



Season 6, Episode 6: Settling In + Houses as Characters

Mon, Sep 11, 2023 • 50:48

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chitchat heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today we'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday, Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And sometimes my tastes scare even me.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona, and I am so excited to hug Meredith tomorrow. This is episode number six of season six and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:53

Oh, yeah, we are getting excited for this weekend this weekend. Like a holiday.

Kaytee Cobb 00:58

It really is like it's a literal holiday. But it's also a Popcast live weekend. And we get to meet up with each other, do some book shopping, hang out with some of our favorite people. I'm just thrilled beyond belief that I get to see you tomorrow

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:12

is going to be so much fun. And I finally get to meet some other people in in person that I haven't met before. So yeah, it's gonna be really, really fun.

Kaytee Cobb 01:20

So great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:21

All right, so let's let you drive because it is an even episode Kaytee. Go for it

Kaytee Cobb 01:28

I'm going to drive this episode. And before we get all the way into the good stuff, I have a little mischief to manage. We are in our brand new house, Meredith, as you know, and that means I'm in a new place. I'm trying to figure out a good recording space. And so if there's a little weird noise this week, or it sounds a little different than you're used to, it's because it's a work in progress. And I just wanted to note that here at the top of the show, you guys know we love making sure our audio quality is top notch every time so it will continue to be a work in progress until it's exactly as good as we want it. That's managed. Now let's talk about our deep dive today, which is books where the house is a character and this was an idea from Roxanna, our wonderful show regular here at Currently Reading and we got so excited about it. We just had to jump on it right away.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:12

Yes, we did it just perfectly slotted in it's the perfect time of year to talk about this topic. A lot of spooky books lend themselves here. So yes, perfect topic.

Kaytee Cobb 02:23

Definitely. All right. Let's get started the way we usually do. Meredith, what is your bookish moment this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:29

Okay, Kaytee, this week, I got Oh, I saw online Holly Farrell, who's at @BirdBrainbooks. She did a story. She's one of my favorite follows. She did a story about a little book that she had happened upon. And as soon as I saw it, I messaged her saying, Well, I am buying that book immediately. And it arrived very quickly. And it is, I think my favorite book of all time. It is a little tiny children's book. But is it a children's book? I don't know. It's called The Gashlycrumb Tinies and it's by the Uber illustrator Edward Gorey. Where has Edward Gorey been all my life? The only thing I knew was that he does the PBS Mystery Show the series that they have, at the very beginning. They have like this little beginning portion and it's his artwork that is a part of that. So if you watch PBS mystery, you're going to know what I'm talking about. The Gashlycrumb Tinies is a small, like 64 Page illustrated picture book. And it is all black and white sketches. And it's an alphabet book. So okay, you know, and so of course I needed it immediately. And so I'm just going to tell you a little bit I'm just going to read you the first little bit of it but me reading it really means very little you have to see it. So we will include some pictures of this. A is for Amy who fell down the stairs, and this poor little girl in a little tiny She's little child in a little white nightgown, She's falling down the stairs. Kaytee it's very sad.

Kaytee Cobb 04:08

Oh no poor Amy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:11

B is for Basil assaulted by bears are. C is for Clara who wasted away and D is for Desmond thrown out of a sleigh. It goes on all the way through. It is my favorite picture book of all time. If you don't think I'm

going to read this to my grandchildren, then you do not know me very well. Because they will be introduced to the macabre just like their girlfriend Amy. Yes. Yeah, exactly. So I took this to get together I was going to and I'm forced everybody to read. I mean, it's the best book of all time the Gashlycrumb Tinies by Edward Gorey,

Kaytee Cobb 04:53

So cute. I know people like it when we recommend a picture book and I feel like this is just the perfect combination of Meredith murderful And Meredith Mimi in one recommendation,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:06

Murderful Mimi, my grandsons are going to be very comfortable with that. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 05:11

Perfect. Okay, Meredith, you already know what my bookish moment is this week because I sent you pictures. My parents came over during the moving in phase of this week in our new house, and they put up my custom bookshelves for me while I tackled the kitchen. The bookshelves are featured in a prominent place in our family room. Even when we were house hunting, I would go and like measure walls with my wingspan to make sure that there was a wall long enough to fit 10 foot long bookshelves on it. And that would that went into my spreadsheet about whether or not this house would be functional for us as a family. Sure course we found when so they're in our family room. I get to commune with them every night when we sit down and watch movies together as a family. They're right there next to like the Big Family TV, the big family couch, which I love. There are also ceiling spotlights that we've rotated. They used to shine on the fireplace. No, no. Now they are spotlights for bookshelves. So we've rotated them around so they can highlight the bookshelves. When I turn them on at night, which I'm a little ridiculously excited about. And yesterday morning, I put all my books back up there. Every time I opened a new box of either my keeper books or my TBR books, I smiled from ear to ear, my face cramped up. And now our house is really starting to feel like a home. And it's because my books are back with me. My friends are here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:30

Absolutely. There is nothing like a wall of books that you have curated exactly for yourself. It's the most friendly library in the world. And it really does make house feel like a home.

Kaytee Cobb 06:41

It truly does. I'm so excited to have them here. And it's brightened up the space. It's made up and I got rid of a lot of boxes when I opened up all those boxes, which was also very exciting.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:52

Good. Well, yes, moving is a heavy heavy lift. And I'm so glad that you guys are now ensconced in your new home. You're really beginning to set your routines and I think I'm so excited for this new adventure that you guys are gonna have.

Kaytee Cobb 07:05

It's a big one. It's still a hot one also, but we're making do let's get into some books though, shall we? What's your first current read this week Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:14

Okay, my first read this week, I'm bringing three books that... we're in September. Now we are going into spooky reading season, which for me begins in September and goes all the way through Well, really, it's 12 months of the year for me, but it's especially leaning into it September, October, November. So I brought three books today that can kind of begin to get you into that mindset. The first one that we're going to talk about is true crime. And it is a book called *Down the Hill* by Susan Hendricks. Here's the setup. On February 13 of 2017, Two teenage girls best friends 13 year old Abby Williams and 14 year old Libby German. They had the day off of school, and they decided to spend it exploring the popular hiking trails near the Monon High Bridge, which is just a few minutes drive from Libby's home in Delphi, Indiana. Libby's sister Kelsey dropped the two girls off at the head of the trail and waved to them as they walked down the path, which was the last time that they would ever be seen alive. Less than 24 hours later, their bodies were found on the north bank of Deer Creek about a mile from where they were last seen. There were very few clues and very little to go on, except for the visual and audio remnants of a strange encounter that the girls had had with a stranger just before their disappearance, and encounter which had been unsettling enough that Libby because she was a smart girl had thought to record it on her cell phone as it unfolded. It's from this recording that we get the title of the book, we hear the killer direct the girls down the hill. It's seriously chilling. In the years since the murders were first made public they have been called the Delphi Murders Libby's audio and video recordings have been released and different composite sketches of the suspect have been shown. But local law enforcement remained very, very close to the vest on their developments in the investigation for years. Until finally, five years after the murders. In October 2022, the suspect was arrested and a trial date was set. And more things have happened even since then. The book is written by CNN reporter Susan Hendricks, who was one of the first reporters to cover the case. A year after the murders. She went to Delphi to interview the victim's families and that as a result started a years long relationship with the families and with the police who worked so hard to get justice for Abby and Libby. Okay, usually after I finish the book, I immediately relay my thoughts into my notes, right. We've talked about this before, but in this case, I took a deep breath, wiped the tears from my eyes and needed a few hours to put my thoughts together. I was deeply affected by this true crime work the last time I felt this way was when I read the book called *The Fact of A Body*. I was so sad when I finished this book. And that's the way we're supposed to feel when we read true crime. Right? Often though, I don't feel much of anything I just kind of move on. But in this book, author Susan Hendricks does a fantastic job of centering the victims and their families. And I'm just going to admit, that is usually not something that I love, I am, for better or for worse, they're for the crime more interested in the details of the investigation than the messy truth of the families involved. And I know how horrible that sounds. It's not that I don't care about the victims. But my honest interest is often in how things get solved here, we get that to an extent, there is resolution in the book. And once you're finished, and I really recommend, wait till you're finished to Google things and get even more closure. So for those of us who hate an unresolved true crime case, you will be satisfied here. The author tracked the investigation, which again, as I said, lasted for five years very closely. And she had a lot of ins with law enforcement along the way. It's a long and winding road to be sure, and we get a full picture of the time and the extreme

effort and skill that was brought to bear on this case. But the real hat trick that Hendricks pulls off is the way she weaves in other elements she centers the victims and their families in heartrending but truthful ways, they really get to tell their story and the author herself doesn't shy away from how this case affected her personally, we also get segments on how social media and online sleuthing both helped and hindered the investigation, and how those things affected the family's experience of waiting for justice. One of the most interesting chapters I wanted to mention is a conversation that the author had with criminal analyst and retired police officer, Paul Holes, who you'll recognize from the Golden State killer case. He brought some really interesting insights into the case. And I was impressed by how Susan Hendricks weaved this into the narrative to such great effect. He explained in great detail some changes in technology that have vastly changed investigation techniques, even in the time between 2017 and 2023. In the middle, I'll say that she went away from a timeline oriented narrative, and she started jumping around in time, and that always throws me for a loop into crime. For some reason, I just want things to go in a really linear this happened. And then this happened sort of way. But it didn't keep me from being fascinated in my reading the whole time. By the end, I just felt impacted. I felt changed in my views of crimes like this and changed in the way I understand what might be going on behind the scenes in an investigation and how hard it must be for the police to keep things to themselves even when they are being torn up in the media and online communities. And it also really shows how hard it is for the families to wait for the justice they deserve. This book is a great example of the true crime genre the best I've read in a very long time. This is Down the Hill by Susan Hendricks

Kaytee Cobb 13:12

Sounds so good and moving, which is not always a combination that you hear with true crime.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:18

Yes, it's a very it's a I mean, it's a tough. It's a tough read because of how much you feel involved with the families which are the victims.

Kaytee Cobb 13:27

Yeah, that makes sense. Okay, my first one this week is a surprising book that I thought you and I were almost going to read together and then didn't it's Shark Heart by Emily Habeck. Yes. So it feels like this book is surprising people a lot all over the internet. And for good reason. The setup is bonkers, like all the way nuts. So the New York Times said about this book, "Shark Heart is wild in every sense of the word" and that is a perfect little summation of this review. Here's the setup. Lewis and Wren get married. And shortly thereafter Lewis is diagnosed with a rare but not unheard of condition. He is slowly turning into a great white shark. Their first year of marriage is also their last as his body starts to change and his instincts do as well. He's still Lewis most of the time, but he eats a heck of a lot of fish and his skin starts changing texture. It becomes more Sharky. Obviously, this alternate reality happens in a world where people occasionally turn into animals. It's not like Lewis is breaking new ground. He's not the only person this has ever happened to his condition has a name. When he says it out loud, people know what it means that kind of thing. But the change to a great white shark is pretty rare. There's people that turned into birds and Komodo dragons and all kinds of other things here but Lewis's students and co workers are struggling to deal with his changes and Wren his wife is attempting to deny what's right in front of her face. We just recently about a month ago now discussed my experiences with Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff when I started reading this one I messaged Meredith immediately to

tell her that I could see some similarities here as well. I also messaged my buddy reader for that book whose name is Mary Munkowitz to tell her that I needed her to start reading Shark Heart as soon as possible so we can discuss it like we did with Lauren Groff's book. She and I read it together. We talked about the twists and turns of the story and compare the two works all the way through. For those who have recently been enraptured by Tom Lake by Ann Patchett. Don't worry about what's coming up for me as well as I recently finished it. The connection to Our Town in both books was a delightful surprise. I love it when that happens when you read books close together, and you're like, huh, who knew that Our Town this play from 90 years ago would feature prominently within both of these novels? Basically, this beautiful book surprised me in every way. I found this scenario to be implausible, but still captivating. I found the characters to be likable, but really complex. I ended up giving this book between four and a half and five stars. And that was the most surprising part of all for me. It wasn't long, it definitely had flavors of Fates and Furies. But I think if somebody didn't like Fates and Furies, they would still really like Shark Heart. It wasn't obscure. It wasn't trying to be super something. It's not. It just was a beautiful love story. That was strange and lovely. And I loved it. And that shocked me. This was Shark Heart by Emily. Habeck.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:27

Well, the first thing that strikes me is that I totally forgot when I was doing my roundup of Down the Hill to mention that I had heard about that from Elizabeth Barnhill. And of course, she was the one who put this on all of our Shark Heart and all of our radar too. The other thing I want to say is I started Shark Heart got a little bit into it was absolutely loving it, but immediately realized that my mood was not the right mood. And i i So know that I'm gonna love it that I was like, oh, no, I want to save this. Because I don't want to even risk not reading it at the exact right time because I think it's going to be such a win. So that was a reason that I not right now that I NRN'd it.

Kaytee Cobb 17:04

Yeah, I do think that you're going to really love it at the right time. It has so many flavors of the books that surprise you in a good way. That I just think it's going to be a really good fit for you when it's the right fit for you. Does that make sense? Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:20

yeah, no, exactly. And the comparison to Fates and Furies just bowled me over because I never would have put those two books together. So I'm interested to read it kind of through that lens.

Kaytee Cobb 17:30

Yeah, yeah, it's definitely and of course, it's partially because I read them so close together. We had just had that long discussion about it on the podcast. And then I picked up part shopkart, probably three days after we recorded that conversation. So it was very fresh for me. And I was like, oh, oh, wait, what about oh my gosh, this is it was so fun for me. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:50

I love it when books are in conversation with each other. And then when you're reading it with another person who has that same context, it's definitely All right. Well, speaking of shared context, Kaytee there's no way you and I could have known that we were going to bring back to back books about men

that might also be an animal men who might also be an animal because I'm bringing The Crane Husband by Kelly Barnhill. Okay, why did this fit into my what will be months of telling you guys about spooky reading, because for a lot of people, they don't want spooky reading because that's not their bag, but they might want something that is a little bit unsettling. Maybe that's as far into spooky as they want to go for for the fall. And this book has a great fall vibe to it. And it's very unsettling. Alright, here's the setup. Our lead character is a 15 year old teenager. This poor girl who is the emotional and physical center of her small Midwestern family, she has to pay attention to the family's meager funds and kind of monitor their budget. Sheep effectively raises her younger brother while her mom, a talented artist and a complete flake. she weaves beautiful tapestries, because of course she does. That's her job. This is a real job. Yeah, exactly. For the last six years, it's just been the three of them, the mom and then the daughter and then the younger son, and periodically the mom would bring guys over but there was never anything like serious. Well, one day this mom brings a six foot tall crane, like the bird a crane, and this crane has a seriously evil menacing air about him and the girl is powerless to prevent her mom from letting this person come into her heart, her mind her bedroom, and pretty soon the crane is sitting down for dinner and kind of running things in the house. Her mom completely abandons the world around her and all the needs of her children to weave the masterpiece that the crane demands she weave in our protagonist is left to do all that she can to stop them from spiraling into destruction. Okay, this is a weird setup, right? But it's not in weirder than the Shark Heart. I guess we're all kind of beginning to accept that at any moment, some six foot something might walk through our door. And we may

Kaytee Cobb 20:08

never know, could be a shark could be a frog could be a bird,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:11

a crane, exactly. This is a recommendation in our most recent listener press episode. And as soon as I heard about it, I knew that I wanted to read this novella. And it isn't, it's only about 150 pages. I'm a big fan of Kelly Barnhill's middle grade, and an even bigger fan of what she's been doing more recently, including When Women Were Dragons. I absolutely loved that book. And I felt a lot of the same prosaic style and narrative voice in this most recent work, The Crane Husband, I will say before I dove into this book, I dove into a little bit of research. And I wanted to find out about the Chinese folktale that the book is based upon. If you're going to read this book, I highly recommend that you do the same. Just search The Crane Wife on Wikipedia, even five minutes of learning will give you a really, really firm underpinning as you start the story and it will make your reading deeper. The Crane Husband is definitely literary fiction, but like Shark Heart, it is extremely accessible. In fact, I read it in just about 90 minutes. Actually, my notes here say it's only 120 pages. But in that time Barnhill creates a world that is so filled with dreads and wisps of dark magic that it is absolutely unforgettable. This book is also filled with thoughts about love and sacrifice, and a mother's love and feeling trapped in your role as a parent or as a sibling caretaker. So it's got all of these elements that are really interesting and the sentence level writing is absolutely incredible. And yet it was so page turning. I turned the pages of this book faster and felt more heart pounding dread than I had in the last three thrillers I had read previously. Barnhill is writing some of the best work of her entire career right now and I cannot wait to see what she comes out with next. And also as I said, you have got to just look at the cover of this book is absolutely beautiful. So this is The Crane Husband by Kelly Barnhill,

Kaytee Cobb 22:06

I am reminded that there was a very popular book last year I think that was a memoir, called The Crane Wife. But I don't think it has to do with this folk tale. It was by CJ Hauser. And I remember it because they talked about it quite a bit on either From the Front Porch, or What Should I Read Next? I have not read it, obviously. But yeah, this one I read on Kindle, and my whole review is you have to be in the mood for something really effing weird when you read this book.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:36

Oh, yeah, it's definitely weird. It's definitely unsettling. It's it's one of those perfect books to push you out of your comfort zone. And also it's not going to take you a ton of time. You're not going to get stuck behind it.

Kaytee Cobb 22:48

Yeah, definitely a good rec for that, like spooky, but not scary. Yes section of reading. I like that. My next one might actually fit into that milieu of reading as well. It's Warrior Girl Unearthed by Angeline Boulley. Two weeks ago. When I recorded with Roxanna I mentioned that I had recently realized that a heist novel really works for me, and I don't really know why that is, but that time I was talking about Monsters We Defy by Leslye Penelope. This time it's Warrior Girl Unearthed. In this book, we meet Perry Firekeeper-Birch who has to work off a debt to her aunt Daunis who we meet in Boulley's first book Firekeeper's Daughter. Perry crashed her aunt's Jeep so she must take on a summer job to pay back the debt. She ends up floating around a bit with a summer program for Native American kids where she meets other young adults who are part of Team Misfit Toys trying to find a good fit for a paid position when she learns about a young native woman who is referred to as warrior girl whose bones and weapons are part of a local universities collection. She's a little bit upset when she picks up an internship position that teaches her about NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. She is incensed. She knows that warrior girl belongs with her tribe, Perry and her team of unlikely friends, the Misfit Toys decide they want to try to get warrior girls bones and weapons back where they belong. So they pool their resources and their knowledge and their skills and attempt to write a historical wrong together. This novel was not as dark as Boulley's first book, which again was called Firekeeper's Daughter. This one also read a bit more white to me even though Firekeeper's Daughter had a cover that made everyone and their mother think that it was YA fantasy, and had a lot more sex drugs and alcohol more mature content in it even though it looked on the outside like something you could hand to your teenager. In Warrior Girl, our main character is just on the cusp of adulthood before starting college and is looking forward to finally slacking off for the summer before real life starts. So she's in that ya to new adult age range. It's not high school first crush am I going to make out with this boy as the main driving force of the plot? It's a mystery. It's a bit thrillery. But again, the part that I really loved was the planning and the execution of the heist, who knew this is still surprising me, Perry and her friends each bring different personalities and skills to the table, as well as faults. These characters felt very real to me, and so did the situation's they found themselves in. Like her last book this one takes place on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and the narrator Isabella start, LeBlanc is really known now as a powerhouse on the field, not just narrating bullies books, but adding many more to her resume since her debut with Firekeepers Daughter in 2021. It's exciting to see a native voice that's really being lifted up in the audiobook field. I just think that's so fun. I really enjoyed this

sophomore novel from Angeline Fuli. And I already can't wait for more from her even though it does take about two years between her books for her to come out with a new one. So I know I'm gonna be waiting a while. This one was excellent, though. It was Warrior girl Unearth by Angeline Boulley.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:56

I think we need to start rewarding authors who take their time between their books, don't you think? Like every other year to get a really really good book. I'm that's fantastic.

Kaytee Cobb 26:07

I'm for it. Yeah, I'm on board. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:09

absolutely. Okay, I'm gonna wrap up my current reads with a true spooky read. This, in fact, is not just spooky. This is horror. So let's be really clear about what genre we're in here. This is Kill Creek by Scott Thomas. Here's the setup. And it's got such a great setup. At the end of the dark prairie road. Right? I'm in period. That's it. That's all I needed. At the end of the dark prairie road, nearly forgotten in the Kansas countryside is the Finch house. For years it has remained empty, overgrown, abandoned, but it's not going to stay that way. Although it probably should. In fact, it definitely should. Our story really gets going when huge best selling horror author Sam McGarvey is invited by a mysterious benefactor to spend Halloween night in one of the country's most infamous haunted houses, the Finch house, he'll be joined by three other writers who have helped shape the modern horror genre. But though this starts out as a simple publicity stunt, it will become a fight for survival. The entity that lives in the Finch house will follow them, torment them and try to make them a part of its own masterpiece, the bloody legacy of Kill Creek. Alright, I saved this one because as I said, perfect for I'm going to call it scary reading season. Again, I want to be clear about what we're getting into here. This was recommended by a listener in April 2023. All things Murderful episode, one of the pieces of content we bring to you if you are what we call a bookish friend, which is a \$5 supporter a month on Patreon. As soon as I heard the premise of Kill Creek, I knew I had to pick it up. As I've said, Now, this is my third time saying this book is firmly in the horror genre. But what is interesting is that as our listener told us, the first half of the book is a lot of character setup, we're learning a ton about each of the four authors that make up our story. So that first half is character forward, and it is a slow burn, it sort of feels like something is going to happen, but not a lot happens. It's interesting, I wasn't bored, but it's not like crash bang, boom from the beginning. And then the second half is where things really start to rock and roll. This is the crux of the horror. And this, I think, is where the book is either going to be made or broken for most readers. I liked it, but I have to just say, the prose in the entire book has a layer of writerly immaturity that kept getting in the way of the story for me, I kept wanting the writing to be just a little bit better than it was. But as I said, as a work of horror is definitely worth the time. It's gory, and scary, and brings together a lot of the horror genre tropes that we've come to know and love. The idea that a house can hide secrets, the idea that secrets can kill. This is well worn horror territory. And that doesn't mean we don't have a good time reading it. I especially think this book will be a hit for anyone who likes the mix of true crime and horror fiction. And anyone who really liked Home Before Dark by Riley Sager will find things to love in this novel. Well, this wasn't a five star book for me. It was definitely worth my time. And I passed it off to Johnny because it's very much in the realm of Stephen King book. This will spice up your October reading if you're not an HSP. This is Kill Creek by Scott Thomas.

Kaytee Cobb 29:28

I remember hearing about that one on All Things Murderful. We love it when our listeners get to play in as part of our content.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:35

And of course, as we know, Finch house is a character in the book. So that's what we're getting ready to talk about now.

Kaytee Cobb 29:43

Okay, my third one is An Island Princess Starts a Scandal by Adrianna Herrera. So for my last book this week, I've got another second book by a favorite author. Last year sometime maybe even two years ago, we discussed A Caribbean Heiress in Paris as an indie Press list pick and when I brought it to the book to the big show, that was a choice from Cafe Con Libros in Brooklyn, New York. Yes. I loved that book. So when I saw that Adrianna Herrera had released a second book and her Las Leonas romance series, and I heard that it was a sapphic historical romance. I snatched it up right away. Our Leona this time, which is female like lioness. It's like a girl lion, right? Our Leona this time is Manuela, she's about to be trapped in a politically advantageous but loveless marriage. So she's taken the invitation from her dear friend Luz Alana, whose story we learned about in the first book to travel to Paris and attend the Exposition Universelle some of her paintings have even been chosen for display. While she's there, she must meet with a team of investors who want to buy her family's land in order to finish a railroad across Mexico. But it turns out the primary investor is a woman, Cora Kemp Bristol, who is known to be ruthless and shrewd. She is powerful and fierce and sure that she'll be able to take senorita Caceres Galvan for all she's worth. Even if she said she'll never sell. Manuela having been out for just a single night in the city of lights, but armed with a vital piece of information proposes a deal, she will part with her family's land, for a very steep price, and for a taste of Paris that she wouldn't be able to find on her own. With the Duchess Cora, as her chaperone and guide. Surely all their activities will be above reproach, nobody can question what they're doing together. As long as they're out. Together, they can take in the art scene, eat fabulous meals and meet a whole cadre of Cora's influential friends. And by night, who knows what will happen. Manuela and Cora have a spark between them from the very moment they meet and it jumps right off the page. Adrianna Herrera writes these fantastic characters that are well developed. You can picture them in your head, even if you're not a reader that pictures characters in your head, which I normally am not. I listened to this romance in a single day. It is very spicy. I know some of you do not like to listen to spicy scenes in your ears, including our Meredith. I don't mind it. So it worked out for me. I was driving alone with a car and a trailer full of our last items from our house in New Mexico. I was focused on the road. But ay dios mio did this story make the miles fly by. It was fantastic. There's a bit of a found family element here, which you all know I loved and the art world features prominently in the story as well. I cannot wait for more from Herrera, especially within this last night on a series. It's a fantastic read. I gave it five stars again, just like the first one in the series. This is An Island Princess Starts a Scandal by Adrianna Herrera.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:03

Oh, I didn't know she had another one out. I loved A Caribbean Heiress in Paris.

Kaytee Cobb 32:51

I know it was so good. Yeah. All right. So those were our six current reads. Which means we get to get into our deep dive, which as I mentioned at the top of the show was suggested by our dear Roxanna, we're going to talk about books where the house is a character. And there were so many ideas on the post about this that she made in the bookish friends group like that people have big opinions about this. Yes, there are a lot of books that fell into this category for a lot of readers.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:19

Yes. And this is something that I realized I never really thought about it as deeply as I did when I was preparing for the show. But this is something in my reading that I really love. I love the trope of a house being central to a story whether it's a mystery or not, I love it when I kind of accidentally happened upon that. It's something that I will often mention make mention of when I'm making my notes. So yes, this is a really fun way to look at our reading and figure out okay, this is another thing that I know, reader know thyself. This is something I am really attracted to.

Kaytee Cobb 33:52

Yeah, I love it as well, especially when it's so well drawn that I feel like I wish there was a floor plan included. You know, I love a map at the beginning of my stories, but even being able to like look at the house from above and see like in the Swifts Yes, remember in the Swifts by Beth Lincoln, that shenanigan was drawing this floor plan of the house, I put a bookmark on that page so that I can flip back and picture where she was in the house that she did all these shenanigans. And I love a floorplan probably even more than a map, right? Because

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:25

then you know, right something is getting ready to happen within the bounds of just these, you know, the walls of this house. And this This was actually one of the books that first came into my mind because I think that that house which was filled with trapdoors, and secret tunnels and also things that would like jump out and scare the people who lived there. Like there was a really

Kaytee Cobb 34:44

Yeah, booby traps to you if you took the wrong book off the shelf, right,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:49

exactly like it's a house with a point of view. And I really

Kaytee Cobb 34:53

loved that. Definitely. All right, what else came to mind for you?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:56

Okay, so, of course I immediately had to go to scary because that's so much of what I read. And there are so many great examples of it. So I thought about How to Sell a Haunted House by Grady Hendrix. So I thought about that. And that's, you know, obviously the word house is in the title. Actually, the word house isn't the title of a lot of these. But I thought about A Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires because the house which is not like a crumbling mansion, it's like a 90s just normal house,

but I can picture it in my mind like it really, it was a very vivid description of the house. I think that Grady Hendrix really does that well. And then I thought about there's a house in ACOTAR, book five, The Court of Silver Flames. I love houses. And in fact, also in Nevermoor in the Deucalion. There's a room that's like the rooms that like this houses that give you what you need when you need it. And the house in Silver, Court of Silver Flames. I made mention of it when I brought the book to the show, because it was one of my favorite parts of the book is a house that's going to give me the exact book that I need will appear on my nightstand and in Nevermoor in the Deucalion. There's a room where the right scent comes into the room and it's made, especially for what you need at that moment. I love the idea of a room of requirements, you know, that's gonna give you what you need. And that house in Court of Silver Flame, you know, Nessa is there, healing, and it's there to help her heal. And I just love that idea.

Kaytee Cobb 36:27

Yes, yes, I would like a house that does that for me, its like a house and a butler in one but it's better than a butler because

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:35

a Butler is like a person and I've always thought like, that would be the one thing that would suck about having like servants is the only thing that they're around all the way around. And I would feel like I needed to talk to them. And I don't I mean it because I should right that's the right thing to do. But just a house that just has like the exact right coffee appears on your right next to you or the food, the meal that will most nourish your body. But it just happens magically. But it's all very like made to take care of you. Uh huh. I love it so much.

Kaytee Cobb 37:05

Yes, definitely. I had Nevermoor on mine as well. I also thought of a few kind of literary fiction ones because I knew I had to bring some of the other side. Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:16

thank you.

Kaytee Cobb 37:17

Thank you. So I feel like the most obvious two for that are The Dutch House by Ann Patchett. The name of the book again, but it's also about the family that live within the house. You can picture the stairwell, the paintings, the wallpaper on the walls, it all plays a part in the story. Yeah. I'll also add The Two Family House by Lynda Cohen-Loigman, which I read in 2016. It's a duplex that two sisters in law living next door to each other and their children are born during a blizzard only few minutes apart. The house is how they communicate with each other. It's how they relate to each other. It's more than just the walls around them. It's symbolic of their relationship as well. Again house in the title. And then the newest book I read of this ilk, a little more literary again is The Attic Child by Lola Jaye. So this takes place across multiple generations. But in the same house and the attic is a big part of this kind of like the mad woman in the attic by Jane Eyre with Rochester right? Yep, Jane Eyre. Yep. It just the way that those rooms relate to each other plays a big part and what's under the floorboards and what do you see scratched into the wallpaper and that kind of thing is all a really big part of how that story comes together. Right? I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:33

did actually have a couple other examples of non creepy houses. One of them is a book that I really really liked by Lisa Jewell called *The House We Grew Up In*. Now we talked about Lisa Jewell, she's a great crime fiction domestic suspense writer. But this book is not that. This book is about growing up with a mom who becomes a hoarder. And the thing is that the house is very much on the stage of the story. Because we see the house before this family trauma happens. And then we see what happens after this family trauma happens. And then what has become of the mom's mental health and how that affects the house, and how all of that affects her remaining children and the way that they interact with each other. So *The House We Grew Up In* was one that came to mind. And then as far as just a lot of fun, I'm going to extend the definition of the word house to include a castle one of my favorite middle grade books is called *Tuesdays at the Castle* by Jessica George, this castle is magical. And it moves rooms around like on any given day. The people who wake up in the castle have no idea when they open their door where they're going to be because the castle will move rooms around based on what people need based on what it's trying to tell the king like it moved the second eldest boy's room right next to the throne room and it moved to the first like the airs room over to next to the library and that was communicating to the king that he needed to kind of do different things. for his son's and then also it just would switch the stairwells for fun and to help the kids play games. It's the most magical castle I love that book *Tuesdays at the Castle*. I love that whole series.

Kaytee Cobb 40:10

That one is fun. One of my favorite middle grade books is *Anne of Green Gables* and the house that she lives in in *Green Gables*. I actually drove by a charter school here in Arizona the other day and it had a green steeped roof. And now it is *Green Gables* in my head, because that picture of the house I mean, I just talked about rewatching the 1980s miniseries with my kids as well. It's so much a part of what that book means to me that the *Green Gables* of the house and *Anne of Green Gables* they have to go together, right. They're their best to use in my head. And then I do have one thriller one to add as well because we all contain multitudes it's *Keep it in the Family* by John Marrs who everybody knows my love for John Marrs. He has two kind of genres that he writes in. This is his more traditional psychological thriller, as opposed to his near future sci fi thrillers but there's a couple that is renovating a derelict mansion into their dream house. And there are creepy messages written on the floorboards, including I will save them from the attic written in all caps across the floorboards in one room. They don't know what's going on there. But they have to piece it together. And it's about what's happening inside this house again, a couple generations apart. Speaking of renovating old houses, the only nonfiction pic I have for this is *Downton Shabby* by Hopwood Depree. He's renovating an old castle that it turns out is part of his family legacy in Scotland. Such a fun story. So fun to think about what is behind the walls and under the floors and revealing the many, many centuries of history in this one house.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:53

Those are good ones. So I'm going to add a couple more in the scary house landscape. Of course, I mentioned earlier when I was talking about *Kill Creek*, I mentioned Riley Sager's *Home Before Dark*, but his latest one, which was not a super super hit for me. But I wanted to mention it because at the time I said that the house was probably my favorite character in the book. And that's the book, *The Only One Left* this house is right on the cusp of a cliff. It's kind of tilted because of the fact that it's when our

story starts, it's like beginning to fall into the ocean. The house is a very big part of this environment of what we're experiencing here. And then, if you want to go to Iceland, a very scary Icelandic house setting is in I remember You by Yrsa Sigurdardottir. And it's a house that has been renovated, and it's on this remote island, and a lot of scary things happen in that house. And then finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention in the Louise Penny series, several of the books, we go to the old Hadley house, and that house is most definitely a character in the stories that it plays a starring role because it is one of the most just malevolent houses I've ever read in fiction.

Kaytee Cobb 43:09

Yes. And I love it. It's a recurring character within the series. Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:14

exactly. In fact, the book that Roxanna and I are getting ready to record the new A Journey to Three Pines which we're going to record this weekend, The Cruellest Month, book number three, we're back at the old Hadley house and bad things happen in that house. So creepy. It's so creepy. Yes, for sure. So that's a lot of location specific fun.

Kaytee Cobb 43:33

Definitely. And like I said, there's so much more where that came from. A lot of people had really great ideas within the bookish friends group about this, we'll be sure to put a post online sometime this week, asking about your favorite houses that play as characters in the books you love. And if you want to become a bookish friend and jump into that conversation, there's so many great recs across every genre. I mean, good job Roxanna for coming up with a great conversation starter. And this

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:00

is a great example of what one reason that the bookish friends group is so great, and really worth the \$5 a month because someone will put up a post about like, hey, favorite books where the house is a lead character. And there were what 76 comments for last time so many? Yeah. And then, but remember the time a few months ago, where I was like, hey, what's a reverse harem novel? Anybody got an example? And then like, 10 minutes later, there were 14 Reverse harem. Like I thought that was so niche. So that happens all the time. So you just never know what genre you're going to be your what micro genre you're going to be able to really get a deep dive into. And some of your favorite books can come from those kinds of conversations.

Kaytee Cobb 44:39

Definitely. And there's people solving mysteries there too. Like, oh, I have a friend that's looking for this book. And this is all she remembers about it. Who can tell me Oh, God loves that. Well, no,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:49

they love that fun. It's like catnip to the bookish friends to be like, who's gonna figure it out first? Yeah, that's a lot of good reasons to join that group.

Kaytee Cobb 44:57

All right, that was a lot of fun. Let's move. Make some wishes, we're gonna assume that these books were the houses of character, they all have a fountain somewhere on the property. Let's visit the fountain and make some wishes there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:08

Absolutely. Well, again, I made this wish before, but I want to make this wish I have two wishes, two small wishes, plan your spooky season reading. So it's the 11th of September, it is plenty of time for you to be mindful about what your reading is going to be for spooky season. We only get it once a year. Everyone gets into it, plan your spooky season reading, be mindful about it, grab at least one book that's going to put you into the right mode and wait till October or November for those of us who live on the face of the sun, we're going to have to wait for cold weather for a long time. But maybe the plan you're reading it can help you get into the fall mood. The other thing I was was a wish that I was getting give today. But then apparently it got granted. You know how I always mentioned that I love Fabled quarterly events that they do. They do their book review and it's free. And it's just so much fun. I highly recommend when you see that follow Fabled bookshop and attend to their quarterly book reviews because they're really, really good. Well, An Unlikely Story book boyfriend Bill, you know, he does one minute with Bill every week. He just did an hour with Bill. And my wish was going to be that event. Obviously, I don't live in Massachusetts. So I couldn't make it there. Although, you know, I would have if I could have. But I was like well offer a virtual option. So many of us would pay for that. And it turns out apparently they did record it. I haven't seen it yet. But apparently that is the case. And I was so delighted. So I think this is a way that a lot of independent bookstores now. I think we know this is a way that independent bookstores are able to touch their clients around them and also across the country and across the world. And I'm so glad that more people are doing it.

Kaytee Cobb 46:48

Yes, I agree. I like that wish and I love that it was already granted. Rest kind of ish.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:53

I know ping ping splash splash.

Kaytee Cobb 46:56

Double thing. Double splash. I love it. Okay, everyone's Well, I do a little bit of a touchy feely, we will wish and people don't like it so you can skip them if you don't want to listen to but this week, I wish to express my gratitude this week was one of those it takes a village weeks at our house. I am so grateful to my parents to my oldest kiddo. Micah laid like 1300 feet of flooring in our house. Oh my gosh, she worked so hard. He is like a professional. Now my dad taught him how to use all the power tools so he can make the cuts and like oh wow, he's gonna be 13 a couple weeks after this airs, and he was as good as a paid worker. It was amazing. He was amazing. It was so great. So Micah, definitely for the ways that these people pitched in to get our house shipshape brightened up beautiful for us to live in. It was so many man hours of work, and being surrounded by people who love me and work hard to get the house ready was a huge blessing. I'm also super grateful to the authors and narrators that told me stories while I worked. I have been off my rhythm as I've mentioned for months now because of this move. And while August was still a little slower month for me, I ended up much closer to my average reading pace because of the ways that I blasted through audiobooks. For seven days straight, I got told

so many fantastic stories that I can't wait to tell you all about. And of course, I'm also grateful to our team and our show regulars between Mary stepping in and Megan being on top of uploads and of course, Roxanna being ready and willing the week before when needed. We are just surrounded by great people. And I'm grateful. So that's my wish this week is to be allowed to show my gratitude in a mushy, gushy way on air and tell you all how great it is to have this village. Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:41

Absolutely. We We love being surrounded by the village that we're surrounded by. I'm so glad that you felt that support there as you're getting into your new house that makes all the difference. And do you know that I read 17 books in August? That is way more. And it's because I went into that mode of using books to cope mentally. And I felt myself go into that mode, which is not my normal, but 17 books

Kaytee Cobb 49:07

in August. But those stories and authors were there for you. Yes. When you needed them. Yes. Just so special. And that's more than I read the other part of the summer Meredith like June and July, I was lower than 17 books for both of those months. So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:20

yeah, well, I mean, I'm usually closer to 10 to 12 Is it would be a really normal productive month for me. So ya know, clearly that was a sign of my mental health, but I'm so glad that your stories were there for you in the way that you needed them to. Alright, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram,

Kaytee Cobb 49:41

and you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:45

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 Thank you Megan for shownotes this this week, this is going to be a lot of a lot of shows notes

Kaytee Cobb 50:00

many books, so many houses. You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:09

And if you want more of this kind of content, as we mentioned, become a bookish friend. It's \$5 a month, it keeps the big show ad free, you get all kinds of both content and community. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 50:28

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:34
Until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 50:36
and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:38
Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 50:39
Happy reading Meredith