

Comfort is Having Good Books to Read

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Everyone has or does something to experience comfort. For some it might be wearing fluffy slippers or snuggling in a cozy afghan. Maybe comfort is tasting something from childhood like chicken pot pie (that maybe you would eat while watching Ed Sullivan on a Sunday night). Last night I was in that place between my last read and whatever my next would be. My book stacks didn't appeal, so I cranked up my reliable old Kindle to look at titles, which told me very little because I had forgotten what I had downloaded.

I clicked on "A Better Man" to find out what it was, read the names Myrna and Clara, a bit of profanity, and instantly: comfort. I was back in Three Pines. Then it was 2 a.m., and I was seven chapters in before I could drag myself away. Gamache is back at work. A pregnant woman has gone missing. Clara's latest art is being panned on social media, and there are bigger problems rising. Gabri is certain it is the end of times because he just offered Ruth a coffee laced with brandy and she said, "No, thank you." But I know it's not the apocalypse yet because Louise Penny has a new book coming out August 27, and all is right with that world. I hope.

The total opposite of comfort would be some people's worst nightmare: being stuck in an elevator. But what if it was also a team building exercise for a group of competitive, cut-throat, corporate ladder-climbing co-workers who need to solve the puzzles within in order to get out? That's the premise of "The Escape Room" by Megan Goldin. Four people step into an elevator, the doors close, the lights go off. The first message they see is "Welcome to the escape room. Your goal is simple. Get out alive." And that's when the trouble starts. Alternating elevator chapters with chapters detailing characters' back stories alleviates some of the claustrophobia that the reader encounters and fills in the reasons they find themselves trapped. While this was a mindless thrill-ride, it was somewhat satisfying reading about morally bankrupt characters set up to get their just desserts. Although most of the characters were despicable, and the character I actually liked didn't get much page time, I still enjoyed this one.

Eww! It starts with a snake, but persevere, the snake catcher comes, catching the snake and discovering a body long undisturbed. Garry Disher's "Under the Cold Bright Lights" really took me by surprise. Alan Auhl retired from Homicide years ago, but he's still a cop so that's why he goes back to work cold cases. The younger detectives, heck, all of them, think he is washed up, a retread. But that's OK; Alan likes his job, and he's good at it. While he's juggling several cold cases, a new one heats up that he was involved in years before, so he's drawn into that as well. Separated from his wife, he lives in a three-story house, letting rooms to his daughter, waifs, strays, some doctors from Sri Lanka, co-workers, even his ex from time to time. Lest you think Auhl is a white knight because he helps others, there are times he also crosses the line. My question is this: Is it wrong to like a character who takes the law into his own hands? Disher joins the list of Australian authors I'm going to keep track of.

Also out now is a quick summer mystery called “One Little Secret” by Cate Holahan. The title could be a misnomer because literally EVERYONE has a secret. At any rate, the story quickly sucks the reader in as three neighboring couples, who don’t know each other really well, throw in together so that they can vacation at a very nice beachfront property. Tensions rise over drinks, then everyone goes their separate ways. The next day finds one of them dead and everyone else a suspect. It was fun weaving between the different combinations of couples and suspecting everyone. This was a fast-paced read perfect for the beach or your nearest lawn chair.

“Things You Save in a Fire” is all about strong women, love, romance, forgiveness and firefighters. It’s about what makes a hero, which sometimes means running into a crisis and sometimes means being a stand-up human being. I really enjoy the way Katherine Center writes because she always deftly balances love and drama with humor. Want a pleasant way to pass the time? Pick up one of her books.

So if you’re looking to revisit some old friends, place a hold on Louise Penny’s newest. Otherwise, we have many other great reads to take you places you weren’t expecting. Come in and check something out.