

# DISCOVERIES

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**Mulligan, Neil**

**LOST LETTER**

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A woman cares for her dying mother and learns about long-buried family history in this absorbing drama. Mary McDougal is on the brink of making partner at her Manhattan accounting firm when she learns that her 77-year-old mother Maggie has been stricken with pancreatic cancer and has just a few months to live. Mary is grief-stricken, but she struggles to cope with Maggie's disease in the calmly therapeutic manner that the medical establishment prescribes for the end of life. She prevails upon the prickly Maggie to move into her apartment, where she buckles down to helping her strong-willed mother through pain, forgetfulness and a terrifying physical decline. There are clashes, misunderstandings and tears, but mother and daughter also grow closer through their shared ordeal as they take stock of their life together and Maggie starts to tell stories about Mary's father Jimmy, who never returned from World War II. (Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the two women, the Army has discovered a 60-year-old letter from Jimmy to Maggie and is trying, with all the ponderous determination of military bureaucracy, to deliver it to her.) Mulligan tells this tale with sensitivity and skill, and the domestic scenes with Mary and Maggie have a quiet, subtle realism that finely evokes the anguish and solace that families take from the experience of dying. Woven through their present-day trials as a counterpoint is the happy narrative of Maggie's wartime romance with Jimmy. To the author's credit, this subplot is a vivid recreation of a working-class Irish neighborhood in the Bronx, full of hardship but also hope, as Maggie and Jimmy make plans for the future. (In yet another register, Mulligan renders Jimmy's experience of the Battle of the Bulge with terrifying immediacy.) Writing with a wonderfully evocative prose style, Mulligan takes his characters through sorrow to a luminous redemption.

A moving saga of love and remembrance.

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