



Season 5, Episode 25: Reading in Other Formats + The Time and Place for a Quiet Book

Mon, Jan 23, 2023 • 57:11

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading Podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from having those 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. Today we'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I never thought I'd be obsessed with an e-reader, but I am.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and my bookshelves and TBR piles are teetering. This is episode number 25 of season five, and we are so glad you're here. I'm also obsessed with my e-reader Meridith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:57

Yes, yes. And I've realized that when I load books onto my e-reader, I feel less guilty about them.

Kaytee Cobb 01:05

Well, that's very delightful. It's not real books, because they're just digital. It's fine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:12

Exactly. All right, right. Okay. Well, we're going to tell you that we are going to talk today, this is a listener request Deep Dive. One of our favorite listeners, Alex Cox, she asked us to talk about the concept of quiet books. And we will get into how we define a quiet book, why you might want to read a quiet book at a certain time of year, and then also some that have worked for us. But before we do that, Kaytee let's start the way we always do, which is with our bookish moment of the week. What have you got this week?

Kaytee Cobb 01:47

Okay, so this week, or really the last couple of weeks because you recorded with Roxanna last week. I spent some time really reevaluating my bookshelves. Y'all know I have these beautiful built in shelves that I built with my dad last year. But every year at the beginning of the year, I really like to take a deep dive into my physical TBR shelf, and decide if there's anything there that I really want to prioritize, or that I'm ready to let go of because as we know, readers change. And I might not be the same reader that I was when I purchased that book. Or maybe I found out something about that book that I'm not so keen on reading about anymore. I also look at my keeper shelf, which is my top shelf one, which is fine because it's like the top shelf liquors the best liquor, right? The top shelf books are my keeper fiction shelf. Those are the ones that I have decided I want a copy of forever. So I can either pick them up and flip through them again. Or if somebody comes over and says, "Can you tell me about some of your favorite books?", I can point them to that shelf. And sometimes that needs a reevaluation too, as we discovered with that 2018 Best of rerelease, listening to those books from five years ago, sometimes we're like, "Huh, that's really interesting that I chose that as a top book this year, I no longer feel the same way about it". And it's because we do continue to evolve as readers and we continue to change. And we read more deeply, or we read more broadly. Or we're falling into a cozy rabbit hole, which is all great. And I want that bookshelf to be the best reflection of me as a reader as it possibly can be. So I love this time at the beginning the year when I can look at both of those really big shelves and evaluate. Are these the books that I want here. That's been my bookish moment.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:30

I like this idea, Kaytee and I feel like I've only had my bookshelves and my keeper shelf for a year now. And so I really would love to take a look at that shelf and see if there are maybe a couple that a year later. Like, I probably don't need that book forever. So that's an interesting thing to think about. I think I'm going to do that.

Kaytee Cobb 03:54

And well, I think everybody should do it and show me your discard pile. I would like to be tagged in those.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:59

Ooh the discard pile. That's interesting. Absolutely. Okay, so my bookish moment of the week, as I alluded to, is just remembering how obsessed I am with my e-reader. Now I use a Kindle Oasis with a Casebot case. Now I say it like that, because it's the combination of those two things that is the magic, right? So historically, I read only audio and print. And mostly like 85% in print and I really do love physical books for sure. But the e-reader I was just on a retreat with my leadership team for here comes the guide. And I didn't I knew I wasn't gonna get that much time to read during that trip because we were obviously there to work. And when we weren't working, we were talking to each other and spending time together. And so I didn't bring a lot of books. I just brought my Kindle and it was so Oh, nice to be able to get a few minutes because I'm a serious introvert. So I would take a few minutes every time we would break for lunch and I would go outside. And I would get just a few minutes while I was eating to read on my Kindle. And I was just reminded how being able to take it anywhere and prop it up on its little stand, and just get a few minutes in my book, it really rejuvenated me for the rest of the time that we were together. But then at nighttime, I was remembering it's people ask me all the time, but the Paperwhite has the amber light feature that you always talk about "Meredith, so why would I spend

the extra money on the Oasis?" And I've always said it's the buttons, right? The Oasis has backwards and forwards button so you don't have to touch the screen to move now you can touch the screen, but you don't have to to move back and forth. Now, why is that important? And it didn't occur to me until I actually owned one why that is so important. And that is because on my Kindle Oasis, I read in bed a lot, I can read on my left side and use the buttons with my right hand, or I can flip on my right side and use the buttons with my left hand. You cannot do that with a paperweight. And so this is the reason that I absolutely love the buttons on the Kindle Oasis and why it makes it so worth it. To spend the extra money on it. I absolutely love it. It is one of my prized possessions and just the realization as I was on this trip and sleeping in a bed I don't normally sleep with and sharing room with you know, I'm like, oh, you know, I need to be able to turn over this way. And there it could my Kindle goes right with me. So it just makes reading and take your reading with you so much easier.

Kaytee Cobb 06:46

So does the Oasis rotate when you flip from your one side to the other?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:51

Yeah, it rotates exactly rotates upside down. Yeah. So then when you're on your other side. Now you're good to go with your other hand.

Kaytee Cobb 06:59

Interesting. Okay. Yes, that is different from my Paperwhite. You're right. I like it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:03

Right? It's really, for those of us who read a lot in bed. It's a difference maker.

Kaytee Cobb 07:09

Hmm. I actually brought my my Kindle down with me while we were recording.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:14

Did you really what you thought you were gonna get bored and just start reading?

Kaytee Cobb 07:18

Well, no, no, because we had a little bit of a delay that we had some some difficulties getting connected today. And the internet's being stupid. So I was like, well, I could get like a page or two in it's fine. It's so easy with a Kindle.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:29

It is and two or three quick flips of the page, you're down the road. Okay. All right, Kaytee. So let's talk about our current reads. What's your first current read?

Kaytee Cobb 07:40

Okay, my first one continues my weird niche of nonfiction that I found at 2022, which is getting deep into nonfiction about nature. I've read an entire book about mushrooms. It's called Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake, which, as far as I'm concerned, should be a made up name. But the guy's a real person.

And he wrote a real book all about mushrooms, because he's a hippie dippie weirdo. Let me tell you about him. So how did this even end up on my TBR? Well, not only did I get into nonfiction about nature in 2022, and Katie and I ended up reading a lot of it together, but Coach Beard on Ted Lasso is reading this book in one episode of that beloved and delightful show. And that pushed it closer to the top of our joint TBR list. It happens. TV makes me read things. Sorry, not sorry. Merlin Sheldrake is like I said a full on hippie weirdo. He is British, which is not what makes him a weirdo. That makes him awesome. And he's been obsessed with mushrooms ever since he was young. Bless his poor Mama's heart because as a child, this person grew mushrooms in his teenage bedroom. He also brewed beer and mead in his college dorm room, because he wanted to experiment with yeast. And his dorm mates drank it like true sociopaths, what in the world is happening here. Alongside these very interesting life choices, Merlin uses this book to regale us with tales of the humble mushroom, and the interconnectedness of fungi with nearly everything on the planet. Essentially, everything we eat, and most of the things we see are in some kind of symbiotic relationship with fungus, including our own bodies, our own skin, and our own guts. Most of the plant matter that we eat as food, and almost all the trees and flowers on Earth are supported by fungal networks to help regulate nutrients give plants access to parts of the soil that are otherwise inaccessible, and provide communication pathways from one plant to another. Of course, fungi are not just plants. He gets into the science behind consuming mushrooms as far as social and psychological effects go, which proved to be far more interesting than what I first expected which was just a drug trip. Certain types of mushrooms are also able to cure depression for up to six months on a single dose, and studies about mushrooms and the way they came to be so vilified as a psychedelic, all very interesting. Finally, by the end of this book, I was convinced that mushrooms and fungal networks might just be able to save the world because we are screwing it up on a massive level sometimes, right? There's research being done now and materials being created now that could replace single use plastics with completely biodegradable material made from mushrooms. And there are mushrooms that are able to consume waste that doesn't biodegrade for hundreds of years otherwise. It's truly remarkable. And although I did not end this book by growing mushrooms in my bedroom, thanks to everybody, my husband would have divorced me for sure, I did end it with far more respect for the humble mushroom and the fungus that keeps our world running. This was way more interesting than I thought it was going to be. It's Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:56

Now, how many people had fungal network on their bingo card for phrases that would come up today?

Kaytee Cobb 11:02

You get to mark that off. Good job.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:04

Give yourself a dot on that one. Well, that sounds really interesting. Did you see? Well, you know that I watch 60 minutes every week, and I have since I was a child,

Kaytee Cobb 11:14

because you're actually 85

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:16

I know. 100% Well, this week, on 60 minutes, Prince Harry was interviewed by Anderson Cooper. You know, that's a slam dunk for me. He was talking about the fact that he had done some therapy with mushrooms and he was talking about it's not like psychedelic, but treatment for anxiety and depression just talking about very interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 11:42

Yeah, I like truly there are like different narcotics, we could get rid of, different psychedelic drugs that we could get rid of and like take off the market in order to replace them with a mushroom which and like one dose every six months. That's pretty amazing. Right? Pretty amazing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:58

Right? Absolutely. Okay. That's a good one, Kaytee. I'm glad you brought that one. Okay, It is weird, but it's interesting, weird. Like, it's not like weird. I don't I wish I'd never heard that weird. Which I am known to bring.

Kaytee Cobb 12:12

Is that talk about. That's about to happen. No, yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:16

No, actually, this one is not that weird. But so remember, last week, which you listened to and you weren't there for you I said recorded with Roxanna. I talked about reading a book that is coming out on January 31, called The Drift by CJ Tudor, which I really, really loved and it's just one of those edge of your seat thrillers you're definitely going to want to get well, I decided to go back to an much earlier book of hers because I had never read it. And it had been on my shelves forever called The Chalk Man by CJ Tudor. Alright, so this is the book we're going to talk about. So the setup is not that much to write home about if I'm being honest, because we see this kind of trope a lot in crime fiction, but bear with me. Our story starts in 1986. And the main character is young, 12 year old Eddie. And he and his friends are on the verge of prettiness. And they're spending their halcyon days riding bikes, and generally being annoying young boys right there. They're just hanging out. It's 1986. That's we did. So given that this is in the world, before cell phones, the boys come up with a secret code, the chalk men that they draw on the concrete with chalk, or there is this secret code and they draw these stick figures for one another as hidden messages, like go to the corner store, Billy and I will be there, there's like there was like a certain chain of messages that they would use. They had this color coded system, which is actually the kind of thing that you did when you grew up in the 80s. And I kind of love that about this book. But one morning, the kids find a chalk man that's in a different color than their normal colors, and it leads them to the woods, they follow the message only to find the dead body of a teenage girl. So flash forward to 2016 Edie has a raging drunk drinking problem. And he's trying to forget his past until one day, he contains a letter containing what do we think? A chalk man. And this is 30 years later, right? And he realizes that the old friends from the group, they've gotten the same thing. So they come back together. And we all got to figure out what's going on. Right? Again, I said, this isn't groundbreaking. Now we'll see that this book is, you know, six or seven, at least years old. So it's her debut actually. And I kind of want to be a CJ Tudor completist. So I'm really glad to have gone back to the to the beginning. So this book is very, very different from the drift. This is crime fiction. This is not thriller, which is what the drift is. So I want to be clear about that. I really liked this book. It totally busted

a slump for me it was fast. It was easy. It was engaging. It was what I needed it to be, but it is not perfect. So I want to be clear. What I liked and what I didn't so what I really liked, although I don't normally love the old friends revisiting a crime from their youth trope, which again, I think is just played out, oh, wt, but it really worked here. And I really tried to figure out why. And I think it's partly because the friends were young, they were 12 when the story happened. And I think another difference is that they were boys. So the the stories that I really hate so much that I won't even read most of the time are the ones that involve later teenage girls, making stupid choices or being horrible. And then let's all go figure out who killed who. I can't I won't even read a book when when I read that in the summary. So here, we've got the Stand By Me vibes, right? So the outcast boys with the complex and ever changing friendship dynamics, which the book actually does a really good job of putting you in that scene. These boys were just interesting to spend time with and their experiences made sense to me, it felt like something that could actually happen, not something that was made up so that there could be a big twist later. And I really liked our main character, Eddie flawed and strange as he was, and I thought the story was really well done being filtered through his lens specifically. Also, I do love a dual timeline and a mystery when it's well done. And it's really well done here. You speed back and forth between 1986 and 2016. Getting a bit more information each time you visit each timeframe. So it's well organized. I point that out because I'm going to be talking about another book that does the same thing in a couple of weeks, and it can really go wrong. I also love that the plotline had multiple levels of mystery as we moved between so I had to kind of keep my wits about me. And I liked that in a book wasn't overly much, but I liked that. So that paired with the character development, I would again say this is more crime fiction than anything else. But here's what I didn't love. There was a point where the interesting multi layered puzzle became too complex. I felt like a few too many ingredients were being added. At that point in the book. I think the debut part of this scenario was most at play. I think as she has traveled through time she's gotten better at knowing what to keep and what to let go of. But things came together at the end if a bit hurriedly. But she landed the plane. And at the end, I was left feeling very satisfying. feeling like I had been told a good story with some good puzzles that were solidly solved and that is fine by me any day. So this is The Chalk Man by CJ tutor.

Kaytee Cobb 17:43

All right. I feel like that book flew under the radar for me even though I know I saw it because there were so many man books. Yes. Same time right The Whisper Man, The Chestnut and The Nothing Man the like every man was on a cover. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:57

Right. If I remember correctly, this one came out very close to Alex North's The Whisper Man. Okay, which was by far the buzzier. And I think probably if I had to compare the two I'd say that that The Whisper Man was a better book, but they're just doing two different things so that they feel like they're trying to do the same thing.

Kaytee Cobb 18:16

Okay, okay. All right. I like it. That sounds good. Okay, my second one is a left turn, we did get a question about why we never make right turns Meredith. And that's because here in the US, left turn is more wild, right? You have to go across two lanes of opposing traffic if you're making a left turn, right. That's what we're doing here. There's a left turn. I'm gonna talk about a romance, a foodie romance,

which is not anything like The Chalk Man. So this one is called Chef's Kiss by TJ Alexander. This was a rec that I got directly from bookish friend Jesse Weaver who was reading it over the Christmas break and knew that it was gonna be right up my alley, so she sent it my way. Here's the setup. Simone, our main character works as a trained chef at a company called The Discerning Chef. Much like Gourmet magazine. This company is focused on large glossy, high budget print media. But it's the 21st century and people want their cooking advice at high speed in bite size format. So it's time for a pivot or they're gonna go under. This is a little like Save Me the Plums by Ruth Reichl, except imagine they had turned to Tasty videos instead of trying to save the print magazine. So they're like 30 seconds, shot from overhead, just your hands and your cutting board. You know, like that kind of media is what they're pivoting to. Simone wants to spend her time curating the perfect sourdough, She wants to make 85 batches of sourdough with different yeasts and different rising times to see which one is the best one, not roll out new recipes and video content every single day in order to keep visitors coming back to their site. That is not her jam at all. So the company brings Ray as a kitchen manager. It's Ray's job to keep the kitchen stocked for Simone's recipes and content, but they're also an avid homebrewer. And when a long form video gets out with Ray explaining the brewing process that then goes viral, the entire business gameplan gets changed. Meanwhile, sparks start to fly between Simone and Ray, even though getting involved with a coworker is for sure a bad idea when your job is already precarious. Right? Ray is also non binary, and is regularly misgendered and dead named by their co-workers and bosses, not once or twice, but repeatedly. And sometimes in an intentionally malicious way, like, purposefully coming to this person and using their dead name, because they know that they're going to get a rise out of them. It can be really difficult to read. And I assume really triggering for some readers. The author is also non binary, so I have no doubt that this book is based on a lot of personal experience with workplace politics and behavior. But that doesn't make it easy. And some of the reviews that I found really reflect that fact. For me, I thought that the representation on the page of a non binary character, affirmation surgery, and joyful romance were all really excellent. I would have loved to see more growth, or maybe faster growth on Simone's side of things, especially because she's kind of portrayed as the main character. And she's often the one that's screwing up throughout these conversations. It takes her screw ups to kind of recognize in ourselves as readers, that sometimes we have to be a good ally by learning and it's not always comfortable, and we have to stretch ourselves, and you're gonna mess up. And how do I mess up without like being a total a hole about it, right, like all of that is played out on the page. And it can be hard to read for any number of reasons. That being said, if you like a foodie romance, or you're looking for a different type of representation on the pages of a book, this is a great option. That leaves that possibility of learning and growth open for both the characters, and the reader, which I really loved. So this was Chef's Kiss by T J Alexander.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:02

Alright, Kaytee, I'm now going to try to learn and not be a total a whole by asking, what is a dead name?

Kaytee Cobb 22:12

Okay. Yeah, actually, I love this question. And I think there's probably a lot of people asking this. So for a non binary or a trans individual, they have a birth name, right, that was usually given to them by their parents, but it might not match their outward facing gender. And that means that name becomes their dead name once they choose a new name. So for instance, my sister has chosen the name Sylvi. We

no longer use her birth name around her or to talk about her because that is what's called dead naming in the trans and non binary community. So that happens to Ray multiple times in this book. And when you've already made that pivot to a new gender and a new representation to be pulled back by your old pronouns, or your own name, can be really hurtful. It'd be like if somebody walked up to you and they were like, "Sorry, I really think Meredith that you look like a Michael. I'm just gonna call you Michael from now on", and you'll be like, "Well, F you, that's not my name", like rude, right? So it's that same idea.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:10

Right. It's very disrespectful. Once someone has said, "This is my, this is who I am. This is you know what I want you how I want you to recognize me", That's incredibly disrespectful. Okay. Thank you for answering that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:22

Okay. I am going to bring middle grade, which I just have not read very much of it all. But I did read one and I really, really liked it so much. I'm interested to know Kaytree, have you read *The Candymakers* by Wendy Mass?

Kaytee Cobb 23:22

Of course.

Kaytee Cobb 23:38

I have not. I haven't even heard of this book.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:40

I really liked this book. It was just the perfect little treat. Okay, so here's the setup. It's a very straightforward setup. And it's catnip for Meredith, 49 year old Meredith, because it would have also been catnip for nine year old Meredith. So here we go. A huge very famous, very beloved candy company very publicly invites four children to compete in a national competition to find the tastiest confection in the country... like invent it. Not find it, invent it. Okay, so who will invent a candy more delicious than the already mega popular oozing Crucho-Rama? Or the Neon Lightning Chew? Will it be Logan, The candymaker's son who can detect the color of chocolate by touch alone? Will it be Miles, the boy who is allergic to merry go rounds and the color pink? Will it be Daisy the cheerful girl who can lift a 50 pound lump of taffy like it's a feather? Or will it be Philip the suit and tie wearing boy who's always scribbling in a secret notebook? They've each got serious skills and very specific superpowers. And I don't mean that real. I don't mean like actual superpowers, but very cool things that they can do. And they've got serious secrets. So it will be a race to the chocolaty ending. Oh my gosh. So obviously *The Candymakers* is a story that has Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory vibes to an extent because it is set in a chocolate factory. But it doesn't have any of the weird strange older guy who randomly sings Willy Wonka kind of thing. Which creeps me the eff out and it always has

Kaytee Cobb 25:24

How about Oompa Loompas? Are there any small assistants?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:27

Nope. The Candymakers in this case, The Candymaker, the lead candy maker is just a really nice guy with a really sweet, normal family. And his son is one of the four kids that's involved in this competition, which is an interesting like side plot in and of itself. It's also got really serious Mysterious Benedict Society vibes, because it's fun to figure out what each kid can do and how they might work together or sabotage each other. And I loved each of our four main characters. I love them together as we first meet them. And then I loved how the book rolled out each of their stories, one by one giving us more of their backstory. There's a lot beneath the candy coated surface, you guys, and it's worth finding out. I think what I really liked about this book is that there was so much to uncover. There were a lot of puzzles to solve and knots a unknot, there's just a ton going on, but not in an overwhelming way. Just something new is happening on every page kind of way, which of course is because this is written for middle graders where it's not written for, you know, but as an adult, I still was very like, oh, oh, I was just delighted the entire time. And you are richly rewarded if you pay close attention to this book. I can imagine myself having read this at like 9 or 10 and underlining and highlighting things as I felt they were going to help me solve the different mysteries. Kind of like how I felt when I read Harriet the Spy, when I was a kid, this also gave me those vibes. So each of their stories comes to a really sweet resolution that had me grinning from ear to ear. There's definitely some more depth going on than I expected there would be. But there's no trauma here, just very realistic portrayals of certain kinds of issues that kids can go through easy ones and hard ones, physical scars and other things that just are normal circumstances that children have to deal with. And I liked that exploration. Overall, if you really liked The Book Scavengers, or Winterhouse then The Candymakers will be a tasty confection for you. As I said, any book that has me grinning from ear to ear is a book for me, and I'm so glad I read this one. And I did buy it for my forever middle grade shelf. So this is The Candymakers by Wendy Mass.

Kaytee Cobb 27:43

Okay, I'm totally doing this for Levi. I even wrote it down on my notes today because it sounds perfect for him. And I have to tell you that Ben Guterson, one of our favorites. He came out with a new book called The Einsteins of Vista Point, which I got for Levi for Christmas. And he it was his first book of the year. He already read it. He loved it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:01

Oh, good. Good. Good. Good. That is That is wonderful. Well, I will tell you that The Candymakers is almost 500 pages. So they're very fast moving pages, lots of short chapters, but it's a it's a chunker. So I think it's a good thing because long books can be delightful books.

Kaytee Cobb 28:19

I love it. Okay, this next one is not long, but the way that it's presented made it feel sweeping and epic. I'm going to talk about Violetta by Isabel Allende. So this was an Indie Press List pick from Bill at An Unlikely Story in early 2022. Every once in a while we get a question from regular listeners of the show. What is the Indie Press List? This is our collection of five books pressed into our hands by an indie bookstore. We send all the sales to them, all the profits to them, and they curate this fantastic list for us. So this was way back in, I think February of 2022, An Unlikely Story put this book into our hands on on our shelves. You and I both read 10 to 15% at least of each title before we record an episode talking about those titles for our bookish friends. And sometimes we finished the book and sometimes we put it

on our shelf for later. And that's what happened with Violeta, for me. I have to be in the right mood, and I'm sure most of us do for a sweeping historical fiction title. And I hit this one exactly right when I finally picked it up at the end of 2022. Our main character is Violeta. She lives a full century between two pandemics. She was born in 1920 in Chile, during the Spanish flu pandemic, and she is now 100 years old and writing to someone who is very dear to her about her life during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020. We put those pieces together as the story develops. As Violeta uses this long form letter to recount her life and the weaving in of political and pivotal events. Over the past 100 years of history, she travels widely, not just all over Chile, which spans like this huge, you know, long skinny country so it has vast differences in terrain, and climate. But she also travels all over the world. She comes to the US, she goes to Europe, so much changes all over the planet, over the course of these 100 years. There are wars and huge developments in technology. Transportation moves from horse drawn carriages to motor vehicles to air travel, and housing becomes vastly different, as does the global economy and its interconnectedness as a whole. She is an elderly woman as she tells her story, but she includes the details of her marriages, including her marriage bed and her passionate affairs and the mistakes she's made along the way. By the end of this book, you've lived a whole life alongside this captivating woman. And it's under 300 pages, but I can think of no one who tells a story like Isabel Allende. Add to that I love a Latin American setting. I would love to visit Chile, and Isabel Allende, who is a treasure of the country brings it to life for the reader in a fabulous way. This is literary and gorgeous. And I can credit probably 96% of my desire to visit Chile and fly all the way down the world from where I live to the books that I've read that were penned by her hand over the years. She also writes a complicated and sweeping family saga, unlike anyone else in the business, if you love a world war two fiction historical fiction book, but you're tired of women's backs on covers, and you're ready to leave Europe finally, and see more more of the world, Isabel Allende should be at the top of your TBR and Violeta be a wonderful place to start with her. This is Violeta by Isabel Allende.

Kaytee Cobb 29:00

Yes, I love that one. And I just felt like it was so accessible in a way that some of her earlier works, which I really want to read, but haven't been able to sink into them. This one, you're just not having to work that it just goes down really easy.

Kaytee Cobb 32:06

You just get into it. Exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:08

All right. My third book is a book called Never Lie by Freida McFadden. And if you are getting ready to go on a drive or go on an airplane, and you love a book that just takes all your attention, listen up, because you're gonna love this one. Alright, here's the setup. Newlyweds, Trisha and Ethan are, of course as we do when we're newlyweds, searching for the house of their dreams. So when they get a chance to visit this really cool estate that is up for sale at an amazing price, they jump at it. Though, really honestly, any sane person wouldn't have gone out to see the house right at that moment, because there was a blizzard coming in. But we need a story. So off they troupe. When they come to visit this remote manor, they realized that it once belonged to Dr. Adrian Hale, a famous and beautiful psychiatrist who vanished without a trace four years previously. And then, of course, we knew it was going to happen because we have apps on our phone that tell us these things. A violent winter storm

hits and they have no choice but to hole up in the manor, it's honestly a wonder Kaytee that any of us get to anything on time or even stay alive given how many places you can get trapped these days. Right on a boat, an island, a house, a manor... it's it's it's a wonder. Okay, so they're trapped in the house, right? It's Yes, it's there's this terrible storm, it's just her and her husband. So at some point, Trisha gets bored because there's she doesn't have her Kindle on her and amateur amateur. And she happens upon and I mean, really, honestly stumbles upon a secret room, one that contains audio transcripts from every single patient that Dr. Hale has ever interviewed. So of course, like any person, she doesn't have any respect at all for doctor patient privilege, and she just barrels right in. This is something to do. You gotta love good old Trisha here. Okay, so she listens to the cassette tapes. And she learns from listening to these cassette tapes about the terrifying chain of events that leads up to this mysterious disappearance of Dr. Hale. She's playing the tapes one by one late into the night and with each one she and we are getting another shocking piece of the puzzle to fall into place. And Dr. Adrian Hale's fate slowly comes into view. And then Trisha reaches the final cassette and all hell breaks loose. Okay, you're gonna strap on your suspension of disbelief on a lot of levels to read this book, because you just need to. I mean, there's like six places here where you're like, "Seriously?" If you just ignore those pieces, because sometimes we have to do that, then we will say so this was a recommendation from Elizabeth Barnhill on an All Things Murderfull episode, which we do for our Patreon subscribers. And it was exactly what she said it was going to be. It's great on audio. It's done by Leslie Howard, who she does convincing male voices, I really, I really, really liked Leslie Howard. So I tore through the audiobook, which I listened to at 1.3 speed. That's a fast speed for me. Obviously, I know, there's lots of people laughing at that. But just so you know, I was able to listen to it faster than normal for me. And it was just over four hours long. So this isn't a big commitment at all. But it was one of those that once I got started listening, even though I had had to fully strap on my suspension of disbelief vest, all I wanted to do was keep my earbuds in until the end. So this was a twisty, fun thriller. It's a popcorn thriller, but it is popcorn at its most delicious. I took a couple of 45 minute drives, and while I was listening to it, I had that experience, where as I parked, I had no memory of having driven there. That's how into this book I was. I will also say that I am a sucker for a story that takes place in a big remote house. And this house really plays a part in the story. And I just love that. So I have to give it the popcorn thriller name because the writing did sometimes get in the way of the story. So I was discussing this with my bookish friend Betsy and mentioning to her that there were two things that happened in the story that often take me out of a popcorn thriller, it just seems to happen all the time. So the first thing is that I get the impression that the writer is playing to the lowest common denominator of reader. And I don't mean in intelligence, I mean more in attention span, right. And so I kept being annoyed by the fact that I felt like, she just thought as a reader, I was kind of dumb, and she had to help me with that. And that irritates me a little bit. Secondly, what I often see in books like these is there's a pounding over the head of certain clues, like, right, and then this and then I'm gonna remind you that this and I'm like, God thinking about the right, I'm like, I got it, I got it. So those two things are definitely a play in this book. And so I'm not going to sugarcoat it, those things are at play here. But the story was very interesting, and different and twisty. And I liked the narration so much. I liked a couple of characters really specifically. And so I very much wanted to see what was going to happen to these four people. So I would recommend this one if you have a long drive or flight to go on. You can definitely listen to this one with your kids. Although there is some murder, it doesn't take place on the page. And it's not very gory. And this book also is not overly sexual. You could listen to it with your teenagers in the car and they probably would get pretty interested too. So Freida McFadden is was a new author to me.

And I definitely will be dipping into some more of her books. But I read *The Housemaid* since I finished this one, which is another book by her and I was underwhelmed. So Freida is not an auto buy. But I very much enjoyed this one. It's *Never Lie* by Freida McFadden.

Kaytee Cobb 38:17

Excellent. I like a like a quick thriller like that that keeps you interested, even if there are some faults to it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:25

Absolutely. Very good slump buster. All right, Kaytee. So let's really pivot away from because *Never Lie* is a good example of not quiet book. So let's so let's talk about quiet books. So Alex Cox is one of our good bookish friends. She's a Patreon subscriber and someone who I know both of us just really enjoy talking about books with and so she said the other day, you know, "I would love to hear you guys talk a little bit about quiet books. You mention it every now and then. What is a quiet book? And why would someone potentially want to read a book that is quiet?" And I like this topic, Kaytee, because part of the reason that you and I started this podcast all the way back in 2018 was because we felt like in the book podcast world at that time, there were kind of only quiet books being talked about and we wanted to talk about, we wanted to talk about other kinds of books. So for the first like two years of the show, we made a kind of a joke about like, Oh, it's a quiet book, right? Yeah, right with air quotes. So Kaytee what to you is a quiet book, and have you found any love and affection for them at all?

Kaytee Cobb 39:39

Over the years, it's been five years now have I finally changed my tune perhaps? Right. So the first thing I want to say here is that sometimes not literally, but I feel like I've written content for our deep dive in my sleep. Like I wake up in the morning knowing what we're going to talk about the next day. And I can bullet point a list because it's been percolating through my head so much. This is a stretch for me, the quiet book conversation. I had to really sit down and kind of quiet myself, in order to get into a headspace where I could talk about why quiet books have a benefit, when is a great time to read them, some of my favorite ones from over the years, because I don't feel like I run on a quiet book speed most of the time. There's four kids in my house, we're homeschooling, they're always around, they're always around. Like, it doesn't get quiet around here very often. And I think that's one of the things for a quiet book. that it's nice to have a calm, quiet space where it doesn't feel like the book has to yank you back into it by your teeth. Right where where it's so engrossing that you can read it through the melee that's happening around you. And I don't get to, I don't get to cultivate that very often at my house, sometimes during screen time, because they're off, you know, having their brains melted by the television. But that doesn't happen very often, either. So do you find you have a lot of time and space for quiet reading Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:11

Right. So certainly now more than I did a few years ago. And I really think that's a great point Kaytee is that depending on the season of life that we're in, sometimes reading this kind of book, or having this kind of, because a quiet book for you and me might be like, we might all define it differently, right? But I think your point is a good one, because there are books that you need to be able to maybe potentially in a quiet space, I certainly do. And then you need to be able to be quiet in yourself. They usually these

are ones that benefit from longer sessions of reading, instead of just a five minute dip in. You really want to be able to read uninterrupted for 45 minutes or an hour. And that is just often really hard to come by and in certain seasons impossible to come by. Exactly, yes. Because by the time you get to nighttime, when you have a bunch of little kids, you're just too tired. Because the other part of a quiet book is that not only does it need that kind of concentration, I feel like for me, I have had several really good experiences reading books that I would describe as quiet, but they only happen when I'm in a really good emotional and mental place. Like I have to be kind of at my best self level. And sometimes that is really hard to come by. Right? You know, right? So you know, because they'll just be certain things that have me just feeling on edge or distracted or distractible. And in those cases, a quiet book is not going to be the right thing. But every once in a while I will have that kind of perfect experience. And the one that automatically jumps out to me is one of the first times I think post Jackson, who is 11, one of the first times I had that experience after having him was when I read Wendell Berry's Hannah Coulter, which was several years ago, but we were doing the podcast and I think you and I were both surprised that I had read it. And both really surprised that I had really liked it. Hannah Coulter is a quiet book because it is completely character driven. Right. So in my definition, and again, it's gonna be different for every person, but my books that are quiet for me are very character driven, they also are really setting heavy. So we're very much in the setting too. Hannah Coulter is really just the story of a woman's life. And there's nothing especially interesting. There's no big plot, there's no big twist, there's no big anything. It's just a story of this woman's life, but it is really beautifully written. And I was interested the entire time. And I could tell you today multiple scenes that are kind of seared in my memory. So for whatever reason, all the cards came together to make that kind of a perfect reading experience. The another one that popped into mind for me was The Essex Serpent by Sarah Perry.

Kaytee Cobb 44:10

I thought you didn't like that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:11

No, I did like a lot about it. I did like a lot about it. And it is one of those books that I happened upon at a used bookstore and I happen to, happen to decide I wanted to leaf through it again and I ended up sitting down with it again. And it's it's really quiet and really memorable and very beautifully written and very setting heavy. So that is just another one that I that wasn't quite as perfect for me as Hannah Coulter was when I read it, but it is definitely that kind of quiet book. Also really good example of a book that has a little teeny tiny teeny tiny bit of what sounds like plotline and it kind of goes in and goes in to getcha and you think it's going to be like a pipe dream, but no, it's not. And so it's one of those that if you listen to certain people, and you don't know that they are really big fans of quiet books, you listen to a setup and you're like, oh, this might be something where something's gonna happen. No, that's not true about The Essex Serpent, very little is going to happen. But if you know that going in, I think you can really love it. And it can be a great read.

Kaytee Cobb 45:26

All right, I like it. I like it. I did have a wonderfully perfect quiet experience very recently and it was because of bookish friend Erica Keckley, who sent me a message way back in March saying that Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan, might be a great Christmas time read for me. But knowing who I am as a reader, she was like, but no pressure, and you should probably never pick it up. It's totally fine.

You should probably just ignore me, right? Like she's like the, the slow strew of books in front of me. So this is a novella, green and white cover set around Christmas time. I cannot even tell you the names of the main character and his family, but the place that he's at, and the drives that he takes where nothing happens, and he's just in his head, thinking about his family, thinking about his girls, what's he going to get them for Christmas, nothing happens. There's a there's a tiny little movement of the plot in quotes right at the very end of this 70 page novella. And I read it in a single sitting in the car on the drive home from Arizona, where I was visiting my parents on New Year's Eve. And that was the perfect way to sink into this story that felt like it happened at the same speed. I was reading it, there were no jumps in time. There were no big pivotal moments. It was just being there, in this car, in this town in Ireland with this small family in their small home for a small Christmas. And that was the perfect quiet experience for me, even though I'm not usually one to cultivate a quiet reading experience. But it was the car. It was the children on their screens in the background. Jason was listening to his audio book, like just things went perfect for that moment to occur. The same thing happened with Love and Saffron. For me, I remember sitting out on my patio, reading these letters between these two women. And yes, things happen in this book. But it's really about a relationship between two women writing letters that have never set eyes on each other that live across the country that are talking mostly about food. And the way that that book wraps me up, if I hadn't had shade, I would have gotten sunburned because I just sat there and read and I just wanted to be there with them while I was still outside at my own house.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:51

Right. So sometimes that quiet book is really a quiet reading experience. And we don't just mean quiet from the sound perspective. So before we wrap up on this, I do just want to mention that Alex had a few books that she has had quite reading experiences with and the first one is Tara Road by Maeve Binchy. And I have been reminded a few times lately of Maeve Binchy, and her novels, and she's an Irish writer. I really love her writing. And I would agree that she writes quiet books... but they're.... But for me, I wouldn't think of her first just because I think that her books actually have things happening in them. But I can see why she would be described that way. She also talks about We Were the Mulvaney's and The Hobbit. And then of course, two books that I think almost for so many people consider them to be quiet books, The Dutch house and Hamnet is on my list. Right? Both of those are ones that are very beautiful. The Dutch House especially like, what the heck happens in that book? I don't know. But, but you're riveted the entire time, or at least I was when I was listening to it.

Kaytee Cobb 49:04

Or you're not. But I have put that back on my TBR which I know is probably a shock to anybody who listened to me talk about it the first time I read it. I even bought a new paper copy because I do think I had the wrong reading experience when I went into it. And I tried to make it something that it wasn't. And that's part of what what can go wrong with it. Where you're like, What is even the point of this? I don't even know like why did I even read this? And it's because I wasn't I wasn't in that headspace emotional space, mental space to appreciate the lyricism of Ann Patchett's writing the gorgeousness of the character she develops and this brownstone in New York City like it just it wasn't there for me and I think it would be if I came at it again from a different angle.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:46

And that's I mean, that's a perfect way to end this discussion, Kaytee because it's all about you will only have a great and because you they can be some of the most memorable reading experiences, because these books are probably ones that you are going to remember and then they will probably land on your best stuff list for that because it will be such an outlier experience for you. So it's worth pursuing. But you can't force it. Right? So just, you know, give yourself maybe you have a few books that you're like when I'm ready for a quiet book. When you feel all those areas coming together, give it a try. And don't force it. Set it aside if it's not working, because like you said, You might love *The Dutch House*, if you read it a few years from now in a totally different headspace.

Kaytee Cobb 50:32

It's weird how that happens. It feels like we should always be the same readers and we should always like the same things. But that's just not true.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:38

Yes. Well, and I will also say that Kaytee, you and I don't lean towards these kinds of books, but of course, Anne Bogel at *What Should I Read Next* is. If this kind of reading experience or these kinds of books are very much what you love, you probably already know that Anne Bogel does too. And so she is really... and Annie B. Jones. Yes, Annie B. Jones too although she likes a level of quirk every once in a while that Bogel doesn't. But both of those are great sources for some really, really beautiful novels that aren't likely to land on our show. So you know, that's, it's just something to, I just want to underline that because, you know, Anne Bogel is just the queen of the character driven, quiet novel. And if that's what you love, she can recommend some really good ones. Definitely. Okay. All right, Kaytee, let's talk about our wishes for this fountain. What are you wishing for this week?

Kaytee Cobb 51:33

Well, Meredith, of course, this was not planned. But my wish this week is that we all had, *What Should I Read Next* bubbles that could pop up over our heads when we have a conversation with a new reader. So I mean, and I had already written this out, but Anne Bogel, over at *What Should I Read Next*, she has her guests tell three books they love, one book they did not love and what they're reading now. And you I'm sure have the same experience that I do, which is that people want book recommendations. Maybe they found out that you have a books podcast, maybe they tagged you on Instagram, and opposed to saying "I want 12 recommendations for this year", and you have never interacted with that person before. So you don't know how to give them a good book rec, you're just like, well, one of my favorite books is this. But what does that mean to you? Like, I don't know if you're gonna like that book, right? So I have this, this completely impossible dream wish that either we could all just have a name tag on our shirt that says, "Here's three books I love, one book I didn't love and what I'm reading now", or that we could have some kind of digital upload above our head that says that information so that when somebody says, "I'm interested in a book recommendation from you, now that I know you're a podcaster, or that you're a big reader, or I've been to your house, and I've seen your bookshelves, and clearly you've got some books around you. What should I read next", that you would have that information readily available, and we've all, you know, thought through it, and put that information onto our name tag or into our up above our head bubble, so that a good recommendation can come to us or that we can give one back to those people. This is this is not one of my more practical wishes, but it's what I want. And I'm going to wish for it anyway.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:17

I think in the post AI world, we're kind of we all just live in a headset all the time. That is something that you'll just be able to like press a button or think of thought and that that that will appear.

Kaytee Cobb 53:28

Right? Well, like star ratings over our head that that say like us as humans, that's what our star rating is from other people. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:35

Exactly. Exactly. So yeah, maybe it's impractical now, but maybe it won't always be impractical. You never know. All right, my wish at the fountain is that every reader would consider experimenting with reading their next couple of books in a different format. Several of the conversations I had at my reading retreat were with people, the people I was there with were are not necessarily, I mean none of them read like we do, but they all like to read. And so we got to talking about

Kaytee Cobb 54:07

You had a reading retreat or a leadership retreat?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:09

I was at, did I just say reading retreat, I was at a leadership retreat.

Kaytee Cobb 54:12

I thought you lied to me?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:15

No, I was at a work retreat. Not Not, I was with people who are readers, but not like readers with a capital R. So we were talking about my e-reader I said that I was there with my Kindle. And we were talking about audiobooks. And we were talking about all this and several people would be like, You know what, I've just never tried books on audio. Because when I was younger, I couldn't take in information that way. Or, you know, I have never tried an e reader. But I am terrible with having books around me all the time. So maybe that would really help. And there's just so many ways why the how the different formats can come into play in your life and finding the right format can make all the difference and all of a sudden reading can be a real joy in a different way potentially. And so I am just really wanting all of us to think about, we're all readers with a capital R. So you've probably done some experimenting. But when's the last time you read in a format you don't normally read in? When's the last time you marked up your books and you book darts, and you highlighted and you made notes. That's another way to interact with your books. When is the last time you did a tandem read? So you got the audio and you had the print book and you let yourself be read to while you were looking at the print book. So there's just lots of different ways to interact with your books. And as I was talking to this group of people, I realized that sometimes we just need to shake ourselves out of what has become our normal. And so that's my wish that everyone would say, Okay, what maybe on my spreadsheet, did I show as my lowest percentage? How can I maybe incorporate that in a different way that might open up something new and make my reading better in some way? That's my wish. Ping splash.

Kaytee Cobb 55:59

Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:01

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

Kaytee Cobb 56:09

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:13

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

Kaytee Cobb 56:23

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:29

And if you want more of this kind of content, you can become a bookish friend for just \$5 a month. You get a ton more content from us. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All of those things make a huge difference toward us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 56:50

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends. Thank you all for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:56

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot,

Kaytee Cobb 56:59

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:00

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 57:02

Happy reading Meredith