



# Season 5, Episode 17: Book Gushing + Great Covers That Made The Book Better

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**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 don't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:24

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on a 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 fountain.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday, Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas and it's getting cold here, y'all, I'm getting out my reading blankets.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and plane reading is some of my very best reading. This is episode number 17 of season five, and we are so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:55

Okay, the plane reading is very good reading. That's some of my best too. Alright, so we're going to start off this episode letting you guys know that our deep dive is going to be some covers of books that have increased our enjoyment of the book. And I am... I really went down a rabbit hole with this. So I'm excited about this deep dive.

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:19

I'm excited too. It's fun to think about the ancillary things that make the reading experience better.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:27

Absolutely, absolutely. All right. So before we get into that, let's talk about our bookish moment to the week. Kaytee, what's your bookish moment?

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:37

Okay, my bookish moment this week, Meredith, I did a quick trip this past weekend to Arizona and back and I flew out of the smallest airport I've ever been in in my entire life. Santa Fe has only two gates, they're working on a third. It's very, very tiny. When I was waiting for my flight home in the big airport to

board, I got out my new headphones that have noise cancelling and I haven't used that feature very much, even though I wanted to try it out. Turns out an airport is the perfect place to try out noise cancelling headphones. Because what it did was it made kind of a gray sound, cancelling out the noise. But I could still hear big noises like announcements, but not the hum of conversation that I'm really bad about eavesdropping on around me. So I was able to let go of everybody else's drama and phone calls and plane conversations and just sink into a book, which I haven't really been able to do in an airport before. I can do it on a plane because there's that gray noise anyway. But at the airport, there's it's so busy, there's so much happening around you, it was the perfect place to try them out and really get a feel for the capability. So I wasn't listening to an audio book, I was reading a paper book. But I had my headphones in which has two benefits. Of course, nobody talks to you with headphones in. And nobody and you can't hear other people and their conversations. So it really made for a great experience even while I was just sitting there and killing time.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:05

Yes, this is exactly what I do. When I fly to Memphis and back. I fly by myself. So I that is some of my best time. And so yeah, the noise cancelling headphones and then on the plane, right, I don't have to have any headphones in because the plane noise is just that perfect kind of background noise or gray noise that helps you sink into a book I really those trips back and forth to Memphis, I get some of the most and best reading done. That's really, really fun.

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:32

I don't get to fly very often by myself. So that was the other one for this one. Because usually I have to pay attention to like, "Are my kids terrorizing anyone? Have they wandered away from the gate? Who's watching our bags? Does anybody need to go potty?" but getting to fly by yourself is kind of key for getting to completely shut out the world when you're doing this reading hack as well.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:52

Absolutely, I find it to be, you know, really, really useful. And being a long distance grandmother has, you know, upsides and downsides. But I've just decided to lean into the upsides of getting to read a lot as I do these trips by myself. Okay, all right, so my bookish moment of the week, I wanted to bring a podcast episode as I like to do every little bit and actually, I want to bring two podcast episodes because both of them really increased my knowledge of different parts of the industry. And just were very, very interesting to me. So the first one is the episode that recently came out. It's episode 126 of Sarah's Bookshelves Live. She did an interview with an audiobook producer. And uh, you know, I've said before, I think Sarah is an incredible interviewer, whether she's doing authors, or other people who are in the industry and this episode was such a great example of why I like the the content that she brings, because this was so fascinating to hear the different things that are at play when they're putting together audio books. It was just incredibly well done. I was riveted the entire time. Did you get a chance to hear that one?

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:10

Yes, that is absolutely one of my favorite episodes she's ever done. I can I continue to think about what we learned from the interview, I thought it was just fantastic.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:20**

Yes. And then the other episode that I wanted to tell you about is an episode of Planet Money called The E-Book Wars. And it goes over some things that we've talked about before. It's only like a 30 minute episode. And you know, Planet Money does a really, really good job. And they really explain in depth and nuance, The E-Book Wars between libraries and publishers and why that matters to readers, why it matters to authors. Why that clash is really interesting, because it is one of those corporate clashes that everyone involved loves all the players involved, right, like publishers love librarians, librarians love publishers and authors. And so it was just a very nuanced episode on a complicated topic that really does affect us as readers. So that Planet Money episode, The E-Book Wars, we will link to both of those in the show notes, but two really good podcast episodes related to the reading world and the industries that affect us on the every day.

**Kaytee Cobb 06:27**

Excellent. I love that. And I'm very interested in checking out that e-book episode because I have a lot of questions about what's going on there.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:37**

Right, a lot of lightbulb moments for me like, again, we know a lot of the elements, they're in broad swaths, but this got into some more nuanced that made some light bulbs go on above my head, so very interesting. Okay. Let's talk about our current reads. Kaytee, what's your first current read?

**Kaytee Cobb 06:55**

Okay, my first current read I'm very excited to tell you about but I have a caveat first with the fact that space and stories about space are a big deal here in the Cobb household. I got kids that are obsessed with astronauts and other planets and rockets and all kinds of things. So this falls squarely in that wheelhouse. I'm going to talk about A Rover's Story by Jasmine Warga. We've got two fantastic storylines in this book, and I loved the way they came together. First, we have Resilience. Resilience is a Mars rover, who is determined to live up to his name. Res was built to explore Mars, and our author Jasmine Warga combined qualities and missions of multiple rovers to create this fictional robot. It's just a robot but it is our main point of view for the story. It's a rover and it certainly doesn't have human emotions, or at least it shouldn't. But as he learns new things from the NASA scientists who assembled him, he begins to develop human like feelings and that could compromise the mission. Human emotions or not, launch day comes and Res blasts off to Mars, accompanied by a friendly drone helicopter named Fly, who is hilarious and lives inside Res's little rover body, but Rez quickly discovers that Mars is a dangerous place filled with dust storms and giant cliffs. And as he navigates Mars's difficult landscape, the reader is pulled into the story, just like we are in The Martian by Andy Weir. If you let your kids read the young version, the young readers version of that book, this is a perfect pairing for that. If you're like me, and they just read the regular version, then this one is also going to be great for them, and it will have far fewer F bombs. So I've spent a lot of time talking about Res already, but we're also following the story of sixth grade Sophie, whose mom is one of the scientists that helps to build and program Resilience for his trip to Mars. So he has a very special connection to this rover. And she writes him letters as though they can talk to each other, even though resilience cannot communicate back with Sophie. So that gives us a human and OwnVoices perspective, because Sophie and our author are both Muslim Americans. This cannot be communicated through the robot's

point of view alone. I already mentioned *The Martian*. But also if you're a reader who loved Mindy's beloved Murderbot books by Martha Wells, and that look inside at AI that develops a more human intelligence and personality. This would be a great book for you. I pressed it immediately into the hands of my kids, but enjoyed it myself as an adult reader the whole way through. This is a keeper book for the shelves. have any kids or adults that love space, and stem and pondering other worlds and wondering about what's out there. It was fantastic. It's *A Rover's Story* by Jasmine Warga.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 09:44

Ooh, that one sounds really good and a lot of space book space mysteries... like I feel like all of a sudden, that is something that's coming on my radar a lot from middle grade to, you know, adult fiction. It's interesting that there's those patterns to begin to develop.

**Kaytee Cobb** 10:01

Yeah, definitely.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 10:02

Okay. My first current read is, you know, I told you guys, I read a bunch of horror, right? And you guys know what do I do when I need to clear my chakras? I read me some Agatha Christie, right? This is what, so this is why every few episodes, you guys have to listen to me talk about an Agatha Christie book. It's just something we've had to get used to about each other. So this time, I read *Peril At End House* by Agatha Christie. Here's the setup. Hercule Poirot is on vacation on the Cornish Riviera when he overhears a conversation because he Kaytee, like you and me, can't help but eavesdropping, right? It's just what we do. So what he overhears is Nick Buckley, who is a woman and a very pretty woman, she's describing her recent, shocking to friends, and she's describing her recent accidental brushes with death. First on a treacherous Cornish hillside, the brakes on her car failed. And then on a coastal path, a falling boulder misses her by inches, and then later on and oil painting falls, and almost crushes her in her bed. But Nick, pretty, but stupid, tosses all of this off as hilarious coincidences. She literally is giggling about all of this. But Poirot is doubtful, but what can he do? So he finds a way to get himself into this conversation and he finds a way to, you know, begin this friendship with Nick Buckley. And then, while he's still trying to figure out how to bring up the fact that he actually thinks someone is trying to kill her, he finds a bullet hole in Nick's sun hat, and he decides no matter what he needs to help this woman. He plans to find the culprit before they can kill poor dumb, Nick. Oh, no, she is really a very frustrating character, but she does not in any way. tamp down the full enjoyment of this book. Alright, so *Peril in End House* is interesting because it is often listed on the multitude of lists that you can find of top 10 Agatha Christie books, many, many people put this in the top 10,, at least of Hercule's books, if not in all of Agatha Christie books. And after reading it, I can definitely see why. There are a couple of things about this book that make it similar and enjoyable to all my favorite ones. Hercule is at his spicy and sassy best. He is paired in the story with Hastings which of course you know, Hastings is my favorite foil for Hercule's sarcastic humor. They are just such a fun pair with each other. I love their interactions. And of course we have the crumbling estate and the huge cast of potential baddies. Those are the things I'm always looking for in my favorite Agatha Christies. But what is different in this book, and I liked it so much is that usually we have someone at the beginning of our story coming to Hercule to beg him for help. But in this story, Hercule actually has to convince the person who is so obviously having their life attempted on that she in fact, is in danger. And this makes for a hilarious first quarter of

the book. Hercule just cannot believe that this woman can't see what he can see, and the reader can see so clearly. The other thing I love about this book is that while all of Christie's books are puzzles, this one is a true puzzler. This one had me thinking and rethinking the potential motives and suspects the entire way through. It's not a long book, most of her books are not, in fact, it's only four and a half hours on audio. Again, this is why it's a perfect chakra clear for me. But I was thinking and rethinking and writing down and rewriting down who I thought the murderer does. And at the end, I ended up only being partially right. For me when I read Agatha, this is perfection. I always want her to get the best of me by the end. And she often does. Also I should say this is a Hugh Fraser narrated version, which is my absolute favorite. He does the voices so well, including female voices, which has become a real peccadillo for me in my audiobook listening. Overall, this is a delightful experience that I spent mostly putting together a puzzle while I listened. So this was puzzly perfection. This was Peril at End House by Agatha Christie

**Kaytee Cobb** 14:48

That does sound really good and as a non Agatha Christie... I mean, I like her. I'm not not a fan girl, but I'm not an aficionado, and I had never heard of this title before. So I'm glad you brought it to the show.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 15:01

Yes, I am trying to work my way through the the books that consistently are listed as the top 10. Because I tended to kind of just pick and choose randomly, really, honestly, just whatever's available from my favorite narrators. It's Agatha Christie. But I'm trying to be a little more careful about my choices.

**Kaytee Cobb** 15:18

I like it. Okay, so for my second book this week, I had to make a last minute substitution, because I talked to Mary about a book that she and I would like to discuss together and so I had to swap it out real quick, and switch this one and instead, okay, and that means I accidentally brought two sci-fi books in a row to the show, which I don't think I've ever done before.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 15:41

I'll bet there will be a lot of people who are cheering to hear this because we just don't bring enough sci fi.

**Kaytee Cobb** 15:48

There's not much sci fi here. That's so true. So first, we talked about the Mars Rover Resilience. And now I want to tell you about The Lesson by Cadwell Turnbull. So this novel, The Lesson by Cadwell Turnbull broke ground as one of the first science fiction novels set in the Virgin Islands. It explores the nature of belief the impact of colonialism and asks how far we're willing to go for progress. Here's the setup. An alien ship shaped like a giant shell rests over Water Island in the Virgin Islands. For five years, the people of the US Virgin Islands have lived with the Ynaa, a race of super advanced aliens on a research mission that they will not fully disclose. They have skins to make them appear more human, so they can interact with humans in a standard way. But little things about them are just off. So the humans can nearly always tell when they are interacting with an Ynaa, rather than a human being. It doesn't stop them though, from being elected to the government and assuming other positions of power

throughout the Virgin Islands. Mostly they are benevolent beings. But any act of aggression is met with disproportionate wrath. This has led to a strained relationship between the Ynaa and the local Virgin Islanders, and a peace that will not last a year after the death of a young boy at the hands of an Ynaa. Three families find themselves at the center of the inevitable conflict. They are witness and victim to events that will touch everyone on the island. Each of these three families is fully developed. Although it did take me time to get my feet under me with how they related to one another and which characters were part of each family. It's kind of like keeping track of the Montagues and Capulets in Romeo and Juliet. If you aren't already familiar with the story, you're like, wait, I forget is that person on Romeo's side or Juliet's and what's happening between them. So some of these characters really grew on me especially and I kept thinking about them and the decisions they made. Well after I closed the book, this is another one that was sent to me by Brilliant Books in Traverse City, Michigan, and it never would have come across my radar otherwise. But it ended up making a pretty interesting book flight with a brand new release that we just talked about for the November Indie Press List. So it was fun to compare and contrast those two because I read them relatively close together. The cover is really beautiful. And overall I gave it four stars, mostly because I felt like there were some ends that could have been tied up a little better and some story connections that could have been a little stronger from one plotline to the next. I did really enjoy it though. It's The Lesson by Cadwell Turnbull.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 18:22

Oh, that sounds very, very interesting. It's also almost kind of giving me Sparrow vibes.

**Kaytee Cobb** 18:28

Yeah, well, I mean, but it's all happening on Earth. So it has a little bit of a different vibe than The Sparrow but definitely if you liked the one, there will probably be elements you liked in this one as well.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 18:38

All right, good. Okay. Well, I'm glad that that worked for you, Kaytee because I am going to bring a book that did not work for me and it is one of those that is such a bummer, because it is the third in a series that I really loved. I've loved the first two. So the book I want to talk about today is The Harbor by Katrine Engberg. I'm going to give you the setup the way that Amazon gives it to you, because I have something to say about this. And I think it's instructive. Here's what Amazon says is the setup. When 15 year old Oscar Dreyer Hoff disappears in this quote, "masterpiece of Nordic Noir", the police assume that he is simply a runaway, a typically overlooked middle child doing what teenagers do. But his frantic family is certain that something terrible has happened. It's not like him to be gone unexpectedly and he has left behind a very cryptic note. It's not that much to go on. But it's all that our lead characters Jeppe Kørner and Anette Werner, yes, that is Kerner and Werner have, and with every passing hour, as the odds of finding a missing person grow dimmer, it will have to be enough. Okay, that's the setup. I want to lead with the fact that they, Booklist here in a starred review described this book as a masterpiece of Nordic noir and this my friends is exactly why most of us don't trust a lot of critical reasoning. Because, okay, I love Katrine Engberg. Her first two books, The Tenants and The Butterfly House are ones that I've talked about on the show. I love this series. It's a great example of Nordic police procedurals. I really, really, really loved those first two books, so I and I love them on audio. So I dipped into this one, so excited. And for the first 30% of the book, which again, I'm listening to an audio, as I'm taking my walks with Blue, it felt like this one was going to be another hit. So I'm rocking and rolling, walking



along. But then as I walk along, walk after walk, hour after hour, a feeling started to come over me. And that feeling was a lack of certainty that this book was actually going anywhere. It's like we were rolling, rolling, and we started to roll slower and slower. As I continued to listen with more dread in my heart, it occurred to me that this book was in fact horribly, committing the worst of all bookish sense for me, it became boring. I still love the police officer characters Kerner and Werner. Even though nobody says Kerner and Werner in the book, it's just it's something that you notice when you when you read a setup like that. I love these two characters and their stories were moved forward in this book, which is part of the reason why you need to read these books in order. But I've even there, I found myself wondering why we were just saying the same things over and over again. By the time I got to the end of this book, even after I sped it up just to get there, I was really, really glad to be done. Because the reality was the central mystery here itself was just not very interesting. And there were no characters for anyone to care about, positively or negatively. And overall, I just wanted it to be finished. It's not a badly written book. The prose is fine. It's just a boring book. Maybe it's not possible for those two things to exist. Is it badly written if it's boring? I've gone back and forth about this. I will however, continue to listen to these books on audio when her next one comes out. I will download it and listen to it, because I have high hopes that this is going to be a one off situation. And I really, really love this narrator. Now, I will say that not too long after I read this when I read the first book in the Jussi Adler Olson series, The Keeper of Lost Causes, which I loved and which three books into that series, which is a long series switches to this narrator so I am really, really happy that even if the fourth book by Katrine Engberg is, is boring again, I will have another series the Jussi Adler Olsen series to jump over to and to get, hopefully that same kind of experience. So this was not great for me. It didn't work that well for me. This is The Harbor by Katrine Engberg and I say that with really, really sad emotions.

**Kaytee Cobb** 23:10

I'm picturing you walking with Blue and just getting slower and slower as you get more bored and Blue being like, "What in the heck is happening? I thought we were going for a walk."

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 23:19

Yes. And in fact, I have noticed that when I am very interested in the story I'm listening to I do tend to walk faster.

**Kaytee Cobb** 23:27

I can totally see that makes perfect sense to me.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 23:30

All right, what's your next book?

**Kaytee Cobb** 23:32

Okay, my next book actually pairs pretty well with your bookish moment Meredith this week. I want to bring Thank You for Listening by Julia Whelan to the show. And she has been all over the podcast circuit lately because this is Julia Whelan beloved audiobook narrator who has now written a romance novel about audiobook narrators, so bringing it full circle and of course she narrates it herself. It should be listened to on audio because that is perfection. Here's the setup. Sewanee is our main character. She's an audiobook narrator but has left romance, the genre that she became known for in the dust.

She can no longer abide the happily ever afters when her life has veered so much from what she planned for it. Her job allows her the income and flexibility to care for her ailing grandmother who's in a care home, but has started to lose her memories and this is a pretty decent part of the plot. So if you have a tenderness around Alzheimer's, dementia or memory loss, that part is going to be difficult for you reader. When Sewanee gets tapped to moderate a panel at a romance convention in Las Vegas, she unexpectedly spends a whirlwind Snowden night with a charming Irish stranger. But of course nothing will come of that because this is a romance. Cue predictable music right? On her return home, Sewanee discovers one of the world's most beloved romance novelist wanted her to perform her last novel, which is bringing something new and different to the industry. Instead of a traditional audiobook or novel, it'll be released in paid episodes. The catch is that the contract comes with Brock McKnight voicing the male lead. It's a pseudonym of course, as most steamy narrators employ for themselves. Brock is the industry's hottest, most secretive voice. Nobody knows his real name. Nobody knows anything about his background. Even though she gave up on romance years ago, her admiration of the late author and the monetary boon that comes with it, which would allow her the opportunity to get her grandmother more help makes the decision for her. As Sewanee begins to work on the book, resurrecting her old romance pseudonym, she and Brock forge a real connection hidden behind the comfort of anonymity. They share with each other in ways that neither is able to do in person, and it's a romance. So you probably already know where this is going. I loved this book, I loved the plus elements of the story with the grandmother and the memory care discussions as well as Sewanee herself. You find out right at the beginning of the story, that she has an eyepatch that covers a missing eye and scarred skin. But it takes a long time to figure out what happened and what turned her disability into disillusionment with the world and with happily ever afters in general. She is smart and witty, but wounded. The supporting characters here are fabulous and Brock's voice like heated Blue Steel, but still voiced by Julia Whelan, is dreamy as all get out. Julia has narrated hundreds of audiobooks, and she wrote this one to show the fun and foibles of the industry from behind the scenes. She had some wonderful interviews, like I mentioned before with various podcasters that are totally worth listening to. And I'll make sure that Megan gets the links for show notes. But mostly I just wanted to give this book a warm hug when I finished it. Because it gave me all the best feels I adored it. It's Thank You for Listening by Julia Whelan.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 27:04

I'm so glad you liked that, Kaytee. All right, Kaytee, I'm going to talk about my third book, which is one that really surprised me because how much it did work for me. And it really honestly did surprise me. This is The Family Game, by Catherine Steadman. Have you heard of this book? Have you seen it?

**Kaytee Cobb** 27:21

I've heard of Catherine Steadman, but not this title. No.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 27:24

All right. Here's the setup of this book. Our lead character is a young British woman. Her name is Harriet Reed. She's a novelist, who has just had a breakout hit and she's newly engaged to Edward Holbeck, the heir of an extremely wealthy and powerful family. Think old money with ten Os to start that word, Carnegie money. These are embarrassingly rich and powerful people. But Edward has kept Harriet far from his family throughout their relationship. He's basically estranged from his family. But the



news of the couple's engagement has the Holbeck family trying to get back into Edward's life. As Harriet is drawn into their lavish world, the family is very friendly, so welcoming. So when they go over for a family dinner, and Edward's father, Robert gives Harriet a tape, yes, a tape of a book that he's working on, she is desperate to listen. She really feels that she's been drawn into the inner circle, because Robert really wanted her to listen to this tape. But as she listens to it, it's clear that this isn't just a novel. It's a confession, a confession to a grisly crime, a murder. And suddenly, this family game is in motion. All right, I was more surprised than anybody that I liked this book. Now, the premise is something different. And that was why I chose it for my Book of the Month because the premise was different. There were several elements in the book that legitimately surprised me, even in the beginning elements that you just don't normally see in thrillers. I can't talk about what those elements were because they would be spoilery. But just trust me that they're there. Make no mistake, though, this is a thriller. I hadn't read her previous book *Something in the Water* because it never interested me. It was it was just super hyped, and the people who loved it were people who love thrillers that I never liked. So I didn't pick it up. But the premise here drew me in and it kept me turning the pages all the way through. I inhaled this book. There is absolutely no question that the family in this novel is seriously screwed up. There were several times as I was reading, that I said out loud, "Are you serious?" Not because of what the author was doing, but because of the screwed up-ness of this family. If you've this is going to be a really inside baseball thing, but if you have read the Louise Penny series and you've read book four. And when I say the Morrow family, when that means something to you imagine an entire book based on that family with a thriller sort of ending and you will know what I'm talking about. This family is just crazy screwed up. And this book was incredibly satisfying. I read this book because I needed a really quick win. And it gave it to me in spades. I read it in just three short sittings, and this is the perfect kind of thriller to read over the holidays, when you just need something to interest you and not demand a lot of you. It was dark, and surprising and totally delicious, and takes place over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Which makes it very interesting. Also, I will say that there is a scene where this family celebrates something called krampusnacht. Which is, have you heard about this like Krampus this like terrifying. Evil Santa? Yeah. Okay, well, there's a holiday celebrated in Germany, and this family celebrates it. And I will never forget that scene in this book. It is absolutely fascinating. This book is filled with that kind of stuff. It's off its rocker, but in the best possible way. This is *The Family Game* by Catherine Steadman.

**Kaytee Cobb** 31:24

Gosh, it sounds it sounds so good. I'm very excited to hear about this. I love the holiday setting. I love it. It sounds to me like *The Nest* or *The Heirs* mixed with *Knives Out* like a little bit of *Clue* element. And like who did what? With rich people. I just I'm totally obsessed. I have to get my hands on this immediately.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 31:44

Right. But I will say all of those things are correct except where *Clue* and *Knives Out* had kind of like some wackiness insert murder, right? Yeah, like, this is like dark. This is like, seriously, I was reading it going like, "Oh, she's gonna go there? Oh, okay". Rubs hands together. Like it was fascinating. But it is capital D dark.

**Kaytee Cobb 32:10**

Yeah, serial killer laugh over your thought bubble shoulder. I like it. Right.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:15**

Okay, so those are our six current reads. And so now we are going to get into our deep dive. Kaytee, I had noticed that every once in a while I would read a book, where as I was reading it, and I read a lot of books in print, probably way more than I know, I read way more in print than you do Kaytee because you read so much in audio. And so I love a good cover. I don't necessarily need my book to have a good cover but when it does, it adds a lot of enjoyment for me, especially books where I feel that the cover itself adds the enjoyment as to the meaning of what's inside. So when there's a real when there's a real mixture between the book and the cover, The Family Game, the book that I just talked about, does a terrible job of this because at least in the US cover, it has there's like this very satisfying the dark haunted, kind of like crumbling mansion in the background. But then the words "The Family Game" are in pink neon letters. And it makes no sense that this cover probably the British cover will do a lot better job. But this cover didn't, it didn't it actually work to keep me away from what was good about the book instead of drawing me into it. So I wanted to talk about some covers that do it really, really right. But Kaytee, you do do so much of your listening in audio.... Did this topic flummox you?

**Kaytee Cobb 33:42**

It was a little harder for me to prepare. But once I got going, I got excited about it and part of that is because what I do a lot of times is I'll pick a book that I have on my shelves, and then find the corresponding audio to it. So that I can, you know, keep track of my progress in the paper book. And I still have the paper book in front of me. So I still if there's a map, I've still got the map in front of me, I still have that paper book experience, even if I'm taking it in audio probably at least 50% of the time. So even though audio is a huge portion of my reading, I'm still getting at least the other like media experiences with the audiobook.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:21**

Okay. And that is my favorite way. I've been doing that so much more in 2022, having the book in multiple formats and having the print book, you know, as you said, it just brings so much into it. Well Kaytee, the first book that popped into my head is a book that we've talked about on the show many times for many different reasons, but man the cover is so perfect. It's Winterhouse by Ben Guterson. Now, this cover is done by Chloe Bristol. All the covers of the Winterhouse series are done by Chloe Bristol, and they are the perfect example of a cover that adds to the meaning of the story. And as you're reading it, you're looking came back at the cover. The paperback version, in fact has one of those, I don't know what they're called a cover where, when you close the cover, like it has cut out of the windows of Winterhouse.

**Kaytee Cobb 35:10**

Yeah. Like a peek through.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:12**

It's like a peek through exactly. And so you see the characters and there's some little clues as you read the book, there's some little clues that are revealed to you. I really love Chloe Bristol's illustrations and

everything that she does. And I know that when I interviewed Ben, because I loved the Winterhouse in the series so much, he really talked about how he too, was excited to work with her. And that she really got how to bring those things together. I think there's a lot of middle grade that does this really well. And that just really appeals to me, because in middle grade, they are really looking to bring kids in through the cover. And so they concentrate on those illustrative elements. So for me, Winterhouse was just the first, the first one that popped into my head.

**Kaytee Cobb 36:00**

Definitely, I love that one. And the first one that I thought of actually was also middle grade. I talked about it probably about eight, six to eight months ago now. It's *The Last Cuentista* by Donna Barbra Higuera. This is a beautiful blue and orange cover that shows a human face that looks like it's in light and shadow, but the light side is a regular human face with skin. And the other side looks like an anatomy drawing of the muscles underneath the skin, not in a creepy way. Just like what you would find in an anatomy textbook. That face is surrounded by images that become clearer to the reader as you take in the story. So by the end, it feels like you can't tell if the story came first or the cover like you know that the story came first. And the illustrator was just really fantastic. But it feels like they work so well in tandem together, that it feels almost chicken and egg ish, right where you're like, Well, I mean, did she see this image and decide to write a story about it and work in all these elements. And it just pulls out those elements in the story so well. And then the very striking like color combinations there really add to it as well.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:04**

Absolutely, that's a perfect, in fact, I just bought that book and I thought the exact same thing. That cover just really, really adds to it. Another cover that I liked so much more after I finished the book is the cover to *White Smoke* by Tiffany D. Jackson. It's not necessarily the kind of cover that I'm attracted to. I tend to like anything with gold foil, lots of florals, like that tends to be my, what I love but the the cover to *White Smoke*, which is a very creepy, very scary work of YA horror. It just does such a good job of showing you in the foreground, the face of what we are to think is our lead character, which is very strong. And she's kind of looking out from the cover with a lot of almost, what's the word I'm looking for, like, she's daring. Liken almost she's daring, like brashness, she's like she's not going to be daunted by the things that are happening in this book, which plays a lot into what happens in the story. She really does have to marshal all of her inner strength to get through the things that are happening in the story. But then what I love is then, of course, there's white smoke on the cover. But they did a great job of putting some things that almost reveal themselves to you as you look more and more at the cover. Things that you don't notice initially, that are clues that happened in the story, again, the book revealing itself, and the more you know about the story, the more the cover makes sense. That's the winning formula for me.

**Kaytee Cobb 38:40**

Yeah, I love that too. And I think I think it's one of the reasons that illustrators are so valuable because it can really make a book or just completely flop on it right like the the cover does matter in so many ways. And putting in those little hints makes it matter that much more.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:58**

Absolutely another cover that doesn't necessarily, you know, I like like Magpie Murders also has a great cover that reveals clues to the story, and it's just very spare. It's very memorable. It's red with a magpie on the front. But then as you look closer, you see those clips. I love that about a cover. But then we have books that are much more difficult, I think, to do a cover design for like Matrix by Lauren Groff. And the cover, the British cover, especially does a really great job. It's waves of gold echoing in sunlight. And then it has a really bold and timeless typeface. And it does what the book does, which is weave together a very modern take on a very old story again, mattress is a work of historical fiction. It takes place hundreds of years ago, and yet it's a very modern take on that story. Right somehow, both historical and modern at exactly the same time. It resonates with modern readers as much as it would you know someone who, who was listening to the story in real time when it actually happened. And so the cover there, the British cover does such a good job of bringing those two things together and really draws you in making you go. Hmm, the title Matrix everyone has a problem with right like everyone's like, why is this? Why why is it called Matrix, but the cover itself does a good job of bringing you in and making you want to open up the cover and being like, what is this about? Oh, nuns, why should I be interested? And then we know we're off and running from there.

**Kaytee Cobb 40:35**

Perfect. I love that. And I my second one, I actually have almost the flip side. It's one of the few times I think the US cover is far and away better than the British cover. And it's an Indie Press List book from this past year: How High We Go in the Dark by Sequoia Nagamatsu has clouds on the cover, and then phases of the moon going from, you know, all the way waxing to waning and a full moon in the center. And not only the gold foil and the beautiful clouds and sky around it, but as you read this book, it feels like you are putting together those pieces of the moon to where you've, you've gotten all the phases under your belt. So even though this book is not about the moon, and it's not about the phases of the moon, as you read, it feels like that cover becomes more and more applicable to what's happening inside the story and the way that you're piecing things together. And I, I love the the US cover of this book, and the the British cover is like black with various circles on it. And it's super unattractive. And I'm very glad that finally we got a win in this category. Because I think that cover adds so much to the story that you're gonna find inside.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:48**

Absolutely, I totally agree. And I wanted to bring up an Indie Press List book from many months ago, the Last Smile in Sunder City. Because this is an example of of a trend that we're seeing in covers. Not only do I think that the cover of that book completely draws you in, and lets you know exactly what story, this very noir detective story that you get. But also it is an interactive cover. And so it kind of like the background is like a map of Sunder City. And it gives you lots of details with the names of different places and streets. And so that also draws you in. And as you read the story, it becomes more meaningful. But then it also is one of those covers where when you click on an app, it you can bring the cover to life and make it actually move. And that's a trend that we're seeing in covers. And I will be interested to see if that continues because I like it. Some people think it's like a little bit, you know, schticky yeah, I like it. I like it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:45

Okay, I've got one more also. So one that I'm currently reading, I'm almost done with it, but I can't not mention it. It's again, a British version of An Immense World by Ed Yong. So this one is nonfiction and explores the senses of animals. While it's tempting to recognize that our own perception of the world, as humans are shaped by what we see and what we sense, but there's really so much more happening in the world around us. The cover in the UK version is gorgeous navy blue backdrop that has animals around it in like a wreath shape almost that appear almost holographic, like you can look at them from different directions. And they seem to almost shimmer in all blues and purples. And each of those animals you will find within this book. So it's again, a little bit of a seek and find, but also just really stunning. Like I want it up on my wall. It's gorgeous. And it really adds to what you're gonna get inside. And I'll tell you what, carrying that book through the airport this past weekend, everybody wanted to know what I was reading because that cover is so eye catching, they would be like so. So what is this book? What's happening here? And I was like, well, first of all Blackwell's.UK, that's where you get this one. So it's just it's fantastic. That one's An Immense World by Ed Young.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:00

No, I haven't heard of that one. I'm gonna go take a look at that cover. Hopefully, all of you guys have been pulling up covers as we've been talking about them. If you don't know them already, that will make this a lot more interesting to you. And we also want to know, what are some of the covers that you think have really added to your enjoyment either purely because of the way they are so beautiful that they drew you in? Or because they have some sort of meaning that revealed itself so we will do a thread on Instagram. And we want to know what kind of covers have really hit the mark for you. All right, Kaytee, let's talk a little bit about our wishes at the fountain. What's your wish this week?

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:00

Okay, Meredith this week, I am going to wish for some help from our listening community. So I wish this week for the perfect holiday romance to add to my TBR this year in December. We're halfway through November now. I'm going to be looking for holiday romances. But of course I I am craving something a little different. I don't want a Hallmark movie of a Christmas tree farm. I want diversity. I want plus elements. I want holidays that are not Christmas. I want holiday romances or, or end of the year romances that really are going to add something exceptional to my reading life. And I did do a call for this last year around Christmas just in my Instagram stories and got a lot of great suggestions. But this year, I really want to open up to the entire listening audience. So if you think this is like one of the few times that I'm going to ask you to DM me, or even email Currently Reading and say, Kaytee, I have the perfect book that ticks all your boxes for your December romance reading. And I just want to sink into that season and enjoy myself.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 45:46

I will bet that our listeners will come in will absolutely help fulfill this wish for you, Kaytee, because they are very, very good at this.

**Kaytee Cobb** 45:55

Or get like 150 books recommended to me and I'll just be set for life.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 45:59

I love it. I love it. Okay, all right, my wish is a little bit darker. Well, no, my wish is that everyone who likes this kind of thing will do a little bit more of it in this season of the year. And that is I am loving doing puzzles while I listen to audiobooks. This is not new, many of us do it, I find it to be one of the most restorative activities that I can do. And especially this time of year, I mean, for all of us. We spend a lot of our time outside here in Austin for much of the year. But at this time of year, it's getting dark so early. Jackson doesn't have as many sports things happening in the evening. And I finally can spend a little bit of time in the evening doing a puzzle and listening to an audio book. And it's very satisfying to me. So I wish that if that sounds interesting to you invest in a new puzzle. Might I suggest for all my murder friends, I want to tell you that I am just starting on a new puzzle that is called the HH Holmes Murder Castle. So you guys have heard me talk about one of my favorite works of nonfiction, The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson. This is about the first World's Fair, and also one of the country's most prolific and audacious serial killers, a guy named HH Holmes. He did a lot of very bad things to a lot of people. And he did it in the late 1800s. So he got away with it for a very long time. Part of how he got away with it is that he built his own murder house Murder Castle is what this this puzzle is calling it. The puzzle shows the castle with a cutaway. So you can of course see everything that's happening indoors. So we see part of it outside and then the whole building is cut away. So we're seeing 14 different murders taking place within this castle in this puzzle. It has a fantastic insert that gives you a big version of the puzzle, which is very useful for someone like me, who needs it kind of like plussed up, I need a magnified. So it gives you a magnified version of what's happening. And also on the back, it gives you details on the 14 different things that are taking place. So it gives you some history on the serial killer and it gives you a list of things to seek and find and then you can go find more information on it. So this is if you have a dark heart like me. If you love doing puzzles, now what Jackson said it's "Mom, the trifecta would be if you were listening to The Devil in the White City and doing this puzzle at the same time" and I said Jackson, you are a genius. That's exactly I've already read the books I'm not going to do I'm listening to something else, but I am absolutely loving it. So if you love puzzles, grab a happy one, grab a Christmas one, or grab a dark one like the HH Holmes Murder Castle which I know everyone's gonna wonder where I got it. I cannot for the life of me remember if someone sent this to me, or if I bought it my own self, I have a feeling someone sent it to me and I'm a horrible person that I don't remember who that was, but if it was you, I am enjoying it immensely. I'm going to try to find the link so that you guys can also get this specific puzzle. Alright Kaytee, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at [@Meredith.reads](#) on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:16

And you can find me Kaytee at [@notesonbookmarks](#) on Instagram. Send me all your romance recs.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:21

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 them can be found on our website at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](#).



**Kaytee Cobb** 49:31

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

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:38

And if you want more of this kind of content, there is so much more where this came from hundreds of additional episodes can be found if you become a patron subscriber for \$5 a month. You get all of that additional content. You can join us as a bookish friend on Facebook and you keep the show commercial free. You can also rate and review us on 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** 50:07

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

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:13

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:15

and your book be unputdownable.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:17

Happy reading Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:19

Happy reading Meredith