

Where We  
Missed Was  
Everywhere

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ere we are, my brother and I, dancing without moving our arms or feet. Mainly, we shake in place. He is six, and I am seven. We wear matching green striped pants and wool turtle-necks that scrape our skin and squeeze our throats, but they are warm. It is right to wear clothes that do what they're supposed to instead of just look good. We must know this, even if we don't think so. Outside the rain sounds like a lazy person peeing, and everyone else in the family is downstairs—talking, falling asleep, drinking, smoking cigarettes in the broom closet without exhaling, crying quickly and quietly in the bathroom, staring at their fingernails, aching for relief. My brother and I have nothing to do with that. We dance without moving, silently and violently, to the free plastic record that came in *Time Life Magazine*. This orange record is the thickness of a sucked-down Lifesaver. We would eat this record if we could.

We are not making noise. We dance without moving in a little room on the second floor. No one uses this room because it's too small. But we are small, so that's an equivalent. An equivalent is not a substitute, however. This room is starved, and we dance in one corner only, because everyone knows you shouldn't take up more space than you can use.

The free record that came in *Time Life Magazine* was stuck to the page like a barnacle. This is like finding free food stuck to the sidewalk, free for the prying.

My brother dances so hard he breaks a sweat. He moves his lips in all directions, faking that he's muckle-mouthed. The man next door is muckle-mouthed, and it's something you don't ever want to be. That's just free for the crying, end of story.

The orange record is the orange of a Creamsicle you snag from the freezer but forget to eat, and so it halfway melts, and you stuff it back in the freezer when no one's looking, because you better not waste food, and the Creamsicle is basically dead but hardens up some, and around the edges it turns a fierce, nasty orange, the orange of an exploding sun.

The name of the sample record is "Classic and Unforgettable Beach Boys!" but we do not know this, because we never saw the letter about the classic compilation that came in the mail, and no one is going to buy this classic compilation anyway, because once you get into mail order records or mail order magazines or mail order make-up, you are in deep, deep trouble. You'll end up in the poor house, and everyone knows that, be-

cause even if you say “Stop! Stop!” the magazines, records, and make-up will keep coming in the mail until the day you die, and then your family will have to pay for them. Don’t ever get into it, and even the mailman knows that.

We are not making noise by dancing without moving to the song “Surfin’ U.S.A.” It is our new theme song and beats the hell out of the *Gilligan’s Island* music. There is a scratch in the part where the *Time Life* man says the name of the song, but we don’t care. We are tough little shits, though we will not say this to anyone, not ever.

Twelve seconds of “Surfin’ U.S.A.” plays before the orange record melts into “Surfer Girl,” and we know this because we’ve timed it four times. It’s like when a person is talking to you and they fall asleep mid-sentence. We dance as fast as we can before “Surfer Girl” comes, because it’s a terrible, horrible song. We want to kill this song, because you shouldn’t ask people if they love you. My brother and I say, “No!” We say, “Why are they doing this to us?!” We say, “Cheapos!” The man next door yells this word when he gets home from work, and it bounces through our window. But really, couldn’t *Time Life* have sent us the whole record? Cheapos.

We are tough little shits, and we don’t smile either, because we are using the plaque detector product that our dentist, Steven Steele, gave our mother for free, and she didn’t even have to pull it out of a magazine. The plaque detector tastes like sick candy, and believe me, no one would want to eat it. Plaque detector is a bad purple blood color, and we chew it after brushing. Plaque detector detects where we missed, and where we missed was everywhere. We are terrible brushers, but good dancers, or maybe we aren’t even good dancers, we only have each other to judge.

“Hey lady!” my brother shouts under his breath and he yanks his turtleneck out as far as it will go, so far that it may never snap back right. The TV is on but the sound is off, and we see a woman in white run toward the screen with a pail of water. Could be she’s from the prairie or *Gilligan* or the show about the horse. There is always a lady with a pail of water.

“Water!” I say, “Water!” Because we can’t spit yet. And maybe we’ll never get to spit, and then we’ll have to die of thirst. Unless the lady with the pail of water comes.

Downstairs everyone cries more, drinks much, sleeps faster. The fu-

neral party has just begun. My brother and I have nothing to do with that. We are small, but we’ll add up later. We dance without moving, silently and violently, and we are the boss now, ripping the needle off the record before “Surfer Girl” can even begin. Not a single word! We shake as hard as we can, dancing without moving, as if the lady is coming, and she’ll save us for free. 🗣️