

Buy Me Love

Martha Cooley

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In Martha Cooley's novel *Buy Me Love*, a woman's lottery win reveals her complicated relationships with money, family, and art.

Ellen and her brother, Win, were raised by a father who was a world-renowned, closeted opera singer, and a mother who was an alcoholic. In adulthood, Win, a talented composer, surrenders to alcoholism himself after the death of his fiancée in a Madrid train station explosion; Ellen, meanwhile, becomes a poet, though writer's block forces her to work as a freelance proofreader.

When a Brooklyn bodega owner suggests that Ellen buy a lottery ticket, she does, choosing to play the digits of her childhood phone number, which she's just seen stuck to a subway grate. Much of the book is devoted to the period between the time when Ellen learns that she won the lottery, and the deadline for collecting her winnings. In that period: she becomes involved with Roy, the adoptive father of a boy whose life, like Win's, was changed because of a train-related accident. Her father dies, and she travels to Italy to meet his lover and receive her inheritance. And her life intersects with that of an anarchistic transgender art warrior, Blair, who is scarred by an incestuous childhood relationship.

The book's expository dialogue, combined with Ellen's tortuous indecision over whether or not she should claim her winnings, results in some frustrating moments. Nevertheless, Ellen's good heart, and the bond that she develops with Roy and his son, makes hers a warm and hopeful tale, if one that concludes with a reminder that life can be changed by ironic developments.

Buy Me Love is an unusual novel about a woman whose lottery win brings her to a deeper understanding of herself and what is important to her.

RANDI HACKER (May / June 2021)

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