

Title & Author: Home Front by Kristin Hannah

Setting: The story takes place in Seattle, Washington during the early years of the war in Iraq. Some of the story takes place in Iraq as well.

Main Characters: **Jolene** is the main character. She is almost 40, a member of the National Guard, a wife, and the mother of two girls. Her husband, **Michael**, is a successful lawyer at his own company where he used to be partners with his father, who recently passed. Michael hasn't been the same since. They have two daughters. **Betsy** is a seventh grader who is struggling to find acceptance with her peers, and be "cool". She fights with Jolene constantly and is embarrassed by the fact that her mother is in the service. **Lulu** is four, adores her mother, and loves to put on her kitty ears headband, which she believes makes her "invisible". Jolene's best friend, **Tami**, and her family live next door. Tami is also a part of the National Guard, and she has been a part of Jolene's life since they joined as teenagers.

Situation: The main character loses her neglectful parents to a car crash when she is 17 years old, leaving her alone. At 18, as a way to find order in her life, she joins the military. Many years later, after getting married and having a family, her country asks her to fulfill her duty as a member of our service.

Main Conflict: Jolene is battling "war" at home with her pre-teen daughter, and her very absent husband who has told her that he doesn't love her anymore. Neither of them respects the fact that she is a part of the National Guard. In fact, they despise it. When she finds out that she is being deployed in two weeks to go to war, this only adds to the tensions in her home, and the distances in her relationships.

Plot Events:

Right after Jolene's deployment, Michael takes on a tough case. His client, Keith, murdered his wife, is sitting in jail, and refuses to speak. Keith's father tells Michael that when his son came back from serving two tours in Iraq, he was not the same. Michael decides to have Keith evaluated by a psychiatrist in the hopes that the findings will help him make his case in court.

In Iraq, Jolene is being sent into dangerous situations, but she sends pictures and letters, and emails home to convince her daughters that she is safe. But at home they see the news and they know otherwise.

An important moment for Michael is when he meets with the psychiatrist that is going to evaluate his client. He says some very powerful things to Michael that not only relate to his case, but make him realize what his wife is really going through.

Quote: *"Some clichés are true. And war is hell. It's the dark night of the soul. There is no front line over there. The war is all around them, everyday, everywhere they go. The human mind can't safely or healthily process that kind of carnage and uncertainty and horror. No one comes back from war the same."*

The impact of this quote is a reality check for Michael. For the first time since Jolene left, (several months prior) he decides to write to her.

Jolene doesn't get this letter because she and her team actually get shot down. Jolene and Tami end up in the army hospital in Germany. You find out that Tami suffered a traumatic brain injury, is in a coma, and may not live. Jolene ends up losing her leg.

When Jolene is sent back to the states to begin her rehabilitation, Michael does everything in his power to be supportive, but Jolene has changed so drastically that it doesn't help. She believes that Michael only views her as his duty, and even worse, she appears to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

One of my favorite moments is when Michael makes Jolene go to court with him. After listening to the prosecution talk about how this man killed his wife, Michael stands up and delivers the defense. In doing so, he

talks about how this man is not a monster, but a hero who needs help. A man who went to war to defend our freedoms, experienced things the likes of which none of us could understand, and came home damaged. His PTSD was so severe that he had no idea what he was doing. In his mind, he was at war. He didn't even know he killed his wife. (Michael has already started to see this with his wife. Jolene's screams at night prove she is reliving the crash, and when he tried to comfort her, she attacked him. She didn't know she did it either.) There are several moments where Jolene realizes that her husband is not looking at the jury, but directly at her. He uses his speech to prove to his wife that he has changed, he is proud of her, and he wants to help her, because he loves her.

Quote: *"I guess war doesn't only change the warriors."* This simple statement is something Michael tells Jolene, and it is significant because he spends much of the story changing, working to become a better father and husband.

Predictions & Outcomes: One thing that I predicted was Michael changing his mind about leaving his wife once she went off to war. In the text it showed how hard he took his father's death, and it seemed like Jolene just became a target for his misdirected emotions. I figured getting what he wanted (separation) in the form of her going off to war would prove how much he really needed her. Another thing I predicted was that Jolene would end up seeing the doctor that Michael had evaluate his client. I figured he would be the one to help Jolene since she was going through PTSD just like the client Michael was defending. The one thing that I didn't really think would happen was Tami's death. She was an incredibly strong woman, and I thought that she would wake up from the coma and come home so she and Jolene could be together again. What actually happened was that her death was the final breaking point for Jolene which ultimately pushed her into accepting the help she needed.

Critique:

This is the third book I have read by Kristin Hannah. I like how the story feels like it could be real, and how complicated the characters are. She makes it easy to become absorbed in their "lives".

While some of the story was predictable, there were many moments that I didn't see coming until they were unfolding, like Jolene actually being shot down, and Michael using his court case to reach his wife. I liked how Kristin Hannah wove his work into being the thing that helped both of them come together in the end. This added an irony to it because his work used to be how he kept himself away from his family. It was an interesting plot that got at the age old theme of "love conquers all" (in this case, even war itself).

Vocabulary:

1. codified
 - a. arranged according to plan or system
 - b. Michael's notes were codified and ready for court.
2. pithy
 - a. language or style that is concise and expressive
 - b. You can buy all kinds of pithy sayings to put on your wall.
3. elegiac
 - a. having a mournful quality
 - b. Walt Whitman's *O Captain! My Captain!* is an elegiac piece about Abraham Lincoln's assassination.