

*The Connecticut Baby*

# The Connecticut Baby

by  
Barry Oliver

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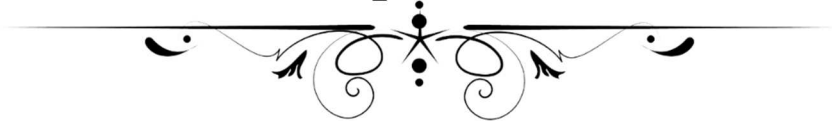
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## *The Connecticut Baby*

# Chapter 1

## Family Secrets



Delilah Idell Hayes was born March 5, 1901, on a farm some thirty miles west of Des Moines, Iowa. She never loved the flat plains of her birth home. Later her name would change to Delilah Idell Perkins when she married Edward Maynard Perkins in the Spring of 1924. They relocated to North Carolina (Delilah did fall in love with the mountains) where Delilah and Edward's descendants had lived ever since. Now at 109 years of age, Delilah (Nicknamed Dilly until her grandchildren were born, then Del ever after) was the aged matriarch of the Perkins dynasty that included her four children (all now passed), twelve grandchildren, and nearing forty great-grandchildren. A few great-great grandchildren were just starting to arrive in the world, though she had only seen one or two of them. Del was blind in one eye and deaf in the other ear, but often surprised people with her perceptive abilities. She was mentally sharp, except when she drifted off, which was happening more and more these days—little “power naps” scattered randomly throughout her day. Del's family worried that, in the very near future, their 109-year-old matriarch wouldn't wake from one of those naps.

This was the reason for Zach Perkins' visit today; to pay a visit

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to Del perhaps for that last time before she faded into family legend. Zachary Edward Perkins was born June 17, 1988, in Greensboro, North Carolina. Now, at age 21, he was a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he would graduate in one month. As a third-generation North Carolinian and a proud Tar Heel, he considered North Carolina to be his ancestral home. Delilah had been 87 when he was born, an ancient fixture in his life, as much a part of North Carolina to him as the Blue Ridge Mountains themselves. Emotionally, it was difficult to imagine Del would ever be gone, but intellectually Zach knew it couldn't be long.

"Del. It's me, Zach," he knocked on the door of her two-story home, located a few miles south of Raleigh. "Are you awake?"

Delilah's live-in aide, Ms. Josephine answered the door. "Why, hello Zach. Come in." She opened the main door, while Zach opened the screen. "Del is in the living room having some tea. Make yourself at home." Even Josephine, age 60, called Delilah, "Del." It was one of Delilah's small, unexplained quirks, that for her entire life she had insisted on being addressed by one and only one name by everyone. For the first fifty years, she was Dilly, the next fifty-nine—Del. Zach was 8 years old before he learned Del had a full legal name just like other people. That also happened to be the year he learned the truth about Santa Claus (he had been the lone hold-out in third grade).

"Hey, Del." Zach walked through the main foyer and turned left into the living room. "It's me, Zach. Just stopping by to pay a visit." The drive from UNC to South Raleigh was farther than "just stopping by" distance. With traffic, it had taken nearly an hour. But that's what all the family were doing these days, "stopping by" to see Delilah for perhaps the last time.

"I'll leave you two to visit," Josephine said, seemingly in a hurry to be somewhere else. "I'll be upstairs if you need me."

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Zach nodded, okay. She was an odd one, Ms. Josephine. Although she and Del got along perfectly well, her interactions with guests could be halting at times. She tended to abruptly leave conversations as if distracted by some chore she needed to attend to. Regardless, she was devoted to Del, and thus Del and all her family were devoted to Josephine.

Zach spotted Del seated at her small, two-seat divan, gazing out the garden window, sipping tea. “Hi, Del. It’s me, Zach,” he spoke rather loudly in case she had not heard the first time. He approached the couch and kissed her silver hair.

Del gave him a knowing smile. “I heard you walking up to the door. I recognized the sound of your car.”

And *that* counted as one of her little surprises. Zach couldn’t help grinning. Del’s one good ear functioned perfectly well. He could safely turn down the volume. “How are you feeling today?” he spoke in a normal tone.

It was Del’s turn to grin. “Everyone always asks me that, and the answer is always the same. I feel like I’m one hundred and nine years old, how else would I feel?” Then, a frown crossed her face. “Too bad about the Tar Heels this year. After last year’s championship, too. What a shame.”

Zach’s expression turned to one of awe and respect. Del was, of course, referring to the 2009 NCAA Men’s Basketball Championship and the fact that UNC had won the Championship game and then failed to make “March Madness” at all this year. Every UNC student was painfully aware of this fact, but how—among some forty great-grandchildren—did Del remember that detail? “Yeah, it’s a shame, but there’s always next year.” He immediately regretted saying that. There might not be a next year for Del.

“Don’t give me that look. Of course, I’ll be around next year.”

*This, coming from a woman half blind,* Zach thought. “Del, I have



no doubt. You seem to know everything.”

Del took a slow sip of her tea. “I’m afraid knowing everything would take a few more centuries but thank you anyway.”

Speaking of centuries, Zach began to peruse the pictures covering every wall and countertop surface of Delilah’s home. He walked to the nearest chest of drawers and began picking up one framed picture after another. There were pictures from literally every decade of the 20th Century along with the first decade of the 21st. At one time Zach had thought about scanning every picture in Del’s home so they would be preserved digitally. Unfortunately, given her massive collection of photos, that task would have to wait until he finished college. Zach added that task to the growing To-Do List of his life. *I swear I will scan them all one day.*

Zach stopped at a picture that confused him. The picture was of him, age 6 or 7, but the photo looked too old, faded, and grainy. “Del, when was this picture taken?” He carried the photo to her for inspection.

Del glanced at the picture for only a split second. “That’s your father, the summer of 1969 when we landed on the Moon.”

Zach gasped. “Oh my God, you’ve got to be kidding.” It was embarrassing how much alike he and his father looked at that age—like identical twins. He again ran the numbers of grandchildren and great-grandchildren through his mind. It was astounding that this centenarian could instantly recall names and dates from among so many. *How do you remember them all?* He wanted to ask, but that question would have been ridiculous to her. These pictures were her life. *She remembers everything!*

Zach replaced the picture of his 7-year-old father and continued browsing the table. He opened the top drawer of the dresser to find hundreds of additional photos stacked inside. Yes, his scanning idea might turn into a years-long project. He opened the next drawer

below to find more of the same. Finally, he opened the bottom drawer. What he saw gave him a shock. On top of the pile was a 5x7 inch colorized portrait of a young woman with short bobbed hair and a light pink blouse that could have been purchased at any store today. The woman was stunningly attractive and thoroughly modern—the young Delilah Hayes. At the bottom was written only the year, 1920. Del must have been 19 in the picture.

Zach lifted the portrait reverently. “Del, I can’t believe it. Is this you?” He carried it over to show her. Her nod was confirmation. “I mean, seriously, you were...umm.”

“Hot?” She finished for him.

Zach blushed. “Oh no, not that. I meant you were very pretty.”

“In a sexy way?” She pushed.

Zach’s red face deepened. *Yes, in a very sexy way*, he thought. If he met a girl like that in college today, Zach would probably fall in love immediately. How does one feel this way about one’s 109-year-old great-grandmother?

“Just pretty,” Zach answered, not very convincingly.

Del patted her fragile, arthritic hand on Zach’s knee. “You’re a little young for me, though. Maybe when you’re older.”

Zach squirmed and stood up abruptly. He knew it was a joke, but still. “Okay, let’s see what other pictures are in that drawer.” He marched over to the cabinet. First, he placed the “1920 Pink Blouse” picture on the countertop where he felt it deserved to be seen. Then, Zach kneeled and rummaged through the lower drawer.

Near the bottom of one pile, Zach found another picture that caught his attention. It was that same young woman, Delilah Hayes, holding a very small boy, a toddler perhaps, standing on a beach boardwalk with the ocean visible in the distance. The Delilah in this picture possessed that same radiant smile as she had in the “1920

Pink Blouse” photo. The boy seemed just as happy. Zach had to dig into his own vague memories of family lore to figure out who the child could be. “Del, I think this is you and great uncle, Will.” Great uncle Will had been Delilah’s first child, born (Zach was pretty sure) in the 1920s.

Delilah smiled warmly. “Oh, yes. I married your great grandfather Edward in the Spring of 1924. Then, two years later little Willie came to us in October of ‘26. That was three years before the Crash. Three years before the world you see there came to an end.”

Zach nodded solemnly. The Great Depression—aka The Great Divider—split Delilah’s world between then and now (World War II and Vietnam would serve as similar “Dividers” for the next two generations). Although he had never known great uncle Will, or Delilah’s two daughters (Zach’s great aunts. All three had died before Zach was born); he had known her youngest child, Zach’s grandfather Perkins (Edward David Perkins II). Grandpa Ed had passed along his stories of the Great Depression to Zach before passing himself in 2004. Zach’s own father had mercifully been too young to experience Vietnam. Zach hoped he might avoid any such “Great Dividers” in his lifetime as well.

Zach glanced at the bottom of the picture where a date was written, June 1922. “Hey Del, the year says 1922. This can’t be Uncle Will.” He walked back to the divan and handed Del the picture. “Can you remember who this was?”

Over the course of one second, a wave of recognition, then sadness passed over Del’s ancient face, like the shadow of a plane crossing the sun. In an instant, it was gone. “That was so long ago, Zach. I don’t remember.” She handed the picture back.

Of course, Zach didn’t believe her. Here was a woman who remembered, among her forty great-grandchildren, that Zach

attended UNC and would be interested in the NCAA Basketball Championships; who remembered in a split second a picture taken in 1969 of a boy—his father—who looked exactly like himself in 1995. “Are you sure you don’t remember?”

Delilah took another long sip of tea as if she had not heard the question. Then, “Do you remember every person found in every picture ever taken of you?”

She had a good point. Zach did *not* remember every such person. *But I think Del remembers them all.* Zach stood up and walked back toward the cabinet. “Let’s see if we can figure it out. So, where were you living in 1922?” There was a long silence even for a slow sip of tea. Zach looked back toward Del and realized he would have to wait sometime to get his answer. Del had drifted into one of her sudden naps that so worried the rest of the family. Zach could see the slow rise and fall of her breathing, so he knew this was not the “final nap,” but merely *a nap*. He was not in a hurry today and could wait a while longer.

Zach took a seat on the large couch by Del’s fireplace, examining the “1922 Mystery Child” picture. He was certain Del knew who the boy was. This meant Del was keeping a secret. By the way young Delilah was holding the child in the picture, along with their identical smiles, Zach suspected the child was her own. He may have just uncovered a Perkins family secret unknown to anyone in the family (living anyway). Perhaps he had even uncovered a scandal. Zach doubted that after nearly ninety years, anyone in the family would care about some lost child from another marriage, or possibly no marriage at all. But he reasoned, that if Delilah was alive, this child could in theory be alive, though Del *had* outlived all her children. Still, could there possibly be an entire branch of Delilah’s family tree unknown to the Perkins side?

Zach had to admit, that his previously perfunctory visit to his great-grandmother had become quite interesting. His admiration

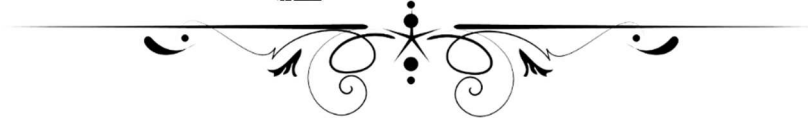
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for the 109-year-old Perkins family matriarch, already quite high, had just risen a step higher. He had been surprised by her power of recall, appreciated her wit, and had been stunned by her—at one time—physical beauty. Now, this.

Zach tapped the picture. “Who are you, little guy? What story do you have to tell?” He lay back on the couch and closed his eyes. Perhaps he would catch a few winks himself, while Del slept. In college, Zach had mastered the art of the “power nap,” and could doze almost as quickly as his great-grandmother. He held the picture against his chest. *Tell me your story*, he asked as he drifted to sleep.

# Chapter 2

## Living Pictures



Zachary Perkins awoke within one of the many Ocean Dreams he had been having throughout his life. He saw an open window with semi-translucent cotton curtains billowing softly in a light breeze. He could hear the lapping and breaking of waves in the distance from the ocean carrying that breeze. He luxuriated in the feel and sound of it.

Neither of his parents really understood the origin of Zach's fascination with the ocean. True, they lived in the Carolinas and had vacationed in the Outer Banks like nearly everyone in the state. But they had spent the majority of their summer vacations visiting Del and her extended family, which at the time was west of Asheville in the Blue Ridge Mountains. His parents never understood (because he never really told them) the impact of his few memories of the ocean along the Outer Banks.

Zach's fascination with the ocean led him to pursue Marine Sciences for his first two years at UNC. His parents had gently pushed him in the direction of something with better-paying prospects. Student loans, after all, were the death of many a college dream. Zach had taken their advice and switched his major to Economics. He would now be starting an entry-level job at an accounting firm in Charlotte after he graduated. That career choice

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would not have been the child-Zach's first choice, but the adult-Zach needed to pay bills. Nevertheless, Zach's ocean dreams persisted, like the one he was experiencing at this instant.

The breeze and the sound of the ocean waves stretched on, as Zach became more fully awake. The window became more solid, the room more illuminated with the growing light of the morning sun. A sense of increasing unease came over Zach as he realized this dream was quite different than any before. Zach had the disorienting sensation that he was waking up in another room, for real. He noticed the walls were made of painted wooden boards. One of the walls had a picture, more like modern art, of people strolling along the beach. Another wall had a framed painting of a cartoon animal, perhaps a cat. Next to each was a mounted gas lamp, currently darkened.

The cry of a sea gull brought Zach fully awake.

*That sounded too real to be a dream*, Zach thought as he sat upright. His next observation simply could not be believed. Zach was sitting in an open cage in a room that was definitely real. *This is no dream*. Most shocking of all, Zach saw that he was sitting on a thick cloth pad and was wearing a simple cloth diaper held together by a safety pin.

"What the Hell is going on?" Zach said out loud. The voice of a child echoed those words in his ear. He brought his hands instinctively to his mouth. They were not his hands, either. The "hands" and the "arms" attached to them belonged to a child who seemed to have reached for his face. *Oh Shit!* he thought, as a new sensation came to his awareness. Zach stood up in the cage. There was a stain where he had been sitting. Apparently, the child's cloth diaper was wet.

Zach stepped away from the stained cloth until he hit the cage bars. "I'm in a crib. What is happening to me?" he spoke once more

in that strange child's voice. Panic threatened to overwhelm him. His throat began to constrict. Zach didn't know if he should call for help, or scream. He tried screaming but nothing came out of his mouth. He couldn't take a breath. Panic had frozen his lungs. Zach could feel the dizzy sensation of oxygen starvation stealing his consciousness. Zach slid down the crib bars and slumped onto the crib mattress as he passed out.

Seconds later, lungs working again, Zach regained consciousness. His Ocean Dream—now Baby Dream—persisted. As the tunnel vision of hypoxia slowly receded, the room in all its previous detail re-emerged. Zach lay on the crib mattress, unmoving. He tried to make sense of this strange room and the child's body he seemed to occupy.

*Have I been drugged? Did Del do this to me?*

Zach didn't get the impression his great-grandmother was into drugs other than her blood pressure medication.

Zach didn't have long to think about it. At that moment the door to the room opened and a small girl ran across the floor. "You're awake!" She said brightly, stopping at the crib bars. "Little David's awake! Little David's awake!" She yelled then ran out of the room just as quickly.

Zach jumped up and grasped the wooden bars. His eyes just cleared the top rail of the crib. "Wait!" He called after her. "Come back! What's going on? Talk to me!" But the girl had run out of the room. Zach felt the familiar sensation of panic rising again.

Then, out of nowhere, Zach remembered the advice given to him by one of his scuba instructors at UNC. Zach had taken scuba certification during his first two years of Marine Sciences. His instructor had warned the class about panicking at depth. "People naturally panic when they think they're drowning. Don't panic," he had warned. "Panic will kill you. Also, do *not* race for the surface.



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Your lungs will explode. Take a slow deep breath if you can. Remember, you have three or four breaths in your flotation vest. Think your way out of it and you *will* survive.”

Zach brought his mind into focus.

*This is like drowning. Think your way out of it.*

His heart rate slowed; his breathing became regular. The room, the crib, and even his new body remained unchanged, but his mind was calmly detached. *How do I get out of this?* He scanned the room slowly as if through a scuba mask, looking for a means of escape.

Next, Zach heard heavier steps approaching his room. He hoped it wasn't a metaphoric shark approaching. Surrealism topped the charts when he saw the person who entered his room. It was the woman from the “1920 Pink Blouse” photograph. It was the stunningly beautiful and impossibly young Delilah Hayes in real life.

Zach choked. I'm really drowning!

“Good morning sweet David.” Delilah stepped over several toys scattered across the floor that Zach had not previously noticed. “Starfish told everyone you were awake.” The woman (Delilah?) reached into the crib and hoisted Zach into her arms. “Today is the big day. I don't think anyone got much sleep.” In a universal motherly gesture, Delilah patted her child's bottom and felt wetness. “Better get you changed first.”

*Shark! Breathe!* Zach repeated this phrase in his mind over and over again, barely staving off panic.

The woman spread a rubber mat on the wooden floor with her free hand, and then carefully laid Zach onto it. He realized what this woman, presumably the young Delilah Hayes, was preparing to do. Back to his shark litany, Zach knew that thrashing around was the surest way to be attacked. He decided to lie still and go along with it. *Try not to move*, he commanded himself.

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Delilah stepped away to a dresser cabinet in the room. She opened a drawer and picked out a cloth diaper along with a clean washrag. There was a water jug and a small ceramic basin on the dresser top that she filled with a splash of water, then wet the rag. Delilah returned with the wet rag, a cloth diaper, and a small bottle of talcum powder. She on the floor again sat cross-legged beside Zach.

Count to 1—breathe in—2, breathe out—1, breathe in. Zach squeezed his eyes shut. She's going to change her child's diaper. That child happens to be me!

Delilah loosened the safety pin, and in a fluid, well-rehearsed motion, removed the sodden diaper, cleaned her child, then pinned a new diaper in place. Zach kept his eyes shut the entire time.

The young Delilah noticed her child's distress. "The water is cold first thing in the morning. I'm sorry. I'll set the water jug in the sun later to warm." She lifted Zach to his feet. She tossed the soiled diaper and wash rag into the water basin to soak. "All done," she said brightly.

Zach stood motionless, stunned and shamed at having had his diaper changed by such an attractive young woman, presumably the great-grandmother of almost ninety years in the past. The woman walked to the door and motioned him to follow. "Come on, now. You can't expect to be carried around all the time."

Zach had no intention of going anywhere with this ghost from the past. He hoped she would simply disappear, and he would wake from this nightmarish dream.

The young Delilah, however, interpreted his stance as a stubborn demand to be carried. "Well okay, just this once." She looked cross as she scooped him up in one arm. Then, Delilah's face warmed into a huge smile. She giggled. "You know I'm just kidding, don't you?" Delilah did a small pirouette on one foot, then kissed

Zach's cheek. "I love carrying you. I don't care what the experts say about it." With that, Delilah carried her child like a breeze through the doorway. "Let's have some breakfast."

*What do the experts say?*

Zach contemplated Delilah's words as he was carried out of the nursery room by a ghost.

The door to the nursery opened into a short hallway that led to a common living room, dining room, and kitchen. There, a family of three were already seated at a table. The little girl, who had alerted the house of "little David's" waking, was seated next to a boy who appeared a couple of years older than her. They appeared to have a breakfast of scrambled eggs, toast, bacon, and orange juice. Another woman stood at the stove preparing more food. She looked to be approximately the same age as "1920 Delilah", having a similar bobbed haircut, blouse shirt, and pants that ended just below her knees.

Young Delilah carried Zach across the living room and placed him into an old-fashioned wooden highchair that had a small wooden tray attached to its front. Being entirely self-conscious in his present state, wearing nothing but a cloth diaper and t-shirt, Zach expected his arrival to draw more attention. It didn't. He was hardly noticed by the others.

Young Delilah went to the stove and prepared a small bowl of some indistinct brown mushy substance. She delivered the bowl to the wooden tray attached to Zach's highchair. Next, she poured a small glass of milk from an old-fashioned glass bottle. Zach had only ever seen glass milk bottles in movies. He looked at the bowl and milk, waiting for some clue. He wasn't sure if he was supposed to feed himself or let Delilah do it. Either way, he had no appetite at present. He decided that doing nothing was still his best option. Delilah then attended to making her own breakfast. Apparently, her

child was expected to feed himself.

The brown mush appeared to be over-boiled oatmeal. It had the consistency of slimy pond scum. Zach wrinkled his nose. He wasn't sure if he could force himself to eat it. He removed the spoon embedded in the mush and took the smallest exploratory taste. Despite its disgusting appearance, the oatmeal was surprisingly good. He guessed that salt, sugar, and milk had already been mixed into it, perhaps even a hint of butter. He nodded approval and took a tentative spoonful into his mouth.

Next, Zach took a sip of milk. His eyes opened wide.

*That's really good!*

He didn't realize that he was drinking whole, non-homogenized milk probably less than two days out of the cow. The milk had a thick, buttery texture. Zach took a large gulp of it.

*I could live on this stuff.*

"Okay, is everyone ready for the big day?" Delilah announced to the room.

It was her second reference to a "big day." Zach listened carefully while avoiding eye contact.

The boy seated next to the little girl answered first. "I've done my chores."

The little girl spoke next. "So have I. But what are we supposed to do while you work?"

"Just play upstairs," Delilah explained. "Quietly."

"Can't we come down and see?" The girl begged.

"No, Starfish," the other woman at the stove answered. "You kids have to stay up here. You can't be seen in the store."

The little girl (*Starfish?*) did not seem to like that answer.

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“Are people lined up yet?” Delilah said to the woman at the stove.

“Now Dilly, we don’t open for another hour. No one is outside yet.” Zach remembered his great uncle Will telling him of the days when Delilah went by the name Dilly instead of Del.

*So, this is Dilly?* Zach still couldn’t believe it.

Next, Zach noticed the stove at which the other woman was cooking. It was an antique-style gas stove with four burners and a solid metal oven door below.

*Does anyone still use those?*

Again, Zach had only seen stoves like that in movies.

The woman stirred eggs in a cast iron skillet. Dilly walked up behind her and dished more eggs and bacon onto her own plate. “I’m sorry Anna. I don’t mean to be annoying. It’s just opening day nerves. But, what if no one shows up?”

*So, the woman at the stove is Anna,* Zach observed, silently checking off the names of everyone in the room. The only person left to be named was the boy seated next to Starfish (*Surely a nickname*).

“Dilly,” Anna said patiently, “There’s a hotel around the corner. People will want coffee. They will come.”

A coffee shop? Is that it?

“But they also serve coffee at the Grand Orchard?”

Despite her patience, Anna gave Dilly a frustrated look, as if they hadn’t discussed this detail a thousand times before today. “And, we also sell...”

“Books, I know. We sell books, too.” Dilly nodded in agreement. “I just worry.”

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“Well, stop worrying. You’ll upset the kids. Besides, our coffee is better. It says so on the sign.”

So, they’re opening a coffee and book shop, Zach concluded. And, now I know the name of the hotel across the street, the Grand Orchard. I just need to catch the name of their business, and the name of the boy sitting by Starfish. As long as he could focus on discovering clues, Zach could take his mind off the fact that he apparently occupied a young child’s body in this world.

The worry left Delilah’s face in an instant. “That’s all. My worries are gone,” she beamed. “Kids, is anybody here worried? Starfish?”

“Nope,” the girl chimed.

“Moon?” She said to the boy

*Check*, Zach nodded as he now had a complete list of names.

“Nope, nope,” the boy (*Moon?*) repeated emphatically.

Surely, Moon is a nickname, too, Zach thought.

“David?” Delilah asked next.

Zach should have seen that coming. Everyone now looked at Zach, aka David. He was expected to say something. Unfortunately, Zach aka David, could not force himself to make a sound. He felt like a deer in headlights.

“I’ll take that as a no,” Delilah answered for him. Anna looked at her and mouthed a silent, *Is he feeling well?* Delilah returned a silent, *I don’t know.*

Apparently, Anna had eaten her breakfast while cooking at the stove. When she finally came to the table, she instructed the children to wipe their plates and set them in the sink. Obviously, this did not apply to Zach who remained trapped in David’s highchair.

When Moon turned on the sink faucet to rinse his plate, it made

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a startling rattling noise as air gurgled through the pipes. Zach would later learn this was due to the significantly lower water pressure in the building, which allowed air to backfill the pipes.

While cleaning her own plate at the noisy faucet, Delilah's opening day jitters returned. "Let's just suppose no one comes when we open for business. Suppose they discover we're two unmarried women with children. What then?"

Ah, the real reason behind her fears, Zach thought. Probably the reason why we "kids" can't be seen in the store.

Anna placed both of her hands squarely on Dilly's shoulders and spoke firmly. "Dilly! This is nineteen hundred and twenty-two, not eighteen twenty-two. Women with children work. Suppose our husbands died in the War. No one will know. We can vote now. We can do anything we want. Stop worrying about what other people think."

Anna's reference to the current year brought a few important conclusions into place. First, that meant Zach's great-grandmother was currently 21 years old, his same age (*well, my future age, anyway*). When Zach had first seen Young Delilah walking into little David's nursery, he had assumed she was the 1920 Delilah, age 19, a full two years before the "Mystery Child" photo had been taken. Now he knew it was the *same* year that picture had been taken. Zach was willing to bet heavily that the current month was June, and that the boy in that old photograph was named David.

For some reason, they think I am David. How can that be? Unless I look like him? Unless I AM him!

Zach had not yet looked at himself in a mirror. What if he saw the boy, David, looking back at him? What would that mean?

Starfish appeared to be thinking about Anna's last words when a light went off in her head. "It's just like Winnie Winkle," she clapped.

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Anna released Dilly's shoulders and pointed to Starfish. "See. Winnie Winkle. That's who you are."

Dilly breathed relief. Her worry was gone again, her carefree smile back in place. "Well, you're Winnie Winkle, too. We're in this together."

"Two Winnie Winkles, then." Anna gave Dilly a quick kiss on the cheek.

Winnie Winkle was the next name added to Zach's list of names to discover. *Who is she? And what was that about?* He thought about the kiss Anna had given Delilah but dismissed it. *Women kiss each other on the cheek all the time*, he reasoned. *Even in 2010.*

"Winnie Winkle! Winnie Winkle!" Starfish repeated over and over while jumping and spinning.

"Now, it's time to head downstairs," Anna said while trying to calm the excitable Starfish. "People will be arriving any moment. You kids play quietly in your rooms. Moon, you're the man, so you're in charge. If you need one of us to come up, just turn on the faucet. We can hear that below. Don't come downstairs. Is that clear?"

The boy, Moon, stood at attention. "Yes, Ma'am."

Anna was silent for a moment as she regarded Moon critically, then snorted out laughter. "Oh, so I'm a Ma'am, now. Did you hear that, Dilly? I'm a Ma'am."

Delilah joined her laughter. "I guess I'm going to have to show you more respect. Is there anything I can get The Ma'am?" She said in the humorous parody of someone *putting on airs*. "Am I moving quickly enough for The Ma'am?"

Moon grinned. He could tell they were teasing him. Anna suddenly hugged him and lifted him into the air. "Who am I?" She laughed.



"You're Anna," he choked as she hugged him tighter, then spun around in a circle. "Mom, I can't breathe," he protested through his own laughter. Anna set him down and kissed him firmly on the cheek.

Delilah next lifted Zach into the air, freeing him from the highchair, then set him on the ground with an equally exuberant kiss on his cheek. The two women then made their way to the front door of the apartment. "Starfish. David. Remember, Moon is in charge," Anna said one last time before she and Delilah descended the noisy wooden stairs leading to their small business on the ground floor.

"Let's go to David's room to play," Moon suggested. Starfish agreed and raced ahead of him. Zach stood motionless where Delilah had set him, not knowing what would happen next, or if he should move at all.

"Well, are you coming?" Moon motioned for him to join. Zach took a few tentative steps toward the room as Moon turned to follow Starfish.

I guess I'm supposed to go along with the pretense, he decided. If they really think I'm David, then I should keep acting the part. But, how do I act that part?

Zach had no idea what a child of David's age could do, know, or say. *I don't even know how old David is.* Zach had no idea what the real David was like. Even subtle changes in personality would be noticed by close family members. Therefore, doing less was better, Zach reasoned. He followed Moon into little David's nursery. *Do they even call it a nursery?* He would have to be on the lookout for as many clues as possible.



In David's nursery, Moon appeared to be studying the pieces of a puzzle scattered on the floor. Zach had seen the puzzle pieces briefly while having his diaper changed, but on closer inspection could see it was a partially completed picture of the RMS Titanic. Starfish played with an antique metal fire truck while Moon studied the puzzle. As a matter of fact, all of the toys in the room appeared to be antiques. Then again, if it was really the year 1922, the toys were probably brand new. Zach sat on the rug covering the hard wood floor, just far enough away not to be included in their play.

*Now what?* Zach knew he would have to say something eventually. He should keep it simple, though, so as not to reveal his identity. He hoped that being young children, Moon and Starfish might be less critical of Zach's performance. He decided to start with a question asked by nearly every child.

"How old are you?" He said to both of them.

Starfish was quick to answer. "I'm three and a half," she said proudly. "Moon is six, and you're two."

Moon looked up from his puzzle at Starfish. "Actually, you are three and nine months," Moon corrected her. "Your birthday is in September."

If September being three months away confirmed Zach's suspicion.

*It's June 1922. Just as I guessed. Thank you, Moon.*

"David is exactly two," Moon added. "His birthday was last Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup>."

Zach checked off yet one more box on his list. That means 2-

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year-old David was born on May 25, 1920. Thank you, again.

The next question Zach wanted to ask was about their names, Moon and Starfish. Were they nicknames? Surely, they had to be. But he decided against it. The *real* David would know the answer. Perhaps, however, David didn't know this next question. "Who is Winnie Winkle?"

Again, Starfish was quick with an answer. "Oh, she's one of my favorites. She's a comic. Here, let me show you." The 3-year-old girl jumped up and ran out of the nursery.

"Now you've done it," Moon said while inspecting his puzzle.

*Done what?* Zach worried he made an error after only his second question.

A minute later, Starfish returned, dragging a sheet of cardboard paper almost as big as her. She dropped it on the floor in front of Zach. The page was covered in comic strips glued to the paper. No. Upon closer inspection, Zach could see they were the individual characters cut from those comic strips, glued individually in rows on the paper. Apparently, Starfish collected the characters, rather than the strips themselves.

"See, this is Winnie Winkle," Starfish pointed to a black-and-white comic cut-out of a woman dressed in the 1920s style. "Winnie Winkle a working woman. She makes the money and takes care of her parents." She pointed to other figures who were apparently the woman's parents. "And this is her boss. Well, one of them. She's always getting new jobs." Starfish moved down the page. "And this is Krazy Kat, and this is Cap, and this is Tippie." She proceeded to name each comic character and describe its back story.

While she talked, Zach looked closely at the character she had named "Krazy Kat". He thought he had seen that one before. Then, it came to him. He looked up at the framed character hanging on the wall he had seen earlier that morning. "Krazy Kat," he pointed.

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“Oh yes, that’s him,” she pointed enthusiastically. “Your birthday present. I made it for you,” she added proudly. “Krazy Kat is crazy!” she giggled. “He’s in love with Ignatz, but Ignatz likes to throw bricks at his head.”

Zach doubted Starfish could have drawn Krazy Kat in the frame. It appeared too professional. It was more likely her mother Anna had helped her.

Moon could see that his younger sister was racing ahead of little David’s comprehension. “Ignatz is a mouse,” he explained. “And, Krazy Kat is in love with her, but she doesn’t love him back. She throws bricks at his head, instead. It’s really funny.”

Zach had never heard of Krazy Kat, but it began to sound like an early version of the cartoon, Tom and Jerry with which he *was* familiar. He made a note to do a search on it, then caught himself when he remembered they were probably 75 years away from the internet.

“Come here, David,” Moon patted the rug next to him. “Let me show you my puzzle.”

It was time for Zach, aka little David, to enter the flow of their lives. He could no longer remain a passive observer. He had already begun the process by asking questions. Now it was time to join in their play. Zach walked over and sat next to Moon.

“It’s the Titanic,” he pointed to the half-completed puzzle that looked to be over one hundred pieces. “It sank in 1912.”

That subject was, so far, the one subject for which Zach needed no explanation. He knew all about the Titanic. He had seen the movie starring DiCaprio and Winslet. Zach figured it would not be wise to mention that fact in this place.

“Anna wanted to make it hard for me, so she took it to Mr. Russell. He has a jig saw. Look at the pieces,” he held two of them

up. "They are all the same shape, except some are up, and some are down."

Zach examined the two pieces, then compared them to the ones on the floor. Yes, they were all the same shape but with alternating orientations. He had seen this type of puzzle before, all a single shape. He never really liked them. They were impossibly hard.

Moon had a mischievous expression on his face. "Watch this. Hey Starfish. Go get the stopwatch in our room."

Knowing what Moon intended, Starfish went to retrieve the watch. It was an old-fashioned stopwatch, the kind with a knob to manually wind its spring. Zach caught himself thinking that word again, *old-fashioned*. *The thing is probably brand new*.

Moon gave the watch a few winds then handed it back to Starfish. "You know what to do. Push the start button when I say, go." Next, Moon tore apart the puzzle, closed his eyes, and mixed the pieces in random order. When he opened his eyes, he looked at Starfish. "Are you ready?"

Starfish nodded, yes.

"Go!"

Starfish pressed the timer button.

For the first precious seconds, Moon studied the pieces, not making a move. Then, his hands came alive as if someone had pushed a "fast forward" button. With speed well beyond his six years, Moon pieced together first the ship, guided by its more distinctive features, then the featureless water and sky (those parts only slowed him a little).

"Stop!" Moon yelled as he placed the final piece.

Starfish was mesmerized by his performance and forgot to stop the watch. Zach was just as mesmerized and might have done the

same. Moon looked at Starfish urgently. "Push the Stop button!" She finally stopped the timer, then handed it over to Moon.

"See," Moon showed the time to Zach. "Two minutes and fifteen seconds. Minus ten seconds because Starfish was slow. That's two minutes five seconds."

Zach figured it was safe to ask. "What's your record time?"

"Two minutes flat," Moon said proudly.

Zach couldn't help thinking about what this 6-year-old prodigy would do with a Rubik's Cube. He knew he couldn't mention that particular toy from the future, either.

Given the distraction offered by Moon's puzzle performance, Zach figured now might be the time to ask about their unusual names. "Why is your name Moon?" Zach hoped his question might sound like an innocent, *why is the sky blue?* kind of question typical of young children.

Moon looked puzzled by such an existential question. After all, why is anyone called by a particular name versus another? Zach worried he had gone too far.

"I don't know why. I'm just Moon. Starfish is Starfish, and you are David." The question of the origin of names caught Moon's interest. "Anna and Dilly think people should go by only one name. They don't like it when I call them 'Ma'am'. They insist I call them just Anna and Dilly."

Moon's answer wasn't exactly what Zach was looking for, but he didn't want to push his luck. Besides, there was a good chance neither of them knew why they had been given their names. Such a question might only be answered by their mother and Zach was nowhere near ready to ask Anna.

Later that morning, just before Dilly made lunch for the children, Zach felt the beginning urge to use the bathroom. The

pressure in his bladder was slight, so he figured he would hold it until much later in the day when he could locate a toilette and privacy. Using the diaper he was wearing was out of the question. Unfortunately, Zach misjudged the capacity of his only two-year-old bladder. Within minutes, the urge had strengthened. Zach knew he had better find the toilette soon. However, if he asked, that would surely give him away since it was apparent that little David was not toilet trained.

One minute later, he no longer cared. Zach had to go now. "Umm, I have to use the bathroom," he announced timidly.

Moon nodded and said, matter-of-factly, "Ok, you can go."

This was no help. "I mean the toilet," he added.

Moon seemed unconcerned. "Yes, you can go," he repeated.

How do I ask where it is? Surely the real David knows where the bathroom is.

As if he finally understood, Moon stood and took Zach by the hand. "Come with me. I'll help you with the safety pin."

Zach didn't want help with the damned safety pin; he just needed to know where to go. As soon as they were at the bathroom door (it was to the right of the kitchen, down a short hall), he said to Moon, "I can do it myself. Just keep the door closed."

Moon seemed to understand little David's desire to be independent. He waited as requested outside the door.

Once in the bathroom, Zach in fact struggled with the safety pin. The pressure on his bladder was making him even more desperate, but the pin wouldn't budge. Finally, he grasped the thing with both hands, pushed down hard with both thumbs, and released the pin with a snap. The suddenness of the snap nearly sliced his finger. *I wouldn't call that a safety pin*, he thought. The cotton diaper unraveled from his waist and fell to the floor. Zach raced to the

toilet not a moment too soon.

After he was done, Zach was faced with a new problem—how to put the diaper back on. He couldn't recall the origami-like fold that Delilah had used to shape the simple, flat, square cloth into a diaper. Even if he did, there was the problem of the safety pin. He feared he would skewer himself in a *very* sensitive part of his anatomy. Zach's only other option was to walk out of the bathroom naked and that was *not* going to happen.

Zach had no choice. "Moon," he called to the closed door. "Can you give me a hand in here?" He covered himself with both hands when Moon entered. The older boy did not look surprised in the least.

"Good boy," Moon praised little David for his success. "Pretty soon you won't need diapers. That will make Dilly very happy."

*How about now, this instant,* Zach thought. He could be potty trained today if that would make Dilly happy. On the other hand, it might draw attention and that was the last thing Zach wanted.

Other than instant potty training, Zach had another idea while he had been sitting on the toilette. If falling asleep in the year 2010 had somehow transported him to this place, it was reasonable to assume that falling asleep in this world (1922) would cause him to wake up in the present. He had heard somewhere that this was how "waking dreams" worked; you fall asleep to wake up. Zach just needed to lay low, not drawing attention to himself until little David was put to bed that night. So, it would be diapers for just a little longer.

In an act of humiliation, Zach lay on the floor as instructed and allowed Moon to re-diaper him. To his credit, Moon knew the correct folding technique for a simple, flat diaper. As with the Titanic puzzle, his hands moved quickly. He pinned the cloth almost as snugly as Delilah had. Obviously, he had done it before,



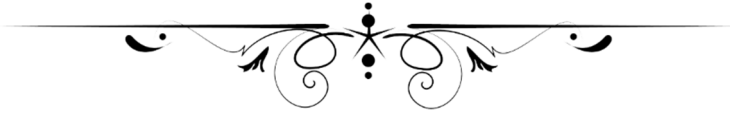
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diapering little David. Apparently, it was one of his responsibilities as the oldest child.

Good boy to you, Zach mentally returned Moon's praise. One day you will make a great dad, I'm sure. Not that I'll ever know. I'm getting out of here tonight.

# Chapter 3

## A Better Cup Here



Anna and Dilly returned to their upstairs apartment by 6 P.M. in a flurry of excitement. They were positively overcome by joy. It did not take a genius to recognize opening day had gone well.

“We made five dollars on our first day!” Anna shouted triumphantly. She grabbed Starfish and Moon’s hands and then spun them around in a circle, dancing.

“Did you hear that, David? Five dollars! I can’t believe it!”

As a toddler, David would not have been expected to understand numbers, which was a good thing, because Zach was thoroughly unimpressed by that number. Five dollars, to his modern ear, sounded like merely the sale of two cups of regular coffee or just one large espresso specialty drink. Apparently, in 1922 dollars, things were different.

Anna picked Zach up and sent his two-year-old body flying a foot into the air before catching him again, then smothering his face with kisses. Zach found it oddly disturbing to be thrown into the air like a leaf, while at the same time feeling the same contagious joy

that Anna felt after their first successful day of business. The kisses made him blush.

"I told you everything would work out." Anna continued to dance with her two children.

"I never doubted it a second." Delilah picked up her little David and danced with him while his bare feet dangled in the air.

"Ha!" Anna laughed at Delilah's comment.

"Well, I never *really* doubted anything," Delilah answered. "I always knew we would succeed."

Having switched to Economics after his first two years at UNC, Zach had studied small business models. In addition to sharing their contagious excitement, Zach found himself naturally curious about their business operation. Five dollars was apparently good money judging by their reaction. He wondered if he could help them make six. Unfortunately, Zach inhabited a two-year-old's body at this time. Little David could hardly start asking questions about their business plan.

They'll just have to figure it out themselves, he concluded a bit disappointed. I'm still getting out of here tonight.

"Everyone listen up." Anna clapped in the air. "To celebrate our first day, how about we all go to the Orchard Soda Fountain for ice cream and treats."

Starfish and Moon were ecstatic. "The Soda Fountain! The Soda Fountain!" Starfish burst.

"Can I get a Bull Moose?" Moon asked.

"Whatever you want," Anna said

"Within reason," Delilah cautioned.

"Whatever anyone wants!" Anna cheered.

“Yay!” Her children screamed in unison.

“But still something reasonable,” Delilah advised.

Good girl, Dilly. Zach was pleased with his, or rather David’s, mother. Don’t blow your first day’s earnings celebrating your first day. You should wait for at least one full quarter of sustained profits before thinking about a celebration. Zach so wanted to talk business with the young Delilah, if there was any possible way to do it without blowing his cover.

“Everyone, get your shoes,” Anna instructed the children. “We can take the trolley uptown to the Orchard Soda Fountain.” This was followed by more cheers from Starfish and Moon. At 2 cents a ride (the price for adults—children rode free), Delilah would not complain about that cost.

Delilah carried Zach to David’s nursery where she found a one-piece romper suit for him to wear. The outfit included socks that reached up to his knees and flat-soled shoes, the kind Zach had only ever seen on nursery room wallpaper. *Does anyone actually wear this kind of shoe anymore?* His one-piece romper was a little sailor suit complete with a sewn-on sailor necktie. Wearing that suit with a diaper underneath, Zach couldn’t feel more ridiculous. Clearly, people would stare at him in public.

Shoes on, children dressed, the little family of five now headed out the door. The single flight of stairs outside their apartment emptied into an antechamber downstairs. To the right was the coffee shop. Directly ahead was the outside door. Zach so wanted to turn right into the coffee shop and give it a look. But this was not on the agenda. The other four walked out the front door, so Zach was obliged to follow.

The front door of the building opened directly onto an ocean-front boardwalk about twenty feet wide. Zach was greeted by the salty smell of the nearby ocean. Whatever this place was

(hallucination? Dream?), it felt powerfully real. Zach paused a moment to examine his environment. The boardwalk extended in a straight line approximately a quarter mile to the left and right. Stores lined the walk in both directions. Directly ahead, past the boardwalk guardrail, was a single line of grassy dunes. Beyond that, sandy beach, then the ocean. Zach walked toward the guardrail, drawn by the sight and sound of the ocean that had awoken him that morning. Its calming effect was profound. It gave the illusion that he had somehow come home.

Zach had been to the Outer Banks of North Carolina numerous times in his life, but he did not immediately recognize this place. He scanned the coast for any familiar landmarks but found none. Zach reasoned that he had not seen literally every mile of the North Carolina coastline and that he might not even recognize the places he *had* seen in the year 1922. It was yet one more box to check off in his mind: his exact location - if this place even existed somewhere in the world. Zach considered the possibility that its location might be inside his head.

“Come on, David,” Delilah called to him. “The trolley is this way. We can go to the beach some other day.”

Zach turned to rejoin the group, then stopped when he saw the front of their coffee shop. He looked up to see the shop sign hanging above the front window.

### **A Better Cup Here**

Zach checked off another box in his mind—the name of their business. Below that title was a simple line drawing of a fancy coffee cup and a well-manicured woman’s hand holding the stem. Wavy lines of steam were drawn rising from the cup.

*That’s good*, Zach thought, remembering his lessons on advertising at UNC. “A Better Cup Here,” implied they were better than the one over there, meaning of course the Grand Orchard

Hotel, their competition.

*That's actually very good.*

A swell of pride rose in his chest for Anna and Delilah's little business. The swell didn't last long, however, as he discovered the others were not waiting for him. They were now almost to the street corner. Zach pumped his short legs in a sprint to catch up.

When he caught up with them at the street corner, Zach was overwhelmed by what he saw next. It was as if the entire world of 1922 opened up before his very eyes. The Main Street of, "Wherever Town," ran perpendicular to the boardwalk, forming a "T" intersection. Shops, apartments, and restaurants lined both sides of the street and appeared to be connected by a myriad of crisscrossing telephone lines.

Men and women walked both sides of the street dressed in what Zach could only describe as "period costumes" from a 1920s movie. It struck him that everyone wore hats, men and women alike. Even Anna and Delilah had donned bell-shaped hats (classic for the 1920s) that fit perfectly over their bobbed hair.

There were Model T's and Studebakers parked up and down the street, along with two or three other models of automobile that Zach did not recognize. It was as if an antique car convention was in town. The center of the road contained a double set of rails with an electric line suspended high in the air above, presumably for the electric trolley they were preparing to ride.

On the opposite side of the street, at the corner of Main and Boardwalk, Zach spotted what was both their competition and source of customers for the women's coffee shop—the Grand Orchard Hotel. The name "Grand Orchard" had inspired in Zach's imagination images of a massive ten-story conference center hotel in a major city. What he saw was a more modest two-story hotel that could accommodate maybe a couple of hundred guests. Still,

that was the number 200 multiplied by the cost of a cup of coffee (whatever that was), surely more than five dollars a day. Zach began the mental calculation of subtracting the number of customers who would drink their coffee at the hotel, or find another restaurant nearby, and the fact that the hotel would not likely be at 100% capacity at all times. Zach had to pull himself away from his microeconomics analysis. Nevertheless, he felt certain Anna and Delilah could make more than five dollars a day.

“Here it comes!” Moon shouted, pointing up Main Street. “The trolley!”

Zach followed Moon’s hand to see a trolley car approaching, towed by a team of four horses. Zach was puzzled by the horses, given there was a perfectly good power line running above. *Maybe the power had gone out*, he reasoned. He added that detail to the rapidly growing list of questions he needed to answer.

The trolley stopped in front of the Grand Orchard, off-loaded then on-loaded new passengers, before making the turn to their side of the street. When it arrived, Dilly handed the coachman four pennies, then they all boarded the trolley. To his embarrassment, Anna had to give Zach a hoist up the first step that was too high for his two-year-old legs. The five of them took seats on a wooden bench near the window. The trolley then lurched as the team of horses began their slow walk up Main Street. Moon and Starfish were permitted to stand on the bench so they could look out the trolley windows. Zach decided to join them so he could see more of the passing town.

Among the countless details Zach was able to observe from his new vantage point were car license plates. Needless to say, they were not the modern license plates he was familiar with. Each one displayed a large, four-digit number with smaller letters below: either CONN, MASS, or RHOD; followed by the year, mostly 1920 and 1921. The majority of the plates read “CONN.” He saw not a

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single “NC” or “NORTH C.” Zach reasoned that little David might not know what state they were in. He turned to Moon and whispered, “Are we in Connecticut?”

Moon smiled at the question. “Yes David, we’re still in Connecticut. It’s more than fifty miles to the next state.” He clearly interpreted Zach’s question to be a two-year-old’s misunderstanding of speed and distance. “We’re still in New Orchard, even.”

### *New Orchard, Connecticut. Check!*

Although he would have to look it up on a map, Zach now had a specific name for this place. Yet more questions arose. Zach never knew that Delilah had spent any of her life in Connecticut. Family lore told of her growing up in Iowa, meeting Great Grandpa Edward, marrying him, then moving to Asheville, North Carolina. Never in all his years had he heard a single reference to Connecticut. There had never been any reference to a coffee shop, either. This new information added yet one more layer to the ever-deepening mystery of Delilah’s hidden life.

Ten minutes later, the trolley had reached its inland most point, that being the First Congregational Church, the crown of Main Street. The trolley began to round the corner to make its return trip to the coast before stopping to let passengers off. Anna, Delilah, and their children disembarked—little David requiring assistance again with the last step.

The Orchard Soda Fountain could not be missed largely because of the billboard-sized sign above the store reading, “ORCHARD SODA FOUNTAIN.” Zach gave the advertisement his most critical assessment.

*It’s not even close to the originality of A Better Cup Here.* Then again, they had an easier job, given the public’s insatiable demand for ice cream and soda drinks. *I guess they can afford to keep it*



*simple*, he conceded.

Stepping inside the soda shop, Anna and the children took seats at a round metal table, while Delilah went to the counter to order.

“Remember, I want a Bull Moose,” Moon called to her.

“And, I want a Mutt and Jeff,” Starfish followed.

“You know my order,” Anna said knowing that she and Dilly always got the same thing.

It was now little David’s turn to give his order, but Zach had no idea what the *real* David would want. His own favorite was Rocky Road but wasn’t sure if that flavor existed in 1922. Zachary Perkins didn’t know the history behind that particular ice cream; that it had been named in 1929 after the hard times, or “rocky road,” that Americans faced after the stock market crash and the Great Depression. Young David remained uncharacteristically silent.

“Right,” Anna spoke up, still worried about David’s odd behavior today. “He probably wants chocolate with marshmallow cream,” she ordered for him.

A man wearing a button collar white shirt and green striped bow tie walked over to Delilah. Zach estimated his age to be mid or late twenties. He noticed the man walked with a prominent limp. “Hello Mr. Jenkins,” Delilah greeted him. “I have quite an order tonight. We’ve had a big day.”

“So I heard,” Mr. Jenkins smiled broadly and winked at the others sitting at the metal table. “You opened your coffee shop today. A big celebration then?”

“Oh yes, we had a great first day. So here is our order,” she announced dramatically, especially for the children to hear. Then, Dilly leaned in close and spoke to Mr. Jenkins in a hushed tone as if giving a long and detailed order.

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Zach noticed by her demeanor that Delilah was probably altering the original order. *Yes!* Zach was proud of the frugal young Delilah. *She's being smart about it.* He suspected that the cost of all the ice cream they had just ordered would take a sizable chunk out of the five dollars they had earned that day.

After she had given her confidential order to Mr. Jenkins, he spoke at full volume again for all to hear. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you." The man limped away with great speed and began preparing their dishes. As he prepared bowl after bowl, glass dish after glass dish, Zach could see Delilah shaking her head while mouthing a silent, *no, not so much.*

Next, Mr. Jenkins began to pile their order, one by one, onto a metal serving tray. Zach could see he was preparing a tray even larger than their original order. Delilah's expression grew more alarmed.

"You must have heard," Mr. Jenkins announced as he placed the last dish of ice cream on the tray. "We are running a sale today just for new businesses that open on a Thursday. Twenty cents." He opened his arms wide, indicating all of it.

Delilah choked at the outrageously low price.

Mr. Jenkins added, "We don't often run that sale, so today is your lucky day." Delilah understood and mouthed a silent, *thank you.*

Even at twenty cents, this little meal of sweets had cost them 1/25th of their first day's earnings. Zach felt even that much was hard to justify. Then again, he was shocked by the amount of food they had just bought for two dimes. It was more than a "little meal," but rather a full dinner of ice cream and soda drinks.

While little David's extended family of five ate and talked and laughed over their ice cream feast, Zach glanced back at the soda fountain counter to where Mr. Jenkins was serving other customers.

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At one point the man walked around the counter to deliver a single dish. Zach now saw the reason Jenkins could only carry one dish at a time. His other hand was holding a cane. He also observed that Mr. Jenkins' right leg did not bend at the knee, as if the joint was frozen. One look at the man's feet solved the mystery. Zach saw a wooden peg planted into a man's shoe.

*An artificial leg. What's the story behind that?*

Zach understood that if his plan worked tonight, he would likely never know the answer behind Mr. Jenkins' wooden leg. Perhaps 109-year-old Delilah could answer that question. On second thought, how would Zach explain his question in the first place? No, he would certainly never know the answer.

I just want to wake up in the year 2010 so I can start my new job in Charlotte. I want to get on with my life as if this dream never happened.



That night, lying in David's crib (for the last time, he hoped), Zach began to prepare himself mentally for his return home. The recent memory of having his diaper changed a final time before being put to bed by the attractive, 21-year-old Delilah Hayes was a huge distraction, as was the much thicker "night diaper" that little David was changed into.

*Never again, Zach prayed.*

Zach was not sure of the exact procedure that would return him to the modern world. He remembered that he had been concentrating on the "1922 Mystery Child" picture before he had

dozed off for a power nap on Delilah's couch. He currently held no such magical picture, but Zach hoped it wasn't really necessary. He figured it was the act of concentration—the mental effort—that had resulted in time travel. Thus, he would attempt to mentally teleport himself back to 2010.

Is “time travel” the right word for it? Zach pondered. I mean, I assume my 21-year-old self didn't go anywhere. In this place, I'm in the body of a 2-year-old boy named David some 88 years ago. Does that David now inhabit my body back in 2010? Did we exchange places? Oh God, please no. Zach tried to push that thought far from his mind. He closed his eyes and began his scuba diving exercise, counting one before breathing in, then two before breathing out.

Is there some object from the year 2010 that I should focus on?

Zach's mind wandered. Although he had learned the name of the child—David—along with the boy's date of birth, and that David lived in New Orchard, Connecticut in the summer of 1922; there was still much he didn't know. Where was David's father? Had Delilah been married, or was little David illegitimate? And, how did Connecticut fit in? What was the connection between this state and Delilah's childhood life in Iowa? Who was Anna? Where did she come from? Were her children illegitimate as well?

Zach shook his head. *I'll just have to figure out a way to ask Delilah when I return. But now, it's time to leave this place.* He resumed his scuba exercise. It didn't take long to feel the beginnings of sleep.

But why did the trolley require horses to tow it when there was an electric cable above? And why did Delilah and Anna open their business on a Thursday?

“Damn it, Zachary Perkins! Stop it!” Zach said out loud. Yes, he had hundreds of unanswered questions, but the most pressing of them was how to get out of this place. “You have to release it, Zach,”

he commanded himself. “Just let it go. None of it makes sense anyway. There’s no point trying to figure it out.”

Zach noticed the curtains in the dark, blowing in the ocean breeze. He could hear the calming waves in the distance.

That’s it. Focus on the sound of the ocean.

The ocean had always calmed him. Zach breathed a sigh of relief. The ocean was the object that tied him to his future. It had always been a part of his life, always a powerful force. Zach listened for each wave. He could smell each puff of breeze passing through the curtains.

Then it hit him! The sign at the ice cream shop, “ORCHARD SODA FOUNTAIN.” Absolutely everybody wanted ice cream, so of course, the sign could be basic. Next, he remembered Delilah’s sign, “A Better Cup Here.”

There’s a woman’s hand in the picture. Men won’t come!

How could he have missed it? Delilah’s business logo clearly implied the coffee shop was a women’s parlor. They were chasing away *half* of their customers.

I can turn their five-dollar-a-day business into ten!

Of course, the money might not exactly double. There was the unknown 1920s social stigma of men wanting to avoid a business owned by unmarried women. But regardless of that factor, Zach felt sure they could make more than five dollars a day if he could only redesign their logo. Maybe seven dollars? Maybe eight?

Zach stood up in his crib and looked at the door to his nursery. “I need to tell them the idea. I know I can help them.”

Zach looked back at the window with its billowing curtains. He took one more deep breath of the ocean air. “Okay, change of plans,” he whispered to whatever power might be listening. “I need to stay