

The Boy They Didn't Take Pictures of

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The boy, Charles, was part of a family of seven—four children, two parents, a grandmother they called Pippy. He was not the oldest and not the youngest but was eleven when he noticed something: everywhere in the house were pictures of all of the members of the family, together and alone, but nowhere was there a picture of Charles. He said nothing about it, because he made himself believe that it was not true, that somewhere—some upstairs bathroom or basement hallway—he would be proven wrong, he would find a picture of himself.

Did he ever investigate this closely? Never, of course. When he was fourteen, he spent a good deal of time at the house of a friend named Alex. Alex's mother, named Scarlet and looking that way, liked to take pictures of Alex's friends; she had a wall where she displayed them all. But as the months went by, and Charles's time at Alex's house implied that he should be on the wall too, nothing of the kind happened. Scarlet smiled at him, spoke to him kindly, but never asked him to sit on the fence in the front yard, where all the other boys posed. Again Charles said nothing because he figured it was an oversight only, one that, if pointed out, would make him seem gauche or needy or strange.

Many years later, now in his twenties, Charles dated a woman, Reah, who kept pictures on her shelves. Small gold and seashelled frames held photos of her friends and sisters and even her ex-boyfriends— who were now her good friends and (how nice!) called often. But after nine months together, there were no pictures of Charles on the shelves. Reah had never even taken his photo, or asked a stranger to take their picture together. Again, Charles said nothing.

But with each successive slight, from childhood till the present, with each odd instance of his seemingly lifelong invisibility he wondered: Was he ugly? He wasn't, he knew this, but nor was he handsome.

Aha! He did have an unshapely nose, and an incongruous chin, and some scars from acne that potholed his cheeks. But was that it? Did the people he knew simply prefer the more photogenic of their friends and family? He knew this was too simple, too crude, too enraging and wretched to be doubted for a moment.