

## Woodstock – Ian Margieson.

### Woodstock – a synopsis.

Forty years on from the greatest music festival of all-time, comes the most personal story of them all; from a man who didn't hear a single note. It is the summer of 2005 and when his daughter announces that she is pregnant and plans to turn her back on a promising postgraduate musical career, fifty-six year old novelist and rock music aficionado, Joseph Morrison finds himself forced to re-evaluate his own life. He finds himself recalling the friendship he had as a child in 1950s Belfast with the elderly, yet beguiling shopkeeper, Mr Rimbaud. He finds himself too, back in 1969, the year he took his first trip abroad, heading for Bethel, New York and one of the greatest cultural events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, The Woodstock Music & Arts Festival.

Having arrived three days too late, Joseph meets the last remaining person left at the festival, an archetypal, spaced-out hippie-chick who refers to herself only as Janis. Having persuaded the young Irishman to escort her back home to Port Arthur, Texas, Janis proceeds to lead Joseph on an awakening road trip across the States that will leave both of them changed for life. Travelling through Tennessee, into the Mississippi Delta and beyond, and encountering a dead hobo, a dysfunctional hillbilly family and a distracted police officer along the way, the two find themselves drawn into a slow-burning friendship that neither ever expected. After finally confiding her true identity to him as they near their journey's end, Janis then tells Joseph that she is suffering from cancer, but disappears in the middle of the night, leaving the young man wondering about her fate for more than thirty years.

The story concludes with a double postscript. Firstly, we learn that Joseph himself suffered with cancer five years ago and took an emotional trip back to America, where he met up with Janis's son, whom she had named Joseph after her road trip companion of 1969. The

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two experience a poignant coming together of memories, as Joseph learns the surprising truth about what happened to Janis after her disappearance all those years before. He travels to Philadelphia where the now middle-aged Janis, having fought cancer for most of her life, runs her own coffee shop and an emotional reunion ensues. Finally, having recalled his own youthful days, Joseph encourages his wayward daughter to follow her own heart and he at last comes to terms with her decision and his place as expectant grandparent to her child.

The novel closes, modern day, with Joseph telephoning Janis late one night, having not spoken to her since their reunion five years ago with an offer of a return trip to the American South, tantalisingly setting up the sequel.