

## Missing

It all started Halloween night 1986. I was 17 and Bethany was 16. She was the love of my life. Her daddy never approved of me, convinced I was a bad influence. She came from money, and I came from hard working middle class. Little did they know most of the ideas that got us into trouble were hers.

Her parents asked Beth to take her little brother, Jason trick-or-treating. I tagged along to spend time with Beth. Plus, it was a good excuse for me to score some candy of my own. She and I were dressed up as Danny and Sandy from Grease while Jason was a ninja.

After circling the neighborhood twice. We dropped Jason off and headed to the Burger Palace. By the time we arrived, my best friend Doug had already talked several of the group into toilet papering Principal Sawyer's house. Beth and I passed. We'd finally convinced her dad to allow let her to attend the fall formal with me; we didn't want to give him any reason to change his mind.

Just before ten o'clock, I dropped Beth off, with a kiss goodnight and the promise of picking her up for a Saturday at the lake with friends.

If only I'd known then what I know now I would've never have left her alone.

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The next day I learned that Beth was missing. The only thing that was found was the charm bracelet that I gave her for her birthday, discovered at the edge of Miller's Woods, at the foot of a tree with a letter "B" carved into it.

The police picked me up at her dad's insistence I had something to do with her disappearance. But there was no evidence against me. The worst part was enduring the stares and whispers when I returned to school the following Monday.

I never gave up looking for her, even when the police wrote her off as a runaway.

Time passed and things went back to some semblance of normal. But nothing could fill the hole in my heart.

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Six years later, to the day, the nightmare I thought was over happened again. In 1992, Edward, a young boy of eleven disappeared from his family home sometime in the night. The only thing that was ever found of him was a shoe a couple of feet from a tree next to Beth's. This one had a letter "E" carved into it. Once again, I was brought in for questioning as the police tried to make a connection between Edward and Beth's disappearances. But none could be found.

This renewed my search for Beth. If only I could find out what happened to Edward, maybe it would lead me to Beth. I was warned many times by the police to stop interfering. All too soon their investigation stalled once again.

The police barred me from continuing to investigate on my own so I came to the conclusion, if you can't beat them, join them. The following month I joined the police academy. After graduating I joined the local force so I could keep looking into the disappearances.

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Then Halloween night, 1998, it happened again. Wesley, a thirteen-year-old boy disappeared. All they found of him was his comic book laying near the tree that bore his initial. The police were seeing a pattern. Every six years there was a disappearance. But beyond a single personal item and an initial on the tree there was nothing to connect the victims to each other or a suspect.

In 2004 the local police and county sheriff worked together to place officers on patrol in an attempt to stop another disappearance and hopefully catch whoever was taking the children. Despite their efforts Ashley, the youngest victim yet, at seven, disappeared that night. Finding only her doll that laid at the base of tree with a freshly carved "A" in it.

Through all efforts, patrols, curfews, lights, video cameras and more the pattern continued. Fourteen-year-old, Rosalie disappeared in 2010, and ten-year-old Evan in 2016.

Now 36 years later, I am back out in these woods trying to prevent another tragedy. Off in the distance I see a light floating just above the ground.

"Who's there? Show yourself!"

"Ollie" comes a soft voice

The light starts to move as I follow. I can't believe my eyes, "Beth?"

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The next day they discovered a tree displaying a letter "O" with a police badge lying beside it.