



Season 6, Episode 12: Recapping Our European Vacations

Mon, Oct 23, 2023 • 55:29

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 strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk and 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 love traveling. I love reading at home most.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona, and I may still be suffering from jetlag, but I'm also riding a travel high. This is episode number 12 of season six and we are so glad you're here. Meredith, we've got a theme.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:56

We do. We do have a theme. And it's it's going to make sense to absolutely everybody who knows what the month of September October has been for us.

Kaytee Cobb 01:05

Oh my gosh, it's been so busy. So of course, our deep dive today is going to be a circle back on the vacations that you and I both got to take over the past few weeks. And just kind of touching base on how it went and what kind of reading we did and all the bookish delights that awaited us across the sea. But first we're gonna get started the way we always do with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, what do you got?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:26

All right, well, I'm definitely still in a UK mindset with my reading. It's what I'm currently reading. It's also what I'm thinking about. And it's when I'm listening to on my podcast, so I had to make sure that I

highlighted brightlined spotlighted, the episode of Sarah's Bookshelves Live that came out just a couple of weeks ago, where her guest was the Irish author, Liz Nugent. And she talked about a lot of things in her writing career. But she also really talked a lot spoiler free about her book *Strange Sally Diamond*, which you guys know I brought to the show I absolutely loved. And I love it. When Sarah talks to any author, but especially this episode just gave so many aha moments for me having loved *Strange Sally Diamond* so much. Sarah asked Liz several questions that I would have wanted to ask if I had been sitting in that chair, which is what Sarah does so well. And I was like, oh, so interested in her answers. And it made me want to go back and reread the book because now I have all of this new kind of layer of highlighter on top of it. And so it was just a really well done episode. You know, we talked about Sarah's show not infrequently because we think it's so well done. This episode especially was one that I really enjoyed. Yes, we

Kaytee Cobb 02:49

do love Sarah and I cannot agree more that her author interviews and the ways that she asks questions, and the ones she chooses to pursue are just very insightful. I love the way she pulls those together.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:01

Yeah, yeah, exactly. So what's your bookish moment of the week? Okay, mine

Kaytee Cobb 03:04

also still has a UK lens. I already talked about Waypoints on the show that was Sam Heughan that wrote that. But my bookish moment this week doesn't quite fit into the deep dive. And it is that over the course of our time in Scotland, I also finished the *Clanlands Almanac* by Sam Heughan and Graham McTavish. The subtitle of this book is "Seasonal Stories from Scotland" and it touches on various items throughout a Scottish year. So I would listen to it as we like roamed to the Scottish countryside and went to different parts of Scotland. He focuses on or they both do, they focus on key diary dates, a battle of the month, a DRAM of the month, a clan of the month and an adventure of the month. They also have what's called competition corner, where throughout the year, they have a competition between the two of them each month and Sam Heughan is like young either late 30s or early 40s. Graham McTavish is probably a solid 20 years older than him and they'll compete and like physical feats of strength every month, and whoever wins gets points. And the person who loses has to swim naked in the North Sea at the end of the year. So it's so fun to like keep checking in with them throughout the year. They narrate the audiobook together and you can hear them like gently ribbing each other and not so gently harassing each other throughout the book. I finished up the trip by watching Sam's rom com *Love Again* on the plane ride home, which also features Celine Dion. So now I can leave this man who Jason refers to as my Scottish boyfriend back in the realm of my dreams because I'm all done with him in my ears and my eyes for a little while longer.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:39

That sounds excellent. I was trying to find on my Instagram feed. I recently started following a Scottish guy who I'm wondering is is it the co author that you're talking about? It might not be but he's a guy who basically goes around Scotland dressed adorably and then giving us an insight into different places, you know, relics And old falling down castles but also things that still exist there and just kind of like a

historic lens on current day Scotland. It's very, very interesting. I couldn't find it just in my quick review here, but I'll give it yeah, I'll give it I'll make sure that it's in the show notes. But yeah, Scottish history is absolutely fascinating.

Kaytee Cobb 05:17

Yes. And it's like a long storied colorful history. And it's so fun to hear the accents in your ears for these audiobooks. So that had to be my bookish moment. It was delightful. Love it. All right. Let's get into our books. Our current reads, I'm excited to hear what you've been reading about lately. I feel like we haven't gotten to talk to each other in so long.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:38

I know. I know. We haven't. So I've been really looking forward to talking about several of these books. So the first book I want to bring is one that I wanted to weigh in on I know that a lot of people have read it recently. I love this author. So I wanted to just put my thoughts on this book out there. This is None of This is True by Lisa Jewell. Did you read this one?

Kaytee Cobb 05:56

I have not read this one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:58

Okay, here's the setup. Alex Summer is a popular podcaster and she is kind of just finishing up a big project and she is looking for her next big project. She's out one night celebrating her 45th birthday with her friends at her local pub and she crosses paths with a very unassuming kind of beige colored woman whose name is Josie. Josie, it turns out is also celebrating her 45th birthday. In fact, Alex and Josie are birthday twins. A few days later, Alex and Josie bumped into each other again, this time outside Alex's children's school. Josie has been listening to Alex's podcasts and she says that she thinks that she in fact, might be an interesting subject for her next series. So the two of them gets a talking Josie is life appears to be strange and complicated. And although Alex is unsettled, she's getting some yellow flags. She can't quite resist the temptation to start and then keep making a podcast about Joe sees life. Slowly she starts to realize that Josie has been hiding some dark and very strange secrets. And before Alex realizes it, Josie has wormed her way into Alex's life and in fact directly into her home. But then Josie vanishes. And only then does Alex discover that Josie has left behind her a terrible legacy. And Alex has become the subject of her own true crime podcast with her life and her family's lives in real danger. All right. It is no secret to anyone I love Lisa Jewell. I think she writes such interesting books in a really smart way. I think she's best described as domestic mystery or domestic thriller and this new one serves up the goods. It is right in her sweet spot. This book is propulsive from the very start. I was reading as quickly as I could, those short chapters and changing POVs are just too hard to resist. I was one more chapter on my way through this entire book. The premise is really interesting, too. It's not the same old woman goes missing story that seems like we're getting almost constantly in the genre. This is something different. This book is dripping with creeping dread. It's like a slow motion car crash. You see it coming. You see it fairly clearly and early on, but you just can't stop watching. So this is what we have here. I was yelling at our main character over and over again, don't do it, don't do it. And yet some part of me instead of being irritated, was so happy that she was ignoring my very sound advice, because it gets us a whopper of a story. This book isn't overly gory, and it

doesn't have a ton of violence on the page. So that may be useful for some of you to know. I also will say that this is fantastic on audio. It's the kind of book that will get you through a long car trip with ease. There are elements that were definitely predictable, but that didn't affect my overall enjoyment of the book. And the ending was fine for me though. It should be known that there are several people who found the ending confusing, but that confused me. That ending seemed very clear. Again, I love Lisa Jewell. She is an auto buy author for me. If you haven't read her, I always suggest starting with my personal favorite of hers than she was gone. That is a great introduction to this talented writer. This one is None of This is True by Lisa Jewell.

Kaytee Cobb 09:33

I like that title a lot. So I'm gonna have to pick that one up. Well,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:38

she does these word salad titles which I wish that she wouldn't because they're a little tiny word. They're they're completely forgettable. But what I will say stands out about this book in particular is it gives us one of the creepiest villains I've read in a very long time. Yeah, it's fun. Yeah, like make yours can crawl creepy.

Kaytee Cobb 10:01

I did not read a lot on planes, but I watched The Blackening on the way home from London, which is like thrillers but it's all like it's all Black people as the cast and they have to figure out which one of them is the least Black or the Blackest to figure out who's gonna die next, because it's this weird creepy game. That villain in that movie. I was like, are people watching this over my shoulder and wondering why I'm freaking jumping in my plane seat because it was so like visceral and I could not it's funny, but also scary, and I loved it if it's really good, so I'm kind of picturing that like, not obviously not the same thing, but like a good villain that you're like, completely creeped out by

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:41

makes all the difference. A memorable villain makes all the difference. I love it. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 10:46

definitely. Look, see, I have watched so many things lately. My reading might be bested. But I got lots of things to talk about.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:52

That's all right. That's good. We change it up, keep it fresh.

Kaytee Cobb 10:56

Okay, my first book, though this week is one that I actually read quite a while ago, but it kind of rounded out my current reads nicely. So I'm going to talk about How Not to Drown in a Glass of Water by Angie Cruz. So this was our April, Indie Press List pick from Parnassus books in Nashville. And this book is really fun, because it's a mixed media format. And Meredith has talked about these quite a bit recently that it incorporates not just prose and paragraphs on the page. But this one combines interview transcripts, job applications, bills, and so much more into the text in order to give us kind of a glimpse

into the life of our main character whose name is Cara Romero, Cara has recently been laid off from a job that she thought she would have forever. And so now in her mid 50s, she's applying for new positions. She has been set up with a job counselor, who is kind of running the interviews that we're reading in this book. She talks through her work history and her personal life with this job counselor in 12 different sessions which are documented in the little book, it's less than 200 pages, which is why I'm calling it a little book. But it touches on aspects of Cara's life that you wouldn't expect to see in a book this small or with this format. Because it feels deeper than interview transcripts should be able to give us as far as depth goes. We sit in the interview room as she is supposed to discuss hypothetically her work experience and ends up telling us about her best friend or her estranged son as part of that discussion. I loved Cara as a character. And I found Angie Cruz to be really inventive and insightful in her writing. It was a great read. But here's where I diverge from apparently the entire listening world. I tried this one on audio. And I did not appreciate that it was a produced book. It was like sound effect production. The audio book attempts to bring the text to life by adding things like the sounds of doors closing a squeak on the floor and the ambient noise of the room. We're drinking out of a glass of water. When I mentioned that I didn't like that. On the Indie Pess List episode, I was lovingly but directly told that I was wrong. Like you can't be wrong, right? It's my own opinion. I'm allowed to be right about this for me. But for me as an avid audiobook listener, I'm not a fan of added sounds, and even music and my audiobooks. I love a full cast recording. But keep your sound effects board out of my book, please. This is admittedly something that probably stems from the fact that I listen at not 1x. Maybe we won't talk about that number specifically today. For some reason, my brain doesn't like to process sound effects in triple time, even if it can handle voices at that speed. All that being said, this small book is not hard to pick up and read in paper format. So that's the way that I recommend it. It's full of heart Cara is a middle aged protagonist that we can all root for. She's an excellent, well rounded woman and I love that. However, if you're looking for an audiobook experience, it has been lauded by nearly every bookish friend who listened as one of their favorite audiobooks of the past year. So unless you're me, you can't go wrong with either format. But I hope you love it no matter how you take it in. Its How Not to Drown in a Glass of Water by Angie Cruz.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:12

Yeah, I never any of the mixed media stuff I always do in print just because my brain processes it better. And I read this one too and really liked it, but I definitely would prefer it in print. Do you think with the audio though, that if someone listened to the sample, do you think they would get it be able to get a sense of whether or not it would be right for them

Kaytee Cobb 14:31

as long as they listen to the sample audio at their regular listening speed because I do think the speed had a lot to do with it. Because I can like I'm fine sitting on the couch and listening to a show that my husband is watching. It doesn't bother me to have sound effects with the dialogue. Obviously, it's just listening to it fast is just really not a fun experience.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:52

Yeah. Okay. Well that is really useful information to know how people should tackle it. Definitely. All right, Kaytee, I am bringing one one that I know you really loved. And I really liked it too. But it's very different from my kind of reading. But there was a distinct reason that I read it, I read *A Psalm for the Wild Built* by Becky Chambers. Finally, you've been waiting, waiting forever. Okay, this book has a simple setup, and certainly it's one that you've heard before. So I'm gonna keep it really short. As our story starts. It's been centuries since the robots have pinga became self aware. And they laid down their work and wandered into the wilderness all together all at the same time, never to be seen again, it's been so long, in fact, that these robots have faded into myth, and almost urban legend. As our story starts, the life of a tea monk is upended by the arrival of a robot who says that it has come to honor the old promise of checking in with the humans. And the robot cannot go back until the question of what do people need, gets answered, alright, I've been saving this book in a little metaphorical box in my mind, and on my shelf labeled emergency break glass. And in mid August, as I have spoken about a little bit here, I hit that kind of emotional emergency. So I broke the glass. And I'm so glad that I did. Like everyone told me this book is a little tiny bit of peace and calm. It's a little bit of balm to the soul. It was in short, exactly what I needed. In that moment, I think I needed to be in the company of a human and a robot who are just trying to figure out how to be the best version of themselves. And I identified so much with our lead character, sibling, Dex, who is just trying to figure out their purpose. So I had expected all of that. And I had expected a lot of really prosaic nature writing, which we definitely get here. It's really very, very beautiful. If you've ever wanted to just sit on the side of a stream and watch the water and notice the sound around you and the bugs around you doing their bug like things. This book is perfect. I do want to mention something that I hadn't heard before. But it was a lovely surprise. I loved the portion of this book that talks about sibling decks starting their time as a tea monk, and knowing not a single thing about how to do it, and sibling decks fails over and over again, and then slowly begins to figure things out. It's a beautiful ode to the beginner's mindset. I think what I hadn't expected was how philosophical this book gets. This book is deep, deep, deep. And I can imagine a lot of my own reading moods, where this book would not be the right fit. But in the right mode, it's just exactly right. It's righter than anything else could possibly be, in fact, so no one goes into this book for the pulse pounding plot. But if you hit a point in your life where you need a safe place in your brain, and in your heart, this is the book to break the glass on. This is *Psalm for the Wild Built* by Becky Chambers.

Kaytee Cobb 18:09

I love that book so much. Now I have to ask, though, art, will you make another metaphorical shelf in your mind for the second one?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:19

Absolutely. I mean, for sure. And I'm definitely it's in that same place on my shelf. It's in the same place on the shelf in my head, which is it's there for you, when you really really need it. And boy reader, I'll bet you know exactly what kind of mood that is when you're like, I can't find safety anywhere. And our books are there for us right then. And it's one of the most useful ways that our books serve us.

Kaytee Cobb 18:48

Yes, I think this one offers grace in so many ways too, because it's just a novella. So you don't have to have a long attention span. You don't have to keep track of details. So if your mind is in that kind of everything is scattered, everything is broken space. This book is okay for that. You know, like it's not going to ask too much of you. It's only going to give

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:13

you something an offer. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. That was really really good.

Kaytee Cobb 19:17

For sure. Okay, this one also brought me a lot of comfort but in a different way. It's Congratulations, The Best is Over by R. Eric Thomas. I love him. So R. Eric Thomas wrote an essay collection that I practically sang about on the show, although you all are happy that I did not actually sing in 2020 It's called Here for It. He comes into this one having new stories to tell about moving into a new apartment and then buying his first home, losing his father and being in relationship and then married to someone whose job during the pandemic made their family both vulnerable and essential. I read this one with my Katie and anytime we finished an essay I found myself wiping away tears of laughter and also wondering how he managed to write something As a black gay man, that so was not just full of heart and relatable, but so perfectly applied to my own life, like we have very little in common between us. And one story, he gets a large cut on his arm, the situation is scary, and it's dripping with bloody humor, like he is in that kind of creepy. There's blood everywhere. He's like, maybe going to die, right? But it's hilarious. He's so funny. And in my actual life, Meredith, you remember this, I had recently been stitched up by my husband for a large cut on my leg from a freak drinking glass injury. But I also had to butterfly and glue onlys chin shot after a poorly executed jumped into the pool. So I had multiple bloody wounds that had to be stitched up. And then I read this essay where I was finding the humor in these situations that at the time were scary and painful, and made me a little bit woozy delirious with the bloodiness of them. These things happen weeks apart. And here I was reading this essay collection that included the story about his own home injury from drinking glass, like it could not have matched up more perfectly. The title comes from the fact that when we enter midlife, it seems there's not as much to look forward to on the horizon. Congratulations, the best is already over. Right? It's not like and next you will see that 30 is the new 20. Like, everybody's like, man, you're in midlife now. That's what it is. It's celebratory. But it acknowledges that other people don't seem to celebrate this time of life as much as you think maybe we should. That also felt relatable as I celebrated this summer, my 39th birthday. But it left me feeling full of hope that there will be humor and delight in the moments to come. Even the hard ones are Eric who goes by our Eric on social media feels personal in the same way that it sounds like I'm saying our Eric when I talk about him, he's yours and mine. He invites us into his story and his life in the same way your best friend does when you sit down to catch up. First a big hug than a funny story that maybe is laced with grief than laughing to cry about that memory you shared with the gay frogs that live around his Lake, and then hope about the ways humans navigated the pandemic together. The stories keep coming with nary a miss, and I love that he was able to deliver with the second collection just as well as his first next time, I really hope to get to listen to his audiobook because I've heard he reads his own work. And I've only ever read his essays and text. But listening is supposed to add an entire dimension to the experience. So maybe next time I'll take it in that way for now. This one was excellent on paper. This was Congratulations, The Best is Over! by R Eric

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:48

Thomas. I'm surprised you didn't How come you haven't listened to these on audio? If you don't,

Kaytee Cobb 22:53

because I get them as galley. Okay. And so I have them on my Kindle and I can't wait to read them. So I end up reading them that way you jump

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:01

into it quickly. Okay, that totally makes sense. Okay. All right. My third book is when I have really been looking forward to talking about on the show because I feel like it is not getting that much play and it is so very, very good. So for all the listeners who love CLI fi, this is one you have got to get this is *The Great Transition* by Nick Fuller Googins This is a beautiful purple book, which I feel like we've been getting a large number of beautiful purple books so your bookshelf should be coming along just just fine. All right, our lead characters are a family there's mom and dad larch and Christina and their teenage daughter me we find out from the beginning that 30 years earlier dad larch came to New York with a team of volunteers to save the city of New York City from rising waters and torrential storms. And mom Christina was doing her own work on a different battlefield on the frontlines fighting massive wildfires that at the same time, were ravaging the entire western United States, they became part of a movement that changed the world. This is now in our story called *The Great Transition*. And from that they and all the people who worked on these things with them forged a new society. And that's where we find ourselves in the present. As our story starts a big event celebrating the great transition is happening. And in that event, several climate criminals read oil and gas company executives are killed in a very surprising and televised attack. Emmys mother Christina disappears and is quickly identified as a possible suspect. And it means illusions of the utopian life that she's had for these 15 years are shattered. So me and her father larch make their way from their home in Nuuk, Greenland to New York City, which is now not a huge metropolis. It's only a lightly populated storm surge outpost. They are desperate to find Christina, but they are not the only ones looking for her. All right, as I said, this is climate fiction, no question. We are deep within the floodwaters of the end of the earth as we start this novel, but it doesn't stay there. What is most interesting about the climate fiction portion of this book is how much time is spent after the world gets its act together. That's something that I loved. In some ways, it's very helpful, this idea that maybe we could actually get to a place where we have net zero emissions, and where we're healing our planet and not hurting it. But the great transition, let us know that, as before the world ended, not everyone can get on the same page. And the nuanced way that this novel deals with this issue is just one of the many ways that it succeeds. What you really need to know about this novel is that it is equally climate fiction and family drama, because the story of larch and Christina and daughter me is really the heart and soul of this book, we get the story of how larch and Christina met. And then we also get to see their marriage through their eyes, and through the eyes of their 15 year old daughter. And this is a warts and all view of middle marriage, we can fall in love with somebody and then realize 15 years later that the version of them we fell in love with is not the person that we are living with anymore. But that doesn't mean that we don't love this version, too. It's very complicated. And that really is what I'm taking away from this book is that somehow this debut author has managed to bring us a story of our world exactly as it is right now. Marriage as it is right now, parenting, as we're experiencing it right now, the feeling that the world is ending, and yet, we might possibly still be able to save it, the feeling that no matter how present a crisis, we can't all get on board

with the one way to solve it. It's full of the best and the worst in humanity. And I absolutely loved it. This book has been comp to Station Eleven. And I can definitely see that comp working. It's about the end of the world, but also about the world being rebuilt, and it has a distinctly literary point of view. I couldn't help but think that if you liked the Displacements by Bruce Huntzberger, and Aurora, by David Koepp, you will find a lot to like in this one. I think the fact that we're getting climate fiction and dystopian novels that are really working on several levels is wonderful. And I hope we get more. This is a great one. This is The Great Transition by Nick Fuller Googins.

Kaytee Cobb 27:33

Interesting. Right now the essay collection that Katie and I are reading is called Not Too Late by Rebecca Solnit, I think is her last name. And we're just about to finish it. But it's about this like period of transition that we're in right now where we know what needs to be done to avert climate disaster, but we're not quite there yet. And some of them are kind of speculative essays about what we might be looking at when we look back in 20 years, 30 years, 50 years. So I feel like this would be a great one for us to pick up like right on the heels of that one, and have a fiction version of what we just read.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:09

Yeah, because it asks a lot of questions around what will actually need to happen. And to get everybody on board like as a global initiative, not as

Kaytee Cobb 28:20

a paragon French movement. Yeah, yeah. Oh, this sounds like such a good pairing for what we're reading right now. I'm very excited about this. I'm gonna message Katie as soon as we're done. Okay. My third one this week is an author we both really like her newest release is called The Hanging City by Charlie Holmberg. Yes, yes. So this story was very good and very surprising. It flipped everything on its head in what I thought I loved about fantasy, which, as we all know, is namely, like dark skies, stars and men with wings. Yep, that is that's what we love about fantasy, right? Here's what we got here. Our main character is Lark. She left the human settlement where she grew up more than seven years ago, because her abusive father was so bent on using her strange gift to control the people around him. What's her gift, she can intentionally make others, both people and creatures feel extreme fear. They don't see or hear anything. It's not a hallucination. She just mentally makes them terrified. Making even the physically strongest enemies flee in terror. So she's this tiny little thing, but she can vanquish anyone because they will be terrified and run. She has been jumping from settlement to settlement because as soon as people figure out she has this gift, they think she's a witch. They kick her out, right? She's terrifying. She never finds her place. So she finally attempts to enter keg Mar, the city of trolls. They live obviously, under a bridge that spans a huge canyon carved by a river. So while They have water for their crops and to live. The river is also home to gigantic beasts which have to be fought by the inhabitants of the city to keep them safe. Since Lark is not large and strong, like the trolls who stand easily a foot and a half taller than her and weigh at least three times as much as she does, it seems like she doesn't have much to offer the settlement, and only useful humans are allowed to stay here. But when she shows the High Council her power, they agree to let her remain on two conditions, she can never reveal her strength, and she can never use it on another troll or she will be killed. She is sent over the edge of the hanging city into the canyon below for shifts fighting Canyon monsters using only fear. Just as in any city, there are some unsavory elements, beings who use their strength and

power to make life miserable for others, especially those who are different from themselves. So it's not surprising when she draws the unwanted attentions. I'm in a hole named Grog. Because of course, that's his name. He's the awful troll. But there are also trolls who are almost resentfully kind reluctantly, kind even, like, ooh, knock and Asmar and the half human half troll hybrid named perg. The characters in the story are interesting and well drawn all the way through. Even when the story goes in unexpected ways. It did have a bit of a mushy middle, which we've talked about before it lagged a little bit, it felt like nothing was really happening. But I was also interested the entire way through I loved the development of this city under the earth, going in the opposite direction of the way I like to go and my fantasy which is up above into the mountains and the stars, like Belarus. I was also surprised in this role by this one that went into the belly of the earth and involved not wings, but horns and slightly green skin. This novel would be happily seated on the romanticize shelf. Even though I didn't expect that either at the outset. Everything's pretty closed door. I'd give it a two out of five on the spicy scale. It was enthralling and strange, and I'm really glad that she gave us this adult fantasy romance novel that seemed totally outside of her regular wheelhouse. This was *The Hanging City* by Charlie Holmberg. I think Charlie Holmberg does different kinds of magic so well, like is she's very, very creative with that part of the magical world that she's building. Yeah, definitely. I love that. Okay. Now we've done our six current reads, and we get to kind of have a little like, scrapbook our together and talk about these big trips that we went on. We both traveled all the way across the ocean happened to be at the same time, and I have been just dying to hear about your trip. Meredith. Tell me some stories. I want to know how did it go?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:51

It went really, really well. Betsie and I had such a good time traveling together, we traveled together really well. I feel like we ended up splitting up our trip the way that we would have wanted to which is half our time in London, half our time in the Cotswolds. We were a little bit worried that maybe we should have done like one additional day in London and one less day when we were day in the Cotswolds. But it ended up being perfect where we just had the right amount of activities to do each day. But then we spent most evenings at home in our flat in London or in our cottage, in the Cotswolds just kind of really going over our piles of books that we bought that day, because almost every single day we went to a bookstore, if not more, so we loved having time to play with our books in the evenings. And that was that was really, really fun. I mean, I love our trip was you know, the, the way we conceived of it was that it would be a bookish trip through London and the Cotswolds. And so in London, of course we wanted to visit so many of the stores that people had told us about or once that we already shop at like Blackwells that we already shop at online. And in the Cotswolds, I really was the one who was pushing to go there Betsie very willingly wanted to do that, because I've read so many books set there. So in that instance, I just wanted to experience what I'd had in my mind since I was a child. And yeah, it both London and the Cotswolds lived up to expectations. I'm not a big city girl at all, and I would happily moved to London today. It's so beautiful. It's so urban. It's incredibly easy to get around which of course people had told us and the big thing that I was surprised about because I'm a complete diet coke addict. Everyone said we'll get ready for the fact that you're not gonna be able to get any ice with your diet coke or you're only gonna get Coke Zero. Not true. So if you're addicted to Diet Coke, or you're addicted to ice in your beverages, every single meal we were offered both and we didn't go to like weird places. We went to like just very everyday places all around. So that was excellent. Like I said, very easy to move around the city. I was kind of overwhelmed when we went to Buckingham

Palace. We went there on the same day that we went to high tea. And then we went to Buckingham Palace and I didn't expect to get as like weirdly emo as I got standing outside of a building that I couldn't get anywhere near. It was just like, all of the time I spent as a child and my grandmother and I got up early and we watched Princess Di and Prince Charles's wedding together and I put together scrapbooks as a child with Princess Di. And I just everything about that just reminded me of that period of time. And of course, when she died and all the scenes of all the hordes of crowds there and just being there was really, it just felt like emotional because it felt like something I had imagined for so long. And then I was experiencing it in person. We went to lots of great bookstores, Foyle's was by far my favorites. And I want to find out from you because I told you that and I was able to tell you in advance, save time for Foyle's, I really hadn't paid much. I knew we were going there, but I hadn't really paid much attention. I would go back just to spend like two days at foils, and another day at dawn Daunt bookshop, because those stores were made for discovery. I ended up buying over 50 books total. Yes, I brought an extra suitcase to bring back with me, Betsie and I both did We both used them heartily. And I shipped books back Blackwell's was able to ship my books. So I bought over 50 books, you guys are going to be hearing me talk about Irish and British authors for the foreseeable future. So this is basically now a UK podcast.

Kaytee Cobb 36:45

I mean, that's what we were all hoping for, I think, right? Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:49

Yes. So, so good. What about you? What was your stint? Well, let me just tell you one other thing. driving on the wrong side of the road. We laugh a lot about that. We make fun a lot about that. It was a harrowing experience. Betsie did all of the driving. She was absolutely incredible. She held herself together. She just jumped in with both feet, kept us safe, didn't damage the car, or us or anybody else. She parked she traveled between cities. She drove in in London, she drove out to Heathrow, it is a harrowing experience to drive on the opposite side of the road. I knew it would be but it was 10 times more harrowing than I thought it was physically exhausting to both of us. And we needed a rest date afterwards. Luckily, we had planned one because we knew that that was going to be a big deal. So it we didn't have a car in London, but we had we went and got one at Heathrow and then we drove to the Cotswolds and then drove back to Heathrow in our car in that car. So four days in the car.

Kaytee Cobb 37:51

The roads in the south of England are so especially leaving London are so thickly congested with traffic, and if not on the side that we're used to, but I was in like a coach bus for one of our days. And the closeness of like how we pass other buses and other vehicles. Yep, I was like I cannot imagine poor Betsie in this Mini Cooper with these huge buses and not just coach buses but double decker buses are everywhere. There's just actual regular traffic black cabs everywhere. I was like Oh, I'm so glad that I do not have to drive anywhere in London. I went the full two weeks without thinking about the price of gas even one time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:35

Yeah, yeah. Well, we drove so mean great. She drove on, you know freeways and and all that traffic and everything. But driving in the Cotswolds is its own kind of freak out. Because the vast majority of

the roads that we were driving on were, if they were for two cars, they were the equivalent of what in the States, certainly in Texas would be for one car, one vehicle and many of the roads were actually just one lane and you just have to find places to go. We had to learn the process. And there is a process for figuring out who's gonna go win and who's gonna go around and who's going to pull over and she figured all that out. There was a lot of screaming and squealing and cussing on both of our parts. But she was Rockstar. I give her all credit for managing that part of our trip.

Kaytee Cobb 39:22

So many gold stars, Betsie. Good job. Yeah. All right. Well, like I mentioned at the top of the show, I'm still jet lagged. We had very little jetlag on the way out. Our kids, all four of them did really well. They were they slept a little bit on the plane, maybe two or three hours for each of them. And then they were very tired by that evening. Even though in Arizona it was eight hours earlier like it would have been noon for them. It didn't matter. They were very tired. They were ready to go to bed. And then that immediate exhaustion on that first day was enough to kind of snap them into UK time so I had one kid that needed Benedryl for a few nights to help him get into sleep. But mostly, we like went to bed at 9pm and woke up at seven or eight. And they did great. It was amazing because that's the thing that I was most worried about was that we would spend a whole week being like cranky and tired and brain fog and not really getting to enjoy our time there. Because I had planned the Shi T out of this trip, I had spreadsheets, I had tickets saved in PDF format on my phone in a specific folder so I could access them without Wi Fi. I had just gone deep into the rabbit hole, trying to make sure that we kind of knew what we were doing, but had enough downtime, but also got to see the things that we traveled all the way over there with four kids, like people were like, are you guys insane? Like, why would you even do this to yourselves and they were fantastic. Our kids were so good. And they were just up for adventure every day. They would ask at night, what are we doing tomorrow, mommy, or in the morning? What are we up to today? And they just knew that kind of I was in charge. And they were just going to roll with the punches. And mostly with a very few small exceptions. They trusted that I had it under control. And I did which was awesome. It felt very empowering for me, which was great. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:16

no, you did an amazing job. It was fantastic.

Kaytee Cobb 41:19

So over the course of our two weeks, I finished six books, mostly on Kindle, I hardly had any audio time at all. So if I was reading it was after the kids went to bed or while we were traveling from one place to another. And I just brought my Kindle with me. Even though I bought 15 books for myself, I did not read any of them. While we were on the trip, I brought them all home with me. So that was fun. And it's way more Kindle reading than I normally do as well. Like normally it's less than a third less than a quarter of my standard monthly reading. And this month is going to be quite a bit more than that. I also you got to see a lot of people got to see I got to meet up with not just one set of bookish friends at Foyles. Like I announced on the show, I had four separate meetups with bookish friends sometimes it was just two or one person and there was the one that was six people meeting me at Foyle's. But I got to meet 10 UK bookish friends, people who I had met through the screen or interacted with online and then got to talk to in person people who thought they would never get to see a currently reading person have like face to face, because why would that ever happen? And they were kind and had amazing accents. And I just

wanted to talk to them for hours and we spend time figuring out each other's taste and making book recommendations to each other. I spent a whole meal eating tacos with Stacy Rutledge Chen, who has been a supporter since day one. Yeah, the podcast. And she got to meet my kids and they all loved her. It was great. So that was Stacey, I kind of want to shout out all the people who like made time to come meet me. I'm not gonna do that. But y'all know who you are. It was fantastic. And it was really great for my family to see that not only is mommy's job a real job, right? I don't just talk into the computer, but people listen and they are excited enough. And they feel like they know me well enough that they would travel to a bookstore to meet someone they've never met in order to spend time with her. And they were like, this is pretty cool, mom. Good job. You it was it was very fun coming home. We've had worse jetlag. I've had kids crying at dinner, most nights this week, at like 6pm. They're just starting to melt down. I've tried to push it a half hour later every night, we're almost getting to regular bedtime, but then they're still up at 430 and five in the morning because they're just not switched yet. But they've been incredible. They ate pretty much everything we ordered from every nationality we could think of they had Ethiopian food, they had a Japanese food, they had oysters on the half shell, they ate everything we could put in front of them without they had Cantonese food where I wouldn't tell them what they were eating until they finished it. And so they liked it. And it was tripe. Oh, and they were like, that was really good. Like they're just adventures through and through. And I'm so grateful that they're willing to let us drag them around and go with the flow. And I think it makes for not just the memories that we created. But the things we got to do together. We haven't decided that it's more important to us to scrimp at home. So we can splurge on stuff like this, where we know we're going to keep those things close to our hearts for the rest of our lives. And our kids will never forget them. Right. So that's what we're going to do. Hopefully every year I'll get to tell you about where we went and who we got to meet and what kind of books I bought because it was phenomenal.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:40

Yeah, you guys hit Yeah, you planned the heck out of that trip. And I thought and the kids are great ages for that. They're all going to be able to remember it.

Kaytee Cobb 44:48

Nobody had a pee accident even once. Amazing. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:51

yeah, no, that's excellent. Well, what was your favorite bookstore that you got a chance to visit?

Kaytee Cobb 44:56

Oh, it was Foyle's in the UK for sure. I have stories of content, like, Yes, I could have spent two hours on each level easily. Yeah, I spent about three and a half hours there, two with the bookish friends that met up with me. And then I just stayed. And I just kept wandering around and shopping and going up and down aisles. In Scotland, it was Toppings and Company, which was the one that I posted pictures of. And there were ladders everywhere. Every room had bookshelves to the ceiling. And you could get on the ladder and you could get to the high bookshelves and the kids would get up on the ladders and be like, Oh, look at this book up here. It felt like the beauty in a nice library. It was so beautiful. Like brought to life. Right? Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:40

I love it. I love it. Love it. Love it. Well, yeah, I mean, I just want to mention that too. Did you go to Words on the Water? No, no. Yeah. So that was just so fun. That was very interesting small little secondhand books bookshop in a barge, on, you know, actually on on the river, it was really, really interesting. But then Daunt bookshop is the one that was so interesting, because about 60% of their store. So about 40% is organized the way a normal store is, and that about 60% of it is devoted to two floors that are organized by country. And then within that, too, like I headed straight to like the Japan section. So within that you have a bunch of nonfiction and a bunch of fiction all mixed together. And so it's just like, this incredible way to discover books from other places, books that I have never seen before. So I got a bunch of mysteries or crime fiction from other countries, because I was like, Oh my gosh, that sounds so so good. So yeah, very, very interesting way to organize a bookshop. So don't bookshop was very interesting. We got way too many bookmarks. We got way too many tote bags. Like everywhere I went, I was just like, give me a tote bag. I can't be bothered to carry my books any other way. And so just absolutely fantastic.

Kaytee Cobb 46:59

I feel like you could make like a blanket out of all your tote bags, like some soft fabric on the back. And then it would be this whole, like mosaic of all the bookstores, you got to visit.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:09

Oh my gosh, I kind of collect tote bags from every but like I tried to grab one from every bookstore that I'm in so I could actually do like kind of from all over that was a really great idea. But yeah, it was fine. It was really really fun to take these trips, there's no question that it has affected our recording schedule. So for our Patreon content, we are of course can deliver everything because we always do. But the schedule is a little bit off because I was gone, then you were gone. Elizabeth Barnhill has been in Ireland for almost two weeks. Bhumi has been on vacation. So we just have a lot of stuff going on. So we will be delivering all the content, but our scheduling is a little bit off. So we hope all of our fantastic bookish friends will put up with that,

Kaytee Cobb 47:55

you know, I'm just glad that we were partnered with The Novel Neighbor for the indie press list this month, and they were willing to deal with our schedules so that we could get that content out on time because that is like our flagship Patreon content. So important to us so important to the bookstores. And we delivered on that one we did

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:12

we absolutely was fantastic. They had a fantastic month, maybe our biggest month of sales than any single bookstore has had, which always makes us so so so happy. So that episode is still there if you missed it and you want to listen to it become a bookish friend just become a bookish friend for a month if you want to. It's just \$5 you can grab that and all the episodes of indie press list and all things murderful we're going to record all things murderful this coming week. And I know that I'm going to be talking about some books there that I bought on my trip that I'm not talking about yet on the big show. So all things murder for those listeners get stuff earlier. They hear about books earlier. And so when

there's a big huge run because it's been on the big show, they've already got their copies or they've got their holds in at the library.

Kaytee Cobb 48:56

Absolutely. It's like magic. It is all right. Let's visit the fountain Did you see any great fountains while you were like the fountain in front of Buckingham Palace? Meredith? Can we talk about that fountain? Yes, yes. In fact, with people sprawled all around it. I loved it so much. Yes. And

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:12

in fact, there is an episode of my favorite show of all time Elementary where Sherlock and Joan are in fact right in front of that fountain and I was like, Oh my gosh, I was boring Betsie with the ins and outs of that entire episode. But yes, that that was very very fun. Okay, so my wish for the fountain goes back a little bit because we're still in October. So I want to talk a little bit about some more October spooky reads. And some people have been asking me, okay, I want to do spooky reads but make it monsters. And so I wanted to bring a book I wanted to remind everybody about a book that I personally really love and that I have gotten to read multiple other books in this series and they are all creepy AF this first one is Relic by Douglas Preston and Lincoln child. The This was one that I heard about through a recommendation from one of our all things murderer fool listeners Jen Hayden. Here's the setup. Just days before a massive exhibition opens at the popular New York Museum of Natural History. Visitors are being savagely murdered on in the museum's dark hallways and secret rooms. And autopsies indicate that the killer cannot be human. But the museum's directors plan to go ahead with a big huge party to celebrate even though these these murders are happening, because that seems like a really smart thing to do. So museum researcher Margo Green has to find out who or what is doing the killing. And can she do it in time to stop the massacre? This book is just monster fun. This book is Jurassic Park meets a night of the museum meets some other monster something because it is really detailed. It is gory. It is super fun. You imagine that you are in these dark hallways, you know, kind of the back of house that the museum is where these things are happening. But then every once in a while someone will bleed throughout the museum. It's very evocative. It is not for HSPs. But this series is really really good. There's an FBI special agent that comes into play. Who works with Margo. I'm forgetting his name right now. Not pin dragon pin Pendergast. He's absolutely fantastic. He's curmudgeonly and sexy. They work together to figure out what is this monster? How did it get there? And why is it killing people? It's so good. This is Relic by Douglas Preston and Lincoln child. So my wish is that if you want creepy and make it monsters, that's the book that you'll pick up. It's nice and backlist so you'll definitely be able to find a copy.

Kaytee Cobb 51:49

Definitely. I love that Douglas Preston is who interviewed John Irving when I saw him at the Santa Fe Literary Festival. Oh, interesting. All right. My wish is one that I think all of us are actually wishing in our hearts. I don't think I've ever wished it before. But I do wish it everyday in my head. I wish that book club stickers would be actual stickers on books that are removable. Yes, I know that too many people covers don't matter. I know that many people love seeing a book club sticker on a book because they love Jenna or Reese or Good Morning America or whatever. I know that helps some people choose which books they're going to buy. That's great. I just really, really wish that every sticker of that nature would peel off of my beautiful covers. I can think of multiple books over the past year that have

gorgeous covers that were ruined by a giant book club sticker that is printed on the front of the book. Remarkably Bright Creatures really personally offended me. Starling House is the most recent one that really just viscerally offends my sensibilities because that cover is beautiful. I love Alex Harrow has a giant printed sticker on the front, it gets my goat so badly. So I didn't buy pretty hard covers. So I could always see that Jenna Bush Hager loved that book. I want those stickers to be removable. That is my wish, ping splash. It's a petty wish. I don't know there

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:15

are a lot of people that are cheering you along on that wish, Kaytee because it is something that really bothers a lot of people. I mean, for me, the stickers don't bother me as much. But I know I mean, it bugs me. But it doesn't bother me as much as for example, a when they redo a book and give it a movie cover like I Will not I simply will not

Kaytee Cobb 53:37

buy it or when they don't match in a series. I can't handle it. Right. And you'd

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:41

think that that would really bother me. It doesn't although Do you know what I got? So I just felt so I felt dirty and used the second I did it. But I pre ordered that dang new version of Fourth Wing that's coming out the same day that Iron Flame is coming out just so that they would match. And there's no wreath like they just 100% Got that they just they might as well walked up to me and just stolen my purse.

Kaytee Cobb 54:06

And just taking it right out of your wallet. Yep, I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:08

love it. So I did I caved I caved there. So all right, we're only human, we can only put up with so much. That's true. All right. That's it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 54:24

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:27

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 54:37

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:44

if you want more of this kind of content, as we said you can become a bookish friend you get so much more content and you can become a part of our Facebook community which is 2000 members strong. It's a great group. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts. and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things helps us to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 55:06

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends especially when I get to hug them in person. Thank you all for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:14

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 55:17

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:18

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 55:19

Happy reading Meredith