



Season 4, Episode 34: Forever Favorites + Books That Live in our Heads, Rent-Free

Mon, 4/4 • 50:56

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. We'll discuss our current read, bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:32

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas and today's reads will show that I contain bookish multitudes.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and if there's such a thing as a reading superhero, sign me up for that job. This is episode number 34 of season four and we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:52

All right. Well, we want to let you guys know right up at the top. I just jumped in.

Kaytee Cobb 00:57

I'm driving this episode.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:59

Yep, go for it. You're in the driver's seat.

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

All right, Friends, we want to let you know right at the top of the show here, that today, our deep dive is about the books that live rent free in our heads. And those could be books that we really loved, or maybe not. We'll see how that goes. But first, because it's the first Monday of the month, we want to talk about the thing we always talk about on the first Monday, which is our Patreon and why you might want to become a bookish friend Meredith what's a great reason to become bookish friend this month?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:27

Well there are always a lot of reasons to be become a bookish friend because of course you get all the content so if you love currently reading you're definitely going to want to be a bookish friend because you want all of the extras that you get to get All Things Murderful with me and Elizabeth Barnhill, you get Kaytee Reads Too Mu, ch you get The Indie Press List, you get the ability to be a part of our bookish friend community, which is huge because if you ever have wondered "What books should I tackle next on my TBR", they will help you decide, all of your bookish friends, all 1900 of them will help you decide. But I think probably the most persuasive reason to spend \$5 a month being a bookish friend for currently reading is because what it enables us to do every single week is bring you this show with no commercials. This is the one commercial that we do all month long. And all the other episodes which are now regularly, you know, coming up on an hour long, that's an hour of bookish content four times a month with no commercials at all completely uninterrupted content for a lot of people that is \$5. well spent.

Kaytee Cobb 02:39

It is. And just to be clear, that also includes our Patreon benefits. There's no commercials over there either.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:45

Right? That's true. Exactly. No commercials, anywhere. So there are so many reasons to join us. It's a great time of year to join us. And you can do that by going to patreon.com/currentlyreadingpodcast.

Kaytee Cobb 02:59

Five bucks a month, all kinds of great stuff there. I do want to tackle some mischief before we get into our bookish moments, which is that next week, we are going to decide to take a spring break for the two of us. So there will be no new episode in your feeds on April 11. But we will be back as usual on April 18th. We're going to juggle some family goodness. And then we'll be refreshed and ready for you right in the middle of April. Now that that's managed, Meredith, what is your bookish moment of the week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:28

All right, my bookish moment of the week is spring. I have to say, Kaytee, I've said it on Instagram, I said it a few places. Spring in Texas is my favorite. I come from the Bay Area of California, which is some of the most beautiful weather in the world all year long. But what that means is, there isn't a lot of difference between the seasons. But here in Texas, no, we don't get a lot of snow except every once in a while. But we do get cold winters that kind of decimate the landscape everywhere. And then very, very quickly, it becomes spring and that is my favorite thing to watch. I love to watch the changes outdoors, all of a sudden the birds are back and the blossoms are on the trees. And like Texas does everything so big and extra. And Texas, Texas spring happens really, really fast. And that means I'm out on my walks listening to my audio books, which had kind of stalled out on my audio books because when I'm not walking, I don't really have a commute. I don't really do a lot of audio book listening. And so now Spring is here. I'm back to my walks and I'm back having my earbuds in my ears and I've actually read some great books in just the last little bit so super excited about spring reading.

Kaytee Cobb 04:43

That makes me very excited. We're having the same thing here in New Mexico of course with birds and we've got tulips that come up voluntarily at our house, and it makes me very happy. Yeah, I love Spring. Okay, my bookish moment Meredith you already know about this but bookish friend Kodi shared in the bookish friends group last night that she has a seven year old daughter named Amelia. Amelia and her friend play reading club podcast during recess at school. She told her mom that it's just like the reading podcast we listened to with the two girls, which is you and I, Meredith,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:16

I love this so much. I love Amelia

Kaytee Cobb 05:19

I love Amelia. We've now decided to make her our president of the reading club podcast. When Kodi asked Amelia, what they do when they play reading club podcast, she said, "We just sit in the sun and talk about what we're reading," like "Duh mom, what else would we be doing?" I did not know that it was a life goal of mine to be someone that a seven year old wants to pretend to be. But it turns out that it absolutely was and I'm so excited to be able to check it off. What a delight. I actually just before we jumped on today, ordered some currently reading swag to send to Amelia to celebrate her love of reading so that she can also feel like a reading superhero. I'm so excited about that. Thanks, Amelia. We adore you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:56

I absolutely I love that so, so much.

Kaytee Cobb 05:59

So fun. All right, let's get into some current reads. Let's play reading club podcast, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:03

Well, this is my favorite part. All right. So I am bringing as I said in my bite size intro I'm bringing three very different books today, which makes me super excited. More than ever before you guys my reading is morphing. It's changing. Elizabeth Barnhill just from Fabled just was texting me the other day and she was asking me what about a book I was currently reading and she was like, "Man you're reading is, it's really changing isn't it?" Like, it is. This next book I want to talk about is a perfect example of a book that two years ago, I never would have picked up. But I decided to read, after looking at it a million times and turning my nose up at it, My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Otessa Moshfegh. Have you ever read this book?

Kaytee Cobb 06:48

No. We've had it recommended to us and I've never picked it up. Tell me about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:52

Right. So this is, you guys are gonna remember this. If you don't remember the title, you're gonna remember the cover, which is this woman sitting on like a chaise lounge looking sort of woebegone and melancholy. This is, this is this book. As soon as you see the cover, you're gonna know exactly what I'm

talking about. Here's the setup. So our unnamed narrator which by the way, right there is why I was always stopping before. Period. Record screech.

Kaytee Cobb 07:15

So that's what just happened in my head.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:18

I don't, I can't, I don't like unnamed narrators. But for whatever reason it worked here. All right, our unnamed narrator lives a life that is fairly problem free. I mean, it really is. And so she really should be happy. She's young, she's thin. She's beautiful. She recently graduated from Columbia. She works an easy job at a super hip art art gallery. She lives in an apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, which is paid for like all the rest of her needs by her super large inheritance. But spoiler alert, she is not happy, Kaytee and it's very sad. There is a hole in her heart and it isn't just because she lost her parents, which she did. Or the way that her Wall Street boyfriend treats her or her toxic relationship with her best friend. It's just, it's everything. So our narrator decides that she's going to take a year off and rest and relax. And so she finds a skeezy doctor to help her medicinally accomplish this.

Kaytee Cobb 08:24

Are there tapeworms involved in this?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:26

Nope, there're no tapeworms. She just naps for a year.

Kaytee Cobb 08:30

What?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:31

This is, this is the book.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:32

Yeah. All right. I've heard about this book, like you. I've heard about this book for years. And I finally decided that I was just gonna, I was in the library and you know how I am in the library. When in doubt, check it out. It happened to be on a shelf as I was passing by. And I was like, "You know what, I just want to dip into this ridiculousness and see what's happening here." And so because I had a general sense of what it was about, so I put it into my bag, well, then, I'm checking out from the library with the librarian, who we often chat. And she was saying, she saw this book, and she's like, "Oh, you know, what's so interesting about this book is that if you read it right, it's actually quite good. But if you read it wrong, you'll hate it." And I was like, "Say more words about that. And she was like, here's the deal. If you read it, like the farce that it is, then you can really enjoy it. But if you go into it, like reading it, like you would read a regular book, like taking it seriously and trying to empathize with this character, you're absolutely going to hate it." And she's like, "but just look at it written as a farce." And so that was actually really, really helpful to me. Because if I had read it like I was going to read another book, I absolutely would have DNF'd immediately. But once I had the permission to find the unnamed narrator ridiculous, I actually started to see her differently. I even felt myself having the ability to try and

understand her and see why she might be doing what she was doing. There's absolutely no question that this book is so far out of my own lived experience as to literally be a fantasy. I've been a married mom since I was 20 years old. So I have no idea what she's talking. But I kind of relaxed into this fantasy and started to enjoy the ride. Now, I will say that this well, this book is very, very, very millennial and it has the feeling of being written by a young female author, who definitely believes that she's going to win a National Book Award at some point. And the writing for sure feels like someone who has an MFA from like a northeastern college somewhere and for sure, is obsessed with Lauren Groff, like these things I just I know for sure are true about this. She takes herself very seriously, in I mean, in my fantasy world of what she thinks. But luckily, because I had the advice of my fantastic librarian, I was able to read this book and not have to take all the characters so seriously. It's quite well written. It's very much a commentary on life today. And although there are reasons that I can see people absolutely hating it, I would say if you read it as a farce, you might actually get something out of it. So this is My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Otessa Moshfegh.

Kaytee Cobb 08:32

What?

Kaytee Cobb 11:32

Okay. Okay. I hear what you're saying. I don't think this is a book for me. I have kind of found that I don't think that satire or farcical writing, like my brain doesn't work that way. I don't know if that makes me odd in some way. I'm totally fine with it admitting it here on the podcast. But I like I cannot read a book like that. And not even with the setup Meredith, you saw me covering my eyes, and like rolling them so hard I sprained them. I can't, I don't know. But I'm glad it exists.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:09

I mean, it's a commentary on where a certain part of a certain generation find themselves. And it's also a commentary on larger existential crises that we can have, where literally, I don't have this lived experience, it's really set up to be farcical. Right. Nobody would do what she's doing. But I have had the experience of saying, I have every material thing I could want. I have a family that loves me, I have lists, lists, lists, right, you know, and yet, I am not happy. Right? And I mean, like, I'm not feeling that all the time. But I have these moments where I feel that way. Right? Or like, "Why am I not feeling super satisfied with every part of my life when I really should be? Why do I have this existential dread or this feeling of foreboding joy, or whatever it is?" So, again, I read this book, because I wanted I'm all about right now, stretching myself to read things that are unlike what I've been reading for a long time. So I'm feeling drawn towards these kinds of reads. I am not suggesting that this is a book that I think people should go out and like, "Oh, my god, yeah, this is a page turn you want to bring on the airplane. I am not saying that." I'm just saying it was an interesting book. And I was really happy to get that feedback from someone who'd read it before, to kind of put me in the right mood and the right read it from the right angle. And I think that I got more out of it that way.

Kaytee Cobb 13:41

All right. I mean, it sounds like a brain stretcher. I can see that. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:46

What was your first book?

Kaytee Cobb 13:46

Okay, my first book is not an airplane book either, but for completely different reasons. I am going to talk about *The Love Songs of W.E.B DuBois* by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers. Oh my goodness, this gorgeous book, and it's gorgeous like I just want to hold it and hug it sometimes. It made it onto my TBR list well before released, but I decided to save it for a slow but steady read in February. Here's the setup. The great scholar W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote about what he called "double consciousness", a sensitivity that every African American possesses in order to survive. Since childhood, our main character Ailey Pearl Garfield has understood Du Bois's words all too well. She is reared in the north of the United States, but spends her summers in the small George's town of Chicassetta. Side note, I love the name Chicassetta. I want to go there and where her mother's family has lived since their ancestors' ancestors arrived from Africa in bondage. From an early age, Ailey fights off a battle for belonging that's made all the more difficult by a hovering trauma, as well as the whispers of women, her mother Bell, her sister Lydia, and a maternal line reaching back more than two centuries, that urge Ailey to succeed in the ways that they were unable to do. So Ailey starts to uncover her family's past generations of ancestors, Indigenous, Black and white in the Deep South. In doing so she must learn to embrace her full heritage, a legacy of oppression and resistance, bondage and independence, cruelty and resilience. That is the story and the song of America itself. That's the song part. I like that. This story follows Ailey's ancestral timeline, as well as her present tense story. It is difficult, not just the enslavement of humans, but the sexual assault that oftentimes accompanies that enslavement, as well as the sexual assault of minors and children. There are trigger warnings that are bound in this book, and it's not going to be a book for every reader. It's tough. It's a tough hang not by a longshot right? Really great readers, people who are like, I can read deeply and critically and wonderfully, are still going to have often a hard time with this book. Alongside that it's 800 pages, did it need to be 800 pages? Well, it's a long family history interwoven with a story of the current women of the family. But I think it could have been pulled together by about 100 pages. Not cut in half. It didn't need to be 300 pages, but it could have been pulled in, especially in the past timeline. All that being said, this book went directly onto my keeper shelf when I finished it. And the characters that I found here in these pages, especially Ailey and her uncle Root, will stay with me for a very long time. It's a keeper. It's gorgeous. It's *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:32

Man, I've heard so many, many good things about this book, but also that it is a tough that it's a tough read for all those reasons. Yeah. But I've been wondering if we were going to get that on the show. So I'm glad to know that that it has your your stamp of approval. All right, well, also a book that you originally brought to the show that I'm so so glad that you did. But it was quite a long time ago that you did. I wanted to talk about *The Ten Thousand Doors of January* by Aix Harrow. I'm so excited to talk about this. This is the absolute flip side of the book that I just was talking about before because there I was saying, "Hey, this is not a book that I would say drop everything and read it." This book, I feel like everybody should read this book. It's so so so good. All right. So let me give you a little bit of a setup. So in a sprawling mansion that's filled with tons of collected treasures, January Scholar is a curiosity. As the ward of the wealthy Mr. Locke, she feels kind of like the artifacts that decorate the halls of this

gigantic manor house that she's being raised in. She's carefully maintained, she's largely ignored, and she's totally out of place. And then as in all good stories, January finds a strange book, a book that carries the scent of other worlds and tells a tale of secret doors, and love and adventure and danger. Don't sleep on that sentence. Our story has that following January on every adventure as she jumps into the book and walks through the doors that opens for her. And that's the standard setup. And it's necessary all of that. But it feels incomplete to me. There are so many very interesting things about the plot of this book, that I honestly sat for 20 minutes trying to figure out how to tell you more, because I think that original setup doesn't even come close to doing the book justice for what it really is. But the problem is, the more things I pull out to tell you, the more I'm potentially spoiling your joy. So I'm just going to complete the setup by saying just trust me. That's all I'm saying. This book, my physical copy of this book Kaytee is so filled with metal book darts that it's a glittering mess. It's a it's an absolute mess. I booked darted so many lines of this book. It is an absolute adventure. It's an adventure for your brain, because it's so clever and layered the way that she's constructed the story, so clever and layered. It's an adventure for your heart because you go through every emotion as you fall for these characters. And it's an adventure, yes, for your soul, even my cold dead one. It's heartbreakingly beautiful. It's definitely not what I thought it was. And I feel bad for the fact that when I was hearing about it before, I guess I wasn't paying enough attention, because I didn't feel pulled to it. And I think that's because again, it's difficult to set this book up and really let you know what's happening in there. I ended up loving it from the very first page and I read it as slowly as I could, because I wanted to savor every word. This is one of those books where the words are as delicious as the story they are painting for you. And this is definitely one of those books that I will always wish I could go back and read it for the first time. Again, it's just that kind of book. It's like a love song to books and it's a love song to the power of stories to change your reality and to words themselves. And it's a love song to love because this is the piece I didn't understand Kaytee. The love story here, it's my favorite love story since Time Traveler's Wife. It had me clutching my chest all through the book. It had me crying into my husband's chest and telling him how much I love him. Don't get me wrong. This book is lyrical and beautiful and evocative and all those readerly words, but it's also flat out heart poundingly exciting. The plot hums along and I was wanting to race through to see what happened next, whilst also wanting to go slowly, because I didn't want it to end. This book was for me simultaneously, a wistful dream and a visceral adventure and I'm going to admit now that I did cry at the end of this book, but not because I was sad, or it was sad. I cried because it was over. I was so sad to leave this world. And these people, this is on my favorite shelf forever. The Ten Thousand Doors of January by Alix Harrow.

Kaytee Cobb 21:05

I love that book so much.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:08

Oh, my God. So good. I really honestly, let me say one more thing. I honestly think that if you were an adult who grew up loving the Chronicles of Narnia and its door and Secret Garden and its door, then you simply have to give this book a try. Because it will draw you in like it drew me in for sure. Literally if there were a thousand more doors of January, I would follow her through every single one of them.

Kaytee Cobb 21:36

The audio on that one is narrated by my love January Lavoy, which is so fun, because it's a January narrating a book about a January. I didn't listen to it on audio. But this makes me want to go back and reread it. I have to ask, do you feel like like as now as you walk through Austin or anywhere else you go, are you like noticing doors? And wondering what's behind that one?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:59

Yes. Yes. And I'm noticing doors. I'm noticing gates, like here in Texas. There's a lot of places where there are gates that weirdly like as you're traveling the landscape like as soon as you get outside of Austin, you're like in the country, right? Like it's very, it's very quick that it happens. And there's lots of gates that kind of go nowhere, where you're like, "Why is there a gate there?"

Kaytee Cobb 22:18

And now you know why there's a gate there?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:20

Yeah, exactly. Oh, it's so good.

Kaytee Cobb 22:24

Oh, I hope everyone picks it up now. Good job, Meredith. When I looked at the three books that I had chosen for this week, and I was getting all my show prep done, I all of a sudden realized I was like, "Oh no, you better switch one of those out because otherwise it's going to be like Kaytee and her dark, depressing thoughts about everything and trigger warning." So I switched out this one and now I've got some joy for you. I'm going to talk about When Life Gives You Mangoes by Kereen Getten. And it's middle grade, and it's pink. And it's delightful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:51

Oh, good. Good. Some lightness is good.

Kaytee Cobb 22:53

Our author Kereenn Getten grew up in Jamaica before moving to Burlington, Alabama. So now she writes out her childhood experiences. In this story, we travel back to the island of her youth to meet Clara who sees her home as anything but exotic. She's on Jamaica, everybody else thinks it's this beautiful exotic paradise. And she's like, "No, it's home." Right? Her favorite things are to eat ripe mangoes off the ground, run outside in the rain and visit her secret hideout with Gaynah, her best friend who lately has been acting a little bit not so nice. A little bit B word right? This summer when we meet her though, Clara is struggling. She knows something bad happened last summer after a hurricane hit her island. But the trouble is that she cannot remember what it is. All she knows is that now she's fearful of the water that used to feel like a second home to her. And sometimes she gets tiny drips of memory. Or her mom tries to tell her what happened but all of it seems untrue. This summer, she is hoping for something different. A new girl has come to the village. She's unlike anyone Clara has ever met before. All the other kids in the village are like being awful to her. Oh, you can't even remember why are you scared of the water. They're all they're all terrible to her. She's about to shake things up in a really big way. Hopefully big enough to shake some memories out of Clara. This middle grade novel

had some themes that felt similar to others in the genre, while also putting me in a tropical paradise. That's just a regular home to Clara our main character and throwing in some twists and turns to the story that I didn't expect. It was a four star read for me, because I actually would have liked it to be a bit longer. I get why it wasn't. It's a middle grade book, and to have the ending wrap up a little differently or be more satisfying. But overall, I found it really enjoyable and I loved especially the cast of characters that we get to meet inside the pages. This book was sent to me when I was subscribing to the middle grade shelf subscription from Bookshelf Thomasville. I rarely pick those books up immediately but I'm glad I got to this one when I did. It made me excited for summer days outside in the sunshine and having my kids exploring and adventuring together. This one is When Life Gives you Mangoes by Kereen Getten

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:01

Does sound perfect as we get toward warmer weather. That's, that's such a good book for this time of year.

Kaytee Cobb 25:06

It's very beachy. Like there's lots of ocean talk. It's lovely. Nice.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:10

All right. All right. My third book is the complete opposite of Ten Thousand Doors of January, which I did by design. I read Pretty Little Wife by Darby Kane. Here's the setup. Our lead character is Lila Ridgefield. She lives in an idyllic college town, but, and I'm going to shock you here, not everything in this college town is what it seems. And even Lila isn't what she seems. As we start our story, a student has vanished a month ago. And now Lila's husband Aaron, who's a beloved high school teacher is also missing. At first, these cases are treated as horrible coincidences until it's discovered that the student who's missing is really the third in a string of unexplained disappearances over the course of the last couple years. And the police are desperate to find a connection with the small town in an uproar. Everyone is worried about this girl, and they're worried about their beloved high school teacher Aaron, who's missing, everyone except Lila, Aaron's wife. She's definitely confused about her missing husband, but only because she was the last person to see his body. And now it's gone. BUM BUM BUM.

Kaytee Cobb 26:23

I was kind of hoping he would be dead.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:26

Well, Kaytee, [inaudible] to that story. But this book does a great job of taking you all the way through it, the highs and lows of all of this. So I picked this book up after Ten Thousand Doors of January. I had a whopper of a book hangover after that book. And I had a huge stack of books from the library and this one being the smallest happen to be on the top so when I went to do my book flight, I grabbed it first. People had told me very recently that it wasn't very memorable and it was pretty messy and at that moment that made this book perfect. Why, you might ask yourself, would I ever want to spend any time reading a book that is unforgettable and mediocre? Because I was so in love with Ten Thousand Doors of January and afterward, I knew that no other book could possibly live up to it, like breaking up with the

love of your life, and then realizing that you're definitely going to have a one night stand because you're never going to love again anyway. Right? That was that was this book. And that's why we had the deep dive on one nightstand books. This was the book that led to that. So this was definitely my mindset when I started the book. And really it was absolutely perfect. Like a good one night stand, it was fast and satisfying on a surface level, and probably totally forgettable in the long term. Since my expectations were so low, I actually quite liked this book. It kept me turning the pages. I liked the voice of the narrator. She was tired and cynical just like I was when I read this book. Somehow I felt like I knew her. And I liked her. The book, this book isn't overly gory, which is something to note. A lot of times people are looking for thrillers that are not overly gory. So this is one of those. But it also had an interesting cast of characters. And it has an alternating point of view with a police officer, which you guys know I always love in my popcorn thrillers. Again, is this book groundbreaking? Absolutely not. But it was exactly what I needed for it to be at exactly the right moment. So if you think you might want that kind of book in your arsenal, or a book to put into your beach bag or on in your airplane, carry on bag, I would definitely recommend *Pretty Little Wife* by Darby Kane. And yes, it has a terrible title.

Kaytee Cobb 28:40

How about the cover? Is it the back of somebody's head?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:43

No, because it's not historical fiction. It's just some it's something completely forgettable.

Kaytee Cobb 28:47

Perfect. I love that. Okay, so now we've had, like, farcical fiction, gorgeous, evocative, beautiful love story, adventure. We've had middle grade, we've had historical fiction, and a thriller that's forgettable. I brought a book of essays as my last one. So I think we've covered six bases. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:10

Something for everyone. Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 29:12

I like it. So my book of essays this week, is *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America* by Kiese Laymon. The title makes it sound very dark. It's not about suicide. Please note that before you fast forward me because you don't want to hear about it. This book has an interesting history that's worth sharing. But first I'm going to tell you that it's essays by an author that I love and trust and that I gave it five stars. It's not very big, but it's very powerful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:40

That's what she said.

Kaytee Cobb 29:43

Perfect. Yes. We can always say that about Kiese too. I will continue to be bossy about reading style here and recommend that as with all essay and short story collections, you only read one a day, rather than binging through them so that they can stay separate in your head. I will die on this hill. I do not

care. If you're like, yes, Kaytee, we know well, if you're new here, you need to know my rule about these.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:04

This is your "we are not animals."

Kaytee Cobb 30:06

This is my... Yes, we are not animals, we only read one essay a day. And we only read one short story a day. Kiese Laymon is the phenomenal author of *Heavy*, which I went back and looked, and I put it on the press list on episode 34 of season three. Oh, and today we are doing episode 34 of season four. So that's fun. These nonfiction essays are like personal memoir, but without trying to communicate all of his life story. We've had questions about that, I think there's a major difference in essays versus memoir. So here's my little tangent about that. Essays are often reflective pieces about the author's own story, but they don't necessarily follow a linear path, or try to paint a complete complete picture of the life, right? Whereas memoir has a much more, "Here's where I've been and here's where I am now" feel to it. That's my definition of the two. These essays, in particular, are placed in a book in reverse chronological format. So the first one of this new edition was written at the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, and very clearly reflects our current circumstances. But then the essays go backward in time ending with Kiese as a young man. The interesting thing about this book, though, is that it was republished in 2020 with this new format, this backwards chronological timeline. It was originally brought to the page through a different publisher in 2013. As you can imagine, Kiese has grown quite a bit as a writer since then, in seven years, right in nearly every way. He had to buy back the rights to this book from the original publisher for 10 times the amount that they paid him for it. That that is nuts. And this is all outlined in the very first chunk, the very first essay in this collection. So I'm not spoiling anything. I mean, it's a book of essays, you're not spoiling anything anyway. But reading through that, I was like, Oh, my goodness, this essay, so he buys it back for 10 times what they paid him for it, and republishes it, this time, with Scribner. It's still possible to find the older version and really, the new one is only missing a single essay about Kanye West, but I'm glad I read the new one. Kiese Laymon is a gifted writer and I found myself highlighting and making marginalia, making margin notes, in this one nearly every day for every essay. One essay a day, even better with a buddy. Katie and I read it together so we could process together and that allowed this book to come alive in my hands. I'm super grateful to Caitlin at my local indie, which is Garcia St. Books for pressing it directly into my hands in the store one day. She told me I would love it and she was absolutely right. This is *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America* by Kiese Laymon.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:38

Interesting. That's very interesting that he had to buy back his own book for 10. I mean, it really speaks to his success in the interim period of time. Right? But still.

Kaytee Cobb 32:48

Right, but they wouldn't have like, why not just let him edit it and republish? I don't know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:53

That's fascinating.

Kaytee Cobb 32:54

Crazy. Okay, those were our six current reads. And that means it's now time for our deep dive. And what I'm really worried about here, Meredith, is that we're both gonna start listing books that live rent free in our heads, and then all of a sudden, my TBR is gonna explode.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:09

I don't think so. Because I think I found a pattern to the books that live rent free in my head.

Kaytee Cobb 33:15

Oh, well, I'm very interested to hear about them. What makes a book live rent free in your head? What puts a book onto this list? What do we even mean by live rent free in your head?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:27

So when I think about that, I think what are the books that scenes from that book are constantly appearing in my mind? Or like, you know what I mean, I'm remembering it and I'll be I'll be thinking about it all of a sudden, for absolutely no good reason. But over and over and over again. And I realize that it's not... the majority of the books that are on this list are books that I really legitimately didn't, at the time especially, didn't like, but maybe the fact that they have been so memorable, kind of has maybe if I were to go back and reread it, for example, in my book journal, I might give it a higher rate higher rating, just because I'd be like, "Well, yeah, but I kept thinking about that book." So one example of this, for me is *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* by Hank Green. I did not like that book. I know that I'm an outlier there because I know that that the majority of people really, really did. I really didn't like that book. I didn't like the narrator. I didn't like

Kaytee Cobb 34:28

April May?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:29

Yeah. Oh, God, I didn't like her name. I didn't like 100 things about that book. But I constantly think about a few of the scenes from that book. And I think about it from the perspective of social media and social media stardom and what that does to people and how they parlay that. So that book keeps coming up in my mind, even though when I talked about it on the show, "I was like I really, really, really disliked this book".

Kaytee Cobb 34:56

Yeah, I can see that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:57

So maybe in that case, it lives rent free. My head, not because it's necessarily so visually memorable, but because it's topic was one that is so applicable to several things in the life that I live. So it's like I draw my experience when we read, I feel like we kind of slot those stories into our head almost as if they're our own lived experiences, even though they're not. And it's like, okay, I can compare this to this thing. You know, this thing that's happening in the world. I think that makes me think about April May,

God help her and trying to navigate her instant social media stardom, and all the horrible decisions that she made around that. So maybe that's a case of where real life is, like, just aligning with that piece.

Kaytee Cobb 35:42

Interesting. So that what you're saying about An Absolutely Remarkable Thing makes me think of So You've Been Publicly Shamed by Jon Ronson, which I found fine when I read it. But it has some of those same elements that you're talking about where like social media can get away from us. And we can't always expect the way things are gonna turn and especially these past two years, with COVID and with everything else that has happened in the world, people like dropping a little tweet and walking away and then figuring out later that "Oh my gosh, I just destroyed my entire life, because I said, whatever". Like, that kind of action out in the world brings that book to mind frequently for me, even though at the time I was like, Yeah, it's fine. Whatever. Like, it was kind of forgettable for me. It's not that I didn't like it. I just was like, Okay, great. But now I think about it all the time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:33

Yeah. Crazy. Yeah. Yeah, no. And that's the thing is like, the books that and I really, I mean, I went through many years of my book journal I pulled, you know, maybe 10 total, but they're 10 that legitimately come up in my mind all the time either because of you know, like Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild. Now, that is a book that just charges me. I, I detest not necessarily the book, but the subject of the book, the kid who goes off in the in the bus, so it doesn't, it's not at all I really liked Jon Krakauer. And I actually think that that's quite a well written book, as evidenced by the fact that I still think about it all the time, because he wrote it in such a way that now whenever like that poor, what was her name? Gabby, that girl who was killed by her boyfriend, and they went off on that little tiny van, and they were like, we're gonna go live like the to the tiny van life,

Kaytee Cobb 37:22

Gabby Petito?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:23

Yeah, I think so. And so every time I'd hear that story, different situation, not exactly the same thing kind of situation, but I kept thinking about Into the Wild. And again, my brain is, is pulling a situation that's in front of me and is trying to figure out something similar to catalogue it with and so that kept coming up in my mind. Sometimes it will be a character that will live rent free in my head. So one example of that, believe it or not, and you're not going to believe it Kaytee, is that horrible really book we never ever needed A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes by Suzanne Collins, the prequel to Hunger Games, we did not need this book

Kaytee Cobb 38:01

Who... is it Snow?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:04

That Snow character and his family and the things that they had to do to kind of like pretend like they were still really rich, but they and those kinds of things. I think about those GD Snow people all the

time. And it's the little details. It's like the little memorable details that make that Snow in his teens kind of character that has made and so for whatever reason, he'll just pop in, he's living rent free in my head.

Kaytee Cobb 38:32

Yeah. But you know who there's a family from a book I throw against the wall. It's Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng. I hated that book. I threw it against the wall. Right? It was part of our ratatouille episode. And I think about the ways that they just would not friggin talk to each other all the time. And I don't my family now, my current family that I live in is not like that. My family of origin is not like that. We talk about all kinds of things together. But I am constantly thinking about that family, and how I don't want to be that family. And I don't want to have that family dynamic. And I don't like It's like my antithesis. It's my anti hero family. And I hate them. Okay, do you have any, do you have any good books that live rent free in your head?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:23

So yes, and sometimes it's just like the imagery. And yeah, so Sophia Segovia's Murmur of Bees is one that the imagery constantly comes up in my head and partly because of where I live in the south of the united in the southwest of the United States. That one is is set in Mexico and it's just written in such a beautiful, beautiful way. I'm reading Violeta right now. Roxanne and I are buddy reading Violetta and it's

Kaytee Cobb 39:52

I'm reading Violeta right now.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:53

Oh, really?

Kaytee Cobb 39:54

With Katie

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:55

and it's very it's bringing up those that that feeling that Murmur of Bees gave me just that that sense of place. I think about I think about some of those scenes that the scenes with the bees, which oftentimes in books, that would be a really, really bad thing. In this case, the bees are very protective. They're a very protective force of the main character of that book. And so I think about that I think about that book all the time of it.

Kaytee Cobb 40:18

I have a lot of kind of near future sci fi that, you know, as we see things change, like the introduction of, the introduction of the Metaverse, it made me think of the Thunderhead from Scythe and the ways that we keep like making these weird steps toward things that I've read about, or Dark Matter, or the one by John Mars, like any of those where I'm like, are we on the precipice of Jurassic Park? Are we on the precipice of whatever...

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:46

Parasite?

Kaytee Cobb 40:48

Yeah, will just trickle up in my head. Can things trickle up? They will bubble up in my head in a way that I'm like, I don't like it. I don't like it. And then The Lazy Genius lives rent free in my head. I thought about getting a W W T L G D bracelet instead of like W W J D, it would be what would the lazy genius do? Right? So that I could just wear it, you know, or like, put it on my water bottle and just have it there all the time. So I can be like, "What would Kendra do in this situation?"

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:15

You hear her voice.

Kaytee Cobb 41:17

Yeah, exactly. Which was great, because I listen to her. So I have her voice in my head anyway. She lives rent free in my head. She's an actual human that lives rent free in my head.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:26

That for me is Gretchen Rubin. Like I will hear her actual voice in my head, you know, several times during the day for sure. Sometimes there are settings. Like, I don't think, now I think it would be really hard for me to go into a corn maze from some of the books that I've read. And I definitely feel like it would be really hard for me to go into an attic after reading The Southern Book Clubs Guide to Slaying Vampires. There's an attic scene in that book.

Kaytee Cobb 41:55

Mm hmm. Very memorable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:57

There is a hallway scene in that book made me not want to go into my upstairs hallway for a while. Like so sometimes books will do that. Right the like they'll traumatize you from wanting to go into certain places or certain kinds of houses or certain you know whatever's because of scenes that you've read. Library at Mount Char is one of those. One of my favorite books of all time. I think about that book all the time because the imagery was so strong.

Kaytee Cobb 42:21

I last weekend, the reason that you recorded with Mindy, we went to Kartchner Caverns State Park and while I was walking through the cave, I was like, Oh, I would love to read like a scary mystery set into a cave.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:32

Nope.

Kaytee Cobb 42:32

And then I was simultaneously very glad that I had never read a scary mystery set in a cave before I went to Kartchner Caverns because I would have been terrified the whole time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:43

Yeah, yeah, no, exactly. And I feel Yeah, and caves are something that I can't, I think in a past life, I died in a cave because I can't, I just couldn't even I can't even go into a wine cave. Like when we were living in the Bay Area, we'd go Napa all the time. And people would be like, "Let's go be in the wine cave". And like, "No, I'm out." No.

Kaytee Cobb 42:59

Is it like the window free?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:02

It's a cave. No, it's a cave.

Kaytee Cobb 43:04

The caveiness?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:05

It's the caviness of it. It's the closed in. It's like, what's going to collapse on our heads? Like "This wine cave has been here forever". I'm like, "I don't care. Today's the day. I can feel it." I can't. Can't do it.

Kaytee Cobb 43:18

Oh, I love it. Oh, man. Okay, well, that that was great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:22

We have more books living rent free in our heads than we thought that we did. And I think that I mean, free in good ways and in bad ways. Every single book that you read in some way you don't, you don't know exactly how it's gonna find you and how it's gonna leave you afterwards. There's another book that was the very first book that I thought of that since I read it, I'm not going to talk about it today, because I'm going to bring it as a current read in the not too distant future, when I finished it, I was sort of like, I don't know why this book is such a favorite of so many people. But in the intervening time, it has begun to live rent free in my head. And now I think I would actually give it a full star rating up from when I actually set it down. Yeah, like I've really marinated on it since then. And so and it's it's it's gained in my esteem. So sometimes it's a good thing that a book lives rent free in your head.

Kaytee Cobb 44:12

Yeah, I definitely have had that happen, where I'll continue thinking about a book and I'll go back to see what I rated it and be like, "Why did I read it so low? It's still in there. It's still harassing me all these months or years later."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:24

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Kaytee Cobb 44:26

Interesting. All right. Well, I can't wait to hear listeners, what books live rent free in your head and if you can find a pattern, I love the pattern that Meredith was able to pull out, and the patterns that she saw in hers and the way we were able to pull that together. So let's press some books into readers hands. Meredith, what do you want to press this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:45

All right, I want to press a book again, bringing a little bit of lightness, a little bit of fun. I am very much in the mood to read another fairy tale retelling. So I was thinking about some of my favorites and one that I actually haven't talked about for a really long time is one of my favorite fairy tale retellings. It's called All the Ever Afters by Danielle Teller. And I read this book back in 2018. It has a really beautiful cover. I liked this book a lot. So here's the setup. Our lead character, Agnes was born into the very lowest class of society like serfdom. And so early on, she is separated from her family and forced into servitude as a laundresses apprentice when she's only 10. Using her considerable smarts and her ingenuity, she escapes this really horrible matron and makes her way toward a hopeful future. When teenaged Agnes is seduced by an older man and becomes pregnant she is transformed by the love of her child. She's once again left penniless, and she has no choice but to return to servitude at the manor that she had really tried to leave behind. Her new position is nursemaid to a child named Ella, an other worldly infant. She struggles to love this child, who in time becomes her stepdaughter, and eventually, Ella becomes the celebrated princess, who of course embodies all of our fantasies. The story of their relationship, the one between Agnes and Ella reveals that nothing is what it seems, no one is exactly what you think that they are, beauty is not always desirable, and love can take on many masks. I have thought about this book a lot since I read it and I love I love love, love books that tear back the cover and tell a different version of a well known story. This really does that. Obviously, we are concentrating on this, the evil stepmother from the Cinderella story. This book creates a full fledged, fully layered human that explains the story. And that's my favorite kind of thing when they can land that plane when they're like oh, so if you liked Wicked, what Wicked did with the Wicked Witch of the West, this is definitely a book for you. Not to say that it is complex as Wicked was. For sure this is a much more straightforward, lighter read, but it is still very emotionally complex and interesting. And I found myself really rooting for the Agnes character. I loved this book. If you like a fairy tale retelling, especially to read in your summer reading, definitely pick up All the Ever Afters by Danielle Teller.

Kaytee Cobb 47:30

That sounds great. Was that early in 2018? Because I don't feel like you've ever brought that one to the podcast. And we started recording obviously in August of 2018.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:39

It's possible. I thought I brought it to the show early on, but it's possible that I didn't.

Kaytee Cobb 47:43

It's possible that my library card catalog in my head is also not totally functional four years later. Okay, the book that I want to press this week is Roots by Alex Haley. Been a long time since either of us a big old chunker on the press list. But this is a book that also lives rent free in my head and it has since

February of 2020 when I first read it. 2020 was my year of the brick, in which I read 12 books over 800 pages, one for each month of the year. And this one was my favorite by a longshot. A generational saga, this book has the subtitle "The Saga of an American Family". But let's start at the beginning. Kunta Kinte is the root of this family tree hailing from Jufureh in Gambia. We start the story in 1767 when Kunta Kinte is abducted from his homeland and sold into slavery. What follows in this nearly 900 page book and 30 hour audio book is a story that I intended to read slowly but steadily, one hour of narration or 30 ish pages a day. Instead, I finished it in less than half the time that I planned because I could not put it down. As we move forward in the timeline of this family tree. We get to know each generation of Kunta Kinte's descendants. We see some terrible moments, but we also get to see them arise and overcome. This story is unputdownable and it does not feel like 900 pages. It feels like a milkshake that is just an extra extra large one. It's inspiring and unforgettable. If we traced the ancestry of The Love Songs of W.E.B Du Bois that I talked about earlier as a current current read, I think we would find both Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi and Roots by Alex Haley as the ancestors in that family tree. And so it makes sense that all three of them are forever favorites for me. I'm so glad that today I get to add Roots by Alex Haley to the press list.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:35

Oh good. Yes. I've heard so many people say that like Shogun and Thorn Birds, which were kind of written around the same time. Big chunkers that really read like, much much much shorter book that's very accessible.

Kaytee Cobb 49:49

Yes, exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:50

All right, good. That's a good addition to the press list. All right. Well, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me, I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 50:00

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:04

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.

Kaytee Cobb 50:13

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:19

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Kaytee Cobb 50:35

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:40

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 50:43

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:45

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 50:46

Happy reading Meredith.