

Missing Meredith

by Jill Barth

As attractive as we found Meredith, most folks weren't shocked when she went mysteriously missing. A girl who looks that good is bound for trouble.

It all began when a long yellow Ford LTD came into town from the north on Route 24. If the car had just been passing through town like most do, it would then have simply rambled past Meredith's house and you wouldn't be listening to me now.

It did not roll on past.

Most speculate around the moment that big yellow beast approached, the sun was just starting to set.

So you can picture that car, rusted around the wheel beds, idling gingerly at the end of the drive. Get a visual of a young, healthy girl with tan legs swinging on a porch swing. Meredith took the steps with aching slowness, her red cowboy boots thumping the stairs one-at-a-time. By that final broad stair she had already made eye contact with the driver, and she knew what she was doing.

Surely she should have known better.

After that, she was gone.

The police did manage to uncover something useful from Meredith's lavender room: a newspaper clipping from far-away Denver about a devastating snowstorm. Schools were out because of the snow. No happy endings here, after the snow had thawed the frozen bodies of an entire family of five were found on a mountainside, dead since before the storm.

Even so, the town police and county sheriffs were unable to make any headway on the case. They searched our area, with the help of good local people. Volunteers were rewarded with hot coffee from the 4-H, but not one valid clue turned out. Eventually the state took hold of the hunt, which allowed us all to breathe easy with the departure of responsibility. I can't tell you how many cups of low quality 4-H coffee my husband I had to drink while waiting to find Meredith.

Shortly after the state police got their hands dirty, a body was found.

The body was that of a young woman.

There were metal braces in her mouth.

As you may have guessed, Meredith was blessed with perfect white teeth all in a row. She did not have braces.

The body was not Meredith's. The body was that of a girl from a town 300 miles away. This girl had been staying with her grandparents when she went missing over 13 months prior. The grandparents took no consolation in the recovery of her remains; they too were missing. The only clue in the case of her disappearance was a Polaroid picture of a 1976 Ford LTD sitting by an unidentifiable lake looking yellow as can be.

Now, this is where I come in. On a cold early winter day after she'd been gone for months. On a walk with our Westie dog, Blizzard. Because I have tender shoulders, I thought I'd leave the leash behind, none of that pulling from the dog. Just a nice, companionable walk. Well, you know what that darn dog did? He took off. Went right through a plowed-up field into the woods. When I finally found him Tiny Blizzard was standing by a butter yellow car, its roof covered with dry fallen leaves. The tires were flat. Clearly, this car had been in the woods for an extended stay.

I went to the door and peeked in. Through the dust, I could make out a knapsack, brown and faded in the front passenger seat, but no driver and thankfully, no passengers. I hiked around to the back side of the car and noticed that the trunk was not actually closed. Colorado license plates reminded me of the dead family under the snow.

I went for it.

I opened the trunk.

So this is how it ends up, like it always does... up to me to take care of things. This Meredith fiasco is no different. You know after taking a look at it, coupled with those atrocious cowboy boots, I can confirm with conviction: the skirt was indeed inappropriately short. If the newspaper wants a quote about the body, that's what I'll tell them.