



Season 5, Episode 38: Bookshelf Joy + Boss My TBR

Sun, Apr 30, 2023 7:14AM • 56:58

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

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

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday, Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and a new wall of bookshelves gives me life.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love when Bookstagram comes together for good. This is episode number 38 of season five. And we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:53

Oh Kaytee, I know exactly what your bookish moment is going to be about. And I really can't wait to get to that

Kaytee Cobb 00:58

Me too. First. Before we do that though, I'm going to let everybody know that we are going to tackle that boss my TBR segment again for our deep dive today. I'm excited to have a new crop of readers to harass with our suggestions, which of course are always gentle. But also we want you to do what we tell you to.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:16

Spot on. They're there. They're spot on is what they are.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:17

They're correct is the thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:19

I wasn't gonna use that word you did.

Kaytee Cobb 01:20

Perfect. But first, we have some mischief to manage this month because it is the first Monday of the month. It's also the first of the month. So welcome to a new month of Currently Reading. We are now going to the only ad we do all month long, which is the ad for ourselves our bookish friend community, which is located over on Patreon.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:44

Yes, and it's May 1 Today. Rabbit rabbit rabbit. And so I told Kaytee today we're going to talk about our Patreon community for you know, \$5 a month you keep the show ad free all that good stuff. But I said this month, I really really want to talk about one of our newest offerings for our Patreon content. Of course you guys know we do the indie press list right? And we do all things murderful, which is the show that I do with Elizabeth Barnhill talking about murders and thrillers and then Katie and Bhumi Ishola do Trope Thursday. And I really have come to love this particular offering that we have because Kaytee Trope Thursday is not like any of the other things that we do at currently reading big show or in our Patreon content. It is really wide ranging, but also follows that signature currently reading format, but has a wider literary kind of flavor. You and Bunmi are really, really good readers. I love the way that you talk about books together. I love the books that Bunmi is bringing to the show. Every single time I've listened to a trope Thursday, one of the two of you has brought something that I'm like, Well, definitely have to read that

Kaytee Cobb 02:59

and never heard of it had no idea about existed. Yep.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:02

Right, exactly. And just the the kinds of conversations that you're having over there are really illuminating. And they're just great bookish conversation, while also staying really on topic. A lot of times, when we talk about wide ranging conversation, it's like rabbit hole rabbit hole. You guys manage to thread the needle of letting it roll, but then also keeping it really focused on all what all of us want to hear, which is great conversation about a lot of different kinds of books, you pick great tropes to go over every month. This one that dropped just this week is about classic retellings books that are retellings of classics. And of course, you got to talk about one of your favorite books of all time, pride. And Bunmi was bringing several that I had never even heard of. And so it was just a really, I just really, really enjoy it so much. And so I just wanted to brag on trope Thursday a little bit for this particular focus on Currently Reading's, Patreon content.

Kaytee Cobb 04:06

Well, I am a words of affirmation girl, as you know, so I love getting to hear a little bit of feedback directly from you about it. And I also want to highlight that one of the things that you're talking about that you really can't get anywhere else is Bunmi works for Penguin Random House. So we get this great behind the scenes of the publishing industry section which we call from the editor's desk. She is an acquiring editor for Penguin Random House. So we get to like peek behind the curtain at a publishing

house, which is one of my favorite things to do every month. I just sit there and I'm like Bunmi you just run and I'm going to ask you questions like I know nothing because I know nothing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:41

Right? Right. Well, you sit in for the for the rest of the read and you write you ask all those questions. So Trope Thursday, just one part of all of the great content that you're getting if you pay just \$5 a month and again, it also keeps this show ad free. So now our mischief is managed for the entire month. The whole rest of the month I'm currently reading is going to be completely ad free.

Kaytee Cobb 05:04

Now that our mischief is managed we can get started the way we always do Meredith which is with our bookish moments of the week. What is yours?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:12

Alright, so if you follow me at all on Instagram at Meredith dot reads you know that I recently well and also my wish last episode was that I wanted to put together I wanted to want to put together IKEA bookshelves, right? Well, luckily I have a bookish friend Betsy at bookish Betsy she came over and we put together for IKEA Billy bookcases, just the normal standard, not extra tall, not anything special about them, just the normal ones, I got a sale price on them. And it completely has given me life this week, we put them on a wall of my dining room. And my dining room has been a room in our house that, you know, just real talk. We don't do a lot of formal dining room hosting. We're in there for the holidays. I do my puzzles there. But my dining room hasn't really felt like the heart of the home for me. Well, it turns out, if you put four gigantic bookcases up on a wall in a room, all of a sudden that room wants to give you a big old hug. So I'm so excited. It has given me the ability to completely reorganize all the places I keep books in my house in ways that make a lot more sense now, and I also got to do some shopping on Etsy got some very, very good prices. On some very particular bookish decor, you collect elephants and octopuses. I collect owls, especially very bookish owls. So I got a chance to get some bookish owl book ins, I got a chance to get some Sherlock Holmes fun, a brick book. And with Sherlock Holmes silhouette on it, I got a chance to get a per row book. And so I'm really, really excited about how it's all come together. And again, the biggest thing is just how much it has changed that room or that part of the house, which is right at the entrance to our home. So it automatically gives people something to talk about. It's really it's made a big difference. And it was not expensive to do and those kinds of projects make me feel really happy. Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 07:14

Yes. And as a hint to Johnny for forever. From now on, you always have the option to buy more bookends that exactly match Meredith's taste. To go on those shelves. Jason has been riding that bookend train for like a solid three years now. Like, Hey, it's your birthday. Guess what? I got you custom bookends. Are you excited? Yes, I am.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:36

Yeah, I would eat my own lefty ear if ever my husband does that. Right now you could you could absolutely Nerf gun to his head, he could not tell you that there's a single bookend in our entire home and it's filled with them. So that is nothing happening. But that's a really sweet idea that Jason's doing?

Kaytee Cobb 07:56

Well, he picks a gift idea. And he just hangs on to it for dear life for as long as possible.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:02

When you get a good, you get a good one though. You just do it.

Kaytee Cobb 08:05

Yeah, for sure. Okay, my bite sized intro revealed a little bit of my bookish moment, of course, but I can't not talk about it. I just want to keep this like tide of joyful emotion rolling. So I'm going to make sure that all of our bookish friends listening know about Bookstores for Bob on Instagram, if you hadn't had the chance to go to a local to you bookstore lately. And you listen to the episode two weeks ago that I did with our show regular Mary, you have an assignment, we're giving you homework, and it's the best kind, go to the bookstore. And make sure you walk out with at least one book. That is one of Bob's legacies. That's Mary's dad. And she said in that episode, that's one of the things that he instilled in his daughters and his family that when you go to a bookstore, you leave with a book, always. And so we had Megan put together this beautiful graphic, and people started sharing, we've shared it first to our patrons so that they could get the ball rolling, and I could try and keep it secret for Mary. Of course, she figured it out within like 38 seconds. And then I had to just pretend not to get any messages from her all day. But the way that the bookish friends have come out and showed out for Mary and there are just stacks and stacks of books being purchased all over the country and the world in honor of boggling makes me so happy. And Mary let us know and post it on Instagram. So this is public that he would be absolutely delighted and laughing his very distinctive laugh over how much he loved getting the Internet to go book shopping together in his honor. So my bookish moment has to be this just outpouring of love. get you to the bookstore friends and show us your stack. We will make sure that graphic is included in our show notes so that you can share it whenever you're ready to share your bookstores for Bob post.

Kaytee Cobb 08:28

Exactly. And it can be just to clarify because I've had people ask me this question. It can be any bookstore. Yes, right. It can be it just has to be one book. It doesn't have to be any more than that. Right? And then hashtag Bookstores for Bob. It is such a happy, happy thing. And I love thinking that he's looking down on all of us. And he's just absolutely delighted. What a fantastic legacy.

Kaytee Cobb 10:16

Yes, I love it so much. Like trick to the internet, like, guess what? I have a job for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:22

Well, and this group of people, they understand the assignment. So I really I'm, I'm not doubting it all that we're going to be able to make that hashtag popular.

Kaytee Cobb 10:30

Oh, yes. I want it trending all over the world. It would be great. Okay. Meredith, let's get into current reads though. What have you been reading lately?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:38

All right. So I want to talk about a book that I feel like has been everywhere. I'm Bookstagram. Actually, a couple of the books I'm bringing fall into that category today. Couple of my length, not one not so much. So strong opinions. Everyone's gonna get ready. All right, this first one I really really liked this is Everyone in my Family has Killed Someone by Benjamin Stevenson. All right, this book's title, it's cheeky tone is really all you need. For the setup. Our lead character is Ernest Cunningham. We know him as Ern, and he wants us to know right from the start that everyone in his family has killed someone including him. And it's such a great hook, isn't it? We meet this entire cast of murderous family members when they get together for a decidedly unhappy family reunion at a ski resort. And of course, high jinks ensue. And you'll find out about each family member and who they murdered. And why. That's all you need to know about the story. Kaytee, have you read this one?

Kaytee Cobb 11:36

No, I bought it for my mom for Christmas. And I have the audio for myself. But now I'm I feel like I've heard that maybe that's not the way to go for this one. So tell me more.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:45

Well, I mean, yeah, I can definitely see why that would be something that you would be thinking about. So as I said, this is a book that's gotten a ton of love in the Bookstagram community. And for good reason. It is definitely a lot of fun. And a lot of that hype is surrounding the fact that this book is what our dear friend Sarah from Sara's bookshelves live calls voicey. I love this term that she coined. I use it all the time now. And so you'll just know that that comes from her. This book is voicey. It's cheeky and funny, and we just don't find that enough in our mysteries, but maybe with the advent of books coming from Benjamin Stevenson and Richard Osman will be getting more of those. And I really hope so this book is really funny. And it's perfectly clear that the author is a comedian by trade. Our Narrator ern who I was telling you about is an expert on crime writing from the classic age of mystery, like Agatha Christie, and it's so fun to watch him break the fourth wall and tell us the rules of good crime fiction and how he is going to adhere to those rules. As he tells us the story, it's really fun. But there were two aspects to the book that surprised me. The first is that I wasn't prepared for the level of intricacy in the mysteries within the book. And I do say that with mystery, plural, this book is kind of a head spinner, you have to pay a lot of attention to what is going on. And there's a lot to keep track of this is a positive for me. And so I loved it. But I definitely can see for some people who feel like they don't want their mysteries to be this multifaceted, that this would be a hitching point in their feelings about the book, probably the biggest single surprise for me was that I didn't expect this book to have the depth that it had around issues of family, the way we look at our family and our family reputation. But more than that, the way there's a story that we tell ourselves about our family, about who we are as a group, and what that means to who we are as individuals, there's a recurring line in the book that says family is gravity. This obviously speaks to the fact that to a certain extent, we fall back again and again, into our family and into our habits and roles and dynamics that we play within that family. For better or for worse. I know that I'm known to do that myself. This book does a really interesting job of portraying those themes at a deep level, the title lives up to its promise. And it's fun to track that as you go through the book actually had a little check. Like I made myself like a little this doesn't checklist. Exactly. There are lots of little easter egg elements for people who read a lot of detective fiction like I do. And so that was another reason why this book was a total romp all in this by saying that this was a book that I read

during my reading retreat, which I just told you guys about, and I'm really glad that I did because I wanted something that was propulsive because I knew I'd have a lot of reading time and I did not want to be bored. This checked that box, but also I wanted to be able to sink into a book and to read a book that would benefit from me having long interrupted periods of reading time, and this book definitely did that. I think the intricacy of the mystery He was benefited by having long periods of time to read it. I think if I had had to pick it up and put it down and pick it up and put it down like I do in my normal reading, I might have gotten stuck behind it and it might not have landed as well for me another reason to be grateful for reading retreats. So this book is something I would highly recommend that you tuck into your bag the next time you go on your own reading vacation. This is Everyone in my Family has Killed Someone by Benjamin Stevenson.

Kaytee Cobb 15:25

Sounds so good. And I knew like my mom is also a big mystery reader, which is why I got it for her for Christmas. And of course, I ordered a UK version because it was not out yet in right the US when Christmas rolled around, so

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:39

Right, right, I did I ordered that same UK version. I do have to say, I mean, I haven't listened to the audio. So it might be absolutely stupendous. I liked reading it in print, because I definitely did find myself flipping back and forth to remind myself of certain plot points and names. There's a lot going on in this book. I am not gonna lie about that.

Kaytee Cobb 15:58

Right. Okay. That's good to know. See, this is why we talk about them out loud. Exactly. My first one this week is called Ana Maria and the fox by Liana De La Rosa. I got sucked into this book by the beautiful cover and I'm not mad about it. This novel is the first in a new series by Liana De La Rosa that focuses on the Luna sisters. And we start the series with Ana Maria Luna. Well this because in Spanish, you get your mom's last name and your dad's last name. That's what she has so many names. The Luna family is in danger in Mexico. So Ana Maria and her sisters are sent to London in order to keep them safe from the violence of the French Revolution in Mexico, talking about like a period of time and place that I knew nothing about. It's the first time that Ana has been out from under her father's thumb, he's always seeking perfection and Ana Maria has to be the perfect daughter and representative of the family. During their time in London. They are tasked with being out in society in order to raise the awareness in London of Mexico struggles back home because they're hoping that the British will start funding one side of this revolution over the other. That means that even though Ana Maria is engaged on paper to someone her father chose for her she cannot ignore the sparks that fly when she meets Mr. Gideon Fox, a young member of parliament, the son of a Scot, and grandson of a formerly enslaved black woman. He raised himself up from the gutters into the parliament has a goal to abolish the Atlantic slave trade. If only he can get the votes. That means he needs to keep his eyes on the prize on the politics. Not on Ana Maria, when a business deal goes south and Gideon is in quotes, the only one who can save her. He offers his hand in marriage as protection. So we've got a marriage of convenience as the core trope of this novel, which I'm for sure a fan of which I probably can blame on Outlander. Because really, that's how that whole book starts. Right? Right,

Kaytee Cobb 15:58

right. It's one of my favorite tropes. It's a great trope.

Kaytee Cobb 16:54

It also has some of the same elements and timelines as a Caribbean heiress in Paris by Adrianna Herrera, which was one of our indie press list books from last summer. And that's why I can tell you that if you're only going to pick up one historical romance with hot Scott and a powerful woman of color from across the Atlantic, I for sure have a favorite of the two. But if you've already read a Caribbean Heiress in Paris and loved that Regency timeline, this could be a great next read. While we wait for more in that series. I personally was hoping for a bit more space in Ana Maria and the Fox, and it has this scene that I find way too many historical romance novels have where there's a horseback ride, and the woman's horse gets out of control. And then what happens, the man is the only one who can save her right? Like he has to jump on her horse or grab the reins or it happens all the time in historical romances, and I don't want to read it anymore. I want the woman to be so adept at horseback riding that she has to save him. That's what I wanted. My next step would be that would be fresh. Let's flip it on its head. But the main characters of Gideon and Ana Maria and her sisters who will start in later books in the series, based on the title were vibrant and well drawn. It was colorful, it was lush, I enjoyed the machinations of Parliament, and the really beautiful ballroom scenes. That's what actually drew me in here, rather than the romance and the spiciness. This was overall relatively tame. It's Ana Maria and the Fox by the Ana de la rasa.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:25

Okay, so I have a couple of follow up questions. So where would you put it on the spice scale? So you said it's not very spicy, we're talking about actual scenes involving spice between mommy and daddy. Okay. All right. So they're not actually but

Kaytee Cobb 19:39

yeah, I would give it maybe a two and that's because there may have been more description than would marry a two but there was really only one spicy scene that would be very easy to skip past if that is not comfortable for you as a reader.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:52

Okay, so this would be a really good book for for people who fall into the category of I love some romance. I just don't want to be assailed by that. Scenes over and over again. We're sure. Okay, good to know. Excellent. Well, I actually got that one too from book of the month, which is going to surprise you. I put that in my box because well, I mean, I love that. And I love that Regency time period. I love that marriage of convenience trope. I love the woman of color in the hot Scot, all of that just does it for me. So Okay. All right. My next book is another one that has been everywhere. I mean, absolutely. But I read it. So I'm gonna talk about it. And I want to talk about it with you Kaytee because I want to find out what your thoughts are to this is I Have Some Questions for You by Rebecca Makkai. All right, you have seen this book everywhere. I know that you have. So I'm not going to waste a lot of your time setting it up. Just really, really small set up here so that we remember what we're where we are here. We've got Bodie Kane, who is a film professor and a podcaster. And she's enjoying a successful career and generally just minding her own business when she's invited to teach a course at the Granby

School, which is the New Hampshire boarding school where she went in high school, and where her roommate, Sally Keith, was killed in the spring of their senior year, There's long been a lot of debate about the circumstances of that death and the conviction of Omar Evans, who was the school's athletic trainer, and a man of color, but Bodie has generally tried to forget that it happened. But alas, she gets drawn back into taking a closer look into the case. And it's clear that there are real problems with the conviction and lots of secrets that people still all these years later want to keep from coming to light. All right, Kaytee, this book was a mixed bag for me. And I really, I almost feel like I need some bookish therapy, because I had a lot of contradictory thoughts about it. It definitely, of course, had all the buzz of a huge new release, as it should, because her previous book, the Great Believers, was a massive, massive literary and commercial success. I didn't read great believers. But this one was interesting enough in its premise that I thought I would dive in and give it a try. This ended up being a book that I was very glad I had read, and one that I did not really like. Have you ever had that experience? Where they both exist at the same time?

Kaytee Cobb 22:10

Yeah, but it's usually because I'm reading something that made me really uncomfortable. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:15

Right. And this may very well have been a FOMO related situation here. So let's start with what I liked about the book. Because there were several things this book is absolutely written with a very sure hand, the sentence level writing is very, very good. Even when the story got slow, or starting to meander down rabbit holes that I didn't personally find interesting. The writing kept me going. Rebecca Makkai is a fantastic writer. And I am going to eat my metaphorical hat here and say that the narration on the audio was done by Julie Whelan. And it was very good. I think it's mostly because this book just doesn't have a lot of dialogue. Right, I was able to just relax into the story. I really enjoyed her narration quite a bit. And there is no question that Makkai's exploration of the themes of our obsession with true crime, violence against young women, young white men getting away with things that young black men can't get away with. These are all themes that are explored and handled really well. I also really liked the overall construction of the book, which I won't say a lot about, because I don't want to ruin that piece for you. And it's a really strong piece of it. There were several things about the story that were not for this reader. I knew when I came into this book, I knew, because people have been very clear, this was not a mis marketed book. In my opinion, it was clear from all the readers in advanced copies. This is not crime fiction. This is not a mystery. This is not a thriller. That's not what it is. And it was clearly marketed as not being those things. This is literary fiction, full stop. So I shouldn't have been surprised when much of the book. So so much of the book was about our narrator, who's a fortyish woman ruminating about her experience as an insecure high school student. And I think I probably would have been okay with most of that, except for the fact that as an adult, she seems to have gained so little perspective, she just hasn't grown that much. She seemed very stuck in the traumas that happened to her before, and also the ones that happened to her after the events covered in the novel. So all of the teenaged angst even coming through the mouth of a 40 Something adult Narrator just tweaked the wrong chord for me. Also, there's a side plot that has a me to theme that I felt really took me out of the story and was unnecessary. It felt like she was trying to tackle too many big issues at once. But I will say this is a piece that a lot of readers really, really enjoyed about the book and felt was really important. So again, this reader had that opinion, but I just want to give a universal a more universal

take on that. In her interview with Sarah Sarah's book shelf life which I really recommend that you go and listen to too, because Sarah always does a great job with her author interviews. Rebecca Mackay says it's a book with a crime minute for people who aren't interested in the crime. But all the things around it. And you know, really, we say it all the time reader know thyself, when an author says that I need to listen, I'm a reader who is there for the crime. I want to know the who and the why. And the when I personally am very much less interested in the ripples out from that crime and say what you will about that fact, it is a fact. And I need to know that about my reading. And when I'm talking about a book, I need to know that that's the reason this book didn't work for me, not because it wasn't good. But just because it didn't work for this reader. But I will say Mackay lands the plane with a deft hand, the ending was thoughtful, and resolved fully an elegant in a lot of ways. So this is a case of I'm glad I read it, but I didn't like it. And that is a really common kind of reading, I think. So moving on. The reason that it didn't work for me personally, can help me make better choices going forward. So that's part of what we do here at currently reading. It's part of why we talk about books, even when they don't work for us not to tear the book down or the author down or to Yuck, anyone's Yum, but to say, Okay, but why didn't it work for me? And to work through that? Because that also might mean it would really work for someone else. Kaytee, what did you think

Kaytee Cobb 26:27

I, first of all, I did read the Great Believers. And I loved it. It was one of my favorite books of whatever year that I read it probably 2017 2018. I don't know when it was. And so I went into this book with a very favorable opinion of Rebecca Makkai. To me it felt very slow. And part of that I chalked up to the fact that I was reading it on my Kindle. So when I get galleys, I read them on my Kindle, I would do my Kindle reading before I go to bed, which means sometimes I read for three minutes, and then I'm asleep. Like I just can't get huge swaths of reading done in that format. And some books suffer from that, especially galleys,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:10

right? This definitely would have benefited from longer swaths of reading time where their audio or in print, but longer periods of time, yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 27:18

yeah. So usually, when I'm doing my review, I take that into account like, oh, Kaytee, you were tired, because you were reading at bedtime? Not because you were bored. Right? Yeah. And I tried to account for that. When I make my review of a galley that I read on my Kindle, I did think the construction was really interesting. And I did like, the way she revealed what happened and what is currently happening in our narrator's life. There are some very interesting things that she does with the way she wrote this book. But overall, I was kind of I mean, I gave it four three and a half stars kind of in that middle range for me as a reader, which means I liked it fine. I don't remember a ton of it. And I only read it probably a month and a half ago. So that should tell you, I guess, overall, that it didn't really stick with me, even though I listened to the interview today.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:10

Right, right. And I mean, Sarah does such a good job with that interview. It's even if you haven't read the book, I would highly recommend listening to that interview, because it's really very, very interesting.

She asks great questions. I also realized now just as you said this, in the category of reader, know thyself, this book is written in second person. And that is almost always, for whatever reason, I can't explain why. But it's almost always something that takes me out of a story or just slightly gives me an undertone of irritation. Not I mean, in any story that's written in second person. So that's another thing that I should have realized. I mean, I don't know. Should I not have read it? Should I have gotten in there and been like, Oh, this isn't second person. And it's truly a Whelan. And there's like this kind of I'm 40. But I still sound like I'm 16 and some my emotional development. Should I have stopped reading it? I don't think so. Because I'm glad that I read it.

Kaytee Cobb 29:03

Right. Yeah. And I think it's very discussable. Especially if you know, the entire arc of the story. This would be a great book club book. Yeah, there are going to be people that you know, hated reading it and are also glad they read it. There are going to be people who loved it, it's going to be on tons of top of the year lists, I'm sure of it right now. And there's a lot of content to unpack in this book. So if you have a group of readers that all read it together, there's lots of different rabbit trails that you could follow that are all about what happens within the storyline, which I think would be really interesting.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:34

Exactly right. When I was saying I felt like she was doing too much. That's exactly what I meant was there were a lot of readers for whom they were like, oh, no, this is what I want to talk about when we're talking about crime. Yeah. And this is, you know, this is exactly what's interesting. So I really want I want to make sure we underscore that those things are there for readers for whom that is a way into a story, just in case I didn't close it before this is I Have Some Questions for You by Rebecca Makkai.

Kaytee Cobb 30:01

Perfect. Okay, my next one is an essay collection. It's Inciting Joy by Ross Gay. So this is an essay collection, it's nonfiction, and it's about the different and unexpected places that we find joy. First of all, I love the cover, I love the title. And I have found using my reading spreadsheet that essays really work for me, they're a great like bite size way to take in some reading, which for me, is a good way to stay out of a slump, because then I'm still reading at least a little bit every day, if I have an essay collection going in this one Ross Gay really draws from his personal experiences in community gardening, pickup basketball games, and the experiences he had caring for his father as he died. He asks his reader to follow Him and find joy in places that it feels like might be completely lacking it. And he highlights the way that community and caring for one another builds connection and highlights the goodness in the world around us. Ross Gay is a poet. And I have highlighted that with other writers in the past, because the amazing people in our midsts, who are poets first and then put themselves to the page by a prose are really able to call on the written word in a different way. It feels to me like someone who's a poet has access to language in a way that the rest of us cannot write like, I would never have been able to write a sentence like that. But because you are playing with words in this other medium, you have some magical power that I don't have, they are able to pull fuller and deeper meanings from fewer words somehow. And it shows up in the writing of this prose as well. Katie and I read this one together, because we are reading essays every day in 2023. We are the essay enthusiast is what we are calling ourselves for this year. And it's a wonderful bite size way, like I mentioned, to keep reading, even when you're between books, or between obsessions, or between series, or whatever it is right. Meredith at

one point, you talked about reading a little chunk of David Sedaris every day because sometimes it's too much to read him all at once. Right,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:06

exactly are intimidated. I'm not ready to move. I'm not ready to move to my next audio book. So I just go to one of his and listen to it a little bit. Yeah. So I don't I'm not forced into a decision.

Kaytee Cobb 32:16

Exactly, exactly. Regarding this collection. I'll add that the man may be a poet, but he also loves a footnote. This collection was one of our favorites so far this year, especially if you take away the fact that some of these essays had footnotes that were five or more pages long. Why Ross Gay? Why just write another essay and put that story in it. You don't have to try and Russian doll your stories for us. They're interesting enough without that, in the same way that we might see a gratitude challenge on social media and either jump right in, or roll our eyes. This book asks us to look around and find the joy in the midst of sorrow or change or difficulty. And I'm grateful for the ways that it made me and Katie, look around and find the joy around us. And of course, as I prepared this currently today, I thought of Mary and the ways that she walked us through her grief a couple of weeks ago and finding joy in hard. So if you resonated with that deep dive, maybe this is the next book for you. It's Inciting Joy by Ross Gay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:22

That's a really good one. That's I'm so glad that that was good. Okay, my next book is a five star fantastic. If you are looking for a book on a long drive, you're gonna want to get this one kinda read. Alright, this is The Overnight Guest by Heather Gudenkauf. Here's our setup and all my murder fans. This is for you. So just get your download ready. Our lead character true crime writer Wiley Lark has rented an isolated cabin murder cabin in my park parlance to work on her next book, and when a massive storm hits she's okay with it. She's got the fire. She's got the quiet it's fine. Did I mention that two people were murdered in this cabin two decades earlier? Yeah. Murder cabin. So Wiley is chillin like a villain in the storm until she lets her dog out. And he doesn't come right back. No. Okay, at this point. I'm just basically saying Godspeed. Bingo. I'm going back into the murder cabin. But no, she goes out and looks around. And then she discovers a small child in the snow just outside alone, unconscious, freezing and bleeding. Okay, so there's the WTF of that scenario, which is bad enough. Then we have our second timeline 20 years previous, where we're following a police investigation into what happened at a family home where two people are shot dead, and two kids are missing and one little girl is found scared alone in bleeding in a cornfield. As we follow our story, we get to see how these two plot lines come together. And yes, you guessed it, someone that that murder cabin is in grave danger. All right, this is my happy place. This book is my happy place. It came to me as a recommendation from a bookish friend. And I cannot find who recommended it. But I know that it was someone who sent me a message or an email or somehow, quite a while ago saying, Meredith, this book is for you, you definitely need to read it. So thank you, whoever you are, you deserve all of the credit. And if you reveal Yourself to me, I will definitely make sure that I give you credit for this. I absolutely loved this book. Now, it's absolutely true that when I started it, I was super very much in the mood for a propulsive audiobook, I might have just finished listening to have some questions for you. And I really needed something that was going to just be all crime all the time. This book has those two

different timelines, it has rotating perspectives and action coming out the wazoo, and it also has characters that you care for, and relationships that matter within the context of the story. This is not just a popcorn thriller. This is why this is my happy place. I will say that it took me right at 10% of the book to be fully grounded in the story. The rotating perspectives at the beginning were a little bit confusing on audio. But at that 10% Mark, I was quickly able to find my place in the story, and it was off and running to the races from there. This is not groundbreaking literature. And I guess you probably can say that this is not going to be the most memorable book that I read all year. But this is my favorite kind of reading. All I wanted to do was for everyone to leave me alone in my car folding my laundry and listen to the story because my heart was pounding I could not wait to find out what was going to happen if you like the books of Lisa Jewell especially you will like this book. I did very, very much. This is The Overnight Guest by Heather Gudenkauf and I do recommend it on audio though I'm sure it would also be good on print and Kindle.

Kaytee Cobb 36:57

Perfect. I read a Heather Gudenkauf book a few years back and it was recommended by I think one of the people that I know that is the biggest fan of her Morgan Tolman, so okay, I don't know if it's possible that she recommended it because she loves this author.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:14

I feel like if it was Morgan, I would remember that it was Morgan. You know what I mean? Just because, yeah, so but Right. But who knows? If you were that person, please let me know in my apologies that I didn't put that information in a place where I would remember later.

Kaytee Cobb 37:28

I never put that information in a place I'll remember later. So Godspeed. I do have a spreadsheet in my head, though, for indie press list picks. So I'm bringing one of those today. Here we go Four Treasures of the Sky by Jenny Tinghui Zhang was an indie Press List picked from Cafe con Libros. Last summer in 2022. This store was so interesting for us to work with because they were one of the first stores that ever said we have a very specific vision for how we want to present ourselves to your bookish friends. So these are the books that we'd like to bring to the program. And we were like, What would you like to consider? And they were like, No, we would not. And it was great because they had such a fantastic sense of self.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:09

Yeah, that the list just hit both times, even though we were like, well, maybe. And they said, no, no, this is exactly right for our store and for what we will bring to you. And it was fantastic. It was the right call for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 38:22

Yes, absolutely. Yes, we learned a lot from that partnership, which I love. In this story we follow Daiyu. She is named after a tragic Chinese heroine. But who wants tragedy as their backstory. This novel finds her constantly trying to break away from that namesake arc trying to forge her own path of success and joy. First day you is smuggled across the ocean from China to America in a barrel, she has to find a way to survive alone in California bouncing from a calligraphy studio to a brothel to a shop in Idaho.

This novel takes place during the time that anti Chinese sentiment was increasing and included attacks and violence on anyone who was deemed a threat. In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, banning Chinese laborers from entering the US and deporting anyone who arrived after 1880. It was a brutal time for those of Chinese descent. Which leads me to my overall impressions of this book. It is brutal. The author did meticulous research and her author interview at the end of the audiobook sold me on the whole idea of the story she talks about where she got the idea she talks about making sure that every aspect of this book, elevated Chinese American voices or Chinese voices even the cover design, the audiobook narration, every part was so thoughtfully considered. It is though literary fiction and every sense of word. That means that it's beautiful writing stunning writing and it means that readers who love a swing up may want to look elsewhere. Daiyu's life is brutal with a capital B and capital every other letter every time we feel like she has found a path for Word, she gets foiled again. And again. This book, though brought to light a portion of American history that for me and many other readers and listeners has been overlooked in our education, even in history classrooms. It's not an easy read, but it is an illuminating one. So this kind of goes to what you were saying earlier, Meredith about I'm glad I read this book. And I did not love the experience because it was painful on like, emotionally, it was a fantastic read, and it hurt to read it. It truly stands though, as a work of literary art is beautiful on every level. And I am glad that I read it, even though it broke me in a number of ways. This was Four Treasures of the Sky, by Jenny Tinghui Zhang. Alright, so those were our six current reads. And now we get to be a little book bossy, which is one of our favorite things to do around here. And we have two new volunteers or victims for the Boss My TBR segment,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:01

voluntary victims is what they are. Yes, perfect.

Kaytee Cobb 41:05

So our first victim is Ashley Curran, who when we asked for submissions for this segment, she said, Oh, I love this. Here are her five books, Babel by Rf Kuang Be still my heart Crying in H Mart by Michelle Zauner. Killers of a Certain Age by Deanna Reybourn. Scythe by Neil Schusterman, and A Darker Shade of Magic by Victoria Schwab. And when she sent in this submission, she said my last two reads at the time, were currently reading recommendations, and both excellent. So I know I'm in good hands, which we love to hear of course, yes. All right. Did you have a feel for where you wanted to go with this one when we started?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:43

Yes. And so it's interesting, because you made our two choices. And I don't know exactly what system you use to do that. But when I read them, I was like, oh, one of these feels very much in my wheelhouse. And then the other one feels very much in your wheelhouse. And this one is the one I was like, Oh, we're kind of like book twins. Because Babel and Killers of a Certain Age and Scythe and Darker Shade of Magic, and then she throws in Crying in H Mart. And I'm like, oh, okay, that's the outlier. Okay. Which again, very, very good book. Not for this reader.

Kaytee Cobb 42:12

Correct.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:12

So, you know, so I was like, oh, okay, well, my initial thought was, anytime anybody put Ccythe on a list, I'm going to say, just stop what you're doing and go read that it's always always always going to be first. For me, it is one of those books like Hunger Games, that I feel like, Absolutely, everybody is going to like it Project Hail Mary is another one that falls into this category. I have recommended Scythe to so many people, Kaytee, I know you have too. People who've said I don't I haven't read forever read Scythe people who said I have a teenage son who doesn't like to read, read Scythe, I mean, name a reader, and I'm going to put Scythe into their hands. So that's got to be first. And then after you finish with Scythe, I think you're going to want something a little bit lighter. And I'm going to go with Killers of a Certain Age. Okay, it's that light kind of pithy, it's voicy. It's got the elderly protagonist, something a little bit different. And also, by the way back to back Assassin's Yes, in that, right. So you've got a little bit of shared tonality there. But really, it's a lighter version of it, and a different story. And then I'm going to say cruise into Babel, because I feel like babbles gotta be, I mean, we're choosing three, right? Our job in Boss My TBR, were just three, choose three, and given the order that we think that they should be in. And so I would round that out with Babel, because I think after Scythe and after Killers of a Certain Age, you're going to be ready to jump into something that's going to demand a little more of you. But it's going to have the propulsiveness that I think this reader seems to like in her book. So that's my, that's my order. Kaytee, what do you think about that order?

Kaytee Cobb 43:52

Well, Meredith, we are very much on the same page. Here, I have read all five of these books. I chose Babel first. But that was purely selfish. I love it so much. I wanted it first. And it was my topic of 2022. I followed the same idea that you did, though, because I liked the through line. So I like Babel next to scythe because both of them are kind of coming of age stories about teens that are raised to perform in a certain way. So there's that mini thru line but then they're going to be so different, right? And then you keep that like many three line and you pick the assassins up instead, instead of the teens being and then you go to killers of a certain age. So I had Babel Scythe Killers as my top three in that order, because it was like, let me take this tiny section of this story and plop it into this one. And now I get a whole new storyline. And now I'm going to take this tiny thing in the story and plop it into this one and it felt like this fun like, poetic game. I was playing with her reading life.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:54

I like it. I like it that that makes complete sense. I think either one of those orders yes would be fantastic. but those are definitely the three books of this five that you should start out with, but all five being great books.

Kaytee Cobb 45:04

Yes, definitely. I like that a lot. Okay, our second volunteer this week is named Caroline Francois and she says, Oh, I'm so in here are her five picks she has Upgrade by Blake Crouch. Signal Fires by Dani Shapiro. Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting by Claire Pooley, Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi, and We Ride Upon Sticks by Quan Berry, these books are very different. And I have read three of these five. So it may be that the first deck was a Meredith stack, but I have read all five of the first deck and only three.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:42

Okay, so I've only read one of these in the stack. I know generally, though, about all five of them. So I you know, I think my biggest question, and so much when we're bossing people's TBR, is we want to be able to ask them questions, right, in order to make the best recommendation, because my big question is, is Caroline a mood reader? Because if she is, I think it would be better for us to say like, Okay, if you're in the mood for x, then this book would be really good. Because these are really specific. Like for me as a mood reader, all of these books, I'd have to be in a really specific mode except for Upgrade. So that's the one that I think is a no brainer, because that is just one of those straight ahead. Very interesting. Well done, plot filled, but with enough like scientific theory to make it interesting and give you something to talk about and think about. So upgrade I liked very, very much. But if I were going to jump into for example, Iona Iverson's rules for commuting, which I have in which I very much intend to read, I would have to be in a really specific mood and be ready for something very kind of up and sweet. Right? And I'm not always in that mood.

Kaytee Cobb 46:55

Yeah, definitely. And that was what struck me about this list also is that all these books are so different. We have like near future sci fi, we have a short literary novel, and we have a curmudgeon, I feel good story. We have a science driven literary fiction, also short. And then we have we ride upon sticks, which is like quirky, 80s nostalgia with some paranormal fantasy stuff going on. Like they're just, you can't make any connections between these books. Like you could just go down the list, because it's not like you're gonna get bored, because I just read about that. And it's not like, you're gonna think that oh, Kaytee and Meredith chose this one first. But it's so different than the last. Of course it is all of these books are so different from the last one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:45

Yeah, well, exactly. And I think we write upon sticks is a book that I also own and really, really, really want to read. And I keep putting it in my October reading TBR because it has that kind of witchy element to it. So that would be another thing that I would ask would be how important how seasonally Do you like to read? Is it okay with you to read about witches in April or in may go for it? You know, there's because these are five quality books that define what we mean when we say we contain multitudes. I love so much that Caroline has all five of these books in her basket of hey, I might want to read it. So, you know, what do you think about Signal Fires? Did you read single fires? Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 48:29

I actually when I was like, well, Kaytee, you got to make some kind of decision because you can't just be like Caroline throw them all in the air and see which one lands first but but I have not read Signal Fire, I have a lot of friends who have, I've heard that it's a quick read. It's just over 200 pages. And truly my Goodreads feed when I went to check on it, again, is full of bookish friends who loved it and gave it five stars. Like it took me so long to scroll and find somebody who gave it anything other than five stars. So I do think it's kind of a surefire win if it made it onto your TBR it's probably the book for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:06

Yes, yes. I was gonna say exactly that. If this made me it's not a book that I would touch with a 10 foot pole, but because I know myself as a reader, but everyone who I've heard talked about it has said, top

top top of the year for me, yes. So it really does seem like that would be one that she put on her list. That really should be the one that she knocks out first, because I think it could be a huge win for her

Kaytee Cobb 49:30

right, it's probably going to be a hit. It's probably going to be a quick read. And then I did put upgrade next because we get that wild swing from one side of the literary spectrum to the other. And then I put we ride upon sticks as my third one because it's like quirky and interesting. And again, it's one of those books that once you've put it on your TBR and you've heard about it and you know that there's you know, like a piece of hair that's referred to as Emilio Estavez in this book like If you are into that, you're going to be in to the story, and it's gonna hit for you. So those are my top three,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:06

but just know that it's very quirk forward. Yes. And so definitely wait till you're in the perfect mood for that. But she's got you know both of these both of these listeners had fantastic choices for us to go over. These are good books to have on your TBR all of them all 10 of them definitely

Kaytee Cobb 50:23

and Mary's the one who pushed Iona Iverson way up my TBR. So like, when I'm looking at this list, I'm like, well, first on my TBR is not first on Caroline's TBR. But that's what I want. You know, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:33

Yeah, no, exactly. Exactly. I love bossing people's TBRs

Kaytee Cobb 50:37

it is it's so fun, even when it's a challenge. And we have to kind of like, mess with it a little and kind of work it out vocally to see what feels right. It's a lot of fun. I like it. Alright, let's, you know, pivot in our bossiness over to our perfect garden with a fountain in the middle and will calm down a little bit and get a little less bossy. Even though my wish this week is a little bit bossy. So you go ahead.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:02

Okay, well, unfortunately, my wishes a little bit bossy, too, because my wish is that everyone would listen to a new podcast, a new bookish podcast that I am really loving. It's called the generations podcast with Deb from at Lone Star words. Have you heard of us?

Kaytee Cobb 51:17

No, I know who Deb is. But I have not even heard of this podcast.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:20

Right. So at Lone Star words, Deb is one of my favorite follows on Instagram. She does not read like I read. But I love her for that. She reads in a very literary way. She's incredibly thoughtful and smart. And her reviews have often tipped a book that maybe I thought wasn't for me over into the I'm gonna pick this up now, stack and I really enjoy the way that she talks about books while she's doing a podcast now with her daughter, Sophie. And they are doing a really, really great job. They've really gotten their feet under them. And if you like bookish conversation that leans more toward the literary side of things,

this is going to be a podcast that I think you're absolutely going to love. They are not reading big commercial stuff all the time. They're not suffering from FOMO. They are really getting into lots of backlist, and then really literary frontlist just listened to an episode where they had Sarah Hildreth from fiction matters on this was a great episode. Such a perfect match. Sara, also fantastic follow at fiction matters, talks about really literary and high literary books reads in that way, and I'm so so glad that both of those people are ones that I can follow because what they say about these books really, really matters. They're doing a great job. So the generations podcast, I really feel like it's a great new addition to the book podcast world and I wish that everyone would give it a try.

Kaytee Cobb 52:56

That does sound like a good way to boss people. Yeah, I love a mother daughter duo. I often consider the idea that that Micah and I should do a podcast together. He's about to be 13. He's a voracious reader has big strong opinions about books. And I'm like, maybe I should maybe I should just do some kind of spin off thing with me and mica because I think it would be really great. And I love that like mother and her child connection and getting to hear on mike. Right. It's really

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:26

great to be able to hear them. They have a great relationship without it being like Twitter, you know, they just they're both really interesting people's individuals and what they bring together is really, it's just a great addition to the book podcast world. I'm so glad that they're doing it.

Kaytee Cobb 53:41

All right. I'm subscribing to that so I can check it out. Okay, my wish this week is for people to jump into a rabbit hole via books. So this comes from a post from our bookish friends group, Marissa Irene posted this past week. She says she loves when a book takes her from blah. That sounds boring to I'm an expert on this topic. I am obsessed. This is my entire personality. Now,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:05

I loved this post, it totally caught my eye.

Kaytee Cobb 54:07

I love it so much. So she mentioned a book about trees called The Secret Life of trees and a book about sharks called The Devil's Teeth that both did that for her. The point of the post was to see what other books had taken people's interests from zero to 60. And I want that for everyone. It doesn't have to be nonfiction. You could read Babel, like we talked about already, and all of a sudden get excited about the ways that words get translated from one language to another and the strange words that make their ways into other languages. You could be a Kaytee and read the Soul of an Octopus by Sy Montgomery, and then become so known for octopus love that people near and far tag you on posts and send you videos and make sure that any book with an octopus on the cover lands in your inbox. One bookish friend mentioned a recent Meredith pick which was Zero Fail by Carol Leone as a book that sent her into a secret service rabbit hole. I love it. I Just want to encourage all of us as readers to chase the high of getting really, really invested in a topic and finding every book you can that speaks to it fiction or nonfiction, prose or poetry or essays, I can guarantee that your reading life will be deeper, even if it's not broader if you let yourself jump into the rabbit hole, so that's my wish this week.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:22

I think that that's a great wish pink splashing because I did that most recently with Julia Child like I all of a sudden was like, reading multiple books and I got a bunch of her recipe books from the library and I was watching Julie and Julia and I was like, you know, I really went down the rabbit hole with that it is very fun to be like, This is my Julia Child's my whole personality now.

Kaytee Cobb 55:42

Nothing else matters.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:44

Loving ultimate. It's very fun. All right, 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 dot reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 55:53

And you can find me Katie and notes on bookmarks on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:57

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 currently reading podcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 56:06

You can also follow the show at currently reading podcast on Instagram and tag us in your bookstores for Bob posts, or email us at currently reading podcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:15

And if you want more of this kind of content, join us as a bookish friend for \$5 a month on Patreon you get hours and hours more bookish goodness. You can also help us by rating and reviewing us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 56:37

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:42

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 56:45

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:47

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 56:48
Happy reading Meredith