



Deed So, a coming of age story, takes place in a small Southern town in 1962. It was the last year of innocence -- the year before the Kennedy assassination, the civil rights struggle, feminist activism and the Vietnam War changed America forever.

Brainy twelve-year-old Agnes Hayden Bashford (Haddie) wants nothing more than to leave Wicomico Corners and escape to the exciting world beyond its narrow, tradition-bound borders. A series of shocking incidents brings the outside world crashing down on her backward village, exposing long-buried family secrets and setting Haddie on a collision course with an unstable firebrand who will have to silence her to protect his identity.

A tragic act of violence throws this quiet backwater into the maelstrom of change, thrusting the Bashford family into the vile cauldron of bigotry and hatred. Haddie witnesses the killing of a Negro teen by a white down-on-his-luck farmer. Ambrose Slater rushes to defend his son, Elmer, a retarded boy, outnumbered in an after-school fight, and kills Jimmy Young, the delinquent son of a single mother. The ensuing trial, manipulated by local political aspirants, attracts the attention of outside agitators who see it as a civil rights cause celeb.

The court proceedings and the demonstrations divide the town, pitting neighbor against neighbor. Violence escalates from street scuffles to mob action. Out of the chaos, an arsonist is born, who terrorizes the town, convincing each faction he does the bidding of the opposition. Barns and abandoned buildings burn and, finally, an occupied house is set ablaze, and two autistic children die in the conflagration. Fear and suspicion stalk the community.

Haddie aches to be like her friend Gideon Albright who has joined the army and is seeing the exotic destinations of her dreams. Idealistic Gideon goes to Vietnam to promote democracy, but discovers at the tragic battle of Ap Bac, that the corrupt Vietnamese government has other priorities. He returns home wounded in body and spirit. Haddie fights to break through his combat-induced shell while struggling with her own feelings for Gideon, which are changing at the speed of light from friendship to first love.

Haddie's father, Thomas Bashford, and his cousin Hayden Kent are both veterans of WW II. They have different worldviews, but a shared love for the peace and prosperity of their civilian life in the bucolic home of their ancestors. As a consequence of the heartbreaking events in Wicomico Corners, a wartime decision by Hayden comes to light, destroying his lifelong friendship with Thomas.

At the funeral of the autistic children, Thomas learns from the grieving mother, Charlotte Maddox, that while he was away at war all those years ago, his sweetheart, Eliza Maddox and Hayden had married. The girl died before Thomas returned from the Navy, and Hayden never told him of the wedding. Thomas feels betrayed. When he learns Eliza died in childbirth, Thomas burns with rage at his cousin. The gulf between Thomas and Hayden widens when they take opposite sides regarding the trial, the deepening violence and the town's response to it.

Already frightened because she will have to testify in court, Haddie discovers she not the arsonist is responsible for the death of the children. While babysitting them, Haddie allows Edwin to escape. The boy leads her a desperate chase across the fields at night and discovers Haddie's secret hideaway where she stashes smoking materials. Haddie keeps the incident from her parents, but when the Maddox home burns, she realizes Edwin went back for the zippo and lighter fluid. She finally tells the truth, but no one will believe her. She turns to Gideon, but Gideon is a haunted man, unbalanced by his war experiences. His twisted way of dealing with these demons puts him on an explosive course with the unfolding local tragedy.

Long dead Eliza's love child, Victoria Maddox, is Gideon's girlfriend. When Gideon is arrested, Victoria accuses Haddie of telling her tortured lover she is illegitimate and causing him to snap.

As the tension mounts in the tight-knit community, peaceful citizens commit outrageous acts and innocent townspeople are suddenly at risk. Among them is Erasmus Jackson, also a veteran and the most successful Negro farmer in the region; Cleo Young, a caring, devout housekeeper who watches over the Maddox family and helps her niece, Desire, cope with the loss of her eldest son; and Reverend Wilfred Harrison, who tries to lead his community to justice.

The arsonist, a troubled young man increasingly disconnected from the community, has only one remaining link to normalcy -- Gideon, the only person who can reason with him. When Gideon dies, the misfit is cut loose forever, and determines to visit one last grandiose act of vengeance on the community. Haddie and her girlfriends become entangled in his horrible plan and Haddie is forced to choose between saving herself and rescuing her friends.

Deed So is a novel in the tradition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We are almost upon the fiftieth anniversary of the publishing of Harper Lee's masterpiece (1960-2010). ***Deed So*** lays bare the issues that marked the Sixties as a turning point in American History.