



# Stray

*Joni Johnson*

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## **Stray** Joni Johnson

Lila Baxter, 17, is abandoned at a gas station in a small town when her father, who was taking her to live with her grandmother, has a lapse in sobriety. Lila is left alone, unsure of where she is, with no money, and no cell phone. Gas station cashier Vance Larson, 18, offers to help the unwanted girl. And how does Lila repay him? By unwittingly unhinging Vance's whole life. Fixing the trouble she's caused is next to impossible. And will any of it matter when her father returns?

First book of the upcoming series!

## **Stray Details**

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Author : Joni Johnson

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## **From Reader Review Stray for online ebook**

### **Beth Rodgers says**

'Stray' by Joni Johnson has an interesting premise. When Lila finds out that her father is about to kick her out of the house on the eve of her last day of high school, she isn't quite sure how to react. Despite her father's lack of care or sensitivity toward her, she doesn't know anything other than the world in which she has lived for the last seven years since her mother left. Rather than despair, she tries to figure out what she might do to leave on her own, but before that becomes a possibility, her father decides to ship her off to a grandmother she doesn't even know. The only problem with these occurrences is that they are mostly known from the description of the book, and it makes everything leading up to it seem not quite as important.

When Lila finds herself stranded on the cross-country road trip to her grandmother's, there are many questions to ask, including whether her father meant to leave her. Even though this question is never fully answered, there are subtle hints to make readers believe that maybe he didn't. Yet the fact remains that Lila finds herself all alone, stranded at a gas station in the middle of who-knows-where, and the only person who comes to her aid is Vance, the gas station attendant and all-around country boy who will most certainly find a way into Lila's heart.

Despite the predictability of all of these happenings, the story is still quite thought-provoking. As readers wonder what they would do if faced with a similar situation, they discover more of Lila's doubts about letting others in and sharing more than just half-truths, namely in terms of Vance and his mother, Vicki. Their kindness and loyalty to her after knowing her for less than 24 hours is admirable, even if it seems too good to be true. Yet it is nice to consider that truly good people do exist in this world and would help in just the way that Vance and Vicki do. Lila and Vance's attraction to each other, and lead up to their romantic entanglements, also forms a large part of the engagement factor with this novel.

Trouble looms ahead, though, in the form of Vance's former (and current) nemesis, Jimmy, along with Vance's ex-girlfriend, Mandy. Lila's dad, whether present or not, remains an antagonist throughout the novel as well, and Lila and Vance's similarly questioning natures even make them turn on themselves and each other from time to time.

Even though there were some grammatical issues throughout and a bit too much description at times that could have been cut short to get to more of the action, Lila's story will pull at readers' heartstrings and compel them to find ways to be more compassionate in their own lives by helping others who are struggling. The ending was also not quite what was expected, but kept with the sense of reality that Joni Johnson worked hard to portray throughout her writing. This is a story about courage in the face of adversity and how trust can be earned even if one believes it remains an impossibility.

\*Review originally posted at [YABooksCentral.com](http://YABooksCentral.com)\*

Beth Rodgers, Author of 'Freshman Fourteen' and 'Sweet Fifteen,' Young Adult Novels

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### **Annie Martin says**

I enjoyed reading this book!

It was interesting from the beginning and didn't drag in any part of the story. Things moved along nicely, and it was easy to connect with the characters. Fun romance that's not all surface, has some depth to the characters and subject matter. Overall good read.

There is a little bit of language in it, mostly out of anger or frustration (a bit of name-calling). Nothing vulgar.

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## **Madison says**

Stray's synopsis promised exactly what I love in YA fiction - tortured teens and a touch of romance. It reminded me of a story I read and loved many years ago by Cindy C. Bennett.

Lila has just graduated high school. She knows she only has a few days until she must find her own place to live, but she doesn't expect her father to pack her into his truck and drive halfway across the country. And, despite his disinterest over the past years, nor does she expect him to abandon her in a small town in the middle of nowhere. Alone and unsure what to do she accepts the help of Vance, a (admittedly handsome) guy she meets, who takes her home. There she experiences the love of a family for the first time as Vance and his mother, Vicki, welcome Lila into their home and lives.

The pacing of Stray is rather slow. It does make the story drag a little, but the slow pace was nice in some ways, setting the tone of the book. The feel of the book is one of quiet contemplation, as Lila struggles with everything life throws at her. And there is a bit of action and plenty of drama in the story towards the end.

I felt for Lila. It can't be easy growing up in a home where there is no love, only neglect. However I did find her character to be a little inconsistent. The majority of the time she is shy and unassuming. She keeps her head down and eyes averted, and yet other times she springs into conflict. She is also a tad hypocritical, judging other girls for the way they try to attract a boy's attention and yet she herself openly admits to being good at getting a guy's attention, even using a white nightgown and a directing question to do so. There is also a bit of name calling of the aforementioned girls, which I didn't like.

The story begins with Lila's last day at school and life at home, followed by her journey with her father. This certainly gives the reader a strong indication of how life has been for Lila in the past, but I thought the story became more interesting once Lila meets Vance and moves into his home. I particularly liked Vance's mother, who is as strong as she is caring and motherly - exactly what Lila needs. Vance is also kind and caring, but wrestles with his past and the impact it has had on his family. There is also no shortage of drama, particularly involving an ex-girlfriend, as Vance and Lila quickly develop feelings for each other and Lila comes to terms with her new life.

Stray had a number of grammatical errors and inconsistencies throughout the book. There is nothing quite like a misplaced apostrophe to grab my attention away from the storyline! I believe that Stray would read a lot better after a really good edit.

I was pleased with the ending and how it didn't discount Lila and Vance's feelings, yet left room for them both to take control of their own lives. Overall, Stray is a sweet contemporary romance that, while it didn't grab my heart, will suit readers who like complicated romances and stories about teens overcoming hardship.

The author provided an advanced readers copy of this book for reviewing purposes. All opinions are my own.

Find more reviews, reading age guides, content advisory, and recommendations on my blog [Madison's Library](#).

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### **Margaret Tidwell says**

FTC: I received a free copy of this book from the author in exchange for my honest review. I received no other compensation and the opinions expressed in this review are one hundred percent true and my own.

Stray by Joni Johnson was a good book, but I did notice several things in this book that bothered me. This biggest thing that bugged me was that she spelled Vance's last name two different ways and she does that throughout the entire book. On one page it will be spelled as Larson, and on the next page, it will be spelled, Larsen. I also did find a few places where a word was misspelled as well. Even saying all of that I really did like this book and I was sad when I was finished with the book because I fell in love with Lila and Vance. This book is in a genre that I don't usually read because I usually can't get interested in them but this book was different. I really enjoyed this author writing and her characters. If you love YA books or are looking for something fun to read this summer, I would for sure recommend this book to you. This book would also be perfect for teenagers, and it is one that I think most teens would relate too.

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### **Cassandra says**

Great book, interesting characters, looking forward to more from Joni Johnson!

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### **Brandi (Brandi Janee's Bookshelf) says**

\*3.5 stars\*

Originally posted on [Brandi Janee's Bookshelf](#).

The synopsis of this novel gives a pretty good summary of what happens throughout the book. In a way I feel it almost gives too much away because the story starts before the information given in the description. The story opens with Lila going to her last day of high school. We get a little look at how her life is but not much. Lila thinks her father is about to kick her out since she's graduated high school but after getting home later that day she finds out he plans to take her across the country to live with a grandmother she's never met. I think knowing ahead of time that Lila would be abandoned at a gas station hut the shock factor of the moment. From the moment the two started on the road I was waiting for the moment Lila would be left.

The pacing of this story is pretty slow. The entire story takes place over about 2 weeks but it felt like it was longer. At some moments the pacing benefited the story, for example it made sure the romance didn't feel rushed, but other times it didn't. There were moments the story dragged and I found myself waiting for he next exciting moment.

I don't know anything about the background of where either of the main characters is from but they seemed real. The characters can make or break a story for me, and these characters made me want to keep reading to see how the story would end. I did feel there were some inconsistencies with Lila. She has trust issues because of the way she grew up, so much so that she didn't allow herself to open up and make friends. The only friend she had didn't really know anything about her life and she refused to tell him even when it could have helped her. However when she meets a complete stranger, Vance (and his mom), while she doesn't completely open up to them right away it seems like she almost completely trusts them.

I wasn't completely satisfied with the ending. I appreciated that there wasn't a perfect ending where everyone got exactly what they wanted because that's not how life is, especially Lila's. However there were some things that didn't quite add up and I had a lot of unanswered questions. One thing that didn't seem right was Lila's age. I know for parts of the story to make since Lila needs to be 17 but when looking at the timeline it doesn't make sense. Lila's birthday is in February and she just graduated high school so unless she skipped a grade Lila should already be 18. This wasn't a huge issue but it's something I noticed. My main issue with this story is all my unanswered questions.

Did Carl (Lila's father) leave her on purpose?

If he didn't, was he on his way back to get her?

Why wasn't Lila's grandmother ever contacted? Even though she didn't know her, there was some way they could've found her contact information.

What did Carl's mother do when he and Lila never showed up?

Why didn't anyone contact Carl's next living relative once he was in the accident? Once again, there is a way they couldn't have gotten this information.

There are so many more questions I had but I don't want to spoil any of the story.

Overall, Stray was enjoyable. With some changes I think this story could've been incredible. I would like to see a little extension of the story to be able to see where life goes for Lila, and even Vance and his mother. If this synopsis sounds interesting to you, I think it's worth giving Stray a try.

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## **Catherine Wright (Cat's Guilty Pleasure) says**

I was given a copy by the author in exchange for an honest review.

This was an emotional read with very well written characters. While you are reading you can actually feel the emotions and situations the people are going through. It is a slow paced read, but it never gets boring, you will be kept intrigued the whole time you are reading. I enjoyed reading it and if you love romance you need to give this one a chance.

Review was done in conjunction with Nerd Girl Official. For more information regarding our reviews please visit our fansite at <http://www.facebook.com/nerdgirl.ng>

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## **Sandy says**

I gave this book three stars based on its potential. I think it could be a wonderful story and could really benefit from an editor. There were a few inconsistencies with Lila's current age, what age she was when her

mother left and the number of years in between. Also, the fact that she was a minor was presented as a hurdle, but then she returns home to live alone and take care of her father's business. The timeline in which the story unfolds seemed rushed for the romantic relationship that develops. Additionally, there were three scenes that were emotionally charged that if they were re-written could really move and connect the reader with Lila. Overall, it was a great start that could become great with a little work.

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