



Season 6, Episode 19: Book Subscriptions + Books That Kept Us Up At Night

Mon, Dec 11, 2023 • 57:30

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 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 am a total sucker for a really pretty book.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in. I don't live that's called autopilot. And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona. And I love a checklist that I can easily accomplish. This is episode number 19 of season six. And we are so glad you're here. All right. Well, Kaytee, honestly,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:04

I've been waiting for you to be on autopilot and and make a mistake like that. Because when I moved from the Bay Area to Austin, it took me like six episodes to get it. Well,

Kaytee Cobb 01:13

you know why it didn't happen until now is because I moved during the summer during our summer break. So I had time to like, tell myself No, Kaytee, you live in Arizona now you live in? Yeah, I don't live in New Mexico anymore. Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:26

I know muscle memory is like one of the strongest kinds of memory.

Kaytee Cobb 01:30

So it's so bad. I did it for like 200 and some odd episodes when I lived in New Mexico. So where we are. Exactly,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:37

exactly, exactly. All right. Well, we are going to let you know that we're going to do a deep dive today, talking about books that have kept us up all night.

Kaytee Cobb 01:47

Very excited for you to carry this one. Meredith. Okay, excellent.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:51

Excellent, because I do read a lot of that kind of book. So I'm looking forward to talking about it for sure. Now, first, let's start the way we always do with our bookish moment of the week. Kaytee,, what have you got this week?

Kaytee Cobb 02:03

here to have, you know, my bookish moment this week, I made a bookish holiday season printable for our bookish friends this week, it was super fun to whip this up as the fulfillment of a fountain wish by our friend Alex Cox. And then so many people were thrilled to have it, we put it out within 24 hours of her making this wish at the fountain in the bookish friends group. So I created the bones started filling it in and then you and I worked together on how much of a to do element it should have to it. And how much should just be about delight and living your best reading life during the holiday season. So when y'all are hearing this, if you're not a bookish friend, it's already December 11. And you're thinking I want that, but it's too late. That's okay, we made so much of this easy to accomplish. I love a to do list. I even do this for myself, I make it to do list, I put something on there I've already done so I can just check it off. Because that is so fulfilling to me. Some of these, it would be easy to do like five of them simultaneously, right? You could just check off a whole bunch at once. So if you're like it's December 11, maybe it's not even worth it. Maybe I'll just wait till next year. I promise you can knock this out way before December 24. And you'll feel like, look, I made my holiday season bookish you're probably doing them on your own without even thinking about it. This is kid friendly, adult friendly, available on Patreon. Just a little fun thing, a little holiday bookish notes, and we hope you love it. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:25

Kaytee, I thought you did an amazing job. It's so pretty visually. And then also, like, Give us an example give you today is December 11. What is today's item that's on the calendar.

Kaytee Cobb 03:36

Okay, so the fun thing about today is that eight of the 24 prompts are reflective. So Today's reflection is a book recommender reflection, where do you get your best book recs. And that's a great thing to reflect on at the end of the year, because that means you can be focusing your 2024 reading a little better having done that reflection already. And it's easy, you can do that in five minutes or less. You're just thinking about who consistently gives me Recs that I really love. And you know what, honestly, it's probably Meredith because it is for most of us.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:08

So you're already done. See, right? Well, these reflections are really useful because they get to the heart of what I feel has sort of become the theme for you and I of the work that we do at currently reading which is really getting people to read or Know thyself because we we believe strongly that if you know yourself as a reader in a lot of different ways, and these reflections help get you there, then you can make choices that make your reading life really, really satisfying. We've had people tell us once I kind of got a handle on these kinds of things. I went from having an average of 3.2 star books to an average of 4.5 star books like really big differences when you know some of these things. So those reflections are simple or they seem simple, but when you put it all together it actually really helps you have a more satisfying reading life. So I think you did a great job on that. bookish calendar. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 05:02

Um, bookish holiday season is what we decided to call it because we didn't even want it to be like your bookish to do list or your bookish bucket list. No, it's just a seasonal goodie.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:13

It's just for fun. Exactly. It's a lot of fun. All right, well, I have something that's a lot of fun, too. And I brought actually, several other things I did for this episode. I'm in I mired in preparing for Christmas. And right now I'm in my gift buying season, right? I mean, we all are. And so I'm thinking a lot about different things. I'm getting a lot of questions from people about great gift ideas that are bookish. I recently started doing OwlCrate, do you do OwlCrate?

Kaytee Cobb 05:43

No, but I've heard of it. And I've seen some really fun stuff from it. Okay,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:47

I gotta say I wanted to do it. Obviously, it's why I signed up for it. But I have been been blown away by the books that I've gotten. Now, these are fantasy books, subscriptions. So keep that in mind. But for example, two months ago, so I'm not spoiling anything from the current month. So every month, you get a book and you can get a book with goodies or you can get just a book, and you can get ya or you can get adult fantasy. So you have some choices that you can make, and I just do the adult fantasy, so I'm just getting the book, but two months ago, I got a you never know what you're gonna get. I got a copy of Starling House, which of course happens to be one of my favorite books of the year. But this version of Starling House was so above and beyond beautiful with different endpapers different font within the book, illustrations, a completely different cover with by the way, no sticker on it. In the actual so the flap, obviously, when the flap comes off, the jacket comes off. The book itself is gorgeous. It has a letter directly from Alix D Harrow, talking more about her inspiration for writing Starling House. It just took my love of that book and took it up a notch. And then the next month I got another book, I'm not going to spoil what that is because that's this current month. It was a book that wasn't even on my radar until I got it. And all of a sudden, I had this gorgeous copy of this fantasy book that I'm totally interested in reading. So OwlCrate it's not overly expensive. They have lots of different gifting options. I bought it for my own self because I'm like that, but it's a fantastic gift for you or for somebody that you love. And this is not sponsored in any way shape or form. They have no idea who we are. I just really really liked it.

That is a great tip. It sounds quite a bit like the Fairyloot ones that I get as well. And I love those I think getting like you said in your bite size intro getting a really beautiful version of a book can really elevate the experience even if you don't do all the other goodies. Well, exactly. I like what you just said goodies to what happened in my mother. That was cute. That was cute. The thing about the fairyloot it, which I'm very interested in, but there's a waiting list and with OwlCrate. They just let they just let you have

Kaytee Cobb 08:01

a raffle fought the raffle goodies for everyone goodies for everything.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:08

All right, Kaytee. Well, let's talk a little bit about current reads. What have you been reading?

Kaytee Cobb 08:13

Okay, well, the first one that I chose for this week is one of my favorite books. And so it's kind of fun that you talked about OwlCrate because I did wait a long time to get off the waitlist and get into the Fairyloot doors. So I was excited to start getting these beautiful editions. And this one was Divine Rivals by Rebecca Ross. So this book was just excellent. I loved it and it takes so many of my boxes. It's kind of a shame that it took me as long as it did to read it. But once I jumped in, I loved it. Our main character is Iris widow. She's in a bit of a tight spot when the novel starts because war is raging through England. It feels like World War Two timewise and environment wise, but it's not. Because this war isn't between countries. It's between the gods. They have been sleeping for centuries. And now the human realm has been pulled into their disagreement. they've woken up. They're mad. Everybody's fighting irises mom keeps disappearing on her. She's suffering from addiction, spending money that they don't have on her habit. And that's because she can't deal with the fact that no one has heard from her son, irises brother since he was sent to the frontlines. Iris needs to step into lead breadwinner role as a young 18 year old woman she applies for and receives a job at the oath Gazette, but it won't pay the bills unless she gets promoted to columnist. The problem is that Roman Kitt was hired at the same time and is gunning for the same job. But he's a Nepo baby. His father's loaded his education is top tier His house is enormous. How could Iris ever compete on sheer talent alone? To deal with her anxieties about this job, she writes letters to her missing brother and slips them into her wardrobe. But they always vanish once they're in there as if by magic. She's hopeful that he's receiving her messages except he's not there instead transported to Roman, her nemesis. He's cold and calculating and handsome. So one day he writes back anonymously. He knows who she is all Tom Hanks as Joe Fox and you've got mail, but he keeps his identity a secret, and they start to build a connection outside of their rivalry can Iris fall for someone she doesn't even know. But she has met? Will words be enough to keep her safe as the world around her becomes even more dangerous day by day? This book has so many of my favorite things in it that it almost feels like it should be too much retelling a mythology check. You've Got Mail, fanfiction check enemies to lovers check World War Two timeframe without it being World War Two. Double check. Rebecca Ross has probably bitten off too much here, right? Well, no she weaves together this storyline artfully the backdrop of war, the love of the written word, the gentle working in a mythology all of it captured me completely. I was really hoping I could read this as a standalone and then leave it behind. Because as we know, I don't love a serious situation. But I will absolutely be picking up book two and this duology when it releases the day after Christmas, for now, I have to continue sitting with this cliffhanger induced hangover and complaining about it to anyone who will listen, I loved it too much to

let it go for very long. So I'm glad I did wait to read it until just before the second one releases. This was Divine Rivals by Rebecca Ross.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:16

Sometimes I forget how good you are at setting up a book, you did a really really good job setting that book up. That was really good. And I've heard so many people say that it's one of their favorites that they read in forever. Like really, really love it.

Kaytee Cobb 11:31

So good. And I'll add here because I got this one from Fairyloot. It's really beautiful. So now a book two will come out. They will not make it a main pick for that month. Now that I've been with them long enough. I know that it will not be a main pick for that month, but they will release at some point, a special edition that kind of matches the first one so I don't have to have like regular plebeian divine rivals number two and beautiful divine rivals. Number one, like they're gonna match. So that'll be great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:59

That is interesting, because that was one of the things I thought about most I mean, so few fantasy books are standalone. Right? So that's interesting that that's how they deal with that. Okay, good to know. All right, Kaytee, my first book is such a great book just on its own. Again, I bought it for myself. The here's the theme. Meredith only buys great things for herself. This is the theme of today's show. But this book is a perfect gift. So I absolutely had to bring it even though Kaytee, you and I do not very often bring cookbooks. Oh, perfect. Yay. So remember when we were together just a couple of months ago. Yeah, we were in that bookstore and I was looking for a particular book and we could not find it. I finally had to break down and order it from a big box retailer because I was having a hard time getting it but it was worth it. It's The Cook's Book by Bri McKoy is a cookbook so I will just tell you the subtitle is recipes for keeps and essential techniques to master everyday cooking. I Kaytee did not think it existed. But this is the perfect cookbook. Bri McKoy, as you well know is a national treasure. If you don't follow her already, you absolutely must. She is a good mood in a tiny little blonde with bangs package. I mean, she's just the cutest thing you've ever seen. But I just now I got my hands on her new cookbook literally yesterday. And I had to bring it today because it is perfection. I'm not really great with cookbooks because usually 99% of cookbooks I end up thinking one or two recipes are good. And then they go up on my shelf and never to be opened up again. Other than books by on a garden. That's definitely true for me. But Bri McKoy's cookbook is actually better than any of Ina Gartens cookbooks. That is a huge statement for me to make. And I do not make it lightly because here Bri does something really interesting. She plays on the kind of latest cookbook Zeitgeist strategy and really goes in for a lot of cooking technique and instruction. I feel like we're getting a lot of this kind of book right? And normally, I'm going to tell you that kind of thing bores me Salt, Fat, Acid Heat was great, but I didn't make most of the things that are in that book. And I certainly don't need the 50 books that came after that that basically tried to do the exact same thing. But here Bri has created a book that both offers really down to earth instruction on making great food from your home kitchen. No matter what kind of home kitchen you have. Small rental kitchen, she's got you covered. She pairs that with recipes that I actually want to make an even more so food my family wants to eat. for better for worse at the end of a long day. I am not someone who relaxes cooking. That's not my jam. I'm just someone who wants to get in and out and on with my life and any more than 30 minutes. I'm not going to make it that kind of food short

abbreviated but delicious food is what we find here. There are some rare Spees that take a little bit longer, of course. But one of my favorite parts of the cookbook is that at the beginning of the recipes, she has like a little clock icon. And she tells you one or two things about what you need to know to be successful from a time perspective and making this recipe. So maybe she lets you know what you should prepare in advance, or what part of the day you need to get something going. So like, for example, if the slow cookers involved, she tells you that you're going to need to prep some things that morning or the night before. And that's the thing about this book is that it's got great recipes. It's also got straightforward instruction written in Bri's adorable voice. And it's also done in a really smart way. You've heard me talk about this with other kinds of books. Most recently I talked about it with The Lazy Genius Kitchen book, this cookbook is laid out visually in a way that is very easy to wrap your brain around. And that makes a huge difference for me in enjoying this kind of book. Also, it's got an absolutely gorgeous pink and rose gold cover. As I said, this would be a perfect Christmas gift for almost anybody because I certainly love it. But especially someone who is just starting out with her own home kitchen and her own home cooking journey. This is a cookbook I wish I had gotten with my first apartment because Bree makes it possible to have any home kitchen be a place where you can make great food. This is The Cook's Book by Bri McKoy.

Kaytee Cobb 16:28

So I love a cookbook and I try to be better about checking them out from a library and then I don't but I love to own cookbooks, I want to look at cookbooks. And then I rarely cook from them exactly what you're talking about, right? You're like, look, this is so great. These are great ideas. I'm never making any of this. So everything that you said, makes this such a perfect fit for me. Like I feel like I need to go get it right now.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:50

Right? Let me you're you're totally right you do. And let me tell you just a couple more things that are going to double down on that because I realized that there were so many recipes in this book that actually fit the way I want to eat on a weeknight, that I said to myself, You know what, I'm just going to use this to kind of decide my menu for the next couple of weeks, the next couple of months, I'm just going to open up the next recipe and say, these three things, or these five things are what we're going to have next week, I always get takeout on the weekend. That's why I said five instead of seven dinners. So the other thing is, she, of course got her start with things related to cocktails. That was kind of how she made a name for herself. She does this section where not only does she talk about different cocktails, but she does this other section where she's pairing some of the dishes with really easy and easy to find and easy to own wine like not expensive wines. So that for those of us who maybe want to have the right wine, but we don't want to spend \$30 A bottle or whatever. She makes it really easy. So again, I just I don't know Bri, we have no relationship. We're not friends like this has nothing to do with anything. This is just a really, really great cookbook. And it is the easiest way. Put this with a couple of great utensils that you could easily buy on Amazon and you have a great gift for somebody. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 18:10

I love that. Who needs this cookbook in my life. That's my next bookish reflection that I'm going to work on today. Everyone does. Excellent. Okay, my second one this week is a middle grade novel, y'all. I know you don't always love middle grade. You can skip me. I don't care. It's Hummingbird, my Natalie

Lloyd. So this is a middle grade novel about a girl with brittle bone disease. This is a truly personal story for the author and I did enjoy it. Olive is our main character she has been homeschooled for most of her life. That's because she's fragile with a capital F. She has osteogenesis imperfecta, which means even small falls can end with a snapped femur and months of recovery. She has finally convinced her parents to let her attend the local elementary school for her sixth grade here mostly says that she can meet people and start to make friends. But her first day doesn't go the way she hoped. And now she's sure she's never going to fit in all hope seems lost until all of here's a town legend, which she hadn't heard before. Because of her isolated homeschool bubble, the town of Macklemore. her hometown supposedly has a magical wish granting hummingbird. All you have to do is find it and prove yourself worthy and it will grant your heart's greatest wish. No big deal. But Natalie has spent her life trying to convince herself that she wouldn't want to be any different than she is. So what if her wish is to not have brittle bone disease? What if it's just to be a regular kid that can run and play and doesn't need a wheelchair? Well that turned her into a different person than she is all have teamed up with an unlikely band of friends, a found family if you will, to attempt to learn more about the bird and hopefully solve the mystery of where to find it. Of course, they're all kind of competing to see who can find this bird first because only one person gets their wish. Granted, this book has really fantastic representation, but swung a little wildly into the magical realism. For me, it was overdone, frankly, like she wanted to write a different story but couldn't figure out how to make it work without jumping the rails a little bit. And I saw quite a few reviews that mentioned the same thing. So I'm not alone in this. However, I would not hesitate in the slightest to hand it to a middle grade kid who enjoys stories who are set in the real world. For an adult reader, it was a bit too far into the wacky but for a kid out, I think it would hit just right to get to see this experience of this kid and get to see different ways that you might not fit in or that you're struggling to figure out your path in life when you're at that weird tween teen age where you don't really know what to do with yourself. What I did really enjoy was the core story of a girl with osteogenesis imperfecta. And the thread of this child entering a public school system after being homeschooled, since I didn't experience that for myself. I was a public school kid. But my kids will definitely experience some kind of storyline like that someday. I love seeing how it plays out in fiction and nonfiction. Overall, I did give this one four stars and stuck with me in the month since I read it. So I wanted to be sure to bring it even though it wasn't a surefire hit for me. So this was Hummingbird by Natalie Lloyd. Oh, that sounds really really good. Yeah, I mean, it's a great story. It was just like, wow, okay, well, this is a lot with the magic and the like, it feels like it could have been a little bit more grounded for me. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:22

All right. So we're gonna go from a delightful middle grade story to a story where children murder people. Oh, I love that and it's true crime. Even

Kaytee Cobb 21:32

better. Okay, don't love that actually. Okay,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:36

I bought this book on my UK trip. So working my way through all my my UK purchases which I love. This one is called The Wicked Boy by Kate Summerscale. Here's the setup. It's the summer of 1895. So we've got historical true crime here. And 13 year old Robert Coombs and his brother Nattie who is 12 are seen by several people spending lots of cash around the docklands in East London. In fact, for

10 days in July of 1895. They ate at coffee houses and took trips to the seaside and went to the theater. This unusual for the Coombs family because they don't have a lot of money. And in fact, their dad has recently taken off for a year long job on a fishing boat to make ends meet. The boys tell their neighbors that they've been left home alone while their mother visited her family in Liverpool but after a few days of this neighbors get suspicious and they call the aunt the mother's sister will the boys tell her everything's fine but finally the aunt realizes everything is not fine. She runs over the lake she forces her way into the house and finds the badly decomposed body of their mother in a bedroom upstairs Robert and Nattie were arrested for murder and sent to trial at the Old Bailey This is their story don't don't I should mention that this book The Wicked Boy is the was the winner of the 2017 Edgar Award for Best fact crime book best your credit. So okay, I love Kate Summerscale. And I love her historical true crime. I had read The Suspicion of Mr. Whicher before If that sounds familiar to you, she wrote that so she manages to put you right smack in the middle of the scene. You know the people you get a sense of them how they live and how they speak and why these crimes took place. So when I saw the wicked boy at Waterstones in the UK, I immediately grabbed it. And this was one of the books that I finished whilst still in England. That's how much I was sucked in by this book. Here we try to understand a 13 year old boy who's so lacks empathy that he could kill his own mother and happily, joyously go about his business for another week or more having all the fun he could before his crime was discovered. You manage to see both the young boy and the murderer inside him simultaneously, which is a neat trick on summer scales part and the ending is very, very interesting. It is not what you expect. Again, I love Kate Summerscale, and I already have my eye on another book of hers. She is the best I have found at Victorian true crime. This is The Wicked Boy by Kate Summerscale. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 24:25

just one of them is wicked, because there's two siblings, like running a map. Right? Like spending all the money. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:32

I mean, you know, younger siblings,

Kaytee Cobb 24:34

they would you do whatever. I mean, getting an older kid that can boss anybody around to some Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:39

Right? Exactly. Let me say that in the book, you do get a firmer understanding about how all of that works.

Kaytee Cobb 24:45

Okay. Okay, that makes sense, because that's a big question for me. Okay, my third one this week. I have a lot of things that make me smile this week. But my third one is Red White and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston. So I went back to check because I thought At that I had only ever brought this book as a book that I hated. Oh, because when I first read it, I did not like it very much. But it turns out I never brought it as a current read at all. I just regularly threw shade at it in reference to other books. So it was like in the corner getting poo poed on but I never talked about it. So I'm correcting it now because I've reread it. I picked this one up for a second time this fall when shad and I discussed it for

Popcorn in the Pages because the screen adaptation released. I was honestly not excited to reread it because I didn't enjoy it the first time, but sometimes that makes good discussion, so I was fine with that. But it went much better for round two, so I knew I had to bring it to the big show for a full treatment. Here's the setup. Alex Claremont Diaz is the first son of the first woman president of the United States. He's smart as I'll get out, not too hard on the eyes and part of the White House trio along with his sister and the granddaughter of the vice president. The three of them are tabloid darlings, and the world is always watching what they're up to, which is why they're invited to the royal wedding of the Crown Prince of the UK. However, Alex is displeased mostly because his arch rival Prince Henry will obviously be in attendance since it's his brother's wedding. Prince Henry dismissed Alex out of hand many years ago with a comment that was both standoffish and snobby. So Alex has hated him ever since. At the event, the two of them are needling each other as always, and end up knocking over a cake that was rumored to cost 75,000 pounds. This is a public relations nightmare that needs dealing with immediately so damage control is called in. The two of them will stage a fake friendship complete with trips to see each other public events and Instagram posts to prove it's legit. It doesn't matter how much they annoy each other. It's necessary and it's happening. They start to spend time together because they have to. And while his mother is attempting to get reelected for her second term, Alex is starting to realize that all the assumptions he made about Prince Henry over the years we're wrong to say the least our boys get to know each other and then things take a turn. And we're shelving this in the romance genre. So it's not a surprise that the term they take is a romantic one. But a prince cannot be gay, and Alex cannot mess up his mom's campaign so all feelings and activities must be kept under wraps and in the bedroom. When I read this one the first time in 2019. I listened to the audiobook and the book is narrated from Alex's point of view, like the text is written from Alex's point of view. So the narrator is kind of Aleksey in intonation. But the problem is that said Narrator could not do a British accent not on a train, not in the rain. Not with House Not with a mouse. It was very bad. The voice and the accent he chose for Henry was so atrocious that it clouded the entire book for me. I found myself so annoyed with him that I couldn't enjoy the story at all. I was mad the whole way through, which meant that everything that should have captured my heart about this book was sullied, and I ended up giving it three stars. This time I remedied the situation by reading the words on the page. And guess what? It was 1000 times better. I was able to put my own voices into my head for Alex and Henry and dear reader that made all the difference. The second time I found Alex and Henry both to be endearing. Alex nearly immediately and Henry took time to grow on me. But it happened exactly the way that it's supposed to exactly the way Casey McQuiston intended. Now, I think this is worth bringing up because as we know, I'm kind of the audiobook evangelist around here. I listened to about 60% of the books I read each year on audio. I don't shy away from murder and my ears have no problem with 60 times on audio. But I think it's important to note that audio narrators make a big difference. And that choice is super reader specific. Of course, there are readers who loved this book on audio. There's one narrator, though that I will not listen to at all anymore because I've learned through the way that she has ruined books for me in the past. I'm not going to name her. But there are others like Bahni Turpin and January Lavoy that consistently make the book better than I think it would have been on print and knowing that about yourself is important reader know thyself. If I had known myself more as a reader in 2019, I would have and should have abandoned this one on audio as soon as I heard Prince Henry's accent, but I stuck with it. And it negatively affected it for four years for me. So let's honor our readerly preferences and the books themselves and treat them the ways they deserve to be treated. I'm so glad I reread this one because now I love it. It's Red, White and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:17

I mean, you bring up such a good point, Katie. And there's you've brought up a couple books recently where you recognized quickly that the audio wasn't working, you switched and that was a huge hit for you. So good. Yes. Now, I as you were talking about it, I also realized that this book for me was a reader know thyself that has been really really useful. We all know that rom coms are not always my go to they're almost never my go to. That's okay. Sometimes there are exceptions to that. And when there are audio, when there are rom coms that are really hyped, oftentimes, I will end up dipping into it. So what I realized with this one is that there's one particular thing that almost always takes me out of the story or makes it so irritating that I can't do it. it and it's here in this book, which I tried recently because of popcorn in the pages. And that is the overly witty in my mind Overleaf in some people perfectly witty repartee between the two leads Alex and Henry Yes. Whether it whether it's to mount Alex and Henry or to men to women to men and women, I don't care. It's the Emily Henry's books fall into the same category for me. I can really be interested in the setup. The dialogue makes me crazy, but that very thing that makes me crazy is something that other people absolutely love. And so for me, I now need to pay attention when I see people review a book and they talk about really, really witty dialogue or witty repartee, those kinds of things I need to know. Aha, not for me, so reader know thyself, it doesn't mean that this book isn't fantastic. It just means I knew about 25% And this isn't going to be hit for me. So I'm not going to hate read it. I'm just gonna set it aside and let other

Kaytee Cobb 31:00

people love it. Definitely. And I think that's so important to know. Like, I think you can see that even in show choices sometimes, like if you'd rather watch I don't know succession, then shits Creek, maybe that would give you a little clue about this same thing in your reading life. And I'm not saying that's true for you, Meredith. But it can be that like, well, I just don't want to feel like I'm reading a rom com or a Seinfeld episode, I want to feel like I'm reading something that was thoughtfully constructed in a different way. So yeah, it just

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:29

all of these things. If you reflect on them and recognize them about yourself, you can make better choices. You can leave things aside quicker, leaving more room and more time for books that you will enjoy. And that's all that matters. Okay. All right. My third book is a book that I did really enjoy because it was a really quick read and it made me think a lot. This book is called One of the Boys by Jayne Cowie. These last two books got boys have not fared very well in these last two books of mine. Alright, here's the setup. We're in a near future UK when our story starts. And scientists have discovered what they call the M gene, which they find is the gene which can make men have a propensity for violence. So they've isolated that gene, some males have the gene most don't. And now anybody can be tested for it. Our lead characters are Antonia and Bea sisters with a very complicated relationship with each other. They're very different from each other. And each one has a young son, they're very close in age growing up when at this point when testing has become really common. But there's still a lot of controversy, Antonia had her son tested to make sure that he did not possess the M, gene Bea has refused to let her son take the test because she doesn't want his world to be determined by a positive or negative result. These women will go to any lengths to protect their sons based on what they think is right. But one of them is hiding a monster. All right. I'm so thankful that my good friend and my

colleague Whitney whirling, made sure I read this book, she came up to me at our retreat, and she was like, You need to read one of the boys she recommended to me twice. This was the second time. And I'm like, Whitney, I just, I don't love like books that make me We Need to Talk About Kevin like books about violent young men just shy away from it. She's like, No, no, I know what you're talking about. This is very, very different than that. It's much more interesting. I love the way and Whitney was totally right. I love the way that Jayne Cowie takes us into this not too distant future, a very close in time future where we can absolutely imagine that something like what happens in the book could take place. It's a very John Marrs kind of situation, we can imagine a time when a test result would have major social and medical implications. We've seen that happen, right? We've lived it. Whitney also knew my friend Whitney also knew that I as a mother of three boys would be very interested in the story of mothers and sons, and what mothers are willing to do to protect their sons and how he uses three boys actually, not just the two that I talked about in the setup the three boys as examples of the different choice. That construct seems a little bit simplistic, but I found it made the story move along in a way that moved to the plot and serviced her message really well. I also really liked how she marked the passage of time and the way that society was assimilating this idea of this gene testing over time. It went from being new and niche to completely normal and accepted and that also service to the themes that Cowie was setting up. She did this by having like little peeks into news articles at the beginning of the different sections. There's no question that I thought a lot about whether or not I would want my son's to be tested for a gene. And if there was a positive result, I would really really consider how that would affect their lives. This is absolutely a book for you, if you like John Marrs, as I said, if you like speculative fiction at all, there's a lot of similarities and vibe and in the propulsive narrative of the story, John Marrs and Jayne Cowie can get together and go bowling like they just are. They're right there together, right. And make no mistake that an awful lot happens in this book. And near the end, you wonder if it's become almost a little bit overdramatic the end, at least this reader did. But that didn't matter the fact that it was a great read, that would be so perfect for book clubs, especially book club with a bunch of moms. This is One of the Boys by Jayne Cowie. Okay, I need one clarification before I like try and wrap my head the rest of the way around this. So you have a young boy, you can get them tested, he might have this gene, does the gene mean he could become violent or that he will become violent? Could? Okay, so even knowing it's a yes does not mean that he's a serial killer? Well, exactly. And there's lots of different and also there's a lot of different kinds of violent propensities. Maybe it's just impulse control. Maybe it's not psychopathic killing, and maybe nothing, maybe absolutely nothing. But what happens when we move to a place where baby boys kind of as soon as they're born as a part of their normal health panel or testing? Yeah. And then what happens? Like when you get together as people are going as kids or going into preschool or kindergarten? Are you asking, is it? How do we you know what I mean? Like, how do you know who you want your child to play with? If you're a mom of girls, do you want to know before your daughter starts dating? Like there's a lot of very interesting implications in Genk, how he does a great job really illustrating them. And also, it's very much a book about moms and sons, and that very particular relationship that exists in that dynamic, right.

Kaytee Cobb 36:57

And she also wrote the Curfew, right about Yes, being given a curfew at night, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:02

So what would happen if men had to be in their homes by 7pm, and they couldn't come out until 7am? The next day, spoiler alert, all crime at night stopped until it didn't, and that's curfew. Very good. But both those curfew is more of a murder. Mystery. Okay. This one is more speculative fiction, you know, very interesting for discussion. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 37:25

interesting. I feel like it would play nicely. Also with Nicki Erlick, The Measure that one about the length of strings, people get them on their 21st birthdays or something like that everybody wakes up one day and has a string. And it's that same idea. Like do you open the box? Are you somebody that needs to know that information? Or would you rather just see how life plays out kind of thing? So yeah, exactly,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:45

exactly. Looks like this. Yep. Although I think my answer for those two things would be different. Like I definitely would open the box in the measure. And I don't think I would want to get my son tested.

Kaytee Cobb 37:56

Interesting. And if he wanted to get himself tested, is that an option? Yes. Okay. See fun. They can all like right this like combined world where it's like you are born, you're a boy, you may or may not get tested, you may or may not get a string, you may or may not get your one testing to see if you have a soulmate,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:15

you may or may not die in a self driving car, right? You might

Kaytee Cobb 38:19

get married and may or may not invite AI into your relationship. It's a whole thing. There's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:24

a lot of things that could happen if Jayne Cowie and John Marrs ruled the world.

Kaytee Cobb 38:28

Yeah, yeah, it would go a little. A little bonkers. A little quick, I think. All right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:33

Okay, so those are our current reads. So we're going to talk a little bit about books that have kept you up at night. And I think we can talk and I have examples of books that have kept me up at night. But I think more interesting, Kaytee, what I'm more interested in is, Has that ever happened to

Kaytee Cobb 38:49

you? Do you stay awake for best ever like, or as a book ever literally

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:53

kept you up at night? Well,

Kaytee Cobb 38:55

I have a few different answers to this question. But I don't like I don't have a ton of books in this category. Like they were so propulsive, that they kept me awake at night. It's more that a book will affect me in different ways than keeps me from going to bed. So the most applicable one to me right now is as we're recording, it's December 1, which means last night was November 30. Almost always on the last night of the month, I like to clear my slate as much as possible of current reads and not carry them from one night to the next and even more so on December 31. Right before a new year starts I would love to have zero current reads on January 1. Oh, and so I will stay up later than normal on the final day of a month in order to finish books, especially if I'm within the last 2030 Sometimes 50% In order to get through it. And it doesn't even have to be the I love this book so much or it's so propulsive I cannot put it down. It's like I want that fresh start that rabbit rabbit December 1 Wake up and who it's a new day it's new month one Can I read today? And that is enough to keep me going at night? That's right. No,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:05

that's not something that I do. But I certainly have enough bookish peccadilloes to understand having it it. But I think I take your point, which is that there are a lot of different reasons that reading might keep you up at night. That is one of them. Reading and propulsive book is another one reading a book that has scared you and now keeps you from sleep. Right, another one. Yes, that has probably happened to me more than anything else. And then also, I actually have a couple of books that pretty immediately came to my mind that I finished. As I was going to bed at night, I don't often stay up really, really late. I usually, I read a lot in the morning. I don't read a lot at night, like I usually can't get more than about a half hour of reading in at night because I'm just tired. It makes you makes me sleepy. And so that's not something that's happened a lot. I do have a few exceptions to that. But there have been a couple of books that finishing them at that night time. They were kind of like a gut punch. And I found myself up at night really emotionally affected by it. And weirdly, the first book that came to my mind is a book that I read very close to the beginning of the podcast, it was one of the like, I think it was in the first season that I brought it and it's called The Only Girl in the World by Maude Julian. It's a memoir. Both of these are and it's about this little girl who has this really, really really terrible, abusive upbringing. And it was very propulsively written it was very beautifully written. I've thought about it a lot since I read it. It's been five years, but I remember having a really hard time sleeping that night. The same thing happened to me as I was finishing Glass Castle by Jeannette walls. Ah, okay. Yeah, another memoir of a difficult childhood. So I found it strange that those were the first two books that came to my mind as they thought about books that keep you up at night. Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 42:05

I definitely. So I thought of books that freaked me out enough that I couldn't sleep at night, but I can't remember reading any of them. At night time. It was just that they got in my head enough that by the time I went to bed at night, I was still like, Did I check all the windows? Is? Is there anybody creepy outside my house right now? Like The Whisper Man, that book creeped me out. And I think I read it at night. I can only remember sitting in broad daylight because I was like, obviously I can't read this book at night. light all around me. And then at night I was like, oh, no, I don't like this situation. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:43

well, since I read Jo Nesbo's, The Snowman that's on my list. Yeah, it like that same that same sort of thing. And when we've had like some of our big snowstorms in in Texas, I'm like, Oh my gosh, don't look out the window right now. Whatever your snowman like it. Like It still freaks me out. For sure. Yes, yes. Definitely. The other one that had me locking my windows that I did read. I both read it at night because it was very propulsive but also it really, really scared me. It's I'll Be Gone in the Dark. The other thing that I did that I should not have done. You have to read I'll Be Gone in the Dark first. But then years after the book came out. HBO did a docu series. Yeah, by HBO. I think HBO did a docu series based on it. Which is really really well done. And unlike the book is able to bring in the ending the catching of the killer like they're able to wrap that in. That is one of the most terrifying things I have ever watched. And I stayed up way too late watching it so I screwed myself over by Michelle McNamara two times.

Kaytee Cobb 43:48

Roush C double f2. Yep.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:52

Yes. Although I really can't blame her for the series. Because, right. She

Kaytee Cobb 43:56

had gone. It's yeah, it's not her fault. All right. So that definitely happens for me. But I mean, we've mentioned a number of definitely creepy books. And then these memoirs that you've talked about Fierce Kingdom kind of fits in already with what you were talking about with Jayne Cowie's book, but it's a mother and son and attend situation at a zoo. I know I read that whole book in one day. So it's not like it was carrying over. But I dreamt of carousels that night. I dreamt of running from guns. I like it got into my head, and that's more likely to happen. So even with The Mountain in the Sea by Ray Nayler, which is about octopuses that gets so smart that they are become like sentient. I was creeped out. I was dreaming about undersea things that night, even though I love octopus. I was creeped out by it. And that can happen even when I read An Immense World by Ed Yong nonfiction about the senses of animals. There's nothing scary in there. It's fine. I mean, there's some stuff that's kind of like wow, animals are a little creepy sometimes. But I was like dreaming about mantis shrimp. Why they just work themselves into my head in such a way and we and we know dreams are how you process what your brain has taken in during the day. So of course, something that you learned or something you're thinking about is going to show up in your dreams. But it seems to happen to me a lot with scary books. And with really informative ones, both of them show up in my dreams a lot,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:18

right? They activate those centers of your brain Well, well, Fierce Kingdom was definitely on my list because that was a book that I did, in fact, stay up much later than normal reading one or two o'clock in the morning, because I absolutely could not set it down, I had to find out what was going to happen. My theory is that books that take place almost in real time are ones that are are really like that, right? Like you just it's very hard to set them down. Because your body's just in this, I absolutely have to know what's going to happen. For me the books of TJ Newman, both Falling and Drowning are in that same realm of just heart pounding, there is no lead up to the action. And the stakes are so high that you it just feels like you can't be like and I'm going to put this in and take money. Go to sleep for a while. It's fine.

Yeah, yeah, exactly. So that's you know, and I talked last week for better for worse, I talked about The Year the Locust, the first 80% was exactly like that, like it was so high stakes and a heart pounding that you're like, oh my gosh, I just have to read one more chapter. definitely kept me up several nights.

Kaytee Cobb 46:31

Definitely. I like that I also so I Remember You by Ursa Sigurdardottir. Last December. That's one of the few that I remember playing on the title. I remember being ready to go to bed and being like, I literally cannot go to bed. I have to finish this book. I was reading it to prepare for the indie press list in January last year, almost exactly a year ago now. And I could not put it down safely. Right? Oh, my brain revolting. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:59

Well, the other category of book is books that are just so page turning not necessarily scary. But just such milkshake books that you just, it's hard to stop. And for me, for better or for worse. The Twilight series was was the series that I definitely had that experience with Hunger Games, of course, yes. And most recently, you gotta give it to Fourth Wing for being a book that you just felt like, you know what, I'm just gonna call in sick because I need I need an entire day to spend with this book because I'm in this world, and ain't no one gonna pull me out of it. And I love books like that. I know, that's a very singular reading experience. That I think we're kind of always chasing the high of that. Yes, I

Kaytee Cobb 47:45

do. Like even though I'm trademark, I'm saying there's melatonin in every book. Like, it doesn't matter. I open that book, especially on my Kindle at night. I'm already laying in bed. My Kindle is propped up in front of my face. I literally fall asleep with my Kindle in my face almost every single night. It just, it works like magic. Like I did pop a melatonin gummy and just put myself to bed. I am always chasing the idea of a book that is so repulsive, that the melatonin is rendered ineffective. It will not function on me. And I don't know if it's like, well, you get up early, and you work out and you're doing all these things all day and you're running, running, running, running. So nothing works like that anymore for me. Or if it's that I'm not finding the right books, but it feels like I'm I always want that experience, even though I know I'll regret it the next day.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:35

When's the last time you like Do you remember a book that that gave you that experience

Kaytee Cobb 48:40

where I was laying in bed all ready for bed? And I was like, I'm still wide awake. Because this book is so good. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:48

I don't remember. It's literally never happened yet.

Kaytee Cobb 48:50

I mean, maybe before I had my first kid. Sure. Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:53

That'll definitely do it to you a long time

Kaytee Cobb 48:55

ago. Yeah. So what is that 14 years? Well, I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:59

would be interested to know, I know that we have a lot of bookish friends who probably do some of their best reading at night and maybe they have that experience a lot. But I know that we are going to want to know what are the books that have kept you up at night for many different reasons against propulsive scary, gotten your thoughts made you feel sad, whatever it is, what are the books that really really kept you from getting a good night's sleep?

Kaytee Cobb 49:23

Okay, I have one more Flipside question to this. Have you ever been reading a book and gotten close to the end and said, Oh, I absolutely cannot finish this at night right before I go to bed. Because I've gotten to a book that I knew something sad was coming and that will like I can't cry myself to sleep. If I know I'm getting toward the end of a book that I'm pretty sure it's gonna make me cry. I will flip that Kindle shot and walk away as soon as I possibly can. Because I don't want to be like shaking the bed with my heaving sobs. While Jason was trying to sleep next to me have you Has that ever happened? Because I realize we are very good Aren't people in this way?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:01

Yeah, I mean, for a lot of reasons that has never happened. I don't read very many books that made me cry. If I cry, I'm, I think I'm a pretty quiet crier. Like, I don't I don't think there would be much movement in it. So I think you know what I mean, so that, that would be okay. There's just not very many books that have made me sob except for The Time Traveler's Wife, which is the book that I cried the most. And I think I was really I was on the ground crying, right was probably shaking the ground. At that point. It was so cool. South

Kaytee Cobb 50:31

San Francisco Bay Area felt the earthquake.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:35

Oh, my goodness. So sad. So sad. All right, Kaytee, let's talk a little bit then about wishes. What is your wish for this week?

Kaytee Cobb 50:45

Okay, I've had like a good run a good string of wishes lately. So this week, I'm kind of cheating. I'm granting a wish to myself, making a wish and I'm granting it. So this week, my wish is to completely abandon Goodreads for StoryGraph on December 31. And I'm going to make it happen. But I'm putting it out there publicly so that I have some accountability for myself. So this is a fountain wish that I'm granting myself, we just did an episode two weeks ago about Goodreads hating a book you love and talked about some of the inherent issues with that platform, it's owned by Amazon. It's never updated. It

gets review bombs on it. It's just a mess sometimes, right? Of course, I've known about story graph for a few years now it's probably three or four years old. But when I tried it for a year, which was the year of 2022, I was double logging, because I wasn't sure if I wanted to stick with it. So I would log everything I read in Goodreads and in story graph. Because I wanted to see which one worked better for me. Well, what did not work better for me was double double logging. That was not working for me. So it didn't do what I wanted. And I abandoned it. And in the meantime, they've continued to update the platform, while Goodreads has remained stagnant. So today, as I prepped, I deleted all my previous info from that account so that I can start fresh with a new story graph account on December 31. That's completely up to date. And starting 2024, I'm giving myself a gift of granting my fountain wish. And I will keep that information only in one place. And even sign up for story graph plus, which is their subscription platform, it's five bucks a month or \$50 for a year, it goes toward supporting the platform for keeping it ad free keeping it reader focused, they take suggestions they actually implement them, which is a novel idea because nothing like that happens on Goodreads. So I'm voting with my time, my dollars for an alternate this coming year, just like we do with libro.FM, bookshop.org and the indie press list every single month. So I think it's more consistent with our overall messaging as a podcast, and our goals here at currently reading. So I'm making this wish at the fountain. I'm throwing in my coin pink splash, and then my coin is gonna get shot back out at me because I'm going to make it happen.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:58

There you go. I know. Did you say are you going to make it public?

Kaytee Cobb 53:02

Am I going to make it public? I don't know. I don't really care for the social aspects of logging my reading. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:08

yeah. No, I don't either. Yeah, I definitely don't need

Kaytee Cobb 53:12

to be like, no, nobody can see my profile. It's only for me. Perfect.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:16

Okay. All right. So my fountain which has to do with Christmas reading again, I am very, very aware of where we are in this month of December. And I just want to make sure I'm giving you guys all the good stuff that I possibly have. I want to make sure if you are looking for a Christmas book to read, you're reading one of my favorites, which I think is just the perfect book to read at this time of year. This is The Christmas Bookshop by Jenny Colgan. It is absolute Christmas perfection for this reader. And so I think a lot of you might feel the same way. Here's the setup. When we meet Carmen who's our lead character. She has just been laid off from her department store job and she is of course not happy. The last thing she wants to do is think about spending Christmas with her perfect lawyer sister Sophia, and Sophia has picture perfect house with her perfect children and her perfect life. But Sophia is greatly pregnant with her third child and she needs help. And she just so happens to also have a client who needs help revitalizing his bookshop. So Carmen realizes how limited our options are. She takes the job heads off to Edinburgh, then the best part of the story starts Carmen walks the historic streets of

Edinburgh to the dusty cobweb covered bookshop owned by Sofia's client, Mr. MacCready, and we know something good is about to happen. The store is dusty and disorganized but undeniably charming. And the location is amazing. It could be an amazing bookshop. Can Carmen help Mr. MacCready make a profit this holiday season and can she make the right choice in the Christmassy love triangle she finds herself in. I'm just going to let you guys ruminate on whether or not those things are going to happen. This is such a sweet heat treat. This is the perfect love letter to bookshops. It's a love letter to Scotland. It's has one of those really satisfying set of scenes where we go from musty, overfilled unprofitable bookshop to beautiful warm, cozy bustling bookshop, full of Christmas lights and decorations. It's so satisfying. This book is satisfying on every level. And I wish that I could read it again for the first time. This is The Christmas Bookshop by Jenny Colgan. I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 55:29

Sounds perfect. I need it. Now. I pick it up a couple of years ago, because I remember you talking about it. Oh, it's so

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:38

good. It's so good. Remi be in the right mood. If you're in the mood for Christmas murder. This is not the right mood. But it's just really, really great. And this is the perfect time of year to go ahead and grab it. Grab it on your Kindle. You know, like don't, don't make it hard on yourself. Like make it easy. But save it to read and those little moments after you get all your Christmas stuff done. Use it as your ward it's so good. That's my wish. Splash. All right. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 56:10

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram full show

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:14

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 56:30

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Kaytee Cobb 56:58

We know Meredith only gives herself the best gifts. Yeah, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:01

Exactly. If I was going to buy myself a gift, I went by myself

Kaytee Cobb 57:10

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:15

All right, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 57:18

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:20

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 57:21

Happy reading Meredith