

When Your Grandfather Shows You Photographs of His Mother

You identify yourself in the antique image. Long slender neck, narrow torso, your face tipped to avoid the light. Your hands rest in the valley between your thighs sharp under yards of stiff calico. Your face long, well-sculpted by a lean diet and youth, nearly but not ascetic. Blue veins clutch the temples under translucent skin, a milky film that just contains you. In the next photograph your black dog Carlo poses at your side.

But Carlo isn't your dog. Three degrees separate you across the time dimension. You never beat a man with his horse-whip for using it on his horse, though you wish you had that sort of courage and that sort of hands-on life, or burned all the books except the family Bible, praise her lord. And yet you hold your bodies as both shields and thresholds.

Because a face never reflects the same, every photo sees something else. You're your father under the red star and your mother's grandmother in the morning sun. But not your mother who is the image of her aunt. You never did let her kiss you. You see Carlo and his mistress in another photograph, and her smile is so familiar. Now the gauzy mask of your mother's face floats across her-your features. Another light source and hour. Another shift of the hologram that is you.

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