

cecelia ahern

A PLACE
CALLED HERE



'Brilliant... beautifully bittersweet'

HEAT

Table of Contents

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33

[34](#)
[35](#)
[36](#)
[37](#)
[38](#)
[39](#)
[40](#)
[41](#)
[42](#)
[43](#)
[44](#)
[45](#)
[46](#)
[47](#)
[48](#)
[49](#)
[50](#)
[51](#)
[52](#)
[53](#)
[54](#)
[55](#)

A Place Called Here

Cecelia Ahern

Acclaimed novelist Cecelia Ahern's *A Place Called Here* tells the story of Sandy Shortt, an obsessive-compulsive *Missing Persons* investigator who suddenly finds herself in the mystical land of the missing, desperate to return to the people and places from whom she has spent her life escaping. With this imaginative fourth novel, Ahern, whose *P.S. I Love You* was made into a major motion picture, continues to establish herself as not only an icon of Irish chick lit, but also a bold and creative thinker.

Continuing the whimsical trend she started with *If You Could See Me Now*, Ahern asks readers to step outside the boundaries of reality, and enter a world where missing people (and possessions) from all over the globe congregate to start anew. When Sandy goes on an early morning jog and strays too far into the forest, she too finds herself "Here," the aptly named home of the missing. In addition to finding her lost socks, diaries, and stuffed animals, she also finds many of the people she has searched for throughout her career. From Bobby Stanley, who disappeared from his mother's house at the age of sixteen, to Terrence O'Malley, a librarian who disappeared on his way home from work at age 55, Sandy is quickly reunited with the people she has come to know only through photos and heartbreaking memories shared by devastated loved ones who enlisted her services. Of course, finding these people and possessions only makes Sandy realize how much she has missed out on in her real life, most notably her concerned parents and her on again off again boyfriend Greg.

A Place Called Here is often predictable and the premise is a bit hard to swallow at times. Still, readers who take the leap will be rewarded with what is ultimately a witty, compassionate, and captivating love story.

*For you, Dad-with all my love.
Per ardua surgo.*

*“A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown
whatever the circumstances of disappearance.
The person will be considered missing until located and his/her
well-being, or otherwise, established.”
An Gardaí Síochana*

1

Jenny-May Butler, the little girl who lived across the road from me, went missing when I was a child.

The Gardaí launched an investigation, which led to a lengthy public search for her. For months every night the story was on the news, every day it was on the front pages of the papers, everywhere it was discussed in every conversation. The entire country pitched in to help; it was the biggest search for a missing person I, at ten years of age, had ever seen, and it seemed to affect everyone.

Jenny-May Butler was a blond-haired blue-eyed beauty whose smiling face was beamed from the TV screen into the living rooms of every home around the country, causing eyes to fill with tears and parents to hug their children that extra bit tighter before they sent them off to bed. She was in everyone's dreams and everyone's prayers.

She too was ten years old and in my class at school. I used to stare at the pretty photograph of her on the news every day and listen to them speak about her as though she were an angel. From the way they described her, you never would have known that she threw stones at Fiona Brady during recess when the teacher wasn't looking, or that she called me a frizzy-haired cow in front of Stephen Spencer just so he would fancy her instead of me. No, for those few months she had become the perfect being and I didn't think it fair to ruin that. After a while even I forgot about all the bad things she'd done because she wasn't just Jenny-May anymore: she was Jenny-May Butler, the sweet missing girl whose nice family cried on the nine o'clock news every night.

She was never found, not her body, not a trace; it was as though she had disappeared into thin air. No suspicious characters had been seen lurking around, no CCTV was available to show her last movements. There were no witnesses, no suspects; the Gardaí questioned everyone possible. The street became suspicious, its inhabitants calling friendly hellos to one another on the way to their cars in the early morning but all the time wondering, second-guessing, and visualizing dark, distorted scenarios implicating their neighbors. Washing cars, painting picket fences, weeding the flowerbeds, and mowing lawns on Saturday mornings while surreptitiously looking around

the neighborhood conjured up shameful thoughts. People were shocked at themselves, angry that this incident had perverted their minds.

Pointed fingers behind closed doors couldn't give the Gardaí any leads; they had absolutely nothing to go on but a pretty picture.

I always wondered where Jenny-May went, where she had disappeared to, how on earth anyone could just vanish into thin air without a trace, without someone knowing *something*.

At night I would look out my bedroom window and stare at her house. The porch light was always on, acting as a beacon to guide Jenny-May home. Mrs. Butler couldn't sleep anymore and I could see her perpetually perched on the edge of her couch, as though she was on her marks waiting for the pistol to be fired. She would sit in her living room, looking out the window, waiting for someone to call or come by with news. Sometimes I would wave at her and she'd give me a half-hearted wave back. Most of the time she couldn't see past her tears.

Like Mrs. Butler, I wasn't happy with not having any answers. I liked Jenny-May Butler a lot more when she was gone than when she was here and that also interested me. I missed her, the *idea* of her, and wondered if she was somewhere nearby, throwing stones at someone else and laughing loudly, but that we just couldn't find her or hear her. I took to searching thoroughly for everything I'd mislaid after that. When my favorite pair of socks went missing I turned the house upside down while my worried parents looked on, not knowing what to do but eventually settling on helping me.

It disturbed me that frequently my missing possessions were nowhere to be found and on the odd occasion that I did find them, it disturbed me that, as in the case of the socks, I could only ever find one. Then I'd picture Jenny-May Butler somewhere, throwing stones, laughing, and wearing my favorite socks.

I never wanted anything new; from the age of ten, I was convinced that you couldn't replace what was lost. I insisted on things having to be found.

I think I wondered about all those odd pairs of socks as much as Mrs. Butler worried about her daughter. I too stayed awake at night running through all the unanswerable questions. Each time my lids grew heavy and neared closing, another question would be flung from the depths of my mind, forcing my lids to open again. This process kept much-needed sleep at bay and left me each morning more tired yet none the wiser.

Perhaps this is why it happened to me. Perhaps because I had spent so

many years turning my own life upside down and looking for everything, I had forgotten to look for myself. Somewhere along the line I had forgotten to figure out who and where I was.

Twenty-four years after Jenny-May Butler disappeared, I went missing too.

This is my story.

2

My life has been made up of a great many ironies; my going missing only added to an already very long list.

First, I'm six foot one. Ever since I was a child I've been towering over just about everyone. I could never get lost in a shopping center like other kids, I could never hide properly when playing games, I was never asked to dance at discos, I was the only teenager that wasn't aching to buy her first pair of high heels. Jenny-May Butler's favorite name for me, well, certainly one of her top ten, was "Daddy-longlegs," which she liked to call me in front of large crowds of her friends and admirers. Believe me, I've heard them all. I was the kind of person you could see coming from a mile away. I was the awkward dancer on the dance floor, the girl at the cinema that nobody wanted to sit behind, the one in the shop that rooted for the extra-long-legged trousers, the girl in the back row of every photograph. You see, I stick out like a sore thumb. Everyone who passes me registers me and remembers me. But despite all that, I went missing. Never mind the odd socks, never mind Jenny-May Butler; how a throbbing sore thumb on a hand so bland couldn't be seen was the ultimate icing on the cake. The mystery that beat all mysteries was my own.

The second irony is that my job was to *search* for missing persons. For years I worked as a garda. With a desire to work solely on missing persons but without working in an actual division assigned to these, I had to rely solely upon the "luck" of being assigned these cases. You see, the Jenny-May Butler situation really sparked off something inside me. I wanted answers, I wanted solutions, and I wanted to find them all myself. I suppose my searching became an obsession. I looked around the outside world for so many clues I don't think that I once thought about what was going on inside my own head.

In the Gardaí sometimes we found missing people in conditions I won't ever forget, not for the rest of this life and far into the next, and then there were people who just didn't want to be found. Often we uncovered only a trace, too often not even that. Those were the moments that drove me to keep looking far beyond my call of duty. I would investigate cases long after they were closed, stay in touch with families long after I should have. I realized I