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LIFE | IDEAS | PLAYLIST

Lisa Scottoline on Joni Mitchell's 'A Case of You'

The writer of legal thrillers on how the song gave her the courage to face boyfriend troubles



Joni Mitchell performing in the 1971 documentary 'Celebration at Big Sur.' Documentary PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX/PHOTOFEST

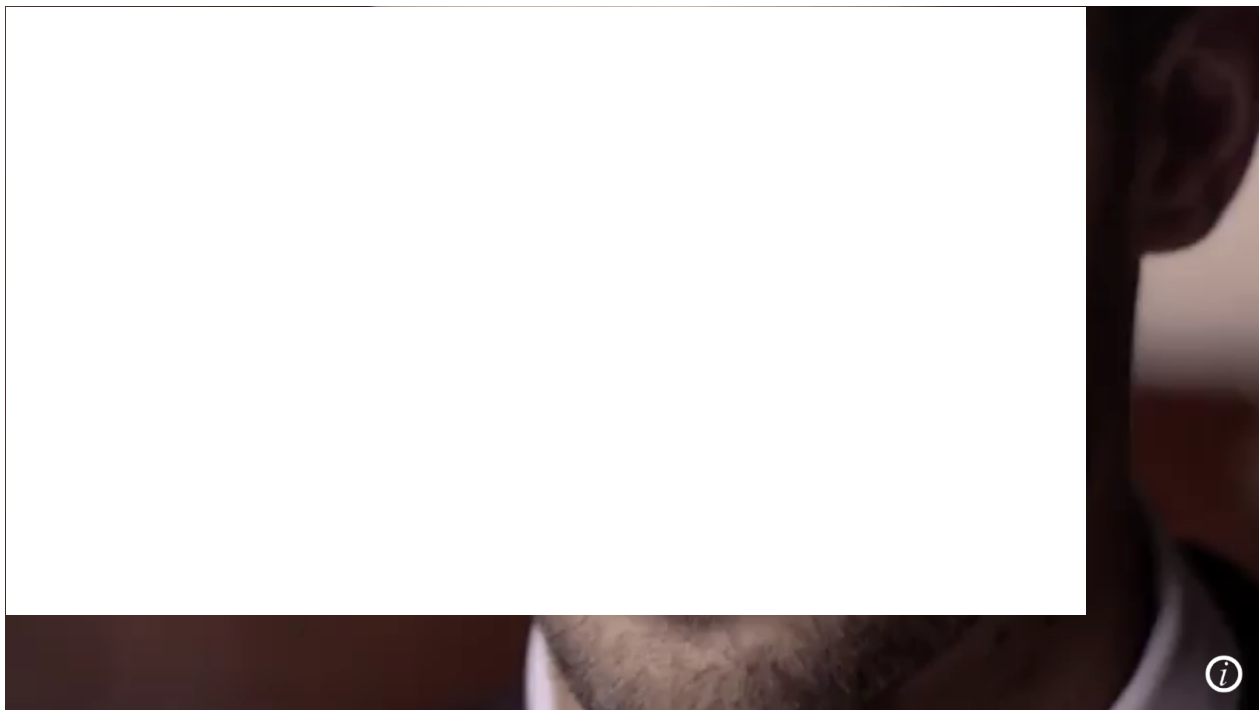
June 13, 2017 10:38 a.m. ET

Lisa Scottoline, 61, known for her legal thrillers, is the author of "One Perfect Lie" and co-author with Francesca Serritella of "I Need a Lifeguard Everywhere but the Pool" (both St. Martin's Press). She spoke with Marc Myers.

In the early 1970s, I didn't quite get Joni Mitchell. I was in high school, and her songs weren't resonating with my life. That was before I heard **"A Case of You"** coming through a dorm window at college.

— ADVERTISEMENT —





In the spring of 1975, I was a sophomore at the University of Pennsylvania. By then I was dating a guy I thought I loved.

The relationship wasn't going well. Deep down I wanted a real boyfriend, a guy who would say something true, not what he thought I wanted to hear.



Lisa Scottoline

One day, while walking in the Quad past Speakman dorm, I heard Joni's voice on an album finishing a song. Inwardly, I rolled my eyes. But when the next song on the album began, I stopped to listen.

As Joni played and sang, I heard the truth: "Just before our love got lost you said / 'I am as constant as a northern star' / And I said, 'Constantly in the darkness, / where's that at? / If you want me I'll be in the bar.'"

Joni was calling out a guy who was trying to B.S. her. I had goosebumps. I knew that feeling.

Joni continued: "Oh I could drink a case of you darling / Still I'd be on my feet."

Yes, Joni, exactly! I was crazy about my guy, but I was getting only empty romantic words and promises from him.

The more I listened to the song, the more I realized Joni was giving me love advice. I physically shook. I went into the dorm and followed the music.

On the third floor, a door was open and the record's last song was playing. A girl returning from a shower told me the album was Joni's "Blue," from 1971, and that the song I liked was "A Case of You."

I bought "Blue" that day. I didn't have a stereo, so the girl next door in my dorm played the song for me over and over. That night, I broke up with my boyfriend.

I told him I wasn't happy, but I didn't leave him room to sweet-talk me or fix it. I just backed out and left. It felt awesome. That's the day I became a woman.

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