



Season 5, Episode 19: Happy Surprises + Bookish Vacations

Mon, Dec 5 • 57:42

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 read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Mindy Brouse 00:23

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:35

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and happiness for me is a relaxing trip to the library.

Mindy Brouse 00:44

And I'm Mindy Brouse, mom of seven living in the mountains of New Mexico and my favorite days are spent with people I love, real or fictional. This is episode number 19 of season five, and we're so glad y'all are here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:58

Hey, Mindy. So yeah, sometimes fictional people are easier to spend time around than the real people that we love.

Mindy Brouse 01:03

Girl preach. Yeah, I think you're absolutely right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:07

This time of year for sure. Right. All right. Well, Mindy, I'm always so happy to be able to record with you. And we are definitely looking forward to talking about our deep dive, which we will let you know we are going to talk about reading vacations, reading getaways. How do you do it? Why might you want to do it? And what are some tips and tricks for doing that. So Mindy and I both love to do that. And we can't wait to talk about that. But before we jump in Mindy, you know, this is the first episode of the month. It's the first episode of December. So we have a little bit of business that we need to take care of, which is if you are a new listener, we will let you know that we only do one commercial for the entire month for Currently Reading, and that is for ourselves. That is for our Patreon. Because we have so

many, over 2,000 people have decided to join us as patron subscribers. It's \$5 a month. And they enable us to have a show that is all year long, commercial free, which is when we did our survey Monday. This was the number one reason that people said that they joined our patron was because they just love having an hour of book talk with no commercials.

Mindy Brouse 02:20

How can you not love that it's the best. I'm totally spoiled, because I thought all podcasts are like that. And then I was like, oh, no, they're not. You guys have worked so hard to give us that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:32

Exactly. Well, what we decided to do early on was that we wanted to focus less on the business of podcasting, which having ads in your shows requires a lot of administration. And we wanted to focus more on creating bookish content. And so that's what we've done on our Patreon. We have multiple episodes that come out every month. We have All Things Murderful, we have which focuses on just mysteries and thrillers. We have Trope Thursday, which is a fantastic show that Katie does with our good friend and book editor Bunmi. So lots of industry knowledge going on there. And of course, we have the Indie Press List. So fantastic rotation of bookish content for \$5 month. It is December. You're buying gifts for everyone else, you might want to decide that right now is when you are going to join us for \$5 a month, you can do an annual subscription and save some money there. Or you can just do it month by month. Join us for a month pay \$5, see what you think. If you hate it, and if it's not good enough for that \$5, no harm no foul.

Mindy Brouse 03:37

That will be impossible to not love and, and the best part of the Patreon for me Meredith is the Facebook group because you guys have built such an amazing community. It is worth \$5 a month and I have heard that from many many other bookish friends just to be a part of that community where we get bookish, encouragement, bookish suggestions, just all the book talk you've ever wanted in your life right there. That's the best.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:02

Right, in a really, really safe and really supportive, non toxic community. That's what I love. There's just it's a drama free zone. So we love that. So all of that to say buy yourself a gift. Join us as a bookish friend for \$5 a month and see what you think. We would love to have you as a part of the group. Okay, Mischief Managed. Mindy, are you ready to talk about your bookish moment of the week?

Mindy Brouse 04:28

I am oh my gosh, this one is especially precious to me Meredith because bookish moments with my older kids are few and far apart now. So Paul Lewis is 14, but everyone else is 17 and older except Jubilee. We all know Jubilee is my little caboose. She's her own little separate family group. On our drive to Texas for Thanksgiving, Esther took over the driving for the last three hours you know, it's a 10 hour drive for us and she immediately sat down, she got buckled, she turned to me, Meredith and said, "Can we listen to Mary Jane again?" And I was like, "I'm sorry. What? Are you kidding me?" She's like, "That book, Mary Jane from this summer. Can we listen to it?" I was like, "Yes, yes", Meredith I said like, yes, like 12 times so excitedly. We read that book together on a road trip in June that Esther and I

took together. And honestly Mary Jane by Jessica Anya Blau is one of my favorites of the whole year. And I forgot that this is terrible. I mean, but I forgot how much Esther loved it, too. So when your 17 year old asked to reread a book with you, yes, please. Thank you. So we did that. And we were giggling and sighing, and at the same time, we would go oh, my gosh, yes, that part. So I'm glad you said that, Paul, the Pauls in the backseat, my husband and my son were like, "Y'all..." and we were like, sorry.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:40

It's a great book.

Mindy Brouse 05:42

It's so good. So it was a fantastic to get three hours together back in that book, and we'll pick it up on our way back home. So it was really great, man. That was my really special bookish moment of the week.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:54

That is so much fun. You're right, as kids enter the teenage years, not all kids, but at least my kids, the bookish moments are further and further in between. And so I'm so glad that you were able to have that. Well, I had a really fun bookish moment of the week. Several months ago, it was really, I think it was like, May even several months ago, I decided that I was going to not go to the library every single week as I had for a couple of years before that, because I was really investing in my life, my own library, and I had bought so many books and I was like, I need to read the books on my shelves and not be every single Saturday going to the library and bringing home 12 or 15 books and doing my reading that way. So several months ago, at least six months ago, I decided to forego that. Also our Saturdays with Jackson's various sports are really, really crowded. And it's my one day that I go to the library. So it kind of made sense. But this last week, I decided his sports are done for I think we have six I think we have six weekends off. He's an all year round kind of guy. And so I said I'm gonna let myself put some books on hold at the library. And I'm gonna go back and I went and Jackson came with me and he scurried off to find a comfortable space too. I didn't look but I'm sure it probably wasn't reading, it was probably screen time. But I got to spend an hour and a half just looking at all the new releases looking in the stacks, just kind of like book flighting on the go, picking books up with bookish serendipity, one of which I'm going to be talking about today. That's the thing Mindy is that when I go to the library, I pick up books with reckless abandon. We know we've talked about this a million times, which is not something I do when I'm purchasing books. And so I find books through book or serendipity that I wouldn't otherwise and it brings a lot of joy to my reading life. The Lake Travis library is my library. They are absolutely wonderful. And I'm so glad to be back to going regularly. So that's my bookish moment of the week.

Mindy Brouse 07:59

I bet they're happy to see you. Your librarians love you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:03

Well, they we have a really, really great bunch of librarians there. I love them. Okay, so let's talk about some of these current reads. What's your first book that you want to talk about?

Mindy Brouse 08:13

All right, my first book is one I discovered while perusing Scribd. I often just go to Scribd and just kind of scroll looking at new releases. Things that I might like, I love how they're like, "If you like this, you might like this," and I found this but my first current read is What Could Be Saved by Liese O'Halloran Schwartz. No relation, I think so.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:13

No relation.

Mindy Brouse 08:14

Alright, first glance, I placed this squarely in my wheelhouse Meredith because it's a family saga. I love Family Sagas. It's set in Thailand. I was there. But this novel did bring a lot of difficult topics. So it was not an easy read. I'll just say that from the beginning. But there are scenes and lines and perspectives that I have squirreled away in my mind for the future and I actually go back to and I actually Meredith, I reread it in preparation for recording with you because it's been a while and I wanted to make sure did I still love this? Is this how I still felt about it? And because I'm 52 and well, maybe it's just Mindy, but there were lines that I was like, Oh my God, yes, it was this book. And so now I've written them down, definitely felt the same way. Alright, so this is a dual timeline tale that has us in 1972 Thailand and 2019 America. We're following a couple, Genevieve and Robert and their two daughters Bea and Laura and their son Philip. The father works for US intelligence while the mother tries to keep this upper middle class traditional life that she knew when she left the states. She wants it going strong in Bangkok. The family though lives behind a wall, figuratively and literally with servants and tuk-tuk trucks and drivers and all these things. Genevieve strives to be what she thinks of Meredith as the epitome of an American Housewife in 1972. She leads by example for the community of women who are being placed over there with her husband. It's temporarily in Thailand. So you can picture this like Country Club set placed in Thailand and be like, we are not in Kansas anymore. Genevieve wants order, decency and that country club lifestyle for everyone. But most of all, she wants to go home. They're supposed to only be there a year. It's been three and a half. She's frustrated. Our story starts in 2019 with Laura, the youngest daughter getting contacted from someone claiming that they have found her younger brother who went missing 47 years ago in Bangkok. As we go back and forth in this family saga 1970 to 2018 we see how the firing of one servant, how the US involvement in Thailand, and how a family living in a country but set apart and not really living in the country so to speak, creates a string of events all headed to seven year old Philip. There's a gut clenching and heart wrenching tension as the story moves forward. Meredith there is mystery, there's misunderstanding, multicultural mistreatment, all woven into the story told from different people who lived in the home... Thai women, American women, Thai men, American men, Thai children and American children. This is all against a backdrop of two very different worlds being lived out in the same house, people working together for very different reasons. As we see the story through different eyes we learn again how family loves and hurts one another and unique ways how life isn't black and white. How we can internalize so many unspoken things good and bad, and how parents are just people trying to figure out life as they go. This is for sure a family saga. A couple of my favorite quotes are from this book, but I will just give you this one. "The memories of their parents were like that sometimes filled with fury, sometimes love, sometimes sorrow, unforgivable things mixing with dumbfounding things and tender things, the same event equal parts hilarious and enriching. There is no one way to think of our childhoods." It's a great book. Definitely

some triggers, including sex trafficking, adultery and heroin addiction. I think the author handles each of those as delicately as she can. But I just want everyone to know they're there. So this is an unforgettable story. *What Could Be Saved* by Liese O'Halloran Schwartz.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:07

Oh, that sounds like a really good one. A great one for this time of year when I kind of like to dip into deeper, more character driven novels.

Mindy Brouse 12:15

Yeah, it's really a it's really good Meredith. It's powerful. All right. What about yours? What's your first current read?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:20

My first current read is the perfect opposite of that. This is light and fluffy if that is the kind of reading that you'd like to do at this time of year and I like both. Sometimes my moods take me to both. So this one was a book that I picked up through that book of serendipity when I went to my library because I would not have purchased *The Christmas Bookshop* by Jenny Colgan. I love Jenny Colgan, and I've read a few of hers that have left me a little bit cold, so I probably wouldn't have shelled out the dollars in order to purchase it. But in this case, it was the perfect little treat. Alright, here's the setup. When we meet Carmen, our lead character, she's just been laid off from her department store job and she is not happy. Because really, there is no main character in a Jenny Colgan novel who can start out happy. The last thing that poor Carmen wants to do is think about spending Christmas with her perfect lawyer sister Sophia in Sofia's picture perfect house with her perfect children and her overall perfect life. But Sophia is greatly pregnant with her fourth child and she needs help. And Sophia happens to have a client who needs help revitalizing his bookshop. So, Carmen realising both that she's in a Jenny Colgan novel and also how limited her options are, she takes the job and she goes to Edinburgh. This is when the best part of the story starts. Carmen walks through the historic streets of Edinburgh to the dusty cobweb covered bookshop owned by Sofia's client, who's Mr. McCredie. And we know at this point that something good is going to happen. The store is dusty and disorganized, but it is undeniably charming, and the location is amazing. It could be a perfect bookshop. Can Carmen help Mr. McCredie turn a profit because he really needs to or he's going to get booted. And can she make the right choice in a Christmasy little love triangle that she finds herself in? We hope she can and again, we're all going to remember that we're in a Jenny Colgan novel, so we have a pretty good idea. All right. This, as I said, was just a perfect holiday sweet treat. It was a delightful little confection. It just took me three sittings to get through. And it totally put me in the holiday spirit. This book is a love letter to the city of Edinburgh because other than the *City of Ghosts* by VE Schwab I'm not sure I have ever read a book that so made me want to go to Scotland. This one describes the city and in the castle that sits above it and the shops on the thoroughfare where this bookshop resides so perfectly that I was literally ready to buy plane tickets. And this is a love letter to book shops, and this one has one of those very satisfying scenes where we go from musty overfilled unprofitable bookshop to beautiful warm, cozy bustling bookshop, full of lights and Christmas decorations. And that kind of swing up in a place is so incredibly satisfying to me. And when you throw in some very believable family dynamics, plus a low stakes love triangle, you just get the perfect combination for a few hours of reading time as the Christmas holiday

season begins. Sometimes Jenny Colgan hits the spot and this one definitely did. This is The Christmas Bookshop by Jenny Colgan. Have you ever read anything by her Mindy?

Mindy Brouse 15:57

I have. And I've read that one too and I loved it. It's like a warm cup of chai on a cold winter morning. That book is so good. That's a great one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:06

I liked it a lot. All right. What's your next book?

Mindy Brouse 16:08

All right. My second book is a cozy mystery. It's also a series and this is set in India. Yep, cozy mystery in India. This three book series, fourth one's coming out next summer 2023 of summer. This is by Sujata Massey. Today, I want to talk about The Widows of Malabar Hill. All right. The heroine of these novels is the country's only female lawyer. Perveen Mistry. Yeah. Mystery. That's clever, right. She's inspired by the actual first female lawyer in India Cornelia Sorabji. I love that the author wanted to kind of pay tribute to her and create this series. This is set in 1921 India. Perveen is only 23 years old and faces the many difficulties and discriminations against women in India as well as those against her faith. She's in the minority faith of Parsis and she has to figure out how to make her dreams of becoming a lawyer true within and pushing against the system. She becomes though more than just a lawyer. She's like a detective lawyer, right? Because I said this is a cozy mystery. So her goal is not only to practice law as a woman, but to fight for the marginalized. She's smart, clever and curious, you're just going to love her. The setup for this story is that a man has died and left his three widows behind with them seemingly signing over all of their inheritance to a charity run by another man. The women live in full production, strict seclusion, never leaving the women's quarters and never speaking to men. Well, you know what, those documents seem a little questionable to Perveen and she wants to validate the claims or help the women get their inheritance, whichever way it goes. As Perveen moves forward, though, guess what? There's a cozy mystery. Right? So that means there's a murder. So there's a murder on the estate Meredith. So naturally, not only does she have to solve this will and the inheritance issue, naturally she wants to figure out the murder too. So she's going to try to solve that and the fate of the three widows. Meredith this book is just such a delight. It's a cozy Indian mystery. Yes, please. A female lead character who is smart, feisty and disabled. Also, yes, please. A series of these books progressing through the 1920s Indian history. Yep. Also, all the yesses. This is a light historical fiction, and a mystery coming together and they just do it really well. In this novel we get to experience India and 1921 seen through a woman's eyes. These books are really quick reads Meredith. They delight and entertain while doing some education. But again, this is just a cozy nice quick read The Widows of Malabar Hill by Sujata Massey,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:40

I liked that one a lot. I thought that one was really, really good.

Mindy Brouse 18:44

Yeah, it's just a nice quick, you know, when you need a little cozy, but you're like, hey, maybe I'm okay with being in somewhere else other than England. Right. And, you know, let's try it. Yeah, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:53

Exactly. I learned a lot about what they were what women were going through in that period of time there. So that was very interesting. All right. My second book is actually a book that is part of the series that the first 10 books I absolutely loved. I dipped into the series again recently and read the Garden of Lamentations by Deborah Crombie. This is a British police procedural series that's being written even now. So here we go. Here's the setup. Our story starts on a May morning when the body of a young woman is found in one of the private gardens in Notting Hill. The poor girl almost looks like she's sleeping. But Reagan Keating has been murdered and the lead detective on the case DI Kerry Boatman turns to one of our main characters Gemma James for help. She and Gemma worked together on a previous investigation and Gemma has a tangential connection to the woman who was killed here because the woman was the nanny of a friend of her sons. So Gemma soon discovers that Reagan's death is the second tragedy in this exclusive London park. A few months before a boy died in a tragic accident nearby. But when still another of the garden residents meets a violent end, it becomes clear that there are more sinister forces at play. And Boatman and Gemma must stop the killer before another innocent life is taken. Alright, that's the setup for this particular book in the series. So this is, as I said, a series that I love so much. I used to read it every single year as the books came out, just like I've done with Louise Penny. But back in 2017, I have really vivid memories of the fact that I started this book and just this particular book, The Garden of Lamentations, and it just felt tiring to me. I remember thinking at the time that I needed to take a break from the series so that it could become fresh again. And it was really fun to pick it up after five years. That break did me a lot of good, because it reminded me of all the reasons that I love this series. I love Gemma and her partner DI Duncan Kincaid, and their kids and the whole family dynamic that they have and that their relationship grows throughout the series. I love the way that Deborah Crombie puts you right next to the detectives as they go about their business solving the case, including interviewing witnesses that something that when done well in a police procedural I love I love feeling like I'm sitting side by side with them. And I love the way that Deborah Crombie describes every room that you enter. So when you're going in to interview a witness, she puts you not only in the space, but she tells you everything you need to know about the person that you're interviewing, just by her description of their space. That's something that I really enjoying. So there was something really comforting to me about being back in this world. And then as I hit the halfway point, I realized what it was that had put me off the series five years ago, you know how often in these kinds of series, we're like, we're we're talking a long series. Yeah, you're following a murder that has happened. For in the first few books, there's a murder that happens within the bounds of that book, right? And then you solve it and you're done. But a few books in the author decides that that is just not enough. There needs to be some other overarching mystery that goes on and follows the characters through several books. We see this time and time again. Yep. Well, it was this second piece of the puzzle that just felt really exhausting to me. Unlike Louise Penny, who manages to thread this needle really well, keeping interest all the way through. In this series, that ancillary mystery felt heavy, it felt like derailed the other portion, which was the mystery taking place just within this particular book. So I was really glad to be back with these characters. And I'm open to reading more into the, in the series, but I'll check first to see if that overarching mystery resolves itself and releases the characters to go back to doing what they are so good at, which is solving crimes in London. I will say that the first 10 books in this series are brilliant, and they are the perfect read if you're all caught up on Louise Penny. And of

course, this series, it's very important that you start with the first one, which is called A Share in Death. So that's book number one. This book is Garden of Lamentations by Deborah Crombie.

Mindy Brouse 23:30

Oh, man, this this sounds like something I'd really enjoy. So you're saying pick up the first 10 and then wait to hear from you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:38

Right. We'll pick up the first one and if you like the if you like, what's going on there, you might really like it. But again, if you like Louise Penny, this is a series that sort of a slam dunk for you. Alright, what's your third book?

Mindy Brouse 23:49

All right. My last book today takes us to Kabul, Afghanistan. It's a backlist book that I felt that I was the last person in the bookish world to read but I have since learned otherwise. Published in 2007, this is A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini. Have you read this one Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:07

I have not read this one. No.

Mindy Brouse 24:08

All right. So this book was pressed into my hands at our last Albuquerque bookish friend Denise by Deniseread75. She said she liked it even more than The Kite Runner. So the same author with that so I was immediately intrigued. I quickly asked her if it had a similar pivotal scene that's in that book that was really really difficult for me and she said it didn't so then I picked up the paper back. If you had held off from reading The Kite Runner or you DNF'd whatever it because of the scene in that book, this story by Khaled Hosseini is fantastic and doesn't have that trigger. So here we go. The setup the novel's two main characters are women Mariam and Laila, born a generation apart but not very far from each other. Though they are living much different lives until war thrust them together in the most unexpected way. Their stories weave together in a powerful way while also showing us 30 years of Afghan history. You're in it. I kind of felt like a woman sat down this American middle aged, clueless white lady and lovingly told me the story of her beloved country in the most personal and heartbreaking way. I really felt like I was a part of this history watching. I saw burkas and the Taliban and curfews and laws all through her eyes, and I wept with her. This story shows the power of love and what women can do, and have done and continue to do in the face of terrible treatment, abuse, oppression, and an entire government set against them. In this book, the way women find each other and hold on for dear life is a theme I can read all day, every day. I love Mariam and Laila from start to finish, and their stories to be heard. I don't want to say more about the setup, because the ways that they come together and the way the story connects, is actually super spoilery. So I just don't want to say more than it's, it's beautiful. This is an unforgettable and truly beautiful story. Not beautiful in the way like Hamnet and some others aren't in the language. This is just two women that you're going to fall in love with. I wouldn't say it's character driven, though. This is more of a balance between things that are constantly happening and these two women trying to keep up and it's just really great. That's A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:21

You know, Mindy, I've heard a lot of people say that they, I mean, of course, Kite Runner is such an amazing novel. And a lot of people have said, "and I liked this one even better". So that's something that I've heard several people say, yeah, so that's a good one. I love it. And I love to have it so backlist and takes us out of the United States. So that's a really good choice. All right, we're gonna wrap up our current reads with my third read, which was a five star fantasy read for me. I absolutely loved it. I read Gilded by Marissa Meyer. So this is a retelling of The Rumpelstiltskin story with a few key tweaks that makes the story so much better. Our lead character is Serilda who is a poor miller's daughter. She has developed a talent for spinning stories that are fantastical and evocative and addicting, and entirely untrue. Well, when one of Serilda's crazy stories gets the attention of the sinister evil king and his undead hunters. She finds herself swept away into a Grim capital G grim world where ghouls and phantoms prowl the earth, and terrified screams ring out in the distance. The king being evil is also of course, super greedy, and so he orders Serilda to complete the impossible task of spinning straw into gold, or be killed for telling lies to him in her stories. In her desperation, Serilda unwittingly summons a mysterious boy to help her. He agrees for a price, soon Serilda realizes that there is more than one secret hidden in the castle, including an ancient curse that must be broken if she hopes to end the tyranny of the king and his undead hunt forever. All right, five star book, absolute five star book. It has been a long time since I have enjoyed a fairy tale retelling as much as I enjoyed this one. In fact, we may be reaching all the way back to A Curse So Dark and Lonely for the last time I loved a fairy tale retelling this much. If you liked that book, you are definitely going to want to grab Gilded. Big note here though. Hear me say this. It took me 35 ish pages to get into this book. It has a slow start. And I really have to say I didn't care a lot about the main character for the first bit, but I trusted my bookish friend Elizabeth Gilligan who urged me to keep going. She and I have very similar taste in YA fantasy, so I trusted her and I'm so glad that I did because this book was worth it. The Rumpelstiltskin story has long irritated me though in the fairy tale The miller's daughter is everything that I don't respect in people. She lies to save herself and her father. She makes promises that she doesn't fully consider at the time and then she is indignant when she has to abide by her side of the deal. Rumpelstiltskin is always portrayed as the bad guy in the story, which never has made sense to me. Even baby Meredith was annoyed by the fact that yes, Rumpelstiltskin is obnoxious, but he is in the right. He helped this woman and then she gets mad when she has to live up to her side of the bargain. So I stayed away from Gilded because the Rumpelstiltskin story bothers me. Marissa Meyer finds a way to remake the story and keep the good bits, but make the other bits make so much more sense. I actually loved how faithfully this story hewed in most major ways the fairy tale. But then Marissa Meyer improved upon it. The characters are believable and the direction of the story makes sense given the rich world that she has created. The miller's daughter character I loved instead of despising. If you like the elements in ACOTAR where you go back and forth between the courts, there are going to be things to like in this story for you. It's not the exact same, but it gave me the same vibes. And those court locations are some of my favorite element elements in ACOTAR. And you don't often see the worlds built so fully. So I wanted to mention that because there's a lot of that here in Gilded. I will say that Marissa Meyer's really big hit series, which starts with the book Cinder was fine. I read the first book, it was fine. I felt no need at all to continue in the series, mostly because of readerly quirk for me. I am never that interested in books that are about robots or AI for whatever reason, that's not a topic that interests me. So Cinder was just fine for me. I was so surprised as anyone that this one worked so well for me, but it did. Gilded is part of a

duology and I immediately ordered the second one. I have to know what happens in the story. Fair warning: this first one does end on a pretty major cliffhanger but the second book which is called Cursed is available now. So if you love really well done YA fantasy grab this one. It is the perfect way to spend several hours under a blanket cuddled up. This is Gilded by Marissa Meyer

Mindy Brouse 31:43

Okay, so is this the same author as Cinder but it's a different a new series a different... yes okay

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:49

Totally yeah same author unrelated series. Totally different worlds.

Mindy Brouse 31:53

Enticing I love when you do this when we record because now I know what book I can get Esther for Christmas. Your Venn Diagram of reading and Esther's overlap and really major ways. Yeah. Where would this rate... is this YA you said?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:07

Yes.

Mindy Brouse 32:08

Okay. So on the not safe for Mindy scale, it's very low.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:11

Very Yes. Totally safe for Mindy. And safe for Esther. Yes. Yes.

Mindy Brouse 32:16

Okay, because I am not a fairytale retelling person. I know many people are. I did love A Curse So Dark and Lonely though.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:22

But remember, get both. Get Gilded and get Cursed. Don't do that to her because it ends on a big cliffhanger. And you really you I dipped right into the second one. So Okay. All right, Mindy. Let's get to our deep dive and talk a little bit about one of my favorite things in the world, which is taking a reading vacation. So I've been waiting all year as you guys know for the new Louise Penny, which came out last Tuesday. And so hopefully by the time you're hearing this, I have probably already finished that book this year. I don't have the ability to take a vacation to do it. But I had a tradition in the past where I would block out some time and I would go on a reading vacation with the sole goal in mind to read the new Louise Penny just so I would know that I had that marked out time but nothing was going to get in the way. So Mindy have you taken many reading vacations that were just devoted to this?

Mindy Brouse 33:23

I have only done it once now and you were the inspiration. I remember now did the Louise Penny's books used to come out in September?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:30

They used to come out the last week of August

Mindy Brouse 33:31

and I thought Yeah, yeah because I can see why that's it's a harder time of year to do this right. Your tradition of doing that inspired me when I saw when The Winners was coming out by Frederik Backman, I put it on my calendar. I literally sent a calendar event to my entire family and said "Um Don't bug me. I'm out peace out I'm going to be reading the whole day."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:53

Now did you... there's several different ways to take a reading vacation so when I was doing it, I would actually Johnny and I would go away and we would go like, when I lived in California would go to Halfmoon Bay for two or three like two nights. Yeah. Now when you did it did you do it as a staycation?

Mindy Brouse 34:12

I did it as a staycation, so like you said there's a few ways to do it. I was not able to like literally go anywhere. So I just told everyone I was going like pretend to be gone and I was in my room. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:25

Right, which is a fantastic option and something that I think we really need to consider because it is not realistic a lot of the time to take time off. So the first thing that we have to do when we think about reading vacation is we have to think "Okay, when can I do it?" Let's schedule some time again, whether you're going away or you're staying home, you have to schedule some time in Mindy that you did the exact right first step. Tell your people that this is happening and I usually try to do it, because I've done the staycation element too which is a really big struggle for my husband and son. They really struggle with, with, with leaving me to read, but the only way I have any shot at making it happen is if I put it on the calendar a few months in advance. And so you sent out a reminder to your family and you said, "This is an event. The book is coming out, I am going to arrange things so that you guys are on your own." And so then did they abide by that?

Mindy Brouse 35:31

Oh, they did. And it actually the funny part is that I ended up getting an arc from Katie Proctor earlier. So then I had to move my book event. And that's where it got a little like the fam was like, "No, you can't, you can't do that two days before", because literally, I got the book and moved the event for the next day. But right, it was doable for me because my kids are not little anymore. So if your kids are little, you know, there's ways to make this happen for younger children, even not going away, guys, like I remember what it was like to have some littles and not be able to plan a vacation away. Yeah. But you can do this book holiday in your house if you prepare. But it does require preparation if you have little ones, but my family did abide by it. The main person they had to keep an eye on was Jubilee because she was like, I know she's here. So they just had to keep her happy and entertained. But everyone else was like peace out mom, whatever. As long as we have food, we don't care.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:25

Well, one trick I have put into place is I started saying to my husband, Johnny, I started saying, Okay, I want to take a reading vacation. Sometimes it's because I want to read a particular book. And sometimes it's just because I want to go away for a really just 24 hours, and know that I'm gonna get that time for really deep reading what ever kind of reading that is. So what I started doing is saying, "This is going to be your birthday present to me". And so I would say "You don't have to worry about a gift for me. My birthday is completely taken care of. I'm handling it". And I would book a hotel room. The next thing you knew, once you block it off, you need to determine what is important to you in your reading getaway. So for me, I know a couple of things are really important. I do it best alone. I don't, I haven't had good luck of going away with people. Because then what happens is, of course, you want to talk with the people that you're with because you love them.

Mindy Brouse 37:28

Right? Yeah, naturally. Yeah. Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:30

So I go alone. And I put on the calendar months in advance, and I book a hotel at a place that does room service. Because one of the biggest things for me is I don't want to have to go anywhere to get my food. And I don't want to have to worry about preparing. I don't want to stay in an Airbnb where I have to prepare my food. So I book a night in hotel that that feels safe to me because I'm alone. So again, if you're going to go do this on your own, you need to make sure you feel really safe. And then you need to think about okay, how are you going to get your food. Now for me, I love me some room service. But for other people, they'd say, You know what, my brother, for example, he plans an event like this, and he planned it in a place where he knows right down from the place where he's staying is this little village that has several different places that he loves to eat. And he takes his Kindle and he goes and sits at a table himself all by himself. And part of what where he loves to get his reading done is while he's eating in a restaurant. So decide what rhythm works for you.

Mindy Brouse 38:40

Right? Oh, I can't agree more. And honestly, I love that you bring this up as a gift. Because how many of us really don't need more things or really don't want more things right now this time of year. And maybe your partner is like I cannot figure out well, you know what? Tell them right now. Say like I made a coupon for you. That says you get to go away for a 48 hour book holiday at the time of your choosing here honey, wrap this for me give it to me for the holiday. That would be absolutely perfect, but you do need to know your rhythm. This was such a hit for me Meredith in my heart. Like it just was so good for me that I've already told the fam like I'm going to do this twice next year. And I think one time is going to be like you just describe what your brother does. Because I did get to go do something like that with a friend. We stayed in separate hotel rooms and then we went down the stairs and ate and talked. I love the idea of that. Yes, it would have to be for me and my budget but I think I can make that happen somewhere really fun. But then the other one I just want to go camping by myself in the pop up somewhere safe, somewhere chill, and just go read in nature and hike and read and I can read and read and read and read and I prefer to have the food there for whenever the mood strikes. Now, I like knowing that I'm not sure when I'll be hungry and here's the food already and I can just eat my greasy potato chips with my Mexican street salsa and be a happy girl. So you do need to know your rhythm.

But you and I are both really big mood readers. So mood is a big deal for us. And so I think I could see how it could be different in different seasons of life or even of the year it was really too late for me hiding in my room, locking the doors and reading *The Winners*. That's literally all I did was read and eat simultaneously and cry. So that book was very cathartic. So it's like I knew going in, right like, this is going to be a sob fest. Everyone knew. If you've been reading *Beartown*, you know, it was the finale, so that we were going to be crying, but it was so good. Like, I needed that. That was the exact time of the year I needed a good cry. So that's another part of this, like, know what you want to read, know how your feelings I could see like, well, what if a book I just want to pick up a book, but that's not my mood, right? Meredith, you and I would probably have to pack several, if we weren't focusing around a new release that we were both excited about for whatever reason, then we're going to have a bunch to pick from so that we know once we get to our retreat, so to speak, our single person retreat, what mood is going to what are we going to need to read, you know, and so I love that idea of a gift, choosing your location, really think it out, you're like, don't, I don't feel like this is a thing that will go well, if you just spontaneously do it. If you haven't thought it out, not only for your family, if you have a family and you focus around, but around yourself. I'm just so grateful you shared about this in the show the last five seasons because you planted those seeds and be like, oh, yeah, I go away. I put it on the calendar. And I was like, Huh, well, that's an idea. That is very clever. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:41

The other thing that as far as rhythm that we need to think about is, you know, we need to think about the rhythms of you know, how do we want to eat, what do we want to have available to us, but also we want to think about, like you said, we I need to plan in a few ways to move my body during the day. So I one of my favorite retreats I did was I went and stayed in Monterey, which when I lived in California was a couple of hours from my home. And I stayed overnight at the Intercontinental the Clement, which is right next to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. And as a part of staying there, you get a day pass to the aquarium. And so what I and you can go in and out as many times as you want. And so what I did was I would go I would, you know, read for a while and then I would go down and I would put in my audiobook and I would go into the aquarium and just wander around and watch the animals being fed. I mean, the Monterey Bay Aquarium is a world class. So it's, it's big so you can you're moving your body a lot as you're walking, and you're going up and down stairs and you're just looking at these amazing things and I switched to a different book when I was listening and doing all of this and then moving my body and then going back and having some lunch and going back to the hotel room and then I was ready to rest and relax for a while. The other thing that I have started doing in my home when I can't get to a full reading retreat or solo retreat or even when I can't plan like a full day of reading like you were talking about *Mindy*, which I think is such a great idea to stay at home but arrange it so you can read a lot. I have been doing what I call "Kindle and a candle." And I tell Johnny like one time a week "I have had a day and I need I'm just telling you now like I'll tell him like in the middle of the day. I'm just telling you now tonight I'm doing Kindle and a candle" which means at eight o'clock when we normally would start our evening together, I am gonna go take a bath and then I'm gonna get in bed and I am going to read with my Kindle and my flameless candle which I have flameless candles all over my house. And I have one that has like this little with this little like sound to it that makes it sound like a flame burning. Yeah. And I literally the lights are off in my room. And I have arranged with them like "Hey, Mom's going to bed early. And I'll see you tomorrow morning". And so your your reading vacation can be something as small as that like you said we they are the your reading vacation will be different in different seasons

of your life. If you have littles you can plan Kindle and a candle. Yeah, put the littles to bed, and then go even if it's just one hour, make the plan, make it special. And you can make that happen. If you're in a season of your life, where finances and time and rules and and your family situation enables you plan a beautiful trip to an Airbnb by a lake where you have the most amazing reading settings of your life and give that to yourself as a gift. But yes, your reading vacation will change over the seasons of your life for sure. But there is always an ability to do something, but it will make you feel like you're taking some time for you and for your reading. And I think that that's a great thing to do.

Mindy Brouse 44:58

I think it's as you were describing you walking around Monterey, I literally felt my neck relaxing and my shoulders. I was like, Oh my gosh, that is so relaxing. I love that idea of building up to it also like, Y'all, if you start with Kindle and candle or for me, it's porch time. I have texted the family in the middle of a hard day and said, "Hey, dinner is blah, blah, blah. And I need to be on the porch with my book from this time to this time. I just need that today". And they know they're like, Okay, and so because I have been doing that the idea of a whole day didn't like throw them off. You know what I mean? They're like, Oh, okay, yeah, now you just have more time, you know, so

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:36

Yeah, you eased into it.

Mindy Brouse 45:39

So if you do the Kindle and the candle or the porch and a book, whatever

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:42

Porch and the Pino

Mindy Brouse 45:43

Porch and the pino. Hey, now there you go. Porch and Pilsner for me, but yes, like, you go out there. You know, there's so many reasons to do this. Not only is this a healthy thing for you, um, but you're modeling how to enjoy something that means a lot to you to your family. You're showing how important reading is, which, you know, we want to wave that flag as often as we can. But you're also showing your family, I love you, but I also need this. This is important to me this time alone in so if you have littles I jotted down a few things to make this if you can't, if it's not in the budget right now tag a friend. So talk to a best friend and say, "Look, I want to do this. Is that something that interests you?" Probably yes, because you probably have readerly friends say, "Okay, I'm gonna do this day, and then you keep my kids and then on this day, a month later, or whatever it is, I'll keep your kids".

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:34

Oh, great idea.

Mindy Brouse 46:35

That way, you're making it happen for both of you. Because some if you don't have a partner, or if your partner just can't do that kind of thing, for whatever reason, make it happen for each other. Ask

grandparents. This is the time to send out maybe an email, maybe a blanket Facebook post. "Hey, you know what, I want for Christmas from anyone who's willing to do this? I want a book holiday. And if someone could keep my friends for 48 hours, I would be eternally grateful". You know, obviously, you don't want to share it with everyone on Facebook, because you may have weirdos in your friends list. But if you if you have cultivated a really good friends list, then you can but y'all, why not ask? Because I have found that we often don't know how to show love to some friends. Like we want to be there for them we don't know. Goodness Meredith If I knew back in the day when Jackson was little and you just needed this and you couldn't make it happen. I'd be like, "Dude, I love Jackson. Jackson and I are gonna go play the hell out of all the things today. See you tomorrow morning". Like how many? If we think about it, would we want to do this for someone? Yes. So just trade off. I think trading or tagging with a friend is a really great way to make this happen. If you have older kids, y'all, honestly, I found that once my kids were ten and up, I could probably do something like this if I had all the food ready. If I had all the food ready, and I was really fun about it, like yes, you can have cereal for lunch and breakfast, as long as you have some fruit and then make it a holiday for the weekend. Yeah, if they see that it's fun for them. They are way more likely to be like, "Hey, mom when is your next book holiday when we can watch Netflix nonstop and eat the food we love?" Y'all, I've said it before, when I was doing the Bookend Homeschoolers, I've said all the time, a solid day of Netflix has never killed anyone, it's fine. It's gonna be a great thing. So there are just honestly, I think there are just way too many benefits to not set aside a day in 2023 guys, where you make this happen in whatever way you can dream it and cultivate this in your life.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:33

And it's a great time of year to put this on your list to your husband say hey, again, like I did with my birthday gift. Tell your husband, "Hey, you don't want to worry about finding a gift for me. Let me tell you what I really want. On March 23 to 25th, I want those days off. And I'm going to read and so whatever make that happen". So yeah, that can be a good thing to do. Well, good Mindy. I hope that people take advantage of this. I hope that you guys do this. Let us know. Are you already doing it? How do you make it happen? What is the most ostentatious reading vacation you've ever had? What is the smartest way you kind of created something out of nothing so that you could do this? And everything in between? We want to know because I think this is one of the most fun things that we can do as readers.

Mindy Brouse 49:19

And I know we're gonna get messages... we know, we know this y'all we love the idea of a book retreat. Yes. Oh hell yes we do. Yes. We would love to go read with you and go do that sometime. This is different. This is talking about just you alone and even extroverts like myself benefit from this so this is not a book retreat with friends. This is your personal cultivated personalized book holiday by yourself.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:43

Right? Absolutely. Okay, Mindy. Let's visit the fountain. What is your wish this week?

Mindy Brouse 49:49

Well, it was really timely in your second book when you talked about the police procedure. I was like, Oh, we're gonna be touching back on this when we get to my wish. Man, I wish sure that I could find a

series that is just like Law and Order the TV show, the original one not like yeah, the million spin offs, just the original. I watched that religiously back in college and through adulthood, but I want it in book form. I adore police procedurals, followed by courtroom drama. I love that show, how it had both. You know, the idea the TV show was first half was police procedural and then we're in the courtroom. Yeah, I want a series like that in book form for me to love. There's just something about following the whole journey of the crime and then to the verdict. I just love it. I want wit and sarcasm with smart people. A story that keeps me reading fantastic detectives. I want some snark, I want great partners. I want a team that I can love and root for to bring justice. Now, don't get me wrong. I do love detective stories. We've shared that before. I loved the Crimson Lake series by Candice Fox is a favorite. I loved Eddie Flynn for most of the series. And we all know it crashed and burned for me in the last one. But I also love the Detective Galileo series by the Japanese author Keigo Higashino, which we both love. Yep, that series. Those are all great. But Meredith, I have an itch that can't be scratched. And it is a combination of both. I really want that. So I'm wishing for that. I'm speaking and into the fountain and hoping that bookish wish comes true.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:16

It's a good idea, Mindy. I hadn't realized until just now that I love. I would that's an itch that I have too. So that's a great idea. I love Law and Order, we should get that in book form. Yes. Okay. All right. Well, my book also harkens back to something we talked about, which is Mindy that I actually think that there is another yet another kind of reading retreat that we haven't talked about yet that I have not yet done. But I think I could do it. This is so you're right. This is not a big reading retreat like people have talked about us doing for Currently Reading because we know that that would be a great opportunity to meet and get time with readers, which is its own result, right. But that wouldn't be the result of reading. And then of course, we've talked about taking a solo reading vacation, but I think that there is potential for a happy medium in there. And let me tell you, this is what I'm wishing into the fountain that I that I'm going to try to put this together in my own life. And maybe some of us other people can do it too. And we can really refine the formula. I think if I were to pick two or three, probably not a bigger group than four people total, who are devoted readers, people who really, really love to read and who want this kind of dedicated reading time. So like one person has to be the reading Nazi and I of course would be this person because it's more than just the coordinator. You have to be a Nazi. And so what I would say is, are you have to be bossy, let's really do that. Yeah, because I would get the Airbnb and I would research it to be the perfect Airbnb for lots of great reading spaces. My team and I just went to a place in Burnet Texas that was called Log Country Cove and the place where we stayed had so many great reading spaces overlooking the lake inside in front of the fire. I mean, it was perfect. And so I would find the right Airbnb where we each would have our own bedroom. And there would be multiple, sort of Co-like larger reading, reading spaces, indoor and outdoor. I would make sure that we had great snacks, but I also would make sure that we had a couple of DoorDash events happening where food was being delivered. And then we would get there and I that's where me being super bossy that in order to do this, we have there has to be one person who says "Okay, here's our schedule, guys. We are going from 9am to noon, it is solo reading time. At noon, we get together for lunch from noon to two and we'll all talk about whatever we want to talk about... books, what we're reading, life, whatever. From two to five, it is solo reading time". And then you know, get we're going to do a walk and then we're going to do dinner and then you know solo read. Everyone's in bed by nine. You're in your own room. So you can watch TV, you can watch a show, you can continue to read whatever you want. But the the bossy part is

in order to make this work, someone has to make sure that the rules are followed. No one is creeping into anybody else's room to talk about. And no one is saying Oh, but I read this and I want it No, no, we have to abide by these rules. But I think if we could do it, it would give us that happy medium of being able to be with friends and get time with friends but also get that reading time. So I'm putting this wish into the fountain. I'm thinking about how I because you have to have the perfect group of people. You have to have the perfect space, thinking about how we can do it, but I think that it can be done.

Mindy Brouse 54:57

Meredith we are mind melded today because after something happened this summer on the show, I don't remember what y'all talked about. I literally message Liz and Julie and Joy and a couple others and said this exact thing. I said, "What if you guys came to my house, and I sent my family camping and we had a very scheduled reader retreat with just a small group". Yep. But Meredith, the thing that is missing, I cannot be that bossy person. We all know this. I'm a two. I'm, I'm gonna I'm gonna be like, we'll okay. If we don't want it. We can you know,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:32

You're, you're the person I'm fighting against in this scenario, right?

Mindy Brouse 55:37

And I want to go read but my people pleaser side will be like if somebody is still sitting here and then I'll just keep sitting here. So I need I need to designate the person who is the book boss for the book, retreat. Honestly, I think it could be done like in your own home or somewhere, depending on where you live. You know what I mean? Like, not trying to think to make it totally quick and easy. Just come to my house. My family has been booted, we're gonna read. I love it. Meredith. I love Okay, I'm gonna make that wish come true for me in 2023 that is happening. Thank you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:08

Right. Start small. Maybe we make it an afternoon paired with dinner, you know, like start small, or go big. Whatever you you know, whatever you feel like. I think that would be really, really fun. So ping splash. Those are our wishes into the fountain. All right, Mindy. Well, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram. And you can find Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Mindy Brouse 56:33

And you can find me Mindy at @gratefulforgrace on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:37

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.

Mindy Brouse 56:48

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:55

And if you really want to help us or add to your own reading life become a bookish friend. For just \$5 a month you get a ton of content and admittance into one of the best readerly communities out there. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference in us being able to find our perfect audience.

Mindy Brouse 57:18

Bookish friends really are the best friends. Thank you everyone for helping Currently Reading grow and get closer to its goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:25

Alright, until next week, may your chai be hot

Mindy Brouse 57:29

And your book be unputdownable

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:31

Happy reading Mindy.

Mindy Brouse 57:32

Happy reading Meredith.