

Breach Of Promise by James Scott Bell — I was really excited to read a book by Bell, I've read many of his "how to's" for writing and editing and thoroughly enjoyed the tips and tricks he's shared. In fact, it was his book on [Revision And Self-Editing](#) that spurred extreme action in one of my manuscripts and helped me find the needed tension, clean up the messy parts, and finish something I could be proud of.

I'm currently reading, very slowly, [another of his how-to books](#), and he references some of his own published works because it's less frustrating than getting copyright permissions. It inspired me to finally hunt down a copy {or two} of his fictional titles and give them a read. I'm actually somewhat ashamed to admit this, but I was disappointed.

It's not that the story line was bad, it wasn't. I could also see how many of the techniques he'd written about were used in his own work. Sometimes to the frustration of me {the reader}, but it all came together. It had the perfect gotcha moment, which is probably when I stopped wishing the book was over and was actually curious what would happen next.

I think the core problem, for me, was that it was Christian Fiction. I've read a lot of Christian fiction over the years. Some of it has been pretty amazing, and some of it has made me roll my eyes and move on. The difference, for me, comes when I feel preached at, vs just letting the story naturally unfold. I felt there was a heavy dose of preaching in this particular book, which might sound like a "duh" moment since the main character went to church a few times and the message taught was shared, but I felt like it broke one of the Bell's own cardinal rules: Don't shove your theme down the reader's throat. Tell the story.

Mara Daughter Of The Nile by Eloise Jarvis McGraw — This book has been on the shelf since way back when my kids studied ancient history for the final time in their high school years. Having an abundance of choices for the Ancient Egypt time period we never got to this particular title, which is a shame because it was an amazing book.

Mara is a slave, who is tired of being starved, and abused by her master. She sneaks away, when she can, to town and steals a few bits of bread to fill her belly. One day, after doing so she's preparing for the punishment due her, when someone "purchases" her. He offers her freedom, if she will be his spy in the Egyptian palace.

While enroute to the palace, another man approaches her and tells her the same thing, except he expects her to spy on the opposite side. Mara, forbidden by both men to tell anyone who she is and what she's up to accepts both jobs figuring she's bound to be successful as both sides will play into her hands. The only problem is, she's fallen in love with someone and his alliance with the would-be-rightful-king is strong. Mara is faced with hard choices as she continues her secret mission(s), unaware that the man she's in love with is also in love with her until he thinks she's betrayed him.

Mara, willing to prove herself, is sentenced to death in an effort to make things right and to show she was not a traitor amongst the small band of rebels. The only question left is: will the rebels arrive in time to save her life?

This was one of those books that was hard to put down, with nearly every chapter ending in a cliffhanger leaving Mara somewhere she shouldn't be or in risk of being found out. I fully enjoyed it, and breathed a sigh of relief upon reaching the end. Not just because Mara's fate was known, but so that I could finally sleep.

Homecoming by Kate Morton — Remember last month when I mentioned my favorite author had a new title coming out? Well, I managed to pick up a couple of copies. Yes, a couple. I snagged the [audio](#) while I waited for my copy with the [Australian cover](#) to arrive in the mail. I'm glad I did, because despite the length of this book, I plowed through it, got to the end and wanted to read it all over again.

Jess, down on her luck in love and work, is living in England when she receives a phone call informing her that Nora, her grandmother, has fallen and is in hospital. Being away for so long it's hard for Jess to imagine Nora as old and frail, much less frail enough to fall down the attic stairs.

Jess returns to [NSW](#) to be with her grandmother, to get to the bottom of why Nora was in the attic, and to find out what the deathbed ramblings her grandmother is whispering are all about. To find the answer Jess must open old wounds and uncover dark family secrets that will impact not only her own life, but that of her estranged mother's. All while wondering if it's possible to return home again, the later being a topic rather close to my heart.

In typical Morton fashion the story is woven moving back and forth in time, far more being revealed to the reader than to all the characters in the book. And no matter how much you think you have it all figured out, you have to get to the end to find out if you're right.

One of the things I found both terrifying and delightful about this book is that Nora, the sweet doting grandmother, is also a villain. You'd have to read the book to see if you agree with my assessment. She's the type of villain we *could* all be if we, too, were faced with one hardship stacked upon another. Facing our breaking point, being willing to do whatever one can to save ourselves from madness. Then doing whatever it takes to protect that secret, even if it means alienating your children from friends and love, and eventually their own child.

I also have to add, because this made me chuckle so much, that a big error slipped past the editors and it caught me off guard for a minute. At some point within the story Jess, who has lived in England for many years now, rents a car and is driving it in Australia. Morton perfectly captures the trials and tribulations of what it is like being a seasoned driver and yet being thrown in a situation where you are attempting to navigate your vehicle on the opposite side of the road.

Having been off the Island for over two years now, I will still, on occasion, hit my windscreen wipers instead of my turn signal. Or worse yet, be traveling on a road in the opposite direction compared to normal and have a moment of complete panic come over me as I begin to think I'm on the wrong side of the road.

The flaw here is that in England they drive on the exact same side of the road as one does in Australia. Thus, despite the scene that made me smile because I felt so deeply for the stress that Jess was feeling, she wouldn't have experienced that because both countries drive on the left hand side of the road! It made me doubt my knowledge and set off googling just to be sure I hadn't gone crazy.

A Deadly Grind by Victoria Hamilton — This is one of those books that's been in my Audible library for so long I don't remember how, when, or why I acquired it. I've started it twice and never gotten very far. But, I was completely out of books to read, and credits to spend with Audible, sitting in a car in the middle of a large Wal-Mart parking lot waiting on

the guys to grab things. So, I scanned my Audible Library, snagged this book and decided to give it another go.

I'm not going to lie, it was still a bit of a struggle, even with the speed turned up to force myself to concentrate. Jaymie and her sister, Becca, are at an auction where Jaymie purchases an original Hoover after outbidding two other people. Her sister is horrified because the small house they co-own is already full to the brim with junk.

When they bring the piece home it's put on the enclosed back porch. And right from that moment forward the book becomes predictable and dry. The guest staying at the B&B next door asks incredibly nosey questions that no-one in their right mind would answer: Do you have an alarm system, do you live here alone, do you work, what times, etc.

You knew she was being set up to be robbed as soon as those questions started flowing. And, she was. Sometime in the middle of the night a commotion wakes Jaymie and Becca and they find a dead man on their porch, and no one knows who he is.

The book moves forward as the police attempt to solve the crime and Jaymie works on the side to try and assist. Unlike other cozy mysteries, though, it felt a lot like Jaymie was just wandering around her town giving us the lay of the land and not actually accomplishing anything. Her need to be in certain places at certain times to witness or overhear things felt contrived. I really struggled to push through to the end of this book.

I appreciated the historical background of the small town that is sister to one in Canada. I enjoyed reading about the annual Tea With the Queen, and the small town angst and frustrations were more than believable having lived in a small town myself. I really loved the author's depiction of "pee mail" for the dogs, too. I know, small minds, and all that. But it did crack me up.

The book picked up a lot of speed towards the end, and I do mean almost the bitter end where Jaymie lands herself in a near death experience attempting to find some clues to offer the police about the mysterious couple who make no sense throughout the story. When I say "no sense" I'm referring to how Jaymie felt, I suspected they were part of the crime although

to what extent I wasn't sure.

And before you slam me too much for being down about another writer, I'm going to confess that I have the next book in the series on hold through my library's [Libby App](#). Yep, I do. Because I'm curious if the next book will be a little quicker and more action packed since the town and its people are already established. Plus, the author left us with a little something at the end of the book that made me sigh and realize I was going to most certainly have to attempt to read the next title in the series.

The Keeper Of Lost Things by Ruth Hogan — While on the [Libby App](#) I opted to have a look for a few books I'd heard chatter about, and was delighted to find this one available. I must warn you that if you opt to read this book, it ensnares you from the start and becomes difficult to put down.

Anthony Peardew is a collector of things. Lost things. It doesn't matter where he finds them, if the rightful owner is not found on the spot, he brings them home, labels them, and stores them for safekeeping until the owner can be found. The only problem is, until his death, no one knows about the lost things hidden in his office.

That is until his assistant Laura inherits everything. With two exceptions. One, she must not change the rose garden. It was made for Anthony's would-be wife, who died before they were wed. And, she must reunite as many of the lost things with their owners as possible.

Laura, overwhelmed, saddened, and confused enlists the help of the gardener Freddy, and the girl next door, Sunshine who has down syndrome. They become their own motley family, and work together in an attempt to reunite items with owners to not only honor what Mr Peardew wanted, but also to calm the resident ghost.

There is another portion of the story that weaves back and forth in time about a woman named Eunice and a trinket she once found on her way to a job interview. We follow her life, love, and heartbreak. It isn't until the very end that we see how much Eunice and Anthony were connected, and how Laura holds the key for both of them to find redemption.

Upon reaching the end and having the full understanding of all the characters, the way the stories wove together, and the small “shocks” that arrived, I wanted to reread the book all over again. It’s most certainly one that will be on my “purchase a hard copy asap” list.

You can currently read it on [Kindle Unlimited](#) if you’re curious. I’m not a fan of ebooks, but I know many other people are.

The Reading List by Sarah Nisha Adams — This was one of the other books I found in my library’s [Libby App](#), and put on hold to borrow the audio version. I’d heard a lot of chatter about it in a reading group I’m in, and wanted to see what all the fuss was about.

This story unites two unlikely people; widower Mukesh, and anxious teenager Aleisha. Aleisha is done with her school exams and is just waiting for University to start, and in the waiting she applies for a job. She doesn’t get the one she’d hoped for, but ends up with one at the small local library. She’s not a reader, she’s not a book lover, and she doesn’t want to be working at the boring library. But, here she is with the job. And the only good thing she can say about it is that at least she’s not at home.

Mukesh is still mourning the loss of his wife. His daughters call and leave him voice mails trying to encourage him to eat better, to get out more, to go to Temple. Mukesh, though, is lost without his wife. He misses her more than he can express to his children, and he’s not sure how to do all the things alone that he and his wife used to do together. Then one day he finds a copy of *The Time Traveler’s Wife*. He wonders if it’s a sign from his wife. Something she left in a spot where he might find it so he could find some comfort in his hurt.

Except, Mukesh is not a reader. He’s never loved books, not the way his wife did. But he forces himself to sit and read the book anyway. And when, at least, he finishes it he goes to the library and asks Aleisha if she can recommend a book for him to read, something that he’ll love just as much as *The Time Traveler’s Wife*.

Aleisha is surly, and doesn’t recommend a book. In fact she scares Mukesh so badly he retreats, and eventually runs from the library with a book in hand that he didn’t check out. Aleisha, ashamed of what she did, feels guilty. And, while working the rest of her shift,

stumbles upon a list of books someone left in their returned books.

She decides to read them, so she can feel like she has some knowledge of books to recommend to Mukesh. Aleisha soon finds the power in books. The ability to escape the real world and get lost in another. Something she yearns for with her dark and dreary homelife.

Thanks to the reading list, Mukesh and Aleisha become friends, and Aleisha is able to help Mukesh overcome some difficult relationship struggles with his daughters and granddaughters. When the worst happens at home, Mukesh is able to be there for Aleisha and help her find happiness again.

My only complaint with this book is that the “dark” at home for Aleisha is a single mother who is struggling with severe anxiety and/or depression. The author nailed how it feels for family members struggling to help, care for, and be in this situation.

At one point Aleisha refers to home as a jail, and my heart broke for her. As the parent of a child who struggles with severe anxiety, I knew what she meant. How the home can hold your loved one prisoner and make them fearful to leave it. When Aleisha felt angry and frustrated about making constant excuses for not joining her friends for outings, I also felt for her. Being an adult and having done that, I can only imagine the pain that someone so much younger must feel.

The issue for me was not the mental health crisis in the home. In fact, I think the author portrayed it beautifully. But rather that there were at least 2 grown adults who were relatives {a father and an uncle} who were aware of the mother’s struggle and neither did anything to help the children in this situation. Not until it was too late. That didn’t sit right with me, but at the same time that might be exactly why the author chose to have the characters act out the scenes as she did.

The struggle for those who suffer with mental health is real and hard and ugly. For those who live and walk beside them, it can be just as hard and real and ugly. And sometimes, we all close the door on the big wide world and pretend that everything is normal.

It's one of those books that, for me, I will be thinking about for a long time.

Small spoiler alert that will not impact the story: If you are not familiar, or haven't read some of the classics that you'll be introduced to within The Reading List, some of the key parts of the story may be given away. And, there may be some comments you won't entirely grasp if you haven't read the books. I have not read all the ones on *the list* but I still thoroughly enjoyed the story.



I just want to add a quick note that none of the links to the author's books are affiliate links. I just love the books I read enough, and want to support fellow authors by simply linking their websites and books when possible.

Even if I read a book I'm not madly in love with, I know that someone else might be. We've had many *book wars* in our house as to which books are best, and which ones everyone should read. The problem is, even in our own home we can't agree on titles. One groans when I confess that I struggle with Tolkien's works. Another prefers obscure books that are often so difficult to find they have to be ordered from other countries. Which is why, even when I don't love a book I've read, I still share about it, and link to the author's website. After all, it might be your next favorite read.

Check with your local library and see if they use the Libby App. Some do, and some use other apps to help reach patrons who may be homebound, prefer ebooks, have kindles, need/want audio books, etc. All you need to use the app is your computer, tablet, kindle, or smartphone and your local library card. If you're not sure how to proceed from there, don't hesitate to check with your local library staff. Most are very willing to help get you all set up with whatever app they use.

The Reluctant Author:

