

# The Missing Girl

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Cover Art: "Inhospitable" by Raeleen Kao. Used with permission.

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ISBN: 978-1-62557-983-6

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Published 2017 by Black Lawrence Press.

Printed in the United States.

# The Missing Girl

You see her posters on telephone poles all over town. EULA JOHNSON, MISSING. Some have been torn down, only the stapled corners remaining. Others are blurred and warped from rain.

In the black and white photo, not much bigger than a thumbprint, her limp blonde hair falls to her shoulders. She's wearing a white blouse buttoned to her chin, and she's smiling at the camera. A tentative smile, like maybe she knew something was going to happen. Or like she was used to wanting things she knew she wasn't going to get.

Date of Birth: August 14, 1997

Place of Birth: Fresno, California

Height: 5'0"

Weight: 111 pounds

Hair: Blonde

Eyes: Blue-Gray

Race: Caucasian

Wearing: Blue jeans, green t-shirt, maroon windbreaker  
Last seen walking alone on Jerrold Road in Modesto, California at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 17, 2011. If you have any information concerning this person, please contact the San Joaquin County Sheriff's tip line at 1-209-958-4826, or call your local FBI office.

You can see her in your mind's eye, perky smile dimming, fear dawning in her eyes. Yes, you feel like you know this girl. Just the kind to go missing. Awkward and shy. Inexperienced and eager. Tender, playing brave. Dirt poor. You know. The kind of girl who'll step right into your car if you call her pretty.

Him you're not so sure of. Cowboy hat and a Silverado pickup? Baseball cap and a Mustang? Or a Tahoe maybe, black and sprayed with mud. You can't see his face. He could be anyone, after all. But you can feel the tingle in his groin when he saw her, how his breath must have quickened. You drive this way a lot, wondering where he picked her up, where he took her, what he did, whether she liked it. Eula Johnson.

Jerrold Road is empty today. Birds gather in one of the tall, bare trees by the roadside, jabbering. Dead leaves whirl in the wake of a chilly gust of wind. Yellow grass. Gray sky. Not a car in sight. Just a girl in a gray sweatshirt, hood up against the cold, walking.

Slow way down and hit the button for the passenger window.

Go ahead, say it. "Hey, pretty girl. Want a lift?"

And as she buckles her seat belt (after all, she's not a reckless girl), "So what's your name, sweetheart?"

"Early. Early Halliday."

"I'm Late," you say, sniggering a little. "Guess you probably heard that one before."

She tucks a pale strand of hair behind her ear and looks down at her lap. Her skin is very white, almost translucent. You can see a tracing of light blue veins in her neck.

"I just bet a lot of boys have called you pretty, Early."

Watch her blush as she turns wondering eyes to you. Take your foot off the brake pedal and step on the accelerator. Don't speed. You'll want to take this slow.