

A Further Genealogy of Chastity Willingham Dimsdale
By John Palisano

There is great music to be found in routine. The percussion is made from our slippers going down flights of stairs, heavy and protesting against be roused on a winter morning. Clanking as a coffee pot is opened, then a ride symbol like woosh as water is poured inside and then out again into the reservoir. The clicks of the plastics. The short scrapes of the ceramic coffee mug on the porcelain counter. The sticking sound of plastic gaskets pulling apart on the fridge.

Modern sounds.

Soon, though, ancient, timeless sounds take center stage. The same sounds my mother once made, in our dining room as she, too, eased down into a seat with her breakfast, not much different than my own.

The sliding sound of papers on a wood table. Slurping sounds of coffee, slowly drunk and savoured. Low sighs. Loud, wooden creaks as chairs are adjusted and moved just so as the meal and the reading commences. Comforting sounds. The soundtrack of life, rising from slumber, making sense from the randomly dreamt moments still lightly impressed in the peripheries of vision, soon to fade away as the day takes hold.

This is the time when I am most grateful, as the house my mother bequeathed me feels less massive and threatening. It's like I am not alone, for I have the morning and the sunlight and the birds chirping and the cars outside, and the occasional neighbor shouting goodbye.

It is also the time I dare look at the pictures again. The last time I looked through them, I was struck at the stories of my relatives. Found in the attic, with scarcely any information, I was left to fill in the blanks. Their stories called to me, with some even frightening me.

Even so, it beat feeling alone. While I read, my mind was busied and stopped focusing on being the sole living thing inside the great big house. I knew the place inside and out—I grew up here just outside of Boston—which meant I knew when I was not entirely alone, if not in body, then certainly in the spirits who'd inevitably come to visit.

When I first moved into my mother's house—my childhood home—I'd gone about cleaning the many drifts of accumulations she'd left behind. Most were benign objects. Stacks of shopping bags. Cookie tins. Magazines. Piles of clothes she had picked up at thrift stores.

In the attic, somehow preserved through freezing winter temperatures and humid summers, lie a treasure of photographs inside an envelope. Each photograph had a name written on back, along with a holiday. Could these be relatives? I couldn't help but wonder about their stories.

"I think they're creepy," said my beloved cousin Stephen when I showed them to him. "They're scary, in a way. All those stories, lost to time."

"They're not lost anymore," I'd insisted. "Now they're found."

It's said we inherit our most present traits from our grandparents. We end up more like them than our immediate parents. Our hairlines, our medical predilections, our passions, the type of people we fall in love with—all

predetermined.

If that is true, then what effect do other, more distant relatives have? Are there any genealogical traits present there, as well? Or are there none of consequence?

In my case, the pictures have each given me a glimpse into the impossible, the possible, and often, things supernatural. In doing so, each has revealed intriguing and illuminating insights into this task called being human.

As I can look out and see the construction building around me, and the alien sounds pumping from car radios, and the new faces in my neighbourhood, I am enjoying getting lost in the stories of an earlier world, one where things may not have been as noisy, nor as fast, but one where, strangely and miraculously enough, the weird and the strange still to this day of technological achievements, readily defy explanation.

And it's inside these stories where we meet again, my friend.

Chyna Dale