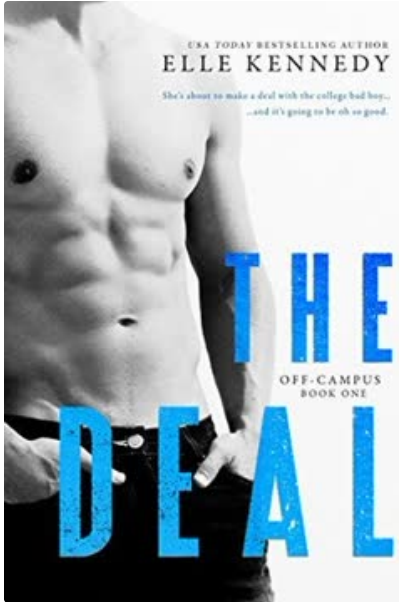


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Off-Campus #1

The Deal

by Elle Kennedy | 2015 | 342 pages

4.22 ★★★★★ 800k+ ratings

Romance

Sports Romance

New Adult



Listen

Plot Summary

Hannah's Unwanted Attention

Hannah's crush on Justin grows

Hannah Wells, a talented music student, harbors a secret crush on Justin Kohl, a football player who remains oblivious to her existence. Despite her academic prowess, Hannah struggles with self-esteem issues rooted in past trauma, which complicates her romantic life. Her attraction to Justin

symbolizes a longing for normalcy and connection, yet she doubts he would ever notice her. This internal conflict sets the stage for her journey of self-discovery and emotional growth.

Garrett's Academic Struggles

Garrett risks his hockey future

Garrett Graham, the confident captain of the hockey team, faces a crisis as his GPA threatens his eligibility to play, jeopardizing his professional aspirations. Desperate to maintain his standing, he seeks help from Hannah, the top student in their Ethics class. Despite their contrasting personalities, Garrett sees an opportunity to leverage Hannah's academic skills, initiating an unlikely partnership that will challenge both their perceptions and priorities.

A Deal is Struck

A mutually beneficial arrangement forms

Hannah reluctantly agrees to tutor Garrett in exchange for his help in making Justin notice her. Garrett proposes they attend a party together to elevate Hannah's social status and catch Justin's attention. Although hesitant, Hannah is enticed by the prospect of stepping out of her comfort zone and potentially winning Justin's affection. This pragmatic arrangement inadvertently sets the stage for deeper emotional entanglements.

Unexpected Chemistry Unleashed

The Kiss changes everything

During a study session, Garrett challenges Hannah to prove her kissing skills, leading to an unexpected and electrifying kiss. Both are taken aback by the intense chemistry that surfaces, but Hannah quickly dismisses it as a fluke. Garrett, however, is left questioning his feelings, realizing he might desire more than just a platonic relationship with Hannah. This pivotal moment shifts their dynamic and introduces new complexities to their arrangement.

Party Games and Realizations

Jealousy and attraction collide

At The Party, Garrett and Hannah's fake date strategy works too well, drawing Justin's attention. However, Garrett finds himself increasingly jealous and protective of Hannah, struggling with his growing attraction to her. Meanwhile, Hannah is torn between her long-standing crush on Justin and the undeniable connection she feels with Garrett. This tension forces both characters to confront their true feelings and the implications of their evolving relationship.

Trust and Vulnerability

Hannah lets her guard down

Garrett encourages Hannah to trust him and let loose during a bar outing, promising to keep her safe. For the first time, Hannah allows herself to relax and enjoy the night, thanks to Garrett's unwavering support. As they dance, Garrett reveals a vulnerable side, sharing a painful memory about his mother, which deepens their bond. This moment of shared Trust and Vulnerability leaves Hannah questioning her feelings and the nature of their relationship.

Confrontation and Confession

Hannah faces Garrett's father's ultimatum

Hannah is confronted by Garrett's father, Phil, who demands she break up with Garrett to prevent him from losing financial support. Phil's threats are clear: if she doesn't end the relationship, Garrett will be cut off financially, jeopardizing his education and hockey career. Despite her love for Garrett, Hannah feels trapped and reluctantly agrees to Phil's demands, believing it's for Garrett's own good. This confrontation sets the stage for a painful decision.

A Painful Breakup

Hannah ends things with Garrett

Struggling with the weight of Phil's Ultimatum, Hannah breaks up with Garrett, citing a need to explore other relationships. Garrett is devastated, sensing there's more to her decision than she's admitting. Despite his

heartbreak, he respects her wishes, though he remains unconvinced by her reasoning. This breakup challenges both characters to confront their emotions and the external pressures that threaten their relationship.

Garrett's Determination

Garrett refuses to give up

Garrett is determined to uncover the truth behind Hannah's sudden change of heart. He suspects her breakup reasons are fabricated and is relentless in his pursuit to win her back. His unwavering belief in their connection fuels his resolve, even as he faces the challenges of his hockey commitments and personal turmoil. Garrett's determination highlights his growth and commitment to both his career and his relationship with Hannah.

A New Year's Revelation

Hannah's call sparks hope

On New Year's Eve, Hannah calls Garrett to wish him a happy birthday, reigniting his hope. Their brief conversation is filled with unspoken emotions, and Garrett senses that Hannah's feelings for him haven't changed. This interaction strengthens his resolve to uncover the truth and rekindle their relationship. The call serves as a turning point, renewing Garrett's determination to fight for their love.

Reconciliation and Truth

The truth comes to light

Garrett confronts Hannah, demanding to know the real reason for their breakup. Hannah finally confesses Phil's threats, revealing her sacrifice to protect Garrett's future. Garrett is furious with his father but relieved to learn the truth. He reassures Hannah that his grandparents' Trust Fund secures his financial independence, rendering Phil's threats powerless. This revelation allows them to reconcile and rebuild their relationship on a foundation of honesty and trust.

Championship and Closure

Garrett triumphs on and off the ice

With the truth revealed and their relationship mended, Garrett leads his team to victory in The Championship Game. His success on the ice mirrors the personal victory of reclaiming his relationship with Hannah. As they celebrate, Garrett's father is left in the shadows, his influence diminished. Garrett and Hannah's love proves resilient, overcoming the obstacles that once threatened to tear them apart. This closure marks the culmination of their journey toward independence and self-discovery.

Characters

Hannah Wells

Talented yet insecure survivor

Hannah is a gifted music student haunted by past trauma, which affects her self-esteem and romantic life. Her crush on Justin represents a desire for normalcy and connection, but her unexpected chemistry with Garrett challenges her perceptions and forces her to confront her fears. Her journey is one of self-discovery, courage, and emotional growth.

Garrett Graham

Cocky athlete with hidden depths

Garrett is the confident captain of the hockey team, driven by the pressure to succeed and live up to his father's legacy. Beneath his bravado lies vulnerability and a longing for genuine connection, which he unexpectedly finds with Hannah, complicating his priorities. His determination and resilience are central to his character development.

Justin Kohl

Mysterious object of desire

Justin is the quiet, intense football player who unknowingly captivates Hannah. His reserved nature and intelligence intrigue her, but his true intentions remain unclear, leaving Hannah to question whether her feelings are reciprocated. He serves as a catalyst for Hannah's emotional journey.

Dean Heyward-Di Laurentis

Charming playboy and loyal friend

Dean is Garrett's charismatic and flirtatious roommate, known for his carefree attitude and numerous romantic conquests. Despite his antics, he values his friendships and provides comic relief and support to Garrett. His loyalty and humor add depth to the story.

Logan

Protective teammate with a soft spot

Logan is Garrett's best friend and teammate, known for his tough exterior and loyalty. He harbors a secret attraction to Hannah, adding tension to his friendship with Garrett as he navigates his feelings. His internal struggle adds complexity to his character.

Tucker

The nurturing chef of the group

Tucker is another of Garrett's roommates, known for his culinary skills and nurturing nature. He often plays the role of mediator and voice of reason among his friends, providing stability and support. His presence adds warmth and balance to the group dynamic.

Cass Donovan

Talented but egotistical duet partner

Cass is Hannah's demanding and self-centered duet partner for the winter showcase. His diva-like behavior and manipulative tactics create tension and frustration for Hannah, complicating their collaboration. He represents the challenges Hannah faces in her academic and personal life.

Mary Jane Harper

Shy songwriter caught in the middle

Mary Jane is the talented but timid songwriter of Hannah and Cass's duet. Her reluctance to assert herself allows Cass to dominate their rehearsals, leaving Hannah feeling unsupported and isolated. Her character highlights themes of self-assertion and collaboration.

Kendall

Scorned ex with lingering feelings

Kendall is Garrett's former hookup who struggles to accept their casual relationship's end. Her unresolved feelings for Garrett create tension and highlight his commitment issues. She serves as a reminder of Garrett's past and the growth he undergoes.

Phil Graham

Manipulative and controlling father

Phil is Garrett's father, whose influence looms over Garrett's life. His ultimatum to Hannah reveals his manipulative nature, as he prioritizes his own ambitions over his son's happiness. Phil's actions ultimately backfire, as Garrett's financial independence renders his threats ineffective.

Plot Devices

The Deal

A strategic partnership with unexpected consequences

The Deal between Hannah and Garrett serves as the catalyst for their evolving relationship. Initially a pragmatic arrangement to achieve personal goals, it inadvertently deepens their connection and forces them to confront their true feelings. This plot device drives the narrative and character development.

The Kiss

A moment of unexpected intimacy

The Kiss between Hannah and Garrett is a pivotal plot device that shifts their dynamic from platonic to potentially romantic. It introduces tension and uncertainty, challenging their perceptions and setting the stage for future developments. This moment is crucial in altering the course of their relationship.

The Party

A social experiment with unintended results

The Party serves as a backdrop for character interactions and revelations. It tests the boundaries of Hannah and Garrett's fake relationship, exposes hidden feelings, and propels the narrative forward by complicating their personal and social lives. The Party is a turning point in their journey.

Trust and Vulnerability

A theme of emotional growth and connection

Trust and Vulnerability are central to the characters' development, particularly for Hannah, who learns to let down her guard and rely on Garrett. This theme underscores their evolving relationship and highlights the importance of emotional support and understanding. It is a key element in their personal growth.

Phil's Ultimatum

A catalyst for conflict and growth

Phil's Ultimatum serves as the primary obstacle in Garrett and Hannah's relationship. It forces Hannah to make a difficult decision, ultimately leading to personal growth for both characters. The ultimatum also highlights Phil's manipulative nature and sets the stage for Garrett's eventual triumph over his father's influence.

The Trust Fund

A symbol of independence and security

Garrett's grandparents' Trust Fund represents his financial independence and security, freeing him from his father's control. The revelation of The Trust Fund is a turning point in the story, as it nullifies Phil's threats and allows Garrett to reclaim his relationship with Hannah without fear of financial repercussions.

The Championship Game

A metaphor for personal victory

The Championship Game serves as a metaphor for Garrett's personal victory over the challenges he faces. His success on the ice mirrors his triumph in reclaiming his relationship with Hannah, symbolizing the resilience and strength of their love. The Championship Game also marks the culmination of Garrett's journey toward independence and self-discovery.

Analysis

A tale of growth and resilience

"The Deal" by Elle Kennedy explores themes of self-discovery, resilience, and the power of genuine connection. Through the evolving relationship between Hannah and Garrett, the story highlights the importance of Trust and Vulnerability, and emotional support in overcoming personal and external challenges. The characters' journeys reflect the complexities of young adulthood, as they navigate academic pressures, family dynamics, and romantic entanglements. The narrative underscores the idea that true love requires courage and honesty, and that personal growth often stems from confronting one's fears and insecurities. Ultimately, the book conveys a message of empowerment and the transformative power of love and friendship.

Last updated: February 3, 2025

FAQ

Synopsis & Basic Details

What is The Deal about?

- **Fake Dating, Real Feelings:** The Deal centers on Hannah Wells, a music student with a crush, and Garrett Graham, a hockey captain needing academic help. They strike a deal: she'll tutor him, and he'll pretend to date her to make her crush jealous.

- **Unexpected Romance Blooms:** Their arrangement leads to unexpected chemistry and genuine feelings, forcing them to confront their vulnerabilities and desires. The story explores the evolution of their relationship from a pragmatic agreement to a deep emotional connection.
- **Personal Growth and Challenges:** Both characters face personal challenges, including past traumas and family pressures, which test their relationship and force them to grow. The narrative focuses on their individual journeys as much as their romantic entanglement.

Why should I read **The Deal**?

- **Compelling Character Dynamics:** **The Deal** offers a captivating exploration of two contrasting characters, Hannah and Garrett, whose initial animosity evolves into a deep and passionate connection. Their witty banter and emotional vulnerability make them relatable and engaging.
- **Emotional Depth and Growth:** Beyond the romance, the story delves into themes of self-discovery, overcoming past trauma, and the importance of trust and vulnerability. The characters' personal journeys add layers of complexity and emotional depth to the narrative.
- **Engaging Plot and Pacing:** The book combines a compelling plot with a fast-paced narrative, keeping readers hooked from beginning to end. The unexpected twists and turns, along with the characters' evolving relationship, make for an addictive and satisfying read.

What is the background of The Deal?

- **College Campus Setting:** The story is set at Briar University, a fictional college known for its hockey and football programs. This setting provides a backdrop for the characters' academic and athletic pursuits, as well as their social interactions.
- **Cultural Emphasis on Sports:** The book highlights the cultural significance of sports, particularly hockey, in Massachusetts. The pressure on athletes to excel both academically and athletically is a recurring theme, influencing Garrett's character arc.
- **Contemporary College Life:** The Deal reflects contemporary college life, including the social dynamics of Greek life, the pressures of academic performance, and the challenges of navigating relationships. The story captures the essence of young adulthood and self-discovery.

What are the most memorable quotes in The Deal?

- **"I'm not asking you to take your clothes off, baby. I just want to peek at your midterm.":** This quote, spoken by Garrett, encapsulates his initial cocky and presumptuous attitude, highlighting his character's initial arrogance and disregard for Hannah's boundaries. It also foreshadows the unexpected connection that will develop between them.

- **"You're not his type.":** This blunt statement, delivered by Garrett to Hannah, reveals his understanding of Justin's superficial preferences and serves as a catalyst for Hannah to reevaluate her own desires. It also highlights Garrett's growing protectiveness and his desire to challenge Hannah's perceptions.
- **"I'm not going to try anything, Wellsy. It's just a ride home.":** This quote, spoken by Garrett, showcases his attempt to reassure Hannah and gain her trust, despite his reputation as a "player." It reveals a more vulnerable side to his character and foreshadows the genuine connection that will develop between them.

What writing style, narrative choices, and literary techniques does Elle Kennedy use?

- **Dual Point of View:** Kennedy employs a dual point of view, alternating between Hannah and Garrett's perspectives. This allows readers to gain insight into both characters' thoughts and feelings, enhancing the emotional depth and complexity of the narrative.
- **Witty Banter and Dialogue:** The author uses witty banter and sharp dialogue to create engaging and realistic interactions between the characters. The dialogue is often laced with sarcasm and humor, reflecting the characters' personalities and their evolving relationship.
- **Emotional Intensity and Vulnerability:** Kennedy balances the lighthearted moments with intense emotional scenes, exploring themes of past trauma, self-doubt, and the challenges of vulnerability. The

author uses vivid descriptions and internal monologues to convey the characters' emotional states.

Hidden Details & Subtle Connections

What are some minor details that add significant meaning?

- **Hannah's Pepper Spray:** Hannah's habit of carrying pepper spray and having 911 on speed dial reveals the lasting impact of her past trauma and her need for control and safety. This detail underscores her vulnerability and the challenges she faces in trusting others.
- **Garrett's Tattoo:** The description of Garrett's arm tattoo as black flames hints at his inner turmoil and the intensity of his emotions. This detail foreshadows his passionate nature and his hidden depths, which are gradually revealed throughout the story.
- **The Recurring "Baby":** Garrett's frequent use of the term "baby" as a form of address, initially dismissive and presumptuous, evolves into a term of endearment, reflecting his growing affection for Hannah. This subtle shift highlights his character development and the changing dynamics of their relationship.

What are some subtle foreshadowing

and callbacks?

- **The "Baby" Nickname:** Garrett's initial use of "baby" as a dismissive term evolves into a genuine term of endearment, foreshadowing his growing affection for Hannah. This subtle shift highlights his character development and the changing dynamics of their relationship.
- **Hannah's Music Choices:** Hannah's eclectic taste in music, ranging from Etta James to One Direction, foreshadows her complex personality and her ability to appreciate different forms of expression. This detail also hints at her hidden depths and her capacity for emotional vulnerability.
- **The Mention of the Trust Fund:** The casual mention of Garrett's grandparents' trust fund early in the story foreshadows his financial independence and his ability to defy his father's control. This detail becomes significant later when Phil Graham's threats are rendered powerless.

What are some unexpected character connections?

- **Logan and Justin's Friendship:** The revelation that Justin is friends with one of Garrett's roommates, Logan, creates an unexpected connection between the two rivals. This detail adds complexity to their dynamic and highlights the interconnectedness of the characters' social circles.

- **Phil Graham's Connection to Boston:** The fact that Phil Graham finished his career in Boston and decided to stay in Massachusetts after he retired explains why Garrett ended up at Briar University. This detail adds depth to Garrett's backstory and his relationship with his father.
- **Hannah and Beau's Shared Experience:** The revelation that Beau Maxwell, the quarterback, had seen Hannah perform in the spring showcase creates an unexpected connection between them. This detail highlights Hannah's talent and her impact on others, even those outside her immediate circle.

Who are the most significant supporting characters?

- **Allie:** As Hannah's best friend and roommate, Allie provides unwavering support and a voice of reason. Her loyalty and protectiveness highlight the importance of female friendships in the story. She also serves as a foil to Hannah, showcasing a more outgoing and socially adept personality.
- **Logan:** As Garrett's best friend and teammate, Logan provides both comic relief and emotional support. His loyalty and protectiveness towards Garrett highlight the importance of male friendships in the story. His internal struggle with his feelings for Hannah adds complexity to his character.
- **Cindy:** As Phil Graham's girlfriend, Cindy serves as a foil to Hannah, highlighting the manipulative nature of Phil and the vulnerability of women in his orbit. Her character adds depth to the story and

underscores the theme of abuse and control.

Psychological, Emotional, & Relational Analysis

What are some unspoken motivations of the characters?

- **Hannah's Need for Validation:** Hannah's initial pursuit of Justin is driven by a need for validation and a desire to feel desirable after her past trauma. This unspoken motivation underscores her insecurity and her longing for acceptance.
- **Garrett's Fear of Vulnerability:** Garrett's initial resistance to a serious relationship stems from a fear of vulnerability and a desire to maintain control over his life. This unspoken motivation highlights his emotional guardedness and his struggle to reconcile his personal desires with his professional aspirations.
- **Phil Graham's Need for Control:** Phil Graham's manipulative behavior is driven by a deep-seated need for control and a desire to maintain his image as a successful and powerful figure. This unspoken motivation underscores his narcissistic tendencies and his inability to prioritize his son's happiness.

What psychological complexities do the

characters exhibit?

- **Hannah's Trauma and Insecurity:** Hannah's past trauma manifests as insecurity, a fear of vulnerability, and a need for control. Her psychological complexities are explored through her internal monologues and her cautious approach to relationships.
- **Garrett's Internal Conflict:** Garrett's internal conflict between his desire for a serious relationship and his fear of vulnerability is a central aspect of his character. His psychological complexities are revealed through his guarded behavior and his struggle to reconcile his personal desires with his professional aspirations.
- **Phil Graham's Narcissism and Control:** Phil Graham's narcissistic tendencies and need for control are central to his character. His psychological complexities are explored through his manipulative behavior and his inability to prioritize his son's happiness.

What are the major emotional turning points?

- **The Kiss:** The unexpected kiss between Hannah and Garrett is a major emotional turning point, as it forces them to confront their growing attraction and the potential for a deeper connection. This moment shifts their dynamic and introduces new complexities to their arrangement.

- **Hannah's Confession:** Hannah's confession about her past trauma to Garrett is a major emotional turning point, as it reveals her vulnerability and her willingness to trust him. This moment deepens their bond and sets the stage for their relationship to evolve.
- **The Breakup and Reconciliation:** The breakup and subsequent reconciliation between Hannah and Garrett are major emotional turning points, as they force both characters to confront their true feelings and the external pressures that threaten their relationship. These moments highlight the resilience of their love and their commitment to each other.

How do relationship dynamics evolve?

- **From Animosity to Attraction:** The relationship between Hannah and Garrett evolves from initial animosity and a pragmatic arrangement to a deep and passionate connection. Their witty banter and contrasting personalities create a dynamic that is both engaging and emotionally complex.
- **From Fake to Real:** The fake dating trope is used to explore the evolution of their relationship, as their initial pretense gradually gives way to genuine feelings. This transition highlights the power of vulnerability and the unexpected nature of love.
- **From Individual to Interdependent:** The characters' individual journeys of self-discovery are intertwined with their evolving relationship, as they learn to rely on each other for support and understanding. This interdependence underscores the transformative power of love and friendship.

Interpretation & Debate

Which parts of the story remain ambiguous or open-ended?

- **The Future of Phil Graham:** The story leaves the future of Phil Graham ambiguous, as it is unclear whether he will ever change his manipulative ways or reconcile with his son. This open-ended aspect allows readers to ponder the complexities of family dynamics and the challenges of overcoming toxic relationships.
- **The Long-Term Impact of Trauma:** While Hannah makes significant progress in overcoming her past trauma, the story leaves open the question of its long-term impact on her life and relationships. This ambiguity underscores the ongoing nature of healing and the challenges of living with past experiences.
- **The Nature of Love and Relationships:** The story explores the complexities of love and relationships, leaving open the question of whether there is a single definition of true love or a perfect relationship. This ambiguity encourages readers to reflect on their own experiences and beliefs about love and connection.

What are some debatable, controversial

scenes or moments in The Deal?

- **The "Fake" Relationship:** The initial arrangement between Hannah and Garrett, where they use each other to achieve personal goals, can be seen as manipulative and unethical. This aspect of the story raises questions about the nature of relationships and the boundaries of consent.
- **Garrett's Initial Behavior:** Garrett's initial cocky and presumptuous behavior, particularly his use of the term "baby," can be seen as problematic and disrespectful. This aspect of the story raises questions about gender dynamics and the challenges of overcoming harmful stereotypes.
- **Hannah's Decision to Break Up:** Hannah's decision to break up with Garrett to protect him from his father can be seen as both selfless and misguided. This moment raises questions about the nature of sacrifice and the challenges of making decisions for others.

The Deal Ending Explained: How It Ends & What It Means

- **Triumph Over Adversity:** The ending of The Deal sees Garrett and Hannah triumph over the obstacles that threatened to tear them apart. Garrett's team wins the championship game, and he and Hannah

reconcile, reaffirming their love and commitment to each other. This ending underscores the power of resilience and the importance of fighting for what you believe in.

- **Reclaiming Independence:** The ending also highlights Garrett's newfound financial independence, which allows him to defy his father's control and reclaim his own life. This aspect of the story emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and the challenges of breaking free from toxic relationships.
- **A Future of Love and Support:** The ending suggests a future of love and support for Garrett and Hannah, as they embark on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth together. This aspect of the story underscores the transformative power of genuine connection and the importance of finding someone who accepts and loves you for who you are.

Review Summary

★★★★☆ 4.22 out of 5

Average of 800k+ ratings from Goodreads and Amazon.

The Deal received mostly positive reviews, praised for its engaging characters, witty banter, and steamy romance. Readers enjoyed the chemistry between Hannah and Garrett, as well as the realistic portrayal of college life. Some criticized the book for perpetuating stereotypes and misogynistic attitudes. The story was described as a fun, entertaining read with a good balance of humor, emotion, and sexual tension. Many readers found it addictive and recommended it as one of the better New Adult romance novels available.

About the Author

Elle Kennedy is a bestselling author known for her romance novels. She grew up near Toronto and realized her passion for writing at a young age. Kennedy has a B.A. in English from York University and began actively pursuing her writing career as a teenager. She writes for various publishers, specializing in stories featuring strong heroines and alpha heroes with just the right amount of heat and danger. Her books have appeared on the New York Times, USA Today, and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists. Kennedy's success in the romance genre has made her a popular name among readers of contemporary and new adult fiction.