

'Stunning and heart-gripping'
André Aciman, author of *Call Me by Your Name*



lie with me

Philippe Besson

Translated by Molly Ringwald

PENGUIN BOOKS

Lie With Me

'An elegiac tale of first, hidden love between two teenage boys who have no chance of a shared future, *Lie With Me* sold more than a hundred thousand copies in France, where it won several prizes and is being made into a movie. The book reads like a photograph, faded but composed' *New Yorker*

'[A] study in intimacy . . . the novel captures the full tragedy of the closet . . . Molly Ringwald, by delightful coincidence an icon of '80s John Hughes films, provides a limpid translation . . . Equal parts André Aciman and Marguerite Duras, *Lie With Me* poignantly reflects on why some memories fade and others do not' *The New York Times Book Review*

'A timeless love story. Molly Ringwald's translation is as clear and beautiful as the story it depicts. You'll read it in a night, but its exquisite heartbreak will linger' David Ebershoff, author of *The Danish Girl*

'I read this novel from start to finish without stopping, steadily undone by its honesty, humility, and grace. It's the rare kind of story that reminds you – deep in a place you've almost forgotten – what a miracle it is, and what a heartbreak, to fall in love even once' Jia Tolentino, author of *Trick Mirror*

'This is a gorgeous fever dream of a book. Ringwald's translation does elegant justice to Besson's balance of beauty and despair, and to his interrogations of memory and longing. *Lie With Me* positively glows in the dark' Rebecca Makkai, author of *The Great Believers*

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'This year's *Call Me By Your Name* . . . a moving and graceful novel' *Vulture*

'This gorgeous, aching novel captures all of the fear and freedom of young desire. Besson's sharp, compressed prose gets right to the heart of what it means to have to fall in love in secret. Thanks to Ringwald's pitch-perfect translation, this affecting and sexy elegy may well be the best gay love story in contemporary fiction. I dare you to read it without crying' Christopher Bollen, author of *The Destroyers*

'*Lie With Me* succeeds as a novel because of Besson's graceful writing, beautifully translated by Ringwald. Besson is a gifted stylist, and he infuses Philippe's story with the right notes of sadness and longing . . . perfectly captures what it's like to be young and in love . . . a lovely novel' *NPR*

'*Lie With Me* is an exquisite whisper that lingers long after you've finished reading it' Kevin Kwan, author of *Crazy Rich Asians*

'In spare yet evocative prose, elegantly translated by Molly Ringwald, Philippe Besson relates the erotic awakening of two adolescent boys in a small French town in the 1980s. *Lie With Me* captures their world with the grainy poignancy of an old high school yearbook, while movingly conveying the quintessential human dramas of longing, love and letting go' Caroline Weber, author of *Proust's Duchess: How Three Celebrated Women Captured the Imagination of Fin-de-siècle Paris*

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‘A man looks back at his first love, a forbidden homosexual affair during his last year of high school in a small French town in the 1980s. A French bestseller likened to *Call Me By Your Name* and *Brokeback Mountain*, the novel marks the first English translation by the actress and writer Ms Ringwald, a longtime Francophile’ *Wall Street Journal*

‘At first erotic and joyous, ultimately elegiac and haunting, *Lie With Me* is a deceptively slender book as big as life itself’ Rumaan Alam, author of *That Kind of Mother*

‘Molly Ringwald translated this French *Call Me By Your Name*-esque novel about two teenagers in 1984 Bordeaux as they fall in love in the shadows, leaving one of them to reflect on the relationship many years later’ OprahMag.com, 30 of the Best LGBTQ Books in 2019

‘Besson is a thoughtful writer who can strike home with vivid imagery . . . [and] deftly translated [by Ringwald]’ *Kirkus*

‘There’s much book-to-filmstar appeal in this moving, well-plotted tale: *Elle* dubbed it “the French *Brokeback Mountain*”; there’s something of *Call Me By Your Name*’s Elio in Philippe, who lives in the books he reads and writes; and actress and writer Ringwald ably translates’ *Booklist*

‘Universally touching’ *Le Parisien*

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‘Moving . . . Besson’s writing and Ringwald’s smooth translation provide emotional impact’ *Publishers Weekly*

‘The French *Brokeback Mountain*’ *Elle*

‘French author Philippe Besson’s international bestseller *Lie With Me* is now available [in English] thanks to actor, author and erstwhile Parisian Molly Ringwald’s fluid translation. Told in three parts, the slender novel recounts a clandestine romance between two teenage boys in 1984 . . . More than twenty years after his last encounter with Thomas, Philippe runs into his former lover’s doppelgänger, and a chance discovery shatters the gentle reverie of the past. Small ripples can make the fiercest waves’ *Vogue*

‘There’s a reason why *Lie With Me* is often compared to *Call Me By Your Name*. In this slim French novel, an unnamed author is prompted to revisit his first love affair with a man. All relationships since have paled. And yes, it’s translated from French by *that* Molly Ringwald’ *Refinery 29*, 35 Outstanding LGBTQ+ Books of 2019

‘One of the best novels you’ll read this year . . . translated by the actress and author Molly Ringwald, *Lie With Me* by Philippe Besson brilliantly reminds readers of the joys and agonies of love’ *The Advocate*

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‘An intense, unforgettable novel, alive with the ache of longing and loss’ Sarah Waters

‘It has been years since anything moved me as much as *Lie With Me*. It will become a classic’ Jonathan Coe

‘A deeply moving depiction of first love, both tender and elegiac’ John Boyne

‘Devastating and tender; this is the book I wish I’d read when I was fifteen, and a book I’m glad to have as a companion now’ Andrew McMillan

‘His voice haunts me still’ Alexander Chee

‘A tender, sensuous novel’ *The New York Times Book Review*

Philippe Besson is the author of a number of award-winning novels and screenplays. The French edition of *Lie With Me* sold over 120,000 copies, was a number one bestseller, and won the prestigious Maison de la Presse prize.

Molly Ringwald’s writing has appeared in the *New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, the *Guardian* and *Vogue*, and she is the author of the bestselling novel-in-stories *When It Happens to You*.

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Lie With Me

— *A Novel* —

PHILIPPE BESSON

Translated from the French by
Molly Ringwald



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Bret Easton Ellis epigraph reprinted courtesy of the author

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In memory of Thomas Andrieu
(1966–2016)

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You didn't have to attract desire. . . . Either it was there at first glance or else it had never been. It was instant knowledge of sexual relationship or it was nothing.

—Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

I concluded with an aching finality that the could-happen possibilities were gone, that doing whatever you wanted whenever you wanted was over. The future didn't exist anymore. Everything was in the past and would stay there.

—Bret Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park*

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One day—I can say precisely when, I know the date—I find myself in the bar of a hotel lobby in a provincial city, sitting in an armchair across from a journalist, a low round table between us, being interviewed for my latest novel, which recently came out. She’s questioning me on the themes of the book, on separation, the act of writing letters, whether exile can ever save us. I answer her almost without thinking. I’m used to the questions so the words come easily, almost mechanically, as I allow my gaze to wander to the people walking across the lobby. I watch their comings and goings, and invent the lives of these people in my mind. I try to imagine where they are coming from and where they are headed. I’ve always loved to do that, to invent the lives of strangers in passing. It could almost be considered an obsession. I believe it started when I was a child. I remember its worrying my mother. “Stop with your lies!” she would say. She used the word “lies” instead of “stories,” but nevertheless, it continued, and all these years later, I still find myself doing it. I’m inventing these scenarios in my head while answering questions about the pain of abandoned women. I’m good at that, at

disconnecting, at doing these two things at once—when I notice the back of a young man dragging a small rolling suitcase behind him. I stare at this man in the process of leaving the hotel. I know he’s young, his youth is emanating from him, in the way he’s dressed and in his casual allure. I’m dumbstruck. I think, *This is not possible. This is an image that cannot exist.* I could be mistaken, of course—after all, I don’t see his face, I can’t see it from where I’m sitting—but still I am absolutely certain I know what the face of this young man looks like. And then I tell myself again, *No, it’s impossible—literally impossible*, but still I call out a name. “Thomas!” I actually shout it. “Thomas!” The journalist who’s been sitting across from me trying to scribble down everything I’ve been saying raises her head. Her shoulders tighten, as though it’s her I’m shouting at. I know I should apologize, but I don’t. I’m too caught up in this image that’s now moving away from me, waiting to see if my shouting his name has any effect. He doesn’t turn around. The man keeps walking so I should assume that I’m wrong, for sure this time—that it really is just a mirage. That it’s just the comings and goings that caused this strange illusion. But instead, I jump up and go after him. It’s not so much verification I need, because in the moment I’m still convinced I’m right—right against all reason, against all evidence. I catch up to the man on the pavement just outside the hotel. I put my hand on his shoulder and he turns around.

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Chapter One

1984

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