



Love Lies Beneath: A Novel

By Ellen Hopkins

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From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Collateral* comes a gripping novel about a woman caught in a love affair that could be her salvation...or her undoing.

Tara is gorgeous, affluent, and forty. She lives in an impeccably restored Russian Hill mansion in San Francisco. Once a widow, twice divorced, she's a woman with a past she prefers keeping to herself.

Enter Cavin Lattimore. He's handsome, kind, charming, and the surgeon assigned to Tara following a ski accident in Lake Tahoe. In the weeks it takes her to recover, Cavin sweeps her off her feet and their relationship blossoms into something Tara had never imagined possible. But then she begins to notice some strange things: a van parked outside her home at odd times, a break-in, threatening text messages and emails. She also starts to notice cracks in Cavin's seemingly perfect personality, like the suppressed rage his conniving teenage son brings out in him, and the discovery that Cavin hired a detective to investigate her immediately after they met.

Now on crutches and housebound, Tara finds herself dependent on the new man in her life—perhaps too much so. She's handling rocky relationships with her sister and best friend, who are envious of her glamour and freedom; her prickly brother-in-law, who is intimidated by her wealth and power; and her estranged mother. However perfect Tara's life appears, things are beginning to get messy.

Writing in beautiful prose, Ellen Hopkins unveils a new style while evoking her signature poetic form that readers fell in love with in *Collateral* and *Triangles*.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Love Lies Beneath*:

"Hopkins is at her best in this outstanding novel written in gorgeous prose and interspersed with her signature free verse between chapters. She leaves no stone unturned and keeps the reader guessing until the very last pages. This fabulous, sex-filled masterpiece of mystery and romance has an ending that will give readers major chills." (*Library Journal* (starred review))

"The characters are strong, the writing is vivid, and the plot is engaging." (*Booklist*)

Praise for *Collateral*:

"Uplifting and heartbreaking... featuring characters grappling with the serious issues of our time."
(*Publishers Weekly*)

"Searing. . . Hopkins examines the highs and lows of the mercurial nature of a relationship with someone whose first loyalty is to his (or her) country." (*The Denver Post*)

"Hopkins examines the difficulties often overlooked in military marriages, such as limited communication, infidelity, worry over injury, loneliness, and the physical and mental issues of returning veterans. . . . The story will appeal to many readers." (*Library Journal*)

Praise for *Triangles*:

"Though Hopkins is known mostly for her young-adult novels, her latest is an absorbing grown-up story, told in beautiful blank verse, about three friends with messy family and romantic lives." (*EW.com* ("Must-List" pick))

"Hopkins delivers a raw and riveting tale of love and forgiveness that will captivate readers." (*Publisher's Weekly*)

About the Author

Ellen Hopkins is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of eleven young adult novels, as well as the adult novels *Triangles*, *Collateral*, and *Love Lies Beneath*. She lives with her family in Carson City, Nevada, where she has founded Ventana Sierra, a nonprofit youth housing and resource initiative. Visit her at EllenHopkins.com and on Facebook, and follow her on Twitter at @EllenHopkinsLit.

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Love Lies Beneath

One

As gyms go, this one is exceptionally clean. Hardwood gleams beneath the December sun flurrying down through the fog-misted skylight, and the place smells more like floor polish than the afternoon regulars'

liberal drips of sweat. Even the Pilates mats manage to shed the odor of perspiration, and that pleases me. I prefer to inhale the scent of exertion only during coition.

Coition. Good word. Appears before “coitus” in the dictionary, and though they mean the same thing, the softer “shun” sounds chicer than the “tus” to my ear. Not that class is requisite to the act itself, but in conversation, tone is everything.

“Tara! Concentrate. Your form is terrible. Straighten your back. Lift your chest.”

I do as instructed but complain, “Squats stink. And anyway, I thought you appreciated my form.”

Nick slinks closer, bends to lower his face close to mine, and I wait for his tongue to tease the pulse beneath my ear. Instead, he slaps my behind, hard enough to sting. “You told me your goal is perfection. You’re not there yet.” His words slap sharper than the gesture. “That’s why you need me.”

Honestly, most personal trainers could accomplish the task. I’ve handpicked a half dozen over the years, trying them on for size, so to speak. I’ve kept Nick the longest because of ability above and beyond, not to mention outside of the gym.

I do enjoy specialized service, and Nick has exceptional talents. Still, he has bruised my ego.

“I don’t need you at all, Mr. de la Rosa. In fact, I think we’re finished . . .” The look on his face is priceless. I’m an excellent tipper. “With squats and thrusts and weights, at least for today. As for the postworkout workout, give me thirty to shower and I’ll meet you out front.”

“You are a wicked, wicked woman. Almost scary, in fact.”

“Almost? You underestimate me, sir.”

Our little exchange did not go unnoticed, and envious eyes follow my retreat toward the women’s shower room. That’s correct, ladies. He and I are doing the filthy, and you’re right to be jealous. What Nick de la Rosa may lack in discretionary income, he more than makes up for in carnal creativity. Who needs to go out when one can have so much fun staying in, playing doctor?

My locker is well stocked with aromatic soaps and lotions, but before I use those I take a few minutes to douche away feminine fragrance, heightened by the previous ninety minutes of effort. One of my exes called me fastidious. Another claimed I’m obsessively clean. But, as my late, great first husband once told me, “A sweet pussy invites the tongue to tango.” I plan on plenty of oral dance in an hour or so.

Meanwhile, I run the water hot, perfume my hair with gardenia-scented shampoo, and soften my skin to silk with this fabulous vanilla-cedar shower gel. My eyes are closed against the final rinse of conditioner when a voice flutters softly within the tiled walls.

“What is that amazing incense smell?”

“It’s body wash from Kiehl’s.”

“Expensive?”

“Not too.” I blink away water, and when I identify the person on the far side of the conversation, I hope the showerhead’s splash disguises the serrated intake of my breath.

Penelope teaches yoga, and while she’s something to see in a tank top and stretch pants, naked she is simply exquisite. In a side-by-side comparison, I can hold my own against pretty much any woman here. But Penelope is one of those rare young things whose obviously natural curves and fawn suede complexion rival anything my pricey plastic surgeon could accomplish. If I had hackles, they’d be bristling.

“You can find the body wash online. Vanilla and cedarwood.” I grab a towel, cover my imperfect assets, and try not to stare at Penelope as she and I trade places.

For the next twenty minutes, I work serums and moisturizer into my skin before applying foundation. Not sure why I’m bothering. It will all come dripping off in a little while. Oh well. At least I’ll look attractive until then and turn a few heads on my way to the door.

December shrouds San Francisco in gray. I step out into the heavy, wet curtain and am happy I took the time to blow-dry my hair, which is long and thick and would stay damp otherwise. My stylist calls it problematic because it takes extra time to color. But I’m determined to keep it as close to its original fox red as possible. My sister is two years younger, and at not quite thirty-nine her hair has gone completely silver. It’s actually striking on her, but the look would be wrong for me.

I stand back against the building beneath a wide awning, watching sidewalk travelers hustle by. Everyone walks quickly here, worried more about what’s behind them than the appointments waiting for them up ahead. It’s an eclectic stream—high school kids with prominent piercings, street dwellers of various ages and genders, a young black woman in short leather, an older white man in ankle-length mink.

It’s quite the show, and I’m enjoying it well enough until it strikes me that I’ve been loitering here for a very long time. I look in through the big plate-glass window, beyond weight machines and treadmills. Oh, there he is, in loose jeans and a flimsy flannel shirt that doesn’t exactly hide all the lovely musculature I’ve almost memorized.

Nick starts in this direction, but before he can take a dozen steps, Penelope cozies up behind him, pouts against the back of his neck, and lifts on her toes slightly, saying something into his ear. He spins and now his face is hidden. But I can see hers clearly. Her smile is more than flirtatious. It’s tinted with affection. And her eyes, locked on his, tell a story I really don’t want to know.

I have hackles after all. Rage sizzles, white-hot, and my hands tremor. Unreasonably, it’s Penelope my inner bitch wants to maul. It’s not her fault Nick wants his steak and his cupcake, too. She must sense the devil’s gaze, because her head swivels, side to side. When she glances over Nick’s shoulder and notices me glaring through the glass, she gives him a playful shove. Does she realize he’s meeting me? Do they have some quirky arrangement?

Nick turns his back on pretty Penelope, heads straight for the door, and when it opens a shock wave of anger hits him square. He looks at me, and I swear he has no idea why I’m pissed. “What’s wrong?”

I force my voice low and level. “Why do you think something’s wrong?”

“Well, I don’t know, Tara. Maybe it’s your body language.” He reaches for my elbow, tries to steer me clear of curious eyes on the far side of the window.

I yank my arm away and hold my ground. “Do not touch me again unless I say it’s okay. Understand?” He nods, dumbstruck, and I continue. “Does she know we’re sleeping together?”

“Does who know?”

“Stop playing stupid! God, I hate when men play stupid! Penelope. Does she know? You two obviously have something going on.”

Nick starts up the sidewalk, sure I’ll follow, or at the very least let him leave me standing here like an idiot. “You don’t own me, bitch.”

I have no choice but to take the bait. But I’m not going to be gutted without a fight. I catch up to him and strike from behind, jabbing with words. “I’m sorry, Nick. I thought you liked our arrangement, that it was mutually beneficial.”

He stops, turns to face me. “I do like it. But there was never any mention of exclusivity.”

“You are seeing Penelope, then?”

“Well, yeah. And others. It’s not like I’m engaged to any of you. Like I said, you don’t own me.”

Maggot.

“I believe you said, ‘You don’t own me, bitch.’?”

The smirk slips from his face. “Uh yeah, guess I did, and I’m sor—”

“Shut up.” Damage control? I don’t think so. “No one talks to me like that, Nick, least of all hired help. And, make no mistake, that’s exactly what you are . . . uh, were. I do hope your ‘others’ are as generous as I have been, because there will be no more under-the-table supplemental income from me. Come to think of it, I might have to 1099 you.”

My turn to smirk, and he doesn’t like it. “Go ahead and try. You paid me in cash and can’t prove a thing.”

That makes me laugh. “Do you really think I wouldn’t take steps to protect myself, just in case you turned out to be the weasel you are? You know those nanny-cam things? So happens I have a boudoir cam. I don’t suppose you ever noticed I always paid you before you got out of bed?”

Not completely true, but close enough. The camera covers the entire room. Anyway, it’s not like I’d really 1099 him, but it won’t hurt to make him sweat a little. Damn, I am going to miss his sweat. But I could never have sex with him again, knowing he might have just come from someone else’s bed. Who wants to sleep with a harem?

“So, we’re finished?”

Cheeky little bastard. “You needed confirmation of that?”

“What about the gym?”

“This city is crawling with personal trainers. I’m sure I can find another one as multifaceted as you. Meanwhile, I can handle my own workouts. I really don’t need you, or anyone, to tell me how to squat.” I start to walk away. Turn back. “You never did say if Penelope knew about me.”

He stares at me stupidly for a moment. Then he dares, “I didn’t see the need to disclose the dirty details.”

My hackles lower and I smile. “I think I should take up yoga. Don’t you?”

I turn my back on him, and as I start to walk away he calls, “You say one word to her and you will be very sorry.”

In a low, measured voice, I reply, “I hope that’s not a threat. This is a game you can’t win.”

He changes tactics. “You don’t understand. I love her.”

“Then why have you been fucking me?”

I leave before he can answer. Wounded. Envious. I don’t even know what love feels like. It’s unfair an asshole like Nick should know. But if it’s even remotely like having sex on the side with whomever, all the while claiming your heart is taken, maybe it’s just as well that it’s outside my realm of experience.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Barker:

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