



# Season 5, Episode 36: Lots of Feels + How Grief Changes Reading

Mon, Apr 17, 2023 • 52:25

**Kaytee Cobb 00:10**

Hi readers. Welcome to the currently reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you already know, we don't shy away from having strong opinions. So be ready.

**Mary Heim 00:23**

We are light on the chitchat heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today we'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

**Kaytee Cobb 00:33**

I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and I have very smart reader friends.

**Mary Heim 00:39**

And I am Mary Heim, a therapist and working mom of one living in Wisconsin. And this week, Kaytee, I can just tell that hammock reading season is finally finally on the horizon here in the Midwest. I can smell it, it's coming. This is episode number 36 of season five. And we are so glad you're here.

**Kaytee Cobb 00:57**

It has been a long time coming this year, Mary Yes, it has.

**Mary Heim 01:01**

Oh boy has it ever.

**Kaytee Cobb 01:03**

We are still skiing regularly here in New Mexico, which is a little ridiculous. It is well into April. At this point, I am going to let everybody know right here at the top that our deep dive today is gonna be a little tender, maybe a little hard for some listeners, we're gonna talk about how grief can change your reading. And this is very specific and personal right now to Mary's life. So it's going to be a little bit q&a interview style, but just wanted to kind of prepare your hearts for that for later. But first, we'll get started with some lightness and fun and bookish moments of the week. What is yours, Mary?

**Mary Heim 01:37**

So Kaytee, there is a book that I'm going to share this week that has had a big presence in my life over the last month. So much so that you are not only going to see this in my current reads, but also probably in our deep dive and this week's bookish moment as well. So some of our listeners may know

that I unexpectedly and suddenly lost my dad just about a month ago as of this recording. And in the aftermath, I stumbled on a book by a grief therapist that I have been kind of aware of through my professional life, but had never read any of her books. I picked this one up at the library and I ended up just really loving it like love doesn't. It's not a strong enough word to capture how important this book has been to me this last month. So as I'm reading my library copy, I was like, Okay, I must own this book for my permanent shelves. There's no question about that. But when I went to go buy a copy, I found it nowhere. It is not at my bookstore. It is not on new book selling sites. It's not on thrift books. It's not on Kindle, I had a friend who manages a bookstore halfway across the country. See if she could use some of her bookstore magic to try and find me a copy nothing. It's truly nowhere. I found one copy on Amazon for literally almost \$300. And I was like, I can't I can't do that. Like I am a little I'm foggy in my grief. But I can't spend \$300 on this book. At first second, I was like maybe I can just pretend to lose this library copy. And I totally would have thought that as well. You know, I thankfully I didn't have to do that. But I went there. So I turned to the bookish friends group or Patreon group to see if anybody had any thoughts of where I could look for a copy that I hadn't thought of yet. The outpouring of love and offers to help me search was amazing. That could have been my bookish moment of the week alone. But my hero Bunmi your incredible co host of Trope Thursdays on Patreon, an amazing human being and member of our community, unbeknownst to me, pulled some of her magical publishing strings and reached out to the editor of this book. Granted this book was published in 2015. So this is a while ago, she reached out to the editor to see if she could find me a copy and when they couldn't find a copy they reached out to the author to see if she can help. When I tell you this story makes me want to sob from gratitude. kindness of strangers I practice talking about this like five times so I wouldn't burst into tears telling you this story right now. I am just I am not kidding. It was it just meant so much to me. It turns out that even the author herself only has three copies to her name. It is out of print, the rights have been returned back to the author which is why it is nowhere to be found. But the author herself assured me they are working on self publishing a rerelease. So it is coming. And in the meantime, I was able by some magic to find one copy on eBay for a very reasonable price. So I did not have to commit library fraud hallelujah. But, like the kindness of this bookish community is literally unmatched and Bunmi who you know we're still like fairly fresh internet friends. Just going above and beyond to see if she could help me track this down in my single minded grief fog. She is my new hero. I would literally do anything for her. She's probably sick of all the Facebook messages I have sent her now thanking her for how much that meant to me but her car I am to actions and that of our community have just like meant the most by and large. This is my bookish moment of the week, probably my entire year. I just I will like never forget this story. I want to hug it. It was yes, it was so wonderful. That's my moment.

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:16

I love it so much. And this actually, if people are remembering or paying attention this week, that's two weeks in a row where my co host got to gush a little bit about Bunmi, who is just a fantastic human. And if you haven't gotten to meet her or know her, you're missing it because she's fabulous.

**Mary Heim** 05:35

Great. Yes. Okay, what about you, Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb 05:39**

Okay, so my bookish moment also has to do with a bookish friend My friend, Candice, Whitney and I are reading along to The Comfort Book by Matt Haig, along with my reading partner, Katie Proctor. So all three of us are reading together. And in the midst of our little mini daily discussions about that book, Candice made an observation about my reading that I had never noticed before. And I like I felt like the cheesy film clips where it's like the gates open and Heaven and the light pours through, and then there's angels. And you're like, Wow, this is a little dramatic. That's what happened to my life. So Candice made the observation that I love to read things about vastness. And this encompasses so much of my reading. And I didn't realize there was this overarching theme. So she brought up the vastness of ocean, the natural world, space. And it translates to my fiction reading, and my nonfiction reading, but I hadn't made that connection. I have said, I love nature fiction and nonfiction. I love sci fi. I love reading about octopuses, and other ocean creatures, right? But she put together that there's a thru line in all of those stories that I love, and it's that my experience is valid, but small in the grand scheme of things. Candice says, if it's got a lot of ground to cover physically or metaphorically, Kaytee, you're into it. And it's one of my favorite things about you. And I was like, Whoa, like, actual physical emoji mind blowing situation where my brain actually exploded out of the top of my head. And I just was so excited about this idea of like vastness being this overarching theme in my reading life, that I had to share it. So that's my bookish moment.

**Mary Heim 07:26**

I love that so much. That is an excellent bookish moment. And it honestly makes me want to go have like, I feel like a bookish Tarot reading with Candice and be like, tell me, tell me what you notice about my reading. Be like, I want that from Candice, maybe I'll have to go message her.

**Kaytee Cobb 07:42**

And Candice is also a good friend of yours. And I know your message about a lot of books. I feel like she could do this. She could put in a side hustle where she kind of analyzes people's books and their reading and their star ratings. And she has this magical power where she can find that thru line

**Mary Heim 07:58**

and then she would create a really beautiful graphic about it. Yeah, she would. If y'all don't follow Candice on Bookstagram or even in our group, she makes beautiful book graphics for her like current reads. So there you go, Candace, we just done and dusted created a business plan for your business idea whether we got to do it or not. We would love to see you do it. I love that.

**Kaytee Cobb 08:19**

Excellent. All right. Let's get into our current reads. Mary, what are you bringing first this week?

**Mary Heim 08:25**

Okay, Kaytee, my first book this week is Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murderers by Jessie Q. Sutanto, this was the very first book that I was able to pick up after my dad died, and honestly, I don't think that I could have picked a better one. Okay, so this story follows our protagonist Vera Wong, a 60, something widower and tea shop owner, who loves nothing more than doing a little internet sleuthing. Whether it is local crime, or who her son is or isn't dating, but when a dead man shows up in her tea

shop one morning, Vera decides it's up to her to catch the killer, because as she says, Nobody sniffs out wrongdoing, like a suspicious Chinese mother with time on her hands. What is maybe most unexpected, though, is that the cast of characters she's pegged as suspects will slowly weasel their way into her heart and her life as she gets closer to figuring out who is to blame for this murder. Now, Kaytee, I know that this author's Dial A for Aunties series is so beloved in the mystery corner of the book world, but I am going to admit to you I haven't read a single one yet.

**Kaytee Cobb** 09:27

And I didn't love it.

**Mary Heim** 09:28

Okay, good to know. All right. So maybe maybe I'll be picking it up. Maybe I won't, but it definitely has me paying attention to this author, because I loved this one so much. Vera is the perfect kind of prickly protagonist and Kaytee, dare I even say curmudgeon who's meddling is borderline at best, but you just can't help but love her. This is a rare novel that I found to be both character driven and plot driven with a mystery that kept me hooked and character development that I truly loved watching play out. This one is for you if you want a cozy-adjacent mystery novel with some heft, if you love found family or a curmudgeon story or perhaps gasp you are like me. You thought you couldn't stand curmudgeon tropes. And now suddenly, everything in your life has turned itself on its head and maybe you do love them. Either way, it could happen. Vera Wong made me want to immediately brew up a cup of tea and invite all my neighbors over to start sleuthing some sort of low stakes drama together. This one was such a surprise hit for me it found me at just the perfect time. That is Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murderers by Jessie Q Sutanto, I love this title. So good is so good. And the cover is also fantastic.

**Kaytee Cobb** 10:43

I just looked it up while you were talking. I'm obsessed with the cover. Of course, I also Jessie Q. Sutanto is like whipping them out because I read her YA release that came out at the end of last year called Well, That was Unexpected, which is about older teens in Jakarta, Indonesia, Bali, that area. And I liked it quite a bit which kind of turned me around on her series for of Dial A for Aunties. So now I'm very interested in picking this up as well.

**Mary Heim** 11:12

You know, in the author's note, she actually says she had pitched this book, I think I'm might be butchering this a little bit, but something along the lines of she pitched this idea, just a sentence or two about this book to her agent or her editor. And they were like, you need to pause what else you're working on your other books in the pipeline. We need to put this one out right now. So she said she like wrote it, put it all together. It like jumped the line of everything else she was working on. Because it was like so everyone was so excited about it. And it is really well done. I really, I really, really loved it. It was so much fun.

**Kaytee Cobb** 11:47

That is great. I'm picking that up, ASAP. I love it. Okay, the first one I'm going to talk about this week is The Light We Carry by Michelle Obama. So this is not an under the radar pick. Everybody and their mom knows about this book. But I did love it. So I want to chat about it. Michelle Obama's first release

Becoming came out in November of 2018. And that book really shares her life and her story. It's pure memoir. That was a five star read for me. And I'm here for anything she writes. That means I didn't even really look into this new book before I pre ordered it and received it when it released in November of 2022. Well, as many of the rest of you may know, but I did not. This is not more of her story in the intervening four years, it's probably something we would shelve in the self improvement section or the Self Help section of the bookstore instead. In this nonfiction title, Michelle draws on her own experiences and the connections she made on book tour four years ago, meeting people all over the country, who maybe seemed like they had nothing in common with her. And finding out that they resonated with her story, as she told in Becoming, they kept asking her, but how did you recover from that, or make it through that, or deal with that criticism from the public. So she wrote this new book, that she refers to like a toolbox, and includes the different ways that she makes it through her daily grind, and the different tools and techniques that she uses to boost herself up during hard times. She tells stories about her parents, especially her dad who had multiple sclerosis, that led him to walk with a limp. Despite that, he carried himself in a way that allowed others to see him. She says the ways he interacted with people and the world made him visible in all the right ways. In that chapter, which is about being seen for who you are, she again pulls on those personal and family experiences, but then turns them outward, and shows how they shaped her and how they can guide the rest of us into who we want to become and the ways we want to be seen in the world. One of the chapters with the biggest impact for me that immediately changed things in my actual home was the starting kind Chapter, in which Michelle introduces us to her friend named Ron, who begins each and every day by saying hello to himself aloud in the mirror. Hey, buddy. He greets himself, warmly every day. And I know I know I love that so much. And that way every day starts with kindness from himself to himself. She then goes on to talk about how even in classrooms, the tenor of interactions will change, and discipline events will decrease. If a teacher greets each child warmly and by name as they enter the room that day. So how did that change my home, I sat my kids down and my husband and said, we are going to start with kindness each day. This doesn't mean everything about all the things will change. But whenever you first see a member of our family each day, whether it's right when you get up or when your dad gets home from work, you will acknowledge them, turn your body toward them and acknowledge them with a warm greeting. And it has changed things in our house to be greeted with a hug and a How'd you sleep or what's on the plans for today. Instead of so and so did this or I hate everything about my job or whatever it is that normally would have infused those interactions first. So I will continue to sing Michelle's praises from the rooftops. Whether you're a memoir reader or a self help reader, or just a fan girl like me, her books continue to work for me. This one is The Light We Carry by Michelle Obama.

**Mary Heim** 15:14

I of course have been aware of this one, but I hadn't yet kind of bumped it up on my list, but I'm like, wholly and thoroughly sold by you on that, Kaytee and like, well, I know what I'm about to spend my next libro FM credit on. This sounds lovely. Wonderful. Perfect. I love it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 15:29

It's so great. Okay, so now we're two for two. Mary, what do you have next for us?

**Mary Heim 15:33**

All right, Kaytee. So my next book is also an not one that is flying under the radar. By no means do I think that I'm the first person that's talking about this book from anyone's perspective. But my second book this week is Pineapple Street by Jenny Jackson. So Kaytee, I have been searching for a readalike to Crazy Rich Asians by Kevin Kwan. Pretty much since the day I read it years ago. I love that series. I think that what Kevin Kwan was doing at the time with writing that series was like really nothing else I was reading. That is like my ultimate probably because I read it on my honeymoon but it's like my ultimate smart vacation book. Love that. While this book is not an exact comp by any means. It has that fizzy champagne cocktail effervescence about it. Almost as if you smushed Kevin Kwan and Elin Hilderbrand together and just plunked him on the Upper East Side. This story follows a wealthy family of one percenters and the drama unfolding at a particular time in their lives. It is pure character driven Escapism through and through, we explore this story through the eyes of the three adult children of this stereotypical old money Wasp family. Darley, the oldest forwent her inheritance for a love marriage. Cord, the middle son and real estate business era married a 99 per center graphic designer Sasha, much to his sister's chagrin, and Georgiana Gen Z and positioned as the fairly naive, sheltered youngest of the family are at the heart of our story. These characters are not exactly likable, but they are compulsively readable. And something I did not expect, but found myself enjoying was watching their growth as this otherwise relatively quiet novel turned along. I often kind of forget about my love for this niche little sub genre of dryly comedic or social commentary contemporary lit, that very much speaks to a specific moment in time, and that is squarely where this one lands. It is primarily about first world problems. And listen in a world that can often feel like a dumpster fire, I do not have a ton of extra empathy to extend towards fictional characters and their problems created by their inherited wealth. But while that is absolutely this book on the surface, it is also not the whole picture in the underlayers. There's plenty of humanity here. And I think that's what ultimately made this one work for me like it did. I will say, there were a few left terms within the plot that I wasn't necessarily expecting one or two that hit almost a little too close to home for me at this point in my life, but the way the author handled them was both kind of detached enough as well as human enough to make them not overwhelmingly hard to read. This would be a fantastic vacation book. I can totally understand why it's getting some of the buzz that it is. That is Pineapple Street by Jenny Jackson.

**Kaytee Cobb 18:18**

Sounds so good. And you know, I've seen this because it was on Pie Lady Books, Instagram. And one of my bookish friends Stephanie Bonin had just finished it and messaged me about it, but it was kind of delectable. Yeah, her so I have it on my radar, but I have not yet picked it up. So I'm glad that you talked about it and I'm glad to have a little fuller picture of what's going on in these pages.

**Mary Heim 18:42**

Yes, for our northern hemisphere readers. This is going to be a summer beach bag book for sure. For sure. For sure.

**Kaytee Cobb 18:49**

Excellent. So get those library holds in no because it probably won't come up till summer anyway.



**Mary Heim 18:53**

There you go. All right, Kaytee, what have you got next?

**Kaytee Cobb 18:56**

Okay, my next one is called *Time's Undoing* by Cheryl A Head. This was a direct recommendation from our dear friend and monthly contributor to all things murderful Elizabeth Barnhill, who is the adult book buyer at Fabled bookshop in Waco, Texas. Meredith gets recommendations from Elizabeth regularly both in person when they lunch together, and every month when they record together, and do to the rest of the bookish friends, but getting a direct rec from Elizabeth is something pretty special. So I always try to make time for those. This one I picked up as a galley on Kindle, as soon as Elizabeth sent me a message about it. Here's the setup. In this novel, we first meet Megan Mackenzie, a young black journalist in 2019, who has grown up hearing the family lore about her great grandfather's murder, but it feels like no one really knows the real story or any details to the case. Her grandmother's ailing health and the new Black Lives Matter movement gaining a national spotlight, lead her to Birmingham, Alabama, to investigate this cold case for herself and try to turn it into a journalistic spotlight series of articles. But this is a dual timeline story. So we are also going back to 1929 when Robert Lee Harrington, Megan's great grandfather is moving to Birmingham with his pregnant wife and young daughter. He's pursuing a job as a carpenter and trying to avoid his past. The storylines weave together as Megan puts together her story, and Roberts family life develops in this new city. And our author Cheryl Head does a great job drawing us into both of these timelines. I do have a small quibble with this book though. And I did read a galley so it could have been fixed by the final version. Megan's timeline, as a journalist, included the most mundane details about how many phone calls she made that day, who she reached, who she had to leave messages for, whether they called her back by the end of the day, like, what so and like whether she was able to write a paragraph for her story, and how long did that take her? I get that this is part of a reporter's job description, but it surely does not need to be in a novel. I love reading novels that include podcasters as their storyline, but I don't need to know how long it took you to edit the episode. It's not interesting, right now. Every time this minutia got included, it took me out of the story. Despite that fact, I found this book otherwise to be unputdownable, especially knowing that the storyline is inspired by true events in the author's own family. In fact, the author's grandfather's photo is worked into the beautiful cover effect that Elizabeth pointed out to me when she first recommended it. This was a fantastic historical mystery. It's called *Time's Undoing* by Cheryl A Head.

**Mary Heim 21:39**

I can totally see why Elizabeth thought of you for this one. Kaytee, like that makes so much sense to me. It absolutely sounds like a Kaytee pick. I love it.

**Kaytee Cobb 21:47**

Yes, definitely.

**Mary Heim 21:49**

All right, Kaytee for my third book this week, I have got *After This* by Claire Bidwell Smith and Kaytee, this is the book that I mentioned at the top of the show in my bookish moment of the week, the suspense I've been keeping y'all in for the last 20 minutes or so. Like I said, I have been aware of this

author's work as a grief therapist and speaker just because of my professional affiliations. But somehow, in those initial foggy days of grief, something compelled me to take a look at the book she'd written and clearly I am so glad that I did. After this is part personal narrative memoir, part journalistic exploration into the unknowable question of what happens after we die. The author lost both of her parents to illness before the age of 25, and largely because of this experience, found her way into working as a bereavement counselor in a hospice setting. In her professional career. She begins the story kind of skeptical of anybody who claims to know what if anything, waits for us on the other side of this life, but also propelled by her questions about these personal losses that have so shaped and affected her life from a young age. From the perspective of a journalist, but also as a grieving daughter, she decides to tackle everything from medium readings, shamanic journeys, past life regressions, and immerses herself into the ceremonies of organized religion, and the rigor of scientific experiments to try and find the answers that she is so desperately curious about. Each chapter is beautifully and heartbreakingly interspersed with letters to her young daughters, as she processes her loss now as a mother herself, which I'm sure you can imagine, both broke my heart and made me feel so seen as a mom to a young daughter grieving my own parent, and I'm sure you can hear the emotion in my voice, because it's still really fresh. For me, it's here, Kaytee, I am not opposed to some level of Whoo, in my own life, as in like the woooo, right. And I think you need to be at least a little amenable to those possibilities if you're going to read this book. I will say, though, that I was even a little reticent to bring it to the show, because it was so personally and profoundly impactful for me, like I almost wanted to just squirrel away the experience of this book just for myself because it felt so sacred, right? Like, you can hear that emotion in my voice. I am like, can I even talk about this? It's only been a month like it's really raw still. But I will say I shared this book, I make good reads and had a couple friends, bookish friends and otherwise reach out and say like, I'm really curious to hear what you thought about this. I lost my own dad, I lost my grandparents, my partner, etc. And that was the driving force for me of, okay, it's okay to bring a grief book, right? Because grief is part of this human experience. I will say this, along with Vera Vera Wong was one of the first books that I was able to pick up and actually pay attention to and comprehend after my dad passed, and it was truly a life raft book for me. Even more so than the comfort of the possibility that my dad is still with us in so many ways was the comfort of seeing someone else wholly and thoroughly embrace her grief and find ways to weave it into the meaning of her life. You know the story of how I then set off desperately to find a copy of my own instead of the library copy I had been reading. And I'm happy to say that, you know, as I mentioned, while it's still really hard to find, it was super easy to find copies in my library system to check out it does appear to be available on libro FM. If this one sounds of interest to our listeners, I am very excited to know that this one is getting rereleased, it is clear that I will be stocking up on a few copies just to have on hand to pass out to any friends experiencing grief or kind of going through this own journey in their lives, once it is released more readily. But this is going to be a hard print book for me for sure. That is After This by Claire Bidwell Smith.

**Kaytee Cobb 25:44**

Oh, Mary. We can't all cry. Well, thank you for sharing that book with us. And for being willing to talk about a hard thing with us. This is of course, as we already mentioned, what our deep dive is going to be about So we are going to get more into this journey and the reading experiences you've had over the past month in our deep dive. I do still have one more book to talk about, even though it feels like this is the wrong order to do things. But I do want to acknowledge that this is hard. And there's so much



love poured out here between the two of us and with our community and you and I know that all our listeners are going to be grateful for the emotion that you were willing to put into that current read.

**Mary Heim** 26:29

Thank you friend.

**Kaytee Cobb** 26:31

Okay, my third book this week is the one that I was worried that we might have doubled up on but we didn't. So now I get to tell you about Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club by J Ryan Stradal. Oh, yay. Oh, all about it. I was rather worried that Mary and I might end up doubling up on this book because both of us really love J Ryan Stradal,

**Mary Heim** 26:52

really and truly, truly,

**Kaytee Cobb** 26:54

truly Yes. This story is blurb-ed as being about a couple, Mariel and Ned Prager, who are from two very different restaurant families in Minnesota, Ned is the firstborn son in a family that owns a huge restaurant chain called Jordy's, which I picture as like a Minnesota specific Denny's. It serves giant meals all day long. And the battle to get anything heart healthy on the menu is hard fought. We meet Mariel on page one, when she makes the less than one minute commute from her house to her work across the street, where she owns the lakeside supper club. It's been in her family for generations and been a staple to the community during that first commute to work on page one or page three or so Mariel hears from a neighbor that she needs to pick up her mother Florence from church after an event that morning. But there's a rift between Florence and Marielle. And they haven't really spoken in years. So while this is a story about a couple, and the two restaurant families they come from, it's mostly about generations of women primarily Mariel and Florence and Florence's mother, Betty. J. Ryan writes women so well, and always has, in each of his novels, we meet and fall for a Midwestern woman, or many of them that embodies the spirit of Minnesota especially. It's a love letter to the women in his life that raised him and turned him into the man that he is. The restaurant in this case is just the backdrop to the story. And it's a great backdrop. In the supper club. You can smell the smoke and the wood paneling. You can hear the silverware clinking against the plates, and Jordy's, you can feel the vinyl underneath your seat as you sit down for a meal. This book as with all of J Ryan's books, has some really tough stuff in it, especially around motherhood and parenting. It would be spoilery to say more than that, but please, please, readers, please look for triggers. If you have sensitivities around pregnancy and birth and young children. My heart belongs in the pages of these books, as does my heritage. My childhood summers were spent Lakeside up north in Minnesota, and the generations of women before me could have walked right out of the pages of this book. I'm not saying it's going to be right for every single reader. But I sure can tell you it's exactly perfect for me as a reader. I gave it five shining stars. Don't you know? This was Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club by J Ryan Stradal.

**Mary Heim 29:23**

Katie, if you can believe it. I haven't read this one. Now I really I don't have access to a galley or an arc. I am patiently not patiently at all awaiting release day and so very excited to make a pilgrimage to my bookstore and get a copy when there is a new J Ryan Stradal book in the world. It is like a holiday for me. I'm so so excited to read this book. I'm so glad to hear there was never a doubt in my mind. It was going to be excellent. Right but I'm so glad to hear from you that like yes, I can have my expectations sky high because it will meet them. I can't wait

**Kaytee Cobb 30:00**

Oh, it's so good. And yes, like Mary mentioned today is April 17, it actually releases tomorrow, April 18. So hustle on over to your indie bookstore, grab a copy, if you need like, a summery yellow cup of comfort to hold in your hands.

**Mary Heim 30:16**

Hallelujah, I love it, I can't wait to read it.

**Kaytee Cobb 30:18**

Okay, so that was like our little like peek up from under the water. And now we're gonna go back down. So I want to start out our deep dive, as you know, we're talking about how grief changes reading. And, as you've already heard, this is going to be a tender section of episode. And we both Mary and I want to recognize that if you listener are in a place that it's too hard to listen to people talk about grief, and loss of a parent, or loss of someone else close to you. That's why there's timestamps, and we encourage you to skip ahead and care for yourself, before listening to something that will hurt in any way whatsoever. So that being said, Mary, our listeners who follow you on social media know, and of course, from the rest of this episode that your dad pretty suddenly died about a month ago. And so today, we want to talk about the journey, especially with regard to your reading life. So we're not going to share the details around that. But we're going to talk about kind of afterwards, we have this very sudden and unexpected loss. What happened immediately afterwards with your reading life.

**Mary Heim 31:28**

Yeah, you know, Kaytee, for the solid two weeks, after I lost my dad, I was like, I'm never going to read another book ever again, like, I'm gonna have to tell Kaytee and Meredith like, thank you so much for including me in this group. And now I have to leave because I'm done reading. Like, I could not focus, I could not comprehend a single word of a single book that crossed my path. I tried. I was like, here is this thing that brings me comfort that I share with my dad, like, my dad is the one who taught us you don't go into a bookstore without leaving with a book like you read every night before bed. And I was like, desperately wanting to hold on to reading and it just, I just could not focus just I couldn't do it. And it was hard, because I wanted that comfort. And I will say, I hope my husband doesn't mind me sharing this the night that I got home. I don't even remember, it was like three days, that were really hard days, we weren't sure yet if my dad was going to make it or not. And I came home and my husband read aloud to me from Harry Potter, which was like, the most beautiful, comforting, wonderful thing it was like, here's this way to have reading as a part of your life to kind of, you know, escape into this thing that I love so dearly, was him reading aloud to me. So highly recommend if you are having a hard time, see if you can have a loved one read a beloved book to you, to ground you and comfort you a little bit but it

was a solid two weeks before I could even look at a book and read more than a sentence and totally understand it.

**Kaytee Cobb 33:12**

Yeah, I can see that with regard to different types of reading. Were you were you feeling that just with regard to like words on the page and the ability to focus or Jeremy reading aloud to you? Was that okay? Because it was a story you already knew. So you couldn't kind of drift in and out?

**Mary Heim 33:29**

I think that was it. I think it was like, here's this kind of comfort that my my love is offering to me, right? That I it's a story I don't need to pay attention to like, I probably reenact the Harry Potter novels as a one woman show at this point in my life, right. So I think it was that it was more of a comfort but like I couldn't, I had checked out the Golden Spoon. I was first on my library holds list for so many books that I was excited about that released right around that time, the new Veronica Speedwell all these books that I was like, Yes, I'm first on the library list. And I had to return all of them. Because even like this kind of, you know, great British baking show murder mystery could not comprehend a single word. I couldn't listen to an audiobook. You know, we spent a lot of time in the car back and forth to this hospital that was a little far away over the course of those three days. And it was just like, I mean, I had to ride in silence. This was not going to be my time to catch up on my audiobooks, you know, so it was it was really hard because I genuinely was like, I can't imagine getting back to this place where I can read again, but that comfort of Jeremy reading Harry Potter to me like I will never that is something I'm always going to hold so tender and dear to me was that because it was like this reminder of like this comfort is still here. Here's someone I love, you know, taking care of me in this very nice, specific, tangible way. But yeah, me myself and I could not read a single book.

**Kaytee Cobb 34:58**

Definitely and I mean, we've talked about this some offline as well. But I went through my own small loss during that period of time small in comparison to losing a father. And in scale, it was smaller, but I felt a lot of the same things. I, even when I was able to finish an audiobook, which took me four or five times longer, I felt like, I didn't remember anything that I had read. I wasn't. I didn't care about the characters. I didn't care about the plot. So I had tried to force my reading back in, like into submission, and I wasn't able to control it. I didn't have that ability to say, well, Kaytee, you love reading. So just do it. You know, it just didn't work. So like, I felt that same adrift feeling, which I've talked about some as bookish moments over the past few weeks about being slumpy and trying to get that mojo back. But it's hard when you feel like your life gets derailed completely from where you thought it was going on this, like even keel, right. So you said that lasted about two weeks, you told us about two of the books already that you kind of picked up as you came out of that first fog? Are those books that you typically would have reached for or that you thought would be able to draw you in?

**Mary Heim 36:20**

You know, I think so. I initially was like, I need fluffy. I need light. I need something that's totally escapist. And to some extent, some of the books the books that I read, were a little bit later Vera Wong is not like a super right hard literary literary cool. Yeah, exactly. Right. Another one that I recently just finished on audio took me not kidding you three weeks longest, I think an audio book has ever taken me, but not for

not loving it Kindred Spirits Supper Club, which I just loved. It's a little rom com about a local Wisconsin girl. And like, those were really fun and enjoyable. And I think Vera Wong grabbed me and like, that's, I was ready. And also it hooked me. But it's interesting, because I feel like whereas in early pandemic, for example, which was not the same kind of experience, right? But it was this a similar shift in my mental health. Like reading life, right, I only wanted fluffy and light books, then I was like, keep the big feelings in the literary books away from me with, you know, a 10 foot pole. But I also noticed that I needed I was not shying away from books that made me feel I was not like suddenly all of these books that I've kept at a distance. In the last couple of years, when things have felt kind of hard. I was suddenly like, give me like, give me these books that will make me feel I mean, I was reading A Grief Observed by CS Lewis is one I've been kind of picking up and putting down that book does not pull punches about grief, right? Even after this, like I at many points, reading that book would be sobbing through the pages. And it was like very healing. Like it was very cathartic to be seen in this grief. And this is one of the reasons why Kaytee I came to you. And I was like, I want to talk about this on the podcast, I was like, this is something that I didn't anticipate the way that I would want to lean in to using books to help me feel like I have any trouble feeling my feelings. You know, literally my job. But I was kind of shocked at how what I initially thought I needed, which was like light and fluffy distracting books was not all that I needed. I also don't think those books would have worked for me as much if I didn't also have some books that were grounding me and rooting me in my grief, like allowing space for my grief to exist. And that really surprised me. That is a new experience for me in my life as a reader for sure.

**Kaytee Cobb 38:55**

Okay, interesting. Yes, I empathize with this idea of using books to feel your feelings, because I was having a Voxer conversation with a friend of mine, Rebecca, about some feelings. And I eventually i derailed it on purpose. And I said, Well, now I have a funny story to tell you. Because I'm all done with those feelings. She said, Kaytee, how convenient that you can say that's enough of those feelings for now. I'm going to put those away and switch to something different. And it is I think, for me, a way that I process my own feelings is to reach deeper into a book that maybe has a little sprinkling of that on top and say I'm I'm going to let myself be fully feely within these pages. Whereas in my regular day to day life, I do like to compartmentalize them a little bit and maybe tuck them in a pocket and say I'll deal with you after I get my kids to bed. You know, like, like, you can wait, it's fine. But within my stories, I can get into those feelings more. So are you hopeful, or nervous about the idea of your reading kind of returning to a baseline, more like what you're used to? Or do you think this is a permanent shift? Like now Mary has accessed this other level of herself? Or what are you thinking?

**Mary Heim 40:14**

You know, I think what I'm seeing with the way this grief and the loss of my dad has literally touched every part of my life, and not to turn this into my own therapy appointment. But like, I feel like there's no way that I can be the same person that I was before. And in that same vein, there is no way that I'll be the same reader that I was before either, right, like, of course, I'm still gonna read and love the books I always have loved like that is not ending. But whereas as a sensitive reader, right? In the past, I've avoided those topics, I'm not averse to those books. Now, like, I don't know if I'm going to be able to explain this well, but almost like this unexpected pain and trauma has happened in my real life, there is no way that reading about hard things could be harder than experiencing them. So you know, and honestly, to see my own grief and feelings like mirrored in the words of someone else, like it very much

reminds me that I'm not alone in this feeling that every human being who has ever existed, and everyone to come will likely feel the same things that I'm feeling, at some point in their life makes me feel very even more connected. Like I've unlocked this, like deeper level that I definitely have explored in my reading in the past, but it's certainly taken a pause for me in the last five years or so. And I'm gonna get like a little out there for a second, but one of my favorite poems, talks about how like, sorrow carves this well, right, that joy can fill. And it's almost like, this grief of my own has carved this deeper well into my life, that like, I can feel those feelings more deeply, whether it's sorrow and grief or joy. And I can only see that being further mirrored in my reading life to come. It's just it's the same, but it's deeper, I have gone a further level into how I experienced the world now. And of course, that's going to show up in my reading. Yes, you know, definitely.

**Kaytee Cobb 42:10**

Okay. So kind of as my like, final question I had for you in this q&a section, our listeners do know that you're a practicing therapist. How do you think that that professional experience has impacted your own experience with grief? Do you feel like you were better prepared? Do you feel like you had tools that the rest of us don't? Can you give them to us now? Like, what's the plan here?

**Mary Heim 42:36**

I promise if I have any tools, I will not get keep them. Right. Right. But you know, I think in some ways, being a therapist has made this a little easier. And in some ways, I think it's made it harder. This like, of course, is conjecture, right? There's no way to know how I would have experienced this loss if I weren't a therapist, but I had a friend, a therapist, friend of mine had reached out to me in the days right after my dad died and was like, you know, you have been in the business of grief for so long. Just know that that might make it a little harder to shift to the human experiencing side of it, I didn't feel that at first like I was and have been fully present with the waves of grief and just trying to flow with them. It is very much a part of my daily life that is just I have accepted that like this grief is a friend that will be with me now for a while. But I have noticed that that piece kind of creeping in a little bit more, the more time has passed, like I can see where I want to be with my own grief almost from my therapist perspective, and I'm just not there yet. And there's nothing I can do to force it. And me being who I am is struggling with accepting that truth that I don't get to control this, right. But on the other hand, I think the benefit of my own kind of years of therapeutic work personally, like my own personal therapy, as well as doing this daily, has made me just very unafraid to pursue that which is hard. Like when I noticed resistance instead of shying away from it. I'm like, Oh yeah, that's where the growth is. We're gonna go poke on that, like, that's where we're gonna go. And I think that that is helping me a lot with kind of fully feeling and experiencing this grief in the very human way that I know that I need to but I can't acknowledge to or I can't not acknowledge rather, that that wasn't a consideration in me bringing this topic to you and saying hey, I think I want to talk about this. A recognizing like any one of my clients could listen to this episode I could and did burst into tears in the middle of you know, sharing a book but I also am feeling very pulled to this truth that I am far from the only person experiencing this, having had experienced this will experience it in the future. And I think it's so healing, to have others meet me in my own humanity with this. My hope and being able to talk about this with you Kaytee is like someday, someone can like push play on this episode. in their own grief and like feel seen, yes, in the way that so many people in my community and our community have made me feel seen in this and like what a gift that would be able to come out of this. Yeah, I will just say this to the other reason why I knew it would be

okay for me to do this today is because I knew I would be met and received with love from you, my friend. And also I like trust and love in this community that we have. And I just feel really grateful for that.

**Kaytee Cobb** 45:31

I'm also very grateful for the community that is unfailingly supportive, and what surrounds any of this team, especially with love and acceptance and generosity in stuff that's hard. And I'm really grateful for our friendship and the way that we have been able to never meet in person. Yeah, which I'm very bitter about, but still hold each other's hands. Yeah. In a in a digital way. That's really special. You did mention a few books between current reads. And this deep dive. As you were talking, I definitely was thinking of Maybe You Should Talk to Someone by Lori Gottlieb, as you talked about your own therapy experiences as a therapist. And Tell Me More by Kelli Corrigan. About the hardest things that we have to learn how to say, which I think are both really great companions for this conversation. Do you have any others that you want to slide in here and plug right at the end?

**Mary Heim** 46:35

I do. I will wholeheartedly cosign on Lori Gottlieb's book, I literally have it behind me in my office right now. Such a good one. Healing After Loss by Martha Hickman is like a daily. I don't want to call it a devotional because it's secular but just like a daily reading on grief that actually one of our bookish community Ginny Walters sent to me she has been a good another good internet friend of mine who I have never met in person who experienced her own loss of a parent within the last two years. And she was like, here you go friend. Like this was so powerful for me. She turned me on to the Good Mourning M O U R N I N G podcast, their Instagram is great. They are Australian writers. But I pre ordered their book because I was like, Yes, this sounds so great. Another one that I would recommend too. It's not necessarily on grief. But another Kelly Corrigan Glitter and Glue is about her relationship with her mom. And I love that book. And yeah, the other ones After This, obviously A Grief Observed, those have been really just like anchors, right? life rafts for me. So I'm sure more will come to me, and will continue to come as I read them. And that's something that I'm finding a lot of comfort with sharing that too on Instagram and in our bookish, you know, friends community, I'm sure I will continue to share those. Because, yeah, it's been great to be able to great, maybe not great, it's been helpful to be able to process my feelings through other people's words like that. So those are ones I would definitely add to the list.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:06

Perfect. I think that's a fantastic and relatively comprehensive list that we can always add to later because that's what the internet is for. Amen. All right, let's go ahead and visit a fountain. And maybe this week, we both cried plenty. It's a fountain of tears. It's fine. It's very salty. We're visiting it anyway. And it will still take our coins. What is your wish this week, Mary?

**Mary Heim** 48:31

All right, Kaytee, my wish for the fountain this week is a really pretty simple one. I wish that everyone would readily give themselves grace and kindness when they are in a reading slump. Whether it is a big slump related to something hard going on in your life. Or if it's a book hangover after a great read or something in between. I am so guilty of this. I know many of our community does this to themselves as



well. Instead of trying to fix the slump. I wish we could all just be more gentle with ourselves. And remember that it is very unlikely that we are never going to pick up a book ever again. Which, right I truly literally believed. And just like let ourselves be in whatever season we're in, if we have said it once we've said it a million times, but I know it's still hard to believe it but the books are just going to be waiting for you when you're ready, go watch some Netflix, go outside for a while, take a walk, take a nap. Stop imposing a timeline on yourself for something that is supposed to be healing and fun and supportive. Maybe have a loved one read you some Harry Potter, but to just release some of that and no, just as a reminder that like the books are here for you. They will be waiting when you are ready. And you do not have to fear like that additional loss in your life. Right? They will always be there for you. So that is my soapbox and my wish to myself and anyone else to whom it resonates. pings. Flash pings my flash. What about you, Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:53

All right. My wish is forward looking. This week I wish to remind people about upcoming bookish events. So today when the episode airs, it is April 17. If you're listening in real time, or even in the upcoming week, I want to remind you to add some things to your calendar. First is April 23. Next Sunday, it's World Book Day. There's some fun history to this holiday. But suffice to say that it's recognized by UNESCO, and meant to help encourage reading, which is part of why they moved it to a spring day in 1930. Because it's a better time for reading outside than the original date in October. Put some reading on your calendar to celebrate whether you're somebody or not, it could be a single poem. That's fine. Second is coming up the following weekend. April 29, is independent bookstore day, Mary, and I know you all love to celebrate in your home. I'm going to encourage all of you to plan a trip to your local indie bookstore to celebrate sometimes they'll have events or special merch. But even if it's just a regular day for them, I promise they will appreciate your visit. And your business as Mary's dad taught her, do not go to a bookstore and leave without a book in your hands.

**Mary Heim** 51:02

Yes, everyone. If you can embody the spirit of Bob Lange this month, please go to a bookstore and leave with a book. He would love that and I would love it too.

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:12

All right, those are wonderful wishes this week. Ping splash. And that's it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me Kaytee at notes on bookmarks on Instagram, and Meredith is at Meredith dot reads.

**Mary Heim** 51:26

And you can find me at Mary reads and sips on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:30

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 currently reading podcast.com.

**Mary Heim** 51:40

You can also follow the show at currently reading podcast on Instagram, or email us at currently reading podcast@gmail.com

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:47

And if you really want to help us please become a bookish friend. We've talked about them a lot this episode. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts, or shout us out on social media. All of those make a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

**Mary Heim** 52:02

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

**Kaytee Cobb** 52:08

Okay, Mary, until next week, may your coffee be hot

**Mary Heim** 52:12

and your book be unputdownable.

**Kaytee Cobb** 52:14

Happy reading Mary.

**Mary Heim** 52:15

Happy reading Kaytee