



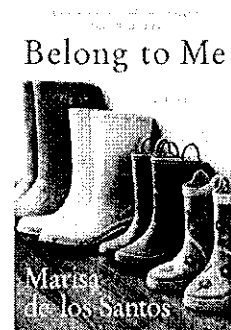
**Book:** **Belong to me (May 2008)**

**Author:** De los Santos, Marisa, 1966-

Adults  Fiction

**Description:** While Cornelia gains unexpected insight into her troubled marriage, Piper finds her carefully controlled life unraveling in the wake of a friend's crisis, and Lake tells a complex series of lies to gain her son's entry into a school for gifted students.

**Genre:** Chick lit; Contemporary romances; Domestic fiction; Love stories



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**Database:** NoveList

**Publishers Weekly:**

Cornelia Brown, heroine of de los Santos's bestselling *Love Walked In*, returns in a gracefully written if formulaic sophomore effort. Cornelia and her husband, Teo, move to suburban Philadelphia, where she finds it difficult to fit into the sorority-like atmosphere. Despite a bevy of domestic dramas (planning a family among them), Cornelia's first-person chapters are the quietest of the three points of view. Seemingly shallow and vicious, neighbor Piper shows her kinder side as she struggles through her best friend's fight against cancer. Though the extreme of Piper's two-facedness isn't convincing, her moments of sincerity invite genuine empathy. Cornelia also yields narrative time to Dev, a precocious teenager whose father is missing and whose mother develops a friendship with Cornelia. Dev's connection to the story is initially unclear, though he does grow close to Clare, a troubled teenager with an unconventional connection to Cornelia, and a late-breaking development grounds his role more firmly. Though each story line is a good read on its own, they don't always braid nicely, and while the predictable plot wanders into sappiness, the prose is polished and the suburban travails are familiar enough that fans of the women's fiction and higher-brow mommy lit will relate. (May) --Staff (Reviewed March 31, 2008) (Publishers Weekly, vol 255, issue 13, p38)

**Library Journal:**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Having met Cornelia Brown in de los Santos's well-reviewed debut, *Love Walked In*, we now follow her and her oncologist husband, Teo Sandoval, to suburban Philadelphia. Piper Truitt lives across the street with her husband and two young children. She considers herself the arbiter of style and local propriety. Add to the mix waitress Lake and her son, Dev, who is enrolled in a private academy far superior to his previous California public school. From the outset, Cornelia and Piper are traveling down different paths, while Cornelia and Lake seem to hit it off. Go figure? But there is more beneath the surface of these women and their motivations than the lovely locale can mask. Dev thinks he and his mother moved to the area because his long-lost (and unknown to him) father is there. But how do you go about locating someone who's been gone for 13 years? Then Piper becomes caregiver to her longtime friend Elizabeth, diagnosed with cancer, a role that seems more appealing to Piper than wife to Kyle. These family dynamics collide and reconfigure in a variety of ways that readers will find fascinating. De los Santos keeps us totally engaged with these fragile creatures, who get under our skin and, ultimately, into our hearts. Highly recommended. [See Prepub Alert, LJ 1/08.]--Bette-Lee Fox, Library Journal --Bette-Lee Fox (Reviewed March 1, 2008) (Library Journal, vol 133, issue 4, p74)

**Kirkus:**

In de los Santos's second novel (*Love Walked In*, 2006), Cornelia Brown returns as the heroine, now married to handsome oncologist Teo and trying to make a new home in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Having moved out of New York City after the double whammy of a miscarriage and 9/11, Cornelia finds herself a shunned outsider among the community's perfect blond matrons. Particularly unwelcoming is her tightly wound neighbor Piper, who is as sharp-tongued as she is judgmental about fashion, flowers and childrearing. Cornelia does begin a fledgling friendship with another newcomer, Lake, a waitress who has moved from California to enroll her genius 13-year-old son Dev in a special school after his previous school punished him for being too smart. Dev suspects there might be more to the move, that Lake may be moving them closer to the mystery father he's never met. As much as Cornelia likes Lake, she senses Lake holding back at crucial moments and responds in kind. Meanwhile, Piper turns out to be a far more complicated woman than she seems on the surface. She drops everything (but her children) to care for her best friend Elizabeth, who's in the last stages of cancer. By the time Cornelia succeeds in becoming pregnant, she and Piper have grown surprisingly close, each opening her heart a little to the other. Days after Elizabeth dies, Piper's husband leaves her and she finds herself an outcast for continuing her (platonic) involvement with Elizabeth's mourning husband and children. In another development, Dev stumbles on the truth Lake has been hiding and learns the identity of his father. The father is stunned; Cornelia is devastated; and oh-so-sensitive, intelligent Dev is furious. Needless to say, a happy ending awaits Cornelia, but readers will be far more interested in Piper, a complex, genuinely intriguing character. Pages on which she appears glow; the rest merely flicker. Witty and intelligent but too often pat. (Kirkus Reviews, February 1, 2008)

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Cornelia closer even as she harbors a shocking secret. And from the first page until the exhilarating conclusion, de los Santos engages readers with Cornelia, who, while trying to adapt to her new surroundings, must remain true to herself. As their individual stories unfold, the women become entangled in a web of trust, betrayal, love, and loss that challenges them in ways they never imagined, and that ultimately teaches them what it means for one human being to belong to another.

[top of the page](#)

## Discussion Questions

1. Each character faces a different challenge: what are these challenges and how do they handle them? Who has changed the most by the end of the novel?
2. When we meet Cornelia's neighbor, Piper, she is commenting on Cornelia's lawn and home, suggesting changes. Does she have a right to criticize Piper's lawn and home? How did this make you feel? What does it mean to be a good neighbor?
3. Piper confesses that she finds security through organizing, but when her best friend, Elizabeth becomes ill, this surprise rattles her carefully organized world. What does safety mean? What rituals, if any, do you have to create a feeling of safety?
4. What is Dev's relationship with his mother like? Do you think mothers and sons have a different relationship than mothers and daughters or fathers and sons? Why or why not? What do Dev and Lake learn from each other?
5. Part of the way into the story Dev embarks on a quest to find his father? What issues does he face? If you were Dev would you look for your father? Why or why not?
6. Near the end of the novel Lake says that everything she's done has been for Dev. Is this acceptable? Is it ok to lie to protect the people you love?
7. Do you think Clare's and Dev's relationship is an accurate depiction of first love? How does their relationship differ from the other romantic relationships in the novel? What do you think will happen between them in the future?
8. How would you describe Cornelia's childbirth experience? How does it lead her to make a decision that would change the lives of the people in her life?
9. What does "family" mean and how is this explored in the novel? Is it possible for one person to belong to another?
10. Cornelia compares life to the movies. What if any movie does the novel remind you of? What movie(s) would you compare your life to?

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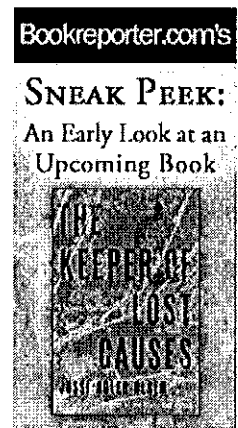
## Critical Praise

"The novel reveals layers of rich patina --- the story underneath is more complex, engaging, and surprisingly moving... de los Santos delivers an interconnected network of compelling little stories. Her writing is both vividly descriptive and surprisingly insightful."

—*Boston Globe*

"Prose that shines in moments of tenderness."

—*People*



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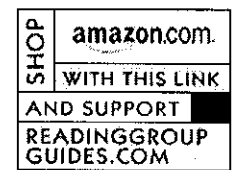
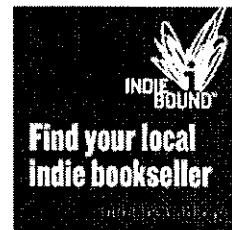
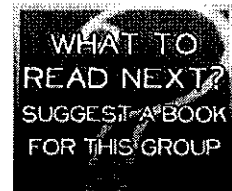
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"By the book's end, humanity is discovered in the unlikely places, and Cornelia learns that tempting as it is, you can't always judge a woman by her hairstyle."

—*New York Times*



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The child of a general surgeon hailing from Cebu City, Philippines and a nurse hailing from Westminster, Maryland, Marisa de los Santos grew up in Baltimore and Northern Virginia. She was a happy if somewhat neurotic kid, and had a little sister, Kristina, whom she both antagonized and adored, usually at the same time.

Enamored of Louisa May Alcott, Helen Keller, Joan of Arc, and Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, Marisa read while skating, turning cartwheels, descending stairs, and/or bathing, sometimes with disastrous results.

Marisa found early success with the publication of her poetry collection, *From The Bones Out*. However, her son Charles soon arrived. Along with being handsome and brilliant, Charles screamed more than any baby on the planet. Three years later, Charles's sister Annabel, also lovely and brilliant, also a maniac, made the scene. Their caterwauling, combined with Marisa's distractingly large love for them, made mustering the concentration necessary for writing poetry difficult, so she produced less and less. That's her story, anyway. (When in doubt, blame the kids.)

Around this time, Marisa started hearing a voice in her head. While this was initially a little weird, the voice turned out to belong to a fictional character, Cornelia Brown. Cornelia kept talking until Marisa was compelled to write *Love Walked In*.

Charles and Annabel turned out to be great kids.

Marisa was so smitten by fiction that she wrote a second novel, *Belong to Me*, which will be published by William Morrow on April 1, and she's now at work on book three.

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**Belong to Me**  
A Novel  
by Marisa de los Santos

List Price: \$14.99  
Pages: 416  
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About This Book

Everyone has secrets. Some we keep to protect ourselves, others we keep to protect those we love.

A devoted city dweller, Cornelia Brown surprised no one more than herself when she was gripped by the sudden, inescapable desire to leave urban life behind and head for an idyllic suburb. Though she knows she and her beloved husband, Teo, have made the right move, she approaches her new life with trepidation and struggles to forge friendships in her new home. Cornelia's mettle is quickly tested by judgmental neighbor Piper Truitt. Perfectly manicured, impeccably dressed, and possessing impossible standards, Piper is the embodiment of everything Cornelia feared she would find in suburbia. A saving grace soon appears in the form of Lake. Over a shared love of literature and old movies, Cornelia develops an instant bond with this warm yet elusive woman who has also recently arrived in town, ostensibly to send her perceptive and brilliant son, Dev, to a school for the gifted.

Marisa de los Santos's literary talents shine in the complex interactions she creates between these three women. She deftly explores the life-altering roller coaster of emotions Piper faces as she cares for two households, her own and that of her cancer-stricken best friend, Elizabeth. Skillfully, de los Santos creates an enigmatic and beguiling character in Lake, who draws

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