

Only Time

By

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Chapter 1

The North Carolina countryside in Cumberland County is quiet except for birds singing from the trees. Not a soul around.

A brown horse gallops through the woods dodging trees. Union Army Major General Sam Fowler bounces in the saddle. His left hand gripped the handles of a large cloth bag draped across his saddlebag in front of him. Sam glances at his watch. It's not a watch from 1865.

"I hope the history books are correct about eighteen eighty-five in this neck of the woods."

The birds stopped singing and flew away.

A cannonball whistles through the air.

The cannonball explodes in the ground twenty feet away, showering dirt all over Sam and his horse.

Sam's knuckles are white from gripping the handles of the cloth bag. "I can't lose you. I just can't."

Another cannonball whistles through the air, exploding on the ground fifteen feet away. Sam got his second dirt shower. The horse rose on its hind legs. Nostrils flaring and front legs swinging around.

Sam flew out of the saddle, still gripping the handles of his cloth bag. He slammed hard into the ground.

The horse galloped away through the trees.

Sam was sprawled on the ground, face in the dirt. He pushed up with his hands. “What happened?” He got on his hands and knees. “Ahhh!” he screamed, rolling over to his back. He pampered his right knee. His ears perked up. His eyes widened. Voices in the woods. A silent scream as he stood up. Dirt covers his face and the front of his uniform.

“Where’s my horse?” he said, looking around the woods. “Scared off,” he added. “There she is!” Sam beams, spotting a large object covered with a large camouflage netting.

He clutched his bag against his chest. He hobbled as fast as the pain allowed. “I can make it. I can make it,” prayed Sam.

Another cannonball whistled in the air and exploded ten feet away. The shock wave knocked him on his butt during his third dirt shower.

He stood up, still clutching his bag. He hobbled over to the netting.

He arrived! Sam dropped his bag to the ground. He frantically tugged at the netting. It slid off this object, landing in the dirt.

The front half of a Bell 47A helicopter with that iconic crystal clear plastic bubble and clear plastic doors. The tail boom and rotor blades are gone. The landing skids were left intact. The engine wasn’t the standard helicopter engine. It’s bizarre.

Sam bent down frantically, scooping the netting into a pile.

The cracking sounds of tree branches from behind him.

He glanced over his shoulder, hearing more crackling sounds of tree branches and footsteps. “They can’t get me,” panicked Sam.

A bullet zinged inches from Sam’s head. He ducked. It injured the trunk of a nearby tree.

Sam looked over his shoulder. Ten Confederate soldiers, all kids, crouched in the woods with rifles aimed at Sam.

An officer stood behind the kids with his right hand gripping the handle of his sword tucked away in a sheath. “Fire!” he barked.

“Not today!” insisted Sam. He flung open the door to the helicopter.

Bullets zinged by Sam’s left side.

He bent down, scooping up the camouflaged netting and tossing it inside the helicopter. It landed on the bench seat near the other door.

Bullets zinged over his head, injuring more trees.

He bent down, picking up his bag. He tossed it in the helicopter, landing on top of the netting. He gritted his teeth and hopped inside the helicopter slamming the door shut.

Bullets zinged all around the helicopter. “I’m so lucky those kids are lousy shots.”

He reached over to the modified console. On one dial on the console, Sam’s all thumbs dialing October 12, 1979. He’s all thumbs dialing the individual letters on another dial on the console to spell Los Angeles.

Bullets still zinged, injuring additional trees near the helicopter.

Sam flipped a “Travel” toggle switch to the right for the “On” wording on the console. The console lit up.

Sam pushed the helicopter’s cyclic stick between his legs forward.

The helicopter hummed. It vibrated.

The bubble shot out psychedelic red, blue, green, yellow, and purple hologram colors like fireworks.

The Confederate soldiers’ dropped to the ground for cover. It’s quiet. They inched up to their feet, pointing their rifles to the ground. Eyes widened, and mouths dropped open.

The soldiers looked at each other. Eyes widened, mouths still dropped open.

“That strange contraption just vanished, captain. Just vanished!” puzzled one soldier.

The officer drew his sword from its sheath.

He walked cautiously out of the woods, his sword ready to fight. He inched with eagle eyes to the spot the helicopter magically occupied.

“Should we report it to the colonel?” asked one soldier.

The officer examined that spot with intense focus. “Risk prison for being loco. No way!” the captain replied. “Okay, men, what you saw never happened. Understand? It never happened,” the captain ordered.

“Yes, sir,” his soldiers yelled in unison.

“Let’s move out. We have a Union Army to kill!” he ordered.

The Confederate soldiers turned around and marched away. The officer rushed to catch up with his men.

A large basement was quiet. There were racks of old clothes, antique furniture, old military uniforms, a knight's armor on a stand, and old movie posters scattered around the basement. It could be a museum.

Psychedelic red, blue, green, yellow, and purple hologram colors morphed in the center of the basement, shooting out like fireworks. Loud vibrating and humming sounds echoed off the concrete walls.

The helicopter magically appeared in a poof. The hologram colors, vibration, and humming dissipated. The bubble is foggy.

Wilbur Jenson's eyes peaked out from behind the knight's suit of armor. It's safe. Jenson moved out from behind that armor. Hands are shaking. Jenson wore a white shirt, red bow tie, black pants, and round glasses. His standard wears for this thinning white-haired lanky hunched over, ancient timid man.

Jenson lumbered over to the helicopter.

Sam opened the helicopter door.

"Welcome back, Mister Fowler. I hope you had fun playing a Civil War Union General. And I hope you collected some fantastic items and facts for your movie."

"I did, Jensen, but the Confederate Army appeared. I escaped death!" praised Sam. "It was worth paying that loony scientist fifty thousand to build this machine for me back in forty-six," Sam added.

"Yes, sir. Your face and uniform are all dirty."

"Stupid cannonballs."

“Sorry, sir.” “I’ll clean the uniform.”

“Sir, there’s a hole in your left jacket sleeve,” noted Jensen poking his index finger a hole in his left coat sleeve.

“Sam glanced down. “Well, I’ll be. I didn’t feel it,” said Sam. “Sew a patch on it.”

“Yes, sir.”

Sam hobbled away to the basement stairs.

“You’re hurt, sir?” said Jensen.

“Minor battle wound. Get that bag out of the time machine. Run it over to the studio and give it to Warren,” Sam ordered. “These items will be great for my last movie,” he added while he hobbled up the stairs. “Leave the netting inside the time machine,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” Jensen replied. He reached inside the time machine, grabbing the handles of the bag. He grunted and tugged. He grunted and tugged again. The bag fell off the netting. Jensen groaned, pulling the load across the seat. The bag plopped to the floor. Jensen’s out of breath. He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Jenson bent over, grabbing the handles of the bag. He struggled to drag it across the floor to the stairs.

Jenson dragged the bag up the stairs plopping it on every step landing.

The fog dissipated from the bubble. It’s crystal clear.

Chapter 2

It's a beautiful sunny day in Los Angeles.

Shoulder-length blonde-haired Shelly Nelson sat at a drafting table in her small office. The table faced a window providing a spectacular view of the Los Angeles area with the Hollywood sign in the background.

She's a graphic illustrator for the Sanders Advertising Agency. She sat on a stool glancing at her illustration for a new General Mills breakfast cereal. She listened to "Calling All Angels" by Train from her MP3 player earphones. The song ended. She removed the earphones, turning off the player.

She grabbed the MP3 player and earphones. She got off the stool and walked over to her desk, opening her plain black purse. She dropped her player inside her purse.

She glanced at the digital calendar at the edge of her desk. The calendar displayed June 15th, 2007.

She returned to her drafting table, sitting on the stool. She gazed out the window at the Hollywood sign in the background. It's healthy to relax the eyes with long-distance sights. The faint sound of females singing.

The singing got louder. It was at the door of her office. Shelly turned her stool around.

"Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to Shelly. Happy Birthday to you!" five women sang out, entering the office. They stopped singing.

A woman carried a small round birthday cake. Four women trailed behind her. One of the women held a stack of paper plates and a plastic knife.

The woman walked over, placing Shelly's birthday cake on her desk. "Happy Birthday, Shelly," she sang.

"That's so sweet of everybody," Shelly smiled.

"You know I wouldn't forget your birthday," the woman said, walking over. She kissed Shelly on her cheek, hugging her.

"Laura, I know you wouldn't, but you're early," Shelly said. "I don't turn thirty until tomorrow."

"I know, but I thought you were going away with Alan for your birthday," asked Laura.

"We are!" Shelly grinned.

"I'm so jealous," pouted one of the women. The other three pouted.

One of the women started cutting cake slices with a plastic cake cutter, dumping them on paper plates.

She gave Shelly the first piece. She handed out slices to the rest of the women.

"How does it feel to be marrying the future President of Sanders Advertising in a few weeks after his father Jack Sanders retires?" one of the women asked Shelly.

"Rich!" Shelly responded with sparkles in her eyes.

The women chuckled. Laura rolled her eyes.

"Where's he taking you for your birthday tomorrow?" one of the other women asked.

"We're going to Spago Beverly Hills tonight. Then a boat trip to Catalina Island in the morning to

spend the weekend at the Aurora Hotel and Spa,” Shelly beamed.

“Awe, that’s so romantic!” said one of the women.

“No more Burger King meals for you,” another woman added.

“You know it!” Shelly bragged.

A white-haired woman in a classy chignon bun hairdo entered Shelly’s office. She had a small gift-wrapped present in her hand.

“Hi Mary,” said Shelly.

Mary handed Shelly the present. “Mister Sanders regrets he has to go to San Francisco for an emergency meeting with our other office. He won’t be able to take you out to dinner tonight for your birthday. And the trip to Catalina will be postponed. He’s sorry and should be home by Sunday evening. He’ll take you out for dinner that night,” the woman informed Shelly in a dull, monotonous tone.

“Thank you, Mary,” said Shelly.

Mary turned around walking out of the office.

“Boy, being an executive administrative assistant sure snuffs the caring soul of a person,” said one of the women. The three women chuckled.

Laura looked at the present in Shelly’s hand.

“Here we go again,” she muttered under her breath, shaking her head.

Shelly ripped the wrapping off the box like it was Christmas morning. She opened the box and removed a sparkling diamond necklace. She placed the necklace against her neck.

All the ladies, except for Laura, walked over and admired it.

“It’s so beautiful, Shelly!” one of the ladies beamed.

“Come on, girls. Let’s get to work before her future father-in-law fires us,” Laura warned.

The women smiled at Shelly and left.

Laura walked over and hugged Shelly.

“We need to talk,” she said with deep eyes.

“Come on, Laura. Why can’t you give it a rest?” Shelly complained.

“You’re in love with Alan’s money. Not Alan. Don’t give yourself away for a massive bank account,” Laura scolded.

Shelly admired her sparkling diamond necklace. “You hate Alan, so you don’t understand our love. Plus, you better remember he talked his father into hiring you since Jason’s, flying helicopters in Iraq.”

“No. Alan’s a nice guy, and I appreciate him giving me an administrative assistant job. But I know you! I’ve known you since we were ten, and there’s never been any love here!” Laura said.

“Not true!” Shelly fought back.

Shelly turned her back on Laura, returning to her General Mills illustration.

Laura stormed out of Shelly’s office in a huff.

It was five-thirty in the evening.

Shelly raced her red 1999 Toyota Celica through the thick Los Angeles streets. She hated LA traffic, so she weaved in and around the slowpokes. She always drove at least fifteen miles over the limit. She’s been lucky - no speeding tickets and no accidents.

She whipped her Celica into the parking lot of her apartment complex in Van Nuys. She parked in a stall getting out.

She walked away.

She looked at the building that housed her apartment. She looked at the center of the complex where the swimming pool was located.

“I feel like changing my routine.” She headed to the swimming pool.

Shelly opened the gate entering the pool area.

She walked close to an older man in shorts and no shirt slouched alone in a chair. His head bent down.

“I hope he’s not dead,” she worried. She walked over to him to ensure.

He looked homeless with white whiskers, thinning hair, and a red, swollen bumpy nose. Years of alcohol. She noticed a circular scar two inches below his left collarbone.

The man snorted with a small glass drink in his right hand.

“He’s not dead, just asleep.”

The glass tilted, dumping its liquid soaking the crotch of his shorts.

“Sir, you’re spilling your drink,” she called out.

A loud snort came from his nose.

Shelly reached down, removing the glass from the man’s hand. She sniffed the remaining liquid in the glass. “Whisky and soda.”

The man opened his eyes. He scanned the pool area in a daze. He focused on Shelly standing by him. A smile grew on his face. “Lisa? Am I finally in heaven?” he beamed at Shelly.

“No. I’m Shelly Nelson, and you’re in Van Nuys,” Shelly broke the news.

He frowned. He glanced down, seeing the huge wet spot in the crotch of his shorts. “Did I do it again?”

Shelly sat down in the chair to his right.

“No, you’re fine. The only accident you had was spilling your drink,” she answered, showing him his glass.

He spotted his glass in Shelly’s hand. “Good! It’s a pisser being old,” he said. “No pun intended,” he chuckled.

Shelly placed his glass down by his chair. She touched his arm, looking concerned. “Are you okay, sir?” she asked, glancing again at the scar below his left collarbone.

“Do I know you? I got this sudden weird feeling we’ve met before.” “You know, one of those *deja-vu* moments.”

“I don’t believe so. I’ve lived here for the past two years and don’t recall meeting you,” replied Shelly.

Shelly scanned around the pool area, then back at him. “Do you have any family members around?”

“No wife, no kids, and minimal retirement money,” he said. “Are you married, and do you have children?” he wondered.

“I’m getting married soon, but don’t plan on having kids.”

“A beautiful woman like yourself who doesn’t want beautiful babies? I don’t understand,” he replied.

“It’s a long story. So, how come you’re not married with grandkids running around?” Shelly probed.

He reached down for his glass. He grabbed it. “Empty,” he said. “Well, my first wife died in forty-five from brain cancer.”

“Was that Lisa?”

“Yes,” he replied, and his eyes welled up a little.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Then, I hired Amanda to be the office manager for my printing shop in West Hollywood. After she pursued me for a year, I married her in forty-eight. That marriage went great for a year until I got arrested,” he said with sad eyes.

“What for?” Shelly got curious.

“I don’t want to talk about it because I spent ten years in prison, and it still hurts. I realized Amanda had set me up for some illegal activity. She’s now filthy rich, and I’m alone and poor.”

“That’s a shame.”

“So after I got out of prison in fifty-nine, I couldn’t find work for six months. So I left Los Angeles and worked odd jobs for eleven years across the country. Dishwasher in Pittsburgh. Short-order cook in Memphis. Drove a taxi in New York. Then I drove a garbage truck in Chicago for thirty-five years. Then I retired in eighty-five. I moved back here to Los Angeles two years ago.”

“Why did you come back?” she asked.

“I had this overwhelming urge to move back here.” “It wouldn’t go away.”

“Did you ever fall in love again?” she asked.

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