



Season 6, Episode 33: Crumble and Chronicles + Changes In Our Reading Lives Over Time

Mon, Mar 25, 2024 • 1:06:54

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.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:24

Were 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 read very differently than I did five years ago.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:42

And I'm Roxanna Kassam Kara, a mom, a marketer and a mood reader living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. And I love to play reading ping pong. This is episode number 33 of season six. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:55

All right, well, we are so glad to be here together Roxanna. It's been a while since we've recorded this show together. We do Journey to Three Pines, of course. But we haven't been able to record this show together for a long time. So it was super excited that we were gonna get a chance to do it. We'll let you guys know right up front that we are going to talk later in the show about the different ways that Roxanna and I have expanded our reading lives, right. So we're not the same readers, we were a few years ago. Some of that is just organic change. And some of it is changes we've made on purpose. So we're going to talk a little bit more about that. And wait. All right, but first, let's get to our bookish moments of the week. What is what is the most bookish thing for you this week? Roxanna? Well,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 01:38

Meredith, I have been on a real bookish tear these past few weeks, which is not usual for me, you know, you once so diplomatically said, I'm a very bespoke reader. I'm a super picky reader. I'm a mood reader, but unlike you, I don't know what I'm in the mood for until I pick it up. So that sometimes leads to a lot of DNFS, but lately, I've found the perfect books and have read five or six great books back to back. And what I found is working for me is exactly what I said in my bite size intro ping pong books,

which is I think what you said a few episodes ago, you know, which means really reading drastically different books back to back to back. So I always loved the idea of reading flights and always wanted to do them but you know, it's rather know thyself and I can't do that I just get too bored with the sameness of two or three similar books in a row I love to finish a book then pick up something drastically different from my next one and you'll see that my picks today so my bookish moment of the week is actually tied to this summer ever since I heard you talk about having your truth pecan bars and your thriller during the Christmas break I stuck with you oh my god young you it would I was listening to that in the car on the way home and I just thought where where can I get some treats? Where can I find some quiet time I just needed to make it happen for myself. So last Saturday, the stars aligned and I had some time to myself so I woke up early a big myself a delicious apple crumble I made a strong cup of coffee. And I sat down with Hench by Natalie Zine-Walschots. And it was so great to read this page turner and enjoy my favorite treat and hot coffee at the same time. It was decadent, like really just so indulgent. It was so good in fact that I've decided to call it Crumble and Chronicles and I'm going to try to schedule one every few months. Oh,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:29

I love it. I love that so much. No, my favorite part of that message that you left me afterwards was Do you know that I ate the entire crumble by myself which is very unlike you, like your you know, I just loved how you were just in it, and nothing was taking you away from it. And it's just that's heaven. It's

Roxanna Kassam Kara 03:48

really heaven just to be so indulgent and lazy sometimes, and make a whole apple crumble and eat a whole

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:55

it was amazing. Well, I agree. I have been on a tear myself you have I feel like sometimes, you know, sometimes reading feels like no work. But I mean, the actual act of reading, sometimes it flows and sometimes you have to kind of grab it and wrestle it down to the ground, right? Yes, this lately since my reading retreat, which was now like a week and a half ago. I've just been just chewing up books. I've just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, back to back. I read for in the four days that we were on the reading retreat, read two more that weekend. I mean, just really, really, really both finding time and also being in having the brain space to just be able to get into these books, which has been great. And then four days ago, I started reading All the Colors of the Dark by Chris Whitaker. Have you listened to that message that I did? Yes. I'm going to talk about this book in great detail. Obviously I'm gonna give it a full treatment as we get closer to its June 25 release date. because it will for sure be in my top 10 of the year I send that message to you. If it's not, then 2024 will have been the most incredible reading year I will ever have. Because this book is absolutely incredible. It's one of those books that just when you're done with it, you know, you can't immediately go into another book. So it stopped my kind of run. I had read actually several books that I really enjoyed. But this one just stomped on my heart. And I just knew you know what I need to take a couple of days. I need to I just the next book is going to be such a victim of all the colors of the dark that I just need to take a couple of days. I think I'm going to speaking of ping ponging, I think what I'm going to do is I think I'm going to go to some nonfiction. Like, I think I'm just going to really ground myself in the non emotional real world and then be ready to dip into something else. Because right now, any other book just feels like it's what's the point that you know,

when you read a book? I mean, we've read books like this together, where you just finish it and you're like, what's the point of any other book? Yeah.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 06:05

And to say more that you're gonna go to nonfiction like that talks about how what a severe book hangover you have, like, you've basically said all fiction is ruined for me, right? There's I can't pick up a mystery thriller. Nothing. I have to pick up nonfiction to recover from this masterpiece. That's pretty incredible.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:23

Yeah, I mean, exactly. And I could give you all the different reasons you know that this book was so real and so grounded in its emotional depth that fantasy seems silly. A rom com seems silly, a thriller seems that like I could just knit every it just all seems silly. So that's not gonna last forever. This is just a, you know, short period of time. But yeah, I have a couple of nonfiction books including a couple that recently, Elizabeth recommended might be great. As we get ready to go on our trip to the Hamptons, she's recommended a couple of like disaster nonfiction, you know, she you know how she loves those? Yes, a couple of like ones like a hurricane book and once like a shipwreck book, but disasters on the high seas, near where we're going to be going when we go to The Hamptons Whodunit. So that might be the the medicine that I need. And then I think I'll be totally ready to jump into another book. Yeah,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 07:15

that sounds great. And just the right kind of ping pong, very different, and very compelling and page turning to just to take your mind off of it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:23

Yeah, I just Yeah, I need to let that percolate for a while. Okay. Let's talk about some current reads. What have you been reading lately? Okay,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 07:33

Meredith. So for my first book, today, I'm going to be talking about The Night Raven by Johan Rundberg. Oh, good. Well, one book I never thought I would bring to the show is a Swedish crime novel about a serial killer who drains blood from his corpses.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:49

That is not a Roxanna book.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 07:51

That is not a Roxanna book. You know, I listened to murder full faithfully, I listened to you and Elizabeth talk about these books. And I admire it from afar with no compulsion to pick it up. But today, I am picking that exact book. And it's because this book is in fact, middle grade. So I think of it as Nordic noir Jr. So last time, I was on the show you might remember with Mary, I mentioned that my daughter Kieran was looking for middle grade with more murder in it, and boy did our listeners deliver. I got so many great suggestions. And Ilsa from Massachusetts suggested this one and I was so intrigued. I picked it up myself. So here's the setup. We are in Stockholm, Sweden in 1880 12 year old Mikka is an orphan

struggling to survive during a long dark winter at her orphanage. She spends her days taking care of the younger children, rationing what little food and firewood they have, and working shifts at a bar called the chapel for a tyrannical bartender mica is shocked when a newborn baby is left at the orphanage in the middle of the night by a boy with a cryptic message. When a detective shows up, mica senses something even more sinister is going on. And eventually she begins to suspect that the notorious serial killer the Night Raven, who everyone believes is in jail, is actually still on the loose and is looking for his next victim. She joins police detective Hof to uncover the truth about the Night Raven, and what they discover could lead to both their deaths. This book was spine chilling period. Technically it is middle grade, but it is the darkest middle grade I have ever read. Like this is middle grade for the Swedes who then grow up and read about children swinging from trees. It is morbid and somewhat gruesome. And there is some gore and graphic death on the page. But it was a delicious page turner and perfect for me. So mica is a very likable character. She's not precocious or plucky, which I don't like and my child heroines, you know she's very smart and she's very observant. But that's because her life depends on being aware of everything around her. But she's also smart enough to know when to be silent. Her partner in crime detective Hoff is a gruff policeman with a gentle side. And he takes mica on the case because of her powers of observation. Together, they discover what really happened to the Night Raven, and the coverup that is taking place to keep the public from knowing the truth. As I said, I never read books like this, but because this wasn't middle grade, it was actually obviously okay for me. Like, I wouldn't hand it to Kieran. And I think, you know, you would have to be sort of a junior Meredith, or a current Meredith, to really love it. It was harsh and graphic at times, there are some images of rats that I'll never be able to get out of my tell you. There's this thing called the Rat King that he talks about that I don't even want to I don't want to ever remember again. But it was so well told. And just like, you know, honestly, like Jr, darkness. For me, it was it was exactly what I wanted, and exactly the amount I needed it. So this book, as I said, is translated from Swedish. And Johan Rundberg is an award winning author of children's books. And he was actually awarded Sweden's most prestigious literary prize, the August prize for this book. There are now four books in this series published in Sweden, and two of them have been translated. I really liked this book, you know, yes, it was dark and gruesome. But it was so different from middle grade that we read here in Canada in the US, it was so well paced. It had such an atmosphere, you could just feel the cold and the darkness, the ending felt a little rushed, and maybe not as thorough as I expected. But the build up to everything was so satisfying and enjoyable. And the other thing I liked is, you know, this book is only 187 pages, some middle grade books we're getting now break 500 600 pages. Yeah, sometimes I just can't hang with it for that long, you know, whereas this one, and also because this world was dark, you know, to be in there for 187 pages was perfect. So I really loved it. I will say one note, that while this mystery resolves, there are some unsolved clues and bigger mysteries that carry through to the next in the series. But I still found this a satisfying resolution. I will for sure be putting the next one in the series on my list. Maybe in October. So that's The Night Raven by Johan Rundberg Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:17

I absolutely love the setup here. I think Kieran who is my girl, Kieran and I are, you know, soul sisters? And she I think she probably as she gets a little bit older, this will be perfect for her. But But yeah, let's, let's let her get a little bit older before we have her reading about blood being drained from from people. So but

Roxanna Kassam Kara 12:39

for you know, people HSPs like me who listen to you and Elizabeth and think well, I could never read that. But I want to join in the conversation. Honestly, it gave me a really good feeling of what Nordic Noir is like, without having to go into, you know, some graphic stuff that I couldn't handle. So I would also recommend it for for HSPs looking to get their little, you know, Murdery thrills.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:00

What I'm wondering is, is this an entire kind of part of the genre that we have missed out on, which is Nordic, middle grade mystery, like maybe that's this boopie Spooky, like, maybe that's more of this for HSPs. And even for, you know, there's a lot of times where I want something that's not crazy dark, but still has some mystery.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 13:25

But and that's what I was thinking, Meredith like, is there a whole like, is this what the Swedes read? And, you know, Norwegians read like, Have I missed out on this whole swath of middle grade, because it really was excellent. I could see myself being in the mood for this again. I really enjoyed it. So it's for sure a genre I'm going to be looking into and just seeing, are there more Johan Berg's out there writing stories like this? Because it was really, really great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:51

I love it. I love it. Okay, well, my first read is a book Roxanna that you did not read yourself. But many months ago, you saw it and said, well, Meredith, here's a book that I would never read. But it sounds exactly right for you. And when you do, you're almost always right. And this one was very, very interesting. This is called The Red Parts by Maggie Nelson. Yes. Here's the setup. The Red Parts is a memoir. And it's an account of a trial and an exploration of our very specific American obsession with violence and missing white women. In 2004. Maggie Nelsen, our author was looking forward to the publication of her book. Now listen to this, this book was going to be called Jane, A Murderer. And it was a it was a narrative inverse about the life and death of her aunt who had been murdered 35 years before. So I mean, let's just take a pause there. So she's gonna write about her aunt who had been murdered 35 years before but it's like an it's like a novel in verse less. Okay, so that book did not it did not come at that point. case was unsolved. It was widely accepted that she had been the Jane, her aunt had been the victim of this infamous serial killer all the way back in 1969. So then, kind of as that sure to be best seller is getting ready to come to come out, when in November of 2004, Nelson received a call from her mother who told her that the case had been reopened after 35 years that a new suspect had been arrested. And that they were going to send that person to trial because some DNA had been both found and tested and matched. So some resolution to this case, well, over the months that followed, Nelson found herself attending the trial with her mother, and reflecting on the ways that this murderer hung over her, her family and her entire childhood. That trial and those reflections became this memoir, which is in prose, called the red parts, prose much better in prose. Much better for this reader, at least. So I found this book you had recommended to me and I had shelved it in my head, but I ran across it and purchased it. When we were in the UK. I was like, Oh, this is the one that that Roxanna had recommended. And the shelf talker called it a literary work of true crime. And that's all I needed to hear. And there's absolutely no question that this book is that it is a literary work of true crime. And really, honestly, unlike any other work of true crime that I've ever read, it's about a cold case,

as I said, that assault 35 years later, and I will tell you right up front, that we know who the killer is. And we know from the beginning that we get justice, that the family gets justice, I know these things were important to us. But other than those things, that's really the only part of the the parts of the book that worked for me, there was a lot about it, that did not work for me. And I will be honest with you and let you know that I almost didn't bring it to the show, because I thought who needs to hear me talk about a book that I didn't really enjoy. But as I was leaving a message for you, Roxanna, as we do all the time about whatever we're reading, I heard myself say exactly that, like, who needs to hear me talk about a book I didn't enjoy? And then I thought, Well, no, actually, there are a lot of people who might hear me talk about what I don't like and hear the decisive, very singular work of true crime. And this might be the rare True Crime book that would work for those readers. So it's incredibly well written, and it is impactful, and it is something different in the true crime genre. But what I didn't like is this, I didn't like the fact that the author Maggie Nelson seemed clearly to me more interested in having her writing read by people than by writing a book that was actually interesting. This book is a genre mashup, because it is equally true crime story of trial, but also equally, very much a memoir. And you feel that all the way through. For me when I read to crime, I don't want to read a memoir unless we're talking about one of my favorite books of all time, *The Fact of a Body*. Usually, I'm not interested in a lot of thoughts and feelings on the author's part in the way that Maggie Nelson weaves together the story of her aunt's murder and the way that her family dealt with the grief of it, and her own kind of life and career for me, it was really mish mushy and kept taking me out of her aunt Jane's story. But I think that what Maggie Nelson really wanted was what she mentioned at the very start, which is that she wrote for five years, a book of poems about her aunt Jane, that feels right. To me. Everything about the writing here feels like someone who is very interested in their voice and in very literary writing, and very much wants everyone to read it. And they want them to know that they have an MFA in fine arts. And they want them to know that they have this very high pedigree and that they would love to win an award. That's how this entire book felt to me. And that's just the kind of literary pomposity that takes me out of a story, whether it's fiction or nonfiction, but I can totally see this book working for a lot of people for exactly those reasons, because it is not super focused on the crime itself or the perpetrator of the crime. It's not even so much concerned with the victim of the crime, although certainly, Aunt Jane herself is treated very well here. It's much more of a story of a family that has grappled with this for 35 years and happened to have a member of that family who absolutely loves to write in a literary fashion. So I do think that there's value to this book, and I want more than anything for it to find its perfect reader. That just wasn't this reader. This is *The Red Parts* by Maggie Nelson.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 19:54

Okay, so Meredith, let me ask you a couple questions about that. So it sounds like this book had an experimental style that didn't work for you? Well, actually, that's my question. Was it the experimental style that didn't work for you? Or was it the tone of kind of look at me Look at me. And my writing. That didn't work.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:13

Yes, both of those things. And it was also that, and again, I don't know that this is a fair, I don't know that it's a fair thing for me to say. But I found myself disliking the author so much, that it got in the way of the story that she was trying to tell. Like she she said, I'm going to write about, like, a murder and my aunt and how it affected my family, but the entire thing was just about her. And it just felt so. So that

piece got into the gut in the way. Primarily, I just, I read it quickly, because I just wanted to be I wanted her voice out of my head, because I just didn't enjoy the author. And it was it was very much a memoir, in addition to be in the story of this trial.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 21:00

Yes, I remember your your message on this book. And you read me I think the beginning, or you were quoting the beginning of the chapters, and I remember it sounding to me, at least, you know, it sounded pretentious and sort of self, maybe not self aggrandizing. But kind of self aware.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:17

Yes, write like self aware. It's what I always call it. And this is probably terrible. This is just my own shorthand, not based on any real knowledge, but I always think of it as being MFA writing it that seems like that, like people who are like, I'm a writer. You know what I mean? Yes, like very, you know, so that got in the way of it for me, but I think for a lot of people who are like, I would never normally tread touch true crime. This might be an excellent fit for them. I could see that. Okay, so I wanted to bring it for that reason. All right. What's your name? What's your next one? So

Roxanna Kassam Kara 21:52

my second book today is Burning Roses by S.L Huang. So Meredith, you know, I love books about friendships between women late in life. But this novella takes it to the next level. The main characters are fairy tale heroines, Red Riding Hood, and who ye who is the hero of a well known Chinese myth. These women are in late middle age reflecting on the mistakes of their past. In the beginning of the story, they are pulled into a quest to fight the Firebirds, which are these huge infernal creatures that destroy the Land and everything on it along their quest, they are forced to reckon with what they are really running from, which is their past mistakes, and the losses they suffered for them. As who you says, Now we are just two old women, old women who have hurt their children. So I'll say this about the story upfront, it's not for everybody, it puts you slightly off kilter, and you feel like you're always trying to keep up. And there are some novellas that are like that, you know, this has a very Piranesi like quality to it. And that it's very confusing at first, throwing names and snippets of past events at you in a jumble that it's hard to understand and that can put people off, but you just need to go with it. This story is like a puzzle that slowly comes together. Each chapter reveals a puzzle piece that helps put together the bigger picture. As Rosa, as Red Riding Hood is called as Rosa and who you traveled together on their quest. They are sharing stories of their pasts, and these stories help the reader understand the characters actions. Even up until the very end, you're given information that makes certain conversations in the beginning, make more sense. So there's a lot in this novella, you know, from Rosa Red Riding Hood, to huggy, to the sentient animals, to other fairy tales, like Goldilocks and beauty in the beasts that are woven in. It's a really interesting mashup. And I loved that about it. It was a lot, but it worked for me. While this book is filled with adventure, at its core, it's about two women reckoning with their pasts in calling each other out to face hard truths. They recognize each other's faults, but they also encourage and push each other, to live into their lives and have courage. It's an adventure for sure. But it's also an introspective story of two women reconciling with their mistakes, accepting themselves and giving themselves the respect they deserve. It's one of the most unique fairytale mashups I've ever read. And I'm for sure going to read more by this author. That's Burning Roses by Sal Huang. I love the idea of the story. And yes, for me, one of the things is I was thinking for our deep dive today I was

thinking about some of the sweetest spots for me that I'm wanting to read more of, and I just love female friendship stories, especially ones where the friendship comes together in mid or later in life instead of like, we were childhood friends, you know, because that's a different dynamic, but But yes, this one sounds really an interesting way to get to some of those issues, using fables or fairy tales to get you there. Yeah, it really is. You know, it took a bit for me to find my footing but just the way SL Huang has done it, like what would happen to Red Riding Hood if she saw her grandma killed by Wolf, like who would that turn her into? And what kind of choices would she make? And then when she was an old woman, what would she regret about that? It's just interesting to think about some of that. And, you know, I just found it really fascinating. Sometimes I'd love these novellas because they are really experimental, they do throw a lot together, they mash up a lot together. And I find that really just they're just very different from anything else I read. So I found it really, really interesting. Well, I'm

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:33

going to go a little bit in the fairytale direction to with this new one, but this is going to be its next one, but this is going to be very, very different because I read a book that I this is why we don't choose books based on how pretty their covers are.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 25:48

Sometimes we do and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Well, what's the

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:52

big fat bummer is that the cover? It must have been a UK cover because the one that is currently available in the US is nowhere near as pretty as the UK cover that I actually read. But anyway, this story is the same inside this book is Once Upon A Broken Heart by Stephanie Garber. Here's the setup. Evangeline Fox is young and in love. And I mean like L O V E love Roxanna But everything crumbles when she learns that the love of her life is going to marry another woman. So what could she possibly do? So she's desperate to stop the wedding and to heal her wounded heart. And so she because this is the smartest thing to do. She strikes a deal with the charismatic, predictably wicked Prince of hearts. And in exchange for his help, he asks for three kisses to be given at the time and place of his choosing. But after Evangeline's first promised kiss, She learns quick that bargaining with an immortal is a dangerous game, and that the prince of hearts wants far more from her than she pledged. All right. I started this book on a whim. If Stephanie Garber's name sounds familiar to you. It's because she wrote the Juggernaut series that starts with the book Caraval I haven't read that one. So this was my first novel by this author. I've had this book on my list for a while it's been recommended to me by a few bookish friends who know my love fairy tale retellings. And as far as I know, this is not a retelling of a specific fairy tale, but more of a book that puts you in the feeling of a fairy tale. And it absolutely does that. There are magic potions and enchanted arches that unlocked doorways and storybook castles. There are evil villains, and handsome princes. There are great families who are full of magic and peasant families who are full of love all of the great makings of a fairy tale. And I really liked it for those elements. I read this after having read a really dark memoir, the last one we talked about. And so it was the perfect ping pong book, but in and I called it a palate cleanser. And it really is that that's the best way to look at this book. It reads young, I would say it skews young on the YA realm of things. The main character Evangeline is she sort of was all the way through bounced on a on a pinhead for me. Part of me thought she was charming and delightful and sweet. But then she was also young and

naive. And some of the phrases that the author uses when describing her inner monologues drove me absolutely crazy. Like she would describe things like this. "He looked like 1000 broken hearts." Okay, clearly not the writing that is best for me. I know myself, I shouldn't be in the inner monologue of a 16 year old who's in love and heartbroken. This is you know, this is clear reader know thyself, but it was able to look these things in favor of the sweet and fairly well paced story. I brought this to the show because although it was only three stars for me, it gets well over well over four stars on Goodreads over like 240,000 reviews. And a lot of people rave about it being one of their favorite novels. I can see this especially working for teenage girls who want something that has some romance and some longing and some yearning and all this fairy tale elements. But it's not open door. This would be perfect for that this is very chaste, there's no open door, anything happening here. I should also mention that this book ends on a cliffhanger and it goes straight into the second book, which is readily available now. So a little bit of sweet romance is never a bad thing. But this might have been a little bit too sweet for this reader. This is Once Upon a Broken Heart by Stephanie Garber perfect for your young ones who want something sweet. That's not spicy.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 30:11

Meredith, you left me a voice message about this. And when you read that line, he looked like he had a face that broke 1000 hearts. I literally stopped where I was walking and just laughed out loud, because it was so preposterous to me. But to your point, like to me that would stop me dead, like I couldn't read on. But I could see a lot of readers who wouldn't be you know, just like say, Well, yeah, this is why writing that's the point and would keep going and really love the story. So it really is a case of reader know thyself. Oh, just

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:40

like the boy that I'm with. Looks like 1000 broken.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 30:46

When I read that at 16, I would have been like, oh my god she sees inside.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:50

Me. Exactly. And there's nothing and that is wonderful. And that's exactly why I wanted to bring it to the show. Because although Meredith at 50 It wasn't the right fit for. Meredith at 16 would have been absolutely all in and there that is as important as Meredith at 50 Having a book that works for her right. So I yeah, I wanted to bring up that. And also because the UK cover is it's really, really gorgeous. I gotta say, Oh, I have to look that up. All right. What's your last one?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 31:19

Well, for my last book today, I'm talking about In the Shadow of the Mountain by Sylvia Vasquez-Lavodo. Mer, did you ever discover a book that has been on your TBR for ages? And when you read it, you think, Oh, my God, like this gem has been under my nose the whole time? Why didn't I read this sooner?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:37

I love it. That's one of my favorite things. Me too. And that's

Roxanna Kassam Kara 31:41

exactly how I felt about this incredible memoir. It was a five star read for me and it will be one of my favorite books of the year. So I would describe this book as a cross between Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer and Finding Me by Viola Davis. So here's the setup. This is a story of the first Peruvian woman in history to climb Mount Everest. This story starts just exactly how you think it would. It focuses on Vasquez Lovado's grueling and dangerous journey to scale Everest full of life threatening encounters such as crossing flimsy rope bridges, getting caught in treacherous snowstorms and almost falling into icy crevices. This is my happy place. Meredith. I love a good Everest memoir.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:24

You love a good icy crevasse.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 32:26

I love a good icy crevasse, especially when I'm eating my apple crumble and have my coffee beside me. I will read about other people falling into the depths of their you know their death, no problem. But what I really loved about this book is that intertwined with that current day story of Everest is the second narrative where Vasquez Lovado tells her own story about what got her to Everest in flashbacks to her childhood and young adulthood. So, Sylvia Vasquez Lovado grew up in a wealthy suburb of Lima with a loving mother, and a powerful but tyrannical father. Sadly, her childhood is turned upside down due to sexual and physical abuse. Trauma, she bears the scars of well into adulthood, which leads to a long span of self destructive behavior. She leaves Lima for college in the US and ends up in early 2000s Silicon Valley, making a name for herself in the .com. Boom, but she's still fighting her demons. succumbing to alcoholism, sex addiction, and shame over her recently recognized homosexuality, she finds refuge in the harshness of mountain climbing, and decides to conquer her demons by climbing Mount Everest. Not only that, she decides to take a small group of women on the journey to base camp with her women who are survivors of sexual trafficking. This story sounds like a lot, but it's beautifully told. The book starts with a critical point in the climb to Everest, which sucked me right in. So as I said, she alternates the Mount Everest journey with the second timeline into her own past, solely revealing to the reader what is brought her to the point of climbing Everest. I thought I wouldn't like this because really, when I'm reading an Everest book, I'm reading an Everest book. I don't I know I you know me, I don't love trauma memoirs. I thought I'd be like, Well, yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah. Like, like, let's get back to the point. Let's get to the past, you know, but actually, it was structured so well, and every page was so compelling, that I never felt when I got to the next chapter, oh, no, I wish I was back in Everest. It was just so well told. And it never at any point felt disjointed. You know, it's just flowed really well. And having that insight into her past really helped you identify, you know why she wanted to do this climb to Everest. So, as you can imagine, this story is filled with trigger warnings about very hard things, and that time graphic depictions of sexual and physical abuse. As I said, it's not the kind of memoir I usually read, but I found it really valuable to go deep with Vasquez Lovado and it really helped bring dimension into the story. I hadn't thought before about how sexist and patriarchal mountain climbing can be. And Vasquez Lovado's struggles and really shine a light on that. This was an incredible story well told. And frankly, I'm shocked that it was not on every bestseller list baskets, Lovado herself has now climbed the seven summits, which are the seventh highest peaks in the world. And I think this is a book that

deserves a lot more recognition and buzz, not just for her accomplishments, but for a really incredible story well told, that was *In the Shadow of the Mountain* by Sylvia Vasquez Lovado.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:34

I love that kind of memoir, where it's some adventure, some high stakes, something that they're trying to accomplish, but then also all of the backstory, you know, when that can be done in a way that you want to read all of that, that is so enjoyable. I love it. I hope more people will pick this up. I

Roxanna Kassam Kara 35:50

hope so, too. It was it's one of the best Everest adventure memoirs that I've ever read. So, even if you're just thinking about it, read that first chapter and you will be sucked in my friends.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:01

I love it. I love it. All right. Well, the first two books that I brought to my current reads were books that I thought would work for me, but didn't this was a book that I wasn't sure was going to work for me and boy did it. So today's theme is upsetting expectations in your reading, right? This is a fantastic five star book called *Better the Blood* by Michael Bennett. Here's the setup. This novel is a police procedural set in New Zealand and focusing on Hunter Westerman and Maori detective who is a single mom, a brilliant cop, and a woman working hard to rise to the ranks of the Auckland Police Department. As we start our story Hunter receives a cryptic video and from that, she discovers a man ritualistically hanging in a secret room. And there's a strange symbol, an inward curving design that she's never seen before that's discovered at that crime scene. Soon a second seemingly unrelated crime is discovered. But that same symbol is found by Hannah again. And other clues have her finding a connection between those two crimes in the present day. And horrible crime that took place on Maori land 160 years before. Now, other blurbs go a lot further into telling you what happens in this story and they give away way too much. Suffice it to say we have a ritualistic serial killer on the loose and Hana with her experience and her cultural heritage is the best person to stop that person. All right, I heard about this book from Elizabeth Barnhill on all things murdererful several months ago. And then recently, but so there was something about when I and this is a terrible thing about me. But sometimes when I hear the word like tribal lands, my brain just kind of like gets fuzzy. And I don't know what that is. But I'm so glad that at my reading retreat, Betsie brought this up and she was like, I really honestly don't know why you haven't read this yet. It was on Fabled best to the rest list. And it is so good. You need to read it. So I was like, You know what have it. I'm picking it up right now. And it was so so good. I'm so glad I did. This is just a stunningly well written mystery. It's one of those books that hits on every level. The sentence level writing is fantastic. The characters are really well done and deeply fashioned by the author. I'm especially impressed to the author Michael Bennett can write the hunter Westerman character. So well, we all know that a lot of men don't write female characters very well, he does. And you know, you knew that I was gonna say it. Pacing. This book gets the pacing, right. It took me about 35 pages to get into it. But once I was into it, I was absolutely sucked in those first 35 pages aren't bad or boring or a slog or confusing. I just wasn't gripped like I was when I got to the 35 page mark. So I think that's useful to know, give it a little bit of time. But as I said, once that happened, I was absolutely in and I kept reading and reading in every spare moment until I came to the very, very memorable and well done ending. This book centers on a gruesome set of serial killings. So I'm already in right. But what makes it really excellent is that this book is so much more than a serial killer book. The villain in this story is one of

those villains that we can talk about where he's doing awful things, but you find yourself really considering how someone might come to a place where they are doing these things. This book does a fantastic job of making us look at some very old and very fraught issues that the people of New Zealand and their minority tribes have dealt with for hundreds of years since As the English colonized it, and let me say that usually, as I said, those kinds of words and things in my mysteries kind of weigh things down for me, I have to be honest about that. That is why in this case, I am so impressed by how the story was handled, the author was really able to thread the needle between dealing with important and nuanced issues, and also keeping the story moving from page to page. And add to that you very much care about multiple characters on the police side of things. So overall, this was just a fantastic read for me, and I'm so glad I took the time to read it, it was richly rewarding. This is called Better the Blood by Michael Bennett.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 40:43

That does sound fascinating, not for me. But I love that that that that piece worked for you that you weren't sure that it would, but that the story pulled you through.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:53

I mean, in fact, it was that piece, the history piece, the indigenous tribes, the indigenous peoples piece that actually made the story for me, it was really that piece that I came away going, I learned so much. I was so fascinated and horrified by that part of the history, which I knew nothing about. And it really, really, really made the story for me. I liked that book so much.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 41:15

Well, hopefully other murder full readers who would normally shy away from it will pick it up after that. All right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:20

So those are our current reads. So let's talk a little bit about an idea that you had actually Roxanna for us to talk about our deep dive, something that we've been thinking about and talking about a lot together, just as Reading Partners, which is both our reading, changing the books we were choosing and enjoying changing, and how in some ways that's happening very organically and naturally. Again, there are just seasons in your reading. But also in some ways there are, there are ways that we have made some really intentional choices to get us to that place. So let's talk a little bit for you. What are where are the biggest places that you're seeing these changes for your in your reading?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 42:05

Okay, so yes, I think this really started for me after 2022. So that was the first year I had put on my books into the reading tracker. And I realized that a lot of books weren't working for me. And when I looked back at the reading tracker, it was my favorite genres mystery and romance, what that I had read a lot of that just weren't working for me the way they had been. And I think it's because it was a hard year. So I was kind of going back to my favorites. And I had just read too many of them. So I thought, Okay, I need to just change this up, I just need to kind of put a little bit more oomph into my reading life. And I had read that you're in 2022, a few sparkling novellas here in there that I really felt like wow, like, these are really fresh, and they really woke up my reading. So I decided to do more of

that. So I could appreciate new genres, and also bring some sparkle and freshness back to my forever favorite genres. So I decided I would read more fantasy and sci fi and less romance and mystery. So I didn't, I'm making it sound like it was very well thought out. Like I had a big reading plan. I didn't. But just as the year was going on, I thought, Okay, I'm gonna pick up less romance and mystery. And let me see some of these books work. Let me see if I can pick up, you know, little bits of this. Now, I wanted to make sure I was still reading good books that I enjoyed. And I think that for both of us, Meredith, you know, some, I think people might get scared about expanding too much, because then they don't want to be reading, you know, three year, three and a half star books, when they know they're trying to genres will give them, you know, books that they're satisfied with. But that's why I decided, okay, well, I still want to read books that I love. So I'm going to start with novellas, as they said, because I could dip in quickly, and the dip out if it didn't work. And then I started kind of listening for some sort of keywords in podcasts and stuff for books that I thought it would work. So what about you, Meredith? How did you have you? Did you think sort of deliberately about stretching your reading? Or how did that journey happened for you? Well, I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:01

think some of it has happened, just kind of over the course of time. And I've changed as a person a lot in the last six years that we've been doing the podcast, I really have felt my own self change. And so some of the things that appealed to me I'm finding are a little less appealing and some things that before I really would have assumed I'm feeling really drawn to. And I think we all go through that in different I mean, we talk a lot about how your reading life has seasons. So I think part of it is that I agreed with myself with my own self that I was going to lean into the season of my reading. Now why is that a big deal? It's a big I think a lot of us become we start to have an identity as a reader. And so we think but you know, but I'm really into mysteries and thrillers. That's my thing. When you add to that being a podcaster, who is known for being really into mysteries and thrillers, who has a show based on that? Then you you kind of We have a lot of pressure. And so there was a part of me that was like, but what if? What if I start reading some more literary things or some things that are a little bit slower or way backlist or just not necessarily in the mystery and thriller genre? What if I start doing that and people are like, I don't really like your stuff anymore, because you're not reading what? So there was some of that that was going on for me. But I just decided in my own self that I needed to lean into reading what was appealing to me. And just hoped that by building like a long cannon, people can go back to early episodes and hear a lot more about thrillers. And they can listen now and hear more literary more sci fi, like I talked about last week on the show, I'm, I think another really big thing for me has been a change in my reading life occurred back when you and I as you and I got to be really good friends and started to be reading partners, because you have not only our reading together that might be kind of the place where I felt this change happening is because we've undertaken books together that I wouldn't have undertaken on my own. Yes. And that opened up a world of like, okay, wait, I can stick with a 900 page, Russian family drama, and really get so much out of it. And so that really opened up my eyes. And then, you know, I was talking last week my wish was, I want everyone to get themselves a reading partner. And also do some buddy reads with someone who can shepherd you through a new genre, like I'm doing this buddy read of this high fantasy novel. I've always wanted to read, quote, unquote, high fantasy, but I never really had the courage to do it on my own. And so finding someone who reads a lot in that genre, the Largent has really just, it's opened up a whole new genre for me. So I think for me, a big part of it has been not just opening my life to Bookstagram, which is,

which is a big deal and just kind of opening up to a lot of different kinds of follows. But also engaging in deeper bookish friendships that you where you can really discuss how those books are landing, and then having someone get to know your taste. And like I never would have read Rosemund, Pilcher, except for the fact that you said, you know, I really, really think that you would love The Shell seekers. And I was like what? Written in the 80s, my mom had the ugly mass media paperback, you're like, No, trust me. And it's one of my favorite books of all time. And so being open to deepening those bookish friendships so that then we can be open to books that are totally new and open us up to new kinds of reading. That's been a really big deal. For me. That's that's made a lot of changes in my reading life.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 47:54

Uh, yeah, I would agree with that. I think buddy reading with you. We have tackled things that I wouldn't have stuck with, frankly, on my own, but I was so glad to share them with you. And some of them. It's been interesting, right? Like, like City of Brass, for example, I loved it and read the rest of the series, you were like, okay, like that one was good. I'm not going to read any more like some have been hits from me, and some have been hits for you. But I don't think we've ever regretted a single book we've read, because we learn so much talking back and forth to each other about them. And that for sure, to me has been the richest part of expanding my reading life. And the other thing I'll say for you, you know, I'll say yes, you were afraid, not afraid, but nervous about changing your reading, because people knew you for your mysteries and thrillers. But I do remember you saying? Well, I'm finding three star thrillers and I don't want to bring three star thrillers to the show. Because that's not good for listeners. I want to bring consistently good books. And yeah, they might be thrillers. They might be mysteries when there's great ones. But I'll also bring great books from other genres. And I think that to you was more important finding great books, versus sticking in a genre where maybe you weren't finding as many hits as you had in the past,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:03

right? I mean, absolutely. When I think about it, now, I'm almost never picking up what I would call a threat. I mean, not never. But it's rare that I pick up what I would call an American thriller. And part of that is because I mean, the reason for that is they just haven't been bringing me any joy. It just has been has been really empty, which doesn't mean that they're not good. It just means in the season I'm in right now I need to say, hey, try something different. That's not bringing you joy. But what I have found is mystery still very much work for me, and then expanding by starting to travel in a way that I haven't traveled in the earlier parts of my life. I have found a lot of books from other countries, like I had no idea that Japanese mysteries, were going to be such a huge fit for me not like I've traveled to Japan. But what is actually something that you introduced to me was The Devotion of Suspect X. And then I've read several since then, including one I read recently that I said, you just absolutely have to read, because that is a whole part of the genre that is still very fresh and new and interesting to me in this season of life. So I'm okay. With these changes. I also have been reading a little, you know, I've been drawn to some more literary kinds of reading. Yeah. And then there's one more thing, and this is kind of a new, fresh thought for me, that is forming in my head right now. And I have a feeling you will be seeing it over the next year or two years in my reading. But I heard Sarah Hildreth was on Laura remains Ten Things To Tell You and Sarah Hildreth from @fictionmatters. And she is known for having a very literate having very literary tastes. She has a lot of background and education in academia, in teaching English, she's very, very well, she has a lot of ability to talk about classics and high literary in a

way that I don't. And I really appreciate a lot of what she's doing. But she said something in this episode that has just stuck with me, and I can't stop thinking about it. And she said, you know that she was talking about how on Instagram there was this, her for her frustration had been that she was seeing a lot of people say, you know, well, I read this book, and it wasn't what I wanted it to be, which is something that I that I've said, and she admits something that she said too, but she was seeing it a lot. And so what she thought to herself was, maybe instead of thinking was this book, what I wanted it to be, maybe in some cases, you want to think about the book in terms of did the author accomplish what the author set out to accomplish in this book. So the idea is taking a more critical lens, to your reading, as opposed to just reading for escape or enjoyment. Now, I am always going to need a mix of those things. The way that I made up, it's been like this since I was a child, I read for escape, I read for entertainment, that's always going to be true, but I'm feeling like I'm carving out some place. And I've done some of that over the last couple of years years, especially reading that you and I have done, where we talk about books in a more critical way. And we talk about it less in terms of did I like this and more in terms of what did I think about this? Or what are we thinking about this. And that is something that I'm realizing from looking at my reading tracker, that when I do that I might not love the book, but the experience is very enriching to me. And that doesn't need to be true of everyone at every season of their reading life. Again, when I was a, you know, 30 year old mom of three young kids, there is no way that I was thinking, Oh, what's the next Booker Prize long list for me? No, give me a cozy mystery. That's all I can handle. But now in this season with this is what I'm thinking about. What do you How does this How does this strike you, me saying this about my own reading? Are you going to be bored if all of a sudden I'm like, Oh, let me talk about this book that I didn't like, but I have all these thoughts about it?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 53:11

No, not at all. In fact, I think I'm traditionally honestly a bit scared of, of literary fiction. And I think just because it's so unpredictable, predictable. It's not genre fiction. You don't, it's not going to deliver, you don't know what it's going to deliver. But reading it with you helps me enjoy the process, and not necessarily the outcome. I mean, and I might love the outcome, but I don't have to. So for example, we read Covenant of Water, which everybody loved. But honestly, I probably wouldn't have tried it on my own just because of the intimidating length of that book. And Yellowface is another one that I was like, this is just not for me. Hateful character. satire. No, thank you. Yep. But the discussions we had around those books, Meredith, like they ended up being some of my favorites of the year. And even if they hadn't, the discussions alone, would have been worth those books. For me, we just delved into such deep issues. And I do think reading those on my own, I don't not sure I would have changed as much as a reader. Because the fun of those is discussing, you know, discussing what the author is trying to do just exactly what you said, how it's hitting for us what it's bringing up, and that's really helped change my reading. I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:23

think that cobbler and chronicles needs to be a new podcast from the two of us where we cobbler and talk about high literary and break it all down.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 54:32

I am so in for that. I will, I will like airlift you the crumble and we can do that because I just I really do enjoy the books that we read together that way. It's like It's like all the things I loved about English class with none of this stuff. I hate it. You know, I'm not sitting there doing chapter summaries and reading books we hate but all the things I've wanted to talk about and really dive deep into it. And, you know, this is the thing share things that I wouldn't necessarily share with other people about. Do you really think that how did this character act and this is how it feels, and I'm not sure about, you know, this race relations thing I don't know about this part. Like to have really frank discussions around some of that stuff, just makes the books come alive. And that's been so so rewarding, like if I was sticking with, I mean, I still love my romances, and I still love my mysteries. But if I was just sticking with those, I wouldn't get that. And I do think that's part of it. Like, as I said, I love books with expectations. But once you read a lot of those, you expect a lot. And then when they don't deliver, even if they're good books, you're kind of like, well, not as good as that, you know, the last one I read, not as good as this one I read. Whereas going into literary fiction, or other genres that I don't read, like, just like this Burning Roses book, you know why I liked it, because I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what it was going. And I had no expectations of that genre. So to me, it was really interesting, because it was doing very different things. And so I I also like expanding the genres I'm reading. Because of that, if I have no expectations, I find that I enjoy things more.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:09

Right expectations, so often are the killer of joy in books. And one of the things that I've loved as a that you've been reading more science fiction, which is the genre that I love, and I always want to be reading more of, but part of the way that you've done that, which has been super helpful to me, too, I don't know why historically, I have shied away from novellas, I don't know if that I don't know where that came into my brain that novellas were somehow not worth my time. Because lately, it has been such a great way to get into genres that we don't normally read, or an author that I haven't read before. And just to clear your palate to move on to other things. So reading short, has been working really, really well. And then the other thing, of course, is just checking books out of the library profligately so that you can do big huge book flights and just with reckless abandon, right, where you can give yourself the ability to say I got 20 books out of the library. And maybe one of these is going to grab my intention. But I'm going to give myself the ability to find that one by reading the first few book first couple of pages, first couple of paragraphs first chapter, whatever you want to do. So those have been, I guess I can hear listeners kind of going like, well, you've talked about, you know that you've expanded, but how have you done it? I think reading short reading novellas, even short stories to get in, you know, reading some short story Compendium some collections of short stories by different authors that give you an idea of like, Hmm, this is actually an author that I want to read a lot more of. and a short story or novella is a great way to find that out. Yeah,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 57:57

I think so. And you know, if you would ask me pre 2022, the idea of a novella never crossed my mind. It just didn't, it didn't enter my consciousness. And if it had, I think my English students self would have been like, well, but that's not a real book. Like, why would I pick that it's not a real book. It's a novella. So I didn't, I don't know why, but it didn't cross my mind. But then, you know, one of the ways I've been getting into different books is reading is listening to podcasts, with hosts that have different reading

tastes than me. And sometimes, you know, they mentioned novellas. It was an old podcast I was listening to that doesn't exist anymore. But they mentioned novellas and I thought, well, that sounds interesting. And it seems short. And to your point, it was great to get into. The other thing I'll say to like, if you want to expand your reading genres, but you you want to make sure it's still a hit for you. I mean, you can never 100% Make sure, but one thing I found is make something unfamiliar with something familiar or interesting. So you know, when I read Djinn in Cairo, which was a novella I really loved, what attracted me to that is that at its heart, it was a murder mystery. Yes, it was in a fantastical, high fantasy Cairo with gins and ghosts, and you know, all over the place. But the story was actually quite linear. You know, there was a Dejan, and this inspector of supernatural mysteries or whatever, had to find out what happened. So I could follow that linear path, while still enjoying all the different newness and that was enough for me and great for me the beginning it seemed city of brass, right, it was, what I loved is that it was set in fantastical, 18th century Cairo, which is a time period in a culture I was interested in hadn't read anything about it. But it was about kind of royal palace politics, and I love that stuff. So you know, I could mix kind of something I really liked that I knew with something I didn't know and that really worked. On the other side. I remember I found that romps mostly do not work for me, no matter what genre they are. I had romp a romp yet does not work like me. Be occasionally a middle grade. But that's about it. So, you know, it doesn't matter if it is science fiction, if it is fantasy, if it's a romp, I'm probably not going to like it. So you know, that's another thing I learned. And I'm glad I learned that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:00:12

Yeah, knowing ourselves as we as readers, knowing what those words are, and leaning into what we're feeling drawn to as we change as humans, and I think is, is the absolute key to continuing to keep your reading light, fresh, for sure. All right. I'm so glad that we got a chance to talk about that. Let's talk about a couple of wishes at the fountain. What's your wish this week? Okay, so

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:00:36

my wish is actually just tied to the discussion we had. And I don't know maybe I'm the last person on Earth to know about this, and everybody else knows. But I wanted to make sure everybody knew about shepherd.com. So S H E P H. E rt.com. I heard about this website from the Strong Sense of Place podcast many months ago, and have been just using it like crazy ever since. It's basically a searchable database of book lists put together by over 10,000 authors on every topic imaginable. So if you search for stories about climbing Mount Everest, you will get authors from listing their five favorite books on exactly that topic. Or if you liked Thursday Murder Club, and you put that in, you'll get authors lists of five other books like this. So it's just these mini kind of five books that authors you know, contribute. For whatever topic, it has led me down such rabbit holes. And I've discovered so many good books I would never have heard of. Like today I was I found, you know, a list about books about fictional female astronomers. Wonderful. Of course, I'll dive into that. Books about what else do I look up today, cookbook authors that are now doing fiction, like just, you can look up anything you want, and you will get a list of five books, and guaranteed I have not heard of most of them. So if you're looking to expand your genres, it's a great way to go. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:02:00

this is really, really fantastic. There's a list for crime fiction books without profanity on page sex or gratuitous violence. I can see a lot of people being interested in that. Books for frazzled parents, books

about rock and roll, how bargaining with supernatural beings can ruin your whole day? That reminds me of one of my books I brought today. Yes. Okay. Well, there is no question that I have a major rabbit hole to dive into this weekend. This website is absolutely incredible.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:02:33

It's really great. And it started by just a guy who loves to start his own startups. He calls it a bootstrap passion project. He wanted to create a bookstore experience when you're not in a bookstore. So that's how he kind of got all these people to put together these book lists so you can kind of get that serendipitous feeling. It's really really great and I think just you know, go in and explore it. You will lose yourself for a few minutes to a few hours and it's so worth it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:03:01

Oh man, that is fantastic. Yes, I love that so so much. All right. Great. Well, my record my wish is that more people this has been top of mind for me because Johnny and I are watching the new version, the new series that is Shogun on Hulu Shogun, of course the book by James Cavell came out in 1986. So it's very very backlist. I pressed this into readers hands all the way back in episode 14 of season one, podcast. So this is a book that both Johnny he actually it was the first book early in our relationship that he loved that he said, Please read this book. And I was like, No, my parents had it in a mass market paperback. It was so good Shogun. The show is very, very good. It's very beautifully done. It's very good. The book is so much better. It is absolutely fantastic. It is the story of an English. They call him an English pilot, but it's he's a he is a ship pilot. So it's not a pilot pilot, but that's what they call that's what they call it whose ship is blown ashore in Japan. And this is back in 16 the year 1600s. So these people had never seen Japanese people before and vice versa. And then his name John blackthorn, and then he meets up with two people who will change his life a warlord with his own quest for power, one of the best villains of all time, and a beautiful woman who he falls in love with. This is a love story. It's a family drama. It's got political machinations. All in this incredible backdrop of historical Japan. It is absolutely fantastic. And I wish that more people would say would not be intimidated by its length because it is a little bit lengthy. The pages fly this is Shogun by James Clavell, and I just couldn't recommend it any higher.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:04:57

You know, I I think I would have said exactly what you said, Meredith. Like, I remember seeing this in the 80s and some mass market paperback, I would never pick this up. But I actually had no idea what the story was about. And now you've got me interested in it. Yeah, it's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:05:10

an adventure. It's a love story. I mean, as far as vibes, it makes sense that I would love this with how much I love The Count of Monte Cristo. It's got a lot of that same kind of like, just so much in one story, and it's just so memorable and visual. And this you know, I will definitely say, you know, if it makes you feel better, I think you could watch the show, and then get into the book because that might help you visually get into it. But I when I read it, I didn't have any trouble getting the visuals. John buckthorn is a snack. For sure. So, alright, that's 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. And Kaytee is at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:05:55

And you can find me Roxanna at @Roxannathereader on Instagram full

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:05:59

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

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:06:09

Our website also includes links to all the ways you can support the show like our Patreon, you can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:06:21

if you really want to help us, you can join us on Patreon. It's a bookish friend. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts, and shout us out on social media. Each of those things makes a huge difference in our finding our perfect audience.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:06:35

We love to see our bookish friends and grow our bookish community. Thank you so much for that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:06:39

Until next week, may your coffee be hot,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:06:42

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:06:44

Happy reading Roxanna,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:06:45

happy reading Meredith