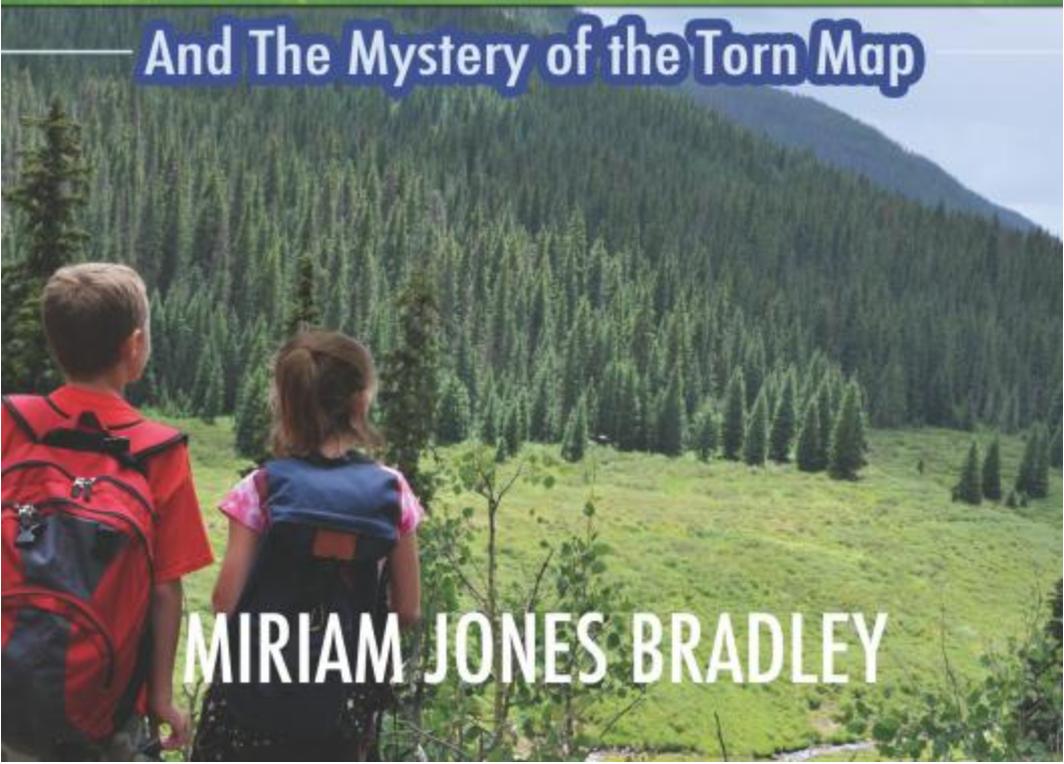


# the Double Cousins

And The Mystery of the Torn Map



MIRIAM JONES BRADLEY

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## And the Mystery of the Torn Map

*by*

Miriam Jones Bradley



AMBASSADOR INTERNATIONAL  
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA & BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

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Emerald House  
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Greenville, SC 29609, USA  
[www.ambassador-international.com](http://www.ambassador-international.com)

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The Mount  
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Belfast, BT6 8DD, Northern Ireland, UK

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Dedication:

For my husband Bruce, whose vision for this project often outshines mine and whose love and confidence make it all possible. I realize more each day the incredible gift God gave me when He sent you my way.

# Acknowledgements

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# Prologue

When double cousins Max Rawson and Carly Johnson, along with their siblings, Dorie, Chad, and Molly, arrive at their grandparents' ranch in Nebraska for a visit, they expect a lot of fun. But what they get is much more than they could have imagined.

Right away Grandpa Johnson asks them to help him solve a family mystery involving his Grandpa Isaac Lewis Johnson and Isaac's twin brother, Zachary Lewis Johnson. When the twins were eighteen, their parents gave them each an engraved pocket watch. Soon after their birthday, Zach left home and was never heard from again. Now, over a hundred years later, Grandpa, who has Isaac's pocket watch, wants the children to see if they can trace the other watch and maybe even find out what happened to Zach. The kids, all mystery lovers, can't wait to begin.

Before they can get started, though, Grandpa finds a new hired hand. The children—especially Max—believe Slim, a transient train-jumper, cannot be trusted and will rob Grandpa blind. Max's suspicions seem to be confirmed when he sees what looks like his Grandpa's pocket watch when he's snooping through

Slim's drawer. But when the children tell their Grandpa, he shows them his pocket watch, proving Slim is not a thief.

The children begin to suspect that Slim has the watch that belonged to Zach, but this too is proven untrue when Slim shows them the watch and it has his initials on it, not Zach's.

Just when the children begin to lose hope, Aunt Susie arrives for a visit. She has a laptop computer and internet access, and the children decide to put a message on a website for people looking for lost family members. They post photos of Zach and Grandpa's pocket watch and wait.

In the meantime, they grow to love and respect Slim, and he becomes more and more a part of the family. They attend the county fair, where the cousins get to watch another cousin, Brandon, show his calf. The next morning, before they leave for another day at the fair Aunt Susie calls to tell them that she has received an e-mail about the watch. She meets them at the fairgrounds to read the letter. Slim slips away when he hears who the letter is from.

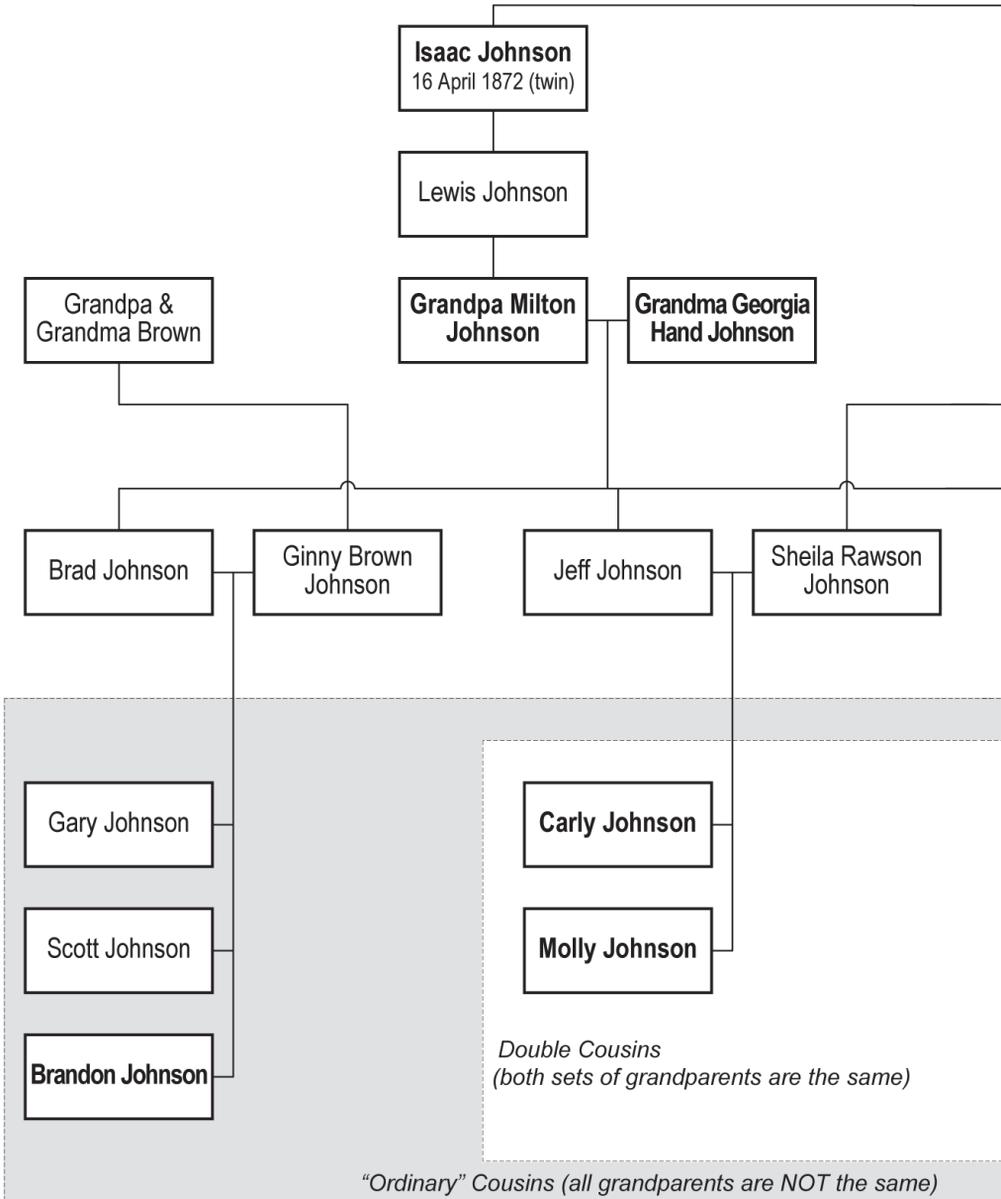
The lady verifies that her family has the other watch and states that Zach was found on the edge of Lamar, Colorado, injured and with amnesia. Since he didn't know who he was, he used the initials from the pocket watch he was carrying and made up a new name, Zedekiah Lee Jay. He married and raised a family there and never remembered who he really was.

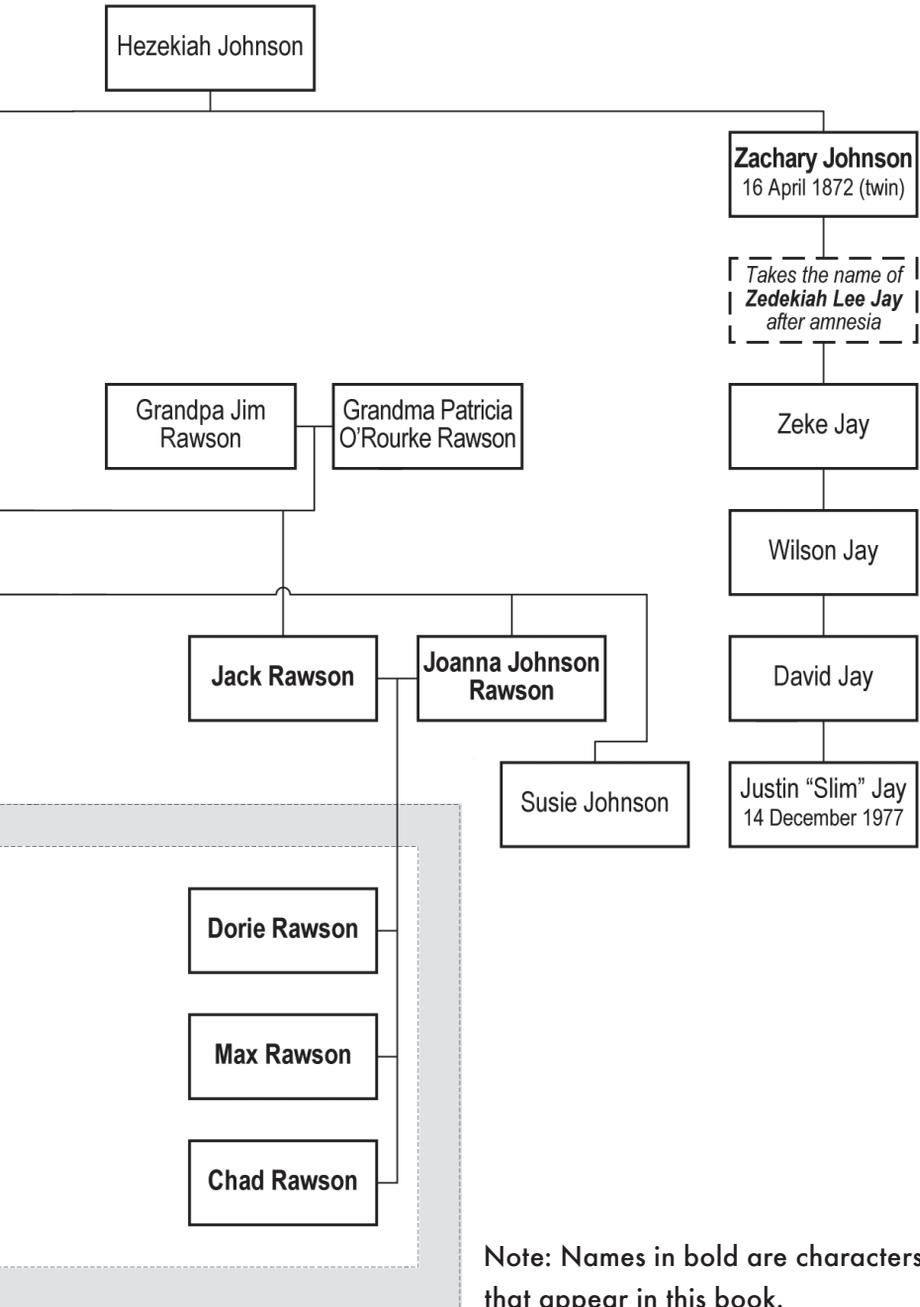
In addition, she asks for their help. She says she has a brother, Justin Jay, who has a similar watch, but the family doesn't know where he is. Years earlier he was blamed for something he didn't do and left home, never coming back. She wants them to let her know if they ever happen to hear from him. From the description she gives of his watch, the children recognize that this is

Slim. They are afraid he is going to run away rather than face his family. They rush to the train tracks and stop him from fleeing once again.

Slim (Justin) calls his parents, who insist on coming to get him, and they meet the family. The cousins are overjoyed that they solved the mystery of the watch but, most importantly, that Slim is really and truly family.

# Johnson Family Tree





Note: Names in bold are characters that appear in this book.

## CHAPTER I

# A Plea for Help

October 1891

*With his head, the horse nudged the man lying on the ground, still as death. Nothing. The horse nudged him again and snorted in the cold, snowy air, insistent. The man stirred and moaned. Again the horse nudged him and whinnied.*

*Pain. Such bad pain, Zach thought. Robbed. I was robbed. The map—do I still have the map? He reached to his waist and felt for the small bundle under his clothing. It was there. He started to drift off again. Bam! It felt like his head would explode. He heard the snort of the horse and felt the wet nose against his face as the horse nudged him. He moaned. Oh, the pain, the dizziness. He rolled over onto his stomach and tried to sit up, but the dizziness knocked him flat again and he blacked out.*

*Again the horse nudged him until, slowly, Zach pulled himself to a sitting position then, leaning against the horse, he dragged himself up and onto the horse's back. "Go home, Corp," he mumbled before everything went dark again.*

*He could hear them talking about him, but he couldn't open his eyes. Heavy. They were so heavy.*

*The words were jumbled: “What will we do if he doesn’t come around? Who is he? What was he doing out there in the cold? Do you think that paper and the pocket watch he has are his?”*

*All questions. Questions that made his head ache. He stopped trying to wake up and drifted off again.*

*“Look, his eyes are open,” the young woman said.*

*The doctor turned to look at the man who lay on the bed in the upstairs room of this home. “He’s had his eyes open off and on for a week now, but they don’t follow anything or even seem to focus.”*

*“How long do you think it will be?” she asked.*

*“I don’t know, Jane. You just never know. When we found him on the edge of town, I wouldn’t have given him one chance in a thousand. But now, it’s been two weeks and I think he’ll live. I just don’t know if he’ll thank me for that.” He sighed. “The longer it takes for him to come around, the less chance he has of a full recovery.”*

*Silence filled the room.*

*“Who are you?” a raspy voice shattered the silence.*

*The doctor’s head whipped around to look at the young man. His eyes were clear.*

*“Well, well,” said the doctor. “You’re really awake. I’m Dr. Clark, and this is Jane Bell. Can you tell me your name?”*

*Confusion filled the younger man’s eyes. “I’m . . .” His voice faded. “I don’t . . .,” he started again. “I don’t know,” he said, frustration and fear in his voice. “I don’t remember.” His eyes pleaded with the older man. “I don’t remember anything.”*



**Over One-hundred Years Later, Rapid City, South Dakota**

*“Max, come take a look at this.”*

Max, jarred from the world he was engrossed in, groaned. He clutched the *Encyclopedia Brown* book and rolled off the couch.

“What, Dad? Where are you?” He stood in the living room and waited to hear his dad’s voice again.

“I’m in the office, son. There’s an e-mail you might be interested in.”

A jolt of excitement shot through Max. An e-mail. He loved e-mail but he didn’t get much, only from Carly and Brandon, two of his cousins. Carly was his double cousin because they shared all the same grandparents. Both Carly and Brandon were ten, the same age as Max.

Book in hand, he rushed toward the office at the end of the hallway.

“Is it from Carly?” Max asked.

“No.” Dad didn’t look up from the screen. “Where are your brother and sister?”

“I don’t know. Who’s it from?” Max looked over his dad’s shoulder but couldn’t see a name.

The words “need your help” popped out at him just as Dad said, “It’s from Slim. Go get Mom and send her in here; then find Dorie and Chad.” He looked at his watch and continued with a twinkle in his eye. “Meet us at high noon in the family room.”

Max dashed from the room. A letter from Slim, and he had seen the words “need your help.” *Oh boy!* He grinned. *This could be interesting, very interesting.*

“Mom, Dorie, Chad, family meeting in the family room.” Max stood in the center of the dining room, cupped his hands, and shouted, “Family meeting in the family room!”

Max sprawled sideways in his favorite blue rocking chair and looked at the clock on the wall above the couch where Dorie and Chad sat. *12:01.*

“What could Slim want?” Dorie asked.

“I don’t know. I wish Mom and Dad would hurry.” His mind drifted to the ranch in Nebraska. It had been a busy summer. And different—much different—than what they had expected. They had met Slim and become friends. Once they had quit suspecting him. Max grimaced at the memory of how they had accused Slim of being a thief. He thought of Slim and his past, running from his family. And now he’s home with them. Our family. Max sighed.

“That’s a big sigh, Max.”

Max looked up and saw his parents in the doorway.

“A penny for your thoughts,” his mom said. She reached down and tugged on his hair as she passed the rocking chair.

“I was thinking about Slim and the ranch and how we solved the mystery of what happened to Grandpa’s Great-Uncle Zach. It almost seems like a dream.”

“It has been a strange summer, hasn’t it?” Dad shook his head. “I think it’s about to get strange again. We received an e-mail from Slim.” Dad sat back in his recliner and held up a paper. “He says he needs your help. He sent it to the rest of the family too. Should I read it now, or do you want lunch first?”

Max saw the twitch at the corner of his dad’s mouth. “Dad!” Max pulled his hair and groaned. “Hurry up, or I’ll die.”

“Yeah, Dad. Hurry.” Chad bounced up and down on the couch, his shock of wiry red hair flopping around on top of his head.

Dorie leaned forward, twirling her hair on her finger.

With a laugh, Dad finally began,

*Dear family,*

*Wow, I love saying the word “family.” I hope you have all recovered from the month at your grandparents’. I am doing my dead-level best to get back in the swing of things. It’s not easy, but God has been good to me.*

*I wrote because we need your help, and pronto. I know we left the ranch only a couple of weeks ago but we’ve made an incredible discovery. My dad bought an old clock to clean and fix up and you’ll never believe what he found in it—another clue that may give us more information about Zach. My usually level-headed parents are so excited about the possibilities that they haven’t slept at all since the discovery. Dad says, “Get that passel of young sleuths down here to help, ’cause if anyone can solve this, it’s them.” He said if you could solve the mystery of what happened to Zach from your end he’s sure you can finish the job. It’s a busy time of year on the farm and I can’t do this by myself. Is there any way some or all of you can come down to help us with this? We know school will be starting soon, but if we don’t get this done now we’ll have to wait until school’s out next spring. Please say you’ll come. Soon! Maybe we can talk on the phone later today to work out details.*

*Love, Slim (Justin)*

Max thought his head would explode with excitement. He itched to bounce like eight-year-old Chad but struggled to stay in his chair. “Can we go, Dad? Can we go?”

“We have to.” Dorie pulled her long hair back in her hands and tugged the scrunchie she wore like a bracelet up and over the ponytail. Max could see her hands shaking.

“Whoa!” Dad held his hand in the air. “Mom and I can’t go, not until Labor Day weekend anyway, but since we weren’t going to start with your home school until after Labor Day this year—”

The phone interrupted him. Max grinned as his dad answered.

“Let me guess, it’s Carly’s or Brandon’s dad,” Max said. His mind raced. *Would they be able to go? What could Slim and his dad have found in Colorado?*

Max stared out the window of the van, watching as the Southern Colorado prairie slid by. His stomach did another flip every time he thought about the new mystery, and he couldn’t quit thinking about it. What if they couldn’t figure out the mystery this time? What if it was just a fluke that they had solved the mystery at Grandpa’s ranch earlier in the summer? It was really neat that Slim’s dad had such confidence in them, but what if they couldn’t find the answers? He sighed. *I guess it’s like Dad said and we just have to keep our eyes open, use logic, and use the knowledge we have. Just like Encyclopedia Brown.* He looked at the book in his hand and sighed again. Since solving a real mystery at Grandpa’s he hadn’t been able to get into his mystery books as much. He shifted in his seat and leaned forward, his shirt sticking to the back of his seat. “Grandpa, can you turn the air up? It’s hot back here.”

“Sure,” Grandpa said. “I guess it’s the eight bodies and all of the hot air that’s heating the van up. We’ve had quite a long trip today from Nebraska and South Dakota.”

Max laughed. “I can’t believe we are actually on our way to Colorado.”

“And that all of us can go,” dark-headed Carly said from her seat beside Max.

“No kidding,” said Brandon. “I sure didn’t think I was going to get to come. After the busy summer with getting the calf ready to show at the fair and all, I thought Mom and Dad would want me to stay home and get ready for school.”

“I didn’t see how we could get away either,” said Grandpa. “Then your Great-Uncle Floyd and Aunt Esther offered to come watch the ranch for us.”

“I’m sure glad you could,” said Max. “None of our parents could come. Their summer has been too hectic and we couldn’t have come if some adults weren’t with us.”

“What I want to know is what they discovered in that old clock.” Molly leaned over the back seat. She held her ever-present book in her hand.

“Me too,” said Dorie from beside her. “I can’t figure out how they would know it had anything to do with Zach.” Dorie shrugged her shoulders. “I can’t figure it out.”

“You can ask Slim yourself in a minute,” Grandpa said. He turned the van into the parking lot of the gas station in Lamar, Colorado, where Slim had promised to meet them.



## May 1891, Denver, Colorado

*Zach hurt. Every bone in his body ached from days in the saddle. Too tired to be impatient, he waited at the front desk of the hotel as the clerk talked to the man in front of him. Zach pulled out his watch. It reminded him again of his twin brother, Isaac, and the matching pocket watches their parents had given them on their eighteenth birthday last year. The gnawing in his stomach started again but he tried to ignore it. He missed his brother, his parents, and his home, but he didn’t want to*

*admit it, not even to himself. He started to wind the watch but stopped, frowning. The knob was loose. Carefully he wiggled it back and forth then put it in his pocket as the man in front of him moved away from the desk.*

*“How can I help you, sir?” the clerk asked.*

*“I need a room. For one night.” Zach fingered the watch in his pocket. “Can you tell me if there is a good watchmaker close by?”*

*A few minutes later, Zach let himself into his room on the second floor. He not only had learned where to find the closest watchmaker but also had obtained directions to the nearest bathtub. First things first. He had to wash off some of the dust from the trip. He could taste the trail dirt in his mouth. Then he needed to get a meal and sleep. Tomorrow he would get his watch checked. The blank white stationery on the desk in his room caught his eye. I’ll write to Mama in the morning, he thought. I should have written home already, but what could I say? That I spent the last year working on farms much like Dad’s? No, I’ll wait. When I write it will be with something worth telling.*



Slim leaned against a silver, extended-cab pickup, his hands deep in the pockets of his clean jeans, and watched as the kids piled out of the minivan. He grinned. Boy, it was good to see that bunch again. Chad’s feet barely touched the ground as he flew across the parking lot and launched himself into Slim’s arms. Max, more controlled, stood in front of Slim, hands at his side. He shifted from foot to foot until Slim threw his arms around him in a big hug. Then Slim stood with Chad on his shoulders, surrounded by the other five children.

He looked over their heads at Grandpa and Grandma Johnson and nodded. “I thought they might be happy to see me, but I didn’t expect to feel like a movie star.”

“Slim the Star.” Grandpa grinned as he settled his cowboy hat onto his head.

“It’s a fur piece from my life three months ago.” Slim swallowed hard, trying to get the lump out of his throat. “I don’t know if I ever thanked you. You believed I could change and gave me a chance.”

Max stood in line at the counter, waiting his turn to pay for his pack of gum. Movement to his right caught his eye and he saw Slim standing beside him with Chad on his shoulders. When it was his turn the cashier looked past Max to Chad.

“I saw you in the parking lot.” The lady behind the counter smiled. “Is this your uncle?”

“No,” said Chad, his voice high and fast. “This is our cousin, but we didn’t know him until this summer ’cause he’s been lost for over a hundred years, and he used to ride on trains all the time, but now he doesn’t ’cause he and his dad made up, and we solved the mystery of the watch so now we know he’s family, and we’re going to his farm to help solve another mystery and these are my sister and brother and cousins.” He took a breath but flew on before anyone could get a word in. “Carly and Molly are my double cousins and we have the same grandparents, but Brandon isn’t. He’s just a cousin ’cause he has other grandparents.”

Chad stopped again for a breath and Max jumped in. “Thank you, Chad, for sharing our family history.” He rolled his eyes but couldn’t quite keep the grin off his face.

The cashier looked from one kid to another, her jaw hanging, eyes glazed. She shook her head and laughed a big belly laugh, one that made the children laugh along with her. "I guess I asked, didn't I?" The sound of her laughter followed them out the door and into the parking lot.

Max hurried to keep up with Slim's long steps as they walked toward the vehicles. "What did your dad find? What makes him think it is Zach's?"

"Well, Dad will want to tell you the whole story when we get there. But I don't think he'll mind if I tell you he found a torn piece of a map."

"A torn piece of a map," Carly said. "What does that have to do with Zach?"

"We had almost forgotten it," Slim said. "When they found Zach, he had the watch *and* a torn piece of paper which looked like half of a map. Dad's kept it in a safety deposit box for years. We went and got our piece and they match. Not only do they match, but there are two sets of initials on it and one is ZLJ."

# What a way to end the summer!

Is it possible for the Double Cousins to squeeze a new adventure in before school starts? The excitement all begins with an e-mail from Slim who has found a clue in an old clock and needs their help to solve this intriguing mystery. Before they know it the Double Cousins are on the road in search of answers.

It's great fun for Max, Carly, their siblings, and Cousin Brandon to travel through Colorado in the camper with Grandma and Grandpa Johnson. Even better is spending time with their recently discovered cousin Slim.

It's not all fun and games—or camping, hiking, and roasting marshmallows—however. There's a real mystery to solve, complete with hundred-year-old clues, family stories handed down, and a few tense and dangerous moments.

Will they succeed in putting together all the pieces? Are they real detectives, like Max's hero, Encyclopedia Brown? Will the pesky thief scare them away? Or worse yet, will he beat them to the treasure? Come along and find out in *The Double Cousins and the Mystery of the Torn Map*.

As the cousins pursue their clues, they find that they each have particular strengths and can achieve more together than separately, and they learn valuable lessons in cooperation, contentment, and confidence.



Miriam Jones Bradley has lived “from sea to shining sea” but spent most of her life in the Great Plains. She and her husband, Dr. Bruce Bradley, now make their home in Newberry, South Carolina.



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