



Season 5, Episode 42: Book Recs from Friends + Gateway Books

Mon, May 29, 2023 • 57:53

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 00:24

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And I am so happy that summer reading is in full swing.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and I love meeting authors in person. This is episode number 42 of season five and we are so glad you're here. Meredith, we are like hitting summer, we're going to meet some authors, we're going to read by the pool.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:43

It's gonna be great. I've already done plenty of reading by the pool. I am in full summer reading mode so ready for it.

Kaytee Cobb 01:06

Yes, love that. All right, y'all. I'm gonna let you know at the top here that our deep dive today is about gateway books. So these are the books that get non readers or reluctant readers addicted to reading, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:19

We're talking about adult readers and Kid readers. So all kinds of readers who may need to get back into the swing,

Kaytee Cobb 01:26

Right. Because when you hit the summer, sometimes you just want to slump right in front of the TV all summer long, don't you? Yep. All right. But before we get into that, we are going to get started that way we always do with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, what is going on in your reading life?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:41

All right. Well, speaking of summer reading, you know that in the last couple of weeks, especially in the last, like 10 days from when we're recording right now, today is May 19, lots of the summer reading guides are coming out, right? Our good friend Sarah Dickinson's summer reading guide came out which is fantastic. Anne Bogel's summer reading guide came out, which is really, you know, one of the ones that's been she's been doing this forever, right? My bookish moment of the week was listening, which I don't always have time to do, but in this case, I purposely wanted to hear the episode that she did this week, Anne Bogel on What Should I Read Next introducing the summer reading guide. But she flipped the script on me. I was expecting something different. In this episode, what I got was a very, very interesting behind the scenes look at how they put the summer reading guide together. And they did it kind of in a narrative background kind of way. It was really highly produced. And they had, they'd been collecting some nuggets of audio since back in like October of last year when they began doing the planning for this. It was really, really well done. And it was very interesting. It charted how they pulled the books together, how she gets all her reading done, she'd been dealing with some really terrible throat problems after she'd had a virus that really should have been kind of a nothing thing. As a podcaster, I just felt how she would have felt during those months of not having her voice. And she's got all of the regular work to do and putting the summer reading guide together that episode. It is the episode that dropped on May 16 Of What Should I Read Next, we'll link it in the show notes. It was a really interesting hour ish of bookish behind the scenes content very, very much worth a listen.

Kaytee Cobb 03:33

I love that. And I love that heads up because I have had a very crazy week around here. So I've completely fallen off the podcast wagon as far as listening to other people's shows. So that's a good reminder that I need to put that one in my queue.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:47

Right, exactly. But for a couple of exceptions, I oftentimes will get behind. But I knew I wanted to hear that. So what is your bookish moment of the week, Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 03:55

All right, Meredith, my bookish moment this weekend after we wrap up recording today, I get to spend the entire next two days at the Santa Fe International Literary Festival. I've got friends coming into town. I've got listeners coming to events and going out to meals with me this weekend. I'm even going to set up a book exchange out of my trunk because I have so many books that I'm trying to unload that I don't even want to list them on Pango. That feels like too much work because it's like hundreds of books. I have so many books to get rid of. So I'm just going to be like that weirdo with the watches, you know that like open suits. And has watches everywhere, except mine's gonna be books, I'm just gonna be trying to like pawn them off on everyone. So an entire weekend of book talk ahead of me, author panels, living my best bookish life. I'm very excited. And I think afterwards, I'd love to do a deep dive on Literary Festival Best Practices and what I learned through the whole experience, if that's something that you would be interested in or that our listeners would be interested in, so let us know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:54

I think that would be very interesting. I am always a little bit weird about attending events like that. because at the bottom of my heart I, I really don't want to meet authors for a variety of reasons, mostly because I'm just so awkward in person. I'm so trepidatious about it. But you're really good about doing things.

Kaytee Cobb 05:11

You're not the only one who feels that way. Like we've seen people posting about, you know, what do I do? Like, how do I even approach an author at the table? What if they just think I'm a big weirdo? Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:20

I have this thing. And I've always had it. It's like, when you hear people who are like, back in the day, I went to a Star Trek, like back when I'm saying when I was like, 16 years old, I went to a Star Trek The Next Generation...

Kaytee Cobb 05:32

I never would have put that on my like, Meredith radar.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:35

Yes, my boyfriend at the time, my daughter's father and I were really into TNG. So the next generation, right, so we were gonna go and Data was there and Picard was there. And I just couldn't go up to the table. Because I felt like these people and I feel this way about authors. I just worry that they're like, in their heads, rolling their eyes and having to be which I'm sure is not true, this is just this speaks to me and my own insecurities, not to the authors themselves. But someone said recently. Oh, Meredith, are you gonna go see, I can't remember which festival it was but Amor Towles was going to be there. And they're like, "certainly you're, you're gonna be there". I'm like, no, no, no, I am incapable of standing across the table from Amor Towles and having any sort of productive conversation. So Kaytee, yes, you will bring us all the best practices. You're very good at events like this. I think that will be a very interesting Deep Dive.

Kaytee Cobb 06:27

I'm pretty excited about it. And I'm very excited that listeners are coming from all over the place. So I'm going to meet some people from Texas and Colorado. And I think there's someone coming from Maine, like just a big swath of readers. My extrovert heart is very excited. Let's get into some current reads. Meredith, I feel like you have a spicy opinion brewing for us today. I have that like Spidey Sense tingling. What do you have on your docket?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:52

Well, I definitely have a couple of books that worked really well for me and a book that didn't work so well for me. So I don't know how spicy it is, but it is definitely an opinion. So let me start out with a book that kind of surprised me how well it worked for me. And this was a book that was really big, I want to say last summer. So everyone's heard about this, but it's been it had been a while. This is What Happened to the Bennetts by Lisa Scottoline. Did you read this one?

Kaytee Cobb 07:16

No, I remember seeing it it was on the radar, but it didn't make it onto my TBR.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:21

Elizabeth Barnhill from *Fabled* really, really championed this one. So of course, I knew that I would like it, but I wanted to put a little bit of space around it. So I'm so glad I finally read it. Here's the setup. So one of my favorite mystery tropes starts like this. They were a perfectly normal family living a perfectly normal life. And this is what we have in *What Happened to the Bennetts*. Dad Jason Bennett is a suburban dad going about his new balance kind of day to day when his life takes a horrific turn. He's driving his family home after his daughter's field hockey game when a pickup truck begins tailing them way too close, and on a dark stretch of road. And suddenly two men jump from the pickup and pull guns on Jason demanding that he gives them the car and then something happens that changes their lives forever. To make matters much, much worse, later that night, Jason and his family receive a visit from the FBI who tell them that the carjackers were members of a dangerous drug trafficking organization and now Jason and his family are likely targets because of what had happened. This gang never leaves loose ends. The agents tell the Bennetts that they need to enter the witness protection program like now. Can you imagine? But here's the thing that's so interesting. Witness Protection, of course, was designed to protect criminal informants, not regular law abiding families. So this family is taken overnight from their normal lives. They're trapped in an unfamiliar location and they're dealing with grief and the family begins to fall apart at its seams. And then because this is a thriller, dad, Jason learns a shocking bit of info and realizes that he may have to take matters into his own hands, which can I just say is never ever a good idea. But here we are. As I said this was a recommendation from Elizabeth Barnhill, so I knew it would be good. I also think that this book is perfect for summer reading, which is why I wanted to save it up until right now. I did this one on audio and in print. I did a tandem read and that worked really well because it was so propulsive, I wanted it in all the forms. So I could just keep reading. And I liked the narration on this one a lot. Now a lot of the talk about this book centers on what readers think of as the two halves of the book, the first half dealing with the incident and the immediate aftermath. And then the second half, which is very thriller free and all action. This book is not universally loved, because the readers who didn't love the book tend to say they liked the book's first half, but it just lost them at the second half. I for one liked both parts. They are very different. There's a point in time when the narrative shifts emotionally and from a pacing perspective. But I liked that the first half made me ruminate on what I would do. And this. I mean, to this day, I read this fairly long time ago. I think about this all the time. What would my family do if it found itself in this situation? And it's a very accurate portrayal of grief and PTSD. I like that Scottoline lets us go through that with the Bennetts and you do feel like you're going through with them. I was then ready for the shift to a faster pace of action in the second half. To me, that was just the lift that I needed. The plot wasn't overly complicated. Just satisfyingly twisty. This book wears proudly its thriller designation, though I would call it a thriller plus, because of that resonant first half, I liked the lead character, dad, Jason, who is a court reporter. It gave the story several interesting perspectives. And it made Jason Bennett's actions make a lot of sense throughout the book. This is something this sort of connection or bridging is something that is often missing in thriller titles I find and I loved the ending, it was exactly what I wanted to see happen. Tidy. Yes. And in this case, exactly what I felt the story called for. Lisa Scottoline has written over 30 novels. And I read her a long time ago, loving her book, *Everywhere That Mary Went* when I read it

more than a decade ago. That writing expertise is apparent in the sure hand with which she wrote *What Happened to the Bennetts* and I'm so glad she's back on my radar. So this is *What Happened to the Bennetts* by Lisa Scottoline.

Kaytee Cobb 11:44

Okay, Meredith, I totally lied, because I thought this was like a family story, like a family drama. And so I think I'm thinking of *We Are the Brennans*, which was pretty popular last summer. So I had that cover in my head. And then I was like, What is she talking about? So confused.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:02

Yeah, you did have a little bit of a confused, I thought, I thought my setup made sense. But you had a confused look on your face.

Kaytee Cobb 12:09

I was just like, I don't even know what this book is. This is so confusing to me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:13

It's a thriller. But man, it made me really, really think like, what if just overnight, you had to leave everything and everyone in your life? Who mattered to you? And then what if your teenage kids had to do the same? Think about what it would be like to try to keep your kids off of social media off of their phones off of searching out a internet cafe or what I mean, I don't know if those even still exist, but you know what I mean, that whole part of the book before it even gets super thrillers, it had me very interested and tense.

Kaytee Cobb 12:45

Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Okay, this is a big turn. I am going to talk about *The Comfort Book* by Matt Haig for my first one. So stick with me, this is kind of like reading Matt Haig's diary, is what we're doing here. So many of you will remember that Matt Haig wrote *The Midnight Library*, which both Meredith and I loved. He also wrote *How to Stop Time*, which I loved and Meredith did not love that we're gonna say that nicely. Although it is about to be a movie with Benedict Cumberbatch as the lead. And I'm kind of excited about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:00

Sure. I'll watch it.

Kaytee Cobb 13:19

Right. Yeah. I mean, it's Benedict. I'll watch it. The blurb for this one says it's for anyone in search of hope, looking for a path to a more meaningful life or in need of a little encouragement. So this is one that Roxanna and I briefly mentioned on episode 30 of season five as a book that's great for a reading treat to make it through the winter doldrums. I started reading it in the beginning of March right after we recorded that episode of this year, and I finished it nearly two full months later, I read with two buddy readers, and we read two to four entries a day so that we wouldn't take so many moons to finish it. But it was still a very long, slow but steady read. This book directly faces Matt's own struggles with depression. He talks about suicidal ideation and being deep into a depressive state. I read this one

along with my reading partner Katie and our mutual friend Candace. And we used the Fable app to keep our thoughts in order, which also made it possible to fall behind and catch up as needed. Each of us found certain chapters that really spoke to us. And what we were dealing with directly or indirectly in our lives. Many of our notes on Fable included stuff like I should tattoo this on my body somewhere, or this would be a good one to post it note to the bathroom mirror. There were some parts that felt really repetitive to us though. For instance, there are multiple full pages spaced throughout the book that have the sentence, nothing is stronger than a small hope that doesn't give up printed on it over and over and over again, like that same sentence printed 10 times on one page. And then it's repeated multiple times throughout the book. So you're like you can think of, you know six other pages to write or could we just have left these blank like, I don't know why we're doing this over and over again, but they're also really wonderful multi page essays referencing other authors or historical figures that Matt Haig found inspiring. Off the top of my head, I remember some from Robin Wall Kimmerer, Joy Harjo, and Nellie Bly, the investigative reporter. I do also have a strange little story about this book, I ordered a copy from my local indie. Went to pick it up when it came in. And as we were reading, I realized that my copy went through about page 205, and then the final 30 pages of the book repeated the first 30 pages. So I had another title page, another library of congress page, another dedication, another index, and the first few entries repeated over again. And I was like, Well, this is a weird way to print a book like, is it like a repeat as needed thing? No, because everybody else's book went to page 250. And I just didn't have the latter half of the book. So thankfully, my indie quickly replaced it. And they were able to be reimbursed by the publisher. So I wanted to bring that up because this happens to readers, right, we get a book. And for whatever reason, it's misprinted. There's chunks missing or a signature missing. So you're missing like 16 pages right in the middle of the story. You can take it back to the store that you bought it at, and your Indie or your regular bookstore will be able to replace it for you. And they are not eating the cost of that. The publisher will then reimburse them for that book, which I think is important to know because we care about supporting our indies right. And we're like, Well, I don't want to, you know, screw them over somehow by getting the books that I paid for. It works out okay. Overall, for this title, we did really enjoy the book. I'm 95% sure I passed along to Mary because it's no longer on my shelves along with a bunch of other titles that felt exactly right to send her way as she started grieving her dad. I heartily recommend the experience of reading it along together with friends and doing a very small chunk each day. This one was The Comfort Book and it did bring me comfort by Matt Haig.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:50

Oh good. I'm glad that I'm glad that it ended up being comforting to you. He definitely is doing a lot of work in a lot of different literary ways in making sure we normalize talking about these really important and pervasive mental health struggles so good for him for sure. All right, I'm gonna talk about my second book, which is also the second in a series and this was one that wasn't as fantastic for me again, three and a half stars so nothing tragic but nothing fantastic. This is The Absent One by Jussi Adler-Olsen. So in the first book in the series, The Keeper of Lost Causes you guys will remember me having raved about that one. Jussi Adler-Olsen introduced detective Carl Morck a brilliant detective, who was recently assigned to run what they call Department Q, with the goal of solving Copenhagen's coldest cold cases. That first book was a five star read for me. Detective Morck, by the end of that book was loving his work at department Q, and I was wanting to read more of it. So we're all intrigued when a closed case lands on his desk. A brother and sister were brutally murdered two decades before, and one of the suspects part of a group of privileged boarding school students confessed and was

convicted, but once more reopens the files, it becomes clear, of course, that all was not as it seemed, looking into the supposedly solved case leads him to look for a woman named Kimmy who's living on the streets and who makes a habit of stealing to survive. She has definitely mastered evading the police. But now she's got a bigger problem, because she realizes that the police are not the only ones looking for her. Because Kimmy has secrets that certain very rich and very influential individuals would kill to keep from coming to light. Morck and his team have to race to find her and solve crimes from the past and the present, if they're going to keep more murders from happening. All right. As I said, the first book, *The Keeper of Lost Causes* was a book that I read in July of 2022. And I absolutely loved it. The second one was good, but not nearly as great as the first one. But the second book also made me very much want to continue with the series, which is a weird contradiction. So let me explain. I continue to love the characters in this series. I love Carl and his right hand man Assad and their relationship. With this novel, we added a female member to the team and I loved what happened to that dynamic. Also, I want to say that although I wasn't turning handsprings over this particular installment, I listened to it very fast, which is a marker that it's definitely not a bad book, or it wasn't a boring book. But my main issue is that this book had such a great premise, and it kept starting to get going but then it would sputter and die out and this happened over and over again. It was so frustrating. I'd be like whoo, okay, here we go. And then we get caught up in expository text about a character doing something really been all like eating a banana. We're starting their car, but that would go on for way too long and I was yelling at my phone get on with the story Jussi. So yeah, moments of brilliance and potential, but the story was just too unevenly paced to reach the heights of the first in the Department Q series. But as I mentioned, this book did very much make me invested in reading more. It's hard to explain, but I've had this happen in a series before the third Louise Penny book, *The Cruellest Month* is a perfect example. Like in this one, I read that one and did not love the mystery. But I felt more invested than ever in the series in the characters itself. And so I wanted to read further, I will say that this book had a bang up ending, it had lots of action and some serious emotional resonance in the characters lives. It was deep and affecting, and I think that was what made me want to continue to advance. Also, this book has significantly lower ratings than any other books in the series on Goodreads. So I'm just going to chalk it up to a sophomore slump and continue to follow the mysterious adventures of Carl Morck and Assad. This is *The Absent One* by Jussi Adler-Olsen.

Kaytee Cobb 21:10

Interesting. I don't know if I've had that experience where I super felt blah, about a second one. And I was like, Well, I can't wait for Book Three.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:19

Well, it's not unlike kind of how you feel at the beginning of that the first ACOTAR book, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* where you're like, huh, but then you also feel compelled for one reason or another to continue to the second one, and then you're off and running. So there's a there's a level of that the character development is quite good and nice books. Okay.

Kaytee Cobb 21:38

I feel like there's a missed opportunity here to call it Department Q and then not use q for like, random words, or like it should be the Department of cold cases with Qs in all. Yeah, in all the spots. I've just feel like that's a missed opportunity.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:53

I'm not sure if the Norwegians are into that kind of punny kind of stuff like word play.

Kaytee Cobb 21:59

Yeah. Well, whoever translated it could have made that happen for me, I feel like. Okay, on that note, my second book this week is one that was from the Indie Press List almost two years ago. It's *The View Was Exhausting* by Onjali Datta and Mikaella Clements. So this was an Indie Press List pick from *Novel Neighbor* in September of 2021. At the time, it was screaming summer to both of us so we did our little pre read, and then I put it on my shelves, and it sat there for quite some time. Still didn't read it the following summer, but that's okay. Because I have it as a current read now. It's perfect for your summer beach bag. Here's the setup. Win Tagore, her first name is Whitman but she goes by Win, is an elitist Indian British actress. She has had a long term on again off again relationship in quotes with Playboy Leo Malinowski, and the internet loves them together. Win and Leo like everyone ships the two of them, right. But it's always been fake. As a woman of color, Win knows the Hollywood deck is stacked against her, so she has perfected the art of controlling her public persona. Whenever she gets close to a scandal, she calls in Leo with his endearingly reckless attitude for a staged date. Each public display of affection shifts the headlines back into her favor, and Leo uses the good press to draw attention away from his own dysfunctional family life. They continue to pretend to their own mutual benefit. But even when they think it might work to level up to a real relationship, one or the other of them knows it would ruin the great thing that they've got going, however, their chemistry is fizzling and their arguments start to sizzle as well. This book really centers on them figuring out their ish and figuring out if they can make it work for real between them. It is perfect summer reading. The romance spiciness level, because I know you're going to ask is only about a two out of five on the spicy scale on the chili pepper scale. There's not a lot that happens on the page. But the setting of yachts and the French Riviera and Hollywood make it a great beach book. Even the cover will look gorgeous. Just like laying on your beach chair as you go dip in the water to cool off and come back out and people will be like, Ooh, what is this book? It looks so sparkly and summery and fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:18

It's very Instagrammable Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 24:20

It's a whole vibe for sure. It made it onto Sarah's Bookshelves 2022 Summer Reading guide last year due to the Indie Press List. She read it because of the Indie Press List. She put it on her 2022 Summer Reading guide. So now if I had a summer reading guide, I would put it on my 2023 one. It didn't blow me out of the water in any way. But I really enjoyed my time reading it. And again it had that perfect summery, sweaty sparkle right. I don't sweat I glisten. That's exactly the tagline for this book. It's *The View Was Exhausting* by Onjali Datta and Mikaella Clements.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:56

I actually liked that one quite a bit and several people who don't normally read that kind of contemporary romance have also really liked it. That one's a real outlier for me and maybe a good gateway book for contemporary romance. All right. Before I started talking about my third book, I'm

going to save the 10 of you who are getting ready to write me an email and tell me that Copenhagen is not in Norway because I just talked about the Norwegians. I understand that Copenhagen is in Denmark. Okay, so put your put your emails away.

Kaytee Cobb 25:28

you can get close that email, put it in the trash, it's fine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:32

Alright, my third book is a book that I liked a lot and it definitely falls into a perfect Meredith wheelhouse book. It's called Blue Monday by Nicci French. Here's the setup. Our lead character in this really promising series is Frieda Klein, a very solitary by nature psychotherapist who had, and I understand, that she has a really hard time sleeping. She's a woman of a certain age, she has a really hard time sleeping. So oftentimes she's up walking London's streets in the middle of the night. She has a whole vibe in and of herself, Kaytee, because she, she really has this ethos that the world is a messy, uncontrollable place, but that we can control what is inside our heads and in our environment. Frieda believes in control discipline and living by a strict moral code. As our story starts the kidnapping of five year old Matthew Faraday garners huge national attention and spawns a desperate police hunt. And when Matthew's face is splashed all over the newspapers, Frieda cannot ignore a really upsetting coincidence. One of her patients has been having dreams that he's been telling her about. And in these dreams, he has a he has a hunger for a child, a red haired child that he can describe in perfect detail, a child that's the spitting image of missing Matthew Faraday. Frieda is incredibly reluctant to involve herself or her patient in this case, but the coincidence is just too much for her conscience to bear. And her gut tells her that something is very wrong. So she finds herself in the center of the investigation and becomes the very reluctant sounding board to the Chief Inspector who's assigned to the case. Okay, this book was so so good. And I will say right at the top that Marli James, our good bookish friend Marli James made a point of sending me information about this book and just said, Meredith, I just read the second one in the series, she kind of quickly read the first one, this Blue Monday is the first in the series. Marli didn't read that one in great detail, because the subject matter of the missing little boy was more than she wanted to read. So she knows herself as a reader. And she just skipped straight to the second book and more power to her. But she knew that this was going to be right up my alley, and she was absolutely right. Right at the beginning, I can tell that this is going to be a series that I'm going to read. I'm going to want to read all the way through and I've already gotten started on the next one. It's very backlist. This first one Blue Monday was published all the way back in 2011. If you're a sort of seasonal reader, I will let you know that we the setting here is rainy winter London. I liked the two different mysteries that we were trying to solve. And I liked seeing how those two mysteries were going to weave together in our story. Mostly I loved the Dr. Frieda Klein character, she is a really interesting lead in a lot of ways, not least of which because she is a psychotherapist instead of being a police officer on the team, right. She's also very prickly, but she's not a caricature of prickly she's not a curmudgeon. She's, she's not a parody of herself. She's someone that you can believe exists in real life. She's lonely, but also doesn't want to be alone and doesn't have to be but chooses to be. She's very complicated. I think if you like the Vera character from the Ann Cleaves series, which I very much do, then you will really like Frieda Klein. They're not exactly the same person, but we've got a similar vibe going on here. I also really liked her partnership with the Detective Chief Inspector Carlson. They had a nice interplay of intellectual equals. I should say, really clearly that this is very much a police

procedural if you like the works, as I said of Anne Cleaves, if you like Deborah Crombie, this is going to be a big win for you. The style of this one takes some getting used to. there are a lot of points of view and they rotate very quickly. The net effect, of course, is short chapters, which is always helpful, but I can see someone maybe being a little irritated at how fast these different points of view are coming at you. And it honestly takes 75% of the book to figure out why all of those points of view are important. I decided to just be along for the ride and I was all also very interested. So this was okay for me. But I want to put out there that at times it feels like it's a little bit weirdly paced, but she has a plan and it's going to come together by the end. Also, I feel very much that now that I am in this world, the books that come next in the series are going to make a lot more sense to me, I have a feeling that this book did a lot of table setting that will be well served in the rest of the series. It's also interesting to note that this book is written by a husband and wife partnership. Sometimes that doesn't work. But it felt very seamless here. I liked it very, very much. It's perfect kind of smart, murderly book that I love over the summer, this is Blue Monday by Nicky French. Interesting, right? And Marli picked it for me. And you know, I have to say I'm currently reading a book right now that was pressed into my hands by another bookish friend who said, I just read this, you've got to get it. It's got Meredith written all over it. And I'm like, 9% away from finishing it. And it's fantastic. So it's so lovely. When people know your taste well enough to be able to say you're really gonna love this one. And I just we're so well served by our bookish friends.

Kaytee Cobb 31:09

Truly, I mean, I think we could easily just never have to choose books for ourselves again, and just be like, I will only read recommendations that come directly from bookish friends and and we'd probably be fine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:20

Like, it's so great. That would be an interesting experiment, wouldn't it?

Kaytee Cobb 31:24

Oh, that could be an interesting experiment. I agree.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:27

Unlikely. It's unlikely, but that would be an interesting experiment.

Kaytee Cobb 31:32

Yes, the obstinacy comes out hard with those recommendations sometimes, right? Although my third book is also a recommendation from a bookish friend, I am going to talk about My Government Means to Kill Me by Rasheed Newson. So this one came way back in August and September of 2022. We had a bookish friend post twice about this book, Laura is her name, she set it up like this. This is her words, and I'm going to add to it. This is a fictional memoir of a young black gay man named Trey finding his own way in New York City during the 1980s. The book was propulsive and page turning. It's clear the writer, a TV writer knows how to write a narrative that draws you in and wants you to keep going. There are footnotes that are all factual, and Trey has run ins with lots of famous people. It's not a happy book. But it is joyful. Thanks to Trey's point of view. So that's what Laura said that put it on my TBR. That was enough for me, and I grabbed it when I saw it at the bookstore. And finally, in April of this year, so

nearly six months later, I did pick it up. Here's what I'm gonna add to Laura's setup. Rasheed Newson, like she said, is a TV writer for shows like Narcos and Bel Air both of those shows are complex, layered stories that balance character and plot in a really fantastic way. That's what we find in these pages. Trey is a young man who moves to New York with nearly nothing to his name, just a few bucks in his pocket. Even though he grew up wealthy in Indianapolis, as Trey makes his way in the Big Apple, he starts meeting pillars of the black community and pillars of the gay community. He also begins to volunteer with act up, which is an AIDS activism organization. In that way, this book touches on some of the same thing as Like a Love Story, which is written by AbdiNazemian. And that one is ya, the adult themes in this one really elevate it past that novel for me. I loved the touch points with historical figures, the way that Trey brings lightness and humor to the story that can be really difficult. I mentioned quite a few things that are kind of hard about this story, but he has a sparkling personality to him. And the fact that it's under 300 pages. It's not a lengthy read, it's not a difficult read, even though there's hard stuff in there. All of that made this one easy to drink down in a single day, while still being really impactful for me. Added bonus is the fact that I finished this book and randomly, Rasheed followed me on Instagram. I hadn't posted about it, but there he was, in my follows. So I wrote to him, I followed right back. And through his account, I have been able to keep a better handle on the writer strike that's happening in LA because he is a TV writer, and he's out there on the picket lines. So it created this really personal connection that I wasn't expecting from a book that has nothing to do with the TV writers strike. But the author is personable and interesting on Instagram. So I really liked having that connection. I immediately pressed it into the hands of another one of our bookish friends before I even finished it. And now I'm excited to get to tell all the rest of you about this five star read for me it was My Government Means to Kill Me by Rasheed Newson.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:33

And it's so great when people feel so strongly that they're like, No, you really, really need to read this. I love that.

Kaytee Cobb 34:39

Yes, exactly. Exactly. That's kind of what we have. For our deep dive today. Meredith, we are talking about gateway books. This deep dive was first proposed by a friend of mine, Candice Whitney, she actually called it gateway drugs, which are the things that get you hooked, right? It's like a small sample to get you excited about a little more So we're calling them gateway books, the ones that get readers addicted to reading. And I'm excited to talk about this one, because I think we've touched on this a few other times in other deep dives. But I want to go hard. Yeah. Talk about it in depth, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:13

No, I think it's really a great conversation to have at this time of year. And we know that I mean, just in my own personal life, I can think of 10 or more people who compared to when I met them a few years ago, you know, maybe when I met them, they weren't reading very much at all. But just with a well placed book or two, now, they're reading as much if not more than I read now. So it really can work. It can work for your kids over the summer, and it can work for your friends. Now, my biggest thing before we start talking about the specific books, my policy is that I mean, everyone in my life knows, what I do they know that I love to read this is if they've been to my home, this is this is plainly obvious, right? So I don't mean to advertise that I might have some good recommendations for them. But I don't offer

recommendations to people outside of a bookstore or the library, unless they asked me. So this is my so first and foremost, I will say that all of the people who I would say I had a hand in turning them from a maybe a reader who's not reading much right now, into someone who's reading all the time. It's because they broached the conversation. They said, I'd kind of like to pick up a book, or I'm kind of thinking of maybe buying a Kindle and reading at the pool, what do you think I should read? Then we can have the conversation. But I just felt like, that's been a very successful policy for me, because I feel like if we press except, you know, Jackson is going to have some force reading time this summer, because I know that I'm gonna have to force that issue. But he's 11. And that's what happens. But anybody else? I feel like they need to want to read again, they need to want to start it

Kaytee Cobb 37:00

well. And to follow up with that, just like Anne does on What Should I Read Next, right? We don't just walk around with like a tag that says, Ask me what you should read next, because I'm going to tell you, it's this one book ever. Right? You always are saying okay, yeah, I'd love to give you some reading recommendations. What was the last book you read? Was it you know, in high school English class? Or was it you tried, you know, the big celebrity memoir of the summer, and it didn't hit for you? Like, tell me about that experience? And that way I can tailor my reading recommendations to you. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:34

Right. I mean, certainly, that's always the question that I'll ask is, you know, will tell me a book, or two or three that really did work for you the lot, even if the last time you read was 10 years ago, or sometimes lately, it's happened a couple of times is people have been like, Well, I really, really loved Big Little Lies. I watched the show. And I know it was based on a book, should I read that book? Or that kind of like they saw something on TV, and then wanted to double back and said, Oh, if that's if that's a book, you know, I might kind of be interested in that. Are there more books that are like that? So that's kind of a good starting place too.

Kaytee Cobb 38:10

Yeah, and that's one of the things that we see a lot as readers, right? Like, oh, I just saw that Daisy Jones and the Six came out or Dear Edward by Ann Napolitano, which are very different shows. But having those characters and that storyline in your head, maybe is going to lead you to want to I want to dip my toe back into the bookish world. So one of the things that I started thinking about right away is that even with this, like gateway drug idea, I was thinking about uppers and downers, right. Like some people, that's what they're looking for, you might find a reader that really wants to read or would be perfectly suited for Hannah Coulter by Wendell Berry, even though that didn't come up on my list of like great gateway books, because it doesn't feel addicting and propulsive to me, but there are readers that that's the perfect gateway book for right first, you got to figure out what reader you're talking to.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:04

Yeah. Which can be hard in this situation. Because usually compared to you know, when other people who read a lot ask you, they can easily tell you oh, these three books really worked for me, this one didn't. So it can be hard to pull this information out. One of the questions I will always ask after saying, like, Hey, okay, what made you want to ask me this question? Or what were you know, some books that really worked for you is, I will often say, what format are you thinking about reading in? Like, do you

love a print mug? You know, is it like I want to read in the afternoon because we're going to have you come home from the pool, and then my kids are going to go down for nap or rest time or, you know, they're going to have device time. And I know I'm gonna have a couple hours every afternoon, or what is the time of day? What is the the format that you're going to be taking it out? And and so that's another really good question, because that can help you tailor your recommendation to them, for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 39:55

And how long of a chunk Are you going to get right because one of my favorite intro recs is David Sedaris...funny essays, you can read a small chunk each day. My new go to for him is Calypso, I've loved a lot of books by David Sedaris. But that's the one that I go to as my first rec for him now. And then also The Anthropocene Reviewed by John Green, because those are short, little snippets. But if you're talking to a reader who says, Well, I'm going to have three hours every single afternoon during the summer, because my kids are at camp, or whatever, what should I dip into? It's not an essay book. It's not nonfiction humor, right? There's something else to put in that spot. So what else have you got for us, Meredith? What What are some of your buckets maybe that you put your reading recommendations into?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:39

So I definitely have a few books that I pull out for wide swaths of situations. And none of these are going to surprise you. After five years of listening to the show you you all have heard me talk about these, but maybe jot them down for yourselves because they are I've been talking about it for five years, because these books have been working because they were five years. Exactly. So any teen boy or girl who comes to me and says, or the mom or dad comes to me and says I need something that's just going to really draw them into reading something that they're not going to be able to put down, of course, say it with me, Scythe by Neal Shusterman. And again, I'm pulling out that specific archetype. But I have recommended sites to my mom, to my sister to friends of all kinds. I mean, Scythe is one of those books that almost anyone can read and be like, This is unlike anything I've read before. But it's completely easy to get into. It's not difficult. It's not a lot of world building, you're into the action. And then if they like it, they can go on further into the series, so they have more books that they can read. So Scythe is just a slam dunk gateway kind of reading.

Kaytee Cobb 41:53

Yes, definitely. That was the first one I wrote down and it was part of the reason that I slated this deep dive for us today, because I was thinking about our most recent boss my TBR segment where somebody had Scythe as an option on their TBR. And we were both like, it doesn't matter what you read, just read Scythe. That's the only answer here that we need. And if you have a reader that likes that sciency goodness, Blake Crouch is your next recommendation, Dark Matter for sure. He's got other ones that are kind of in that same near future world where you don't have to be a genius to read it. But it's going to propel you all the way through the book. And then I would put Project Hail Mary on there as well, because again, you could hand it to anyone from a middle grader because Levi and Micah in my house who are nine and 12, both love that book all the way up to my dad, who is 73 Anyone in that entire span of years is going to love Project Hail Mary. So I feel like that Project Hail Mary is just a big win in that whole age range,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:55

Project Hail Mary is on my list for sure. So it's largely coworkers of mine who can be anywhere from their 20s all the way into their 50s. If they come to me, and they've said, I've had kids. And in that period of time when my kids were little, I just got out of the habit of reading, but I want to get back into it. What's the first book I should read, I always give them Big Little Lies. Because especially if you have young kids, if you've been through the kindergarten thing with your kids, then you understand these characters immediately. It's a milkshake book. It's got some substance to it so you don't feel like you're just reading fluff. But it's a milkshake book. It just goes down so easy. So that is another one that I can't even tell you how many friends have restarted their reading practice by getting into Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty.

Kaytee Cobb 43:47

Definitely. I also had a Liane Moriarty on mine, but it's in a different bucket. For me, I have a character plus plot bucket. And those are the people that you know, you want to pour your heart out to them because they really care about the people in their lives. And so I put What Alice forgot by Liane Moriarty and All the Lonely People by Mike Gayle, both in that bucket because there's that certain reader, right that wants that really personal connection with their stories that also wants to be pulled through the story. So it has the well developed characters that that reader is going to be able to connect to well,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:24

well, I can count on more than one hand the number of male dad, Grandpa readers that I have convinced to get back into reading by giving them I am pilgrim by Terry Hayes. This is a spy thriller, but it is so readable everyone who I've handed it to include I mean, it's a five star read for me Kaytee you love it too. Everyone that I've given it to has absolutely loved it.

Kaytee Cobb 44:53

Definitely that one is a bit of a more thrilly bucket for me. I was making buckets for this and I don't know why I'm But I was thinking about thriller readers or people who want that really propulsive kind of male gaze driven narrative, but are scared to pick up a big book and I want to give them 11/22/63 as their gateway, because that is a chunker. Right? It's going to keep you fed, it's going to keep you in reading for quite a while. But the whole time, you just want to keep turning pages, you just want to keep listening. The audiobook is fantastic. The print book is fantastic. Either way, you're going to just keep going and going and going with that story. And that is a great way to build a habit to get something big enough that you're starting to make time for it every single day.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:40

Yes. And in that same category, I would put the Relic by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. It's the first in a long series. It's a big chunk of a book, but it goes down so easy. It just reads like a thriller. It's very cinematic. Great for all kinds of readers. It's just absolutely a hit every single time I've recommended it.

Kaytee Cobb 46:02

Okay, I am going to pivot again to fantasy. So we've talked sci fi we've talked thrillers like that that character plus plot bucket A Curse So Dark and Lonely, one of the ones that Meredith has pressed into

our hands and done an author interview and convinced all of us to read that, again, you're going to be able to hand to anyone from older middle grade all the way up to adulthood. It's the Beauty and the Beast retelling Brigid Kemmerer, really brings us into the story there. And it feels familiar enough that it's easy access. But it's still completely spins the story on its head, we've got this protagonist with a disability that you can root for, it's just a great way to get into to get back into the habit of reading.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:46

I love that one. And for people who are thinking, you know, I want to dip my toe a little bit in YA fantasy. That one is a great one to get started on. Of course, we have to talk about The Hunger Games as also being a gateway book. I mean, that's just that's one of those ones you can hand to any buddy. Yes, the entire series. I have to shoehorn in here, my latest five star read the Fourth Wing, which a lot of people are saying I haven't wanted to not stop reading a book as much since I read The Hunger Games. So if you if you had that experience, you know, 10,12 years ago with the Hunger Games, and you're like, I'm I've been chasing that the Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros would be one that I would definitely recommend some pretty surprising people are ending up loving that book,

Kaytee Cobb 47:32

one has gotten the most posts of people being like, it's been a long time since I called in sick to work in order to read a book. But here we are, because I stayed up till 4am. Like, yeah, exactly. It's very surprising.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:44

That kind of book and you can hand it to anyone. I mean, that's not true. That's not true. You cannot hand it to anyone, it does have a couple of spicy scenes in it, do not hand it to your young children. Okay, let me be noted about that. It does have it does have some spice in it. You can hand it to anyone who would be okay with two really spicy scenes.

Kaytee Cobb 48:02

But well earned is what you told us about those exactly right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:06

For sure.

Kaytee Cobb 48:09

All right, do you have any, any more gateways that we need to address, I also have The House in the Cerulean Sea on my list. And that would be for the reader that has enjoyed middle grade in the past. But that's a lot easier access. It's a simpler language, it's simpler world building, and they're ready to make the jump to adult books. But they still want some of those same middle grade fields. That's the gateway book for that reader. And then I put The Ten Thousand Doors of January by Alix Harrow on my list as well. And again, that one's going to be for a specific type of reader, right? You have to be willing to simmer in a world for a little while and love beautiful language and that type of thing. But I love that book. And I just wanted to put it on the list somewhere.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:47

Yeah, anyone who hasn't maybe who got their degree in English, but got burnout on reading books for their degree, and they haven't read for a while that would be a good gateway book for them. The only other one I have is one that you know, I pull out of my back pocket when I just feel like the reader is wanting to be rooted in something that's familiar, and that is Jurassic Park, which is a fantastic novel. Obviously, it was a novel before it was a movie for a certain kind of reader rooting that familiar story. But within the book that gives them so much more. It's not as scary for them. It doesn't feel as reading ish as bookish to them. It feels kind of like, Oh, I love the movie. Everyone loves the movie, the movies. Cool. And so there's a certain kind of reader for whom that can be a real gateway. They'll be like, Oh, wait, Michael Crichton wrote other things and they're just more open to that. Yeah. So it's a bunch of good gateway books. Again, nothing groundbreaking as far as that no one has heard of before but just books that when someone says to you at the pool, oh, I really should read again. You know exactly what to put into their hands.

Kaytee Cobb 49:52

Yes. So you can just pull up the show notes and be like, you know, I've got some ideas for you like the watches in the trench coat. It's the same thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:01

You know when you said that before I thought you said that they hid their watches in their cloak and I was like, wow, yeah, if you were in the 1500s But you said,

Kaytee Cobb 50:09

a cloak. Oh, did you know I probably said, cloak. I'm wearing a bowler hat. I don't even know what decade I'm in. It's fine. Okay, get it together, Kaytee. Okay, we are wrapping up that deep dive. Let's move to the fountain and make some wishes this week. Meredith, what is your wish?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:29

All right, Kaytee, this is a wish that I wish so hard. I can't even believe it. Like I could quote scrunch up my eyes and produce tears that I wish this wish so much, but it takes a little bit of context sting to make this make sense to you. Okay, so last week, my best friends took me to Hawaii for my 50th birthday, which is in August, but we went early because May in Hawaii is beautiful. So we went to the island of Kawaii and on one of the days we went on a guided hike. So we had a guy and he picked us up and he drove us all the way across the island and stopping at certain places. And then we did this like four hour hike. I almost died. I won't get into all the details. I'm lucky to be alive. But on one of these overlooks, these incredible overlooks we're looking out over the ocean. And he says, See that next island over there. And it was only 17 miles away. So it feels like it's like just, it's like just a short boat, right. And he's like, right, that is a private island. It's called the forbidden island of Niihau. And it is owned by the descendants of people who were the inspiration for the book, the Swiss Family Robinson, the Robinson family owns this island. But here's the thing, Kaytee. It's a private island, nobody can just go over there. There are people over there who've never been on the mainland. They apparently speak of native Hawaiian language, only the descendants of this one family live over there. They don't even know exactly how many people are over there. But they know that they don't have water. They don't have electricity. They don't have any of that stuff. It's just this very mysterious island that they know that there

are somewhere between 75 and 250 people over there. But very little is known about what goes on over there. They know that there's some farming that goes on. They know that the US military has some access to the island for certain things, but it's very shrouded in secrecy. And it has been owned by this one family for like 200 years. So I became really obsessed with this notion on several levels. And I was like someone needs to write a book about what the flip is happening over there. There is such a story. I don't know if it's a thriller. I don't know if it's a family saga. I don't know if it's jungle horror, I don't know. But I know that there's some sort of story that could be written over there. And like Hawaii is such fertile ground for fiction because we don't get a lot of Hawaiian based fiction. I just feel like man, somebody, Peter Heller, or Tim Johnston, or Catherine Ryan Howard, somebody needs to go over there. Or do a deep dive into that and write about The Forbidden Island and just let us know what the heck is happening over there.

Kaytee Cobb 53:28

This is a complicated wish, but I like it and I can get on board.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:31

Yeah, I want that. I want that book so bad.

Kaytee Cobb 53:34

I like the idea of multi generational family drama, jungle horror, like just throw them all and just put it in the blender, blend it up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:41

Think how many ways you could take a story about an island that you have no idea what's been happening over there for 200 years. I've spent way too much time thinking about this. I'm I'm absolutely obsessed with this notion.

Kaytee Cobb 53:54

Well, I hope someone takes that idea and runs with it. Because that's basically what I did with my wish this week. I kind of stole it. Okay, but I'm bringing it to the world. So I think it's good. I think it's good that I stole it. I'm going to wish for a reading cafe. So I'm going to give credit. So we're going to call it a wish cosign. The username of this person who wished for this is HIJKLMNO7 on Instagram. She made the following wish I know I was like what is this word, but I realized it was the series of letters. She said I wish there could be reading only cafes, something smallish and cozy, wonderful coffees and tea, comfy chairs maybe a reading blanket on each chair and a reading lamp with events to meet bookish new friends attached to the cutest any bookstore you can imagine envision reading retreat vibes, escape home, enjoy the time then get to sleep in my own bed, which that is the part that I cosign. I love my bed. I always want to sleep in my bed even though I love to go out and do things and travel. If I could just take my bed with me. That would be great. So I'm co signing this because sometimes I get an app hour or a few hours away from the house to do nothing, right. And this is what I want to do. I don't necessarily need new books. Although I do love a trip to the bookstore, I just want somewhere away from my house that's cozy and quiet, and allows me to read for hours and maybe brings me snacks or pool nachos. Like I just want to be fed and beverage and just be cozy in a place that is not my home

where my people cannot harass me. That's all I want. This can't be that hard. Right? So that's my wish. Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:33

I think it's a great wish I know that Johnny, this would be his dream to because, you know, he spends his afternoons at various coffee shops, you know, reading because that's his preferred place to read. I actually prefer to read at home. And so we're different in that way. But yeah, he would he would cosign on that wish for sure. And it does seem like something that wouldn't be that hard to accomplish. I mean, except, I think probably the economics of it are not super profitable.

Kaytee Cobb 56:00

right. Yeah. How do you make money doing this? You don't cuz there's only four people in there at a time. So what you're not doing anything..

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:06

How many, Yeah, how much beverages can you possibly do in that in that period of time?

Kaytee Cobb 56:10

Like individual bathrooms for each person? They would just be beverages the whole time. So, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:16

Unless you did like a subscription model, like a membership model. You know what I mean? So you you

Kaytee Cobb 56:22

sort of pay for a month, and you can access it when you need it. Right? You're

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:27

paying for the the availability of it not for you know, the per? Yes. Yep. So that would be that's something to think about good wishes. All right. We've we've given a lot, a lot of ideas for inspired entrepreneurs here. All right. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 56:48

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:51

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

Kaytee Cobb 57:01

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us but not about Norwegian things not including Copenhagen at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:12

And if you want more of this kind of content, you can join us as a bookish friend for \$5 a month you get tons more episodes and you keep this show completely ad free. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference in our finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 57:33

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:38

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 57:41

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:42

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 57:44

Happy reading Meredith