

The house Justin had been looking for was positioned atop a terraced lawn. A blond woman in a blue work shirt and mud- speckled jeans was at the side of the driveway, energetically digging a flower bed.

When he saw her, Justin's eyes filled with tears. Somewhere within this stranger he could see the little girl who had once been his sister. He lowered the car window and all he could manage to say was: "Did you used to be Lissa Fisher?"

The woman leaned on her shovel and watched as Justin got out of the car. "Do I know you?" Her smile was warm. She was pulling a strand of hair away from her face, leaving a faint tracing of dirt on her cheek. A precarious tilting sensation, a feeling of being in terrifying free fall, swept over Justin. He tried to speak, but no words would come.

He saw that his silence was making the woman uncomfortable. She tugged on the shovel a little, as if preparing to leave.

"I went to Lima Street," he said quickly. "I thought Mom and Dad would still be there, but ..." Suddenly the words were tumbling out of him, almost incoherently. "At the nursing home, they told me about Dad. They had some of his things. They were going to send them to you, but I thought that if I brought them it might be a good way for us . . . for me . . . to reconnect and . . ."

The woman was already recoiling, holding the shovel in front of her, backing away. "Who are you?"

"Lissa, I'm your brother. I'm Justin."

Lissa's voice was angry, tinged with fear. "Whoever you are. Whatever your game is. I want you off my property. Now."

She turned and bolted toward the house. The slam of her door reverberated like the sound of a gunshot.

His sister's rejection had been so venomous and so complete that it had shaken Justin to his core; it had spun him back toward his old habit of walling off all thoughts about his past.

After returning from San Marino, he had tried to concentrate his attention on his new job. And on Amy and Zack.

But he'd been unable to ignore the nagging questions about his family that had been raised by his return to Lima Street. This morning, the continuing absence of answers to those questions had finally overwhelmed him. He had called the convalescent hospital to request the name of the cemetery in which his father was buried.

Now, Justin was walking through a maze of jumbled headstones—most of them cracked and crooked, none of them rising more than a foot or two above the uneven graveyard grass.

It was September. Santa Ana winds were feeding wildfires on the mountains. The air had the heat of furnaces and the smell of cinders in it.

As Justin approached his father's grave, he was feeling dazed and hollowed out.

It had nothing to do with the heat or the fire. It had everything to do with what was waiting for him at the grave site.

He was not walking toward just one headstone; he was walking toward three.

The newest was his father's: "Robert William Fisher... December 14, 1941–June 16, 2005."

The next grave marker read "Caroline Conwyn Fisher . . . May 1, 1943–October 31, 2004." It belonged to his mother. A flash of pain shot through Justin; it was almost unbearable. A piece of his heart had been ripped away.

As he turned toward the third headstone, Justin's eyes were blurred with tears. The stone was smaller and far more weathered than the other two. It took him a moment before he could clearly see its inscription:

"Thomas Justin Fisher
August 5, 1972–February 20, 1976
To live in the hearts of those we love is never to die."

Justin had come in search of his father's grave. And he had found his mother's. And his own.