



Season 5, Episode 24: Journeying Together + Reading Partnership Answers

Mon, Jan 16, 2023 • 1:14:37

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

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

Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:24

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and having a reading partner makes my life better.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 00:42

And I Roxanna Kassam Kara, a mom, a marketer and a mood reader living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. And in 2023, I'm going to lean into my bookish peccadilloes to help me build a more fulfilling reading life. This is episode number 24 of season five, and we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:00

Whew, that sounds like a really interesting thing for you to do to lean into your peccadilloes.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 01:05

Well you're going to hear all about it more in our bookish moments.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:08

Oh, I can't wait. I can't wait. Okay. So we will tell you right up front that our deep dive today is going to be what we have gotten a lot of questions about Roxanna, and that is our reading partnership. So you and I have defined this thing, right? We're not just friends, we're reading partners, and we share our entire reading lives together. Yes. And I am really interested to talk about it. I'm interested to answer some of the questions that we've gotten. And I'm interested to find out your take on a couple of the things because there's a few things that we haven't actually talked about. So I'm going to be interested to see what you think.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 01:47

Yeah, some of those questions were had me scratching my head a bit because they were things I hadn't thought about, I think because we, you know, sort of fortuitously fell into this. So it'll be interesting to chat about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:57

Yeah, no, that's gonna be good. Alright, so that's going to be our deep dive later. So let's get into our bookish moments of the week. Roxanna, what are you bringing to us?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 02:05

Okay, so my bookish moment this week is a case of reader know thyself. So as 2022 wrapped up, I really got into those best of 2022 lists, which I love. I listened to all the podcasts, I read all the lists, which is a fabulous thing to do. And one of the things I look forward to at the end of the year, but as you know, Meredith, I don't usually have bookish FOMO, especially over new releases. Because I like books that have stood the test of time. But God, do, I get bookish FOMO over those best of lists, like there's just something about people talking about a book that really struck a chord with them and saying, This is the best of the best, like, every cell in my being vibrates. And I'm like, rushing to take notes and write it down. And "What is this book and I must fit it in before the end of the year, because what if that's one of my top 10? And I What if I miss it?" and so all those that FOMO energy comes in. And so of course, I rushed, and I read three of the books that I had heard about before the end of the year, and two of them were misses for me, and one was just okay. Now, I'm not saying that these weren't great books, they actually were great books. And they were right for those who suggested them. But they weren't right for me. And I think it was more a case of me, knowing myself, you know? Best of lists are an amazing way to add great books to your TBR. But I know myself, and I know that I like books that have had an opportunity to sort of be out in the collective consciousness for a bit, you know, make a lasting impression, age like a good wine, one of those books that people remember years after they read them. And that just can't happen if you're just looking back a year. So actually, what occurred to me, I had an aha moment because I was listening to the 2018 Best of podcast that you guys shared your best of lists. And I thought, you know what would be great would be listen to past Best of lists, and then look into the books there that have aged well, and then you know, do that with the same like with new release episodes that come up podcast episode, listen to those, of course, but then also go back a year or two years or three years, and listen to my some of my favorite podcasts and their new release episodes from a few years ago, and see which books have really sort of resonated and stayed. And so I just thought that would be an interesting hack for me to take something that, you know, could work for me and make it work even better.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:26

Yes, I think that makes a lot of sense. And it makes sense to me, because you're such an Enneagram three. So anytime someone says these are the best books, I think that that is the only time that you're like, well then I need to read because otherwise, you have a bizarrely small amount of bookish FOMO. I mean, there are times where I'm like, I don't know, I don't know how you're not interested. Like you really don't have much FOMO at all. So but yeah, so that makes sense to me. I think best of lists are really, really great for each of us to create the best of lists. I think that's really important because I think we need to consider "Why did these books work for me? Why did they stand out?" So often, it's

because they were either unexpected, or they were different from what we normally read. There's a lot to be gained from looking at it that way. But like you, I think getting really wrapped up in everyone else's best of list for the year can be, at best kind of, you know, adding huge numbers to our TBR. And at worst can kind of make us feel like, "Wait, why are these books that other people are loving not working for me?" can kind of make us question ourselves. So staying true to what we know about ourselves as readers, even amidst all the end of year hoopla, I think is not always easy to do, but it's important. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Well, my bookish moment of the week kind of has a you know, it's similar in a way because it is in the category of reader know thyself, because as we got to the end of the year, I did have that last week of the year situation where I'm like, wait, okay, I don't really want to read anything. I've already recorded the best of episode, just that whole thing. And then like, what do I want the last book of the year to be? What do I want the first book of the year to be? And as I get all, like, magical thinking about all of this stuff, and I just, but what ended up happening is, I found myself, so I read three or four books at a time, all the time. And I found myself in the midst of three books, all of which were slow burns. And what I realized is, as soon as I figured out that, even more than one of them was going that direction, I should have shifted or pivoted, because what ended up happening is it grounded my reading to a halt. And so what I ended up doing and Roxanna, you know this, because one of the books was a book that we were buddy reading, on two of them, I finally said, "You know what I'm calling it, I got to 65%. I'm gonna finish this book, because I want to read it and finish it and talk about it. But I am going to shift into a new gear". And this is something I talked a little bit about last year, but I am using this gear more in 2023. And it is a gear that is I'm reading closer than skimming. So I'm not skimming, but I am not close reading, I'm not book darting, I'm not underlining, I am getting what I need out of the book in the quickest way possible. And I did that with both of these books, both of which I will bring to the show in the coming weeks. And I was so glad to have finished them. And I was so glad to be done. Like that feeling of lifting of like, okay, I can start something new now. And when I make my when I make my choices, I need to really think about how those three current reads play together. And I need to just set something I need to know, I can't be reading three slow books at a time.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 07:57

Yeah, I'm totally with you. I mean, we were buddy reading, as you said one of them. And it was a good book, but I'm with you, there's some books where you do have to make the call to just sort of, you know, go read it, but maybe not pour over every word because you'll be in that book forever. And if there's one thing I learned from last year, you know, when my reading grounds to halt like that, when I lose momentum, it's very hard for me to pick it up again. And if I can sort of anticipate that and do things to prevent that, it just makes me happier. It's not about the amount of books I'm reading, it's that enjoying my reading does mean that I have to have a bit of momentum. And so yeah, exactly. And then yeah, the interplay of the books, too, is so important. Like I think, you know, we picked our next buddy read because it's a faster read, I think for both of us.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:44

All right. Well, speaking of these current reads, let's get into current reads. What's your first one?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 08:49

Oh my god. I'm so excited to bring this to the show, Meredith, and I'm excited to talk to you about it. My first book today is called Home Fire by Kamilla Shamsie.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:58

Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yes.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 09:00

You remember when I left you voice messages about this book?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:04

I do. I feel like I've read it already. And I mean, that's how into it you were.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 09:09

I was really into it. And going back, I'm into it all over again. So this is a real boa constrictor of a book for me. It started off slow. I was wondering where it was going. And then it just squeezed me tighter and tighter until I finished and my pulse was racing. And my heart was pounding in my ears. And it squeezed the life out of me. I'm going to just be thinking about this book, honestly for years to come. So here's the setup. It's a big setup. So I'm going to try and keep it concise. It's the story about three siblings. There's older sister Isma. And there's two 18 year old twins, her siblings Aneeka and Parvaiz, and they live in a working class suburb in London and their mother died several years ago. So we meet them at a crucial time. The family has long been under surveillance by the British government, because their father was a jihadist who died on his way to Guantanamo. So that's the first thing in the mix. When we meet them, the brother Parvaiz is a lost marginalized boy and he's really just looking for a father figure. And he gets wrapped up with those ISIS militants and slowly radicalized. And Isma, who's the older sister is really just trying to keep that family unit together. And she makes some crucial bad calls, calling the police at the wrong time and everything just sort of implodes. So we have that big story going on. And then mixed in with that story is another Muslim family. And this is the family of a wealthy British MP and the Home Secretary, his name is Karamat Lone. So Karamat Lone is Muslim, but he's basically built his political reputation on rejecting his background. He's sort of you know, hardline anti immigration. He says he's Mr. British values, Mr. Strong and security, Mr. Striding away from awesomeness. So of course, he sees Parvaiz's situation. He's a, you know, high ranking politician, and he wants to buy himself political points. So he says, "Look like these are the Muslims, we don't want here. These are the Muslims that give Muslims a bad name". And he wants to punish them to win political points. But what he doesn't know is that his own son is wrapped up in the fate of these siblings. And the story of these two families is inextricably linked. So it basically just builds from there to like this explosive peak, really explosive,. It was one of the most powerful endings I've ever read. And I was literally breathing hard after it with my heart in my throat, like I'm stressed out just talking. It's a good book, it was a good book. I will say, I think, honestly, if I heard the setup, I would probably, you know, kind of take a few steps back. This was a book club book for me, which is why I picked it up. But I'd be like, God, this is heavy and super political and a bit esoteric. And it seems like she's trying to make a point. And I'm just saying all this because in case listeners are thinking that, I will tell you, it doesn't come off that way, it comes off as a good story, it comes off as a really good story. And then you just sort of as you're sitting with it, some of these layers come to you afterwards. And one of the great things she does to make this book more accessible and very compelling, is that she weaves Twitter posts, and news and tabloid stories into the story. And they function almost like a Greek chorus. So there's this one chapter and I think I left you a message about this narrative, because I'm still reeling from it. It's half

a page long. And it's specifically just trending hashtags on Twitter. And it just shows how British public opinion shifts in just a matter of hours back and forth. So mind blowing, because it's so relevant. Yes, in Britain, but yes, in Canada, and yes, in America everywhere. So I just there was just so much in this book to sort of, you could just read it through as a story. But you could also dive deep if you wanted to. Now, if you do care about those things, I will say that this book won the Women's Prize for Fiction in the UK in 2018. It was long listed for the Booker. It is also based on an ancient Greek play Antigone by Sophocles. Now, I feel like this will really make people want to move away. So I'll just say, I didn't know any of this before reading it. And it didn't affect my enjoyment of the book. And I'll just say, she really lands the plane. And that's really all you need to know. Go into it, trust her, because she lands the plane. It's a story that you'll think about for years to come. So that's Home Fire by Kamilla Shamsie.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:22

This, I do remember you your experience of reading this book, and we talk about this a lot. Roxanna were books that are window books. So we're looking into a life that is not what the speaking from me looking into a life that is not my own. That gives me a window into somebody else's world and the things that they're dealing with. But it's first and foremost a story, a novel that just has you wrapped in and is not trying to just pound you over the head with message. And that balance is not easy for an author to strike. But when we find a book that does, I think, for both of us we're like, yes, because that's exactly what we're looking for, right is that it's first and foremost a story. And yet I also learn to see things differently, lived in somebody else's shoes, I loved this experience. And this is a book that I I really, really want to read for sure.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 14:20

And that's exactly Meredith, I think I become so sensitive, because there's so many viewpoints in the world. And there's, you know, there's only so many books you can read. And when I read them, if I do feel that an author's really trying to sort of hammer something into me, I just I don't know, it's the rebel in me, I just push back, you know, because I want to be pulled into the story. And I also kind of want to figure it out myself. You know, I want to come to some of those conclusions. I want to pull out the important things. I don't necessarily want someone to tell me. And so I find that a good story that pulls you in, that you can then sit back and say, Hmm, I wonder if they met this. I wonder if you know this could be applied to my life this way, makes it much more interesting than someone who's, you know, making sure I know what they want me to take away from this book at every step.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:08

Right, drawing every single line perfectly so you don't have an opportunity to participate. Yes, yeah. Yeah, no. And this one is one that does that really, really well. Okay. I'm gonna talk about a book that we did read together that I have been waiting to bring to the show for a really long time, because I wanted to talk about it with you, because it was one of our favorite books of the year, I think both of in our top three, right. So this, you know, so we have to talk about this is Babel by RF Kuang.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 15:37

Woo.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:38

Yes. And I want to talk about it. Yeah, I know, I know that it feels like this book has been everywhere. So bear with me, because most of the time, I, you know, I at least shy away from books that I feel like bringing to the show will just be a repeat of what you've seen everywhere. But what I feel like is that you don't always know what *Babel* is about. I feel like a lot of people have talked about how great a novel it is. And it is. It's incredible. But I feel like sometimes what gets missed is the story itself to go back to what we were just talking about. Yeah, yes, there are big issues and all of that, but there's also this very core story. So here's the setup. The story starts in 1828. And our lead character is Robin Swift, who when we meet him is in a very, very sad state. He's trapped in a severely impoverished home watching his mother die a horrible death of cholera in Canton, China. Suddenly and inexplicably Robin is scooped out of squalor and taken to London by the mysterious Professor Lovell. There, Robin trains for years in Latin, ancient Greek and Chinese, all in preparation for the day that he will enroll in Oxford University's prestigious Royal Institute of Translation, which in our story is known as *Babel*. *Babel* is the world's center for translation. And more importantly, it's known for its magic, and that magic is silver work, the art of manifesting the meaning lost in translation using enchanted silver bars. Now, don't worry if that sentence doesn't make sense to you right now. The story will make it make sense for you. Just know that the silver work magic has made the British the world's biggest superpower and it gives the British Empire the ability to colonize most of the world. But as Robin arrives at Oxford, he realizes that devoting his life to *Babel* means betraying his homeland. As his studies progress, Robin finds himself caught between *Babel* and the shadowy Hermes Society, an organization dedicated to stopping imperial expansion. And at some point, Robin, our poor boy is going to have to decide where his loyalties lie. Okay, this is a big book. And this is one of those books that as you say, Roxanna, this is this book is too big for one person. I really, I felt, I felt like reading it together and close reading it like we've never actually I mean, we read books all the time. But we closely read *Babel*. Yeah. Meaning that we literally read it chapter by chapter, like we really took it slow, because from the first words, you know that this is a modern classic. I am positive that *Babel* will be a classic from our generation. Yeah. 100%. So it took two months for you and I to move through it, because we did it so slowly and so deeply. And the first thing that I want to say is that I'm glad that we've invested that time in it, because if there's ever been a book worthy of that investment, it is this one. The other thing I really want to say is everyone hear me say that *Babel* is not a fantasy. It is not fantasy. I would say it's historical, dystopian fiction or historical speculative fiction. But it is not fantasy. I think the fact that it's been marketed as such has driven away some readers who would absolutely love the book. So that's the first thing that I want to just shout from the rooftops. There is an element of magic in it. Yes, the silver work that I talked about in the setup, but that is so small of an element in the bounds of the entire book. Second, I really want to say that this book is so much about friendship. Yes. And this, I think, is a piece that we just don't hear about when people are talking about this book. Robin forms a friendship with three other students forming a foursome of two boys and two girls, not romances. It just happens to be how it breaks down. And that foursome forms the heart and soul of everything that I loved about the book. Now make no mistake, *Babel* demands attention and investment from its readers. It's not just a novel, it's an experience. It needs you to pay attention to the action. And there is lots of that. But it also needs you to bring the same focus to the portions of the book that are about language, and translation, and colonialism, and silver work, which is also about colonialism. It needs you to love the characters and their friendship, but it also asks that you see each one of them individually. And it asks that you be willing to alternately love and hate each one of them. Also, personally, I learned so much from this book

about so many things. And you and I, Roxana learned so much about each other. And there were times when we each saw ourselves in different characters. And we had to reckon with that, too. Yeah, this book demands that of you, but it gives so much in return. As I said, it's truly a modern classic. I think that this book will stand the test of time, like Dickens or Mark Twain, or Toni Morrison novel, it's that good. The text is sparkling, and toothsome, it dazzles you and then hold your head and forces you to look at things that maybe you did not want to see. And it takes your breath away every time. There was a time near the end, when we were both very concerned that Kuang had written herself into a corner. Yes, but then she proved us so very wrong, delivering an ending that was both beautiful and perfect. I do want to say that we found it perfect as a slow but steady because the chapters are such that you can sink in, and then really let it soak in before returning and moving on. But then there were times that we gobbled up several chapters in a row, because we just had to see what was going to happen. It's great like that. We kept harkening back to the fact that we had learned so much about each other and about the world. And this is truly too much book for just one person. But then all the great ones are are they this is Babel by RF Kuang.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 22:19

Oh, Meredith, you did such a good job. Even just your setup. I was thinking how is this woman getting this book? Because it is a lot. And when you hear podcasts talking about it, everybody talks about the broad sweeping, you know, significance of it. And that is true. Yeah. But if that's what a listener hears about a book, it doesn't necessarily make them want to pick it up. Right. And, you know, you're right at the heart of the story is the friendship between Robin, and Rami and Victoire and Letty, and they really pull you through the hallowed halls of Oxford, coming to terms of the realization of maybe Oxford is not what we thought it was. And then, you know, the journey they go on afterwards. And it's just a you know, at every step, you're thinking, well, what would I do in this situation? That's, that was so much of our voice messages to each other, you know, did Robin make the right decision? And would I have made that decision? And what did Letty do? And should she have done that? And why was that her reaction? So when people talk about those themes, I don't want readers to think that they're big, esoteric themes. It's they actually have pulled through the characters in a way like you really do love and hate each of these characters. And they really make the story so personal for you, like, you know, when we were talking about books that are plot driven, and books that are character driven, driven, and books that are trying to teach you something. Somehow RF Kuang has done all three in one book, but it never feels overdone. It never feels hitting you over the head. You really pull out I think Kaytee said last time when you were talking about it, you it meets you where you are, and you pull out what you what you want from it. And I think that's so true.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:59

Yeah, no question. I, I felt so often, like I was just being laid bare by her prose, which was very accessible. There's nothing difficult to understand about, you know, it's very accessible prose. And the story takes you through it the entire way. Oh, and also, it's wrapping around it these you know, these elements of colonialism and the British Empire and the ramifications. So much of that, that I did not understand. I did not understand. And in fact, just a few months before we read Babel you had mentioned, wanting to read the real I wish there was a book that delved more into colonialism because I feel like it's a piece that we don't understand enough and then we got Babel.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 24:45

That's exactly it. Like it's a book that tackles colonialism, but does it in a way that pulls readers through the story right? And then you see the effects of it on every single one of those characters. And the silver work is used to show you how colonialism worked in an engaging fantastical way. So you said it's not a fantasy, you know, it's really a tool to tell the story. And I found it such an effective tool. And it really helps you understand, just like the language is between two cultures have similar things in different things. And one can sort of coop the other. That's, you know, what happens with colonialism and just the effects of that on each of those nations. And each of those students. Yeah, you're right. Like I there were parts in that book where I was just, I had that, you know, Brain exploding emoji, like I literally had to sit back and just reread and think about what she was writing. And honestly, if you had asked me a month before, will you ever read a book on translation that will blow your mind? I'd be like, No, that doesn't sound like something that's possible. And then we read that. And that blew my mind because it made me think about colonialism in a different way. And it made me think about, well, it made me think about privilege and examining my own privilege and what that means for people who look like me, people who are like me, it was just really it is a modern classic. And I think it'll be one of my best books this year. It'll be one of my best books for the next 10 years. Like no, you know, it's just one that will, I think, live on for a very long time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:13

Yeah, it's absolutely incredible and worth the investment of time, for sure. All right. Tell us about your second book.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 26:20

Okay. So for my second book, I'm going to take an abrupt left turn here. I wanted to bring to the show today, a series actually, starting with The Sunday Philosophy Club by Alexander McCall Smith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:32

Yes. So I'm so glad you're going to talk about this.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 26:35

So Meredith, you've heard me talk about this many times, but listeners have not so I wanted to bring it. Many readers know McCall Smith by his most popular series, The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, but The Sunday Philosophy Club is really my favorite series by him. So here's the setup. The series begins with the first book as I said, The Sunday Philosophy Club. Isabel Dalhousie is in her mid 40s independently wealthy living in Edinburgh, Scotland, where she edits a philosophy journal called The Review of Applied Ethics. In the first book, Isabel sees a young man plunged to his death from the upper circle of a concert hall in Edinburgh. Is it murder or is it just an unlucky accident? Isabel is determined to find out. Along the way, we meet a very colorful cast of characters. Isabel's very strident housekeeper Grace, her spoiled niece Cat who runs a deli and Cat's cute boyfriend Jamie, a bassoon player. Now as you can tell, this book is not really about the plot. It's about Isabel was a middle aged, quietly rich woman who spends her time pondering the ethics of life's everyday minutia. And you know what, Meredith? If I come back in another life, I want to be a middle aged, quietly rich woman who spends my time pondering the ethics of life's everyday minutiae in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:49

I was just sitting here thinking, that sounds great.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 27:54

Sounds amazing. And that's exactly how I read these books. They are my escapist adventure in between, you know, more demanding books. Isabel is smart, and she's curious, and she spends a lot of time in her head. And that really does come out on the page, her mind is constantly wandering the snatches of conversation she hears or thorny, ethical problems she's wrestling with, or why her niece Cat can't stick with a good man. And that stream of consciousness writing, combined with sort of the mists of Edinburgh gives this book almost an esoteric, dreamy feel. This series is really about mood and character, I use it as my palate cleanser, the way you use Agatha Christie. It's like the lazy river after a roller coaster of a book. It just sort of calms me down, cleanses my palate, you know, as you say, clears my chakras and allows room for the next book. Now I have a couple thoughts. While I love Isabel's tangential thoughts coming out on the page, others may not. You know, you might find it slow or draggy or pointless. So I would say if you don't like it by the first chapter, move on, because it's not the book or the series for you. And I will say, you know, this is a series of 14 books. And this is when you need to read in order, because the relationships build on one another. So when we meet Isabel, she's single, and by book 14, her situation has changed drastically. And you really want to follow that book by book and you can read this book while you're sipping a cup of Lost Malawi tea from Rare Tea Company, because Alexander McCall Smith named that tea, so it's a nice little experience together.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:27

Oh, nice.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 29:28

Yeah. And that's The Sunday Philosophy Club by Alexander McCall Smith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:33

I love that. I did not realize that it was 14 books long, though. I had was thinking it was three. Interesting.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 29:38

It's really long. And I remember when I came upon the first one, it was one where I was just I was just in my head and lot and I just needed something an escape and it just sounded like a great title. And you know, I've never read any other series and my whole life the whole way through. And this one I have waited for other books in this series and I always wait and when they come out like every two years, I rushed the live Ready to grab them because they're just that perfect. You know, they're not very long. And they all have that same feel. And they're just like a really good cup of hot chocolate. They go down easy. And then you move on to the next book. And honestly to be back in Edinburgh, you're kind of walking those stone streets and going into the little village shops. And it's just great. It's it's not a cozy. It's not saccharin. It's more sort of intellectual than that. But it really is, it has such a great mood to it. I really love dipping in every single time I do.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:29

All right, good. Yes, those are one thing I'm very much I've kind of been saving, jumping into it for that time when I really need that I'm overstimulated and I really need that book. And it's kind of like a piece of chocolate that I've that I see up there and I'm just saving it for the right moment. Okay, so I am bringing a book for my second book that is actually coming out, let's see, today's January 16. So coming out in two weeks and a day, January 31 is a book called *The Drift* by CJ Tudor. Here's the setup. So in this super fun super thriller, the very best way to get you into it is to tell you that we have three points of view and we start out all three with a bang. Hannah awakens to carnage, all mangled metal and shattered glass. evacuated from a secluded boarding school during a snowstorm. Her bus careened off the road, trapping her with a handful of survivors. They will need to work together to escape. In our second point of view, Meg awakens to a gentle rocking, she soon discovers that she's in a cable car stranded high above snowy mountains with five strangers and no memory of how they got on board. They're headed to a place known only as *The Retreat*. But as the temperature drops and tensions mount, Meg realizes that they may not all make it there alive. And finally, we have Carter, who's gazing out the window of an isolated ski chalet that he and his companions call home. As their generator begins to waver in the storm, something hiding in the chalets depths threatens to escape, and their fragile bonds will be tested when the power finally fails for good. As our novel progresses, not only do we find out the fates of all three, but we find out how their narratives are tied together. And that's when the fun really starts. Oh my gosh. This one is a slump buster. And again, it's coming out in a couple of weeks. So this is brand new. This is by CJ Tudor, who wrote *The Chalk Man*, which when I got this one on NetGalley, I had actually never read anything by CJ Tudor. But since then, I have actually read *The Chalk Man*. I'm going to be bringing it to another show because she is becoming a real favorite of mine. So this is a dystopian virus thriller, and I am here for it. I absolutely love it. It does require that you keep these three separate situations clear in your head. I don't struggle with that. But sometimes there are some people who do so just know that about the structure. Reader know thyself, if you have issues keeping characters straight, this might not be for you. But I felt like the author did a great job of helping us do that. But if that piece doesn't bother you, and you like a puzzle, or you like trying to figure out how the three things are going to come together, you are going to love this book. It's a mystery and a thriller and an escape the virus novel and just busted the slump that I had been in when I read it. It's just page turning fun. It's violent to be sure. So be aware. This was one Roxanna that I told you early on, not for Roxanna. Yeah, this is this is not for HSPs. There's all manner of blood and gore and guts and post plague creatures called whistlers. So and they are called whistlers because of the sound that they make when they breathe.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 33:58

Oh my god. Like, this is why I'm an HSP. Like, right? I'm like, I can't but I love to hear you talk about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:07

I know right? So that when I know it's that kind of book, I tell you like all of the plot and then you don't have to read it but I just tell you like the good stuff, right? Yeah. So this is a great cold weather book. The snowy landscapes figure prominently here. I was delighted to be under the covers reading all the horrible things happening to these four people. And isn't that also what reading is all about?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 34:29

Can I just say here I am reading about you know 40 somethings about the streets of Edinburgh with my cup of Lost Malawi tea and you're under the covers reading about these whistlers right...

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:43

People dangling from cables up in the air and oh my gosh, oh my gosh. So this is The Drift by CJ Tudor. I really really liked this one. Not all my NetGalley reading ones that I walk into, like really not knowing much at all works. In fact, there have been a lot of big bummers when I do it that way, but this was one that's a really, really big hit. So again, comes out January 31. So get your pre order in.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 35:07

Well, and that seems to me like perfect timing, because isn't it just end of Jan, beginning February, you're like, Oh, the dreariness of like the grind is really getting to you, and then you get a book like this. That's page turning, and you're just on the edge of your seat. Really, just to kind of bust you out of that. It sounds amazing. Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:24

It was so so good. I read it so fast. It's like short chapters. It's just like, Michael Crichton-y kind of like just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, like so good. It was really really good. I liked it. Okay, what's your third book?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 35:39

Okay, so my third book is The Bodyguard by Katherine Center. And you've heard all about this too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:44

Yes. Well, you made it so that I didn't have to read it.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 35:47

Exactly. Which is one of the one of the benefits of our reading partnership for sure. Right. So Katherine Center is an auto buy author for me and I love every book of hers since Happiness for Beginners, which is a currently reading test night. In this one, Hannah Brooks is our main character. She looks like a kindergarten teacher, but she's actually a bodyguard in her in Congress presence works in her favorite since no one expects her to be so skilled at protection. She is hired to protect mega actor Jack Stapleton was famous for shirtless action movies, but dropped off the radar a few years ago from a family tragedy. Jack has a stalker and needs Hannah to protect him. When he has to go home to his family's ranch in Texas. Hannah comes with him. But surprise, he doesn't want anyone to know he has a stalker. So she of course has to pretend to be his girlfriend. This book is exactly what you think it is. It's no more and it's no less. You know, Center wrote this when she was in lockdown, and she just wanted a fizzy bubbly rom com to lift her readers spirits. And that's honestly you can tell from the premise. That's exactly what this one does. Sure, it's far fetched. But Center does a good job of making these characters believable. There's a hefty amount of tropes thrown in. There is the jerky ex boyfriend, the jealous best friend, the kind but crusty boss. But in Center's hands, it somehow works. And you can drink this down in a sitting or two. I have to admit, what I love about Katherine Center is how she mixes the joyous with the difficult. You know, she writes right at the center of that bittersweet, messy life. What

Liane Moriarty does for mysteries, you know how they're mysteries but kind of so much more. Katherine Center does that for romances, you know, yes, there's romance at the center for stories. But they're often about so much more, you know, complicated family dynamics, personal trauma, and recovering to be the person you want to be this book, though, it was fun and light and fizzy kind of left me a little lacking in that emotional depth department. It was much more on Netflix rom com than her other books. And really like you go into it, you're casting it in your head, which I never do. But this book automatically, I'm casting it, I could see it happening. And it was a really light and fun way just like you said, you know, a kind of quick win, and really kind of just a great slump buster. But I was craving some more of that vintage Katherine Center after I read it. So I went back and read one of her backlist titles actually called *Things You Save in a Fire*, and that really hit that sweet spot for me. In fact, it was one of my best of the year. It's about a female firefighter who publicly assaults a man who traumatized her, and then is forced to leave her job and join another fire station. What was fascinating to me about that book was the firefighting culture and the challenges a woman faces in that male profession, and the culture of the small town fire hall and how the dynamic changes when she joins and what she has to go through to be accepted. It was really the meat of the book. And the plot was really multi layered and fast paced. So I highly recommend both of these books, depending on what mood you're in. That's *The Bodyguard* and *Things You Save in a Fire* by Katherine Center.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:52

And I think just even the fire was the one that you said if I was going to read Katherine Center that was the one to read. Am I right?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 38:59

Yes, exactly. I would say the other one is nice and light, but probably you could find elsewhere. There's a lot of books written like that. But what Katherine Center does best is yeah, I would read *Things You Save In a Fire*. That one honestly, the romance is almost like secondary or tertiary like I don't even remember the guy's name. And she hardly ever mentions it. It's really about this woman dealing with these dynamics in the fire hall, which honestly are like, it's not like everything's hard and then becomes really easy in the end. It's really fascinating. That's the one I would start with, especially if you've already read *Happiness for Beginners*.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:33

Got it. Okay. All right, good. Okay, my third book is another book that I have been looking forward to talking about and is the one that I've probably gotten the most DMs about people saying, I really want to know every year people want to know what did you think of the new Louise Penny book, which dropped the last week of November. So this is *A World of Curiosities* by Louise Penny. Here's the setup for this novel, which is the 18th in the *Three Pine Series*. It's spring in *Three Pines* and the villagers are preparing for a celebration of a sort. Armand Gamache and his right hand man, Jean Guy Beauvoir find themselves on edge. You see, because of the celebration that's going on, a young man and woman have reappeared in the investigators lives after a long time. This brother and sister were young children when their mother was murdered, leaving them orphaned, and very damaged. And now these two and their troubled lives have arrived on the doorstep of *Three Pines* as Chief Inspector Gamache works to figure out what their appearance in the village will mean. His alarm grows when a letter written by a long dead stonemason is discovered. In it, the man describes his terror when breaking up an attic room

somewhere in the village. Every word of this 160 year old letter is filled with dread. When the room is found, the villagers decide it must be opened up. As the bricks are removed, Gamache, Beauvoir and the villagers discover a world of curiosities. But the head of homicide soon realizes that there's more in that room than meets the eye. There are puzzles within puzzles and hidden messages, warning of mayhem and revenge. Unsealing that room sets the stage of this novel, again, the 18th in the series, and it sends us on a dark and terrifying journey to the truth. All right, I finished this up and I had feelings. I had feelings about my feelings. I was a dam about to burst when I finished this book. First of all, I was so relieved, as I am every year. I'm always for a couple of weeks before the next book comes out, just flat out low level anxious about whether or not it's going to be good, because how can she possibly do it again? Yeah, I'm relieved because this was such a good book. I was amazed, shocked that after 18 books, she's getting better and better. How can that possibly be? I felt shell shocked because this book is a wild wild ride. The pacing was perfect. And every single thread of the plot came together in a fast braiding rope of the last 50 pages. I was glued to the action kind of had that same feeling you had at the end of Home Fire. I was like my heart was I was physically responding to what was happening. I was impressed because where the heck does Louise Penny get her ideas? There are three major plot points here, and they are astoundingly genius and so dang interesting. And they just are so out there. Remember, a couple episodes ago, I talked about Glass Castle, and I talked about her odd plots. Yep, we have it here again in spades. But it's so fresh and different and perfectly woven together. That's the thing about Louise Penny, you are never going to get the same book twice. I also was filled with doubt, because apparently, I have no idea because apparently, my sleuthing skills are terrible because I had no idea that the baddie was the baddie until it was actually revealed. And then, when it was all explained, this Slowpoke was able to see that it had been there the entire time. Now, I have heard some pushback saying that this particular book is dark, and that somehow it doesn't fit in with the rest of the series. I have to say, I strongly disagree with this notion. This book is a level up of everything that Louise Penny has already been doing. It levels up the writing. It levels up the plot. It levels up our deep knowledge of members of our main cast, and it does each of those things incredibly well. Here's my honest and slightly spicy take Roxanna. People who think that Louise Penny is writing a cozy series in her Three Pine series are wrong. She's not. She has publicly said that she excused being called a cozy series writer, and even bristles at the term village mystery. She is writing about the mysteries of the human soul. And if the main thing that you love about the series is the bistro and the cafe au laits and the croissants, which I do love those things, but if they are the main thing that you love, then book 18 may very well be where you want to hop off the train. Because I think Louise is demonstrating here more than ever that she is not writing about only cozy nights on Clara's back terrace. She's taking us along with Gamache into the dark night of the human soul, which is dark and scary and unsavory. There are lots and lots of books to revel in that are simply cozy and I am so glad for for that, I love those books. But if you're looking for just that, or even mainly that here, you'll be disappointed. I for one am grateful that we get so much more than that here and I will go with Gamache and Louise Penny, absolutely anywhere. So finally, I feel sad, because now I have to wait another year for another trip to Three Pines. I feel grateful, grateful that Louise Penny never ever phones it in. She's always finding new ways to make the mystery interesting to make it so much more than just a mystery novel to make it art. And that's what this is. This is A World of Curiosities by Louise Penny.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 45:41

I love that. I love that sum up and it just sounds exactly like what you said to me in your messages. I can feel that passion coming through. And I'm so with you, you know, like Louise Penny is not a cozy mystery writer. She's not a village mystery writer because those books use the coziness, the food, that warm atmosphere as the focal points of their books. Louise Penny uses it as the counterpoint in her books. Right? Right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:09

The rest in between the rest in between what's actually happening.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 46:14

Exactly, she uses them to add that bit of light when she's gone really dark, because she's using it to plumb the depths of human nature, right? So and that gets really dark. So then she uses the cafe au lait and Olivier and Gabri to sort of lighten it up. But then, you know, she goes back into those sort of dark depths again, and that's what I think makes her such a masterful writer. So I think if you want to stay on the lighter side, no problem. I like to stay on the lighter side, then sure, then like The Sunday Philosophy club or Legends and Lattes, you know, like those are the ones to stick with. But she does get dark all the different themes that she tackles and what makes her so masterful at what she does.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:53

Right. And I think from all the interviews, because every you know, when the books come out, I watch all the interviews and all the sit downs that she does. My impression is that more than ever, she is shaking off that cozy mystery moniker. And she is if I had to guess I think we're we're going to get darker and deeper as we as we go further, which is amazing. So one of the things Roxanna that you came up when you and I were talking through this book, and also you are consistently reading your way through the series, and you are well more than half like you're what 10, 12 in?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 47:28

Yeah, I just finished The Long Way Home.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:31

So you're consistently reading the series, I am consistently doing a reread. I then just read this one. This got us talking a lot as we always do about all our books, but it really really really got us talking about Louise Penny, and themes and all the the passion that we both have about the series. And that is the thing is that I am so passionate about what she is doing in this series because it's so singular. It's so different than what anyone else is doing. It's its own world. And it's just got so much to give to us. So for years for years and years, I have noodled around this idea of wanting to do something about the some some piece of content about the Three Pines series, and after World of Curiosities came out, and I got so passionate about the book and thinking that it was just the best one yet. I said to myself, You know what, now is the time. And I know it's the time because I immediately said, and this is something I want to do with Roxanna. We have talked for a long time about wanting to do a piece of content together. Yeah. And so we talked about it, we talked about it with Kaytee, we talked about all you know all the ways that we could do this, and so we are going to be as a part of Currently Reading. So this will be a part of the Currently Reading podcast, it will come out on a different day. It will be in front of the paywall not behind the paywall. So it will be available to everyone. We're going to do a show called "A Journey

to Three Pines. And we are going to do a limited series we're thinking right now probably something like 25 episodes, because what we want to do is we want to deep dive into these books. So we're going to do them book by book. And we're going to have a set format. Not unlike you know, we love a set format here at Currently Reading, right, that's what we love to do. So we're gonna have a set format to talk about each book and really get in there and get into the themes, get into the characters, get into the plot lines, do some research as to how she brings in things from the real world and kind of how those things tie in. So I mean, I am so excited about this project. I haven't been this excited since we started Currently Reading really.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 49:55

I'm, and I'm tingling honestly hearing you talk about it like my book darts are vibrating in my hand because I can't wait to go into my Louise Penny and start highlighting because I just think it's going to be so fun to go into each book, particularly with a structure, you know, because we're not going to be sort of just sort of braving the wilderness here, we really will have a structure and then going through each book and then progressing through them. And seeing how she does build that identity of each of the characters and how she grows as a writer. And the theme she's developing, it's just going to be so fun to hear both our different perspectives and kind of the push pull of that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:33

And we will say that these are going to be full deep dives into the novel, so they will be spoiler filled. So if this is something that sounds interesting to you, first of all, we want to know about it. Yes, send us an email currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com Send us an instant message. If you're in the bookish friends group, let us know there. We want to get a gauge. I mean, I think there's gonna be a lot of listeners here in our community who are really interested in it. And I think there's listeners who maybe aren't even right now listening to book podcasts, but love Louise Penny, that will also be really interested. So I think there's going to be kind of a couple of different audiences. And so but we definitely want to hear from you. And if you've been thinking, I might want to read the books, or I might want to do a reread of the books. Now is the time because we are going to, like I said, we're gonna deep dive these now. We, Roxanna and I, spoiler alert, we don't, we probably shouldn't be committing to, we're probably just completely off our rockers to, to, you know, because of if any two people who just kind of don't have a lot of bandwidth, it's the two of us. But you know, a one and a three walk into a room together. And you know, things happen. So we are going to do A Journey to Three Pines. I don't know exactly when the first episode is going to come out. We are making plans now. They will come out some period of time apart, maybe one month, maybe six weeks, maybe two months apart. We want people to come on that journey with us. So if you want to join us, now is the time to really be thinking about getting into Still Life. Of course start with Still Life. And that's where we will start. And we will we're just really going to look forward to doing this. I'm I'm so excited about really spending some time just honoring this incredible series.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 52:22

Me too, honestly. And as you said, when you first brought it up all of me sort of tingled at the idea. The idea is just so exciting, like you said, and just so build so much momentum that we've got to take it going because it's just it's kind of pulling us in. I'm honestly, I'm so excited to do this and to share this with listeners.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:41

Yeah, I think it's going to be really, really good. That's *A Journey to Three Pines*, and it will be coming out soon. All right, Roxanna, we are close to one hour in. And it is time for us to talk about our mini deep dive that we're going to do today, which is a little bit about some questions that we've gotten about our reading partnership. So I want to talk a little bit about why it may even be, you know, important for anyone to listen to us talk about because who the heck cares about just the two of us, right? It's because I think that this idea of having not just someone who you do, buddy reads with, but a reading partnership is a very different thing. And it adds to your reading life in different ways. And I think that if people decide that this sounds like something that they really want, you can kind of put it out to the universe. And hopefully you will be able to either take advantage of an existing relationship, or maybe a relationship comes to you that all of a sudden you realize, hey, this might be someone who we could have a reading partnership with. So Roxanna, do you want to talk a little bit about why it is that we call what we do a reading partnership, instead of just we do buddy reads together?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 53:55

Yeah. Okay. That's a great question. I think that's a great place to start. So I think we call it a reading partnership because we're not just doing buddy reads together. That's how we started. But we really do share each and every book we read with each other. You know, every book I read, I'm leaving you a voice message on and vice versa. And it's not, you know, it's not like a tick that we have on checklist. We actually want to share these books because I think and correct me if I'm wrong, Meredith but when I'm sharing a book with you, I'm processing it and consolidating it and synthesizing it in my head, as I'm sharing it with you, and then when I hear books from you, it's just like you said, I'm vicariously reading through you. So I'm kind of you know, my reading life isn't doubly rich, but it's almost triply rich, because now I'm thinking much more deeply about the books I'm reading, even when they're light fluffy books, and I'm getting to hear about the books you would read that sometimes I wouldn't touch with a 10 foot pole. And now I get to hear about this books from you, whether they feature the whistlers or you know, walking zombies like I get to hear about all that great stuff that I love to hear about, but I don't necessarily want to read. And so I think that really benefits us and leads to a really rich reading life on both our parts.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:09

And so from a logistical perspective, we've said this before, but just to kind of remind everybody, so we communicate almost exclusively through voice messages, we do texts back and forth, you know, throughout the day. But the deeper conversation, the way that we get deeper is through voice messages. Now, that works for us really, really well, because of the lives that we lead, right, we both are married moms who have big full time jobs. And so it wouldn't work for us to talk on the phone a lot, or have, you know, set times that we zoom, which which are perfectly great ways to communicate, that just wouldn't work as well for us. And so we have found and actually recommend, it was your idea to just communicate in this way. And it's so great, because it gives us the freedom and flexibility to leave those messages or listen to those messages, when we have those breaks in our schedule. And so sometimes, we'll have days where just because of the way things shake out, we'll leave each other several long messages and was like, Oh, my gosh, we talk so much today. And then other times, we'll have to go three or four or five days, between even, you know, hearing from each other because we're

so busy, and they're just things going on. So I think that that really is where the idea of the reading partnership was born. Because we started out buddy reading and we met in the bookish friends group, right. So you were the bookish friends group, obviously I was. Someone talked about reading the second book in the ACOTAR series. And Kaytee was the one who said, Oh, Roxanna, if you're thinking about reading that Meredith was thinking about reading that, and I don't think she really intended to matchmake like she did, but she really did. And you had recorded with us once and I just, I had a real affinity for you. But I didn't know you at all. And so we just kind of started reading that second book, which is what is that? Mist and Fury? I think that's Mist and Fury, right, Yes. So it was November of 2020. And we were both, you know, completely in the midst of lockdown. And so we just loved the book, we found that our schedule and doing the reading the way we were was really working for us. And then we went on to, you know, continue to read or almost always do reading some book together, almost always. But then we have gone through periods of time, when you did your big move, for example, where for a while, we just needed to not be trying to do a buddy read because it wasn't going to be the right time for us. That's where the reading partnership comes into play because then we were still talking with each other about the books that we were reading. But we didn't have that feeling that we needed to be reading the same book and sort of keeping up with that with each other. So it gives us this rubber band in our relationship where like it can be tightened up or stretched really big depending on what we need for it to be during that time. And I think that has been something that has created a situation that can last really long term.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 58:13

Yeah, I think that's totally right. I think, you know, we often get questions like, Are you guys the same kind of readers? Do you read at the same pace of the same kind of books, and we don't, but I think what makes it work is that we have the same expectations. And I think that's what's important. And it doesn't matter what those expectations are, frankly, you know, it just matters that the person you're reading partner with has the same expectations.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:35

Right. We have the same expectations of our of our reading partnership. Yes, yes, absolutely. So one of the questions that we got is, do you all stretch each other and in what ways? And I think this is a really, really good question. Roxanna, what did you think about this?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 58:51

I think we really do. You know, I think I think we stretch each other. First of all, like you talked about, in that we're reading different books from each other. So the books I'm hearing from you are often not books I would pick up. And so I get to sort of live that part of my reading life that I wouldn't necessarily have. And then in the books we do pick up like you just talked about with Babel, we have such good, deep, meaty, just discussions about them. And because we've been reading together for so long, I think we can be really vulnerable with each other and honest with each other. And, you know, we we sometimes like are processing as we're talking and leaving these messages for each other, and relating them back to our own human experiences. And so I think that really stretches us because I might say something that you don't necessarily agree with, or you might have picked up something that I didn't and so I'll go back and say I never thought about it in that way. So, you know, like, for example, reading

Babel was twice as I think rich as it would have been and stretched me because I got your perspective too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 59:50

Right. We did. We tend to dig deeper when we're reading a book together, even when we're reading a book that we're struggling with, you know, like the book that we're just finishing up, we've actually been reading *The Marriage Portrait* by Maggie O'Farrell. And that's a book that didn't go down as easily. But the experience of reading it together is really useful because we'll pick up on different things and then sometimes just the other person having a similar experience, like, I'm not imagining things, right, we're really like, we're really stuck in the setting here. Not a lot happening. And sometimes it feels good to have that to share with another person. And the other thing is, I know for a fact that when we read together, we tend to choose books, I would probably, especially given my reading within the bounds of the podcast, and sort of how quickly I need to move through books, I probably wouldn't tackle on my own. Yeah, you know, I think that's been a real stretching point is that you'll recommend a book, like the shelf seekers that I would never ever, ever, ever, ever have picked up. But the way that you'll present it to me will say like, here's, here's what I think you might really like about this. And we know each other's reading so well. Now, that is the other probably single biggest benefit of having a reading partnership is that you have one person who does not have to be your book, twin, I think we've benefited hugely from not being book twins, but you have one person who because they know everything that you read. But as I talk to you about not just the books I bring to the show, I talk to you about the books that I DNF, I talk to you about the books that I throw across the room. And I'm like, Oh, I'm you know, and so you get that unvarnished view of it. And because of that we can tell what the other person is going to like or even from a mood perspective, I think that's the other benefit of a reading partnership is that when you're talking about your reading as a whole, then we can get a sense for each other's moods. And you might say something like, Well, I'm thinking about picking up *Yatta, Yatta, yatta*. And all immediately be like, no, no, no, no, no, that you are not in the right headspace for that you might be at some point. But that is not you will not like that right now. And like we have that insight into each other moods in the more immediate, not just like Meredith as a reader, but in like, Meredith as a reader in late January 2023. Yes. You know, like, with everything I'm going through,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:02:26

yes. And yes, because you know what I'm going through because we you know, we started on reading messages, they became life messages. So we often now leave each other, you know, part one reading part two life. So you know, everything else I'm going through, and you might say you just don't have the bandwidth for this right now or right, this is a slow one. And I know how you get around slow books. So just, you know, maybe wait and pick up something fast first. We're kind of the gauge for each other.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:02:49

Right. And I'm glad that you brought up that piece about reading updates in life updates, because that's another question that we get is, but how do you kind of organize? Like, doesn't it end up being this Russian doll effect where you're leaving message, so all of a sudden, you're responding to responding to respond? You know what I mean how that can happen. And I think one of the best things we've done is to delineate two different kinds of messages, because then that helps us to keep the messages shorter. We really do we try our hardest to do that. We tried, like, oh, my gosh, I just talked for 13

minutes, and that definitely happens. But it also helps us to know when we should listen to a certain thing versus saving it, you know, for a different time, it just keeps them a little more organized. And that way we don't get into that rabbit hole of feeling like oh, man, now I need to leave a message that responds to 85 different things. And it's, it's really hard to do that. So we kind of just constantly keep a lens forward and respond to things. But it's always kind of in the immediate like, this is what's happening now. And today. Yeah. And we don't have to go back. And you might leave me five minutes on a particular book. And I'm listening to it and taking it in. But my next message might not respond about that book unless it's queued something in my mind specifically, yeah. So I think that's useful to think about. Alright, one of the questions that we got, which kind of threw me for a loop... Do you ever do you ever worry about or have you ever talked about what happens if you get tired of having a reading partner? I imagine it would feel like a breakup, especially if you wrote both weren't feeling the same way. I read that question. I was like, Oh, I think it would be almost as hard as a divorce. Like honestly, I was like, gut punched when I read that question. I'm like, Well, no, we're gonna read together forever. What are you talking about?

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:04:43

I felt exactly the same way. I read that it was like, what, what? Because I hadn't literally never in my mind had that ever entered as a possibility. Not once what I read that and was like, what I just was so shocked. I really I also felt sort of Sucker Punch by it like, I don't know, I don't know what i'd do.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:05:04

right? Well, I think, I think it's unlikely that it will happen to us because our reading partnership has really developed into this a friendship that is so much a part of the fabric of who we are. So I think it's unlikely that will happen in this particular relationship. But I do think to answer the actual question, I think if here's the thing, it's a once in a lifetime, find when you when you find the person who's your right soulmate, best friend, reading partner, that kind of thing, right? And I'm almost 50 years old. And this just happened a couple of years ago. So like, you know, it doesn't happen all the time. And I know that there are times where you can buddy read a lot together, and but it just isn't operating on all cylinders. And that happens way more than the moment where you find the perfect reading partner. And so, yes, I think there's an element of, you know, try to be as honest as you can be. But to a certain extent, it's really hard to tell somebody like, you know, I kind of just, I'm tired of doing buddy reads with you, that's just, I mean, that's just the reality, nobody wants to say anything like that. So probably the reality is, you know, messages get further and further in between, and, you know, you're maybe not sharing as much and you're maybe picking up some other buddy reads that are working, you know, better. And, again, reader know thyself, you have to have the people in your reading life, whether it's for buddy reads or bookish discussion, or a full blown reading partnerships, that are the right fit for you. So you have to really protect and honor that space. And you don't want to spend bandwidth in places where it's not working. So, you know, I would say if a relationship is not adding to your reading joy, you know, it's okay to make bandwidth for other relationships in there.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:06:49

I totally agree. And I think I think the question is interesting, because if you had asked me three years ago, you know, do you need a partner to share all your reading with? And you know, would you would like to just read a book by yourself? And what if you had that partner and you didn't have them having

not had one, I would be like, No, you know, reading is a solitary thing, I'm fine, I don't really need one, we kind of fell into this. And because now it doesn't feel like a checkmark on our to do list. It really is, you know, our relationship is so close that we share everything, I think it would be really hard. But like you said, go into your buddy reads and see who you have a connection with don't necessarily go in looking for a reading partner, like who is the right person, you can't eHarmony this, you know, you just kind of go in and see what works. And when it feels good, you pursue it. And when it doesn't, to your point, you kind of just slow down a bit and let it go. And when it's supposed to happen, it will happen. And otherwise, you know, like, like you said, it may not be the right move for you. And then you have buddy beads, or you have other things that you're doing that make your reading life rich and full. And that's what works for you. It's all about what works for you, and fulfilling kind of your reading life.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:07:55

And it doesn't need to be a one on one situation, you can find a small group of readers who, again, maybe your buddy reading with specific books, but maybe you're just getting together regularly and talking about your current read now. And tossing out the question, what was your last five star read and just opening up a question like that amongst this group of readers and so it's a group that gets together and does that or does it in a text thread or does it be via voice. There's lots of different ways that that can look, the point being that buddy reads are great, but they aren't the only way to regularly share your reading life with with somebody else. Yeah. All right. Okay. So I'm glad we answered some of those questions. I think that was really, really good. Let's talk a little bit about what your wishes at the fountain.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:08:40

Okay. So I'm excited to bring this to the fountain, because it's a wish that's near and dear to my heart as I start 2023. So, Meredith, I have bemoaned to you frequently the lack of my reading stats for 2022. You know, I started using the currently reading reading tracker, but fell off in March, and I just use Goodreads. And that was one of the regrets of my 2022. The trouble with that is that I had kind of no running list and no useful data. Not that everybody needs to track that. And I didn't really think I needed to, but then I realized, you know, what, they were sort of some key stats that were important to me, you know, at the end of the year, when everybody's doing those best stuff lists, you know, I wanted to know, like, what was my percentage of Own Voices? What was my genre breakdown? What formats did I read on, and I knew this intuitively, but as I started using my reading tracker for 2023, I didn't have a baseline, and you know, seeing what Kaytee did and what other people and the bookish friends did. I thought it'd be nice to have sort of the numbers going back. But I couldn't stomach going back in and entering sort of all my data from 2022. So what I did was I did a really kind of quick and dirty version. I literally filled in like four fields. I did title, whether it was an own voices, genre and the format. I didn't even fill in authors and even the names of the books. I just kind of put in keywords. So so that I could do it really quickly, it took me an hour. And I got some great data out of that. And so now having had that data, so I just want to first of all give people permission to do that, that if you were like, you know, wouldn't be nice to do it. But I'm not going to go in and do it doesn't have to be perfect. And Kaytee said this over and over, just enter what you want. So having done that, I realized a couple of things. First of all, I, I realized I like some romance. But it's a really easy fallback for me when I have a lot going on, and I had a lot going on last year, but contemporary fiction is more likely to fill that hole for me, which actually you pointed out in a reading message, right, which is another great thing, like we have these

insights and teach others reading lives. And so that's what I'm going to do next time when I'm reaching for a romance. Not that I won't read romance, but I'll also try to fit in some of those contemporary fiction. And I also realized that my own voices percentage was about 25%, which, for me is a little bit low for my liking. And so I plumbed you know, the lists, all the best of 2022 lists, and I added a bunch of backlist books to my TBR. So when I'm in the mood, I can pick them up. And so those are my two wishes for 2023. I want to read some contemporary fiction, and see how that does for me, and read more own voices by having sort of a well that I've already filled. And thank you reading tracker for making me realize that those two will make me you know, hopefully happier 2023.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:11:21

Absolutely. I'm so glad that you did that just quick and dirty. You gave yourself permission to do that. Because it really, it can give you some really good insights as it did. Well. So my wish is actually not completely different. One of the things that's new to the reading tracker this year is that Kaytee added the year over year tab, so that you can put in your sort of totals for the year and a couple of different metrics. But totals was what I was doing in this particular exercise. And I realized that just a few years ago, I was reading 12 13, 16 books a year, because remember, I have records going back to 2000. Yeah, so I was averaging like 14 books a year, all the way up until 2017.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:12:07

Wow, really?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:12:09

Yes. And I had kind of not really realized that. My point is, I wish everyone would realize that you can have a very fulfilling reading life and read any number of books a year. Yeah, I had great reading years at 16 books as much as reading years that I've had at 120 books. And so just having that view. Also, it really underscored when Jackson was little I just didn't read as much again seasons of life. So if you're in a season of life where you're like, Man, I may pick up three books over the whole of this year. A that's totally okay. Yeah. And B your life is not likely to always be this way. If you want to read more, there's likely to be seasons of your life where you will be able to do that. So all those year over year stats just really had me surprised to certain extent, but just it really snapped me back into realizing like yeah, you haven't been reading like this forever, man. It's it's really been kind of a new thing that you've been reading, you know, over 100 books a year. So any kind of reading any number of books is good reading. So that's what I wish everyone would remember. Ping splash. Alright, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram. And Kaytee is at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:13:32

And you can find me Roxanna at @Roxannatheplanner on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:13:36

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:13:46

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Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:13:59

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Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:14:18

And we especially love five star reviews. So thank you so much for that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:14:22

All right until next week, may your coffee be hot

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:14:24

and your book be unputdownable

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:14:26

Happy reading Roxanna,

Roxanna Kassam Kara 1:14:28

Happy reading Meredith