



## The Secret Vineyard

*Loretta Hill*

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## **The Secret Vineyard** Loretta Hill

*When you're stumbling through life, try falling head over heels ...*

Grace Middleton knew that her ex-husband Jake was a lying, cheating, wife-abandoning bastard.

What she didn't know – until his untimely death – was that he was also the owner of a secret vineyard in the heart of the Margaret River Wine Region. And, much to the chagrin of his new wife, he's left the property to Grace's three young sons.

With the intention of putting it up for sale, Grace takes the boys to view Gum Leaf Grove. And immediately finds herself embroiled in mysteries from Jake's past – and becomes the accidental target of the resident 'ghost'.

Nowadays Grace believes in love even less than she believes in ghosts. So no one is more surprised than her when she's caught between two very different men – with secrets of their own . . .

A sparkling romantic comedy about trust after betrayal, hope after regret, and falling in love after vowing never ever to do it again . . .

## **The Secret Vineyard Details**

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Author : Loretta Hill

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## From Reader Review The Secret Vineyard for online ebook

### Sam Still Reading says

Loretta Hill's novels are an integral part of summer. It's practically an Australian tradition to lie on a couch under air conditioning (or a beach if you're lucky) and lose yourself in the story. The Secret Vineyard is a light romantic comedy that will definitely entertain on a long, hot summer day. If you've read The Maxwell Sisters and The Grass is Greener, you will recognise a few of the supporting cast. If not, you've got plenty to look forward to!

Grace Middleton is a single mum of three lively, adventurous boys. Her marriage didn't end well and even though she's an accountant, money is tight. Grace is estranged from her mother, her best friend married her ex-husband and well...it's not going all that well. When her ex-husband dies, she's not expecting anything for her sons. But it turns out her husband did care a little bit as he's left them a property Grace never knew about, a vineyard and house in the beautiful Margaret River region of Western Australia. Grace's aim is simple: sell the property and have her sons live comfortably in Perth. But when they arrive at Gum Leaf Grove, it's not what they were expecting. It's a huge, rundown house with 70s décor with ample place for the boys to play. It may just have a resident ghost, a secret safe and a secret room. But what's in the secret room turns out to be extraordinarily beneficial for Grace... To top it off, there are two single men interested in her! Grace's plans begin to change as she envisions a life lived in the beautiful south west...

If I were to describe The Secret Vineyard in just one word, it would be fun. (But I won't because that's no fun for me to write, nor you as the reader of this review). There are serious issues addressed, like loss and healing, but the overall tone is tongue in cheek. And it works. I'm not too good with romantic comedies (it's all about the drama, not the LOLs) but the story brought a giggle throughout. Some of the aspects of the novel you might have to take a leap of faith for (like what's in the secret room) but it's a load of fun doing so. One of the characters, Scott, cracked me up in his 'moves' on Grace. He's following the textbook but in real life, the smoothness is coming off as awkward. The other contender for Grace's heart (I can't reveal spoilers here) is much more sincere in his respect and admiration for her, even when he says nothing at all.

Of course, with three boys in the story, there are going to be plenty of funny moments. There are ghosts, inopportune statements in public bathrooms, even more embarrassment in unlocked bathrooms and a need for pizza. (I heartily approve of the last one). Loretta Hill nails their characters – they're loud, rambunctious and utterly lovable. Grace's sister Rachel is a calming voice of sense in the background and a surprise visitor near the end of the novel provides some perspective Grace didn't think she needed. It's a sweet ending to a book that starts with loss but ends with happy gains for all.

Thank you to Penguin Australia for the copy of this book. My review is honest.

<http://samstillreading.wordpress.com>

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### Suzanne says

I have decided that audio reads, for now, need not be literary fiction as I often choose; I need chick lit, rural romance or something simple. This book was perfect, it allowed me take into consideration the obvious

distractions I face with my daily hour commute.

Grace is a super mum to three gorgeous boys, not only does she survive a cheating nasty ex husband, she seems to thrive. Grace ends up in the wine region of Western Australia after an unexpected turn of events, and here we really see her come into her own. Grace is self deprecating, quirky and funny. A very likable gal indeed.

Snappy dialogue, excellent narration - this book was always interesting to listen to. The characters were all enjoyable and the premise of the story line whilst a tad unbelievable was simply fun. Recommended to readers of romance, rural romance and chick lit. I had fun with it.

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### **Claire says**

This is the first Loretta Hill book I've read and I can't wait to go back and read her previous books. What a great read, I didn't want to put it down. I loved that it was set in Yallingup in the south west, I could relate to so much. I thought Grace was such a great character, a strong woman who kept going regardless of the hurdles put in front of her. I would love to have a mystery guest like Mitch come stay with me, he sounded quite tasty and very handy around the house. The kids were great characters too and made me laugh on more than one occasion, quite a handful too. I definitely recommend this book for an entertaining and heartening read

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### **Jenny says**

The Secret Vineyard is about trust, love, and guilt. Single mum Grace Middleton was near her last tether looking after her three boys, Ryan 7, Alfie, 5 and Charlie 3 when her ex-husband Jake left her children a vineyard in Yallingup in Western Australian wine area after his death. Pop Star Michel Beauchene was involved in car accident that left him with PTSD and was hiding in the boy's vineyard which he thought was empty. The readers of Secret Vineyard will see what happens to Grace Middleton, the boys and Michel Beauchene.

I enjoyed reading Loretta Hill books they always make me laugh with the way her characters interact with each other. The Secret Vineyard did not disappoint, and I loved reading this book. I like Loretta Hill's portrayal of her characters. The Secret Vineyard was well written and researched by Loretta Hill. The Secret Vineyard engaged me from the start, and I was unable to put it down until I finish reading.

The readers of The Secret Vineyard will start to understand the problems that pop stars have with the press and stardom. Also, the readers of The Secret Vineyard will see how grief, alcohol and PTSD can affect sufferers and the people around them.

I recommend this book.

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### **Janine says**

This was a lovely fun book with a few poignant moments.

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### **Kim says**

New to me author. I listened to the audiobook. A contemporary MF set in wine country WA. I'll read more from this Australian author. The narrator did a wonderful job, with many individual voices.

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### **marlin1 says**

Loved this, perfect holiday reading that had me smiling all the way through.  
Left me in a happy place!

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### **Theresa Smith Writes says**

This novel, The Secret Vineyard, would have to be one of the most delightful reads I've had in a long time. For me, everything worked. I both laughed out loud and had the occasional tear; I couldn't wait to get back to it each time I had to put it down.

Grace is a highly relatable character. A single mum with three boys, dumped by her shallow husband for her \*best\* friend, working as much as she can while trying to balance mothering; I liked Grace right from the get-go. An unexpected windfall comes her way via her ex-husband's will, and this is where the novel sets in for its duration. Grace heads to the 'secret vineyard' her boys have inherited in order to check it out before selling. What ensues is a delightful adventure in a dilapidated/haunted house that ends in some surprising results.

Along the way she meets some great people, some not so great people, solves a family mystery, falls in love, resolves some unfinished family business, and sets herself and her boys up for a new future. This novel is popping with the type of laughs you can expect from a house with three boys tumbling around it. There were several instances where I had to pause in my reading because I was laughing so hard. A bit of background on this snippet (which had me in stitches): Ryan, Alfie and Charlie are Grace's children while Scott and Mitch are the two men who have popped up in her life.

"He pays rent with labour. It's strictly a business arrangement. We don't really get much into each other's space...at all."

"Except that one time," says Ryan, just when I think the kids are too absorbed in their donuts to be listening.  
"When you saw him naked.".....

..... "She screamed 'cause she saw his penis," Alfie tells Scott, as if he didn't have enough information already.

"It's a big, big one," Charlie reveals, stretching his arms wide to demonstrate, which would be more accurate for a whale.

"He might be exaggerating...slightly," Mitch murmurs, a mischievous smile twisting the corners of his mouth, though he doesn't look up from preparation of the coffee.

A tidal wave of mortification rolls through me. What must Scott be thinking right now? This is a disaster!  
"Guys," I hiss. "That's enough!"

The hilarity continues throughout the novel but has such authenticity; I have two boys myself and a daughter so suffice to say, I could see it all panning out exactly as it did on the page.

While some might find Grace's ignorance about a certain situation a tad unbelievable, for me, it was incredibly relatable. I almost never know who is who in the celebrity world and could literally run into someone famous and have no idea. My time, like Grace's, is limited, and when I do have some of it free, I don't spend it reading tabloids or catching up on celebrity gossip. I found this part of the storyline quaint and touching, and entirely romantic, and could see clearly why Mitch had set himself up so incognito, even if it did mean he was digging a hole for himself that would be impossible to get out of unscathed.

At the heart of *The Secret Vineyard* is a clear and solid message about love, forgiveness, trust, and family, although in terms of family, it's all about who you choose to surround yourself with rather than family for family's sake, and I loved this. The Secret Vineyard has been squashed into a space on my all time favourites shelf and I will definitely be buying more copies in the future as gifts. It's a delightful read, romantic and funny with a touch of whimsy and a dash of mystery.

Thanks is extended to Penguin Random House Australia for providing me with a copy of *The Secret Vineyard* for review.

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### **Brenda says**

When Grace Middleton's ex-husband Jake died unexpectedly, she was shocked when she learned he'd left their three boys, Ryan, Alfie and Charlie, a vineyard deep in the Margaret River and surrounded by other well-known and successful vineyards. Immediately thinking of selling to gain some much-needed funds for the boys' future, plus Alfie's ongoing medical treatment, and with school holidays looming, Grace decided to drive the three hours from Perth to check out this secret vineyard (that no one knew about) – a week's holiday which she knew the boys would love.

Gum Leaf Grove filled them with amazement – but the ramshackle old farmhouse, which had been abandoned for twenty years, was a different story. As she learned more, Grace realised that she'd hardly known Jake at all. The secrets that so obviously made up his past intrigued her; could she uncover the mysteries of that past? Or should she leave the resident "ghost" to the new owners?

With the French man from the adjoining vineyard plus the cousin who was helping with repairs; and the real estate guy casting strange vibes, Grace tried to work out the best thing to do. Sell and return to Perth was the obvious answer. All she knew was her three boys were her focus – the most important males in her life. She certainly didn't need any more – did she?

*The Secret Vineyard* by Aussie author Loretta Hill is another fabulous rural romance which I thoroughly enjoyed. I laughed out loud on so many occasions – especially some of the comments by the adorable kids. The usual "awwww!" when Mummy told them they couldn't do/have something they wanted was so cute! Charlie at only three and Ryan, the "man" of the house at seven, with Alfie in the middle, brave, fearless and all of them full of mischief. I've read all this author's work, and she never disappoints – this is no exception. Highly recommended.

With thanks to Penguin Random House for my ARC to read and review.

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### **Monique Mulligan says**

I laughed so much reading *The Secret Vineyard* by Loretta Hill - this warm-hearted romance was engaging from start to finish. It's one of those books where you're cheering on the characters all the way (and telling them when to stop what they're doing because 'that guy is a sleaze and you don't want him'). I loved the relationship between Grace and her sons - those 'I need five minutes' peace' feelings while loving your kids to bits are common to most mothers, I'd say. The interactions between Grace and her boys made me laugh out loud more than once ... it was refreshing and oh-so-relatable. Then there was the unlikely rock-star meets mum-of-three scenario that completely worked for me in a light-hearted rom-com way. And finally, the setting - Margaret River, one of my favourite places. While I was reading, I just wanted to be there ... with my not-at-all-a-rock-star man by my side. Thanks for putting the romance back into a busy week, Loretta!

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### **Bianca says**

*The Secret Vineyard* was an easy, sassy companion during my travels abroad.

It was fun, relatable, in some cases, and it also had a good dose of wishful thinking, in other words, an excellent contemporary romance novel.

The fact that it takes place in one of my favourite places in Western Australia was just an added bonus.

This was another winner from Loretta Hill.

*This will go towards my Aussie Author Challenge on [www.bookloverbookreviews.com](http://www.bookloverbookreviews.com)*

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### **Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says**

\*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

Warm, funny, genuine and profoundly romantic. These are the words that come to mind when I think about Loretta Hill's new release, a novel titled, *The Secret Vineyard*. A backdrop of the stunning south-west location of Western Australia, close to the Margaret River wine region, compliments the absorbing storyline. Loretta Hill's latest features themes of loss, new beginnings, forgiveness, family and love. *The Secret Vineyard* is one book you definitely need to put on your 2018 to-read list.

*The Secret Vineyard* is Grace Middleton's story. The book begins outlining Grace's chaotic life. Grace is a single mum to three young boys. She balances the care of her children, with her work as an accountant. Despite being in the business of managing finances, Grace's situation isn't great money wise. Her husband Jake left her almost four years ago, when she was pregnant with her youngest son Charlie. Jake is the rotten sort, he had an affair with Grace's best friend Carrie that resulted in a divorce for Grace and a marriage for Carrie. When Jake dies unexpectedly, Grace and her boys are gifted with a secret inheritance, a vineyard in the south-west of WA, called Gum Leaf Grove. Grace decides to take the boys to the property, with the full intention to sell it. However, circumstances quickly change for Grace. A family mystery, an intriguing ghostly presence at the vineyard, the loss of her job in Perth and the opportunity to fall in love again all

present themselves to Grace. Gum Leaf Grove becomes the saving grace for Grace, her boys and even a mysterious stranger's life.

The Secret Vineyard is my favourite of Hill's books and I have read all but one title by this author, to-date. With the absence of a title from Hill last year, I was so pleased to see she has blessed her readers with an early 2018 release. Hill has set the bar high for 2018, I simply adored this novel, and it seemed to tick all the boxes for me. The Secret Vineyard has already secured a position on my top reads for 2018!

The Secret Vineyard is the leading character of the novel, Grace Middleton's heartfelt journey. Hill has chosen to use a first person style of narrative for her sixth novel. The use of this narrative technique allows the reader to really get into the heart and mind of the heroine of the story, with a large degree of depth. This point of view enabled me to establish a swift but lasting connection to Grace. As a mother of two young children myself, I quickly saw the parallels between my own life and Grace's life. Hill paints a picture of motherhood and in particular, single parenthood, with a strong dose of realism. Hill presents the reader with the tears and tantrums version of raising kids. Through the novel, we witness moments of despair, desperation, embarrassment, happiness and pride in raising three spirited children.

Hill's heroine Grace is supported by a fantastic cast of secondary characters. I liked the inclusion of Rachel, Grace's sister to the mould. She is a great source of reason, help and guidance in Grace's life. I liked how Grace and Rachel's conversations gave us an insight into both the events in the book, as well as Grace's mind. Grace's mother, whom she is estranged from for the bulk of the novel, allows Hill to tackle themes of forgiveness, trust, family dynamics and alcoholism. There are also comedic elements in the book, which comes from the inclusion of a colourful character called Antoine, who hails from an adjoining winery to Gum Leaf Grove. However, I felt Grace's three children, Ryan, Alfie and Charlie are mostly responsible for the humorous scenes in the novel.

Romance is high on the agenda in The Secret Vineyard. Initially, the prospect of romance, which Grace tries so hard to resist, comes from real estate agent Scott. Readers will soon see how transparent Scott is, perhaps before the lead Grace. Scott's inclusion in the storyline adds complications to the romance sub plot, as well as the revelation of an interesting secret this character holds close to his chest. Hill treats her lead to not one, but two men in the love stakes. The other male contender is much more guarded, genuine and shrouded in a healthy dose of mystery. This appealing male lead's storyline does make up a healthy chunk of the novel's direction but it is a compelling narrative thread that I enjoyed unpacking immensely. Half the fun, which some readers may find a little too far-fetched, is the 'ghost' element that is connected to this particular character.

As much as I loved the romance in The Secret Vineyard, I very much enjoyed the other aspects of the story. The family mystery involving Grace's husband Jake, a set of letters Grace discovers at Gum Leaf Grove and the investigations Grace embarks on in order to solve this mystery, adds further appeal to this novel. I liked the inclusion of the hearty family history thread and the hints to the presence of a resident ghost. It is certainly something a little different for Loretta Hill and displays her growth as a writer to tackle some different sub themes to her previous titles.

My love for this novel was sealed by the use of the familiar south-west region of Western Australia as the location of the main events of the novel. The vineyard that Grace's children inherit, Gum Leaf Grove, is located near Yallingup, a part of our state I have had the pleasure to visit many times over. Hill brings out the best of this region, which will be sure to draw in outsiders. For those with first-hand experience of the region, it was a pleasure to see how Hill captured the beauty – the beach, food, wine and giant forest areas of this region, perfectly on the page.

My final word on The Secret Vineyard comes from the ending. The closure of the novel is crisp, sweet and happy one, for (almost) all those involved in the events of this entertaining novel. The inclusion of the meaningful final song lyrics made me tear up. Loretta Hill's sixth and latest novel is a book that has so much to offer the reader. The Secret Vineyard is; a hearty mystery, an unexpected love story and a study on complex family relations. All of these themes are offset by a relaxing West Australian vineyard setting and moments of bona fide humour. An essential read this summer!

\*I wish to thank Penguin Books Australia for providing me with a free copy of this book for review purposes.

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### **Sharon says**

It's not until somebody dies that you find out about the secrets they may have been hiding and that's exactly what happened when Grace Middleton's ex husband, Jake suddenly died. Leaving behind a vineyard located in the Margaret River Wine Region for their three sons, Ryan, Alfie and Charlie. This was the last thing Grace would've expected from, Jake.

At first Grace has thoughts of selling Gum Leaf Grove as the money from the property would help remove the pressure off the family financially. But first she and the boys would take a trip to this secret vineyard and see what kind of condition it was in.

It was obvious that Gum Leaf Grove had been neglected for many years and was now just a run down old farm house, but with a few fixes and tidying up the place would look new again. As the repairs got under way, Grace started discovering things about Jake that she never knew. Secrets from his past, were beginning to unravel and Grace wonders if she can discover the answers to Jakes mysterious past, a past she never knew existed. With the repairs nearly finished, Grace knows she must put the property up for sale, but now knowing about Jakes past could this change her mind?

What an enjoyable and very entertaining book this really was. If you enjoy reading Rural Romance novels like I do then make sure you read this book by Aussie author Loretta Hill. Highly recommended.

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### **Steve Maxwell says**

A funny and beautifully crafted story set in country Western Australia this romance doesn't disappoint

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### **Kylie D says**

I really enjoyed this book, it had me laughing out loud in several places!

It follows the story of Grace, a harried single mum of three young boys, who inherits a vineyard in the

Margaret River region of Western Australia when her ex-husband dies suddenly. The place is a dump, but has a lot of potential, so she calls on local hunky real estate agent Scott for an appraisal. She also stumbles across squatter turned handyman Mitch, scarred and with a mysterious past, who helps her out with maintenance and cleaning, and gets on great with her kids.

It's a lovely, feel-good story, about the transformation of Grace from social retard who hasn't dated in years, to suddenly having two men vying for her affections. But it's the interactions with the kids, and the things they do and say, that really light up this novel. You can feel Grace's embarrassment when they announce things inappropriately to the wrong people, such as the hole in Grace's underwear. You find yourself cringing with her and laughing along.

A beautifully written story, with a great sense of place, I recommend this book to all lovers of romance.

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