



# Season 4, Episode 31: A Spicy Meatball + When Backlist Gets "Cringey"

Mon, 3/14 • 1:02:08

**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 will not shy away from having strong opinions, especially this week. Get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:26

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 press books into your hands.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:36

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And sometimes I need to read a book that makes me uncomfortable.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:45

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and some weeks are more bookish than others. This is episode number 31 of season four, and we are so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:55

Boy, that is so true. Kaytee, there are some weeks where I feel like I get no reading done. And then some weeks where I just feel like I'm finishing book after book after book. We just need to lean into the flows and be okay with the ebbs. Yeah. Alright, so let's tell you right up front that our deep dive this week is going to be what we're calling when backlist gets cringy. We all know that we love to read backlist books, but what happens when you're reading one that really veers off of what we today might think is acceptable wording or acceptable ideas or acceptable roles. So we're gonna get we're gonna get into that a little bit later. But first, let's get into our bookish moments of the week. What have you got Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:39

Meredith, I am, this week, for the first time in three and a half years, I am going to talk about having a non bookish week as my bookish moment. And we as you know, we've been doing some renovation downstairs at our house, there's been workers here often, there's a lot of activity. It feels like I'm either doing school with my kids or being pulled downstairs to answer questions or help out or do whatever. And it feels like I have actually no time to read. And by the time I you know, have put the kids to bed at

night, and I'm ready to sit down on the couch for a little bit, either I'm going to watch something and turn my brain off with Jason or I am full on dead on my feet exhausted and I have to go to bed at 8:05pm. And that means I feel like I'm not reading anything, not because I don't want to. I'm not in a slump. I would love to be reading. I just am going through this moment, this little tiny season, where I can't read. There's physically not time of day and even when I would have time, often, for me that means audiobooks. Again, I'm either doing school or I'm working around power tools so I can't hear anything anyway. So it's like, it feels like I'm being foiled at every turn. And I cannot read and it's so tough. But that's my that's my bookish moment, I guess.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 02:54

And now you understand how the rest of us feel. Right?

**Kaytee Cobb** 02:59

I hate it so much.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:01

When you have those days and days where work or whatever it is where you're like, I just have not been able to pick up a book. And I'm so tired by the end of the day that I can't, but your season will be short and you'll get back into your normal routine really quickly. And we will all be really glad because then we need you to be our Kaytee who reads too much. That's your job.

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:20

I'm sure I'll find some time. Maybe I'll blast through 30 books at the very end of the month and be like well, I read nothing and then I read 12 in one day.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:28

Yes, well and that's how my reading goes for sure. It's a study in ebbs and flows. And right now I am in what I would describe as a flow. After a couple of weeks in Memphis when I was doing, you know, the all the new grandmother stuff, I wasn't able to read very much. Since I've been back. I've just been finishing book after book after book. And my bookish moment of the week really came when this morning, I finished another book. And I realized that I am reading a ton of nonfiction right now, not all nonfiction, but much more than I normally do. And I think it's just because my brain is in a place where I have a little bit more bandwidth. And also I'm reading a lot of different kinds of nonfiction. I've read some sports related stuff. I've read some business related stuff. I've read some true crime. I've read some, even yesterday spent some time reading Julia Child's memoir. I didn't read it from cover to cover. And for that reason, I won't bring it to the show as a current read because I only bring books that I've read all the way through. I spent a couple of hours dipping into different chapters that Roxanna had wanted me, my reading partner had wanted me to read. And then I ended up watching Julia and Julia and just kind of and then getting into watching YouTube of Julia Child shows, like her actual shows from the 60s. I went down this total nonfiction related rabbit hole. And so I just realized this morning as I was thinking what has characterized my reading in the last week, it's been the surprise of reading more nonfiction than I have in really since we started the podcast.

**Kaytee Cobb 03:31**

That's fun. I love that we're all able to like embrace those seasons though and say, You know what, this is what my book brain is craving right now. And I get to lean that way.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:16**

Exactly. Interestingly, we're going to talk about current reads. None of my current reads are nonfiction this week. So we'll have to wait a little bit for me to have another one of those for the show. But Kaytee, start us off. What's your first current read that you want to talk about?

**Kaytee Cobb 05:30**

Okay, because we have now entered into March, I will point out that for this month, all my current reads are going to be Black authors. It's not, it's not because I'm preaching at anybody. It's because I read all black for February. So I just want to point that out right at the top here. My first one this week is *Isaiah Dunn* is my hero by Kelly J. Baptist. This is a middle grade March pick, and I am so excited to share about it. This one first came onto my TBR when we were working with Novel Neighbor in St. Louis for Indie Press List selections. It didn't make it onto that list, but I still wanted to read it. And so they're the ones who put it on my radar. Guess what? It was excellent. This is coming of age mixed with a love of the written word mixed with tough stuff that middle graders might need to face or might need a window book to understand. *Isaiah* is our main character, obviously and he is the man of the house now because his father passed away tragically, almost a year ago. His mom has gone totally silent, and the bottles that clink in the trash bags are concerning to him. That means he's pretty much in charge of taking care of his little sister Charlie. When he gets paired with a classmate through an anti bullying program to stop the shade they've been throwing at each other all day long, he learns that a lot of kids are hiding something a little bit under the surface. And when he starts reading through his late father's journal, he discovers a love of poetry within himself, as well as his father's stories about *Isaiah Dunn*, a superhero powered by beans and rice. Many of our listeners and bookish friends have fallen for *My Storied Year* by Katie Proctor. This is the next one that you want to pick up friends. I pressed it directly into Katie's hands, and she loved it too. *Dragon* from her book and *Isaiah* from this one would absolutely be friends with each other. I'm so glad to have read it. So grateful to Novel Neighbor for putting it onto my radar. I gave it five stars. I loved it. It's *Isaiah Dunn* is My Hero by Kelly J. Baptist.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:21**

All right, well, my first book interestingly, totally unplanned Kaytee is a book that we considered for the Indie Press List and we decided not to use it, but I still wanted to read it. Totally unplanned. Couldn't be any more different from the one that you just talked about. But they're similar in that one single way. Okay, because I want to talk about *Anthem* by Noah Hawley. So, right, so Noah Hawley is probably going to be familiar to you because he wrote the 2016 uber bestseller *Before the Fall*, you guys probably remember a lot of people describe that book as being the airplane book, which is weird, because I don't think it should be. But anyway, I read *Before the Fall* not too many months ago, I really, really loved it. So when we were working with *An Unlikely Story* coming up with our February list, we realized that they let us know that Noah Hawley had a brand new book coming out. And I was like, Oh my gosh, yes, please, I'm so excited. So let me give you a little bit of a setup. But let me tell you, as

with a lot of things about this book, there, this is not easy to do, it's not easy to set up this book. So try to hang with me.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:34**

As we start our book, the hook of this book is that teenagers are committing suicide at a rate never seen before. So I'm talking like dropping like flies like 1000s upon 1000s. I'm not talking about anything what we would experience today. Pandemic related numbers is what we're talking about, clearly trigger for suicide in this book, as well as a whole heck of a lot of other triggers. So some at risk kids are at what's called The Float Anxiety Abatement Center, which is this really high end center that very rich parents who care about their kids, but have no idea what to do about what's happening, send them to this place called The Float. But the nation is completely veering out of control. And we realize really quickly that the only sane people in our story are this group of teenagers that we're following. So we've got Simon, we've got the Prophet, who's a fellow patient at The Float Center who used to be named Paul, and we've got Louise and they all escaped from The Float Center to go on what the Prophet is terming an epic quest. He tells the others that God speaks to him and that God has given him directions on how to save the world from the madness that has beset it, and part of their quest is to destroy the wizard who's a real person, a Jeffrey Epstein ish character, who's got billions of dollars that he uses to horribly exploit young girls. Trigger warning for all of that. So we're following this group of teenagers as they basically try to save the world and the world is burning to the ground. This book has been described as Kurt Vonnegut meets Grimms fairy tales. And I will tell you that that is an apt description. Okay. Like I said, it's a very hard book to set up. It's a very controversial book. And, Kaytee, when you and I first dipped into it for the Indie Press List, we both at the same point in the book decided that it was definitely not the right fit for the Indie Press List, because it is very, very, very controversial. And definitely not for every reader, and just not the kind of book that we like to put on the Indie Press List. But I was very interested and wanted to continue and see what was going to happen. I really like Noah Hawley's writing style. So and then the other thing is, every once in a while, I like to challenge myself with a book that might really piss me off. And this did. But the thing is that there is something in this book to piss off every one. I don't care what your politics are. Noah Hawley wants to burn it to the ground. That's what he's trying to do with this book. He's trying not, he's not trying to piss me off and my left leaning politics, he's trying to make everybody angry, because he's really angry. This book seethes with anger. It drips with rage. It's barely contained, this rage. Also, lots of people have said over the course of the last two years that they don't want to read a COVID book. And I think that that is true specifically and lots and lots of us don't want to read a book that's about a pandemic. But also, I think what even more of us don't want to read is a book that's about the post 2016 world of a fractured America, an America that seems like it's about to split at its angry seams. A world where there is no longer a set of agreed upon facts, but rather a chosen set of facts for each of us on both sides of the spectrum. A world where we can hate our neighbor so much that we might refuse to speak to them, to let our children play together, and to Noah Hawley's imagination, where we might be willing to do a whole lot more. This is a world where an American Civil War is starting. So that's where we find ourselves. Now, if you asked me if I liked this book, I would give you a resounding no. This book made me as uncomfortable as I've been reading a book since I read Leave the World Behind. And though I am definitely not one to quibble with endings that are unresolved, this ending feels like such a cop out that the author who repeatedly breaks the fourth wall throughout the book to sort of dip in and say, Hey,

reader, you might be thinking this. At the end, he even admits that he's copping out. So I had issues with that. But the whole book made me think, and I think it would be an amazing book club book for sure. As I've said, every now and then I think we need to read a book that makes us mad, or makes us squirm. And I'm really glad I finished this book. Now after I finished making those notes, which is what I do, as soon as I put the book down, I came back a few hours later, and I had a couple more things to add. First, I am so mad at Noah Hawley on 10 levels after reading this book. But I simultaneously want desperately to have a beer with him and deconstruct his thinking on every part of this book, because it was also kind of brilliant. And even more hours after finishing it, I realized that I had the bookish equivalent of the meat sweats. I felt overheated and desperately uncomfortable and vaguely ashamed of my choices. And I realized that the only thing that I could do was let time slowly take the toxins out of my system.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:15**

As to who I would recommend this book to, it's really hard to say. I was talking right afterwards with Betsy Ikenberry, who's a good bookish friend of mine about how I felt she asked me if I thought that she should read it. And I said, Betsy, I feel really torn. Part of me thinks Yes, I want so many of you to read it because I want to have people to talk about it with I desperately want to discuss this book. That's the kind of book that it is. But also Betsy, I really like you and I don't want to put you through this. Not that this book is bad. It's brilliant. But it is so very uncomfortable. So weirdly enough, as I was talking to her about this book, she decided to read it because of apparently, everything I was saying made her want to pick it up more and more, even though I was actively trying to convince her not to read it. So if others of you decide that you want to pick up Anthem, because you kind of like Leave the World Behind, and you kind of like The Library at Mount Char, and you like reading books that make you mad and uncomfortable and have feelings, but not sad feelings, like you want to have feelings, but you don't want those feelings to be sad, you might want to pick it up. And I might want to do a Zoom with you. So we shall see. So this is Anthem by Noah Hawley.

**Kaytee Cobb 15:33**

Oh, that is a lot to unpack Meredith. As you know, I DNF'd with prejudice about 60 pages in. Like I couldn't do it. And there, there are a number of things that made me set it aside, but I will not be picking up that book.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:52**

Right, exactly. Like I said, the reason that you set it aside, like you set it aside too early, because if you had read another 40 pages, you the exact opposite thing he would have been pissing someone else off with. So if that's the only reason that you don't read a book, because you don't like the way that he makes a certain character, you know, he's letting us into the minds of these characters, that's not a good reason not to read this book, because he's doing that to everyone. He's not coming at this from a point of view that's like, he, he, his point of view is everyone's point of view needs to be burned down. Not you see what I mean? He's not coming at it from one specific side. So as soon as he makes one person mad 40 pages later, he's gonna have made their political opposite just as mad. Yeah. And that's what he's doing the whole way through. It's very, very provocative. And I think it's purposely

provocative. Now, I am in no way shape or form trying to convince you to read this book Kaytee, I do not think that you should, at all. I do not think it would be a useful way for you to spend your time.

**Kaytee Cobb 16:57**

I'm not going to pick it back up. I just, I feel like I gave it a fair enough shake for what I wanted to get from it. And I and I loved his previous book. So I wanted to be able to get into this one. Because I was with you like, yes, let's put this on the Indie Press List. And then there were a lot of reasons that it wasn't a good fit for that program,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:18**

not the right fit. Yes.

**Kaytee Cobb 17:19**

But that those first few pages, I mean, first 50 60, 70, however far I read, I just couldn't get over a number of things. And it wasn't necessarily that I was feeling challenged, it was that I was feeling like he and it may have been just writing provocatively, but it felt like he was saying things he shouldn't be allowed to say.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:45**

Right, exactly. And that's exactly the point that he's making. And I think it's a good one, because I don't think you or I should be able to tell anybody what they can or can't write.

**Kaytee Cobb 17:59**

Right.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:00**

However, to your point, you and I get to make the decisions about what it is that we read.

**Kaytee Cobb 18:08**

Correct.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:08**

So you know, so yes, that's exactly the kind of provocation and there's 10 Other examples of it, at least where the way that he does something is specifically designed to really ramp somebody up. It's a very provocative book. And you can make an argument that it's navel gazingly provocative, right, that he's that he's so interested in his own thoughts that he's willing to burn absolutely every everybody down with by the way, no solution provided, right? Like, no, so there's no solution coming. There's no redemption. There's no hopefulness. There's no so there's a lot to be angry with in this book, for sure. Yeah.

**Kaytee Cobb** 18:55

Very interesting. I have something totally different to talk about now. Okay, good. Good. So this one I'm going to move up in age audience for each of my current reads. So it's now I want to talk about for my second book, Cinderella is Dead by Kalynn Bayron.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 19:10

Yes, I want to read this.

**Kaytee Cobb** 19:12

Oh, good. I'm so excited. This is YA dystopian fantasy. It's all those things squashed together. In this world, we meet Sophia, who lives in Cinderella's fairytale kingdom. Cinderella found her prints 200 years ago. And now her story is gospel in this kingdom. Like every family is required to have a copy of Cinderella's story on their bookshelves at all times so they can refer to it as needed. It's bonkers. Teen girls are required to appear at an annual ball where men of the kingdom select wives based almost entirely on their looks and their dresses. If they attend to this ball twice and are not chosen they are forsaken and never heard from again. The problem is that Sophia is a big No for traditional gender roles. She'd much rather marry Erin, her best friend. At the ball that she, you know, was invited to along with every other eligible maiden in the kingdom, Sofia decides to flee into the White Woods and only survives because she meets Constance, one of Cinderella's stepsisters' last known descendants, one of the last few people that is directly connected to this family line. They start to unravel the fairy tale, one adventure at a time and vow to bring down the king once and for all. This fairy tale retelling is much more like a fairy tale untelling. It's unraveling the entire story. I loved it. There are surprises right and left. There was reanimation of corpses. There are witches and fairy godmothers. There's a smash the patriarchy vibe that you know I loved. And there is of course, great representation throughout as you can tell from the setup. I felt like it was so fresh and new, while also being really dark and propulsive. It wasn't like a fresh new, sparkly version of a fairy tale. It was like a fresh new one that you like pick up a log and you see things crawling back into the dirt, that kind of fresh and new, right? It's solidly sitting at four and a half stars for me, and the narration by Bahni Turpin as you know, it did not hurt in the slightest. I was in from the dedication, from the very first, like, welcome to Cinderella is Dead by Kalynn Bayron. I was like I love this book. I love this book. It's funny, I love it already. The cover is fantastic. This story is great. The plot, the characters, every single part of it. I really enjoyed it. There were a few little kind of loose ends, which is the only reason that I didn't bump it all the way up to five but this is a standalone YA dystopian fantasy that I adored. It was Cinderella is Dead by Kalynn Bayron.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 21:47

I have the physical copy on my shelf. I cannot wait to read it. Multiple people have said that they thought I mean because of my love for fairytales that they thought that I would love it. It's got a great cover. I'm so glad that it was as good as I was hoping it was going to be. This is going to come up for me soon for sure. Because I've been kind of steadily in the mood for another fairy tale retelling. Okay. Well, again, Kaytee these books have a connection that we could not have, that we could not have predicted because the book I'm going to talk about is a book that I read this weekend, which I almost never do, but I had to talk about it because it was the book that I read right after I read Anthem. And I think that's a part of why I liked it so, so much. Because after reading Anthem, like I said I had the

bookish meat sweats. So I needed something that was its polar opposite. I needed something nice and sweet and something where things made people made sense in their choices. I was scrolling the Currently Reading bookish friends group, which is our Facebook group for our Patreon supporters, and up came a book that I had never heard of before, called *The Fine Print* by Lauren Asher. This book was nowhere on my radar. And it is not the kind of book that would be on my radar because this is a straight up open door contemporary day romance, which is not something I normally read. But brilliant bookish friend Alexis Labath posted the following in the group and I'm going to tell you exactly what she said because she did such a great job of selling this book. This is what Alexa said. She said, "I cannot not press *The Fine Print* by Lauren Asher. This romance has a handful of steamy scenes that you can't skip over but it also has a billionaire with a trauma background from bad parenting. It has aftermath of parental death. It has a villain with amazing personal development who turns into a pretty darn great guy. It has a character with Down Syndrome who is so vibrant and beautiful and not a love interest. It has self awareness, aftermath of manipulative relationships, a badass female character with drive and focus on her career and trigger warnings for talks of suicide, self harm and mental health topics and recovery." Alexis goes on to say, "This book is five stars, 10 Stars, all the stars. Please read it. Do yourself a favor and pick it up. Oh, and it's by an indie author." So I thought she did such a good job selling it. I will also add by way of setup that our main asshole with a heart of gold is Rowan Cain. He's one of three grandsons in a fictional version of basically the Disney Corporation. So he's a grandson of what would be a fictional version of Walt Disney. They are billionaire brothers who are set to inherit what's essentially the Disney fortune. But Rowan our lead character has baggage with a capital B. And our lead female character is the sassy Zahra, who is, as Alexis says, sweet and beautiful, but much more interestingly smart and focused on her career at Dreamland, this fictional theme park where our action starts. So yes, all that, and a theme park, I had to jump into it immediately. This was the perfect one night stand book, which is what I needed to recover after my days and days I had spent with Anthem. This book swept me off my feet in the very best possible way. It should be said right from the start that this is a very, very open door romance. The sex is not very creative, but it is definitely present. Though Alexis thinks that you can't skip these steamy scenes, I definitely think that you can skim them at best. I should also note that this book has a really great cover in its paperback and a terrible cover for its Kindle Unlimited, which is how I read it. The Kindle Unlimited cover is just one of those that you would never ever, ever pick up. I think it's also really important to say that this absolutely is not what I would describe as great literature. The writing itself is middling at best. I don't want anyone to read this and complain about picking it up and being surprised that the writing is really at a high school at a high school level tops, okay. But I was in such a place that the story took me in completely, I was totally invested in the characters. And I didn't really care that every chapter or so at least, we talked about some part of our body being on fire, or the touch of another person causing us to feel a burning sensation. There's all manner of fire metaphors in this book. It's it really got to be actually kind of hilarious. But I didn't care, Kaytee because I was having too much fun. And sometimes that's exactly what our reading needs to be: fast, fun and for better or worse, forgettable. If any of this sounds good to you, or if you have a hole in your TBR for a palate cleansing one nightstand book, I would highly recommend downloading this. Put it in your Kindle, so no one has to see it. This is *The Fine Print* by Lauren Asher. And I loved it.



**Kaytee Cobb 27:28**

It's that's exactly what we talked about last week, the one night stand, but you don't need it to be pretty in the morning. You just need it to do what it does in the moment.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:37**

No, it made me smile the whole way through. I stayed up until two o'clock in the morning reading it. Johnny was like "Are you still reading?" I was like, "Yeah, shut up." And I attacked him. This is the best kind of book for just exactly what I needed. Right? It was so so good. And it had lots of really great Like, yes, it's open door. But it had so much more like interesting backstory in the characters and the backstory of the park itself and how they get their ideas and work on the ideas and get budget approval for different things. And it had substance to it. But then it also had like just the silly tropey things that just make you grin in a stupid way. Because at one point you were 12 and you're not anymore, but it's still fun. It was just great. I loved it.

**Kaytee Cobb 28:30**

Oh gosh, that's ridiculous. I love it. Okay. This is another big left turn, although there will be gushing here. I want to talk about The Violin Conspiracy by Brendan Slocumb.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:44**

Oh yeah, this is another great one for that.

**Kaytee Cobb 28:47**

I love it so much. Okay. I am happy to say that this one was put on my radar in two fantastic ways. And I have both of those people to think first Elizabeth Barnhill from Fabled messaged me and said, "Kaytee, you specifically, you need this book," which led me to request a galley of it. And then maybe three weeks later, we start working with An Unlikely Story and they come in with our February list of picks and this one was on it. We both jumped at the chance. We said heck yes. Let's try it out. Thankfully, I already had the the galley on my Net Galley account. Perfect. Sent it to both of us. Well, friends, despite those two wonderful sources, I was not prepared for how much I would fall in love with this book. I was not prepared. Let me set it up for you. Ray is leaving his hotel room ready to head home after another concert. Everything is going as expected. But when he arrives home his \$10 million Stradivarius violin is not in the case. Instead, he finds a tennis shoe with a ransom note in it. There are so many people that wanted to get their hands on this instrument of course, but a few rise to the top of the suspect list immediately. His family and the Marks family as the investigation right ramps up sodas raised preparation for the Tchaikovsky competition in Russia. Basically, it's the Olympics of classical music, but he needs his violin to play. Perhaps it was one of his competitors. They're also rising to the top, the story moves forward. But in the meantime, we move back in time to when Ray was a young teen learning to play violin without the support of his family, the ways he had to make ends meet in order to keep playing, the racist interactions he had as a minority in the classical music world, the way the violin even came to be in his hands. This story is coming of age, mixed with a love of classical music. But my big caveat here is that it's commonly marketed as and billed as a mystery or thriller. And I think that does it a disservice. If you go into this expecting to be on the edge of your seat, you will be disappointed. And the very, very few low ratings that I've seen on Goodreads said exactly that. They

wanted a thriller. They wanted to be propulsively, turning the pages the entire time, and they didn't care about Ray's backstory. That's not why they came to this novel. You pick up this book for the family drama, for the music, for the relationship with his grandma, which is the best thing I've ever read. You don't pick it up for the mystery. It's like a cherry on top. You consider that a fun little side element that keeps the current storyline moving forward. But it's in the past where this one really, really shines. And it shines so much. I fell so hard for this book that I reached out to Brendan and I will be interviewing him this week. And the mini episode for that will air this Friday. So if you're listening on Monday, you've been wanting to pick it up, now is the time so you can listen to me gush in person to Brendan on Friday. I loved this book. I loved it so much. It's *The Violin Conspiracy* by Brendan Slocumb.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 31:44

Yeah, this book is absolutely fantastic. And I have to say, I think you're absolutely right about it being billed as a mystery or thriller and that not being, that doing it a disservice. I think you're absolutely right. And I think it reads really, really propulsively. So if when someone hears that they're thinking like, oh, it's like, character driven or slow, there's nothing slow about this book at all. But I think you're absolutely right, that what makes it great is there's this follow through storyline of what happened to the violin that leads us through his backstory and all of those other pieces in a way that I felt was really page turning. I love this book too. Total cosign on the gushing on this book. Yay. That was that was a really really good one. All right, more gushing to follow. Yes, because we are squarely in my in my wheelhouse here and we are going to bring a book that is basically my new favorite crime fiction writer. I'm bringing a book by Catherine Ryan Howard Kaytee. I'm bringing her book *Rewind*. I loved this book. Five star book. If you love mysteries, if you love crime fiction, if you loved *The Nothing Man*, and *56 Days* by Catherine Ryan Howard, you're immediately going to want to put *Rewind* on your list. Here's the setup. This is a book where actually you need very little setup. This is a book where I would really say please don't go read things on Amazon because I feel that the blurb gives away too much. You'd be really well served by just going into it with no setup at all. But let me give you just a tiny bit to whet your whistle. Andrew is the manager of the Shanamore Holiday Cottages. Again, we're in Ireland here. He watches his only guest via a hidden camera that is in her room. One night, as he's watching the unthinkable happens. A shadowy figure emerges on screen, kills the guest and then walks over and destroys the camera. But who is the murderer? And how did they know about the camera? This, you guys, this book is so good. If you love a quality page turning piece of crime fiction that's again right up there with her two other best ones *The Nothing Man* and *56 Days*, this is it. *Rewind* is phenomenal. This book contains an Irish vacation rental that is odd from the get, an Instagram influencer who is on the edge, several suspicious characters who give you the heebie jeebies right from the start, and a journalist who is very smart. But is she smart enough? I can't believe that as of now, I have read Catherine Ryan Howard's entire catalogue. I can't even remember the last time I've read all the books that somebody had written except for Louise Penny. Every single book has been great and *Rewind* is more than great. It is excellent. I gobbled this book, I gobbled it whole. I read it in an afternoon. Now, if someone is going to complain about this book, I think that their most obvious complaint would be that it wraps up pretty neatly by the end. But I don't think she did that in a way that doesn't make sense. I felt like all the pieces were there, which is what I love so much about her writing. She is so smart, that she knows at the very beginning, all the different places where you're going to be making guesses. She's ready for you. She's smarter than you are. And she she just so perfectly crafts her books. I feel like she solidly lands the plane on

this thriller. It had me riveted the entire time. It had me guessing the entire time. It had me guessing wrong. It had me guessing right and thinking I was wrong again, all the way through. This is as good as 56 Days. So you Kaytee might be really glad that you live in a world where Anne has her Octobers, I'm glad I live in a world with Catherine Ryan Howard because she is writing the best crime fiction out there right now. This is Rewind by Catherine Ryan Howard. Those were a lot of really, really good books. I feel like it's been a while since we've had a show that was so chock full of books that we absolutely loved. So that's always happy when we can do that. Okay, so let's talk about our deep dive today. So the deep dive idea came to us from a bookish friend, Holli Peterson. She's at @shelvesisters on Instagram. Here's what Holly said to us.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 36:31

"I love reading backlist books, but I often find myself cringing or even setting the book down entirely when I come across things that were quote unquote "normal" for the period where they were published in or the time period that they're set in, but feel uncomfortably racist, sexist, ageist, ableist, etc, in the context of today's standards, but then I feel weird about not reading those books because I don't want to dilute my reading experience by sticking to only contemporary books that don't tread that line. Also, some of those backlist books have really great content and redeemable qualities that I would hate to miss if I set it down the moment that it got weird." So she says "I recently read a book called Birds, Beasts and Relatives by Gerald Durrell. I love Durrell. I think his books strike the perfect balance of humor, witty observations and environmental awareness. Durrell did remarkable things for animal welfare and conservation. However, this book made me ill at times because it's set in Africa and has some not so flattering descriptions of its people and their dialect, as well as assigns wife, a very minor gender stereotype role. I felt uncomfortable reviewing this one because I loved it on the whole, but I hated those parts. So if you could someday have a deep dive on books that you love, but are problematic, and how you review rate and recommend those books without giving a gazillion trigger disclaimers. I would be so grateful. This is a real literary conundrum for me." And Kaytee, I think this is a literary conundrum for all of us especially

**Kaytee Cobb** 38:06

And we love a literary conundrum here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 38:07

Exactly. Especially because I think in the last year especially there has been more and more clamor to read backlist. More and more of us have kind of said, I'm tired of just only the brand new. And there's you know, so I wonder, I want to turn my lens backwards. But then we run across something like this. So Kaytee, how do you think about this? Or when we first started talking about doing this as a deep dive? What were the first thoughts that came to your head?

**Kaytee Cobb** 38:38

Well, first I started thinking about which backlist books I have found that that have cringy stuff in them. And as I started thinking about it, it seems like the further away I got, there's like a sweet spot of really cringe worthy stuff like 50 to 150 years ago, you're going to find all kinds of language and situations that are not are not palatable for the modern reader. But when you get even further back than that, like you

might find the Count of Monte Cristo, smoking hookah in a cave, but you're not going to find like, and then he called somebody the R word or the N word or like something that we don't even feel comfortable saying out loud anymore, you know, like, because that language is far enough removed, that it doesn't translate even. I mean, it does. It's translated into English, but it doesn't translate to the negative connotations that we have today. So there's like a sweet spot of cringe or a really like, what's the opposite of a sweet spot? An achy spot, a bitter spot and achy spot, right? Yeah, it's like there's a bit of cringe. It's gross. And, and books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* fit in there, where they're taught in classrooms. They're required reading often, and they have language that is particularly offensive. And you know, and why teachers don't know if they should read it out loud. And should Black students have to sit in the same classroom as students were discussing it, like it's that cringe worthy, but it's also that classic. And, and gosh, it's a hard line to toe. And so for me, I'm really I try to think of how what does this genuinely add to the canon? Or add to the conversation that can't be found elsewhere? You know, like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, can you get a river adventure elsewhere? Can you get a perspective on a young child interacting with an escaped slave elsewhere? Can you get that kind of interaction or that kind of plotline somewhere else without having to force feed yourself something that's really no longer acceptable? Because we know better and we do better? You know?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 40:46

Right. I think about it in terms of books in terms of my own reading of backlist, and then in terms of books that my kids are reading, whether it's you know, in elementary school, junior middle school, high school, college. And so, for me, when I read like one of my favorite, you know, one of the not one of my favorite, one of the books that got me into reading was *Gone With the Wind*. Right? Right. I was eight years old when my grandmother handed me *Gone With the Wind*. And she didn't say the word boo to me about it, it was just like, hey, here's a book that I was interested in. And she's like, Yeah, you can read it. As I was reading it, and running across and this is remember, I was born in in the early 70s. So when I was reading it was was early 80s and I remember reading some of those parts and bringing it up to some of the parts, especially having to do with the the, you know, the the Black people who worked for the family that we're focusing on, worked for, or were enslaved by, not worked for. That's correct. That's, that's an important distinction that I would make, or that we should make. And so even my eight year old mind had questions about it. And I brought those things up to my grandmother. And I appreciated then that my grandmother had a conversation with me that put those things into context and helped me understand that this was a story that was written a long time ago, when we know better, we do better, all of those kinds of conversations. And remember this happening in the early 80s. Right? I'm really glad for that reason. And I think that this is what has kind of set my my setpoint on this topic, is because I'm really glad that my grandmother didn't take it from me and say, I'm uncomfortable with you reading about this period of time, where these really problematic to say the least things were happening, or these relationships are passed off as being normal, but they're really not normal. And you know what I mean, all of that. So she didn't stop my reading of it. But she put my reading into context. And so for that reason, as I've raised my own children, it's been really important to me that my kids read, for example, *Huck Finn*, but not in a vacuum. And I think that's the distinction that I that I would make. I wouldn't search for a, I certainly think that would be great to read books, I would, I would say a both and. So for example, when we're talking about *Huck Finn*, I want my children to read *Huck Finn*,

because of the very things that we're talking about. Because I want them to be horrified by what they're reading. And I want to talk about why was it okay? Why was this why is this book considered a classic, and yet it contains these things. So I want it's the conversation that I want because I think that I and then I want to and then I want to offer other books that are in new contexts that present the relationships in new way, a way that we think now think of now and so I That's how I feel about you know, the there's the topic of banned books, you know, there's the topic of you know, Forever by Judy Blume. Did you read Forever by Judy Blume?

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:05

I don't know if I've ever read any Judy Blume which like makes me think that y'all are gonna take away my reader card. I truly don't know if I've ever read any Judy Blume. I know. Meredith is having a coronary on on camera right now.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:19

Okay. It's okay, Kaytee. Because when we know better, we do better.

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:24

Somebody asked me how did you even know how to have sex if you haven't read Forever as a child?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:29

More importantly, I would say how did you know how to have your period? Okay, I need you to read Are You There God? It's me, Margaret. If you don't read anything else, I need you to read it because I need Onalee to read it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:40

Okay, noted.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:43

Big Judy Blume fan. Again, born in 1973. It you know, I might as well been born with a copy of,

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:49

Yeah they hand him out of the hospital at that time.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:52

Right, exactly. Right. So, so Forever is a really good example of a book that a lot of people have said "Take it out of the libraries!" You know, it shouldn't because it I mean, yeah, it, it's got some stuff in it for sure. And my mom did try to keep it from me for a long time. And you know what? I understand it. But eventually I read it despite her, and at least she was able to have a conversation with me about it. So again, when we talk about backlist like that, when I think about my kids and what I want them to read or not, I want to be able to have the conversation because I want I don't want there to be a vacuum. Right? So that's really important to me. When I think about it for my own self. I gotta say, I am very like I read Harlan Coben, what was the the Harlan Coben book, Deal Breaker? Right, which was written in like early 90s, which is when I was graduating from high school, and I read it, and I was like, "Holy

Hannah, there is a lot of really cringy stuff in here" having to do with like, the way he talks about women or they talked about, there's a lot of stuff. But when I read it, I read it with great interest. So it doesn't upset me. And, and I'm in that case, I'm making a joke out of it. But in other cases, it wouldn't at all put me in that mindset. I will see it and recognize it and be like, Oh, this is making me uncomfortable. But I read it with a lot of interest, because I read it with the context of the time, and how far we've come. And that's a part of the conversation that we have with our kids is, you know, I think there's such an opportunity to read some of this backlist stuff and then talk about how far we've come and how much further we have to go on all topics of racism and ableism and sexism and all of that.

**Kaytee Cobb** 45:04

Yeah, I think I think for me, and even as we've had this conversation, what I'm noticing is that almost everyone we've mentioned, as an author writing things that may have made you cringe, that might make you cringe now that were written in the past, is a white male. And I think when you're talking about making sure that we have balance, and we have the other perspective, it's about making sure that, you know, we can only do so much about the classics, because publishing has been so inherently gate kept.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 47:20

Gate kept

**Kaytee Cobb** 47:21

Sure in in the past that, that we have to take what we can, but the way to balance that is with your contemporary reading, making sure that you're getting those other perspectives and for your kids so that they can see, oh, the reason this is problematic is because now I've also read a book about the time of the Civil War and afterwards by a Black person and I can see where Margaret Mitchell fell short or maybe glossed over some things that weren't actually that great or painted the family here as as nice white enslavers instead of instead of, you know, great co workers of their, of their property that they kept. So, right, being able to give that full circle view, rather than saying, Well, I have read some classics, and now they guide my reading life, and they guide my decisions in my life, from here on out that we keep reading more, and we keep reading current and future books, because we are learning more. And that gives you the opportunity to make those contrasts and make those distinctions and figure out, you know, I loved reading a couple John Irving books over the past couple years. But again, over and over again, you're like, wow, there's a whole book about abortion, and the Catholic Church, and Ooh, there's a lot in here. That's like a little rough, a little hard to swallow. Right. So Right.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:05

So what do we do then about poor Holli Peterson, who brought this idea,, this idea for the deep dive to us, which is such a good one, where she's talking about, I read this book by an author that I really, really like and there's a lot of good bits in this book. But then there's also these other pieces. So I think what I would say to that is, understand that a book can have all of those pieces, and you as a reader contain all that you need to be able to say, I'm going to take the good that is this and I'm just going to set aside and leave behind the pieces that we have left behind and that we need to leave behind, right? And understand that this was written at a completely different time where cultural mores were different,

doesn't mean that it was okay. But it was like what I think the worst lens to look at backlist is to read something backlist and expect that a person writing at a different time would have the the ways of speaking or the ideas that we have today. I think that's not fair.

**Kaytee Cobb 49:57**

I completely agree. And I think in in that sense she asks about reviewing rating and recommending these books without giving a zillion trigger disclaimers, right? I will put in a public review or in my reading journal, published in 1936, read in 2021. That's my lens that I'm looking through this book at, right instead of saying, "Here's all the crazy this and that and everything else that you're going to encounter in here," being able to just have those two dates, and say, "This is where it's coming from. This is where I'm looking at it from". And they are very different times in history. So, and I do think that it does a disservice to readers to assume that anyone wouldn't be able to handle that to say, Okay, you wouldn't be able to look at a book and say, This was published in 1975, or 1992 and it has some cringy stuff about the way that men and women interact. Well, of course it does, because we're readers. And we know that there has been change since then. Right? Right. So

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:58**

We can feel good about that change. And that's one of the things that when I when I come across it, I feel good about the change. Now, I will say, obviously, I don't even need to say this. We also know that we get to make the decisions in our reading. So a couple of months ago, Roxanna and I got excited about a book that we it was a I can't even remember the name of it. Honestly, it was a legal it was like a legal thriller that a couple people had mentioned, and we were excited about it, it was written by a white guy and what we were excited about the plotline. And we started reading it, and we were like, oh my god, this is so mid 90s, misogynist, just everything about it was super oldboy network and the way some of the words and the phrasing that he was using, we were like, "Okay, you know what, this book just isn't good enough for us to overlook the tiresome misogyny." And so we just dropped it. So we all you know, we have the ability to say, "You know what, that's a product of its time and it's not for me in my reading right now." Both of those things can exist. But you know, again, when it comes to if there's a lot to be said for a book and it's just like, there's some you know, there are elements in it that today make us uncomfortable, I think we can look at it through that lens and be able to take what is good and leave behind those pieces that we we've chosen to do better in.

**Kaytee Cobb 52:23**

Right. Right. For example, as one last thing here, we could talk about To Kill a Mockingbird, right, which is fantastic. And a classic, and absolutely overshadows the character of color and turns Gregory Peck nope, Atticus Finch into a white savior. Right? And we can look at that book and say, "Yes, and". There were also some white people who did try and fight a good fight, even if they came in charging, like a like a charger on their white horse with a knight costume on. And, and also, here's Just Mercy. And here's where we are now, at this point in time. Just want to throw in one non male for this deep dive, because we've had a lot of them. Oh, Margaret Mitchell, also non male. We had a couple.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 53:11

Right. Well, and a lot of people you know, in my reading origin story, a lot of also what I talked about is Nancy Drew, you go back and read Nancy Drew. I mean, they're describing characters as pleasingly plump. There's described, there's all sorts of misogyny all over the page. I mean, when you go back and read Nancy Drew now, now do I think that means that we shouldn't, that we shouldn't read Nancy Drew? No. But if my daughter or my granddaughter is picking up Nancy Drew, I would be buddy reading it side by side and being like, Ooh, there's so much fun stuff here. And also, it's not okay to call someone plump, you know, in order to, to describe them as it has to do with their body, or to describe them as it has to do with the color of their skin. Those kinds of things we can talk we can yes and that

**Kaytee Cobb** 53:59

Right or right off women as insensible just because they have a uterus or like we get that all through. I've only read one Nancy Drew also, gosh, this is like Kaytee confessions this. And it was like, well, a year ago,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 54:13

Well, they have since then done other versions of Nancy Drew, which is a whole other topic, because I think that they really take out all the stuff that is good about Nancy Drew, and they kind of they updated it, but then they made it like, not as good. So but anyway, a lot to be said on that. But I'm really, really glad to have this discussion today. Because I think that it's one that we are all grappling with. It's one that you know, every reader, reader know thyself. Every reader needs to read in a way that feels good and right to them, and you need to make decisions for your kids and your kids' reading in a way that feels right to you. And luckily, and thankfully, we all get to, we all get to do that. We aren't forced to have a copy of Cinderella in our houses and you know, to read it's religion.

**Kaytee Cobb** 55:01

Right? Nor are we required to remove any books or houses that have brought something into our reading experience, right? I mean, banned books are its own topic. That could be a whole new Deep Dive. But yes, that's not what we're talking about here. Either you can make those decisions for yourself without taking them out of every classroom in the country or your state.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 55:21

Exactly, exactly. So lots, lots to think about there. But I'm glad we were able to talk about it. Thank you so much Holli for bringing this deep dive idea. As always, we welcome your ideas. If there's a literary conundrum that you have, if there's a trend, or a theme that you're seeing that you're like, This is everywhere. I want to talk about it, or I want more of it. Let us know. So send us an email to [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com) and we will probably, if we think we can do justice to it, we will get it on our calendar. All right, Kaytee. Let's press some books. What book do you want to press this week?

**Kaytee Cobb** 55:55

I do have another middle grade book this week. And this is the first time that I have ever pressed a book written by an actual bestie of mine. I'm going to press My Storied Year by Katie Proctor.



**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 56:08

Oh good.

**Kaytee Cobb** 56:09

In the past, I have pressed books by people I'd like to be friends with, people I interact with and get along great with, but someone I talk to every day, it's never happened. It's happening today. I mentioned this one during my current read for Isaiah Dunn, but I want to put it here as well. Another great gem for middle grade March. My Storied Year by Katie Proctor. Our main character here is Dragon Stewart. He's a middle grader with dyslexia, which makes him feel like an outsider at school. But home is rough too, because his mom isn't doing well and social services steps in to make sure things are going okay, which as we know, can upend everything else. This book is like a love letter to teachers, a love letter to kids who struggle in and out of the classroom, and a love letter to the written word. The way that Dragon is drawn out of himself is so wonderful and lovely and I often find myself thinking of him, even in my own kids' struggles with learning at home. This is a book written by my bestie but it's also just a really great book. And I was so happy to read it at the time and I'm really happy now to press it into your hands today. It's My Storied Year by Katie Proctor.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 57:17

Oh, I'm so glad that that's on the press list. That's a really, really good one. All right. Well, I'm also going to press, because I promised I would last week, I'm also going to press my favorite middle grade book for me and that is The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone by Jaclyn Moriarty. And Jaclyn Moriarty is the sister of Liane Moriarty which actually, I hate even saying that because I feel like poor Jaclyn Moriarty. That's how people always kind of introduce her but she is such a great author, her own self, and I loved this particular book. So here's the setup. Bronte Mettlestone is 10 years old when her parents are killed by pirates. This doesn't bother her particularly. Her parents ran away to have adventures when she was just a baby which is very sad. She has been raised by her aunt Isabel with assistance from the Butler with a capital B and has spent a really pleasant childhood of afternoon teas and writing lessons. Now, however, her parents have left detailed instructions for Bronte in their will, instructions that annoyingly have been reinforced with fairy cross stitch, which means that if she doesn't complete them terrible things will happen to her town. She travels across the kingdoms perfectly alone, delivering gifts to 10 other aunts, a farmer aunt who owns an orange orchard, a veterinarian aunt who specializes in Dragon care, a pair of aunts who captain a cruise ship, and a former rockstar aunt, who is now the reigning monarch of a small kingdom. But as she travels from Aunt to Aunt, Bronte suspects that there might be something more to this journey than just the simple delivery of treasure. This book, you guys is a delight. It is my favorite kind of middle grade. Of course, I love an orphaned lead character. I love a very, very smart and sassy lead character which Bronte is for sure. It has a real fairy tale vibe to it, her family, all the different aunts that she visits. Every one of those scenes I can remember so clearly. I really want to reread this book actually. There are so many fantastic scenes here. And just overall also, I really want to say there are some really jerky family members too, so it's not all puppies and rainbows. She actually runs across some surprisingly douche-y family members as she's going and delivering all of these things, according to her parents will. There's also a lot of really smart puzzles and a satisfyingly tidy ending, which I love in my middle grade. So

overall, a complete middle grade delight that I have pressed into the hands of so many people and now I'm putting it on the press list. This is *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone* by Jaclyn Moriarty.

**Kaytee Cobb** 1:00:21

Meredith, I remember, when you pressed this into my hands. It was right at the beginning of the pandemic and you said "Save this for the time when you exactly need it." So I read it right after the Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires because I needed to cleanse myself. That was a meat sweats book, cleanse myself and this book was the perfect book at the time for me. So I'm so glad you put it on the press list.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 1:00:45

I love it and it is on my official middle grade shelf, which I have in my house which is completely devoted to middle grade. This immediately got a spot there because not only is it absolutely perfect inside, it's got a really, really beautiful cover too. 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 @meredith.reads on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 1:01:08

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 1:01:12

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 at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](https://currentlyreadingpodcast.com).

**Kaytee Cobb** 1:01:22

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us with your deep dive ideas especially at [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com).

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 1:01:30

And if you want more of this kind of content, become a Patreon supporter for \$5 a month. You can also help us by rating and reviewing us on Apple podcasts and shouting us out on social media. All of those things make a huge difference in our finding our perfect listening audience.

**Kaytee Cobb** 1:01:47

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

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 1:01:52

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot and your book be unputdownable. Happy reading Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 1:01:58

Happy reading Meredith