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A Little Spit Goes a Long Way

by Kris Thompson

I spit in a tube. I mail it, postage paid. I do not have to think too much. This is good since I've spent so much of my time doing nothing but thinking too much and to no end. Instead, I will trust strangers to tell me things I do not know, things I could not know, things I was not meant to know.

I wonder if those who held tight to their secrets would have worked harder to conceal them had they known the leaps and bounds science would take, putting to bed "it's not mine".

I spit. I wait. I try not to think too much about the fate of my foamy offering. I stupidly hope it does not smell when opened. I'm fairly certain I've not sent any cold or flu viruses, but what about those that unwittingly send Mono? Herpes? Hep C...or maybe that's Hep B. I can't remember which is in saliva. For sure Ebola. I'm quietly thankful that my job is not opening mailed saliva.

Results in, I learn benign information displayed via pie chart and map and there is nothing too surprising but I do wonder if a trip to Scotland is now justified, expenses falling under the category of getting to know myself better. Do I have a clan crest? A tartan? I put this idea on the backburner along with all the other ideas involving things I want but feel selfish.

Instead, I watch *Outlander* again. I change my maps program to talk to me using a Scottish accent.

At the very least, I now have something interesting to talk about at book club. I hold attention for a few minutes but someone's sister-in-law found out she has like 90 siblings, their bio dad being a fertilization doctor playing loose and free with the rules. And with his sperm. Gross. Netflix made a documentary. Who can compete with that? Against the advice of book club, I make my profile public. Now everyone can see all of me...genetically speaking. I wait.

I dream of him. Of meeting him. Of him seeing the proof, knowing the truth, and welcoming me into his arms. I wonder if I have siblings and assume it is highly likely, although surely not 90 of them. I wonder if he has a daughter. A sister would be nice. Would she share?

Eventually, a man messages. Not him, but someone close.

“Who are you?” he sounds truly puzzled. “Why are we so closely related?”

We work the puzzle together. Who I am. Who he is. Turns out my bio mom, who's name I've known for years and who's been gone for years, was our father's high school sweetheart.

I take a trip to meet him, my new brother. We hug. I look for similarities and find them which makes a previously unexperienced warmth well up in my chest. I try to play it cool.

He likes to build things and shows me his workshop. His hands are somehow as expressive as his face. I've not noticed that in anyone else ever. Interesting. He doesn't call himself an artist but he is one. I say this and he laughs. He is modest. I like that.

Our visit is going well. I can tell he's not ready to say goodbye. He asks if I can stay for lunch. His wife, my now sister-in-law, puts together sandwiches and chips and tea. His girls, the nieces I didn't get to see grow up, are teenagers. I can see they want me to like them and I do.

This new family shows me framed pictures on their walls and photo albums of my brother growing up. They want me to feel a part of them. I want that too. Instead, I see what I missed out on and wonder what it would have been like to grow up in that house...the one in the older pictures. To celebrate those birthdays, those Christmases. There's a sweet photo of my brother, maybe three years old, sitting on our father's lap, looking at the newspaper funnies. Our father is reading something aloud. They look happy. I'm suddenly devastated in a way I did not expect. I try to play it cool.

Our day ends with an unexpected invitation for an extended visit. I accept and we spend the better part of four days together visiting places in the area special to the family.

As a child my brother's extended family spent their summers at what they call "camp" which is basically a cabin at a nearby lake. The lake is amazing. Beautiful. Peaceful. I love lakes and wish we were swimming. I'm certain I could swim to the opposite side of the lake, not because the lake is so small but because I always swim to the other side.

We go in the currently unoccupied cabin. It's early spring and no one will use it until summer. There is no lock on the door. Family still come and go as they please. Rustic, the cabin smells of smoke and wet wood. It's not unpleasant and reminds me of something I cannot recall. There's a cot in the kitchen where his...our...grandmother liked to sleep. I missed out on meeting her by 15 years but her apron still hangs in the kitchen next to her bed. I touch it. There are old children's drawings tacked up on the wall. I examine each. I walk down to the water so I

can touch it. I'm trying to make micro memories to take with me. I can't imagine I'll be invited to camp with the rest of my new extended family. It's enough I've got a new brother. I want it to be enough.

Before I fly home, my brother gives me several photos...ones I would have been in had we grown up together. He's told his father about me, how we puzzled it out and about the DNA. His father did not deny, but refused to meet me or to talk to him about me. He gives me our father's address, suggesting I write to him. I go home armed with a name. And pictures. And stories. And an address.

I write to my bio dad, confident my eloquent words will compel him to write back. I tell him I don't want anything from him, that I'm just a normal person looking to connect family dots.

He does not write back. I do not feel normal.

Benefit of the doubt compels me to write again. I tell him of my wonderful life growing up with my adoptive family, which is completely true. I tell him I want nothing from him which is not completely true. I want acknowledgement. I dream of more but would settle for acknowledgement. I tell him I'll understand if he doesn't want to know me, that I'll be ok either way.

I check the mail incessantly. He does not write back. I do not feel ok.

For many years I've been invited to my family camp. Now they're not my new or my bio family. They're just family.

I still check the mail and, while I remain hopeful, I finally do feel ok.

THE END