



EPILOGUE

**FOR THE LONG
MARCH HOME**

**BY TOSCA LEE AND
MARCUS BROTHERTON**

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The first interviewer is a man with smiling eyes in dark jeans and an unassuming Oxford shirt, his neatly trimmed beard flecked with gray. "Bling," Claire's twentysomething hairdresser called it two days earlier when Claire showed her the man's website on her tablet, where there was a photo of him with a famous actor he'd profiled.

The second is a sundress-clad woman Claire recognizes from the picture on the back of her latest novel. She's part Asian, maybe, with a dark mole, like the beauty marks Claire's friends used to draw on their cheeks to look like Jean Harlow.

The man sets the digital recorder on the coffee table, and Jimmy sits forward to peer at it with a low whistle. "Those things keep getting smaller and smaller."

"Yes, sir," the interviewer says, looking like he's feeling the effects of the red-eye from Seattle, along with the Alabama heat. He accepts a glass from Claire with thanks as she serves iced sweet tea with lemon.

"So you're writin' a book about the defenders of Bataan," Jimmy says.

"We want our readers to know everything you went through," the second interviewer says, taking out a notebook full of scribbled questions. She's flown in from Nebraska and spent the first fifteen minutes of their visit fielding Jimmy's questions about the Cornhuskers' upcoming football season.

"Well, there sure ain't many of us left anymore," Jimmy says. "And some of us ain't never talked about what happened over there. Not 'til recent times. It just wasn't something we did. We came home and moved on. Took some men years to start being right again, but the love of a good woman sped up the process for me, I reckon." He glances up and winks at Claire.

Claire looks away with a little smile and pats his shoulder. She bears a striking resemblance to a woman in a vintage lipstick ad sitting on a bookshelf.

"Do I have it right that you were married six weeks after you came home, Pastor Propfield?" the man asks.

"Call me Jimmy," the older man says. "Both of you."

"Six weeks after Christmas," Claire says, sitting on the edge of the sofa. "In the county courthouse."

"And you enrolled in seminary, essentially following in your father's footsteps?"

The older man chuckles. "Things were different with me then—different for my father too, and if you'd have told me I'd do that in 1941, before the war, I'd have never believed it."

"I assume the war changed that for you?" the woman asks, looking up from her notes.

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"Well, I suppose the short answer is yes," Jimmy says, considering. "The longer answer is I saw a lot of things I didn't know what to do with even after I came home. I experienced and did things I wasn't sure how to forgive myself for. I'm certain today that nothing can separate us from the love of God. It's a promise I never had to cling to much before. But it's one I share now every chance I can. I suppose I don't consider myself a preacher so much as a teller of stories, a bearer of good news."

The first interviewer looks around at the photos crowding the console behind the sofa. Five children and eighteen grandchildren grin from the frames.

"That must be Private First Class Hank Wright standing next to you," he says, pointing to the middle figure in an old black-and-white photo of three teenage friends. He's taller than the other two, his hair mussed, dimples framing his smirk. The boy beside him is fair-skinned and freckled, with laughter in his eyes.

"It is," Jimmy says. "And that's William Crockett beside him. But if you want the story of the best men I ever knew, we have to go back to 1932, when Claire and me were just kids."

"Let's start there," he says, and clicks the recorder on.