

Out of Wedlock

Larry Lockridge

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The searching novel Out of Wedlock is about people's overlapping and conflicting allegiances and committed relationships.

A man discovers his true identity with the help of friends and lovers in Larry Lockridge's novel *Out of Wedlock*.

Jess's dreamlike episodes were the partial cause of his being bounced around between foster homes as a child. A perfect SAT score, though, landed him a scholarship to Harvard; this paved the way to medical school and a position in a plastic surgery practice. Jess keeps the trances at bay, but his stimulating relationships (as with Natalia, a food critic and unorthodox Catholic) trigger them.

Natalia leads Jess on tours around New York City during their prescribed biweekly meet-ups. Following Natalia's rule against falling in love, Jess also dates one of his patients—his biggest success, Gilah. But then Natalia and Gilah declare their love for one another; and elsewhere, Jess is sued for malpractice and befriends his lawyer. Horace is gay and remains Jess's friend despite his hopes for romance. Later, Jess meets Amanda in a chat room and falls in love without meeting in person; he also falls for Sinead. Amanda's sleuthing into both Sinead's and Jess's pasts prompts the disparate group to find Jess's biological family together.

Identity searches direct the plot. As couples get to know one another, they get to know themselves as well. Further, each person is developed in distinctive terms: their voices are particular to them, their interests are delineated, and they grow through the activities they do together and the experiences they share, from food connecting to Natalia's Polish roots and elements of Gilah's equestrienne history. Jess is jealous of Natalia's traditions; Horace's dog acts on impulse and primal urges. Their idiosyncrasies are many. However, the book's anecdotes and dates also pile up, becoming a hodgepodge of cosmopolitan details.

The book vacillates between cerebral literary references to writers who were out of sync with conventions of their times and a wry, heady tone, exemplified by Jess's out-of-body experiences. But the story also sprawls as its cast sets goals and achieves them: Jess's practice flourishes, Natalia and Gilah achieve success, and Horace transforms to impress a beau. Sex fuels some forward movement, but the unlikely pairings and enduring friendships remain at the book's core, pushing it toward its unpredictable ending, in which the question of who anyone will become over time remains open.

A romance, a comedy, and a psychological treatise with artwork between chapters, the searching novel *Out of Wedlock* is about people's overlapping and conflicting allegiances and committed relationships.

MARI CARLSON (January 10, 2023)

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