



Season 5, Episode 46: Reading in Perfect Time + Bookish Travel Agents

Mon, Jun 26, 2023 • 48:12

Kaytee Cobb 00:10

Hi readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we read recently. And as you already know, we don't shy away from having strong opinions. So be ready.

Mary Heim 00:23

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

Kaytee Cobb 00:33

I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love a bookish homework assignment.

Mary Heim 00:39

And I'm Mary Heim, a therapist and mom of one living in Wisconsin. And most of the traveling I'm doing this summer is of the armchair variety. This is episode number 46 of season five, and we are so glad you're here.

Kaytee Cobb 00:52

We are so glad you're here. I'm so happy to be recording with you today, Mary. And I am going to let everybody know at the top here that just like you just mentioned, we're about to have our summer break from podcasts. So today you and I are playing bookish travel agents. We're gonna tell you all where to go and what books to read when you get there, or before you get there. But before we do that, let's talk about our bookish moments of the week. Mary, what is yours?

Mary Heim 01:17

Well, Kaytee, it was probably about a year ago now that you made the offhand comment to me that whenever I planned to read *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles I should plan to start it on June 12, knowing that this was the day the story gets started, of course mood reader that I am I shuffled that information away in my brain and stuck this one on my summer reads shelf to be forgotten about for the better part of nine months. Well, when it started to get close to June, I thought, Hey, I wonder if anybody else is interested in doing this kind of date targeted read along with me. And I put the call out to our bookish friends Patreon group on Facebook, I got a great response. And this week, I am deep in the throes of reading this book in real time, quote, unquote, with over 30 other bookish friends on the Fable

app. It's a big old group. Wow. It's really fun. I am just having a great time. I love it. You know this as my fellow extrovert on the team. I'm like, let's have a party every day for 10 days. Yeah, exactly. I, you know, when I'm reading a chunker, as we like to call them, or honestly, just at this stage in my life, with still kind of battling some of that grief, brain fog, I knew I would need and frankly thrive with a group for accountability. And to make this just really fun. Like I love a group project. I have loved getting to share thoughts and insights with bookish friends about this incredible story. And of course, Kaytee, you were spot on. This is the way to read this book. So if anybody else hasn't yet picked up Lincoln Highway, stash it away for 11 more months. Pick it up next June 12. I highly recommend that it has been so much fun this week.

Kaytee Cobb 03:02

Yes, I think I think it adds so much to the experience to know that the weather outside was probably the same. And the sun was setting and rising at the same time each day. Like it just really brings you into the book in a different way, right?

Mary Heim 03:15

Yes, it does. There's like each, you know, a couple of chapters stuck into the day. And when I turn the page to get to the next day, especially if I start in the morning, it's like I'm waking up with Emmett and Duchess and Billy and talk about I did not time it this way, obviously. But with our deep dive today, you know, bookish travel agents and books with sense of place that is like, right where I am with this book, and it's so much fun. I highly recommend as you never steer us wrong. You totally steered me in the right direction with this one.

Kaytee Cobb 03:46

Well, that's fine because there's a lot of car things happening there. So you could almost say that was punny. Okay, what about you, I am going to tell you about my bookish moment, which will not sound bookish for a second here, but yesterday, I went to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum here in Santa Fe. You wouldn't think this is bookish, but it is in fact, we were sent with a homework assignment and admission by my Patreon co recording friend, Bunmi Ishola, who works as an editor for Penguin Random House and I get to record with her every month about the behind the scenes goodness of the publishing industry. I mentioned a few episodes ago that Levi, my almost 10 year old got to read his first galley when he was getting his eyebrows stitched up. And that book is called Beneath the Swirling Sky by Carolyn Leiloglou. He super loved it. And it comes out on September 12 of 2023. So I've already got it slated to reread later this summer. It includes kids who are able to disappear into and travel through famous paintings, so it's perfect for any of your artsy middle grade readers. Bunmi though is already working on the sequel with her author. She sent us on a homework assignment to run reconnaissance at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe. So we went with a specific scavenger hunt list of paintings to see and corridors to photograph. And like notes on how the paintings are displayed and what color scheme is used inside the building and that kind of thing, which will possibly all be part of Book Two. So this was as close to author research as I can get without being an author myself, and it was so fun. And it really added a depth to our experience at the museum. All the kids were like, Okay, what's our next painting and they were ready to go. They couldn't wait to go find the next thing on their scavenger hunt. It was so fun.

Mary Heim 05:33

This is the coolest thing ever. Yes. Oh, I am. I mean, you obviously listeners, you can't see but my jaw was like dropped to the floor when you were describing this. I want to go do that. That's so cool.

Kaytee Cobb 05:48

I love that. How do we do this? How do we set this up so that authors like can contact the local people and send them on missions for them? Because it was so fun.

Mary Heim 05:57

Right? Send me it's like not DoorDash What's that? It's like, I will be your for hire Milwaukee Area fact finder for your book, and even have to pay me just give me your book. This sounds like a great trade. That sounds so fun. I love that.

Kaytee Cobb 06:13

Absolutely. All right. Let's get into our current reads this week. Mary I can't wait to hear what you're bringing to talk about

Mary Heim 06:20

Okay, Kaytee, my first book is Romantic Comedy by Curtis Sittenfeld. Now, this by no means is a book that has flown under the radar. Surely you have seen it everywhere. At the kickoff to summer reading Curtis Sittenfeld is a high profile author. She's got legions of fans, but if the hype has escaped you, here's the setup. Sally, our main character is a writer for the night owl and NYC based Saturday night sketch show I think very thinly veiled almost not veiled at all SNL, and she has been there for ages. It was impossible for me, in fact, to not immediately cast her as Liz Lemon in my brain for my fellow 30 Rock fans. This show is her life, Her life is the show and that is kind of the way that her story has been progressing. Sally starts working on a sketch that takes a kind of a dig at dorky normal looking dudes at TNO, who end up paired with gorgeous, successful famous female partners with the punch line being that the same would never happen in reverse in a heteronormative relationship. But then she meets Noah Brewster, musician, icon and host of the show for the week and may form a connection entirely to her surprise and disbelief.

Kaytee Cobb 07:28

Oh no, not another romantic comedy protagonist with one of my kids names. This is getting terrible.

Mary Heim 07:34

Yep, I think you.... This one Noah is a goodie in this one. And it's not too... you don't have to close the door for them. It would be okay. So Kaytee, without getting too spoilery I am going to say that this book takes a significant turn in part two, when Sally and Noah and the rest of the world experienced the hit of the pandemic and it brings them together in unexpected ways. While this isn't jacket copy, I think it is important to know going in that part one of the book is really just kind of the exposition to what happens in the later two thirds and that you as a reader should be prepared for a tone shift that takes the book into a direction I wasn't necessarily expecting. While a fair number of readers on Goodreads mentioned that they didn't love the way this book took a left turn, for me, that is when I actually started to really love it. I will say my expectations for this book were very, very low. I had heard some really great and

nuanced reviews for this one kind of chastising Sittenfeld for taking one of the world's most popular and kind of disregarded genres romance right and putting a literary spin on it and calling it brand new. There are incredible diverse, well written interesting fun romances and romcoms being written every day and have been for literally decades. I fully agree that nobody should be saying that she is doing something brand new here because she's not but I couldn't help but get sucked in by the interesting premise here and her absolutely flawless writing really, I mentioned above that the first part of the book kind of dragged for me a little bit like how many details of putting on an episode of SNL do we actually need but I became thoroughly invested in these humans and their relationships, and their pandemic and of navigation together in a shaky and uncertain world. There was an epistolary format two parts of this book that I just inhaled and I think Sittenfeld just did a really fantastic job writing, nuanced, real love in this story. I wouldn't call it a rom com like genre wise, but I would say give this one a try before you write it off as not for you. She can be divisive as an author sometimes but she does know what she's doing. I think she does something really special with her books, especially this one. That is Romantic Comedy by Curtis Sittenfeld.

Kaytee Cobb 09:47

Interesting Okay, okay, I've definitely heard all kinds of reviews from both sides of the aisle on this one so I'm glad to hear like a more fully developed one from you.

Mary Heim 09:59

Yes, yeah. wanted to share it because I too was like, this is all over the place in terms of enjoyment and they would have it initially did keep me from reading it. I picked it up on a whim. And I'm glad that I did. So if you're on the fence, I think it's worth a shot.

Kaytee Cobb 10:13

All right, all right, I like it. Okay, I am also bringing one that's not unheard of we would say. Meredith brought this one to Episode 33 of season five. I read it immediately afterward and loved it. But now it's 13 episodes later. And I want to pop it up on our listeners radar again and make sure that you Mary specifically know about it, because 13 episodes ago, there were some things going on in your life. And I'm guessing you didn't have time for reading podcasts. So I want to talk about The Grace of Wild Things by Heather Fawcett. Do you know this one?

Mary Heim 10:48

I haven't read it. Of course I know Heather Fawcett. Okay, and I have been very excited to read it but you're right I think I listened to that episode back when everything was immediately brand new topsy turvy for me and it just kind of like in one ear out the other so I'm very curious to actually have this book maybe pressed to me today.

Kaytee Cobb 11:08

Yes, here I'm this is mostly like there's a lot of people listening. I'm talking to you right now, Mary.

Mary Heim 11:15

All right here for it.

Kaytee Cobb 11:16

So this is a fantasy retelling of Anne of Green Gables, one of my very favorite classics of all time. Grace is our main character and she is our orphan. We love a story that starts with an orphan. She's getting a little old for the orphanage, where she has been passed over by potential parents again, and again and again. So she runs away to find the witch in the forest. She offers herself as an apprentice telling the witch that she can do magic even though nobody believes her. She's sure the witch can teach her to use her magic. Even though she has a terrible reputation for being awful. The witch that is she is very cranky. She's very awful. She's no Marilla Cuthbert where she's like secretly soft on the inside. She's very cranky. Of course, the Witch wants nothing to do with a middle grade upstart. So she sends Grace away or maybe considers cooking her in the oven. But in order to save herself and prove that she can do magic Grace changes the witches cow and now it produces ice cream instead of milk. Okay?

Mary Heim 12:17

Yes, sounds great.

Kaytee Cobb 12:18

So they strike a deal. Grace has to learn all the spells in the witch's Grimoire. And if she does, the witch will make her an official apprentice. Otherwise, she'll take Grace's magic and then cook her in the oven. Just like classic and we've got a classmate who's infuriating when we first meet him. We've got a bosom friend who helps grace with the witches challenge. We've got a protagonist who loves the outdoors and takes great delight even in things that can be hard to handle. She is spunky and tenacious and sometimes gets discouraged just like the rest of us. For those of us like you and me, Mary who read and loved Emily Wilde first, we will recognize that same essential character here In Grace that we saw in Emily. She is smart and driven throughout. While this novel is definitely for middle graders, and the other is certainly for adults. I think any adult who loves Emily Wilde will find plenty here to love as well. I adored it. It's so good. This is The Grace of Wild Things by Heather Fawcett.

Mary Heim 13:20

I mean goal completed Kaytee I don't know if you saw me grab my phone as you were sitting and request it from the library. But here we go. I love it. It sounds perfect. And I feel like yeah, I was like this is what I want to read out in the backyard in my hammock. I mean, how many times can I talk about my hammock on this podcast? I'm going for gold but this one sounds perfect for backyard reading. I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 13:43

Can't wait. I can't wait to hear what you think of it. Please report back immediately as soon as you pick it up and as soon as you finish

Mary Heim 13:49

You know I will. Alright Kaytee my second book today is Royal Blood by Aimee Carter. Now by this title alone I'm sure it's no surprise to anyone that I had to pick this book up. We've got Royals. We've got murder. It's YA. this book has Mary Heim written all over it. Royal Blood tells the story of Evan Bright a 17 year old illegitimate daughter of fictitious British King Alexander, who has spent her life getting kicked out of boarding schools and paraded all around the US far away from the dad she's never known but when she's forced to spend the summer in London with her father and the rest of the royal family,

her identity is somehow revealed and the world is dying to know all about her. After a night out in her new world turns deadly, Evan becomes the primary suspect in a murder investigation that threatens to ruin her reputation and tear her world apart. She's got limited time to prove that she's innocent and to protect the secrets of those she loves the most. Now Kaytee, this sounds like a fun, frothy, maybe even kind of forgettable YA murder mystery at the outset. But I am here to tell you that this book is definitely more than it seems. Firstly, and I kind of wish I had known this going in, triggers abound and not just like peripherally mentioned but there's like some tough stuff happening on the page. So reader know thyself, go check out Storygraph before you dig into this one, if that might be an issue for you. I will say I'm kind of a sensitive reader, I was fine. I listened to this one on audio. I skipped ahead on the parts that I really did not want to hear happen, but just be mindful of that before you go in. And with that said, I think what the author did is something that not many ya murder books can't do. She wrote a really compelling and fun, maybe fun murder is fun royal book that also did not pull punches, and made you really feel for these characters and think about the complexity of living life in the public eye, especially when it's something you're unprepared for or didn't want in the first place. This one read to me like a mashup of American Royals and Karen McManus or for my fellow Princess Diaries era millennials, which I'm sure is my royal fiction origin story, or even if you read and found interest in Prince Harry Spare, this past spring, I think this one would be for you. This is the start to a series and it does a good job of resolving the mystery in this first book, while also leaving room for what's to come next which we love. Of course, that is Royal Blood by Aimee Carter.

Kaytee Cobb 16:09

I feel like that's something really special that you bring to the podcast Mary is the intersection of YA and murder. Because like Truly Devious came from you, A Good Girls Guide to Murder came from you. Like I can think of many recs over the years that are big hits that we heard about first from you. So if anybody has been like, that was a hit that was a hit from Mary. This it sounds like is your next hit.

Mary Heim 16:33

I'm honored. That makes me feel great. Yes. Because I realized as my YA reading has, you know, as I've gotten further from that age, I still will read and enjoy many within the genre, but really, I love YA murder mystery because it's like gentle enough for me. And I love YA fantasy and this one like this is a good one. This is a good way murder mystery. All right, Kaytee, what's up next for you?

Kaytee Cobb 16:58

All right, my second one this week is nonfiction. It's called A Beginner's Guide to America by Roya Hakakian. This was an impulse buy at my local bookstore many months ago. But I'm making a concerted effort to read my shelves right now. So it finally made it onto my current reads. This is nonfiction written sort of like a travel guide with attempts at humor. Like if Bill Bryson tackled immigration in the US as an outsider. Roya Hakakian is an Iranian American, and emigrated to the United States. So she wrote this guide based on her personal experience, as well as the anecdotes from her community about what it's like to be an immigrant here in the country we live in. Written as a guide for the newly arrived and providing practical information and advice royal reveals what those who settle here love about the country, what they miss about their homes, the cruelty of some Americans and the unceasing generosity of others. She captures the texture of life in a new place in complexity, right, she talks about beauty and darkness and discusses all aspects of her experience from food to

racism to capitalism. Her experience is especially interesting because Iran especially has been for many years a hot button country in the United States, which adds another layer of complexity. I flip back and forth from the paper to the audio on this one, and recommend the paper as my format choice. The audio is narrated by the author. And while normally I do love an author narrated memoir, it felt a little like she was trying to signal to the listener what was supposed to be funny, and kind of waiting for us to laugh at it. Like when they leave the the space for the laugh track, right? Instead of letting us decide for ourselves. On paper, you're free to enjoy or cackle or not as you prefer. This book is not long at 222 pages on paper, and less than eight hours on audio. But even in that space, it did feel a little bit like it lulled at times. Sometimes I felt like the observations were sharp and cutting and hilarious. And sometimes it felt very humdrum. However, I do think that it captures the actual immigrant experience. Well, some things are exactly as you might expect, and some are wholly surprising. Do note that the guidebook is written in second person as though she's talking directly to you. The reader has an immigrant to the United States. So you left your country behind. You have different foods to eat now, right? You are experiencing a new culture. As a non immigrant myself, I was grateful for the way she approached this country with both praise and criticism. It felt like a balanced look at a huge change in her life and the lives of so many. This one was hot and cold for me overall, but there were parts that I really loved. It's A Beginner's Guide to America by Roya Hakakian

Mary Heim 19:40

That sounds like the parts that you described as really being hits for you, Kaytee. I was like, Oh, yes, absolutely. That sounds so great. worth maybe a chance to pick up with all of that known going. For sure. Well, Kaytee, I'm going to piggyback off of your nonfiction to lead into my third pick this week, which is also nonfiction pick. It is What Looks Like Bravery by Laurel Braitman. Now I have said recently that my reading in the last few months since losing my dad has either been these really introspective, heavy meaningful grief books or absolute escapism fluff and literally nothing in between. This one wholeheartedly falls into the former category, but I'm here to tell you it is worth every single tear that it has made me cry from almost the day she was born. Laurel Braitman has been contending with the impending loss of her father diagnosed with an aggressive and progressive cancer. Her father spends his days working to prepare his kids to live without him. But of course, we know the truth that nothing can really prepare you for that after losing him in her teens Laurel is burnt to a crisp in her mid 30s. After spending years running away from the bad feelings she's held at bay since his passing, we follow her story through what comes next many wildernesses both literal and metaphorical. And she's challenged to face the facts that no achievement can protect her from pain, and that hope in the face of hardship is the ultimate form of courage. I was instantly drawn to this one for obvious reasons, but once I had checked it out from the library, I'll be honest with you that I let it sit for a few weeks I even had to renew it before I finally picked it up. Once I did though, I absolutely devoured it in just two days. This is Laurel's real life, which means that her narrative isn't always picture perfect, obviously. But the way she weaves the story of her life and losses together into an ultimately hopeful and wholehearted narrative left me just weeping in the last few chapters of this book. If you share my love for books that make you feel things about being human, put this one on your TBR immediately and bring a pack of tissues. That is What Looks Like Bravery by Laurel Braitman.

Kaytee Cobb 21:43

Sounds like it hit exactly perfect for you. Yes, ma'am. Excellent. All right. Well, if we're doing kind of forced segues, I'm gonna talk about your tears leading to my tears here because I want to talk about *Go As A River* or by Shelley Read. I first heard about this book from Suzy at novel visits when she brought it to Sarah's bookshelves live spring preview episode. I wrote it off at the time as not for me, but it kept showing up on my radar. So I picked it up when a copy stumbled into my hands. And I'm glad I did. By the time I actually sat down to read it. I knew I was gonna love this one. And I was hoping that it would give me some big feels I was looking for some catharsis, I was looking for some access to my emotions that I felt like was missing for a little while in my life where I was only crying about whether my kids had lied to me recently, instead of anything that was personal and heartfelt. So I set it aside for a time that felt right and it hit exactly perfect. This book follows Victoria Nash, who is just a teenager when we meet her in the 1940s, but quickly moves into adulthood based on everything that happens around her. As an older teen, she meets Wilson Moon, a Native American young man from the Four Corners region of the country, which is nearly my backyard in 1940s. Colorado will is not accepted by the townspeople of Iola, where Victoria's family owns the famous Nash peach farm, known throughout the region for their delicious peaches. As a side note here, if you have any option to read this book with access to fresh peaches, or peach cobbler or peach pie, you'll want to take advantage of that. I have never craved a perfect summer peaches so much in my entire life as when I was reading this book, when tragedy strikes, because you knew it was coming, Victoria and Will she flees into the nearby mountains living in a small cabin, hiding from the town's people struggling to survive, and she is forced into adulthood all alone. Throughout the story. We watch Victoria grow into a life she didn't choose, find love and lose it, lose family and find it. Running behind this personal narrative is the story of the Gunnison River being dammed in Colorado, which will submerge her hometown and her family's famous peach farm in the process. It's a strange little trope, this little background action, but I love stories about the ways the landscape changes due to human intervention. And stories of a town sunken underwater are right in that wheelhouse. This book gave me all the fields that I was hoping for with a genuine and heartfelt connection to the characters and their struggles. It is literary It is beautifully written. But the plot never lagged for me in the story. It kept me turning pages and fully invested all the way through. I read it on paper, which That in itself is a little weird for me in less than two days because I couldn't put it down. It's *Go as a River* by Shelley Read.

Mary Heim 24:38

I like the rest of the world right have seen this one everywhere. But maybe you just like you said I was like I don't think that's for me. Or I don't think it's for me right now because I don't shy away from literary fiction, but I was like, Nope, I'm not. But as I'm hearing you describe this, I'm like, I think I need to put this one back on my radar. That sounds really good.

Kaytee Cobb 24:59

Just make sure you have a box of peaches.

Mary Heim 25:01

I was the peach truck is literally coming to Wisconsin like, in 2 weeks. So. So I'll maybe time it with its arrival.

Kaytee Cobb 25:10

Okay. Okay. It would be Yeah. If you have like a little table next to your hammock, like a peach and this book. I mean, just sitting. Yeah, a peach table. That's what you need for this book. Because literally like every page, you're like, really, I think I could eat another peach right now. It's so good.

Mary Heim 25:27

That's exactly what I'm going to do. All right. I've got a plan.

Kaytee Cobb 25:30

Okay, well, we've kind of talked about strong sense of place with some of these books. We've talked about strong characters. And so we're gonna get into our deep dive where we get to be bookish travel agents. And I was thinking about our history with this, Mary. So I went back, Mary and I love a deep dive about traveling and books and family. So on Episode 44, of season four, we talked about family vacation book clubs. I loved that episode. It's one of my favorite ones we've done, especially when we got responses from people about their own family book clubs on vacation, they sent us photos, they asked us for recs it was so great last summer.

Mary Heim 26:07

it was the best, it was so much fun. It was so fun.

Kaytee Cobb 26:13

We also have gone back to school with campus novels in season four, Episode Five. So that was a different kind of travel. But we were all about that as well. So we have done a few trips of this nature. This time, we're packing our bags again. But really, we're packing your bags listener. So Mary, what's the first place that you want to travel and pair a book with?

Mary Heim 26:36

All right, so I feel like and maybe it is just my placement in the country, right. And the way that my family spent all of our summers in the North Woods of Wisconsin, like that was our primary vacation spot. We have a little humble little cabin that my grandpa built like 50 years ago. So the first place I am sending our readers, of course is to the woods. And this was such an easy one for me. In fact, mood reader that I am, I can think back to these are two books that I have read on trips to the north woods in the last couple of years. And I was like done. Okay, so if I am sending our readers to the North Woods, first with *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. So of course, Kaytee, when you dropped that name earlier, I was like, here's a chance for a perfect little callback. I haven't read much Bill Bryson I know, he's prolific. But this one, both this one and the one I'm about to talk about next. Within this little subcategory are two differing spins on traversing the Appalachian Trail. So Bill Bryson is a comedy writer. He's kind of this like, Americana through and through. This one is really fun. It's really funny parts of it are a little bit dated. But if you want to feel like you are smack in the middle of the woods, this one is just like *Pitch Perfect*. And then to kind of flip on to the other side. My next pick and my favorite of hers, *Happiness for Beginners* by Katherine Center is like if you took Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, but you made it into this lovely heartwarming rom com with some emotional heft. I remember reading both of these within this little category at that cabin in the woods. They were such an excellent tone match to being surrounded by wilderness and I'm like, is this what started my mood reading like is that where I became such a

steadfast mood reader? Maybe but I am sending our readers to the woods with these two. I just love them both.

Kaytee Cobb 28:29

All right, I like that a lot. I also decided to start a little close to home. So the first one that I chose is to go to Texas, which of course is the neighboring state to New Mexico. And I picked Bluebird Bluebird by Attica Locke. This is about the Texas Rangers, we have a Black Ranger as our main character. And you are on the Texas Highway is you are in the Texas desert. You are driving all over the state with this detective, whose name is Daryl Matthews. It's an incredible transportive journey into this huge state. And she has more in that series. So if you've already picked up one of those, you can keep going with it. But it's a great way to pre plan for the small, windy roads that you'll be driving on to get across this huge state which always very much confuses me. In Texas, you can drive like three miles on this road than make a left. You're going 600 Miles altogether, but every turn is only three miles away. It's ridiculous. So that had to be my first one.

Mary Heim 29:34

I love that Kaytee, I'm gonna piggyback a little bit. There's really not too much to connect these two places together. However, I liked your comment about a series. The next place I'm sending our readers naturally is Egypt, of course, with Murder at the Mena House by Erica Ruth Neubauer. This is a local author to me. I've talked about this series before I will shout it from the rooftops for my fellow like Deanna Raybourn, Veronica Speedwell, Emily Wild lovers. We've got this plucky heroine, historical fiction murder mystery. This first one first in the series is set in Egypt. And it really immerses you like sucks you right into that sense of place. I've raved about this one before, it's so fun. Her second one, I think, takes place in the English countryside. And then I want to say it's the third one, like on a transatlantic cruise or something like that. So if you are like, let's truly armchair travel all around the world. And also you would like that world to look like 1920, this is a great, this is a great place to start with that. It's Murder at the Mena House, it is so much fun. So under the radar, and I think everybody should be reading it. And chances are good, I'm probably not going to Egypt anytime soon. So this is a great way to do that.

Kaytee Cobb 30:50

Love it, love it. Okay, I am going to take us on another US road trip with How The Word is Passed by Clint Smith, which is like taking a field trip with a college professor, except you're reading it. In a book, he is taking you from Texas, to Georgia to New York City. And every chapter, you're learning a little more about the history of those locations, and how they play into the history of the US overall. And he develops his sense of place so strongly to where you feel like you've gotten off the bus with him and together and you are walking into maybe a rally or onto a former plantation, or into Central Park in New York City. He's an excellent writer. He's also a poet. So he's very careful with his words. And everything he writes like he he's already announced his next book, I pre ordered it the second it showed up on Instagram. I'm so excited about it. So this one, again, field trip with a college professor, what more could you ask for? He will educate you and entertain you the whole way through. It's How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith.

Mary Heim 31:53

I love that case. Would you say that's like a good nonfiction fiction pairing with Lincoln Highway? Or are they two separate beasts?

Kaytee Cobb 32:00

mostly How the Word is Passed is taking place in the southern US and mostly in the Lincoln Highway, you're staying pretty north of what we would probably call the Mason Dixon Line. So you could pair them in that you're kind of road tripping the whole time, but you're not going to be visiting many of the same places.

Mary Heim 32:18

Gotcha. Or if maybe you just want to cover the entirety of the United States. Eastern Seaboard. Yeah, right. Exactly. Oh, well, that one you just put on my list. All right, perfect, Kaytee. Next, of course, I'm going to take us to the beach and listen, I tried to be mindful in what I chose here because truly I think that most of these yearly summer TBRs are chock full of great beachy reads. This is not one that you're gonna have a hard time with. However, two in particular that I think do a really exceptional job. The first one being Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid and frankly, this one wasn't my favorite of hers, but I did enjoy it. What I think she does so well in so many of her books, but this one in particular as it aligns with summer is she really nails that feeling of 1980s Malibu. I existed for one year in the 80s. So I wasn't there to tell you if it's historically accurate however, it is like if you want to be dropped right in Malibu right in that place. This one is perfect. And I will say my second beachy pairing of course is a surprise to no one but I'm going to preface this with this is an author that I avoided for many years and recently within the last two summers have enjoyed her beachy books, that is Ellen Hildebrand and I will say this her books are hit or miss for me I have really enjoyed two or three I have been so annoyed by two or three like she's very divisive, but when I enjoy her I really enjoy her and I'm not a Coastie Of course, I live smack in the middle of Wisconsin but whenever I pick up one of her books, I am like immediately imagining myself riding my basket at bicycle all around Nantucket and I'm window shopping for some Nantucket red shorts for Jeremy it's like a whole thing. She does such a good job developing that sense of place. And you can tell she really takes her Nantucket route seriously. It comes across in her writing for a long time. I was kind of snob I'll call myself I was a little snobby about it. I was like, Oh, these are just some are beachy reads. I don't think this is for me. I have really enjoyed some of the books of hers that I have read. So if you too have been kind of avoiding her for reasons, give it a go, let's not be snobs together. Books are really fun. They're great summer reading for a reason. So if I'm sending you to the beach, but not necessarily just the South, we're going to Malibu. We're going to Nantucket this summer.

Kaytee Cobb 32:29

I'm going to take us even further up the coast on the beach. We're going to go to Maine for my next one. So I have three wrecks for Maine. And it depends on whether you're a romance reader, a Thriller, Horror reader or a classic reader. So if you're a romance reader, you're gonna pick up Happy Place by Emily Henry which is very firmly placed on the coast of Maine. They're making fun of wicked pissah the whole way through the book, like just using it completely wrong. It's hilarious. And very much like it's part of the vernacular, the location, everything, the food, all of it plays into that storyline. If you're a Thriller, Horror reader, of course, you're gonna pickup Stephen King. He lives in Maine, a lot of his

books are placed in Maine, and he will take you to Maine. And he'll also scare the peepee out of you, which is fun. And finally, if you love a classic, a literary classic, you can sink your teeth into you're gonna pick up John Irving who also is a Mainer. And he places a lot of his books, especially like Cider House Rules, some of those older classics, Prayer for Owen Meany take place in Maine, and really bring you to that location and they're, they're all pretty substantial, so they're gonna give you some time to really sink into the story and feel the sense of place for those

Mary Heim 34:42

Okay, Kaytee. So as long as we're up in the eastern seaboard, I am going to take us to New York City with also two very different books in very different categories. The first one, of course, the entirety of the Vanderbeekers novels. We've talked to recently, you and Meredith have talked recently about the merit of middle grade and this is another series that is just New York City feels like a character in these novels. I really really love Vanderbeekers different vibe, of course from the next one I'm about to share, which is City of Girls by Elizabeth Gilbert, which is a saucy coming of age novel set in the 1940s. This is the first book I read postpartum after my daughter was born. So the details are hazy. However, I remember feeling like I'm drinking like a champagne cocktail in 1940s to New York, it is just effervescent. And I feel like I reading this one would make you feel like you're getting dressed up to go out on the town on your vacation. So if you're as long as you're in Maine, just you know, pop on over to Manhattan and those would be my two for sure. For New York City.

Kaytee Cobb 37:01

Excellent. I am going to clump a bunch of international recommendations all together here because we've already gone to Egypt, but one of the closest place that I can travel internationally is Mexico. So if you want to go there or if you're planning to go there, I'll recommend Gods of Jade and Shadow by Silvia Moreno Garcia, excellent sell propulsive rife with Mexican folklore and history and firmly placed in the country of Mexico. If you're going to Sweden, of course, I have to tell you, you're gonna read Beartown by Fredrik Backman. I'm sorry, I'm not sorry. You're gonna read it anyway. And yes, it's about hockey. It doesn't matter. So is Sweden. It's also about hockey. All right. If you're going to Spain, I want you to read Fountains of Silence by Ruta Sepetys, which is 1920s. It's during Franco's kind of dictatorship in the country very much, you're in there. And the audiobook especially brings you into the time and place with radio broadcasts included in the audio narration that make you feel like wait, are these legitimate from the time or did she write these and the narrator just sounds like he's on an old radio, you are there with him. And finally, way down south, we're going to Chile, with Violetta by Isabel Allende. When I brought this one to the show, I did mention you want to look for trigger warnings on this book, if you have some sensitivities, check Storygraph for those. But this book is incredible and covers 100 years of Chilean and a little bit of American history as well. So you're kind of traveling back and forth. But mostly you're in this long, skinny country that spans many latitude from high mountains to Arctic deserts all the way across this country. It's amazing. So Chile, Violetta by Isabel Allende. That's what I've got for my international locations. You got any more for us, Mary?

Mary Heim 38:53

I sure do. Okay, so Kaytee, I will do also a little bit of an international mixed bag first I'm sending you know, if you're like I don't care about the beach, I want to go somewhere else in the summer I'm gonna send you to Scotland. The first one on this list is City of Ghosts by Victoria Schwab. Which is like my

OG spooky season, but honestly, it feels like you are right there surrounded by Scottish ghosts from page one. It's middle grade, but again, it is so well done really good on audio. I like reread this book in the fall because it is so good. And I'm not much of a reader at this point. But anyways, so if you want to feel those fall vibes, those Scottish vibes the next one I'm going to throw in here is Lighthouse Witches, which is beloved in our community that was an indie press list pick from a couple of years ago. And then Kaytee, I'm gonna jump us over to Italy and then back to Ireland with Love and Gelato by Jenna Evans Welch and Love and Luck by Jenna Evans Welch to really super sweet really fun ya rom coms. Honestly, the author the best thing she does with these books is the setting. I felt like I was in the Italian countryside with gelato I was in Ireland with luck. These are really fun. And then I'm going to take us just swing us to the south a little bit to Australia with The Dry by Jane Harper. This book is beloved and honestly don't come for me it was a little forgettable for me. But what did I not forget the sense of place? Holy smokes. Did this feel like the Outback to me? And again, I'm an outlier on that this book is so beloved, I couldn't tell you a lick about what it's about five years later, but I could tell you exactly how transported I felt reading it. You compare this one with The Thorn Birds from the Wayback Machine. What does that from the 70s and basically be just inhabiting the Australian outback this summer.

Kaytee Cobb 40:39

And let's all just go to Australia. First of all, that sounds great.

Mary Heim 40:42

That sounds great. Can we do that?

Kaytee Cobb 40:44

That sounds incredible. I have one more but it's like very left field. So I want to give you another chance to do any more finishing up.

Mary Heim 40:53

Mine is very not left field. So I'll finish up in the south with Big Gay Wedding by Byron Lane and Other Birds by Sarah Addison Allen. I am not Southern, but these two just oozed southern charm to me. Big Gay Wedding tells the story of a southern widow mother who welcomes her son back for the summer only you know he brings along his partner and wants to get married I read it and I was like this is the book that everybody needs to be reading this summer. It is so southern so summery. So fun. Other Birds is like Southern magical realism at its finest telling the story of like fictional island off of the coast of Georgia. There's tiny turquoise birds and an orphaned daughter trying to solve a puzzle. These books are going to take you right into at least the South that I have kind of envisioned in my mind. And I think really perfect summer reading too. And now Kaytee, I am dying to hear where is the super left turn that you are taking us how far

Kaytee Cobb 41:45

left field can you get when we've been all over the world? Yeah, and until you Mary, if you happen to be going to space this summer.

Mary Heim 41:53

Okay, couldn't have guessed that one.

Kaytee Cobb 41:56

Then obviously, you will be picking up Andy Weir's books, like Project Hail Mary or The Martian or one of Roxanna's favorite recs, Chris Hadfield Astronauts Guide to Life on Earth, which, again, at like you're going to a space station, you're living on a space station. You are an astronaut, or you are a middle grade teacher that becomes an astronaut. Maybe voluntarily, maybe not. And he and both of these men are taking you to space and you feel like well, now if it ever happened, I would know exactly what I'm supposed to do up there. I've been prepared by Andy Weir and Chris Hadfield,

Mary Heim 42:33

I love it. Okay, Kaytee, when I tell you that I actually did consider bringing Andy Weir's books, because we've been talking about sense of place, but I was like, No, that's way too out there. Kaytee's gonna be like, what? What's wrong with her? I should have known better I should have known he would have been right on that page with me. Can I finish this off by pulling us very back close to home to where where I am. And I think where you have lots of roots, too. Of course. I started with the woods. We're going to end just anywhere in the Midwest with any J Ryan Stradal. Yeah. Like reading his books, or like knocking back a brandy old fashion and walking out to the lake. I cannot think of anybody who writes the Midwest better than J Ryan Stradal. Now granted, I haven't read the newest book, but I feel confident enough in saying pick up any one of his three and you will be you will be right in my neck of the woods this summer for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 43:26

Yes, that is what I do every summer that I don't get to travel to Minnesota. I go there anyway, when I pick up one of J Ryan's books. I love it. Excellent. All right, let's go ahead and visit the fountain. Mary, what are you wishing for this week?

Mary Heim 43:41

All right, Kaytee. So the last few years, my kiddo has been old enough to really participate and have fun with the library summer reading program. And it has been so much fun to do this from the parental side with her I just have loved it. I feel like a library summer reading program is right up there with Scholastic Book Fair energy. Is it not like these two things live unvarnished in my memory? I know that some libraries do summer reading programs for adults. Alas, mine does not. My fountain wish this week is I just want I just want adult summer library reading programs. I don't even need anything fancy. Just give me a sticker sheet and let me enter my name for prizes. There doesn't have to be actual prizes. You can just lie to me. I can just be entering raffle tickets to nowhere but just give me the excitement of that experience. I just love summer reading energy and I am doing pretty much anything to obtain it. Even if it is just living vicariously through my kid that is my fountain wish forever chasing those vibes that's that's where I'm at

Kaytee Cobb 44:46

raffle tickets to nowhere would be such a great band name. You're right. It really should happen. And that's a great idea. Come on Wisconsin Public Libraries get Mary a raffle ticket to nowhere.

Mary Heim 45:00

Please, that's all I want.

Kaytee Cobb 45:03

fun. Okay, I am going to wish for all y'all that have kids to buy something. Basically, I'm going to wish to encourage any parent out there or any caregiver out there to get a Kindle Fire on Prime Day this year. So we've talked a lot about summer reading for kids and the ways to work it into your summer days. Even as we record today, on like a regular Friday, the Kindle Fire is only \$60. And you can expand the memory with a micro SD card. The Amazon parental controls are easy to enable and manage. So it is not at all hard to make this device this very inexpensive device into a reading and audiobooks only tablet. First, of course, you add the audible and Kindle options since Amazon owns those. You can also add hoopla through the App Store, which is used by a lot of libraries to get access to eBooks and audiobooks. But it's also so easy to sideload apps that are not in the app store. And both Libby and Libro.FM have instructions about how to do that onto a Kindle Fire on their websites. It's a multi step process, but it's explained with screenshots and text. So it's achievable even for you even whoever's talking back to me right now and saying, I can't do it. Yes, you can. I promise you can. Megan will for sure. put links to those instructions in show notes. Adding those library apps especially means that you are not committed to buying all the books and audiobooks for your young reader, which means even at full price, this device pays for itself in about four or five books. But I can almost guarantee that the price will go down on Prime Day by at least a little bit more. And that should be coming right up in mid July. So put it on your wish list now. Mark your calendar, change your households reading life for the better. I promise. Get out there. Get a Kindle Fire. I'm not an Amazon fan girl. But you can make this a tool that will change your kid's reading life for ever. Ping splash

Mary Heim 46:56

Ping splash.

Kaytee Cobb 46:58

That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram and Meredith is at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Mary Heim 47:08

And you can find me at @Maryreadsandsips on Instagram

Kaytee Cobb 47:12

full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and I am sorry, Megan, there were so many in that deep dive and timestamps so you can zoom right to where we talked about them can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Mary Heim 47:25

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

Kaytee Cobb 47:32

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Mary Heim 47:50

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

Kaytee Cobb 47:56

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Mary Heim 47:59

and your book be unputdownable.

Kaytee Cobb 48:01

Happy reading Mary.

Mary Heim 48:02

Happy reading Kaytee