



Season 6, Episode 2: The Books We Pressed Onto Each Other

Mon, Aug 14, 2023 • 56:29

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 00:24

We are light on 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 love it when my reading surprises me.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona, and I love a bookish serotonin hit. This is episode number two of season six. And we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:51

bookish serotonin hit is always a good idea.

Kaytee Cobb 00:55

It is a good idea that plays into my bookish moment. But first, I'm going to let everybody know that for our deep dive this week, we are going to circle back on those books that we pressed forcefully and directly into each other's hands at the end of season five. So if you read along, or if you've been waiting for that, that's coming today. We're doing it in a special way. We're going to figure it out together first. We'll get started that way we always do with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, what is yours?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:22

All right, for my bookish moment of the week, I want to bring a Instagram and Tiktok account that I absolutely love. And this is one that I think is probably really popular amongst our group. But just in case you love cozy fantasy, and you don't yet know about at @Megs.tea.room. I want to be sure that

you're following this account because I am in love with this woman. She has the coziest account. It is the sweetest, most comforting corner of the internet. Now, I will tell you that I found out about Megstearoom for my friend Betsie. And it was Megstearoom where Betsie heard about Legends and Lattes. And then Betsie told me and then we started talking about it and then all of that stuff started happening. So she specializes in cozy fantasy. If you like Legends and Lattes, and you're like Where can I get more of those kinds of books where my imagination can run wild but I don't have to be worried about there being a lot of sex or violence, @Megstearoom will be a wonderful place for you to visit. She dresses up often not always. But she dresses up as like a like a barmaid that you would meet like in in Hobbiton. And that sounds like weird cosplay. But yeah, but I'm telling you, it's not. In her space. It's just like very gentle. And like she does this thing sometimes where she'll play like a song. And she'll be like, are you looking for books that make you feel the same way This song makes you feel, and it'll be kind of like a cozy, gentle song. Like, I just love it. If ever I'm feeling super stressed out, this is where I head and she's just sweet and funny. And it's just a comforting part of the internet. I also think she's really gorgeous. And there's something about her that makes me wish that I was hardwired to be with girls because she is the girl I would choose to be with like she's very appealing. I really like her.

Kaytee Cobb 03:28

I hope she listens to this.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:30

I don't think she has any idea who we are. And I'm like I'm loud and proud about my love and affection for Meg so I'm totally fine with it. That's @Megstearoom so you got to check it out.

Kaytee Cobb 03:41

Okay, well, we're all gonna go right now. Everybody is easily influenced by you, Meredith. So she'll be like, where are all these people coming from? This is weird. Okay, my bookish moment this week is like a little blip of delight. I haven't been a Book of the Month member for a while, about two and a half years ago, we started the Indie Press List. And right around that time, I stopped my membership because our Indie Press List was filling that hole for me in a way right? Especially because I mostly like Book of the Month for the serotonin hit that you get at the beginning of the month when the books drop, and you're like, Oh, I get to go shopping. It's already paid for. It's very fun for me. And even when we get to have a hand in choosing the books for the Indie Press List, I get that same hit when the episode drops and the list drops to the bookish friends on that first Thursday of the month. But this month, we are still living with my parents in their house. And I got to enjoy Book of the Month again in a new way. So my mom is a long time faithful member. And she pulled me over to her computer to look through the August selections and pick my brain about what I had heard what I knew and which one I would pick for her if I were doing the shopping which is my favorite part. Sometimes she does this via email or like Facebook Messenger when we aren't physically close by. But this time we just sat down hip to hip and review the selections. Now she's just like the rest of us. So no shame here. Obviously, these books pile up a little bit, they get ahead of her. It's not like she's choosing them. And as soon as it arrives, that's her next read. And I'm actually like forcing her to read something. But getting to chat through the talking points and talk about where and what I had heard about certain books was just really fun and bookish, and it was like a great mother daughter moment. So that was my bookish moment.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:24

I think that is wonderful. My mom also does Book of the Month, and she'll periodically ask me what I think about the choices, and I have never stopped my membership. I like Book of the Month. Of course, it doesn't compare to our Indie Press List, because Book of the Month, you almost always know I mean, they're they're big books, they're up and coming. They're buzzy books. That's what they do. No shame in that game. indie press list is very different, right? We're trying to do something different there. But if there are a lot of months where I skip a month, but there are a lot of months like this last one, it's my birthday month, which and I'm a BFF and so I get a free book tour ended up getting three books this month, I'm really looking forward to it

Kaytee Cobb 05:59

well, and they moved their boxes bigger, right, you can get more books than three now. It used to be that you you maxed out at three and now you can add more than three. Yeah, that's pretty fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:08

Yeah, I like I like Book of the Month. I gotta say, I'm not I'm not ashamed to admit that either. This episode, the theme is things Meredith isn't ashamed to admit.

Kaytee Cobb 06:16

Excellent. I love that for us. Okay, let's talk about things you aren't ashamed to have read? What are some of your current reads?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:22

All right, I have some good books to talk about today. I'm really looking forward to bringing these my first current read is a book called Clean Air by Sarah Blake. And if you love CLI fi, listen, because you're gonna like this one. Here is the setup. We start our story after the climate apocalypse that we know is all coming has has come and gone. And it's interesting to note that in the end in this novel is telling it wasn't the temperature climbing or the waters rising that get us it was the trees Kaytee, they created enough pollen to render the air unbreathable and the world has become completely overcome with it. Now trigger warning. If you have pollen allergies, this book will really freak you out. All right. In the decades since this event, which in the book is called The Turning humanity has figured out how to survive this horrible pollen and our main character Isabelle has grown up and grown used to the airtight domes that they now have to live in in order to stay alive. She and her husband are raising their daughter Cami. And Isabel is basically trying to just live life as normally as possible, while not freaking out about being trapped inside all the time. Trigger warning if you're claustrophobic because this book will really freak you. Then just when everybody thinks they've got it all figured out, Someone, a serial killer start slashing through the domes at night exposing people to the deadly pollen at the same time. Yeah, get this at the same time Cami, the daughter, the little girl began sleep talking, having whole conversations about the murders that she doesn't even remember when she wakes up. Mom Isabelle becomes obsessed with the killings and the killer both on tracking him down and understanding him. She is trying to understand what would possibly make someone want to take lives in such a horrible way. After its humanity has just survived and figured out finally, how to thrive again. This setup is so good. Kaytee, I loved this book. Okay, I heard about it from the paperback summer reading guide from @fictionmatters, which had quite a few gems in it that I had never heard of before, including this one.

Again, I love the premise. We've got a true genre mash up here. It's sci fi. It's dystopian, and it's a full on murder mystery. And it's unlike anything I've ever read. The story puts you deeply into the lives of our characters right from the start, and even more, it gives you those satisfying details on how the climate disaster the turning came to be. And also how they survived it and tons of details on how they live life now, my favorite sci fi novels are heavy on those details. And they're a huge part of why I love this genre. And this book delivers. I do want to double down on the content warning I never thought I would have to give but if you struggle with pollen allergies, this book may have you sneezing and being seriously triggered. The author's note at the end lets us know that she wrote this book because she herself has had horrible allergies and asthma, her whole life. So when you read this book, you can see why it would be her nightmare. And then of course got the mystery portion right in the center of that and you have found my happy place especially for summer reading. I will say that beginning grabbed me, but there was a small time at the center where I felt like we were kind of spinning in place. And where I felt a strange disconnection from our lead character. I couldn't quite settle on where she was coming from. But that didn't last long. And then the story started to move right along again, and the lead found more of her own voice and her own point of view, and I could feel her coming into focus, and I truly loved the ending. There are a few things in the plot that made me think of *The Need* or Rumaan Alam's *Leave the World Behind*, mostly in vibe and that kind of strangeness that both those books bring. They're not perfect comps, but I felt it so strongly as I was reading it that I felt I had to mention it here. I ended up really liking this book, and I've been thinking about it constantly since I read it and every time I see cars covered in pollen. If you liked *The Displacement* or *Station Eleven* or *Curfew* by Jayne Cowie, then I think you will find a lot to enjoy here. This is *Clean Air* by Sarah Blake.

Kaytee Cobb 11:06

Wow, that was a lot of comps on that one. It sounds very good. Yeah, it

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:10

was very interesting. I really keep thinking about it.

Kaytee Cobb 11:13

All right. Well, good job, Sara for putting that on our radar. Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:17

That's a good one.

Kaytee Cobb 11:18

Okay. My first one this week is *Everything Happens for a Reason* by Kate Bowler. And I feel like most people know about this book now. But the subtitle is "and other lies I've loved" because we all hear that right? Everything happens for a reason. But she is kind of turning that on its head in this book. So Kate Bowler is an online treasure. I feel comfortable saying her writing and speaking is lovely. And this book is part memoir and part faith deconstruction. We start the story when Kate is 35 years old, she's teaching at Duke Divinity School. She's a new mom to her first baby. And then she starts feeling stabbing stomach pains. They are debilitating and impossible to control despite antacids, she loses tons of weight, she goes to the doctor where she is usually told it's no big deal. She's probably imagining it even when she can't speak or move through the pain. Much like Meredith, this trigger

warnings, it's probably obvious here if you have triggers around colon cancer, which is what she gets diagnosed with. This is going to be a really hard read. If you have triggers around unexplained medical maladies. The whole beginning of this is gonna be really difficult. It wasn't just a little thing. It was stage four colon cancer, it was a big thing. It was the thing. So the book walks through her diagnosis, her treatment plan her surgeries, and the people who stood beside her and the ones who made her you know, want to dope slap them. When they said things like, well, everything happens for a reason, right, which is a lot of the narrative we get. She was raised in the evangelical church and discusses the way that lack of healing, even when prayed for it feels almost like a personal attack. When you're a person of faith like, Well, I'm a good person and I go to church every week and not just me. But all these people are praying for me and so I must be doing something wrong for this to have happened to me. Like we should all be able to expect miracles. She wonders why suffering makes her feel like a loser. And she explores the burden of positivity. She wants to know why it's hard to surrender control over that which you have no control. Kate Bowler is funny and approachable. Even when her writing is heartbreaking. She cuts to the quick and she tackles the stuff we're all thinking even when we aren't facing life threatening diagnoses. Spoiler alert that this is not *Breath Becomes Air*. Kate is alive. She is podcasting regularly on the Everything Happens podcast. This was not a sobbing on the floor book for me. And it does not end with her husband writing the epilogue after her funeral. That's not what this book is about. It's a fantastic look inside a medical challenge and the way her community her family her partner responded to it, which I very much appreciated. As I continue on my own faith deconstruction and reconstruction journey. I was really glad for Kate's wise words and I'm really glad for her presence her continued presence in this world. This is *Everything Happens for a Reason* by Kate Bowler.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:14

Oh, I'm so glad that you brought that one Kaytee. I think books like that are so useful. And you gave it to us in a way that we know that everything's you know she's going to she's going to be okay. Okay, so yeah, right. I do want to just because it's topical, I want to introduce this PSA. My grandmother died of colon cancer. And so obviously it runs in my family. So I've been getting various scans or just recently, six months. So I got my first colonoscopy because this is what we're doing now. And now they're actually recommending it starting at 45. And everything was totally fine. They found a little polyp got rid of it if I had not gotten a colonoscopy and they that could have been the start right yeah for for me because again, it runs in my family, which is not the only way you get colon cancer. But I just want to say this colonoscopies are not nearly as bad as Instagram or whatever has made it seem it was a nothing thing. The prep was a nothing thing. The thing was a beautiful nap. It is absolutely worth your time and your attention. It is not a big deal at all. But it's so, so important. It's so important. It saves so many lives. So that's my little PSA.

Kaytee Cobb 15:25

I love that. I'm glad you put that in here

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:27

is not a big deal and it is getting the practice getting better and better all the time. Okay, my next book is very seasonally appropriate is book called *Dark August* by Katie Tallo. I've been saving this book for a year y'all. I've been saving. I read it last August because I wanted to read it in August. But then by the time I was ready to talk about on the show, it was September and that felt weird. So here you go mid

August, grab this book. If you would like a literary mystery, you're gonna want to listen up. Here's the setup. So here we have our lead character Augusta. She goes by Gus Monet, who as we find her is living in aimless existence with her piece of crap low level criminal boyfriend went out of the blue, she gets a call saying that her great grandmother, her last living relative has just died. Finally making a good decision for herself. Gus ditches the boyfriend and returns to the home in the town that she left when she was a young girl. Her inherited house is actually a dilapidated nightmare, but it redeems itself in that it comes with an old dog named Levi, who I love and who Gus loves. So Gus goes about combing through her great grandmother's things. And this next part is my literal dream. She stumbled across an old trunk. Wait for it, filled with stuff from her childhood keep waiting. But much more interestingly, she finds cold case files that belong to her mother, a disgraced police detective, who died in a car accident when Gus was just eight. So Gus is suddenly struck by memories of her mom obsessing over these very same files and documents and photos. And especially a Polaroid of a young ballerina when Gus spots a front page news story in this town about the fact that a body has been found linked to one of these cold case files from the childhood trunk. She can't resist following her mother's clues. And like she actually makes a board with like the string she makes like a stringy board which my dream she digs deeper and is determined to finish her mother's investigation. And her search leads her to a deserted Ghost Town, which was left abandoned when the residents fled after a horrific fire and they just never came back. Why? Why would that happen? As we can expect all this searching around is shaking things up, shaking up things that have long been asleep. And people are not happy. In fact, they may be mad enough to kill. All right, this book was from my Book Drop subscription, which every once in awhile, you hear me talk about

Kaytee Cobb 17:59

it, I had no idea that you still had a Book Drop subscription.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:02

I do not still have one. But I have a shelf that holds my books from the Book Drop subscription. And I will tell you what, there has never been a subscription that is more likely to send me a book that I look at and think and read later. And it's wonderful. It I don't get it every once in a while I picked one off that shelf. And invariably they're good. This is an example of it. This one actually came out in August of 2020. And I don't think it got nearly the hype that it should have gotten because it should have gotten like Tim Johnston level hype for sure. So this is a debut by a Canadian author. And I got interested in it after hearing a podcast that Roxanna sent to me where these five Canadians, they're mystery book experts, and they sit around talking about their favorite books of the previous summer. It's like a weird, it's a weird little construct that they've got. But it's interesting. And this book was one they talked about. And I was like, I have that on my shelf. The writing style is excellent. And it's really easy to sink into the lead character is a 20 year old woman, Gus who I told you about. And that can go either way. For me, she's on the Hot Mess Express when we start the book, and I don't always love that. But she gets herself together. And I really, really was rooting for her. The story cracks along all the way through and it never loses its pacing. We get breadcrumbs of the mystery at perfect intervals to keep us turning the pages. But we don't have to just be here for the mystery because there's a lot of satisfying character development and story development here. In some ways. It's the story of a town as much as it's the story of just a couple of murders. This is definitely one that will appeal to anyone who loves the aforementioned Tim Johnston or Jane Harper. And if you really loved *We Begin at the End* by Chris

Whitaker, Chris Whitaker Thank you, then this one will work for you although it has a much easier narrative style than That book does I like this one a lot. Give it 4.5 stars. If you like a smart literary mystery, this is going to be one that you're going to want to read this August. This is Dark August by Katie Tallo.

Kaytee Cobb 20:12

Excellent. You brought quite a few unsettling books already today. Meredith. Yeah, very on brand today.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:19

I'm gonna keep it going.

Kaytee Cobb 20:20

I love Okay, I'm gonna stay in my brand.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:24

Sad, sad and weepy?

Kaytee Cobb 20:26

No it's not sad, but it is YA. it's *Ander and Santi Were Here* by Johnny Garza via which if you've been paying attention, Jaysen Headley or ezeekat, brought to Episode 45 of season five. He talks about as a current read, and I grabbed a copy while he talked about it because he completely talked me into it Good Reads gives a few comps for this book, two of which I really enjoyed and one of which I rather despised. So I was a little nervous when I was going in, but I did love it. If you haven't listened to Jaysen talk about it, or it's been two months because it has since you heard it, it's okay, because I'm gonna set it up for you. *Ander Martinez* is one of our main characters. They are a non binary muralist in San Antonio, Texas preparing to head off to art school, they work at the family taqueria, they enjoy pan dulce and tacos every day for lunch. In order to encourage the pursuit of their art, the family fires *Ander* in order to encourage them to get out into the community and focus on murals. To replace *Ander*, *Santiago* is hired at the taqueria. And *Santi* is a hottie. They fall for each other pretty quickly. But both have complications in their storylines that make relationships and connection difficult. So that's the main setup of this one. And one of the things I really appreciated most about this book is that it's a YA romance that, like Jaysen mentioned is very sex positive. It doesn't close the door and leave young adults, especially to imagine what conversations about safety and consent might look like they're happening on the page. I think that's so important for YA books, if we want our young adults to grow into people who know how those conversations happen, especially if most of them have been reading about them at some point or another. It also important to me does not center misunderstandings as the main conflict. There's a big plot point that needs to be revealed by one party to another but it's not withheld out of malice or doubt over their affections or anything like that. And it's not like read about in a text message and then spirals out of control. I hate that trope hate miscommunication so much when it's like, you literally could have just said, here's what's going on, and this entire book would have been about nothing. It makes me crazy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:41

Yeah, it really does make you mad. I can tell like you you turned red when you talk about.

Kaytee Cobb 22:46

But this one, it just has a really big win if our young adults go into every relationship thinking that someone is going to be lying about something because that's all that ever happens in books and it makes every relationship spiral downward. They'll start relationships with a foundation of mistrust. And I hate that. So I'm very glad that Ander and Santi did not face that issue. Ander and Santi's story was memorable, very inclusive, it was peppered with Spanish in a way that helped me as a fluent speaker to understand how some families choose to make their speech non gendered. In this case, the family replaced any gender and endings which in Spanish are usually Oh, or ah, with a instance. So when the mom normally would have said Mijo or mija, she would call their child, me K, which I thought was so cool to get to hear through my ears, especially it was very well done. The audio was excellent. The writing was excellent. And I definitely look forward to more from this author who invited me into community so well in this novel. This was *Ander and Santi Were Here* by Jonny Garza Villa

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:50

Oh, I'm so glad that that was so good, because Jaysen just spoke about I think he said that it was his favorite book.

Kaytee Cobb 23:57

favorite of all time, right? Yeah. And he was rereading and also already after only like a month of having read it, you know, right beforehand and

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:05

it just love it. I love it. So, so so much. All right, Kaytee well, are you ready to begin our we're gonna do our third current read. But this one is, these are the books that we asked each other to read, right, which we in the history of the podcast, we have never done any sort of what we think of as forced reading. We're both like, we don't want to be pendant. We don't want someone to tell us we have to read something. But then I had this genius idea and I caught you at a moment of weakness, I guess. And you said sure. And so we surprised each other and you asked me to read *Chain Gang All Stars*, and I asked you to read *Fates and Furies*. So we'll tackle these first as current reads. Now neither one of us knows exactly how the other one felt about the book. So this is the first you and I are each hearing the real nitty gritty about how we felt about the books that we that we asked each other to read right, and then our deep dive will float From there, we'll talk about what this experience was like both as the presser and the pressy. So I read *Chain Gang All Stars* by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah. I'm not going to give you guys a lot of setup because Kaytee just talked about this not very long ago at all. And so I don't want to go on forever. So just to make sure that you are fresh. We've got our lead characters, Loretta Thurwar and Hamara Hurricane Staxxx Stacker, and they are stars of the *Chain Gang All Stars*, which is the flagstone program of CAPE or the Criminal Action Penal Entertainment, a super popular, very profitable program coming to us from the private prison industry, which in this world has become the way prisons are handled. Basically, the prisoners in CAPE compete in death matches. And if they win enough of them, they win their freedom. And that's where our story starts centered on Thurwar, and Staxxx. All right, I have big, big, big feelings about this book. It is so complicated. My feelings are so complicated, the book is not complicated. The book is very straightforward propulsive story, my feelings are so complicated, maybe the most complicated reading experience I've ever had. And I think also one

of the most memorable, which in my reading today is worth a lot. I'm gonna work really hard. And I have for that because I read this right at the end of our season, I read it right at the end of May, in fact, or end of June. And so I jumped right into it. And all of that time, I've been working hard to organize my thoughts and present a full picture of how Chain Gang All Stars worked for me, because it was different, in some ways, very different from the way it worked for you, Kaytee. But then there were ways that it was similar. I really disliked the experience of reading this book, I didn't want to pick it up. Once I'd read the first bit from then on out, I didn't want to pick it up. And when I did, I had to force myself to keep reading, not because it's not an excellent book, though, because it is an excellent book, I had multiple big problems with the book. And yet, it impacted me in a way that as I told you, when I give you a little brief peek into how I was feeling, I am sure that this book is going to be on my top 10 books of the year. See what I mean? Complicated. Okay, here's what worked for me. First, the premise is amazing. It's fascinating on its face, but also because we know that we're maybe 10 years away from something like this happening, we have to consider this a very possible reality. And the tech in this book is fascinating. I think the author was also a really big fan of the tech of this book, because he spent a lot of time telling us about it. And I loved these parts. The sentence level writing was amazing, accessible. And yet, at times, multiple times had me back on my heels in the best way possible, the character set was vast and varied and gave us people to hate and people to root for. And given the premise. Those are not the people that you would expect. The novel gave me a deeper, much deeper understanding of the inequities of the American justice system both before and after incarceration. And a much deeper understanding of the unfair circumstances that lead men and women of color to be put into the system so much more than their white counterparts. But that very same message, that important message was also a huge reason that I struggled with this book. I personally really shy away from books that make me feel pounded over the head by the message. And in this case, I felt pounded so hard that I had a dent in my head. But after finishing it, Johnny read it. And we continued to talk. And then I went to my book group, and we continued to talk people who had read it. And the more I thought about it, the more I kept thinking, maybe that's a good thing. Maybe this 50 year old, privileged white woman needs to have a dent made in her head. And yet that message got in the way of the story for me, I can't ignore that fact. The other piece that kept me from connecting with the story is that it seemed to me to be especially in the first 75% a series of loosely connected vignettes. And yet sometimes that can work really well for me. But here I kept feeling bounced around. I couldn't grab onto a feeling of connection because as soon as I tried it was gone. And that left me feeling unmoored and disconnected. Is that the author's intent? Or is it that he's more comfortable writing in the short story milieu? Certainly his Friday Black collection is masterful. Either way, I couldn't find the Well, for most of this book, I will say that that lack of flow did change in the last 25%. And that was really propulsive and I cared very much about how it ended and it had an amazing ending. So that lack of connectedness coupled with the violence didn't repulse me. As I've heard. I've heard some people say, use that word. It didn't repulse me. It ended up making me feel so tired. And maybe, as I've thought more about this in the ensuing two months, that was how I was supposed to feel first shocked, then disgusted, then angry, and then just tired, one of our leads, Thurwar says over and over again how bone tired she is. And that's a point of understanding that tiredness that feeling of resignation. And fatigue is what the black community has felt for 400 years, and I can't endure it for the length of a single book. buck up is what I was telling myself. So did I like this book? No, but I'm fairly sure I wasn't supposed to like it. I was supposed to be affected by it. And I was more with every passing day since I've read it. I would absolutely not have made it through if I hadn't been reading it for you, Kaytee. And for that I am entirely grateful. Because I

am really, really glad that I finished this book. This is Chain Gang All Stars by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

Kaytee Cobb 31:34

I get goosebumps multiple times hearing you talk about it. And I feel like you only said violence once. But we've talked a few times about the level of violence in that book and how it's tiring. It's often to the point of revulsion. Right. Like there, there are adjectives that come out of the amount of violence in that book, especially. I'm I'm really glad to hear you talk about it. And it was very effective to hear what worked for you and what didn't and the ways you thought that even the parts that didn't work for you worked their way into you. Right. I thought that was really interesting. So Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:14

And it made me really think a lot about how am I making choices about favorite books versus best books, right, we're gonna do a deep dive on that on a separate episode. It made me think about how books make it to my top 10 list to the year. They're almost never ones that are super fun and delightful and frothy and forgettable. Yeah, right? It's the ones that really demand something of you. Or really just get under your skin or the like this one that you can see is a modern classic. But the experience of it is not what I normally mean, I read, I've said this many times I read for better or for worse. And this is what I'm really getting to. I read for better for worse for entertainment. That's what reading does for this reader. It's not what it has to do for everyone. That's what it does for me. And with this one, it wasn't that kickback and be entertained. It was demanding a lot more. And then I had to reckon with that issue of it's so issue heavy. And how do I feel about that? Because that is not something that I usually like in my brain. So that challenge, though, was really, really good for me. So yeah, I'm really, really glad that I read it. I think about it every single day.

Kaytee Cobb 33:33

Well, I'm glad that you finished it even if it was because my hand forced yours to turn the page.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:39

Yeah, no, I really, really want to and also I have to say one of the most discussable books that I've read in a long time. Like I said, Johnny and I had multiple deep conversations about it. And then Lexy Largent and I really, really, really got into it not in an argument we've got into the conversation. And her thoughts on it really helped me clarify my thoughts on it too. So, again, a book that just begs for discussion to make it hit even deeper. Definitely. So thank you. Thank you, Kaytee. I'm glad that I read that.

Kaytee Cobb 34:11

Okay, we are going to connect these two with the feeling of complicated feelings about books that we read because of each other. So my book, as Meredith mentioned was Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff and I have a Freudian slip in my notes. I actually spelled her name, Lauren Gross. In my notes, and I, oh, you know, I looked down, right. As I was getting ready to start talking, I was like, well, Kaytee. That's what happened there. So when Meredith had assigned this book, to me for her forceful indirect press, she recommended going in mostly blind. So I am going to give a setup but it's pretty minimal, because if anybody decides to pick it up, I want it to be a similar experience to what I had. So this is the story of

a marriage. Lotto and Mathilde meet toward the end of college and sparks immediately fly between them within two weeks, they are married. But Lotto and Mathilde are very different people, as are we all he has spent his life in the lap of luxury. As the heir to the owner of a bottled water conglomerate, he sleeps around a lot. He cherishes the women of all shapes and sizes that let him into their beds, and leaves a lot of broken hearts in his wake. Then he meets Mathilde, Mathilde is tall and willowy, and quiet and brilliant. And their friends really don't know how she captured his heart, but capture him she did. And so we follow their lives as they come together with some peeks into the past before they met. And as their careers change, and their marriage develops and deepens to something different than the first day that they said I do. I know that a lot of people heard this book get pressed in my hands and then decided that they would try it out as well. I got tagged in or saw a lot of posts from people that hated it, throw it against the wall, or DNF. Those were the three main posts that I saw. Oftentimes there was a self deprecating, maybe I'm not smart enough to understand this attached to those posts. Like that exact phrase. I saw that a lot with regard to this book. And I want to dispel that notion. This book is polarizing. The characters are unlikable, every character is unlikable. The relationships are uncomfortable, the conversations what's said and what isn't are difficult to stomach. So Meredith, you just said you like to read for entertainment. And I'm like, This is so interesting, because there was very little about Fates and Furies that entertained me that I would say like, what that was entertaining, right? This love of this book, or hatred of this book isn't about smarts, you are smart enough. And it's okay to not like or even hate this book and be smart enough, right? That's not what it's about. My journey, while reading this was kind of like, I was the hero of my own Greek myth. It was an epic saga, that at times, I was forcing myself to get through and turn the pages because it was assigned to me. And every once awhile, I was able to just drink it down like water. But it was, there were many times that I was like, I probably should DNF this, oh, wait, I can't write over and over again. I had a buddy reader that helped push me along when I got discouraged and wanted to quit. But I knew I was going to have to make time to push through no matter what I was happy for the hand holding in the meantime. And I did end up giving this one four stars. But if you had asked me what you did a few days before I finished, how much you had to Gird your loins. And I told you, if you had asked me that 25% of the way into this book, I would have told you it was a one star read for me, I was unhappy in my reading of it. And then the story shifts and changes. And these unlikable characters have further and further dimension revealed to them. And by the end, I really was glad that I read it even though I had not enjoyed the process of getting there. Which was surprising to me. That doesn't happen very often in my reading, either because I feel like I have a good picker for myself or I don't push myself in that way. Or if it feels like I'm about to start putting myself in that way. I say maybe this isn't the right time for this book. I'm gonna set it aside. You also mentioned when you assigned it to me that you felt like five years ago when you first talked about it. I was five years younger, my own marriage was five years younger. And in the interim, I had become a woman who could read this book in a different way than I would have at that time. And having that in my head as I read it made it feel like not just a mirror book, but a makeup mirror book with like, fluorescent lights and superzoom where you're like, wow, those wrinkles are way deeper than I thought they were in oh my gosh, are the bags under my eyes actually that dark. When you're looking at one of those mirrors. You're like, why do people even have these mirrors, they're horrible. They make you look awful all the time. That's what I told Katie, when I was about 50% in right before we get to the second section of the book, I was like this is a mirror book. And I don't like what I see of myself in this book. And that is part of why I disliked it so much at the beginning. And then I had to keep going. And I did and I finished the back half in probably half the time it took me to read the front half. So there's a lot

to be said about having your hand forced and having to continue to turn the pages in order to meet a goal or grow yourself or be a different person than the one that started the book when you first opened it. And it's not that that's how we should all be reading all the time that we should be like forcing ourselves to become better readers and better readers. Right I am glad for the experience of reading this one. So this is Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff, or gross,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:07

grace as well. So Right. I mean, Lauren Groff is one of those authors that is so polarizing. And and one of those authors that I even can't quite explain why it is that just her sentence level writing feels to me like she sat down and said, I'm gonna write a book that is just going to be exactly understandable to Meredith. Like it feels her her writing, which of course, is a completely irrational thought. But that's how her writing feels to me, Curtis Sittenfeld feels the same way. Like for some reason, both those authors feel like they like plugged into my brain. And it's like, their thoughts or my thought, it's weird, I can't explain it. And there's a lot about Fates and Furies from a plot perspective, that without spoiling like, in a non spoiling environment, which is what this is we can't talk about. So when we won't talk about but I do my I mean, my big question to you is, so I had told you that, you know, I think that you're ready for this book in a way that you weren't five years before. And I wasn't necessarily thinking at all that, like you're going to see yourself and eat or your meal. And as I said, on the show, it wasn't that I at all think that these characters are like you or that this is like your marriage, because that's not true at all. But more in terms of as we mature, relationships in general, we can see them more clearly whether our own or other people's, we're bringing more to the table. And so that's why I said that. So did you feel that like now that you're done with Fates and Furies? Did you feel like yeah, I, I definitely got something out of this book that I wouldn't have 5, 7, 10 years ago.

Kaytee Cobb 41:47

Yeah, I think if I had tried to pick it up earlier in my life, I mean, not like within the last six months, but a substantial amount of time earlier, I would have DNF. And I would have been one of those people that said, I'm probably not smart enough for this like it because it would have been, it wouldn't have been about doing a more introspective, not even introspective, but like a deeper look into the book, I would have said like, well, this isn't fun. We're kind of over it, you know, right. So I think in that way, it does take a certain level of being willing to go there with a book that I didn't necessarily have before, right,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:27

it is in both the books, chinking all sorts and Fates and Furies, neither one of them are a romp in good time.

Kaytee Cobb 42:33

No, we did not do that for each other. We didn't.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:37

And I? Well, it would, but I think it would be easier. And I think part of what we do every single week is we have a really good sense of for one of a better term, I'm gonna say, a Meredith book or a Kaytee book, not creating teams or anything like that. But just like a descriptor as a descriptor, it would be easy

for us to be like, Oh, an eye all the time, we'll read about a book or I'll read a book and I'll be like, Kaytee would absolutely love this, this would be such a slam dunk for her. And you do the same thing. That's different than saying, This isn't necessarily a book that I'm choosing, because you are going to not like it. That's not what we were trying to do. But it's different to say this is a book I would love to have you read and just be able to talk about with you in depth to get your sense of even though I know going into it that it's one that is not necessarily going to be a particular all time favorite, or it would really surprise me. You know what I mean? And I think we both did that for each other. Choosing a book that is not a wheelhouse for either one of us. But that would affect us in some way that would be memorable. And that's it that's different than this will be a slam dunk for you. You know, you should read it.

Kaytee Cobb 43:52

Yeah, definitely.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:53

And I know that we talk all the time about again, just to go back to what I was saying about changing all stars. We talk all the time about just if you're not enjoying the book, DNF it not right now it in our in it, right, like that's okay. And we and that is 100% true. Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 44:09

we will preach that all day long. For sure. Right? Because you absolutely I don't

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:13

want my reading. I don't want anyone else's reading to be filled with slog, right. Your reading shouldn't be something that adds to your life. But this is part of the reason that I think joining a book club taking a recommendation from a trusted friend pushing yourself maybe through a read harder challenge that Book Riot is doing or something. We're not all you're reading, but a small portion of your reading is pushing yourself a little bit into a new genre you've never read or to read something that just would normally not at all be what you would read. It can sometimes push you to really great places having to do with that book. But then also sometimes you push into a genre that all of a sudden becomes your very favorite or an author. They're like I had no idea That's what like, the first time I read Steinbeck, I was like, Wait, wait wait wait wait wait wait, this is so much better than I thought this was going to be. And so I do think it's important that, at least for me, I'll just speak for myself. I like doing this kind of reading every once in a while, because I do want to push myself.

Kaytee Cobb 45:19

Yes, I would agree. And I think you're kind of hitting on one of my favorite things about this entire little like projects that we gave each other, which in my head, I was calling my required summer reading, because I like a school assignment sometimes, right? And I'm not against, you know, starting a class and having to have already read whatever it is that you're going to be discussing in class. And even as a teenager, when I had to read, I don't know, To Kill a Mockingbird in the summer so that we were ready to discuss it in class on day one. Even if I didn't love it at the time, which I'm pretty sure I did. I still didn't mind the assignment. I don't hate that part of it. I think there's also an element here for me, where, you know, as we mentioned quite a few times this summer, this month off was a move for me. My rhythms

were disrupted, my amount of time I was spending with people was disrupted. And I almost felt like you had personally attacked me. Because two of the chapters in the first section, which is the section as you'll remember, that I did not love are 55 pages long for each chapter is 55 pages long. Yeah, she does that that is so rude. Meredith must hate me to have given me this book to read like it felt very painful. Especially because I didn't have our chunks at a time where I could say, Well, right now I have time to get through this giant chunk of a chapter. It was like, well, now I have to set it down mid chapter which makes me like, want to break out in hives. Also, with regard to her writing. She does this in this book. I don't think I've read any other Lauren Groff, like you mentioned before, she has these bracketed sections to the story. And I felt not smart enough. When I started the book, I didn't know what these bracket sections were about. I didn't know what was going on. It's almost an omniscient narrator inserting their thoughts.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:09

And I love that. I love that so much. That is one of my favorite constructs. And And

Kaytee Cobb 47:14

does she do that in any other books? Or is it just this one? That needs

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:17

to be the only one that I wrote? I don't think Matrix she does that. Okay.

Kaytee Cobb 47:20

Yeah, so my buddy reader, Mary, who was a in person, but good friend in New Mexico was the one reading it with me. And she told me that she had decided to give those bracketed narration people a voice, and told me a few options she was considering. But I started reading those sections in my head in Morgan Freeman's voice. So it was like the voice of God chiming into the story. And from that moment on, even in the long chapters, it brought a lightness and a little point of interest, where I started looking forward to those Narrator sections. Even more, even if it was two words, I would be like, Oh, we got Morgan Freeman coming up here. And he's gonna chime in and give me a little like, insight into these characters. And that was something I had never done before. Like, I don't care whose voice is in my head. It's my voice. I don't care who's talking to me. But adding the intentional voice of someone else. And it could be Jennifer Coolidge. It could be whoever you want, right? Right. But adding somebody else's voice into certain sections of a text, I feel like now I want to work it into all kinds of stuff. Like, I just want to be like, this is now part of my reading life. I loved it, whatever you

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:27

need to do. Now, it's interesting to me that you did it via print that you didn't listen to this book.

Kaytee Cobb 48:33

Yes, I did do it via print, because I had that summer reading required reading in my head, that it was something that I was gonna want to be able to sink deeper into. And especially if I'm not enjoying a book, if I'm listening on audio, I will let it wash over me a lot more. And I'll finish it and be like, yeah, it was fine. And I don't have strong opinions about it. Because I'll make sure that I'm doing dishes or walking the dog or whatever, and which is fine. I can absolutely focus on a book when I'm multitasking

like that with like a mindless task. But I'm more likely to not pause it when my kids come up and talk to me if I'm not into the story in the same way. And I didn't want to feel like I had cheated the experience. So I required of myself that I read the text rather than listen to the book for that reason. And I think it was a good idea.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:26

Yeah, yeah, no, I understand that. Well, we do A Journey to Three Pines, Roxanna and I both in these close readings, which is what we call when we're preparing for the show. We're doing them only in print for that exact reason. Although they're fantastic on audio, but you really you can you can sort of make a study of a book a little better, at least I can. In fact, that's just for

Kaytee Cobb 49:46

same with Popcorn in the Pages. Even if it's a book I've already read or listened to on audio. I will reread it in print for those episodes for that same reason. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:54

you just can't go deeper. So here's my question for you. Is this something that you want to do again? The future like at the end of it, like at the end of the season,

Kaytee Cobb 50:02

I would do it again, even though if you had asked me 20%. And I would be like, Meredith will never tell me during the summer, but I also I know that this summer was an anomaly for me. And despite the feels I had throughout the process, I did enjoy it. And I really enjoyed this conversation and hearing about the complicated feelings and be able to process them together. And I think having a bookish best friend, like we say, at the top of every show, to talk through a book that you've both read, that you have big feelings about is really cool. It's a great experience. So would you

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:40

do and it does? Yeah. Oh, totally. I would love to do it. Again, I think it would be great. And I love that What this demonstrates is that we don't have to have the book doesn't have to land the exact same for each of us, for us to share the experience together. Yeah, like it doesn't have to be, we don't have to felt the exact same way about the book, right to have shared it. And yet, neither one of us feel torn down by how the other you know what I mean? There's, there's a way to have both and, and I think that that is one of the best things about reading in community. Before I started doing Currently Reading, I never really I didn't have any community in my reading, that wasn't something that was important to me. And now I feel like I have so much. And that's been a surprise in how much it has deepened my love of reading, to reading community with other people. And, you know, I know there are a lot of y'all reading Fates and Furies. And I think that that's great. And reading it together, I think is the best way to do it. There's a lot to talk about. I personally don't need to hear you guys say that you want to.

Kaytee Cobb 51:43

So we don't, we don't actually meet those, those little pieces of feedback.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:48

But I encourage you to find a safe space where I am not and go to town. And now you

Kaytee Cobb 51:55

really feel the post about like, Well, this was assigned to somebody else to read. And also I hated it. Like that's not that's not what we told you to do.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:03

I think I think just in general, how about we don't do post saying that we hated the book. And you know, just think in general that we should talk about books that we liked, not books that we that we hate it. So anyway, lots of great books discussion today Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 52:19

Lets to go to the fountain. Meredith, what are you wishing for this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:23

All right. This week, I wish that if you are a parent raising readers, I want you to give a try to something that one of my friends from my book group mentioned and made me so so happy. She said her name is Jessica. She said that recently, she had had a great reading experience. And she'd been doing something quite often over the summer with her kids. She has two kids who are burgeoning readers. And she'll narrow down her next book to two books, both of which she's totally into reading. And then she lets her little ones take turns choosing the book for her to read next. And so they really get it because it's like this very sacred duty, right? Like this reading is important. And she's modeled that to her kids. And they really understand that. And, you know, she hands him the books. And they really carefully take turns reading the blurb, reading, getting a little bit into the text, trying to figure out what the book is about, thinking about what their mom's mood might be, how the cover looks, all of all of these things. And then they make the choice. And then that's the book that she reads. Now, it's a book that she wanted to read, she'd already narrowed it down so that she knew either one was going to be okay, it's a way of introducing a little bit of bookish serendipity into her reading life because she doesn't know which one they're going to choose. And also, it's a great way to model a love of reading and the fun of reading. Part of what is fun about reading is making your choice of your next book. And when your mom looks to you to say you are a capable reader, and you can help me make this choice because I like the way you think about books. What a great way to raise readers. So I just wanted to shout that out. And I just wish that you'd give it a try if you feel like it. Ping Splash

Kaytee Cobb 54:01

Splash, okay, that kind of goes along with my wish, which I phrased as I wish for each of us to practice letting go of the reins sometimes, which is what Jessica is doing with her kids by saying, I have these reins on my reading life and I'm going to hand them to you, you get to steer the horse for a little bit. But of course, for me, this is about our deep dive. I know that I can speak only for me and of course many other readers will relate that I don't want to be bossed in my reading. I want to choose what I want to read and when I want to read it and I might make a plan or a schedule. I might boss myself in my reading. But I don't want to be told you must read this. And yet I found myself enriched by the possibility of letting someone else boss me my bookish best friend. So if you find yourself being a bit of a control freak over your reading which same girl same My wish is that you allow someone else to take the reins

for maybe just One book, maybe only one time or maybe only once a year, but try it out and see how it goes and see if it brings a gift or a richness or a surprise to your reading life that you didn't expect. Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:14

That's a good wish, Kaytee I love that. I totally cosign on that wish.

Kaytee Cobb 55:18

Good wishes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:19

That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram,

Kaytee Cobb 55:27

and you can find me Kaytee in Arizona sweating @notesonbookmarks on Instagram

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:32

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 55:42

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:49

And if you want more of this bookish content, there are more than 150 pieces of content on our Patreon. You can join us for just \$5 a month and always have currently reading available to you. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All of those things help us to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 56:09

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:14

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 56:16

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:18

Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 56:19

Happy reading Meredith