

# Have You Seen Me?

by Kimberly Ford

It's as she reaches into the fridge for the carton of half-and-half with the grainy waxy photo of the little girl—Last Seen 10/2/06—that the memory surfaces:

“Hey. That's mine.”

In the memory: standing in the middle of his room in bare feet, red swimsuit with the dark blue stripe around the chest, her skin taut from chlorine and sun. In her hands, an LP. “Pink Floyd is weak. You said.”

“I would never say that. ‘Money’ is weak. That's one song.”

“You said they sucked.”

“Did *not*.” He sat up in the massive orange beanbag. “Give it back.”

“No.” She was standing, looking down at him. But she was thirteen and he was fifteen. He'd been at boarding school. She'd sent him a shoebox of tollhouse cookies and he'd never said thanks. He'd gotten taller while he was away, his face leaner, his dark eyes bigger. There was a patch of hair on his chest that made her uneasy. He'd spent most of the summer in his room with the door shut but when he and Tommy Richter were in the pool that afternoon, calling *Marco* and *Polo*, they'd let her play.

“Don't be such a baby.” She told him. She lifted her chin. He'd given her the record and now he was glaring.

“Give it.”

She pressed the album to her flat, spandex-covered chest and tightened her forearms over it. “Just because you gave me your favorite record. And now you'll never get it back.”

At which he hauled himself up and out of the beanbag chair. “Give it or I swear to god I'll *kill* you.”

He was up, but she was long gone.

Her plan was masterful: the slamming of his door behind her. A sprint down the long windowed hallway past the stairwell, into the safe haven of her room. The slamming of a second door. Furious

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locking. Her brother would take the stairs two at a time. A floor below her, he'd sprint down another hallway. He'd yank open a kitchen drawer for poultry shears to force his way in. Meanwhile? She'd place the album on her own turntable, lower the arm, turn up the volume. To nine.

Though if she's honest, now, as she takes up her coffee, the only thing she actually remembers is: the head of the stairs.

He was right there, one hand on the top and the other on the bottom of the now-flexed cardboard sleeve.

Maybe her plan wasn't masterful after all. Maybe she'd failed to slam his door effectively or he hadn't been sitting as deep in a beanbag as she thought. Maybe he was inches behind her the whole time.

She remembers losing her grip on the record.

So she screamed. She screamed and screamed and as she screamed she pulled back and down and away from him. But he was older. He was bigger and it *hurt* where he grabbed her wrist so she clutched at the record and screamed.

Until...

Their father.

From everywhere. They hadn't heard his footfalls because of the screaming. Or maybe because the stairs were carpeted in deep shag. Not hardwood until a decade later. Either way, their father stood over them and the scream was cut short. But not quickly enough, and she realized—slowly under the circumstances—that she had been screaming in her father's presence. She had wrenched her dad from *Scientific American* or *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* or *Cosmos* or *Omni*.

She needed to explain. The album was officially hers. Officially. It wasn't fair, and it was never fair: she was younger and smaller and her brother gave her the album then swore to god he would kill her. She wanted her dad to know, officially, that Mom would never come running up the stairs. Mom would wait for the screaming to play itself out before speaking in calm tones up the stairwell. Her dad couldn't know, as her mother would have, that after all the

screaming, hours later, she and her brother would sit at either end of the big couch—watching *Star Trek*.

Her father stared. His mouth hung slightly open. She stood there, in a bathing suit, a record in her hand. She was ashamed.

“Could one of you tell me what in God's name is going on?”

“She took my record. Ask her. It's mine.”

Their father looked to his daughter. Wearily. “That's it? A record? Sounded like there was a real emergency up here. I got the distinct impression there was a serious emergency taking place.” He looked from the one to the other.

He took the album from her. He gazed at it for an overlong moment, as if he might put it on the turntable himself. On a black background a white beam of light refracted through a prism. Her father was a scientist. He studied the cover. He looked to his son, then his daughter. Slowly, he said, “Do you two know how lucky humans are to see the visible color spectrum?” He considered the album. He frowned. “Most insects...” He looked as if he'd forgotten his thought. “Most insects see only ultraviolet.”

She imagines, as she closes the fridge, that he would've assumed their mother would handle the screaming. But she'd left him to fend for himself. She'd gone back to school. A weekend seminar. Then one of his children was screaming.

Her dad, she understands this later, might not have been reading. Maybe he didn't surge—panicked, *Discover* flung—from the Eames chair. It wasn't visions of her dismemberment, of her rape that overcame him. More likely, her father stood at his bureau listening to his hand-held Weatheradio. When the screaming began he adjusted the small grooved dial as if to ease static. The overwhelming drowsiness that afflicted him was maybe her dad's most frequent state.

Standing over his children, he looked back to the album. Without a word, he held it out between them.

No one reached for it.

Her brother would return to school in less than two weeks. The following summer he would be at odds with their father. He would

take a job down south to avoid haircuts and stilted family dinners and insinuations—lack of ambition, suspicion of drug abuse, disrespectful table manners. His posters of The Clash and The Who and The Dead Kennedys would be untacked, his room painted Mystic Fawn. The beanbag would be replaced with a day bed for a guest.

Which left her alone at the top of the stairs.

Coffee in hand, she looks at the photograph on the refrigerator door: her own son and daughter fresh from The Dumbo Ride. She squints and the picture summons up another memory. Herself at three. Tipping.

She tipped and tipped further, her chest pressing into the curved metal handlebars of the red tricycle with the little step low on the back. Her brother stood behind her with one foot on the step, his small hands just wide of hers, his free leg pushing them along. They listed, the handlebars cold against her chest, and she was sure they would fall. They tipped further. But some force righted them, and they turned the corner and gained speed.

