

Christmas Pictures

These are pictures from the old days, when cameras used film. Those two boys are brothers. The taller was sixteen and the other was fourteen. If they weren't squinting into the sun you could see that they both have blue eyes. But you might expect they would since they have blonde hair.

Look at how skinny they are. Couple bags of bones. That's the driveway of their house they're standing in. It was a ranch house in the suburbs, very clean inside.

Here they are in their mother's car, the older one driving. He had just recently earned his license. They're pulling up to a fast-photo booth in a shopping-center parking lot to drop off a roll of film to be processed by a lab someplace and have prints made. Even a fast-photo booth might take a week to get the prints back, unless you asked for rush service and paid extra.

Look at how blue that sky is. It gets like that in those desert towns this time of year, the days so clear and cold, with the sun so bright that all one wants to do is scream at it, *Liar!*

This is inside the car, front seat. Those frayed places in the upholstery had just started to show. The younger brother has just said, What are we going to do? The older brother answered, I have an idea.

This is the car stopped at the fast-photo booth. The older brother has rolled his side window down. That sun in his face has got him squinting so hard his eyes are almost closed. He's looking up at the booth at the girl inside who works there. She's hard to see at this angle. The younger brother is hard to see, too, lost in the shadow the way he is.

Here the girl in the fast-photo booth has slid open her window to tend to her customers, the two boys. You can see her clearly now. She's not very pretty. Not photogenic. Not ugly, just plain. Just the girl in the fast-photo booth. The lenses of her glasses are a little thick, you can see how the light bends going through them near the rims, distorting the look of her face. Those rims went out of style more than a year before this picture was taken. And her hair looks dirty in that light. Really it was the color of mud. Her face was beginning to puff up from too many hours of sitting in the fast-photo booth, eating junk food and passing the time. No telling what she might look like now.

This one is when the older brother handed the roll of film to the girl. She's reaching to take it and he's saying, We were supposed to put this film in for

processing already but we forgot.

It doesn't show in the picture, but her hands were slightly sticky. It was right after this that the older brother said, Please do us a favor, and the girl said, What.

These next three are close-ups. That's why they're a little out of focus. Some of the cameras in those days were not very sophisticated.

In the first, the older brother is saying something like, Our mother is going to come by later today to pick the pictures up, we told her we had already put the film in, when she asks for the pictures please tell her there's been a problem, you made a mistake or something and they're not ready yet, please don't tell her we just brought the film by today.

In this next one, look at that look the photo-booth girl is giving the two brothers. She's just about to say, I'm sorry, I can't do that.

This is right after she said that. The younger brother is leaning forward so the photo-booth girl can see him. He's looking at her and saying, Please? Please?

The photo-booth girl says it again, I'm sorry, I can't do that. This is taken from behind her, over her shoulder so the back of her head is in the foreground. You can see how her hair looks dirty. We're looking at the boys and the car from roughly her point of view. If you look closely, you can see that the younger one, even though he's hard to see because of the shadow, has a faint smile. The older one, with his face full in the sun like that, looks like he hasn't smiled in years.

Here's another one of him with that same dead expression on his face. His brother just said to the photo-booth girl, Oh, come on, why not?

Here we see the photo-booth girl, she doesn't even want to look at them. She's looking for one of those envelopes the film is supposed to go in so it can be sent to the processing lab.

Look—the older brother's not looking at the girl anymore. In this one he's just looking off into space, or at the horizon out beyond the fast-photo booth. He's about to say, Never mind. When he says it he says it twice.

In this next one, the photo-booth girl is holding the envelope in one hand and a pen in the other. She's looking at the older brother with her eyebrows raised. She probably just said, I'll need a name and address. The older brother still isn't looking at her. Neither is the younger one. The older is still staring off into space, while the younger looks like he's looking at his shoes or his lap, or maybe at one of those worn spots on the upholstery.

The next four shots on the roll were blank, so there are no prints of those.

Here are the last two. This one is of the Christmas tree, all decorated and lit up and with all the presents under it. And this one, it looks like something on a floor, it's hard to tell. The focus isn't good and the light is low.