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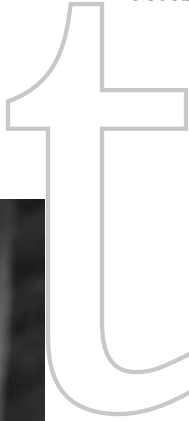
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Long-Distance Relationship

MORIAH WALTON



THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY does not mean very much to a child of eight years to begin with, much less when said child is faced with the enchantment of a recently arrived bank of fog. Thus, when my sainted mother attempted to pry me away from my two-hour perch at the window that misty winter day with the lure of a history magazine, I would not be moved. The woman baffled me. There was a sea of crystalline drops suspended outside like the sighing whispers of a million aqueous faeries and she was rattling on about paper and ink: clearly a mark of insanity. In this conviction, I might have remained forever plastered to the window. But I live in Texas, land of the bipolar weather. Within ten minutes, my fairyland was swallowed by a violent thunderstorm that swept over the countryside without so much as a “pardon-me” by way of apology.

Devastation has a funny way of settling in an eight year-old, particularly when said eight year-old is wildly imaginative. In my childish frustration, I determined

the best way to show the weather my displeasure was to completely ignore it. Affecting a ridiculous air of nonchalance, I flounced my way through the house in a royal snit, fully intending to show the weather who was boss by reading whatever it was my mom had offered me earlier. It was in this preposterous state beneath the tendrils of a thousand arcs of lighting I was ignoring that I first met Dr. Tesla.

The man did not notice me. He was sitting quite at his ease, fully immersed in a book. Piercing eyes pored over the tome, oblivious to all save its words. The book intrigued me. I knew any number of boring old men who would sit in chairs, but my bookish self instantly connected to a man who would choose to do it with a book. My unconcealed enchantment with this tall, athletic physicist went completely undetected by the individual in question. This may seem odd, but was hardly surprising to me. He had, you see, been dead for 58 years.

I KNEW ANY NUMBER OF BORING OLD MEN WHO WOULD SIT IN CHAIRS, BUT MY BOOKISH SELF INSTANTLY CONNECTED TO A MAN WHO WOULD CHOOSE TO DO IT WITH A BOOK.

Eleven years ago, a photograph republished in a children's history magazine reached out with a tendril of lightning and sparked in my brain a fascination with history that never died. Over a decade later, the same photo graces my computer background, unchanged by time. I stand in stark contrast to this timelessness:

Nikola Tesla, Father of the Modern Age, is past the point of changing, but every minute changes me. Yet here he is, scattered throughout a hundred of my notes, the inventor of alternating current morphed aptly into the spark that flared into the historian I have become.

Pursuing a double major in communication studies and history, I often marvel at the relationship between a biographer and their subject. I can cite the letters, patents, and even diaries of a man I

have never met. My knowledge of his library seems akin to that of a close friend who often raids it, but the library is no more.

**SOMEONE WHO KNOWS
EVERY DETAIL OF A PERSON
THEY HAVE NEVER MET;
THE DEFINITION MATCHES
THAT OF A STALKER.**

The sentimentalist in me cries every tenth of July for a genius forgotten, but the student in me wonders what can be learned from the communication of the biographer and the subject.

Can it even be called a relationship? The idea verges on the macabre. Yet my dictionary lists the word as defined by the concept of two or more things with a significant connection. Surely, the connection of an historical subject and the tireless, exhaustively thorough historian mad enough to call herself a biographer qualifies as significant. A very loud voice within me thinks so, though it has probably been largely biased by a thousand sleepless nights of research which beg with no small affront not to be addressed as anything less than significant.

There is also the matter of technical connection by name. Years from now, when my research is finally complete and my work reaches publication, my name will be permanently connected with that of Tesla, the subject of my work. Yet Tesla is only one drop in the inkwell of my projects. If the idea of connection by name must apply universally, then I am also related to Capt. Hook, the subject of another project. If both cases count as a significant connection, it could mean the inventor of the radio is related to the pirate captain by a degree of separation found in me. If the subject must be real, then we fare little better: I am also the author of a short history of spoons. Lunacy was never before more useful for eating soup.

Or perhaps it is not so ridiculous. An old professor once told me that humanity is comprised of an endless web of connections which ties us all together. If a web is to accomplish a task of this enormity, it is almost certainly required to make a few logic-defying leaps now and then. Perhaps one of these leaps is through time, because the notion of one person whose death warrant was signed in 1943 inspiring a wild imp of a girl half a century later defies human explanation. Perhaps this is evidence of some sort of immortality of the human soul; perhaps this is God's way of working through time; perhaps this is a question for quantum theorists, not writers; or perhaps I simply read too many books for my own good.

The concept of history defies explanation to a being that exists in the present, much more so when enhanced by the concept of a human who existed at one time but cannot be spoken to now. Accordingly, the concept of an historical biographer defies explanation. Someone who knows every detail of a person they have never met; the definition matches that of a stalker. The scientist in me is horrified at any notion of something that cannot be explained, the writer in me is fighting the

urge to wax preposterously poetic about the effrontery of being compared to a stalker, but there is another thought as well.

The part of me that used to be eight years old sees a photograph and, having little concept of history, decides that she wants to get to know its subject. She does so in the only ways she can. That part of me is the part that now smiles at lightning storms instead of ignoring them, the part that knows the capital of Serbia, and the part that jumps at a chance to read any biography it can find. If the effect of any relationship is the subtle changes we pick up along the way, I certainly owe a deal to mine with the man Edison despised.

Recently, I woke up to find another crystalline bank of fog settled over my house. Rather than contemplate it from my window, I took a book and joined the faeries outside. Time never made much sense to me anyway. Nikola Tesla died over half a century before I was born. He was one of the greatest men I now know.

A Chest Full of Lessons®

SHARON ORSBORN

There's a chest in the sunroom that I don't open much.
It's full of dog tags and medals, and report cards and such.
It's a box not much bigger than a suitcase is.
And it's filled with things that once were his.
What the box really holds is a story too brief
of happiness and memories, and a whole lot of grief.

Grief is a process that takes time and tears.
It's not over in weeks or months or years.
It takes as long as it takes, I would say.
It gets a bit better with each passing day.

It ebbs and it flows like the ocean tide.
As time goes by it begins to subside.
A tide that once raged becomes a mere neap.
Occasional tears replace a great need to weep.

The chest in the sunroom will always be there,
a reminder of life and things that aren't fair.
But it's tucked away now; it doesn't take too much space.
And what I've learned from it will not go to waste.

The learning is a part of the me I've become.
It's a piece of a puzzle that's nearly done.
I have had other lessons, too many to list.
But up until now this one had been missed.

And as much as I hate it I have to say,
it has helped me become all I am today.
Who I am today is not the same as before.
The chest has led me through a different door.

It's a door to knowledge of the human spirit
with a lesson for all who would listen and hear it.
Each of us is a product of what we've been through.
We are the end result of the old and the new.

Memories and grief are stored in that chest.
And the lessons it taught me may be the best yet.