



BETHANY TURNER



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2019 by Bethany Turner

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Turner, Bethany, 1979– author.

Title: Wooing cadie mccaffrey / Bethany Turner.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2019]

Identifiers: LCCN 2018049157 | ISBN 9780800735227 (pbk.)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3620.U76 W66 2019 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018049157>

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

Published in association with Jessica Kirkland and the literary agency of Kirkland Media Management, LLC., PO Box 1539, Liberty, Texas 77575.

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



*Dedicated to the memory of Nora Ephron,
Who taught me that you always
need someone to kiss on New Year's,
That daisies are indeed the friendliest flower,
And that sometimes people don't
just want to be in love.
They want to be in love in a movie.*

Prologue

Four years ago, on my thirtieth birthday, I had two very important realizations.

1) I didn't need a man in my life in order to be happy or fulfilled.

2) My chances of meeting and falling in love with a man—and having him fall in love with me—would increase exponentially if I lowered my standards.

Not my standards for the man, of course. No, with the introduction of realization number one, the standards for the man had never been higher. If I didn't *need* a man, then there was no harm in being very picky and waiting for the right one to come along. But with the introduction of realization number two, I could no longer deny that I did very much want to be in love . . . whether I needed to be or not.

In my heart of hearts, I knew I had no desire to settle for anything less than a man who would make at least one of the Bronte sisters proud. But there wasn't much chance of falling in love with any man at all if I stayed hung up on the

idea of my romantic life playing out like the classic novels and films I loved so much.

Cary Grant does not exist in my Millennial world.

Of course, I wasn't expecting Will Whitaker to show up, or for him to burst onto the scene as if acting out a story-book meet-cute.

You know what a meet-cute is, right? It's that charming first encounter between two characters that leads to a romantic relationship between them. Suffice it to say, with realization number two, I had given up on ever experiencing a true meet-cute. Actually, I was pretty convinced that I wouldn't know a true meet-cute if it fell on me. I'd spent most of my life trying to force the meet-cute. Trust me . . . that doesn't work. Intentionally bumping into guys and dropping your books rarely results in them saying, "Hey, let me help you with that." I've found that "Hey, watch where you're going!" is more common.

So by the time I turned thirty, I was absolutely convinced that meet-cutes were a thing of legend.

Enter Will, stage left.

It was a day like any other at ASN, the American Sports Network. That's where I worked. ASN. But not like in *sports* or anything. Heavens, no. All I know of basketball, football, lacrosse, or any other sport is how much money is generated in advertising dollars as a result of our coverage of said sport, and how much all of those on-air sports people get paid. My office is in the part of the ASN complex that the sports people call The Bench. They come to our stark wasteland of blah concrete walls for marketing and accounting needs. Perhaps the occasional human resources disaster. But then they happily return to the glitz and glamour that they refer to as The Field.

“Gotta get back on The Field,” they love to say. *On* The Field? That sounds so stupid. But when I say “I’m heading over *to* The Field for a bit,” I am invariably met with questions that they think are hilarious. “Got some plowing to do, McCaffrey?” Sure.

So there I was, in The Bench—or *on* The Bench, as they continually correct me—when I heard the most dreaded of all birthday sounds: about twenty tone-deaf sports experts and about half as many barbershop quartet wannabes from The Bench, all singing “Happy Birthday.” To me, presumably.

“Oh, wow. You shouldn’t have,” I managed to say in a way that I’m pretty sure sounded grateful, as they made their way into my office—holding a monstrous cake ablaze with thirty giant candles.

“Happy birthday, dear Cadie,” they belted. “Happy birthday to you!”

I waited for Kevin Lamont, who was carrying the cake, to set it down on my desk so I could blow out the candles, but he just kept holding it. Kevin, of course, is now the host and executive producer of *The Daily Dribble*, the most successful show on ASN. He’s also the vice president over all prime-time programming for the network, which makes him my boss. But back then he was simply *The Daily Dribble*’s host and one of my absolute favorite people around the ASN offices. And though he’s gone a bit gray and put on a little around his midsection, he certainly hasn’t lost a centimeter of height from his NBA days.

“Make a wish and blow out the candles,” Kevin teased as he held the cake at his shoulder height—which is still at least an inch above my head.

“Well, I’d love to, but—”

“Here, Cadie,” Max Post, resident sound engineer extraordinaire, chimed in as he pulled a chair over to my desk. “Climb up here.”

“Very funny, guys,” I replied with a smile. “C’mon, Kevin. All of the wax is going to melt down onto the cake.”

“You’d better do something about it then!” he insisted as he jutted out his chin toward a couple of former linebackers.

In an instant, the linebackers had grabbed my arms and hoisted me up—not onto the chair by the desk, but onto the desk itself.

I was so grateful that after six years at ASN, I knew better than to wear a skirt to the office.

“Very funny,” I repeated, as I did all I could to remind myself that I loved my job—and that it wasn’t my coworkers’ fault that they were savages. They meant well, and I knew that everything they were doing was an attempt to show me that they cared. They just happened to be from a culture in which you showed someone you cared by snapping them with a wet towel in the locker room.

I was ready to end the spectacle, so I took in a deep breath and prepared to use every bit of power my lungs could muster to blow out those thirty massive candles in one fell swoop. But just as I released the pressure of air, Lindy Mason called out from the hallway.

“Hey, everyone. Montana’s here.”

Kevin turned his 6’9” frame toward the door—and my cake went with him.

“Happy birthday, Cadie!” scattered voices called out as they left me in favor of Joe Montana, who was on *The Field* for an interview. An interview that they’d been waiting months for—but that only about eight of them were actually

required to be present for. The others were just going as fans who happened to get paid to gawk at their heroes.

“Sorry, McCaffrey,” Kevin said as he shrugged and handed me the cake.

“Et tu, Kevin Lamont?”

He smiled and winked as he said, “Next time, don’t have your birthday on a day a legend is scheduled to be in the studio.” And then he ran out after everyone else.

Perfect.

I held the ridiculously large cake in my arms and tried to figure out how to get down. I had learned not to wear skirts to work, but unfortunately I still insisted on wearing heels.

“Now what?” I asked, of absolutely no one.

I sighed and looked at the chair next to the desk. I wouldn’t be able to see where I was stepping, due to the sheer magnitude of the cake, so stepping down onto the chair was out. I decided instead to squat down and place the cake on the desk, but the combination of the weight of the cake and balancing on heels made me very wobbly. I felt myself losing my grip on the cake as I teetered forward—the cake that still burned with the light and heat of three decades’ worth of candles.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” a voice called out from behind me.

Before I knew what was happening, he had one arm around my waist and the other under my cake. He gently lowered the cake onto the desk and then looped his arm under my knees. Pretty instantly I was back on the ground, on my feet, but there was a brief second when he was carrying me in a manner of which I knew Charlotte, Emily, and Anne would all approve.

“Sorry about that,” I muttered, the heat of my cheeks

undeniable, even before I had looked at him. And then I *did* look at him.

He was taller than me, but not as tall as most of the guys from The Field, who regularly made me feel like a Hobbit. No, he was just the perfect amount of tall. Okay . . . probably not an athlete. Although he was fit and muscular. At least not a star athlete. A golfer, maybe? His face drew me in—with its crinkly eyes and perfectly shaped mouth. But it was also just the tiniest bit . . . goofy. His nose was a little too big, as were his ears, and while he was handsome—without question—he was also blatantly imperfect. So probably not an on-air personality.

“Um, is your cake from Madame Tussaud’s bakery?” His eyes darted with humor back and forth from my eyes to the cake.

“What?” I turned to face the cake on the desk, and my mouth and eyes flew open as I took in the sight of candles, which had become nothing more than melted wax nubs barely standing between the fire and the frosting. “Oh my goodness!” I exclaimed, and then I huffed and puffed—and hardly made a dent.

“These must be those hard-to-extinguish candles,” he astutely observed as he began huffing and puffing alongside me.

I wheezed. “You think?”

“Just a hunch.” He shrugged, and I laughed.

We kept blowing, and the sparks kept reigniting. We could have doused the flames, or suffocated them, but that didn’t seem to occur to us just then. All we knew to do was use all the air our lungs could generate, over and over again. Finally—one by one—sparks faded, as there was nothing left but little bits of wick swallowed by extremely waxy frosting.

Neither of us said a word for several seconds. He backed away to provide a comfortable distance between two people who had just met. Yes, he had very recently carried me in his arms, but that had been a cake emergency. Now, the proximity would just be awkward. But I barely even took note of any of that. I just stared at my once beautiful cake. Well, at least it had given the appearance of being beautiful, when it had been lit up like a friskier version of the Olympic torch. Once the dazzling spectacle was gone, I was able to see what was written on it, in black icing.

“Happy 50th Birthday, Cadie!”

“Happy 50th,” I said aloud. “Lovely.” I shook my head and laughed. “Kevin Lamont is a punk.”

“Oh! You know Kevin Lamont? I’m supposed to be meeting with him today. In about—” He glanced at his watch, and then his eyes flew open. “Oh, man. About five minutes ago!”

I scooped some icing onto my finger and then licked it off as I said, “Don’t worry about it. The whole Field is in a Joe Montana haze right now. No one knows you’re missing.”

His eyes opened even wider. “Joe . . . Joe Montana? Is he . . . is he here?”

I turned away from him so he wouldn’t see me roll my eyes. “He is. Kevin’s interviewing him for *The Daily Dribble*. I’m sure if you hurry, you can still catch him.”

“Am I allowed? I mean . . . I have an interview—”

“Oh yeah?” I interrupted, not meaning to show interest but unable to stop myself. “For what position?”

“Well, hang on a second,” he said as he crossed his arms and leaned against the doorframe. “What makes you so sure it’s a job interview? Maybe Kevin Lamont is interviewing *me* on *The Daily Dribble*. Did you ever think of that?”

I turned his direction once again—increasingly charmed by him. “No. I didn’t.”

“Oh, come on.” He stood up taller and puffed out his chest. “I’ve played some ball in my day.”

I laughed. “I’m sure you have. You are very clearly a fine athletic specimen.” I felt the heat rise back up to my cheeks. *Please let him know I’m teasing.*

“Why, yes. Yes, I am.” He knew. “In fact, it’s probably best I wait a few minutes before going out there. Montana’s not quite the well-tuned machine he once was, so—”

“You wouldn’t want to make him feel insecure or anything . . .”

“Exactly.”

The corner of his mouth crept slowly upwards, but there was nothing gradual about the appearance of the twinkle in his eyes.

“Researcher on *The Daily Dribble*,” he finally said. “I’m not sure what gave me away.”

“It was mostly the fact that you called Kevin by his real name. His close friends—you know, pretty much all the major athletes in the world—call him—”

“Swoosh.”

I tilted my head, trying to figure out if the cute, imperfect, charming guy was as much of a sports fan as the rest of them, or if he just knew things because he was a researcher. I was really hoping it was option B, but I wasn’t optimistic. I mean, do people really become sports researchers if they aren’t obsessed with sports? I just didn’t know if I could allow myself to be interested in another sports guy.

But the fact of the matter was that most people didn’t come to work at ASN if they weren’t governed by their love

of the game. Whichever game. At least *one* of the games. I knew I was an exception to the rule, and always had been, and that worked just fine for me. Spreadsheets don't need color commentary, and they don't go into overtime. What *did* go into overtime, however, pretty much every single day, was my work schedule. And when you work all the time, work is the best place to meet guys.

It would be nice if once—just once—the guys weren't *sports guys*.

"Yeah." I sighed. "Swoosh. Well, thanks for your help with the cake and, you know . . . that whole embarrassing birthday debacle."

"Anytime," he replied with a smile. "I guess I should get to this interview."

"Definitely. And if you hurry, maybe you can still catch Joe Montana."

He nodded appreciatively and made his way out the door and into the hallway. "This way?" he asked, pointing toward The Field.

"Yep. Good luck."

I smiled at him and then turned back to my mess of a cake. A girl can't afford to be a cake snob on her thirtieth birthday, so I began the arduous task of scraping the wax onto a paper plate, salvaging as much of the frosting as possible. It took several minutes, but I tackled it with the precision of a neurosurgeon, sucking on wax chunks as necessary so nothing went to waste. Of course it was just as I had stuffed another giant dollop of icing into my mouth that he showed up at my door again.

"So, I'm going to venture a guess and say you're not really turning fifty years old today. Correct?"

I gulped down my glob of sugary indulgence as quickly as I could and turned to face him. “That is correct.”

He was in the doorframe, leaning against one side of it, one leg crossed in front of the other, his arms mirroring the position. He really was cute, my second viewing confirmed. And he got even cuter as a wide grin overtook his entire face.

“What?” I asked, my own smile growing by leaps and bounds at the sight of his.

“Black frosting,” he replied as he took one step back into my office.

I still didn’t understand what he found so amusing, but as long as his amusement kept resulting in that smile, no one would hear me complain. Finally, he realized that I had no clue why we were staring at each other with goofy expressions on our faces.

“Black frosting,” he repeated. And then he took yet another step. “It’s . . . well . . .” He chuckled softly and then said, one more time, “Black frosting.” But this time the words were accompanied by a general sweeping motion across his own mouth and pearly whites, and I understood.

“What’s your point?” I asked, hoping that my self-assured demeanor was at least somewhat believable. “I refuse to allow the world’s prejudice against food coloring—stained teeth and lips to stand in the way of my birthday celebration. After all, a thirty-year-old only turns fifty once. Or twice potentially, I suppose.”

“Very true.” He nodded and smiled and then stepped farther into the room—closer to me, and then closer still. It had been quite a while since I had felt any sort of chemistry with any guy, or even been somewhat attracted to one, so to be attracted *and* feel a spark was almost enough to make

me wonder if my two important birthday realizations from earlier in the day had just been the sad, pathetic musings of a woman desperately grasping at straws upon waking to discover she was no longer in her twenties.

But then the cute stranger with the slightly too-big nose and the slightly asymmetrical eyes—and the absolutely bewitching smile—walked straight over to my cake and used his fingers to dig into the thickest patch of black icing he could find. He turned to face me and grinned the toothiest grin you can imagine—and his teeth were the stuff of Halloween legend, just like mine. Then I knew—or at least I suspected, or at least I really, really hoped—that those two realizations had been rendered obsolete. My smitten brain was already working on the revisions.

1) I didn't need a man in my life in order to be happy or fulfilled. But having the *right* man in my life certainly wouldn't stand in the way of happiness or fulfillment.

2) My chances of meeting and falling in love with a man—and having him fall in love with me—would increase exponentially if I lowered my standards. But that didn't mean that I couldn't be pleasantly surprised by someone actually raising the standard. And it didn't mean that someone who raised the standard wouldn't be . . . better.

“So, you're thirty?” he asked, not taking his eyes off of me as his icing-stained fingers went back for seconds. I laughed and nodded. “What other lies has this cake told? I bet your name isn't really Palie at all, is it?”

My eyebrow rose. “No, it isn't.” I peeked at the smeared, waxy icing, which now said, “Harpy soy Birdbay, Palie!” and started cracking up. “You think my name is Palie? And . . . today is my thirtieth birdbay?”

“Well, it doesn’t seem quite right, I confess,” he said. “But really, your name . . . how old you are . . . none of that matters. What really matters is that you have a harpy soy birdbay. So . . . *has* it been a harpy birdbay, Palie?”

It’s getting better all the time. “Yes, thank you. It’s been pretty harpy.”

“Good.” He smiled and looked down at his shuffling feet. Once he looked down, he realized he was fidgeting and put a stop to it. “I’m Will Whitaker, by the way,” he said, raising his eyes to meet mine once more. He began to stretch out his arm to shake my hand but quickly realized the staining was not just reserved for his face. With a laugh he stuck out his left hand instead. I would have met it with *my* left hand, but I was even more untouchable than he was, so I awkwardly shook his hand with the pinky finger and thumb of my right hand.

I finally told him my name as I laughed and shook my head at the absurdity of it all. “Cadie. Cadie McCaffrey.”

“Ah yes.” He nodded. “That suits you so much more than Palie.”

I would have gladly stood there, being amused by each other, all day long, but the thought suddenly occurred that I had work to do—and he was supposed to be in an interview.

“Oh my gosh.” My eyes flew open as his had earlier when he’d realized he was running late. And now he was *very* late. “Aren’t you supposed to be meeting with Kevin?”

“He was busy with Joe Cool. We’re meeting in a few minutes.”

“Joe Cool?” I repeated, my men-who-love-sports trepidation rising back to the surface.

“You know . . . Joe Cool. Joe Montana.”

“Yeah.” I sighed. “I figured.”

“You’re not a Montana fan?” When I didn’t reply and just shrugged my shoulders, he pushed further. “Not a football fan?” I bit my lip and still said nothing. “Not a *sports* fan?” he asked incredulously.

“No, I’m really not.”

That was it. I knew that was it. See ya, Will Whitaker—ye of the shaggy head full of hair and the tiny little dimples that had already presented themselves as an added benefit of making him laugh. If there was one thing I knew from experience, it was that I wasn’t nearly as opposed to dating sports guys as they were opposed to dating someone who didn’t understand the first thing about their greatest passion.

“Okay.” He shrugged, the intensity of his eye contact and the sparkle in his eyes not fading one little bit.

Hang on. What?

“But listen,” he continued. “You don’t have to like sports to still appreciate Joe Cool. Montana was the best of all time. It didn’t matter what was happening on the field all around him—his head was always exactly where it needed to be. He could size up fifty yards of chaos in an instant, and zero in on exactly the right play at exactly the right moment. He’s the reason I fell in love with football. He made me realize that sports—when done right—isn’t just about strength and speed and agility and all of that. Yeah, Montana had an arm like no one else, but he’s in the Hall of Fame because of his brain.”

I have to admit, Will Whitaker had found a way to make sports talk somewhat interesting to me. And a little bit of that may have even had something to do with Joe Montana.

A very little bit.

“Will?” I began with a smile.

“Yes?”

“It sounds like Joe Montana is a hero of yours.”

He nodded. “Absolutely.”

“Okay, so you need to get over to The Field. Run to the men’s room, splash some water on your teeth, and go meet your hero! What are you doing standing around here?”

The corner of his mouth rose once again, and the shuffling feet returned—but this time, he didn’t look down at them. His eyes never left mine.

“I needed to see if you have plans tonight. Because, if not, I’d love to take you out for your birdbay.” He leaned in slightly and added, in a near whisper, “That would make me very harpy.”

Ladies and gentlemen: the meet-cute.

1



Four Years Later. To the Day.

What a difference four years can make. I sniffed and dabbed at my eyes as I scrolled through the countless photos on my phone. Selfies on roller coasters; shots of beautiful scenery, taken on weekends when we got out of the city and drove upstate; Central Park, covered in snow—serving its premiere purpose as a worthy backdrop in every picture I could manage to sneak of him.

Those were always my favorites. The sneak attack photos. When he knew I was taking his picture, it was as if his face wasn't capable of a non-goofy expression. And I liked those too. But when I caught him taking in his surroundings, delighting in . . . anything? Well, that was when Will Whitaker was the most photogenic man on the planet.

I hadn't taken a sneak attack photo of him in almost a

year. Actually, I had to go back six months to even find any photo of him at all.

If no longer feeling compelled to snap adoring photos of the person you're supposed to be in love with isn't a sign that the relationship's in trouble, I don't know what is.

I threw my phone against the cushions of the couch and stood—finally resolved. That phone call had pushed me as far as I was willing to go. I crossed to the mirror beside the front door.

“Okay, that won't do,” I told myself upon witnessing the brown-black mascara circles underneath my eyes. I hurried to the bathroom and grabbed a washcloth. “What's your rush, Cadie?” I muttered. “It's not like you have anywhere to be for 'A day or two. Three at the most.’” I groaned as I repeated his completely noncommittal brush-off.

I couldn't remember the last time he'd been on time. At least not for a date with me. For work? Sure. Kickoff? You bet. He'd never so much as missed a performance of the national anthem. Punctuality was, apparently, completely unnecessary for evenings with his girlfriend. But cancelling altogether? That hadn't happened very often at all before tonight.

Four years.

The number seemed to magnify and expand each time it entered my thoughts. The number of years had felt like a huge, wonderful accomplishment back when I thought Will and I were building toward something—and a huge, disastrous waste of time now that I finally accepted that we weren't. And if we weren't building toward something, it had to end. That was all there was to it.

Work would be awkward, of course. I wasn't looking for-

ward to that. But it wasn't as if either of us ever had much reason to visit the area where the other worked—and we'd have even less reason now. In fact, I'd be perfectly content if I never had to step on The Field again, whether Will worked there or not.

I dropped the white washcloth covered in dark smudges into the sink. “Who cares?” I groaned.

I stared into the mirror, but I wasn't looking at the remnants of makeup, or the angry red hue of my fair skin, splotchy from crying and agitated further by my careless use of the washcloth. I wasn't even looking at the constellation of freckles across my nose, which had once made me self-conscious until Will convinced me they were one of his favorite things.

I was trying to see deeper than that. What was it about me that would never be enough for him? I knew my flaws, and *of course* Will knew my flaws. But he still called me his girlfriend. He still professed his love for me. Nothing had ever made him run. Nothing had ever caused him to seek comfort in the arms of another woman or to grow bitter with me.

Nothing had ever caused him to ask me to be his forever, either.

I could play it tough all day long and put up the defenses that had to be in place in order to keep from being destroyed by him, but staring in the mirror, with only my doubts and fears and fragile heart to guide me, I knew I was in very real danger. My heart had been claimed long ago. It belonged to Will Whitaker for as long as it was beating. And I didn't know how it would survive the final, painful realization that he didn't love me quite enough to give me his in return.

I stopped in my tracks, midway between the bathroom

and the kitchen, where the cold, congealed marinara sat in its pan and unlit candles sat on the table, taunting me.

Am I actually going to end things?

Tears pooled in my eyes as I thought of it all as an inevitability for the first time. No more trying to figure out how to keep things fresh. No more wondering if something had caused him to lose interest—if something had caused *me* to lose interest—or if our ho-hum monotony was normal for couples who had been together as long as we had. No more dropping hints about marriage. No more disappointment each time another significant date or special occasion concluded without a proposal.

No more walking through doors that he held open for me. No more laughing together at four years' worth of inside jokes, lost in a language that only he and I understood. No more of that bewitching smile, reserved just for me.

Stop it, Cadie. I couldn't afford to spend time thinking about all I would lose by ending my relationship with Will—not when there was so much to gain. After all, I had had two very important realizations.

1) I didn't need to get married in order to be happy or fulfilled.

2) My chances of convincing myself I actually believed realization number one would increase exponentially if Will Whitaker was out of my life.