



Season 4, Episode 9: Books from Authors We've Loved Before + Constructive Spicy Opinions

Mon, 9/27 • 59:33

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 know, we won't shy away from strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

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 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I am constantly thinking about the best way to think about and talk about books.

Kaytee Cobb 00:45

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I am inhaling books like they're the way I breathe. This is episode number nine of season four. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:56

Okay, do you, have you been reading a ton? I know you had a couple months there were things were a little lower than normal, especially the summer.

Kaytee Cobb 01:03

Yeah, we did some more traveling. And now we're back into like our regular routine. And I'm getting big numbers every month and reading really great books, which is the more exciting part

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:13

that is way more exciting quality over volume for sure. All right, well, Kaytee, we are going to just let everyone know at the very top of the show that our deep dive later in the show, I think is going to be an interesting one because we are going to talk about a topic that has been on our minds and our hearts, which is how you and I and sort of the public at large talk about books that we love, but more importantly, how we talk about books, that we don't love those spicy opinions. So that's what we're going to cover on the deep dive.

Kaytee Cobb 01:45

We love spicy opinions here at Currently Reading. We say it every week. But we're excited to talk a little more about what that means to us as readers. So,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:54

exactly. I think this is gonna be a really interesting conversation. All right, but first, we're going to start out the way we always do with our bookish moments of the week. So Kaytee, what have you got this week?

Kaytee Cobb 02:04

Okay, this week in Cobb homeschool land was pretty emotional. Right? We did not only a deep dive into the events of September 11, but we also finished our read alouds of Charlotte's Web. You guys oh my god, right. And I told my kids at the beginning the week that I knew I was going to be reading things aloud to them this week, and that I would cry. I just laid it out there on Monday. I was like, "Look, you guys, this is going to be an emotional week". And sometimes that leads to little sparks or comments or afterward like little like, oh, and mommy's cried so hard, right? snarkiness, right. And usually my eight year old gives me hugs. He's a little sweetheart. But this week with the pre warning, I let them know I said, it's okay to be emotional about reading. And some of our reading this week is about events that I experienced in real time in my life. And there was a lot of heavy stress and worry and difficulty. And some of our reading is about characters that all of us now are really attached to. And they feel real to us. And it's okay to cry over them also. So I don't need commentary about it. I might need a hug, but I don't need sarcasm. And it was different for me to kind of come at that head on. But I decided I was tired of the little like snarky asides that my kids were making. Y'all they came through. Meredith, it was so great. Not only did my kids allow their own eyes to fill up with tears multiple times this week. But they were kind and gentle with each other and with me, and it was really wonderful to be reading together as a family. And I'm just really grateful for the way that it played out. As our as our family gets to read together. So that's my bookish moment.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:45

All right. So I'm going to do something with my bookish moment of the week that I have never done before. And I'm going to let you choose your own adventure for my bookish moment of the week I have, I have two different options. Okay, I'm going to tell you a little bit about each one. I know. See, I'm feeling very, very seven. One of them one of my bookish moments is sort of, they're both tangentially about a book. They one of them is a little bit harder has a little bit of a spicier or strong opinion to it, maybe even possibly a little bit of a rant. And is he I think maybe more difficult but very useful to certain people. And then the other one is lighter and useful to more people, but not necessarily as emotionally impactful.

Kaytee Cobb 04:36

Hmm, so the question is, do we make it a flight and just sit in the in the heart and the sad and the scary that we've already established here today? Or, or do we bring it up? And I think I'm going to choose the spicy opinion and and sitting with where we're at right now.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:54

Okay. All right. So yes, one of the things I did this afternoon was I went to the library and I came home and I had a book flight. Well, one of the things in my book flights that I'm doing right now is I'm getting some of the newer picture books that are coming out because as I've said, I'm, I'm working on my library for my my soon to be grandson. There was a book that I got today that I had been really interested in, and it's called *The Small Knight and the Anxiety Monster*. And it's a beautifully illustrated, very well intentioned picture book. That is this story, really briefly, I won't go into detail, but really briefly, it's a picture book. So it's not long, it's a small knight, a little girl who is having some issues and some worries, we know from the book, what those issues and worries are about. And her anxiety in the form of this kind of scribbly anxiety monster gets bigger and bigger and bigger, the more and more she worries about it and sort of keeps it inside. And then at the end of the book, she the daenam wall of the book is that this little girl turns to the anxiety monster, which is taken up all of this page, and she says, I'm looking you in the face, and I'm not afraid of you anymore. And then the anxiety monster gets really little goes away, and she puts him in a glass jar doesn't go away completely, but it's totally manageable. And now that's the happy ending. Here's my rant. I was a little girl who was six years old and wanted a picture book about anxiety back in the 1970s, early 80s. They didn't exist, I think in the way that they do now. But I can tell you, that if my parents who I think who were who were so wanting to make my anxiety better, if they had, in their very good intention, sought out a picture book to give to me that with this story, it would have made my anxiety so much worse. And unbeknownst to them, because the reality is this picture book is like a lot of picture books, not all, but a lot of picture books that I have seen recently that have this very simplistic notion about anxiety. That is if you just sort of look it in the face, it will go away. And the reality is that this isn't helpful. And in fact, it is hard, it is a harmful message. Because if you try to have a message like that, all it does is make the child who is going through the anxiety who is incapable of simply looking it in the face and making it go away. That is not possible. That's not how anxiety works. Ever, let alone in small children. It will only make that child feel more alone and more scared. And so again, I believe that the author and the publishers of this book that I just mentioned, are extraordinarily well intentioned, I'm not taking issue with them at all. But I do want to urge you, if you have children, a child or children in your life who are dealing with anxiety, and because you're bookish, your first move is to find a book to help. I really want to suggest that you read it carefully and make sure that the message there is one that is if you're anxious, it is normal. And okay, there's nothing wrong with you. And there are strategies and tools that we can use to make it more manageable. But the message cannot be just look it in the face and be brave, and it will go away. So my recommendation, then is if you have very young children who are dealing with this, a book that I would have found really helpful when I was really little is called *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes. And it is one that doesn't get a lot into strategies, because it's for really little ones. But what it does is it normalizes the fact that you may be sort of preternaturally anxious, and that's okay. And that you're not alone and that it doesn't make you strange, and it's not just going to go away with the snap of a finger. If you have older children, I'm thinking somewhere from eight to 12, A book called *The Anxious Ninja* by by Mary Nhin can be really, really helpful. That one does get into some language about strategies that are really executable that can be helpful. So my rant today is let's stop making anxiety seem like something that little ones can handle on their own. And instead, let's make sure the books we provide to them are ones that can empower them on a journey of healing through anxiety because there are things that can really, really help.

Kaytee Cobb 09:51

I love that. And I think that a not only well people really love that you took a second and got a little vulnerable with us, Meredith, but also, you said it would apply to a kind of a small subset of readers. And I think that all of us can take away from that, that whatever your child is struggling with, if you're going to find a book for them, that is going to help them through it. Make sure it's not phoning in an easy answer and making it look like Oh, this is so simple. Just look it in the eye, and it goes away. Because our kids struggle with all kinds of stuff, right? And to make it look simple, like that makes our kids feel powerless. And that's never that's never our goal or intention. So I do think it does apply apply broadly to anyone with kids in their lives that loves to read. So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:40

Yeah, absolutely. Good. Well, I hope so I hope I hope that that is helpful. But for now, let's move on to talking about our current reads. What's your first current read this week?

Kaytee Cobb 10:51

Okay, my first current read Meredith is one I know that you're going to be very excited to hear about its Apples Never Fall by Liane Moriarty.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:59

Whoo, I am interested. There's there's some differing opinions on this book. So I want to know what you think

Kaytee Cobb 11:04

Some chatter out there. Right. So I went through and I looked at all of her books, just to be sure. But with this title, I have read every single one of her adult novels, and I feel pretty good about that. Right. I also found out that she has a middle grade trilogy that I did not know about published between 2007 and 2009. So now, unfortunately, I still have added to my TBR. Her newest title is Apples Never Fall and it is family drama to the max. At the outset we know that Joy Delaney, the family matriarch has disappeared. She's 70 ish, right? She sent a cryptic text to her children, which they kind of discounted because she's 70 ish, right? Sometimes you get some text messages that are a little wonky from your 70 year old mother. But her phone has been found at home. And things are not looking good for Stan, her husband and the father of their children. The kids who are all grown adults with issues of their own have to decide whether to bring in the police, how much to tell them, and whether they think their father had any hand in mom's disappearance. It's not looking good for Stan as more and more evidence is revealed. At the same time, we peel back the layers on the correct drama. And we're also going back in time to when the Delaney's hosted Savannah, a young woman who showed up at their doorstep one night after a fight with her boyfriend. Like total weirdos, they invite her into their home and then into their lives, much to the chagrin of their kids who are like, you guys, she could like steal your identity or car or like all your money like what are you doing? We don't even know who this like Savannah lady is. As the story of Savannah unfolds, so does the mystery of what happens to Joy and the secrets and suspicions of the family take center stage. There is a lot to like about this book. Okay, we have a relatively large cast of characters that admittedly I found hard to keep track of at first because there's

like the four kids the mom, the dad Savannah like bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, all these people that you have to know their names, but they do end up getting developed, and they each feel fleshed out. The Delaney family is known in their town and throughout Australia for their amazing tennis skills and the tennis coaching program that they own. And while I'm not a tennis player, I have no vested interest in that part of the story. But it didn't bog down the writing for me at all. You can be only peripherally aware of tennis and still enjoy the mystery. All that being said, this book is 480 pages long. Ah Oh, yeah, I know. I know. Right? It could have been edited down by a solid 20% which is 90 pages, almost 100 pages, right? It still would have been a great story with great character development and a satisfying ending. I think the length does it a disservice. If you don't mind though, reader know thyself, if you don't mind settling in for a longer book full of big juicy family drama, and inner woven with a relatively gentle mystery like we talked about last week, this will be a fabulous pick for you. I give it four stars, which makes it a great addition to the Liane Moriarty cannon. It's Apples Never Fall by Liane Moriarty.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:07

Interesting, as these authors get more and more successful, I feel like their books get longer and longer. And the editor takes more and more of a backseat. And when it you know, 90 pages less it still would have been it's not like it would have been too smaller

Kaytee Cobb 14:21

book. Right? Right. It still would have been 380 pages, which is

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:25

Right in that realm of what you know, I understand that when a book is too short or book it's really too long that it becomes harder to sell. I understand that. But anywhere in the three to 400 page in length. That's the sweet spot. So yeah, it does make you wonder why this happens. And we do see it happening over and over again. But I'm still very much looking forward to reading it for sure. I love I love her her books. Okay, my first book is this. I've been looking forward to talking about this, this book on the show because it's very interesting and feel like we're not seeing it everywhere. But it was really, really good. This book is called The Kingdoms by Natasha Pulley. And if you guys pull it up, when you look at the cover, I'll bet you will be like, Oh, yes, yes, yes, I actually have seen this book because this cover of this book kind of started a new cover trend that now I'm seeing in a lot of places. So pull up the cover, just so you all know what I'm talking about. So this book is an alternate history. It's a time travel, alternate history. So it's a mashup, and it's very, very entertaining. So here's our setup. Our lead character is Joe Tournier. And Joe, when we first meet him has a horrible case of amnesia. His first memory, the only thing that he can remember is of stepping off the train in 19... In the 19th century French colony of England. Did you hear what I said? Okay, the 19th century French colony of England, alternate history. The only clue that Joe has about his identity is a 100 year old postcard of a Scottish lighthouse that arrives in London, the same month that he does. The postcard is written in English, which is an illegal language. And it's not written in French, so everything's supposed to be in French. And the postcard is signed only by the letter M. But Joe is certain that whoever M is, knows him far better than he currently knows himself. And really, M contains the key toward him finding out who he was before his amnesia. So he's determined to find this M. And the search for this person will send Joe

from French ruled London, to rebel owned Scotland and finally on to the battleships of a lost empire's Royal Navy. And in the process, we see that history is being changed.

Kaytee Cobb 16:56

Alright, sounds amazing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:58

It's so interesting. This, I mean, I have been all about lately, books that are doing something a little bit different, I feel like my there's been a little bit of a sea change in my reading. And I'm finding anything that feels like I've read it over and over again, I just want to set it down, right, this book is that breath of fresh air. So and I just have thought about it so much. I read it about six weeks ago, I thought about it almost nonstop since then, that's an overstatement. I've thought about it a lot since then. I was very much interested the entire time. And there's a lot going on in this book. So you'll see in its marketing materials, there are a lot of comparisons to *The Seven and a Half Lives of Evelyn Hardcastle*. And I definitely agree with that it's not a mystery in the same way. But in that you are constantly being sort of pulled off center in the way that you are in that book, this book has that element to it. And this is a book where you very much have to pay attention. This is not a book that you can skim through, or a book that you would want to take to the beach shore, the pool, kind of when your kids are interrupting you every couple of minutes. This is not that book. So let's be really, really clear that this is a right book at the right time kind of situation. For that reason, because it was one that was gonna sort of demand a little more of me, I wanted to save it for September, October, this is when I like to do this kind of reading. I actually read it a little bit early, but I wanted to bring it during this time of year. It's beautifully written and it's complex in a Russian doll kind of way. That's very satisfying. If you can get into a reading experience where you can sink into it again, you have to be able to pay attention. It's also got a fantastic sense of place. I haven't felt so fully lived in like a historic place in a really, really long time. This is largely set on sailing ships, and it reminded me a lot if anyone watched *The Terror* on AMC you're kind of in that same space. So if you know you know. I definitely wouldn't call this book weird, but it is unlike anything I've read before, which was a really positive thing. It also has a beautiful love story in it. It's not the main focus, but I do want to say that it has a beautiful love story in it between two men that ended up being one of my favorite romances that I've read in a really long time. So the book is not a romance. But that particular subplot was really interesting and beautiful and I cared very much what happened. And I loved the lead character Joe, his bewilderment and befuddlement at his amnesia and the circumstances around him are just palpable and that's me just kind of one of the things I've always been afraid of, and you just really feel it in this in this book, like how confused he is. And also the time travel is very well executed. So if that is your catnip, this book is worth your time. I will say like you just said about *Apples Never Fall*, this one would have been even more perfect if it had been 20% shorter. I feel like this is a recurring theme in our books lately, just 20% would have been the key. But even with that this was a huge success for me. So if you love a multi layered character driven romance with time traveling elements, I would definitely say to give this book a try. It's really really good. This is *The Kingdoms* by Natasha Pulley.

Kaytee Cobb 20:42

I need this book in my hands from right now. Like I don't think I realized until you said it, that amnesia actually is like catnip to me also. So you add in like time travel, romance amnesia, like I alternate history had a nice strong sense of place. I just yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, while you were talking, I was totally paying attention to everything you said. But she has gorgeous covers on all her books.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:09

Yes, her covers are amazing. Right. And I feel like whoever's doing her covers get is doing such a great job that they are being copied. Like they the kind of overall theme of them then is being copied. But Kaytee, there is a scene in the light house that still like right now I have full body chills. It is, it is so it is it is really good. Now I will say that I really want to say I don't think this is a book for everyone. This is not the kind of book that I would say, oh, everyone should pick it up and read it. So hear me say that you guys. This is a really particular book. It's an undertaking because it is big. And it is complicated. So I'm not saying "Hey, everybody grab it". But if some of those themes are interesting to you, at least give it a try. Have a couple chapters. If it's not pulling you set it down. Don't struggle through this book. But if it pulls you in like it did me I think it could be really worth your time.

Kaytee Cobb 22:11

Very cool. I love it. I love it. I love it. Okay, my second book this week is Truth and Beauty by Ann Patchett. This book is backlist from 2004 that had been sending me death rays from my TBR for like at least 10 years now. Like I have the physical copy on my shelves, and I just never picked it up. Just never picked it up. So I finally took the plunge and I was surprised by what I found there. Ann Patchett is known for her novels especially right we know all about her novels like Dutch House, Bel Canto, Run, State of Wonder, but she has gifted us with all kinds of writing including short story collections and memoir. And this is a great example of the latter. In Truth and Beauty, we walk through a 20 year friendship between Anne and her college friend Lucy Grealy. Their friendships define their lives and their work. Lucy is famous in her own right, so she's not just kind of riding on Ann's coattails. She is the author of a book called Autobiography of a Face, which is her own memoir, tracking a journey of losing part of her jaw in childhood to cancer and the hundreds of surgeries that followed. So even if you Google her, you can see how her face is different from other people's faces. And that is part of how their friendship started. Lucy was sure that nobody wanted to be friends with her. Ann, however, pushed her way in and was in hospital rooms, recovery rooms during many of those surgeries. And that's explored here. So it could be difficult as a read for somebody that has anxiety around surgeries and hospitals and recovery. But it's also based in going out to clubs, trying different kinds of drugs, launching their books, supporting each other through both fame and desolation, depression. Their their lives are so intertwined throughout those decades, it would be remiss, unfair of me to tell you that 1981 to two decades later is only to 2001. And that's because Lucy does die in this book. It's not a spoiler, it's it's part of the setup for this not for this memoir, but it is difficult. So it's not a happy book. It's raw and difficult many times, but it's also really incredible writing. And I found myself, you know, underlining passages wanting to hear them again. And the friendship in these pages extends beyond the ink and paper into the real world in a really tangible way. I really loved my time with Anne and Lucy and the way that they loved each other and supporting each other through their two decades together. This book is Truth and Beauty by Ann Patchett and it's not big and it's not overwritten. So it's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:53

I'm so glad that you read the way that you do. And I'm so glad that you make the choices that you do you about what you bring to the show. Because I'm, I would never pick this book up even though I'm a big Ann Patchett fan, right? And I think she I've liked, loved so much of her work. There just wouldn't naturally be what I would gravitate to. But I'm so glad that you do and that you bring this to us because it sounds really amazing. It is.

Kaytee Cobb 25:19

And I think there's I think there are perfect readers out there for that. Exactly. So Exactly. 100% somebody picks it up because of this.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:26

Right? Absolutely. Me too, because they definitely should. Okay. Kaytee, I have been waiting to talk about this book with you. And I very much want to know, have you read The Best of Me by David Sedaris?

Kaytee Cobb 25:40

Now Yeah, no, I'm dying to although Pam O'Brien who we love, bookish friend Pam, she sent me an autographed copy of it. So I Oh, hold on my shelves because she loves me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:52

That is so excellent. Okay. Okay, this book doesn't really take any setup, because I'm just going to tell you that this is this was this, The Best of Me by David Sedaris, was published late last year. This is David Sedaris is basically what he terms to be his best stories and essays spanning his entire career. And again, as selected by the author himself. And as we all know, right, that Sedaris isn't, isn't a humorist, and an essayist who writes about his own life going all the way back to his early childhood, and all the way through his life. And he is 64 years old right now. So this collection of essays is covering a lot of ground. But the question on the table is this. Is this collection of essays covering that ground? Well, Kaytee, and I'm going to tell you that this is the best book I have ever read that I do not want most people to read.

Kaytee Cobb 26:52

Okay. Okay. I'm still with you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:56

Right. This book is billed as David Sedaris, his very best. And it may very well be certainly some of my favorite of his essays, and I have read everything that he has written. Okay, I've read everything in book form. I've listened to it multiple times on audio, I have read all of his New Yorker articles. I am a fan on I've seen him in person I've like I'm a fan on a top, top top level. So I feel grounded in his work enough to say that, I think, yes, this represents the best the best of the best of his work. But my problem with it as a collective work, is that my my fear is that it creates in me a fear that people are going to say, I've heard such amazing things about David Sedaris, but I've never read him. So I'm going to read this

book, that's kind of like the great, it's like a greatest hits, right? Like somehow we want to you listen to a new artist, you're like, well, I guess maybe they don't even do this anymore. But like, Greatest Hits, and you think, well, this will give me a full sense of their writing and his entire career. But the problem is that this is a book of high notes. And if you only have the high notes, you don't have the low notes, which means you don't have the context for the high notes. And this is my major problem with it. When you read his essays in the context of the books, as he's published them previously, they have so much more context, so much more meat on their bone, the jokes are funnier. And the stories are more poignant when you read them of a piece in the way that he originally wrote them. I found myself thinking as standalones if I imagined not having any of the other context, that they felt empty in a certain way. So every single piece of writing in this book is fantastic. I just don't think if you're new to David Sedaris, they should be read in this format. I always recommend Naked, Dress Your Family and Corduroy and Denim and Me Talk Pretty One day as much better places to start with his work. So again, there is nothing in fact, there's nothing about this book that's not great. The pieces in it are wonderful. I just don't think they stand alone in the way that they're collected here. There is a new essay at the beginning, which I really, really liked. That's interesting. I will also say that I think if you're going to do this, if you have never read David Sedaris, please start in with one of his other books. Right? But if you love David, and you are like I just kind of want the high points because I have all that context, then I think this is really worth your time. Do it on audio. We all know he's best on audio. Not only because he's best on audio, but also, So this particular collection includes both sort of classic recordings of his classic works, which is really fun to listen to a younger David Sedaris do his some of his work. And also it includes an interview with the author that is exclusive to the audio book. So there's a lot of good in especially the audio book collection that I think for strong and grounded fans of David Sedaris, you will love. But please, if you've never experienced him, please start with one of his classic works just to really get the full David Sedaris experience. So this is the Best of Me by David Sedaris.

Kaytee Cobb 30:42

Okay, so I'm allowed to read it, though. So you're telling everybody else not to read it. But I'm an exception.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:46

Only if you don't only if you don't have any experience with David Sedaris, that that's who I'm saying. I just am not. And again, he is wonderful, but it just you're just, it's, you're missing something when you read just the highlights? Well,

Kaytee Cobb 31:03

I mean, the same as when you have like a sitcom, right? And there's never any moments that, that come off the laughter. And you're just sitting there like holding your side the whole time, you you're not enjoying yourself to the same level as you could if there was a dark scene, right? Something a little less exhausting in the humor department. So right

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:23

or get and, in it. So in addition to the dark, light, high, low points, there's also the fact that, like, if you only watched the like season three, Episode Five, right, or the one funniest line of every episode of Seinfeld, throughout all the years of Seinfeld, if someone put together the funniest line of every show, and then ran it really, you know, just back to back to back to back. You might Yes, find some of it funny, but a lot of it you're going to miss because you don't have the context and what made it so interesting. That's more getting at the heart of what my problem was here is that there's so much more story that makes those essays poignant, but you have to have it all to make it truly punch and pop.

Kaytee Cobb 32:10

Totally. Okay, Meredith, my third book this week, is kind of a twofer, but not really. I want to talk about Hostage by Clare Mackintosh.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:21

Ooh, yes. Let's talk about that.

Kaytee Cobb 32:22

You want to hear about this, okay. It's crazy to me that this kind of thing happens in the book world, but it does. So what we've got here is Hostage released on June 22, of 2021. Falling by TJ Newman released on July 6 of 2021. Two weeks later, both books could be tagged with the same tagline that's on the cover of hostage which is you can save hundreds of lives, or the one that matters most. However, that is mostly where the similarities end. And I couldn't wait to read both. So I'm not going to talk about Falling as a full treatment here today. But I have read both books. Mina is our main character in Hostage. She is a flight attendant on the inaugural flight from London to Sydney, a long haul on a huge jet being covered on news outlets across the world. The plane has barely departed when Mina receives an anonymous note regarding the young daughter that she has left at home, she's forced to make decisions that affect her family. As well as the hundreds of people on board the plane. There are still 20 hours to go until landing. And the tension ratchets up every hour. As you might expect. This book is called Hostage. So I'm not considering it a spoiler to tell you that this is a hostage situation. There are strings being pulled behind the scenes in the air and on the ground by a group of terrorists and they are not who you would expect. The writing here is more internal and character driven for thriller. So it wasn't quite as propulsive plot wise as some of Clare Mackintosh's other writing. This is the fourth book of hers that I've read. One very plot driven thriller, which was I Let You Go, one very character driven novel, After the End, and this one hits the sweet spot between the two of them. I definitely recommend it. Especially if and there are a bunch of you out there you read Falling, because I want more people to discuss the differences in the two books with me. So basically, I am self serving, asking you to pick up this book, so you can come talk to me about it. If there was anything about Falling that made you uncomfortable or left you feeling a little bit achy inside this is a great option that I think will hit all the right notes. I couldn't put it down. Even though I did say it is pretty character driven. It's Hostage by Clare Mackintosh.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:49

All right, my third book is another one I've been really excited to talk about. Because I found it and through bookish serendipity which is my favorite way to find the book literally was headed out of my library. I happened to glance over to my right. And I saw a collection of books, which is a series of books with covers that are so beautiful that I was like, You know what, I don't even care what it's about. I'm grabbing book number one, because I am not an animal. And I'm just gonna take it home and see what we see. And that book turned out to be *The Unexpected Inheritance of Inspector Chopra* by Vaseem Khan. I love this book. It is so great. Okay. So here's the setup. On the day that he retires, Inspector Ashwin Chopra inherits two things. The first is a mysterious case of a drowned boy who suspicious death no one seems to want solved. And the second one is a baby elephant.

Kaytee Cobb 35:51

Ah, I need this book.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:53

Kaytee, you will love this book. You will love this book for so many reasons. But elephants figure prominently, especially this baby. Alright, as his search for clues takes Inspector Chopra across the teeming city of Mumbai, from its grand high rises to its sprawling slums, and deep into an underworld that I didn't know about before, he begins to suspect there could be a great deal more to both his last case and his new elephantine inheritance than he thought. I loved this book. So come for the cover, stay for the charming story and characters within. If you got so Louise Penny fans, I want you to listen up because there's a lot of reasons that I think you guys are going to want to try out this series while we wait for another Louise Penny to drop next year. So inspector Chopra is a fantastic lead character. He is what I would term a slightly grumpier Armand Gamache. I loved him immediately and watching him wrestle kind of as he came to retirement was both slightly funny and legitimately sad in places and the relationship between Ashwin Inspector Chopra. I love the name. Ashwin, by the way that is such a great name,

Kaytee Cobb 37:16

we should have another baby and call him that

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:19

Isn't it's just beautiful? So the relationship between inspector Chopra and his wife is such a sweet element of this story. You guys know, I'm a sucker for happy, happily married middle marriage. It's really wonderful. And you have that very much here. It's a slightly spicier version of Armand and Reine-Marie Gamache. So this is a book that definitely has a coziness to it. But I would not describe this as a Cozy Mystery at all in the same way that I would not describe Louise Penny's books as cozies. It has an amazing sense of place. I don't read enough in India, but I love India and the scenes in Mumbai, again, very transportive. I loved it. It also has the vibes of the Alexander McCall Smith Number One Ladies Detective Agency series, so they're not perfect readalikes. But if you like that series, I really think you're gonna find something to like here. the mystery inside it is interesting. But it's not the main reason to read this book. In fact, if you go into it, again, we're not talking about a thriller. Here, we're not talking about a literary mystery here. If you go into it just for the mystery, you're going to find this to be a slower

burn than what you'd like. This is more kind of a slice of life, sense of place, with some mystery in it. But if you go into it, really, really just wanting this story of an interesting man in his family, with a dash of an extraordinary baby elephant, you will be in good hands with this book. I was delighted with it from start to finish. I literally was smiling as I read it, except for some places where I wasn't smiling. And this is a series that I am for sure going to be reading further into. In fact, I put on my calendar to read the next one at exactly this time of the time of your next year because it's a really nice summer book for me. I like to read seasonally, and it was perfect for that. So also, I know several of you guys pay attention when I talk about books. If I have feedback on what Roxanna my buddy reader thinks also because she's kind of my anti book twin. I will tell you she also immediately grabbed this book and she loved it too. So this was one of those places where our reading tastes aligned. This is The Unexpected Inheritance of Inspector Chopra by Vaseem Khan.

Kaytee Cobb 39:41

Okay, so now you got me twice because I've already put that on hold as well. I am obsessed with the idea that the series is called the "Baby Ganesh Agency Investigation" Series. I love that. There are five already and two novellas you guys, this is like this. Keep me in elephant books. Every single cover has an elephant on it. I am so excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:03

And aren't the covers pretty?

Kaytee Cobb 40:05

They're so pretty. I like I don't, I haven't read any of them and I want to buy all of them and put them on my shelves just like like,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:12

I was very much keeping myself from buying all of them for exactly that reason, which I just never ever do. But there, and there's just such a sweetness, but it's also really grounded in real life. So there's, it's not just like puppies and butterflies. It's just a great book. I loved it. I really loved

Kaytee Cobb 40:29

it. I love it so much. I feel like we had such good books today. Meredith, I'm really happy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:33

We did. We did. Alright. Okay. We did have lots of good books today. But we also I also had a book that I had strong opinions about, right. And that often happens here and Currently Reading. In fact, we were the first book podcast to really bring strong opinions publicly, right? This was something that when we started was a little bit controversial, because here to for book podcasts have really concentrated on only talking about books that they really, really like. So when we said we were going to talk about books, whether we like them or not I think a lot of people collectively gasped. But from the very beginning, it was important to us that we bring that just because we thought it made things more interesting. But also because we thought there is a way to be able to talk about books have strong opinions, in our own self, and maybe strong opinions that are diametrically opposed to each other, but

still be able to have a constructive conversation. But Kaytee, that's not always how it feels. Right? We can have sometimes strong opinions or lead times people will use our phrase spicy opinions. And sometimes it doesn't feel constructive. So when we said we this topic had been on our heart, when you were thinking about this, what were your initial thoughts?

Kaytee Cobb 41:58

The first thing I thought about was, why do we want strong opinions? Why do why do people listen to us? Knowing that we are going to have strong opinions about things? And I think that for a lot of us as readers, it is really fun to come in with an opinion that's against the grain, right? If it seems like everybody is flowing along in this lovely river, and you're swimming upstream, it feels like, Oh, I'm different and unique and interesting. And you should listen to me because I don't think like everybody else does, right? Sure. So that was the first thing I started to think about. And even in our own contrary opinions, we both of us tried to be sure, especially as we've grown into ourselves as readers and podcasters, to say, not something like everyone who did enjoy this is wrong, or they're bad, or they're dumb readers, or whatever. Because we mentioned this every week, right? There are a million times we could say this and a million more. Not every book is for every reader. And even your strong opinion, or my strong opinion might just be that we didn't read that book at the right time. Right? Yep. And so, so that was the first place I went with this discussion, but that no matter what your strong opinion is, even if you're so excited to go against the grain, or if we are so excited to go against the grain, it doesn't mean that one person is right. Or that this book is trash. Right. Right. Which is sometimes fun to say, but it's not true.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:31

Right? Absolutely. I think that's what we really want to underscore is that even, you know, and I've been thinking a lot about this for myself. So there's, there's a couple things that were at play for me as I thought about this. We we can talk about this, we can navel gaze about how you and I talked about books on the podcast all day long, but it's really a much larger conversation because you and I are part of the conversation but bookstagram, goodreads. You know, I guess to a lesser extent, Amazon, I guess people read reviews on Amazon. But Goodreads and bookstagram are a couple of places that you often will hear people say like, Oh, I went and ripped that book apart on bookstagram or on Goodreads. I gave it a one star and you know, kind of like it's like a badge of honor. And so I think we wanted to talk about today on the show, because we want to have this larger conversation. Because it matters how all of us talk about books we love and books that that didn't work for us. And so I've been thinking a lot about it for myself because there are a few different groups of people that when we on the podcast or in bookstagram or whatever public format we choose whether it's a book group like the Currently Reading bookish friends, when you kind of start a post with this might be a spicy opinion, but and then you sort of follow it up with blah, blah, blah, how much I hated this particular book that everyone else loved. Right? That kind of feels good in the moment this kind of shallow bomb dropped. Yeah. But not only do we need to think about the author who wrote it, and that's the most obvious one, right? We all know that. But I think we're often not worried about that, because we can email the author's not in this book group, or they're not reading my Instagram if I don't tag them. But we're also needing to think about the person who recommended the book, who you may or may not be tagging, they're going to we need to think about how are we speaking based on how they're going to feel, which

doesn't mean that we can't express an opinion, but it's a consideration. Then there's the third kind of largest group, which is all of the people who legitimately had a good experience reading the book that you or I or the whoever is kind of ripping apart, right? Because, for better or for worse, when we love a book, we have a feeling when someone just kind of says, You know, I don't know, whatever they're gonna say whatever negative thing that they're gonna say about it. So again, what is all of this mean? I've been thinking about it for me, as I talked about books on the podcast, and I went back and listened to myself talk about some books that I didn't like. And for the most part, I think that we do a pretty good job. Not all the time, I have made some big missteps, some missteps that I have even walked back and into season episodes, right? Where, for the most part, I think we do a good job of being constructive with what we're how we're talking about the book. Again, I have made mistakes. And I have said things like in a recent episode, I talked about a literary mystery. And I said, when when people talk about this book, they they whine about the fact that it's too character driven or whatever, using that pejorative word whine. I didn't mean for it to be hurtful. But I realized later that someone listening who in fact, had had that thought about the book could have could have been hurt by that. Now, we are still going to have strong opinions. I don't want to do a podcast where we can't have strong opinions. I don't want to have a book group where all the members can't have strong opinions. I'm not interested in that at all. But Kaytee, I think there are some things that we can do. Some guardrails we can put on ourselves that helped these discussions be not only considerate and respectful, but also more actually useful. Because it can be useful to hear me talk about why a book didn't work for me, right? If you know my taste, because you listen to the podcast, or you follow me on bookstagram, then if I constructively tell you, why didn't work for me, that can help you figure out maybe it will be a book that works for you.

Kaytee Cobb 47:50

Yeah, yeah. And we talked about this some we did the episode about evil book twins and anti book twins, right? We did an episode about ratings. That was Episode 30 of season three, we talked about what stars mean to us, and what that means, you know, at a broader view of our reading life, but I am completely tracking with you 100%. Meredith, I wrote down some notes for myself talking about how even if you're tearing apart about by the end, you are hate reading it, right. I'm thinking of even two weeks ago, you talked with Mindy about Survive the Night, essentially panned to the book, one of our bookish friends said, hey, my son heard you talk about that book. He's so excited to read it. He heard Meredith's glowing review. It wasn't a glowing review. But it was a useful review, because he knew what to expect going into that book, right. And so the most useful, strong opinions are the ones that are specific and pointed while being spoiler free, right? They make it very clear what left a bad taste in your mouth, because some readers like that flavor of thing, right? If you're talking about a brussels sprouts book, and I love brussels sprouts, I want that thing, right? But if you're just saying, Okay, I've got something spicy, and you don't say what it is, that doesn't help me as a reader decide, and it doesn't help a bookish friend decide and it doesn't help your follower on bookstagram decide if they will also find that distasteful thing in this book. Right? If, if you include those strong opinions and the specifics, you make it very clear that while I hated everything about this book, there was this thing that was actually really strong about it had a really great central character. I just hated every way that he behaved right, or had a great plotline. But I didn't like the resolution of that plotline. All of that is useful to us as readers because our whole goal here, all of us is that we're never going to finish our TBR so whatever we can do to hone in on the books that are going to work exactly for us. That's the that's the

gold that's the nugget that we want to take from any review ever. So yeah, I think we just need to be more considerate in our language and useful in our language and making sure that whatever spicy opinion it is, somebody can take something from that and make a better decision for themselves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:10

Exactly. We don't want to yuck each other's yums. But we do want to be constructive. The one of the things that I think about is I've talked before several times about one of my favorite accounts at @Katieladyreads on Instagram, I absolutely love her. She is known for what we could term as spicy or strong opinions. But she doesn't just throw the bomb out and say I hated this book. Does anyone else feel the same way? Yeah. Right. Like, that's my least favorite kind of post Kaytee, that I just have no time for that kind of post anywhere. But what she does is really carefully articulate in the most hilarious way possible, the things about it, that didn't work for her. Now, they may very well be things that I'm like, really, because I loved that thing about that book. But again, she's giving me enough to be able to make that distinction. And that's the key. So we stand by the fact that strong opinions, spicy opinions are welcome. But they must always, in our opinion, be respectful, considerate, and useful. And what we will say is, we will continue to hold ourselves here on the show to a high an even higher standard, to make sure that we're bringing that level of honesty and usefulness to the show.

Kaytee Cobb 51:26

Yes, I think Gretchen Rubin says there's there's some guru of an organization that says anything you have in your home must be beautiful or useful, or both. Right? Let's, let's apply it to book reviews from here. They will either be beautiful, or at least useful. Exact sometimes both.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:47

Hopefully, hopefully, we this is the standard we will aim for. Okay, good. Well, I feel better having talked about that. Kaytee do you?

Kaytee Cobb 51:55

Yes, absolutely.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:56

Right. Good. Good. Okay. Excellent. So now, let us press some books into readers hands.

Kaytee Cobb 52:04

Okay. I am going to press a book that I I don't know if you do this, Meredith. But I keep a list of potential presses in my phone. So that if I'm sitting at the end of an episode or my end of my prep and saying, I still don't know what I'm going to put in for this week, I can go look at that. And even if I don't pick one of those books, it'll jog some ideas for me. So I think that this one finally has risen to the top because it pairs perfectly with this episode. I'm going to press *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett. One because I already brought an Ann Patchett book to the show. And two because we're talking about reading and reading books, that might not be for everyone. This is a book for me, specifically, readers. I read this one way back in 2013. I still think about it. This book is short enough that it can be read in a day. We are at a lavish birthday party in South America, which the location is left kind of general. But something very

similar to the crux of this book happened in Peru in 1995. An opera singer named Roxanne Cross is wowing the guests. Mr. Hosokawa is being celebrated by his contemporaries. Everything seems to be perfect. Until a band of terrorists loaded up with guns takes the entire party hostage. Now, I found plenty of reviews. No let's go back... takes the entire party hostage. This story turns in ways that you don't expect. Bonds are forged and relationships developed even though it's a hostage at an opera birthday party situation, right? I found plenty of reviews ranting over this book, including one that was filled that said it was filled with disgustingly sweet sentimentality and melodrama. So I know there are going to be plenty of you who want to come in with a hard disagree. Kaytee, this book does not belong on the press list. I didn't like it. But this is the time to practice what we preach. Right? Make sure that you examine your own opinions and that you're empowering other readers to make their own informed decisions about this book. For my part, Eight years ago Kaytee really loved the tension, the characters, the relationship, and the ending. This booklet... this backlist book published 20 years ago is now my addition to the press today is *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:25

I think that's a perfect addition and a book that has been on my TBR forever and doesn't kind of sound like a book that I would really like the setup sounds perfect for me, does it? It absolutely is on my TBR. I'm very glad that you pressed this. Alright, I'm going to press a book that I read all the way back in 2001 that I absolutely loved, but also has engendered strong opinions amongst people.

Kaytee Cobb 54:49

Look at us on the same wavelength.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:51

I know. Alright, this is *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. Anytime I think about David Sedaris, I also think about Bill Bryson because they're my two favorite humourist essays. They both make me laugh out loud. I've read much of Bill Bryson's backlist. And just like David Sedaris, I cannot read him with like while I'm eating because I will choke he is he just makes me laugh so hard. But not everyone feels the same way. So this is a book that is for me. Yes. I picked up this book when we were staying at a cabin with my family back in 2001. So I was only like 26/27 years old. And it was sitting on a coffee table in this rented cabin. And I remember it was like a Saturday morning we'd gotten in late on Friday night, my mom was fussing around in the kitchen making I was waiting to make coffee and my mom was just taking forever in the kitchen. And I remember, irritatedly sit... plopping myself down on the couch like I was a teenager again, and picking up this book and being completely sucked into it from the very, very beginning. So *A Walk in the Woods* is the story is actually this. It's a memoir. So this is a true story. A few days before Bill Bryson is about to take off on a hike of a 2000 mile hike of the Appalachian Trail alone, which when he came up with this idea sounded like a good idea. But as he's gotten closer to the trip, it's it's become more and more intimidating to him. Right as he's about to take off for this trip. He's contacted by an old friend who he hasn't seen in a really long time named Stephen Katz, who basically starts chatting with him, and he asks if he can come on this hike with him. So Bryson is both happy about this, because now he's going to have somebody with him, which makes them feel a lot better about a lot of things. But also, Stephen Katz is not necessarily the perfect companion for something like this. He admits to the fact that he's pretty unfit physically. He's been struggling with a drinking problem.

And he likes to snack more than anything. As I read this book, I kept feeling like it was like trying to hike the Appalachian Trail with a dirty joke telling Winnie the Pooh, like this is exactly who Steven Katz is but they proceed and we're so glad that they do. Along the way, Bryson and Katz bright well, Bryson gives us a lot of history of the Appalachian trail along with really fabulous descriptions of the journey. I really liked that part. I didn't know this part of the country at all back in 2001. And I was only I had never even left California at that point. So I liked feeling like I was transported to the other side of the country. And we get to see the hilarious interplay between Bill and Stephen and the many people that they meet and spend time with while they're doing this 2000 mile hike. They also face a lot of very real danger, including trying to menace an approaching bear with a pair of nail clippers, which is one of the best scenes in a memoir ever. All of this is told through Bryson's trademark droll wit, which makes me laugh but again, might not be a hit for everyone. So I highly recommend it. I love this book at this particular time of year. It's one of my favorite books to read in the fall. This is A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson.

Kaytee Cobb 58:16

I am glad you pressed that book. I loved that book. I love a lot of Bill Bryson but that's definitely a favorite.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:23

All right. Well, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's the you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 58:31

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:35

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 our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com

Kaytee Cobb 58:45

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:52

And if you really want to help us and if you want more of our bookish content, become a patron for \$5 a month you can become a bookish friend on Patreon. You get all kinds of great content from us and you keep our show commercial free. You can also shout us out on social media, which is the best way for us to find our perfect audience. Whether it's friends

Kaytee Cobb 59:12

are the best friends, all those things are helping us grow and get closer to our goals. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 59:18

Alright, until next week. Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 59:20

Happy reading Meredith