

Lullaby for Leo

A NOVEL OF DISCOVERY AND FORGIVENESS

By Michael March

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Lullaby for Leo

2021 MICHAEL MARCH

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1

November 12, 1971, 8:08 A.M.

Outskirts of An Khe, South Vietnam.

Tuning out the musical mating calls of the white-cheeked gibbons and the shrill warbles of the Asian barbets, Leo runs his hand over the sweat oozing from his brow and scans the jungle's dense greenery. The fireteam leader cradles his M-16 and, adjusting the straps on his rucksack, hops over a pool of water below the stand of mangroves and hustles the twenty meters to join his point man. The NCO drops to one knee behind a clump of thick brush and smacks at the mosquitos buzzing around his ear. "Okay, Rip. What you got?" His voice is a hoarse whisper.

"Dinks, sarge." Corporal Ripton aims an index finger at the hut, half a football field north of their position. "I saw Victor Charlies. Three of them cut across the field and ran inside the school."

Leo's facial muscles tighten. "Any sign there might be more?"

"I didn't see any, but you know Charlie. Where there's one, there might be a regiment of those sneaky bastards."

"Yeah. Well, let's hope not. Listen. Follow me. We'll stay under cover and check out the trail on the right flank. Let's see what we're dealing with."

His plan becomes moot as a spatter of automatic weapons fire erupts from the front window. The rounds kick up dirt around Leo and Rip's position. Both men flop on their bellies. Each aims their M-16 and fires off a short burst at the muzzle flashes.

"Come on. Let's pull back," Leo orders. "Follow me. Stay low."

Rip reloads a magazine and raises to one knee. "Gotcha, sarge."

The two men race toward the tree line, zigzagging as they run.

The squad members drop to the ground and lay down cover fire. Carter unfolds the M-60's bipod feet and falls on his belly. Flipping the machine gun's safety into the "F" position, he squeezes the trigger and replies with accuracy.

Blake lifts the M79 launcher. He adjusts his rangefinder and fires a high-explosive round. The thump of "Big Ed" is a reassuring sound to him and his fellow grunts. The grenade sails toward its target and explodes at the base of the schoolhouse wall, blowing out large pieces of straw, wood, and dried mud. The grenadier digs into a front pocket on his nylon vest, loads another round, aims, and fires. The rocket arcs skyward and impacts below the window, ripping away another section. The enemy fire stops.

"Fire off some Goddam smoke," Leo shouts, unhitching his rucksack. "Ripton, Caswell, drop your packs. You're with me."

Blake flips open the breach of his weapon, loads another 40mm projectile, and fires. The missile lands a few feet short of the school. The white smoke wafts in the gentle breeze and obscures the view of the one-story hut.

Leo throws out a hand. "Carter, cover us with the sixty. The rest of you spread out. Watch your interval and lay down support." He leaps up. "Come on, let's move."

Rip and Caswell take off and follow in a crouch. After a dozen steps, the three men leave the shelter of the jungle canopy and sprint across the open field.

Leo plucks a fragmentation grenade from his vest and pops the pin. "Watch it. Stay back." He lobbs the explosive through the large cutout in the damaged wall. "Fire in the hole," he barks, forcing Rip and Caswell back a couple of steps with his outstretched arm.

The explosive discharge blows out another section of mud and straw bricks. Leo throws up a hand signal as the smoke disperses and leads Rip and Caswell to the building's edge. He crouches and peers around the corner. Two black pajama-clad VC are busy scrambling out of the side window. One's dripping blood from a shoulder wound.

Leo fires a burst from his M-16. His men empty their magazines.



Wednesday, March 17, 1972

Oakland, California. On-Time Transport Bus Terminal

The loud blast from the airhorn startles the uniformed veteran. His breaths come in short spurts as his deep-set brown eyes dart from side to side. He's searching for the elusive enemy, one he's left far behind in the jungles of Southeast Asia. He shudders and arches his back against the plastic chair. The older couple seated across from him avert their eyes when they catch him staring. Leo adjusts his gaze and focuses on counting the cracks in the slate grey wall around their heads. His eyes lock on the circular clock hanging above the chalkboard bus schedule. The time shows it's ten minutes short of noon.

Pinned to the left side of the oversized green jacket dangle Silver and Bronze Stars, a Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster, and an assortment of decorative military ribbons. Short a Good Conduct Medal, he's confused about too many things beyond his control. A civilian once again, the former combat soldier prays the constant ache in his forehead will fade with time, and the memories of what he's done in the name of God and country will cease haunting him.

Leo's pledged to stay positive. And why shouldn't he? Inside his jacket pocket sits a ticket to the San Francisco bus station. From there, he'll take the shuttle to the airport, grab a sandwich, and board the three o'clock flight home to Atlanta. Feeling somewhat better, he closes his eyes and tries to relax.

"Hey, you, Sergeant Dumbass."

Leo's muscles tense. His eyes spring open. A pimple-faced long-hair, his eyes hidden behind a dark pair of shades, stands over him.

"You proud of yourself, asshole?" says the buttinsky, pulling off his sunglasses. "Did you have a good time killing people? Any water buffalo?"

Leo clenches his jaw. "Screw off, turd." He scrambles to his feet and takes a step forward. "I ain't in any mood. I don't need your crap."

The barbershop reject slips on his glasses. “Oh, yeah. Right. I almost forgot. Your type loves violence.”

The soldier balls his hands into fists. “I don’t care what you think. Get the hell away from me, or I’ll give you a beating you won’t soon forget.”

Caught off-guard, his adversary skips off in the direction of the soda machine with the “OUT OF ORDER” sign taped over the money slot.

Leo drops back into his seat and narrows his eyes. “Stupid idiot!” The veteran’s survival instincts kick in as the peal of a bus horn shocks his senses. He rolls off the chair and straddles his duffle bag, fighting to gather his wits.

The pest hasn’t taken the hint. “What’s with you, psycho? Paranoid?”

“I’ll show you who should be paranoid.” Leaping forward, Leo presses his palm against the troublemaker’s Adam’s apple and forces him back two steps. “I’ve had enough of you. Get out of my face!”

Without a word, his tormentor turns tail and dashes past the newsstand and through the exit door.

“That’s right, moron,” Leo shouts. “Scram! Di di mau!”

A male voice rumbles through the box speaker hanging above the ticket counter: “The twelve-thirty to the San Francisco terminal will begin boarding in two minutes. Please proceed to Line C and have your ticket ready. Thank you for using On-Time Transportation.”

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They’re fifteen minutes into the bus ride, and as far as Leo’s concerned, the trip’s already fourteen-and-a-half minutes too long. *Thank God it’s only a forty-five-minute ride. These seat cushions smell like dog farts. I can’t believe this damn driver has managed to find every pothole in the road, and bridge traffic sucks a big one.*

The chubby black woman in the aisle seat pokes him as she lifts her Baby Ruth and takes a bite. He tries to ignore her probing elbow, keeping his eyes riveted on the window.

An elbow jabs him again. “Hey, will ya stay on your side of the seat, please?” Leo grumbles, avoiding eye contact. “You keep poking me.”

The woman gives him the once over. “Hmm. Sorry, soldier boy. Didn’t mean to hassle you.” Her eyes settle on his military decorations. “You some kinda war hero or something?” she says, gobbling down the rest of her candy bar and serenading all within earshot with a short series of staccato belches. Her seat cushion moans in protest as she swivels her heavy bottom and digs a hand into her bag.

Leo detects the sound of air escaping from between her butt-cheeks and wrinkles his nose as she rips apart the wrapper of a York Peppermint Patty and swallows the circular piece of chocolate in one bite.

He turns toward the window and catches a squad of Hell’s Angels heading in the opposite direction, rumble past. The Harleys shoot by too quickly for him to get a good look.

The olive drab of the military convoy following behind the choppers sends chills through his body. The sight rekindles painful memories. Leo leans back in his seat and shuts his eyes, but there’s no escape. The vivid imagery of that day with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade takes control once again. He tries to block out the day at the schoolhouse, but there’s no escaping the past. As he falls asleep, he finds himself back in the jungles of the Central Highlands.

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A pain in his right calf gives Leo a reprieve from the unrelenting nightmare. The thanks this time belong to the oversized passenger next to him.

He glares at her. “What the hell’s wrong with you? You kicked me. Stay on *your* side. I don’t need any hassles.”

“Sorry, general. I didn’t know you were so touchy. You ever hear of an accident?” She slides a cherry Lifesaver into her mouth and breaks it apart with her molars.

It takes extra effort for Leo to corral his emotions. “Jeez. You need to get it together. Didn’t your mother teach you manners?” He shoves both his trembling hands beneath his thighs and grits his teeth.

“I don’t need the likes of you teaching me anything,” she huffs and turns away.

The bus slows, turns right, and inches forward. A baritone voice overrides the hiss of the airbrakes. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your driver. We’re about to arrive at the San Francisco, On-Time terminal. Please, collect all your belongings and prepare to exit. Thank you for letting us get you to your destination on time.”

Leo lets out a sigh as his attention shifts to grabbing the shuttle and then boarding the long flight home.

2

Friday, August 17, 2012, 6:39 P.M.
The Rectory, Birmingham, Alabama

The pert brunette smacks her lips as the icy-cold blend of crimson liquid, spiced with Texas Tequila, hits the roof of her mouth and burbles into her stomach. Lisa winces and places her glass on the table. Brain freeze has found another victim. She presses a thumb and forefinger over her left eye and rocks back and forth. Slowly, the painful sensation recedes.

The young woman lifts her drink and runs the tip of her tongue around the rim. Her lips pucker as the salt rolls across her taste buds. “Ah. That’s more like it,” she says, blowing a tuft of out-of-place brown hair from in front of her eye. The slightly intoxicated bar patron points at her half-empty glass and throttles back against the black upholstery. “This drink is mighty tasty, Mags. Now I can relax a little.”

Her friend takes a long gulp of her frozen Daiquiri and lifts out the lone strawberry floating at the top of her glass. The cone-shaped fruit disappears between her bright red lips.

Lisa licks the edge of her glass. “It’s been a rough week at the paper, don’t you think?”

Maggie wiggles an eyebrow and plucks the strawberry stem from her mouth. “Feels like any other week to me. I’m happy anytime that automatic deposit shows up in my checking account.”

“You’re crazy, girl. My feature article on corruption within the city council took me way longer to finish than I originally imagined. Thank God, it’s done and awaits my editor’s approval.”

Her companion's oblivious to Lisa's comments. She's enthralled with the action on one of the Plasma televisions hanging over the bar. On-screen, a large man with a bright red beard, horses a fat blue finned tuna into his boat. Blood splashes on the fisherman's legs as the enormous fish rolls around on the deck and fights for survival. Maggie loses interest when two male patrons stroll into the restaurant. She keeps an eye on them as they find a table.

"Are you paying attention to me, Maggie?" Lisa asks.

Her girlfriend gives her a quick wink. "I'm a bit distracted. Go ahead."

"I know I should be happy. I have a plum assignment with the city desk, but I don't know if I can keep this up. I'm tired of trying to find dirt on city officials and spitting out articles exposing crooked food inspectors."

Maggie drains the rest of her drink and pats her sternum with the tips of her red-tipped fingernails. "Don't be so touchy. The conspiracy theorists pay your bills." The slender blonde leans back and plays with her straw. "What about me? For six years, three days a week, I put out my Magical Maggie column. Don't you think I'm tired of the grind?" She giggles. "My readers would abandon me if they knew I've been through three marriages."

"You can count on me to keep your secret."

Maggie waves to the waitress. "Let's order something to eat. This rum makes me light-headed."

"Good idea." Lisa wraps her lips around the straw and slurps the crushed ice from the bottom of her glass. She pulls the slender piece of plastic from her mouth and licks the end. "What plans do you have this weekend?"

"I hope to work on some extracurriculars with Corey. I've got a couple of hours' worth of investigative journalism planned. With any luck, I'll get a couple of helpful tips for my column."

Lisa rubs her lobe and plays with her hoop earring. "Whoa. Sounds perverted when you put it like that."

"I hope so. I can use the exercise."

Lisa's face turns red. "You're so bad. Please, no more. You conjure up images I would prefer not to explore."

Maggie chuckles. "You're such a prude. I bet I know what you have planned." She sighs and plays with her straw. "You'll stay at home with your cat and watch television like you do every weekend. Right?"

“What’s wrong with being a homebody? Molly loves me, and she’s amazing company.”

“If you say so, sweetie. I guess you forgot how good a guy is for relieving stress.”

“I beg to differ, Mags. Men have a talent for injecting unwanted drama into your life. I know from experience.” She sighs. “I’ve never gotten over my first and only love.”

“From what you told me, you messed it up with Travis. Besides, you’re looking at it all wrong. Certain types of drama can be highly romantic.”

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Lisa cradles her Smart Phone and listens as her mom’s answering machine clicks on. “Hello. You’ve reached Enya. Sorry, I’m not home right now. Please leave your name, number, and a short message. I’ll call you back as soon as I can.”

“Hmm, strange,” she announces as she checks the time on her Seiko. *Where would mom be at this hour on a Friday night?*

Lisa has her mom’s routine down pat. The senior Partainian should have her hair in rollers and relaxing on the couch, curled up with Patrick Jane, and a rerun of *The Mentalist*. The last time they spoke, her mom said she’d added *Silver Linings Playbook* to her to-do list. That must be it. Mystery solved.

Molly purrs as her mistress strokes the underside of her furry belly.

“She’s gone to see a movie. Right, girl?” Lisa pushes the sizable grey and white cat from her lap and gets to her feet. “Come with me into the kitchen. I’ll give you a treat.”

The graceful feline chases after her owner, and catching up, bounces off Lisa’s leg. Her slightly inebriated mistress, thrown off balance, manages to collect herself. “No, no, girl. You mustn’t trip me.”

She collects a small bag from the cupboard’s center shelf and drops three Temptations Catnip treats on the cream-colored kitchen tiles. “Here you go. Enjoy them, you big hairy fur-ball.”

The cat sniffs around and examines the small olive squares. Satisfied, Molly uses her sandpaper-like tongue to direct one into her mouth, then rolls onto her stomach and swats at the air.

Her mistress bends to check the water level in the shiny silver bowl. The melodic tones of her phone stop her short. Dropping the bag of treats on the kitchen counter, she strolls to the mahogany coffee table in the living room. Retrieving her cordless phone, she reads her brother's name and number on the display screen.

She wraps her fingers around the handset. "Hi, Jared. How are you, little brother?"

"Lisa, I left you a voicemail. Why didn't you call me back?"

"I must have missed it. Why? What's up?"

Jared doesn't say anything. Lisa can hear him crying.

"I have awful news, Sis. Please, sit down."

She tenses her body but remains standing. "Go ahead. Tell me. What's wrong?"

"It's Mom. There was a car crash. She's dead."

A tidal wave of panic washes over Lisa. "What? Impossible."

"I'm so sorry," he whimpers. "I wouldn't joke about such a thing. It's true. Mom's dead."

The phone falls from her hand. Lisa reaches for the box of tissues and collapses on the couch. She wipes her eyes and finds the phone between the cushions while Molly meows and trots to the corner of the room.

"Oh, my goodness. Sorry, Jared. I lost the phone for a minute. How did this happen?"

"Hit and run on Georgia 400 yesterday evening. Mom's body is at the morgue in North Fulton Hospital. Denise identified her remains and called me. That's all I know."

Lisa wipes her nose. "What do we do first?"

"I have the phone number for the funeral home we used for dad."

"Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God..."

Her brother interrupts. "Lissie, get a grip. Can you take off a few days? There's plenty we'll need to straighten out. Would you meet me at the house?"

“Of course. I’ll leave in the morning. Uh. I should be there around noon. I love you, Jared.”

“I love you too, Sis. See you then.”

Lisa reaches down and rubs Molly’s neck. Her cat’s eyelids flutter, then close.

3

Saturday, August 18
Alpharetta, GA.

She pilots her blue Prius along Windward Parkway. Molly relaxes on all fours in the passenger seat. A leather harness with a leash looped around the headrest restricts her movements.

“We’re almost there, girl, another half mile.”

The cat stands and laps at the water dispenser's spout that Lisa's taped to the inside of the door.

“Don't worry, baby, almost there.”

The car turns left at Cogburn Road and takes another turn at Bethany Bend. Lisa's stomach churns. Her flow of tears gains in intensity. “I can't believe mom's dead, girl. It doesn't seem real.”

The Norwegian Forest cat trills twice and tries to walk across the center console, but the leash won't allow her.

Her owner tickles the kitty's neck. “I know, I know. I love you too.”

She makes a right and rolls into the driveway, parking next to the white SUV with Georgia plates. Her brother rushes from the house, his eyes red and puffy.

Lisa pushes open the car door and hops out. “Oh, Jared, how could this happen?” She yanks a tissue from her purse and blows her nose.

He throws his arms around her. “I know. It's hard to believe.”

She points to her Toyota. “Please help me with Molly's stuff. They're on the floor in front.”

“Sure, Lissie. Whatever you want.”

Jared opens the passenger door as his sister climbs onto the driver's seat. She reaches across the center console and unhooks the cat's leash. "Come on, girl. Let's go inside."

Molly leaps onto the seat and rubs against her owner's face. Lisa cuddles her and backs out of the car. She walks to the side door of the house and throws down a black hair-tie—the gray and white feline dives for it.

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Jared lifts his cell. "Hello, is this Barton's Mortuary?"

"Yes, it is." The baritone male voice has a distinctive Southern twang. "This is Beau Reddick. I'm the funeral director. How can I help you?"

"I'd like to arrange for my mother's cremation." Jared chokes up momentarily. "She's at the North Fulton Hospital morgue. We'd also like a memorial service."

"You have my deepest condolences. May I have the name of your loved one?"

"Yes, of course. My mom's name is Enya Partainian. My family has used your services before, for my dad, Malik, about three years ago."

Jared can hear the tap, tap, tap of fingers on a computer keyboard.

"Ah, yes, Malik Partainian. I found him in our database, September 12th, 2009. His wife bought the platinum package at the time. We can discuss the commemorative options when you come in. Meanwhile, I'll have her transported from the hospital. North Fulton, you said. Right?"

"Yes, North Fulton." Jared places his hand over the phone. "Lissie, we need to drive over to the funeral home. What time should I tell him?"

His sister wipes her eyes. "Whenever." She crumples the Kleenex and drops it into the plastic wastebasket. "We should head over there right now and take care of it. Don't you think?"

"Yes. I agree."

Jared lifts his hand from the receiver. "My sister and I will see you in about twenty minutes, Mister Reddick."



Monday, 12:30 P.M.

With the curtains tied back, the oversized stain-glass windows filter in the sunlight and cast colorful rainbow swirls on the far walls of the chapel. Rows of straight-back wooden chairs are arranged on either side of the red-carpeted center aisle and stand watch over the dozen floral arrangements surrounding a small circular table at the front of the chamber. A brass urn, with a mother of pearl band around its center, sits at the center of a white tablecloth. Within that molded container rest a few pounds of ashes, the remnants of Enya Partainian's earthly existence.

A framed eight-by-ten color picture of their mom, together with their dad, rests on the right side of the table. On the far left hangs an assortment of photos. They're pinned to a white background and organized chronologically. At the top left corner, there's Enya as a little girl. Next to it, an image of her as a teenager, then another taken at her wedding. The pictorial history continues with candid shots of Enya in various stages of adult life. Above the array, in black ink, appears scripted lettering: *To Live Your Life is to Accept and Cherish Love*, a phrase created by her daughter this morning.

Denise dabs at her tears as she reads the maxim. She gives Lisa a peck on the cheek. "Enya would have loved your sentiment. I think it's wonderful."

Lisa sniffles. "Thank you. I know how close you and mom were."

"For sure, friends since grade school. Both of us pledged for the Alpha Gamma sorority at Lassiter, and together, we attended Georgia State. We were each other's maids of honor." Denise bursts into tears. She wipes her eyes and falls into a chair beside her husband.

Lisa joins her brother amid the mass of bouquets and wreaths, semi-circling the table. The aromatic scent of lilies, orchids, and roses is unmistakable.

She takes another look at the photo collage. "Can you believe mom's gone?"

"It's rough." Jared finishes examining the condolence cards included with the floral arrangements. He steps back and reaches for his sister's hand. "I know how you feel. This never-ending nightmare is real for me too."

"It's much worse," she sobs. "I feel like someone ripped out my heart. Mom was my best friend." Lisa reaches for Jared's shoulder.

He casts an arm around her waist. "We'll get through this, Sis. Come on. Sit with me."

"I'm okay. Yes, let's sit. We have a few minutes before the service."

A middle-aged woman, flanked by a pair of men, signs the registry at the chapel entrance. When she finishes, they parade down the center aisle.

She takes Lisa's hand. "Hi. I'm Alice Federstone. So sorry about your mom. I was in her Mahjong group. I'd like you to meet my husband, Alfred. This is our son, Teddy."

The older man takes a step forward. "So sorry for your loss."

Lisa nods. "Thank you for your kind wishes."

Alfred offers a quick head bob in return. "Your welcome."

Their son wears a solemn expression as he shakes Jared's hand.

The Federstones turn and take seats in the third row.

"You know, Jared, we have virtually no family here in America. I think there are distant cousins in Armenia, but I'm not sure. Mom never talked much about it." She twists around and surveys the half-filled rows of seats behind her. "Nice turnout."

Lisa's startled by a familiar voice.

"I'm so sorry to hear about your mother."

She looks up to find a high school classmate and two other women standing in front of her. She bolts upright and embraces the speaker, a long-haired blonde wearing a grey checkered pantsuit. "Suzie, thank you for coming. How are you?"

Her friend flashes her wedding ring. "I'm fine. You know, I've married again, going on two years now. I hitched up with John Noyes. Do you remember him? Everyone called him Buzz in high school. His parents owned the pastry café on Shallowford. He's expanded the business with his brother, and they're doing quite well."

“That’s terrific. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thanks.” Suzie narrows her eyes. “Did you know Travis is back in town? I saw him last week at a charity event.”

“Err...no. I didn’t.” She takes a deep breath and sighs. “Listen. We should meet for lunch once my mom’s affairs straighten out. I miss you.”

“I’d love that. I miss you too.” Suzie pulls out her phone. “Give me your number, and I’ll stick it in my cell.”

“Great. It’s 204-365-7091.”

Lisa’s friend taps the buttons on her keypad. “Check. I’ll call you in the middle of the week, say Wednesday.”

“Please. You better.”

Suzie brings a hand to her forehead. “Oh, sorry. These are my cousins? They’re visiting from Cincinnati.” She extends a hand. “This is Mary and her twin, Janice. They’re fraternal. Mary’s older by twelve minutes. No one ever believes they’re related.”

Lisa makes a quick comparison. “No. I can see the resemblance.” She hugs Janice, then her sister. “Thank you all for coming.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll call you Wednesday morning,” Suzie says, guiding her cousins toward the seats.

Beau, the funeral director, raps his knuckles on the wooden pedestal in the right corner of the room. A younger man with short brown hair and dressed in a black pinstriped suit stands next to him. “Ladies and gentlemen, may I please have your attention. Allow me to introduce you to Pastor Robert Goodman from the Church of the Universal Spirit.” Beau shuffles to his right and surrenders his spot.

The crowd settles down.

Pastor Goodman steps to the podium. “Thank you, Director Reddick.” He clears his throat. “My deepest condolences to Enya’s children, Lisa and Jared. I’ve been friends with their mother for more than ten years. I knew Enya as a fine person who, without question, believed in the will of God and always put her friends and family before herself. She was a woman always ready to offer a helping hand. We’re here today, not to mourn her loss, but to celebrate her life...”

Lisa’s mind wanders. She’s preoccupied with concerns regarding her mother’s financial affairs. There’s a bunch of paperwork and legal issues

still to resolve. *Let's see now. I've contacted Social Security and canceled her insurance this morning. The duplicate key to the safe deposit box is in my bag, and I have joint access to mom's bank accounts. I'll call her attorney, Larry Dresden, this afternoon. What should Jared and I do with mom's belongings, and what about the house? I must think logically and work this all out.*

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03: 27 P.M.

Lisa's rump rests at the corner of her mother's king-size bed. Two piles of letters sit on the comforter next to her. Her head jerks back involuntarily as she reads. "Oh, my God!" She drops the yellowed paper on the bed and seizes another. An excess of adrenaline pumps through her body. "Jared, get in here. You've got to look at these."

Footsteps echo throughout the hallway.

"Hurry up," she shouts. "You're not gonna believe this."

Her brother rushes into the room. "What's so important? I was stacking the extra set of dishes. The thrift shop's truck is coming by at five to pick them up."

Lisa holds out a paper. "Look at this. It's from a soldier in Vietnam."

Jared takes the letter from her and skims the first few lines. "No way. Sis, this is an old love note."

"I know. Right? There are dozens." She gestures at the papers on the bed. "They're from someone named Leo Miller. They date back to 1971 and 72. Who the hell is Leo Miller?"

Jared passes a hand through his long black hair. "I have no clue."

Lisa lifts her cell. "I'm going to call Denise. I'm sure she'll know."