

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
Dunklin County Library

The anticipation of a new book is a simple pleasure of life! Books are such a sweet respite for me; a way of leaving the screens behind and diving into another era. The thrill of how the author uses the same words I already know and often some I do not know to tell a story with characters who are daring, funny, or challenged. Many times when I see the chapters dwindling to the finality, my reading slows to linger over the plot and contemplate the choices made. Ah, then, it is time to select another book!

With snappy dialogue and funny dating moments, Linda Holmes sets up her newest release, *Back After This*, with appealing characters and real-life details of a podcast. Cecily Foster, a podcast producer, reluctantly agrees to host a dating show to save a friend's job, guided by influencer Eliza. While navigating 20 blind dates, she is drawn to Will, a photographer, but Eliza's skepticism complicates matters. Cecily must reconcile her own desires with the show's demands, questioning whether she can find love and success without compromising herself.

Since her husband's unsolved murder three years ago, Iris Blodgett's life has unraveled. Awash in grief and buried in debt, she cannot pay her mortgage and now that she has lost her job, she has no idea how she will provide for her unruly teenage daughter, Ellory. Facing eviction, Iris turns to her new beau, prominent architect Hugh Smoll, for a shoulder to cry on. Yet, the seemingly perfect Hugh offers her something more: an invitation to move into his mother's centuries-old mansion while he renovates the property. It seems like the perfect solution, but when Iris and Ellory arrive at Ravenscliff, the family inside is not quite what they expected. Iris did not even know Hugh had siblings, much less that they'd all be living together. With repairs underway, the house gives up its dark secrets one by one. Before long, Iris unearths a chilling family history and the terrifying reason she and Ellory were invited in the first place. Katie Garner's *The Family Inside* is full of plot twists and eerie feelings making this novel hard to put down.

Lisa Unger introduces a fast-paced game that turns deadly in *Close Your Eyes and Count*. Adele Crane, a struggling single mom, joins a reality show, "Extreme Hide and Seek," on remote Falcão Island to win \$1 million. The show's troubled host, Maverick Dillan, faces pressure from a past contestant's disappearance. As a storm hits, and a mysterious warning is issued, Adele and her fellow contestants, including Wild Cody and Malinka Niqui, face not only the game's challenges but also mounting dread and disturbing secrets.

A reclusive groundskeeper with a hidden past, Murphy Shepherd rescues those in danger. While grieving his mentor, he saves Summer from the Florida coast and becomes entangled in her search for her missing daughter, leading him into the perilous world of modern-day slavery. Aided by new allies, including a loyal dog and an ex-convict, Murph races to find the girl, confronting his own buried secrets along the way. This story explores love, the fight for freedom, the horrors of human trafficking, and the transformative power of selfless love. Part of a four part series, Charles Martin's story of heroism, heartache, and healing is entitled *The Water Keeper* while maintaining interest with historical and geographical details.