

HEARTWARMING INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE

*Love & Inspiration*®

# Homecoming Hero

Renee Ryan



Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing *Homecoming Hero*. Writing this book was a special treat for me on so many levels. I have many military friends, both men and women, who have inspired me through the years with their commitment to their calling. It was a joy getting the opportunity to explore their daily lives. Any mistakes I made in writing this book are all mine.

I also enjoyed giving a none-too-subtle wink to my favorite spectator sport: college football. I love college football. And when I say I love it, I mean I love, love, love it! I'll watch just about any matchup on TV, but I especially like going to the games in person. There's something infectious about the game-day atmosphere. The crowds, the junk food, the noise, the band, the screaming/booing/cheering fans—all of these individual aspects mix together to form a sensory overload that leaves me pleasantly exhausted. I can't think of a better way to spend a Saturday.

Because of my husband's job, I've had the good fortune of living in many college towns over the years. I've attended games at some of the most famous stadiums in the country, as well as some of the not-so-famous ones. I've tailgated with die-hard boosters and people who want to talk about their hair rather than the game. I've sat in terrible seats, fabulous seats, skyboxes and even stood on the sidelines. I've memorized countless cheers and fight songs. I've watched the cheerleaders and the silly antics of the mascots. But there's one special mascot who has literally stolen my heart. I think you can figure out which one. He doesn't do much, except

just be who he is. I love him for that. UGA, you're the man!

What about you? Any college football fans out there? Or would you rather talk hair? I'd love to hear your opinion on either. You can contact me at my Web site, [www.reneeryan.com](http://www.reneeryan.com).

In the meantime, happy reading!

*Renee*

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Wolf seek out Hailey in the opening scene? What makes his task especially difficult? Is he right to try to stop her from her goal? Why or why not?
2. When Hailey discovers Wolf was the only survivor of the IED that killed her brother and three other soldiers, she realizes she has an opportunity to offer comfort to a wounded soul, yet she has no idea how to go about it. What does she do? Have you ever been in a position that stretched your capabilities? What did you do?
3. What is motivating Hailey's determination to become a missionary in the Middle East? Do you think she's naive, as Wolf claims? What's the difference between having a heart for causes versus having a heart for people?
4. What is Wolf's reaction to the missionaries' speech at Hailey's church? Why does he react that way? Do you think he overreacts? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think Wolf dislikes J.T. at first, despite their common backgrounds? What changes between the two that ultimately makes it possible for them to become friends? Have you ever had someone in your life who started out as an adversary but turned into a friend? What happened to make the change?

6. When Wolf asks Hailey to help him shop for items to put in his townhome, the excursion goes badly. What happens in the store? Why do you think Wolf reacts that way? What would you have done had you been Hailey?
7. Do you think Wolf's intense need for danger makes him an adrenaline junkie? What's really driving him to do the risky things he does? Do you agree with his assessment? Do you think God makes mistakes? Why or why not?
8. What does Wolf do to "shock" Hailey into staying home? Do you think it's unfair of him to show her those videos? Why do you think the exercise backfires on him?
9. When Hailey realizes she can't help Wolf overcome his guilt she turns to J.T. for help. What does he tell her? Why is his advice so hard for her to accept? Have you ever felt helpless in the face of a loved one's problem? What did you do?
10. What happens when Wolf takes Hailey to a homeless shelter that is mere blocks away from her house? Why do you think it's so hard for her to look people in the eye, at least at first? What changes in her as a direct result of her time with the homeless?
11. Why is Wolf afraid to love Hailey? What's holding him back? What happens when he reads her brother's e-mails from Iraq?

12. What happens to Hailey on her short-term mission trip to Haiti? Why is this change significant? Have you ever thought God was calling you to go in one direction, only to discover He had something else planned for your life? What happened?



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**"Hailey. Listen to me." His voice shook as he spoke. "You can't travel to the Middle East right now."**

"But—"

"It's not safe. Your brother didn't want you in danger."

She heard the plea in his voice. "But mission work is dangerous. Clay knew that. I know it, too."

"I don't care how prepared you think you are, you can't go there alone."

She touched his shoulder, surprised at the tension she felt under his hand. "I won't be alone. I'll have others with me. And, of course, I'll have God."

His shocked gaze locked with hers. "The Lord can't protect you from roadside bombs."

Looking into Wolf's angry expression, Hailey knew words wouldn't get through to him now. But maybe a firsthand account would.

"Come to church with me this afternoon," she said. "A couple who are permanently based in the Middle East are visiting," she explained.

"You're not going to listen to another word I say unless I agree to this, are you?"

"Nope."

"You are one hard-headed woman, Hailey O'Brien." His tone held a hint of admiration.

"So I've been told, Captain Wolfson."

## **Books by Renee Ryan**

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*\*The Marshal Takes a Bride*

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## **RENEE RYAN**

grew up in a small Florida beach town. To entertain herself during countless hours of “lying out” she read all the classics. It wasn’t until the summer between her sophomore and junior years at Florida State University that she read her first romance novel. Hooked from page one, she spent hours consuming one book after another while working on the best (and last!) tan of her life.

Two years later, armed with a degree in economics and religion, she explored various career opportunities, including stints at a Florida theme park, a modeling agency and a cosmetics conglomerate. She moved on to teach high school economics, American government and Latin while coaching award-winning cheerleading teams. Several years later, with an eclectic cast of characters swimming around in her head, she began seriously pursuing a writing career.

She lives an action-packed life in Lincoln, Nebraska, with her supportive husband, lovely teenage daughter and two ornery cats who hate each other.

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Renee Ryan



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ISBN-13: 978-0-373-87617-4

**HOMECOMING HERO**

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Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.

—*Matthew 11:28*



To First Lieutenant Erik J. Anthes. I'm humbled  
by your continued dedication to our country.

Thank you for your service, my friend.  
May God keep you safe and in His arms always.

## Chapter One



**U.S.** Army Captain Ty Wolfson stared at his friend's childhood home in stunned silence. He'd been so focused on getting off post he hadn't considered what he might find once he arrived in Savannah. The possibility that he'd be standing in front of a two-hundred-year-old house in the heart of the historic district hadn't crossed his mind.

Not once.

But here Wolf stood, confronting generations of tradition, wrapped up neatly in what the historical marker deemed O'Brien House.

As he read the story of the O'Brien family history, guilt twisted painfully in his gut. It should be Clay preparing to climb up these steps. Not Wolf. Not like this, under these terrible circumstances.

And yet...he *would* walk inside that house. To fulfill the promise he'd made to Clay on that Iraqi roadside.

Determined to accomplish the difficult task before him, Wolf started forward, but a jolt of sorrow knifed through him. The feeling was so strong, so visceral he had to stop and swallow several times to get the emotion under control.



Breathing hard, he lowered his gaze to the grainy photograph he'd kept with him for the last six months. The sight of Clay's little sister grinning back at him made Wolf's heartbeat quicken with anxiety.

Dressed in a traditional graduation gown with the requisite mortarboard scrunched on top of her head, Hailey O'Brien looked far too young, and far too innocent to have set such a dangerous course for her life.

Whatever it took, Wolf would stop her. He owed that much to Clay. And the friendship they'd shared in Iraq.

Blinking the grit out of his eyes, he stuffed the photograph back in his pocket and studied Clay's childhood home a moment longer. He knew he was stalling, but he needed a chance to take it all in.

The three-story brick mansion filled an entire city block. Each floor boasted rows of tall, double-glass doorways leading onto cast-iron balconies. A fence in the same ornate design ran along the perimeter of the manicured lawn, encircling tall trees and large bushes that reached halfway to the second floor.

With his gaze tracking the adjacent streets, Wolf experienced a sense of claustrophobia. There were too many trees in this part of town and the houses were too close together. He'd lived too long in the desert not to feel pinned in now.

Shivering, he blew into his cupped palms. The temperature had dropped to a sharp, bitter cold that turned his breath to frost. Clay had prepared him for the heat, with his constant griping about the Savannah humidity. But he'd said nothing about this bone-rattling cold that made Wolf's leg ache more than usual.

A light mist swirled in the gray, depressing air. The perfect accompaniment for all the regrets he harbored