



Season 4, Episode 35: Dream Bookshelves + Exiting the Comfort Zone

Mon, 4/18 • 53:12

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 those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

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 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And though I may have a head cold, I still love talking about books.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and I didn't know crying over bookshelves was a thing, but it definitely is. This is episode number 35 of season four and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:57

Oh, Kaytee, I know the exact shelves you're talking about and I almost cried over them. So you know it is a thing.

Kaytee Cobb 01:03

We are all verklempt over my bookshelves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:05

Exactly. All right. Well, we're gonna hear about those I have a feeling, but first, we want to let you guys know that we are so happy to be back from our spring break. And we are very ready to talk about books. This week, we're going to talk in our deep dive about reading outside our comfort zone. Kaytee, I feel like you and I have been doing that maybe a little more than we have in the past. So we're going to talk about how we decided to do that. What are the things that make us feel okay about it? How do we kind of make that jump? That's what we're going to talk about in our deep dive. But first, let's get to our bookish moments of the week. Kaytee, what have you got?

Kaytee Cobb 01:41

Oh my gosh, I was so excited. Okay, so we took last week off for spring break. For my part, I had a kiddo that had to have surgery and we just didn't know what to expect recovery wise. My parents came into town to help manage children, and Levi's surgery went perfectly swimmingly, beautifully great. He bounced back super quick. So my dad and I spent a lot of time for the week that they were in town working on built in bookshelves. And I went back and I figured out that it's been about two years since I wanted to start this project. And then I first went and found the wood that I wanted to use for it a year and a half ago. But it was only about a week ago, or now almost two weeks ago that I went and bought that wood right before my parents came into town. And so my dad and I cut and sanded and routed the edges and did all the things. And then we assembled these beautiful, reclaimed wood bookshelves. And once once we put them all on the wall, and I stepped back, I burst into tears.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:43

Yes, they are really and that but then you added another feature that really gave it the wow factor.

Kaytee Cobb 02:49

Yes, this morning or this week, I finished putting up warm LED strip lighting on every shelf so you can see all the titles beautifully. And I just I'm obsessed with them. Every time I walk out of my bedroom in the morning, I happy sigh. It's like I open the door and angels sing at me. It's so wonderful. It makes me so happy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:08

Right? They look really, really great. I'm so impressed by the fact that you did all of it, you know from actually buying, like you didn't even just buy shelves and put them on the wall. Like that's really impressive. Also, one of the things that strikes me about this project from having been in your house, you oriented me to let me know where these shelves were. And it strikes me that that was a it's a hallway....

Kaytee Cobb 03:33

Yeah, basically,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:34

that doesn't necessarily scream "Put bookshelves here". But once they were there, it makes perfect sense to use it in that way. It looks great. It's super functional. It just made me think there might be more places in my house than what I'm currently thinking about. Like what I'm you know, that might be ready for bookshelves. Because it doesn't have to be like sometimes I think, well, I don't have a big blank wall. Right. But you were thinking beyond that.

Kaytee Cobb 04:05

Right? And I love them on every level. They bring me super, so much joy. They're at least twice as big as any bookshelf I have ever owned in my life, which just thrills me no end. And I like I love that Jason was I mean, he's like, "Babe, I am so impressed." This is amazing. He basically did nothing. He did one coat of lacquer, and my dad and I did everything else. And he loves them and I love them. And he's like, "Okay, so tell me which shelf is the one that I should be choosing from" and I was like, "Well, I've read

all of these except this one shelf so you can choose from anything" and he's like, "Okay," so he's excited. I'm excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:41

So that was my next question. How are you deciding? It's a lot of book storage. So is this replacing like there were shelves elsewhere that now don't exist or is this all additional and then how, what books are going on that wall?

Kaytee Cobb 04:56

There were not just shelves everywhere. They were like piles. There was the TBR piano right there first.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:02

Okay, so the TBR piano is no more?

Kaytee Cobb 05:05

Right. Our piano just is a piano now, which is very exciting. Okay, so I have like a fiction favorites on the very top. I have different genres of nonfiction throughout. And then I still have my TBR in a rainbow and that takes up about one full shelf and a half, but each shelf is 10 feet long. So, I mean, they're just, there's just so much space, and then I have almost a full shelf that's completely empty that I can do for like photos or like making TBR stacks and that kind of thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:32

It's the most fun. It's the most fun to have a really, really large amount of real estate. So I think what all of our listeners are doing right now is walking around their house and looking in their hallways and thinking, "Does this hallway really need to be as wide as it currently is?"

Kaytee Cobb 05:49

Can it be 10 inches thinner, cuz that's all you need.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:51

Exactly. We all just need 10 inches, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 05:55

Everybody just means 10 inches, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:57

That's my T shirt. Okay. All right, my bookish moment of the week is something that I don't think we've ever, I certainly have never done. I'm going to recommend a booktuber

Kaytee Cobb 06:09

Fun!

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:10

who I am currently obsessed with. I don't do a lot of booktube mostly because if I'm online at all for social media, it's going to be either the bookish friends Facebook group for our Patreon supporters or Instagram. But I ran across Nakia's Hideaway. This is her account name on on booktube and her account name on Instagram and I totally recommend following her on both. She is so fantastic. She and I have a lot of overlap in our taste. She does a lot of mysteries and thrillers. She does quite a bit of horror, which is so fascinating to me. Because when you hear her and you see her and you kind of get to know her, you wouldn't necessarily think that she'd be like a horror maven, you wouldn't think that she'd be drawn to that because she's pretty sunny, she's gorgeous and like, but yeah, she really likes horror. So we have some overlap, but she also reads a lot of mystery. And she just is really, really well spoken. But she's funny and authentic. And I just love her content, again, both on Instagram and on booktube, she's a fantastic follow. But she does one thing, Kaytee that I am really hoping we can somehow do ourselves because it's genius. It's brilliant. She does a piece of content, where she reads it, she's doing it by herself, but she reads one star reviews from wherever Amazon Goodreads wherever, for the books that she really, really loves. So and then she reacts to them.

Kaytee Cobb 07:45

I love that so much.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:47

It's so great. I was rolling. I was absolutely rolling. I mean the horror with which she's reacting to some of these reviews, or the just disgust, it's so funny. So I think that was brilliant content that she's doing. I've watched so much of her stuff. I went way down the rabbit hole. But I totally recommend Nikias hideaway again, both on booktube which is YouTube, that's just a bookish account on YouTube, and on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 08:15

Which is Bookstagram. but the real website. We just put book on the front of everything.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:21

For the longest time, I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what Bookstagram or Booktube meant. I literally thought it was like a separate website.

Kaytee Cobb 08:27

There's BookTok also, which is TikTok for bookish people. So they're everywhere. Bookish people just take over all the places.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:35

Exactly. All right, Kaytee, let's get into our current reads. What do you bring in this week?

Kaytee Cobb 08:41

Okay, my first pick this week is the 2022 Newbery Medal Award winner and while there aren't a ton of awards that will make me put a book onto my TBR, the Newbery is definitely one of them that at least

won't make me run the other direction. It is *The Last Cuentista* by Donna Barba Higuera. I'm so glad I picked this one up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:01

I'm so glad you did too, because I just got it in the mail this week. I've heard amazing things about it isn't the cover gorgeous?

Kaytee Cobb 09:08

It is gorgeous, the blues and the oranges. I'm obsessed with it. Okay. The cover makes it look a little spooky and creepy. And anyone might not know what to expect when you pick this up. So, but it's filled with wonders. I would call this middle grade sci fi. So for those of you who have mentioned, bookish friends, we see you that we don't bring a ton of sci fi to the show. That's still true. But...

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:32

No, I'm bringing more. I am committed to bringing more. I am committed to bringing more.

Kaytee Cobb 09:37

We see you. This is a great one, especially for those of you who have a bit of sci fi side eye and need a gentler entry into the genre. Petra Pena is our main character. When we meet her, it's her last night on Earth. There's a comet heading directly for the planet and a few hundred scientists and their children have been chosen to journey to a new planet. It is up to them to carry on the human race. The travelers are put into suspended animation and the children complete subconscious courses of study as they journey so that they are like fully educated by the time they arrive. Petra wants to take an elective on the stories and mythologies of her ancestors. Because story is her love language, and the ways that she carries the memories of her grandma especially just moved me to tears. When they arrive hundreds of years later and are woken from suspended animation, a terrifying group called "The Collective" has taken over the ship. They want humanity to be able to start fresh without the weight of the past, or the memories or the sins of our forefathers. So they purge the minds and memories of all aboard. Even their names are erased. Petra, though, she remembers, and perhaps her memories and her stories will be what make the difference for everyone. Petra is an incredible main character. She is lovable and brave. She's smart and determined. She's a heroine that we can all root for. This book gives us a reason to talk about why history and why our stories matter, why it's important to remember hard things from the past, even when they don't paint us in the most flattering light, which is a conversation we're having right now. Right? When should we maybe tuck that under the rug and pretend it never happened? This is a perfect way to introduce the reasoning behind learning history or writing or literature to a reluctant learner in any of those subjects. But at the same time, it's just a wonderful propulsive story with fantastic characters, gentle world building and wonderful writing. I completely adored the incorporation of Mexican folklore and culture as well. This book is a wonder I loved it. It was the Newbery winner for 2022 *The Last Cuentista* by Donna Barbra Higuera.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:52

Now several people who've mentioned it to me have said, "If you loved *Project Hail Mary*, this might have some of those same vibes."

Kaytee Cobb 11:59

There's definitely some of those vibes here. Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:03

It's not a YA Project Hail Mary.

Kaytee Cobb 12:05

Right? Yeah, it's not nearly as sciency. So if you like Project Hail Mary, but you were like, "Oh my god, I had to skip like the calculation of physics," you're gonna be fine. You're gonna be fine. It'll be great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:15

More story, less math. Okay. All right. Good. I'm very much looking forward to that one. I've heard fantastic things about it. Oh, good. Okay, my first read this week is Seasonal Work by Laura Lippman. And this is a collection of short stories. Stay with me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:33

Talking about short stories... you're with me, but I'm talking to the listeners. Don't leave. But they're by Laura Lippman, who is a fantastic crime fiction writer. So we're not talking about a bunch of emo short stories or a bunch of English major short stories. We're in crime. We're in the crime fiction genre here. So here's the setup. The best way to give you a sense of the collection is to give you just a little bit about a few of the stories. In a story called JUST ONE MORE, a married couple who's trying to get back that romantic spark creates a playful diversion that comes with very unexpected consequences. In SLOW BURNER, a husband's secret cell phone proves to be a dicey temptation for his very suspicious wife and Laura Lippman's, Baltimore PI, Tess Monaghan, she's got a whole series of books featuring Tess Monaghan and keeps a watchful eye on a criminally resourceful single father in the title story, SEASONAL WORK. These give you a sense of the 12 stories in the collection, all of which touch on the intersection of love, murder, deceptions and secrets. It's crime fiction hit and run. And I loved this collection.

Kaytee Cobb 12:33

I'm with you.

Kaytee Cobb 12:34

It sounds good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:35

It was very, very good. So this though, I have to say was this was an unexpected find for me a because I do not gravitate toward short stories. And it's just not something I would pick up off the shelf. But I am a member of the Fabled Story Bound subscription. I have the Pioneer flavor of that subscription. And I've loved every single book that I've gotten. By the way, several of them you're going to you're going to be hearing about this was one of the first and I bought for that recommendation, and the fact that I have read Laura Lippman's books and really, really liked them. I wouldn't have picked them up. But this was one that I literally took it out of the box and I was between books. I sat down with it thinking maybe I'll give it a few pages, and I read it entirely cover to cover. I loved in this collection, how different every

story was from the next. We're talking very different. All of them had something to do as I said with crime or some psychological element, but they were from a wide range of points of view, wide range of characters, wide range of settings, plotlines, and I enjoyed every single one of them. I never knew what piece of candy I was going to be taking out of the bowl next, right? I especially like the title story, SEASONAL WORK, which was a fascinating look at a single dad and how he kept his family going, not entirely legally. And I really loved the domestic noir story that imagines housewives are maybe not what they seem. I love that trope and Laura Lippman does it so well here. This was the perfect book to get me out of a book slump that I happened to be in. Like I said, I drank it down so quickly. This is Seasonal Work by Laura Lippman.

Kaytee Cobb 15:38

Oh yeah, that box of chocolates metaphor was just begging for it too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:42

That's exactly what this, if you like crime fiction, that's what this is like.

Kaytee Cobb 15:47

Awesome. Love it. Okay, my second one this week is my womp, unfortunately and it was one I was really excited about, so I know I had to still bring it to the show. It's By the Book by Jasmine Guillory.

Kaytee Cobb 16:00

A few months back I recorded with Mary and brought If the Shoe Fits by Julie Murphy to the podcast. It's a closed door romance published by Disney Hyperion that retells the Cinderella story in the setting of a fake bachelor show called "Before Midnight". It is delightful. It is fantastic. So when I saw the next one, in that kind of series installment come up on Netgalley for requests, I jumped at the chance. This one is a reimagining of Beauty and the Beast, my favorite Disney fairy tale, like all bookish people, and written by one of my favorite romance writers, Jasmine Guillory. Unfortunately, those are the two best things that I can tell you about it. Isabel is our main character. She's working in a publishing house. Isabel right, Belle, everybody calls her Izzy though she's not just Belle.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:00

Oh no.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:46

Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 16:46

but even at 25 years old, and having worked there for years, she's still only an editorial assistant. She's feeling like her career has stalled out completely. She's discouraged in her writing. She's one of the only Black employees at the company. And she's not even sure if this is where she's supposed to be anymore. When she overhears her very bossy boss, complaining about a high profile celebrity named Beau, who is supposed to be writing a tell all but hasn't been responding to a single email, she offers to go to his mansion and check on him in person and give him a pep talk. But because we've all seen Beauty and the Beast. We know it's not a spoiler that she ends up living there instead. And slowly they

get to know each other and he finally starts to put his pen to the page. Now, this is still Disney. So this book is totally closed door romance of the fade to black variety. What really, really didn't work for me is not just that because let me tell you, I love some open door. But the fact that 25 year old Izzy talks and acts far more like a 17 year old. She was exhausting to read about as was Beau although his cranky standoffishness was much more likable overall. Jamie Holden likes to remind us that people who are not aged 25 have brains that aren't fully cooked yet. No offense to any listeners. That's just when brains mature. I have never felt that more fully in a protagonist than in this book. The little nods to the Disney movie were sometimes cute, sometimes eye rollingly bad. And for that reason, this one had very little of the fun sassiness that I expected after reading book one in the spinoff series. I did still finish it. It was fine. But when this one comes out on May 3, I'll be telling you instead to go to the library and pick up If the Shoe Fits by Julie Murphy, and pass on this one, which was By the Book by Jasmine Guillory.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:31

That is a bummer because I really do like Beauty and the Beast too. You wonder if he wrote it that way because what the their target audience is more like 16, 17?

Kaytee Cobb 18:40

But she's still 25. Like, make a 17 year old.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:43

I know maybe they're thinking like aspirational like a 16, 17 year old kind of wants to think about what is it gonna be like when I'm grown up only with all through the lens of a, who knows.

Kaytee Cobb 18:54

I don't know. It like did not hit for me on so many levels.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:58

I'm sorry about that. So okay, well oftentimes when we do our three books, our middle one is our womp. In this case, that is not true for me because I have books, all three of the books I'm bringing I really like. I finally got a chance to read and I say finally because probably 50 people have asked me if I have read it. I finally got a chance to read His and Hers by Alice Feeney. This is one that you've read, right?

Kaytee Cobb 19:23

Yes, but I listened to did you listen to it?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:25

I borrowed your copy.

Kaytee Cobb 19:27

Oh perfect. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:29

Yes, I liked it a lot. Okay, so here's the setup ish. You guys know with these, this is a thriller. This is just a straight up thriller. So you know with these I like to have you go in as blind as possible. You will

recognize this book most likely from this nugget in the audio which is definitely the way that you should if you like audio at all. That's the way you should take this in. There are three points of view: his, hers, and the killer's. The killer's is done in the most creepy, perfect way with an autotunes sort of voice scrambler. It is truly creepy. Yes. And it's just done very, very well. And really, honestly, just knowing that much would give you all you need to go into this book. It will probably be enjoyable to go into it like that, but I'll give you just a little bit more. When a woman is murdered in Blackdown, a quintessentially British village, news woman, news reader they call her in the UK, Anna Andrews is reluctant to cover the case. Why Kaytee? Why is she reluctant to cover the case? And Detective Jack Harper is suspicious of her involvement until he becomes a suspect in his own murder investigation. Great setup for a thriller. Everyone's got suspicious motives. We have no idea who to trust, right? Normally, I have to say I don't love the unreliable narrator trope. But it really really works here. Alice Feeny has a very sure hand in her writing. So I felt that the start was a little bit of a slow burn, certainly not slow or boring. But not as riveting as the last two thirds, which really, really rock and roll. But it the first third had me with that "Wait, what?" If you like that feeling when you're when you're in your thrillers, where you're like, "Wait, what?", then you're gonna love this from the very, very beginning. I did not see the resolution coming and I was very much concentrating on it. So that is a trick that she has pulled. In fact, a reader friend of mine just finished it last week and she emailed me and she said, "I never saw that ending coming." But when you think back, it definitely makes sense. Again, that's the thing for me, you've heard me say a million times. If you can pull one over on me great, but you have to have the receipts, right? You have to be able to show me where I missed it. But it was there. And Alice Feeny does that in this book. Again, I listened to it. And I think it's a great way to take it and I happened to be able to do it on a ride back from Memphis. So I was able to do it all in one big chunk, which is very, very enjoyable to read a thriller like that to not have to be interrupted. The production values are just very, very high on this audio book. I will definitely read more but Alice Feeny This is actually my first but I have Rock Paper Scissors next up on my audio TBR. So this one is His and Hers by Alice Feeny. All right, Kaytee, what's your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 22:23

My third book this week is a collection of poetry because it's April. It's National Poetry Month. And I read poetry almost never. So I was like, well, if I'm gonna read it, I'm definitely bringing it to the show. It's Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman. This is my one nod to National Poetry Month. This is all I've got.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:44

I can't. I can't do any more, but I love Amanda Gorman. So I'm with you.

Kaytee Cobb 22:47

Perfect. So with poetry, I have to take it slowly but steadily and kind of tell myself, like talk myself into it. "Kaytee, I promise this will be worth it. In this case, I was definitely right. Amanda Gorman, we love her. She burst onto the stage as the National Youth Poet Laureate when she recited her poem, The Hill We Climb at the inauguration of President Biden. This book is her first full length poetry collection. It's centered very firmly in the COVID 19 pandemic, and the national events of the past two years. There's very little in this book that doesn't touch on either COVID or social justice. So if that's not your jam, it's not right for you right now. That's totally okay. Amanda Gorman just this month turned 23, which is why

it's so stunning and surprising that, especially after I just echoed Jamie's brain fully cooked statements that she's so powerful and incisive with her words. I wanted to bring a short segment from to The Big Show from this book. But even that was so difficult to choose. As I flipped through and looked at all that I had underlined and highlighted in this book, over and over again, her words would move me to tears, and I would be underlining or putting little emoji faces in the margins. And I couldn't get enough. I wanted to drink it. I wanted to swallow the whole thing. It's gorgeous. So I will share this one stanza from early on in the book, and can promise that for anyone who's willing to pick up a collection of poetry, written by a young genius, there is plenty more where this came from. Here's Amanda's words. "Anxiety is a living body, poised beside us like a shadow. It is the last creature standing, the only beast who loves us enough to stay. Sorry if we're not less friendly. We've had COVID trying to end things. Even now, handshakes and hugs are like gifts, something we are shocked to grant be granted. And so we forage for anything that feels like this. The click in our lung that ties us to strangers. How when among those we care for most, we shift with instinct, like the flash of a school of fish. Our regard for one another, not tumored, just transformed." Amanda, not that you will ever hear this, but thank you for your words and for your heart. What a gift. What a gift to have someone like this plow on to the stage and take our breaths away. This book is a gift. It is Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:16

I am very glad that you brought that. She is so amazing. And when she, like you said burst onto the stage literally and figuratively with the inauguration and just blew everyone away and then has had so many months of such a very fast rise to stardom, and she represents so many things to so many people which puts such a weight on her young shoulders, she's just weathered it all. She's carried it all with such grace. Now I wonder Kaytee, did you so you, you read this? Did you also listen to it? Because she's so much of what she does, is in her performance.

Kaytee Cobb 25:53

I did not listen to this one. However I have, I don't watch a lot of booktube, but I will watch any video ever of Amanda Gorman. So I feel like I have her voice in my head. I've listened to The Hill We Climb many times since the inauguration. And so I can hear her voice even when she's not reading to me. So that ended up being okay I think.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:16

Yeah, that totally makes sense. Because that's the same way for me for David Sedaris, like I never need to actually hear his voice again for the rest of my life. I will always hear it when I'm reading. Exactly. Right. All right, that's a good one. Okay, my third book, I'm so delighted to bring this book because it is an absolute delight and a surprise. I'm going to talk about Arya Winters and the Tiramisu of Death by Amita Murray. Here's the setup. Arya Winters on the outside looks like your typical cozy heroine. She lives in a cottage in a small English village, which she inherited from her dead aunt, and she bakes for a living. But you should know that Arya specializes in macabre desserts. She has nosy neighbors, who she avoids as much as possible because of her social anxiety, which is acute and she has a keen interest in all things sexy, especially Branwell Beam, the writer next door. Well when her neighbor Tobias Yards turns up dead after eating poisoned tiramisu, which was definitely not poisoned when Arya gave it to him, no one seems to connect it to Arya's auntie Meera's recent death. But Arya sees the connections. And not surprisingly we are in a cozy here. She takes matters into her own

hands. What you doesn't realize is that the murderer is dangerous, preying on lonely people who've experienced trauma and that she might have to do all she can not to be his next victim or her next victim. I actually right now as I say this, don't even remember which way so that's not a spoiler. This Kaytee is the freshest, most surprising cozy I have read in forever. I will give a special shout out to bookish friend and my friend Betsy Ikenberry, because she wanted to make super sure that I read this book, she knew it would be a hit for me. And that, really, she really, really, really got it. Here's what it's like. It's like the author told her publisher that she was writing a cozy and she gave them a cozy title and a cozy cover. But hidden inside the folds is a smart mystery full of emotional depth. And unlike in most cozies, the murders themselves were much scarier than in normal cozy, and the clues leading to the resolution were more detailed and smarter than normal. So it was just more in every way. Now, I have to speak to the elephant in the room that anyone who's read this book is waiting for me to talk about. We have to talk about Arya herself. Because this sweet, sweet person is not going to be everyone's cup of tea to be sure. This was what Betsy really wanted to warn me about. She sensed that if she liked Arya, I might too. And I did. But she's not going to be everyone's cup of tea. Arya is neuro divergent in a couple of ways. But the author never labels it, which I love. Nor does the author pussyfoot around it. But we do see Arya wrestling with her differences both in her adult life and in her childhood. And that can be tough to watch. I would definitely say that if that if that particular thing and neuro divergent person struggling in the world in various ways is a trigger for you. This might be a book for you to at least be very careful as you get into because there's a lot of that here and it really does pinprick your heart, but I think that the emotional depth here is what makes it so interesting. The way the author is able to go back and forth between Arya solving this mystery and also toying with opening herself up to a romantic relationship and various friendships, which she does not do easily. And then dealing with these things on a really deep level and going into the issues that have scarred her, this is brave writing here in the midst of what looks like a cozy mystery. And all of this is coupled with a surrounding cast of characters, both alive and recently murdered, that are very, very interesting. So just overall, it's a smart, interesting mystery. I would say if you liked *The Maid*, but you wanted more spice from your main character, this is going to be the book that you really want. If you loved *An Elderly Lady is Up to No Good*, this will be right up your alley. I loved it. It was a breath of bittersweet, fresh air and I'm so glad I read it. It's *Arya Winters and the Tiramisu of Death* by Amita Murray.

Kaytee Cobb 30:59

She sounds so fun. I got lost in a rabbit hole while you were talking. And I went and looked at her Twitter and her Goodreads profile and stuff. I want to be friends with her.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:10

Yeah, and I want to be friends with Arya Winters. Like there's just so much to like here. And even if the mystery hadn't been as great as it was just that piece of it, I still would have been along for the ride for the narrative of just being in Arya's head. But again, it's not all kind of cupcakes and giggles. You know what I mean? Which a lot of times what you get in a cozy and a lot of times what you're looking for in a cozy. I'm not. I'm not saying that's a bad thing at all. But this is that rare cozy that kind of it's a cozy plus, or what do you call that? Romcom plus?

Kaytee Cobb 31:42

A cozy plus. I love it

Kaytee Cobb 31:44

Well, she has six books so far on Goodreads. So I feel like there's more to give there. But this one... the cover, the purple, I think I might need it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:44

A "cozy and". Right. Exactly. It's just that and a little bit more, gives you a little meat on the bone. I liked it a lot. And I'm fairly sure there's going to be more in this series. And you can bet I will be snapping up the next one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:06

It's really it's really, really good. It's very good. Love it. Okay. All right. So those were our current reads. So now we are going to get into our deep dive and our deep dive today is about reading outside of our comfort zone. Kaytee, this is something that's been coming up for us a lot, as we talk about reading things that feel a little bit different, or us being attracted to reading things that feel a little bit different than our normal wheelhouse reading. Yeah. But reading outside of your comfort zone can be uncomfortable. That's why ,that's why we have wheel houses. That's why we have big huge ruts that are very, very deep, because sometimes it's just easier to pull a little more of the same off the shelf. Because you never know if you're gonna read something and really not like it, and then what do you do? So that's why we wanted to have this conversation. So Kaytee, how, how much do you feel right now in this reading season that you're in, that you are reading outside your comfort zone? And is that even something that's important to you at this point, because sometimes we don't need to be reading outside our comfort zone. Reading just needs to be a comfort.

Kaytee Cobb 33:13

Whatever it is, right? Well, as I started to prepare for those deep dive Meredith, I was like, I don't know if I have a lot to say about this. And then I remember that sometimes, those are our best deep dives.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:23

Yes, they almost always are

Kaytee Cobb 33:25

interesting things we talk about. So my, my short answer here is that my wheelhouse is very large. My comfort zone is kind of like if you shoved four king beds up next to each other, rather than like Miss Muffet's tuffet. Like, I have a lot of space to roll around in my comfort zone. You know?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:45

That's a great metaphor. That's a fantastic metaphor, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 33:47

Excellent. I'm so glad I really liked the word tuffet. So I really wanted to work it in here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:52

You did. That was perfect.

Kaytee Cobb 33:55

Okay, so it feels like I don't like take a lot of chances. Because there's not a lot that I'm like, Huh, that's not for me. But then, as I was preparing for this deep dive, I sent you a book that's coming out in the fall. And I said, "Look at how pretty this cover is Meredith. I love it. But I'm totally not reading it". And you're like, "Wait, why?" I said, "Oh, no. Okay, so you're gonna read it, and you're gonna talk me into it." Because it's Hester, which means it's like fanfiction about The Scarlet Letter, which I didn't feel great about. So I don't plan to pick it up. But you, Meredith, you are what gets me to take a chance outside my comfort zone. And really, it's you and a very small selection of other people that I can have written off a book and say, that's, that one's not for me. I don't need it. And then you know, you, Katie Proctor, Candice Whitney, and Stephanie Bonin, who is like a surprise pick here, but she's the one who will get me to pick up character driven, beautiful fiction, that normally I would have been like, "Yeah, but I mean, I'm probably going to be bored, right?" She's like, "Kaytee, I know you."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:58

Trust me, right? So I think that's exactly right. I think the very first thing that we can do, if we want to read out of our comfort zone is have that group of readers, they don't necessarily need to be close, close friends. One of my best readers who falls into this category is Liz Hein. Liz, I'm just not a close, close, personal friend of mine, but we're great bookish friends. And she is someone who I have, by the way, I would love to be close personal friends there, we just haven't done that yet. I just want to be sure I'm saying, I'm not saying like...

Kaytee Cobb 35:32

She's coming for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:33

Exactly. I'm coming for you. She is someone who I have learned, if she she knows my tastes well enough to be able to make that kind of recommendation. Now, obviously, you and I have a very public record of our reading tastes, which means we have more people who have a sense of that, right. But even for absolutely any reader, if you have that two or three people in your life, that you share your current reads and kind of how you're feeling about them. Then you have those people who when they hear about a book, maybe even if it's a book that they wouldn't read, just like the one that you just that you just recommended. You recommended that to me because you were thinking Meredith might really like this. And so you don't have to read it yourself. But you know enough about my taste to say this might be a good fit. And even then, when it's something that is very outside of my comfort zone, that kind of person's judgment gives me the ability to say, hmm, I'm now maybe a little more interested. City of Girls is a good example of this for me. One of my close friends who also works with me at Here Comes the Guide, said, "Meredith, I know what you're gonna say about I know you don't love Elizabeth Gilbert, but just give this book 40 pages because I've read it and I really think this book might be for you." And she was absolutely right. But that was a book outside of my comfort zone. Because one thing that can put a book outside your comfort zone, like you even with Hester tendentially is when the author's previous works you've had experience with and you're like, not for me. Right? Right. You don't love Nathaniel Hawthorne. I happen to weirdly love Nathaniel Hawthorne. So that's why it was and I really liked Scarlet Letter. But that's what it was for you that put it outside of your comfort zone.

Kaytee Cobb 37:22

Yeah, well, and it sounds like Betsy, with Arya Winters and the Tiramisu of Death was like, listen, here's what I have for you. It she's a trusted source just like these other people that we've mentioned so far. Right? So we see that play out even in our current reads pretty regularly. I think another key here is that none of those people on my on my shortlist is coming to me and either taking advantage of it like, Oh, here's another one. Here's another one. Here's another one, right? Yeah, there's not a constant flow of "Kaytee, I know exactly what you need all the time. Here you go a buffet of recommendations". It's a very select recommendation. So so when you or these other people on that list does make a recommendation like that I do take notice rather than being like, Oh, look, another DM from somebody who thinks that I should read such and such book like, Thank you. No, thank you. Right? And not none of you is saying "This book is the one that will become your lifetime favorite and will change your life" because those extra high expectations will plop me right back into the comfort zone and the rut and be like, "No, you're gonna ruin it for me. You can't you can't do that to me."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:30

Right, exactly. So the benefit of reading outside your comfort zone, the reason that you might want to pursue some of these avenues that we're giving you is because then your reading just gets bigger. Right? Like maybe there's an entire genre, that right now, you never look to, if you read outside your comfort zone, read a couple you might be like, actually, I really like science fiction.

Kaytee Cobb 38:50

Look at that. Bringing it back around.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:52

Exactly. So that's kind of the why of why we're talking about this. So yes, develop some trusted sources, be a trusted source. So don't hesitate to point out a book, if you run across a book, either because you read it or you read about it. If you think immediately of one particular reader who might really want to want to read that book, don't hesitate to say this might be a really, really good fit for you. I don't know for sure. But I'm just kind of putting it out there. That can work both ways. The other thing that I know that I've personally done that has massively helped me to read outside my comfort zone is I have availed myself of a lot of different book subscriptions. And I can't tell you how many times there's been a book that I've seen a million places, but when I receive it from my shelf subscription from Bookshelf Thomasville, when I get it from one of my Fabled book subscriptions that I'm a part of, when I get it from Book of the Month, when I get it from the book drop any of these can be...

Kaytee Cobb 39:57

Indie Press List.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:58

That well right exactly. So I was just getting around to the fact that and that's part of the reason why we started the Indie Press List. Because reading quality fiction that is chosen kind of for you by a trusted store, like a really quality independent bookstore, that can massively open up your your reading and really help you read outside your comfort zone. That was a major reason why we wanted to do the Indie

Press List and why every month, we think, "Wow, I wouldn't have wanted to read this book. But now that I'm in it, I see what is going to be so great about it."

Kaytee Cobb 40:34

Well, I think there's something to be said there too, about, you know, we just have this big like, explosive episode about mood reading versus planning reading, and apparently, everybody has big feels. But taking the time, I'm going to I'm going to vouch for the planners here to say, this is not necessarily something I feel like reading, but I have to read 20% of it like you and I do for the Indie Press List. Sometimes that's all you need to say like, "Dang, I never would have touched this with a 10 foot pole. And now here I am. And I want to finish it. What happened to me? Oh, it's outside of, you know where I think my lane is."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:10

Right, exactly. And so for a planner, and you make a good point Kaytee. For a planner, you can say I'm going to plan in making sure that I at least give a chance to some of these books. For a mood reader, it's where book flights come into play. It's why I do book flights, because so often, that's where I find a book that was outside of my normal wheelhouse. And so when you avail yourself of several different either book recommendation sources, or book subscriptions, and you get those books in front of you, because you go to the library and you when in doubt, check it out, you load up your bag with a ton of books come home, do a few book flights for mood readers. So you can simply plan in book flights, you're not having to plan to read a particular book, you're just planning in some time to do some book flights. And then you're opening yourself up to books that maybe otherwise wouldn't have really been something you thought you would love. But they become some of your absolute favorites. I can name so many books that fall into that category. But the absolute standout for me is The Library at Mount Char, which I knew nothing about. And as I started to read, it was definitely not a book that would normally be for me because it's very weird. And I don't like weird, I've gone on record that I don't like anything that can be construed as weird. It makes me uncomfortable. But darned if it didn't completely suck me in way outside my comfort zone. But bookish serendipity and a book flight enabled me to open myself up to that.

Kaytee Cobb 42:43

And I think bookish serendipity that leaves room for I don't know why I said it like that book of serendipity, it's a new way to say it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:51

It's fancy.

Kaytee Cobb 42:53

That leaves room for things like that little, you know, niggle in the side of your gut right there, where you're like, oh, that cover, huh, I might be interested, it's a little shiny. And I don't know what's inside, but it's a possibility. And then you have room for that wheelhouse to build a little another room on the side of it. Right. It's like I didn't know this was part of my wheelhouse. But now I've put on an addition and now it is.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:19

So well, exactly. And then another way you can open that up is to open yourself up to book boyfriends and girlfriends that you find in all different places, again, whether it's on Bookstagram, or booktube. Or I oftentimes become book boyfriends and girlfriends with the book buyers that the Indie Press List stores, like my latest love of my life is Bill from An Unlikely Story. I have learned that his recommendations are really good fits for me. And they moved me just a little bit outside of my comfort zone. So really pay attention to those recommendation sources that put you right on that edge and maybe lean in if you're wanting to expand, lean into those recommendations and prioritize them a little bit more than maybe the wheelhouse books that you automatically would pick up. You just you know, think what, huh? I'm not so sure what Bill's talking about with this particular title. But if he thinks it's really, really great, I'm at least going to give it a shot. And I think that that's really the number one way to move yourself out of your comfort zone is to tell yourself that when you pick up a book and start reading it, you are not committed to finishing it. Whether you're a planner reader or a mood reader, no matter what season of reading that you're in, you don't have to finish that book if it doesn't feel really right. But by even starting it, you open yourself up to the possibility that it could be very, very right. And it could push you out of your comfort zone. But open it up further.

Kaytee Cobb 44:50

Yeah, I like that. And we're not saying anybody, if you're in a season of comfort, like lean into your comfort zone, that's okay too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:58

Absolutely. I I have so many times in my life been in a season, like my 10 years reading cozy mysteries. Sometimes that's all your reading needs to be. But if you're feeling that pull, that draw to something different, these are just some ways that you can accomplish that. Yeah. All right, Kaytee, so then we're gonna press some books. Are you going to press a book that was outside of your comfort zone?

Kaytee Cobb 45:22

I am. Are you surprised?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:24

I am not surprised. I was hoping you would.

Kaytee Cobb 45:27

Okay. I don't know if you'll be surprised by which one I press. I'm excited to hear what you've got for us. My book this week that I want to press into your hands is The Book of Longings by Sue Monk Kidd. I read this book two years ago and just recently bought myself a hardcopy for my shelves. My gorgeous, gorgeous shelves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:48

It is a gorgeous hardback.

Kaytee Cobb 45:50

It is a gorgeous hardback. I did get a paperback. We should talk about this sometimes because I have a thing about hardbacks and paperbacks. I had handed over my hardcover, which I think came from Book of the Month to my mom after I finished because I knew it was perfect for so I pressed it into her hands. And now I'm pressing it into all of yours friends. In this story, we meet Ana. she is the wife of Jesus, and she's a writer. And she's a story we don't get to hear because of the way that biblical writings omit women from the narrative so often. Now, this is fiction, Sue Monk Kidd talks in her author's note about how that setting and that historical fact makes it possible or even likely, that if Jesus had any kind of serious relationships with women, we would not know about them today. And my strong opinion about this book is that the author's note should have gone at the beginning of the book, and therefore it should be read before the story starts. Unrelated to that, I do wish the ending of the story had been slightly different. Like that was the only thing that kept me from giving it a resounding fivestars it was like a slightly shaded fivestars when I read it, but it hasn't colored my view of it these many years later these few years later on a story is deeply feminist. It is a champion of writers and writing and it's sometimes sexy. In fact, when I first brought this to the show, this is when I used the phrase sexy time with Jesus that made some listeners roll their eyes a little bit, but know that it's not open door descriptive sex, I chose to bring it today because as a born and raised Christian, there was plenty here that made me feel like it was outside my comfort comfort zone. I was uncomfortable. Often when I read this. At the time, I would have said that the most outside of my norm part of this was loving a book so much that was so character driven. Like I said with Stephanie Bonin like, I tend to not love character driven books, but when the right ones find me, oh, man, those characters can just weasel their ways into my heart. That part of it made it fall well out of my regular reading. And yet when I see it on a book list, or a bookstore shelves, I smile, and I touched the cover. And I finally purchased a copy from my own shelves. So it stuck with me for the long haul. This is The Book of Longings by Sue Monk Kidd.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:03

You know what? I haven't read it yet. Although I've heard so many great things about it because of my evangelical upbringing.

Kaytee Cobb 48:10

Yeah, it is uncomfortable to look at all these stories that you know that in a way you don't know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:17

Right? That's interesting. Well, I am also going to bring a book that even at the time I read it, which was way back in 2008 was way out of my comfort zone. But absolutely worth my time and worth your time now, but it is weird. It's a strange, strange book filled with strange and incredibly memorable characters. I'm going to talk about Geek Love by Katherine Dunn. Kaytee, id you ever read this book?

Kaytee Cobb 48:43

No, I have never read this book, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:45

Alright, so Geek Love is the story of the Binewskis. They are a carny family. That is a family who every member performs in traveling carnival. Here's where things get weird or weirder. The parents of this

family set out with the help of amphetamines, arsenic, and radio isotopes, among other tools to breed their own exhibits of human oddities. So they have several children. There's Arturo, the Aqua boy who has flippers for limbs and an ego and ambition worthy of Genghis Khan. And Arturo is very memorable. We have Iphy and Elly, they're Siamese twins. We have an albino hunchback Oly, and the outwardly normal Chick whose mysterious gifts make him the family's most precious and dangerous asset as the Binewskis take their act across the backwaters of the US, inspiring fanatical devotion and terrible, threatening revulsion. And that's its members conduct their own Machiavellian version of sibling rivalry, Geek Love throws light on our notions of what is freakish and what is normal, what is beautiful and what is ugly, and what is holy and what is obscene. Kaytee, this book is memorable. This book is definitely to harken back to two weeks ago, living rent free in my head after all of these years. It's very strange, but it is very beautifully written. This book took the freakish, most bizarre of us and it showed that all it takes for us to have common emotions is for us to be human, not not normal. It's filled with very real emotions of love and hate on part of all of the characters. And I was riveted from beginning to the end. If you love character driven novels, you will absolutely love this one. But also, I recommended highly to people who are willing to read a little bit out of their comfort zone, because there's no question that you're going to be pushed to those places in this book. The closest vibe I could give you, although it's not for the same reason, but from a feelings perspective. If you loved the discomfort of All the Ugly and Wonderful Things, you will like the discomfort here. But again, not the same topic theme. Nothing is the same there. But the same kind of like, am I uncomfortable? Am I riveted? Am I both? I don't know. But I know I'm reading something I'm not going to forget. That is Geek Love by Katherine Dunn.

Kaytee Cobb 51:30

This is so interesting. I don't think I realized there was like a circusy carnival background to this or I may have already picked it up and instead. Now I'm interested.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:41

When you get to the parents who are trying to create children with carnival esque oddities and yet these children have they are their own characters. They are they are not victims. They are their own. I mean they are but they this book is just this book is a great book club book because there is a lot to discuss in this book, Kaytee. Alright, that is it for this week. As reminder here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 52:13

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:17

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

Kaytee Cobb 52:26

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:33

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Kaytee Cobb 52:50

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:56

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 52:59

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:00

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 53:01

Happy reading Meredith.