



Season 3, Episode 20: Bookish Peer Pressure + Book Subscriptions for Gifting

Mon, 12/14/20 • 53:26

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 we've read recently. And as you know, we do not shy away from those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

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 this week, I realized that old readers really can learn new tricks.

Kaytee Cobb 00:44

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I have been missing my Meredith. This is episode number 20 of season three, and we're so glad you're here. Meredith, it has been a month since I got to record with you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:57

I know. There's been lots of different planned things, unplanned things I know. But we've both been looking forward to getting getting back into this this week. It's gonna be a lot of it's gonna be a lot of fun. And you're feeling better.

Kaytee Cobb 01:10

Mostly. I mean, guys, don't mess with COVID. She's a rude taskmaster.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:18

Yes, seriously, even when it's mild, it is really, really not fun.

Kaytee Cobb 01:23

Totally. All right, let's let everybody know, before we get started that our deep dive today is going to be book subscriptions, we want to talk about the ones that we like to receive, and the ones that we like to give. So I'm excited to dive into that a little more. And since this episode is releasing on December 14, we know it's the perfect time to be thinking about last-minute gifts.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:42

I'm excited about this, I found some new ones that I had no idea existed. And I feel like I might be spending a little more money on book subscriptions for myself than I had planned to.

Kaytee Cobb 01:51

Me, too! Sorry, husband. Okay, but before we do that, because this is the second week of the month, we wanted to do our little Patreon ad for ourselves and talk a little bit about being a bookish friend. And this one is our last one of 2020. Our last ad for ourselves of 2020. And so I wanted to take a moment to tell everybody about the reading tracker, which we have talked about in the past. But as we're coming up on the beginning of 2021, and a new reading year, I have been working my little tushy off all week long to make this year's tracker the absolute best it can be. I have added so many new charts, I'm up to 30 charts, which I know is ridiculous. But I love charts.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:33

That is a lot.

Kaytee Cobb 02:34

I have added so many new stats, it's a lot of charts, but they're so exciting, like just so many different ways to visualize the way that your reading year is going. And some of them track, you know, overall, and some are by month. And these new stats that I've added, I'm especially excited about star rating averages by different metrics. So by recommender, by publication house, by demographic info, like if you happen to usually rate authors of color higher than white authors, or vice versa. If you happen to rate certain genres higher, or vice versa. And I've added a mood reading category for people like you, Meredith. So you can put in the general mood of a book. And it'll give you your average star rating by mood. So you can see, oh, I tend to really love twisty books, or page-turners, or ones that leave me feeling happy. And so I'm just really excited about all the different ways that you can like, take a harder book at your reading and see what works best for you as a reader. It's gonna be so great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:39

Right. And it is, and you've done such a great job with it. And it's, it's really I mean, there's no question that it appeals to all of us who have sort of an inner data nerd, but even more importantly, what we hear over and over again. And what we experienced ourselves is tracking your reading, when you do it right, and when you have a tracker that helps you really see the trends and see helps you see what is going right, then it can make for a much more satisfying reading life. Like there's a really straight line between those two things. And there are very few things in the world that are that satisfying. So I think this is a this is a really great bonus that our patrons do get, and it's only \$5 a month to become a bookish friend, you get a lot of extras including the reading tracker. And Kaytee Reads Too Much, which is extra content that Kaytee puts out every month. I do All Things Murderful. So my favorite thrillers, mysteries, police procedurals, lots of great content, and just five bucks a month. So if you want to give us a Christmas gift, this is a great time to become a bookish friend.

Kaytee Cobb 04:40

Yes, we would love to have you join us. Alright, so now that we've taken care of our little business discussion, let's get into bookish moments. I want to hear about your bookish moment of the week. Meredith, what have you got?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:52

Alright, well, Kaytee, you're not gonna be surprised about my bookish moment of the week but I am sort of surprised about it myself, and I hinted at it in my bite-sized open. Because you guys have heard me say a million times that one of the readerly things that a lot of people do, Kaytee, that you do a lot of is buddy reads. And I have been very transparent about the fact that for a variety of reasons, I just haven't ever really gotten into buddy reads. There's a variety of reasons for that. But this week, I have embarked on a buddy read with one of my favorite people in the world, Roxanna Kassam-Kora, and she and I have been reading *A Court of Mist and Fury*, which is the second book in the Sarah J. Maas *Court of Thorns and Roses* series. I guess that's what they call it right? Again, it's a second in a series. I realized that that's a big deal for me, too. But everyone had said that this book, the second one, is by far even better than the first one in the series, which I was fine with. I was okay, it was fine. Yeah. But this book is amazing. I'm about two thirds of the way through, so I'm not I'm not ready to give my full review on it. Because you know, we all know things can fall apart in the last third of a book, but the bookish moment is the buddy read that Roxanna and I have been doing and we have been having so much fun reading this book. And every chapter we we have a back and forth about whatever happened in that chapter. And it's so it's just really added to my enjoyment of the book. And it's funny, because the overall feeling she and I were talking about it is we have this this kind of, we're having fun in a way that, you know, we're middle-aged executives, who spend a lot of our life kind of just like pushing the rocks up the hill type of thing. We're having so much just plain old fun experiencing this world together, we come home from our jobs, and we talk about fairies. And if we like men with wings, and we debate the positives and negatives of the different courts within, it's just it's absolutely crazy. We're like children. And you know what, that's exactly what reading is supposed to do for us certain kinds of reading is make you feel like a kid again. And I feel like she and I are eight year olds running around in this world together. And we're just having so much fun. So it's been a great bookish moment this week.

Kaytee Cobb 07:23

I love that so much. As you know, it has just made my week to have you like kind of reporting back to me about how much fun you're having talking with Roxanna. I just love it. Okay, so my bookish moment is also about a buddy read. Weird. So as you know, all through November, I was buddy reading, like the hardest book I've ever read with our bookish friends, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, which was great, it was so excellent to buddy read it with them. Because it's a lot of really dense, really hard information. We checked in together on zoom three different times. And it was so fun to get to talk to our bookish friends and just like hanging out with them and kind of process together and like cuss out the United States together. It was really a great time. But I have decided to swing wildly the other direction for our next buddy read. And this is just a small one that is kind of off the official path, we are going to do another official one for all the currently reading bookish friends soon. But in December, I'm going to read *A Christmas Carol* with just a few bookish friends. And then we're going to buddy watch the Muppet Christmas Carol, which is the only the only video version that is worth watching over and over again. I love that version so much. So I'm so excited to get together with them

again on zoom and just watch it together and talk about the little novella. And I just love that we're going from like this 400 page like history tome that was so heavy, we cannot read more than like 10 pages a day to a Muppet Christmas Carol. I just, I think that's so fun. And I'm so excited. And it's very bookish, and very delightful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:01

Exactly. Another way that reading can add to the the layers of happiness in our life is being able to read hard things, but doing it together so that you take it in differently and you have different context. And then also Yes, always having the option with your next book to swing wildly the other direction so that you know, we contain multitudes. So I think that's awesome.

Kaytee Cobb 09:20

Yes, so fun. All right, let's talk about some books that we have finished. What have you been reading Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:26

Okay, I have a real melange of books today, Kaytee. They are all over the map with my books because I was swinging right and left. So right before I read this book, I read *The Roanoke Girls* and I talked about the Roanoke girls with Mindy, of course you've heard now that book was so level 10 on the icky scale that which and again, page turner for sure. Like you know, I'm not I'm not at all saying it wasn't really readable, but it was super icky. So I decided when I got done with that book, I read *Princess and the Goblin* but I still wasn't 100 percent. My palate wasn't 100% cleared because *Princess and the Goblin* had been so small. I was like, I am going to finally read a rom com, which is so popular. Everyone loves rom coms. Certainly I can participate in this, right? I read *The Party of Two* by Jasmine Guillory. All right, here's our setup. Our lead character is the predictively, both beautiful, and brilliant. Olivia Monroe, who has just recently moved to LA to start her own law firm. And of course, because she's smart and driven and you know, very focused on her career, she is definitely not interested in dating, and those are all capital letter words. Okay, now this next part is from Amazon. The emphasis however, is mine. But when Olivia meets a gorgeous guy at a hotel bar, and they spend the entire evening flirting, she discovers too late that is, he is none other than hotshot Junior Senator Max Pal. Now, Olivia, as we've ascertained, has no interest in dating, certainly not dating a politician. But when a cake arrives at her office with the cutest message, she just can't resist it. It is chocolate cake after all.

Kaytee Cobb 11:17

Oh my gosh.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:20

All right. All right. So now to finish up, Olivia is super surprised as they start dating that Max is actually really sweet. And he's funny. And he really legitimately believes in the things that he says that he believes in, which surprises her, she thought he was going to be a typical super privileged, white guy. Olivia's African-American, and she really, really likes him. But of course, the central question is, will they date and if they do, can their careers survive it? Okay. I definitely liked some things about this book. For sure. There's there's absolutely no question I did. Jasmine Guillory's writing is very readable. It goes down very, very easy. Right. So she's, she's not difficult to read. But, and also, I do want to say

it was the palate cleanser that ended up completely cleansing my palate, because I was really ready for a book with more substance when I got done with this book. But different things in the book, I had so much trouble sort of either suspending my disbelief, or suspending my irritation, about like the whole cake and pastry thing, which they mentioned in like I read that purposely because I want you to know, right in the setup on Amazon, they talk about the cake thing. And just they pound this thing over and over in the book there is constantly a cake or pastry being delivered to somebody or being talked about the delivery to somebody. At some point, I was like, do we not have anything else to give or speak about these stupid pastry? Like, why are we so focused on it? So and also, it was super, super predictable, which I do realize there's a real reason for that. And sometimes that's exactly what we need. So I'm not downing it at all for its predictability. Because, again, Hallmark movies are predictable. And yet sometimes it's just exactly what you need. So overall, I didn't hate this book at all. I just have realized that for me. My best palate cleansers come in the form of usually middle grade, there's a usually the best palate cleansers for me, and rom coms are not most of the time they aren't a genre that's for me. But again, for someone who likes books in this genre. I actually think this is a pretty good one. So this is Party of Two by Jasmine Guillory.

Kaytee Cobb 13:45

Well, I am glad to hear you talk about it, because I've read a number of Jasmine Guillorys, but not that one yet. So I'll have to think about when it's time to put it on my TBR because I think I can put up with them a little better than you can.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:59

Yeah, again, I didn't. It's not a bad book in any way, shape, or form. And just I want to be the kind of person who can read ROM coms. I want that for myself. And I'm just no fun.

Kaytee Cobb 14:12

Poor Meredith. I think you're fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:14

I'm not fun. No, not fun at all!

Kaytee Cobb 14:17

Okay, my first book this week, or this month, because it's been forever since I got to talk to you was The Scorpio Races by Maggie Stiefvater. This book was a listener press by Nicole Peterson, who told us about it in our listener press episode. And she let us know that the first line starts on November 1, it's the first of November and that means somebody must die. So I picked it up in November of course, because I had to, and a lot of our bookish friends did as well. We saw this like kind of trickled down into the bookish friends Facebook group and mighty networks group where people a lot of people were picking up at once so that was really fun. I was not disappointed. We are following two main characters in the lead up to the Scorpio Races where riders attempt to ride water horses through a race to the finish. It's deadly and terrifying, like the water is often filled with blood after this race happens, it is so dangerous. And water horses are these huge violent beasts that do not want to be tamed. Our first character is named Sean Kendrick. He's been a champion before. But he is kind of buried in servitude. He's like a life indentured servant to a very wealthy owner of water horses who hires people to ride

them for him. And then he gets the glory for that, right. So Sean has won before, but he really he wants to be able to strike out on his own. And he has to deal with this a-hole boss and his son, which is kind of a fun little, like, little bit of tension in the book. I like that part of it. Our female protagonist is named Puck Connelly. Girls do not ride in races in this world. But fate has taken her by the hand and not only must she ride, she needs to win in order to keep her home. So there's this tension between the two of them. Obviously Sean wants to win. He wants to try and buy his freedom. Puck wants to win in order to be able to keep her home. Both of these names smack of Irish ancestry. And that's because the water horse myth that Maggie Stiefvater based her story on is found all over the world. But she pulled most of these portions of her story from Ireland directly, in order to weave her tail. It's so well done. I found myself just like, wanting to get back to my audiobook over and over and over again. The narrator did a great job. I couldn't wait to see what happened with Sean, and with Puck as a race day neared. And this is just really great. Why a fantasy, and I can't wait to read more from her. She has a great little like, kind of sassy wit to her writing. That made me laugh at times and got me totally invested in the characters. So I want to thank Nicole for a great press and I want anybody else to read it that it sounds interesting for it's *The Scorpio Races* by Maggie Stiefvater.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:01

Okay, so I'm going to sort of keep us in the water genre right now and talk about a five star middle grade book that I have been so looking forward to talking about on the show. I read *Malamander* by Thomas Taylor. I loved this book, you guys. So this was actually a book that I found talked a little bit a couple weeks ago with Mindy about the Awesome Book Awards that our listener bookish friend Pippa turned us on to these are British awards for bid for the best middle grade fiction of the year. And *Malamander* is on the shortlist for the awesome Book Awards for 2021. So I've actually picked up several from that list. So that's a fantastic recommendation source if you love really good quality middle grade. Okay, here's our setup from *Malamander*. It's perfect for this time of year because our story starts in winter in the town of Erie-on-Sea, where the mist is super thick and the tourists are gone and things are very, very quiet. Our lead character is the young Herbert Lemon and he is the last and founder for the Grand Nautilus Hotel, which means he keeps track of any items that are lost or found in this historic old hotel where he lives and then into our story in a very exciting way pops Violet Parma, a fearless girl around Herbert's age, who lost her parents at the hotel when she was just a baby. And she's sure that the the sort of adorable nervous, Herbert is the only person who can help her find her parents. But the trouble is that Violet is at that very moment being pursued by a huge, strange hook-handed man. And if that wasn't enough, the town legend of the Malamander, which is a part fish, part human monster, whose egg is said to make dreams come true, is rearing its scaly head. So our question is, will Herbert and Violet survive long enough to be able to find Violet's parents for her? This book is so, so great. And when I was reading it, I said this book is one of those books that gives me the Nevermoor vibes. So it's not exactly the same as Nevermoor. Although there are some similarities in the plot and in the relationships in the fact that they're each story centers on a sort of fantastic hotel that the kids live in. And it's just got it's like Nevermoor by the sea. That's really the best way to describe it. It's really, really beautiful in its setting. It's got these quirky sweet characters in the kids and then the townspeople, there's several characters that like Nevermoor, you're you're interested from the very beginning when you meet these other people. So it's really just peopled with a cast of characters that you care about. It's got some great villains who are believably villainous in a way that's appropriate for the age of the of the protagonists here. And it's got a sea monster, its magic ruby eggs. This would be a

fantastic read aloud for you and your kids, especially over the Christmas break. I think it would be a fantastic one to just cozy up under blankets, everyone is going to be interested from start to finish. There's some beautiful illustrations. The cover is amazing. And it definitely helps to know that it ends on a little bit of a cliffhanger because this is a planned trilogy. But it resolves enough that you feel satisfied, right? It walks that line, you know that there's some things that are still to be discovered. But you don't feel like you're just left like Wait, what what? Why did I spend all this time I got no resolution, so it's definitely not doing that to you. So I am for sure buying this one for my middle grade shelf. And I probably will also buy the sequel sight unseen just because I really, really liked this one. So this was *Malamander* by Thomas Taylor.

Kaytee Cobb 21:02

And we did do it as a read aloud after you told us about it and and all my kids loved it. They could not wait to read it. Actually, as I got COVID and lost my voice my both my boys ended up taking turns reading chapters aloud to us as well, which was really special. So has a great maps in the front, like you said, the illustrations and I love that almost every character has a name that has something to do with the sea. We've got Mr. Mollusc and Lady Kraken and Sebastian Eels. And like over and over again. It's just like, like little sea creatures are sprinkled through in the characters of the book. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:38

Right. It's just that that sort of old-fashioned kind of wink and a nod kind of. I just love middle grade literature like that. This is really I hope it wins because of the shortlisted books. This was definitely my favorite.

Kaytee Cobb 21:51

Yeah, it's it's delightful, for sure. I loved it. Okay, I also have middle grade for my second one. And my book is specifically for middle grade Meredith. So it's called *The Forgotten Girl* by India Hill Brown. This is a middle grade novel that is creepy, and ghostly and has to do with dead kids. And you're gonna love it. Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:14

That sounds awesome. Are you kidding? This is perfect!

Kaytee Cobb 22:19

It's perfect for Christmas, too. Yes, because right at the very beginning of the novel, our main characters are seeing the first snow of the year. We've got Iris and Daniel, they're sneaking out to play in the snow. Even though Daniel's grandmother Suga has always warned against the snow spirits, who are like creepy spirits that steal children away when they go and play in the snow after dark. So they go play outside, the kids decide to make snow angels, and uncovered the grave of a young girl named Avery. Our very first chapter ends with a jump scare. I mean, a middle grade jump scare. But totally, you're like holy crap. What? Oh, my gosh, this is crazy. So we go from there. The novel kept me guessing throughout like, who is Avery? What's going on? Am I imagining? Or is our main character? I put myself in the book? Am I imagining what's happening? Or is this really happening to me? There's this great, like school project in the background, which gives the middle graders in our audience a little time to kind of get their hands on the history of the city where these two are living. Of course, there's

this multi generational story because we've got Daniel's grandmother Suga, who's giving all her like, creepy old wives tales to the kids. And then the platonic friendship between Daniel and Iris is just so sweet and so delightful. It's what kept me going even when the when the story got a little bit creepy and a little bit scary and a little bit. Oh, should I should I keep reading this? It's almost bedtime. It's totally okay. It's gonna be fine. But keep reading. Because it is so fun to get wrapped up into the story and to know that the kids in your life that like to be scared a little bit. This is the perfect book for them. It's so fun. It's very ghostly like I said, made that hair stand up on my arms. I highly recommend it. It's The Forgotten Girl by India Hill Brown.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:13

All right, well, I've already put a hold on that in my library because that sounds absolutely fantastic. Now you said that it scared you though. Scared? Like would like how worried would you be that this would scare a nine to 12 year old.

Kaytee Cobb 24:27

I would hand it to a kid that likes scary books, not one that only wants to read, you know, Cardboard Kingdom and or, you know, Drama by Raina Telgemeier. Like somebody who we get, you know, requests like this from listeners who, you know, my middle grader or my young team really loves to be scared but there's not a lot of books in that area. This is the book that I'm going to hand that kid.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:53

Okay, good. So right. If they're sick of RL Stein, then this probably would be right up their alley. Okay. That's Well, yeah, I'm an adult lady, and it sounds absolutely fantastic to me. Okay. Okay, so my third book is an outlier to me in 2020. But normally would be very, very much a book that would, that would be really normal for me because I just have not read a lot of nonfiction at all in 2020. So much less than normal. But I read one that I really like. And it's called Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness. And this is by Ingrid Fetell Lee. So as far as setup goes, the title pretty the subtitle pretty much tells the story, the shortest way I could describe it would be if The Happiness Project became a much longer, sort of infinitely more researched happiness textbook, that would be what what Joyful is. I really, really loved this book, I really did. But I would be given a doing a disservice to our listeners, if I didn't say that it is very research-heavy. So unlike a Gretchen Rubin-type of book where there's a lot of anecdotes, and you move through it really easily. This one, I definitely had to, you know, I was had to be purposeful about making my way through it, because partly because of the way it's written, which is a little more in a textbook kind of style, rather than a light sort of easy to read style. And also, because of the way the publisher put it together, it's a lot of sort of unbroken text. And when I read nonfiction like this, I find myself wanting to kind of have certain things in bold and or some call out text, or just to have my eye be able to find the salient points in the text a little more than what she's doing here. But what she's actually talking about, you know, again, the surprising power of ordinary things to create extraordinary happiness is really, really great. So how do how, you know, how do different smells make us happy? How and why? How do different lights and different light bulbs make us happy or make a room seem cheerful, or be appropriate for certain kinds of activities? How does you know the way that a room is organized? From a furniture perspective? How can that play into the happiness you might feel when you're in that room and taking all of the senses and figuring out how different things in certain ways we can really increase our spirit of playfulness or joyfulness. And again,

this is a part of me that I always feel like I need to really tap into. And so I feel like I learned a lot about joy and what contributes to it. I kept thinking the whole way through Man, I wish that she was doing a little better job, though, of helping me immediately be able to recognize like, okay, here's the theory. Here's the research. Now, here's what you can do, to put these things into action. And the whole way through, I kept thinking, this seems like such a missed opportunity to me. But then at the very end, there's a joyful workbook, I think, is what she calls it. And she kind of does what I was wanting her to do the whole way through, she kind of does it in an appendix in the back. And I feel like that's a missed opportunity. But it's there. And I want everyone to know that it's there. And, and again, I found so many things that were really actionable in this book, but I had to swim a little against the current to get there. But I still think that it's worth it. So this is Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness by Ingrid Fatell Lee.

Kaytee Cobb 28:41

Okay, my third one. I don't know where I heard about it, either. I know it was somebody who DM'd me on Instagram. So somebody, please DM me again. And tell me it was you because I love this book. It's called Your House Will Pay by Steph Cha. So this book has these two powerful families in LA, that are pitted against each other. It's kind of racially-motivated these this like animosity between these two families. One of our main characters is Grace Park, who is the daughter of Korean immigrants. She works at the family pharmacy, and she's trying to navigate family tensions, like her sister isn't around and doesn't talk to her mom. And her parents are kind of, you know, sad and withdrawn from the community. And so she's trying to figure out like, you know, why does my family Why is everybody sad all the time. And Shawn Matthews is our other main character. He is a black American male, whose family is also suffering and grieving and that's because his sister Ava was murdered as a teen back in the 90s. And at the beginning of the story, another black teen is shot. So all those feelings are being brought back to the surface. So this sounds like a lot of like really heavy drama, right? You're like, Kaytee, this doesn't sound very good. But the way that these two families come together, there's so much like heightened tension between them. And you're trying to figure out this sort of mystery like how are these two families connected? There's, you know, this like Korean immigrant family and then a long time Black LA family. What's their connection? And why do we care about the two of them together? So the tension runs high. We're trying to unravel what happens when they smashed together in this huge way, in the middle of the story, and we're trying to figure out who's at fault? Where can we find justice? I really thought that Steph Cha did a great job keeping us wound really tightly into our story the whole time, like you're just like, kind of sitting at this high level of tension all the way through a la Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam, where where the whole time, you're just kind of like, you don't feel like you can breathe in all the way. Because there's something constricting your chest, and you have to just go keep going through it and make it to the end. So I cared about each of the characters, even though I didn't really like any of them that much. There's not somebody in this book that you're like, "Oh my gosh, but at least there's Miriam who is just the best." Nope, you don't really like anyone. But you're totally wound up tight the whole way through. I thought she was really confident in her plotting. This book is her highest rated one on Goodreads. But she's not she has other ones that sound really great as well. So I'm looking forward to picking up more from her. And this one is just really great, like, racial tensions all the way through. It's Your House Will Pay by Steph Cha. Okay, so those were our six current reads. And now we get to get into our deep dive, which apparently has been bad for our wallets. So let's talk a little bit about book subscriptions. Meredith, what did you find out this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:44

Okay. So the first thing that I did was I wanted to go through my bullet journal for the last couple of years and really take a look at the book subscriptions that I've done and really figure out by the numbers, did I consider these to be worthwhile recommendation sources, because one of the things about books subscriptions, depending on how they're set up, is that there's an element of surprise to most of them, right? You don't, you're not going to be able to control what book you receive. That's part of the fun. The absolute favorite, the one that is almost 90% successful for me, that I highly recommend, and I've talked about a million times, but there's no way I can't start out talking about the Shelf Subscription from Bookshelf Thomasville, because it's 90%. Successful for me, again, I do the Olivia flavor. And that means nine out of the 10 books that they have, that they have sent to me have been four star or higher for me, which is really, really amazing. Given that I have no part in selecting those books except for the fact that with a shelf subscription, you are able to choose your person. And so they have some different options. And they tell you kind of the genres that that person might cover. And then they also have a Surprise Me option, too which is what my mom ended up doing. And so you get a mix of things. So again, my number one recommendation is a book subscription from Bookshelf Thomasville, I've done it for over two years. And it's just highly, highly successful for me. And then of course, it felt like we have to just get out of the way Book of the Month. Because yes, they are our only sponsor, but really real talk, you guys, having nothing to do with that. They are a really good recommendation source for me. And I like the way that that particular subscription is set up. It's not a lot of money, you do have some agency in that you choose between your five, you know, five monthly choices, or you can skip a month. And so the agency there gives you the ability to have it not be a surprise, and then you know, but you also then can maybe choose some things that are a little out of your wheelhouse, knowing that they make good choices. So I feel like I just have to get those two out. First and foremost, because they have been really successful for me. Do you have any that fall into that? I mean, I know both of those have been successful for you. But any others that fall into that like these are just kind of the top ones we have to recommend.

Kaytee Cobb 34:13

Yeah, well, first, I want to add that with Bookshelf Thomasville, I am not very faithful. So I have like jumped around. I usually do three months at a time. And I jump around to different flavors for them. So I've done so Surprise Me. I've done Annie, which as we've talked about, we love her. But she's not a book twin for me, those were not hits. And I've done the Middle Grade one. And so I do want to point out that they have all these different options, especially if you are a mom or an aunt or grandma who's looking for something to give to the kids in your life because the middle grade one has been a total delight. That's the one I'm doing right now. And I love the books they're sending and they're very consciously choosing a lot of books by authors of color. So I really love that because you're supporting this independent bookstore. They're making sure that they're supporting authors that really need our support. And I just, I think they're doing a great job with that one. So definitely want to put a plug in for the middle grade and ya options for Bookshelf Thomasville as well. The other one that I have that I just recently started probably within the last six months is Feminist Book Club Box. And I really am liking this one too, because what she does is she picks a theme for the upcoming month. And then all the members together, get a Google Form emailed to them, and they get to submit ideas that follow that theme. So it might be eco feminism or Afro futurism or whatever. And she's always gonna pick books

by women, oftentimes tries to pick books by women of color. And then if you've already read it, or you already have a copy of that book, you can trade it out. If not, you get the book, the discussion guide, and you can get the extra fancy upgraded box that has products that are all by women owned businesses. So I really like that one as well, because it feels like your dollars are going to a lot of really great places. And again, if you already have that book, you can switch it out for something else in her members only store and you don't pay anything extra for that. So I think she's doing a really great job over there too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:08

That's really smart. All right. I wanted to talk a little bit about Literati. I don't know if you know anything about literati. But one of my friends just has been telling me so much about, Well, two things. So they do they have two different kinds of models for their adult or their kid boxes. So this is so Literati adult, what they're known for, is they do these, it's like a book club that is hosted by a quote unquote luminary. So you're getting books from like Malala, or Steph Curry or Richard Branson. So these sort of very highbrow kind of luminary people there they are choosing the book, they are right, you know, that you're receiving and they are writing to you about why they think this is a great one for you to receive. And then you can read them with other people who are part of this book club. So that's kind of the Literati model for adults. But my friend Amanda has been raving about Literati kids, because they basically do kind of like a Stitch Fix model. But for books, so you give them some information about the age and kind of reading tastes of your kid. It's not super personalized. From what I understand there's an element of personalization, but it's a little bit broader. But then they send you five books every month, the actual books, and then you let your kid kind of rifle through them, read the back, read a couple pages and decide which ones you want to keep, and which ones you want to send back again, just like Stitch Fix. And she has a kind of tween girl, and seven year old boy. And it has been a really big hit for their boxes have been really big hit for both of them with both of them, you know, not only deciding to keep several books every month, but also actually reading them which is of course how we can really chose success for a book subscription. So that is one that I'm very, very interested in from a kid's perspective, because she has just raved about it and she looks forward to it every single month.

Kaytee Cobb 38:12

Yeah, one of the other kid ones that we used to get was a was a picture book subscription called BookRoo. And they send three individual picture books each month and kind of similar, you get to say how old your kids are and what kind of interest they have. And then each one is individually wrapped like a present. So you can dole them out slowly through the course of the month, which I really like. Because one of my things with subscription boxes for my kids is it feels like, Oh, it's the fifth or whatever day we get it. Well, that's it now we have to wait until the fifth again. So I like that this one has three individual books that you get to kind of slowly give out as as the need arises. So bookroo was a big hit for my kids, we probably did it for three to six months for our kids. And again, that one's picture books. So that's going to be your younger readers. One of the ones that I read about that I'm kind of excited to try for myself is called The Foxed Box. And this is like Stitch Fix. But for adults. So you send you know your own preferences, you can link up your Goodreads profile if you like so that they know you're not they're not sending something that you've already read or loved or hated. And they mostly try to get used books, which I really like because they you know are not adding to this big like global footprint of like everything coming from certain book warehouses. So this is a local Austin company

they did contact us once to see if we wanted to try and get something going with them as well but it didn't work out at the time. And so owned by two women in Austin and it's just a great way to like reduce your footprint while still getting new books sent to you every month so that one's The Foxed Box, which I think is a fun title, too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:54

That really is no I love that so and I will kind of keep it with the the swing back with the kids. Subscribe. I really want to put a shout out to the Reading Bug Box because this is one that Jackson and I did actually, for two years from the time that he was six and a half, to the time that he was eight and a half. As we were getting ready to move to Austin, we did the reading bug box for him. And it is so great. No, it is one of those boxes where you get the box every month. And there are three to five books, there's usually a hardback and then some some paperback books. They're very much curated for your particular kid. So there's a note too, so there was note to Jackson. And really, they did a great job of choosing books that he very particularly would like. And they also did a good job of listening to me, when I would say I want there to be a mix of stuff that's really readily sort of easily readable to him right now. And then I always want there to be at least one challenge book that's about two, you know, two reading levels up, because I like to have him reading a balance of that. And they really listened to me on that. They also send fun things like you know, you one month you might get like a reading lamp or like not a reading lap, or like a reading a book light or a special, you know, fun toy that's related to one of the books or so he's aged out of it just a little bit. And I haven't re upped it to see if I'm sure that he that it would be great even now that he's nine of them. Now he has a little more agency when he's picking out his books, and he likes that. But for that like six to nine age range the reading bug box is they do an amazing job. And by the way, every month, one of the books that you get is signed by the author. So you're getting these signed copies. And then also the author, they usually include some additional print something where the the, where the author has talked about the his experience of writing the book, but in a way that a child that age would be able to understand. So again, it's just really, really, really well done. And it's not that expensive for what you end up getting. So that's the reading bug box.

Kaytee Cobb 42:05

I've got two more still, I mean, we've got plenty of book subscriptions for you guys. The the one of the last ones I want to talk about is Page One Books, they do a book subscription that is also personalized. And one of their really cool things is that if they send you a book that you've already read, they tell you to pass along to a friend and they will send you another one for free. So if it turns out that whatever they sent you isn't going to work for you for some reason. They're willing to make it right. So this is another like small, individually owned company. And they're just really excellent. And they're doing big things on Instagram. They also have really beautiful book bundles. So if you're looking for, again, a last minute gift for somebody on your list that like go check out their website, because my wish list got super long looking at their book bundles, they are delightful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:54

Yeah, they do a really, they're really smart with the way that they they package all the merchandise their stuff.

Kaytee Cobb 43:00

Yeah, I love the way that they theme everything together. It's it's been really fun to get a little bit of a better handle on what they've got going on over there. And then the last one that I found that, that you know, take note people who love me, I am really interested in the BlackLIT box which have you heard of FabFitFun. It's like these...

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:19

I love FabFitFun! Yeah, it's really good. That's a really good gift. Right?

Kaytee Cobb 43:24

Also a good gift. Not reading-related. But they're like 20 to \$50 a month, right? But you're guaranteed to get some huge number of dollars in product every time you open your box, right. So BlackLIT is much like that it's \$29 a month, they guarantee that you're gonna get \$100 in products every month, including books, book-adjacent items, they ask for your shirt size when you sign up, so you might get some reading swag of some sort. You guys, this is high on my Christmas wish list. I would love to get a BlackLIT box. And of course, as you can tell by the title, they're always focused on Black authors. They have a fiction option, a nonfiction option, one for men, and one for Christians. So there's one for everyone.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:10

Excellent. That sounds really really good. Okay, I have two more. So one of them is called The Book Hookup. Okay. This is curated by the super famous New York City bookstore, The Strand. And so customers get a signed first edition copy of a new book once every quarter. Okay, so I like this because it's not it's not an every month thing. It's just sort of a special thing once a quarter, super curated by people who know what they're talking about. And then you also get so you get that signed first edition copy and you also get a paperback and then you get some swag from The Strand. This subscription looks really really cool. So they and they have different flavors so they have like a classics box or a fiction box. Or a mystery/thriller box. So this is one of the ones that I actually think I'm going to do for myself this year was maybe with a little, little of my Christmas money. Okay, the last one that I have seen some Instagram things for, but I, but really, honestly, I hadn't paid that much attention. But when I did, I was like, holy Hannah, I really am interested in this. It's called Once Upon A Book Club. So they have an adult, sort of box or a YA box. And you get a book, and several other things like three to five gifts, and then the souvenir, quote card. And but here's the thing, they send you the book, and the book has sticky notes in it. And as you get to the sticky notes, it tells you to open up one of the gifts, as you're reading the book, it tells you to open up one of the gifts, which has something to do with what's going on in the story right there. I love the idea of this very immersive experience. I think it sounds really, really cool. So that's Once Upon A Book Club. And I think we should all check out so many of these books, subscriptions, I love that we can do these two, because the vast majority of the time, these are supporting smaller bookstores, and they're really expanding their reach beyond just the people who come into their physical store. So it's a great way for us to be you know, really, it's almost like a charity thing. Really, if we if we buy subscriptions, I feel like it's charitable giving, right.

Kaytee Cobb 46:29

I'm gonna write it off on my taxes for sure.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:33

Exactly. That was super fun. I think those are a lot of really good book subscriptions, that people

Kaytee Cobb 46:39

These are! We're gonna have a lot of poor listeners. That's what's gonna happen.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:44

Or people whose Christmas lists are just completely done. Now. They're they're reading they're, they're buying is finished.

Kaytee Cobb 46:51

Perfect. All right, let's press some books. Let's, let's talk about other gifts that you could buy for people maybe.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:58

All right, well, this is one that I highly recommend that if you have any time off over the holidays, and you want a page turner to cozy up under your blanket with between Christmas and New Year's, get your notebook out, because you're gonna want this book. It was a shelf subscription pick and it was a five star read for me. So I want to talk about *The Last* by Hannah Jameson. Did you ever read this book at all right? Well, first of all had a terrible title. It's got a terrible title. The last, it's almost impossible to find on Instagram, or too great, because it's just nothing. It just really needs a better title, but it doesn't matter because it's such a good book. Here's our setup. So our lead character is John. And he's waiting in the lobby of this really high end Hotel in Switzerland. He's just been there attending an academic conference, when he starts to get this horrifying string of push notifications into his phone. And he quickly realizes that everyone around him is starting to get the same sort of, you know, breaking news alerts on their phones. So Washington, DC has been hit with a nuclear bomb, and then New York, and then London, and then Berlin. And then the network goes down, and all hell breaks loose. Okay, three months later, I'll just, there's a lot there. But three months later, our story picks up. There are 20 survivors holed up in this hotel. And they're trying to maintain some sort of semblance of civilization as they try to figure out what's going on in the rest of the world. What can we do? Are we going to be here forever, we our supplies are dwindling, tensions are rising. Just 20 people left in this hotel, which by the way is super like it's winter. It's like *Shining* esque type of situation going on here. And then the body of a young girl is found floating in one of their water towers. Somebody that they are trapped with is a murderer. This book is like Stephen King, mixed with Agatha Christie in the best possible way. It's dystopian murder mystery, and I am here for it. We need more in this sub sub sub genre. It is so so good if your COVID reading has taken you into a place where you want to read about dystopian societies or you know, when bad horrible things happen to a society and how do we deal with them? This book is for you. It is such a page turner to me. I like *Station Eleven*. Don't ask me about that. It was fine. This book takes it up for murder full notches and it's so so so it's like a really, really really page-turner *Station Eleven*. So that's *The Last* by Hannah Jamison.

Kaytee Cobb 50:00

So, this is kind of a cheat press because I already talked about this at the beginning of the show. But today I'm going to press A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, which might be the opposite of The Last. This is classic. This is a novella. This is like, feel good, you know, warm your heart fiction. Of course, everybody already knows the Christmas Carol, I don't have to set it up for you guys. But I just want to press it because I feel like even amongst our little currently reading team, we've had quite a bit of Scrooginess this year. We're just leaning into our Scroogeishness. That's a word, I'm making that a word. And I think reading A Christmas Carol kind of reminds us of that little like push of joy that maybe we need to get our butts in gear for the season. So it's a it's a cheat press, and that I already talked about it. And it's a cheap press in that again, I'm going to be doing a buddy read of it. It's a novella, even from today, you totally have time to read it before we do this discussion. And I'd love to have you join us and watch a Muppet Christmas Carol with us. Because it is the best Christmas Carol, and Gonzo can just, he's just my favorite. I love him as Charles Dickens. So if you are feeling a little bit Scroogy like me this year, or like Meredith, or like Mindy or like Mary, maybe you need to just actually lean hard into it. Be a little Scrooge yourself and then go through the whole process and enjoy Christmas of the past the present and the future with A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:29

I think that's a great press. It's a lovely, lovely story. It actually does have some sort of creepy elements to it to my family really likes, right, the George C. Scott version of that. So that's a tradition for the Monday family. And so I grew up being totally freaked out by some of the scenes in

Kaytee Cobb 51:48

You would. Because that's like the creepiest ghostiest version of it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:52

It's Yeah, it's Well, I mean, I didn't choose it. My parents chose it like I know I know.

Kaytee Cobb 51:56

It says a lot about you. I feel like

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:00

All right, that is it for this week. 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 52:08

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:11

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 on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 52:21

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:29

And if you really want to help us, rate and review us on Apple podcasts, but even more importantly, shout us out on social media that is really really helpful toward helping us find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 52:42

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:51

Alright, until next week. Happy reading, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 52:54

Happy reading, Meredith.