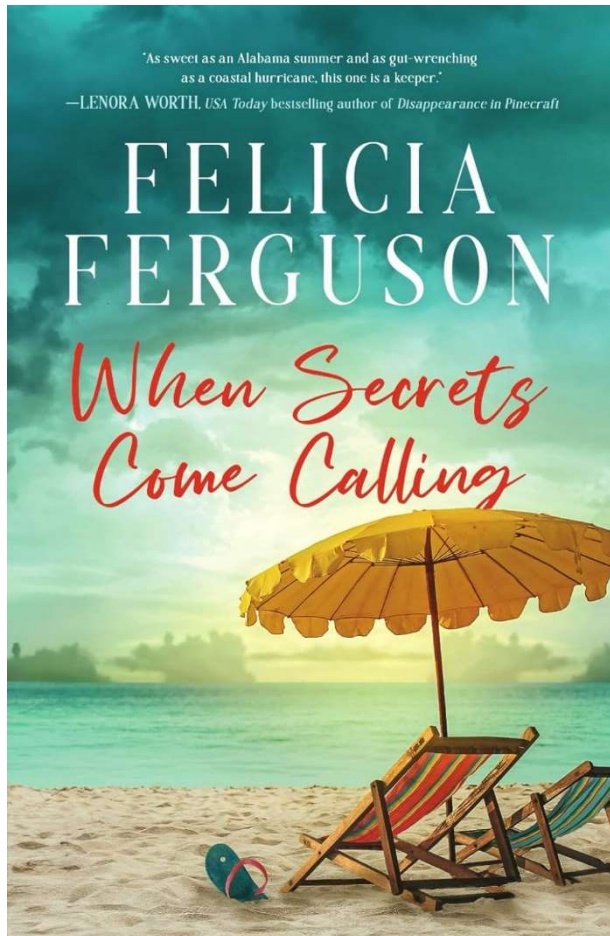


‘When Secrets Come Calling’ keeps you hooked until the end

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“When Secrets Come Calling” by Felicia Ferguson. Destin, FL: Salt and Light Publishing, 2024, 280 pages, \$14.99 (paperback).



“Thumping country music pounded the leather and wood grain interior of Maddox ‘Dax’ Carpenter’s King Ranch F250 with tales of love, summer, and broken hearts,” Felicia Ferguson explains during the opening salvo of “When Secrets Come Calling,” her brilliant new foray into the shadowy world that underlies all human interactions. “Pop. Arrested. For a robbery and murder forty years ago. Dax stared almost unseeing through the windshield as a line of traffic sped down I-85 like a summer Saturday at Talladega Speedway. He swiped a hand down his cheek. The dampness made him blink, shattering the comforting bubble of numbness.”

“The man who had tucked him in bed, said nighttime prayers for protection and sleep, threw footballs for hours, and taught him honor and discipline,” she continues. “That man could be a killer, a thief, and a liar? Could have been for all of Dax’s life. At least according to the police’s evidence and this mysterious finger pointer. Dax grabbed the collar of his Titans player T-shirt and tugged it up, wiping his tears. The police were wrong. They had to be. And he would prove it.”

So begins one of the best novels I’ve read since

“Consigned to Oblivion” by Emilee Breanne Ward a few weeks ago. As many of you know, I don’t review that many works of fiction; I typically leave that to my esteemed colleague Fallon Willoughby. But when this one was suggested to me, I was intrigued.

I found the subject matter strangely appealing, somewhat in the same way that I find shows like “Law and Order” and “Criminal Minds” naturally captivating. The storyline didn’t actually happen (as far as the reader knows), but it certainly could have. Luckily my instincts proved to be eerily accurate; this was a real page-turner that I think a lot of folks would find immensely satisfying. The narrative follows Dax Carpenter, a former University of Alabama and Titans wide receiver, on his quest to uncover the truth about his father who has been accused of a robbery and murder that occurred some four decades ago. His ex-girlfriend, Caitlin Fitzhugh, becomes his unlikely – and unwilling – partner in his quest. Initially convinced that Dax’s father is guilty, she reluctantly agrees to take the case after some “encouragement” from her boss.

Along the way, the pair have several adventures and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles as they simultaneously navigate a personal relationship that has its own unique baggage. As the title suggests, there are twists and turns that keep the reader guessing as to how this entire affair is going to turn out on multiple levels.

Before coming to Kentucky with her family, Ferguson lived in Kansas, Texas and Louisiana. She also spent a decade in Florida before moving to Colorado. With master's degrees in health care administration and speech-language pathology from Western Kentucky University, at first glance Ferguson is an unlikely candidate for bestselling novelist. Her interest in writing, however, has been a lifelong passion; as a child, she dreamed of being an author.

With her current offering, it is obvious she has found her calling in the genre of romantic suspense. By her own admission, she likes to showcase strong female characters who intertwine biblical principles with counseling techniques in a literary style that is both highly effective and intensely addictive. Ferguson's previous books include "The Choices She Made," released in 2022, "The Paths We Walk: Bridges," in 2017, and "The Paths We Walk: Trails," in 2016. She also has short stories in "Sweet Romance for Every Season," a collection released in 2023. Oh, look for her next project, "The Paths We Walk: Tunnels," coming soon.

If you're interested in learning more about Ferguson's perspective, check out "Build Faith for the Journey," her radio devotional that airs Saturdays on Christian Mix 106.

As is always the case when reviewing a novel, you walk a fine line between giving enough information so that a potential reader can decide whether a particular selection is something they'd be interested in – and not giving away any secrets (pardon the reference) that might spoil it for those who decide to take the plunge. Suffice it to say this one has it all. The story Ferguson is telling on the surface serves as the perfect vehicle for deeper truths that lie waiting to be uncovered in each of us. A good example of this is in chapter 24:

“He took my daddy from me and my brother. And I made choices I may never have made because of Daddy's death. But I also would never have met my husband. Had my children. Or have this life that has turned out to be better than I ever could have imagined. God has brought good out of something awful.” Jackie's cheeks wrinkled in a sad, but oddly peaceful smile. ‘Maybe that's enough.’ Caitlin's mouth fell open with a soft gasp. This woman who had lost so much also recognized how much she had gained. And gave God the credit. Something tickled Caitlin's memory. What was it? Something about restoration, years, and locusts?”

“If God did restore, did bring good from bad, why had he done so for Jackie, but not for Caitlin and Brenda? Was it because Caitlin had pushed him away, certain he didn't care, while Jackie seemed to have clung to him? A feeling slipped through Caitlin's heart, like a whisper or a near-kiss. She shook off the sensation and wrapped an invisible band around her heart.”

I've read that passage several times, yet I still hear something new each time I reflect on it. The poetic nature of Ferguson's prose is both innately engaging and emotionally endearing. If you are looking for a great read for the beach or your nightstand, consider "When Secrets Come Calling." Fair warning: Once you start this one, you'll have a hard time breaking away until you've finished it.

Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.