



# Season 5, Episode 32: Five Stars and Big Whomps + Historical Fiction Tête-à-tête

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**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, have you on a 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** 00:31

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I am nicer than people think I am.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:39

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I'm always baking up new bookish ideas. This is episode number 32 of season five. And we are so glad you're here. Do people think you're mean Meredith?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:50

No, I just I don't think I think I mean, I just don't think they necessarily think I'm nice. Well, I

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:55

i think you're nice. And that's what matters.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:57

For sure. That is what matters. If you didn't, I would have gone very, very wrong, because everyone should be nice to you. Oh, well.

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:04

I don't know if that's true. But let's talk about our episode today. So for our deep dive, we are going to talk about what counts as historical fiction, which I'm guessing our bookish friends are already laughing about this idea, as I say it out loud. And we're going to talk about some of our favorite eras or favorite books, etc. But first, we're gonna get started with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, what is yours?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:25

I'm really excited about this bookish moment of the week, mostly because it proves that I'm a nice person, sometimes not all the time, but sometimes let it be known. Let it be known. Here's the thing. It's always in a very specific and focused way. Last week, was it last week, two weeks ago, the episode that you did with Roxana

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:44

three weeks ago now three weeks ago, okay.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:47

At the end of it, she did her wish, yes. And her wish was that there would be a service that would send her a quote from Anne of Green Gables, which is her favorite book of all time each day. Yes, I was in the shower, listening to you guys talk about this. And all of a sudden, I was like, I could make that happen. And I got out of the shower, got dressed, went straight to my computer, went to Canva, which is the easiest app design program ever created a really cute email header from one of their templates that they have, they've got like five bazillion of them. I titled it your daily Anne and then I created a very simple format that just says, Here's a quote from Anne of Green Gables. And so here's what I'm doing. I bought this really well. And I used a tool called Text Expander to create the template. So each day, I just have to open up an email to Roxana. And then I put in a little four letter code and it pulls up my template, which is already formatted with the header and everything. So it's all there. So all I have to do Yeah, we use Text Expander like crazy. And here comes the guide. All I have to do then is go through the book and choose my quote for the day. And here's the thing, it means that I am doing a reread of Anne of Green Gables. And I bought this really pretty copy is pretty. And so each day I choose the quote and then I email it to Roxana, I'm doing five days a week, not seven days a week, it takes me less than three minutes start to finish to do all of this. But I'm going in order. So I'm getting to do a little reread of Anne of Green Gables. And then I'm underlining the quote that I'm choosing and put the date next to it. So when I get all the way through the book, I'm going to send this book to Roxana and she's going to have the actual book with the quotes that we chose for our daily and then I'm thinking wouldn't it be fun to move to a different book to do the same thing with it's a nice way to do a reread really is what I'm saying. It kind of gives me a very task oriented way. That's very short. But it moves me through the book. And it also is apparently she's really enjoying it. So this was an idea that I had that made me feel like a nice person. And it's something I'm enjoying too. So I just thought I would share it because this is something that any two bookish friends could do for

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:00

each other. Definitely.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:01

I love that it's really, really been something that has added joy to my life. I think anytime we can do something that we know, make somebody else happy, especially when it takes very little of our effort to do it. Maybe it's just me, this is my sweet spot for joy giving.

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:16

I can feel that energy for myself as well. And I will also put a little boundary around your bookish moment here and say this is not a service that you're offering. This is something you are doing for your friend. We're not needing people to sign up for this service from

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:31

right although the business part of me was like, I wonder if anyone else would really like to just hop on the email subscription.

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:40

No, ma'am. No, ma'am. You need to close that. Right now tear I'm looking at how many business ideas right. She's like, also, I'm buried just so you know. I'm climbing out of the dirt to come record with you. Right. I'm like, oh, that's fine. Oh, but I had this idea. No, stop it. Hashtag my toxic terrarium putting a boundary around you. Okay,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:05

thank you. We're all done. Thank you. What's your biggest moment?

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:09

Okay, my bookish moment. I'm actually going to call it a currently reading ish moment this week, which makes it bookish, but it's not really having to do with books. So last week, we ended up talking a lot about cake in our episode. And you mentioned one recipe that you all love and your family Maratha. So when I was uploading that episode for release, I grabbed the recipe from you and I printed out like the little pieces of candy that the witch leaves in Hansel and Gretel like a little temptation. Just like I suspected my middle kid on Levi took about 17 minutes to scope out this recipe asked if we had all the ingredients to make it lo and behold, we shared it. So we whipped up a batch of sour cream coffee cake yesterday afternoon for all of us to enjoy this kiddo. He loves being in the kitchen with me. He loves trying new recipes. And I knew that he would not be able to resist this like strewn recipe on the calendar. And I knew he was gonna be like, Mommy, should we make this perhaps, and it was delicious. We all loved it for dessert last night. So thanks for sharing it with us. And it'll be in this week's show notes again, just in case you missed it last week. It was what Meredith called her apology cake last week. We all just ate it for fun. And it was delicious. That

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:15

way. It's good. Well, you said when I texted you the link, you said I might just leave this out and see if Levi wants to make it. It was so fast. I like it that when he asks these things, he sounds like a little British boy from a Dickens novel. Mommy,

**Kaytee Cobb** 06:28

shall we make sure we make coffee cake?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:29

Do we have all the ingredients in our larger?

**Kaytee Cobb** 06:32

I want some all?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:33

So yeah, it's the apology cake. It's the cake that when I need to apologize when it's on the counter, usually, although now we've been talking about it so much. I think I might have to make it this weekend.

**Kaytee Cobb** 06:43

Just to like satisfy the craving. Yeah, I can see that. Now let me give you a hint.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:47

Now you guys have hopefully you have some left the way that my mom made it. Maybe my mom made it as an apology cake. And she never told me the way that my mom made it is when an adult has a slice of it, she would pour a little bit of her hot coffee, like she would turn because it's made in a bundt pan, she would turn the slice on its side. And then she would pour a little bit of her hot coffee into the coffee cake itself kind of making it just a little bit not a lot but just like make it a little bit moist and coffee. And then my grandmother put a big slab of butter on it. That's how she did it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 07:19

I might be drizzling Bailey's on Oh, that would be good

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 07:21

too. Oh, that's a great idea. Yes, it's a

**Kaytee Cobb** 07:26

that's my second slice tonight.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 07:27

It's the nighttime slice. Yeah, yes. For bedtime. Coffee Cake. I love it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 07:33

The night night. Okay, let's talk about books, though. Because we had a lot of cake talk already. Again, what have you been reading lately?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 07:41

I'm super excited about the books that I'm gonna be talking about today. The first book that I want to talk about is one that I have been thinking about a lot since I finished it. And it's a book called the local by Joey Hearthstone. Did you read this one?

**Kaytee Cobb** 07:53

No, but I remember hearing about it, and then seeing your posts about it. And then you kind of teased us with it last week as well. So I do want to hear all about

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:00**

right, exactly. Here's the setup. In this legal drama. Our lead character is James Euchre. We end up knowing him as Jimmy. He lives in works in the East Texas town of Marshall. And what is special about Marshall. Marshall is the seat of the federal courthouse of the Eastern District of Texas. Now this is a place famous and loved by patent lawyers because it has super speedy trials and massive payouts. These juries for martial give out these massive payouts to punish corporations that have taken advantage of poor patent owners. In order for these big city cases to be heard in martial, they really need a quote unquote, local to be a part of their legal team. That's a lawyer who is from martial. Now this is kind of always the way that it's been the local helps the big city teams speak Texan and he helps some kind of speak small town juror and James Euchre or Jimmy and our story is one of the best locals that there is he's well known in this set, but not as well known as District Judge James Gardner. This is the man who has basically invented this whole system and Marshall. He basically got put into the seat in the Far East Texas, and he decided, how can I take this from like bumpkin federal court to something that people are going to know about? So judge Gardner is a very big player in martial. So as our story starts Jimmy Euchre he has a new client named Amir's Anwar, who's a startup CEO, and duar is in martial to defend his life's work against a software patent infringement suit will late one night after a heated confrontation that a lot of people witness in a preliminary hearing, Judge Gardner biggest wig in the town is found murdered in the courthouse parking lot. And all signs point to Amir's Anwar. He has motive. He has opportunity and he has no alibi. And of course, he's an outsider and he's Pakistani. And so this creates a lot of issues. zwaar, though from the beginning swears that he's innocent, and really, really, really asks that Jimmy, who's been helping him with this patent case, defend him. This is a criminal is a criminal attorney. We're gonna go with it. This is not good for Jimmy though, because judge Gardner was Jimmy's good friend and mentor. But doing this is the only way that he can get definitive answers to the case. So with the help of a former prosecutor and a local pi, who's a character I loved in this book, Jimmy jumps in. And of course, we all realize he's in for more than he bargained for. All right, this was a five star legal drama for me. I haven't read a legal drama in a long time that was as interesting as this one, the 13th Juror comes close. But I liked this one even more. There definitely have been a lot of comparisons between this book and early John Grisham. And I think that is a very apt comparison. Early Grisham, you have the same kind of small town setting a town with its own industry and its own personality. Marshall is a character in this story. Those early scenes where we're finding out how judge Gardner made it into what it is, we're absolutely fascinating to me. And as we find in early Grisham, we have the same kind of local boy gone attorney who you root for all the way through the book. And then of course, you have the riveting scenes of the play by play of the trial or in this case trials with twisty evidence and gotcha moments throughout. It's a fun fact where it's at least fun for me that I started my career after college as a trademark and patent paralegal. So everything related to the Eastern District of Texas being the epicenter of patent and trademark law was such a fun plotline for me it is in fact absolutely true. This book took me all of three hours to read, and it was as enjoyable as any popcorn thriller. But even better, it was chock full of both style and substance. And as I said at the top, it was memorable. I will be thinking about this character in this town for a while and hoping very much that we get another book in this series because Jimmy is peach. This is the local by Joey Hearthstone.

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:15

That sounds so good. And I was so hoping you would bring up your like former life because I knew that had to be a draw for this book for you. Yes. And

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 12:23

also, Alex Cox was reading it not very long after I did. And she also really went down the rabbit hole of how much of the book is true and taken from true events. And so she was just, you know, sending me articles and all that it was really, really fun that he does a really good job with the whole concept of that Eastern District Court being created and becoming the machine that it is now

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:46

Alex Cox is really good at she she's like I am a dog with a bone about this information. And I will find this.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 12:52

She absolutely will she will find it and share it and I love it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:55

Okay, so I'm excited to tell you about my first book. And I'm picturing the local has a very bright yellow cover. This one also has lots of bright spring timing cover. It's called before I let go by Kennedy Ryan. And this is I'm happy to tell you a five star romance alert Nice. So this book is the newest reliefs from romance author Kennedy Ryan, whom I had never read before, but she is now quite prolific. She has this huge back catalogue and I'm excited to get into more of her work or a couple at the center of a story is Yasmin and Josiah. They've been divorced for a few years now. But still compare it together and CO own a restaurant which they call their other baby. It's been a few years, like I said, since their relationship fell apart. But Yasmin especially is starting to find joy again, after a lot of therapy. And that is an important note here because this book is very pro therapy and I loved that about it. Yasmin and Josiah start to feel a little pulled toward each other again in this second chance romance, which I don't think I've ever read one of those before. Yeah, I don't think I have weird they already know each other so well. But they have to get past the ways that they had hurt each other in the past to be able to let those wounds heal because they know each other's bodies so well all ready and because they know the places and touches that light the other person up. When things start to warm up. They like get hot real fast. This is a NSF m not safe for Mindy book and it gets there within like 25% You're like okay, we're taking the doors off of this one.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 14:24

Get out the screwdriver, taking the door.

**Kaytee Cobb** 14:27

Yeah, just get those pins out right out of the hinges. It's unique and that this couple has many years of history. So while they're divorced when this book begins, they're in that knowing you stage that felt to me like middle marriage. They have young kids who are like nine and 13 so they're not brand new newlyweds that are wanting to like run to the car and make out in the teenager hotspot right? Their lives are still really intertwined. They for sure seen the good bad and ugly of each other and they've hurt

each other and are starting to mend those hurts as separate people. This book does have some really big trigger warnings around it so much especially and those who want to be Mama's, I urge you to look up triggers before you decide if it's for you. There are some scenes that were very hard to read and I want to be sensitive to that. There's also though I'm really fantastic food pairing to go with this book because they own this upscale comfort food restaurant, in what seems to be a totally charming hallmarked neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia called skylark called Skyland. And I think it's fake. But just like you were talking about with the local the neighborhood kind of plays its own role in this story. It was very fun to visit. If you've ever fallen in love with a plate of grits or found exceptional food at what appeared to be a shabby food truck. This book is going to have the right flavor notes for you. It convinced me that second chance romance is something I'm for in my books, and I'd love to see that mental health presentation on the page for women, men and children. If there's anyone out there that's a huge fan of Kennedy Ryan already please let me know which one of hers to pick up next, because I'm officially in love. And she's got quite a few with fantastic ratings like this one, which have a 4.46 start average on good reo, which is nuts. Right? Yeah. So this is called before I let go by Kennedy, Ryan,

### **Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:08**

I like the idea of a second chance romance. I think that's very sexy. Katie, I'm going to take us down a little bit just because we talked about to five Starbucks. So I'm going to talk about a book that didn't work for me. And it was a big fat bummer, because I was really, really looking forward to it. All right, I want to talk about notes on an execution by Donya Kafka Oh, no, I'm gonna give you guys my thoughts. Let me give you the setup. And it's gonna sound very familiar, because this book, especially last year was just kind of everywhere. So Ansel packer is a serial killer, and he's getting ready to be executed. When we start our book, we know that this is what's happening, we're kind of counting down to his execution. But what you will have heard about this book everywhere is that this is not Ansel packers story. It is the story told through the lens of several women. And we learn about his life. Through them, we meet his mother, who's a 17 year old girl with really only bad options and bad choices to make. We meet Hazel, who's the twin sister to answer his wife, who was forced to basically witness the horror that her sister had to go through being married to him. And finally, we meet Saffy, the detective who has devoted herself to bringing bad men to justice. But everything's complicated with her too. So we hear their stories as the clock on animal's life ticks down. And we're forced to wonder if we can ever find meaning in the minds of violent men. Okay, I went into this book, really, really wanting to love it, because I had heard so many people rave about it. And I had set it aside for a really long time, so that the kind of hype and Buzz could die down and so that I could read it to be its own thing, it ended up only being a three star book for me, it took me a long time to figure out how I even felt about the book, let alone how I wanted to talk about it. Because there is no question that this is a very well written book, it is very well written. And the fact that it's a book about a serial killer, that's not about the serial killer, I'm gonna put air quotes around that part is certainly an interesting premise. It's a literary mystery to which I'm always looking for more of, and we don't get enough of those. And so those things play in its favor, but and I really feel terrible saying this about a book that is so beloved by so many as to make it to the number one on their list. So like, I realized that this is a beloved book, I just didn't connect with it. So again, I understand why people did. But for me, I struggled with the notion that this is a book that doesn't focus on the killer, because to me, it does, and not just in the way that all of the women's points of view are by definition affected by him and his actions. But more so because I felt that his point of view was the only one that was written in a resonant way, the women's points of view, with the

exception of one felt held at a distance to me, I couldn't connect with any of them. And the construction of the book, which has us jumping all over time, was frankly, confusing to me, I do a pretty good job of holding plot lines and characters in my mind. I just ended up trying to figure out what was happening, and more. So what was the draw of this book? Yes, it's a very literary mystery. It's not graphic, and it is thoughtful and intelligent. And it says some interesting things about how our system affects the lives of women. And it says probably its most interesting things about our uniquely American fascination with serial killers, but it also felt really stuck in a space of grief and sadness with no redemption and no purpose in it other than to be hopeless and sad. So clearly, clearly, I missed the boat on this book, and I'm not wanting to yuck anyone's yum. If it worked for you, I can see how it would. It just didn't land for me as well as I wanted to. I will note that as I finished writing this up, I said that possibly as I marinated with the book over time, that rating would rise or my feeling about it would change for the better. In fact, three months on, it has not. And so it has just solidified some of the real problems that I had with the way that this book was presented and written. So this is notes on an execution by Donya Kafka.

**Kaytee Cobb** 20:34

That is a bummer. No,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 20:37

I don't like it. I don't, I don't, I really, really, really understand that. Maybe in a different mood or a different time it would, it would hit differently. But this didn't for me.

**Kaytee Cobb** 20:48

I read her previous one. And I actually gave that one three stars also, which is why I haven't felt pulled toward this one. You might hate me a little bit when I say the only thing that was appealing to me is the purple on the cover. Yeah,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 20:59

it's the rare purple bookshops.

**Kaytee Cobb** 21:01

Yeah. There's there's not enough purple. Yep. So I was like, should I buy it? Because it's purple? The answer's no, I did not give it to that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 21:10

Yeah, and I read it on Kindle. Otherwise, I would give you my copy. And

**Kaytee Cobb** 21:14

then I could just put it there as like, you'll never read this, but it can be purple on your shelves. My second one. This is unfortunately a little bit of a book flight. So my second one is called mommy by Jessica George. And this book has a gorgeous cover. It's been all over Bookstagram. And a lot of people have said this is already my top book of the year. So I was very excited to read it in February. Yes. Let me tell you about it. Maddie is our main character. She's 25 years old, but she's also still coming of age. So while this isn't a new adult, or a young adult novel, it feels like her development kind of stalled. And she's doing all the things she missed out on earlier in life for mom goes back to Ghana



for a year at a time. So she lives in Ghana for a year. She lives in the UK for a year, back and forth. So that means Maddie often spends time with just her dad and her brother as she gets older. And before the book even starts Mattie's dad develops Parkinson's and starts to lose body function and memory. He needs regular care and feeding and Maddie still lives at home. So most of it falls to her. Rather than go out on the town with friends figure out her own personal style, or start a relationship she goes home to be caretaker to her father, when her mom comes home at the very beginning of the book for another year cycle, Maddie finally takes the opportunity to spread her wings, she finds a room for rent, she starts dating finds a new job that allows her talents to shine. And she starts experimenting a little bit with going to clubs and drinking alcohol for the first time. And then tragedy strikes and Maddie spirals in a big way because she's 25. But she's also still a child, she hasn't had the time or stability of self to develop her own reactions to hard things or family drama, which means the reader gets to spiral with her. I could deal with all of that, because I was hopeful that by the end of this book, we would see some real growth for Maddie and really see her come into her own. But like one of our favorite bookish friends and Altman said in her review, our author only gets her about 65% of the way through that growth process. She doesn't finish the work. And it's a novel, we expect to see something more than a little more than halfway alongside that as I process this book with my reading partner, we discussed it being a kitchen sink book, it really felt to me like Jessica, George put one of everything in the fridge into the storyline, it would have been plenty with the setup I gave you here. But there are approximately eight other hot button issues that are tossed into the storyline. So the reader doesn't know where to focus, don't bring in a bisexual side character just to check a box, don't bring in a fight with a friend. When the rest of the situation is tumultuous enough, I would encourage this editor especially to really hone in the story in order to make it shine. And then I probably would have been able to read it more highly as so many other readers did. Instead, it was also just three stars for me. And I was very bummed about it. So this was Mumei by Jessica George.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 23:56

You know, somehow Roxanne and I started talking about this book the other day, and we were talking about it another book too. And she calls these books, failure to launch books. Mm hmm. I realized that that is a trope that I struggle with this whole 20 Something I can't get my life going right because I never lived that I never had that opportunity to fail to launch. And so there's a part of me that has very little patience for it, even though I know it's a really real thing. But again, reader know thyself, knowing that that's a trope that doesn't work for me can help me to make the decision to say, look, this is a book that's really working for a lot of people, but it doesn't need to meet for me right now. So I just thought that failure to launch trope was a helpful definition to me.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:40

I think that's exactly what it is. And it also felt a little too personal to me with some stuff I was dealing with in my like offline life to be like I just wanted to sit Maddie down and be like, You know what would help CRP? First of all, no, and secondly, becoming your own person and not trying to like be a teenager at 25 That doesn't grow you into We're human. So let's stop trying that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 25:02

So do you think that the people who are reading it and loving it are people who are sharing that life? They're kind of in that space, not necessarily the exact circumstance, but they're in that same age

range, kind of grappling with a lot of those same things. And so this is really resonant. Is this the kind of book where, when you're in a really different life season, it's kind of just not for you? I just wonder if this is one that falls into that category? Well,

**Kaytee Cobb** 25:28

I will say that it does have a really interesting exploration of grief. And our podcast pal, Sarah Dickinson really love this book. She also recently married her mom, and she had a complicated relationship with all parts of her family. And before that, so she got to kind of dig into this book in a very different way than I did. And I think that's part of what made her love it. It's not necessarily the failure to launch. She's a very successful middle aged German. Yeah. But I think that point of connection for her was really important. And having that recent grief explored on the page was really impactful for her.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 26:02

Yeah, exactly. So again, we're talking about a couple of books that didn't land for us. But for other readers, they were exactly the right book at the right time. And I absolutely love that. Okay. kaytee. Speaking about the exact right book at the right time, I'm going to bring us at least my reading up and I'm going to talk about a super five star read that will definitely be in my top 10 For this year, because I loved it. I want to tattoo it on my heart. This book is search by Michelle Huntington.

**Kaytee Cobb** 26:30

I've never even heard of this book and you want to tattoo it. It's so amazing to me.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 26:34

Absolutely loved it. Alright, here's the setup. Our lead character is Dana. She's a restaurant critic and a food writer. And for many years, she's been a member of a very progressive Unitarian Universalist congregation in Southern California. So just as she's finishing up the book tour for her latest best selling book, she's written a couple of bestsellers related to food. Dana is approached by some church bigwigs and asked to join the church search committee for a new minister. Now Dana has a lot of reservations, which are a part of what makes the story interesting. But she also thinks to herself, maybe I'll get a book out of this. So as you would expect, there's a lot to write about when it comes to this little search committee. It's a diverse and wide ranging mix of Unitarian Universalist members, and the candidates that they are vetting range from a baker and a microbrew. Master pastor to a reverend who identifies as a witch and environmental warrior, as with any group human endeavor, things get complicated and oh, so interesting. All right. It's a weird setup. It is a weird setup. It's a book. It's not about searching for missing child, or missing, whatever, which you'd think that would make me love it. It's about searching for a new minister for this small church in LA, right? Sometimes books like this that totally surprise you. Or the very, very best ones. So here's the other piece of surprise. Katie, you know who I heard talk about this book and made me immediately want to pick it up? You're never gonna guess cuz she's my anti book twin. Miss Annie B. Jones from the front porch?

**Kaytee Cobb** 28:12

No. Yeah.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 28:13

Did she like this book? Loved it. Wow. And that's you guys know, I listened to from the front porch, because I just think it's a really well done podcast. And I think that she and everyone who is on her show, they just are good readers, and they talk about books. Well, and so even if I know that Annie and I don't often like the same books, it's very useful to me to hear her talk about it. Because if she doesn't like a book, oftentimes I'll be able to find out that I would, and vice versa. But every now and then there will be a book that is smack in the middle of our little teeny, tiny, very thin overlap of our Venn diagram. And search is one of those. There's no question that it doesn't sound like a Meredith book, right? Definitely. When I finished it, I sat with it for a while I did the kaytee thing. I looked out of a window contemplatively for a while, because I just need like I needed to just kind of like take a beat. Yeah,

**Kaytee Cobb** 29:04

you close it and put your hand on the cover and see exactly. And

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 29:06

I felt like I needed feel I needed to lay down, like with the book on my heart like I was being buried with it. Like I just needed to take a minute I sat with it and wanted to figure out why it landed so well with me, because this book is not what I would describe as a quiet book, because it's absolutely filled with interest all the way through. But it's also not rife with car chases and murder. So is it a quiet book? I don't know. I will say that it's not meditative or poetic. It's actually full of quite a bit of sassy, juicy drama. And I think that was a big part of this. It appealed to the very nosiest part of me. It's the kind of book that gives you the behind the scenes look into a process that most people just kind of have to accept that they're never going to know exactly what happened behind closed doors. Here. You are in the room. where it happens and you are listening to these conversations, it was very satisfying. I also really resonated with this book because so much of it was just about people trying to work together. Some people you like some people have your same workstyle, some people you don't like. And in a committee type of setting, you have to figure out how to get along and be productive with everybody, you have to try to see their side of things. And you have to try to build consensus. These kinds of things in the way that they play out, are of absolute interest to me, I was also really delighted by how much food there was, in this book, the lead character, Dana, or narrator is a food critic. And so we go along with her and her friends on their review lunches. So we go all around LA, visiting all kinds of different restaurants with different kinds of cuisine, and she describes her meals in detail. And I loved it. Dana also was a big part of what I loved about this book. And I do think if you start it, and you read the first couple of pages, and you don't resonate with Dana set the book down, because I really think that that was a big reason. She's a woman in her early 50s, I just resonated with who she was, at this moment in her life, we were privy to her interior dialogue all the way through. And so she was someone I felt like I knew, and I understood, and I probably would be good friends with, for example, she searches the whole way through for someone on the committee to be her nudging buddy, the person who when someone says or does something really stupid or beyond the pale, you just look at them. And you know, they know, you know, it really made me smile all the way through things like that would come up. And they just felt really real to me. And I just felt very Cina would be good friends. I read this book really fast in the space of just two days. I found myself although I was reading four books at the time, I was consistently been drawn back to this one. And the last 30% I was turning those pages as quickly and with as much breath holding as I would at the end of any thriller. I couldn't wait to find out how their search was going to resolve add this to my pile of books about nuns and nunneries and other religious

topics that this former evangelical Christian turned I don't even know what absolutely loved it made me feel seen and understood and not alone. And that is one of my favorite kinds of reading. This is searched by Michelle Huntington

**Kaytee Cobb** 32:20

this shockingly to me also sounds very good.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 32:23

And did you see the cover? Did you look it up? The cover is so great.

**Kaytee Cobb** 32:27

Yes, there's a lot that I love about the cover, I kind of want to go touch it and see if it has any texture that I would like. And

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 32:33

it has a lot of meaning. It's one of those covers that I really like not only because it's really visually reveals itself more as you read it, yes. And it has layers of meaning. I just the whole book is just smart. And it just I just loved it. It's just like in the pocket of my heart.

**Kaytee Cobb** 32:48

I love that. Okay. I also loved the book that I'm going to talk about last. And so did you Meredith because I want to talk about I'll be gone in the dark by Michelle

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 32:57

Mac. Big left and I love it a big left still

**Kaytee Cobb** 33:00

searching we're still searching are so I'm still gonna tie it together. So I was trying to figure out if I've read any actual true crime before this, and I was literally googling what counts is true crime. I was like, Is this the first legitimate true crime that I know I have read bad blood, which is white collar true crime. Right? Right. No murders. And I've read Devil in the White City, which is historical, but still true crime. So wait, wait, wait, wait.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 33:26

Didn't you read the yoga store? Murder?

**Kaytee Cobb** 33:27

No, it's on my read part of my TBR shelf though. Okay. Like I bought it.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 33:31

What are you doing with your life that you are not reading that book is? It's a two hour? No.

**Kaytee Cobb 33:38**

Why I haven't read it yet. Because it's only available in mass market paperback. And I hate frickin holding those. That's why I haven't read it. Every time I think about reaching for it. I'm like, Oh, I hate you.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:47**

Yes, I know, the mass murder of a rack is a problem. But the Yoga Store murder is so good. And it will literally take you two hours to read it. You're not going to have to take it out in public, you're going to be done with it so fast.

**Kaytee Cobb 34:00**

Well, I have sent the public it's the actual like feel of it in my hands that I don't like I don't care

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:04**

if people see me reading. All right. Well, it's a yoga store murder.

**Kaytee Cobb 34:07**

Maybe I'll take it to Mexico this week, because then I'll be cut off from the world anyway. Yeah, yeah. So those are the two true crimes that I've read. There is one still very high on my TBR as we've established, but of course, it was on my TBR and finally pushed into the current read spot by you, Meredith. I was ready for something I was in the mood for something that would really terrify me and this delivered Michelle McNamara became obsessed with the Golden State killer and I mean obsessed with a capital O and probably all the rest of the words capitalized to this book details not only his crimes, but also the way she uncovered connections even Well, after the official investigation had gone cold. Michelle McNamara has since passed away. But when she was alive, she was married to Comedian Patton Oswald. So her life had this strange dichotomy of red carpet events and behind the scenes celebrity culture mixed with staring at a computer screen and scrolling Reddit boards late into the night and going on ride alongs with police officers around the neighborhoods where the Golden State killer was active since she was still writing this book when she died. There are some really interesting chapters. To me. They were my favorites that were basically pieced together from her notes after the fact. But they're a little bit more raw and a little less polished than the stuff that she had already written. For myself as a reader. This was a really interesting behind the scenes look at the different versions of a chapter and how it comes together to become a more narrative nonfiction style from pages of notes. For some readers, they might hate it. But for me, I loved it. The true tragedy here, of course, is the many lives lost in the many women who were sexually assaulted over a mini year rampage by this one man. And I say that to say that this book was truly terrifying. I was able to take it in during the day, but it got in my head at night. And I had dreams about it. And I had dreams about Meredith living in California during the 40 years ago. Why would I dream about Meredith 40 years ago, it was that in my head, it was just like percolating around in my head as I processed it all that to say that the details here are strongly based on police files, and they are often gruesome, this man was very mentally unwell, and his crimes are sickening. I don't think I could read a true crime book that doesn't end with me knowing the person who committed these acts was apprehended and is no longer out in the world that was really important to me to know, you will never accidentally pass this guy on the street, he is fully gone. Now. It's really disturbing. So this book, obviously is not for highly sensitive

readers that would be really disturbed by these details, I did find it extremely well written unputdownable the whole way through, and I was glad to finally move it from my TBR shelf to my red shelf. But now I feel like I've set the bar really high for any future forays into the true crime genre. So this was all gone in the dark by Michelle McNamara. Yeah,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:48**

I mean, you guys know how I feel about this one. It's, it's absolutely incredible. And also, I really, really recommend after you read it, or if you read it several years ago, when it came out, if you didn't watch the HBO documentary that was done, that brings the case up to the moment of capture. And afterwards, there's a lot that you learn reading the book plus, that gives you a very full story, including sometimes I get really upset thinking about is the fact that she never got to see him brought to justice. Also, when you watch the HBO documentary, and you find out how she died, you really realize that a lot of the work that she was doing was a big part of what happened. And so Patton Oswald, to his credit, has been very open about those pieces. I just, I find that documentary to be a very, very good companion with reading the book. I think if she could have written the book completely, I think she would have organized it differently. Because I found I didn't like that it wasn't organized more chronologically. It had a feeling as it was put forth, if not being completely finished, but still incredibly compelling. incredibly well done. I mean, yes, one of the best examples of true crime out there, and she didn't even get to finish it. Like it just it. Just the whole thing about her. We lost so much when we lost her like what a force for good. Hopefully, wherever she is, she knows that she had a huge hand in putting that man behind bars.

**Kaytee Cobb 38:18**

I read this as a tandem read. So I was swapping back and forth between audio and paper when I read it because I couldn't, I couldn't stop listening. And reading the audiobook had an additional afterward read by Patton Oswald where he talks about that kind of final chapter that she didn't get to write and seeing this guy brought to justice and seeing him behind bars and getting to see him that part of it was really like it's still giving me goosebumps now and I finished it probably a month and a half ago. It's that like end cap is worth making sure that you get either the updated audio version or the RE released whatever that happened after the HBO documentary where they added that it's worth it to make sure you have that for sure.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:58**

But it is really scary. And the you know, certainly watching the documentary along with the book, I mean, it brings visuals and I read an imprint audio that was really, really really scary and hard to hear. So yeah, not for not for the faint of heart at

**Kaytee Cobb 39:12**

all. Okay, those were our current reads. So today we are going to deep dive on what counts as historical fiction. So this came up because we recently had a book on the indie press list, which is Patreon content for bookish friends that takes place in 1990 sale and I made a totally offensive comment that this book takes place 27 years ago and is historical fiction. Have you rebuked me

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 39:37

if we'd been in person I would have slapped you slapped that that comment out of your mouth.

**Kaytee Cobb** 39:42

Okay, but as soon as the episode dropped, we were informed by American Girl dolls that they have introduced a new set of historical dolls named Nikki and Isabel who are from 1990 note and all of us were horrified. I'll slap those

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 39:56

little slap those dolls if I see them in pretty good. Everybody's getting

**Kaytee Cobb** 39:59

slapped. So, that begs the question, when does a book become historical? What counts as historical fiction?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 40:08

I have the answer to this and this is gonna be okay. It's it's a shortest deep dive ever. Because we're going to move right past it in order to be historical. The events in the book must take place 50 years from the time that it's written. So if you write a book today, you cannot call anything historical. That happened unless it happened before. 1974, which happens to

**Kaytee Cobb** 40:26

be before I was born, right? Like, basically, yeah, I was gonna say, Wait, this is based entirely on merit. It's, it's 50 years. Because I, when I was thinking about it, I was like, a classic is something published 50 years ago, right? So I was like, Okay, that makes sense. For me. It feels historical, if it happened before my lifetime, which now is almost 40 years ago. And that still counts as historical fiction. To me, the Vietnam War, to me feels historic. Me too. But I also read the great believers in 2019, which takes notes in the 1980s. Not historical I tagged it as historical on my

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 41:00

80s are not historical fiction. That is fiction. That is fiction that happened in the not very distant past that feels like it was about 10 years ago, but it really was more than that, but not enough to be historical. It's 50.

**Kaytee Cobb** 41:13

Here's my other question is the 50 year mark, before your lifetime, Will that continue to grow?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 41:18

I'm willing to put a line in the sand and say, I understand that when I'm 75. I understand that I can't then say that historical fiction is 75 years ago, I like I get it, I will have been living within the realm of being able to have lived through events that are considered historical. So no, it's not a moving point. But I feel very sure that 50 The events have to take place 50 years before the time that you're writing it to be considered historical fiction. If it's not just fiction.

**Kaytee Cobb** 41:49

Okay, I'm gonna play with this was a short deep dive, but I'm gonna play with you The Thorn Birds written by Colleen McCullough. Classic or historical fiction. I mean, I think it's it was published in 1977. Right, I

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:01

would consider it to be a classic, just because I feel like it's one of those books you could hand to absolutely anybody. But for four more years, that won't be historical fiction.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:09

The events in it take place up until 1969. Okay, the events and in 1969. Right. Okay.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:16

So then it is historical fiction. So it's historic, because I said, and almost I said, the events that you're talking about, because you can write historical fiction right now. And it's historical fiction right now, if you're talking about World War 150 years and about

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:30

Yeah, exactly. I do agree with that. And I also agree that books do not become classic until they've been in print for 50 years, either, right? But classics are not historical fiction, unless that book itself was writing about something that happened 50 years before, it was

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:46

definitely right. Yes. Great. Gatsby is not historical fiction, because it was contemporary at the time. It's a classic, perfect. It was contemporary fiction. Exactly. So yeah, I feel very sure. But I don't know why anyone is struggling with these definitions. And you know, what's going to happen? There's going to be a bunch of differing opinions. And what I'm going to be interested in is the definition that people come up with, because if it's just well, it's events that took place a long time ago. That's not right. That's not a definition. If you're going to challenge the 50 year mark, the events taking place 50 years before the time that it's written, then I think you need to tell me what your alternate definition is

**Kaytee Cobb** 43:24

fair. Okay. So I will say, then I'll add to your definition. And I will say that, for me, I was thinking of it in generations. So it had to be at least two generations back, which traditionally, for a long time was considered 20 years because people got married earlier than they had baby. They have like 14 babies by the time they were 25 kind of thing. And that's where the 40 got stuck in my head because it felt like well, that's a generation before me, and then a generation after those people, right, so 40 felt appropriate. I can concede your point of 50 though, and I feel like we're pretty

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 43:54

exactly I feel I feel very sure that we have solved this dilemma. And everyone we can move on.

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:01

Okay, do you have a favorite era of historical fiction to read? Gosh,



**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:05

that is a really, really hard one. Other than World War Two. I like reading about a lot of different eras. I really like reading about the Renaissance. I really like any of that kind of 15th 16th 17th century royalty. That's probably my favorite. But then I also really like reading about Bible times. Yeah, very old historical fiction is also very interesting pillars of I know that Pillars of the Earth is not Bible times. But what's the 1100 100? I think the

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:31

Renaissance like Dark Ages. Right,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:33

exactly. So then World War Two, I'm not sure I can choose a favorite because there's a lot to like about a lot to learn about so many different

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:42

historical eras, right? Because there was so much history before us I was thinking all the way from like the Trojan War. So Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller to book of longings, which is Bible times, right? That's like retelling of G read 10 The Read Tent Yes, of course, Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell which is 1500s because that's when Shakespeare was alive and then getting into more current times or more modern era, which is like Roots by Alex Haley, which starts in 1750, and goes to the Civil War. So that's 100 years of history. And still 100 years before he published in definitely counts as historical. I love a Jazz Age, anything. So Murmur of bees by Sofia, Segovia is the 1920s. But it's not the Jazz Age, because it's taking place in Mexico. So it has this entirely different world to it,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 45:27

which I think that's a real sweet spot for me with historical fiction is when we are reading about events or a time period that we sort of know a lot about from one perspective, but then we flip in, we're in a different place, or we're coming at it from a different lens that I find very interesting.

**Kaytee Cobb** 45:44

Yes, either a new character from the one but that you already know, or a new country from the places you've already been, or whatever, like The Night Diary is middle grade, but it talks about 1947. In India, which is not about World War Two, it's about partition, which is when India and Pakistan split into two separate countries. And what happened to the people there. We had all this other stuff going on on the other side of the world, and they're splitting the country up over here in India. I loved that. Yeah, because it was like, Oh, you get to be in that same era, but look at it from a totally new lens.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 46:14

I really like books about the Donner party that was in the 18th. That was in the mid 1800s. So you know, I am open to reading. So in fact, I feel like I'm kind of in a historical fiction of sorts. Like I'm really wanting more of that. It's really appealing to me right now. It's I'm being drawn to historical fiction. So I think this year, probably going to have a little more of that on my list.

**Kaytee Cobb** 46:35

Well, I'm excited to see what rises to the top for those. And I think this was still an interesting deep dive, even if we thought it was going to be very short.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 46:43

Well, I think I will be most interested by what other people consider to be historical fiction.

**Kaytee Cobb** 46:49

Yeah, what kind of pushback you get on our conversation. That's what I want to hear about too. Okay, let's go visit the fountain. Meredith, what is your wish this week?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 46:57

My wish is that more people who love British mystery would get a subscription to Brit box. It is the joy of my life. I watch almost solely britbox At this point, as far as streamers, I absolutely love it. I watch Vera and Shetland, I just watched this multi series limited series called The Pembrokeshire murders, which was so good, and it had the hottest lead detective. Oh my gosh, it was so good. There's this show called The cleaner, which is a comedy. And it's all about this guy who's a crime scene cleaner. And he is so hilarious, just a 30 Minute Comedy, but it is every single episode has me absolutely in stitches. I love all their cooking, like their cooking stuff is what I wish that our American food channels would be. But like all we do our grocery games now. Yes, in the UK, they're actually putting out here's how to make good food shows. There's a show called gardeners world, which is when I am like having a massive panic attack gardeners world is the best thing ever. It's just the most calming, beautiful show you could ever watch. It is an antidote to a panic attack. I love it. And again, so many books in book series, the Ice House by Minette Walters, that is a limited series. It's available on Brit box and it's got Daniel Craig in it from the 90s it's just full of great True Crime scripted series. It's just for certain kinds of book lovers. I feel like Brit box is fantastic. So that's my wish that more people would look into Brit box as an additional streamer for your Roku box.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:34

Okay, it does feel like it was curated, especially for you. I

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:37

mean, literally, it is my number one watch streamer at this point.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:41

That's so great. Yeah, my wish is a behind the scenes wish. So I wish to get a glimpse of the writing process in more books. So kind of like with all began in the dark. Some of the chapters were a little rough a little bit, not shined up quite so much and pieced together from her notes after she died. In the same way. I recently read a book that included an annotated version of the first chapter in the back of the book, annotated by the author. I loved seeing handwritten and then photocopied notes from the author talking about her process and where a certain plot points started and where it ended by the time she finished writing the book and when I picked up as a new read today, also has that annotated first chapter at the very end of the book. So I'm excited to see what that author included for their writing process and story development. I love those behind the scenes peek I love knowing more about the

writing process. I love an author interview for that reason. And I would like to see that included more often in printed copies of books so that nerdy writer adjacent people like me can get that glimpse because I think it adds to the experience and I really love it. So that's my wish this week.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:46

I love that I think that's a great wish. You know, one of the things that I've been interested in is I follow Of course, Louise Penny on social media and one of the things she does is every month she writes a newsletter to her fans who've subscribed every month she talks about where she is in the right due process for the next book or touring for the book that just came out or whatever. And she gets pretty in detail as she's beginning a new book and the process that she's going through and how messy it is and how sometimes she starts and completely stops and throws everything away. And that's deepened my enjoyment of her new books, because I feel like I've kind of been privy to how they've been coming together over the course of months and years. So it does add enjoyment. That is my

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:23

favorite part of her newsletter is that little like, behind the scenes peek, like let's pull back the curtain and I'm gonna show you what's happening here at my house. While y'all are reading this book out in the world from two years ago, you know, like, I love that. It's

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:36

excellent. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's how you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at Meredith dot reads on Instagram,

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:45

and you can find me kaytee at notes on bookmarks on Instagram full show notes with

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:49

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. You can

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:57

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**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:03

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**Kaytee Cobb** 51:23

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

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:27

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:31

and your book be unputdownable.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:32

Happy reading Katie.

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:33

Happy reading Meredith