



# *Novels By Russ Fine*

## *December, 2024*

I want to take this opportunity to wish all of you a *Merry Christmas* and a *Happy New Year*. Kroger is limiting access to their stores for book signing events this month so I only have one event scheduled.

Last month I announced the release of the *Future World History Trilogy* as a single volume. I wanted to let you know that it is now available in a hardcover edition too.

### **Book Signing Events**

12/09/24 thru 12/14/24  
11:00 - 4:00  
Kroger  
1550 Oak Ridge Turnpike  
Oak Ridge, TN

When I retired I started baking as a hobby. I concentrated on making cheesecakes and that hobby grew into a business. In 2019 my wife and I opened a bakery and café in Crossville. It was called Cheesecakes Plus More. Unfortunately, Covid killed our business. In addition to making cheesecakes we also made cookies. One of our best sellers during the holidays was Pecan Sandies. I was asked many times for the recipe but I always politely refused. But since the store is closed, I decided to make the recipe public so it is attached to this newsletter.

Shortly after we moved to Tennessee I joined a local writers group. We had weekly assignments. At one meeting the author who was hosting the meeting put a blue milk bottle on a table and told the people in the group to write a story about the bottle. That story is attached. I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

If you have any comments or suggestions regarding my novels please write to me. So far the plots for all of my books are a product of my imagination. But if you have any ideas for plot lines for new novels please let me know.

*Russell Fine*

Website: [NovelsByRussFine.com](http://NovelsByRussFine.com)

Email: [NovelsByRussFine@gmail.com](mailto:NovelsByRussFine@gmail.com)

## Pecan Sandies

325 Degrees

- 2 Cups softened butter
  - 1 Cup sugar firmly packed brown sugar
  - 4 tsp. water
  - 4 tsp. vanilla
  - 4 Cups sifted flour
  - 2 Cups finely chopped pecans
- Powdered Sugar

Cream together butter and sugar until smooth. Then beat in vanilla and water. Stir in flour and pecans until well blended.

If dough is too sticky cover and refrigerate for two hours.

Roll into 1 ½ inch balls, or use a 1 ounce cookie scoop, and place on ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for about 20 minutes (bottom edge of cookies should be turning brown).

Roll or sprinkle cookies with powdered sugar while still warm.

Recipe makes about 48 cookies.



# The Blue Bottle

## Chapter 1

The antique blue milk bottle sat on the dusty window sill in the otherwise empty house. The sunlight reflecting off the bottle cast unusual bright blue patterns of light on the walls and ceiling. The house was old, but nobody knew exactly when it was built because that happened before the local government began keeping records.

The newest owners of the house, Brad and Kate Miller, had saved for years to buy it. It was their first home. The house was small, only about twelve hundred square feet. It had two bedrooms, one bath, a big kitchen, large dining room, and an even larger living room. Brad and Kate had no children, so it was perfect for them.

They looked at the house several times before offering to buy it, but now they owned it so they were going through it, room by room, deciding how to place their furniture. When they walked into the smaller bedroom, the light from the reflections off the milk bottle surprised them. They both stared at it for a few moments and suddenly found themselves drawn to the bottle by some unseen force.

“Was that there before?” Brad asked.

“I don’t think so. I thought the house was completely empty.”

Brad walked across the room and as he got closer to the bottle the desire to touch it became stronger. He moved his hand closer to the bottle and he felt an uncomfortable tingling sensation in his fingers. Despite the discomfort, he was unable to stop himself. He touched the bottle.

Suddenly, he found himself engulfed in a painfully bright blue light. He felt mild electric shocks coursing through his body. He closed his eyes in an effort to mitigate the pain caused by the light. Then, he felt himself spinning and falling.

As quickly as the light appeared, it disappeared. Brad slowly opened his eyes. He was no longer in the bedroom of his home. He was in a forest, surrounded by unfamiliar plants and trees. He was sitting on the ground, dazed and confused. He wasn’t sure if he was dreaming, dead, or hallucinating. A wave of dizziness passed through him and afterwards he felt a little better.

Brad got up and looked around. The trees around him were very tall and their leaves formed a canopy at least seventy-five feet above the ground. The ground was covered with a thick layer of fallen leaves, but was devoid of plants except for a few bushes that had small bright green leaves and large dark blue flowers. He had never been in a rainforest, but guessed this is what one looked like. Except rainforests were hot and humid, and he was almost cold.

The dark blue flowers reminded him of the milk bottle he touched. Did that really happen? He got up and remembered his cellphone was in his pocket. He took it out and checked the date and time. The date was correct and the time looked reasonable. Then he looked at the level of service; there was none. He turned the phone off and put it back in his pocket.

He began to explore the area, but everywhere he looked there were the same tall trees and the bushes with the blue flowers. He stopped and listened to the sounds around him. All he heard was the rustle of leaves in the canopy above. Rainforests were supposed to be full of all types of animals. This one had no animals at all. There were no birds, no reptiles, no mammals, not even insects.

He continued to walk, but it was the same everywhere he went. If this was real, what happened to Kate? Was she still in their house or was she now lost in the same forest?

## Chapter 2

When Brad touched the bottle there was an explosion of bright blue light, but no sound. Kate had closed her eyes for a few seconds. When she opened them the light, Brad, and the blue milk bottle were gone. It happened so fast her mind still didn't register what happened. After a few seconds she called out to Brad, but there was no answer. She looked in every room in the house. There was no sign of Brad. Now she was worried. She wondered if she should call the police. They would probably think she was crazy when she told them what happened, so she decided to wait. Of course, she had no idea what happened. How could Brad be gone? Where did he go? She locked the front door of the house, went to the car, and began crying.

Kate drove back to the apartment in a daze. She made it without incident, but she didn't remember any part of the ten-minute drive. She was hoping Brad would be in the apartment, but she knew he wasn't. She went inside, sat on the couch, and realized Brad had his cellphone with him. She called him immediately, but there was no answer. She left him a message, but she didn't think he would receive it. Brad was gone.

The next day she realized she had to tell the police Brad was missing. She decided not to tell them about the blue milk bottle. She was going to tell them Brad left the house to get something from the car and never came back.

Mountain Ridge was a small town. The population was about 8,000. In the downtown area most of the people knew each other. Kate walked into the police station. The man sitting at the front desk was Bill Tracy. When he saw her, he said, "Good morning Kate. Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yeah Bill, there is. Brad disappeared yesterday."

"What do mean 'disappeared'?"

"I mean he is gone. I have no idea where he is. He doesn't answer his phone. He's gone."

Bill motioned for her to sit down next to the desk. "You need to tell me exactly what happened."

"Okay. You know we bought that old house on Center Street. We closed on it yesterday. After the closing we were going through the house trying to decide where to put the furniture. I realized we forgot to bring the tape measure; it was still in the car. Brad went out to get it and never came back." She was starting to cry again.

"Please relax. We'll find him. Do you have a recent picture of him?"

"Yes," she said as she opened her purse and took out her wallet. She removed a picture and handed it to Bill.

"This is a good picture. We'll distribute it all over the state. I'm sure somebody has seen him. I have to do some paperwork to properly report this. Can you stay here for a few minutes while I do it? It needs your signature."

"Of course, Bill. I'll do anything I can to help get him back."

"Thanks."

It took Bill about ten minutes to enter all the information into the computer, stopping occasionally to ask Kate some questions. Then he put the picture into a scanner, scanned it, and gave the picture back to Kate. He got up from the desk and walked over to a printer. He brought the form back to his desk, gave it to Kate and said, "Please sign here."

She signed the form and Bill said, "Thanks. Please don't worry Kate."

"That's easy to say, but very difficult to do."

"Do you have someone you could stay with for a few days? This is probably a bad time to be alone."

"I don't think I would be very good company for anyone else right now. Please call me if you find out anything."

"Of course."

Kate got up and left the police station. Bill thought if this was a different couple, he would have suspected foul play, but not with Kate and Brad. They had been friends since they met in third grade. They really loved each other.

Bill had been on the Mountain Ridge police force since graduating high school 12 years ago. He remembered another incident that occurred shortly before he joined the force. A man had disappeared without a trace. He thought the man lived on Center Street, but he couldn't remember his name. He decided to ask the chief about it. He was certain he would remember.

Bill walked over to the chief's office. The door was open. The chief was reading something so he knocked lightly. The chief looked up and said, "Hi Bill, what can I do for you?"

"Just before I joined the force there was a missing person case involving a guy who lived on Center Street. Do you remember it?"

"Like it was yesterday. Why?"

"Because Kate Miller was just in here to report her husband is missing. They bought an old house on Center Street yesterday. He left the house to get something from the car and never came back."

"Pull the file on Jasper Martin and check the address. He was the one who disappeared before."

"Okay, thanks."

Bill found the file a few minutes later and checked the address with the one Kate had just given him. It was the same. Bill went back to the chief's office to let him know. The chief didn't say anything, but he had a worried look on his face. Bill went back to his desk and filed the missing person report with the state. Within 12 hours every police officer in the state would know Brad Miller was missing.

### Chapter 3

Brad had been wandering around for two days. He found there were fresh water ponds all over. He also discovered an occasional piece of fruit on the ground. He wasn't sure if he should eat it, but he was really hungry and eventually his hunger won. The fruit was good, it looked like a pear and had the taste and texture of an apple.

He became accustomed to the temperature. It never changed, even at night it always felt like it was sixty-five degrees. It rained every day, but the canopy was so thick very little of it actually fell to the ground. It did drip down the sides of the trees, gathering around the base of them before running into the little ponds.

He kept thinking about Kate. He missed her so much and he was sure she was wondering where he was. If he could call her and let her know he was lost, but otherwise okay, that would be wonderful. But that would never happen. If he couldn't find a way to get home, he would never see her again. That frightened him more than anything else.

His days were always the same. He would walk for hours but the scenery never changed until he noticed something different on the ground. He walked over to it and discovered a large wooden block from a children's toy set. On it was a big red uppercase "C", a lower case "c", the word "cat", the number 3, a plus sign, and a minus sign. Except for the size, this block was about three inches on a side, it looked like a typical wooden block. It was a little bulky, but he put it in his pocket.

Brad was excited now. He thought perhaps there were other people here. He yelled "Hello" several times, but there was no answer. Brad continued to wander through the rainforest. He lost track of the days, but he continued to carry the wooden block with him. He was sure it was the key to getting back home.

After being lost in the forest for what he estimated was at least a month, he realized something. He obviously hadn't bathed, shaved, or cut his nails since he got here. But he had no beard and his nails had not grown at all. As far as he could tell, he didn't smell bad either. Even his clothes, which should have been in tatters by now, seemed to be the same as when he arrived. Once again, he began to wonder about his physical state. Perhaps this was all a really bad dream from which he would eventually wake.

He slept every night propped up against a tree, waking up when the morning rain started. This morning was different. He was awakened by somebody shaking him. He opened his eyes and was shocked to see a man standing next to him. The man said, "Good morning, you have no idea how happy I am to see you."

Brad, stammering, said, "Good morning, I'm happy to see you too. Do you know where we are?"

"No, I was in a room in my house and saw a big wooden block in one of the bedrooms. I have no idea where it came from. I picked it up and the next thing I knew I was here. I've lost track of time, but I would guess it was several years ago. My name is Jasper."

Now Brad was sure the wooden block was the key to getting back home. He took the block out of his pocket and showed it to Jasper. "Is this the block you saw?"

"Yes, is that how you got here too?"

"No, I touched a blue milk bottle."

Jasper reached into his pocket and pulled out a small blue milk bottle that looked like the one Brad had touched. "I'm pretty sure this is it."

"Yeah, it is. Where did you find it?"

"I woke up one morning and it was on the ground next to me."

"I think I already know the answer to this question, but where was your house?"

"I lived in a little town called Mountain Ridge."

"I'll bet your house was on Center Street."

"Yeah, it was. I presume that's your house now."

“That’s right. I closed on the house in the morning and found myself here in the afternoon. You do realize that whoever did this to us is probably watching us right now and laughing his ass off.”

“I never thought about it that way, but you might be right. Anyway, I think that these two things are the key to getting us back home. Do you remember the date when you got here?”

“Yeah, it was March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016.”

“Are you sure about the date? I ended up here on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004. That means I have been here for twelve years! That doesn’t seem possible.”

“I don’t think time here is the same as time back home. I’m sure you are wearing the same clothes you wore when you got here and they are showing no signs of wear. I’ll bet you haven’t shaved either and you don’t have a beard. So maybe very little time has passed back home. By the way, I agree the bottle and the wood block are the keys to getting us back home, but I think they have to be activated somehow. Do you have any ideas?”

Jasper scratched his head for a few seconds and said “Nope.”

## Chapter 4

Kate spent the weekend alone, crying frequently. But now it was Monday morning and she had to go back to work. Brad had been gone for three days. Both of them worked at the Mountain Ridge Community Bank. The bank only had five employees. She was a teller and Brad was one of the two vice-presidents. She was going to have to tell Mr. White, the president of the bank, that Brad had disappeared.

She arrived at the bank earlier than normal. She let herself in and went to Mr. White's office. He was sitting at his desk and looked up as she approached. "Good morning Kate. Are you okay?"

"No, I'm not even close to being okay. Brad is gone."

"Brad is gone? Where did he go?"

"I have no idea. You know we closed on the house we bought on Friday. In the afternoon Brad and I were looking at the house. He went back to the car to get something and he never came back."

Mr. White said nothing for a few seconds and then asked, "Did you report this to the police?"

"Yes, I did that on Saturday morning. I called Bill Tracy this morning. He said he sent out the missing person report to every police department in the state, but so far Brad has not been seen."

"I think you should take some time off. Take the week off. I'll pay you your normal salary."

"Thank you, Mr. White. I really appreciate it."

Kate didn't want to work, but she didn't want to go home to a lonely apartment either. In the end she decided to go back to the apartment in case Brad came back.



## Chapter 5

Several days had passed since Brad and Jasper met. Suddenly Brad had an epiphany. “When you touched the wooden block, was it in direct sunlight?”

“Yes, do you think these things might be activated by sunlight?”

“I don’t know, but it’s certainly worth a try. How good are you at climbing trees?”

“I haven’t climbed a tree since I was a kid, and that was a long time ago. These trees do look easy climb, so I’m willing to try it.”

Brad looked at the trees for a while, then he said, “The lowest branches are six or seven feet off the ground. I’m pretty sure that if we can get on one of the lowest branches, we will be able to climb through the canopy and into the sunlight. I think I can reach that high and try to pull myself up. What about you?”

“I think I need to find a tree with lower branches. You’re at least five or six inches taller than me.”

“Okay, let’s look for a tree with lower branches.”

They wandered around for about an hour before they found the perfect tree. The lowest branches were about four feet off the ground and there appeared to be branches about every two feet.

Brad looked up and realized this was not going to be an easy climb. It would probably take more than two hours to get through the canopy. It was fairly late in the day so Brad said, “Jasper, I know we are both anxious to get home, but I’m not sure we can reach the canopy before it gets dark, and I don’t want to spend the night in a tree. I think we should wait until after the morning rain before we start our climb.”

“Okay, I’ve been here for so long I don’t think another day will matter. Do you think when we get back, we will remember this?”

“I hope so, because if we don’t remember how we got here, we might end up right back here again.”

The next morning, after the rain stopped, they started their climb up the tree. It was easier than they thought it would be. After an hour they were only a few feet from the canopy.

Brad said, “We’re almost there. I think you should hold that block so the light won’t hit it until you are ready.”

It was uncomfortable, but Jasper put the block inside his shirt and said, “Okay, let’s go.”

Five minutes later they were through the canopy. The view was amazing. It looked like a green blanket was covering everything. Brad wished he had a camera so he could remember what he was looking at and prove to himself this really happened. Then he remembered his cellphone had a camera. He hadn’t turned it back on since the day he got here, so he hoped the battery was still okay. He turned on the phone and was happy to see the main screen appear a few seconds later. It showed the date and time, and it was the same as when he looked at it the last time, which was the day he got here. He thought that was strange because the clock on the phone should have worked even if the phone was turned off. He put the phone in camera mode and took two pictures of the view from above the canopy and he took a picture of Jasper, who was still partially hidden by the leaves.

Brad spent a minute or so looking at the pictures he just took. He put the phone back in his pocket and said, “I’ll go first. I hope this works.”

Brad removed the bottle from his other pocket. He was holding it in his hand when the light struck it. He felt the same mild electric shocks he had felt before and once again the intense blue light hurt his eyes. He closed his eyes and suddenly felt himself falling. He thought he was falling down from the tree, but a moment later he found himself on the floor of the small bedroom in his house. He opened his eyes and looked around.

Kate was standing next to him and she said, “You are so clumsy. I swear you could trip on anything.”

Brad stood up, he hugged and kissed Kate. She said, "What brought that on?"

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you."

"That's an interesting bottle. I think we should keep it. She started to reach for it and Brad screamed, "Don't touch that!"

"Okay, you don't have to yell. Why shouldn't I touch it?"

"Someday I'll explain it to you."

Kate was confused about Brad yelling at her not to touch the bottle, but decided to discuss it with him later. They spent another half hour looking through the house and then went back to their apartment. While Kate drove, Brad took his phone out of his pocket to look at the pictures he had taken. If they were there, he would know his ordeal was real. The pictures were there. Two pictures of the canopy and a picture of Jasper.

After they got back to the apartment Brad decided to tell Kate about what happened after he touched the bottle. Brad watched her as he told her about it and it was apparent that she thought he was losing his mind. Then he told her he took some pictures with his phone. He took out the phone and showed her the three pictures. She looked at them and asked, "What happened to Jasper?"

"I have no idea. But on Monday I'm going to go over to the county assessor's office and look at the records for our house and see if it was owned by somebody named Jasper twelve years ago."

"That's a good idea. What do you think we should do with the bottle?"

"After it gets dark, we should go back to the house and put the bottle in a dark place that will never be exposed to sunlight."

That evening they went back to their house. It was dark. They walked into the kitchen and turned on the lights. They walked into the small bedroom to get the bottle, but it was gone.

"I guess we don't have to worry about the bottle anymore," Brad said.

"You know I never really believed in supernatural stuff before, but I am starting to change my mind."

Two days later they started bringing some of their things over from their apartment. When they arrived with the first load, they saw somebody sitting on the stairs leading to the front door of their house. It was Jasper.

Jasper was watching them as they walked up to him. When they were a few feet away Jasper said, "Hi Brad. You have no idea how happy I am to see you. I have been waiting for this moment for twelve years. I had to make sure I wasn't crazy."

"I was wondering if you made it back. I'm very happy to see you too. This is my wife Kate. I told her what happened, but I don't think she believed me until I showed her the pictures I took."

"It's nice to meet you Kate. I never told my wife what happened. I didn't think she would have believed me anyway. The block was sitting on the window sill when I got back. I went back that night to hide the block but it was gone. Do you still have your blue bottle?"

"No, it disappeared too."

"Jasper, I know almost everybody in town. How come I never met you before?"

"About six months after I got back, my wife's parents died in an accident. They owned a hardware store in Grand View which we inherited. So, we sold the house and moved there. Lisa died from cancer about three years ago, otherwise she would have been with me today. I really miss her."

"I'm sorry to hear about your wife. Do you want to come in and see the house?"

"Sure."

Brad, Kate, and Jasper became friends. Grand View was only about twenty miles from Mountain Ridge and they saw each other frequently. The following Christmas Brad gave Jasper large framed copies of the three pictures he took as a present. Jasper looked at the pictures and with a deep sadness in his voice said, "I wish Lisa was still here to see these."

## Chapter 6

Fifty-four years later, Brad and Kate were still happily married. They had two grown children and had moved four times since they bought the little house on Center Street. Now they were living in an apartment again.

A few months after moving to the apartment Kate started getting frequent headaches. She went to the doctor and he sent her to the hospital for a series of tests. He called two days later and asked her come back to the office. The news was not good. She had an inoperable brain tumor. She had, at the most, six months to live.

Brad was devastated by the news. They decided to make the most of the time they had left, so they booked a cruise to the South Pacific. They flew to San Francisco to board the ship. The first two stops were in Hawaii and they had a wonderful time. For the first time in months Kate was smiling again. On the morning after they left Hawaii they went back to their cabin after breakfast. They walked in and were surprised by the bright blue reflections on the walls and ceiling. Sitting on a small table in front of the door leading to their patio was the antique blue milk bottle. They smiled at each other, held hands, walked over to the bottle, and both of them touched it.