



# A Line in the Dark

*Malinda Lo*

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## A Line in the Dark Malinda Lo

The most important thing is that Jess Wong is Angie Redmond's best friend, even if Angie can't see how she truly feels. It's okay that Jess is the girl on the sidelines that nobody notices. That means she's free to watch everyone else and be at Angie's side. But when Angie starts falling for Margot, a girl from the nearby boarding school, Jess can already see what's going to happen. And suddenly her gift for observation is a curse.

As Angie drags Jess further into Margot's circle, Jess finds more than her friend's growing crush. Secrets lie just beneath the carefree surface of this world, and when they come out, Jess knows Angie won't be able to handle the consequences. When the inevitable darkness finally descends, Angie will need her best friend.

## A Line in the Dark Details

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Author : Malinda Lo

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# From Reader Review *A Line in the Dark* for online ebook

## CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

UPDATE: It's been a few hours since I finished this book and 1) I've bumped up the rating because I've given it more thought, and 2) I cannot stop thinking about it.

I take back what I said about the ending being a missed opportunity regarding the character development. Thinking about it more carefully and reflecting on the events that led up to the ending, I'm now more inclined to say that Lo's storytelling was *fantastic*. Without giving away what happens, the second half of the novel weaves such a complex and fascinating account of what we do for those we love - and the middle ground we find because of it. I was too hung up on what *actually* happens and didn't give enough thought to everything that leads up to it - the possible manipulation, the lies, the truths, the cat and mouse game played by the characters in the book. I think the ending is something that requires more reflection and engagement than what is on the surface. I was wrong before (as below); *A Line in the Dark* is more than I thought it was.

Trigger/content warnings: (view spoiler)

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*A Line in the Dark* is a good book with complex and morally grey characters, and a tense story, but it left me wanting.

- I enjoyed reading this very much. I enjoyed the direction of the story (contrary to what others thought), the narrative (especially from Jess's perspective), and the ambiguous nature of the plot which kept me guessing. Indeed, I was compelled and curious.
- It explores sexuality, friendship, revenge, and how we, especially teenage girls, are defined and perceived.
- The first part of the story is from Jess's perspective (thus first person), whilst the second part is in third person - although the transition felt disjointed, it worked for the purpose of how the story eventually unfolds.
- However, I've rated this book 2.5 because I was left wanting by the end. The first part of the book is character-driven, and how Lo explores her characters and their desires and motivations was fascinating. So when the second part of the book shifts in focus to a more whodunit surrounding a tragic and mysterious event, I felt that the lack of character development was jarring - and it left me wishing there was more, particularly since the \*event\* had such an impact on the characters. It felt like a missed opportunity.

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## Sue (Hollywood News Source) says

**Let's get something straight, this is not an f/f romance. There's no "happy" ending about it. *A Line in the Dark* is a mystery thriller that fuses relevant themes in the plot.** It isn't dark or twisted per my standard. The plot is straightforward, it's predictable. However, it's engaging which what matters the most. I finished it in one gulp. It's fast paced. You'll like and distrust the characters at the same time.

The story follows Jess Wong, who's in love with her best friend Angie Redmond. They're your standard YA BFFs; the twist is both are queer. The dynamic of their friendship started to change when Angie met Margot Adams, who's the IT girl from a nearby boarding school.

A Line in the Dark is about two best friends who started to have a warped relationship with each other. It's unhealthy dynamic while it's not explicitly challenged, although there's acknowledgement cues in the text. It wasn't brushed under the rug for the sake of queer female friendship. I like that three of the main characters are queer. The book didn't use any labels, though I love that all of their parents are supportive – in their own ways, especially Jess's parents. That's very nice to read. There's also the Chinese-American diaspora supporting details. In addition, there's a contrast between going to a public school vs. private boarding school, and how classism affects socialization between teens. The heroine struggled with fitting in, not because she's queerpoc but because of other extra baggage. She's not traditionally beautiful, she's into art, and her parents wanted her to be feminine and studious in AsAm standard. She's awkward, and not like her best friend who can freely mingle with everyone. Her family is not rich, and her best friend already has someone else. That simply made an impact on me. The story follows a Chinese-American queer teen, and her identity is relevant to the plot, but it's not the *plot*.

*My only complaint is that I wish the ending is more detailed.*

***Overall: the main themes of this book are jealousy, murder, and loyalty. A Line in the Dark is a great standalone novel. I'll be recommending it.***

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### **Allison says**

YES. GIMME MORE COMMERCIAL QUEER LADY GENRE YA FICTION.

I loooooooved this. Delightfully flirts those lines between obsession, love, and friendship. An unreliable narrator? \*thinky face emoji\* Oh my, yes.

Perfect for fans of Kara Thomas or, if I have to say it, E. Lockhart.

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### **CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says**

To be honest, I was expecting this to be better, as I LOVED her last SF duology, especially the first book *Adaptation*; those books were exciting and page-turning and had great alien conspiracies and bisexual romance. Unfortunately in *A Line in the Dark* there were quite a few things that didn't work for me: very awkward POV switch two thirds of the way through, flat characters, and just a general not great grip on the thriller genre conventions. The twist ending fell flat for me, partially because I didn't really care about the characters. It feels a bit like a novelist trying out a new genre that they're not really comfortable in or familiar with!

It felt like a break of the mystery/thriller contract between the author and reader; you can't just have a first person narrator omit a crucial scene but share everything else so that the reader doesn't have that information and then say, aha, look at what you didn't know! That's not how you structure a mystery and not how you do an unreliable narrator. I could tell what the book was trying to do (a kind of teen audience version of the best of Megan Abbott), and it certainly had potential, but it didn't deliver for me. At least it had POC lesbian characters? I don't know, maybe teen readers less picky about character and mystery plots will enjoy this just fine cause it's 'dark.'

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## **Danika at The Lesbrary says**

Oof. I can't say that was fun. It was quick read, and captivating, but even before it got into the mystery, it was painful to read. That toxic friendship and jealousy gets to me. No one is particularly likable, and there's no real moment of catharsis after that strangled, uncomfortable feeling that permeates the whole book. It's well done, but it wasn't exactly enjoyable for me (which is why I'm not rating it.)

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## **Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says**

Full review to come!

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## **Taryn Pierson says**

I don't read much realistic young adult fiction. It's just not my jam. I already lived through high school once and taught it for another four years, so when it comes to teen angst, I've graduated twice. But I love YA fiction that brings another element along with it, like a historical bent or a bizarre fantasy world or a dystopian nightmare scenario. *A Line in the Dark* is a delightful combo: a YA thriller. And it's super thrilling because it's a known and universally accepted fact that there is nothing scarier than a teenage girl.

Jess and Angie have been best friends forever, but there's always been unacknowledged tension between them because Jess's feelings are more intense than Angie's. When Angie starts dating a girl from the fancy private school across town, the tension grows into something bigger and more deadly. And that's probably all you need to know about the plot, because I don't want to take away from the slow burn and eventual catastrophic explosion of this book. Teenage girls, a love triangle, complicated feelings, backstabbing, and manipulation. What could be better?

I was nervous about this book because I'd seen some mixed reviews, but I took the risk and bought the hardcover anyway. I am delighted that I was totally vindicated! And now I have that beautiful, sinister cover to adorn my bookshelf and my Instagram feed. I don't think it's a spoiler content-wise to say that there's a big structural shift mid-book, and that's what some readers have taken issue with. For me, though, that perspective change is what elevates *A Line in the Dark* above all the predictably structured novels you can find on YA shelves today, and I say props to Malinda Lo for trying something new.

Highly recommended for fans of dark mysteries and authors like Megan Abbott.

More book recommendations by me at [www.readingwithhippos.com](http://www.readingwithhippos.com)

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## **Lily (Night Owl Book Cafe) says**

*A Line in the Dark* is a book that came highly recommended to me, and since I was already eyeballing it in the store, I felt like this would be perfect for a November read.

I was right, because I truly enjoyed this book.

The book follows a teenage girl named Jess, who is extremely passionate about drawing. Jess has a best friend named Angie and the two have been thick as thieves for a really long time, until Jess notices a girl approach Angie at the Creamery where she works and it kind of puts a wedge between them.

Margot is gorgeous and has her eye out on Angie, which makes Jess extremely uncomfortable and jealous because of her own feelings towards her best friend that she is unable to express or too scared to. The two start dating and Angie and Jess end up in a fight because Angie notices that Jess doesn't seem to like Margot but at the same time Angie isn't aware of Jess' feelings towards her.

Jess attends an art program at the school that Margot goes to (a boarding school for the wealthy) and that causes her to stumble onto some deep secrets that Margot and her best friend Ryan are hiding.

Well, this secret leads to Ryan's death after a Christmas party and these kids end up being investigated because they are the last to see Ryan alive.

This book is done in two parts. The beginning throws you into what happened, but the first part is before the incident and the second part is the investigation following the incident. I thought this book was really well done, I really enjoyed the writing, the characters, the plot was interesting. It had diversity, but it also had a plot.

This is not a book that is meant to be spooky, and I know some people felt that way when they saw the cover. This is actually a contemporary young adult with a mystery and a twist. It's about a girl, who is trying to sort of find herself as well as try to deal with the fact that the girl she is in love with, she cannot have.

This book, I am warning now, does not come with a happy ending. It is not a romance, even if it features a romance.

It also reads as an older Young Adult, it is sex positive, but no there are no explicit sex scenes in it. It does have drinking and some cursing.

I did have a hard time putting this down, I was completely invested in the plot line and the characters and I really wanted to know what happened. The ending threw a real curve ball and it was, I did not expect that but it explained some things.

The only issue I think I have is that, the beginning was not how the rest of the book completely unfolded and I felt that the killer should probably have been more affected maybe by what happened? But all in all, I really enjoyed this, it was an interesting read and I always appreciate a book with diversity and a good, engrossing plot line. This review was originally posted on Night Owl Book Cafe

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**Elise (TheBookishActress) says**

**This was weird. And not in a good way.**

I know this is marketing itself as dark, creepy, and atmospheric, but I'm going to be totally honest: it's not. **There is embarrassingly little atmosphere.** The tone is uninteresting, but occasionally inconsistent. And

truly, this book just doesn't go dark enough.

The only creepy thing about this book is something I'm pretty sure wasn't meant to be creepy - **Jess' crush on Angie**. I had a crush on my girl best friend once. It was deep. It was intense. **It was not this obsessive**. Guys, this crush is.... bad. I would actually be scared to have Jess as a friend. She unabashedly staring up Angie's crotch - *twice*. And honestly, yikes, that's not okay. If the author weren't a lesbian herself I'd call it the predatory lesbian trope, because that is *totally* how it feels.

And unfortunately, I feel like **Jess' lowkey creepy crush on Angie is the only part of the book that actually gets fleshed out**. Margot feels like a one-note villain. Angie feels like a blank slate pretty girl. Jess feels like a blank slate less pretty girl. Ryan feels like another one-note villain and a homophobe to boot. **None feel compelling**. The whole book feels as if it's intended to be an exploration of intense sapphic girl friendship and the line between friends and lovers, but **it just doesn't go there**. And the minimal exploration there is feels bogged down by the sheer creep factor of Jess' crush.

The other thing is that **the mystery isn't that compelling**. This is the kind of mystery that needs to be driven by characters, and these characters failed me. Worse, **the mystery doesn't pop up until the second half**, by which time I was already inwardly marking this down as a three at most. Oddly, the book is very clearly divided in half by **a very messy switch from first to third person in the middle of the book**, which honestly just made the book feel weirder.

The ending could've brought this to a three, but it honestly failed for me. **SOME SPOILERS AHEAD!!** (view spoiler) Perhaps I would've liked the ending if it had been explored in full in terms of how it effects these characters, but it honestly just kind of... **happens**. (view spoiler)

I *will* say that I'm sort of glad there are beginning to be more books with this much diversity so I feel like we can sort out the good from the bad? Maybe we'll get a whole *string* of YA-ish sapphic Asian girl thrillers next year. I fucking wish. But I'm super disappointed this fell into the bad category for me. I will say that **the writing is solid**, but there's just not much else. I'm sorry, guys, but this was a total disappointment.

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## Riley says

I really wanted to like this book :(

Pros:

- There's great diversity
- Asian main character
- queer girls

Cons:

- The first half of this book was so boring I almost quit many times
- I didn't like any of the characters so I just didn't care what happened to them
- there was a shift from first person to third in the second half that felt strange. it almost made this seem like two different books
- the thriller aspect wasn't at all thrilling and the conclusion was just annoying

I'm really sad I didn't like this book because Malinda Lo has written one of my all time favorite books but this one was overall a disappointment

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### Amanda says

3.5 rounded up

This book suffers from a bit of an identity crisis. The cover (which is what first drew me to the book) portrays a super creepy, goth feel but that's not really what the book is. The book itself is almost like 2 books. The first part is great. It's a first person narration through Jess. Jess is a high school girl trying to figure her life out. There is a lot here about identity and the intense friendships girls develop at this age. Then someone dies and it becomes a mystery/thriller. When that happens the narration switches to a third person omniscient narrator and loses some of the intensity. The reveal of the actually mystery itself feels rushed and is a bit predictable. All that being said, I still really liked this and tore through it wanting to know for sure how it all ended up.

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### Emily May says

I really feel like this book was **poorly marketed**. If you're anything like me, you were drawn in by that gorgeous and sinister cover, and a title that seems to promise something dark and creepy - but the book's content is very different. There were some things I liked, but overall **it lacked the darkness and thrills** required for a mystery/thriller.

Let's start with what I did like. I quickly realized that A Line in the Dark was not the book I was expecting; that it read more like a quiet contemporary about art and having an unrequited crush on your best friend. But I didn't mind this. Shattered expectations can be a good thing.

Jess wasn't entirely likeable, but she was a **complex and sympathetic character**. The relationship between Jess and Angie is told really well. The former always having felt like the weird, overweight, and less attractive sidekick to her beautiful best friend. I think her pain when Angie starts dating Margot is palpable and real, making me think this book might have made a better contemporary about the dynamics between them (yes, I am advocating a love triangle! pigs might fly yet).

I also like how Jess expresses her darkest emotions through comic book art, portraying a queer love triangle that obviously contains parallels to her real life. The art aspect was interesting and complemented the story without overtaking it (I, personally, am not a fan of plots where art is the main focus).

As I said, not what I was expecting, but not bad either. Then, around halfway through, the mystery/thriller angle is introduced. Suddenly, the book doesn't seem like it is about Jess's inner struggle, her complex relationship with Angie, queer romance OR art. It is about whodunnit, and it is **just not that thrilling**.

There's a **strange POV shift** at this point from Jess's first person narrative to an omniscient third person perspective. Lo changes everything you thought you were reading and I thought the shift was awkward and unneeded. A Line in the Dark went from being a quiet, thoughtful contemporary to being a mediocre thriller with a rushed (and fairly predictable) ending.



The whole second half of the book feels messy - from the move away from the things we had come to care about to the decision to tag the twist on in one single short chapter, making it not only predictable but anticlimactic as well.

A confusing read full of highs and lows.

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### **Joce (squibblesreads) says**

1.5 stars

**SEE MY VIDEO REVIEW HERE!**

Unfortunately this had everything I wanted but nothing was executed to my satisfaction. The two halves of the book did not come together (first person in the 1st half and 3rd person + texts and transcripts in the 2nd half). There was an excess use of the modifiers "really" and "super", which adds superfluous bulk to the writing and shows that the word choice wasn't strong enough and needs to improve. There were also times where one thing would be explained multiple times.

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### **Stacee says**

3.5 stars

I'm a sucker for a psychological thriller and the synopsis coupled with that gorgeous cover sold me.

I liked Jess well enough. She's loyal and smart and just a bit stalker-ish to keep me guessing on what she was up to. I felt like Angie, Margot, and Ryan were never really fleshed out. I'm not sure if it was on purpose, but it was quite effective in making me not trust anyone.

Plot wise it was more of a quiet anticipation than a thriller. It was slow moving, but I was interested the entire time. I would have liked more at the ending, especially after everything was revealed. It was a shock and then it was over. The only other thing is that it randomly shifts from first to third person and that felt clunky and took me out of the rhythm of the story.

Overall, it was a quick read with enough of a creepy factor to keep me engaged.

**\*\*Huge thanks to Dutton Books for providing the arc free of charge\*\***

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### **Acqua says**

4.75 stars

***A Line in the Dark* is the first contemporary mystery I've ever loved.**

It's a story about unhealthy friendships and relationships between three teenage girls, all three of them queer.

The narrator is Jess Wong. She's Chinese-American, she has always loved art, and she's in love with her best friend Angie. This crush is unrequited, and that becomes even more clear when popular, beautiful Margot starts flirting with Angie. But Margot and her rich friends are not good news - under the money and the pretty faces there are many secrets.

Not the ideal situation, but guess what - it gets worse.

I really liked Jess. She struggles to fit in, and she's not flawless. I love reading about contemporary characters who are flawed and somewhat unreliable narrators. They feel real to me.

All the side characters were memorable. Characters like Margot are fascinating and a bit scary, and Angie surprised me too. Everyone stood out to me.

Mystery/Thriller books with queer characters are not common, and *A Line in the Dark* is a mystery in which there are more than two lesbians, and none of them dies.

It's noteworthy that **I never had to force myself to read this. I was never bored.** And that rarely happens to me with contemporary books.

Half of this book is told in first person, the other half in third person present, and surprisingly, this didn't bother me. Maybe because I knew it was coming, maybe because I was really invested in the story, I don't know. But I think this PoV shift made sense.

However, I don't think the execution of the mystery aspect was perfect. The ending was unsatisfying, and it should have been longer. You shouldn't sacrifice the ending just because you want to shock the reader - that felt messy.

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