



Season 3, Episode 21: Our Last Episode of 2020 + Year-End Reading Reflections

Mon, 12/21 • 46:22

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading Podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we don't shy away from those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

We are light on the chit-chat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler-free. We'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And I love to read alone or with my handsome husband.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I'm looking forward to seeing the end of 2020. This is episode number 21 of season three. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:52

Kaytee, this is going to be our last episode of 2020, isn't it?

Kaytee Cobb 00:56

It is our last episode of 2020. We'll see you all in 2021. Later friends, no, just kidding. Actually, we are going to take two weeks off. So I know you'll miss us. But guys, I promise we'll be back on January 11 to ring in the new year and to talk about 2021 with you. Yay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:15

We are ready to say "bye, Felicia" to 2020 in a major way. So before we get into things we want to let you guys know, our deep dive today is kind of along those lines. We're going to be doing a reflection of our reading lives in 2020. What went well, what didn't go so well. And what are we hoping for in a new year. So that's coming up later in our deep dive. But first, let's start out with our bookish moments of the week. What have you got for us this week, Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 01:44

Okay, so my bookish moment this week has to do with a gift that I got from one of our bookish friends. Donna Hetchler, one of our favorite people sent me a gift to lift my spirits during all the dumb health stuff that my family has been dealing with, over these past two months or so at our house. And it was a couple books and a couple other little fun items. I read one of the books that she sent this past week, I laughed my behind off, it was hysterical. And then because it's right before Christmas, right now, I immediately put it into a stack for somebody for a Christmas gift because I know how much this person will love it, and how much it's going to lift their spirits. So I am very excited that not only did I get to get this wonderful gift from somebody that just completely lifted my spirits. But then I get to pass it along and know that that joy is going to someone else. Very bookish moment.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:37

And very, very practical. I like it. All right, my, my bookish moment of the week has to do with kind of a new routine that Johnny and I have established. So I've talked about the fact that one of the ways that I've worked reading into my life at this season of my life, because Jackson is nine and he gets up in the morning. And he does his thing is that I do some of my biggest chunk of reading time in the morning before I get up and get out of bed. So Johnny usually brings me coffee. And then I read for a chunk of time after I go through emails and make sure everything work wises is all set. So what Johnny used to kind of bring my coffee and then he would go in the other room and watch the CBS morning show or whatever. But what he started doing is sitting in the chair next to the bed and reading, himself. And so he's beginning to use this as a chunk of reading time, which I really love. He's always working on a book, but lately, he has been working on another book by one of his favorite authors that I just have to mention and Johnnie doesn't regularly listen to the show. So I'm going to be okay with telling you guys. He really likes Anita Shreve, which is the cutest thing to me. Because I love how different people's reading tastes are. And Johnny is this very manly man kind of guy. But his book and movie choices are very in line with yours, Kaytee, actually, your your reading taste is much more aligned with Johnny's than my own. He loves a book that's going to make him cry. And Anita Shreve, just pushes his buttons all the time. And so it's so been so fun for me to be doing my own reading, but think kind of be aware of, you know, what, he's what he's reading and he'll kind of have reactions to it or he'll be like, no, we're he'll be you know, like a little, you know, verklempt it's really really cute. I absolutely love it. So he just finished. Let's see, what was his book called? It was Anita Shreeve's, The Stars Are Fire, which he really, really loved. So, book recommendation from Johnny, if you like a book that's highly emotional and going to make you cry, but not in a manipulative way. Look for that book. But anyway, that's been a really fun thing that we have added into our reading this year.

Kaytee Cobb 04:50

I already put it on my TBR. Thanks, Johnny.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:53

All right. So let's talk a little bit then about current reads. What's your first one for this week?

Kaytee Cobb 04:59

Okay, well, know that then my first read is a recommendation for Johnny. It's The Chicken Sisters by KJ Dell'Antonia, I adored this book. I also read it before Reese chose it for her book club. So I'm going to

go ahead and say it was my idea first. It was this book is reality TV meets tiny town meets sisters whose paths diverged in their path and is now like coming back together. So I described it on Instagram as Food Network, mixed with Schitt's Creek, which is like I'm standing by that. I think it's the perfect description. We have two sisters, as I mentioned, in this story. Amanda stayed in her small hometown, which is like this teeny, tiny Podunk town that happens to have two very famous fried chicken restaurants. So Amanda stayed at her hometown, she grew up living behind and working at Mimi's chicken shack, which was started by one of two sisters, way back during like the gold rush. After growing up, she marries Frank, who is the heir to Franny's chicken shack across the road, which of course, there's this huge rivalry between the two of them. Right at the beginning of the story, Amanda is emailing what's essentially the Food Network, trying to get these two chicken shacks on to Food Wars, which is this reality TV show, where two restaurants that have some kind of long-standing rivalry are pitted against each other, and the judges have to decide which one has the better whatever it is egg rolls, fried chicken, whatever. Right. So on the other side, back at Mimi's we have Mae Moore, who left home long ago because she doesn't want to be part of this little tiny Podunk town. She went and became very famous in New York City on a home organizing show that right at the beginning of the story has let her go. Sorry, Mae. We don't want you anymore. We like your co star better instead." So she's coming home kind of tail between her legs, and Amanda and Mae have to figure out their own sisterly dynamic, especially since Amanda like left to the family behind to marry Frank over at Franny's chicken and waffles. And they're on this reality TV show, they're trying to like figure out, you know, behind the scenes without getting recorded what their sisterly dynamic is going to be what the dynamic is going to be with their mom the entire time. There's like these fantastic townspeople that you just completely fall in love with. Very tongue in cheek writing. Very fun, very witty, and a little bit of drama and a little bit of tears, which makes it a perfect book for me. And for Johnny, it turns out, so I just loved it. I craved fried chicken the entire time I was reading it so definitely know that going in. But this book, it got five stars from me. I just loved it so much. It's The Chicken Sisters by KJ Dell'Antonia.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:53

But you did do a lot of crying, right? Because you're kind of making it sound like, I guess. Like, just cute and fun. But you posted pictures of crying, you posted crying pictures and I feel like that was like, okay, because it seemed like, like it was like you were really worked up. So I mean, I'm just saying I think people should be aware that it's like not just cute and sweet. Like it. It does pack an emotional punch.

Kaytee Cobb 08:13

It packs emotional punch. But it's like the kind where you just like hug the book at the end and you're just like tears streaming down your face? Because you're so in love with this book. Have you never cried because you're in love with the book before? Are you confused right now?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:30

Yeah, no. Right. No, I'm not confused. I definitely have had that experience of being of ending a book with tears, but also being like, I really, really loved this experience. So this is not a negative thing. It just happens so so so rarely for me. So I just feel like in the same way that on All Things Murderful, I have a scary scale. I think you should have a tear scale, like scale.

Kaytee Cobb 08:55

How many tissues does this need? Mm hmm. I'm gonna have to start working that in. I think that's a great idea.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:03

Right. Okay. All right. Well, speaking of All Things Murderful. This next book I want to talk about, I actually mentioned a little bit over there on episode three, because I was reading *The Killings at Kingfisher Hill*, which is, this is interesting, an Agatha Christie novel by Sophie Hannah. Okay, so, Sophie Hannah is a thriller and mystery and thriller writer of great renown on her own, who several years ago, was conscripted by the estate of Agatha Christie, to be allowed to continue to write Hercule Poirot mysteries, as Agatha Christie novels. So this is actually the third one that she did, but it's the first one that I've ever read. So this is called *The Killings at Kingfisher Hill*, and let me tell you a little bit about the setup. Okay. And you guys know, I love Hercule Poirot, like he I really want him to be my boyfriend. He is totally the kind of guy if I was single, I would go for this kind of guy. I love it. So he is traveling by luxury passenger bus from London to this very exclusive Kingfisher Hill estate. Now, the fact that he's traveling by bus seems like kind of a bizarre detail to offer right at the beginning, but it does make a difference. So Poirot is going to Kingfisher because this guy Richard Davenport has asked him, the renowned detective to prove that his fiance Helen is innocent of the murder of Richard's brother Frank. There's all this family drama going on. Right. So Richard, once to prove that Helen is innocent, Frank is dead. Poirot will only have days to investigate because Helen is getting ready to be hanged. So we need to move fast, right? We don't have much time. But there is one strange thing that he's been told before he even arrives at Kingfisher. You cannot tell anybody in my family, the reason that you are there. So they come up with this excuse for him being there anyway. Then the bus that they're on to take them to Kingfisher Hill, they have to stop because there's this very distressed woman who demands to get off, insisting that if she stays in that exact seat that she's sitting in, she will be murdered. Although the rest of the journey after they get that figured out proceeds as normal. Poirot's red alert is going off. And his fears are confirmed later when a body is discovered with this very macabre note attached to it. So we've got lots of different weird things happening in this story. And it's exactly like what Agatha Christie would write. A lot of different characters. A bunch of competing agendas. intentions are, you know, are people really who and what they say they are, this book was so so great. Sophie Hannah did a great job with Poirot and I was really ready. Although I really like her writing as Sophie Hannah, I was very much ready to give side-eye to the way she was going to write this. I absolutely loved it. The story was satisfyingly complex, she found a way to create a narrator, this inspector whose name is Catchpool, who is such a good straight man for Poirot, because Poirot really needs a good straight man. That's a very important part of writing him. And she did a great job with this. So I was kept guessing all the way up until the last quarter of the book. And I love the fact that like when you read Agatha Christie, you're guessing, but she also gives you enough to be able to play along. So it's a really satisfying puzzle kind of experience. And I will for sure be reading more Agatha Christie written by Sophie Hannah. So this was *The Killings at Kingfisher Hill*, an Agatha Christie novel written by Sophie Hannah.

Kaytee Cobb 13:07

That's fine. I'm actually reading a Sophie Hannah right now, because of All Things Murderful with Meredith, I'm reading The Wrong Mother. So I have not finished it. I'm like 50%, totally wrapped up in the story.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:19

Right. So that's one book that I did talk about on the show. And I really like that one. I think that's a really quality thriller. And you know that I'm weird about thrillers. So I think that she does a good job. I really I like her writing. All right, what's your next one, your next current read?

Kaytee Cobb 13:33

Okay, my next current read is my spicy opinion for this episode. It's called The Girl He Used to Know by Tracey Garvis Graves. This book, at first glance seems right up my alley. We've got Annika, who is a librarian, yay, who is perfectly happy living alone. And that's because we are sure right from the beginning of the story that she is on the autism spectrum. She has a hard time reading people she has certain ways she wants things to go. And getting out of her routine really messes up her day. All that's well and good until she runs into Jonathan, her college boyfriend, her first love, the only man she's really ever loved. Jonathan has a high stress job. He's recently divorced. But he's having a hard time getting past the hurt of the way that their relationship ended all those many years ago. So the story comes together through two timelines, we see how they fell in love the first time and how their relationship is going the second time. All of this sounds great. This is like yay, Kaytee. Perfect book for you. Right? The thing that really, really bothered me about this book is that we are constantly being told how Annika is so gorgeous, which is fine, but it's almost always couched in this. She's pretty enough to overlook her tics. She's pretty good enough to balance out her personality. Like you can only like beauty is only enough to cover any number of personality issues right? Or like we should expect it to like, Oh, it's okay that you're kind of a rude person because you're so pretty. Or it's okay that you're kind of weird because you're so pretty. over and over and over again, we're getting this and that whole thing, just, like completely pissed me off. I was so mad. And I'd be swimming along just enjoying the story. And then they'd be like, but it's okay. Because Annika is so gorgeous that we don't have to worry about the fact that she couldn't respond to a question correctly or whatever. Like, it's like being beaten over the head with it. Right. So there you go. It just drove me nuts. There are plenty of people who really liked this book that recommended it to me. So come at me, I'm fine with it. Because this book drove me bonkers. And it's The Girl He Used to Know by Tracey Garvis Graves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:49

Alright, so this next book was actually hand sold to me at Book People in Austin, right after we moved to Austin. It's the one and only time that I have been able to go to Book People. Because literally just a couple weeks after we made this pilgrimage over there, and they hand-sold me a couple of books, which I've talked about on the show, COVID happened and I haven't been able to get back there again. So I love Book People. Absolutely fantastic. This is a book I wouldn't have picked up on my own. But I'm so glad I did. This book is The World As It Is by Ben Rhodes. And this is nonfiction. It's a political memoir. Ben Rhodes worked for President Obama in many different roles over the course of more than a decade before, and then of course, during his administration. He started out as a speech writer. And then he was Deputy National Security Adviser and then really spent the majority of the administration

being a very multipurpose kind of aid, and really close advisor and collaborator. So this book is very much about the deep internal workings of a presidential administration. It's a very deep, very close look at President Obama, and especially as it has to do with foreign policy. So this book is very, very interesting. As far as being a fly on the wall. He, Ben Rhodes, his style is very warts and all. He's not an acolyte. He's not someone who is just looking to tell a perfect tale of the people who were involved in the Obama administration. He's willing to call a spade a spade, for sure which I really, really like, because it makes me trust someone's point of view. And I feel like they're being honest. I do have to say this book is big. Like there's, it's, you know, it's not a short book. And it's fairly wonky. So unlike some of the other Obama administration, memoirs that we've gotten, this one is really, really, really deep and detailed, and it is wonky. So if getting into the weeds of a lot of foreign policy stuff, like literally how treaties are written, or how agreements are entered into, if that is something that makes your teeth itch, this one book won't be for you. But inversely, if that is something that you're really interested in. And, and it's, it was really interesting to me, then this book will definitely, definitely be for you. It is interesting to note that I read this book, the week of the presidential election here in the United States. I started it with great apprehension on the Monday night before the Tuesday election and was reading it, I thought, I thought I was going to be reading it after the election was finished, which of course we know that the election went on for 3000 years. So it was very interesting to be reading this while everything was playing out. It was just a it was just an interesting perspective to have. It's definitely a well told story. I kept shying away. I do want to say though a little bit from the author himself. There was something about him that just felt like he was a little bit too self aware for my taste. And by that I mean, not self aware, as much as self congratulatory, or he wanted you to be very aware that he was where he was that he was in on all the conversations, what he was witnessing and how those things made him important that it was sort of because he was as smart as he was that he was sitting in that room. So there was just a little bit of that. But he did do important things. And he did witness important things. So overall, this was the right book at the right time for me, and I will definitely always remember reading it when I did. So that's *The World As It Is* by Ben Rhodes.

Kaytee Cobb 19:45

All right, so my third book this week is the one that I was reading during the 3000 years of the election. So this works out perfectly. But mine was *The Book of Candlelight* by Ellery Adams, our favorite we love Ellery. This is the book that I picked it up on election day. It felt like nothing could hold my attention. But this is also the one that brought my reading mojo back post-election. So this is the third book in the *Secret Book and Scone Society* series. And although they could stand alone, I'm telling you to read them in order. Meredith, you already know this. Of course, I'm telling everybody else to read them in order, because the characters develop, and we have threads that run throughout. In this story, Nora Pennington, our favorite bookshop owner is wet as a drowned rat when we meet her. It has been raining buckets in Miracle Creek for days and the poor girl rides her bike to and from work every day, to and from the swap meet, to and from the grocery store. So since people are shopping during the rain instead of being outside, her shelf enhancers at her store are running low. So she has to pop on over to the thrift swap meet down the road where she meets Danny, a local Cherokee man who makes beautiful pottery. The next day after a bike accident that broke the bowl that she bought from him, she intends to go back to see him again to see if he can fix it. But it turns out that he died an untimely death, drowned in the surging river, the night before. And we have to figure out what happened. His drowning is ruled accidental but Nora and her secret book and scone society friends want to figure out what really

happened because this is a Cozy Mystery. So of course they have to put their noses into the situation. So this was a choice of they have no other choice. So this mystery just unraveled wonderfully, all while reminding me why I love Miracle Creek. Why I love Ellery why I love Nora and her bookshop so much and her friends oh my gosh, her friends, like the one who bakes book pockets that go to the bookshop everyday. Oh, I just love it. Each of her main characters is a delight. Her mysteries are wonderful. Her setting is lovely. There's nothing I love more than cozying up with Ellery and this book was a surefire knock out of the park. It's The Book of Candlelight by Ellery Adams.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:06

I love this series. This is really one of one of my favorite series. And it's I think, right now as far as cozies being written, it's one of the best series out there. So if that's the genre you've been looking to dip into, I agree and you should start with the first one which is called The Secret Book and Scone Society. Alright, so kind of staying with the murderful theme that we're on right now, my third book is a book by an author that I have read before and really, really enjoy. I read The Suspect by Fiona Barton. Kaytee, I think you've read at least one of Fiona Barton's books. She has this series focuses on our lead character, who's a journalist Kate Walters, in this particular book, The basically, when two 18 year old girls go missing in Thailand, their families are understandably scared and desperate to find them. And also, they're having to deal with being thrust into this major spotlight this, you know, this kind of media, just storm that happens sometimes around some of these cases. Well, this is an example of one of those, the question becomes what were the girls up to before they disappeared. So I don't want to give a ton of setup on this book, because I think it's really best to go in just with that, but know that we're on this journey through that, you know, where we are seeing this journey through the lens of our lead character, Kate Walters, and she's trying to navigate getting the story. And she's navigating relationships with the families and trying to help them navigate all of this. Very, very interesting. So this is a good one, I have to say this was a super fast read, it was great at the time, because I wanted one of those things after reading the Obama political memoir, I wanted something that was going to be really fast and not take a lot of brain power, because The World As It Is took a lot of brain power. So I love Fiona Barton style, I really like Kate Walters as a lead character. I like that she's a journalist, instead of a police, you know, a member of the the police department, it's just a different kind of way for us to get into these stories. And the short chapters that rotate through multiple viewpoints just always make for a really, really fast read. I do have to say this book is not perfect. And there were some things about, there were some places where you needed to suspend some disbelief a little bit, which is something I struggle with, but I was okay with it here. And the ending does have some problems. So it's not a perfect book. I'm not at all suggesting that it's perfect, but I really liked it. It was the perfect book at the perfect time for me and it just read really, really easily. So that's The Suspect by Fiona Barton.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:53

All right, Kaytee. So those are our six current reads. So let's talk a little bit about our deep dive as we talked about in the very beginning, this is our last Big Show episode of 2020, which means we are ready to see the back of 2020. And really get into 2021. But before we did that, we wanted to kind of take a look back and say, What was our reading life specifically, like, this year? What were the things that struggled and we know that there were things that struggled, but then also, were there some things that maybe some good things that came out of everything that happened in 2020, as it had to do with

our reading life? So when you thought about this topic, Kaytee, what, what were sort of the first things that popped into your head?

Kaytee Cobb 25:37

Okay, the very first thing that I thought of with this topic is that I want to do a better job moving forward, of keeping track of where I got a book recommendation from, because multiple times on the show over the course of this past year, I would be like somebody told me to read this book, and I don't know who it was. And I, I don't like that. I want to give credit, where credit is due whether it's good credit or bad credit. So I'm working something into the reading tracker that we talked about a little bit last episode, to try and keep better track of recommendation sources, because that's important to me, I want to know who's a good source for me, the stuff that I did write down, I can tell you that of the books that I kept track of, 40% were recommended by you, Meredith. So that went pretty well.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:23

Well, can I give you Can I just tell you how I keep track of this for myself,

Kaytee Cobb 26:27

Please!

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:28

Yeah. Okay. So because this is really important, as far as it's one of the things we talk about all the time, if you track your sources, especially in your reading tracker, then you can really figure out where you find success. So the way I do it is it's one thing to track it, when you read a book, and you're ready to sort of enter it into your tracker,

Kaytee Cobb 26:47

right? That's when I get stuck. When I enter it it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:50

Exactly. So what I started doing is, whenever I have a recommendation, I take a screenshot usually on my phone, so I just take a screenshot of the recommendation, whether it's the Instagram post, that gave me the idea, and I'll take a shot that includes the Instagram account so that I can remember that. Or sometimes it's in a DM and I'll do it in such a way that I have the you know, the actual, I can see the person who DM'ed me what you know, or there's all sorts of ways, but they almost all come to me when I'm on my phone. So I will take a screenshot of it. And then what this year I wasn't as good at doing but I have now figured out trying to make this process even better. I need to then once it screenshot becomes a photo in my Photo Stream. But there are so many photos in my photo stream which I share with my husband, but then it's really hard to find it. So what I'm doing now is I'm tagging the photo with the title of the book, and the word recommendation or rec, I just am doing R-E-C. So now I can just do a find in my photo stream for I can first of all, I can do a find by the title of the book, or it can just do a find for Rec. And then it just pulls up those and so then now I can really track back much easier. So that's how I'm keeping track of it. Because then I can then enter it into my book tracker

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:14

That is amazing. That is. My jaw is like, on the floor. You are so smart. I love you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:20

I'm glad that's helpful. All right, good. I interrupted you, though you were you were talking about this piece needing to be better in your reading life.

Kaytee Cobb 28:27

Well, that was the first thing that came to mind. And now you may have just solved every problem I've ever had in my entire life. What was the first thing that came to mind for you?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:37

The first. Well, I mean, obviously, the biggest, I think problem in my reading life this year, and this is going to be 100% of all of us is because of the different things that happened. And it wasn't just the pandemic, it was largely the pandemic, especially as it all took place in March and April. And then it was back again in June. And it was you know, kind of as we've had these big surges. I just was having a hard time concentrating. But then we had, you know, other major things happen, you know, racial issues happen. We had the election happened, several things this year, took brainspace. And, and also then for me from a work perspective, this has been a doozy of a year because I've been trying to navigate my company, which is all about wedding venues and you know, weddings through a time that we didn't have weddings. And so all of those things pulled together meant that my biggest single problem this year was periods of time, longer periods of time than normal, where I couldn't concentrate. So that was the number one. That to me is my reading life in 2020 from a negative perspective. The thing then that I realized is the outgrowth of that is that and I think you've experienced this too. As I read books, or I was in this weird slump, or I was in a weird mood, or I couldn't pick up a book that kept my attention, I've been harder and harsher, I think on the books that I was reading or trying to read than I would be in another year. So I look back on our shows from 2020. And I see several points where I'm like, you know, I think that was just largely, when I read that book, I was in a bad mood, I was in a bad place. So I feel like that's been the other thing that's happened is that I feel like my overall star ratings in my reading tracker are lower. And I feel like my reviews on the show, I've had to be really mindful of not stepping into a space where I was just not in a good mood.

Kaytee Cobb 30:44

Right? Yeah, that kind of plays into it. So I figured that my star ratings were going to be lower for this year, because I've been cranky, often when it comes to rating books. But what I found when I looked at my January through November reading tracker, is that my average rating for the year was 4.15 stars, which to me seems too high. And I don't know why that is, it feels like either I'm not reading hard enough, like I'm being too generous, or I'm not trying new things as often as I should. Or it could be that I got better at DNFing this year. And I finally got to the point where I was willing to kind of let go of books that weren't working for me at any given time, for whatever reason. But when I looked at that number, I am kind of trying to settle into, what is it about that number that makes me uncomfortable? Am I being too generous? Is that a bad thing?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:43

Well, I wonder. No, I don't think that's a bad thing. I don't think there's I don't think we can make any judgments on our reading life really any year because why would we but especially not this year. But I do wonder because what I saw in my reading tracker was that I swung back and forth between low ratings, and then really high ratings, I had many fewer, like three and a half star reads than I normally do. So that tells me that what was happening was I was either reading a book that wasn't the right book for me at the time, I just wasn't in the mood. So I'd be really harsh with my rating. And then when I would read a book that I that was really feeling right to me, we're reading felt good and normal. And like I wanted to be reading and I could concentrate. I feel like maybe I gave an especially high rating, right. And so then the net effect would be kind of like a four star I haven't done an average on on mine. But I'm wondering if that could be part of what's at play, too, is that maybe you're swinging back and forth between low and high?

Kaytee Cobb 32:41

Yeah, that could be it. Something that I was really happy about with my reading life this year is last year was the first year that I kept really good track of authors of color. And I knew that I wanted that number to be higher for 2020. This year, I blew it out of the water where 40% of my books were written by authors of color, which I am so pleased with, because I was only at about 20% last year. And that is a huge jump.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:08

You doubled! Yeah, yeah, no, that's great. And I think also what's been really great is because you have been so mindful of that, I think that that has really had an effect on me for sure. Because you're bringing books to my attention that otherwise wouldn't be we wouldn't be on my radar. But then just with our audience at large. So I feel like the fact that you were so intentional about that has had a much broader effect on a lot of people's lives than you know, even even just your own.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:39

I'm wondering too, if what's at play, because you just talked about like, maybe I'm not taking risks. The other thing that I have noted here for me is I really, my library is still has been closed since March. Now it's been open for curbside pickup, so I'm able to put in holds. And then I pick those up every week. And thank the Lord. And again, I have the best library on the planet. And I have no issue with the fact that they are still closed to patrons, because we need to be really safe and they'll open when they can. But I will really look forward to that day because there's no question that for me, those browsing sessions in the library, where I just randomly page through books, read a couple of pages, read the inside cover, and then throw them in my bag. And sometimes they end up being you know, ones that I just absolutely love. That bookish serendipity has been really gone for me this year. And I realized that that's something that I really miss. So we all will look forward to when everything is open again, we're all going to look forward to our libraries being normal. I think we won't take them for granted ever again. I know I will definitely be much more mindful of how grateful I am for being able to just browse in the library once they open so that'll be something that will be positive when that happens.

Kaytee Cobb 34:57

I've got one more win that I want to share for you. goals that I made at the beginning of the year. Last year, my average book length was 333 pages, but during 2020, because partially because of you, because I did this like random goal for myself that I wanted to read more bricks in 2020, that number went way up. So this year, my average page length was 360. So it that feels a lot better to me. Like, I'm not as scared to pick up some books that were really intimidating to me before. And that's what's made that difference there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:32

Right. Right. Well, and as far as a couple more wins. For me, I was thinking there, you know, there's a lot negative to say about 2020, even as it has to do with our reading lives. But there's been a couple places where there's no question my reading, life has increased. So at the beginning of the show, I talked about Johnny and I doing more reading side by side together in the morning, and then we're also really making sure a few nights a week, we're all we're just turning off the TV and spending more time reading quietly in the evening kind of side by side. And that has been really great. For my reading life. It's been, I think, great for us to model that for Jackson, because he sees us doing that together. And then also, it's been great for us just as a couple to spend more time together, talking about the books that we're reading. And that's a way that we really can connect with each other.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:19

And then the other thing is that I distance learning is difficult in a lot of ways. I've worked full time and having Jackson home distance learning since March 20th. And it's looking like he's not going to go back any before March of this year. It's really, really challenging. So many of us are dealing with it. But it is tremendously challenging. And we never thought we would be doing it for an entire year. That is mind blowing. But the upside is that I have much more control over making sure that Jackson has two 30-minute periods of time during the day that he can read. One of those is a book he chooses. And one of those is a book a challenge book that I have him working on. And then we also have more time where we can do reading aloud trading the book back and forth to each other, so I can get more time of hearing him read and he can get more time of hearing me read. And that was something that before COVID before distance learning, he had largely, you know, we'd largely kind of segwayed out of that because he was listening to audiobooks at night. And you know, so that is something that has been positive because it not only is a way for us to connect, but it's also really good for me to be able to continue to work with him and his reading comprehension, and continue to challenge him. And, you know, I've seen big growth in his reading comprehension and in his ability to read books that are at a higher reading level. So those things have been really positive, for sure. It's not all negative in 2020. It's not all negative,

Kaytee Cobb 37:54

I have to tell myself that regularly, it's fine. It's gonna be fine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:58

All right, so one of the reasons that we can quickly and easily look back at our year and figure out what worked and what didn't is because we have your awesome reading tracker that you have created. And this is something that is available to our patrons. And, you know, I've said this a million times at \$5 a

month. I think this reading tracker, which is so data driven that you have created, but is so easy to use, and it doesn't take a lot of time is worth the price of entry to being a bookish friend to supporting us on Patreon. So if you are interested in getting this amazing reading tracker and our reading challenge and all the additional content that we do multiple episodes a month of additional content that we do, go to patreon.com/currentlyreadingpodcast and join us at \$5 a month. It's a great time of year to do it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:49

So let's talk about some books that we want to press. What what are you going to press as we round out? 2020 Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 38:58

Oh, man, that puts way more pressure on it. Meredith, rude!

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:01

Your last press of 2020! This is your last chance, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 39:05

Okay, well, I've decided to do a press of redemption. Today, I am going to press in contrast to my second book this week, which was my spicy opinion. I'm going to press *The Kiss Quotient* by Helen Hoang. So this is another romance. It's another non neurotypical main character. We have Stella she is a math genius. She spends all day doing statistical analysis of algorithms. She's super nerdy. I love her. But as a woman on the autism spectrum, she wants to determine statistically the best way to be intimate with someone in bed. So she hires a male escort whose name is Michael, who is hot as everything you've ever imagined to teach her the ropes, and they work through her list of things she wants to learn from kissing to positions. This book had me blushing the entire way through it. It is not only much spicier than the other book that shall not be named at this point in time. But the the representation is so much better of a person on the spectrum. It's also an #ownvoices read in that Helen Hoang has also recently been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. So she is writing from her own point of view. And I think that that is so important. It's very open door, very spicy, like I said, and it was exactly what I was wanting, but didn't get from my second current read this week. Steamy, delightful, funny and sweet. I loved it. It's *The Kiss Quotient* by Helen Hoang.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:38

I think that's a great press, I love a redemption press.

Kaytee Cobb 40:41

It's perfect.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:43

Alright, so I am going to press my favorite pandemic slash apocalypse book, because I just feel like this is my perfect ending press for 2020. It's a book we've talked about a few times on the show, but I think about this book all the time. And that is *The Book of M* by Peng Shepherd. So here's the setup of this book, you're going to remember this pretty quickly. So when our book opens, we're in an outdoor market in India, and on this particular afternoon, a man's shadow disappears. And the scientists cannot

explain this. But then this condition spreads and more and more people start to have their shadows disappear. And well, those who have this happen to them gain a strange power, it comes at a really, really big price because they lose their memories. Like completely. Initially, they lose memories just a little bit like I don't remember who you are, and then eventually it becomes fatal lose their memory, their body's memory to even take a breath. So it is fatal. So our lead characters are love these two, Ori and his wife, Max. And so far, neither one of them have had the pandemic effect them, it's called "the forgetting" is what they end up calling this pandemic. But they are hiding from it by or they they're escaping it by hiding in this abandoned Hotel in the woods. And their lives are for a while kind of normal, but then max the wife, she loses her shadow. So knowing that the more that she forgets, the more dangerous she becomes story for a variety of reasons, she runs away and then Ori has to move heaven and earth to try to find her. You guys, this is a literary apocalypse novel, if you liked Station 11, because it's a literary apocalypse novel, you will like this, I cared about these people so much. Again, this is a book that is full of characters that you really, really want to root for. And that's something that I really enjoy in a book, especially when hard things are happening. So also, what I really like about this book that I've mentioned before, is that more than any other pandemic/apocalypse book, it does a fantastic job of getting into the nitty gritty of how the disease itself rolls out kind of in the world. Now, I said that before, before COVID, we may as a group be less interested now in this concept, because we may all be pretty darn familiar with how things roll out. But this is a this pandemic is different than ours. And it is very interesting. And those details are really interesting. The last third gets a little bit complex, but hang on, because the final resolution absolutely makes it worthwhile. I find myself thinking about this book all the time, especially as we've gone through COVID I found myself thinking of it because I've been thinking how would Johnny and I handle an apocalypse or a pandemic that gets really really really scary and fatal and, you know, bands of scary people in the street and cults that come You know, based on the people who are losing their shadows, all of these things make you really think what would you do in these situations. This is the kind of book that is the perfect marriage of plot-driven and character-driven. And I just can't recommend it highly enough. This is The Book of M by Peng Shepherd.

Kaytee Cobb 44:23

Nicely done way to end 2020 strong, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:28

That's a good book to end it on, I think all right. That is it for this week. That is it for this year. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 44:40

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:43

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 44:52

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:59

And If you really want to help us, become a bookish friend, go to patreon.com/currentlyreadingpodcast. \$5 a month become a bookish friend get a lot of content that helps us. Also rate and review us on Apple podcasts. And most importantly, shout us out on social media. That makes a big difference towards us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 45:21

Yes, a recommendation from you to your bookish friend is the best way to pass along your love of the podcast to others and help us grow. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:29

Alright, until next week. Happy reading, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 45:31

Happy reading, Meredith