



# Lovers and Other Strangers

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## **Lovers and Other Strangers** Josh Lanyon

Recovering from a near fatal accident, artist Finn Barret returns to Seal Island in Maine to rest and recuperate. But Seal Island is haunted with memories, some sweet, some sad; three years ago Finn found his lover in the arms of Fitch, Finn's twin brother. Since that day, Finn has seen neither Conlan nor Fitch. In fact, no one has seen Fitch.

What happened to him? Did Fitch run away, as everyone believes? Or did he meet a more sinister fate? To put the past to rest - and see if there's any chance of a future with Con - Finn must discover the truth. But the deeper he digs, the more reason he has to fear Con is the only one who knows what truly happened to Fitch...

Note: Originally appeared in the Partners in Crime: The Art of Dying anthology.

## **Lovers and Other Strangers Details**

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## From Reader Review Lovers and Other Strangers for online ebook

**Sheri says**

### **Troubled twins. Devastating betrayal. Exposing truths.**

A tragic car accident nearly takes Finn Barret's life and forces him to face his past, a cruel past with wounds still fresh despite their 3 year age. He left Seal Island and sought refuge in New York City after his lover's unfaithful and unforgiving moment of weakness. Finding the love of his life in the arms of his twin brother was more than he could bear, and he vowed to move on and forget the pain. Yet returning to the island raises feelings he was certain had died that fateful day.

Painting runs in Finn's blood, he lives and breathes his art. Frightened he may never see the world the same, he is amazed the crisp salty air is healing more than his physical injuries. Running into Con, his ex is the last thing he wants, but Finn quickly discovers he may need answers only Con can provide.

The writing was gorgeous.

Finn was endearing in every way. My heart ached for him again and again.

Fitch was infuriating and disappointing, and his disappearance was so very confusing.

The family was flabbergasting; their lack of concern for Fitch's evaporation was disheartening.

And Paul...Paul, Paul, Paul- well, I guess you always need a nutty one in the bunch!

The conclusion was startling; yep I was completely blind-sighted. Which honestly I enjoyed the element of surprise, it kept me on the edge of my seat. This may have been my first Lanyon, but it definitely won't be my last!

**\*4 artistically-mysterious stars\***

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### **Emanuela ~plastic duck~ says**

After three years in New York, Finn goes back to the island where he grew up to heal after a car accident. He meets Con, the lover who broke his heart, but where is Fitch, his twin, responsible for that heart breaking and his flight from home?

The story was great. Finn is an artist from an artistic family. He grew up sheltered on an island, where he also met and fall in love with an older and fascinating man. He has a sensitive soul, but he's also easily hurt. It's clear that he isn't over the end of his story with Con and both men need a sort of closure that Finn's hasty departure didn't allow. When Finn discovers that no one has seen his twin brother, Fitch, for three years, he begins to assume the worst. No one seems to have seen Fitch leave the island, no one seems to want to talk about him and investigate his disappearance.

I rarely doubt everyone in a mystery as I did in this book, and it was a great achievement in such a short story, but Fitch's disappearance was like a black hole that sucked all my attention into it. I felt so sorry for him and I didn't buy for one second that he was such a bad guy. Being the least talented of the two twins, he probably amped up the charm, but felt hollow inside. The relationship between the two brothers, of which we only saw a few sketches in Finn's recollections, wasn't spelled out, it was only suggested and still it left me with a feeling of regret for what we weren't seeing. I think Lanyon built such a great character *in absentia* and it unbalanced the story, for me it took away the charm from the romantic part of it and it made me detach from the main character. It was a powerful effect, but I ended up resenting even Finn. I like to think that

some of Finn's guesses especially about the reason why Fitch went to the top of the tower were the right ones. I don't remember when I got so invested in a character who might have been a real jerk. Read it for yourself!

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### **MLE says**

I really like how well the author captures the feeling of an island off the mid-coast of Maine, and the references to the surrounding area show that if he doesn't know the area he certainly did his homework. The family reminds me of the Wyeth's, and from the references in the story it was clear that it was supposed to. The family dynamic is interesting, and I like the relationship with the island community as well. I like that the housekeeper didn't think of Finn quite like he thought she did.

The mystery was interesting, and I liked seeing how things played out in that respect. For me the romance was the weakest aspect of the story. I can't imagine why Finn would forgive Conn, and even if he did I can't imagine being able to build a solid relationship after what Conn did (view spoiler) Added to that I didn't find his character to be particularly compelling or interesting. He's smart, and pretty, but also a bit arrogant, and careless.

I like the story, and, for me, losing the love story would only have made it stronger. I would have preferred knowing more about Finn's family, and his relationship with his brother.

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### **Annery says**

Another perfect story from Josh Lanyon and narrated by Jason Clarke who is capital 'P' perfect for this mist shrouded & moody mystery. Think "Rebecca" off the coast of Maine.

I love how Josh is able to convey a whole family history and limn small town & big city characters in a few deft strokes: Martha & Hiram, the loving caretakers, Thomas, the absent minded uncle, Miss Minton, town eccentric, Paul, the flamboyant city boy with unexpected depth of feeling, and Finn & Fitch, The Barret Boys, so close that Finn confuses himself for Fitch in a photograph and yet with such distinct personalities that outsiders can tell them apart by looking at them. I won't say much else so as to not ruin the story but I'll say that, despite his past hesitancy, Con is the guy everyone needs loving them.

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### **Mwanamali says**

Second reading,

My original review stands. THIS IS FUCKING AWESOME.

First reading- review,

Ever picked up something to read and gone

The premise of this was quite fascinating, I tell you. Finn, an artist, returns home to Seal Island to "rest" after being involved in a near fatal crash. He hasn't been back in Seal Island since he walked in on his sorta-kind-boyfriend/ love of his life Con doing the dirty with Finn's twin brother, Fitch. Seal Is. holds bad memories for him but at least Con is away on a book tour, right? And his brother isn't around. But oh, what's this? No one has seen Fitch in three years. I know! I know! He must have left because he broke Finn's trust. But what's this again? Nobody saw him leave...

To quote Blackadder, **"I smell something fishy. And I am not talking about the contents of Baldrick's apple crumble."**

And, Oh! Looks like Con hadn't left after all.

Eventually what we have is a mystery, embraced by a romance, wrapped in a suspense bow and dipped in mild chocolate. There wasn't that much smexy times to the scale of Blood Red Butterfly. But I am still

We go on a little mission to find out what happened to Fitch. But this one isn't solved through cunning detective work or a join the dots game. The resolution of this conflict hits us over the head when we least expect it. I fucking hate novellas for the rushed sequence of events but hey- it's Lanyon.

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## Mel says

Ugh, it's so hard to rate this book. There was a lot I enjoyed about the story and one major thing that evoked a *whole* different reaction. But I'm still not sure if it's due to something Lanyon did intentionally or something he inadvertently overlooked.

Starting out with the good: Lanyon's main characters. They're layered, they're real, they're engaging. More often than not, they carry both physical and mental scars which makes that the books are not only about solving the mystery or finding love, but also about finding balance and making piece with oneself. Next to that, there's the fact that most of Lanyon's main characters have certain passions that color their perception of the world. Whether it's mystery novels, poetry or painting, the characters have a way of seeing the world that makes them unique and makes the writing that much more beautiful. And so *Lovers and Other Strangers* starts out in hues and shades, as tired, weary and numb Finn Barret returns to Seal Island to recuperate.

The first scenes are terrific. There's a particular awkwardness which permeates everything from descriptions to dialogues. Despite all of the chit chat of the people around Finn, there's a certain sense of silence and unease that grips you as a reader. Part of it is due to Finn's own fears as reservations, part of it is due to the Twilight Zone air of the island.

As the story progresses, the silence ebbs away but the weirdness stays as an essential part of the mystery plot.

As for that mystery plot: this one was very exciting and had me losing sleep in order to find out who did it. I loved how literally everyone was a suspect at a certain point. I had trouble connecting to Con, or enjoying Paul, or even trusting Finn because I kept seeing one or the other as a suspect. And I was kept guessing until the very end.

The setting, the characters, the mystery plot... it all made for a wonderful reading experience and very much worthy of a 5 star rating... had it not been for the following.

(I'm going to spoiler tag this as it's an essential part of the mystery and knowing the fact beforehand might ruin the experience, do beware.)

(view spoiler)

Still, an obviously emotion evoking and good read, but I feel like Lanyon overlooked something major. 3,5 stars.

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## **Lena♥Ribka says**

*Audible*

**Chemistry, scenery, atmosphere were good. The story remains thrilling until the very end.**

### **My problem N° 1 :**

It is good when I don't know WHO DID IT after the first 3 pages, and when I have to rack my brains up to the very end. But a certain amount of logic could be nice. To find out WHO DID IT here was a big disappointment for me. Like REALLY? THIS PERSON had so many criminal energy?! And can I please get an explanation, WHY? I had a feeling, I was taken for a ride on a mystery part.

### **My problem N° 2 :**

Okay, I got it: Fitsch is a BAD twin. He hurt Finn and as it looks like, he even didn't care about. But..he is still your brother, your only close family, your TWIN, FGS. I just couldn't understand that coldness that came from Finn when he thought/talked about his missing brother. "Oh, nobody has seen him since three years, he is for sure dead. Most likely murdered. Will you pass me the dip, please?"

### **My problem N° 3 :**

Jason Clarke. He has a very monotone narrating style. Not my favorite narrator in this collection.

*Read as a part of Male/Male Mystery and Suspense Box Set: 6 Novellas.*

## Susan says

YES! I've been waiting for this day! The day that I could say it: "I've found my favorite Lanyon!"

I am a Josh Lanyon fan. His books are entertaining. I dubbed him "3-star Lanyon"...I know what I'm gonna get...a short, easy, good read. But, I haven't LOVED any of them...and the ones I felt were GREAT were all too short.

Yes, "Lovers and Other Strangers" would be EVEN BETTER with 50+ more pages. But, I just loved this book. Not TOO short that I'm left starving for more and written with what I love most about his books: great characters and an intriguing mystery-bent story! He kept me guessing till the very end. (though, the big reveal was a bit "WTF...really?")...

I love Finn. I love (ok, no, I hate actually, but in that love-to-hate way) his history with Con. Fitch was an outstanding character even though he never had any true page time. The relationships between the characters were so good and as mentioned before, I loved the mystery. **Yes, there were holes and so many details I wish had been included.** But, Lanyon has conditioned me to want SO MUCH MORE at the end of his books that now that I've found one that I just want A LITTLE MORE (it's all relative, right?), I feel a sense of satisfaction.

Good stuff. Highly recommended.

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## Barbara says

**Another gorgeous writing** with multifaceted characters in a Island full of atmospheric beauty, and almost magical feel, which the conclusion was surprising and I honestly enjoyed the element of surprise! I enjoyed the slow pace of the story, it fitted with the sense of loneliness given by the island. And the mystery was also slow because takes a little while for Finn to concern about Fitch fate, also loved that Josh Lanyon kept me guessing who the murderer was almost to the end!!

I've read Josh Lanyon's books before that shook me up emotionally, because of their plots, but also because of the beauty found in his writing and this one do not miss that spot. An Author I really LOVE reading!

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## Martin says

Aspiring young artist Finn Barret returns to his childhood home on Seal Island, Maine, intending to recover there after a terrible car accident that almost cost him his life.

Seal Island brings back a few memories for Finn, reminding him why he had packed his things and left in a hurry, three years before.

But most astonishing is the fact that neither Finn nor any of his family and friends on Seal Island know anything about the whereabouts of Finn's twin brother Fitch.

Inseparable as kids and teens, a tragic incident resulted in Finn running away from his twin, not intending to ever speak with Fitch again.

However, three years later, nobody has heard ANYTHING from Fitch. So the question remains: Has Fitch ever left the small island in the first place?

Finn's investigation reveals not only the complex social structure of the inhabitants of the isolated island, but also returns a former lover to Finn's life, who may or may not know more about Fitch than he lets on.

A beautiful Agatha Christie style mystery on an isolated island. The best kind of setting. I only wish we got to know Finn a bit more.

4 stars!

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## **Bitchie says**

I didn't love this one. I don't even think I liked it.

Of course, the writing was great, the imagery was beautifully done, and I could almost see this island.

But I had some big issues. I'm marking the whole review for spoilers, but again, fair warning: spoilers.

1. No one seemed to give a shit that Fitch hadn't been seen or heard from in three years. Why? I get that he was supposed to be the "bad" twin (and WHY was he the bad twin?), but still, no one even wanted to look into things? As ambivalent as the family seemed to be, I really expected one of them to have been responsible, probably would have liked the story better if it HAD been one of them. At least then all the "don't stir things up now" might have made some kind of sense, if one of them had been responsible.
2. There were a LOT of characters for such a short novella. Friends and family and housekeepers and drivers and family friends and old boyfriends. It was just hard to keep them all straight.
3. Did I miss something about the time period this was set in? Like, there were phones, and cell phones, and a computer was mentioned at least once. Even back in 2011 when this was published, the first thing a person would do to try to find someone would be to hit the internet. Google their name, look at facebook or other social media, hell, even try to call the number Fitch had at the time! But nothing like that ever happened here, so did I miss that this was set before the internet became a thing?
4. I just didn't like anyone. Sure, Finn was ok, but the way his family acted about Fitch, and what Con did three years ago, was just unforgivable, IMO. Maybe, if given more time, lots of grovelling and wooing, but not in the time we got. So, the romance fell flat totally flat.

5. The killer. It was a barely mentioned character, that got just a few minutes of page time, but apparently she was important enough to kill a 23 year old, hide his body, AND pack up all his things to make it look like he just left town. It felt like almost an afterthought, and as I said earlier in this review, it would have made more sense if it had been almost anyone else.

I feel terrible writing this review, because this author has always been so solid for me, but this one was just all kind of a miss. The only reason it got 3 stars (and didn't get DNFed) was because of how beautiful the prose itself was.

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### **Mare SLiTsReaD Reviews says**

3 short stars

So I'm having a hard time rating this one.

I liked it, kinda, I don't know.

I feel like Finch got the shit end of the stick. Seriously.

I mean technically he had Con 1st right? And I get he was a prick. But he was someone's son, and brother and nephew.

And come on, to get killed for trying to piss off your brother, and, I don't know, it was just too much for me. But I guess murder is too much.

Also, I didn't feel the greatest connection btwn Finn and Con. I felt Finn, yes I did.

But then again I have to wonder, did I?

You find out your brother is murdered and 2 days later you are at a cozy B&B....

I don't know

that is all

Mare~Slitsread

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### **Vanessa North says**

Yeah, so I'm on a Lanyon binge. This one wasn't my favorite of even the ones I've read this week, but...even weaker Lanyon is better than most books that cross my path.

I was nervous about the twin thing, and a couple of times it verged into exasperating territory, but in the end, the most annoying bit was the names.

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## Lori says

MORE. I always want more from Josh Lanyon. one book from this man is not enough for me, I want a series every damn time.

What that? Demanding readers are demanding...

I know, but self control is not a strong point. I fall for characters and just want MORE!

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## Baba says

*Even when something like this happened--you would think it would be raining stars--but the world never missed a beat. Ink blue waves washed gently, rhythmically against the pale sand, and the stars were still and bright and cold.*

### (Spoiler free)

Finn Barrett, an artist, comes back to his family home on *Seal Island* to recover after a horrible accident. He needed time to come to terms with how close he had been to dying, to losing everything. He needed time to regain his strength as well as his optimism. For the first time in weeks, Finn felt something come to life again. A flicker of interest, close to emotion. In the aftermath of his accident, he felt the desire to pick up a brush and try to capture what he saw. Finn knew that he had to stop dwelling on the might-have-beens because he would be all right again. Coming back to *Seal Island* was a good idea, even though he was afraid of seeing Con again. But when Martha tells him that Con has a new book coming out and he was staying in England for the purpose of doing research for the one he's writing now, Finn is very relieved that he wouldn't cross Con's path.

*"I'll be long gone by then." His voice came out flat.*

*Martha still didn't look at him. "Well...that's all right so long as you don't take three years to visit again."*

And when Finn is asking how his twin brother Fitch is doing, Martha is quite stunned because she thought that Fitch would have followed Finn back to New York after Finn left the island three years ago. It dawns on him that something might have happened to Fitch because nobody has seen him since his disappearance. Finn and Fitch did not part on good terms since Finn caught his brother and Con red-handed. Finn was deeply in love with Con and he never got over his betrayal. When Finn is starting his search for his twin, he has to face his painful past and his former lover who might even be involved in his twin's disappearance.

## The lighthouse

"I realize after yesterday that you don't feel the same anymore--I guess I didn't really expect

that although I'd hoped, obviously, that we might have another chance. That probably wasn't realistic on my part. Both of us have changed."

Granted, *Lovers and Other Strangers* is pretty light on the romance/sex, but what sets this wonderful and rather short story apart is its stunning setting--a remote island--and the very charming atmosphere. Also, the story thrives through lovely details and very well-crafted characters. The author really brought the characters to life, he drew me into their story and let me feel their pain and emotion. In fact, the characters felt very real all the more as they are flawed--physically and emotionally. Although the story is not very long, it was a satisfying read and I never felt that something was missing. The author delivered a very compelling and interesting plot. *Lovers and Other Strangers* was my second Lanyon read, and I'm looking forward to plowing through his huge backlist.

*Con's mouth nuzzled its way up Finn's throat, and Finn opened his mouth, panting a little beneath that delicate, shuddery pleasure of grazing lips and tongue. When Con's mouth covered his, he moaned softly. Their tongues touched tentatively, withdrew.*

#### **Minor quibble**

I understand how painful it was for Finn to get over his twin's betrayal. Yet I've had a hard time to believe that these two, who were always incredibly close, would not try and make contact after a while of blowing off steam. All the more, as Finn remembered:

*All these months...years without word. That wasn't like Fitch. (...)*

*Finn opened his mouth, and Con kissed him--a baby's breath of a kiss, a dragonfly wing of a kiss. "Forgive me," he whispered.*