

Chapter 1

“The Times They Are A’Changin’”

I do not like beginnings.

On the first day of first grade, the teacher sent me to the corner for blowing a sheet of paper around the table I shared with three other girls. Standing in the corner, I wet my pants.

On the first day of fifth grade, I tripped up the stairs to school, skinning both my knees. The boy I loved, because we shared the same initials, laughed at me.

At the beginning of middle school, I got my first period. The blood soaked through my skirt.

At the beginning of high school, a friend of mine died after falling off a horse. Three months later, President Kennedy was assassinated.

I really do not like beginnings.

It was September 1967. I stood at the window in my dorm room at Lake Forest College, thirty miles north of Chicago, and watched my mom and dad in the parking lot below. I wiped my eyes with the Kleenex my mom gave me moments before, “Always use Kleenex brand. No cheap imitation will do,” she said. My mom had a way with metaphors. She was telling me to be my best and only accept the best.

My dad took my hands. “Don’t forget to be yourself,” he said. Dad was direct. He didn’t need metaphors.

As I watched them drive away, I wanted the beginning to be over, to have it be the middle, to know what the end would be.

I chose Lake Forest College because of the name. It sounded like the perfect place to spend the next four years of my life—a half-mile from Lake Michigan on a hundred-acre campus covered with a forest of trees.

More importantly, Lake Forest College was 400 miles away from my hometown and I needed to get away from home. I loved my mom and dad, but I had to figure out who I was.

Before I arrived, my roommate came and went, leaving the ashtray on her desk full of cigarette butts. I was on my own to find my way across campus to registration. I took a deep breath, left my dorm, and headed to the tables on the patio outside of the student center, known as Commons. Orientation week. Four days of discussions, testing, and getting to know what college was about.

I got in the line marked H-M. “Rebecca Jamison,” I told the upperclassman sitting at the registration table. He searched through the box, gave me a name tag and an information packet, the name of my advisor on the front—Tom Garson, Sociology Department.

“You’re lucky,” the upperclassman said, as he passed me the packet. “Garson’s the best.” I released the breath I held.

“Great. I need all the help I can get.” I pushed the bangs out of my eyes. I started growing them out after high school, but they weren’t long enough to stay tucked behind my ears. In *Teen Idol* magazine Patti Boyd, George Harrison’s wife, said it was time for her to develop a more mature look, so she was growing out her bangs. If it was good enough for a Beatle wife, it was good enough for me.

He pushed the hair out of his eyes too and said with a grin, “Don’t worry, you’ll figure it out.”

“Thanks.” I walked away. “By the way.” I turned back but he was already assisting the next person in line. For some reason, I wanted him to know I go by Becky.

* * *

Our orientation group met in the shade of a sprawling oak tree on the lawn outside of Commons. Dr. Tom Garson wore blue jeans and a corduroy sports coat. His long wavy hair covered his ears, a dark out-of-control mustache covered his top lip. Garson looked us over, perused the name tags we wore, glancing down at his advisement list and matching names to faces. He finally said, “I’m Tom Garson. Please call me Tom. I’ll be your advisor for this year at least. I teach in the Sociology Department. We will spend the next four days getting to know each other, figuring out class schedules, talking about what college means, and discussing the life-altering implications of our freshman book, *Catch-22*.”

I knew it well, having read it over the summer. Best book I ever read and the first book that made me laugh out loud.

“We’ll start discussing it tomorrow. Today, three questions. Who are you? What event in high school shaped your life philosophy the most? Why did you choose Lake Forest?” Garson turned to me. “You first.”

Of course. I never won raffles or lotteries or door prizes. But when it came to the stuff you didn’t want to win, like going first, I always won.

I took a deep breath. “I’m Becky Jamison from Rogerstown, Kentucky. I chose Lake Forest College because I loved the name and I love Chicago.” I didn’t want to reveal that I also wanted to escape my dad’s reputation. In addition to teaching at the local junior college, he was a minister and gave the ‘don’t have sex until marriage’ talks at high schools all over Kentucky.

“Most significant event?” Garson asked.

“President Kennedy’s assassination during my freshman year in high school. It transformed the way I viewed the world.”

“In what way?”

“I fell in love with everything he stood for, particularly the part about giving back to the world. The world seemed pretty bleak after he died.”

A guy sitting across from me rolled his eyes.

Garson went around the group asking questions. Most significant event? Getting elected cheerleader. Winning the state baseball championship. Being valedictorian. Flunking out of Phillips Exeter and going to public school.

“You’re next, Joe.” Garson pointed to that eye-roller across from me, dressed like an athlete on game day in high school—loafers with no socks, blue casual pants, a long-sleeve dress shirt open at the collar, sleeves rolled up to the elbow, a tie with the knot loosened.

After he introduced himself as Joe Scott, I couldn’t help thinking that his last name could be his first. Joe Scott. Scott Joe. Like Benedict Arnold. He became Joe Scott Joe.

Joe Scott Joe pulled a Marlboro out of the hard pack he kept in the pocket of his shirt and lit it. He inhaled, exhaled dramatically. “The summer before my junior year I went to Martha’s Vineyard

for vacation and developed a true appreciation for alcoholic beverages. I guess you could say my first drunk was the most significant event in my life.” I rolled my eyes back at him. I detested his type

He went on. “I’m here because of Garson’s name on my registration packet.” Joe Scott Joe laughed. No one laughed with him. “Seriously, I figure if I stay in college I won’t have to go to Vietnam. Not that I’m against the war. I’ll leave protesting to the long-hairs. I don’t want to get hurt or killed.”

“If you’re not willing to do something to stop it, why shouldn’t you have to go?” Garson asked.

Joe Scott Joe didn’t respond. Instead, he looked over at the one person who hadn’t talked yet, a guy with a red bandana around his head, wearing an army jacket, sitting up against a tree, his arms wrapped around his legs, eyes lowered. On his left arm was a hook where his hand should be. His orientation packet sat on the ground beside him. “You against the tree. Your turn,” Joe Scott Joe said. “By the way, you ever kill anybody with that hook?”

The guy slowly unwrapped his arms from his legs and stood up, leaving his orientation packet on the ground. He glanced around, stepped over Joe Scott Joe, and patted Garson’s shoulder with his good hand as he passed. He never looked back. As he walked away, Garson said, “Dennis McKinney, Vietnam veteran.”

“Shit. He probably did kill someone.” Joe Scott Joe grinned. He put out his cigarette on the ground and left the butt there.

“Shut up, Scott,” one of the guys in the group murmured. I wish I said it.

Joe Scott Joe said, “He shouldn’t have gone to Vietnam.”

“Maybe he didn’t have a fucking choice,” Garson said to no one in particular. “See you tomorrow.”

My dad never said fucking. He never wore blue jeans. No student ever called him by his first name. Times were changing. I looked at Garson. He caught my eye and smiled. I liked him already.

I watched Dennis McKinney, Vietnam veteran, walk away until he entered one of the two men’s dorms next to Commons. Joe Scott Joe walked toward the same dorm, his arm draped around a girl, an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

* * *

The next day I took placement tests in Math and English and registered for classes. I wrote a check for \$96 at the bookstore in the basement of Commons for books, a college pennant, and a sweatshirt. Walking back to my dorm, carrying two bags of books, it happened.

Just past where our orientation group gathered, halfway to my dorm, a guy jumped out of a tree in front of me. He somersaulted to his feet, rubbed the leaves and dirt off his brown leather jacket with the Kawasaki patch on the sleeve, and said, “Under that baggy shirt is a body I would love to get to know.”

If my two hands had not been carrying bags of books, I would have grabbed my shirt to hide whatever was under it. Nothing would ever be the same again.

His eyes, like magnets, focused on mine. Mine, the metal, couldn’t pull away.

“Tonight. Commons. Snack Bar. 7:30.” As he walked away, he must have sensed me watching him because he turned back, grinned, and nodded his head.

My roommate lit another cigarette, dropping the ashes into the already full ash tray. "You're crazy to go. You don't even know his name," she said.

Why did I go? Throughout high school, I dated a few times but never had a serious boyfriend. I knew it would never happen because of my father's speeches. The guy who jumped out of the tree? Here was my chance. I wasn't going to let it pass me up.

When I arrived at the snack bar, he was sitting at a table halfway across the room, leaning back in his chair, his arms crossed over the brown leather jacket, a slight grin on his face. When he saw me, the grin turned into a smile. I walked over to the table.

"Hi, I'm Jeff Ledford."

"Becky Jamison."

"I wasn't sure you would come."

"My roommate told me I was crazy, but I figured I'm safe in a room full of people."

He smiled. "I'm glad you did, otherwise I would have had to eat the éclair I got you." He handed me a plate. "I don't even know if you like éclairs."

"I'm a fan of anything sweet," I said. The éclair he gave me changed my life.

I was always easily changed. When the Beatles came to America, my life changed. When I worked at a camp for children with disabilities the summer before my senior year in high school, my life changed. When I was selected with twenty-four other young people in Kentucky to develop a conference on juvenile delinquency, my life changed. My life changing over an éclair wasn't out of the question.

He caught my eyes and held them there. "I'm a second semester junior, transferred from Northeastern in Boston."

"Why did you transfer?" I took a bite of the éclair, licking off the cream that squirted out the other end.

"I'm going to tell you, but first you have to promise you won't leave. Promise you'll hear me out."

"Promise," I gave him the scout salute, although I never was a Girl Scout. I wanted to join in fifth grade because I thought the scarves were cool. The boy next door, who I vowed to marry when I was older, told me he hated girls in Girl Scouts, so that was the end of that.

"I was kicked out of Northeastern University on a drug charge."

I inhaled sharply. I didn't know much about drugs. In high school, while drinking a five-cent cherry coke at the downtown drugstore, a friend warned me to watch out for cigarettes with twisted ends. My dad warned me about LSD and broken chromosomes. I believed them, but after reading about the hippies who flooded San Francisco during the 'Summer of Love' I was curious.

Jeff sensed my uneasiness, reached over and took my hand, sticky from the éclair and oozing cream. "I promise you'll like me by the time I'm done." I believed him. Something about those eyes.

Jeff continued. "I'm not a doper or a hippie. It was a freak thing. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"What am I doing sitting here eating an éclair with a guy who got kicked out of college on a dope charge?" This éclair affair was getting out of control.

He leaned back in his chair again, crossed his arms over his brown leather jacket. "Just passing time, I guess." He grinned. "Tell me something about you."

"I come from a small town in Kentucky. My mom's a third-grade teacher. My dad teaches at a junior college. I have two brothers."

"Now tell me something that would make me want to turn and run like you wanted to when I told you about my drug charge."

"My dad's also an ordained minister."

Jeff chuckled and at that exact moment I knew I was in trouble. I had bad luck with guys in high school. Partly it was my dad's 'don't have sex until marriage' speeches. Partly it was just my lack of luck.

My first love was my older brother's best friend. The first time he came by our house to hang out with my brother I was in the eighth grade and he was a sophomore. I fell in love on the spot, but he always treated me like a little sister, teasing me, joking with me. My love was unrequited. He joined up the summer after his freshman year in college. He died in Vietnam eight months later.

I liked a guy from my church youth group. We went out a couple times but he moved to Virginia.

There was the guy I met at that camp for children with disabilities that changed my life. Don't know if it was the camp or him. He was the first guy I kissed. As luck would have it, he lived eighty miles away.

I knew nothing more about guys.

"So, Miss Jamison. Anything else I need to know about you?" Jeff took a bite of his éclair and stared at me as he very slowly licked the cream that squirted out the end. My stomach took a flip.

"I've never done drugs, never really tasted alcohol. I graduated first in my class. And I'm not trying to hide anything under this shirt. That's about it but if you need to know something else, ask away."

"That's all I need to know."

I kept talking. "My parents are teetotalers. Dad always told me alcohol tasted like water left in the bottom of a boat for three days. The only alcohol I ever tasted was from a tiny bottle he got on an airplane. I agreed with the boat thing."

Jeff laughed and leaned back in his chair. He looked me over. "You are unbelievable."

"Yeah, I know." I finished my éclair and reached over to the adjacent table for a napkin. I wiped the cream off my lips and fingers and took a drink of coke.

"Why did you come?" It was his eyes. Hypnotic. They immobilized me.

I wasn't very well going to say that so when I said, "Maybe it's your eyes," I wanted the ground to open and swallow me whole. "Anyhow, Jeff, I'm not your type. I better go." I stood up to leave.

"I haven't got a type." Jeff got up and walked towards me.

I pushed back my bangs. "Growing out my bangs since graduation. My mom hates hair in the face. I guess you could call it my first bit of family rebellion. If they don't grow out soon, I swear I'm going to cut them. They're driving me crazy."

Jeff took my chin in one hand, licked the fingers on his other, slicked back my bangs, and still looking me in the eyes, said, "I'll see you around."

U.S. Soldier Body Count: 16,461

OCCUPY WALL STREET ENCAMPMENT

OCTOBER 14-15, 2011

Zuccotti Park and Times Square

New York City

They were the occupiers, almost two hundred strong, many continuing their parents' legacy, fighting against injustice, working for peace.

These occupiers reclaimed public space to protest economic inequalities, corporate corruption, and greed. Since September 17, 2011, they lived in tents pitched in Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street financial district in lower Manhattan. The tents surrounded the kitchen that served hundreds of meals a day with food donated by thousands of supporters. On one side of the park was a media tent and a library with 5,000 donated books. On the other was a fully equipped medical tent.

Every day, along with throngs of supporters, occupiers walked the streets of New York City confronting the police and Wall Street about the one percent who owned the majority of wealth in our country, more than 40 trillion dollars.

Every evening the occupiers gathered for General Assembly. Matt stood on a stone wall, the first to speak. "Mic check," Matt said. Since it is illegal in New York City to use amplified sound on public property without a permit, five people standing near him repeated his words so the crowd could hear.

"Mic check," Matt said again. His human microphones echoed, "Mic check." His words echoed through the crowd. "We will not be deterred (echo) by the illegal actions of the police yesterday (echo). Our jailed comrades will receive legal representation (echo) by The National Lawyers Guild (echo). Tomorrow we march again to let the cops know (echo) we will not be intimidated by their brutal tactics (echo). We are not afraid (echo). The Direct Action group will meet following General Assembly (echo) at the northeast corner of the park (echo). Check the board by the library for the list of other working groups (echo) and for updates about the march tomorrow (echo)."

Matt stepped off the wall. As he walked away, he heard the next announcement. "Mic check." "Mic check." "The library group needs help (echo) cataloging the new books that arrived yesterday (echo). Meet after General Assembly by the Library (echo)."

Matt headed to his tent. He lay down on his sleeping bag, put his hands behind his head, and closed his eyes.

The hypnotic beat of drums startled Matt awake. General Assembly was over. He took a drink from his bottle of water, poured some on his black bandana, and used it to wash the sleep out of his eyes. He slipped the bandana through his belt loop.

Matt headed to the northeast corner of the park. As he walked past the kitchen, he took one of the remaining chocolate chip cookies donated by a local restaurant. Matt sent a text to his mom. "Choc Chip Cookies not as good as yours. Marching tomorrow. Will send details."

* * *

Matt tied the black bandana across his face and walked with hundreds of comrades through the streets of New York City.

“Whose streets?” someone yelled.

“Our streets,” he replied.

A drum kept the beat as the group chanted.

“We are the 99 per cent. We are the 99 per cent.”

They walked down the middle of the street towards Times Square, through the immobile cars. Drivers honked in support. Taxi drivers gave high-fives to the marchers. Tourists and curious onlookers watched from the sidewalks. The police kept a lookout from the sides, thousands of them, in full riot gear, battle-ready, hands on nightsticks.

“No justice. No peace. No justice. No peace,” the marchers chanted. “Banks got bailed out. We got sold out.”

The marchers were stopped by metal barricades. Matt walked up to one of the barricades, the black bandana across his mouth. “Do not go over the barricade,” he heard a police officer say in a Brooklyn accent. Matt never moved his eyes from the officer in front of him.

A young man crossed over the barricade, and, in a flash, three cops threw him down, one pushing his face into the asphalt road, another ramming a knee into his back. The third cop pulled the protester’s arms back sharply to handcuff him with zip cuffs. “The cuffs are too tight,” the man yelled. The police dragged him to a waiting car, not loosening the cuffs.

A police officer yelled, “Off the street!”

Matt raised his arm. “Whose streets?” Matt yelled at the officer.

“Our streets.” The nightsticks came out to the ready.

A police officer grabbed a woman and threw her to the ground, dragging her into the street by the straps of her backpack. “She didn’t do anything,” Matt yelled. “Let her go.” He pointed his camera phone at her.

Police on motorcycles advanced from the back. The motorcycles behind and the barricades in front pushed the protesters off the street and onto the sidewalks. Many ran down side streets, back from where they came, or forward, on the sidewalks. The brute force of the police stopped many from moving.

“Shit! Get off my foot,” Matt heard a fellow comrade say. The motorcycles kept rolling.

“This is a peaceful protest. What you’re doing is wrong,” Matt said to the police officers in front of him who were looking anywhere but at him. “Your job is to protect and serve the people, not Wall Street,” Matt said to a young cop. “This is about justice. You should be on our side,” Matt said.

The cop made eye contact with Matt. “Walk over the line,” Matt said to him. He didn’t.

ARRESTS: 92

Chapter 10

“Universal Soldier”

* * *

Second semester started. I sat on a couch in Hixson Lounge strumming my guitar. Hixson Lounge was my second home. In between classes, that was my place to study, play my guitar, or simply hang out. Hook sat down next to me and handed me a box.

“My Christmas present?” I asked.

“Open it.”

I stared at the medal in the box.

“I’m a hero. Bronze Star to go with my Purple Heart. I’m sending it back.” Hook shifted uneasily.

I picked up the medal. It was the same one my uncle got in World War II. He displayed it in the china cabinet in his dining room. My uncle told me stories of the war. It seemed glorious. It wasn’t.

I looked at Hook, the medal still in my hand. “You can’t send it back. You earned it. When you lost your hand, you still saved two of your buddies.”

“Anybody would have done the same thing.”

“Not true.” I put the medal in the box.

Hook took the box from me and snapped it shut. “The recruiters promised glory. They lied. All I got was a stainless-steel hook and this piece of cheap jewelry.” He put the box in the pocket of the army jacket.

“You got a good jacket out of the deal.” Hook always wore his army jacket and a red bandana around his head. I loved the look.

“You want to know the worst thing I did in Nam?”

I knew he was going to tell me, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear.

“One day, about seven months in, I’m outside at the airfield on base smoking a cigarette near a couple of fifty-five-gallon drums of fuel.”

“I didn’t know you smoked,” I said.

“Quit when I got back. As I stood there the fumes in those drums made me sick to my stomach.”

Hook sat still, looking down at the floor. I slipped the guitar strap over my head and balanced the guitar against the couch.

Hook continued, “An airplane landed and forty guys in clean fatigues got off. I yelled to them, ‘Get the fuck back on that plane. Go home.’ They couldn’t hear me. It wouldn’t have mattered. It was too late.”

“In front of me, on the other side of those drums of fuel, were four bodies waiting to be boarded on that same plane. They were in these black body bags with white name tags hanging from them. It was fucking hot out there. It was so goddamn humid. I saw the heat rising off the asphalt. And there was the smell of the fuel.” Hook’s voice lowered. I leaned in to hear the rest of the story. He still wouldn’t look at me.

“The person guarding the bodies asked if I’d keep watch over them while he finished the paperwork.” Hook glanced up at me. “What were those bodies going to do? Get up and run away?” He looked down again. “I walked over to those four dead bodies next to the fifty-five-gallon drums of fuel, smoking my cigarette. I needed to know who I was guarding. I picked up the tag on the first body. Michael, twenty. Then the other three. James, twenty-one. Andrew, twenty. David, nineteen. I remember those names as though it happened yesterday. Fuck, I thought. They were my age. What were they doing dead? I looked at the fifty-five-gallon drums of fuel, at those four dead bodies, at the new recruits in their clean pants.”

Hook glanced up at me again. “The worse thing I did in Nam? I wanted to throw my cigarette in those drums of fuel and burn up those bodies. I wanted them to disappear. I wanted them to go up in flames. God, I hated those bodies.”

I was silent. Our eyes locked.

“Sometimes when I close my eyes, I feel the heat. I smell those drums of fuel. I see those four dead bodies with the white tags. Michael. James. Andrew. David. They don’t know I hated their guts and wanted them to disappear. Their families don’t know I wanted to burn them.”

I reached out for my guitar and pulled it into my lap. The guitar steadied me.

“I planned on reenlisting. I left my buddies there. I’m not keeping the damn medal.”

Hook got up to leave. He leaned down, kissed me on the top of the head, and tugged my braids with his good hand. “Thanks for listening. It don’t mean nothin’ anyhow.”

“That’s what you keep telling me.”

He stopped for a moment and grinned. “See you later.”

I thought about Michael, James, Andrew, and David. They had mothers and fathers, girlfriends, wives, children, brothers, sisters, uncles, cousins, dentists, aunts, Sunday school teachers, friends, scout leaders, next-door neighbors. They could have been my friend, my lover, the father of my children. They were simply four dead bodies in four black plastic bags with white tags next to two stinking fifty-five-gallon drums of fuel. Goddamn war.

U.S. Soldier Body Count: 21,462