



Worse than Strangers

READING GROUP GUIDE



Introduction

Rose and Lily are best friends first, mother-daughter second, which is good because right now, Lily could really use a friend. Recently fired from her NYC magazine job, Lily has fled to the family cottage in Siasconset, where she stumbles across her first love holding hands with his new fiancé. Lily's not the only one facing heartbreak, however. Rose's own world is rocked by the handsome renter staying in their guest cottage, Thomas Wentworth: the one person she thought she would never see again and the man who has always (unfortunately) held her heart.

A modern retelling of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* set against a backdrop of blue and purple hydrangeas, swollen brick sidewalks, tall sea grass, and uniform, shingled houses, Lily and Rose Gardner's summer journey of second chances, healing, and hope begs the question: Can you repeat the past, and is it ever too late to try again?



Discussion Questions

1. In *Worse Than Strangers*, Lily and Rose Gardner are best friends first, mother-daughter second. They share secrets, laughter, and plenty of banter. Even when they're fighting, the Gardner ladies' bond is undeniable. How has your relationship with your own mother impacted your life? What do you believe are the perfect ingredients for a strong mother-daughter connection?
2. As a therapist, Rose sees an array of clients. And yet, despite her expertise and education, she has a hard time helping her own daughter when she begins to suffer from panic attacks. Have you tried therapy, and if so, what has been the most impactful part of your experience?
3. Lily is an artist who struggles to find her own distinct style. As the summer progresses, she slowly gains more confidence in her work. Do you believe that artistic talent is innate or something that you develop through time and discipline?
4. Lily and Rose's summer journeys both beg the question, "Can you repeat the past?" The book's title is taken from the Jane Austen quote, "Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted." Like the character of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, Rose and Lily have a difficult time letting go. What role has nostalgia played in your own life? Do you tend to romanticize the past or are you someone who charges ahead to the future?
5. Young romance is central to the plot of the book. While Lily and Rose both encounter their first loves again on Nantucket, they handle the situation in very different ways. Do you have a first love? What do you think are the benefits of falling in love young versus finding someone perfect for you later in life?
6. Lottie is the foundation by which Lily and Rose have built their lives. The matriarch of the family, her specter looms large over the story through her many, wisdom-filled "Lottie-isms," even when she is not physically present. Is there a woman in your family that has had a large impact on your worldview?



Discussion Questions

7. In different ways, Rose and Lily must learn how to forgive individuals from their families. Is there someone that hurt you but eventually earned your forgiveness? If so, how did forgiveness ultimately help you heal?
8. A big family secret is revealed in the book that challenges how Lily and Rose view the story of their lives. Have you discovered anything that has made you reevaluate your own family history?
9. A long-lost bucket list plays a major role in *Worse Than Strangers*. If you were to create the perfect summer bucket list, what would be on your list and why?
10. Nantucket is Rose, Lily, and Lottie's happy place. The island is where Lottie built a life she adored as a schoolteacher alongside her devoted husband. It's where Rose found a new beginning after her divorce, and where Lily discovered a new path in life inspired by the island's natural beauty. Is there a special place that has played a pivotal part in your story?
11. Lily and Rose both go on first dates, second dates, and even one disastrous double date. What's your best (or worst) first date story? How soon on a first date do you think it's possible to tell if there's going to be a second?
12. A mysterious psychic delivers a haunting message to Lily at a fundraiser that makes her question her love life. Have you ever visited a psychic, and do you believe it's possible to know the future? If a psychic could predict exactly what your life will look like in ten years, would you want to know? If not, why?



Kyleigh Leddy's Perfect Nantucket Bucket List

Nantucket has always felt like home. My family has been coming to the island since long before I was born. We used to rent a beach cottage in Quidnet, and I first came to the island (and had my first tick bite scare!) when I was only a few months old.

For me, Nantucket has become synonymous with honeysuckle bushes, beach sunsets, salt air, and that special, ineffable summer magic. When I graduated high school, my mom moved to the island full time and fate was sealed. Nantucket was where I first learned how to drive, got my first job (Vineyard Vines—thanks for teaching me how to execute a mean fold!), went on my first date in high school, met many of my closest friends, and learned the necessary ingredients for a successful beach bonfire. Nantucket has also been a place for us to heal. While grieving my sister, my mom and I were able to slowly piece ourselves together over the course of many a beach walk (and plenty of beach cries, too).

As a year-round resident for ten years, my mom was welcomed by this wonderful community, thirty miles out to sea. Through her, I've been lucky to know and love the wonderful world of Nantucket on a deeper level, including The Grey Lady's rich literary history.

However, if I were new to the island and coming to Nantucket for the first time today, here's how I'd spend the perfect summer weekend.

Bucket list bites:

- 1) Start your day on Main Street with some coffee from **The Hub** or a smoothie from **Lemon Press**. Take a stroll around town while you sip, enjoying the historic, charming sites of downtown and its many shopping opportunities.



Kyleigh Leddy's Perfect Nantucket Bucket List

- 2) You'd be remiss if you came to Nantucket and didn't grab a classic mudslide at **The Gazebo** on the wharf.
- 3) The best lobster roll on Nantucket has been a long-debated subject. But if you're asking this author, the honor goes to **The Brotherhood of Thieves**.
- 4) Beach sunsets, acoustic music, and buck-a-shuck? You can't ask for a better Nantucket afternoon than a late lunch at **Sandbar at Jetties Beach**.
- 5) Grab homemade ice cream at **The Juice Bar!** Take your cone (or cup) and enjoy views of Nantucket Harbor at Easy Street Park.

Activities for beachy (and rainy) days:

- 6) Whether it's sunny skies or The Grey Lady is living up to her nickname, **The Whaling Museum** is fun for the whole family. Explore the fascinating island history through immersive exhibits and revel in the view from the rooftop.
- 7) Maria Mitchell's influence is everywhere on Nantucket. A renowned astronomer and educator, her legacy lives on at the Maria Mitchell Association. Experience a night of education, wonder, and stargazing at **The Loines Observatory** as astronomers teach you how to see Nantucket's skies in a whole new light.
- 8) Follow the footpath of '**Sconset Bluff Walk**, reveling in the sights of the east shore bluffs and hydrangea-lined lawns of Baxter Road. If you're up for a longer journey, you can continue the walk all the way to **Sankaty Lighthouse**.



Kyleigh Leddy's Perfect Nantucket Bucket List

- 9) There's no better place to be on a summer Saturday than at **Cisco Brewers** with an ice-cold beer or a delicious blueberry lemonade in your hand watching live music. From babies to pets, everyone in your travel crew can find something to enjoy.
- 10) What better way to end your perfect Nantucket weekend than at **The Chicken Box**: Nantucket's most famous dive bar. Enjoy live music, drinks, and plenty of dancing.

Bonus spots:

A fresh sandwich from **Something Natural** is the perfect accompaniment for a beach drive to **Great Point Lighthouse**, like Lily, Rose, and Theo do in *Worse Than Strangers*.

Looking for your next summer read? Stop at **Mitchell's Book Corner** or **The Atheneum** for a curated selection of the buzziest books of the season.

If you're a sucker for a piano ballad, **Club Car** is the place to be at night. Or, if you're a fan of the stage like Theo and want to get in on the action, partake in karaoke at **Rose & Crown**.

Need a souvenir from your fabulous trip? Check out the famous chocolate-covered cranberries from **Aunt Leah's Fudge**.