

From PART II: THE MOURNING AFTER

(After Ralph's death) I had appropriated his massive rosewood desk for the enormous amounts of paperwork that suddenly engulfed me, as my smaller one was completely taken up with my desktop computer. The desk was six feet long and three feet deep and it offered more room to work on, despite being a microcosm of his penchant for carefully arranged clutter. Two thirds of its surface was hidden under a bevy of miniature picture frames into which he'd inserted his favorites among our family snapshots and photographs taken with some of the luminaries he'd worked with.

One night, writing replies to the mountains of condolence notes that had arrived within the past two weeks, I noticed a photograph that I was sure hadn't been there the last time I'd looked. It was an old, faded print of a young man and woman, set in a frame I didn't recognize. I leaned forward to examine it more closely.

It was a snapshot of the two of us taken just after our marriage, forty-seven years before. I am gazing up at him in adoration; he is looking down at me with a slight smile. I remembered where it was taken: on the boardwalk at Brighton Beach. The photo was a color print that had faded almost completely to brown.

As a child, I would spend hours going through our family album. The sepia-toned prints of my grandparents as newlyweds and my parents as babies would transport me to another time. 'Yesteryear, 'yore' and the crossword puzzle word 'erst' have always brought to mind the color of those photographs. For me, brown and buff were the colors of the past, and if enough time had elapsed between viewings, the creams would have edged further towards yellow and the browns towards rust. I, on the other hand, existed in the here and now, the moments of my life and those of Ralph and our children preserved in color and black and white. This difference had so far assured me that despite my advancing age, I was still a child of modern times, an era that began for me in 1927, the year of my birth. But when I saw that faded photograph of my young husband and myself, I knew that I, too, had become a scrap of yesteryear and yore and erst. The past now included me.