



HEART
of a
WOUNDED
HERO 

**MAKE LOVE
NOT WAR**

SCARLETT WOODS

Make Love Not War

Heart of a Wounded Hero

By Scarlett Woods

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Chapter One: Bella

“Ugh, my head is killing me,” I whisper to myself as I slowly open my eyes.

Blinking up at the glaring bright lights in the ceiling, I try to lift a hand, but my limbs feel almost like they aren't connected to my body. There's a stiffness running through my muscles as if I've been laying down in this one spot for a long time.

As carefully and slowly as I can, I bring my hand to my temple and rub.

The throbbing is consistent, but for some reason, is worse on the left side of my head. It's like a migraine centralized just behind my ear, and steadily expanding outwards to take up the rest of my head.

What the heck did I do last night?

I close my eyes hard, but the lights are so bright that I can still see the LED white glow through them. Or perhaps my eyes are just that sensitive at the moment.

I breathe out hard, turning my head to the side. The stiff pillow under my cheek smells faintly of bleach.

Wait a minute, I don't use bleach on my pillowcases and I don't think I have bright lights directly over my bed. Where am I? What's going on?

My head spins trying to comprehend what's happening but it feels like my mind is running on a lag.

How did I get here? But even more importantly, where is "here"?

One more time, I crack my eyes open, and again, it's a bad idea.

My head is now pounding even more than before and the thought of facing that light again is enough to make tension wind through my already aching muscles. I take a deep breath and force myself to relax. Focusing on one limb at a time, I calm my body.

I start with my legs, then work my way up.

Okay, just relax. Unclench each muscle and move to the next. Use the skills you've learned. I tell myself. *Although I can't recall who taught me or why I would have the skills to do this, I feel like I've done this a million times before.*

It takes several minutes to get my body feeling less like a wire about to pop from tension, but finally, I'm able to tilt my head back up towards the ceiling again and open my eyes. The light doesn't seem so bothersome this time around now that I'm expecting it. But I still ache, everywhere.

Groaning, I try to shift.

Everything inside me protests but I manage a slight twist of my body. Tilting my head to the side, I quietly gasp. There are wires in my arms, an IV hooked into the crook of the back of my hand. I'm in a room with white walls and matching stark white floors. White bedsheets, white ceiling... where am I?

I must be in a hospital? That seems like the most likely conclusion. But have I ever been in a hospital before? By the looks of the piles of fresh flowers in the corner and nurse charts on the wall, I must've been here before and probably for a while.

But, why?

It's hard to think about anything through the throbbing migraine. But somehow, I know a headache isn't my biggest problem. I feel confused, a bit frustrated, and overall exhausted. Above anything else, I seem to be having a hard time remembering much of anything.

Perhaps I had an odd reaction to a new medicine I'm on. Yes, perhaps I have brain fog from the migraine.

I'm not trying to jump to conclusions before I've gotten the facts but there's no one around and I'm starting to panic.

Why am I here?

I try to think back to what could have gotten me in a hospital in the first place, but my mind is blank. Using the clues around me, I try to gather what I know.

Besides the flowers in the corner, there's a little table next to my bed with a stuffed teddy bear on it and a few get-well cards. It seems I've been in here long enough to have visitors. If this is a hospital, where's my nurse? A doctor? Someone to fill me in on my situation? Have I, an adult woman, been kidnapped?

"Hello?" The word comes out clumsy and hoarse. My mouth is so dry that my lips are sticking to my teeth. The air here smells like cleaner and antiseptic. "Is someone out there?"

But something's wrong. My words sound muffled and not quite like me. Almost as if one side of my brain isn't working, or rather, one of my ears. There's a dull ringing sound through my ear.

Bringing a hand to my ear, I feel a cotton padding over it.

"What the—"

The door to the room swings open and a man wearing a white coat over blue scrubs comes barreling in. Despite my unusual tone, I immediately bombard this person with questions.

"Hi, are you the doctor? Where am I? What exactly is going on here?"

His eyes widen and he gasps. "You're up!"

I take a minute and stare at this man.

He looks like a doctor. His body language appears to be overjoyed, but his response sounds muffled to me. He wears an expression on his face that looks like he's on the verge of tears.

Who is this man?

He rushes over to check on one of the machines and runs his fingers over it as he takes in whatever reading it's

giving off. He grabs my chart to write something down on it.

“Um, hello? Sir? Please, tell me what’s going on,” I beg of him. “Where am I? And can you speak loudly? I’m having trouble hearing.”

He sets the charts down and stands at the foot of my bed, staring at me curiously. “You are at Swell General Hospital. You were brought here after your accident.”

Furrowing my brows, I reply, “Accident? What accident?”

He sighs lightly, and once again, I see the twinkle of a tear in his eye as he holds it back. “There was an explosion—”

“An explosion?! What? Where? At my house? Er, my apartment?” I mutter not quite remembering where I live.

He walks to the side of the bed. “You were overseas, Bella. Do you remember that?” he asks in a loud yet soft tone.

“Bella?” I whisper. “Is that my name?” I gasp.

My memory is worse than I thought. I don’t remember who I am. Not even my name.

“You said I was overseas? For what?” I continue. “Why would I be overseas? I hate flying.”

He pulls a chair beside my bed and sits as he responds, carefully choosing his words.

“Bella, you are an active soldier in the Army. You were serving overseas when your jeep ran over a covered mine in the road. The explosion sent you out of the vehicle. You suffered severe head trauma and burns from the blast, but you were rescued by some of the other troops.”

I look down at myself, lifting my hands, turning them this way and that. “I don’t feel like I’ve been burned.”

A look of uncertainty washes over his face. “That’s because it happened four months ago.”

Momentarily frozen, I glance up at him slowly to look him in the eyes, panic welling in my chest. “What?”

“It’s been four months. You’ve been in a coma, and have gone through many successful surgeries since then,” he says cautiously. “We weren’t sure...” his voice trails off and he pauses to steady himself. “We weren’t sure if you were going to wake up at all.”

His voice still sounds muffled as I’m processing his words. “Everything sounds weird,” I say frantically.

He nods. “Your left eardrum was significantly damaged.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that you won’t regain the hearing in that ear.” He reaches out and takes one of my hands in his. “But we’ve already got an order in for a new hearing device that can help.”

The man touches my hand with such a tenderness that it’s impossible to ignore. But reality hits me.

Doctors shouldn’t touch patients in this way.

I pull back quickly and stare at the place where our hands are touching. “Who are you? What’s your name, doctor?”

He looks directly into my eyes when he says, “My name is Titus, and I’m...” He pauses and places a hand over his heart. “I’m your fiancée.”

Chapter Two: Titus

“Are you kidding, Titus?” my buddy Archer from work says from the other side of the phone. “That’s not what I was expecting you’d say about Bella now that she’s finally woken up.”

Sighing aloud, I reply. “I’m afraid not. Bella finally wakes up from her coma and when I tell her I’m her fiancée, I believe her exact words yesterday were, ‘You’re joking, right?’”

“Yikes, I’m so sorry, dude.”

I exhale heavily. “In our line of work, we’ve seen this happen to tons of people. It’s heartbreaking every time but at the end of the day, I’ve always been able to go home knowing my true love was waiting for me or that she was just a phone call away when she was deployed.” I let out another heavy sigh. “But when it happens to you, it’s even more devastating than you can imagine.”

Archer remains silent and supportive on the phone while I navigate through my thoughts.

I continue, “For goodness sake, we’ve been together for five years, engaged for one, and she looked at me as if I were a stranger. There was a disconnect behind her eyes as if she didn’t believe a word I said. My sweet Bella. She was already having to process her hearing loss in one ear and then her memory. But it wasn’t until she said, ‘I don’t remember you’ that reality set in for me.” My eyes get watery now just recapping that moment. “Amnesia is a hell of a trauma to go through, my only hope for Bella is that it’s temporary.”

“Me too, bud. Me too,” Archer agrees. “Did you try triggering her memory with a story or touch of her hand?”

“I did. But I nearly pressed my lips on the back of her knuckles before she pulled away quickly and cautiously. She took a moment to stare at her pale skin and asked if she’d actually been in the hospital for months. When I shook my head yes, I could see the wheels spinning in her mind. She

then apologized for not remembering me and told me to give her time.” I close my eyes and rub the bridge of my nose. “Do you know how difficult it is to see your fiancée in crisis and not be able to do anything about it or even comfort her?”

Archer knows my question is rhetorical as he doesn’t even attempt to answer. “So what now?” he asks meekly.

“Now?” I take a deep breath. “Now I spend every waking moment getting Bella to fall back in love with me.”

As we pull into the driveway of our house the day Bella is discharged from the hospital, I reach out and turn off the radio. Despite the combined salaries of a doctor and soldier and what we can afford, Bella insisted on our first home together to be a small starter home. She never wanted to be the people who appear stuck up or rich. Just humble...like her.

We have a small white stone blockhouse in a nice neighborhood with a chain-link fence around the yard. The grass has been kept mowed but the flower bed out on either side of the front steps has gotten away from me over the course of the last four months. The red mulch riddles with weeds and the rose bushes remain untrimmed.

Bella raises a brow. “This is where we live?”

Chuckling, I reply, “You sound disappointed.” I cut the engine and park the car.

She shakes her head slightly. “No, I’m not disappointed in the house by any means. I was just hoping that when I saw it... I might remember something.” She drops her gaze to the ground.

“Hey, hey, come on.” I reach out and take her hand in one of my own, lifting it up and pressing a kiss against the back of it. “I told you your memory isn’t going to come back overnight. You can’t get upset with yourself, or the healing process is—“

She pulls back her hand with caution.

“Going to take twice as long?” she finishes my statement with a heavy sigh. “I know. I just wanted...I was hoping...ugh!” she rests her hands over her eyes. “You know everything about me. And I know nothing about either of us. You’re a stranger to me. I feel powerless, everything is out of my control. It’s frustrating.”

I feel for you, my love.

“I’ll do everything I can to help.” I get out of the car and then walk around to her side, opening the door and helping her out. “Let me show you something about both of us.”

Against Bella’s wishes, she’s been given a cane to walk with. It’s been so long since she used her muscles that they’ve grown weak. She doesn’t want the cane but needs it. Bella is also required to change out the cotton pads taped over her ear for the next month, which she’s not thrilled about.

I take her free arm to help steady her, linking our hands together. “Let me show you the life we had.”

She seems a little reluctant but lets me lead her up to the front door, and into the house. The moment I flick on the light, Perry starts wailing from behind the makeshift dog gates we put up to prevent Perry from shredding our couch pillows when we’re at work.

Bella turns to look at her, startled. “We have a dog?”

“And a cat,” I add. “Though that sneaky tabby is probably hidden somewhere, as usual. Tiger has always liked you more than me,” I tell Bella. “He’s been out of sorts since you’ve been gone.”

I help Bella onto the couch and then open the dog gates for Perry. The lovable pitty mix bolts in Bella’s direction. Perry is sweet as sugar but big and easily excitable. Lifting her front paws, she rests them on Bella. Bella smiles and holds her hand out to scratch her behind the ears. But Perry knows Bella better than that. Perry skips the ear scratch and leaps up into Bella’s lap, lathering my future wife in sloppy wet kisses.

Sounding surprised and relieved, Bella says, “This one remembers me!”

Did you think that I was lying to you? Then again, can I blame you? If I didn't have any memory of who I was or the life I had, I probably wouldn't believe the first guy that showed up and said we were soon to be married either. I need to remind myself to be patient and understanding.

Suddenly, a warm red color crosses Bella's face. She looks down, running her hands over Perry's smooth fur. “I want to believe you, Titus, and dive back into the apparent wonderful life we had. You seem very nice. And I guess your dog—”

“*Our* dog,” I correct her. “Perry.”

“—Perry,” she corrects. “I guess Perry must remember me. I just don't remember her, or you. And that makes all of this hard.”

“I want you to be comfortable. That's all I want. Time, we need time. That's all.”

Bella looks around, taking in the house with big eyes. “Why aren't there any pictures up?”

“You hate having your photograph taken,” I tell her with a half-hearted chuckle. “Every time I try to so much as snap a selfie of us on the phone, you go red.”

She thinks on that for a moment and then nods. “I don't remember that, but I don't feel like I would enjoy having my picture taken, either. That must be true.”

I sit down on the couch beside her, forcing myself to be mindful of the fact that she doesn't remember me. It's hard.

I want more than anything, to pull you into a hug and hold you close...to kiss you. To let you know how much I missed you while you were overseas, and how worried I have been while you were here, in the coma.

But I can't. I won't. At least, not yet.

I can tell Bella's getting more comfortable but still looks a little on edge about this whole situation. So I make

sure to sit on the far end of the couch, leaving plenty of space between us.

Perry nestles her way in between us. Even if Bella doesn't remember picking Perry up from the shelter, Perry remembers her. There will always be something comforting about having a big dog sitting between you and a stranger.

That's how you're looking at me right now, aren't you? Like we're strangers. I understand why, sweetheart, but I want you to look at me the way you used to.

Suddenly, an idea hits me. "What about a date?" I blurt.

"What?" She seems surprised. "I thought we were already engaged."

"We are. We've been engaged for a year," I respond matter of factly. "We were supposed to get married this winter after you finished your tour. We've already picked out the venue, and you were looking for a dress before you got deployed," I tell her. "My point is, I may know all of that, but you don't. So what if we go on a date? It would give you a chance to get to know me all over again and maybe trigger some memories. We can do something fun that we both used to enjoy, and you might see the reason why we fell in love in the first place."

And you'll fall in love with me all over again.

For a moment, she looks like she might brush off the idea. But slowly, she gives a nod and tells me, "Alright, let's do it. We can go for a date and maybe, just maybe, it will help me remember something."

I open my mouth to speak but she holds up a hand and continues, "And I know that you keep saying how I shouldn't rush this, but I'm impatient. I want to know who you are, and I want to know who I used to be."

There's the strong, decisive woman I know.

"Who you still are is one of the kindest women that I've ever met and one of the most beautiful," I say and she

blushes. “Give me until after dinner tonight, and I’ll come up with a date for us to go on.”

“Do you cook?” she questions.

Laughing, I stand up. “I should have phrased that better.” I move to the bookshelf, grabbing the much-used pizza menu off of it. “Let me call in for a pizza, and by the time that it gets here, I’ll have come up with the perfect idea for our date.”

She smiles at me. “Can we get mushrooms?”

You always order mushrooms.

I smile back at her, nodding, and say, “Of course, we can. We can get whatever you want.”

And I don’t just mean with the pizza. I would give this woman the whole world if I could. But for now, I’m going to have to settle for a decent dinner and a nice date tomorrow. I’ll have to take her to someplace we’ve been before. Somewhere she likes going. Someplace special to us.

My smile grows wider.

And I know just where to go.

Chapter Three: Bella

It's weird getting dressed in clothing that I don't remember owning but liking it all the same. Looking at myself in the mirror, I smooth the front of my black dress. Covered in sunflowers, this choice of outfit seems perfect for a date in late summer. It hangs off my curves in a way that shows them off but is also complimentary. A dress that I bought clearly because I loved how it fit me.

I step out into the living room and watch Titus's whole face light up. A rush of butterflies washes through me and a warmth spreads wildly across my face.

Titus's lips part and he whispers, "That's always been your favorite dress."

I look down at the fabric. "Has it? I was drawn to it by the bright colors, the soft fabric, and the flowers themselves. I think sunflowers must be my favorite?" I say hesitantly.

He excitedly nods his head, grinning at me as if I've just given him the moon. "They are! When I asked you out for the first time, I brought you a whole bouquet of them. And we always go to a field in the fall," he continues. "If there was a blooming field right now, I would take you there now. But..."

"It's not the right season," I finish for him and bat my lashes flirtatiously.

"Exactly," he says. "But it's alright. I've got something else in mind."

The amnesia may have wiped away my personal memories but it seems as if it has left behind bits and pieces of things that don't really matter.

"Come on, sweetheart, let's go out to the car," he replies.

Sweetheart? Does he call me that a lot? Is this my nickname?

He takes my hand in his and leads me out of the house. His hands are big and warm. My fingers interlock with his so

perfectly, and I can't help but feel like maybe we are meant to be after all.

We get in the car and take off.

"So, do I drive?" I ask on the road. "Do I have a car?"

"Of course, you do," he chuckles lightly. "You drive an SUV but I took the liberty of taking it to Swell Fix for a tune-up since it's been sitting for so long."

"Swell Fix? A mechanic shop?"

"Yep. We should be able to pick it up by the end of the week."

"Oh?" I pause for a moment not knowing if I want to even attempt something like driving yet. "Um, thanks."

The drive takes about twenty minutes or so, but soon the lights of the boardwalk are coming into view. A Ferris wheel arcs over the horizon.

That must be where we're going.

But at the last minute, Titus takes a small side road and drives out towards a place labeled Calm Beach. We arrive in an almost empty parking lot filled with sand. A beach stretches up to the boardwalk. The sound of the ocean laps against the shore and sets my heart at ease.

We park and I get out of the car.

Looking around, I hope to see anything remotely familiar but no such luck. In fact, I don't recognize one thing at all.

By the wide grin on Titus's face, I assume I've been to this place before and the way he's nodding, confirms we must come here all the time.

Regardless, it's beautiful and quite romantic.

Titus holds out his hand and waits patiently with hope-filled eyes that I'll take his. Without any hesitation, I take his comforting hand and meld my palm with his. We happily hold hands as we move down to the beach. The sand heavy and thick to walk in. The salty ocean breeze sticks to our skin and

hair. We wade down to the shoreline, so we can walk in the shallows of it. We hardly do any talking in this moment as everything feels so soothing and peaceful.

I pick up a few shells. Titus leads me down the beach toward the pier. He points up at one of the wooden beams and I widen my eyes as I run them over the sight.

“T + B,” I whisper as I read the initials carved into one of the beams with a crooked heart around it.

Titus glances over at me with a charming smirk. “I’m a doctor, not a surgeon. That was the excuse I gave you when I carved this crooked heart,” he chuckles. “We both knew that you would make the heart next time because that way it’d be perfect.”

I chuckle half-heartedly.

I trace my fingers over the mark, holding my breath and hoping that this is going to be like the movies. Hoping that when I touch the initials for our name, everything will magically click into place. I brace myself for a flood of memories...but after several minutes of searching deep within, unfortunately, they never come.

My shoulders sink. “I don’t remember this.”

Titus walks up behind me slowly and wraps his arms around my waist, settling his palms on my stomach. I should be unsettled by the feel of a stranger embracing me so intimately.

But I’m not.

Instead, I actually find myself relaxing in the warmth of his touch.

“It’s okay,” he insists. “You don’t have to rush to remember. It’s going to come back to you in time. And I’m going to be right here with you until it does.”

The sincerity and sweetness in his tone give me a sense of relief.

“Really? You’ll stick around even if, even though...” I stammer to find a way to say this. “Even though I don’t

remember if I love you?" I tilt my head to the side, stunned by the look on his face.

I might not know if I love Titus, but there's no doubt from the way he's looking at me that this man loves me. Love beams at me from his eyes.

"I love you enough for the both of us," he responds so proudly.

It's such an achingly sweet thing to say. There's something so impossibly right about the moment that sends thoughts running through my head. I may not remember this beach, I may not remember this man, but one thing is for sure...I know Titus loves me with his entire heart and at this moment, I want to kiss him.

With a racing heart, I lean forward and press my lips to his. The kiss remains gentle at first but intensifies as I start losing myself in the moment. Turning fully in his embrace, I throw my arms around his shoulder and tangle one hand in his short hair.

Like we've done this a million times, Titus slides his arms around my middle more fully. Then after a moment, when it's clear that I'm not going to pull back with regret, he drops both hands down low, giving my ass a firm squeeze.

I nibble his lower lip, then open my mouth, inviting him in. He takes me up on the offer, deepening the kiss as he walks me backward until my shoulders are pressed against the heavy wooden post of the pier. The wood is damp and just a little rough on the bare parts of my shoulder and my upper back.

Everything about this feels right.

Sure, I don't remember our first date or our first kiss, or the first time we fucked. But I know some things. I know that Titus touches me in a way that tells me he already knows all of my secrets. I know that I like the way it feels when he's kissing me.

Titus slides his hands over my sides and settles one on my hip and the other on the side of my face. He trails his teeth

gently over my throat and then a little more firmly, giving way to his tongue as he sucks just beneath my left ear before continuing down a little further toward my plunging neckline.

He spends some time gently nibbling and sucking then brings his face back up toward mine. When our mouths meet again in a crashing frenzy, I don't want the feeling to stop. My body feels electric as sparks fly.

This might be the way to unlock the part of me that's struggling so hard to remember.

"Please," I whisper breathlessly, grabbing tight to Titus's shoulders. "Please, Titus. Show me how much you love me." I pull him even closer until our bodies are flush together, and add, "I want to know how much you love me. Show me," I gasp as heat rises between us.

Titus gazes deep into my eyes and a seductive smirk spreads rapidly across his face. "Oh, Bella, you don't have to beg, sweetheart. I'll show you how much I love you...I'll show you over and over all night long."

Chapter Four: Titus

When I decided to bring Bella out to the beach, I didn't expect it to go like this...but I'm not complaining.

The little dark section beneath the pier has been our spot for ages, and I was hoping that it might jog her memory, even just a little bit. But now that we're here and we're kissing, it's all I've longed for...for months.

Taking hold of her hands, I pull away from the post where our initials have been carved. Guiding us further under the pier, I gaze deeply into her eyes, and my heart pounds against my chest. Once we get far enough from the edge that no one is going to look over the side and catch us, I shimmy my jacket down and off my arms and lay it out on the ground. Gesturing toward it, I motion for her to lie down.

To my surprise, Bella gives me an almost irate look then holds out her arms, bidding me come to her.

She's always been a bit of a spitfire, my Bella, and right now, it seems that even when she can't remember who she is, Bella still remembers what she likes.

Taking her up on her offer, I inch my way toward her and press myself against her. Wrapping my arms around her, I inhale her scent.

Memories of us flood my mind and holding her once again is everything I've dreamed of for months. It's been too long without having her, not just the months she's been in a coma, but also the time that she's been overseas.

I crave her.

My hands seek out her body with the keenness of a man who has done this many times before. Only *I* know how she likes to be touched and how she likes to be kissed. Only *I* know the right way to devour her body. After all, it's not the first time I've made love to her under the pier.

Bella has always had a thrill for this setting. She always said there was something about being outdoors, being

here, that drives her wild.

She gasps when I waste no time tugging her dress up around her hips and pulling down her black panties. My hand quickly finds its way between her legs, fingers seeking out her kitten and pressing deep inside. Using two fingers because I know she likes the stretch, I gaze into her eyes before she tilts her head back as her eyelids flutter at the sensation.

“Mmm,” she seductively moans.

Her head lays against the wooden beam and she bares her throat to me. Her flawless tempting skin is irresistible. I plant an open-mouthed kiss on her neck and nibble my way down while I finger her. Her legs tremble as I dig deeper inside her sappy wetness. Pressing a third digit in between her wet folds, her mouth falls open and she groans. The trembling seems to scatter throughout her whole body at my every touch.

Do you remember making love here before? Do you remember how well we fucked? Or is this all a new pleasure for you? Either way, I'm going to make this good for you. I'm going to give you the best pleasure you've ever had.

As I psych myself up with excitement, her body tenses and a warmth trickles over my fingers. She's cumming for the first time tonight, but not the last. Pressing my thumb firmly to her clit, I curl my fingers rapidly, not wanting to spare one drop.

She pants and moans on her release, but we're not even close to finished yet.

I unhook the front of my pants and drop them and my boxers down to the sandy ground. Taking hold of her in one swift movement, I lift her up. She squeals breathlessly, and I pin her further back against the post. With her arms wrapped around my neck, she sits at the perfect height for me to bury my face in her ample breasts. Leaning my face in between her mountains, I kiss them through the fabric of her dress, pressing my mouth to every slip of bare-skinned cleavage that I can find.

As I close my eyes, soaking up every moment of this night, the head of my cock taps against her wetness below.

I can't wait any longer.

Letting gravity do the work, she sinks down onto me, her lower lips tightly locked around my member. Meeting her in the middle, I thrust forward.

Her jaw drops and she's speechless as I dive deep until I hit resistance.

Leaning forward half bracing her against the wooden beam as I shift my grip on her thighs and ass, I pull back and thrust forward once more, humping a moan right out of her mouth.

We've been together for years, I know how she likes it. Teasing just on the right side of hard, that's what she wants and that's what I'm giving her.

Grunting with each upward angle of my hips, I continue to pull out until just the tip rests inside her then thrust forward again.

You feel so tight, warm...wet. I don't know how much longer I'm going to last.

Our skin slaps together but the sound remains muted by the crashing waves against the shore.

As I sink my teeth into a stretch of cleavage on her left breast, I feel the sharp prick of her nails scratching into the back of my neck, surely leaving red marks. But I don't mind, I want her to claim me...I'm all hers.

Panting hard, my muscles strain to keep pounding up into her while holding back my release. But I'm out of practice. I won't last much longer.

Before I finish, I let her down and in my deepest and most firm voice, I say, "Turn around, sweetheart. Hands on the wood."

She pauses only for a moment, before doing what she's told. As she turns away from me, I catch a glimpse of the lust

in her eyes and my heart beats so fast, that I feel it might pop right out of my chest.

She turns around, putting her palms flat on the rough, broad wood of the beam. She braces herself as I grab her by the hips and tug, pulling her back so that she's leaning forward at an angle. I slide my foot between her legs and knock against the inside of her ankles, spreading her legs further apart.

I have her where I want her.

Flipping up the hem of her dress and groping at the plump curves of her ass, I use a hand to stroke myself before guiding my hardness into her moist abyss once again. Her grip tightens against the beam as I glide inside, but she takes me easily. As I press all the way into her, she lets out a shuttering moan.

My hands settle on her hips. I hold onto her for a moment, just looking at her, the slope of her back, the red marks on her shoulders where the wood rubbed it raw.

“God, you're beautiful,” I whisper.

I'm the luckiest man in the world.

But before she can come up with a reply, I thrust in and out, each time slamming back home and setting up a harder, faster pace than before. Getting more leverage at this angle, I roll my hips and hit the bundle of nerves inside of her that has her coming apart at the seams.

Back and forth, faster and faster, her body tightens and I know she's close.

“Titus!” she screams my name as she clenches around me and lets go of another massive orgasm.

Her muscles tremble and I nearly explode at the same time. Holding on as long as I can, I roll my hips a few more times, thrusting into her a few more times before grunting my release deep inside her.

Gasping for air, I stay inside her until the last drip expels then slowly pull out. Spreading her cheeks, I watch our mixture of cum slide out of her perfect slit.

I'm hers, and she's mine.

I could stay here like this with her forever, just doing everything that I can to make her feel good reminding her that she's loved. She stands up and her dress cascades back down into place. I pull up my pants and cradle her in my arms as we stroll back down the sand.

With my arm over her shoulder, I bend down and kiss her temple.

No matter what happens in the coming days, that's going to be my goal. I'm going to do everything that I can to make sure you know exactly how much I really love you.

Chapter Five: Bella

Have I been dreaming for the past few months? Have I really been living with and having unbelievable sex with a man who is still but a stranger to me? Have I been having some of the truly most thrilling nights of my life with someone who claims they know me yet I still have no recollection of him?

I roll over in bed and extend my hand to feel for Titus, but he's not there. I hear the shower turn on and remember Titus has to go to work today. It's been a few months but some days it only feels like it's been minutes.

I want nothing more than to spend as much time as I can with this man, getting to know him better. But...life must continue whether I have my memories or not. Besides, each day he trails off to work, I get an uninterrupted chance to wander through the house he calls ours and look around for something that might trigger my memory.

Ever since we picked up my SUV from Swell Fix and after having a conversation about safety with the general mechanic who worked on my SUV, Drew, I've taken to driving short distances directly into town in the afternoons seeking more potential memory triggers.

Titus finishes up getting dressed and walks over toward the bed in his familiar white doctor coat I first saw him with when I woke up.

"Good morning, beautiful," he says before bending down and kissing my forehead. "I'm off to work. Remember, this is *your* home. I love you."

Smiling back at him, I hold back the urge to respond.

Do I love him? I might, but it's still too soon. I'm not ready.

"Thank you," I reply, and instantly a pit forms in my stomach.

He smiles once more and disappears out the front door.

Wasting no time, I get up and start today's march through the house.

Some things feel familiar, even if they don't really make me remember them. I know that Perry knows me. My name is even on the tag hooked to her collar. And our cat, Tiger, has made it clear that I'm his favorite human. The clothing in the closet is undeniably mine.

Some parts of this house I believe could be my life. But other parts make me wonder if this really was my home.

As the day goes on, I find myself constantly bouncing back and forth between being sure that I did live here engaged to Titus, and being terrified that it's nothing but a lie.

I don't know why he would lie about it, and he's given me no reason to internalize such suspicion. But when there is so much of myself missing, I've found it's easy to become afraid others might fill in the gaps.

Finally, it's near the end of the day. I imagine Titus will be coming home soon. Beneath the stairs, I notice a door I hadn't seen before. I assume it leads to a basement. I twist the handle, but it's locked.

"That's odd," I whisper to myself.

As I examine the door carefully, I realize that the hinges are in desperate need of repair. I flip the switch to turn on the overhead light but it's out.

I need a flashlight.

Rushing toward the bedroom, I fetch a flashlight. As soon as I pick it up from the nightstand, it dawns on me, "How did I know where the flashlight was? Did I see it earlier, or was that a memory?" It's difficult to tell.

Pushing that thought to the back of my mind, I make my way back to the door. With the flashlight, I see that the door's only stuck, not locked. I tug forcefully on the handle and crack it open.

A stale, musty odor wafts through the air hitting my nostrils as I take a step inside with the light. No working lights

inside the basement send an eerie chill down my spine, but certainly, it's safe, otherwise, I wouldn't live here. I'm all about safety and I'm in the Army for goodness sake. I have no reason to fear.

Making my way down the creaking stairs, I make a mental note that it's a few degrees cooler than the rest of the house. Upon reaching the bottom, I find myself standing in a good-sized basement. Scrolling the white beam of the flashlight through the air, I observe the scene.

First the water heater, then the pile of large plastic bags beside it. I walk towards the bags, taking another note that they appear to have my handwriting on the labels. Each bag, marked with a different holiday, and a quick peek inside proves that they're full of decorations. Glass figurines sit on top of a shelf and look mildly familiar, while a large wicker cornucopia does not look familiar in the slightest.

"Well, this isn't helpful at all," I mutter aloud. "None of this means anything if I can't remember it."

Sighing with frustration, I suddenly feel defeated. Titus keeps saying my memories will come back to me in time, but how long must I wait.

Titus seems to know what he's talking about. For instance, I have had flashes of things that have happened to me show up in the middle of eating a certain dish. But I haven't had nearly enough memories to expose themselves to make me actually confident in what I'm doing here in a strange house as a wife-to-be.

I continue my search through the basement.

A large trunk in the corner of the room catches my attention. Several cardboard boxes of clothes on top of it, but I move them off and set them aside to get to the trunk. Kneeling, I pop open the trunk. A cloud of dust floods into the air, leaving me coughing and waving a hand in front of my face.

But when the dust settles, I peek into the box.

Widening my eyes, a sense of hope rushes through me. Filled to the top with what appear to be old photo albums, I'm certain this will help trigger my memories. I pick up the one that lies on top, hoping that it might help. I tuck the book against my chest and stand up to head up the stairs.

Once I'm back in the living room, I plop down on the couch and settle the photo album into my lap. My heart rate increases as I open it up, fully expecting the pictures to be of myself and Titus.

But instantly, I'm disappointed.

Titus is in nearly every photo, but none of which include me. In fact, I don't recognize any of the people in the pictures but Titus. This album appears to hold photos of a particular formal event. Everyone is in suits and nice shirts. Flipping through more pages, I continue to see no one I know. Only Titus.

Midway through the album, I freeze when a picture catches my eye.

It's Titus in a suit, standing next to a blonde-haired woman in a wedding dress. From the natural brown hair on my head, I'm positive this woman is not me. In the picture under that one, he's leaning over and giving this woman a kiss on the cheek. In every picture of these two, Titus looks genuinely happy.

My heart stops and then seems to shatter. I didn't realize how much I fell for him until now when I'm forced with the reality that Titus has been lying to me this whole time.

My timing is either excellent or horrible. As I sit there staring open-mouthed at the picture, processing what I'm seeing, the front door clicks open and Titus calls out, "Sweetheart, I'm home! I brought Thai food with me. I thought you might be tired of pizza and, leftovers."

I stand up, rage temporarily clouding my judgment. When Titus turns the corner, I spin around and jab a finger at him. "You lied to me."

He stops in his tracks. “What? No, I really brought you Thai food,” he chuckles half-heartedly as he holds up the bag.

“No, not about the food, Titus. You lied about us. You’re with someone else. Married? Married to someone else...” my voice trails off when I say it out loud.

It sounds absurd when I say it but I’ve seen movies where situations like this happen. Anything is possible.

Titus rushes over to set the bag of food down on the table then reaches out as he plans on putting his arms around me. “Bella, sweetheart, what are you talking about? What’s going on? Tell me what’s happened, and I can help you figure it out.”

Tears spring to my eyes and before I can blink them back, they’re spilling down my face.

“Bella?” Titus says with a concerned tone.

“Stop lying,” I demand, stepping backward and pulling away from him.

I want to storm out of the house, but I don’t have anywhere else to go. I don’t know who any of my friends are and according to Titus, both of my parents died years ago in a tragic car accident. Fear grips me and my blood runs cold.

“Bella, things were fine when I went to work this morning. Did something happen today while I was gone? Are you having conflicting memories all at once?”

He reaches out to me again, but I pull back once more.

“Don’t,” I snap, voice shaking.

Perry bolts around the corner, roused by the disturbance between us. To my surprise, she gives a sharp little bark that seems to be directed at Titus instead of me.

“I need to be alone,” I mutter as I turn on my heel and hurry into the bedroom, locking the door behind me.

I hear Titus’s footsteps follow me to just outside the door but he doesn’t try to come in after me. He only gently

calls out to me from behind the door. “Why don’t you tell me what’s going on, sweetheart? I want to help.”

But I don’t want his help. I just want to remember who I really am...but I can’t.

Chapter Six: Titus

I find the photo album on the couch and it doesn't take me long to figure out where Bella got the idea that I'm involved with someone else. The pictures are spread open to the day I walked my sweet cousin, Carina, down the aisle. Her dad, my uncle, had passed away suddenly a few months before her wedding, and Carina doesn't have any siblings. She could've asked anyone else to walk her down the aisle that day, but we're close. We grew up together as the only cousins of the same age and understand each other.

Bella knows Carina and gets along with her well. But given the current circumstances, I can see how a picture like this would appear to Bella who is already struggling to grasp what's going on and who she is.

"Oh, my sweet Bella. I'd give anything for you not to have to go through this," I say softly under my breath.

Reaching into my back pocket, I take out my wallet. I flip through the folds until I come to the one picture I have of Bella, only because she despises having her photo taken, and gaze deeply at it. A picture that I snapped of her two days before she left to go overseas. Bella smiles as she looks away from me at Perry, running about in the dog park. She was so happy at that moment.

I want nothing more than for her to go back to how she felt at that moment and be happy.

I take a deep breath and slide the picture under the door to the bedroom along with a handwritten note that explains who the woman in the photo album is. Giving Bella the time and space she needs, I settle in on the couch for the night, where I lie awake for hours thinking of how to help Bella before drifting off to sleep.

The next morning the sun slices through the bedroom blinds and lands across my face. It's early, but I'm up now.

Better get started on breakfast for my love.

I'm not a good cook by any means. I'm actually a horrible cook if someone were to ask. But I'll do anything for Bella, and she needs to know that.

Taking out the eggs and bacon, it's not long before I'm using a couch cushion to fan away the smoke from the smoke detector after burning the bacon.

"Well, now. I guess scrambled eggs it is," I mutter to myself as I slide the hot pan of grease to the back of the stove.

It takes a little while but finally the smells of a burned breakfast in the air eventually get Bella to surface from the bedroom. Dressed in only a bathrobe, she stares into the kitchen with both the note and the picture in her hand.

"Titus?" she calls out to me. "I'm...I'm sorry."

She looks so vulnerable at this moment, that I find my heart melting. Shaking my head back and forth, I reply, "Sweetheart, you nothing to be sorry for." I move the eggs off the heat so they don't meet the same fate as the bacon and then slowly walk towards her.

Her body tenses up for a moment, but I open my arms and she quickly rushes into me. I wrap her up in the tightest bear hug that I can, and I almost feel like I have the old Bella back.

"I made breakfast," I tell her.

She giggles. "But you hate cooking," she responds and glances around me at the mess. Placing a hand over her heart, she lets out a pleased sigh. "You're so sweet," Bella says, teary-eyed. She presses her face harder against my chest. "I don't remember everything. I don't remember us. But I want to so badly, Titus. I can tell that you love me, and I want that. I want you to love me so badly, but I don't know how to be the person you asked to marry you."

Suddenly, it hits me.

That's what this is all about. It's all making more sense now. This is the real problem.

I reach out, gently taking her engagement ring from her finger.

With a concerned look on her face, she gasps. “What are you doing?”

Grinning back at her from ear to ear, I reply, “I’m doing what I should’ve done on your first night here.”

Dropping down to one knee, right here in the kitchen, I clutch her hand in one of my own and tell her, “It doesn’t matter if you don’t remember, Bella. It doesn’t matter if you’re never that person again. What matters to me is the fact that I love you. I love everything about you. The way you laugh, the way you smile. The memories we’ve shared in the past but I’m also going to love the hell out of all the memories we’re going to share in the future... That is if you’ll share them with me.”

She inhales a quick sharp breath and her glassy eyes release one tear down her cheek. Her lower lip quivers.

I continue, “I know the real you, and I know that I love you in all forms no matter what.” I gaze up at her gorgeous face. “When you came back home, I thought that I had lost you for good. I’ve never seen you so still before.” I bite back the tears in my eyes. “The way that you looked in that coma, I never want to see it again. I never want to feel as if I’ve lost you again.” I pause for a moment to choose my next words wisely. “I know things are difficult for you right now, but I promise to stand by you through anything and everything. I promise to love you no matter who you are or who you become.”

She looks into my eyes just like she did the first time I proposed to her. “Titus, I—” she whispers but I politely cut her off.

“I mean it with everything that I’ve got. Whatever you need, I’ll be right there to give it to you. However long you need your space, I’m here for it and willing to wait until you’re ready. But until that day comes,” I slide the ring back onto her finger, “wear this as a reminder that I’m ready to marry you the moment you’re ready for me.”

Tears cascade down her cheeks and she snuffles. “I don’t want space,” she admits. “I want you.”

I kiss her knuckles and then instead of standing up, I take hold of her hands and tug her down to the same level as where I’m crouching. She joins me down on her knees and lets out a soft breath when I pull her into a hug. Her arms snake their way around my neck, and she rests her head on my shoulder.

“You’re incredible,” she whispers in my ear.

We embrace in a hug for a while, basking in each other’s sentiments. Basking in the promise that I’ve made to her, basking in love.

We rise up and sit at the table to enjoy breakfast together.

“These are the best eggs I’ve ever had,” she claims, making me smile the same way as she always has.

Reality sets in shortly when I have to go to work. But this time, as I walk toward the door, Bella walks with me. She leans forward, kissing me on the cheek.

“Thank you,” she says. “For what you said earlier. I want to find myself, and I want to do it with you at my side.”

“Then that’s what will happen,” I tell her, simple as that. I lean in and kiss her on the corner of the mouth and then once on the cheek. “We’re going to get through this, Bella. No matter what happens. No matter how long it takes or how it turns out. At the end of the day, I’m still going to love you.”

Leaving her with that message, I head toward the door to go to work. I’ll make a point to leave her with that same message every day going forward. No matter how things turn out, my love for Bella is never going to fade or change. It’s always going to be just as strong as it is now. I will always be here for her, to help her, support her, and remind her that she isn’t alone.

At the end of every day, I’m still going to be holding her hand, telling her that I love her.

Just before I close the front door, I hear Bella call out to me. "I love you too!"

A smile spreads across my face and confidence rushes through me.

She loves me.

Epilogue: One Year Later — Bella

It's been almost a year exactly since Titus told me he was going to support me no matter who we became. He went to work right afterward and it took us almost a week of talking to work out what that meant. While my new hearing device has brought my hearing back to almost where I was before the explosion, I'm still nervous sometimes since a lot of my memories just never came back to me.

Titus insists on redoing important events in our life that I can't remember. That way, even though I can't remember what happened on our first date, I'll remember what happened on our second, first date. And even though I can't remember our first one-month anniversary, I'll remember our second, first one-month anniversary.

It's sweet, really. I feel thankful and lucky every day.

Nine months. That's how long it's been since I woke up from my coma, and thirteen months since my original accident. Through it all, I have been held up and supported by Titus in ways that I could never have thought possible. He has been at my side through all of it, supporting me, comforting me, loving me. Not once has Titus ever looked at me differently, not for using my hearing device, not for my memory loss.

Every day I feel stronger and move forward in life, making it through most of the physical activities that I think I used to enjoy.

Every day I find more trinkets and old notes that help me piece together what my life was like before. Old files on my laptop, letters from some of my Army buddies, and Titus's sweet cousin, Carina, reaches out weekly.

It's incredible to have such an amazing support system, especially unconditional love from people I don't fully remember.

After that memorable night with Titus, I spent the next two months talking to everyone I could who knew me in the past, listening to stories about some of the things that I had done over the years. At the end of every phone call, I'd thank the person, telling them how much I appreciate their time with me. They would always tell me it was no problem or that it was their pleasure, but they'll never know how deeply they hit within me. Helping me fill in the blanks of the memories that never came back, made me feel like I lost less of my important memories.

A few months later, I came to the realization that some things I can't be told about; I need to experience for myself. That's where Titus comes in.

Sure, at times, Titus can annoy me, but I'm sure I do things to annoy him too. Either way, it doesn't change the fact that I think Titus would take on the whole world for me if he thought that's what would make me happy. From the moment I woke up, he's proven that over and over.

He's consistent with his feelings and I've grown to be too.

We've started to call this our second life together and something about the notion feels truly romantic. There's something about the fact that we have spent one life together and still want a second life together that makes my heart race and toes curl.

That's why, today, we're finally cementing our feelings.

While I don't have any living relatives, my captain, Greg Medina, has flown in today just to join Titus and me in this celebration of matrimony.

It means the world to have my captain here.

When I step out into the aisle, Captain Greg Medina is the one that meets me there with his arm crooked, waiting for me to loop my arm through. I take his arm and he smiles proudly at me in my white dress. Whispering in my good ear,

he says, “I’ve never been given a higher honor than this before, and I want you to know that.”

Biting back my tears on this happiest day of my life, I flash him a wide smile and inhale deeply. “Thank you, Captain.” I glance down the aisle and then back at him.

He grins. “Shall we?”

Simultaneously, we move slowly toward the makeshift altar.

Titus and I might’ve opted for a small, almost private ceremony being held in our backyard, but that doesn’t matter. We spared no expense to celebrate this day. The guest’s seats have bright sunflowers carefully woven into the backs. Matching yellow flower petals are mixed with light pink ones and have been scattered on the ground along the aisle.

The small group of people I’ve served with, Titus’s family, friends I don’t remember, and a select few that I do, all turn to look at me. It’s overwhelming but in the best way. Then, running my eyes up to the altar, I see Titus. Looking handsome as ever, something inside me flutters.

The music plays as Captain walks me down the aisle. Perry’s leash is hooked to one of the front row chairs and she bays along with the music. Finally reaching the man of my dreams, Captain transfers my hand to Titus’ and takes his seat in the reserved place of honor in the front row.

Titus holds my hands so caringly and rubs their backs as he gazes into my eyes. “You’re beautiful, Bella.”

Smiling with happy tears in my eyes, the officiant begins the ceremony. I’m having a hard time focusing on the officiant’s words as I keep getting caught up in the way that Titus is looking at me. It feels like one of those first moments at the hospital all over again. His eyes mist up with tears as he looks at me, nothing but pure joy in his expression. It’s endearing, it’s heart-warming... It’s love.

Swelling up inside, I take a mental picture of this moment to add to my new memories. Pure relief, happiness,

joy, comfort, and love. Everything I could ask for in a second life with Titus.

Finally, the officiant asks for our vows.

It's my turn first and my vows are short and sweet. Then Titus leans forward and tells me his promises of love, ending his statement with, "I'd choose you in every life, no matter the circumstances. I promise to love you forever."

His words sink into my mind, and I know that's something I'll remember forever.

The time comes to say 'I do'.

Titus goes first this time, and then it's my turn.

"I do."

The officiant pronounces us husband and wife.

Titus leans in, and places a hand tenderly on my cheek, then kisses me with all of the love and passion in the world. Perry kicks off the applause with her own round of barking. But the sounds of clapping, whistling and cheering in the background, fade as I melt into Titus's kiss.

I've met the man of my dreams and fallen in love with him twice.

No matter what happens in the future, I can be confident in saying my love for Titus will never change. Glancing around at the smiling faces of our guests and feeling the love in the air, it's pure bliss.

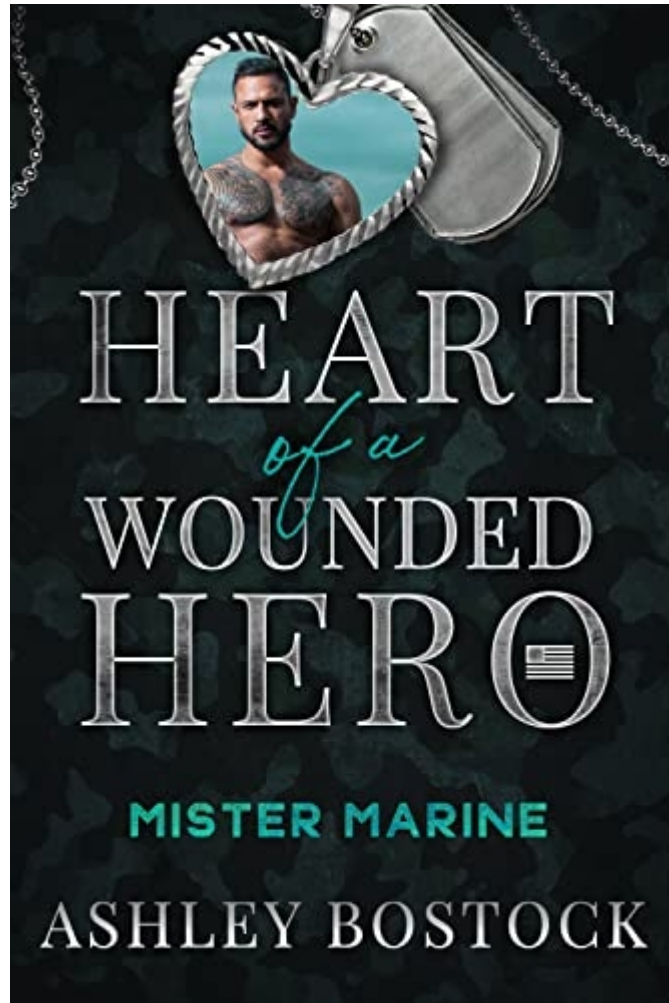
I love Titus, and he loves me.

Life has a funny way of working itself out, and if I could go back, I wouldn't change a thing.

Remember Swell Fix, the mechanic shop where Bella mentioned she had spoken to Drew, the mechanic? Well, get ready because Drew and all the other men at the shop get their own love stories. Click [here](#) to order Drew's story in book one, [Overheated](#).

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THANK YOU

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading Titus and Bella's wounded warrior, doctor instalove. When life does go your way, don't worry, there's a reason. It will all work out in the end.

If you would [consider leaving a review](#), I would genuinely appreciate it. Every review gives new readers a chance to be a part of the series and helps my author's dream become a reality.

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Thank you for being such loyal readers!

Scarlett

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scarlett Woods loves to celebrate and get fancy, but on relaxing nights she is found curled up on the couch with wine, snacks (lots of snacks), her dog, and her favorite book.

She writes books that are romantic, sweet, and steamy.

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