving around near the end of the bed, doing *what* she could not imagine.

“Amy, you awake?” Her voice was just barely above a whisper, as the potential sleepwalking had not yet been completely ruled out.

“I’m down here, Mom.”

She followed the sound of her daughter’s voice and found her sitting cross-legged on the floor at the foot of her bed, a disarray of papers strewn across her lap. “Honey, what are you doing up so early? It’s not even 5:30.”

“I had a nightmare.” She gave no other information and continued to sort through her mess of papers.

“Do you want go back to sleep in my room?”

Amy then shot her the ‘are you kidding me?’ look. “I’m not a baby, Mom. It was just a dream.”

Those type of responses usually rolled right off of her, but this morning, her daughter’s quick dismissal of her motherly protectiveness made her feel like crying. In fact, for a brief moment, the tears actually welled up in her eyes. But she quickly blinked them away and inwardly chastised herself for acting like a fool.

“I know, honey. But nightmares can be pretty terrifying, no matter how old you are. And it doesn’t mean you’re a baby if you don’t want to be alone when you wake up.” At that moment, she was so grateful Amy could not see her, because her emotional dam completely crumbled, and her face once again flooded with heartbreak.

In the silence that followed, it seemed Amy realized that she’d hurt her mother’s feelings, and her voice softened. “It did kind of freak me out. I fell through the ice on this big lake, but I didn’t hit water. I just kept falling down this long black tunnel, but I woke up before I hit the bottom. I thought about knocking on your door, but I didn’t want to wake you.”

“Sweetheart, you can wake me up any time.” Feeling once again needed by her daughter, Katherine resurrected the dam holding back all her dread and sorrow. In this moment, everything was still as it should be. Amy did not yet know that her father had left them without a single goodbye.

“It’s okay; I got over it. But then I started thinking about Dad, and I couldn’t go back to sleep.”

“So why are you sitting on the floor?”

“I was looking for something.”

“Looking for what?”

I'm not yet ready to tell you, replied the persisting silence.

“Honey, did you hear me?”

An audible sigh, then, “Yeah, Mom. I heard you.”

“Well?”

“I was looking for something I wrote when I was a little girl.”

As if you're not still a little girl, Katherine thought. But instead, she said, “How can you even see? It's pitch-black in here.” She turned on the overhead light.

“Mom! Turn it off. I can see just fine.”

“Okay, okay.” She turned off the light. “Better?”

“Yeah.”

“So, what was it that you wrote?”

“Well, it wasn't all me. It's something me and Dad wrote together.”

“You wrote something with your dad? When did you do that?” She tried to keep her tone as nonchalant as possible, but she couldn't hide her surprise.

“Yeah, Mom – I was in third grade – don't you remember? Me and dad made up that game. He'd start and I'd pick up where he left off. Then we'd go back and forth, until one of us ended it. That was usually him; he was good at coming up with endings. I wasn't so good. You remember that, don't you?”

Katherine remembered it very well. And she had tried to participate – once. But her additions had been paltry in comparison to the bountiful harvest of imagination that bloomed in the minds of both her husband and daughter. It was

a game meant for just those two, and she had long ago buried her very mild feelings of jealousy in overflowing pride.

“Of course I remember that game. I just didn’t know that you and your dad ever wrote down any of those stories.”

“Only one. It’s about a killer whale named Benny. He gets caught and sent to a water park. And one day, he’s so sad and angry, and he ends up hurting one of the human trainers. So they lock him up in this tiny little pool, all by himself. Then a marine biologist who’s been watching whales for years buys him from the park. And she releases him back into the ocean, to his family.”

When she stopped talking, Katherine walked into the room and sat down beside her. “Honey, was that story your idea or your dad’s?”

“Kind of both. We just watched Dumbo, and I wanted to make a story like that, but about dolphins. But Dad thought killer whales were more interesting.”

With that, Amy jumped full force back into the task of sorting through her collection of papers. It looked like hundreds of sheets, covered with writing in all levels of penmanship proficiency and in all possible variations of color. Some were loose, and others she’d stapled together in groups. And she’d completely filled each page, front to back.

“Amy, is this all *your* writing?” She almost couldn’t fathom the time and energy that had gone into creating such a volume of work. It seemed almost impossible for a woman *her* age, much less a seventh-grade girl.

Seeing her mother’s surprise, Amy became acutely self-conscious and began to hurriedly shuffle the papers into a

single, neat pile that she could shove back into the box in which they had been safely kept a secret for who knows how long.

It didn't make any sense, the guarded way she gathered up her writing. Katherine had never been anything but immensely proud of her daughter's accomplishments, and especially her skill with the written word. Teachers consistently wrote volumes of praise on her papers, and she never held back telling Amy how much she deserved that praise.

"Amy, why are you hiding all this?"

And just like that, she stopped and met her mother's look with an abashed expression. "I'm sorry, Mom. I guess I wasn't ready to show you."

"You weren't ready? I don't understand." This was all very confusing. So confusing, she'd forgotten completely the dreadful truth she still had yet to confess.

"I don't know. I guess I just wanted it all more... *finished*."

At that moment, Katherine's dismay disappeared, and she laughed.

"Mom! Why are you laughing?"

"Oh, honey, I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing because I'm happy you're not keeping secrets from me; you're just a crazy perfectionist." Amy smiled in return, and Katherine pulled her close in a hearty embrace. And they remained like that, in comfortable silence, for several minutes.

Then Amy pulled away, as if something long forgotten had at that moment popped back into her head. "Mom, I need to find that story. Dad's coming home today. I promised him I would find it."

After that brief moment of forgetful bliss with her arms around her daughter, the dread that subsequently crashed down upon her was almost too much to bear. “Amy, your dad isn’t going to care if you find that old story. He’ll just be happy to see you.”

“No, Mom. I’ve *got* to find it; it’s *really* important.”

“Amy, trust me. It’s not going to matter. Your dad’ll just be happy to see *you*.” With each lie she told, she felt herself sink deeper into the mire.

“You don’t understand. Dad asked me to find it.”

“*He* asked you to find it? When?”

“The day before he left for his hunting trip. I was working on my science project, and I completely forgot about it. He asked me again the next morning, but I was already late for school. I just didn’t have time. And he seemed so disappointed. I even thought about missing the bus on purpose, just so I could find it before he left. I don’t know why he wanted it so bad; it’s not like he was going to read it up there in the mountains.”

Suddenly, Katherine understood. He’d known then that he was going to leave, and he’d wanted that story as a keepsake.

At that moment, she knew for sure that her husband was not coming home, and she inwardly said a word of thanks that she was already sitting, because her body no longer retained the strength to keep her standing.

“Ah, here it is!”

She would never forget that smile, and it would be a while before she would see it again.

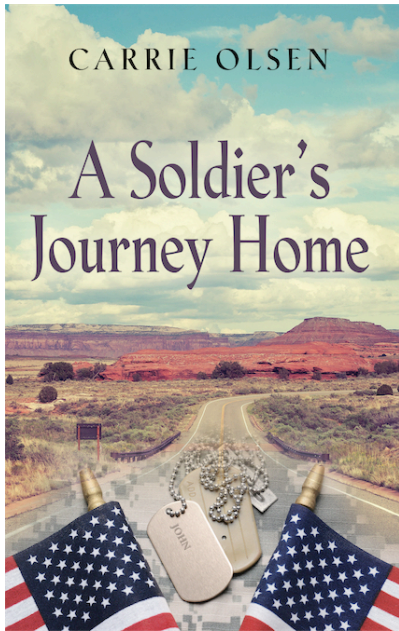
“Amy, there’s something I’ve got to tell you.”

A Soldier's Journey Home

She saw the look on her mother's face, and the smile faded.
“What is it, Mom?”

Here goes. She stood at the precipice, hearing every heartbeat like a bass drum inside her head. One, two, three...

She took a deep breath and jumped.



After retiring from the army, John Williams tries to live a normal civilian life. But his dark secret makes this impossible; so he leaves his family in search of oblivion. However, he can't escape what happened, and as it begins to destroy him, he finds an unexpected path to salvation.

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