

Counterculture Revolution
A Novel of Anti-War Activists

Excerpt

Wake at the Grande Ballroom, Detroit, 1970

Mickey, Jayna, Joyce, and Carol drank cold beers at a long table in a corner at the other end of the hall from the stage.

Every so often, someone approached Jayna, hands clasped, eyebrows mourning, and offered condolences. When Roberto Martinez, the Mysterians original drummer, came over, Jayna asked him to sit beside her. He was a good man. He took off his sunglasses, and transferred them from hand to hand while speaking. “Me and Duane went to high school together, Mumford, and formed a band, the first band for both of us.” He laughed at the memory. “Hah, yeah, we called ourselves The Red Rockets. Hah, what a dumb name. We wore red jackets like James Dean. Anyways, we had fun. Our first gig was at Mumford high school, and we did pretty good. Duane practiced like a fiend, and played the hell out of his axe, a big smile on his face through the whole gig. He had – whaddaya call it? – charisma, even way back then. I was the nervous one, trying to be Elvis up there, singin’ ‘Hound Dog,’ and stuff like that. But they cheered and clapped, little girls screaming, the whole shebang. It was a good gig. Duane was, was a, a talented kid.” Roberto’s voice cracked, and he put his sunglasses back on. Looking off into the distance, he said, “This war, man. It’s no good. What, what, why are kids just, you know, the draft, the government, all the killing and massacres. I was there.” Roberto paused, and took deep breaths, his eyes staring at horror approaching. “I was there. I made it back, kinda, but I’m still there in the middle of a firefight, still scared. It’s fuckin’ insane, excuse my French.” He touched Jayna’s shoulder. “I’m really sorry for your loss. Duane was a groovy guy.”

With half a smile, Jayna looked up at him. “Thank you, Roberto, you’re very kind.”

When a guitarist swaggered onstage swinging his axe, people applauded and called out, “All right! Do it, brother! Rock & roll! Hey, Wayne, kick out the jams!” The young guitarist laughed and waved. He was about 21, but looked like a teenager. Wayne Kramer was one of the two guitarists in the MC5, which stood for Motor City 5, Detroit’s hottest band, poised to hit it big

across America. Their second album had just been released on the Atlantic label. Soon the rest of the band was onstage, and all eyes were on them: the MC5. The Five!

But they waited, stepping from foot to foot, fingers twitching, like a sprinter ready to get into the blocks, as a White Panther Party representative introduced them. He sounded like a preacher.

“Brothers and sisters! I wanna see a sea of hands out there! I wanna see a sea of hands! I wanna see a little revolution out there! Make some noise! Time has come, brothers. Time has come, sisters. Time has come for you to choose. It takes five seconds to decide. Five seconds for you to decide your purpose here on this planet. Five seconds to decide if you are gonna be the problem, or if you are gonna be the solution. You must choose. It takes five seconds to decide to move. Are you ready to move? Are you ready for revolution? Brothers and sisters, it’s time to testify! I wanna know if you’re ready to get down with it. I wanna know if you’re ready to testify! Are you ready? Are you ready? Now I give you a testimonial: the MC5! The MC5!”

The band, guitars roaring, drums booming, each musician with fire in his eyes, blasted off, and everyone was a passenger. In a falsetto, counterpoint to the heavy music, Wayne sang “Ramblin’ Rose,” with Rob Tyner dancing madly, urging the audience to let it all hang out.

The English girl who was with Terry Knight danced by herself, eyes closed, twirling and spinning, arms waving. “She’s on acid,” said Jayna.

“Far out,” said Joyce.

“What kind?” said Carol.

“Windowpane,” said Jayna. “She wanted to lay a hit on me, but, like, I’m not into it right now. Not today.”

Mickey watched her spin and gyrate. Onstage the two guitarists – Wayne and Fred “Sonic” Smith – were working it, blasting out wave after wave of hot licks. Then she boogied over to Mickey, and shouted, “Hey, man, c’mon and shake a tailfeather. C’mon.” In her English accent, she said, “tay-o fe-thah.” Mickey joined her, swaying and bopping, soon lost in the music. After a while he noticed the photographer snap a few pictures of the mini-skirted English girl, and then sidle over to the table where the three women sat. He took a seat, and started a conversation with Carol. Joyce and Jayna squinted, trying to hear what he said to their friend, but the loud music was overwhelming.

The Grande Ballroom was filling up and heating up. Everyone had long hair, the men’s to their shoulders or sticking out wildly, and the women’s halfway down their backs, and some

waist length. Bell-bottom jeans, black and blue, leather vests, black t-shirts, polka dot or paisley blouses, and tall cowboy boots on both sexes. A few cats wore camouflage headbands, like in Vietnam. Maybe they were vets.

The MC5 played with abandon. To physically augment a crashing note, the guitarists in unison leapt high and landed on their knees. Tyner ran from one side of the stage to the other, arms flailing, head bobbing. The drummer, hands a blur, long hair tossed this way and that, played like a lunatic. At the end of their first song the players were already bathed in sweat, shirts clinging, hair damp, foreheads dripping. Rob Tyner balanced on the edge of the stage. “Brothers and sisters. It’s time to ...” The crowd cheered and screamed. They knew what it was time for. They knew what was coming. “Yeah, it’s time to ...” The cheering and screaming intensified. “It’s time to ... Time to *kick out the jams, motherfuckers!*”

Boom!

“Ah-ah-ah-ah ... Kick out the ja-ams. We gotta kick ‘em *out!*”

Now Mickey was in the middle of the dancing throng, in thrall to this music and its primitive, driving beat. He felt great, eyes closed half the time, swaying and rocking. Where was the English girl? She was gone. So what? Mickey continued dancing, and a girl with a red polka dot mini dress and matching headband joined him. She used her arms a lot, swaying them back and forth, fingers dancing. Mickey mimicked her, and she laughed, head thrown back. Her smile was lovely.

When the photographer asked Carol to dance, she turned to Jayna and Joyce. “I’m gonna dance.”

Right away he offered his hand to Joyce. “Hi-ya partners, groovy to meet you.”

She ignored his hand, saying, “I saw you at the peace rally. Who are you? What’s your name?”

He drew his hand back and put it in his jacket pocket, eyes flicking to Jayna, and back to Joyce. “Eddie. Eddie Lennon. Just like John Lennon. Groovy to meet you, Joyce.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Carol told me.”

Joyce frowned at Carol. She’d have a word with her later. “Right. What’s with all the pictures? You took pictures of me. I don’t like people taking pictures of me.”

He touched his camera bag. “It’s real exciting. We’re doing a story on Vietnam Veterans. The VVAW: Vietnam Vets Against the War. You know – the war, Vietnam insanity, um, the massacre, the bullshit.”

Carol was now next to him. “Right on. An exposé, like. Hey, Eddie, you should interview *us*.”

Joyce stared daggers at Carol, who frowned and shrugged, as if to say, What? What’d I say wrong? Joyce turned back to Eddie: “Who’s *we*? *Who*’s doing the story on Vietnam vets?”

“The magazine is in, like, New York. Noir Magazine. They’re new. We’re new.”

“Noir? Never heard of ‘em.”

“You will. They wanna do, you know, cultural stuff, cultural stories. Counterculture. Groovy stuff.” He looked at Jayna, and smiled. Jayna looked askance at Joyce.

Then he leaned toward the dance floor. “So, Carol, wanna dance?”

“Let’s do it.”

While placing the camera bag on the table, he smiled at Jayna. “Would you please watch my camera and stuff?” She shrugged, and said nothing. Then he draped his yellow jacket over the back of a chair.

Still on the dance floor, Mickey watched them dance. Carol moved pretty well, with a lot of hip motion, but the photographer dude was stiff. He mugged and grinned, and you had to give him credit for trying. Carol laughed, and checked him out when he wasn’t looking at her.

When the song ended, Mickey was exhausted. Returning to the table, he asked Jayna about the photographer dude. “He’s with some New York magazine, he says. Says he’s doing a story on Vietnam Vets.”

“Really? That’s cool. He seems to be into Carol. What’s with his head? That bandage?”

“I dunno. He didn’t say. I didn’t ask.”

“Where’s Joyce?”

She looked around. “Joyce? Probably went to get a drink.”

Jayna and Mickey tried to find Carol and Eddie on the dance floor, but they had disappeared.

“What’s this dude’s name?”

“I dunno. Wait ... Eddie, I think.”

“Hm, nice jacket. Let’s see what’s in his pockets.” Mickey pulled out a pen and a small coiled notepad. With his back to the dance floor, he leafed through the pad quickly – dates and times, letters, abbreviations, seemed like it was written in code.

Jayna said, "What's in it?"

"I dunno. A buncha writing. I dunno what it is."

After replacing the stuff, he checked out the other pocket. Hm. Something metallic. A bullet, a .25 caliber bullet. After sitting down, he opened his hand under the table, and showed Jayna the bullet.

She raised her eyebrows and tapped the table with her fingernail. "Wow."

Mickey said, "Who *is* this guy?"

Jayna shrugged. "A lotta people have guns."

A bottle smashed nearby, followed by loud male voices, and then a screeching, angry female voice. Eddie rushed to the table and picked up his camera. "Gotta get this." He left his yellow jacket where it was, and Mickey dropped the bullet back into the pocket.

Mickey followed him to the ruckus.

A thin, smooth-cheeked kid with black-rimmed glasses, a camouflage headband, and blue-and-red tartan shirt poked his finger toward a girl. She slapped his hand away. "Get your finger outta my face, man." The girl was Joyce, whose cowboy boots made her taller than the guy.

He bared his teeth. "Y'all don't know what the fuck yer talkin' about." He had a southern accent, maybe Tennessee.

Joyce said, "War doesn't make boys men. It makes them dead!"

"Where'd ya get that piece-a wisdom from? Some hippy button you bought at a head shop on Plum Street? You don't know shit."

"Oh yeah? McGovern said the war is an utter disaster. There's nothing good to say about it. By going over there and fighting Nixon's war, you justify his imperialism, and his, um, his war mongering. Do you know how many innocent people have been murdered in Vietnam by US troops? How many babies did *you* kill over there?"

His face twisted into a sour smirk. "Me? I shot every fucking thing that moved – man, woman, child, dog, or reptile – if I thought it could kill me. A six-year-old can pull a trigger. And fuck all you pussies who never heard a round whiz by your head. Just eat shit and die. Talk to me about this after your best friend has been turned to mush by a grenade and his brains are splattered all over you. Talk to me when—"

"What about My Lai?" Joyce took a step closer. Now they were almost nose to nose. "The My Lai Massacre? Those guys, army guys just like you, man, they just mowed those people down,

innocent people. Babies! How can a baby be the enemy? There's stories. You gotta know the stories, man, about murder, torture, rape, and scalping. *Scalping*, man! And, and some maniacs have, uh, necklaces made of human ears. You guys are perpetrating some fucked-up shit."

With trembling fingers the kid pushed his glasses up his nose. "That case ain't gone to trial yet. Don't judge a man 'til the evidence is in." He pointed at her, but then pulled his hand back quickly. He pointed at the cat beside her, a kid about eighteen with wavy blonde hair about two feet long. "I hope *you're* drafted."

The kid raised his chin proudly, saying, "I wouldn't go."

Joyce spoke for him. "He wouldn't go. He wouldn't fight Nixon's imperialist war. We hate Nixon, and we hate this war."

"OK, yeah, you hate the war. You really think most those men drafted wanna be out there on the killing fields fighting gooks? If you do, then you're a fuckin' moron, and I have no respect for your intelligence. Most those men had the mentality they were gonna survive no matter what, to see their family and wives and girlfriends agin one day."

Joyce rolled her eyes. "Oh, for Christ's sake, *don't* call them gooks. See? That's what I'm talking about. You know how *bad* that sounds? That's racist. This war is racist."

The kid held up his hands. "Well, fuck, that's what they're called. They're the enemy. Everybody called 'em that." He cut the air with the back of his hand. "Forget that shit. Just dig this: War is fucking hell. If you weren't there, you have no right to talk about it, and what a man should or shouldn't do during war time. Were we cold-blooded? Sure, we were. Did we need to be, in order to survive? Sure, we did. Easy to judge when you're not the one fighting and dying. And there it is. Boom. And I sleep real good at nights."

Joyce sighed heavily. "But you gotta see that if everybody refuses to go to war, there won't be war. The big shots in government are using you to make money. You, a human being, are a business expense. You are cannon fodder, man, a pawn in their game. What the fuck is this Vietnam insanity all about? So some generals in D.C. can get more medals for their chests? So the military-industrial complex can make more money? So politicians can brag about 'our brave soldiers'? It's all bullshit."

The kid's eyes opened wide. "OK. OK. You made a point. The US government drafted thousands of us, hundreds of thousands of us. They forced us into their war where we had to survive or die. All I could think about was, Stay alive, Stay alive. You'll get back some day, and

you'll sit at a table with a tablecloth, and you'll feel the silky skin of a girl, and you'll have a beer at a cool bar, and listen to rock and roll again. Just stay alive. So, I'm lucky enough to get home in one piece, and what do I get for it? Criticism and insults from fucking idiots like you. Go fuck yourself, bitch."

Eddie snapped pictures.

The guy beside Joyce said, "Hey, buddy, watch your mouth."

Other men pushed closer, glaring at the baby-faced veteran.

The vet took off his headband, wiped sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, and replaced it. He bowed slightly toward Joyce. "I apologize. Heat of battle, huh? I'm sure you're a fine lady, and you are entitled to your opinion. I assume we agree to disagree, here." His southern accent almost disappeared. "May I buy you a drink?"

Joyce narrowed her eyes, thinking, What a smooth son of a bitch this guy is. Maybe I was a bit rough on him. After all, he's a pawn. Nixon and his criminal cronies are the enemies. The draft is the enemy. Every draft board should be blown up. She waved him off. "No, thank you. I gotta get back to my friends."

He bowed his head again. "It was good meeting you." From lowered eyes, he checked out the men surrounding him. Then he raised his chin and walked slowly past them and back to his table. He had survived Vietnam, and he would survive this pussy group of hippies, no hassle. The band was still rockin' their asses off up on stage.