



Season 5, Episode 28: Lighting Up Our Reading Lives + Travel Inspired by Books

Mon, Feb 13, 2023 • 59:23

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

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

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chitchat, 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 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and Kaytee... I did not do a bookish intro. Gosh, bite size book. Alright, hang on. Give me a second. Okay, I got it. I got it. I got it. I got it. I got it. I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas and reading is the light of my life.

Kaytee Cobb 01:04

I'm Kaytee Cobb homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love looking forward to a bookish event. This is episode number 28th of season five and we are so glad you're here. Okay, I'm gonna let everybody know at the top here that today our deep dive is about books that make us want to travel somewhere. Sometimes a book makes you want to just pack up your suitcases and go, yes, I want to talk about that. I'm very excited. But first we'll get started like we always do with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith, what have you got for us?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:33

All right, my bookish moment of week is a product which I don't often bring. But for Christmas, my second son Paxton, who just graduated from college, he lives in California and he was so sweet to send me one of my favorite gifts that I've gotten in a really, really long time. And that Kaytee it's this. I'm going to show you ready? Okay, can you see me?

Kaytee Cobb 01:57

I'm ready. Ah, I want one of those so bad.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:01

Okay, so you guys have seen this. This is one of those lamps. They're on Amazon. It's like \$23. We're gonna put the link in the show notes. So this is not gonna break the bank. You've seen this. It's like a book that is laying open and it lights up, right? So it's like, very, it's read. It's chargeable with a USB cord. Okay, but here's the thing. A, I've seen it a million times in pictures. And I was like, right, whatever. It is so much more magical in person first of all... like it literally gives the most perfect light. It's just really delightful to look at. But here's the thing. I have been using it as a reading lamp. So I put it on my nightstand and open it up right next to my head, like I'm fairly close to it. But it puts off just the right amount of light for me. And for my old ass eyes, I can still, I can still see enough to read my book. It's this beautiful yellowy glowy light. It's perfect for nighttime. It just kind of it feels like candlelight only brighter so that you can you can read a book by it. And not like get your hair on fire. And so I just am loving it. And it's like 23 bucks on Amazon. It's just brought so much joy. So Paxton, I know you don't listen to my book podcast. But thank you so much. I love this gift.

Kaytee Cobb 03:25

I love that gift. I also love that you can close it up and just put it like on the stack of books on your nightstand. So it just like seamlessly fits into the decor.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:35

Exactly. And by the way, I will tell you, there's a few on Amazon. We'll put it in show notes. But this one is called the Anwick USB rechargeable book lamp. But again, scroll down for the link right to it.

Kaytee Cobb 03:47

I had no idea they were that affordable. Every time I see them. I'm like, Oh, well, those are probably \$600.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:54

And now I just have the system. I go plug in my Kindle. I plug in my book lamp, my two nighttime reading buddies, and then they're ready for me the next day,

Kaytee Cobb 04:03

And they can light up your reading life. Exactly, exactly. Love it. Okay, this week for my bookish moment, I'm excited to kind of throw a spotlight on something coming up. It's the Santa Fe International Literary Festival, because tickets are either just about to go on sale or have just gone on sale depending on when that drop happens with regard to this episode. This festival just started last year with this exceptional lineup of authors. But I already had travels planned during that weekend. This year, it's May 19 through 21st. And I've blocked off the time on my calendar for the whole weekend. I also got to meet up with the New Mexico branch of bookish friends last weekend. We had a book exchange and had snacks and then we spent a whole lot of time talking about this Literary Festival, which authors we were excited to see if we should plan a whole day event to be there. Which yes, we will. This lineup includes Gillian Flynn, Ed Yong, my new science writing boyfriend crush, John Irving, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, David Troyer, and many more. There's like 50 authors coming to this tiny event in my little baby town that often gets overlooked except in country songs, right? It's an all star cast of authors and my local crew and I will go to at least one full day together. Consider this listener

your invite, if you are interested in traveling to Santa Fe. May is a beautiful time to visit. Plan the trip, buy your tickets, let me know. I will keep people posted for a meetup of some kind outside those festival hours, I would love to meet a whole bunch of you who are willing to travel to another state for author chats and book community. It's the Santa Fe International Literary Festival. I cannot wait.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:46

Oh, that is going to be so much fun and May will be a truly beautiful time to be there. So that's great. Yeah, that's a great thing like gift yourself that little bookish weekend. That Wow, wonderful.

Kaytee Cobb 05:58

Yeah. And really, like, go look at the lineup, because it's amazing. It's, I can't even believe it. It's ridiculous.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:06

It's so great that authors are willing to go to these festivals in that cities are putting on really quality literary festivals.

Kaytee Cobb 06:15

For sure. Okay, let's get into some current reads. What have you been reading lately Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:22

All right. The first book I'm going to bring is... and it's surprising that I had not really dipped very much into this author before, but I read a book called Silent Voices by Ann Cleves.

Kaytee Cobb 06:35

Oh, okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:36

Famous mystery writer. Good friend of Louise Penny. It seems like an absolute slam dunk for me, which it definitely was. But the way that I got into it was that I started watching the Vera Stanhope series on Britbox. And that is the show that I'm watching that's my like comfort show right now. I'm watching all the episodes one by one by one. So this is one that I read because I wanted to have actually dipped into both right? So here's the setup. Our lead character is that epic and fantastic curmudgeon DCI Vera Stanhope. God, I love Vera so much. She's played in the show by Brenda Blethyn. She's recently had some heart trouble, she has angina. And so she grudgingly has started going into a gym and swimming regularly. This is a huge step for Vera. She does not take very good care of herself. When she finds the body of a woman in the sauna of that gym, she of course, looks at the body closely and realizes that there are some bruises around the victim's throat so she knows this is not a death by natural causes. And her team gets called in. So Vera and her colleagues, the side characters I love in this series, they uncover details of the victims past that may explain why she was murdered. There are a lot of people who it turns out would have would be great candidates for this. But the person they arrive at at the beginning feels too tidy for Vera. She knows from long experience that there's no such thing as a simple case, and this one gets more and more complex by the minute. Okay. So this is book four in the Vera Stanhope series. Why am I reading book four? This is because books one through

three were covered in the episodes of the Vera show that I watched. So I wanted to dip in where it was going to be a new plotline to me. And I'd heard that the that the shows, when they're based on one of her novels, they hue pretty closely to the books. So that's why I started in on book four, not because I'm an animal. I really do think if you're going to read these, you should start with book one because we learn a lot about Vera and all of her colleagues and you just care about this group of people. So start at the beginning. I absolutely loved the show. And I loved this book, but I hate the titles of this series. Silent Voices is this one. These are the most meaningless titles I really, that they're the most forgettable like just two words put together that it's just it's absolutely ridiculous. Okay, but the books in the stories themselves are really really good. As I said Vera Stanhope has just become my heart. She's the female equivalent of all the damaged male detectives that we see in other especially British police procedurals, only she's not just that. She's a fully fledged person. She's a fully formed, middle aged, incredibly intelligent woman who loves her career and hates the rest of her life. The way she's written in this story, it sometimes make you want to smack her because she really can be curmudgeonly, but it also makes you really understand her and I love when someone can write in that way. These books are definitely classic British police procedurals, they are slow burn. This is not at all back to back wall to wall thriller action. This is character development and setting development and well constructed plots that move along in what I would describe as a medium pace. These are great puzzles to solve. And this particular book has a very complex and layered mystery at its center. I listened to this on audio, and I think I will probably take all of them in in that way. I found myself wanting to fold that extra load of laundry just to get a little bit further into the story. Vera herself is by turns abrupt and harsh and taciturn and then unexpectedly affectionate. And I love her so much. I'm so glad that I started listening and watching the series because it has become not just a favorite kind of an obsession. I'm working my working my way through season four, and the 12th season just dropped. So obviously they have taken the books and they have built stories around the characters that do not exist. It's they've built onto the books, and I'm all for it. They've done a fantastic job. This is Silent Voices by Ann Cleaves.

Kaytee Cobb 11:06

Excellent I feel like I only know one other two word title from her. It's The Long Call, right? Is that the first one?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:13

Yes. And that's the first one in a different series. And I that's the only other one of hers that I've written. And I vastly prefer. And I liked that one a lot. But Vera, the character of Vera is just so good. The first one is The Crow Trap if you want to go back to the beginning,

Kaytee Cobb 11:32

Perfect. Okay, I also have a mystery series to bring today. And I'm going to talk about the third one because apparently that's what we're doing right now. I'm going to talk about Finlay Donovan Jumps the Gun by Elle Cosimano. So this is the third installment in the Finlay Donovan series. It just came out January 31. And normally, I don't continue with a series I mean, or at least I won't bring it to the show, even if I'm going to keep reading it. So I don't even think I brought Book Two to the show ever. That's fine. We're going for it anyway. I really wanted to take the time to talk about this one. Longtime listeners will remember that this is a series that Meredith cannot get behind because it does not involve good

decisions from our main character. She's a big dumb dumb, and we all want to smack her across the face.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:17

Yeah, I can't read I cannot have my lead character be a Big Dumb Dumb.

Kaytee Cobb 12:20

That is exactly what's happening here. I however, it loves a mystery series A where I'm smarter than the person and it has that element of humor. I really enjoy working that humor into a mystery series and this one delivers on that. The setup from the first book is that Finlay is a romantic suspense writer with writer's block. She's meeting with her agent at Panera and describing the plot of her next novel when a woman nearby overhears her and assumes that she has a contract killer. Instead, this pulls Finlay into a world that involves accidental dead bodies, quite unsavory characters, and her ex husband somehow getting snagged into the entire thing. One of my favorite elements of this series is the friendship and business partnership that Finlay accidentally forms with her nanny whose name is Vero. Vero is smart as a whip. She's very funny, and she calls Finlay on her BS all the time. I love her. They have great dialogue between them. And both of them are juggling the care of the children with the dangerous situations that they find themselves in. In this third installment in the series, Finlay is researching her next novel and trying to determine the identity of a rival contract killer, who may have murderous sights set on her ex husband, Steven. She doesn't like the guy but he's the father of her children, and she for sure doesn't want him dead. That trail leads her to a citizens Police Training Academy, which Meredith I think we should do this sometime as like our business partnership retreat. We should like go to Police Training Academy and like learn how to like pick up a disabled body or like shoot someone in the chest. The way that they have to work through this training academy together, it left me in stitches, it was so funny.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:04

That does actually that would be really funny.

Kaytee Cobb 14:07

Like a great bonding experience. Right? So she's hoping to figure out her storylines and also maybe figure out if there's a crooked cop involved with this contract killer situation. As is typical, a comedy of errors ensues with Finlay and Vero being way too good at some stuff like moving a dead body, which catches the attention of the police traders. Finlay is sure that cop Joey is the crooked contract killer that she's looking for. So she spends a lot of her time trying to sneak around and find evidence of this. We've got the signature humor, the madcap situations a densifying ending. She continues to deliver on this premise that she has put forth. I'll continue to read this series. Why I really wanted to bring this book up is because everyone knows that Finlay has a love interest throughout books one, two and three. There's a hot cop named Nick and a bartender in law school named Julian so it's a love triangle. Oh, and both of these guys like pose a danger to Finlay, right? Somebody going to law school could prosecute her. A cop could figure out that there's a dead body in her car. That's a bad it's a bad thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:13

Wait, hang on. Does Finlay actually murder people?

Kaytee Cobb 15:17

She's around a lot of dead bodies and like, including like decapitated heads.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:22

Okay, but is she killing them? Is she a murderer?

Kaytee Cobb 15:25

Not usually on purpose. Okay. Like, like, Oh, I thought that I thought that that was a refeed drink and instead it was poison, like that kind of stupidity.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:37

So like, she thinks, hey, maybe I'll roofie someone but she ends up putting the wrong thing in and kills them. Oh my God, just shoot me in the head right now.

Kaytee Cobb 15:49

Okay, but wait, this thing with the cop and Julian. Nick, the cop. Julian the lawyer bartender. Okay. The newish info that has come to light for this reader is that smoking hot cop Nick is named after the writers own son, her teenage son. She worked, she wanted to work his name into the novel. And I have some weird feels about that. To know what everybody else thinks about that. Like, like, yes. You know, work in your personal family stories or name a cool character after your husband, kid. Uncle, whatever. But but the hot cop that everybody's like lusting after what?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:30

Yeah, yeah, there's a lot about this that I don't like. I don't. I don't like it.

Kaytee Cobb 16:36

So so you're not for that. Like, like you're not thinking, you know, I'd love to read a steamy romance with the main character named Jackson

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:45

NO. When, if, if I'm in charge of the entire world, I can create any character I want. Couldn't there be like a president Nick, a fantastic judge who puts all the bad guys in jail, Nick, I don't know, mobster

Kaytee Cobb 17:00

like somebody that's like, cool and edgy. Not the hot cop. And we're like, please make out with him. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:07

Yeah, no, that's just a lot. This just goes lower and lower and lower on the list. But at the same time, because 2023 is a year of me not wanting to yuck people's yum, I know how many people including you have really, really enjoyed it, or you love their way through them. And so I think that that, I think that that's great.

Kaytee Cobb 17:26

It is great. I will continue to read the series. But somehow I have to find a way to get like selective amnesia, and forget that we're reading the name of the author's teenage son as the very hot cop that I really like named Nick. In the meantime, this is Finlay Donovan Jumps the Gun by Elle Cosimano third book and the Finlay Donovan series.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:47

All right. I'm glad that that was a hit for you. I'm glad that we are normalizing bringing books in the series because the other thing that 2023 is for me is the year of reclaiming my own agency. And part of that is that I want to read the books that I want to read. And sometimes that means I'm going to read in a series, correct, which means that we're going to talk about on the show and you know what, I think people are fine with that. I think it's fine. We've convinced ourselves that they're not fine with that. And that's silly. We should just read what we want to read. Alright, I'm now going to talk about a book that I really wanted to like but I very much did not. And you know, I don't like to do this. But again, you hear about all my reads so I have to bring some wumps. This book... Oh, I was so excited about it. It is called Blackwater Falls by Ausma Zehanat Khan. Alright, here's the setup. As we start our story, which is the first in a new series from this author, girls from immigrant communities have been disappearing in the small Colorado town of Blackwater Falls. But not unexpectedly in these parts, the local sheriff is very slow to act, and the girls' whereabouts remain a mystery to their grieving families. At last, the calls for justice cannot be ignored anymore when the body of a star student and refugee Syrian teenager Razan Elkader is positioned deliberately in a religiously symbolic way and found in a mosque. Detective Inaya Rahman of the Denver Police is recruited to solve results murder, and quickly uncovered a link to the other missing and murdered girls. But as Inaya gets closer to the truth, outside forces find ways to obstruct her investigation. So she turns to her female colleagues attorney Areesha Adams and Detective Catalina Martine, for help in finding the truth to what's happening to these girls. These three have bonded together from their experiences in the past working with vulnerable groups and now they must work together to expose the conspiracy behind the murders before another girl disappears. Doesn't that sound so so good? Just cracklingly good, right? Yes. And I know a lot of people have loved the other series that Ausma Zehanat Khan writes, and so I was really, really excited about this. I buddy read this with my good friend, Betsie Ikenberry, we were both really, really excited to read this one. It ended up getting three stars for me. And just barely, I was very much teetering between two and a half and three stars. So the other thing is, I saved this to be one of my first books of 2023 because I really wanted to start the year off with a bang, I know. Alright, here's what I did like about the book and there were definitely things to like. The prose is gritty and real. And it drew me in from the start. Khan has a sure hand when setting the stage of her novel, and when we first started out both Betsie and I were very happy with what we were reading. I also loved our lead detective. And reading about the experience of Muslim women trying to navigate a Colorado old boys police department was very interesting and enraging, but interesting and really well done, and Inaya Rahman, our lead character is smart and grounded in a way that had me very invested in her success. There are several scenes with her and her Muslim family, and I felt like I had a front row seat to their real lives and real conversations, dialogue that was done very, very well as they worked through various expectations, and frustrations with each other. The book was at its absolute best, I think, in those scenes. But from that strong start, things started to go wrong. The book immediately began to be not a slow burn, but a slow burn out. And it just drags on and on as the author introduced more and more thorny issues, race and religion is

enough to bite off in a novel. But then she added unions, armed Steelers, crooked cops, race related violence and far right extremists to name just a few. Add to that a workplace romance that not only didn't feel realistic, but made me angry and cringe. And my head was just spinning. I felt like not only was she doing too much, but she was telling me everything she used over and over again, the tool of giving us the characters interior thoughts, which were just them wondering what could have happened with this crime? And I kept thinking, I know, I'm wondering the same things. Why don't we go out and find out what's going on? It was so it was so frustrating. And she didn't show the important themes or give me a true sense of many of the characters. And those big thorny issues that she's based the story on. She pounded me over the head about them so hard that I got a headache. My overwhelming feeling at the end of this book was just being tired. And that is so disappointing, because I really wanted to like Blackwater Falls by Ausma Zehanat Khan.

Kaytee Cobb 22:59

Now, is this the first one you've read by her Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:02

Yes, it is.

Kaytee Cobb 23:03

Okay, because I know, remembering way back two and a half years ago, when Roxanna was first on the show, one of her current reads was this author. So I wasn't sure if Roxanna was involved in this decision to help you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:17

No, she was not. And in fact, when I obviously I was talking to her about reading it. And she was like, I really wished you would started with the other series. Oh, no. She was right. That's right. So it seems it seems like that other series, I mean, I've heard many trusted sources say that her other series is quite good. So I'm definitely not putting her in a category of I would never read her again, because I would actually really love to read some more of her work and really get into it.

Kaytee Cobb 23:45

Okay, that sounds like a good plan. All right. I have nonfiction for my second one. It's called How to Break Up with Your Phone by Catherine Price.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:53

Oh, yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 23:54

Don't we all? We're all interested now. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:56

Yep.

Kaytee Cobb 23:57

So I started and finished this book in early January, but then waited a full month to bring it to the show because I wanted to complete the 30 day detox program that is included in this book before I talked about it here. So this one released in 2018, and I've had it on my shelves nearly the entire time, which is embarrassing. At the beginning of 2023, I decided I wanted a different relationship in my life with my phone in general, and with social media in particular. I had already taken some steps to change how I related with my phone, and I knew that I needed some guidance to get the rest of the way there. Catherine Price starts this small book with her own story of realizing she had a phone addiction. She includes a standard set of questions at the beginning that is used as a like a standardized test to determine if someone has a phone addiction. And guess what? If you've got a cell phone I pretty much guarantee that you have a phone addiction. They're so ubiquitous that it's nearly impossible to not have one according to this like metric that she uses. She then spends the first half of the book through the research, and admits at the beginning that the first section is meant to scare you straight as the reader. It's heavy on the statistics that many of us have heard about the number of hours we spend on screens each day, the ways that apps are designed to create the maximum dopamine response, the ways that it's changing for the generation coming after us. And the ways that social interactions online, no matter how much we want to believe it cannot replace real life social interactions. They're just not substitutable. She then introduces a relatively simple 30 day detox program. It's meant to start with the reader just noticing their own habits, making decisions about what they'd like to be different in their lives, and then taking steps to make those changes. There's not a book that ends with you buying a landline and moving to a hole in the ground and only living, you know, off grid. It's a book that allows the reader to make just more informed choices about how much time and energy they want to spend on social media and what apps they're going to allow to have access to them rather than vice versa. I will say that I had already made a number of changes that she suggested as first steps and the week or two. So the first couple of weeks of this detox were like, Oh, well, I've already done that, oh, I've already done that. Right. So a lot of that was just not new information for me, turning off and silencing notifications, blah, blah, blah, that easier stuff. However, I did really enjoy the opportunity to push myself and to find other ways to spend my time and think about what else I could be doing with my time that didn't involve mindless scrolling, and a screen in my hands. For that reason I do recommend this book. Is it going to change your life? Probably not. But will you end this book and this challenge having a better handle on your own time and attention? I think so. And she does talk about how our attention spans have gotten shorter and shorter as everything comes in these smaller bite size increments. All of us as readers, if you're here listening to Currently Reading, you're a reader. All of us want that longer attention span, we want to be able to sink into a book. We talked about quiet books a few weeks ago that required that more focused attention and the phones are messing with that attention, capability and span. So for that reason, I think any reader would like to get a better handle on social media and feeds and phones in order to sink deeper into the books that he or she loves. So this is How to Break Up with Your Phone by Catherine Price.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:29

I love that. I've been thinking a lot about that, Kaytee, and one of my favorite follows is Ryan Holiday, who does The Daily Stoic. He also owns The Painted Porch bookstore here in Texas. And one of the things that he says often is to ask yourself about whatever app you're using, "Am I using this app or is it using me?" Because I think that there are times we're going to check on something, we're going to

comment on a few things in a group, we especially want to be active, and that's us using an app. When we find ourselves just mindlessly scrolling, that's the app using us. And so I just keep thinking about that over and over again. And just being mindful about that one thing has had me putting my phone down more regularly. So I would love, I'd be very interested in reading about more ways that I can stop spending my time that way because it does get in the way of so much.

Kaytee Cobb 28:19

Right? And the way that even if you think you're done with it, it calls you back and it pulls you back right with that little vibration or with that little popup bubble and screen lights up. Even if it makes no noise at all. And you're like, Ooh, I better I better run over there and check what's happening. Yeah, so yeah, it's hard. It's hard.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:36

It is. Alright, Kaytee, I brought a two and a half star book before and so I'm going to bring you my first five star book of 2023. Now because you know, I don't ever want to have a womp and then not bring us up

Kaytee Cobb 28:50

Oh yeah, we need to swing up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:52

I am so excited to talk about this book because I feel like this is one of those backlist books that had me asking "Why are we not all reading this book?" It was such a joy to read. This is *The Rook* by Daniel O'Malley. Oh my gosh, I love this book. Okay, Marli James bookish friend Marli James recommended to me. She wanted us to know that it was actually her friend Amy Olson, who recommended it to her. So again, when you recommend a book you love, you never know how it's going to travel. And then all of a sudden you're hearing about it on a podcast and in front of 35,000 people. So thank you, Amy for that. Here's the setup of the book. And this setup is short and sweet and just a teensy bit more than what I got from Marli when she recommended it to me because that very little setup was perfect. Our lead character is, sort of, Myfanwy Thomas, Myfanwy rhymes with Tiffany, it's Welsh. Okay, you're gonna that's the one thing that the very beginning of the book you're gonna have to get over.

Kaytee Cobb 29:51

Okay. All right. I'm over it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:53

So when you read the book, and you will, you're going to understand why I say sort of Myfanwy awakens in a London park surrounded by dead bodies, all of whom have blue latex gloves on. Like I'm in. That's all Marli said to me. And I was like, download, okay, but here we go. With her memory completely gone, she must trust the instructions left by the person who purports to be her former self. Those instructions are left luckily in the pocket of the coat that she wakes up in, and she has to rely on those instructions in order to survive. Myfanwy quickly learns that she is a rook, a high level operative in a secret agency that protects the world from supernatural threats. But there is a mole inside her organization and that person wants her dead. Oh my god, this book is so good. Okay, it's a romp. This

book is romp. And it was so unexpected. Like I said, I went in almost completely blind. So then the whole book could just unfold in front of me like the most amazing flower, and it had so many beautiful layers of interest. I love the complex structure of the secret agency that she is a part of. I very much loved the lead character, even though her name is Myfanwy. And I loved the hilarious narration that had me laughing out loud from the beginning. It is so smart and tongue in cheek and just, as soon as I met this new version of Myfanwy, I was like, I want her to be my best friend. We are two peas in a pod. I loved the way that we got more and more info on the pieces the backstory that we needed, just as we needed them. We truly stood in for our narrator, we felt what she was feeling. We felt confused and emboldened and excited, we felt the thrill of being innately good at a job which you had never done before. She sort of just naturally knew how to do what she needed to do. And it was so satisfying. I also have to say I loved the superpowers that are a part of this world in this world. Many people are what's called powered. And those powers are weird sometimes, like their people could be powered in the most amazing ways. And the secret agency that they work for would figure out how to use those powers in battle and sometimes they were not used in battle. They were just used in more prosaic administrative ways and that was equally interesting. Anytime people are doing what they are especially like born to do it's just, I just absolutely love it. It was so imaginative. Also, I loved the Easter eggs throughout. Look for grin inducing tidbits on Martha Washington and the wardrobe door to Narnia. You have to be paying attention. But if you are there is so much to love here. In an Instagram post I made mention that The Rook has elements of Men in Black in that it's an organization devoted to keeping supernatural things in line in check from killing humans but also secret, but on further consideration, I really have come to believe that that is a poor comparison. Men in Black is so base and simple. The Rook is elevated and elegantly plotted. It's so very high minded and civilized and British, which is interesting because the author is Australian. And this is his debut. This book is more aptly described as a perfect combination of the book Hench and The Windsor Knot, with a dash of James Bond thrown in, and a hefty scoop of girl power. It's a series and I immediately downloaded the second one. This is why I said when I want to read a series, I'm gonna read a series because you're gonna be hearing about that. This book is totally 100% able to be read as a standalone. So it is a series but everything wraps up really nicely. The book is so good. It's long. It's over 500 pages, but it never felt long. In fact, the pages flew by and I found myself staying up way too late saying just one more chapter. I have to find out what is going to happen. And that is my favorite kind of reading. This is The Rook by Daniel O'Malley.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:16

That sounds so good. You totally talked me into it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:25

It was so good. Kaytee, you would love it.

Kaytee Cobb 34:29

It sounds like I would love it. Like everything you said like add a dash of this and a sprinkle that I'm like, well I want all of those things in large quantities, please.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:38

Yes, this is an especially Kaytee book. You would really love it.

Kaytee Cobb 34:42

Okay, yeah, I'm gonna have to check it out for sure. Okay, and you read it on your Kindle.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:47

I read it on my Kindle. I was able to get it from my library immediately. Because it's 2012 So it's like sitting there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:53

Oh, good. I'm so glad that that was whenever your first book of the year is really good. I feel like that's wonderful.

Kaytee Cobb 34:53

Yeah, well, it's not going to be available anymore by the time everybody listens to this episode. I definitely like wait, where are the all these holds? Right Meredith has her superpowers also you guys. Okay, my third book is the first one that I read of 2023. But it was not a disappointment like Blackwater Falls. It's called We Deserve Monuments by Jas Hammonds. This is a newer YA release that I got from Libro.FM as a galley because they do those ALC program releases. It was my first book of 2023 and I started out the year on the right foot because I gave it four and a half stars. Avery is our main character. She is uprooted from her life in Washington DC, which was a pretty decent life, in order to move south with her family to Georgia, and take care of her terminally ill grandmother, Mama Letty. Avery's mom and her mother Mama Letty have a frosty relationship and it's been that way for Avery's entire life. She doesn't understand it. It makes for a tense school year ahead as the two circle around each other with undisguised animosity and tension. But every time Avery tries to uncover the truth of the difficulties between them, she's shut down by both matriarchs. Thankfully, Avery finds a friendship to lose herself in next door. Simone and her mother have been constantly in Mama Letty's life. Ever since Avery's mother left town with her daughter in tow many years ago. Her friendship with Jade, daughter of the town's most influential family makes the three of them a wonderful trio. But Jade's mother was murdered years ago, and that murder remains unsolved. So was Avery's grandfather. Add to that the icy cold reception whenever her mother and grandmother are in the same room, and you've got a pot on the stove ready to boil over. There's a central mystery to this story, which kept me listening at warp speed as y'all know. But there's also a sweet and secret romance between two of the girls, which means there has to be a fallout at some point, right? Jade and Simone have been friends for a long time. But they've made a rule in their friendship, to not get involved in relationships because of the way that Jade disappeared earlier in their friendship when she got involved with a boy. So like, oh my god, we're never doing that again. We're the best right? There's also a really racist history to the town, interwoven with Avery's own history that we need to uncover as readers. At this point, I've also started a great rec from Elizabeth Barnhill at Fabled called Times Undoing by Cheryl Head. This novel is based on a murder in the writers own history. And an image of the writers grandfather is even worked into the cover art. That one comes out February 28, and has a lot of similar themes to it, but from an adult perspective. So this one's kind of a double rec. If you like the idea of an unraveling of historical mystery, and a fish out of water story in the south, Times Undoing is the one I'll point you to even though I haven't finished it yet. If you don't mind a YA storyline and characters along with better romance I'll heartily recommend We Deserve Monuments by Jas Hammonds, an excellent debut novel.

Kaytee Cobb 38:04

Yeah, definitely. Okay, those were our six current reads. Which means now we get to do our deep dive about books that inspire us to travel or get us ready to pack our bags, or at least Google Map like, oh, what does that actually look like? I wonder if I'd like to see it in real life. So Meredith, I I love to travel. I love my bed, which makes traveling hard, because I wish I could pack my bed and bring it with me. But I love going to other countries going to other states trying different climates. How are you on like traveling in general? Are you a fan? Or would you rather be at home?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:37

I definitely don't travel a ton. And that's probably more because my husband isn't really big into traveling. If I was married to someone who really liked it, I think I would be into it more. But like I've never been to Europe, I've never been you know, there's a lot of places I haven't been. So I've been doing more travel as I've gotten older and I travel with friends, which is totally fine. Johnny and I both agree, that's a perfectly great way for me to be able to scratch that itch. Right. But so I would say I'm kind of in the middle. I'm not it doesn't call to me all the time. But there are some trips that I definitely think oh, I would just love to see that.

Kaytee Cobb 39:13

Okay, so what's the first thing that came to mind? Like what's, what's the book or series I imagine that makes you just want to, you know, get your passport updated and pack those bags?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:25

Right. So, obviously the first the first book series that I thought about was the Three Pines series in the Eastern Townships in Quebec is definitely the setting that I am interested in even the City of Montreal there's so many of Louise Penny's books that that go into the City of Montreal and deal with a lot of the historic places in Montreal. So I'm really excited Roxanna and I, as we do A Journey to Three Pines are actually going to plan a trip, and we're going to go to the Eastern Townships and we're going to actually go to some of the places, and this is one of those things where we're like, "you know what, if we're going to do a podcast about it, we might also plan up a bucket list trip". So we're and I've never been to... I mean, I've never really, I went to Vancouver, but I've never been to Canada. So I want, I want to see that definitely, but further flung. The very first series other than that, that popped into my mind is a series that I really like by Martin Walker, that starts out with a book called The Dark Vineyard. And basically, these are, I would describe them as gentle mysteries. They're not cozy mysteries. They're gentle mysteries. They're very, very much you are there for the setting, which is vineyards in the French countryside. And so there are racial tensions, and there are things that are going on. And there's the lead detective is this great character, but you are really going there, to bask in the French countryside. And then there's a lot of food and wine in those books. So the dark vineyard is the first book that popped into my mind other than Three Pines.

Kaytee Cobb 40:59

I like that. I like that. I a couple of weeks ago mentioned when I talked about Violeta that if I ever go to Chile, it's going to be because of Isabel Allende. That country is so long and skinny. It travels over so many, like different latitudes that I love the idea of being you know, in the summer at one end, and then seeing penguins at the other end of the country and just having it be this like, amazing variety from one

end to the other. You can be like skiing or on the beach and all in one country at one time. I think that's so cool.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:31

That is cool. I don't think I knew that about Chile. That's That's really interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 41:35

It just runs like right along the edge of South America. So it just covers this huge variety of terrains and temperatures and stuff. I also I feel like people will riot if we don't mention this, like childhood favorite of Prince Edward Island, Anne of Green Gables. And I'm getting to be on the island. I mean, you can take curated literary field trips to Prince Edward Island.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:00

Well, I'm wearing I'm wearing my Anne of Green Gables sweatshirt right now. Because, yes, because I was thinking about Prince Edward Island, right? That's, we all grew up dreaming of that place, right?

Kaytee Cobb 42:11

Yes, for sure. I also, like, almost any book can make me want to travel. When I read Shogun, when you pressed it into our hands during season one, I was like, I want to go to China. I've never been anywhere in that Eastern hemisphere. Really. I've been to Australia and New Zealand, but I haven't been anywhere on like the Asian continent. So there's all kinds of places I'd love to go over there. And Shogun is such a big chunker of a book that you really get into like ancient Chinese society and the Great Wall and historical, like places of historical significance. And I would love to pack my bags and go there as well.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:47

Shogun is such a good book. I love that book. I would love to take the time to reread Shogun

Kaytee Cobb 42:54

and go to China. Yeah, we go to China. Okay, yes. Okay. My next trip, our bookish friends know, this fall, I'm going to the UK with my family. And you know, a lot of us also have read Outlander, and you bet your patoot that I have Googled Outlander locations in Scotland, to see how close I can get to some of those places. Because I love that book, genius coming to life and walking those same streets. I think it's such a delight, and I want to see standing stones and I want to see the Scottish Highlands. And I want to feel like I was there in the places where they walked. Even though I haven't even read the most recent books of that series. I just, I love the atmosphere of those stories.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:39

Right, right. And I was also thinking about how much I would love to go to Scotland and go to Edinburgh and I was thinking about every Jenny Colgan novel, makes you want to go to Scotland, right. And she's got lots of different settings. But the most recent one that I read was The Christmas Bookshop. And it just had me googling these very specific landmarks in the City of Edinburgh, and and just thinking, Oh, I would love to go on some of these walking tours and these amazing things in that city. And I just I would love to go to Scotland.

Kaytee Cobb 44:11

Sure, yes. Okay, I have one nonfiction pick, which is that last year or two years ago, almost I've read *How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith. And he described it as a field trip and a college class rolled into one. So I would love to reread it while visiting the museums, the plantations, the monuments, the island that he visits while he's on the pages and feeling like I got to take that college class with him and also travel around to the different places he went. And that one is, you know, within the country, it's probably more achievable than some of the other ones. But I also had some really achievable ideas about this too. We had a number of bookish friends this summer who read *Remarkably Bright Creatures* off the Indie Press List, and then plan an outing to go to their local aquarium that happened to have a great Pacific Octopus. Yeah, and That is a way to like bring those pages to life without, you know, needing a passport and a suitcase and all this other stuff, right? You could do that with, you know your local Ghanaian cafe after reading *Homegoing* or planning a trip to the Eiffel Tower after reading *A Caribbean Heiress in Paris*, if you're on that side of the world, it doesn't have to be the trip of a lifetime. And it can still bring those pages to life, which I think is a really fun way to read.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:25

Absolutely, it's so fun to be able to bring something into your real life as you read something. And it made me think about the fact that one of my local bookstores is of course, BookPeople in Austin. And it's an incredible bookstore, an absolutely incredible bookstore. But one of the things that they do really well, and that I'll avail myself of every single time I go, is they have a huge local books section to local to Austin, and Central Texas. And so I have found several books in that section, mostly related to true crime and serial killers. But reading those books has given me the ability to know where several different historical things have happened in the city that I live in my new newly adopted city. And so that's a great thing to do is go to the local section of your bookstore, and pick up a book that you know, is about something that happened there and then go visit that place. It kind of feeds into what you were talking about Kaytee, but it just makes you feel like you know, your city more like I didn't know that the wars that were being fought around this area, there were women who were very much the reason that Austin wasn't completely taken over. And so there, it's like, there's the grid, and then there's statues to those women like near the Capitol. And if I hadn't read about that, when I visited the Capitol, that statue wouldn't have had as much meaning. But all of a sudden, I was like, Oh my gosh, I knew exactly what this means, right. And it happened to be in a book about a serial killer that I was learning about anyway. But that's a really fun thing to do.

Kaytee Cobb 46:55

On that same note, I just finished, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* and was thinking about your time, like growing up in the bay area in the 70s and 80s. I was like, what,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:05

every single area that he was that he was active in, I lived at some point, not at the same time. But what I mean is when I was reading the book, I was like, Oh my gosh, I lived like a mile from that particular place. And you know, 20 years difference, but I knew those areas, really, you know, really, really intimately.

Kaytee Cobb 47:24

I was freaked out by association. I was like, I'm one step removed from Meredith, who is only, you know, one step removed from these locations. That's basically me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:33

Oh my gosh, that book freaked me out so badly. But the one trip that I have taken that was inspired by some of my reading is I read A City Baker's Guide to Country Living by Louise Miller. And then I went to Vermont, and Vermont is my favorite place on the planet. It is the most beautiful place I've ever seen. I went to Vermont in October. And it is heaven on earth. It is absolutely beautiful. I want to at least have a like a second home in Vermont at some point because it is so beautiful there and I just feel like I want to live some of my life there. And it was really inspired by my reading because it's just, it's exactly what it sounds like in books.

Kaytee Cobb 48:15

Right? So hallmarky

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:17

It's it really is its hallmark come to life. And everything tastes and smells like maple syrup.

Kaytee Cobb 48:25

I'll take a dash and a sprinkle of that as well.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:27

Yes, a maple latte every morning, please. And thank you.

Kaytee Cobb 48:31

Indeed. Okay, y'all, we want to hear about the trips that you want to go on because of a book that you read. And because of the way that that author brought that story to life, because honestly, like this could have been a 45 minute deep dive, I'm guessing because there's so many great stories that bring those places to live for us. And I want to hear more about them. And I want to read more of them. So tell us all about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:53

Well, and Kaytee, I was thinking we need to do a deep dive on the places that don't exist in real life that we want to visit.

Kaytee Cobb 49:00

Oh yes, that is a great idea.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:03

Because I kept running I was going through my book journal and I kept being like, oh, I want to await that doesn't exist in real life.

Kaytee Cobb 49:11

Yes, we should absolutely do that. We should just do that next week. That sounds like a lot of fun like a whole traveling inspired February. That's what we're gonna do. Exactly. Okay, wrapping that deep dive up. Let's move to the fountain. We're going to pivot over to the garden. We're going to see the the pings and the splashes What are you wishing for this week Meredith?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:30

All right. I am wishing that more really mediocre books would be saved by being brought to major streaming networks and made into super fantastic shows. And I have an example for you Kaytee. I have been watching the other thing I've been so I do I have a comfort show that I've got going all the time and then I've got like a I really have to pay attention show. This is my I have to pay attention show. It's a show on Apple TV called Truth Be Told. And it stars the fantastic Octavia Spencer, as a podcaster called Poppy Parnell. See the alliteration? Do you hear it?

Kaytee Cobb 50:12

Every freaking name is alliterative now. It's fine, whatever. Alright, so like, I'm Kaytee Cobb. I'm also like we're both alliterative and I still don't want any alliterative names in my books.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:23

Alright, well, Poppy Parnell is the lead character of Truth Be Told. This is based on a book, the first season is based on a book called, Are You Sleeping by Kathleen Barber, which I had read because it has this. So Poppy is a podcaster. And the whole thing about Are You Sleeping is that this guy gets killed. He's got these creepy girl twins that are adults when Poppy is investigating everything. And it's a wrongful conviction kind of scenario. I read the book and I was so bored. Kaytee. It was, it was so boring. But what they've done with the show, is they've taken the good parts of this really strong premise, put in some fantastic acting, and created a really, really strong thing. It's like 10 episodes the first season. But then the second season is not as far as I know. It's not based on a book of any kind, but it's based on those same characters, kind of like what we talked about with Vera, right? The second season is even better. It stars Kate Hudson, and she plays this character that's like she and poppy grew up in the in East Oakland, which is a really hard neighborhood. And now the Kate Hudson character has like grown up, she's written this, this incredible memoir that's just been everywhere. And she's become this like Gwyneth Paltrow, goop running, like she runs this, like almost, it's kind of a lifestyle brand, but people love it so much. It's almost culty and she's very beautiful and golden. And then so that's Kate Hudson, and then her husband gets killed.

Kaytee Cobb 52:00

I feel like that's just actual Kate Hudson.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:03

Exactly. Maybe it is. And then we're, of course, Poppy is called in to try to figure out what's going on. But then who can you trust anyway? I wish that more books that I would read and be like, Oh, that was a waste of my time would be made into really good shows that I can watch and truly enjoy. Like Truth Be Told on Apple TV. So that's my wish. Ping splash. Save the bad books.

Kaytee Cobb 52:27

Yes. I like that wish turn that person into a screenwriter instead. That's a great wish. Okay, I am stealing a wish this week. Okay, it's our show. I can do that. Yep. So I wish that every bookstore sold a sticker that has their store name on it. Oh, yeah. One of our bookish friends posted about this, this comes directly from one of our patrons. And I'm the one speaking it out into the world. So bookish friend Carrie mentions that every month she likes to buy a sticker from the bookstores that she shops at especially indie press list bookstores. Stickers are small, inexpensive, easy to pack easy to put into her planner or reading log, which is this is when I was like, Oh yes, I do want this wish in the world. So she puts it in her reading log. And then she'll put you know what book she purchased there or whatever. But then it becomes this more visual beautiful representation of where she's been that year, which store she shopped at whether in person or virtually. Sometimes you can get a bookmark instead and tape it in. But rarely are those available for sale on the website. And not all stores have this. And it's so cheap. Like it's so easy to just put that in a backroom somewhere and toss it in with an order. So I am encouraging any bookstore owner that is listening right now, to make sure that you have your store logo and the name on a sticker in your store so that your readers can go and like shout it out to the world this great bookstore that they got to visit I'm bringing her wished to the big show as a show of solidarity. Ping splash

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:01

That's a good wish. I completely cosign on that wish. That's a that that should definitely happen.

Kaytee Cobb 54:06

That should definitely happen. It should be like bookstore, business plan, buy books, make stickers, the end

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:12

Branding. Exactly. It must do branding. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 54:24

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:28

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 54:38

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:44

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Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All of those things make a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 55:11

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:16

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 55:19

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:21

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 55:22

Happy reading Meredith