

## CHAPTER ONE

The obsession to use his time machine again was overpowering. “It worked before, I can do it again,” Blake Stone told his wife.

“No, you can’t,” Sally protested, “I don’t want your brain to turn to complete mush. You already can’t remember anything from the past eleven years because of that thing.”

“And I’ve explained to you why that happened, numerous times.”

“Your assumption isn’t good enough,” Sally said, turning away. She didn’t want any part of it.

*It’s not an assumption,* he thought.

Blake sighed. His wife ignored it.

Blake sighed even louder. Sally stared into Blake’s eyes and her fist tightened.

“Hun, technically, I brought you back to life. You wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for *this thing*.”

The continued death stare Sally had on Blake frightened him, just a little. “And I said thank you, numerous times,” Sally said in a monotone voice and finally looked away, but not for long. “Look, how long are you going to obsess over this? Yes, you saved me,” she said, flailing her over exaggerated arms into the air. “You went back to the year 2005 and stopped that surgery that ended my life, yes, but you also committed murder to do it.”

“But it saved you, and I got away with it. I’m not proud of what I did, but Dr. Baginski was careless. Yeah, I killed him. I did what I had to do. I didn’t want any chance of you having that surgery with that man. I had to go back before it happened and change time. I missed you more and more every day. Now I’m beginning to wonder if it was all worth it.”

Just as that sentence left his mouth, he regretted saying it. Sally started to cry.

“Hun, look, I’m sorry,” Blake said apologetically. “You miss Nathan as much as I do. I can go back and save him like I saved you. Just think, we can all be a happy family again.”

“But I can’t risk losing you too,” Sally sobbed. “What if something else goes wrong? What if it causes more brain damage and you lose even more memory?”

Blake was trying to go easy on his wife. Maybe if he took it slow instead of getting defensive with everything she said, it would change her mind. As calm as could be, Blake tried to explain himself again. Maybe this time she’d listen to his reasoning.

“Babes,” Blake said softly, taking her hand in his. “The reason I don’t remember anything from 2005 through 2017 is that I never lived it. When I went back to 2005 and killed that doctor months before the surgery happened, I made the mistake of coming back to 2017. So it’s pretty damn obvious....,” Blake paused, rethought his sentence and continued, “... so I’m sure that’s why I have no memories of anything between those years. I was able to kill him before he got to you, just to be sure the surgery didn’t take place and came back to 2017.”

“But that still didn’t stop Nathan from dying now, did it.” Sally’s comment sounded a bit harsh, but Blake had it under control. They were finally having a discussion.

“Either way, hun, Nathan would still not be with us. Think about it for a moment. If I stayed in 2005 after killing that evil man, we’d still have gone on our 2012 vacation that went horribly wrong because we wouldn’t know about it like we do now.”

“But how can you not remember his death? I lived that time with you. You were there! You helped me through it!”

*Maybe I’m not getting through to her.* “Hun, I was there, yes, that’s what you remember, but since you’re the one who stayed and I came back, I don’t. I know this concept is difficult to understand.” Blake took a deep breath. “The point I’m trying to get across is that if I stayed in 2005, we still wouldn’t know what was going to happen on our 2012 vacation. I’m sorry, but coming back to 2017 was a good thing, even with the memory loss. Now that we know our son’s date of death, I can change that too. When I go back to save him, I’ll make sure I stay this time.”

Sally still looked a little confused. She scratched her head, rubbed the back of her neck, squinted, and looked up at Blake. "But why didn't either of us remember you building that box? If you finished it this year and went to get me in 2005, when you arrived back in 2017 you should have remembered you built it. If it weren't for our psychologist putting you under hypnosis to remember where it came from, we still wouldn't know what that thing is."

"I'm sure we'd know, hun. It's obvious by looking at the control panel that it's a time machine. I'm not sure why I couldn't remember, but you couldn't remember because the ten years it took for me to build that thing, you weren't with me. You were the reason I built it!"

This time Sally sighed. Her facial features changed to a depressed look. It took forever to respond, but Sally finally replied. "Please, just be careful" in a voice so quiet Blake almost asked her to repeat it, but didn't want to take the chance of her changing her mind. He finally had her permission.

Blake stood right up, and so did Sally. She held him long and hard while Blake looked over her shoulder at the box behind them. *Yeah, she's right, I'm obsessed.* He held her as long as she needed, paying more attention to the box than the comforting hug.

When she let go, she saw the look in his eyes. "I know you're anxious to get started. Please, spend the rest of the day with me. I'll help you get ready tomorrow morning, ok?"

There was nothing to get ready, but Blake agreed. After three months of trying to convince her, he couldn't believe she finally broke down and said yes.

"Ok. We'll rent a movie, pop some popcorn, and do some serious snuggle time. Go on in the house. I'll be right there." Blake watched Sally until she entered the back door of the house and turned around to face the box. A chill ran down his spine. Since this is going to become a reality, now *he* was the one becoming nervous.

## CHAPTER TWO

It was a restful night. Sally awoke with her arm still draped over Blake's chest. They must have crashed hard and didn't move all night long. She didn't want it to end – especially since she knew as soon as he woke up, he'd be jumping out of bed and off to the box that awaited him outside. *Too late, he's stirring.*

"Morning, hun. Can I make you a cup of coffee?"

Blake looked at his Pebble Time watch. 9:32 A.M. displayed in tall, bright red numbers. "I guess. Thanks. I'll be down in a sec."

Sally put on her silky purple robe and headed downstairs. Blake laid there for a little longer, thinking while staring at the ceiling. *Today is the day. I don't have a choice. We need Nathan back in our life.*

He slowly arose from bed, stretching his toes as they cracked. He dressed in his most comfortable jeans and a button-down shirt with flames. If he's going to go down in flames today, he may as well be wearing them. He picked up his overstuffed notebook and headed downstairs to the smell of Crazy Cups Banana Foster Flambe, his favorite.

"Thanks." Blake accepted the coffee cup and without taking a sip, placed it on the table, along with his notebook, which he already was reviewing even before taking his seat. Sally moved the coffee cup to a coaster and parted her robe a little to one side, allowing more cleavage to show. She was having second thoughts about what she agreed to and thought seduction could be the answer, or stall as long as she could, if not indefinitely.

"So, hun, what's the plan for today?"

Blake looked up at Sally, unaware of the cleavage, then back down at his notebook. "I think we should start on this right after our coffee, what do you think?"

"What were you thinking?" Sally leaned in a bit closer to allow more cleavage to show.

"Well," Blake said, still focused on his notes, "I'll start with a quick test run by sending myself exactly five years into the past, with the box

pre-programmed for its return. This way, if I need to, I can make a quick getaway at the flip of a switch. I'll step out of the box and start the app on my phone, which at the touch of a button, will make it disappear, just to make sure that feature still works."

Sally scooted even closer to Blake to get a good look at his notes. Hopefully, the smell of his favorite perfume she was wearing would entice him to stay. Blake continued without hesitation and placed his arm around his wife. "I'll stay there for a few minutes, make the box reappear, and then I'll come right back," Blake said, looking back at his notes as he pointed to each step outlined in great detail. "This way, when I get back here, I'll see what I can remember. If there aren't any problems and I feel fine, I'll make the true run. Easy enough?"

"What if something happens and the box doesn't come back when you summon it with the app? Or what if it takes longer than a few minutes for more brain damage to occur? Shouldn't we wait at least a week to see if you're still ok? We have all the time in the world, why rush anything?"

Blake was amazed they were talking about this civilly. He took his first sip of coffee and, without looking, placed the cup back down on the table. "I just want this to be over. You know I'm not going to be able to wait an entire week. Last time I exited the box, I lost my memory from that point. Now that you know about it too, when I get back, if I forget, you can fill me in, right? Look, worst case scenario, if the box doesn't come back, I stay in the year 2012 and fix the issue. But it works now, why not then?"

Blake handed Sally the phone. "Go ahead, push it." Sally moved the coffee cup back onto the coaster, accepted the phone and pushed the "Go Away, Box" button. In less than 2 seconds, the box just – poof – went away. She shook her head in amazement. "How did you ever design such a thing." She pushed the button "Come Back, Box" and there it was.

"Okay, here's another question for you." She gave the phone back to Blake. "If it's only five years in the past, won't everything kinda look the

same? I mean, I'm sure you'll see some things that are different, but how will you know it's 2012? We want to be sure this box really works 100%."

"The box works, hun. But the simple answer is," Blake said confidently since he had been planning this moment for a month already, "That patio table over there. You said we bought it this year, so when I arrive, if it's not there, it's not 2017 any longer."

"But that doesn't mean it's 2012 either. But ok, we'll go with that." Sally sipped her tea and thought a moment. "Well, what about when you make it there and see yourself?"

"Since I don't ever remember seeing someone that looked exactly like me back in 2012, it's not going to happen."

"Blake, there are a lot of things you don't remember, like, for example, Nathan's fatal accident."

"I told you," Blake said, not wanting to sound argumentative, "I never lived those dates, so of course I'm not going to remember it."

Sally saw Blake keep looking at the box. *He's anxious, alright. How can I deny this opportunity? If it works, yeah, we can have Nathan back. And if it doesn't, we have a time machine. We can try it again and again until we get it right.*

After a very long awkward silence, she knew it was hopeless to change his mind now. "Ok, you better get going then." Blake took another sip of his coffee and placed the cup back down on the table. He walked slowly, hand in hand with Sally to the already-opened door. For the first time, Sally stepped inside with him. She kissed him hard, tears streaming down her cheeks. "You better get your ass right back here, mister, or I'm going to build one of these things too, come find you, and kick your ass all the way back to 2017."

Blake held back his tears. He hated to see her like this, but he knew this was going to work. It worked before. The thing he didn't know for sure was if it's going to cause 'brain damage' as Sally called it. He stayed strong – for her sake. She quietly backed out of the box and gave the approval nod. Blake hesitated, but then flipped the power switch on.

The hum of the contraption was mesmerizing. The interior red, blue, and green LED lights lit up with intensity all at once, went out all at once, and then flashed one by one in a distinct pattern. The control panel flashed all zeros like an alarm clock that was reset during a power outage, awaiting input as to what date to go and when to come back. He set that date and time and stared into Sally's eyes.

"I'll be ok. We'll be ok. I'll be right back."

They kissed again, just a peck this time. Anything more would be a problem. No more hesitation, Blake pulled the lever down.

### CHAPTER THREE

The patio table was no longer there, Nathan's bike stood in its place. *Nathan's bike! He's alive! I can still remember my objective!* He took a moment to examine his surroundings. The sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing. He stood inside the box for a few seconds, having second thoughts. *Since I'm already here, should I just fix things now? Or come back again like I promised Sally.*

Just as Blake thought those words, Nathan came out of the garage towards his bike. Blake almost screamed with delight at the sight of his son still alive. Without giving it thought, Blake crouched down inside the box trying to hide, as if that would do any good. Nathan looked towards his left. *Mistake number one.*

"Umm.... Dad? What's this thing doing here?"

Just when Blake was about to answer, he realized Nathan wasn't talking to him directly. He was talking to his Dad. His *other* dad. The dad from 2012. Blake walked out from the basement, and looked at the box. *Uh oh. Mistake number two.*

As soon as 2012 Blake made eye contact with 2017 Blake, 2012 Blake vanished. Nathan screamed and called for his mother. *Mistake number three.* 2017 Blake quickly pushed the lever upwards. He was barely able to see that 2012 Blake returned before he, and the box, disappeared.

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Right as the box materialized, Sally saw Blake's pure white face and knew something went wrong.

"Oh my God, what happened? Are you ok?"

"Yes, I'm ok," Blake spoke quietly. Sally held his arm and helped him out of the box. He sat down at the patio table. "I made it to 2012. I saw our son. I crouched down inside the box so he wouldn't see me. When I came out of the garage, I saw myself."

"Wait a minute. You're not making any sense. When you came out of the garage? What were you doing in the garage? Why didn't you make the box disappear and hide?"

"Hun, please try and follow. I didn't have time to make the box disappear. I came out of the garage. I saw myself come out of the garage from within the box. I saw myself from 2012! As soon as I looked at myself, I disappeared."

Now Sally was even more confused. "You're going to have to be more specific, I'm sorry. Which one of you disappeared? Are you from 2012? Is Nathan safe?"

"2012 Blake disappeared when we looked into each other's eyes. At least that's what I think happened. Maybe my arrival overrode the previous Blake.

The tears of joy flowed from Sally. "I can't believe you saw Nathan. This is going to work!"

The hope in Sally's eyes now showed she was all-in for this. "When we do this again, first thing we have to do is make sure no one else is around. No one vanished until the younger Blake saw you, right?" she said, trying to diagnose any future problems that may happen. "But then again, what if Nathan sees you? Or what if I do? Will that make you disappear? Or even worse, what if *you* disappear when 2012 sees *you*? The 2012 Blake won't know anything about the box. And if that happens, I'm sure there will be questions as to where it came from."

“Well, the younger me will disappear first since that’s what happened before. I’m sure it will happen the same way. We’ll figure this thing out. It’s pretty simple. That’s why the test run was necessary.”

“That wasn’t simple, hun.” She walked around the box, running her fingers along the steel frame, now showing more interest than Blake ever seen. “This is sleek.”

There was too much excitement surging throughout Blake’s entire body, and he was ready to try again. Sally wasn’t. She faced Blake and confessed. “I’m afraid, hun.”

“No need to be,” Blake said, taking another sip of his still piping hot coffee. “Now I know what problems to look for. Trust me. I just need to do another test run. The first thing I’ll do when I arrive is to make the box go away. Immediately. Then I’ll hide and make sure no one sees me, and wait for a few minutes to make sure I still feel alright. The only reason I panicked and came back too quickly last time was because Nathan saw the 2012 me disappear.”

“Maybe we can just wait until tomorrow to make sure you still feel ok?” Sally was panicking.

Blake scratched his head. “We talked about this, hun. I just want to get this over with, don’t you? I feel fine now, but I do want to make one more test run so I can stay a few minutes instead of seconds.” He quickly changed the topic. “Did we buy the safari tickets ahead of time? If we did, it’s going to be much harder to convince you to do something else if you did.”

Sally knew he was right. The longer this dragged on, the more difficult it was going to be.

“Why are you asking these questions now? It’s going to be another test run, remember?”

“Just in case. I just want to be prepared.”

A shadow of a doubt now frightened Sally. “Yeah, I hate wasting money,” Sally blushed, “but, no, each event we did was individually

purchased, which wasn't many since we had to cut our vacation short because of... well..."

"Ok, that helps, thanks," Blake said, not allowing the topic to be brought up. "I also need to know what time we left for the trip. If you say we left at ten A.M. and I arrive too late, I won't be able to replace myself with myself because we'll already be on the road."

"We left at around nine A.M. for the road trip, so maybe you can arrive at eight to be sure?"

Blake smiled and finished his coffee. "So, you're back to being all-in?"

Sally sighed. "No. I'm still hesitant. There are still too many unanswered questions."

"Like what? I got everything covered. Just ask."

*Here we go again.* "Will you stay in 2012 or come back to 2017? What happens if you stay in 2012, will you be five years younger? Will you feel five years older? Will every minute you stay there be more and more dangerous to your health? Will you ever tell me you're a 'future' Blake? What if you disappear instead of the 2012 Blake? We're not even sure that's how this works."

"Look, hun, I know you're worried. I'm sorry, really sorry, but I spent an incredible amount of time thinking about this day. I think it's best, for my health and your concern, to just get there, take care of business and pop right back. You're probably right. If I stayed there, I'd be and feel older. I don't know how the timeline or my body would handle that."

Once again, the waterworks started up. This was too much for her to handle. She was back to hating the idea and had even more questions. "What about Nathan and I? When you come back, will I forget all of this since our lives would be living with our son? Will I have memory loss like you did? Will you forget too?"

Frustration was starting to build, but he really couldn't blame her. He didn't know if any of his answers were one hundred percent correct either. They were just assumptions. "Sally, hun, let's think about this

logically.” He held her hand for dramatic effect. “When I went back to 2005 to save you, I knew what I was there for. I got the job accomplished and came back to 2017. I lost all that memory from that time span. It’s that simple. When I go to 2012, it’ll be just as easy. I’ll know exactly what time I come out of our garage. I’ll remember my objective – not to go on that safari, which will save Nathan. After we get back home from our vacation, I’ll come back to 2017, so I won’t feel older than I already am. You’ll have lived your life fully as if Nathan were in it like he should have been – and who knows, maybe the only memory loss I’ll have is from the end of our vacation until I get back in 2017.”

“One last question. Will Nathan just appear and will I wonder where he came from?”

Now Blake was frustrated. “Hun, I honestly can’t answer that truthfully. I’m pretty sure you’ll never know Nathan died. You’d live your life as if he were in it the entire time.”

“Just for the record, I do not think this is a good idea anymore. At all.”

“Noted. Thank you.”