

## THE ART OF LETTING GO

Kenzie Crossley (12)

### *Fire Escape*

*Fact: Both Jade and her dad  
love Queen.*

*Fact: Jade doesn't listen to  
Queen anymore.*

*Fact: Jade blames herself for  
not being able to fix her dad.*

I take another drag and blow the  
smoke into the night sky,  
listening to the sound of sirens  
and stray animals in trash cans  
below.

The metal platform is cold  
against my toes, the brick ledge  
of the window digging into the  
inside of my thigh. I'm too tired  
to adjust, though. Too deep in  
thought...

The door unlocks and close with  
a creak. I hear the deadbolt, the  
chain, and the key. Like  
clockwork, Harry is back from

another one of his 'late night  
escapades'.

"Jade, you better not be smoking  
again." he calls from the  
kitchen.

"I'll stop smoking when you  
stop sleeping with everything  
that has a pulse." I yell back.

"Smoking is bad for you,  
however, the heart wants what  
the heart wants." My rumples  
roomie approaches the window  
and sits beside me. He pulls out  
a cigarette from my pack and  
lights it as well.

"Get your own. And I'm pretty  
sure that's not your heart."

"Offensive."

He studies me. Am I that easy to  
read?

Suddenly he blurts out, "Your  
dad called, didn't he?"

"I don't want to talk about it.  
And no, before you ask."

"Ask what? Jesus, all I asked  
was if he called."

I angrily stub the butt out and  
look at Harry.

"You always tell me I should see  
him, but it's always the same," I  
take a deep breath, "I get to the  
dive he's renting, he's passed  
out. Then, when I pitch all his  
booze, he gets angry and starts  
yelling at me, calling me stuff  
like..." I don't let the words  
leave my lips, they taste too  
sour. "I spend my paycheck on  
his rehab, but when I head back  
to Brooklyn... Don't tell me its  
the right thing to do when it  
hurts this much. I don't want to  
go."

I feel a tinge of pain in my chest.  
You'd think after six years of  
the same pattern I'd have a grip,  
but he wasn't always the villain.  
I had a father. That's what kept  
me crawling back to help him.

"I know I bring this up every time, but a dead beat father is better than a dead father."

"He's dead to me." Dammit. I feel wetness on my face. Harry flicks his cigarette over the balcony then climbs back into our living room.

"Get your bag together, I'll drop you off at the bus station."



### *Facade*

*Fact: Cassie is a straight A student who volunteers at an animal shelter on weekends.*

*Fact: Cassie likes girls.*

*Fact: Cassie's mom doesn't like that Cassie likes girls.*

"Stop It! Stop looking through all my stuff! You're tearing my room apart!" She wasn't supposed to find out.

"I know what you two have been up to! Disgusting. I know you have pictures. I know it."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" I'm shaking. I want to stop her from dumping my belongings on the ground and rummaging through my drawers, but my legs suddenly weigh thousand tons and my arms are tied to my sides.

"You and..." I can hear the venom, "Lauren."

"She moved away and we don't even talk anymore. I don't understand why you're freaking out!" *She's going to find them, she's going to find them.*

She's whipping through my room like a hurricane, ripping up everything in her path, including me.

I'm crying.

She throws back my sheets.

She's got her hands on the mattress and she's pulling it up. I think I've stopped breathing. I want to tell her I'm sorry but my mouth is sewn shut.

She has the photo booth strip in her hands. The kiss.

I see her talking but I can't hear what she's saying. I watch her eyes go dull, her expression of anger fade into a blank mask. I read her lips, each word echoing in my brain like a bomb going off.

"Mom..." I croak.

"You're not my daughter. My daughter is dead. Get your things, and get out of my house."



### *Better Late than Never*

*Fact: Jade is cold.*

*Fact: Jade is really cold.*

*Fact: Cassie and Jade are going to meet.*

I'm freezing my fingers off, I'm tired, and this woman will not back down. We've probably been arguing over who gets the last seat on the bus for a good

twenty minutes. I didn't even want to get on the bus in the first place, but now that I paid for my ticket it's between me getting to my dad fast or becoming a walking popsicle.

I give up and tell her she can have her damn seat. The next bus comes in an hour so it's not like I have time to go back to my place. I thought I saw a small diner on the way here.

The bus terminal echos behind me with announcements of delays and bags being put on to the coach. I jog down the street until the familiar neon sign catches my eye. I breathe a misty sigh of relief as I open the glass door.

The bell rings, and I look around. A bar set with the classic trucker eating a slice of pie to my front, a curvy waitress topping off a cop's coffee to my right, and to my left is a girl sitting alone at a booth.

I take a seat two booths down from her, enough space as not to seem weird. She keeps staring down into her teacup like it's supposed to tell her the future.

She looks up and her expression changes from distress to embarrassment.

Wait... She's looking at me.

Oh. That's right. I'm staring.

"Um... The coach leaves at 11:30 in case you were wondering."



### *We All Start As Strangers*

*Fact: Cassie was watching Jade take her seat two booths down.*

*Fact: Cassie is going to Nevada to live with her sister.*

*Fact: Cassie forgot her earphones at home-her mother's place.*

I was looking into my cup when I felt eyes on me. It felt like I was being dissected.

"Um... The coach leaves at 11:30 in case you were wondering." I call over to her. Her eyes widen and she looks down at the table. Oh, well that's embarrassing. She probably isn't even taking a bus.

"Thanks." I hear her mumble. It's quiet in the diner for a while, nothing but the hum of the news on a mounted television set and plates clinking against each other.

"Nevada?" I try and defuse the awkward silence. I think I made it worse.

"Yeah," She replies with more confidence, "I was supposed to leave on the 9:45 but some crazy lady stole my seat so... I'm stuck here a little longer."

She laughs it off, a chuckle under her breath. She reminds me of the *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* but softer, less angular.

"Sounds like an interesting story. You should sit with me." I suggest, maybe that's too much. We just met, maybe she thinks I'm a creep or something.

"On the bus, or in the booth?"

"Oh, I guess both if you want." I crack a half smile at her and she smiles back. Alright, so I'm not being creepy. Great, at least one thing isn't going belly up tonight. She picks up her stuff and saunters over, slides into the booth.

"Your tea looks kinda cold."

"Yeah, I guess it is." I forgot about it entirely.

"Coffee?" she suggests.

"Sure, why not."



### *Ohio to Colorado*

*Fact: Jade and Cassie are sharing an iPod on the bus.*

*Fact: Jade thinks Cassie is pretty... Cool. Pretty cool.*

*Fact: Cassie fell asleep on Jade.*

*Fiction: Jade's father is fine.*



### *The City of Sin, The City of Angels*

You would think two days in a bus would drive people crazy, but not this person. She makes my eyes light up like the Vegas strip, I see, as we finally pull into the city I'm all too familiar with. It's bittersweet.

The intersection of Paradise and Tropicana tells me we're 2 minutes away from the bus stop.

I look over at Cassie, seduced by the flashy neon signs and beautiful people. I wish I was still charmed by this place.

"Do you think we could get some food once we get off? Rebecca isn't suppose to be off work for another two hours."

She's huddled into her felt seat, head resting on the window.

"I think I have to head straight to my dad's."

"Maybe after? I could come with—"

"No." That came out too harsh. She looks at me like a kicked puppy, and I immediately feel regret.

"What I mean is—"

"No, I understand, it's fine." She swings her feet and slips on her sneakers, hands wrapped around her body. I've screwed up.

"Cassie. If you come, it's not... My dad isn't a stand up guy."

"Just be honest with me. If you want to leave and see your dad, I can go, no hard feelings or whatever."

"I'm just saying, it's not all pretty things in this place. I just want you to be safe." I pause, "If you're going to come to the

apartment, wait outside when we get there."

"Alright."

She gives me a tired smile. I look at her empty hand resting at her side and decide to be bold. I lean into her, outside of my hand on hers. She smirks to herself and links her pinky with mine, suddenly we're palm to palm, all fingers intertwined.

We sit in silence until the terminal.



*It's not your fault, Jade.*

We approach the run down complex which runs square around a murky pool. We climb up a set of metal stairs and begin walking until Jade stops us in front of room 22. She knocks twice. then jiggles the handle. It's open. It's empty. She looks around for any sign of the man. Nothing but stained carpet and the blank walls.

I hear footsteps coming towards us. I turn my head to see who I believe is the landlord.

"If you're here to ask questions, I said I wasn't talking to the press." he snarls, "get out of that room."

"Look, I'm trying to find John McCartney. I heard he was living here." Jade looks him straight in the eye.

"Wait... so you're not from the paper?" his face relaxes, and becomes instead puzzled.

"No, I'm his daughter," she states. The man goes as pale as a sheet.

"Look, hun, I don't know how to say this..." he pauses, for a moment.

"Well, where is he?" She raises her voice, I hear panic. I want to tell her that we'll find him, but I stand there quiet, observing, not

quite sure what to do with myself.

"He's dead. Drank himself to death."

The world comes to a stand still. She looks at me and I look at her. In that moment I feel nothing but the urge to wrap my arms around this girl and make the numbness and sudden breathtaking sadness go away.

I grab her and she clings to me. The distant echo of city traffic doesn't exist, the muffled sounds of people in rooms, the hum of the fluorescent lights flickering on and off, are all drowned out by her sobs.

I hold her for what feels like a thousand years, nothing spoken between the both of us for the longest time.

"Cassie." she whispers,

"Yes?" I murmur,

"Don't let go."

'Don't let go'. It holds so much  
more meaning. 'Don't forget  
me', 'Don't give up on me',  
'Don't leave'.

"I won't. I promise."



*Note: "Accept the things to  
which fate binds you, and love  
the people with whom fate*

*brings you together, but do so  
with all your heart."*

— Marcus Aurelius