



# LOVE NEVER DIES

From the author of 'Chasing Hope', 'Breaking Cover',  
'True Calling' and 'No Half Measures'

# Jenny Walker

*'Can it get a second chance?'*

LOVE  
NEVER DIES

JENNY WALKER

[www.jennywalker.net](http://www.jennywalker.net)

Copyright © 2024 by Jenny Walker

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents and places are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

Jenny Walker asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

# ONE

**31<sup>st</sup> December 2023**

The moment Becky Stirling heard the voices in the distance, there were two things she instantly knew. Firstly, that she recognized the voices, which may have seemed strange as she had never actually heard them before. Secondly, she realized she had to leave. Immediately.

Standing there, she had lost all track of time, the mist rising from the well-groomed grassy lawns all around, the icy air almost freezing her nostrils with each deep inhalation. Her chest was heaving, as if she was drowning in the final acceptance of the reality that for two years she had been trying to push away. If she hadn't seen what lay before her, perhaps she could still believe it might not be true. Yet as she looked at it one last time, the final grim testament to the end of her journey of hope that had begun seventeen years previously was undeniable, her vision blurred by the river of tears that had poured from her since she had first laid eyes on it.

Realizing for the first time since she had stopped there that she was shivering violently, she pulled her knee-length camel coat tightly closed. She cast a quick glance to her left, in the direction of the voices that drew ever nearer. Even at a distance, she knew without a doubt it was them. Becky had to fight an almost overpowering urge to run toward them, to tell them. *To tell them what?* She shook her head and knew she had to go. Another wave of searing grief coursed through her body as she turned to leave. Her boots almost slipped as she rejoined the frosty asphalt that meandered between the grassy islands. Regaining her balance, she cast

one last wistful glance over her shoulder at the approaching mismatched duo, before resolutely striding away in the opposite direction. It was all she could do to hold herself together, to focus on taking one step after another, to stop herself from crumpling to the ground in a heap. That might come later.

So much for the fresh new start, a new chapter in her life. And yet, she always knew she had to face this. To ever think of moving on, she had to first come to this place. Despite having steeled herself for this moment, suspecting how agonizing it would be, the intensity of her reaction had still taken her by surprise.

A quick glance behind and her heart jumped as she saw he had stopped, standing where she had just been, yet looking over in her direction. Whipping her head back, she picked up her pace and circled back down to the road where her rental car waited.

As she fell into the driver's seat and closed the door, her control slipped. With her head buried in her hands, she sobbed for the years that had been taken from them both, the past and the future stolen away in one fell swoop.

When she closed her eyes, she could still see the words. The words that would likely haunt her dreams for many nights to come...

*Holly Marshall*

*7th September 1990 - 5th January 2019*

*Beloved wife to Jack, cherished mother of Isla*

*Taken too soon*

\*\*\*

# TWO

The drive back from Alexandria to her Arlington hotel had been a blur. It was almost a miracle that she made it back unscathed. Feeling that she was fast unraveling, Becky closed the door of her hotel room behind her, leaned back against it and then slowly slid to the floor. The tears had dried, but the hollow emptiness in the core of her being that replaced them was, if anything, even worse. Although it was barely noon, she felt a wave of exhaustion break over her. It took every ounce of remaining strength to drag herself to her feet and stagger over to the bed. Slumping down on top of it, she slowly unzipped her boots and shimmied out of her tight jeans. Crawling under the covers, she curled up into a ball and bit her lip as another wave of anguish rose up within her. She screwed her eyes tightly shut and wondered if she'd ever want to open them again.

\* \* \*

"Table for one, please." Becky said, as the hostess greeted her. Her badge bore the name Irene.

"Sure thing," Irene replied, doing a sharp double-take as she looked at Becky. She frowned briefly, "I thought for a moment I recognized you, but from your accent, you don't sound like a local. Scottish, yes?"

Becky smiled and nodded. "That's right." Her heart had skipped a beat. This was always the risk with what she was doing. *Who else might think they recognized her?* She had debated it back and forth as she had driven back to Alexandria late that afternoon. In the restaurant parking lot, she had almost changed her mind and driven off. But again, this was something she felt she needed to do, as if she owed it to the... memory? *Can it be a memory if it wasn't really known before?*

Becky stopped short. "Excuse me, could I sit at this booth, please?" *It was this one in the photos.* She was sure of it.

Irene turned and shrugged. "Yes, sure; no problem."

Becky slid into the booth and settled on the red leather-covered bench. Irene left the menu with her and said one of the waitresses would be with her shortly. Becky took a deep breath, ignoring the menu for now. Here she was. For better or worse. She had wanted to do this. One last tribute before getting on with her life. If that were possible.

When she had hauled herself out of bed earlier that afternoon, having crashed out for about three hours, the reflection that had greeted her in the mirror was a very sorry sight. Dark make-up stains trailed down her cheeks and she looked pale and ghostly. It was only her sheer determination to work through what she had planned that got her going again. An extended shower revived her to some degree. She had debated whether to go casual and lowkey, but then decided that if it was to be done, she would do it properly.

Wearing her long fitted black dress and matching pumps, she had added a silver necklace and matching drop earrings, leaving the almost ever-present diamond studs twinkling in her second holes. Her long blonde hair was in a much better state after a vigorous blow-dry and straightening session. She had checked her make-up in the mirror and managed to give her reflection a wan smile. "That will do," she murmured. "Much better." She had actually surprised herself with the turnaround from an hour or two previous.

Coming back to the present, Becky picked up the menu from the table and began to peruse it, still half-distracted by the emotions that were still bubbling below the surface. She could still hear those two voices from earlier in her head.

Suddenly, she glanced up and realized the voices weren't in her head. Her stomach dropped within her as she saw them standing before Irene, just inside the

entrance. She had considered this possibility, but had dismissed it as being an incredibly unlikely eventuality. Panicking, she looked around, wondering what she could do. She spotted the sign for the restrooms and grabbed her purse.

Hearing light footsteps running in her direction, she knew she was too late. Looking up with dread rising from deep within, she saw the fair-haired angel standing a few feet away, mouth gaping open and staring wide-eyed at Becky.

“Mom... is that you?”

\*\*\*



# THREE

Becky's mouth opened and closed. No words were forming in her mind. Before she could reboot her brain, another voice closed in. "Isla, honey," he said. "What are you doing running over to this lady like that? I'm sorry, ma'am—"

Becky slowly raised her head and reluctantly met his curious gaze.

"Oh my... what? No...," he stammered. All color drained from him and his face went slack. His eyelids began to flutter and he reached for the edge of the table to steady himself.

Irene rushed over, spotting the imminent faint. "Hey Jack, you OK?"

Becky slowly stood. "I think you'd better sit down," she said softly.

At the sound of her voice, he looked even more puzzled, were that possible, but allowed Irene to help him onto the bench opposite Becky.

"Some water, perhaps?" Becky asked Irene, who stood for a second just watching before nodding and scuttling over to the bar.

"Are you OK?" Becky asked, noticing that Isla had shuffled herself onto the bench beside her and was looking up at her, transfixed.

Jack swallowed hard, closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths before looking back at Becky. "You're... you're not her, but..."

"I'm sorry," Becky said, spreading her hands and slowly resting them palms down on the table before her. "I didn't mean to upset you. If I'd known... I wouldn't have come here."

“Who are you?” Isla asked with fascination, her eyes looking as if they might pop out of their sockets. “You look so much like my Mommy, but you don’t sound like her.” Her little brow wrinkled.

Becky didn’t know where to turn or look. She forced herself to meet the little girl’s gaze and forced a smile. She placed a hand on Isla’s shoulder. “I know, sweetheart, I’m sorry. This must be so confusing.”

Jack took a long slow drink from the glass of water Irene had just deposited in front of him. “I think I have an idea,” he began, “but maybe you should introduce yourself.”

She nodded. “My name is Becky Stirling,” her voice quavered. She stopped, unsure of what to say next.

As the pause reached the point of awkwardness, he spoke up, “I’m Jack Marshall and this is Isla... but I think you already know that, don’t you?”

Becky slowly held up a hand. “Yes, I do. I’m sorry. I don’t know how to explain this.” She hesitated. “I never planned for this.”

Jack nodded slowly, “You’re Holly’s twin—,” he paused and frowned for a moment. “Her twin sister?” he asked softly, his brow furrowing.

Becky sighed. “Yes, I am. I’m so sorry, I didn’t want... no, I mean I never intended to have this happen.”

Jack nodded slowly. “That was you, this morning, wasn’t it? At the cemetery?”

“It was,” she said softly. “Again, I’m sorry for intruding. Perhaps it might be better if I left.”

“Are you kidding?” Jack said, reaching out and placing a gentle hand on her arm. “Look, yeah, this is a bombshell for sure, but, I mean, wow, you’re Holly’s sister. I can’t believe it. After all this time. You can’t just up and leave. Why would you hide from us?”

“No, I guess you’re right,” Becky replied. “And it’s not that I didn’t want to meet you, but I thought my appearance might be difficult for you and Isla. I didn’t want to cause you any pain.” She smiled sadly and softly added, “More pain.”

“Why don’t you sound like Mommy?” Isla asked. “You look so much like her.”

Becky smiled at her. “I’m from Scotland. Or at least I spent most of my life there growing up. I was born in Philadelphia though, as your Mum was.”

Isla rolled her eyes, "Well, duh! I know that. I *do* know what twins means." She inclined her head. "I am eight years old, you know?"

"Isla!" Jack exclaimed. "Look, I'm sorry..."

Becky laughed and waved a hand. "No, no, it's fine."

Jack grimaced. "Eight years going on teenager, more like."

"Da-ad," Isla complained. Looking at Becky, she sighed. "It's like he thinks I'll never grow up." Jack's mouth opened, but before he could say anything, Isla continued, "So, this means you are my Aunt Becky, right?"

Becky hesitated and then nodded slowly. "I guess it does, yes."

"And then I'm your niece," Isla reasoned.

"Yes, that is true."

Isla pondered. "I've never had an aunt before."

Jack managed to get a word in. "I've got one unmarried brother and Holly, well yeah... obviously, up till now, we didn't know where her twin... sister was."

"Have you got any other nieces?" Isla interrupted.

Becky looked from Jack, back to Isla, somewhat bemused and then shook her head. "No, I haven't. You're the only one."

Isla nodded sagely. "Guess I'm your favorite niece then."

Both Becky and Jack burst out laughing.

"What?" Isla protested. "I'm just saying."

"OK, Miss Favorite Niece," Jack said, a twinkle in his eye, "how about you let your 'Aunt' get a few words in?"

"Fine," Isla murmured as she folded her arms, a cheeky grin spreading across her face. She surreptitiously slid an arm around Becky's and lent against it.

Becky blinked hard a few times and bit her lip before regaining her composure.

Jack met her gaze and inclined his head towards Isla, raising an eyebrow.

Becky gently shook her head. "It's fine," she murmured and put her other hand on Isla's arm, pulling her in closer. "It's all just a lot for me too."

"So, Scotland?" Jack prompted gently.

Becky nodded. "Yes, my Mum and I moved back when I was two years old. She's from Edinburgh. My... so-called Dad - who I never really knew - apparently changed his mind on the whole adoption thing being a good idea." Becky forced a smile. "Nothing like being rejected by another parent, huh?"

Jack gave a sympathetic smile. "Your, that is, your and Holly's birth Mum - you know the story then, I take it?"

Becky shrugged. "Drugs, booze, boyfriends, twins didn't really fit in. Department of children and family services. What more is there to say?"

"Scotland," Jack mused again. "No wonder we could never find you."

*That was one reason.*

"So... Holly - I mean - you were both trying to find me?" Becky asked, a huskiness in her voice.

"Hell, yes," Jack said. "You were never far from her thoughts. But DCFs were just a disaster with records from around that time, and less than helpful. It was just brick wall after brick wall. And then, well, when Holly got sick..."

He broke off as the waitress hovered beside their table. "Are you guys ready to order?"

Jack looked at Becky questioningly.

She shrugged.

Isla spoke up, "Yes, I'm ready. I'll have the Mac'n'cheese, please." She turned to Becky. "That's my favorite. I always have that here."

Becky took a moment and then ordered one of the fish dishes and Jack asked for a burger. After the waitress left, Becky cleared her throat. "I'm sorry for crashing your New Year's Eve dinner. I didn't expect you guys to be here and, with the jetlag still working on me, I came early, thinking there would be less chance."

Jack waved a hand. "Are you kidding? OK, granted I had the near-miss heart attack when I first saw you, but this is like a miracle." He paused. "When did you fly in?"

"Just yesterday."

"And you came, just to... to... well I dunno, pay your respects?" He winced. "That sounds so inadequate."

"Yeah, I know what you mean though," Becky said. "And yes, I have been wanting... well perhaps more like needing to come here to do this. But I'm also here for work."

Jack nodded. "I have like so many questions for you. I don't know where to start. But tell me then, work? What do you do?"

“I’m a journalist. For The Times,” she replied. She grinned, “And that’s not the New York version, but the original one.”

He laughed. “If you say so. Here for a story then?” He gave a wry grin and pointed around the table. “Although it seems you are the story of the hour, if not the year.”

Becky shook her head. “Again, not my intention. But yes, here on assignment.”

Jack’s expression became sombre. “So you obviously found Holly. You succeeded where we failed.” He took a deep breath. “If only... you’d come sooner.” The pain evident in his voice.

Becky looked down at the table. “I would have.” She shook her head. “I only finally tracked Holly and you guys down... two years ago.” She looked up at Jack. “Two years too late.” She blinked hard and lifted a hand to her eyes, before resting it back on the table.

Jack reached across and took her hand. “Hey, I’m so sorry. I can only imagine how that felt.”

She bit her lip. “Yeah.”

“So, how did you find us? Do you mind telling?”

“Of course. Like you and Holly, I was fighting a losing battle with Pennsylvania DCFS. Since I turned eighteen I’d been trying to get more information. My mother - my adoptive mother that is - wasn’t much help. She didn’t see any value in ancient history, as she put it. She only told me I was a twin when I was sixteen. From that moment, I could barely think of anything apart from finding my sister. But for years, I was getting nowhere.”

“Sounds familiar,” Jack sympathized. “What made the difference?”

“Just over two years ago, I signed up to a load of DNA family tree type services. You know the ones where you send a swab of your DNA off to them and they tell you if they’ve found anyone else in their database who was a match.”

Jack nodded vigorously, “Yes, yes, of course. Holly had signed up to a few of those too but there were no hits.”

“Yeah, it must have been before I signed up. So most of them came back to me saying no match. But there was this one that said ‘no living match’. I didn’t think anything of it at first. Then I wondered. And then I hoped it meant nothing. Because

if it was something..." She shrugged. "But I couldn't let it go. I plagued them to give me more information but they just said there was nothing more to say."

"I'm guessing, you didn't take no for an answer?"

"First I had to test my theory. I got a colleague to send his sample in to this company and waited to see his result. It came back as simply 'no match'."

"So then you knew?"

"I did and I didn't. I still hoped I was wrong, but it was the only lead I had. I'm not overly proud of what I did next." She screwed up her face.

"I promise not to judge you," Jack said gently.

"A year or two previous, I'd done a story on the dark web, hackers and the like, so I had a contact that I could persuade to help me out..."

Jack's eyes widened. "You got him to hack their database?"

She smiled awkwardly. "Yeah. I didn't know what else to do." Her face fell. "But it worked. He came back with a name and address."

"But then you found out?" Jack prompted softly. "How?"

She shrugged and looked away. "Two minutes on Google." She swallowed hard. "And I found her blog."

"I'm sorry," Jack murmured.

"There she was, looking back at me in the photos. My sister. My twin sister. My beautiful twin sister." Her voice caught. "But within a few moments I realized she was telling the story of her illness in the pages of her blog, raising awareness, getting support for breast cancer. And from the tributes in the comments on the front page... I knew I was too late." A tear tripped over her lower eyelid and she wiped it away. "She was so young. Just twenty-five when she was diagnosed. How can that be?"

Jack nodded sadly. "Isla, honey, would you go and ask Irene if she could get us more water?"

"But there's still some in the jug, Daddy!" she protested.

"I know, but let's get some more. Please?"

"OK," she sighed and slid out of the booth.

Jack leaned forward and spoke quickly. "She noticed a lump mid pregnancy with Isla. The hormones of pregnancy made it advance faster. The doctors gave 'options', but there was only one option in our minds. By the time Isla arrived... things weren't

good. She was young and strong, she fought hard, we all did. But the clock was ticking..." His voice trailed off as Isla returned.

Becky tried to fight the tears.

"Are you OK, Aunt Becky?"

She forced a smile and patted Isla's arm. "I'm just sad, Isla. I'm so sorry for you and your Dad, and for me. I wish I'd known your Mom. But I kind of did get to know her as I read her blog. I found out all about you guys and how wonderful you were."

*And then some.*

Isla nodded. "I helped her write some of it and I drew some of the pictures."

"I could see that, they are really good."

Isla said, "And I helped her pick the name for it. She had a few names and wanted me to help her."

Becky murmured, "Love never dies."

\*\*\*

# FOUR

Jack couldn't help stealing glances over at Becky as they ate their food. Isla was chattering away to her, telling her about school, friends, and just about anything that came into her head. His mind was racing. His heart too. For so long, he had been in a rut of numb survival. Yes, he had done his best to care for Isla and ensure she was loved in every way. But as the initial crushing agony of losing Holly had slowly dimmed to a gnawing sense of ongoing loss, he had just sought to make it through one day after another. Work provided some distraction. But the moments of joy and the sense of being alive were few and far between.

Meeting Becky that evening had been like an electric shock to his system. With each glance, he marveled at how like Holly she was. But he also noticed the little differences. Now that he could observe her closely, he could see the minor variations in each feature he examined. And the accent? While it was obviously different, she had tones and inflections that did sound like Holly. He had to admit that her soft Scottish burr was very becoming. Suddenly he realized that both Becky and Isla were looking at him. Isla quirked an eyebrow.

"Uhh, what was that?" he asked.

Isla sighed, "I asked, Daddy, why are you staring at Aunt Becky like that."

He felt his cheeks flush instantly and as his gaze flicked back to Becky, he saw a similar reaction on her part. "Umm, I... well...," he winced. "Sorry, I just can't help it. You are so like her, but yet you are quite different."

"How so?" Becky asked, inclining her head, a little smile toying with the corner of her mouth.



He felt himself blush more. "You're trying to make this difficult, aren't you?" he asked, trying to evade her question.

She shrugged. "I'm just interested. What do you see?"

Jack laughed. "OK, you want to know? I see an incredibly beautiful woman, the like of which I've only ever seen once before in my life."

Becky's mouth dropped open and he took some pleasure in seeing the redness in her cheeks grow. "OK, sorry I asked," she murmured, but she couldn't keep the smile from her face.

Isla looked up at Becky and then, reaching up with one hand, gently brushed Becky's hair away from the right side of her face.

"What are you doing, Isla?" Jack asked.

Isla released Becky's hair. "I was seeing if she had a scar like Mommy."

"A scar?" Becky asked.

Jack nodded. "Holly had a little scar on her forehead. From a kitchen cupboard door. She was rather clumsy, kept bumping herself."

Isla grinned. "We called her Holly Potter. You know, like Harry and his scar."

Becky laughed. "You read Harry Potter?"

"I'm on the second book," Isla said proudly.

"Holly loved to read to her. Taught Isla to read when she was three years old and she hasn't looked back since." He winked and leaned in, "It's great. It's the only time I get peace!"

"Dad!" Isla exclaimed, trying to look angry, but then dissolving in a fit of giggles. She turned back to Becky. "Are you clumsy too?"

Becky grinned. "I've had my moments. Look here." She pointed to the inside of her right wrist where there was a linear purple scar.

"How did you get that?" Isla asked, tracing it with her fingers.

"Oh, was that when I was sky-diving from an airplane and I cut myself on the parachute release? Or was it when I was wrestling the crocodile?"

"No way!" Isla said, her eyes bulging.

Becky laughed and tousled Isla's blonde curls. "No, my life isn't that exciting. If you must know, I... tripped and fell and my hand went through a window at school."

"What's the most exciting thing that has happened to you?" Isla asked.

Becky hesitated. "You know, I think it is meeting both of you."

“You’re just saying that!” the little girl protested.

Becky shook her head and blinked a few times. “No, I’m not. I really mean that.”

As she looked back over at Jack, seeming a little self-conscious, he couldn’t quite describe the feeling inside. It had been a long time since he had felt anything like it.

“What’s your biggest secret, Auntie Becky?” Isla persisted.

“So many questions!” Becky laughed. She shifted in her seat and looked momentarily uncomfortable. After a pause, she smiled. “I’ve got a black belt in Ju Jitsu.”

“What?” Isla asked. “Like kung fu type stuff. No way!”

Becky nodded. “Yes way. That one’s true.”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

She shrugged. “I got picked on at school.” She gave an awkward smile. “I don’t get picked on any more.”

Isla looked up at Becky and again pushed the hair back from her face and nodded. “I was right, look!”

Jack spread his hands. “What now, madam?”

Isla pointed to Becky’s ears. “See, she has the diamonds like Mommy had.”

Becky self-consciously lifted a hand to finger one of her diamond studs.

Isla continued apace. “Did you know that Mommy got those done after I was born? She called them her Isla diamonds and never took them out.”

Becky bit her lip and then forced a smile. “Yeah, I read about that on the blog. Very special.” She looked over at Jack, seeming almost apologetic. “After I read that...,” she paused, “well I went and got my second piercings done.” She turned to Isla. “I call these my Holly diamonds. To always remind me about your Mom.”

Isla’s eyes widened. “Wow. That’s cool.” Turning to Jack, she continued, “Dad, can I—”

Jack held up a hand. “Isla, we’ve talked about this. Maybe when you are older.”

Isla tugged Becky’s arm. “What do you think, Aunt Becky? Is eight not old enough? What age were you?”

Becky laughed. “Oh, I’m not getting dragged into this. You should listen to your Dad. I was much older, I was twenty-two when I first got my ears pierced.”

“Really?” Isla asked, screwing up her face. “*That old?*”

Becky and Jack shared a look and couldn’t help but laugh.

After they finished their meal and their waitress had left the check for them - Jack having insisted he was paying - they got up to leave.

Just inside the door, he hesitated. "Look, it's still early, only 7.30. How about you follow us back to our place so we can catch up more?"

"Are you sure?" Becky asked.

"Oh yes," Isla said, clapping her hands. "I can show you my room."

"Yeah," Jack said, suddenly feeling somewhat self-conscious. "We can show you lots of photos of Holly and talk some more."

\*\*\*

# FIVE

Back at the house, Becky had lost track of time as they sat there together, the three of them. Isla nestled in between them on the sofa in the den before she had been dispatched to bed under protest. They'd looked through endless photo albums. They'd laughed at funny memories; there had been more than a few tears at their shared loss. She'd told Jack about her progression through the ranks at The Times, leading to her being assigned to D.C. as the White House correspondent. Jack had seemed seriously impressed. She wondered if there could be something more behind his reaction when she then told him it was a two-year assignment. With some encouragement and prompting, he told her about his work with a D.C. charitable foundation as a lawyer advocating for human rights. The man she had read about on Holly's blog was everything her sister had said: kind, charming, gentle and funny. She tried to ignore the crazy thoughts in her head. *How many times had she read that blog, again and again, poring over all the photos?*

"Penny for your thoughts?" he asked.

She smiled. "This has been lovely. I never imagined this. Being able to meet you both."

"It has," he said, an intense look in his eyes. "I'd love you to be a part of our lives here. It would be good for Isla." He paused and softly added, "And for me."

She fought the urge to look away. "That sounds good to me," she said shyly. "As long as you don't think I'll make things... you know harder. Always reminding you of Holly."

Jack surprised her by reaching over and taking her hand. “Not that reminding me of Holly would ever be a bad thing, but it’s you I want to get to know and I want Isla to have the opportunity to spend time with you too.”

“I’d like that very much,” Becky said, her heart tapping out a rapid rhythm inside her chest. She smothered a yawn. “Sorry. I’m really beat. The jetlag is catching up with me. It’s late, perhaps I should go.”

They both stood, awkwardly, then Jack gave a little chuckle.

“What?” Becky asked.

“Blackbelt? Really?”

She shrugged. “I could have you on the ground in seconds, begging for mercy.”

He laughed. “I don’t beli—” He gasped as he suddenly found himself on his back on the rug, looking up at Becky leaning over him pinning his arms to the ground.

She grinned apologetically and released his arms. “Sorry. You were saying?”

He looked up into her clear blue eyes. She blinked and smiled shyly. Fireworks sounded in the distance.

“Happy New Year,” she murmured.

He smiled up at her and then lifted his face to hers and gently kissed her. “Happy New Year to you too.”

She rolled off to one side and they self-consciously sat up beside one another, backs against the sofa.

“I’m sorry...,” Jack began.

“No, don’t be,” Becky said. “Please don’t be.” She looked at him closely. “But were you kissing me or... Holly?”

He drew near and gently kissed her again. “I’m kissing you. I know this is strange. Perhaps too weird. But five days before she died, Holly made me promise to make the same resolution each new year.” He smiled sadly. “It was that if I ever found another woman half as beautiful as her, who could make me laugh despite everything, that I’d be open to see what might happen.” He pushed the hair back from Becky’s face. “And you’re every bit as beautiful.”

“Oh Jack,” she murmured, biting her lip. “I’d love to see what’s possible... but there’s something I need to tell you and it might change everything.”

“You’re not married, are you?” he asked, with a sudden look of concern.

“What? Oh no, it’s not that.” She waved a hand, and her heart skipped at the blatant relief she saw on Jack’s face.

“OK, well then, sure you can tell me anything,” he said, resting his hand on top of hers.

She looked away. “So, was there anything else you think that made it harder for Holly to find me?”

He nodded slowly. “Yeah, I’ve realized that DCFS screwed up big time. They told us Holly had a twin brother. It’s no wonder we got nowhere.”

Becky took a deep breath. After her last failed relationship, she had decided she had to get it out there from the first kiss. She was already one kiss too late on that front. *And this time?* This time, she felt like she was already too far in. It mattered more than ever. She barely allowed herself to hope, but this evening had changed everything. And she couldn’t bear the thought of letting it go further and then it falling apart like it had every other time.

“Jack, DCFS weren’t wrong,” she said softly, looking intently into his eyes. “Holly *had* a twin brother.” She paused and took a deep breath. “But for the last ten years or so, she had a twin sister.”

He sat there looking stunned for a moment. He slowly exhaled. “Wow. Just when I thought this evening had delivered all the shocks I could imagine.”

Becky winced. “I’m sorry. Perhaps I should go.”

He put a hand on her arm and then pulled her close, until her head rested on his shoulder. “Oh Becky, I guess there’s a lot more to find out about you, isn’t there?” he mused.

“Yeah,” she said hesitatingly. “Life is never straightforward. Listen, I understand if this—”

He turned to her and put a finger on her lips. “Does this change what Holly said to me about my New Year’s resolution - the one I thought I’d never be able to keep?” He paused. “Until now?”

She shrugged. “I can’t answer that for you.”

He looked into her eyes. “Then, allow me. And in case you have any doubt, I’m about to kiss Becky Stirling for the third and, hopefully, far from last time.”

He gently pulled her into his arms and their eyes closed as their lips met. This time, it was unhurried, lingering, and it felt as if the distant fireworks were going off in the room with them.

\* \* \*

A little blonde head peeked between the stair rails, having been woken by the fireworks. As she watched the 'fireworks' in the room below her, she grinned and whispered to herself, "Happy New Year!"

\*\*\*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Just a quick note here. Thanks to Jill and Emma at Bigcloset fiction website for encouraging me to actually write a short story for once and submit it for the New Year's contest. It was the push I needed to get back 'in the saddle again'.

I hope you enjoyed reading the start of Becky and Jack's story, because it is but the start. What happened next? Well, I'll let you, the reader, fill in the blanks for once.

My heartfelt thanks go to my family who are a constant joy and support to me. Above all, I give thanks to God who has made me who I am and for the gifts He gives abundantly.

If you have any comments about this story that you would like to share with me, I'd be delighted to hear from you. Do visit me at [www.jennywalker.net](http://www.jennywalker.net) and you can contact me there.



ALSO BY JENNY WALKER

---

## BREAKING COVER

---

Steve Williams, son of a successful retired British Intelligence field officer, has a reasonably successful career as an analyst at MI6, but feels like a failure in his father's eyes. His slight build and apparently passive personality have led to his superiors passing him over each time he tries to pursue his greater ambitions.

Miranda Carlos, a glamorous and beautiful field officer, suffers an incapacitating injury and is unable to undertake what appears to be an important intel-gathering assignment. Several people in MI6 believe the mission to be so important that a suitable imposter should be sent in her place.

Much to everyone's surprise, the computer picks Steve as having the strongest resemblance to the gorgeous Miranda. Steve is thrilled to finally have the opportunity to take on a field assignment, but he has to consider if he is willing to pay whatever price is necessary in the line of duty.

His loyalty to his country is sorely tested as he faces the complete transformation that is required to pass close scrutiny – especially considering the warnings that some of it may be irreversible.

As Steve begins to unearth plans for a devastating terrorist strike, he finds himself fighting for his life and, not knowing who he can trust, he is thrust into a terrifying race against time to prevent a horrific atrocity.

*"Jenny Walker does it again! With an improvement over her hit classic 'No Half Measures', she continues her traditional slow build, introduces memorable characters and provides plenty of surprise twists that will keep you guessing until the end, all well-contained within the framework of an excellent spy thriller."*

*"I've been waiting to see if Jenny Walker would write a second novel to match the superb 'No Half Measures', and 'Breaking Cover' is, if anything, an even better read. Jenny handles the characters beautifully . . . I loved the suspense, the violence and the gentle romance, but, perhaps most of all, I loved the changing relationships between all the main characters. I can hardly wait for the next one."*

ALSO BY JENNY WALKER

---

## NO HALF MEASURES

---

Nick Evans, a gifted yet perpetually unsuccessful singer-songwriter, after another rejection is persuaded by his friend, Julie, to try a different tack. Having been told his voice is not 'manly' enough, could he possibly make it as a female singer called Cara Malone?

The reactions of his friends and family will make you laugh and cry as you ride the rollercoaster of emotions and experiences that our hero-cum-heroine is subjected to.

Success looms on the horizon, but it comes at a price. Add a mysterious stalker, personal tragedy, the fear of exposure, a heart-breaking love story – and you will find that 'No Half Measures' is not only a gripping compulsive read, but also a story that speaks of self-discovery and one which challenges our preconceptions about identity and love.

Someone knows the big secret and events build towards a breathtaking climax where not only love, but Cara's very life, is laid on the line.

*"Jenny manipulates her characters on a realistic stage and we're left breathless by the ingenuity and plot devices she uses to such good effect."*

*"I have never read anything like this in my life. It made me cry, laugh and hold onto my seat at the same time."*

*"I can't tell you how uplifting it was to read this story. It was something I'd been looking for for a very long time. It's a story I know I'll re-read periodically, just for the happiness and inspiration I found in it."*

ALSO BY JENNY WALKER

---

## CHASING HOPE

---

Sarah Munro, a partner in a growing public relations firm, enjoys a quiet life in New Hampshire. Few know the lengths she's gone to in pursuit of her goals. Believing she's escaped her past, Sarah longs for the one thing that's eluded her, but a long-buried secret haunts her dreams of love.

Mark Hamilton, a little-known U.S. senator, believes America needs a change. His friends, recognizing that his strength of character and principled ethics are just what their country needs, have persuaded him to seek his party's nomination for president. Now they fear he won't be able to rise above inhibitions born out of past personal tragedy.

As their lives intersect and entwine in the heat of a national political campaign, Mark and Sarah reach out to each other. Mark wonders if Sarah is the one who might release him from his past hurts. Sarah faces the possibility that to realize her greatest hope, she may need to confront her deepest fear.

*"Jenny Walker simply gets better and better. Each of her novels has a different background, and this thoroughly researched saga is a masterpiece of romance and drama. If you aren't moved, sometimes to tears and sometimes to laugh out loud, then you have no soul. A truly great read!"*

*"Sarah Munro, beautiful and spirited, is a marvelous addition to Jenny Walker's gallery of heroines."*

*"'Chasing Hope' is the best political love story since 'Doctor Zhivago.' Sarah Munro has spent a lifetime trying to find acceptance. She has found peace by building a wall around herself that love is destined to knock down."*

ALSO BY JENNY WALKER

---

## TRUE CALLING

---

Ryan Gallagher suffers a devastating loss as a series of unexpected events overwhelm him and threaten to destroy what little he has left in life. Pushed to the limit, he faces desperate choices in a bid to survive. Sometimes, with no other option, the seemingly impossible is the only way forward.

Caitlin Donovan, a young woman with a four-year-old son, arrives in the Oregon coastal town of Port Orford, seeking to escape a violent past. No matter what she does, it seems destined to catch up with her. As much as she struggles to keep to herself, her barriers gradually get broken down by the people she meets there.

Daniel Wright, a decorated war veteran, is trying to raise his teenage daughter in Port Orford, despite never coming to terms with traumas he has endured in his military service and personal life. In the face of further heartaches, he starts to connect with the first person in many years that has awakened a long-lost hope within him.

The complex threads of deep-seated hurts and hidden truths that link these three start to unravel as love, life and family are put to the ultimate test. Each had to consider what personal price they are willing to pay for a future they could barely imagine.

*"A great writer comes along about once a decade. Since it's been thirteen years since her last great novel, Jenny Walker was overdue. Although she writes from an ocean away, Jenny shows a deep understanding of the U.S. culture and blithely blends Jane Austen with Tom Clancy. You will NOT stop reading until you finish!"*

*"Even Jenny's minor characters live and breathe in the world she creates; some of them could be stories in their own right and sometimes are. But the main performers are more than mere flesh and blood, they worm their way into your brain and you agonise with them, laugh with them and love with them right through to the end."*

