

I read a lot of books this May, most were from one series. Enjoy!

Cartographers — Nell Young's greatest passion is maps, just like her father, Dr Young who is a legend in the field. But Nell hasn't spoken to her father since the day he fired her from her position at the NYPL. When she gets news of her father's death she's not sure how to feel, and when she finds the very map he fired her over it sends Nell down a dangerous path. In her quest to figure out why her father held onto a worthless map, she also begins to unravel the story of her past. Can she solve the secret before time runs out?

I saw this book in the "if you missed it in hardback" section of my local **BAM**. After reading the synopsis on the back of the book, I was intrigued. It started a little slow, but I soon found it hard to put down.

If you listen to the audio version there's an interview at the very end with the author. It's a snippet from a podcast she was on. I was unfamiliar with the cartography history she spoke of and thus found the interview fascinating.

Last One Home — Cassie Carter and her sisters, Nicole and Karen, were always close. That is, until Cassie ran off with the boy of her dreams despite her parents' protests. It wasn't until after she was married she realized the man of her dreams was the wrong guy. After escaping an abusive marriage and finally returning to Washington, she longs to reconnect with family, but fears the bridge is burned and unrepairable. Her family doesn't know the trouble that was her marriage, or the long haul to rebuild herself after she and her daughter escaped.

When Karen reaches out to offer Cassie a few of the possessions from their parents estate, Cassie wonders if it's possible to repair the bridge. Could reconciling bring all three of them the support they need?

I've yet to read a **Macomber** book that I haven't enjoyed, which is why I picked this one. My theory was that the **Cartographers** was so good, it was unlikely I could pick a random book and have it be just as delightful. So, I fell back on an author who's yet to let me down. It was the perfect in-between while I waited on some library holds to come in.

When I Reach You — Miranda's one and only friend, Sal, has written her off leaving a gaping hole in her world that she's not quite sure how to fill. While making new friends, and reconciling with old ones, Miranda finds four mysterious letters.

When the key Miranda's Mom keeps hidden for emergencies is stolen, Miranda finds the first note. She doesn't understand what it means, but she follows the instructions. Each new message leads her to believe that only she can prevent an upcoming death to someone she knows.

I admit I was pretty hooked with this from the start. One word of caution before you read it though: If you've never read *A Wrinkle In Time*, I'd urge you to do so before delving into this book. Miranda's favorite book of all time is mentioned and discussed often, and it happens to be *A Wrinkle In Time*.

My Grandmother Asked Me To Tell You She's Sorry — Elsa is seven, and her best friend is Granny who is 77. Elsa is different from most kids her age, and she spends a lot of time running at school to stay safe from the bullies. Granny is a whole lot of crazy, doing all sorts of things she really shouldn't. But Elsa doesn't mind, Granny is her safe place, and tells her stories from the Land of Almost-Awake and the Kingdom of Miamas. Everyone there is different, and they aren't picked on for it.

When Granny dies, she leaves a treasure hunt behind for Elsa to solve. It reminds her of the Kingdom of Miamas, and so begins her greatest adventure. All while Elsa tries to make peace with the death of Granny and the knowledge that the woman she loved was not exactly who she portrayed herself to be.

This has been on my to-read list for years, and I'm so glad I finally made time to read it. It really was an incredible read. Masterfully woven, breathtakingly beautiful, and deeply emotional. I wasn't ready for it to end when it did despite the fact that all the loose ends had been tied up.

Bowled Over — I know, I know what you're thinking, but you didn't really care for that first book. It's true, but remember the cliff hanger? And Libby had them in audio format for free,

so... This one was better. The story moved with purpose more than Jayme running all over town with no real reason. I think one of the biggest issues I have is that the main character doesn't seem to grow much.

Freeze Or I'll Shoot — Book 3 in the vintage kitchen series. I've been riding out the series waiting to see if Jayme will actually listen to herself about her love interests. The answer is no, no she will not. I also find it amusing that one of her love interests happens to be an IT guy, and the author has made him the picture perfect geek. Which is so not true of many IT people, but let's gloss over that. Jayme has to deal with an overbearing mother and possible future mother-in-law.

I appreciate that she wants to develop boundaries, but oddly not with her own mother, just with the future mother-in-law. And then, when the mother-in-law makes threats to end the relationship, Jayme chooses not to tell her future husband. This seemed an odd choice for a person who wants to have strong boundaries.

By the end of the book she is relationship-less. The police detective she was infatuated with has moved to Chicago and hitched back up with his former love interest. Never mind that he's been texting Jayme and wanting to chat. Weird much? Yes, yes it is.

Her not-boyfriend/boyfriend went to Arizona to check in on his tech company, got a little distant, and called to inform him that he's now re-engaged to his ex-finance. The one who formerly broke his heart. And suddenly Jayme, who wanted a relationship and had to stop herself from looking at the handsome detective and wondering what a relationship with him would be, is suddenly very happy being single.

No Mallet Intended — I have to say the titles are very catchy, but this book opens in such a strange way. Jayme went from having 2 men interested in her to being single. A lot has happened in the small town since we last visited it. And we now see why the men had to be moved out of the picture. Because at the end of this book Jayme is literally running for her life from a would be murder. And of course she feels vulnerable, jumps in her junky van and hits the road. Then, while heading straight for town she does something I can only describe as absurd.

She derails from the path of safety for a dirt road she's been on once or twice. Really? You are running for your life and are on your path to safety when you derail? She drives up a driveway of a stranger's house and runs screaming to the door for help where she— I'm not joking here— falls madly in love. Yep. Really. With a bit more suspense thrown in there to make you wonder if the man will help her or not.

White Colander Crime — I found this title a difficult listen because characters didn't just change in the sense of growth, they changed to fit the needs of the story. A 30 year old crime is uncovered and solved in this story. So you flip back and forth between present time and 30 years prior. Jayme sees life in her small town through the eyes of her sister and her sister's friends.

One such friend is now Jayme's bestie. The outspoken, outgoing Valeta. And now, suddenly, she's tearful and withdrawn. She thinks her brother might be guilty of the crime. And while it makes sense that Val would be withdrawn over such fears, she doesn't really stop being fearful until it's almost certain that her brother did not commit the crime. That's not the Val we know and love who, despite her love for many people in the town, is one to always speak the truth no matter how hard it is to hear.

Leave It To Cleaver — In this title Jayme marries Jacob at a double wedding with her sister. Yep, the sister who has been married x4 has to have a double wedding with Jayme. Weird, much?

Jayme, the crime solving sleuth who has no qualms showing up and giving her time and service in many ways including as a clerk at the store, or interrogating would be criminals is suddenly terrified of having a bridal shower where all the attention will be on her— never mind it's also a double bridal shower. It's like a new side of Jayme is revealed and it just feels clunky. It doesn't match the personality and character we already know.

And then there's the "school scene" that serves no real purpose other than the author's personal agenda. Josie is in trouble at school, but when we get to the bottom of the problem the parent volunteer, a mother of boys, permits a boy to pull Josie's hair and pinch her. When Josie pushed him, she was punished. The supposed mother volunteer felt the boy's actions

were fine because he “liked” Josie. And of course Jayme comes unglued. Does the father? No, no he does not.

The soon to be step-mom goes off on the school volunteer about proper etiquette between boys and girls. I’ll admit, I might be taking this a little personally as the mother of boys, and oh how tired I am of hearing that when a boy likes a girl he’s mean to her. Friends, when my boy liked a girl, he bought her a lemonade, struck up a conversation and had a chat. There was no pinching and pushing. And while I know it can happen, let’s not turn all little boys into monsters. Let’s also address the fact that when girls are sweet on boys they can hang on to them, get in their personal space and be more than just a little annoying. None of which I’d lecture anyone about in my book. More than anything, what purpose does a scene like this serve? Absolutely none. It did not push the story forward. It did not even serve any purpose until the following book in which the principal now LOVES Jayme because of her forward thinking with the problem boy. For real?!

No Grater Crime — Jayme is now married and spends time between her own house and Jacob’s cabin. The catch is that her sister, who suddenly couldn’t get away for a rare occasional moment, is now spending a lot of time at the house, too. Previously Becca had to be in another town to care for Grandma, who is still alive and well.

What I found most irritating about this book was the constant tropes, the preaching of personal viewpoints, and the constant “do nothing but write about it” scenes. I know that sounds harsh, but hear me out..

Jayme is married, she picks her stepdaughter up from school, takes her home, feeds her, father bathes the child, and the child goes to bed. That’s it. That’s family life. Jayme is barely with her family, and the scenes when she is have no real purpose other than to give us this supposed view at what a good mom/wife she is. Not once, in conversation, over dinner or around the fire does Jacob relay a conversation that could have led Jayme to finding out “who done it”.

Josie’s scenes are equally far and few between, and incredibly dry. Josie reads the Pokey Puppy and wants to rewrite it in today’s political fashion so that the Pokey Puppy doesn’t get

all the good stuff, but has to share equally. There's the constant line of Josie wants to be just like Jayme, but with so little interaction between the two it feels out of place.

Josie forgot to tell Jayme she needed 24 cupcakes for school, and Jayme screams at her, no apology because this is right and sets a boundary? Daddy is okay with this and snickers? Weird. Very weird. Not to mention they had time to bake 24 cupcakes sometime between breakfast and going to school.

Jayme flits around town, worries more about an elderly neighbor than her family. And then just to add trope insult upon trope insult two elderly ladies, we're talking women in their 70's, inform Jayme that since she's failing to come to a meeting she's not keeping up her responsibilities since getting married. Jayme is insulted because her family IS her responsibility.

Okay, if we're going to include this idiotic trope, let us remember that women in their 70's were often homemakers. Thus, these two women who cared well for their families wouldn't have said any such nonsense in negativity.

But it gets better. At the beginning of the book Jayme accepts and loves herself— BECAUSE her husband does. Yep, that's why she's made peace with her curvy figure. Ah-hem. What? So this very independent woman is only happy with her body because her husband likes it? That's not true inner peace with yourself.

Then, at the end of the book, while a gun is being pointed at her she declares that guns only have one purpose: to kill humans. Now look, Jayme may have this political opinion, but I'm doubtful. This is not her first rodeo. This is not the first time a gun was pointed at her. And she didn't make such comments before. So why now? And when she tries to answer "the other side's argument" she says, "Even if I had one to defend myself, it wouldn't do me any good unless I already had it out and drawn at this very minute." Maybe so Jayme, maybe so.. But you're in a murder mystery, and not your first one with a gun so this might not be the genre to present such a lecture.

There's also a lecture about spaying and neutering your pets in this episode. Now, small

factoid, I've volunteered with a few different animal shelters in my years. I'm very aware of the stance of shelters in regards to spaying and neutering to help prevent unwanted "extras". And after seeing many furry friends come through the doors and have to go out again without a furever home, I get it. But it's a little far-fetched to think that everyone should neuter or spay every animal. Can we all say extinction? And in fairness it just felt out of place in the story.

An elderly woman feeds some stray cats. They are sometimes called stray, sometimes feral, there is a difference so I found it odd that both terms were used. The neighbor hates the cats because they irritate his dog. And Jayme can understand his frustration, and she doesn't see any solution until everyone spays and neuters all their pets. Really? We're not going to address Mr Cranky Neighbor with the big huge dog he can't control who runs on other people's properties and chases the humans and the human's pets?

So why did I read all those books? Because I was waiting on a hold to come in from the library, and in all honesty I wanted to see how Jayme's love life would end, and how her new family would meld. Was I disappointed? Yes. Will I read the next one or two available in the series? I've already put them on hold.

Britt Marie Was Here — *Word of Warning, this may contain spoilers to [My Grandmother Told Me To Tell You She's Sorry](#)*. Britt Marie was a character [Backman](#) created and presented us with in [My Grandmother Told Me To Tell You She's Sorry](#). And when I saw a title featuring her name I put it on hold through my library's Libby app. I wanted to know what happened to Britt Marie after the previous story ended.

In **[My Grandmother Told Me To Tell You She's Sorry](#)**, Britt Marie is a bit of a villain. She's cranky and unhappy with life in general, and she seems to have a personal agenda. But as the story unfolds you see there's a bit more to Britt Marie, and a lot of what she parrots are the things her husband feeds her. At the end of that book we learn the dirty secret that Britt Marie knew about her husband. And when it unfolds, it causes Britt Marie to pack her bags and hit the road.

In **[Britt Marie Was Here](#)**, it picks up with Britt Marie having already left and looking for a

job. Britt Marie is different, she has some OCD tendencies and is likely on the autistic spectrum, although none of these things are stated about the character.

She's persistent in her quest for a job, and when she lands one in the small town of Borg in the middle of nowhere. Her welcoming committee is a rat and a car that may, or may not have been blown up.

She's in Borg to take care of the only thing that has not been closed down, the Rec Center. She sets about cleaning it immediately, and then turns out the light and sits in the dark all night. After all, she wouldn't want people to think she'd stayed up all night. And the building, despite being cleaned, is not clean enough for her to sleep in.

Despite Britt's prickly nature, and being different, she becomes part of the small odd little community and helps heal many of its broken wounds. The one thing Britt Marie wants most in this world is for someone to remember who she was, and Borg will certainly not forget her.

In typical **Backman** fashion, he digs deep into who his characters are and helps the reader understand the character far more than the character understands themselves. I went from being annoyed with a prickly Britt Marie in the previous book, to wanting to hug her tight and assure her she'd be remembered, she was wanted, and she was loved. This book was an emotional roller coaster, but well worth the trip.

Eleanor Oliphant — Eleanor is another character who is just a little bit different, who says what she thinks even if it's not quite right. She can go an entire weekend without speaking to anyone, and sometimes saying very little during the week. Eleanor sticks to her routine, of work and home, only different on Friday's when she stops for vodka and pizza.

The pizza because it's inexpensive and tasty, and the vodka is to help her drown out the voices of past memories, the ones she wants to forget. The ones that she's spent so long drowning out she's no longer sure what they are, which ones are real, and which ones aren't.

Then one day the new IT guy, Raymond, appears in her life. While walking home from work, they see an elderly man have a heart attack and stop to help him. This one single act brings

two new friends into Eleanor's life, and propels her down a new path that she doesn't hate, but is also not sure she loves.

Raymond is not put off by Eleanor's odd ways, and she soon finds that she appreciates his company. When Eleanor's heart is broken and she's debating doing the worst, it's Raymond who saves her and helps her begin to heal all the broken pieces of herself, to see the world anew.

Eleanor had a difficult childhood. Her mother, a narcissist, did the unthinkable to Eleanor and her sister, and it is only through finally seeing the world with the help of a therapist that Eleanor is finally able to put the past behind her and heal from it.

This has been on my TBR pile for a while, and I'm not quite sure why I kept putting it off. However, while putting a stack of books on hold at the Library, I added this one to the pile. Then, while tidying up a bookshelf I discovered I own a paperback copy. Never mind that, I chose to borrow the audio version. I found this book difficult to put down, despite some of the harder emotional portions of this story. And when the author got to the "gotcha" moment, I may have gasped aloud, or I may have muffled it in my fuzzy [Piggie & Elephant blanket](#).

A graphic for an author's note. The text "Author's Note:" is written in a cursive, handwritten style. A small illustration of a pen nib is positioned above the word "Note:", with a few small dots trailing behind it as if the pen has just finished writing.

Dear Reader,

I hope that if you enjoy the [Vintage Kitchen Mysteries](#) you'll forgive my criticism of the series. It does have its fun moments, and if you obtain the physical book you'll find a vintage recipe in the back of each one.

Of all the books I read this month, if I was asked to pick just one as my favorite I'd be hard pressed to choose between the two [Backman](#) books. Still, if I really had to pick just one of them, I'd probably select Britt Marie, at least for today. I'd happily reread them both though.

The Reluctant Author

