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What if you could have sex with anyone in the world?

The ultimate fantasy? Or a nightmare of self-discovery? Michael Blasco, a young scientist investigating what happens to the brain during the process of learning, suddenly finds himself on the other end of experimentation. On the way home from his lab one night he runs into Tony, a fitness instructor from his gym who he harbors a crush for, on the same platform waiting for the subway. When Michael imagines Tony naked, a pleasant fantasy to spice up a dull journey home, an extraordinary thing happens: Tony strips then and there on the platform and offers himself to Michael in front of all onlookers. Horrified, Michael flees. But back at his apartment, Tony reappears, as if by magic. And disappears again, when Michael wishes him away. Being a scientist, Michael recognizes an experiment when he sees one, and sets out to test the parameters of his newfound gift. In quick succession he conjures up Billie Holliday, Johnny Weismuller, Daffy Duck, Picasso, Sophia Loren, even his younger self.

The world is seemingly there for the taking. But what does Michael really desire? Mad with lust and losing all scientific objectivity, he runs the gamut of his fantasies inventing new lovers and calling up old ones, until, sated and morally bankrupt, he's forced to confront himself. What happens to the heart when it gets everything it desires?

From the renowned author of *Was* and *253* comes a witty, disturbing and intensely erotic fable for the modern age.

Lust: or No Harm Done Details

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From Reader Review Lust: or No Harm Done for online ebook

Nick Davies says

This was different to what I expected, which sorta reinforces the old adage about judging a book by the cover. In this case maybe I should have paid at least the tiniest bit of attention to the cover when I bought it, because I don't think I really looked at it enough. Anyhow, this gay fantasy novel was interesting, and kept me amused during breaks (and when my opponent was thinking about their next move) at a chess tournament I was playing in, and had picked this book up cheap en route to the station on the way to the tournament. The basic premise of 'what would you do if you could have sex with anyone, real or imaginary, alive or dead, whenever you wanted' was in fact an interesting one. The psychological questions and father figure stuff in the second half of the book was less compelling and in the end I was glad to finish it.

Denise says

Really interesting tale of a scientist who discovers he can create a duplicate of someone, have sex with them and there's no harm done. Right? Wrong. I especially liked that he analyses this power in a scientific manner for the first third, conducting little experiments (Can make someone who is dead appear? Will the real person know I did this? Can other people see them? etc.)

Aginor says

This book has a special place in my heart.

It was my first attempt at a m/m book and I instantly fell in love with it. There's no way I can objectively say anything worthwhile here but for what it's worth: Awesome read!

Zen Cho says

Liked it OK, but not as much as Ryman's other books. I guess I found the main character less interesting.

Favourite part: the part just before everything goes to shit with his dad. You know what's going to happen so it's agonising. And it is just so well done -- the kind of person his dad is, Michael's longing, the love each has for the other.

Least favourite part: the ending. Coming to realise Ryman's endings don't do it for me much -- they feel less real than the rest of the book. (The Picasso chapter was similarly unconvincing -- maybe that's why I don't like this book as much.)

Jim says

Strange, sexual, frustrating, over-written, lavishly contemplated and just odd fun; Ryman's *Lust* takes 30-something Brit-American scientist Michael on a strange erotic journey. After discovering that he can call up copies of people he desires, he goes on a quest to figure out what the sexually and usually compliant copy-people, dubbed Angels, can and cannot do.

Also a lengthy rumination on love, desire, loneliness and attraction, his real life desires are having problems, specifically with his longtime boyfriend, who's about to leave him. Michael's impotence is a problem, solved in a darkly satiric scene in a Viagra-prescribing clinic.

Michael's fantasies vary as he calls up his trainer, a coworker, Billie Holliday, Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan, even an entire New Zealand rugby team. Each scene offers a bit of titillation, but more, a lesson on what love and lust are and aren't. His extended affair with Pablo Picasso is comic and sad.

Things get strange in flashbacks about his father, the ultimate confrontation over his sexuality, and desires for his impossibly handsome dad, get even stranger toward the end, wrapped up after his near-death epiphany and tied in a bow during a New Year's Eve party.

This is not for everyone's taste. In fact, it's odd, eccentric and idealistic in its questions about desire and love. Still, I enjoyed the ride.

Fenriz Angelo says

Idk what to say about this book, only that it left me quite satisfied and i enjoyed every bit of it. From the blurb one might think it's a pornish book just for the hell of it, but when you start reading you realize it's more than that, this is a story of a scientist man, Michael, who feels his life has no meaning and one day he has the ability to sum up people he has lusted after, lust that those copies of those persons reciprocate, but such overwhelming lust is hindered by Michael's erectile dysfunction. Michael then decides to answer the meaning of this power and what is it for while trying to balance his two jobs and a broken relationship with his boyfriend.

In the progression of the story we realize along with Michael that this isn't solely about sex, it's about Michael finding himself out and what made him be the man he's at 38, why does he have so much internalized homophobia? why is it so hard to find connections with people? what is he afraid of? what does he really want in life? We get our answers little by little with every interaction Michael has with his "Angels" to a point where he's spiraling downwards until he loses everything he's had in the real world and is forced to rebuild himself.

I found this book really smart, with a lot of messages here and there, there were parts where i related a lot with Michael. All the sex scenes in the book have a reason, some are really erotic, others weird. Every single Angel has a well developed personality, and are very diverse. I liked being in Michael's insight. Lastly, i think this book balances quite well humor, social criticism, and sadness. Through the book i couldn't imagine how the story was going to end, it really didn't look well on Michael's side, but it delivered a satisfying ending.

Very unique take on "how to mend a broken heart" (i could say)

Evan says

I always keep thinking it's not that bad. But it is that bad. It's like I think it will clear up by itself if I leave it alone. Like a sock that loses its other half. You put it back in the drawer, hoping it'll find the other half by itself.

Always tell an intelligent person that they're beautiful. Always tell a beautiful person they're intelligent. Tell a cartoon that they're both.

Who would have thought miracles felt so terrible? You could feel them break the universe.

The dream was not of someone else, but of himself, changed.

I can account for the rain. I can account for the yearning between stars.

Chance Lee says

At one point during "Lust," Michael, the protagonist, wonders "How is this any different from masturbation?" He's able to conjure up anyone he wants and have sex with them. Hot gym trainer. Tarzan. Alexander the Great. Anyone. Then he can send them away, and it's like they were never there. There are no consequences. He can't get HIV, he can't get his feelings hurt because they do whatever he wants, he can experiment without fear.

So how it any different from masturbation? The same could be said of the book itself, which at times, feels like Ryman engaged in writerly masturbation, putting his characters into certain scenarios and writing about them forever. When he spends about 50 pages fucking Picasso -- yes, that Picasso -- it killed the entire book for me.

Up until that point, it's an interesting thought experiment. Gay power dynamics, pornography, a somewhat juvenile view of sexuality vs. innocence, trying to understand how other people see you, etc. Michael conjures up versions of himself, his father, and cartoon characters to fuck around with. But as the novel hits the 250 page mark, Michael tries to make "sense" of this gift, which is a pointless exercise. He wonders if the people he conjures up are truly alive. Who cares? I was hoping the book would address the fact that these people do whatever Michael wants them to do. Perhaps they tell him he's alive, because that's what he wants to here. Perhaps they act this way to get him to question life. If the book does address that, I skimmed over it as I lost interest in the end.

Michael starts to feel guilty dismissing them, a guilt clumsily paralleled in his job as a medical researcher doing gruesome tests on animals. The more complicated things become, the more plot holes arise, and the more it feels like you're losing your own mind as a reader.

The concept may fall apart, but I don't see how it could ever conclude tidily. As a result, I forgive it. The beginning is fascinating and an interesting thought experiment. The sex scenes are hot more often than not,

although there are a lot of descriptions of assholes that are sometimes confusing, like one that "folds in upon itself" or something similar. How does this person poop? It does portray a wide range of body types, but almost regretfully so, tending to give more positive adjectives to muscular bodies and big dicks, and being "surprised" when a non-model turns out to actually be attractive.

Any book that examines sexuality in such a full-frontal way is going to be problematic in different ways to every reader, so again, I forgive these issues. I just wish the book hadn't worn out its welcome, as just as a tendency to do.

Blake Fraina says

Thirty-something scientist, Michael Blasco, is your typical all work/no play type. He is involved in a love affair that's gone well past its sell by date, mostly owing to his neglect, and his current research project involves the sort of animal testing that even he seems a bit squeamish, if not rueful, over. One day, on his way home from the gym, the personal trainer about whom he fantasizes appears to him on the tube platform and performs an ad hoc striptease seemingly as a result of Michael's thoughts. In short order, Michael discovers that he can create a doppelganger of anyone on the planet (living, dead, real or fictional) who must do exactly as he pleases. After the initial shock and disbelief wear off, he warms to the idea and wastes no time in calling up a variety of "doubles," including his boyhood wet-dream, Tarzan (as played by Johnny Weismuller), a Jessica Rabbit-like cartoon character, Lawrence of Arabia, his own American military man Father (on whom he was sexually fixated as a boy), Billie Holliday and, most memorably, a totally manic go-getting Pablo Picasso.

Of course, much like the experiments he performs on helpless animals, his manipulation of these people is not without its ethical ambiguities and complications. Each person reacts differently to his overtures and, despite their obligation to obey him, almost none of them acquiesce happily. Slowly, with each encounter, he begins to learn valuable lessons about consideration, responsibility and relationships. In the end, rather than being corrupted by his newfound powers, he comes out a better, more caring, person.

Lust is a rewarding book on so many levels. It has a lot of humour, partly as a result of the absurdity of its premise but in larger part due to the hilarious, whimsical characterizations which are the book's major strength. Every character, whether based on a real person or a complete fiction, is wonderfully alive and completely unique without ever once stepping over the boundaries into caricature. Increasingly I find fictional characters (particularly those in queer literature) to be bland and difficult to distinguish from one another, with the unfortunate exception being the token outrageous, flamboyant stereotype, but the people in *Lust* are absolutely 100% believable individuals. Even Picasso, the book's most over-the-top creation, is a total delight. Reading it, I felt as if Ryman really knew these people.

In addition to the humour, the book has a lot of heart and is surprisingly romantic. It examines religion, destiny, self-acceptance, relationships (familial and sexual) and responsibility. It has a protagonist who, while not always likable, is extremely easy to relate to, understand and even sympathize with. In many ways, he is just an average guy in extraordinary circumstances. If you like your queer lit with a dose of fantasy, humour, philosophy and/or romance, *Lust* has something for you.

Lynn says

I REALLY wanted to enjoy this one - having loved Was and enjoyed 253 - but feel that Ryman 'outclevered' himself with the concept behind this novel.

Ryman's ideas were interesting, the introduction of Picasso and Billie Holiday particularly amused me, but overall I didn't find myself emotionall engaged in Michael's exploration of his lusts.

Jenne says

So this guy discovers that he has the power to conjure up a copy of anyone he would like to have sex with, and they will want to sleep with him too, and then he can disappear them when he's done.

As you might imagine, this is kind of too good to be true.

And as you can probably guess from the title, there's a lot of sex in it, but the sex isn't usually very sexy. But that's okay!

I absolutely loved this book.

Travis says

A lovely book. Disturbing, joyful, selfish, merciful -- all the things that touch us in life that we can hardly ever hold onto for more than a moment. It was a real pleasure to read a book about a man whose heart is opening up to the world without it being sickingly sweet or self-piting. The novel is humane, and it made me feel. A glorious read.

Sus says

I agree with the reviewer who wrote, "The plot summary may make it look like porn but, if so, it's the most thoughtful, affecting porn I've ever read."

It *is* porn -- sort of. But not really, actually. For a book that's about sex, the proportion of actual graphic content is surprisingly low (although there is some; it wouldn't be like Geoff Ryman to write a book about sex and then not deliver). But it's not just a titillating bonk-fest, all fun and games. That *would* be porn, and more to the point it wouldn't have much point; it wouldn't be -- what shall we call it? -- art. Here, the protagonist, Michael, has problems at the outset: he can't take any pleasure in his sexuality, he has relationship problems, problems with trusting or being open to people, problems getting it up, problems liking himself or feeling comfortable in his own body. The quasi-magical gift he's granted allows him to explore his sexuality by probing not only his fantasies, but, more to the point, his own past. It allows him to revisit his encounters with people he's known and has loved, valuably or fruitlessly; who he's hurt, and who have hurt him. That's what the emotional development of the book is about. That's why it's not just a boink-fest, but a psychologically astute, open, and moving novel.

Which is not to say it doesn't have sexy bits, or humor. The parts where (for instance) Michael takes Johnny

Weissmuller, as Tarzan, around on his arm are priceless. What's interesting, though, is that although the premise of the book is most easily described by invoking celebrity names -- what would *you* do if you could have sex with Billie Holiday? Pablo Picasso? Jessica Rabbit? Lawrence of Arabia? -- the encounters that mean most in the end are those the protagonist has with "obscure" people, non-famous people, but people he has really known and cared for. Which seems obvious, when you think about it. But I'm not sure how much time I usually spend thinking about it. So the effect is kind of transcendent.

Tamara says

I probably wouldn't have picked this up by its own description, but I loved Air so much i'll basically give anything by Ryman a shot, and in this instance, i'm glad I did.

Michael, a gay London scientist, gains a sudden ability to materialize copies of people - alive, dead, fictional - that he wants to have sex with. When he wants them to, they vanish back into the ether, no consequences.

Remarkably, Ryman manages to spin this out into an entire novel without it getting stale. Even more unusually, to my reading habits at least, is that the stakes always stay firmly on Michael - the only thing in the balance of the entire book is whether Michael will be happier or more miserable at the end.

Bill says

Lust is a fascinating Sci Fi exploration of every man's dream - to call up clones of his fantasies who are hot for him.
