



Season 5, Episode 14: Broken Reading + Between-Book Process

Mon, Oct 31, 2022 • 56:45

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

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

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'm here to tell you that even book podcasters can have broken reading.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I believe a pet is essential to a perfect reading experience. This is episode number 14 of season five, and we are so glad you're here. Your reading's broken, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:58

Yes, yes. And it is in fact, my bookish moment of the week. We will, we will be discussing it.

Kaytee Cobb 01:03

Okay, well, right before we do that, I'm going to let everybody know that for our deep dive today, we are going to talk about our between book process when you close one book and before you open the next one. What does that look like? But first, we're gonna get started the way we always do, which is with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, I am sad to hear about yours. Tell us about your broken reading.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:26

Yes. So as we sit here today, when as we're recording today, it's October 21. It's the 21st day of the month, Kaytee. I have read a grand total of three books this month from start to finish, which is not a bad number for anybody to read three books in a month, that's not a problem. The problem is, I need to read three books a week to keep up with the show. So we are seriously dipping into the archives here. And so that is unsettling to me. I've had a I've had some stuff going on with me physically, nothing dangerous, you know, but just stuff that especially this week has really just put me in a place where I

couldn't concentrate on reading just I wasn't in a physical space where I could do that. And before that, I think the thing that's making me say that my reading is broken, because it's one thing to be like, I didn't feel good this week, I couldn't read. That's, you know, that happens all the time. But the week before this happened, I was already feeling some of this. And here's the thing, here's the thing that sends a shiver down my spine. Normally, when I get a little slumpy, or feel like my reading is broken, there's always like the desire to read, even if I can't find the right thing to read. Right. But what's been happening is, I haven't even felt like I wanted to read.

Kaytee Cobb 02:49

Interesting

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:50

At all. Like, I've watched shows, I'm you know, we've watched some movies that we never, you know, but I just have felt a very strange lack of desire to pick up a book. And I know that that's not going to last forever, right? Because we talk a lot about seasons of reading, and I trust my reading enough to know that that's not going to last forever. But it is a kind of reading brokenness that I haven't experienced very much. And so I'm wondering Kaytee, have you ever, like do you ever feel that way? Like, I just don't feel like picking up a book. I could. I have some time, but I just don't feel like it.

Kaytee Cobb 03:32

I think it happens to me, but usually I am able to point back at something that I'm like, Oh, well, it turns out I was about to start my period or I was on the verge of getting sick and so that that feeling now makes sense in retrospect. I was this morning though listening to Laura Tremain, her secret stuff episode with her reading recap for I guess it was October even though it's the 21st, and she talked about feeling this entire year like she's in kind of a reading malaise. And I feel like that's kind of what you're talking about here. It's like an ennui where you're like, I just want to flop around on the couch and not look at even a book. And I do I sometimes identify with that feeling. It passes pretty quickly for me, though. So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:18

Yes, well, I did. I was happy about the fact that today, I did have a pocket of time that I wasn't expecting to have in my day. And I was like, You know what, I was listening to a podcast and there was a specific book that I was interested in. I picked it up and I really made some great progress in it. So I may be kind of at the beginning of that happening. And again, this is the reading life. Yeah, this is you know, there are times in my life before reading was something that I that I had to do, where I definitely would go through periods of time where I you know, again, I've had years where I've read 20 to 25 books in the entire year. And again, that's a good amount of reading. That's more reading than the average American does. But that's a really low amount for what I read now. Right. So, of course, it just ebbs and flows. This is this is being a lifelong reader. And I really appreciate the fact that, you know, Roxanna, my, my, my reading partner, is very part of the reason that I think it's helpful to have a reading partner. And by that I mean, someone with whom you share all of your even if we're not reading the same book, which you're doing that too, we are sharing everything that we're reading with each other. And so part of the reason that I think that's so helpful is that we can give each other an objective, look at each other's reading life. And so she can say to me, "You know what, this, this and this, and this is happening

in your life right now. It's exactly why you have no bandwidth, even though you feel like you should have bandwidth. But it seems like it's seeping, your energy has been seeping out." And this is what's going on, it's happened before, it's not going to be like this always. Sometimes you need an outside person to say what you know to be true anyway. And so that's just another reason why having bookish community, I think, is really helpful. But anyway, so you know, listeners, have you ever felt not only that your reading is broken, but that you, you actually may have for a period of time lost your desire to read in your free time, I'd really like to know that. So anyway, we're doing bookish therapy. I didn't mean to take so long on this, but it really is something that I think for a lot of us. When we have these ebbs and flows, it can be a little panicky.

Kaytee Cobb 06:30

Oh, yeah, for sure. I definitely feel that too. Well, your bookish therapy leads to my bookish therapy dogs. So this week, my bookish moment is about my big dumb dogs. Fezzik and his elderly pal Einstein. We got Fezzik for people that haven't been around for forever during that first pandemic summer in June of 2020. And he first he just terrorized us all the time. And I just couldn't even like look away because he would be eating something and needing a \$3,000 bill. And now he's just a giant, lovable idiot. This dog is fully living into his name, I'm sure if he could talk, he would rattle off an "Anybody want a peanut?" any day now. He's just, he fully embodies Fezzik. But when I'm reading, both dogs, no matter how rambunctious they've been or how zoomy they've gotten, both dogs just want to be close to me. So they will come and lay right next to me. Fezzik will put his entire huge head which I'm sure weighs as much as Blue Schwartz the puppy, yes, right? Like his head weighs probably more than Blue. He will just plop that thing in my lap and let me like touch his ears and play with his ears. And it is, it's bookish therapy. It is a therapy dogs situation, where both of the and then if I get up and move to a different reading spot, they will follow me from one room to the other and either let me stick my feet under them if they're cold, or let me have my hands on them. Because they're not lap dogs... together they weighed 150 pounds, like they're very large dogs. But going away for a week, and having a few days with no pets and then a few days at my mom's house where she has a pretty shy dog that doesn't want to be right next to me and touching me and around people all the time, made me come home and just realize how much I love that companionship. And that kindness and acceptance that I get from these two big like oafs that live in my house with me. So my my puppies, my old puppies are my bookish moment of the week this week, because they bring that slow, soft quietness to my reading life.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:34

Yeah, absolutely. I completely get what you're saying. Because there is something very satisfying about reading with a pet. Whether your pet is a dog or a cat whenever your pet is. There's something nice about the fact that sometimes, you know, Blue will be laying on me and I'll be like, well, I guess I can't get up yet. And there's something nice about feeling like well, maybe I'll just read for another few minutes. I do have to say one of just talking a little bit about puppyhood, Blue is just turning six months old. He's just about to turn six months old. So he's fully in the kind of early teenage years of his puppyhood. And he is a fantastic dog. He's got a lot of energy. He's got a lot of love. And I'm so glad that we brought him into our family. This last week as I've been largely for several days, I was having an issue with my ovary, and I don't know if anyone's ever had an issue with you, you know that it can be pretty intense pain. So I was laying down with heating pads and taking medication and everything for a

couple of days, which is very out of the ordinary for me. During this period of time, Blue never left my side. Yeah, like he, he was right with me. He would lay right up on my belly in a way that would actually make me feel better. You know what I mean? Kind of like that warmth was really helpful and made me feel like I wasn't alone. And he cared about what happened. It's just like that. There's no question that having... cats can do a lot of cats do a lot of this too. But for me my, you know, this has been my experience with Cooper and now with Blue is that you really do feel like you have a partner, whether you're recovering from something or you're reading, and it's, you know, it's really, really nice. And at some point, he's not going to be a teenager anymore. He's in that stage right now, where, when things are normal, he's running around and looking for things to eat. And, you know, so it's at some point, he's not going to be six months old.

Kaytee Cobb 10:29

So true. So true. Time marches on, as it does to us all. Let's talk about some current reads. Let's dip into that coffer that you have that you're slowly doling out for us here. Meredith, what have you been reading lately?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:43

Yeah, well, yes. And actually, I've I have something that I've never done before. I have three books that I'm bringing today, all of which come out tomorrow, November 1. I know. And most importantly, to me, none of these books are anywhere that I've heard anyone talking about. So these are not the juicy big new releases that are coming out. This is, these are three that I found via NetGalley and I know you've heard me talk a lot about NetGalley. These were three that I really, really liked. The first one I want to talk about, it's called, bear with me, It's called Holmes Coming. Okay, Holmes like Sherlock Holmes. Okay, let's just let's try to put a pin in the title. We'll get back to that. So Holmes Coming by Kenneth Johnson. Here's our setup. Our lead character is Dr. Amy Winslow. Notice the W. She's checking on a former patient, Mrs. Hudson at her Victorian house, which is in the isolated Marin County Forest. While there, Dr. Amy finds the need to go downstairs in her cellar, where she finds a secret cobweb covered 1899 electro chemical laboratory, which contains a Jules Verne esque steampunk sarcophagus, out of which leaps, a wild eyed half mummified, Cryptkeeper like man, who suddenly injects himself with something before falling at Dr. Amy's feet, and Amy sets about to try to revive this thing that has collapsed in front of her. She's successful but barely. And he this mummified person claims to be a real life Victorian detective named Holmes, who allowed Conan Doyle to write stories based on his cases. But he became uninspired by 1890s crime. So Holmes devised this method to hibernate for a century to investigate mysteries that happen in the future. Now, Amy, of course, assumes that he's a lunatic. Holmes says that his Scotland Yard identity papers which he very carefully tucked into the sarcophagus for just this reason, have been stolen while he was asleep. So it takes her a while to realize, it takes us a while to realize that in fact, he's telling the truth. Well, he has a, he has a very long shower, and a very much needed shave, and the handsome Holmes is still the same eccentric, arrogant, English, non feminist genius. But now he's living more than 100 years after he was living before, so he's out of sync. But he's still making deductions. But what's hilarious is that these deductions are sometimes because he's 100 years out of sync laughably or dangerously wrong. That's one of my favorite parts of this book. So Holmes and Amy, who is of course, his new Watson, find themselves attracted to each other, while also needing to solve a mystery that involves a very strange tiger attack in the middle of downtown San Francisco, and an evil descendent of Holmes's old adversary, Moriarty. Okay. That's the setup. It is

fantastic. It's Holmes come to the future and it's absolutely wonderful. I do have to say, I despise the title. It's so dumb. I hate it on several levels. But I really love the premise and I grabbed it when I saw it on NetGalley. It's got plenty of plot to keep things moving. We're going through three different kinds of plot lines, and they all are interesting, but of course, the real star of the show is our Sherlock. This is a wonderful version of my favorite detective full of all of this trademark is servic humor and brilliant deductions. And the lead character Amy is a really lovely spunky foil to Mr. Holmes. She delights in showing him around 21st century America, but also around the new, sort of showing him the new cultural mores like that a woman can be a doctor, an astronaut, a vice president. For his part, Holmes initially has a hard time with these things. But then he adapts quickly and well to these new gender roles and to all things technological, which delight him. And that's another thing that I love about this book is Holmes finding out like about iPhones and internet and how he would use all of these things. It's really excellent. I was also delighted by the notion of Sherlock Holmes, finding himself in San Francisco. We see him in London, and of course in New York City in my favorite television adaptation Elementary, but he really finds his feet in San Francisco. It fits his personality so well, and I was so happy to spend some time with him in that eccentric, beautiful, foggy city that I know so well. I will say that there's no question that anyone who loves Holmes will enjoy the story. There is so much canon used to great effect here. But for that reason, if you have never dipped into Holmes, I fear 70% of the enjoyment will be lost. So I want to be sure I issue that warning. But if you love all things Holmes, you are going to want to check out this unfortunately titled, but delightful Holmes Coming by Kenneth Johnson.

Kaytee Cobb 16:09

Well, that is not what I was expecting. But it does sound like there's quite a bit of humor and like, opportunities for a comedy of errors situation like you talked about with him adapting to technology, so I can see the light and fun in that mystery adjacent.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:27

Yes, it was very fun. And there is a mystery that they're solving, which is very, which is also very interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 16:32

Okay, perfect. I love it. I'm glad that he showers up and he turns into a handsome looking man again, because I was picturing like a zombie and that I was not okay with that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:42

Right. Yes, he's very handsome.

Kaytee Cobb 16:44

Perfect. The first one I want to talk about this week is Killers of a Certain Age by Deanna Raybourn. So I mentioned this one briefly in our deep dive about older protagonists, and then read it shortly afterwards. So I'm excited to come back around and tell everybody about it. Our main character is Billie, but she has a cohort of friends named Mary Alice, Helen, and Natalie. They are four assassins that work for a company known as The Museum. And we meet them very first page during their retirement party cruise onboard a yacht. They're all about 65 years old, so of a certain age, but certainly not what I

would consider elderly at this point. And neither do they. They are being forced out because it's time to retire. On that same cruise, they realize that someone has been sent to kill them, to tie up loose ends, perhaps. Maybe the ladies know too much. Well, we'll soon find out, but not before they kill the would be assassin and sink the ship like you do. They then proceed to figure out where this assassin came from, and dismantle the infrastructure behind the company that they worked for together for 40 years. Meanwhile, we get alternating chapters where we see Billie and the other ladies 40 years back as they join The Museum as well as pivotal kills throughout their careers. The end is an action movie sequence that leaves the reader flipping pages like mad and occasionally rolling their eyes. Overall, I really liked this one, but I wanted something a little different. I think 75 and 80 year old assassins would have been far more interesting. These ladies are still completely in shape, totally spry. Occasionally, they complain about aches and pains. But so do I and I'm 38. And they can also kill people with their bare hands, which obviously I have never done and don't intend to do. It doesn't seem like it's part of the plot to make them of a certain age except to be able to say, look, "I made a book with older ladies as protagonists, and they're killers. Oh my gosh, isn't that fun?" Like it didn't, it didn't serve a greater purpose in this book. The end, as I mentioned, felt like spaghetti thrown against the wall. And there's so much happening all at once. It was overdone on every level. All that being said, I do think that Deanna Raybourn is a good writer, and her stories have great characters that are really fun to read. As much as I would have changed a few things about this book, I also devoured it in very short order, and really relished the experience overall. So I gave it like 3.75-4 stars, because it was an enjoyable experience, but it wasn't what I was hoping for. So this was Killers of a Certain Age by Deanna Raybourn.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:17

Yeah, Kaytee, I got that book and I kept having this feeling that it felt like someone said to Deanna Raybourn, "You know what's hot? Old ladies. Old, old people as protagonist, and they're somehow involved with crime," either that, you know, they solve them, they they're committing whatever, and it just felt forced to me. But I agree, Deanna Raubourn is is an excellent writer and I do like a lot of her work. And so I kind of just shelved it and said, "You know what Future Meredith? Maybe when you are closer to 65, you will run across this book and there will be enough time that's passed since this kind of big publishing rush to you know, for the older protagonists", but I agree to that 65 is the new 55 and that 75 would have been a better, would have been a better age to. Also a lot of people are not retiring at 65. So...

Kaytee Cobb 20:12

No, because then you have to live like 30 years, right after that, like that's a long time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:17

Right. Um, but everything that you said rings really true to me about it.

Kaytee Cobb 20:21

Excellent. What's your second book?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:24

Okay, my second book, another book that comes out tomorrow November 1 is called Dead and Gondola by Ann Claire. Now you're going to be able to tell by this title that we are firmly in the cozy

camp here. So again, if you don't like cozies if you're not in the mood for a cozy just hit that fast forward button for a little bit because you got to be in the mood for it. Right? Let me tell you what we have going on here. Ellie Christie, our lead character has like all good leads in a cozy mystery, recently returned to her tiny Colorado hometown to run her family's historic bookshop with her older sister Meg, and their beloved cat, Agatha... Christie. The Book Chalet is the name of their of their bookshop, and it is perched in a Swiss style hamlet accessible by ski gondola and a twisty mountain road. Even though it's very hard to get to, The Book Chalet has become a famous bookish destination known for its incredible maze of shelves and a relaxing reading lounge to die for. But as we expect, trouble blows in with a wintry snowstorm. A man is found dead on said gondola and a rockslide throws the town into lockdown. No one in, no one out. The victim, we find out was a mysterious stranger and he makes himself even more strange by leaving behind a first edition Agatha Christie novel, which is a very rare find. The police get involved, their friends are suspect and so of course the Christie sisters have to save the day. So again, we have a delightful cozy mystery here that is not going to break any molds, for sure. But I really enjoyed this one. I didn't set out to read it cozy the day that I picked it up. But I got sucked into it after just a couple of chapters, mostly because I was in the mood for the setting. And that's I think a really important thing to know when I read and love cozy mysteries. It's mostly because I want to just kind of be in that town for a little bit. It's not because the mystery that we're solving is so epically brilliant, right? And that was definitely the case here. It has all those cozy ingredients. We've got the bookstore, we've got the sweet, very loving family, we've got the bookstore cat, we have all the fun side characters, and they are fun in this book, and we get to know them and then eventually many of them are suspects. But this one again is well written. It's funny, it's got great dialogue, and it had an ending that actually surprised me, and an ending that you don't normally see in cozy mysteries like this. The plot was fun and not overly silly and there are lots and lots of baked goods and warm beverages. We are in The Book Chalet after all. So again, not groundbreaking literature, but I loved my time in the last word Colorado with the Christie family. And for many, this will be a perfect November or December read because it's cozy, sweet, interesting. Not demanding too much from you when all you need is a break from your family and the tasks of the season. If you absolutely love the cozy mysteries by Ellery Adams then you are going to love this book, which I'm sure will be the first in the series. This is Dead and Gondola by Ann Claire, and it's out tomorrow.

Kaytee Cobb 23:40

And that sounds so fun. And I love a ski village setting. I think I might need that one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:47

Yeah, it's really fun. It's a really good example of the genre.

Kaytee Cobb 23:51

Okay, perfect. And I was really hoping you would say baked goods and tasty drinks.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:56

And there's I'm glad but there's book clubs, lots of book club talk. There's book clubs that dress up like the books, you know, to celebrate the books that they're reading. It's fun. It's a really fun book.

Kaytee Cobb 24:06

Okay, my second one this week, I'm going way back in the time machine. So I'm going to talk about *Black No More* by George Schuyler, which is a book that Bunmi brought to one of our patron only Trope Thursday episodes. Yeah, it was first published in 1931. And it's only 208 pages. So very long ago and very short. It's definitely a classic and you might call it sci fi, or you might call it speculative fiction, or you might call it satire. *Black No More* is the story of Max Disher who sells insurance. Being Black affects everything about his daily life, especially his social interactions, like the one he has with a lovely young white woman at the club when she refuses to dance with him. When the scientific and cosmetic transformation company "Black No More" offers to turn the skin of Black Americans white for a nominal fee for the rest of their lives, he opts in. With that change, he decides to change his name as well and he becomes Matthew Fisher, a white man. Matt is used to gaming the system, he was an insurance salesman. So he dreams up a new scam. He joins the Knights of Nordica, a thinly veiled version of the KKK. A, a terrible white supremacist group. Turns out Little Miss hoity toity from the club is also the venerated daughter of one of the pre eminent Knights of Nordica. As things devolve into chaos, because white people can't tell who to exclude, genetic ancestry testing starts to take center stage. And then of course, all kinds of dark deeds from the past have all these people come into the light. Add to that fact that if someone has a baby in a marriage between a newly white person and a previously white person, the baby is born looking like it has mixed ancestry. So in delivery rooms, families are exploding. It's a mess, right? Marriages, families and businesses are all thrown into chaos. This book tackles all of it, much of it in a really, really unflattering light. The story twists and turns in a way that you don't know what's upside down and what's right side up. As you read. I had to go look up the author, because as I've mentioned before, satire sometimes gets beyond me as a reader, like, I'll sit there and be like, "Why would you say that?" Because I take my literary reading very literally, and I can't wrap my head around it. The author is Black. But the way that he portrays some of these situations, and especially the ending had me questioning whether this was written by a horribly racist white man. It's that unsettling. If you look at the audio book cover, Meredith, I would like you to pull it up right now. It was released in 2018. This looks like a millionaire Playboy romance novel, where this man is like taking New York by storm shirtless. It is very suggestive, and not at all what you will find inside. Do it. Go find the audiobook cover linked in the show notes. I already sent it to Megan for her to judge as well. This short book is a classic satirical novel that Bunmi was assigned to read in school, but I had never heard of it before. It can easily be read in a single day has so much to unpack inside, and to discuss with others so i i definitely recommend it for a book club situation. This was *Black No More* by George Schuyler.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:27

Yeah, when I heard Bunmi talk about that on Trope Thursday, I was like, no, that sounds really, really interesting. I really, for me, satire is a really great way to take in these kinds of important cultural issues. Like for some reason it gives me I guess, it's because I'm not feeling sometimes I feel like a lot of books that that like tackle these issues are...

Kaytee Cobb 27:51

like too heavy,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:52

too heavy. It's too heavy handed. Right? I feel like I'm being spoon fed. Whereas with satire, it hits me differently. So I bought it. I bought the you know, the paperback and so the cover is the the beautiful, I think about the Penguin cover. So it's a really appropriate cover. But I do remember looking at the audio book and thinking, What the heck are they thinking but very interesting. I'm looking forward looking forward to picking this one up.

Kaytee Cobb 28:17

Yeah, there's so much to unpack and discuss in this one. I would love if anybody reads it. Like send me live messages because I would love to hear your thoughts about it as you get into it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:26

This would be a great book club book or larger buddy read, you know, to be able to talk through a lot of this stuff. I think that would be really interesting. Okay. All right. My third book is called Meredith, Alone by Claire Alexander. And this is funny. This again, it's coming out tomorrow. So it's brand new, several people DMed me saying "You've heard about this book, right?" It's called Meredith, Alone. And so kind of is a lark. I downloaded it through NetGalley because I really had no idea what it was about. And I was like, oh, you know what, just so I can tell these people that I gave it a try. But I ended up really, really loving it. Here's the setup. When we meet our lead character, Meredith Maggs, just such a great name, she's not left her home for over three years. But she's not to be pitied. She's getting along just fine. She has a full time job. She works remotely. She has her cat Fred, her best friend Sadie visits her with her two kids regularly. She has her online support group where she's made some really real friendships. She does jigsaw puzzles obsessively, and she cooks a lot. She reads and rereads books and her beloved Emily Dickinson poems. So she's not sitting around being sad or scared or panicked. She just can't leave her house. She doesn't. She's very scared to leave her house. She's also haunted by a super unstable childhood and a traumatic event that sent her into the spiral that finds her not leaving her home for more than three years. But thankfully for us, and for Meredith, something is about to change. Two new friends burst into her life and onto her doorstep, and then her long estranged sister gets in touch with her. Suddenly, Meredith's carefully curated life at home is no longer giving her that space to hide. The world is at her door and Meredith has some decisions to make. So, as I started reading this book, which I read in just a plane ride and a half as I was going to Memphis, I realized that I sort of felt like this, this book was an alternate version of what my life could easily have turned into, which is weird, because obviously, the name thing is a weird coincidence to me. I was completely smitten by Meredith Maggs from the very beginning, because she is straddling a line that I know so well. Having this deeply rooted panic, and also being deeply self aware. Imagine she was full of love and care for the people in her life, these people were just virtual. She couldn't go to them. I would definitely call this a swing up book. And for that reason, I found it very satisfying. We meet Meredith as she's had over 1400 days locked in her house by choice, and we go with her on this journey of healing. There's definitely a lot of sweet vibes of say, an AJ Fikry or an Arthur Truluv, those sweet books that also touch on deep emotional trauma. There's no curmudgeon here, but if you like A Man Called Ove, I think there'd be a lot that you would love in this book too. I don't want to sugarcoat it, though, it's really important that you know that there is a lot of trauma here. I won't go into a ton of detail, because that would ruin a lot of the book. But do check on these triggers. There are several of the biggies, including sexual assault. What I do want to say though, is that if you have struggled with any sort of mental

health issue, including anxiety, depression, or agoraphobia, you're going to find a very soft place to land here. At least I did. I found myself having moments where I realized that if, if I had had different parents, who weren't as compassionate with me about my struggle with anxiety, when I was a child, my life would have looked really, really different and probably a lot like what we experienced with Meredith in this book, but I was completely enraptured by her story and rooting for her from start to finish. It had a satisfying ending, and I'm so glad that I dipped into this one. So thank you to all the people who made sure that I read Meredith, Alone by Claire Alexander.

Kaytee Cobb 32:32

That sounds really good. It definitely sounds like one I need to pick up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:37

Yes, it was really good. I think you would like it, Kaytee, it's very good.

Kaytee Cobb 32:40

I don't want to spoil anything, but I have to know if this is a big feelings book like some of the other ones that you mentioned. Like were you sobbing at the end?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:49

No, no, I wasn't sobbing at the end. But I definitely was, I definitely was feeling at the end. So it may be that you that me feeling something it would be you crying about it.

Kaytee Cobb 33:01

crying, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:03

It definitely I'll tell you what it's not. It's not a book that is aiming to make you cry. Right? It's not a book that is that is doing all it can to build up to that big moment. And for me, that makes it successful, because I just like I don't want my social justice, heavy handed, I don't want my emotional poignancy to be manipulating me. So I felt like this was a book that just struck a great line between very realistically portraying a really difficult set of mental health struggles with also a story that makes you want good things for this person. And also, I really like a swing up book. I like it when we start in one place and we end in a much better place. And that's what we get here.

Kaytee Cobb 33:46

Nice. Okay, that sounds great. Okay, my third one is also fantastic. I love this book. It's called Breathe and Count Back From Ten by Natalia Sylvester. This was a five star read for me on every level. I adored it from beginning to end. Veronica is our main character. She goes by Vero with her friends. She's Peruvian, but was moved to Florida in the US when she was very small because she has hip dysplasia and has needed surgery after surgery to correct her gait and manage her disability. She's 17 now, and the only place she feels truly at home like she can move her body the way she wants it to move is in the pool, without gravity pushing down against her joints. She swims every day for physical therapy and rehabilitation. Her hometown in Florida is not so far from the big Walt Disney enterprise, and it is home to Mermaid Cove, a kitschy underwater attraction where in quotes "professional

mermaids" swim in giant tanks, sneaking breaths through tubes that release bubbles into the water. They have an opening on their team and Vero wants to audition, but her parents want her to focus on school and healing. They're constantly watching her gait to see if she's in pain, especially pain that she's not being honest with them about. And she knows they'll never sign the waiver for her to audition or work there. And they certainly don't want her practicing her routine with Alex, the irresistible son of the new landlord of their apartment complex. The plot comes to a head when Vero has a doctor's appointment that reveals another surgery on the horizon, one that her parents knew about and didn't tell her about. She decides to take control of her own life as she nears adulthood, and take the chance to go after her dreams. This book, gah I loved it on every level. Vero's relationship with her sister is perfectly portrayed. They're absolutely each other's biggest heroes and most difficult villains at the same time, just like real sisters, right where you're like, "I love you and I reserve the right to endlessly hate you if I feel like." Alex is an engaging and interesting character rather than just a cute boy that is crushable. Her parents as immigrants that brought their daughters here for a chance at a better life are nuanced and fully developed. Natalia Sylvester has written a number of books, one of which I brought to the show a few years back called Everyone Knows You Go Home. She has been on Instagram and in the authors note of this book talking about her own personal experience with hip dysplasia, and disability, and how that informed the writing of the story. And the experiences that Vero goes through. The writing is poignant, and honest and witty, and the story feels completely original. Like I had never read anything like this before. This book came out in May of this year and has absolutely earned a spot on my forever shelves. The story is just that compelling and wonderful five mermaid starfishes from me, this was Breathe and Count Back From Ten by Natalia Sylvester.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:49

Oh, that sounds really good. And now I really really want to know if she is able to swim with those mermaids.

Kaytee Cobb 36:55

Right? That's the, That's the question. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:59

That sounds great.

Kaytee Cobb 37:00

It was so good. It was so good. Okay, those were our six current reads. And now we're going to get into this deep dive, which is about our between book processes. Adrienne Karns emailed us back in March to ask us she said something I'd love to hear you discuss and give advice about is your between book process. I often finish a book and start another right away. It's a mistake, though, because I'm not always ready for that. Sometimes I want to linger with the characters. But I feel like I'm in such a hurry to start the next. I know I'm sacrificing a meaningful transition with this sense of hurry. But I don't know what to do. I'd love to create an end of book ritual and a start of book ritual. Do you have any tips? I'm curious what you do after you finish a book? And before you start another? Which is an interesting question.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:42

It's a very, very good question. And it brings up a lot of different issues. Again, when we're thinking about the reading life, and there, there's no question for me, I really resonated with what she was saying that sometimes, sometimes when my reading is going really well, which is most of the time, I am kind of enjoying the book and reading but thinking kind of about what's going to be the next book that I'm picking up. Or maybe I hear about a book and I'm like, "Oh, I can't wait to jump into that." Sometimes I do it really quickly. For me, probably by far the most important ritual is that, and I one that I think that everyone every, you know, every really committed reader should have in some way is to finish the book properly. So we've talked a lot about starting a book properly, right, giving it the time and attention to get into it. Don't just start it when you only have five minutes to finish a book properly. I really need to Well, I mean, for the show, I do this, but honestly, I did this before we did the podcast, I need to figure out what's my rating for this book, I need to figure out what did I like about it? What did I not like about it? I need to figure out, you know, what are the kind of comps because I've always liked to be able to recommend books to my friends. So I want to right now. Well, it's very fresh in my mind, I take a picture of the book. And I send that to myself in an email. And I use a voice memo, I use Voice Memo functionality to just talk into my phone and say, these are generally my thoughts about this book. While it's super fresh, I literally don't let myself do anything else until I do this. So again, my rating, my general thoughts about the book, any comps that immediately come to mind, you know, any thoughts that I have in general that I want to capture. And again, I did this before we were doing the show, but for me, it gives me all the information that I'm going to need and then I send that email to myself. So then I only enter things into my book journal once a month. But those emails sit there and they they give me all the information that I'm going to need to enter into my book journal. And so that way I capture it, and I pulled together my thoughts before moving on, and I think that ritual helps me to kind of close out the book instead of just putting it down and immediately going on to another one.

Kaytee Cobb 40:03

That makes perfect sense. And I love getting to hear about what you do, of course, and what any other reader does to kind of put a book on the shelf in their brain to put it away for now, right? So I paid attention this week, especially because I was like, I don't know, what do I do next. Like, hypothetically, I do something, right? And even whether I'm paying attention or not, I know that this is always true that when I finish a book, I always, this is gonna sound weird. Now I'm going to sound like a woowoo, clearing my chakras situation here, I always stare out a window when I'm done. And, and what's happening is mentally that same process that you're talking about, but I have to not engage with anyone else, when that book is finished. So I might be in the car, and I've just finished an audiobook. I might be, especially as a passenger, I'm just staring out the window. Nobody's talking to me. I might be sitting in my reading chair, and actually closing a paper book, whatever. But I have to have some kind of empty space in front of me. So I can stare out a window, because I'm doing that same thing I'm mentally cataloguing, you know, this rating that I'm feeling right now. Is that just a gut feeling? Or is it you know, character, atmosphere, writing, all the things that go into the CAWPILE system that you told us about a few weeks ago, I have not fully adopted it yet. But that is what I'm thinking about, as I'm staring out my window, right. So that window stare takes anywhere from a minute to 15 minutes, depending on the book. And depending on what else is happening around me. I then pop over to Goodreads to mark it as finished and write up a very short review, which used to be at least a paragraph long. But now I save those thoughts for the show. So I will not publicly put a paragraph

somewhere. Because I don't want to like spoil myself. And I also move it over on my phone from a current read to just finished. This is very satisfying to me, even though it's just copy and paste. But I love seeing it happen in that simple text list that I keep of my reads for the year. And all all of that has to happen before I even think about what's next on my TBR.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:15

Okay, that's exactly what you're doing, you're just you're giving yourself a moment to lock in that feeling. I find too that the more of book has affected me, the more time it takes for me to pick up something new. And so sometimes we call that slumping. Sometimes we call that a book hangover. And that that's a very real thing for me, if I have, you know, a Ten Thousand Doors of January, you know, In This House of Brede, right afterwards, a book that I feel like is really become a part of me, I It's like I have to give it its moment, I have to give it a little bit of time. It's like I feel like I can't just jump into something else immediately. And I do then though, feel like I have to be very aware of that middle space. Because that can turn into a longer book slump, because momentum is also at play here. And so for me, I feel like I can I can give myself a little bit of time, but I can't give myself too much time. I need to say okay, that book was great. Now what can I choose? That is different enough that it's not going to be competing with that book in my... for a place in my heart, but it's going to get me back in my rhythm again. So, and for me that involves usually doing a book flight because again, I'm a mood reader. And I don't always know exactly what the perfect book is going to be. So Kaytee, do you think that a planned reader is going to have less of a problem moving between books than a mood reader? Like do you think that's a part of what's at play?

Kaytee Cobb 43:50

Well, I do... I do not have a hard time picking up my next book. But I do also like to leave that space that you're talking about. And usually what goes into that space is a podcast. So today again, I was listening to Laura Tremaine talk about her recent reads with her editor who is Colleen. She's somebody that's important to Laura's team. I think she's her editor, her business manager, and they were talking together about their recent reads. And they talked about how Laura when she finishes a book, she will dip into something that she finds not that interesting, but she does it on purpose to kind of keep her reading mojo, keep her momentum, keep her routine going, but not get sucked into something else because she knows there's other books on her TBR that she does want to read instead. So she'll just dip in, you know, maybe to a short nonfiction or something that's not going to keep her awake. But that kind of gets her ready for the next book, which I thought was really interesting. So when I'm actually ready to move on, which again, could be 15 minutes later or it could be a day and a half depending on if it was The Winners by Fredrik Backman or Witch, Please by Ann Aguirre. So then I look at the last few books I finished and what I'm reading right then because as you all know, I always have a Kindle book, a paper book and an audio book going. So it's about filling the next slot for any number of those things. And then I do that to keep from getting into a genre, like we talked about a few weeks back, I start with my planned reads for the month. So maybe I've pulled a stack of 10 of books that are like priority TBR, that I really want to get to see if anything jumps out at me. Or I might go stand in front of my shelves, and see if there's anything there that, for whatever reason, seems different enough. From everything else I've been reading, for me to pick that as my next read. And then I'm not I'm not good about a between book starting process, except for what you've mentioned before, which is that I will never start a book, if I only have five minutes to read it for those first few pages. That's not, that's not going to get

you into the story, that's not going to do it justice. And that's true for Kindle, audio and paper for me, I will not start an audiobook with five minute chunk, I will not start a paper book with only one chapter and I will not start a Kindle book if I'm going to fall asleep in three minutes. I have to give it a little bit of time to get settled in my head.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:08

Right? I mean, yes, I completely agree. In fact, I usually save for an audio book, I will give myself like my full workout, which is usually 45 minutes to an hour. So that and I feel like that gives me a really, really good entry into the book. And so I've started kind of saying, Well, if that's how much time you need for an audio book, maybe you should do that same thing for a print book. But for print or Kindle, it's usually more like 15 to 30 minutes is usually about what I will say, Okay, can I devote that much time, then I can kind of get into this a little bit and see how I'm feeling about it?

Kaytee Cobb 46:43

Yeah, that's kind of my threshold that I wrote down to about 30 pages or an hour of audio to get into the story.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:51

Well, good. Well, hopefully that is helpful. I think, really what this comes down to is reader know thyself, like everything, you need to figure each reader needs to figure out, okay, what is the, what is the problem that I'm trying to solve, because maybe it's not a problem to finish a book and go right into the next one, maybe it's not a problem to finish a book and need several days before you start one. So identifying what it is that you're trying to solve first, I think is really important. And then from there, you can kind of work backwards to say, okay, what are some things that have worked for me in the past? Or some new strategies that I can, that I can try? Because we all have our little tricks, and, you know, things that work for us in different situations. But sometimes you have to try several different things to find that for you.

Kaytee Cobb 47:38

Yeah, definitely. I, I am sure there is a reader out there, and I would love to meet her that, you know, does some kind of multimedia experience at the end of their books and creates like a Pinterest mood board, and does like a Spotify playlist, and all the things that we've talked about, like cast the movie of what do these characters look like? And I think that's another great between book process, but it's not going to work for every reader, right? So we gave you two different people. And there are a million other people that have a different between book process and and you do what works for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:14

Right. And again, I think this would be a great thread for us to start on Instagram or in the bookish friends group. What is your between book or end of book, start of book ritual? How do you handle that? And I think if we crowd kind of crowdfund all of all of these good ideas, we'll be able to, to have a lot of strategies that people can use.

Kaytee Cobb 48:35

Definitely. Okay, so that was a great deep dive. And now we get to go to one of our favorite places we get to visit the fountain, and make some wishes. Meredith, I'm excited to hear about your wish this week.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:47

I really need a visit to the fountain. I feel like a nice garden. You know, just sitting, sitting and reading in a comfortable place near a bubbling fountain sounds absolutely right to me. Okay. So my wish is that anyone who loves classic mysteries would read a really great classic called *The Ice House* by Minette Walters. Kaytee, have you ever read anything by Minette Walters? She's very old school Ruth Rendell kind of school of mystery writing.

Kaytee Cobb 49:16

No, but I do remember hearing her name before. So I know there's something else that you've talked about by her.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:22

Right. I've read several of her books and *The Ice House* is one of my absolute favorites. So I'm gonna give you a little bit of a setup, a very short setup because this is one of those things where you just want to go into it with just a little bit. So there are three women who live in this big gigantic house in in the Hampshire countryside in England called St Grange. And because there are three women who live in this house, there is all manner of village gossip about them, including that they are maybe witches at the worst and lesbians at the best. And this is you know, so then when a crime occurs, of course, there are a lot of people, including members of the Constabulary, who are immediately just rubbing their hands together gleefully, to find out what's actually happening in St. Grange. All right, this is a great mystery. It really, really, it's classic. It's old school. So again, I didn't look up exactly when it was written. But please be aware that the fact that these women may or may not be gay features really strongly and not in an enlightened way, on the part of a lot of these characters. So really tread carefully there. There are some, you know, the people who use these this terrible prejudice language and everything are made to look like idiots. So Minette Walters is doing a good job, you know, portraying it. But it is in in times difficult to read. And in fact, what made me think about this, most recently, in one of my days, where I was stuck on in my bed, not doing anything at all with my puppy. I was watching BritBox, which is one of my maybe my very favorite streaming service that I pay for. I love BritBox. There is so much good stuff there. But I found a two part miniseries, I think it ends up being like a total of three and a half hours over the course of two long episodes, with Daniel Craig James Bond. And this this came out in 1998. And he yeah, so he's in it. And it was, it was a really well done very faithful adaptation. So I enjoyed the heck out of it. But there were a lot of parts where I was like, Oh, my, oh, this is language we just don't throw around anymore. So again, be be very aware that that kind of prejudice figures prominently, and that there's use of lots of phrases that are very difficult for our ears to hear. But justice is had and it's a really great mystery that's incredibly well written. And once I got past that, especially like the first 15 minutes, the Daniel Craig character is redeemed eventually, and he does a really, really great job. So I wish that more people would read early Minette Walters, not her most recent stuff, because her most recent stuff is like historical fiction that is absolutely atrocious. But her early like Fox

Evil and The Ice House Minette Walters is really really good if you like that classic kind of Louise Penny-ish mystery.

Kaytee Cobb 52:31

Awesome. That sounds great. And I pretty much do the same thing for my wish. This week, I wish to give everyone the perfect slow but steady for November, which is Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. So because tomorrow is November 1, it's a special month for readers. We've got Nonfiction November, and Indigenous Peoples Month here in the US. And this wish is designed to give you the perfect taste of both of those in one book. Braiding Sweetgrass is subtitled Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants. In this braided memoir, we get glimpses of Robin Wall Kimmerer's life as a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and a scientist. She brings us indigenous myth and legend, the intersection of plants and humans, the ways they work together and help each other thrive, and the ways that we've taken advantage of this planet and disregarded its wisdom. Her writing is lyrical and moving, but not dull, and brain numbingly boring right? My copy is full of marginalia and annotations from when I read it in December of 2020. It has stuck with me these past few years. And I think that would make Robin very happy. If I haven't sold you on this, or it sounds too cerebral for you, this is book number four that comes out November 1. There's a Braiding Sweetgrass for young adults releasing tomorrow. And that might be an easier way to read it. Or you could bring along the teenager in your life and read it together. It's beautifully done and has illustrations and pull out quotes and definitions. But if you're ready to jump in with both feet, know that you can have Robin read it aloud to you with the audio on hoopla if your library has that service. And that's a wonderful way to take it in because she knows how to pronounce all the Anishinaabe words that she works into the text. This book is a full experience. So let the sights and the smells of sweet grass and the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer bring you joy and reflection this November. I'm getting a little woowoo about it. But I love this book so much. Please pick up Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Plink splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:44

Yes, and that's a great wish because I have heard so many people, a lot of different kinds of readers have said, I know this sounds dull or I know this doesn't sound interesting, but it is one of my favorite books of all time. So that is that is one that I haven't read yet. And I am really definitely looking forward to doing that as a slow but steady at some point because it is just clearly one that really, really gets into people's minds and hearts.

Kaytee Cobb 55:14

Yeah, and it has 31 chapters. So even it would be even better for a 31 day month, but each one is like between eight and 30 pages depending on the day. So it's very, it's a great option for a slow but steady.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:27

That's perfect. Perfect. All right, good. Okay, 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 55:39

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:42

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 55:52

You can also follow the show at [@currentlyreadingpodcast](https://www.instagram.com/currentlyreadingpodcast) on Instagram or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:59

And if you really want to help us or you just want more of this kind of bookish content, join us as a bookish friend on Patreon. It's only \$5 a month and lots and lots of episodes to delight you. It also keeps our show commercial free, which is great. 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 toward us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 56:24

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:30

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 56:32

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:34

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 56:36

Happy reading Meredith