



Season 3, Episode 14: Who Made Rebecca the Mascot for Fall Reading + Our Favorite Cookbooks

Monday, November 2, 2020 • 48:50

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 those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And sometimes my strong book opinions are stronger than others.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love taking a morning walk with an audio book in my ears. This is episode number 14 of season three. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:53

Oh, we are so glad to be here. Kaytee, we both have had a busy week. And I know we've both been really looking forward to talking today.

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

Yes, I needed some Meredith time for sure. All right, so this is our first episode of November, which means that we get to get started today with our friends at Book of the Month, the only paying advertiser we have for the show, and we get to talk about why we love them. So Meredith, what do you think of our five picks this month?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:20

I think this was another month where I had a really hard time deciding because there were a few books that were really really calling my name, but I'm gonna try really hard to just do one for the next few months. Right, so I don't have to skip months. So all right, my choice this month is going to be *The Star-Crossed Sisters of Tuscany* by Laurie Nielsen Spielman and I loved this book because it feels, well two things, it feels like the trip to Italy that I really need right now. It feels like it's got a very, very strong

sense of place. And also, at its core, it's about a curse. And for whatever reason, I love books about cursed families. So in this case, we have the Fontana family, and 200 years ago, Philomena Fontana cast a curse upon her sister, that not one second-born Fontana daughter would find lasting love. Isn't that a horrible, horrible curse? Oh, that's so awful. So, 200 years later, this curse has come to be, in generation after generation. And we're in current time. And now, we're dealing with a set of cousins who are second born and they are not finding lasting love. Well, all of a sudden, their aunt Poppy, herself a second sister, is coming up on her 80th birthday. And she goes to her great nieces, and says, "We need to go to Italy. I know a way for us to break the curse once and for all." And then the story goes on from there. This book sounds really, really interesting. And again, I'm in the mood to be transported. There were some good mysteries. There was a thriller that I think a lot of people are going to be interested in. But this month. I just wanted to go someplace. What was your choice for this month?

Kaytee Cobb 03:15

I like that. I think that'll be fun. Okay, so my choice this month is Memorial by Bryan Washington. This is so completely my wheelhouse that I almost pre ordered it but now I can get a Book of the Month copy. So I'm excited about that. We have two guys Their names are Benson and Mike. They're a couple. They live in Houston. Mike is Japanese American and Benson is a Black daycare teacher. Their lives get up-ended when Mike has to go to Japan to visit his ailing father who he's been estranged from for years, at the same time that his mom shows up for a visit. So he leaves his boyfriend and his mom alone in the apartment while he runs off to Japan. And hijinks ensue. It's supposed to be kind of darkly funny, a little bit campy. And it's in the in the description. It says it's described as a funny and profound story about family in all its strange forms, which is like the song of my heart. I love books like this. Also an author of color. So this is like Kaytee catnip. I don't know, I there was no other choice for me this month, I had to get Memorial by Bryan Washington. Although I'm excited about another one too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:24

I know there were a couple that I was very, very interested in, which is the best problem to have. So as we always let you guys know, if you are on the fence or you've been thinking about joining Book of the Month, this is a great time of year to do it and reward yourself or I always choose at least one person on my gift list to give a Book of the Month subscription to you don't have to do it for an entire year. You can do it for shorter, much shorter periods of time. So it's a great way to kind of check those. Those hard to buy people off of your list so you can join Book of the Month right now by using our code, CURRENTLYREADING, and you get your first book for just \$9.99. So it's a great time to do it.

Kaytee Cobb 05:07

And if you want to add a second book to your box, like we sometimes do, those are also only \$9.99. So take advantage, would you? But first, we're gonna let everybody know that later, our deep dive is about our favorite cookbooks, we are coming into fall and like, baking season. I don't know if that's a thing. But we're gonna pretend it is. So we're going to talk about favorite cookbooks later. But yes, let's do talk about bookish moments of the week, Meredith, and I think you should go first.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:33

All right. Okay. Let me just say, everybody remember that not every book is for every reader. And I believe that, to my core, right? This entire show is about the fact that not every book is for every reader and some books are very much for some readers. So I very rarely have really strong opinions negatively toward a specific book because I just have this idea that it wasn't for me, but it's for a lot of other people. No harm, no foul, but this is a spicy take, okay, this take if we were on the Popcast, this would probably make me the mayor of flavortown. Because I am going to say I love fall. I love fall reading. I despise the book, Rebecca. And this time of year. I feel like that flipping book is everywhere, is being mentioned everywhere, is the mascot for fall reading is the book everyone says if you liked Rebecca, because you love Gothic mystery. I despise that book. In fact, I hate re-read it not too long ago just because I wanted to remember why I hated it so much. I think Kaytee, that Rebecca is one of the dullest faux mysteries that has ever been written. I think Jane Eyre is more mysterious, creepier. More evocative, spookier, more perfect for this time of year. I know that a lot of people love it and and you know, go with God, that's fine. I just I'm so irritated by Rebecca being elevated to this sort of book we compare all other spooey books to it irritates me. That's my spicy take. Now Kaytee, I say all of that completely not being able to remember. How do you feel about Rebecca?

Kaytee Cobb 07:43

I have read Rebecca. I did not love it. I didn't throw it against the wall. But it took me a solid like four or five times to even get in far enough to feel like I could read it. And I I don't have strong opinions either way on it. I guess. I don't plan to watch the new Netflix special, which I'm guessing is another reason that you're bringing this up?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:05

Well, I think it's definitely another reason why I feel like it's been mentioned over and over again. But I everything I've read about the new Netflix specials that it's really meh. I didn't even want to throw Rebecca against the wall. It doesn't even make me angry. It just makes me it. If it was just a book. It wouldn't irritate me, right? It's just a book that I didn't love. I just think it's dull. I think the characters are mediocre. I think the lead character irritates me. But I didn't. I just felt like because it's made such a big deal of it this time of year like why does this have to be our mascot for fall reading? This is what I don't understand.

Kaytee Cobb 08:47

Well, I like Anne of Green Gables. She loves October, and is my October mascot.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:52

Right, which is great. But it's not spooey. And now every you know, this is the time of year, let's read our Gothic mysteries. Oh, here we go with Rebecca. I'm just oh, I'm just so over it.

Kaytee Cobb 09:06

Okay, my bookish moment, I have decided to lean into the fact that I'm just going to reveal myself here. I have access to eight library cards on Libby. And it's the best part of my life right now. My reading life is just thriving. I can't go into my library in person. So I don't get to go and like browse the stacks. But what is awesome about Libby is that you can add multiple libraries, you can add multiple cards at each

library. And that means between my own three libraries, plus all these friends who are like, hey, let's share library cards. I get to you know, message someone and say, Hey, your library has this and mine doesn't Can I borrow it on your card? Or I get to see what they're borrowing. And if I'm interested in it, hey, while you have that, can you just leave it when you're done and I'll read it after you or listen to you after you. It's so fun. And it ends up being kind of staggered buddy reading with a lot of these people that I'm sharing library cards with, because they might finish something or I might finish something and then we'll flip flop, and the other person gets to read it. I love it. And Libby makes it so easy to switch from one library to another, do another search or from one card to another. I just, it's fantastic. And it's totally like book gluttony. And I love it so much.

Kaytee Cobb 10:24

Okay, let's talk about current reads. Meredith, why don't you start us out? What is your first book this week?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:31

All right. So I have a melange of books this week. And also they vary very much as to how much I enjoyed them. So we're going to start kind of at the bottom and we're going to move way, way, way up the scale as we go through my current reads. All right, so we're starting at the bottom here. This is a book that was not for me. And it was disappointing because it is a second in the series and I feel like I always get so much flack for not reading further in a series lately and this is exactly why okay. I read *In The Market for Murder* by T.E. Kinsey, which is the second *Lady Hardcastle* mystery. A few weeks ago, I talked about the first one, which is called *A Quiet Life in the Country*. And I love that one very much. And then this next one I decided to do on audio, which was a perfectly fine way to listen to it, but it was just such a whomp for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:25

Okay, so here's the setup. So we're, it's springtime, it's 1909 and *Lady Hardcastle*, our lead character, eccentric rich, owns a house in the country, where she lives with her maid who is also her best friend, Florence, right. So they are *Lady Hardcastle* is resting and recovering from her adventures in the first book. And so they're trying to be very, very quiet, and, and just restful. And so they decided she and her maid decided that they're going to go to with one of *Lady hard castles*, friends, they're going to go to the market in town. So they go to the market, they meet a bunch of people from the town. A week after that, a local farmer that they met that day. One who, of course, is a real piece of work, he's a real jerk, turns up dead in the pub facedown in his beef and mushroom pie. So once again, it's up to *Lady Hardcastle* and her maid Florence, to solve the case.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:24

Okay, let me start with that last part. It's up to *Lady Hardcastle* and Florence to solve the case, because the way that the author shoehorns them into this situation is that they get a visit from the constable in their town, saying, I s-h you not. I don't really have enough time to investigate this smarter. *Lady Hardcastle*. You're good at this kind of thing. Could you do it for me? Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 12:55

No.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:57

It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous. It's and the whole so the whole, from the very beginning. I'm like, okay, so you're just not even trying that hard. And this is one of the things that gets me going about a book (Mac Barnett). It's when I feel like someone has a book deal. And they phone in their second one, because they can. And from the very beginning, this felt phoned in to me. So again, this book is not horrible. It's just so predictable and tired. And the repartee between lady Hardcastle in Florence, is really one of the main reasons that I loved the first book, their sort of back and forth. It's very funny. It's very witty. Well, here, Kinsey basically leans 90% on that one thing, and the plot is so boring and takes so long to go absolutely anywhere that it feels like all we're doing is kind of listening to their repartee back and forth, which is really dull when you don't have a plot to be interested in. So this one was just really, really slow for me. And it just proves that style does not win over substance. So this was In the Market for Murder by T.E. Kinsey.

Kaytee Cobb 14:23

Okay, well, I've got something fun to talk about. I want to tell you about The City We Became by NK Jemisin, which kind of blew up the internet a little bit this summer, right? This book is a new, urban fantasy novel from the author of the Broken Earth trilogy, which I loved. Right. I've talked about that one on the podcast before it starts with The Fifth Season. This book is the start of something new. I thought it was a standalone. But on Goodreads, it's very clearly marked as Great Cities #1 and guess what the ending, you know that it's not a standalone from the ending of this book.

Kaytee Cobb 14:57

So we have five New Yorkers, who are each of the five boroughs of the city personified. And I said they are each not are each from or are each part of. They are each of the five boroughs of the city. We first meet Manny, who represents Manhattan. And because he's our introduction to the story, he's the one that you're gonna fall in love with. Every reader that I've talked to about this book, they all love Manny. Manny is the best, he is fantastic. So he slowly has to meet up with these other residents of the city who represent the other four boroughs of New York city as a whole. And that's because in this world that NK Jemisin is building, the premise is that there comes a time in each great city's life that the city comes alive. This happened to Rome, and Tokyo, and Buenos Aires, but it also happened to cities like Pompei, and Atlantis, and sometimes it goes wrong. And that's why there are some great thriving cities that have been you know Meccas of humanity for thousands of years. And there are some that we only hear about as legends, or as stories, because they didn't make it through this process of becoming a city that's alive,

Kaytee Cobb 16:13

Oh, my gosh, I have goosebumps talking about this book is such a cool premise. Of course, you know, there has to be an evil force trying to keep this city from becoming what it is. The City of New York in this book is so I hate to say alive, but it is it's so alive. You feel like you're walking the streets of Manhattan, and Brooklyn and Queens and Staten Island, and you're there with these characters as they try to find each other as they try to defeat the evil in their world. It's just such a delight. It does end completely like "Bloop, and now we're done with that story. Wait till Book Two." And you're just like, no, what!? Which is so Oh, my gosh, it's so frustrating. But so like, Don't pick it up, if that's gonna drive you

crazy, because there will be another one. And then you can wait. And you could read them, you know, subsequently. And that's great. But for now, I just thought it was it was so well done. It was so excellent. And I happen to read it as part of a book flight with others stories about New York. So I also read City of Girls, at the same time, I read a Jacqueline Woodson novel at the same time. And they're like looking at New York from three different times in history, and different angles like this fantasy versus history.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:30

Didn't you also read New York by Edward Rutherford.

Kaytee Cobb 17:35

I did read it New York by Edward Rutherford. I had like a New York, September is what happened here. It was great. It's like I went to New York when I couldn't go anywhere at all. And this book, The City We Became, was an absolutely integral part of that experience. And I loved the way that it pulled me into the story. And I fell in love with the characters and I cared about the action. And it just went and went and went perfectly stepping along through the plot. I thought it was fantastic. And I cannot wait for the next one, which is the only reason that I'm like, not completely in love with it, because I really want the next one now. But it's The City We Became by NK Jemisin.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:14

This one sounds so interesting to me. I am really, really, really interested in it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:20

All right, my next read is my midline read for the week, and that is The Obsession by Nora Roberts. This one. Okay, here's our setup. Our lead here is Naomi Bose. And when she was young, one night, late at night, she follows her father out into the woods into their root cellar, and she discovers that he is in fact a serial killer. And there's one woman down there that's still alive. And so her father kind of goes back into the house, Naomi hides. This is jacket copy, this is not a spoiler, she frees this woman and gets her father, her father's been arrested for being a serial killer. And he becomes a very famous serial killer, right, the kind of serial killer where everyone knows his name. And so she leaves that area. She goes and lives with family and she changes her name.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:21

She's now a successful photographer living into the name Naomi Carson. And she spent years traveling the world and finally she is ready to begin to settle down which is a really big deal for her to actually put down roots, pardon the pun. And so she settles into the city in the Pacific Northwest. And the description of the city the area Pacific Northwest is beautiful one of my favorite places in the entire country. So I really loved it for that reason, and the weather and the trees and I just I love the setting of this novel. And Nora Roberts does setting really, really well. So she buys this house, but it's this complete fixer-upper. This is important to the plot, because we spend a lot of time. And I say that in a good way, if you like the kind of if you like Fixer Upper, if you like, if you like stories about houses being fixed up and being really amazing and historical and yet brought up to date, this book is really going to scratch that itch for you. It's very heavy on that part of the story, and satisfying, too. And of course, because it's a Nora Roberts novel, we also have a handsome mechanic, who runs a very successful

mechanic shop. And his name, of course, is Xander with an X. He's sexy, He's talented, he's good natured. He loves books. And he has protective instinct, right? He's the perfect Nora Roberts lead. But then, of course, should we trust him? Is he too good to be true? Naomi starts to fall for him. But then her past, involving her serial killer father, rears its ugly head.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:09

So I really liked parts of this book, I really, really, really did. Nora Roberts just does a great job writing a particular kind of book. And it's very, kind of, it's kind of an Instagram version of a book. It's very beautiful. It's very detailed, and all the ways that we women want details. And the romance part of it is satisfying and interesting and all that good stuff. But at some point, I started to get confused about exactly what book I was reading, because in some ways, I kind of felt like it was a romance. But then other ways, I kind of felt like am I being led to believe this is gonna turn into a thriller? Is this a mystery? Are we just gonna spend a lot of time redoing the kitchen, which I'm there for? It wasn't boring. But like, are we are we still redoing the kitchen? So I just was confused about where the book was going. And then it started to lag a little bit. And then it really picks up in the last third. And it's got a tiny little ending.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:14

So my book metaphor for this book, Kaytee, because I want to do at least one for you is that this book is like and I'm totally going to date myself, Kaytee, you are not allowed to respond. If this book metaphor does not resonate with you, my 90s girls, you will know what I'm talking about when I say this book is like those collages that we used to make. Where back when there were print magazines, you get a bunch of print magazines with your friends and you get scissors and a glue stick and a poster board and you spend all afternoon making a collage of some sort. This book is like that. You just sort of like pick all your favorite things like the most beautiful, the most sexy guy the most this and you put it all together and sometimes your collage would turn out really great. And other times, it would kind of be a mess, a mishmashy sort of mess. This one, this book is good, but it's on the messier side of things. So that was *The Obsession* by Nora Roberts.

Kaytee Cobb 23:16

I collaged the phone in my room when I was in high school, so.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:20

Ooh, crafty.

Kaytee Cobb 23:21

Like my cordless phone that I use to talk to my boyfriends on. It was collaged and then Modge Podge on top it was very pretty.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:31

That is... okay. So you so you do get it. I didn't know how long the collage thing lasted. But I tell you what I loved.

Kaytee Cobb 23:37

Long enough for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:39

Yeah, we loved laying around, listening to Madonna and putting our collages together. Oh, it's so much fun. All right, what's your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 23:50

All right, so my next one is actually a gift that I think was sent to me and Mindy and you it's I Will Judge You by Your Bookshelf by Grant Snider. Did you get a copy of this too, Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:00

Yes. I did. And I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 24:02

So this is sent to us by one of our bookish friends, Jessica, who can be found on Instagram @tonightsbookishfeast. She's very sweet and very generous for thinking of us and sending us a present and we love her.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:14

Oh, but don't follow her account. Hang on. Don't follow her account if you don't want to be hungry all the time, because oh my gosh, her feed makes me so hungry. Okay, sorry to interrupt.

Kaytee Cobb 24:25

She pairs perfectly with our deep dive today. Hey, look at us bringing that back around. Perfect. Okay, so this book is a collection of comics about the reading life. And for me, they kind of varied and effectiveness there were some that I loved so much. I took photos of them on my phone and you know, messaged them to you or to Mindy or to Shad? Whoever I could think of it just like oh my gosh, isn't this perfect? It's exactly what reading is like, or it's exactly what being a book lover is like, or it's exactly what whatever, completely hit the nail on the head, but much like how you and I have talked about how not every episode of Currently Reading can be a level 100. Right? There have to be, there has to be some variation. I felt like I felt that a lot with this book. Like, there were some comics that I was just like, this is the most perfect thing I've ever seen. And then there were some that I was like, why did he put this in here? This is lame. What is the point of this? So? So it has that variety in it just like anything else you consume, right? Where there's more than one thing associated with the media that you're consuming.

Kaytee Cobb 25:31

I did find plenty of fun and delight in the pages though. And I do think it's a really great gift. Right? We're coming into gifting season, holiday season, if you have a book lover on your list, and you're scared to buy them a book, which, like Meredith, I'm sure you can relate to this. People are like, "No, Kaytee, we don't buy you books, because you've read everything. Or maybe you already own it, or maybe blah, blah, blah." This is a great option to send to somebody like that, because it's just full of delight. And even if they already have it, they can pass it along to another book lover in their life, you know, it's just the perfect gift to hand to somebody that you can page through. I did have to pry it out of Micah's hands in order to get to read it for myself. So it's totally acceptable for children, all the way up

to adults. I thought it was a fun little way to spend an afternoon. Definitely recommend it as a gift. It's I Will Judge You by Your Bookshelf by Grant Snider. And thank you to Jessica for sending us copies of that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:31

Now you know how I plan to use it, because I think it's perfect for this. When I have when my pool is finally done. And I can have some Austin Currently Reading listeners over, I'm going to have that book out on the coffee table because it is the perfect book for book lovers to kind of sit around and page through and be like, Oh, I don't how do you fit? You know what I mean? It's just like, it's the perfect thing to spur great discussion about life as a as a reader, a book lover, so yeah, I absolutely love it. I think it's so much fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:03

All right, Kaytee. Are you ready for my five star book of this episode?

Kaytee Cobb 27:08

I'm excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:09

I love this book. All of our listeners who love A Curse so Dark and Lonely. Listen up, because I've got another one for you. This is a must read. It is Girl, Serpent, Thorn by Melissa Bashardoust. I loved this book. It is so good. All right. This book begins as all good fairy tales do with a story that's being told by firelight. In this story, a princess is cursed to be poisonous to the touch for her entire life. But it turns out listening to the story is our lead character Soraya, for whom this is not a story, it's her real life. She has lived her entire life hidden away, apart from her family, safe only in her room and in the gardens that surround it. Because she is poisonous to the touch to everyone and to everything. Which is really, really sad. And the way that the author helps us to know Soraya you really, really quickly are in her head in her mind and really in her heart. This is such a heart-filled novel. It's absolutely amazing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:29

So when we start our story as it's coming up on the day of her twin brother's wedding. And Soraya has a decision to make because below her in their dungeon is a demonic, but seductive fairy, who says that she holds the answer as to how to undo this curse. But there are lots of risks about even entertaining that notion. And then, above is a young man who is the only person around her who is not afraid of her, in fact, who looks at her as if he is very interested in her as opposed to being repelled by her. And this of course could be her only opportunity to actually connect with another person. Either one of those choices has great danger associated with it. The safe choice of course is for her to ignore both these people and just pretend that they don't exist. But luckily for us, this is not what happens.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:36

You guys this book is so great. It's got all of the fairytale vibes that we are craving it is so well done. Melissa Bashardoust is absolutely so sure in where she is taking us and where she is taking the story. You just have the feeling from the beginning, that you are in really, really capable hands here. The story bobbed and weaved all different ways. It was interesting the entire time every few pages something

would happen that would make you go Oh my gosh. And did all of that without ever feeling frenetic. It just flowed really, really beautifully. I loved the Soraya character. It's this is a why a novel but it did this like A Curse So Dark and Lonely, Our lead character is just a kick ass female, who you're rooting for so much from the very beginning but who also feels very normal and you really understand her insecurities and her desire for connection and all of that without it feeling angsty and teenaged, this was really, really good. I loved the experience of reading this and I will be recommending this to a lot of people for sure. So that is Girl, Serpent, Thorn by Melissa Bashardoust.

Kaytee Cobb 30:53

That sounds so good. I'm so glad you talked about it. I definitely need it. I need it now. Okay, my third one, Meredith, is not for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:02

Okay. Good to know.

Kaytee Cobb 31:03

Fair. Right. Okay. But I'm going to tell you about it. You can make your own decision, but I think it's not.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:08

Are we crying? Are we crying?

Kaytee Cobb 31:10

No, there's no crying in this one. So this is Luster by Raven Leilani. And this book is weird. It was good. I liked it. But it's polarizing because it's weird. And it's got some interesting themes. So I'm gonna try and set this up. So our main character is Edie, and she meets a man named Eric and they hit things off, and they're kind of moving and grooving. And she finds out that he's in an open marriage. So their lives start to become really intertwined. She ends up meeting his wife, and then being part of their life together. It's weird. And so she's kind of just, there's not a lot that happens in this book. So his wife does autopsies at the hospital. She's like a medical examiner. That part was really fun. But there are parts of this book that feel kind of like The Need by Helen Phillips, where you're like, is this really happening? Is that am I imagining this? Is this a drug trip? What is happening? The decisions that Edie makes? A lot of times you're just you're wanting to like, grab her and say, "Edie, no, no, no step back. Look at this as a whole, this is not a good plan." And over and over again, she's making decisions like that, which is how I know it's not a book for you, Meredith, as well as the fact that this has a marriage that and then their sex outside of marriage, obviously, because it's an open marriage. It's just a whole weird situation.

Kaytee Cobb 32:39

However, I will say, the way that Raven, our author writes this, this book, is really, really well done, the writing flows beautifully to the point where even though you don't like what Edie's doing, and the way that Eric interacts with her and his wife, like you just, you don't like what's happening in this book. But her writing pulls you into the story. And I think that's pretty amazing. To be able to say I don't like the content of this book, I really like what the author is doing, while she's pulling me into the story. That's that's a skill to be able to have the both of those things in tension. So I saw a lot of people who said, A,

this makes you very uncomfortable, the entire book just makes you uncomfortable. So they would say, "I'll give it four stars for writing, but three stars for the plot." For me, it was five stars for the writing, four stars for the plot because of that tension that she held us in the whole time.

Kaytee Cobb 33:36

There are like eight jillion trigger warnings with this book. But especially if you have any triggers regarding physical abuse, you need to stay far away. And of course, open marriage, sex outside of marriage, all of that, stay far away. But if it sounds interesting to you, and writing matters to you, and the way that an author can do interesting things with the written word. This is a really good book. But you have to be willing to sit in that like discomfort where you're like, "I don't like what's happening around me right now." And that's hard. So that was *Luster* by Raven Leilani.

Kaytee Cobb 34:14

Okay, so we decided we've actually had this idea on our deep dive list for maybe two full years. I don't know, it feels like it's been there staring at us for a while, we decided we're finally going to tackle our favorite cookbooks. And we both kind of ran into a weird issue when we were preparing for this deep dive. Meredith, what came to mind first, when you knew that we were going to talk about our favorite cookbooks today?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:37

Well, I mean, the first thing that came to mind for me, I mean, as I was preparing it, and I was sort of thinking about, well, what cookbooks do I even own because when we moved from California, I did a huge purge of books in general, but I really, really really purged my cookbooks and only kept the ones that I actually use or a couple that I kind of use just for reference. So the first thing that came to mind, honestly, is that I feel like I don't have really great taste in cookbooks because, because I'm not a very highbrow cook. I mean, I make, I think food that tastes good and is largely healthy, although I do like comfort food. So I just don't have like, I just feel like, I don't know, I feel like I have more Food Network chef recipe books or cookbooks than I really should. I feel like my cookbooks are kind of embarrassing. Okay, that's, that's it. That's all dancing around.

Kaytee Cobb 35:38

Do you have well-thumbed ones, or like ones that are like dirty on the pages?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:42

Yeah, for sure. I mean, so for me, my favorite cookbooks are by Ina Garten. And just as far as like cookbooks, that are literally stained with food, because I am using them all the time. The number one book, that cookbook that falls into that category for me is *The Barefoot Contessa* cookbook, which is a classic Ina Garten, kind of might actually be the first cookbook that she did, I have made almost every recipe out of that cookbook, it contains most of my go to like, oh, we're having people over. Most of the things that I cook in that case come from that cookbook, or from *The Barefoot Contessa at Home*. And so she has a new one coming out called *Modern Comfort Food*. And I probably will at least get that one from the library just to check it out. But those those cookbooks are the ones that literally have stains on them in my kitchen.

Kaytee Cobb 36:38

Right? That makes sense to me. I also found a lot of referencey books in my cookbook collection, I also don't have very many, I have plenty of recipes that I feel are tried and true for me that I can like whip out without needing to look at a recipe, or that my mom gave to me. So I have you know copies of them and sheet protectors rather than an actual cookbook.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:00

Exactly.

Kaytee Cobb 37:01

But the ones that I go back to often that I did not get rid of when we moved which was not very long before you moved were How to Cook Everything by Mark Bittman, the America's Test Kitchen Cookbook and Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat by Samin Nosrat. So all three of those are very much they're like, they're like fundamentals of cooking, so I can go to cook books like that and look at everything from how to boil the perfect egg to how to spatchcock a turkey for Thanksgiving, and the entire, like gamut of food that falls in between those two things like super complicated, beautiful recipes all the way down to very basic you can hand this to your college student when they're first going and launching out of the nest right? So those are those are the ones that I keep on my shelves that I consistently go back to. I also borrow a lot from the library because I don't I don't have a lot of really ambitious cooking desires in my house.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:03

Right, I think that's the thing is once you reach I mean certainly my age but but your age, too. Once you kind of get to that point you have those go to things whether they're for company or for your family, I do I cook a lot of things that are my mom or my grandmother's recipes, those those kinds of things. And then I also think well so for me the the the cookbook I'm most likely to give as a gift is the Martha Stewart Cookbook, which is her very classic one of its early in her career writing cookbooks, but it's very much that kind of overview. It's got everything from the perfect pancake to how to make you know, beef,

Kaytee Cobb 38:43

Wellington?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:46

Sure, beef wellington.

Kaytee Cobb 38:47

Bourginon?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:48

Yeah, I think that's the one that I was going for. And so it really, it really runs the gamut. And it just kind of gets that one-stop shop in a cookbook that's also really elegantly done, and everything that I've made out of it, which hasn't been a ton of things. But the things that I have made have been really,

really good. So that's one that I will often give with some other kitchen item for a wedding gift, for example, that that kind of thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:12

And then the other thing, the other cookbooks that I have, well, Magnolia Table is one that has been a more recent purchase for me actually talked about it on the show not too long ago. That's by Joanna Gaines. And it's really, really good. I got it from the library first, like you're saying I got it from library first because these days I'm much more likely to want to do that and just kind of be able to really sit with it to see do I actually need to own this cookbook. And this was one that I decided to go ahead and purchase because it had many things in it that I was interested in cooking. I've made several of the recipes and they've all been big hits. The other thing is that I've been to Magnolia Table in Waco and it and then also it's follow up. The second collect the second Magnolia Table Collection has a lot of recipes for the things they serve there. And the food just in general is really yummy and very, very much the kind of food that I like, which is not highbrow but tasty and something that your entire family is really going to love. So the Magnolia Table cookbooks are big hits for me. And then the America's Test Kitchen Cookbooks are also really ones that you can almost always count on being very high quality and their Perfect Cookie Cookbook is, is really great if you're like, you know what, I want to do some baking, but I kind of want to do some things that I haven't, I want to get out of my normal rut. So I really liked their Perfect Cookie Cookbook.

Kaytee Cobb 40:41

Okay, you talked about how food can kind of bring us together. And it's a whole family affair when you were talking about Magnolia Table. And so I have a couple of recommendations kind of along that line. Because I have kids that are really interested in cooking. Even though I I like to cook, I think it's plenty fun, but I don't you know want to live in the kitchen, my children absolutely would. They want to be involved all the time in the kitchen. So we have Start to Cook from Usborne, which is really great, because it's spiral bound. And it's for kids, and has really like good thick pages. Really excellent for a starter cookbook for kids. And then we also have my mom got us The America's Test Kitchen Complete Cookbook for Young Chefs, which has 100 recipes in it. And then all these really basic techniques that kids would want. And you know, and it'll be like, have your mom help you with this part in the oven or whatever. But here's how you separate an egg from an egg white. And here's how you roll out pastry dough. And here you know, so it's giving them kind of a primer in the kitchen. And again, it's really well made. And they will just sit on the couch and read through it while we're watching something together whatever like and make plans, oh, I want to learn how to make this, let's do this together. So those are both really great. You know, even like 8-year old gifts, or 10-year old gifts for the kids in your lives, whether you're a grandma or an aunt or a mom, it's a great option. If you're looking for cookbooks, and you want to inspire the next generation of chefs, even if you're not a chef yourself.

Kaytee Cobb 42:12

I also have a website recommendation. So I I love to cook, but I hate planning for cooking. Like the reason that my my cookbooks don't get used that often is because I don't want to sit down at my kitchen table and have five cookbooks in front of me and decide what I'm going to make by flipping through cookbooks. I hate doing that. So what I use very frequently and for years now is a website called Eat at Home Cooks. And this isn't an ad. They don't know me or anything. But I love the way that

she sets things up. So she has multiple menus. You download all the menus for a month. It has a shopping list by week and it's color coded. So you can say, Well, I don't want to make recipe number five, for whatever reason, maybe we're going out that night or whatever. And you can find every ingredient in that recipe and cross them off your shopping list right at the beginning. And then when we could, I mean, I stopped doing it basically at the beginning of Coronavirus when things were crazy and you couldn't get half the things you needed at the grocery store. But it was so easy to put in like an online grocery pickup order, go through the entire list, check my cupboards at home, put the things in and then know I had everything that I needed on hand to make a week's worth of meals in that one grocery run. It just like took away the entire planning part of meal planning that I hate, and left me just with the ingredients, and the recipe and the cooking and the healthy meal for my family. And I love it. So that way I can spend more time reading, which is really what we discovered with those cookbooks situation is that you and I don't spend six hours in the kitchen cooking, because we're reading instead.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:47

Exactly right, right. It's about prioritizing your time.

Kaytee Cobb 43:52

Yep. And we both we both were like, wow, we don't have a ton to add here. Interesting, but our families are fed. And there are some resources that we like to use to do that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:03

There you go. We did it. We did cookbooks. Good job, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 44:07

All right. Hopefully that helps somebody. I don't who. Maybe it'll help a reader let go of the need to cook something really fancy every night for dinner.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:17

Right. sweet and simple.

Kaytee Cobb 44:19

Yeah, for sure. Okay, so let's press some books. What have you got to press for us this week, Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:25

All right. Well, it won't surprise you when I say that. My press, when I was thinking about what I wanted to press, I had food on the brain. And so I am going to press one of my favorite books that I read last year which was Save Me the Plums by Ruth Reichl. I don't think we have any of her books on the press list. And this is definitely my favorite. Her newest one. It's my favorite of her kind of food, biographies. Or autobiographies. She was the New York Times restaurant critic, right? So in, I believe it's Garlic and Sapphires, she talked about being the New York Times restaurant critic. And that's very interesting. But in this one, she is the editor, She's tapped to be the Editor in Chief of Gourmet Magazine. And it's the story of how she decided finally to end up doing that, and her 10 years there. And then this is right at a really pivotal time, where print magazines really are beginning to die. And so she has to end up winding

down the magazine. And so for me, from a food perspective, there's lots of incredible food writing in this book, for sure. But I really liked it for the publishing and business perspectives that she brings to the table. I think she's her most vulnerable self in this book. And I really appreciate that from a from a perspective of a woman who runs a company. This book was very interesting to me, she really is candid about. She didn't always know exactly what she was doing, how she made some of her decisions if she didn't, and so I just I liked it from start to finish. It's very, very fascinating. So my press this week is Save Me the Plums by Ruth Reichl.

Kaytee Cobb 46:10

I read that one and I loved it. And I totally agree. It's, it's stunning. It's beautiful, and it's stunning. I loved it.

Kaytee Cobb 46:17

Okay, my press this week also kind of relates back to the episode but not the cooking part. This week, I've decided to press The Two-Family House by Lynda Cohen-Loigman. This is partially because I waxed a little poetic about how much I love New York City books. And partially because I talked about at the very top of the episode, complicated family stories and family in all its forms stories. So either way, this book hits all my buttons, Abe and Mort are brothers. They live in a two family house along with their wives and their children. On one fateful night in 1947, their wives both have babies within moments of each other during a snowstorm in New York City, and a fateful decision is made. So the novel then follows the ramifications of that decision for both families all the way through the next few decades. And the ways that their stories wrap around each other and the ways their paths diverged. It's, it's heartwarming, but it also has a little bit of mystery in it because you're wondering how this decision is going to play out. Throughout the story. There's a lot of family drama, there's a little bit of rich people behaving badly, which I'm all about. And it has a really good like deeper examination of what it means to be a family, and not just the family you're born into, but the family that you choose. So in December of 2016, when I read it, I proclaimed it one of my favorite books of the year, and I've thought of it fondly ever since. It is The Two-Family House by Lynda Cohen-Loigman and I hope you love it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:47

All right, well, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith @meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 47:55

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:58

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 at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 48:09

You can also contact us directly @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:16

And if you really want to help us rate and review us on Apple podcasts, but even more than that, shout us out on social media that makes a huge difference toward us being able to grow and find our exact right audience.

Kaytee Cobb 48:30

Yes, a recommendation from you to your bookish friend is the best way to pass along your love of the podcast and help us grow. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:38

Alright, until next week. Happy reading, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 48:40

Happy reading, Meredith.