

NICK NELSON  
WAS HERE

A NOVEL

*Matt Micros*

For everyone who believes in true love

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*Also by Matt Micros*

*~Five Days~*

*~The Knights of Redemption~*

*~The Chameleon~*



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**NICK NELSON WAS HERE**

*“There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand imitations.”*

**La Rochefoucauld**



This book is a work of fiction.  
No part of the contents relate to any real person or  
persons living or dead. No events depicted actually  
happened or are implied to have happened.



## I

## THE LAST OF THE NICE GUYS

Nick Nelson was first brandished with the moniker “the last of the nice guys” after leaving a pickup basketball game in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to help an elderly lady he didn’t know, carry her groceries 17 blocks to her house. He did little to change that view of him when he went to his Senior Prom with a girl in a wheelchair, and he cemented it forevermore after driving his roommate’s one night stand home *for* him, when his roommate got called into work. He even bought her breakfast on the way.

The label was something he was neither proud of, nor abhorred, for he knew the title and a quarter would only get him a phone call at a pay phone. But it was also his even keeled personality that enabled him to brush off days that would have driven a lessor person wild.

~

The line at the tax office was ten deep as it usually was at the end of the month. An array of people of

varying ages and economic stature waited; some patiently, others, not so much.

“I’m here to pay my son’s car tax,” an elderly woman announced to no one in particular. She was a kindly looking woman, well-dressed, with curly white hair and soft skin.

“Is he in high school?” another woman asked, the slight tilt of her head indicating that she wondered how a woman in her seventies could have a teenage son.

“Oh, no,” the elderly woman responded. “He’s 41, but he lives at home with us. So does his brother who’s 47.”

“Neither of them is married?”

“They’ve never been. They have it pretty good. We don’t make them pay rent, and I cook for them. They have plenty of money to spend as they choose.”

An older man entered the conversation at that point. His tightly cropped hair and posture that was much straighter than normal for someone his age, led Nick to believe he might be a veteran.

“Smart boys. A little ice cream ain’t worth 40 years of misery,” he said.

Nick, silent until that point, spit the water he was sipping across the floor. Nick Nelson was average in nearly every manner used to describe a person physically except for one. He had abnormally large feet. He credited that feature for the first of his two self-proclaimed talents—his ability to fall asleep anywhere, at any time—even while standing up; and his ability to listen in on other people’s conversations

without making it seem as though he was. Although spitting the water onto the linoleum tiles of the tax office left some question about his second talent.

“I don’t think I’d ever get married again,” the second woman said, as if she was hoping Nick would try to talk her out of it.

“No?” Nick asked politely. The woman had probably been pretty at one time, but life seemed to have worn her down. She wasn’t particularly heavy, yet not tone either, and her tan skin had a sort of leatherette look to it, as if it needed to be sanded down first before color was applied. She was probably in her late-thirties, but appeared much older. The fact that she was there in the middle of the day and the fact that her tan was much darker than a two-day weekend tan, told him that she worked nights, most likely at a grocery store or something of that nature.

“What about you? Have you ever been married?” she asked.

“Not yet. Still fighting the good fight.”

The crusty vet winked and nodded his approval, while his wife, having recently joined him in line, slapped him across the arm, causing him to roll his eyes.

“I’m not opposed to it,” Nick added almost as an afterthought. “But she would have to be a pretty special woman.”

“Don’t say a word!” the vet’s wife responded before her husband could.

The conversation was interrupted by the

screaming of a two year old boy, whose three year old brother had just pushed him over. When his young mother reprimanded him, the three year old began to pound his forehead off the floor.

“Matthew! No!” she shouted desperately as she tried to pull him from the floor.

“My parents told me I used to bang my head on the floor when I was little,” Nick offered.

“I’m worried he’s going to hurt himself,” she answered as he wriggled free from her grasp.

“Well, I wouldn’t encourage it,” Nick said with a smile, “but I turned out ok.”

“Next,” the woman at window 2 said, her eyes widening to indicate she was ready for Nick.

“How are you?” he said as he approached.

“How can I help you?” she answered in a tone that expressed she had little desire to do exactly that.

“I’m just looking to pick up a couple of beach parking stickers.”

“Do you have your license and registration with you?”

“My license, yes. I didn’t think I needed my registration.”

“I should be able to pull it up on the computer. What’s the plate number?”

“I have two cars actually, and ummm....neither have personalized plates, so I don’t really know the plate numbers to be honest.”

“What’s your address?” the woman droned.

“Same as on my driver’s license,” Nick answered with a smile.

She punched in a few keys, then stared blankly at the screen for a moment or two. “I don’t have any cars registered to you in Stamford,” she said at last.

“I have two of them. One’s parked out front,” Nick reassured her.

“I see a blue Hummer registered to you in Fairfield.”

“That’s where I used to live.”

“Did you ever transfer over the registration?”

His lack of a response told her the answer was no.

“I didn’t know I had to,” he answered at last. “But the other car should definitely be in there. I bought it long after I moved. I’ve only had it for two months.”

“Well, that’s why it’s not showing up in the system then. They update it every six months. You said you have that car with you?”

“Yes. It’s out front.”

“Can you go get the registration?”

Nick looked at her and then at the ever-growing line that had now spilled out into the corridor.

“I’ll give you a pass to come right to the window,” she said in the tone of an irritated high school teacher.

“Thank you,” he said as he took the pass. “I’ll be right back.”

When he returned, the young woman with the two young boys was still a good five people away from the window. She seemed to be at her last wit. Nick took a deep breath and handed her his pass as if it was the golden ticket to get into the Chocolate Factory. She took it gratefully. The woman at the window scowled at Nick. The passes were supposed to be non-transferable, but she was tired of listening to the boy pound his head off the floor as well, so she let it slide.

Thirty minutes later, Nick was finally at the window again. He handed her his registration, which she studied carefully.

“This is a temporary registration,” she said.

“It’s what they gave me,” Nick explained.

“It’s expired.”

“I haven’t received a permanent one yet.”

“I can’t accept this.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, I’m serious. You have one car whose registration has expired and another not even registered in town.”

“My driver’s license is up to date and I promise you both cars made the trip to Stamford with me. I didn’t leave them behind.”

“You live on Beach Avenue. Why do you even need beach stickers anyway?” the woman asked.

“Well, that’s actually kind of a long story,” Nick began. “You see, a few weeks ago, I had my roof



redone, and the guys doing it used a big tree I had in the yard as a scaffold to work on certain areas of the roof. Anyway, about a week later, in the middle of the night, I heard this huge crash, and looked out the window to see that the tree had fallen into the street. Well, the Public Works guys didn't chop the tree up for me. They simply picked it up and tossed it back into my yard. So, I then had to hire someone to come out, chop the tree up and grind up the stump. While they were doing that, their huge wood-chipper truck, chipped my driveway. That chip soon became a sinkhole. So, I had to get an engineer out and he said I needed to get it repaired as soon as possible and he recommended having the entire driveway redone. They're doing that as we speak, but I won't be able to drive on it for a couple of days, so I have to park my cars in the lot down the street. I wanted the beach stickers so I could park there without getting a bunch of parking tickets."

Most people, after hearing a story like that, would have relented and handed over the stickers. "Sorry I'm afraid I can't help you," the woman answered before turning to the next person in line. "Next."

At that point, some people would have responded with a string of expletives and thrown something. Nick merely nodded his head as if her response made sense and walked silently from the office.

He took a deep breath once outside. He loved the smells and sounds of late summer. Freshly cut grass. Flowers on their second bloom. The tide rolling in. He opened the passenger door of his car and placed his expired, temporary registration certificate inside the glove compartment before

walking around to the other side. On the windshield was a canary yellow parking ticket. He had exceeded the 60 minute allotment. Many people at this point would have torn the ticket to bits and left the pieces on the street. Nick tossed it onto his passenger seat.

“Nice car,” a voice said from behind him.

He looked up and saw the woman with the leatherette skin from the tax office waiting at the bus stop. “Thanks,” he answered. “I just got it a couple of months ago.”

“A Porsche, right?”

“Yes,” he answered, almost embarrassedly.

“You can definitely tell you’re not married,” the woman laughed.

“Yeah, I figured I’d have my mid-life crisis a little early. You need a ride?” Nick asked.

“I don’t want to put you out.”

“You’re not putting me out. I’ve got nowhere in particular to be.”

“Well, I never have ridden in a Porsche,” the woman said as she climbed in. “I’m Cheryl.”

“Nick,” he answered, formally introducing himself for the first time. “Where to, Cheryl?”

“The Super Stop & Shop over by the mall. I really appreciate this. I’m supposed to be at work by 4:30, and I think I’d be late if I had to wait for the next bus.”

“No problem.”

“So what do you do for a living?” she asked.

“I’m a producer for a small town Saturday morning television talk show called *Fairfield County Weekly*.”

“I’ve heard of it, but never seen it,” she said politely. He figured she had probably never even heard of it.

“Yeah, it’s got kind of a small audience.”

“It can’t be that small if you’re driving a car like this,” she remarked.

“Like I said, I’m single. No wife. No kids,” he laughed.

“There’s Margie!” the woman exclaimed as they pulled into the parking lot. “Do you think you could do me a favor and drop me off in the front? She’ll shit gold bricks if she sees me getting out of this car.”

“Well, let’s hope she does,” Nick said. “Gold bricks are very valuable.”

“You know, the Oyster Fest is this weekend,” Cheryl said as she scribbled a number on the back of a business card. “If you’re around, give me a call.”

“Thanks. If I’m around, I will.”

“Thanks again for the ride.”

“You’re welcome.”

He flipped over the card. It was a salesman’s card for office supplies. The guy must have given it to her. Now she had given it to him. It was wonder anyone ever got married. She was nice enough, but not his type. If he ever walked down the aisle, he wanted it

to be with someone that was also experiencing it for the first time as well. He would toss the card in the “if I’m lonely and desperate box” in his kitchen when he got home.

The pavers were just finishing up at his house as he pulled up to the curb. He had to admit. The driveway did look nice.

“All finished?” Nick asked.

“Yeah. You can walk on it, but I wouldn’t drive on it for a couple of days. And I would make sure any fat friends go in through the front door,” the gruff paver responded.

“Here’s your money,” Nick said, handing him an envelope of cash.

“Thanks. We filled that hole pretty good and paved up a solid two inches. You should be all set now.”

“Great.”

Nick looked at his house as the trucks pulled away. It had been his dream house for years, and when it finally went on sale three years ago, he jumped at the opportunity.

The house was a large white colonial, much larger than needed for a single person, with gleaming round pillars anchoring it in the front and sliding glass doors on both levels opening to a spectacular view of the Long Island Sound out back. The yard was meticulously kept, with a four-foot boxwood hedge shielding it from outsiders. He did notice, however,

that the grass was getting a bit unruly. Nick went over to the crawlspace where he stored his lawnmower and pulled on the door. It wouldn't open. He pulled again, harder this time and it opened slightly before jamming. Nick looked down and shook his head in amazement. The pavers had paved in his crawlspace.

At this point, most people would have embarked on a five state killing spree. But Nick Nelson was not most people. Instead, the last of the nice guys merely chuckled, his chuckle soon becoming a hearty laugh at the absurdity of it all.

## II

## MR. MCDERMOTT

The words “nice guy” and “Rick McDermott” rarely found their way into the same sentence and it didn’t seem to bother Rick at all. With his sardonic wit, searing sarcasm and occasional charm, he was nearly always the highlight of any gathering—unless of course, you were the focus of his venom.

An All-American First Baseman at the University of Notre Dame, he had earned his M.B.A. at Yale after graduation, and soon found himself an employee of Pressman-Griggs—the most successful advertising firm in New York City. If you ate it, wore it or wiped with it, chances are they represented it. After 15 years, Rick was a Senior Advertising Executive, the man they always sent in to close the deal or come up with a campaign slogan when everyone else was blocked. He was arguably the most valuable member of the firm, and yet had been passed over for partner on several occasions for the simple reason that Bill Griggs hated him.

On a good day, Rick referred to Griggs as “that

goofy bastard”. On a bad one, Griggs was a “pansy-ass, no talent, useless, waste of space, goofy bastard”. The two of them had hated each other almost from the moment they met. He saw Griggs for what he was—someone who had ridden on the coat tails of his older and more famous partner. Instead of being grateful for having been brought along for the ride, he was jealous and resentful. Rick saw him for what he was and it irritated Griggs to no end.

On several occasions, Griggs had tried to fire him, but Rick simply brought in too much money for Pressman to even consider it. Why Rick stayed where he wasn't wanted was the simple Mathematical equation of self-employment equals less money plus more aggravation. Translation: it was easier to stay where he was. In a few more years, he would have enough money to retire with homes in Sullivan Island, Nantucket, and the Gold Coast of Connecticut, in addition to apartments in New York City and Southern Italy. He didn't love his job, although there was a time when he did. Rick found that the higher profile the client, the less they were willing to listen. His job had become less about creating and more about telling them what they wanted to hear. He had developed the innate ability to immediately sense what people wanted to hear and regurgitate it back to them as if the idea had been their own.

“Brilliant!” they would respond as Rick simply shook his head and collected his paycheck.

He walked into the offices of Pressman-Griggs at 9:15am, or exactly fifteen minutes later than he was supposed to arrive. On most days he was in the building well before nine, but he knew his coming in

late, irritated Griggs, so he would either stay downstairs and converse with the security guard or get a leisurely coffee in the café.

“Morning, Joan,” he said to his secretary as he entered his office.

“Good morning, Mr. McDermott,” she answered. “Don’t forget you have a meeting with Mr. Griggs at 9:30.”

“How could I forget?” Rick mumbled as he tossed his briefcase on the couch and headed back down the corridor.

He waited in Griggs’ office for the better part of twenty minutes. He pulled out his iPhone and checked the stock market. The weather. His email. Read every article on the New York Mets website. Sent a couple of obnoxious text messages to co-workers. When he had exhausted every gadget on the phone, he gave up waiting and left.

He stuck his head in the office a few doors down. “You ready to go to lunch?” he asked a man who was working on a storyboard. The man was in his thirties, not as good looking as Rick, but with an appearance that was much neater. His shirt and pants were neatly pressed. His tie was precisely to the bottom of his belt buckle. His shoes were spit-shined to a nice glossy finish.

“It’s 10:00 in the morning,” the man answered without looking up.

“So? They don’t appreciate us enough around here.”

“They don’t appreciate us around here *because* you



go to lunch at 10:00 and they know we're friends. Guilt by association."

"So you're saying it's my fault you're not a partner yet? Man, my back is killin' me from carrying you on it for the past fifteen years!" Rick said.

Tom laughed. "I'm saying *you're* not a partner because you arrive late, take early lunches, don't wear a tie most days, leave early, and have no respect whatsoever for authority."

"I have respect for my mother—the only woman I truly trust," Rick announced. "Now, about lunch...."

There was some truth to what Rick had said. The two had met in business school, and were it not for Rick, Tom Reynolds might never have passed his graduate thesis. Then when it came time to interview for jobs, Rick made it a two for one at Pressman-Griggs. He said he wouldn't come without Tom. The partners reluctantly agreed and a day rarely passed where at least Bill Griggs didn't regret it. He liked Tom well enough. Tom was enough of a "yes" man to suit him, but Rick was another story.

"So I waited for him in his office for like twenty minutes and the fucking guy never showed up. Goofy lookin', no talent, waste of space that he is," Rick explained while he and Tom ate a couple of Italian sausages in Central Park. "Good, no? Kind of like a breakfast sandwich."

The wrinkles in Tom's forehead said it all. "Not exactly. So what did he want to meet about this time?"

“Same shit. The guy literally clocks me in in the morning and out at night. It’s to the point now where if I’m early, I’ll wait downstairs until I’m late. And then he goes on and on about wearing a tie. I don’t want to wear a tie. I can’t think when I have something tight around my neck. And our clients don’t give a shit if I’m wearing a tie or not. They want to know if I can sell their product. They wouldn’t care if I made the presentation naked as long as sales went up. Hell, some of the guys that work for Cosmel Cosmetics would probably like it.”

“Wow, that’s completely offensive, and yet, not altogether surprising coming from you.”

“Did you just join GLAAD or something?”

“You don’t have to be gay to be offended at some of the things you say,” Tom explained.

“Well, I’m sure it would help,” Rick shrugged.

His secretary informed him once he had returned to the office that Bill Griggs wanted to see him immediately. Rick knew as soon as he walked into Bill’s office and saw John Pressman seated in there, that there was something different about this meeting.

“John. Bill,” Rick nodded.

“We need to talk, Rick,” Pressman began as Bill sat with a growingly smug look on his face.

“About?”

“A number of things really. Tardiness. Your appearance. A lack of respect for one of the partners. Some of this is my fault. I’ve let it go for too long because you brought in a lot of business.”

“John, you’re a businessman. And because of that, I think this is a fair question. Which would you rather have? Someone who arrives a few minutes late, and leaves a few minutes early on occasion, but brings in thousands and thousands of dollars worth of business? Or someone who’s there all the time, but can’t get out of their own way?”

“Why can’t I have both?”

It was a fair response, and one that Rick didn’t quite know how to answer. After all, it was his company. He had the right to demand whatever he wanted.

“The bigger issue, is that on one hand, I have a partner that I started the company with, who has helped me build this agency into one of the top agencies in the world—“

“He hasn’t helped that much,” Rick interjected.

“And on the other,” Pressman continued, “I have my top executive, a guy who’s brought in a lot of business, A LOT. And, the two of them can’t stand each other. Now you tell me what I’m supposed to do.”

“I know what I would do,” Rick answered. “I’d buy the goofy bastard out before your top executive leaves with half your client roster and your company goes bankrupt.”

“Do you think this is a joke?!” Pressman said as he uncharacteristically raised his voice.

“No, I think it’s tragic.”

“You don’t even have enough respect for one of the partners to show up for a meeting with him?”

“I showed up at 9:30 and waited for about twenty minutes before leaving.”

“The meeting was at 11:00,” Griggs said. They were the first words he had spoken.

“No, it was at 9:30. You changed it to that time I assume, because you wanted to make sure I was in the building early in the morning.”

“The meeting was at 11:00, and you weren’t even in the building. You were out getting lunch.”

Rick grabbed the phone that was in the center of the conference table, dialed an extension, and put the call on speakerphone. It was his voicemail. He punched in a code and a message began to play.

*“This is Jana in Bill Griggs office. Bill wanted me to remind you that your meeting with him is at 9:30am tomorrow. Thanks.”*

“That was before we changed the time!” Griggs said indignantly.

Rick nodded as he reached into his shirt pocket and removed a phone message that read, *“Meeting changed to 9:30. Bill.”*

“Not only are you a goofy looking, no talent, waste of space, but you’re a fucking liar,” Rick answered as he threw the message in Griggs’s face.

Griggs looked like he wanted to go up over the table at him.

“Gentlemen. Enough!” Pressman said angrily. Bill, leave us for a minute.”

“What?!” Griggs said, astonished.

“Nothing is going to get accomplished with both of you here, so let me talk to you both separately.”

Griggs reluctantly trudged from his own office. Rick winked at him and waved on his way out.

“Rick. I sit here with you and I could see us having a drink and talking about world events. But for some reason, you and Bill are like oil and water.”

“Look, we both know the real reason he’s had it out for me is because Johnson & Johnson wanted me to take over their campaign from his son. And we both also know I did everything I could to keep him involved.”

“That may be, but the question remains. How are we going to work this out to best benefit the company? You should already be a partner by now. But I can’t go over his head and make you one without you at least trying to meet him halfway. I’ve spent the last fifteen years fighting with him just to keep you, because you’re talented.”

“I appreciate that,” Rick said. “And you’re right. I should be a partner by now. As for what we’re going to do to make this work, that’s easy. I quit.”

“Let’s not make a hasty decision,” Pressman said, backtracking a bit.

“John, you’re a good man, and I appreciate the opportunity you’ve given me, but you could offer to pave the streets with gold and line them with beautiful women throwing rose petals at me while I ride in on a chariot that you sent to bring me to work, and I still wouldn’t come back here tomorrow.”

Rick left the elder statesman of the firm with his mouth agape as he walked out the door. “Hey, Bill,” he said as he walked past, “go fuck yourself.”

Fifteen years there and it took him all of five minutes to pack up his things. He didn’t have a wife or kids. No nieces or nephews. Just a picture of his parents, five or six pictures of Tom and him at the Mets Fantasy Camp in which Rick was named Camp MVP, and a couple of Emmy-like advertising awards that he had stuffed into the bottom drawer of his desk.

“You coming?” Rick asked as he stood in Tom’s doorway holding his box of belongings.

“Coming where?” Tom asked, without looking up.

“I quit.”

“You what?!” Tom asked in a fury, looking up this time.

“He quit!” came the response from the younger man standing over Rick’s right shoulder. Another younger associate stood to his left. “Told Bill Griggs to go fuck himself.”

“I was ten feet away. It was beautiful.” The second man added.

“We’re leaving to form our own firm, *The Agency*,” Rick said. “We’ll have four partners. McDermott, Jones, Vossler...and Reynolds if you’re in.”

Tom glanced at the picture on his desk of his wife and children. Then he looked at the five or so

pictures he had of him and Rick sitting on an end table. It took him about fifteen seconds before he dumped out a file box and began tossing his personal items in it—which was about fifteen seconds before security arrived to escort them all from the premises.

As they stepped through the security held-open door of the building, the warm summer air enveloped them, along with a sudden sense of panic at what they were going to do next.

“How are we going to reach any of the clients?” Tom asked. “They wouldn’t let us take any of our contact information.”

“Relax,” Rick answered calmly. “I’ve been emailing that info to my home computer for the past month.”

“You *knew* you were going to do this?!”

“I didn’t *know*. But I am kind of a prick, so I always considered it a possibility,” he said as the four of them continued down the busy Manhattan sidewalk.