

*This Morning, Over
Here*

A Memoir That Never
Happened

By Frank W. Butterfield

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Nick & Carter Stories

An Enchanted Beginning

Golden Gate Love Stories

The One He Waited For
Their Own Hidden Island

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This book contains explicit language and suggestive situations.

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U01-K-Chap1-20171102

Chapter 1

This reality you inhabit is much more fluid than you realize. You believe what your senses tell you, which is fine. When you realize that the reality you have is the one you expect, so much more becomes possible.

The room was bright and the bed was comfortable. I stretched and felt the usual charlie-horse begin in my right calf. I stretched it out and willed it to relax. After some fluttering, it did. I turned on my side and curled up, enjoying the deep cushion of the bed.

For some reason, that seemed odd. I opened my eyes and could see, through the window at the far end of the bed, a high-rise office building made out of sandstone and, based on its design, built in the 20s. It was sitting in the

middle of a clear blue sky. It looked familiar but it wasn't right.

I sat up and looked around. I was on the left side of a king-size bed and, based on the smell of things, I was in a Westin hotel room. But, as far as I could remember, the closest Westin to Daytona Beach was in Orlando.

The thoughts came rushing in. Had I gone to Orlando last night to go to Disney World? Did I decide to stay over at a Westin? But, and I tried to remember—from my days when I was driving all over the country and staying in hotel after hotel—was there really a Westin in Orlando? If there was, it had to be around Universal. Then I remembered that one of the hotels by Epcot was run by Westin: The Swan. I looked out the window again.

The high-rise building was still there. I should have been seeing the big dome in the middle of Epcot. Or a big pool with a sandy beach. Where was I?

I reached for my phone and looked at it. The time was 8:37. The date was Saturday, October 7, 2017. That was right. Then I heard

someone in the bathroom whistling. I pulled the covers over my naked body and called out, "Hello?"

"Hello," was the reply I got.

"Who's there?" I asked, feeling myself shaking and wondering how someone from housekeeping got in and why it was a guy.

"You know who," was the reply. The voice was vaguely familiar. I could hear his southern accent.

I turned and looked at the space next to me in the bed. I had slept with someone last night. That was obvious. I could see the impression his body had made. As I looked over the side of the bed, I could see a pile of clothes that were definitely not mine.

Just then the bathroom door opened and a tall, dark-haired man, still wet from the shower, casually ambled out and looked at me with a grin. I squeezed the covers tightly in shock and surprise. "Tom?" I asked, wondering how the hell he got here and why he was here and what was going on. He

looked... different. I couldn't place it but he did.

He was still his majestic self. He was tall and muscled. His dark hair was shorter than when I'd last seen him. And he was wearing a closely-shaved beard

"Yeah? Who were you expectin'?" He grinned at me. He was also much more tan than I ever remembered him being. And it was evenly spread except for around his...

I stopped staring and came back to myself as best as I could. I didn't know what to say. He looked down at me with a small frown. "Are you gonna take a shower before we go to the convention?"

I stared at him, not knowing what to do. "How did you get here?" I asked.

He grinned. "Same way you did. Go get in the shower." He rubbed his belly, a little thick in the middle but still displaying his amazing abs. "I'm hungry. They got all-you-can-eat downstairs. And you know how much you love a Westin breakfast."

I nodded. He was right. I didn't remember ever telling him that, though. The last time I'd seen him had been in 2013 or 2014 at a hotel in Irving, just west of Dallas.

He slipped into a tight pair of white underwear as I watched. "Well?" he asked as he sat down on the end of the bed and began to pull on a pair of dark socks.

I stood, grabbed my phone, ran into the bathroom, and slammed the door behind me.

I heard him call out from the bedroom. "Don't take too long. I wanna be there by 9:30. If you hurry, we can just make it."

Not knowing what else to do, I turned on the water and then pushed the button to switch it to shower. I leaned against the counter and quickly unlocked my phone.

I decided to google myself. Maybe I was dead and there would be an obituary. Or something. I typed in my name, my fingers clumsy on the keys, and waited for the results to come up.

The first entry was a news item: "HBO Buys 'The Unexpected Heiress'."

I nearly dropped the phone. *The Unexpected Heiress* was the first book in a series I'd started writing about a year ago. It was easy to write, so I tried another one. The second one was easy enough, so I wrote a third. Then I wrote a backstory book to explain what was happening in the first three. Then I started writing a book a month. As of the first of October, I'd self-published eighteen books and was having a modicum of success. Mostly, I was keeping my nose to the grindstone and letting the Universe sort out the details, like sales and marketing. It had been working out pretty well.

Tom knocked on the door. "Darlin'? Are you almost done? We need to go."

Not knowing what else to do, I asked, "Tom?"

"Yeah?"

"What convention are we going to?"

He opened the door and looked at me. "For cryin' out loud, what is wrong with you?" I was shocked. He was dressed in a beautiful navy suit and was wearing a purple tie that looked

really great on him. I could feel myself responding to a tall, dark man in a suit like I always did. The last time I'd seen Tom, he was covered in the kind of gear that someone riding in 50-degree weather on a motorcycle would need. I'd never seen him in a suit before, particularly one that was fitted and accented his physique like this one did.

He crossed his long arms and looked down at me. "I already took a shower. Just 'cause Nick and Carter always take one together doesn't mean we have to. Or that we're gonna do so every day. Now get your ass in there and let's get this show on the road."

I nodded, put my phone on the counter, and made my way into the tub.

"Are you OK?" he asked.

As I began to wet my hair, I realized there was something odd about my mouth. I nodded, just to get him off my back, and said, "Sure. I just feel like I'm hungover or something."

"Hungover?" he asked with a laugh. "You are so cute sometimes. When was the last time you had a drink?"

I picked up the little bottle of shampoo and squirted some in my hand. "I don't remember."

"Well, I do, son. It was on July the third of 2015. The Friday we got married in Birmingham."

My head was under the water when he said that. I quickly finished rinsing out the shampoo and looked up at him.

The physical reaction I was having to Tom was becoming more pronounced. It was the same way I got every time I thought of him. But there was no way we were married.

He had been in the closet when I'd first met him in 2002 in D.C. at a bar called The Eagle. As far as I knew, that hadn't changed.

On our second or third date, Tom had told me about being the quarterback on his high school team in a small town near Birmingham. He'd played football at Auburn, as well. He was drafted by some NFL team. I

never could remember which one. But they'd kept him on the sidelines for a year or two. He'd then spent a couple of years in Europe, playing for a team over there. Football had been his life until he was in his late 20s. He'd even coached for a while for a high school in Birmingham. He'd never explained why, but he'd moved to D.C. in 1995 where he'd taken a job as a paralegal for one of the big law firms on "K" Street. When I met him, he was coaching kids' teams out in the suburbs at night and on the weekends. But no one knew he was gay.

After we'd been dating for a few weeks, we'd run into a friend of mine, Robbie, at another bar in town. Robbie loved football, something I had no interest in. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of the sport. As we were talking over drinks, Robbie had suddenly recognized Tom from when he'd played for Auburn. Tom had made it very clear that, under no circumstances, was Robbie to talk about Tom's personal life. Robbie, who was pretty much a cuddly round ball of fur, had been

easily intimidated by Tom's size and had promised to keep things under wraps. Later that night, when I'd called Tom on being an asshole to my friend, he'd gone into a long story about how it could hurt his career at work and how the parents whose kids he coached wouldn't like it either. For me, that had been the end of my interest in him romantically, although I didn't recognize it at the time.

I shook my head. "We're not married. Why are you even here in Florida? What the hell is going on?"

Tom leaned against the counter and asked, "Florida? This is San Antonio, darlin'. We drove down last night because you have a book show to attend..." He looked at his watch. "In forty minutes."

Something was very wrong. How was it possible that I was in Texas? I distinctly remembered going to bed in my cozy little motel room, the one I'd been living in for almost two years, the one that was close to the beach but not on the beach. I'd gone to sleep

after reading one of my books, trying to make sure that I got some of the details right in the one I was writing. Nick and Carter, the main characters, were going down to Big Sur to stay at Nick's father's house and I wanted to make sure that I remembered what I'd written about that house in Book 7. I was working on Book 16.

I looked over at Tom. All of a sudden, time seemed to stop. It only happened for a moment, but the other Tom, the one I'd last seen a few years earlier appeared to be standing behind this Tom, the one I was looking at in the bathroom. I could see the difference between the two of them. The Tom I'd known was a lot thicker and less defined, which wasn't a bad thing, in my opinion, for a guy who was 6'8". But he'd also been a lot unhappier. Almost angry. He'd injured his knee and was having a hard time with it. He was working as a paralegal for a law firm in Atlanta, where he'd moved from D.C. to be closer to his family in Birmingham. But, when I'd met up with him, he'd been in Dallas on an

assignment for them. That night he'd told me, at length, how much he hated the job.

Then, as suddenly as he'd appeared, the old Tom was gone and the Tom I could see, the one in the stunning navy suit, was looking at me. His face, handsome to me, but described by one of my friends as being "monster handsome," was contorting in concern.

He stood and walked over towards the bathtub, careful not to get too close and get his suit wet. "There is something wrong with you. Are you OK?"

I shook my head. I felt the oddness in my mouth again. I ran my tongue around my teeth and stopped. My wisdom teeth were missing.

That was odd. I'd never once had surgery. I had my wisdom teeth, my tonsils, and my appendix. I did have a zipper-like scar on my right hand. It was the result of riding a motorcycle, badly, when I was seven years old. I looked at my right hand and was relieved to see it was still there. Looking at my right hand

was how I had always been able to tell the difference between left and right.

I leaned around Tom to look at myself in the mirror. I looked just the same. I was still quite chunky. I looked just like I had the day before. I still had a beard. I then wondered why I was thinking in that way. That I "still" had these things.

Looking up at Tom, as he tentatively smiled at me, I suddenly realized what might have happened. It was weird. It was highly unlikely. It was hopelessly improbable. But I could feel the relief of understanding cascade over me like the water was doing.

"What?" he asked.

I smiled and decided to try something. "I love you."

He grinned. "I love you, too, buster."

"Sorry about all this. I just..." I shrugged. "I don't know what I thought. I'll be out in a minute."

His grin broke into a wide smile. "Good. Hurry up." He added, "Chop, chop." And, with that, he walked back into the bedroom.

Thanks!

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