



Season 3, Episode 40: Friendly Get-Togethers + The Tropes We Love

Mon, 5/17 • 51:03

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 read recently. And as you already know, we never shy away from strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chitchat, 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 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And it turns out, I'm an introvert who loves to be social with other readers.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living New Mexico. And my reading is never predictable. This is episode number 40 of season three, and we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:53

All right, being unpredictable is good Kaytee,

Kaytee Cobb 00:55

It is a good thing. And Meredith, I'm pretty sure that you and I are going to have a joint bookish moment this week. But before we get into that, I want to let everybody know that our deep dive today is about whether certain tropes attract us to a book. So if we hear that some kind of literary trope is at the center of a story are we more likely to pick it up. But before we get into that, we're going to talk a little bit about Patreon. Because it's been a while since we did an ad for ourselves, we have not

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:22

We don't do ads for anybody, but ourselves. Just a reminder. So bear with us just a little bit while we brag on our Patreon community.

Kaytee Cobb 01:30

As our listeners know, we do not have any ads on the show. And we have focused that energy toward growing our Patreon instead. And we're having so much fun over there. It's such a great use of our

time. So this month, I wanted to make sure that everybody that's listening knows that we have introduced an annual option to join Patreon. And that does two things, it gets you a small discount, and you get access to our Patreon for a full year from the day you sign up. And it lets us know that we have people that are willing to stick with us for the long haul. So then we can focus even more on creating that content that you guys really love. And we've had a lot of friends take advantage of that. But I just want to make sure everybody knows it's out there. Because it's a really great deal. And it's only five bucks a month if you decide not to do the annual option.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:14

You're gonna get All Things Muderful, Kaytee Reads Too Much, And every single month the Indie Press List, which is really right there worth the price of admission. It's a steal of a deal.

Kaytee Cobb 02:26

It is a steal of a deal. And that's what we hear from our Patrons all the time. So if you're interested in checking that out, jump over to patreon.com/currentlyreadingpodcast. You can see everything that our Patrons get every month. And we would love to have you join us as a Bookish Friend. All right, that mischief has been managed. Meredith. Let's now talk about our bookish moments of the week. What have you got for us?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:47

All right, I think you're totally right, Kaytee, that you and I are going to have joint bookish moments of the week because yesterday was Saturday, and we normally record on Saturday. But on this special day, instead of recording in the afternoon, here in Austin, I had a meetup, a book swap for Austin area, but it ended up being Texas area, bookish friends. So these are members of our Patreon community. I put something out in our Facebook group, which is always my absolute favorite place on social media. And I put something out to saying Hey, does anyone want together and get together and swaps some books? And so many people said yes. And I was so excited. They got together at my house yesterday, we had an entire dining table full of books to swap. And we had an amazing time. Elizabeth from Fabled who has been so instrumental in helping us launch the Indie Press List, she was able to be there. She brought a bunch of ARCs from the store. I had 50 books of my own out on the table. And then all of the bookish friends brought their books. We had so much fun doing the swap commenting on each other's choices, because we went around and each person could take one book from the table at a time. And so we were you know, commenting on each other's choices and have we read it. And then as we got kind of through different rounds, we could comment on what was left and kind of we bookmatched each other to the books that were left there. And we actually had very few books that didn't get taken because it was a great selection. And then we just sat around talking for five hours. It was really just so fun. I you guys have heard me say like, in person stuff is hard for me. I'm an introvert. It turns out when it's all readers, and there's so much book talk, I never even thought twice about it. I just was having fun. The time went so fast. It was my bookish moment of the year for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 04:44

That is perfect. And you're right, we did plan this at exactly the same time. So while you were having bookish friends over at your house in Texas, I also had some over at my house in New Mexico. Now New Mexico is a lot smaller than Texas. So our gathering was much smaller as well. But we had the

same kind of connection. And, and even with only six of us, we still had over 100 books at our book swap because these are readers who are excited to share books with other people they were getting to know their fellow readers' tastes, they were pressing books into their hands from the stacks in front of us. And everybody left with a big smile on their faces. And I just love that community aspect of getting to sit around a table with other readers knowing you have books in common. We were sharing snacks and drinks and recommendations. Like if you love that book, you have to pick up this one from the stack. And I just I loved every second of it. I'm so glad we got to do this.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:36

And even if you were to have just two or three people get together, if with a stack of books that you've read recently, that's still a really good swap for sure. What I love too is part of our conversation went into talking about buddy reads. And so we had this whole conversation about do you do buddy reads, you know, a lot of people had never so we kind of talked about, what do they look like? How do they work? It turns out there are no rules they can work and look however you want them to. And then Kaytee, I loved so much that there were several people who by the time they left when they came, they had never met each other in person. By the time they left, they were planning buddy reads together with some books that they had taken. So the community that we're building in the in the bookish friends patron subscriber group is really my very favorite part. The money is ancillary for both of us. It's legitimately the community that we're building amongst those people. So I absolutely love it.

Kaytee Cobb 06:30

Yes, we do say bookish friends are the best friends and we say it for a reason. It's so true. Now that we've tackled our bookish moments, let's get into our current reads. Meredith, what's your first book you want to talk about this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:42

All right. I am so excited to talk about this book Kaytee. This is one that you brought to the show. And I immediately knew that I needed to read it. And then I even made sure when we were talking with Laura Tremaine, I was like Kaytee, tell them about Lobizona, because it's so so good. So I read Lobizona by Romina Garber. Wow, I loved this book so much. Okay, here's the setup. As the story starts, our lead character Manuela Azul doesn't exist, at least on paper. She and her mom are undocumented immigrants from Argentina living in Miami. And Manuela can't go to school or make any friends, partly because she's undocumented, but also because of her strange gold and silver star shaped irises. So her eyes are like really bizarre looking. This is the life they're living where Manuela's, you know, completely disconnected from everything when ICE raids her mom's work, and tosses her mom into a detention center. And Manuela's surrogate grandmother is gravely injured, and both of them tell Manuela she needs to run. And this, my friends, is where the magic of the story really starts. A chance encounter takes her to El Lalbertino, a magic school where boys learn how to be lobizones, or werewolves and girls brujas, which are witches. And all of a sudden so many things about Manuela's life start to make sense. She quickly suspects that the answers to all of her family secrets can be found at the school. But it's a risk for her to be there too. She was illegal in the human world. And when her magical abilities, which are very out of the ordinary begin to reveal themselves, she also becomes illegal in the magic world. Everything is at stake and the choices laid out before her will make or break her world and the world at large. This book has some of the best magic I've read in a long time. It has a

sweet budding romance that reminded me of Twilight in the best possible way. I actually like the Twilight books. It's a fascinating tale taken from Argentinian folklore about curses on the Seventh Son of a seventh son. And it's a great story that wraps in important issues about immigration and gender roles, which normally you guys know I wouldn't gravitate to in my fiction, because I like to read in an escapist way. But here, it's done really, really well. This book was unexpected to me, because I thought it was going to be more issues driven than it ended up being. I haven't been this interested in world building or the lore of a book in a really, really long time. I really loved the way that this Argentinian folktale was layered into the story. It was absolutely interesting. I loved the way that Garber melded together the fantasy story of our of you know of the book that we're reading with the story of undocumented immigrants everywhere. It was interesting the entire way through, but it was also really impactful. That's why I'm saying it was just really well done. And the visuals of this book are so cinematic, it totally reminded me of Harry Potter mixed with Avatar mixed perfectly with 100 Years of Solitude, and with a pinch of Twilight mixed in, there's just so much gorgeousness. My notes at the very end say I wonder if this will be a series and I went to go check and another one is coming out in August. So I absolutely recommend this book if you've been looking for that great YA fantasy that doesn't feel overly YA pickup Lobizona by Romina Garber. It is so very good.

Kaytee Cobb 06:43

I'm so glad you loved it. That was a top read for me last year, as you know, and I just adored it. I'm so glad.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:34

I loved it It's got the most beautiful cover.

Kaytee Cobb 10:36

So great. The cover and the map inside. I just love it. It's fantastic. And it also I will say pairs pretty well with my first book this week, which is Legendborn by Tracy Deonn. I cannot get over this book. I cannot stop thinking about this book. I'm 90% sure that this one also will end up on my best books of 2020. I'm in love with it. So we meet our main character Bree right after her mom died in a car accident. I know you love a tragic story like that Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:05

I do, I do. Kill the mom right at the start. That's what I say.

Kaytee Cobb 11:08

Yeah, boom, she's gone. Okay, so she's 16 years old. She's just applied for a residential program called Early College at UNC Chapel Hill in North Carolina. They argue about it. She and her mom argue about it right before her mom leaves to go to work. And that's the last conversation they have. So Bree obviously has a lot of feelings about this. There's our setup. That's Yikes. Bree is grieving. She's angry, she wants to forget. So she goes ahead and goes forward with a summer program, only to see a magical attack occur on her very first night on campus. When a mage attempts to wipe Bree's memory of everything she saw and failed, it unlocks her own talents, and a memory surrounding her mother's death that shows it might not be all that it seemed. Being out past curfew, gets her in trouble with the dean and connected to a promising young student who's also very attractive a year ahead of her who's

supposed to keep her in line. Turns out that Nick is actually Legendborn. And together they hatched a plan to uncover more about Bree's mom's death. There's a little bit of a love triangle situation in this book. And that's not my favorite thing. So I basically just ignored it and pretended it wasn't happening. This story ties in to Arthurian legend, Knights of the Round Table esque right? We are talking about Gawain and Lancelot and Arthur and their descendants when we go into what does it mean to be Legendborn is so good. It's so good. It stays firmly planted in the current world in the south with racial tensions and patriarchy built into every interaction. Our author attended UNC Chapel Hill and very clearly brings the campus to life for us as readers. It is an incredible story. I cannot wait for more of it. And yes, this is the beginning of another series. But it does have a great wrap up to this first novel. So if you're worried about waiting for more, you could totally pick up just this one. I could not get enough of it. I loved it. I loved it from beginning to end. It was excellent. It's Legendborn by Tracy Deonn.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:11

It sounds really really good, though. I mean, those are tropes I love.

Kaytee Cobb 13:15

Two YA fantasies. But yeah, I mean, fantastic. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:19

So, you know, I honestly feel like YA fantasy I know it's not for everybody. But for me, I am consistently finding some of my favorite reads there, which is really, that's just really there's just a lot of very quality work being done in that genre right now.

Kaytee Cobb 13:34

Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:35

Okay. All right. My second book is very different in a lot of ways. I want to talk about A Sight for Sore Eyes by Ruth Rendell. You guys, I love Ruth Rendell. She is in many circles called the you know, the queen of mystery. She is so so good at what she does. I really like the Wexford series. You guys have heard me talk about that. For people who love Louise Penny, I often point to Ruth Rendell's Wexford series. She also does several standalone novels and this one A Sight for Sore Eyes is one of them. And I read several of her standalone novels that I've really loved. This one, not 100%. Okay, here's our setup. We've got Teddy Brex, who is very, very, very handsome. He's a young man, he's very handsome. He's raised by parents who never loved him. In in, he's raised in a house that if you're anything like me will haunt your dreams. I mean, this is one of the things about the first third of this book when you talk when you hear about his childhood and like how he grew up, gruesome, not like gruesome, like in a violent way, but gruesome, like, wow, that house and the way they run that house is really it's gruesome as far as I'm concerned. Okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:51

Because of the way that Teddy grew up, he has grown to put his trust in objects, especially very beautiful things. Okay. art, collectibles, things that are very high end and beautiful from the outside, because they don't disappoint him in the way that people do. This is sort of become his obsession. Our

other character is Francine Hill. She's gorgeous too. And like Teddy, she carries very deep psychological scars. What brings these two young people together though, is not beauty, it is death. I'm not going to give you any more than that in the setup. Because if I give you any more than that, it's going to spoil the parts of this book that are really, really good. But suffice it to say that you get plenty of backstory before these two meet so that when they do meet, you're very interested in what's going to happen. Alright, I picked this one off my shelves, where it had been sitting for years, I needed something that I felt would be really quality because I had just read *We Begin at the End*. And that's a book that was gonna give me a big book hangover hangover. So I needed something I needed to be in very sure hands. So I picked up Ruth Rendell, right. The book is very, very well written, as we would expect from her in again, in the first third, it really shows you she has such a gift for using the tiniest detail to fully describe a character. I love that when someone can do that, right. And she does it really, really right. This book has so many trigger warnings, not necessarily because there's anything so graphically gory, but because there isn't, but definitely for things related to trauma and surviving trauma. Also, I do want to say that there are trigger warnings here for several different kinds of mental health issues, and a fairly controversial portrayal of an autistic person. So I just want to put that out there proceed with caution. With those things in mind with this book, this book was written in, I think 1998. And I definitely found myself reading it with a 2021 lens. And the it didn't fare really well if you know what I mean with that I the fact that it is loosely a fairy based on a fairy tale and I won't tell you which one because that's part of the fun to figure out. That part was very interesting. And the crime elements were really well done, which again, is what you would expect from Ruth Rendell. However, this is not a short book. And I very much found myself wanting to get through the story, I wanted it to be done midway through, I felt like it was plodding, and I felt like I was left with really no one to root for. And I at this point, I really stopped to consider whether or not I was having an issue coming off of *We Begin at the End*. Was this book feeling slow and plodding because of that? I thought about it very carefully. And I really don't think that was the issue, I really think that the middle third needed a very, very tight edit. And I also realized something very interesting for me, this book is a crime book that does not have a police element in it. And I realized that the police procedural is really I love that particular format in the mystery, because then you have kind of the good guy going in to sort out what you're looking at it from the perspective of a good guy. And you always even if you visit the criminal, you're going to have the next chapter, you're going to be back with the police, you know, the Detective Inspector or whatever. And it may, you know, it just feels more balanced to me, this book doesn't have that. And for that reason, I felt like I was spending the entire time being engulfed, kind of by these characters that were very problematic for a lot of reasons. And I just kept feeling like I just wanted to be done with the entire thing. So again, it's very well written, but not a book that I would tell everyone to race out and get, and not a book that I wanted to linger over at all. So this is *A Sight for Sore Eyes* by Ruth Rendell.

Kaytee Cobb 18:59

So now I have to throw back the question to you that you often I'll ask me, which is why didn't you DNF it if you weren't liking the setup and or like, the characters and the lack of a good guy?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:11

Sure. Right. I definitely was interested for the entire first third because the way that she sets up their lives, I just I was very interested. When I hit the second third, she began to introduce kind of the way that the crime element was going to come into play. So I plodded through the second third, because I

really wanted to find out what was going to happen. That often will happen to me. Once I get to the second third of a book, because of the kinds of books that I read. There's usually that mystery element. Yeah, many times I will plod through for that reason, and that's what happened here.

Kaytee Cobb 19:44

Gotcha. Okay, fair enough.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:46

All right. What was your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 19:48

Okay. My second book is called *The Arsonist's City* by Hala Alyan. I read this as part of a buddy read organized by one of our bookish friends whose name is Sarah. She's at @bookedinadvance on Instagram. She made a big push for Arab American Heritage Month. So Hala Alyan is a Palestinian American author, who's also a poet, and her writing reflects this. But this is not poetry. Sarah did a great job. She organized this huge buddy read with a number of Arab American instagrammers as part of the discussion, so those of us who weren't familiar with that culture, were able to ask questions and be part of this really interesting, enhancing discussion about this book. And that was amazing. So this novel, when we first get started, we're meeting the Nasr family which has been spread across the globe. The inciting incident in this novel is the death of the patriarch, the father for some of them and grandfather for the for the other ones, and the family's home in Beirut, is being passed down to the next generation, said father then decides to sell it. As the family gathers together to celebrate this patriarch's life. They also take the new patriarch Idris, to task over his decision to sell, and then the family secrets starts to come to the surface. Why is this home so important to everybody? This novel is built on multiple perspectives and multiple timelines to bring this together the story of a family and show us where they came from, and where they're going. It felt a little bit like *Crazy Rich Asians*, but taking place in Beirut, in Lebanon. So it was this like very wealthy family, lots of interesting dynamics, some machinations behind the scenes, right. And then all while also it felt a little bit deeper, more literary, *Infinite Country* by Patricia Engel, which is a relatively new release, but I read it a month or two ago. So it gave me some of those feelings as well. So if you liked either or both of those stories, this one will be for you. I listened to it on audio, which was great, because then I didn't have to know how to pronounce anything. Because the audiobook narrator had that covered for me. And I think that if I had tried to read it in print, it would have probably been a little bit too character driven. For me, it doesn't have a lot of big, like seeing pivotal scenes in it. It's more about each of these family members and and unpacking their lives. So the added pace of multitasking while listening, I was really able to get into the story. And again, that discussion added so much to it. There's also some really incredible sibling relationships in this one and adult children interacting with their parents, which I know that's that's kind of like a lull in literature, right? We don't see a lot of adult kids and their parents. We see younger and older, but not that dynamic. So I liked that part a lot. I thought it was really, really well done. It's *The Arsonist's City* by Hala Alyan.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:45

Interesting, That sounds good.

Kaytee Cobb 22:48

It was good. And I wouldn't have picked it up without Sarah. So I'm really glad that she set up that buddy read.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:53

Over and over again that's what I'm experiencing. It's what you're that's what we're hearing is that buddy reads sometimes really do just get you to pick up those books that otherwise you wouldn't you just wouldn't have risen to the top of your TBR.

Kaytee Cobb 23:05

Exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:05

All right, good. Okay, so I want to talk about a book now that I really, really liked and that I do think lots of you guys will definitely want to pick up. I want to talk about *The Windsor Knot* by SJ Bennett. Have you seen this everywhere on Instagram?

Kaytee Cobb 23:18

I feel like I can picture the cover.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:20

Yeah, so I do, I don't want to forget to say that one of my favorite instagrammers, @linesiunderline. Her name is Kerry. She is focusing on this book for her... I think she calls it hyggedunit she does this great series on kind of cozy mysteries, where each month she focuses on a cozy mystery and this is her I think for this month she's doing *The Windsor Knot*. Okay, here's the setup. It's early spring of 2016 and Queen Elizabeth is at Windsor Castle to celebrate her 90th birthday. But the preparations are interrupted when a guest is found dead in one of the castle bedrooms. At first it looks like the Russian pianist has strangled himself, but is strangely tied. Yeah, just go with me there. But a strangely tied knot leads MI5 to suspect foul play was involved. Worried when the investigation begins to head in the wrong direction, the Queen decides to discreetly take matters into her own hands. With the help of her assistant private secretary Rosie, who's a British Nigerian with military experience, the Queen secretly begins making her own detective inquiries. But what that setup doesn't say is the most interesting part of this book. It turns out that the Queen has a long history of solving crimes, and she uses the most interesting assistants to carry out her investigations. This was my favorite part of the story. It's so clever. And so much of this book is filled with delicious girl power. I loved, loved loved it. This was the perfect palate cleanser after, after the book that I had read right before it *A Sight for Sore Eyes*. I loved the premise of the smart aging Queen as detective. I think we have seen this trend towards octogenarian lead characters, especially, you know, detectives, and I am totally here for it. Also, if you love inside baseball, about how the castle is run, and how they set up their events, and how the Queen schedule works, and all of the people that go into all of those things, this book gets into a lot of that in delicious detail. I really loved it. The writing cracks along nicely and there are tons of characters to root for the entire thing just put me in a jolly good mood, and I kept wanting to get back to it. I will admit that the mystery itself got a little bit convoluted in the last quarter of the book. But I stayed patient because I love the characters. And I really wanted to see how everything played out and it wrapped up perfectly

nically. If you liked The Thursday Murder Club, this should be your next read. This is The Windsor Knot by S.J. Bennett. Sounds so fun. It will be very fun. It was light and fun, and had a nice mystery. And I love the concept of the Queen, being sort of the smartest person in the room, even though there's all of these British agents that are supposed to be solving this mystery and the ways that she works with different elements to be Hercule Poirot. But she's also the Queen. Oh, it's so good.

Kaytee Cobb 26:33

It's like The Uncommon Reader. Except it's uncommon detective.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:36

Yes, exactly. is more fun than The Uncommon Reader because in The Uncommon Reader, I felt so bad for the Queen, because so much of that book is about how her life kind of legit. Yeah, right. In this book, The Queen's having a good old time.

Kaytee Cobb 26:53

I love that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:53

Yeah, it's fun. It's fun.

Kaytee Cobb 26:55

I'm taking a turn here. I'm gonna talk about a short story collection. And I know like it's Katie's fault. So I'm going to talk about Night at the Fiestas by Kirsten Valdez Quade. So this story collection now has taken my top spot for best short story collection I've ever read.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:11

Oh, wow.

Kaytee Cobb 27:12

Which is awesome. I'm so excited. So I have a very clear instruction for those of you who are on the fence about short stories, but think you might like them. And it is to do them as a buddy read. Only read one short, short story a day, discuss it with a buddy reader or a group of readers. This is the way there's no other way. And I will not negotiate with you if you're a terrorist, and you insist on doing something different. It's not an if you've been warned, right? This is the only way. This selection of short stories is by a New Mexican author. So it was very much in my own backyard. And it was fun to as part of our buddy read get to show off, you know, what are biscochitos? And why do we care about red and green chili so much. So it was like educating my buddy readers about the culture of New Mexico, which was delightful. I got to share photos and insights about the places we live and how when the pollen goes crazy in the summer, like there will be like yellow streaks in my screen doors like it just really brought it to life for me. So if you want a short story collection, and you can find one that takes place for you live, chefs kiss on that it's perfection. So, this story collection, though, there are stories in here that I don't know if I will ever forget them. There's one about a guesthouse where a man is raising snakes and I know that's a trigger for some people so you could totally skip the story about guest house. There are stories that touch on religion, Catholicism, Mormonism, there's stories of parents and children and

friendships and siblings. And it just takes you through. Just like you talked about with your second book, Meredith, *A Sight for Sore Eyes*. Kirsten does such a good job at giving you one sentence that really pulls apart a character for you and you know exactly what they're going to buy at the grocery store the next time they go or what they're going to sass back to their mom the next time that they get her on the phone. Like you're just you know that person from that one sentence. And I think short story writers do a really good job at that because they have so little to work with, you know, so this 115 to 20 pages. She fleshes out her characters so completely you feel like you know them of these of these stories. One of them is called *The Five Loons* and it just released as a standalone novel. So if you're interested in this author, but you're like Kaytee, stop talking about short story collections, This is a great option instead. You bet your patoot that I'm planning to pick that one up. This entire collection though was excellent from beginning to end. Thank you to Katie Sikkes, again for organizing this short story reading extravaganza. My life my reading life is richer for it. I loved it. *It's Night at the Fiestas* is by Kirsten Valdez Quade.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:48

Well, I think that sounds very, very interesting, especially learning more about New Mexico because as I've said, when I came to visit you I was completely floored by the beauty of the state and would love to learn more about it more about the food, the cook the all of that. So I think that sounds really great. And the idea of being able to know that there's a novel that you can sort of jump right into a few. I mean, that's really perfection because so often with a short story collection, you're like, Oh, I just wanted more from under that one particular thing. That's, I think that's very fun.

Kaytee Cobb 30:19

It was perfect. It was so great. It was so great. I loved it. Okay. So with that in mind, those were our six current reads. And now we're going to get into our deep dive, do certain tropes attract you? And I think both of us, the answer is yes. And I could actually come up with a shortlist that I think, are tropes that you really like. Right, but it was harder for me to do for myself.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:39

Oh, that's interesting. That's interesting. Yeah, I was going through my book journal, and just kind of giving a, you know, taking a look at my Google my Google Sheet that very quickly, I could see some true some tropes kind of rising to the top.

Kaytee Cobb 30:55

Yeah. Yeah. And so first, let's talk a little bit about what is a trope because sometimes you see tropes, or the word tropes associated with very specific genres of literature. But we're talking more general, right? Like there are romance tropes. There's a whole podcast about tropes and romance, if you're interested in that. And then there are tropes in of course, mysteries and thrillers, right, where it's always the husband or whatever. So there's, there's tropes in all kinds of literature, but we think of them kind of narrowly. But then, you know, it was easy for me to be like, well, Meredith definitely has a middle grade trope that she loves. I definitely have some YA fantasy tropes that I'm all for.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:34

Right. So right, I exactly. I mean, people say that if you go all the way back to the Bible, or you go to Shakespeare, we are kind of living in reliving those many of those tropes today. Like, you know what I mean, that it's sort of this very human thing. We have patterns in our behavior. So there are patterns in our literature. So but some of those are more interesting to us in our reading than others. And some, there are some tropes that you know, for example, like you were talking about love triangles, that's something that you don't like to read about, you know, and so, it knowing what those things are for you, as a reader can help you decide if you want to read a book or not. So, certainly, right. So one of the tropes I love is a village mystery, right? The bucolic town with you know, peopled with eccentric characters. And then there is a death and it's completely unexpected, but it's usually a bad the person who dies is usually a bad not great person. And then we figure out who the village mystery is of you know, a really big bit follows the same kind of pattern. And I love it every single time.

Kaytee Cobb 32:42

I love that too. With regard to mystery I also really love a detective down on his luck. Yeah, you know, has has been ejected from the force for some reason or is struggling with something in his personal life, has an injury where that he's in pain all the time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:57

these are these are detective fiction tropes that we see all the time. And they are Yeah, there's some of the some of my favorites.

Kaytee Cobb 33:04

So fantastic. And then another one that I really love, and it's like, it's like a catnip word for me is found family. Yes. As soon as somebody says found family about a book, I'm like, I don't you don't have to tell me anything else. It's fine. Yeah, whatever it is, I'm gonna pick it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:16

So what's interesting about that is that when someone says found family, it that's not a phrase that's going to turn me away from a book in any way, shape, or form, but it's not a catnip phrase. But over and over again, in my book journal, if you were to do some sort of like analytics, you can see that when found family is a part of it, my rating is likely to be really high. So I think there's a connection there. But that phrase doesn't feel like catnip to me, so that that is the thing for me to know about my reading.

Kaytee Cobb 33:45

Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:47

That in fact, I do, like found family stories.

Kaytee Cobb 33:50

Right. Right. But it's not necessarily something that draws you in.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:53

Not like when someone says, okay, Meredith, here's the deal. There's four down on their luck children because their parents have died in some horrible tragic accident. I every single time I will drop absolutely anything to read that book. I do really want to know why that is. Because it's clearly horrible. But that is that is a catnip trope to me.

Kaytee Cobb 34:16

I mean, I know another one that you and I both like, is a revenge plot, like the Count of Monte Cristo, ultimate, ultimate revenge story, but if I could get that high from something else, if somebody said this is a revenge plot, like the count over like, Show me the money, where is it? I'm on.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:33

Right. Exactly. It's there's something so satisfying about that kind of like a good guy done wrong, who then gets back on his feet and just goes after the bad guys. For type Ones, I think that is absolute catnip. Shout out to Pam Hagen O'Brian and her fantastic husband who I got to meet this weekend. He's my book twin, I want to say hello to you. And he also loves the Count of Monte Cristo.

Kaytee Cobb 35:01

And we're reading The Black Count because we're, you know, in love with the Count of Monte Cristo. That's right. Okay, I've got another one like everybody already knows I like a beloved curmudgeon. So I feel like that one just has to be, I just have to throw it out there and acknowledge it. But then one of the other ones that really gets me excited is what's called a window book. And we've talked about this, you know, in various ways that there are mirror books and window books, right. And mirror books show you yourself reflected in literature. And window books give you a window to somebody else. And if something gets described as like, this is a really great window book. And that gets called out rather than just rather than just, this happens to be a really good story. And it's also not from a perspective you've heard before, but says, this book is a great window to someone else, that that phrase and that trope of giving you a window to somebody else is, I love that so much. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:57

The other thing that I am really attracted to is any book that is kind of talks about a magic academy or a magic school, like a school for magical beings, or a training academy. Weirdly. So here's something those things are very attractive to me. I however, do not like and I will actively stay away from books that are centered centered on college campuses. That is a trope. I i for whatever reason, I can't explain it. I do not like books that are on our college campuses. But make it take a college campus make it magic, and I'm all in. But you will have it's not to say that I haven't loved some books. Yes, there are history. Yes. Yes. Okay. But remember, when I read The Secret History, I usually was like 11. I mean, like I wasn't a grown lady. I mean, I wasn't actually 11 but I was like very young. I was in my 20s now as a 47 year old woman now call high school and college, high school based or college based, cannot stand it. Make it magic. I'm all over it.

Kaytee Cobb 37:09

Okay, okay. So Magic for Liars, obviously. I love that book. Excellent. Okay, I do I want to call out one romance trope that I really love, which is enemies to lovers. Oh, I love it when people hate each other at the beginning of the story for any reason. And then they cannot resist their attraction.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:26

Yep. Yes, me too. I love I absolutely love it. I also so help me come up with a better way to describe this one, Kaytee, because I love this trope. I'm going to I'm going to tell you this is a dumb way to describe it. And then I'm it's give you some examples, you'll tell me a better phrase. Like when when your lead characters go from bad circumstances to much better circumstances. So think, Boxcar Children, The War that Saved My Life, Anne of Green Gables. So good. So what's a better way to describe that they're like, you know, What I don't like is when, when my character, here's what I don't like, I don't like a book where it's like, she was living the perfect life. She had everything. And then I don't want to read that. It bothers me, it triggers me. But if it's like, this person's life sucked, but and then all of a sudden, things get a whole lot better.

Kaytee Cobb 38:24

This is like a swing up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:28

Right, that trajectory,

Kaytee Cobb 38:29

or an upswing, I guess was the actual yeah, it's swing up is the word I made up,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:34

Especially when it involves their like physical circ... So in Boxcar Children, The War That Saved My Life, their physical circumstances, were very, very dire at the beginning of the book. And then over time, they get better and better and better. I just love that.

Kaytee Cobb 38:49

Okay, I love that also, but I hate it when it's about somebody's physical appearance, like Ugly Duckling esque stories. Yeah, it's like, oh, she started as like an outcast because she had, you know, pimples and now she's, she's all that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:04

Yeah, no, that's completely uninteresting to me hate that. Yeah. No, I'm talking about like physical circumstances or like, the circumstance having to do with their parents or whoever's caring for them, like they're under. They're under the care of a person who's really awful, and then their circumstances get a lot better. That's right. That's very interesting to me.

Kaytee Cobb 39:24

Yeah, I think I think upswing will work for that. Okay, we can invent a name of a trope, okay, that's a thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:30

I also really like, books where it's our world, but one really significant thing is different. And seeing what that one thing like the consequences are the ripples of that one thing so I'm thinking like, *The Age of Miracles* by Karen Thompson Walker. It's our world, but the sun but the world is spinning slightly slower every day. What effect does that one thing have or *Scythe*, for example, which is like it's our world, but we've solved cancer and crime and so we have to kill people to deal with the population. What is that like? What's that ripple? That, I mean, of course now we're talking about we're talking about dystopia, right? I just

Kaytee Cobb 40:15

Or like speculative fiction.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:16

Speculative Fiction. Exactly. This is your entire genre. I really, really am attracted to that like catnip for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 40:24

Yeah. Yeah. That makes me think of the *Elan Mastai* die book. That time travel one. *All Our Wrong Todays*.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:33

Oh, thank you. Okay. Yes. I could not think of it all of a sudden. Love that book.

Kaytee Cobb 40:38

Yeah. I was just thinking about that book the other day.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:40

Yeah, absolutely. Um, and then finally, a trope that for my entire life has been, has been catnip to me. But finally, I think has worn off is the missing woman trope. The the blah, blah, blah has gone missing. And who is it and why? And all the secrets that will come out? It's the it's the, you know, the popcorn thriller trope. And I just finally think it's worn off on me.

Kaytee Cobb 41:10

Okay, I got I've got one more too. And it kind of touches on that, in that I, I love an unreliable narrator. But not if it's because that person is intentionally lying. Like, I'm thinking of books where the main character has has dementia, or has no memory or for whatever reason, they are unable to accurately reflect events, but not because they're the killer, and they're just lying to you. Okay. Yep. So a very specific unreliable narrator. Not the the trope in general. Right. Right. Right. So right, I think that's my last one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:47

Okay. All right. Well, that's, yeah, again, I think everyone should take some time to really think through what those catnip tropes are for them, because that will help you figure out if a book is going to be a

good fit for you, you know, and that we need so much help right now. winnowing down our TBR. So I think everyone should know what are those three or four things that you just are always big winners for you?

Kaytee Cobb 42:12

Yes. And every Thursday on Instagram, we do a post about our deep dive for that week. So if you've listened to this episode, and you've thought about it, make sure you come over to that post and give us a follow and then tell us your thoughts. We want to have everybody's thoughts in one place. Tell us the tropes that you love, or the ones that pull you in like catnip.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:30

Right, right. disagree with us tell me that I'm completely wrong about magical schools being interesting or that I should love college campus novels, so many people do.

Kaytee Cobb 42:41

Okay, let's press some books with let's see if any of these books have the tropes that we love in them. What's your book that you want to press this week, Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:48

All right. Well, you talked about one of your favorite tropes, and it's definitely one of mine which is enemies to lovers in a romance. I love that so much. But you know what I like almost as much. I love the trope of the opposites attract friendship. I absolutely love it. And the book that I want to press today does it better than almost any other. This is *To Night Owl* from *Dogfish* by Holly Goldberg Sloan and Meg Wolitzer. This is a hug it at the end book you guys I absolutely loved it. So this is middle grade. But it's it's just so wonderful. So here's our setup. We have Avery Bloom, who's bookish, intense. She's afraid of many, many, many things. She's She's afraid of deep water, especially. She lives in New York City. And then we have Bett Devlin, who is fearless and outgoing. She loves all animals and she loves the ocean. And she lives in California. Right, so they're perfect opposites. What they have in common is that they're both 12 year old girls, and are both being raised by single gay dads. And when their dads fall in love, Bett and Avery are sent against their will to the same sleepaway camp. their dads are hoping that they will find common ground and become friends and possibly one day even feel like sisters. But things begin to go off the rails for the girls and for their dads, and they find themselves on the summer adventure that neither one of them could have predicted. Oh, this book is so good. Now it is considered to be an epistolary novel, right? It's written in emails. And I really most of the time, I'm not crazy. I mean, I've read plenty of epistolary novels that are that are perfectly fine. That is not a trope or a structure that is one I'm naturally attracted to. But here, I absolutely, absolutely love it. This book is such a joy from start to finish. It made me laugh. It made me smile. It made me cringe as because it reminded me a lot of what being 12 is like. It's the and if you love a book that is absolutely peopled from start to finish with people to root for, this is the book for you. Because there are so many people from the girls themselves, to their dads to all of the ancillary people that are in their lives. This is a fun, light read, I was invested the entire time with the story, and how it was gonna turn out. And I would recommend it to everyone. This definitely is a great press for me because I do want to press it into every person's hands. I want to say one thing that I said back in two or two things kind of as to format. Kaytee, I think you listened to this book. Yeah. And one of the things that you mentioned and I think it's

a point really well taken is that because this is written as emails that the girls are writing back and forth to each other on audio, one issue is that the chapter titles begin with like to night owl, rewrite all of that, you know, emails do that. In print, this is not something that you even really notice because your eyes just go right past it. I read this in print, I recommended in print for that reason. And then if you do pick it up in print, I read it. I had got it from the library, and the cover was totally adorable. And it was it was it was great. But they released a new cover that has It's horrible. And it has this like animated cover. It looks. It's just horrible. It just looks like a book I would never ever pick up. I'm so irritated that they did it with the rerelease of the book, because the book itself is so very good. So ignore the cover if that's what you get. And trust me when you read To Night Owl from Dogfish by Holly Goldberg Sloan and Meg Wolitzer.

Kaytee Cobb 46:50

That is definitely a delightful book and I actually pressed it into someone's hands yesterday at my house.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:56

Oh did you really?

Kaytee Cobb 46:57

So I'm so glad you mentioned it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:59

I love that. And especially because we're coming up on summer. First of all, I think this is a book for absolutely anyone to read. But if you have an 11, 12, 13 year old girl who's going into summer vacation, grab this book and do a buddy read with her do a mom daughter buddy read, expand even more and do two moms and two daughters or you know, and your sons will love this book too.

Kaytee Cobb 47:20

Or two gay dads and two daughters. Perfect.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:23

Absolutely everyone, boys, girls, everyone will love this book. But the summer is just a nice time to have a book that your child is not going to be reluctant about reading, but you'll want to read it too. And there's a lot of good stuff to talk about.

Kaytee Cobb 47:36

The funny thing about what you just told us Meredith is that my notes for my press also say this is a hug it at the end book and you said that exact phrase about Night Owl and Dogfish. Yes. So today I am pressing Where the Forest Meets the Stars by Glendy Vanderah. Usually I come up with my own setups for all presses, right, but I just love the actual blurb for this one, so I'm going to give it to you here right to your straight. After the loss of her mother and her own battle with breast cancer, Joanna Teale returns to her graduate research on nesting birds in rural Illinois, in rural Illinois, determined to prove that her recent hardships have not broken her. She throws herself into her work from dusk to dawn until her solitary routine is disrupted by the appearance of a mysterious child who shows up at her

cabin barefoot and covered in bruises. The girl calls herself Ursa, and she claims to have been sent from the stars to witness five miracles. With concerns about the child's home situation. Jo reluctantly agrees to let her stay just until she learns more about Ursa's past. She enlists the help of her reclusive neighbor, Gabriel Nash to solve the mystery of the charming child. But the more time they spend together, the more questions they have. How does a young girl not only read but understands Shakespeare? Why do good things keep happening in her presence? And why aren't Jo and Gabe checking the missing children's website anymore? This book you guys, I loved everything about it. I loved Ursa, and the way that she shows up in Jo's life. I loved that Jo had you know her own struggles. It's a swing up book where she starts out in not a great place and then her life changes drastically for the better. I loved Gabe, who when we first meet him is referred to as egg man, which I did not love. But I could not stop thinking about these characters long after I turned to the last page. All three of them especially lodged themselves firmly in my heart and they did not let me go it's just a fantastic story. Very strong sense of place. Wonderful characters moves right along. It's Where the Forest Meets the Stars by Glendy Vanderah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:41

This is when Kaytee you'll be glad to know that Roxanna and I just put we began we're creating a list of books for us to choose from as we go through our buddy reads and we just put this one on our list because we both are thinking it's time for us to read this one because I've heard only great things about it. It's so good. Alright, 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 50:05

And you can find me, Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:09

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 50:19

You can come find us and talk to us about all the things at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:27

And if you really want to help us become a bookish friend is just \$5 a month, or rate and review us on Apple podcasts or even better shout us out on social media. It'll make a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 50:43

Yes, your recommendations, your shares, your reviews, your Patreon support, they're all helping us grow and get closer to our goals. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:51

All right. Until next week, happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 50:53
Happy reading Meredith.