

## Frozen in time

by mazaher

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drawing by athens7

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London. Portobello Road, one clear, windy springtime afternoon. I wander among the market benches, my eyes settling here on a pile of bachelite 78 rpm discs, there on a worn-out eighteenth edition of *A Moveable Feast*, two steps ahead on a dilapidated stuffed armchair.

One seller displays old photographs in more or less ruined frames. They are roughly sorted according to subject matter. There are family portraits, horses and carriages, monuments and landscapes, children, pets, flowers. There are a few rare daguerrotypes where faded, faintly luminous shades are said to be fairies. There are a number of those bone-chilling photographs of the dead set up sitting or standing among their family as though they were alive. There are nudes and pornographic pictures. There are anatomical and medical photographs, a display of the inner workings of bodies now long dead.



And there is something else.

The frame is simple, hardwood carved in a severe double rope pattern and painted over with a bronze enamel.

They stand there, two young men, posing together, almost smiling. The fair-haired one leans on to the dark one, but not so much that he will lose his balance, with a look of ownership in his demeanour the other doesn't seem to mind.

Or is he secretly enjoying it...? (not so secretly, maybe).

They both are sporting a goatee in two different cuts. It becomes them both, but it looks somehow like an afterthought on their smooth faces, or a shared joke, or a matter of playful contention between them.

"They're so handsome, aren't they?"

The vendor, a girl of no more than twenty, turns the frame around, shows me a pencil scribble on the back: *J&P, April 1897*.

"They look happy," I answer. "They look in love."

She blushes.

We watch the young men in the photographs, frozen in time on another clear windy springtime afternoon.

Hair a bit disheveled by the breeze.

Neckties loose, shirts open.

The scent of their bodies in the sun.

Very much alive.

I wonder what has been of them.

I buy the photograph for £ 5,00.

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