



# Season 5, Episode 30: TBR Adding Spree + Winter Reading Doldrums

Mon, Feb 27, 2023 • 54:52

**Kaytee Cobb 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 already know, we do not shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:22**

We're 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 phone.

**Kaytee Cobb 00:32**

I am kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I feel calm when I'm standing in front of bookshelves.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:39**

And I'm Roxana Kasam Cara, a mom, a marketer and a mood reader living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. And in the depths of winter, I love to treat myself to bookish delights. This is episode number 30 of season five, and we're so glad you're here.

**Kaytee Cobb 00:53**

Roxanna, I have not gotten to record with you in a while and I'm glad to be here with you today.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:58**

Me too. I really in the depths of February. This is a highlight for me.

**Kaytee Cobb 01:02**

Absolutely, yes, yes, yes. Okay, so I'm gonna let everybody know I have a couple of announcements here at the top. First, our deep dive today is about reading treats that will help get us through the winter blahs. And yes, we are northern hemisphere readers, and they're our southern hemisphere readers, going through the opposite thing. Y'all can listen in June. That would be a great time for this episode. I also have an announcement that next week, we are taking a spring break. We started doing this last year. It's a random week. In the middle of the year, we're treating ourselves to a spring break next week. So there will be no new episode next Monday. And we will be back in your feeds as usual on Monday, March 13. We hope you have a lovely week off just like we plan to with that mystery of managed Roxanna, let's get into our bookish moments. What is yours, my friend?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 01:52

Okay, well, my bookish moment is a little bit different today. So as you said, northern hemisphere here in Canada, it's the depths of winter. And I always like to lift myself up with a couple of light moments. Today I'm going to bring a poem that I rediscovered this week and it was such a treat, and I had to share it. I'll give you a little backstory. As you know we have CBC here in Canada, which is called the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It's like the BBC and one of the producers of CBC Radio is named Rosie Fernandez. I heard the story on CBC a few years ago, this producer Rosie Fernandez called up this Canadian poet Her name is Wendy Morton, at her home on Vancouver Island to interview her and she said Hi Wendy, my name is Rosie Fernandez. I'm gonna interview you for our episode. And Wendy's heard her say her name and immediately said, I think your name is a poem. And Rosie was like, oh, okay, and kind of went ahead and did the interview. And Wendy called her back a few days later, and she said, I've written a poem for you. Oh, okay. That's cool. She's like, Would you like to hear it? She goes, of course. So this is the poem. I'm gonna read it to you.

**Kaytee Cobb** 02:55

Oh, perfect.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 02:55

If I had a name like Rosie Fernandez, I would wear gardenias and orchids and my hair. I would buy some hot sauce called Jump up and kiss me I would offer to strangers. If I had a name like Rosie Fernandez. I would know how to tango. I would sing anywhere. I would tap dance on sidewalks. I would fall in love insistently spend hours in cafes with a broken heart and good coffee. Oh, if I had a name like Rosie Fernandez, I would know it. And that's the poem. Love it. It's so great and sweet. I remember when I heard that just gave me such a light moment. And she actually published the poem in her next collection of poetry. It was picked up by a vineyard here, Niagara and you started the label of one of their wines. It always gives me a light moment. And I remember you heard it maybe 10 years ago with my parents. And we'd always say jump up and kiss me just because it was just so fun. So it was my light moment of February that I had to bring I had to bring to the show Rosie

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:47

Fernandez poem. I love that. And I love hearing poetry read aloud. So I'm so glad even though it's a short poem that you read the entire thing to us. Well, thank you. I wasn't sure

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 03:56

if everybody be up for it. But it's a nice light moment. The middle of February Why the heck no, it's

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:00

a bookish moment. That's what they're there for. Okay, here's my last weekend, the day after I recorded with Meredith. I went to Mindy's Meno party. Did you see any of this on Instagram?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 04:12

Meno party? Tell me all about it.

**Kaytee Cobb 04:14**

Yes. I cannot wait to tell you all about it. So what she did, she gathered a collection of girlfriends to celebrate the she has entered menopause, we sometimes will have like a recognition of a girl starting her first period. Right? Yeah, this is the opposite of that. This is a celebration of you are all done with that situation in your life. We should celebrate. Yes, right. The party itself was great. We had a lot of fun. But one of my favorite parts was the time that we all spent standing in front of her bookshelves talking about the books that we've read, or the ones that we want to read, or getting opinions from one another about what we should add to our TBR I have a strong opinion here that every party would be vastly improved no matter how great it already is, by time spent standing in front of bookshelves with the They're attendees. So I have a few theories about why this is I'm like writing a small thesis here, right? First, sometimes it's easier to talk to someone when you aren't looking into each other's eyes. There's research to back this up. It's part of why teenagers can have hard conversations with their parents in the car, because everyone is facing the same direction. It's harder to go out to coffee and look at each other's eyes and have those hard conversations, it's less than tense to face the same direction. Second is that as we know, here it currently reading books bring people together. So even if you've just met a person, standing in front of a bookshelf with them gives you the chance to say me to about a book that you love, or one that you throw across the room, and maybe form a first point of connection. I already knew a number of these women, but not all of them. I'm always delighted to find a new point of common interest. Third and final is that books are pretty and books are calming, even bad books. Even if there's nothing on that shelf that you want to read or that you enjoyed in the past. There's something sparkly and lovely about having books in your line of sight. Therefore my bookish moment is that any and all parties should involve standing in front of bookshelves. That's my proclamation signed, King George.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 06:11**

Well, thank you for your TED Talk. Kaytee. I am here for it. I love this. I love the idea of a metal party. I've been listening to the Midlife eries on sorta awesome her midlife theory. Yes. I love it. And this is so amazing. And then of course for her meno party, why wouldn't you stand in front of a bookshelf? And I just love that idea. Because also if it let's say it's not people you don't know so well, exactly what a great way to be like, Hey, have you read that one? What did you think? And even if they have a very opposite opinion, you can be like, Oh, what about the next one on the shelf? And

**Kaytee Cobb 06:40**

let's just move along to another book. Yes, exactly. Yes, I totally agree. And that series over on sort of awesome is fantastic. There will be links to that in the show notes for this episode. Go listen to that. No matter where you are in a journey of womanhood. There's some great info in there for you.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 06:57**

Can I give you a spicy opinion? Okay, yes, I love a bookshelf. I love a library. I love a shell filled with books. I do not find it calming. You don't want to call me I do not I had built in bookshelves in my last house, which I was so thrilled for. They were the bane of my existence. Kaytee, it was in the family room where the TV was. And every time the TV was on, I would look at all those books like visually is the way I take in information and all those books and all those titles and all those covers were just visually way too much for me and I don't have any bookshelves in my house right now. Okay,

**Kaytee Cobb 07:30**

but please tell me that you are not of the opinion that the books should be turned around spine facing in?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 07:36**

No, no, I would never do that real worried there for a sec. I did try them in rainbow order. And I will stand with Mindy because she did say listen, it's calming in that it's more kind of things are grouped together visually feel less, yes, less chaotic. And I have found the same thing. I couldn't find anything. So I moved away from that. But I see what she's saying. And so in this new house I'm really struggling with how do I do bookshelves I don't I don't know. Like I love them everywhere else just for me in my house seeing them and all the clutter and then the kids projects collect on them. And then there's like, you know the Happy Meal toy that's on the side. It just drives me crazy.

**Kaytee Cobb 08:13**

I feel like you're the reader that needs the IKEA him knows bookshelves that have the doors so that you can visually close away. Actually, that's

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 08:21**

a great idea. Yes, yes, that is true. Especially in the family room when there's TV and lots of clutter. I like the doors. So maybe that's

**Kaytee Cobb 08:28**

right. Okay, I think that's good. This has been bookish therapy. Maybe somebody else is struggling with the same thing. But let's get to the meat of episode let's talk current reads what have you been reading lately?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 08:41**

Okay, well, I'm so excited to share this first book with you today. It's a pirate romp called Cinnamon and Gunpowder by Eli Brown. Sounds

**Kaytee Cobb 08:48**

fun.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 08:50**

It's so fun. Kaytee. It's so fun. And it's perfect for this time to get you out of your mundane life, not your specifically,

**Kaytee Cobb 08:57**

although pretty much it's fine. I won't take it as a personal attack. It's fine. So this is a

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 09:01**

backless gem. It was published in 2013. And it was recommended on the bookish friends group by bookish friend Amy Ellis. This is how Amy set it up. And it totally reeled me in a chef is captured and kept alive by a wicked female pirate Tess as long as he makes gourmet meals for her every Sunday

night. That's all she said. And I was like I am in it download and I gobbled it up. Now that's honestly all you really need to know about the book, but I'll give you a little bit more so the year is 1819 and ruthless pirate mad Hannah Mabbott is in hot pursuit of a fellow pirate, the mysterious brass Fox, while at the same time being chased by a wealthy man with a grudge along the way. She encounters Chef Oh, and Wedgwood, who is a very fussy and particular chef to a wealthy Lord, and she gives him the following challenge. You will have a Sunday cook for me and me alone the finest separate you will need to repeat a dish nor serve foods that are in the slightest degree mundane in return. And I will keep you alive and well. Should you balk in any fashion, you will find yourself swimming home hole or in pieces, depending on the severity of my disappointment. So, poor wedge, as they call him really has no choice but to agree. He is a prim, fussy chef that reminded me of The Hobbit, he just wants to go home. He just wants his kitchen with his perfect tools, cooking for his wealthy master. He doesn't want to be on board this ship with this bunch of lowly and raucous pirates. And that's kind of how the fun begins when he tries his best to create these five star meals aboard this ship with basically no resources to satisfy Hannah Mabbott or as he calls her the fiend, and basically to save his own skin. But it's so interesting, you know, at first he hates everything about the ship, its crew and his circumstances. And he just like just sees them as just common and kind of not His people. But slowly he begins to see that his worldview of his wealthy British masters and colonialism and all that's right and good with the British Empire may not be quite what he thought it was. So there's some interesting stuff worked into this plot in this book has the swashbuckling adventure of the Pirates of the Caribbean mixed with the quirky whimsy of The Princess Bride, and I was here for it. And I'll just say my favorite thing about this is the writing. It's just witty and zingy, just like the Princess Bride. It had me laughing out loud, and highlighting every page, I will say I think this one is better in print instead of on audio. First of all, the cover is one of my favorite covers ever. It's startling. It has a picture of crazy Dread Pirate, Mabbott and Owen and them staring at each other. It's so great, it pulls you into the story. But more importantly, all that high seas pirate, you know, skirmishes can get a bit tiring on audio. I know Meredith hurts an audio and it gets a bit much. And paper, you can just kind of skim them after you've done a bit and then get back to the story. So I think that's the way to take it in. So that's Cinnamon and Gunpowder by Eli Brown.

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:01

Oh, that sounds so fun. And you know how I love The Princess Bride

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 12:05

I knew that would reel you in. That's why I saved it for you, Kaytee, perfect,

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:08

perfect. I actually have a pirate book to talk about as well. But it's my second book this week. So I'm gonna stretch out that book flight a little longer. What are

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 12:17

the odds? How many books are there?

**Kaytee Cobb** 12:19

I don't know. And the fact that I would put it on this week with you because it's very fun. But my first one is not like that. I am going to talk about someday maybe by Ani nwaba Nelly this book really threw me

for a loop. Roxanna. I had put it on my TBR after listening to Sara talk about it on Sarah's bookshelves live. But I am notorious. And I don't know if you're like this too, for letting podcasts kind of washed over me, rather than like listening intently, unless there's something really important happening, right? So in this case, I got interested in it. I put it on my TBR but had no idea really what it was about. And I grabbed a copy after Christmas at Barnes and Noble. It's got bright colors. It's got an illustrated cover in my head. I put this as a contemporary romance or rom com. It is not that. Okay, no, ma'am. The name seems like it would be that. No, it kind of sounds like all of those things put together. Right. So now before I continue, I'm going to give some trigger warnings for anyone who's dealing with immediate grief, or has married a husband in the not too distant past or has a difficult time with stories that include suicide because if any of those things are for you, you might want to skip directly to Roxanne as next read which of course is always timestamps in the show notes. The setup for this book is not a rom com at all, not even rom com adjacent instead, our main character who's named Eve introduces herself and the book via the blurb in this way. Here are three things you should know about my husband one he was the great love of my life despite his penchant for going incommunicado to he was as far as I and everyone else could tell perfectly happy which is significant because three on New Year's Eve he committed suicide and here's one thing you should know about me. One. I found him bonus fact. No, I'm not. Okay. Wow. Eve is a Nigerian woman who fell into Insta powerful love with her husband who goes by Q they had a fantastic relationship and he seemed happy. But as mentioned in the blurb, and right at the very beginning of the book, she found him after he committed suicide, the details of which are revealed slowly throughout the story. Eve is understandably, not coping well. Her grief is affecting her relationships with her friends, her family and her employment. She is fighting against the idea that she should be able to move forward with her life. Her family attempts to encourage her into therapy. Her mother in law is dealing with her own pervasive grief at losing her son and that makes for a fractious relationship between them at this point. You're probably wondering why in the world I would read such a sad book, much less bring it to the show. This book felt to me like walking hand in hand with Eve through her depression, her grief and her heartbreak. It felt like finding a glimmer of light in a dark place and holding the hand of someone you love and saying I can't make this better. But I see you and I'll sit with you in this. There's an element of found family in this book that you know I really loved and it pulled the story together. For me as a reader. I found myself sometimes cracking a smile or even snorting back a laugh because nwaba Nellies writing just sparkles on the page. And that glittery sparkle in the midst of sludgy muck of grief is what makes this book really wonderful. This was a four and a half star read for me, even though it's so surprised me, but I just keep thinking about it. And I've already passed it along to a fellow reader that I adore. I can't wait to hear what she thinks of it as well. This was Sunday, maybe by Ani nwaba. Nelly,

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 15:39**

what's so funny with those unexpected beads, right, Kaytee? Like sometimes, because you have no expectations. They come in, they hit it out of the ballpark, and you are here for it. Like it takes you a bit to get acclimated. But then you're like, Yeah, okay, no, this is good. And other times you're like, What the hell is this? Is this not what I thought? No, ma'am. And you put it right down like the right can go either way. So I'm glad to hear that this one went the right way



**Kaytee Cobb 16:02**

for you did, and it surprised me the whole way through because I kept thinking, is this going to turn around? Yeah, but the story won me over. In the meantime, it didn't have to have this other romantic comedy element to it for me to really fall in love with it, which I loved that surprise. What's your second book, Roxanna?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 16:20**

So my second book today is the marriage portrait by Maggie Oh, Pharaoh. Yes, I thought I would bring a literary fiction book to the show. I haven't done that a while this book, as you probably all know, but I'll sum it up quickly. It's you know, Maggie Will Ferrell is the author of much loved Hamlet. And this book is based on true historical events that took place in Renaissance Italy in the 1500s Lucrezia, who was the daughter of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, was married off to the Duke of Ferrara, a just 16 years old. A year later, she was found dead. This book is a failed attempt to imagine her story. We know all that from the jump, and it just pulled Meredith and I did this as a buddy read and it pulled us right in, we just thought that premise was so great. And we were so looking forward to all of Megiddo Frailes description in bringing this world to life. So I will say this book is very lush and atmospheric. It's filled with descriptions of the decadence of Renaissance Italy court life. Against that you get the story of a powerless girl forced to marry this Duke in what seems like the perfect royal marriage. Except Lucrezia is just a child. She's isolated from her family, taken to a court where she knows no one and has no power, and really is unaware of the political machinations around her. And ultimately, it's the manipulations of her mercurial husband that lead to her death. So that sounds intense. It is, you know Lucrezia feel suffocated and stifled in this world. And that sense of suffocation comes through on every page. Ultimately, I think this book is either your cup of tea, or it isn't, I'll say for me, it wasn't. Yeah, it's and I didn't want to say that off the jump, because I wanted to give everybody the premise because a lot of people love this, you know, on Goodreads, it's got a four plus rating. And there's lots of beautiful things, Meredith and I read this together, and there were lots of things we loved. Ultimately, it was not for me, and this is why Oh, Ferrell really wants to immerse us in the world of Renaissance Italy and the Royal Court. And I mean, she really, really wants to immerse us. So at every turn, there are descriptions of churches and Palazzos. And the royal courts were presented over and over again, with the gardens and what people are wearing, and the subtleties of every single character's expression and their eyebrows. It's just very, you get a lot of description. And it starts off really lyrical and beautiful because O'Farrell is a beautiful writer, but it gets a bit tiring and actually pulled me out of the story. It feels like Oh, Farah was so in love with her world that she couldn't tear herself away long enough to actually tell the story as well. This book is told in dual timelines. And so the first timeline is Lucrezia in childhood growing up all the way until she gets married. And the second timeline is Lucrezia at the end of her marriage, suspecting that she might be murdered soon, and those timelines converge. And in the beginning, that's a really interesting tension because you, you know, see her and she's really worried she's going to be murdered and there's just a lot of tension there. But then kind of nothing really happens for so long and those timelines get closer and closer, all that description and things kind of moving slowly. And Lucrezia is feeling of close it in and suffocation just really becomes too much. And I get that that's the point. You know, you're supposed to feel what Lucrezia feels, but it feels almost like you know, like a decadent chocolate truffle like when you pick one up and you're like, Oh, this is delicious. It's dark chocolate. Oh, the center is also dark chocolate. Oh, and it's also covered in dark chocolate. And there's just like it's too. It's too much and too rich and it starts to feel a bit samey. And

that's how I felt about this book. I think it could have done well with some contrast. There's an interesting story of a servant girl here and I think if that second timeline had been about her. It could have been interesting. Or even if that second timeline had been about the Duke, and what his feelings were, I think that could have been really interesting. Without that, it just felt like oh, Farrell was really in love with their subject. And she was painting this gorgeous, detailed painting. And she may be lost the thread of the narrative along the way. So as I said, this is a minority opinion. A lot of people love this book. So if it sounds interesting for you, for sure, pick it up and give it a try. But ultimately, it wasn't for me. That's the marriage portrait by Maggie Ofera have

**Kaytee Cobb 20:31**

some follow up questions.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 20:33**

Yes, please. Did

**Kaytee Cobb 20:34**

you read Hamlet?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 20:35**

I didn't. And I'm so sad. I have it on my shelf. And I'm not sure I'm going to pick it up. Now, Kaytee, because

**Kaytee Cobb 20:40**

I'm wondering, like, it sounds like she got a lot of praise for Hamnett, which is stunning. And then said, Oh, I can take that to the nth degree like I can, I can go deeper into what made that book beautiful, and and maybe focused in far too much on that literary introspective eyebrow examination that she was doing in the marriage portrait instead.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 21:04**

Yes. Like it does sound like I mean, I would say a lack of an editor. But it's almost not even that because the whole premise like she clearly wanted to paint this painting and that is what she did. Right? And I feel like if somebody had told her at the jump, Kate, that's good, but maybe pacing and contrast if somebody told her that but yeah, it sounds like she kind of went with what she's because it is still really beautiful. It is still really lyrical, but it is slow. Like there's a sex scene in that book. That's not supposed to be great. It's, you know, the first time the Duke is married to her, but it's the most slow, painful scene I've ever written in my life. Not just because, yes, you know, she's going through a lot here, but it was like, really like she's talking about his eyebrows and his expression, and I texted Meredith and I'm like, I cannot be in the sexy for another 20 pages. I'm gonna kill myself. Like, it's just so much. It wasn't for me, but if I think he made a good point, Kaytee, if you liked that piece of Hamnett, that part of Hamlet might be for you.

**Kaytee Cobb 22:02**

Yeah, okay, I'm gonna bring my pirate book, which is a change. Bring it so the next one I want to talk about is called the mermaid the witch in the sea by Maggie Tokuda Hall. This book was so good. And



then it jumped the pirate ship instead of the shark. That's what happened here. Oh, so we start out, we meet a young girl named Flora who takes on the identity of Florian because only a man can be protected by and respected by the pirate ship crew of the dove where she finds herself flora and her brother were orphans starving in the street before they earned a spot on the dove. And now a few years later, they really found their space. The crew of the ship takes on paying passengers that are taken out to sea and then kidnapped and sold into slavery like this is their scheme. This is what they do. They've been running the scheme for a while now. Along with catching mermaids whenever possible in order to sell them for their prized blood. The blood of a mermaid causes a sort of drunken amnesia that will if you drink enough of it, or partake too often permanently erase your memories. So the pirate of the dove the main captain of the dove does not remember his name. He does not know anything about his childhood because he has partaken of mermaid blood. So often. All of this sets the stage for Flora slash Florian to meet Evelyn a young woman sold into marriage by her father little tie in there and put on the dove to go meet her intended. Florian is given the job of guarding Evelyn's cabin, since she's a noble woman and a pirate ship is a notoriously dangerous place for a young woman. But when Evelyn offers to teach Florian to read, which is one of my favorite tropes and literature, they start to form a deeper bond than either of them expected. The crew of the dove then takes the passengers as prisoners, and Florian and Evelyn devise an escape plan along with a plan to free the captured mermaid on board and then things really start to go off the rails. This book had me totally hooked, totally enraptured with the characters and the plot and the world building when we're onboard the ship the escape. Yes, I'm here for it, all of it. And by the time we got to the last 75 pages or so my buddy reader, Candace and I were wondering what in God's green earth happened to the fantastic story we had been reading. If you asked me 200 pages into this book, where I was going to be able to rate it when I finished my reading experience, I would have guessed it would have been a four and a half or a five star read. And instead, we ended at like two and a half to three stars, which is a huge bummer and true compliment sandwich style though. I will also say that the representation across races and genders and sexualities is really phenomenal in this book. And the way that the sea itself is anthropomorphized is really compelling. Like you get into the mind of the sea and how it takes care of some chips and how it has machinations to sink. Others I thought that was so cool, and I would love to read more of that part of this. But really, if we could just chop those last time. If I pages and turn this into a different story, that's where it would have really shown for me. So this is the mermaid, the Witch and the sea by Maggie Tokuda Hall.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 25:10**

Okay, I have some follow up questions. Okay, perfect. Okay, so to go from a 4.55 to a two, like what the heck happened? It wasn't just that the ending fell apart. She didn't land the plane, or was it that it was too extreme? Like what happened that really took it and

**Kaytee Cobb 25:27**

she brings in this other character element and magic. So it was already like it already had pirates and mermaid blood and kidnapping and colonialism. Like it was interesting. And then she was like, but also have you heard of a cliff that you have to take an elevator up to learn magic? It was like What? No, no, no, stop. You were already making this beautiful story. We don't need this additional thing to happen here. Like it just went overboard. You jumped off the cliff with elevator. Okay, it was a rough landing on Oh, I'm

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 26:00**

sorry to hear that, my friend. What

**Kaytee Cobb 26:01**

do you have next?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 26:02**

I'm going to take us up. Actually, I'm going to take us down deep down into the sea because my third book today is called into the planet my life as a cave diver by Jill Heiner. As those of you who have heard me on the show before know I love a good memoir, especially if it's by a person who's doing something brave, bold and different with their life. In past episodes, I brought Memoirs of an astronaut and a tea lady. And today I'm bringing a memoir about a woman who dives into underwater caves. More people have died exploring underwater caves than climbing Mount Everest. And we know less about the depths of our oceans than we do about deep space. So Jill Heiner is one of those very few women cave divers. And in this book, she takes us deep into the bowels of the earth, and her terrifying but awe inspiring adventures. And when I say terrifying, Kaytee, I mean, terrifying, you know, she became the first person to dive into the ice caves of Antarctica, which is literally swimming in an iceberg that's about to collapse, she can see pieces collapsing about to fall down on her and kill her. And she's just go there. And she led a team that discovered the ancient watery remains of mind civilizations deep in the earth. To me, I'm terrified of small spaces and sort of deep confines like this, which is why I like to read about it with a cup of tea and safely on my couch. Exactly, exactly. Honestly, hearing about how and why she dives into these deep dark spaces where human life can't be supported. And where she could literally die at any moment had me on the edge of my seat, she takes us into the split second decisions that determine whether a diver makes it back to safety or dies in a watery grave alone in the dark. It's hair raising. What I really liked about this book is that it isn't just about her death defying underwater diving exploits. It's also about Jill as a person and her struggles. She talks about the traumatic event that was pivotal in helping her face her fears and pursue cave diving, she talks about the sexism that's prevalent in this male dominated field. And she talks about pulling her dead friends out of the depths of an underwater cave when things go wrong. It's intense. But this book is very well written and well edited. Sometimes with these memoirs, I find they can just become sort of a mess of stories. And I did this and I did this and you don't really get a narrative arc. I think she had a really good editor that gave it an arc. And that also gave you the human behind the story. So it wasn't just Jill Heiner talking about Jill Heinrichs. And all the great things. It was like, This is what led me here. And it really is a great picture of someone's life who bounces on the knife edge of pushing herself, and also knowing her physical human limits. That's into the planet by Jill Heiner.

**Kaytee Cobb 28:47**

That sounds so interesting. I love diving, open water diving, and have done even just a wreck dive and the idea of not being able to get out by going up completely freaks me out underwater. So this for me would be like a facing your fears. immersive experience would absolutely terrify me.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 29:09**

It's really good. And she talks about the technical aspects of diving, which honestly, I found super interesting. It's a bit like into thin air, you know, when you get talks about the technical stuff, but then

you're in it and you just want to know how is she going to get out of this. She talks about having a buddy along with her and she's like they're holding on to the string and then suddenly he disappears and then she has to go and find him in the depths of the dark and the guideline has you know, it's not tied in anyway, it's super intense. That's why you read it in broad daylight with the fire. But it's so so interesting. Wow.

**Kaytee Cobb** 29:39

That sounds incredible. Yeah, I might have to check that one out. As you know, I love things that live under the ocean. I might have to go there even though it will scare me. I also have nonfiction for my third one. We did quite a bit of interesting pairing here this, Roxanna my third book this week is called Invisible child by Andrea Elliot. Okay, y'all So this book could very well top my nonfiction reads for the year. And I read it in freakin January. And that makes me sad because it's like, where do you go from there? Right What in the world this book came onto my radar in two ways. First is that a good bookish friend of mine, Aaron Wallace read it as part of her Casa training. So that's a court appointed special advocate in the foster system. And then our bookish friend Lexi Largent sent us a voice message at the end of season four on the listener press episode that further pushed it up on my TBR let me just say both Aaron and Alexei were absolutely right. This book is riveting and difficult. And amazing. Andrea Elliot, our author is a reporter for the New York Times who started a series on homelessness in New York City, but wanted to come at it from a different angle, a less loaded angle, she wanted to focus on the kids, the ones who didn't ask for this life who didn't make poor choices, who are part of a system of poverty in the US. And that's how we get to meet Dasani, one of eight siblings who are in and out of the shelter system. In New York City. Andrea Elliot follows her for eight years in order to paint us a really full picture of her family life or interactions with the system and her struggles with food insecurity and homelessness. This book is written as narrative nonfiction rather than memoir and follows Dasani and her family for eight years. It's more than 500 pages long, and it does really tread on some difficult things. There's sexual misconduct within the homeless shelter system, there is drug abuse, there is interactions with the law that go poorly sometimes, but the pages really fly by Kaytee and I, my reading partner read this together and regularly had to remind ourselves and each other that it's nonfiction about a real family and the circumstances that they actually faced day in and day out trying to make a life in the United States. Dasani. Our main focus is the eldest of these eight kids. So she often finds herself in the role of parent even as a young girl, the teachers and shelter staff and classmates that come into and leave to Sonny's life during this time span, the entire gamut of humanity. There's people that you're like, Oh, my God, I'm so glad that that person exists, and that that person saw her and really reached into her life. And then there's people like, Why? Why can't we get rid of him? Why can't we get that person out of her life? It is rough, and it feels like rooting for a character. But you know that these are real people that you're talking about. I bought a book a few months back called a place called home by David Ambrose. That book would make an amazing pairing with this one because a place called home is memoir. And this one is more of a biography told from the outside looking at both tackle homelessness and the foster care system, and drug addiction, and the ways that these systems fail to manage some of the most pressing issues. It's a really incredible way to get a glimpse inside the crisis that is the American social network system, which encompasses everything. Roxana, thank God for Canada, where you have universal health care, and you have a number of ways to manage the small things that turn big. Right, because Dasani is family, everything is a crisis, because there is no real safety net for them the whole way through. It is rough, but inspiring and incredible. And we spent hours

after finishing the book, Googling Dasani trying to figure out what's going on with her in her life now, has she made it to college has she become the person that she set out to be? Has she had more setbacks? It is a really intimate look into her life, and I cannot recommend it enough. It's incredible. So this was invisible child by Andrea Elliott.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 33:44**

Wow, I remember that actually, on the listener press episode and thinking that would be a great one to read. So I'm so glad you brought it to the show. It's really

**Kaytee Cobb 33:51**

incredible, but it is heavy. So now we're going to move into our deep dive and we're going to talk about the opposite of that. We're talking about treats and lightness and sparkle and joy and how to get through what I call the winter doldrums because February is 28 days and also 20,000 years. It is so long. Roxanna, this deep dive was your idea? What were you thinking about when you suggested this? Okay,

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 34:16**

well, I think you summed it up February 20,000 years long, especially in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, we don't hit spring until probably mid April, we usually get a snow in mid April. And this is traditionally the coldest time of year. So it's not like I'm saying, well can't wait till March when those two lips blue. No, there's no two alert here in March. And so I really need to kind of give myself some treats to be there for the long haul. And that's what I do in February. I just pepper myself with treats and kindness and often those treats are reading treats.

**Kaytee Cobb 34:47**

Excellent. Okay, so when I thought about this, it's notorious also in the homeschool mom community and then I went and talked to other teachers as well, saying, Why is February the worst? It's because there's a lot long period of time with no breaks, right? You go from like New Years, all the way to spring break, basically. And you have sometimes a 3d weekend, or sometimes a candy filled holiday to make your life worse during that period of time. Like you just have to push through indefinitely, it feels like and for a homeschooling mom, you're looking toward the end of the year, but your kids are already tired of the curriculum you chose beginning of the year that they were excited about. They're already wondering when is summer break going to start? Like it just feels interminable. So the first thing that I thought about for February because our days are still short, and I know you're even further north than I am your days are short up there in Canada. So the first thing I thought about was light, Meredith and I have both brought a couple light related things to the show. Over the past couple of weeks, she talked about a gift she got for Christmas, that was a book light that you open up and it makes this yellowish glow. I talked about my neck light that I use for reading and on trope. Thursday. This past week, I talked about candles that I put up in my house that turn on every night in order to not burn down my house, but had a little sparkle and light in February is important to me because we have sparkle all the way through into early January, usually from holiday decorations. And then it's just dark all the time. So that's the first treat that I thought of. Yeah,

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 36:19**

I think that's a great one. I mean, and I'm with you. I didn't think about it from a homeschool mom perspective. But you're right the kids are dragging the teachers are dragging Christmases ended, the bills are coming in, it's a long haul, whether you're at work or you're at school, that new shininess of New Year's lasts the one day of January 1, and then you're in it. So you're right light is a great way to sort of bring it up and I have thought about it in a slightly different way. So my treats kind of fall into three categories, my bookish treats, and they're really romps fantasy. Okay, those are the three ways that I think I read. Oh, and one more actually reads. So for romps, you know, that's where Cinnamon and Gunpowder comes in. I want to be as far from my life as possible. And a pirate ship is a good place to be another one actually that I read this February is one that Meredith brought on a previous episode called the golden spoon by Jessa Maxwell, and this is a murder mystery that takes place at the British Bake Off, it's light. It's fun, it's unputdownable. If you liked Janis harlots, the appeal, this is the book for you. And it's actually I think it drops March 7. So if you're still feeling this winter doldrums, I'd say that's a great quick read, that sort of is just a fun romp to take you out of your life.

**Kaytee Cobb 37:32**

I'm gonna come at this from another new angle. So the other way that I like to add a little sweetness and light to my February reading is a snack. I have a very specific snack that I love as my favorite reading tree. It's the Asai berry pomegranate or blueberry dark chocolates from Brookside. So these are like slightly larger than an m&m, you grab a small handful you go set up your perfect reading location, and then maybe once a page, you're taking one little bite of this treat, and it's just enough you know how you were talking about in the marriage portrait, it's like too much dark chocolate over and over layered on top of itself. This has some sweetness of the juice, the tartness from the ice berry mixed with that rich dark chocolate and the way that it comes together makes it the perfect reading tree for me. Also, because they're little balls, they're kind of perfectly contained. You can put them in a bowl, and they're not going to make like messes on your hands or like leave that Cheeto dust everywhere. They're just the perfect little reading treat for me in February, I go buy a bag at Sam's Club probably once a week because it's February and I need a little bit of chocolate to make it through my days. And this one for me is the perfect reading treat because it doesn't leave that mess and it doesn't cause a huge disaster anywhere in my house. It's just that little bit to make it through to the next page and enjoy my reading time.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 38:53**

I love that I'm always looking for the perfect snack because I like dark chocolate which does not work well with white pages and I like a hot chocolate or something like that but I need like a little snack. So I like that and I do the same in February as you do I like light so I sit out in the morning I sit in my room that has the most light I open all the curtains and then I turn on the fire but I do it in the morning because I don't want that dim cozy. I want like bright lights hitting my eyeballs and I read and so I'm with you I think the light and I found actually I was thinking about this I do a lot of color. Okay, so even when I'm reading I take my most colorful shawl I have a billion shells. I collect them so I have like I take my most colorful ones. I wear a colorful cardigan I don't care if things match or not. It's not about that. It's about bright colors cheering up my eyes. I take my colorful I have like all multicolored mugs, I take those and I just sort of think the assault of color makes me feel happy much the same way but I don't have a good treat. So I'm gonna look this I don't wonder if it's available in Canada and then look it up. I

**Kaytee Cobb 39:52**

might have to send you some although it would be very mean of me to be like, please get addicted to these and they're not available where you are.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 39:59**

That would be Yeah, that it'd be hard. I'll see if I can approximate up here. It's a good one in terms of reading treats. The second one that I thought of the second sort of grouping, I thought it is fantasy. I don't read a lot of fantasy, but I find this time of year it just helps me escape into a new world. But I have no energy for new world building. I cannot start a new series, I have to revisit worlds that I've been to already with the next in the series, Meredith and I buddy read a quart of silver flames by Sarah J. Moss. I really loved it. I will say many people write her off as a guilty pleasure. I've often said that she's just not like I really liked the way she writes. I think she portrays recovery from trauma and the dynamics and adult relationships really well. I find it really absorbing into the life now the sex with the fairies, not so true to life. Maybe that's

**Kaytee Cobb 40:46**

the perfect winter treat.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 40:47**

Exactly right. That's what keeps it fun. And I just devoured this 800 page book in a few days, I couldn't put it down. And it's just the kind of like fun I need in February. So that's one that I loved. The second one that I loved that I'm reading now is called a master of gin by P jelly Clark is published by tor.com, which you know, is a favorite here and I brought the novella of this book on a previous episode on season four episode 41 called a Dejan Cairo it was like the prequel. And this is the full length book, and I gotta say, Kaytee, this book just has so much damn style. It's just it's a murder mystery set in this fantastical alternate Cairo in the 1800s. It's one where there's jinn and supernatural beings. They have come into the world. They've helped overthrow the British colonialists, but they also cause a lot of mayhem and there's an inspector who is a dandy in sharp suits. Her name is Fatima Asha Rowley. She's a detective at the Ministry of alchemy and champions and supernatural entities. And it's her job to solve this murder mystery of what these supernatural beings have been doing. So it's just really fun. I think Meredith last time, I brought it to the show called it seven up for the mind's eye. And that's how it feels just effervescent, and otherworldly everything your February is not this book it

**Kaytee Cobb 42:04**

I love that thinking of that bright, early morning light that you're trying to cultivate in your home and the bright colors in your home. I was thinking about snow and how blinding? It's sometimes it's like in the morning, sometimes at our house, I'm like, can you please close the blinds? It is reflecting so much off the ground outside that I cannot see. So I have to capture that early morning light before the sun is overhead and pull in that refracted light instead, do you get a lot of snow there? Well, this past week, we got about 12 inches in about a day and a half. Oh, but usually it's more like, oh, we woke up to two or three inches, you know, like it's just a a decent dusting and two or three inches and Santa Fe is not enough to cancel school, but 12 inches, that was enough to cancel school. Okay, so



**Roxanna Kassam Kara 42:51**

we have we usually do get a lot of snow in February. And in March, we haven't gotten any this year. And it's been really cloudy and gray. So I have kept those windows, we have a lot of windows and I've kept them all open, but I'm with you. It's like you're skiing, but all the time. The light penetrates your eyeballs, and you can't see anything at all. It's like and it's a harsh light, you know, so yeah, it's true. You gotta get it earlier before it gets there. Okay, my next category here is called delight. And sometimes I just need to be reminded that there are good things in February, you know, and that's when I turned to nonfiction. So a book I read that I really love to reread this time of year is called the Book of Delights by Ross

**Kaytee Cobb 43:28**

in my list. Yep,

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 43:32**

this is a collection of very short essays by Bosque who decided on his birthday to write down all the things that brought him joy for one year. And it sounds a bit trite and like Oprah esque, but it's really not he talks about joy, but in the context of his lived experience as a black man in America. And all the complexity that comes with that gay is also a poet. So his writing is really tight and clear, right? But it packs a punch, you sit with what he writes for a while you think about it. Now, these essays are only like a paragraph to five pages long. And they're written in a really sort of casual style. You feel like he's right next to you on the couch, just talking to you. But then you think about that last sentence that he wrote. And it really you're just having aha moments along the way. What I really loved is he talks about practicing delight and how witnessing delight being in it and with it requires vigilance. And you know, in February God that resonates right, like I got to really be vigilant in cultivating delight because when my child has brought home their lunch for the fifth day in a row that they haven't eaten and after throw it in the garbage and I'm screaming like I have to stop and think about there's delight in my life. Let's think about that. You know, I love how he says that. And then he says, Have faith that light will be with you daily, no need to hoard it. There's no scarcity of delight. So I love that and I love how real He is. It's not you know, yes, he talks about nature but it's he doesn't talk about delight like the dew drops on a rose no like this is very real, you know, moments of his life. And they're really surprising. So it's a delightful buddy read. It's a delightful, slow but steady take one per day, and I loved it. What did you think of this one?

**Kaytee Cobb 45:10**

Well, actually, so that one is on my TBR Kaytee, and I purchased it. Right now we're reading, inciting joy by Ross gay, which is longer essays, there's only either 13 or 14 total in the book in 200 pages, so five to 60 pages for each of those. But I'm very excited about this, like the small dosage of delight. And that was my last reading treat that I wanted to give myself and February is small doses of reading joy. So that made me think of Good morning, good night by Lin Manuel Miranda, the book of Delights is definitely on that TBR list by Ross gay, the Book of Awesome, or our Book of Awesome by Neil pareeksha, which is, again, it's little moments and every single one of his little essays ends with awesome, where you're just like, Oh, you're right. I do love it when my slippers are not cold when I put my feet in them, you know. And it's just like noticing those small moments of awesome in our days. And then the comfort book by Matt Hague, these are all secular books. So they're not like Christian

devotionals. Or, like, spend time in your Bible, like these are secular books with tiny entries. So it's a way to get a small dose of daily joy, like a daily vitamin, a multivitamin of joy, this could be a first thing in the morning thing, or a last thing before bed practice or anywhere in between maybe your lunch hour is when you need a little jolt of joy. And I'm guessing our listeners have a whole selection of other books that kind of fall within this category. These are often like gift books, right? But they are perfectly packaged for that small little amount of joy. And I really want to hear about especially once by women, everything I mentioned in this list was written by a man so I'd really like some woman centered joy in my daily life. And I'm sure there are listeners out there that have that for us unless you have one. Roxanna.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 46:58**

I actually do think yes, perfect segue because this is my category too was sort of salt, small bits of delight. I found winter hours by Mary Oliver to fall exactly into that sort of camp. So I love poets, but I don't love meeting poetry as much. I just I love it. But I find it hard to get into. But when poets write prose like Bosque did, it's really tight and it just holds so much in it. So this winter hours by Mary Oliver, I read this one year and just highlighted the holy heck out of it. Like she just has the determined observation of the smallest minutia in nature. Like she catalogues like the nest of a spider in her house. And I know that doesn't sound interesting people I get it, but it's just so astounding and delighting the way she does it. It feels like she spent weeks finding the exact right word and you read it, you're like, Thank you, Mary. That is the right word. It just fills me with delight that you put that together. It's just exactly we said it's like a chocolate box. And you're picking up this morsel. And so yeah, I would guess exactly, I would highly recommend that one. Perfect.

**Kaytee Cobb 47:58**

And then did you have some rereads that you wanted to tell us about?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 48:01**

I do. So I find it February when I have no energy or bandwidth for anything else I'll often read. I don't often reread the whole book. But I'll dig into a book I often read in Green Gables on audio by Rachel Adams, I find is a really good one. I'll sometimes dip into Harry the spy, which is my favorite book as a child, you know, like these favorites, I will read just the beginning or I'll open them to wherever they land. You know, I do this often with the shell seekers because it's so big. I'll just open it to a paragraph and read that paragraph and be like, it's like watching your favorite scene in the movie. I just kind of listen delight in it. And it's great. And then I move on to my next book, but it just sort of when I need some comfort in a small bite to get me through before I can start my new book I find rereads are perfect for that. So you don't have to reread the whole book. There's no rule, just reread part of it and put it down in the pickup or new book. But it's so great to go back and revisit those books.

**Kaytee Cobb 48:51**

Yes, Meredith has instilled in all of us, there's no should in reading. So if you like a single paragraph of book the most go find that paragraph. You don't have to read the whole thing. Love it. Okay, well, I think we're gonna have a lot of suggestions about how other people add delight to the winter doldrums. And I can't wait to hear about it. But let's first visit the fountain. Roxanna, what is your wish this week?

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 49:14**

This is my wish it kind of ties into the reburied piece. I don't think this exists but I'm going to put a wish out I would love some sort of Twitter account Instagram account email service that would send me quotes from my favorite book daily so I'm not talking about a lot of different quotes from a lot of different books which I know is out there I want somebody to send me one line from Anne of Green Gables daily just you know have a Twitter account maybe not Twitter now but you know, like even an email or an Instagram account. I just want like oh yeah, I remember that line that I never would have gone back and read how lovely you know and just get that little bit and then move on or like Leila here at the spice so many good lines. I would just love that one a day just bite size. I love little bites of it and remember Bring it Why does nobody do that? For me, this is my wish for my specific books that is okay love. Some person in the universe should do this for me. It's my wish I can make it whatever I want.

**Kaytee Cobb 50:15**

This is how it wishes work. It's your wish you do whatever you want with it. How do I get my wish, has some flavors that are similar to that. So I this week, I'm wishing for a book tasting experience. So this is happening out of time with regard to the calendar year, but my husband was given a whiskey advent calendar as a belated Christmas present by my sister then we did a dry January at our house. So just recently, we're in the middle of February now he opened box, one of this advent calendar that was supposed to be opened on December 1. So whiskey advent calendar allows you to taste small amounts of whiskey from all over the world. And I don't drink whiskey, I have no desire to have 24 different bottles of whiskey in my house, but he really enjoys the experience afterward, you can go on the website and it gives you details about the bottle and the brewing and the flavor profile all this stuff. So I would love something like this for reading, especially for someone who's just getting back into reading or trying to figure out what works for them and what doesn't like we had a bookish friends, I had a really disappointing reading year last year where my average was 2.3 or something because it was just like a few hits and then a lot of suck for her entire reading year. So here's what I'm picturing a selection of 24 books, although they could even be novellas or short stories to a month. They vary in plot versus character driven. They vary in genre they vary in setting and spice level and writing style like lyrical and literary examination of eyebrows all the way to propulsive and choppy and as you finish each one you give it a rating you're tasting notes on it, where you rate your experience on a whole slew of factors. Do you like the plot driven more than the character driven etcetera, etcetera. At the end of the year, you have this reader profile that has calculated all these different things about these 24 stories that everyone read and you can say, Oh, look at how I match up with you. Or look at how this now tells me this book that's a brand new release would be a perfect fit for you. Because you love that nobody bla bla bla bla in your book experience it's an advent calendar but not it's tasting books and then reading them and telling the internet about your experience and having it spit out your perfect reading experience for you. That's what I want and then you can use that to form your and of Green Gables daily Instagram profile.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 52:33**

Yes. I love this idea. It's very well thought out. Honestly, I feel like you have so many of these like startup ideas in you.

**Kaytee Cobb 52:41**

Yeah, there's something happening. My phone wishes have to do with marketing a lot. I don't know what that is. That's my wish. I wish for a book tasting experience. Pink splash.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 52:50**

Pink splash. Yes, I get advent calendars, but I mostly mental celebrate Christmas. So I write reason open them in December. So I get them at the end of December. And they open them in January and February because that's when I need to treat I don't need one every day. So I open like one week or one every few days. And it's a nice little treat. I've never had a bookish one. So I really love this idea. So if you ever decide to bring this to life, or somebody else does, please let me know and I'll be the first one I

**Kaytee Cobb 53:16**

like it. I do the same thing. I will buy advent calendars in December and save them for after Christmas because of that after Christmas slump. So especially the Trader Joe's beauty advent calendar, that one's my favorite, because it's like what little like delightful tiny travel size thing is behind this window. It's very fun. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Katy at notes on bookmarks on Instagram and Meredith is that Meredith Dodd reads

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 53:43**

and you can find me Roxanna at Roksanda. The planner on Instagram both show

**Kaytee Cobb 53:47**

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 currently reading podcast.com. Our website

**Roxanna Kassam Kara 53:56**

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**Kaytee Cobb 54:08**

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**Roxanna Kassam Kara 54:26**

and I will say the bookish friends are a February treat that I enjoy all year long.

**Kaytee Cobb 54:30**

Perfect until next week, may your coffee be hot and may your book be unputdownable Happy reading Roxanna.

**Roxanna Kassam Kara** 54:36  
Happy reading Kaytee