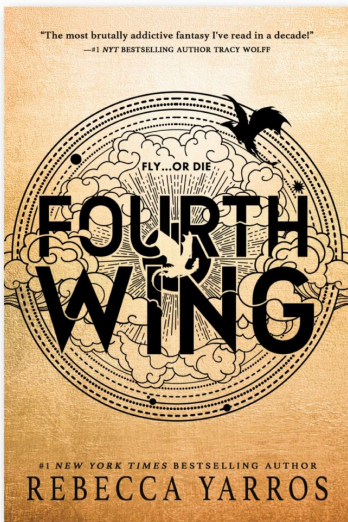


I read my first book this month in two days, and then took forever to finish the second. At one point, I figured I'd only end up with two completed books this month, which there's nothing wrong with. Then, I was notified that a valentine's pre-order was ready, and it inspired me to pick up the pace so I could delve into my new book.



Fourth Wing (Rebecca Yarros)

I'm not a trend follower most of the time, am often late to the party, and have no clue what anyone is talking about, which doesn't bother me at all. While looking for some low key books to read, I made the mistake of asking my writing pals what all the hubbub about the [Fourth Wing](#) book was about. Maybe it wasn't a mistake, because the description given sounded a lot like a grown-up version of the [How To Save A Dragon](#) movie.

So, I checked [Libby](#) to see if they had a copy available, and was surprised to see they did. Thus began the next 48 hours of my life. The book falls under the genre of [romantasy](#). Romance and fantasy combined. The book takes place in a school where young adults are conscripted and focuses on the division most like the Air force, but they don't use planes — they ride dragons. The school has an insane death rate, and that's just for crossing the parapet on entry day. Those lucky enough to survive still have an entire year ahead of them

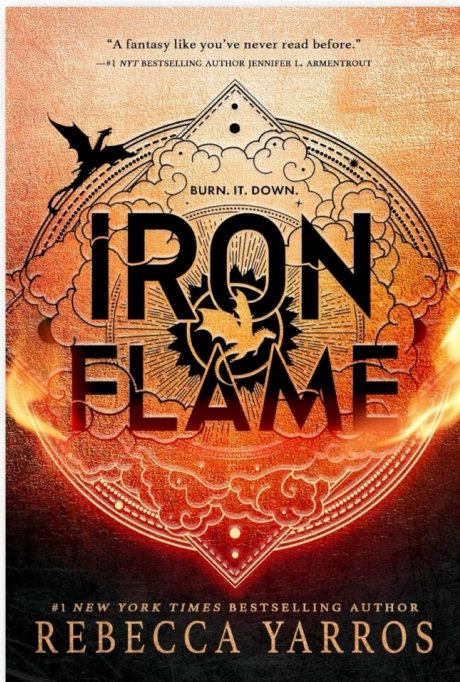
in which they may die at the hands of other cadets or dragons.

The book follows Violet Sorandal's first year, where she's assigned to Fourth Wing. Violet was supposed to be a scribe where she'd live a contented life recording the history of her people, safe underground, surrounded by books and quiet. Instead, her mother, an esteemed general, has made it clear that regardless of her daughter's physical ailments, she will cross the parapet on inscription day.

During her first year, Violet is wary of the marked ones. They are the children of rebels, and their parents are dead — at the hands of her mother. Then she does the unthinkable and bonds herself to two dragons. One, a hatchling which is unheard of, and the other one of the mightiest dragons.

The author opens the book with a warning about the contents. I'm not big on warnings in books, but I will admit that the author didn't hold back. She admitted in her warning that there would be violence, language, and more. Between the age of the young adults, and the military setting, the author opted for plenty of profanity. The kind where it loses all meaning because people use it so often you roll your eyes and shake your head. I can see her reasoning why, but I still think it lost its purpose the way it was overused. She did not hold back with her descriptions during battle scenes either.

What my fellow writer {the one who'd read it} failed to tell me was that the book ended on a dramatic cliff hanger. The kind that made me throw my head phones down, grab my phone and send her a message to say, "Please explain!" The reply was, "Oh yeah, I forgot about that, but at least you don't have to wait a year for it to come out like I did."



Iron Flame (Rebecca Yarros)

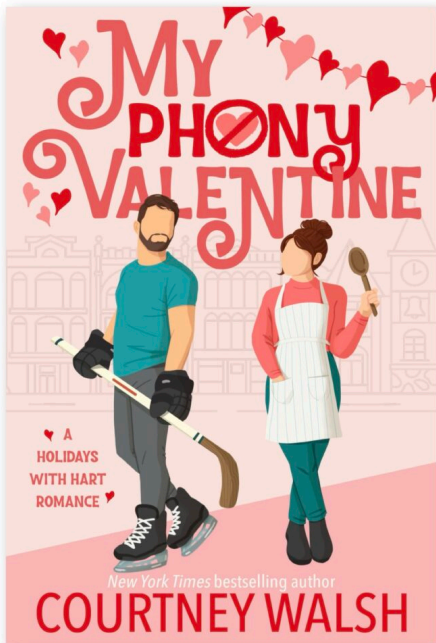
She was right; I did not. It was also available through [Libby](#), and I downloaded it and started listening immediately. I crashed through this book in a few days and then stalled big time. I expected this book to end on a cliffhanger, but a cursory look one evening didn't mention further books, so I plunged back in with vigor.

This is Violet's second year at the academy, and her biggest protector has moved on post graduation. The new vice commandant has a personal vendetta against her. The second year cadets have to endure torture amongst other survival skills, as well as learn how to control their signet {the magic given to them by their dragons}.

Violet must learn who her real enemies are, who she can trust, and how much of the truth she can share with them.

And of course the book ended on another cliff hanger. The kind that made me sit bolt upright,

rewind, listen, rewind, listen, throw my head phones down and grab my computer to find out when the next book would be out. There's no known date at present.



My Phony Valentine (Courtney Walsh)

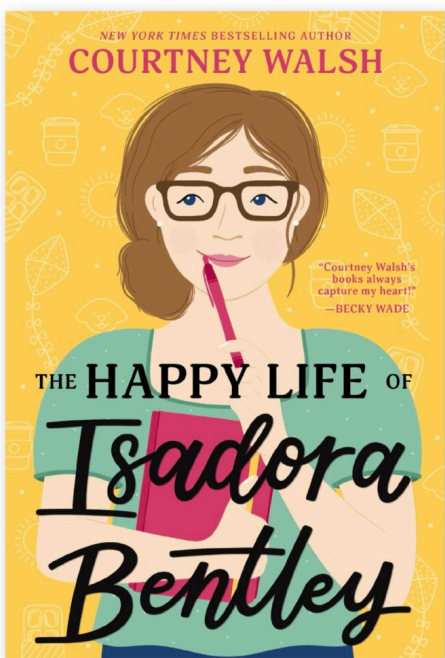
I preordered this book a month ago. I loved [Walsh's Christmas story](#), and since I'm still up to my eyeballs in editing and reading through manuscripts, I wanted something gentle to read. This fit the bill.

Poppy Hart is standing in line at the coffee shop when her arch nemesis picks at her. Pointing out how Poppy will be alone for Valentine's Day and what a disappointment she is to her family. In a moment of irritation, Poppy grabs the arm of the guy next to her, and introduces him as her boyfriend. Little does she know he's the famous hockey player Dallas Burke, and he plays along, buys her a coffee, grabs her hand and they exit the coffee shop.

The thing is, Dallas likes Poppy, and he's willing to offer her a job as his chef if it means he

can spend a little more time with her. Then his agent decides it would be great if they faked a relationship to help clean up his image with the press. As Poppy gets to know Dallas, she learns he's nothing at all like the bad boy image the rest of the world views him as. The only question is, are they still faking their relationship?

This is available in audio format from [Audible](#), and is considered an [Audible original](#). Or you can purchase a copy from [Amazon](#) or [Courtney's Etsy store](#). I can't wait to get my hands on those [stickers](#)! No, I was not asked to promote the book, I just really enjoyed it!

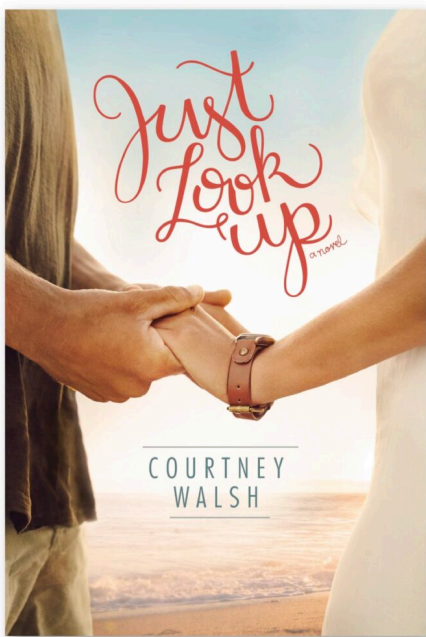


The Happy Life Of Isadora Bentley (Walsh)

Isadora keeps to herself, follows the rules, and believes that happiness doesn't exist. Raised by a narcissist, her confidence and trust are shattered, and the one time she offered her heart to someone else, he used it to give himself a leg up in the research department at the university they both work at.

On her thirtieth birthday, she invades aisle seven of the local grocery store. The one with all the junk food she makes a rule of never eating. Since she's never had a real birthday party before, she makes a habit of celebrating with junk food, but this year while standing in the checkout lane and imagining the judgement she'll get from the clerk she spots a magazine with an article about 30 ways to be happy. She buys it so she can prove the author wrong.

There's only one catch. By while following some suggestions, she makes a few friends along the way. An elderly gentleman, the neighbor, the neighbor's ten-year-old daughter, and a coworker. Can she trust her newfound friends enough to let them help her through the difficulties that lay ahead? Can she find the power to forgive herself and let go of the pain that haunts her?



Just Look Up (Courtney Walsh)

Yep, another Walsh book. Lane Kelley is a big shot in the interior decorating world. She has a fancy apartment in Chicago and a presentation to put on for a mega client. She's worked her

tail off to be prepared for this meeting, so she's more than a little annoyed that her family is calling her the minute she's about to start.

There's been an emergency back in Harbor Pointe, where her siblings and parents all live. One of her brothers was in a motorcycle accident, and is in critical condition at the hospital. It's the tone in another brother's voice that makes her pause and decide to make the three-hour trip back to the small coastal town she swore she'd never return to.

While there, Lane encounters plenty of people she has known her whole life, and they remind her of why she left. When Lane returns to Chicago to give her big presentation, she finds out that in office competitor not only stole her idea, but that her boyfriend/boss gave him the promotion he'd promised her. Lane collapses from stress and finds herself back in Harbor Pointe and falling for a childhood friend.

In this book, Lane embarks on a personal journey to discover her place. I had problems with this book, perhaps because they hit a little too close to home. For one thing, Lane hasn't been home in years, and soon as she arrives her family criticizes her for not coming sooner.

Her mother lectures her about "getting over" something between herself and her sister, which is later revealed that Lane's sister, Lindsay, slept with Lane's fiancée. Their relationship was called off, and within months Lindsay married the man instead. Lane's family lacked empathy and dismissed her feelings.

Lane endured bullying as a child from her own siblings — especially her sister. Pudge became Lane's nickname, symbolizing her weight. A woman at church lectured Lane's mother about over feeding the child and how the Kelley family should cut her off.

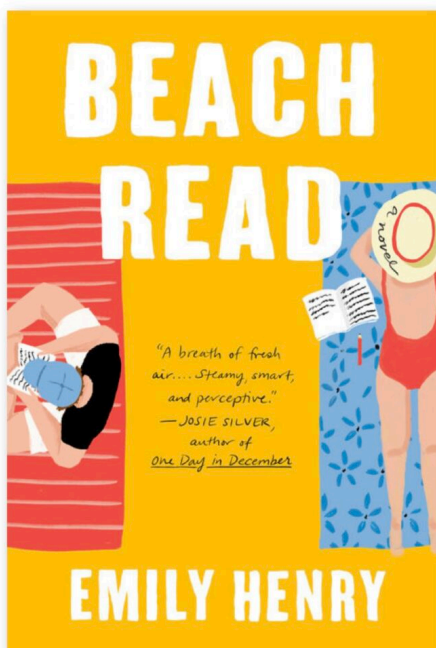
High school was a nightmare for Lane, because the nickname her siblings started carried itself there to haunt her, too. Complete with extra ones piled on. She became the butt of everyone's joke, and when she went to her mother for sympathy and suggestions, her mother told her she was oversensitive and to let it go.

The first morning after Lane's arrival, her three-year-old nephew burst into her bedroom and

throws something at her. When Lane takes off after him, wondering why her sister doesn't discipline the kid, her mother chastises her for walking around in pajamas and not having a bra on. Then tells her she needs to get dressed and do barn chores.

I admit the relationship between Lane and her mother was odd at best. One would think if Dotty wants her daughter to visit more, she'd be sympathetic towards her, and not demand she go milk a cow. Stop telling Lane she's gone from being overweight to too thin and perhaps tell the busy bodies at church to stop discussing her daughter's weight and body as if it were an open topic for discussion. Even tell people the name Pudge is both disrespectful and inappropriate, but Dotty doesn't. She continues to blame Lane for not "getting over" the deep set pain and hurt caused by her own family, all while she disrespects Lane's boundaries and feelings. The only sibling who comprehends the situation is in a coma, fighting for survival.

While the story was redemptive, and Lane needed to forgive and release the deep hurt and possible hate she was carrying, it doesn't mean she has to tolerate being treated poorly. I struggled with that aspect of the story. You can read the first chapter on [Tyndal's website](#).

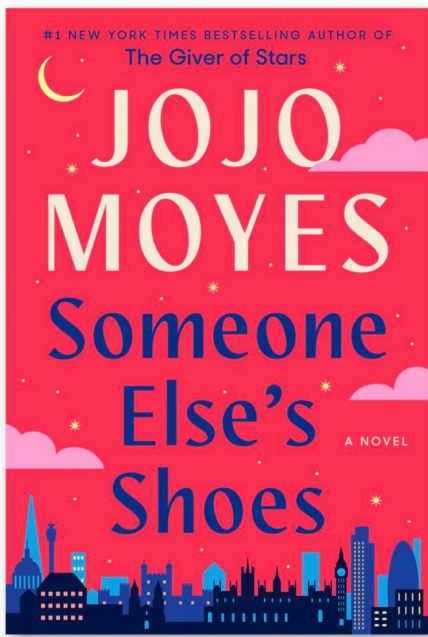


Beach Read (Emily Henry)

January Andrews is in a writing slump. In short, she has writer's block, and nothing she's done has helped since the day of her father's funeral. The day she learned her parent's perfect happy marriage wasn't quite what she thought it was. The same day, *the other* woman approached her with a letter. Down on her luck, out of money, and incapable of meeting a publication deadline, January takes the summer to sell the house her father owned with *the other* woman.

While there, she reunites with her collage rival Augustus Everett. He is the complete opposite of January, including how he kills off all his characters in every book he's ever written. When January finds out he's her next-door neighbor, she's not sure she'll survive the summer, but the two strike a bet. They will each write in the others genre. They can use pen names to publish their books. The first one to finish wins, and the loser must give a glowing recommendation of the winner's book.

I'd had this book on hold with my local library since sometime last year, and was excited when I was notified it was available. Then I was nervous because what if after that long wait it turned out to be a terrible read? I'm happy to report I loved this story. At the book's conclusion, Emily Henry provides insight into the story's inspiration and overarching theme. It made me smile, because within the first few pages I knew the story wasn't about falling in love, but about writer's block. Which was Henry's intention. In fact, the book results from her own writer's block.



Someone Else's Shoes (Jojo Moyes)

This was the month for all my holds to come in. So many arrived that I had to delay receiving some, so I'd be able to finish them all without having to go to the bottom of the wait list again.

With the title of this book, and failing to read the synopsis, I expected a book where two characters had to learn how someone else lived in order to better understand and respect them. Which isn't wrong, they do. However, within the first chapter, the literal shoes are swapped. Not intentionally, it's a mix-up at the gym where everyone seems to carry identical gym bags.

At the lowest point in Sam's life, she accidentally takes Nisha's bag when she leaves the gym one morning. The discovery isn't realized until she's in the van with her workmates and already running late for a meeting. Sam has two choices, but on the expensive heels in the bag, or wear flip-flops. Her co-workers insist she wear the heels. The meeting is a disaster, and she blames the shoes until one of her coworkers tells her she needs to walk like she

owns the shoes. Hold herself high and command the attention of the room. By doing this, Sam secures numerous deals for the company.

Nisha, who has enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle, traveling the world with her affluent spouse, is furious to discover that her own bag is missing. She can't believe the gym allowed this mix-up to happen, and worse yet, she has to go back to her penthouse in a bathrobe. Nisha's perfect life is about to come crumbling down. Her husband has locked her out of the penthouse, and cut her off their expense account. He's taken a new lover, and his wife of 15 years will have to fend for herself.

The book follows the lives of both women. We watch as Sam tries to navigate life with a husband who is clinically depressed but refuses to take medication, and their frustrated teenage daughter. Nisha, penniless and dealing with some OCD tendencies, is being hunted, and hides right under her husband's nose without him noticing. She will do anything he asks to get the divorce settlement so she can return to NYC and reunite with her son.

When their paths converge, they must decide if they can fix the mixup and might even become friends.



A Million Junes (Emily Henry)

A couple of weeks ago, we were at a local second-hand bookstore. The kind that has millions of books hidden in all kinds of nooks and crannies, plays the same music on repeat and has a bearded dragon in an aquarium. One of the first things I do when I enter the shop is look for the books I've most recently read from the library and would love to add to my collection. While I didn't find any I was looking for, I stumbled upon this story. I snagged [A Million Junes](#), having read other titles by [Henry](#) and loving them.

June lives a cursed life. Her father lived a cursed life, as did his father. The generational curse, which is a literal curse, spans multiple generations to the very first Jack O'Donnell. The O'Donnell's and Angerts have had a long-standing feud. June, also known as Jack the fourth, has always been warned to avoid Saul Angert. Her parents have only ever had two rules for her: Do not go to the falls, and don't associate with the Angerts.

Whenever something bad happens to the Angerts, something goes wrong for the O'Donnell's. No matter how much June asks the ghost, Feathers, who sleeps at the end of her bed, about it, Feathers refuses to share. One day June touches a white, little orb that seems to float around the O'Donnell house, and it transports into one of her father's memories. The father who's been dead for a decade, and just like that, June, is mourning her loss over again.

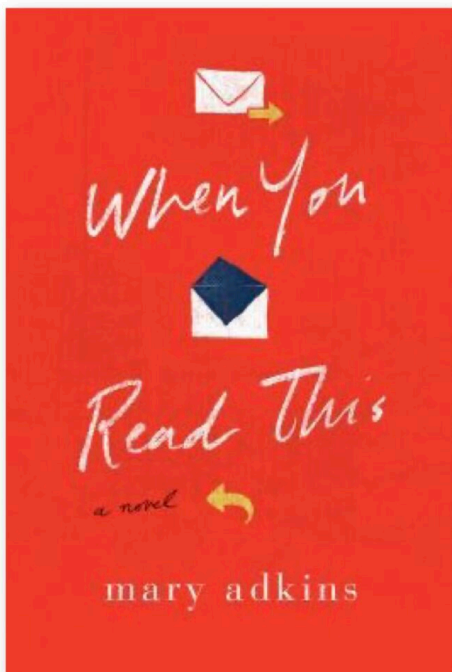
The only distraction is when June bumps into Saul Angert, while trying to escape the house of mirrors at the local carnival. Saul doesn't seem scary, and he doesn't believe in the family curse. He thinks bad things happen, and one shouldn't live their life worrying about when they might occur. Saul even offers to tutor June for her creative writing class.

When Saul shows up at the O'Donnell's house, he ends up touching an orb, too. The orb throws both June and Saul into another memory. This time, they watch Saul's twin sister, dying of cancer, begging for relief from someone, or thing, that they can't quite see in the memory.

June is determined to break the curse, if not for herself, for the sake of her half brothers, who

may also fall prey to it, and while Saul isn't convinced there is a curse, he won't let June venture into memories alone. Can they resolve the families' hatred and fix it before June's time ends?

I need to own this in audio and ebook format as well. Why? I like to annotate the kindle edition, and this book is so quotable. Beautiful, written, and emotional. Having lost my father, I knew exactly what June meant about how one day you're moving along just fine and there PING your father is dead, and there's nothing you can do except relive the grief once more. I wanted to wrap June in a hug. I wanted to know if June would succeed, and the book to never end.



When You Read This (Mary Adkins)

I purchased this book via audible late last year after [reading an article](#) Adkins wrote and was curious what her writing was like. This title was mentioned in her bio. I'm going to be honest. It took a hot minute to get into this book.

The entire story is an exchange of emails, blog posts, and text messages. We learn Iris received bad news and only has six months to live. It knocks her world sideways, and that of her boss, Smith. When Iris is gone, her big sister Jade can't find peace. How did her little sister get sick, and she didn't know? Why hadn't she lectured her more about the dangers of smoking? When Jade and Smith email, they exchange stories about Iris, which helps them both heal, but Jade still feels like everyone else has found their happy place in a world without Iris. She doesn't want her sister to just become a memory. Jade needs her sister to live on.

Smith suggests they turn the blog Iris had written after getting her diagnosis into a book, but Jade says no. The problem is, Smith made a promise to Iris that he'd publish the blog. Smith believes Jade's problem is that Iris didn't always speak well of her sister, and perhaps Jade is harboring guilt. He tells her she should read on. Jade tells Smith his problem is he's afraid of being close to people, because losing them hurts.

Both are forced to face their fears in their own ways. Smith must decide if he can forgive his mother for killing his father. An abusive tyrant who died attempting to kill his wife. Smith doesn't understand how he can miss someone who did so much damage, and how he can be angry with a woman who did everything to protect her son.

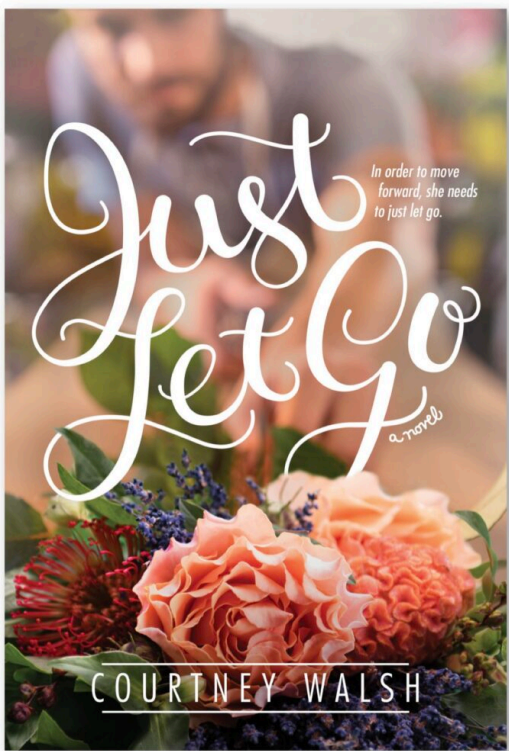
Jade has to decide if suing her sister's doctors over the cancer treatment will resolve anything, and accept that while struggling to pull her own life together, she lost touch with her sister. It doesn't mean they loved each other less, but Jade has to find the power to forgive herself.

Throughout the story, there are emails and texts from Smith's intern, Carl. Who means well, but makes a mess, multiple times, over important things. Stepping well outside of his duties and losing them a few clients. Text's from Jade's mother, who put herself before her daughters their entire lives, and doesn't want babying now. We also get to read Iris' blog posts, her inability to accept that death is coming for her even though she wants to live. The regrets she has, and the small sparks of hope throughout her final days.

In one blog post, Iris talks about going to the hairdresser. With chemo, her hair is falling out,

and she's decided to bite the bullet and shave her head. She's bought 4 beautiful scarfs for head wraps. The scene is both heartwarming and gut wrenching. I swear I cried more over that scene than any other in the book.

Because the book is told through text, emails and blog posts, you know what the person writing is thinking; the downer is there are some subtle things lost, and leave you to guess. Remembering character's email addresses while listening to the audio book was challenging.



Just Let Go (Courtney Walsh)

Yep, another book by Walsh. In fairness, I've enjoyed her books, and they hit the spot after a day of trying to read through mangled manuscript notes and hours of revisions. The downside is that my library doesn't have all the books in this series.

Quinn Collins has always wanted to buy the flower shop in Harbor Pointe, the one her mother owned before she up and left the family when Quinn was nine. Quinn needs to update the shop while preparing for a prestigious flower competition. The one her mother judges. Quinn hopes her mother will recognize her worth and prove Mom should have never left.

Grady Benson, an Olympic skier, stops in Harbor Pointe for breakfast and ends up in a fistfight that does significant damage to the well loved cafe. His punishment is five weeks of community service to the town, and he has to start by helping repair the cafe. With that job finished, he's then assigned to help Quinn, but she doesn't want his help. She wants him to take his reckless entitled attitude, and go away, but as they work together fixing the flower shop, she sees another side of Grady the world hasn't.

Quinn needs to let go of her idyllic dreams about her mother, and it's only when her father tells her the truth that she sees her life for what it really is. Grady must forgive himself and release the lingering shame from his past. With his brother and Quinn's support, he may succeed.

When I first started this book and saw the punishment dealt out to Grady, I chuckled while whispering, "Ka-Chow." The movie [Cars](#) captivated my youngest when he was little. For his fourth birthday we decked the house out in Disney Car's decor, I made a racetrack cake, and put all the small toy cars from the movie on top. He had the pajamas, the bedding, the toys, and even a pair of shoes. While he may have outgrown the infatuation, I confess, we still have all the little matchbox style cars in a box.

I saw the immediate resemblance in Grady's punishment to that of Lightning McQueen. And, like McQueen, Grady thinks he can throw money at the problem to fix it, or maybe even cut his time short until he falls in love with the small town.



Author's Note:

This was a crazy month of reading, and I confess I blew through several books much faster than I expected. Many were in the romance genre, and most of those are quick reads. I think the only book that wasn't in the romance genre might have been *When You Read This*.

My top three reads this month were *A Million Junes*, *My Phony Valentine*, & *The Happy Life Of Isadora Bentley*. I enjoyed each one, and need to obtain physical copies of Isadora & Phoney Valentine. I'd like an e-copy of *A Million Junes*.

The Reluctant Author 