

There's a direct correlation between reading and writing for me. What does that mean, you ask? Simply put, the more I read, the more I write. Even if I read a book I absolutely could not stand, I can often get to the end and say, "Wow I really liked the way the author..." I'm always on the lookout for clever ways authors worked in various techniques. Ways that they spin old stories to make them fresh and new. And of course, I adore getting lost in a beautiful story.

I thought I'd share, at least some of, the books I read each month. Sometimes I manage to read a ton, take March for example, where I blew through 10 books. I mean, I couldn't possibly start the Anne series and just leave it hanging now, could I?

Other-times I read less. July has turned into that. I've been on the go a lot this month and thus I've had less time to read. I also hit a bit of a reading wall. You know, where you read a REALLY amazing book, and then find it hard to get lost in anything else thereafter. I'm not alone on this, right?

I'm always curious to hear what people think of books, or to learn of new titles that might interest me, and I figure if you're game enough to read most of what I write, you might also enjoy hearing about the books I read. Of course, I'm not generally on the "it's hot and new, so I must read it" trend, which means most of what I share will be old news, but who knows maybe you'll find a few gems.

Without further ado, here are the books I read in June of 2022:

1. The Cottage By The Sea by Debbie Macomber.

Now, I have to confess romance is not my genre of choice. In fact, a couple of years ago I read my first one by mistake. That's a long story best saved for another day in which I mistook one author for another and was confused as to why I was reading a sweet love story instead of a deep mystery. But never mind that. Back to the book at hand.

Macomber was inspired to write this story, drawing in on her grief for those on the West

Coast who lost loved ones due to the mudslide in 2014. Now I confess, when I read the Author's Note at the start of the book, I was taken aback. Living on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, I had not heard about this event, and I listened intently to the information shared.

In *Cottage By The Sea*, Annie Marlow loses her entire family in that mudslide. She harbors guilt and grief all mixed up in one big ball of emotions. She'd been invited to go home for Thanksgiving, but the insistent invite had come after she'd made plans with friends and a cousin. She declined the offer and promised to be home for Christmas, which of course magnifies her guilt.

Her therapist, cousin, and aunt encourage her to find her happy place, and Annie takes the advice quite literally, remembering the one place her entire family was together and always happy. That one week in summer when they stayed in *the cottage by the sea*.

Annie feels such peace when she goes to visit the small town, she decides she's going to move there. Immediately. Things have changed since her last visit, the elderly couple who once owned the cottage, have left their property to their prickly granddaughter, Mellie.

Mellie appears to be healthy, but housebound, and Annie is determined to befriend her and get to the bottom of why Mellie never leaves the house. There's Brit, a local teen with a difficult family, that Annie also befriends. And then there's Keaton who is fiercely protective of Annie even though she doesn't remember him from her childhood days.

There is some predictability to the story, but enough twists and turns that it kept me reading and cheering Annie and Keaton on, and wondering about Mellie. I'd rank this story as my top read for June.

2. *The Perfect Family*, by Shalini Boland.

This was listed as a thriller, and having previously read a book by this author and not finding them to be edge of my seat, can't sleep at night, style thrillers I decided to give it a read.

What I appreciate about Boland's books is that I find them difficult to put down due to her clever use of cliffhanger endings with each and every chapter. This book volleys, for a while, between two voices. That of the main character, Gemma, & a mysterious person we only know as a woman based on the things described in the short chapters.

Gemma is getting ready for work one day when her young daughter goes missing, the front door is ajar and she can't find her child anywhere. The situation is quickly resolved, which surprised me, as I anticipated that the entire book would be about finding the child. However, despite the return of her young daughter, Gemma's day goes from bad to worse.

Throughout the remainder of her day, and into the next she begins to believe her husband and Mother-in-Law might be right, and she may need a nanny to help with the children. She resents this, wanting to be the working mother who can also raise her own children, but the escapade of the missing child in the opening chapter leads Gemma to agree to a nanny.

The family interviews one recommended candidate and is quickly in love with the young girl. The problem is, as soon as the new nanny enters their lives things seem to be going well in the work world, but not so much at home.

To avoid giving away any spoilers with the book, I'll just state that there is the typical idea that perhaps the husband and nanny are having an affair. Things spiral from there, and it is not until the very last sentence that you find a form of closure in who, or what, was behind all the escapades as Gemma and her family attempt to return to life without a nanny.

I felt this book left off with such a shocking ending, that I confess I ran off to see if there was a sequel. To my knowledge, there is not. If you're looking for a quick page turner, I highly recommend this book.

3. The Family Holiday, by Shalini Boland.

Yes, I read two books by the same author in one month. I was in a bit of a reading funk, and was looking for something to really pull me in. And, to a degree, Boland's books do this for

the day or so it takes me to read them.

In this particular story Beth and her husband Niall, who's most certainly a narcissist, decide on a sudden family holiday. Beth has wanted one for a long time, but Niall had always disagreed, until the day he suggests the idea himself. Beth jumps, but then becomes leery with the idea of a house swap with a strange family.

She's not sure she wants strangers wandering through her home while she's not there, nor is she sure she wants to sleep in a stranger's home. But in the end she agrees. She texts Amber, the wife of the family they will be house swapping with. Everything is well arranged by the two wives, and we follow Beth and Niall to Italy, where trouble begins almost immediately when the car Amber told them would be waiting for them is nowhere to be found.

Then the home they are staying in is broken into, shaking everyone. Although Niall quickly blames Beth, telling her it's because she probably left a bathroom window open. The local police assure the family it's a once off thing, and tells them they can rest peacefully.

However, the police are wrong, which is where I'll stop so as not to give away too many spoilers about the book. Needless to say things continue to get worse for Beth and Niall. You follow both families' journeys through the wife's viewpoint.

It is not until you get to the epilogue that you find out the entire truth behind what happened. It was very much a "gotcha" moment. Again, another quick read due to the lack of self control to stop turning the pages.

4. The Sometimes Sisters, by Carolyn Brown.

Yet another romance, kinda funny for a person who just said this isn't their normal genre to read. In fact, neither are thrillers and yet I read two of those this month as well.

The Sometimes Sisters, so named because the three girls only saw each other once a year for

a week each summer when they stayed with their Grannie Annie at her rustic lakeside resort. It's been years since the sisters have seen each other or spoken, and it's only the death of their grandmother that brings them together.

She's left them "Annie's Place", the lakeside resort. She's assigned them each a job in her will, and specific instructions on how various aspects of the resort are to be run. Her greatest hope is that by leaving them something that meant so much to her, and she hopes that it will draw them together to see how much they have in common, as opposed to the bickering that drove them apart.

Each sister is hiding their own secret, and their *perfect* worlds are not as perfect as their sister's think. But, then, neither was Grannie Annie's. She took a secret to her grave, and it is only by coming together and uniting as sisters that Dana, Harper, and Tawny will find out what it is.

5. *Alas Babylon*, by Pat Frank.

I know this is an older book, but I'd yet to read it and decided to pull it out in June. I found it very slow going at first, and even once the climatic moment occurred, I still really struggled to fall in love with the book.

The story is based on the premise of a giant "what if" between the author and a friend. The "what if" being, 'What if Russia dropped a nuclear bomb on the US, how bad would the fall out be?' The author expands on that what if, and the result is the story *Alas Babylon*.

We follow a family in Florida, in the one town that was, somehow, miraculously spared fallout from the nuclear bomb that went off. This doesn't leave them without their own struggles though, of which plenty abound. There is no electricity, money is worthless, water is tainted. Salt has become the highest commodity one can have. There is no law and order, and someone needs to stand up and take charge, but is anyone game enough to deal with the drifters?

Honestly, I did not love this book. I enjoyed seeing how the author's mind worked on the "what-if" questions that had been posed to him. I enjoyed the way he masterfully crafted some simple mentions in the beginning of the book that became incredibly important towards the end.

Maybe it was growing up with parents who felt the true impact of the Cold War, maybe it was also how some of that impacted my younger years as a child. Maybe it's just that I'm not really into war books. Or, maybe, after hearing this book really hyped up, I expected more from it than I got. Either way, I'm glad I read it, but I'm not likely to revisit it again.

6. The Windsor Knot, by SJ Bennet.

Okay, so true confession here: I opted to read this book when I spotted it more for research purposes than anything else. How's that for a bit of a tease as to what some of the content of my next book might be about? Having said that, I also thought the premise of this book sounded interesting: Queen Elizabeth II helping solve a murder.

The book takes place in 2016 just ahead of Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday, when it's discovered that a guest in the Windsor Castle has been found dead. There are a few unusual things found with the body, including a badly tied knot that leads M15 to believe this might be an "inside" job, most likely by Russia.

The story bends and weaves in a few directions. You hear of what M15 is up to with their investigation, mostly annoying the staff and suspecting all the wrong people. You follow Queen Elizabeth through her royal duties, and gloss over some of the fun she has had. She quietly enlists her new Assistant Private Secretary to do some undercover work to get to the bottom of what really happened to the deceased guest.

I can't really put my finger on why I didn't enjoy this story. Perhaps it's because my husband's parent's originate from Britain, and I could hear my mother-in-law both chuckling and scowling at the same time. Maybe it's because the book was set in modern times and very real, and I was hoping for something more fanciful. Maybe it's because I didn't pay

enough attention to the cleverly hidden ruses and wasn't entirely sure where the whole mystery was going. Maybe it was because I was still ruminating atomic bombs from my previous read. Maybe it's because I needed a lighter read. Whatever it was, I'm torn on reading any more in the series, but you never know if her majesty might call again.



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I recently stumbled across a fun idea to select a personal book of the year. The idea was to write down your favorite book that you read each month, and then slowly, you'd wind it down to 6 books, then 3 books, and then select the final book as your book of the year. I decided this was such a clever idea I'd give it a go, only the problem is I couldn't decide if I should backtrack and write down my favorite books from each month read thus far, or if I should just start all over again. Either way, if you'd like to give it all a spin, you can [download the printable I made here](#) if you'd like. No strings attached, because I rather like to get freebies myself with absolutely no strings attached.

If you're wondering why I shared June's books instead of July's, that's because July is not quite over yet at the time I'm writing this. In fact, I still have exactly 4 more days to try and finish the second book in a series I'm currently enjoying. I thought it not quite fair to discuss a book I hadn't read cover to cover, so I went with my stack from June. I'd love to hear what you're reading, if you'd like to take the time to leave a comment and let me know.

The Reluctant Author.

