

201203_FTFP_Ep 300_Nov Reading Recap_mixdown

[00:00:00] **Annie Jones:** Welcome to From the Front Porch, a conversational podcast about books, small business, and life in the south.

[00:00:24] "Girl, every choice we make is a new tomorrow for worlds waiting to be born."

[00:00:31] P. Djèlí Clark, *Ring Shout*.

[00:00:45] I'm Annie Jones, owner of the Bookshelf, an independent bookstore in beautiful downtown Thomasville, Georgia and today I'm recapping the books I read in November. As I record this, I am sitting in my dining room. It is [00:01:00] beautiful outside just the day before Thanksgiving. And I'm feeling especially grateful for listeners of, From the Front Porch for long distance customers and local friends of the bookshelf.

[00:01:11] This has been, as so many of you already know in your own lives, a really hard year and saying so out loud almost feels silly at this point because you know, and I know that that's true, but what a bizarre year in which to own a small business, and we are so grateful at the bookshelf, I am so grateful for the ways our community, both near and far has shown up to support us.

[00:01:37] And so thank you so much. I know it is past Thanksgiving for those of you listening to this, but as I record it, I am thinking and reminiscing about all the ways and all the things that even in a hard year, I have to be grateful for. So thank you for being one of those things. I read a lot of books in November, but before we kind of dive into [00:02:00] my November titles, I did want to let you know that I finished two books I mentioned in the October reading recap.

[00:02:06] And I finished them end of October, early November. So I didn't fully get to review them. You may have already seen my reviews on Instagram, if you follow me there. But I did just want to give a brief overview of those two titles. So the first book was *Mexican Gothic* by Sylvia Moreno-Garcia.

[00:02:24] You've heard me talk at length about this one because of casting call the episode we did, where we cast. This book, which was very fun. You can go back and listen to it. But I did just want to let you know if you like Gothic literature, I do think this book might be for you overall. It was not necessarily for me.

[00:02:41] I loved casting it. And, and as it's so often the case, I don't know if you all find this to be true for you, but books that I sometimes feel ambivalent about or just so, so about when I discuss them with other people. We often that's in a book club setting, but maybe it might also be on from the front porch.

[00:02:58] When I discuss [00:03:00] the books, I find myself liking them more. So I do have good memories of *Mexican Gothic* and as I think we said on the casting call episode, I will never look at mushrooms the same way. Um, but I did wind up liking it. It just wasn't my favorite book I've ever read. And I think that honestly is because I'm discovering Gothic literature is just probably not for me.

[00:03:20] I felt similarly ambivalent about *Rebecca*, which is a notorious classic. And so it may just be that this genre is not, not one that typically appeals to me. So *Mexican Gothic* by Sylvia Moreno-Garcia, we cast it a couple of episodes back and I wound up liking it though. Not entirely loving it.

[00:03:39] Next up was the *Saturday Night Ghosts Club* by Craig Davidson. When I was recording the October reading recap, this was the book I was currently reading. I was trying if you'll recall to finish it in time for my book club. And I did like right before 30 minutes before my book clubs started, I finished it.

[00:03:56] I loved this book, I think this would be a great one to add to your [00:04:00] seasonal reading. It does not have to be read in October at all. It is not a Halloween book or anything, but the closing scene does into Halloween. And so it wound up feeling really perfect to read around that time. I loved the setting of this book.

[00:04:13] This book was set in Niagara falls, which kind of had this great small town, wonder years vibe to the whole story. And I actually, the wonder years is a great comparison for that book in general. It is less a kind of scary ghost story and more a coming of age friendship book. Um, if you like, things like stand by me, uh, now, and then if you like those kinds of titles.

[00:04:38] And I think you'll really like this book. I love the way he portrayed the friendships at the heart of the book. I loved the family that was at the heart of the book. I did not really want to leave them. I found them to be, I don't know, really lovely people. And so I wound up really liking this one. It kind of surprised me. I expected to like it.

[00:04:57] Carrie Winfrey, author of [00:05:00] *Not Like the Movies* and *Waiting for Tom Hanks*, she had posted about this on her Instagram, which was the entire reason I picked it up. And then my book club adopted it for their book club pick for the month of October. And I just, I think I settled in thinking it was going to be this great seasonal ghost story.

[00:05:16] And it kind of was, but really what it was, was right up my alley, which is this coming of age, friendship, tale. And I love that kind of book anyway. And then this one was really well written and thoughtful. I just really liked it. I wound up marking a lot of spots in it. My book club overall enjoyed it.

[00:05:33] It was not exactly what all of us were expecting, but I think. In most cases for the better, like we wound up really enjoying it. So that is *Saturday Night Ghosts Club* by Craig Davidson. So those are the two books I kind of started the month with, but I mentioned them in my last reading recap because they were the books I was kind of finishing up.

[00:05:51] Now I have the books I read in November. The first really was a hold over. I started it in November, but I intended to read it [00:06:00] in October due to the subject matter. So this book is *Ring Shouts* by P. Djèlí Clark. This is really a novella, it's a short little book that Olivia recommended to me.

[00:06:11] It's got a very striking cover. I am sure you have seen it. It is a fictional kind of folklore fantasy look at the KU Klux Klan, and it's imagining a world, Clark imagines a world in

which the KU Klux Klan are literal demons. And so if you're a member of the clan, you're a human being who has chosen to join this hateful organization.

[00:06:35] But if you are a Ku Klux, you have turned into and become a demon, if that sounds out there to you, that's because it is. And yet it completely works in this book. In my opinion. Now this is completely outside genre for me. This is very fantasy, like I said, kind of folklore, but because of the three, there are three kind of spunky, gutsy, female protagonists [00:07:00] that lead the book and kind of pave the way for the reader.

[00:07:04] And I fell in love with their voices. I thought they were so distinct and so clear and. I, I love their sense of adventure and their sense of purpose. And so I trusted them and therefore trusted Pete jelly clerk to take me on this ride. It is also obviously because of its subject matter because of its storytelling and intense look at race, at racial injustice, the history of the South, most of it takes place around Stone Mountain, Georgia.

[00:07:35] And so I really appreciate what this book is doing, because I do think, I do think it's brilliant in its storytelling. It is so unique. I have read really not anything else, too much like it, for me personally, the only thing that could kind of compare and they're totally different books. But the only thing that could kind of compare is *Southern Vampires Guide*.

[00:07:57] And I only say that because again, that was so [00:08:00] outside genre for me, it was dealing with something I never read about, which is vampires. And this was dealing with. But also again, really centering it and grounding it in this reality of what was going on in the South. And so I think it was, I think a fantasy reader would love it, but I think somebody like me who is not really a fantasy reader was also able to love it and appreciate it because it was grounded in a deep sense of reality and a deep sense of what was happening at that time.

[00:08:28] So I wanted really liking this book, um, the language and the dialect is beautifully done. I think it would actually be a great audio book. If dialect is sometimes, um, difficult for you. I was, it was reminiscent to me, of my reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

[00:08:43] But once I got a hang of the dialect, I really loved this book. Again. I just thought it was so smart and I love books that use folklore or use like deeply, I guess, fantastical fiction is the best way to describe it, but [00:09:00] to explore truth. And I, for that reason really liked *Ring Shout*. I also loved it because it was so short.

[00:09:07] I don't know if I would've felt the same way if Ring Shout was 300 pages, but because it was like this really digestible, almost could read it. And I think I may have read it in one sitting. Um, it truly, it's just about a hundred, 150 pages. And I, because of that, I think I was able to really get lost in the world without being overwhelmed by it.

[00:09:28] Like. Because it was so outside genre, I'm not sure I would have been able to enjoy it, um, if it had been longer, but it was the perfect length for me. I think if you are scared to read outside genre, sometimes what we like to recommend is books that are shorter. And so this would be a great one if you don't typically like fantasy or folklore inspired literature, I think this one could still work for you.

[00:09:51] And it definitely worked for me. A couple of my readerly friends read it and loved it. There's just a lot happening here that I think P. [00:10:00] Djèlí Clark does a great job of exploring and the writing is outstanding. So that is called *Ring Shout*. It is a novella pretty easily accessible despite its intense subject matter.

[00:10:14] Then I took a hard turn. I think I was coming off of all of these semi spooky dark reads, right? Like if you listen to the October reading recap, I was coming off a Tana French book coming off, Mexican Gothic, Rain Shout. So it was coming off of all of these books. Um, We keep the deck close and it is like I decided, okay, now it's November, time for cozy books.

[00:10:38] So I picked up on a whim, the book, *Anna and the French Kiss* by Stephanie Perkins. This book has been out forever 10 years as a matter of fact. And I know this because the reason I finally picked it up was there is a new gorgeous commemorative cover for the ten-year anniversary. I think *Anna and the French Kiss*.

[00:10:58] So 10 years ago, I would have [00:11:00] been smack dab in the middle of adulthood, pre-Bookshelf. And so *Anna and the French Kiss* is not something that I really knew a ton about until entering the world of the Bookshelf. And then it's kind of one of those books that has been on our shelves for a long time.

[00:11:14] Stephanie Perkins is a relatively popular young adult author in our neck of the woods. She's a very popular young adult author in other parts of the world. But our young adult section, as Olivia will tell you, it's not always a huge sell. Our clientele in Thomasville in particular skews older. And so most of the young adult books we're selling most of them were selling to adults or to grandparents and adults buying for teenagers.

[00:11:39] So *Anna and the French Kiss* did well for us. Um, 10 years ago, back before I ran the Bookshelf, but it is not one I had ever read now, you know, I love a good rom com, less interested in a regular old rom, but I decided to try this one because of the beautiful cover.

[00:11:56] Like I bought this copy because I thought it was so pretty. And in fact, it [00:12:00] is sitting as part of my Christmas with decor because it's this lovely shade of pink. It's got these great images and, uh, the outside of the binding is just beautiful anyway. So that's why I picked this one up. I wound up liking this book now I didn't love it.

[00:12:15] And I think that's mainly because it was more rom than com. And I think I have read so many great romcoms. It reminds me this is going to be my second shout out to Rebecca. It reminds me of finally reading Rebecca and feeling ambivalent of Rebecca, but thinking, wow, Rebecca spawned and created a lot of other literature.

[00:12:37] Like it was clearly the impetus for a lot of great work. I feel somewhat similarly about *Anna and the French Kiss*. It's hard to say because of when it was written and I don't really have this great understanding or comprehension of young adult lit. And the history of young adult lit, but it feels like *Anna and the French Kiss* and Stephanie Perkins [00:13:00] may have helped launch this interest in romantic or romantic comedy literature for young adults.

[00:13:07] Maybe I'm wrong about that, but that's what it feels like. Just because 10 years feels like a long time. Here's what I did love about *Anna and the French Kiss*. Love the setting. Uh, this book is set in Paris. It is set at a boarding school, which I did not know, or I probably would have picked it up earlier.

[00:13:23] So I adored the setting. And even though like I finished it and didn't maybe give it five stars. I still read it in one sitting. I specifically bought it. Yes, because it was a beautiful book, but because I needed a lighthearted kind of mind, mind capturing title. Like I needed an escape for election week.

[00:13:46] And so I specifically bought this book to read during election week instead, sat down to read it on November 5th. Would that have been the day before the election? I sat down and read it the Monday before the election and finished it. And [00:14:00] then I was like, Oh no, I finished my distraction for the week. I finished it.

[00:14:04] So even though it maybe wasn't a five-star book for me, it was solidly three, three and a half. Like, I really liked it because it completely did what I needed it to do, which was provide this wonderful escape this world that I really did want to be a part of. Like I wanted to go to boarding school. I wanted to go to boarding school in Europe.

[00:14:24] And so I was very much here for that. And that way it reminded me of that great Sharon Creech book, I love called *Bloomability*. So it's got that going for it. There is obviously this romance that almost feels a little absurd, almost like, um, I say absurd because it just feels so, uh, ideal and idealistic.

[00:14:45] It almost reminds me of like, An Olsen twin movie from back in the day. Do you know what I mean? Like where you get to go to this wonderful boarding school and you immediately catch the attention of this British boy. Like it's [00:15:00] just very idealistic, but look, what's not to like about that in 2020 in particular.

[00:15:06] And so I, you know, occasionally felt a little irony about it, but then we'd get lost in it and really wound up liking it. So if you watched *Emily in Paris*, to me, this is a great comp for all kinds of reasons. Did I think *Emily in Paris* was a great TV show? No, not really. I thought it was fine. I enjoyed it for what it was and I loved being in Paris metaphorically for a week or however long it took me to binge that show.

[00:15:37] I feel the same way about *Anna and the French Kiss*. I feel like it probably launched a ton of great romcoms or, or young adult romances. I appreciated it for what it is. It was the distraction and the escape that I needed. I loved the setting. And so for that reason, I do think I can recommend it.

[00:15:55] I am sure those of you listening may have already read this book. This book has been out 10 years, so this was [00:16:00] obviously a belated one for me, but I wound up liking it. I think it's very cute. It is called *Anna and the French Kiss* by Stephanie Perkins. If you two need to escape to a pair of sporting school of region boarding school this fall, or this holiday season, then I highly recommend it.

[00:16:18] Okay. Next up kind of sticking unintentionally too young adult. And I don't want to say light literature because this book was not light, but I did want to stick to kind of compulsively readable things, especially the first part of this month. So next step I read *Admission* by Julie Buxbaum. I love Julie Buxbaum.

[00:16:38] You will recognize her name from a couple of great, as we have mentioned, young adult romcoms. So I loved *What to Say Next*. I loved *Tell Me Three Things*. She's also written a couple of young adult books. I feel like her most recent one prior to *Admission* had a September 11th tie-in so that she's not, somebody's [00:17:00] afraid of tough subject matter, but I did feel like this book was a departure for her.

[00:17:03] So *Admission*, by the time you listen to this, I think it will already be out. It releases on December 1st. It was supposed to release earlier this year. It is all about it is a fictional book, but very much based on Lori Loughlin and the college admission scandal. I was very intrigued by that story when it came out, I am still very intrigued and I loved how Julie Buxbaum handled it.

[00:17:30] I felt like this could have gone either way. And instead I feel like Julie Buxbaum was remarkably able to create a great young adult book that was actually appropriate for young adults, which is more than I can say for a lot of violet. So it's entirely appropriate for young adults. It is well-written and compelling.

[00:17:49] It is thoughtful and thought provoking, and it is filled with grace and nuance, which I didn't know if she'd be able to do with this [00:18:00] scandal, which clearly revolves around highly privileged people. And do highly privileged people deserve our empathy or sympathy, especially when they do wrong? And maybe that's a deep question to get from this young adult book, but it's a question I ask myself all the time.

[00:18:19] Um, and maybe it's the lens with which I view the world, but asking myself, like for whom is mercy appropriate and allowed and. Oh, my gosh. I just, I just feel like there's a lot here and she handles it so beautifully. The book itself goes back and forth so between kind of the before of this family being caught up in the scandal and then the after and you are so mad at this family as a reader, you are so mad at, maybe you're mad at their privilege. You're mad at their ignorance. You're mad at [00:19:00] their, Oh, they're thinking they're above it all. Like you're mad at all of these things. And yet you. Julie Buxbaum still shows you that at their heart, they're a family and they're a family that love each other.

[00:19:13] And you know, obviously we don't know what Lori Loughlin, his real family is like, but this fictional family that Buxbaum has created, there is a part of you. Like one minute you are angry at them. And the next minute, perhaps you don't fully feel sorry for them, but you do empathize with them and you do sense.

[00:19:32] Oh, like this, there were horrible decisions being made here and now they're facing the consequences of that. And I just so appreciated how the author was able to kind of toe that line between graciousness and also, um, assertiveness and, and, and admission admission pun intended on wrongdoing and that something [00:20:00] wrong happened here and wrong decisions, bad decisions were made.

[00:20:05] So if you are at all intrigued by the college admissions scandal, if you work in college admissions, I'm thinking guidance counselors, I'm thinking admissions counselors. Hi Courtney. If you are in that world at all, I think you will really appreciate this book and actually I'd love your opinion on it because I'd love to know if you find it to be realistic.

[00:20:25] I am a lay person. And so I don't know anything about college admissions other than my own experiences. And so. For me, it felt very, what I would assume would be pretty realistic. Um, but I'd love to know if other people felt the same. A good comp for this one would be *Tiny Imperfections*. That's a book that came out, uh, earlier this year, I think by, um, Alli Frank and Asha Youmans.

[00:20:50] I read that book and I think reviewed it. I'm sure I reviewed it on an episode of the podcast, but the two authors of that book are admissions counselors, but [00:21:00] for upper or they were admissions counselors for upper-class private schools. And so to me, there were definitely some similarities, definitely the world that this book takes place in is the same world as *Tiny Imperfections*.

[00:21:12] So it reminded me a little bit of that, but I thought this one was so well written, well done, well executed. I can't speak highly enough about it. I just feel like she took a really tough subject and certainly, I think there was a part of, I won't say all of us, but certainly for me, that was just completely intrigued by like the people magazine of it all.

[00:21:34] You know what I mean? Like it was just very. I think because of Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman, celebrity, like it was very intriguing to me, but I think Julie Buxbaum put a human perspective on it and also then reminded us of the seriousness of it. Like I think because it was splashed across the pages of people magazine all due respect to people magazine, if you forget what a serious thing it was and, and what they're [00:22:00] doing, what they were doing had consequences both for their own children and also for children who you know, didn't get into the educational institutions that they're choosing.

[00:22:10] So anyway, a lot to think about this would make a great book club book because of that, I just feel like I could talk about it all day long, but I won't, I won't because we've got to move on, but it was great admission by Julie Buxbaum, highly, highly recommend.

[00:22:27] Okay, next up a fun holiday pick. This is *All About Us* by Tom Ellen. I wanted to read a couple of kind of holiday Christmas-y titles. I read the Hanukkah title, *Recommended for You* by Laura Silverman earlier this year, it's still really loved that book. I've mentioned it on the podcast a couple of times, but I finally was able to read all about us.

[00:22:46] This is a firmly British holiday tale, very reminiscent to me of *About Time*, which is a great movie if you've never seen it, but very, um, sappy in the best possible way.

[00:23:00] Like it is very deep feeling. And I felt similarly about all, about us. It is deep feeling. It is more or less a retelling of a Christmas Carol.

[00:23:10] It took me a minute to understand that. So let me explain that to you. You would probably have caught on a lot sooner than I did, but at the, the center of the book is a young man who is 34 and he is examining his marriage to his college sweetheart. And because I am 34 and have been married to Jordan Jones, who I met in college.

[00:23:31] This was very intriguing to me. And I really liked. A lot of the points of pop culture were very nostalgic for me because the characters are the same age, um, and the same life stage as me and Jordan. And so I really liked it for that reason kind of selfishly, but I also thought it was really thoughtful. And like I said, reminded me of about time.

[00:23:52] There is a time travel component. We are, you know, doing this Christmas Carol thing of examining our past present and future, [00:24:00] which I really liked. And then there's also, it's, it is definitely solidly a love story. This guy is trying to figure out if he's married to the right person, but there's also a really lovely mother son element.

[00:24:12] And I think we've talked about before that we don't always get that in literature or when we do, it feels a little more rare. And so if you are looking for a good mother son book, there is a lovely mother son relationship in this, in this book. And that's a little bit why it reminded me of About Time. About Time is a father son relationship.

[00:24:30] So there is definitely, it is first and foremost, a love story, but the side characters play a big role as well. There's some great friend characters, which I'm always looking for in my romantic literature. And so I really liked this one. It's a paperback original, which I love in a holiday book. Like. I want something that I can just throw rip in my suitcase, uh, and take with me wherever I'm going or not going as the case may be.

[00:24:57] Um, but if you were looking for a fun, [00:25:00] Holiday book this is fun, but definitely more on the sappy sweeter side of things. So there are like laugh out loud moments, but it is definitely a book seeped in feeling like I definitely felt things reading this book. It is called *All About Us* by Tom Ellen.

[00:25:22] Then I began reading a couple of January releases. So I am trying to get on a better reading schedule, which feels like a silly thing to say a reading schedule for shelf subscription purposes. So I'm trying to read like two months ahead. So I decided to embark upon some books. That'll come out in January.

[00:25:43] The first was *The Fortunate Ones* by Ed Tarkington. His first book released to praise from people I really love and trust. He's a Nashville based author. But for whatever reason, I did not read his first book. I did pick up this one. So *The Fortunate Ones* immediately caught [00:26:00] my attention because of its private school setting.

[00:26:02] Do you sense a theme? And it's this private school in Nashville. This is fiction. It is kind of, to me, kind of reminiscent at first of *A Separate Piece*, you've got this guy from, you know, air quotes or the wrong side of the tracks who winds up getting into this private school. He and his mom gets swept up in the culture of the private school.

[00:26:23] He immediately befriends this guy who is almost this. Or who does kind of leave him star struck and, and kind of functions as this guide to him as he, as he goes through this private school setting and the book follows. I, my favorite parts of the book certainly were the parts kind of set when they're this age kind of at this private school, but the book follows them into adulthood and there even is some political drama in this book, which I also love.

[00:26:52] So this was very much, it felt like catnip for me. Like I've got this private school setting it's set in the South, which I'm always intrigued by because of, [00:27:00] of, you know, living here. And then it also tied into, um, politics and too political, um, not necessarily intrigue, but political drama, um, of trying to become uh, a political figure and kind of move their way up the ranks.

[00:27:17] I love this book. I loved it so much. I cannot recommend it enough. I thought it was excellent. I thought it was well written. I, I did not go in with really any expectations. Maybe that was part of the joy of it, because I had not read his previous work.

[00:27:32] I didn't really know quite what to expect, but I thought the writing was great. I thought it was true to life in the South. I thought it gave me a great insider's look into privileged life in the South. If you live in Nashville, I think you would especially love this book because so many of the places were familiar to me just having visited Nashville several times.

[00:27:53] I've got a dear friend who lives there. My brother went to grad school there. So I am relatively familiar with the city of Nashville. [00:28:00] But if you live there, I imagine you would find it even more familiar. And I think you would really like that. Who was I talking to? Oh, author Sue Cerulean and I was talking to her a couple of months ago and she kind of mentioned the importance of reading books set where you live, because it reminds you to look at your place with a new lens, which I just think it's so profound.

[00:28:22] And that's why Susan really is a writer. So if you live in Tennessee or in Nashville, I would really highly recommend this book. I. Loved it and cannot recommend it enough. I thought it was great.

[00:28:38] Okay. Next up, I read another January release, *Next Time* by Julia Clayborne Johnson. Some of you may recognize that name because Julie Claiborne Johnson wrote *Be Frank With Me*, which was very popular at the Bookshelf. I do not know if many of you read it, but it was a big book club hits for us at the Bookshelf.

[00:28:57] And so maybe you are also familiar with [00:29:00] it. So she has written a new book coming out in January called *Better Luck Next Time*. It could not be more different from the *Fortunate Ones*. And yet I also enjoyed it quite a bit. So it has this really fun, almost Yaya sisterhood cover, and it is set at a divorce ranch in Nevada during the pre-World war II era.

[00:29:21] I want to say like post depression, pre-World war II. It is completely kind of unexpected. I was so intrigued. I did not know this was a thing like a divorce ranch. You'll have to Google for it. And in fact, I think some of my listeners would probably love to read the book and then do a deep dive into the real life divorce ranches.

[00:29:41] So apparently you could get divorced in Nevada, even when perhaps you could not get divorced elsewhere or perhaps it was harder to get divorced elsewhere, but if you got divorced in Nevada, it took three weeks or something like that. And so you would go to the courthouse and you would file for divorce and then you'd have to wait for it to be finalized.

[00:29:57] That's my understanding based on this fictional, [00:30:00] based on this fictional book, do not quote me on this, based on this novel, this is what I came to understand. So for three weeks, these women lived basically on these ranches, or in this book on this fictional ranch where they kind of waited and air quotes did their time, like waited for their divorce to be finalized.

[00:30:21] And it was kind of like, Yeah, this sisterhood of women who had just left these marriages and at a time when divorce was certainly stigmatized and, and then they wind up creating these deep friendships and relationships at this ranch. So I think the book has a great narration style. The book is being told in like an interview format.

[00:30:42] It reminded me of a book that I'm so sorry. I cannot remember which book, but there's another book that kind of employs the same tactic where you the reader feel like you're almost in the place of the interviewer, if that makes sense. So the narrator is [00:31:00] this man who worked at the ranch and now he is like a retired physician.

[00:31:05] He is older, reminiscing looking back on his time at the ranch. And he is telling it to an interviewer who goes unnamed. So I love that. I thought it was really clever and, and occasionally, Oh, okay. It reminds that's what it was. It reminded me of *City of Girls* because *City of Girls* has this kind of letter format and you almost get lost in it because who would write a letter that long, but this was similar where occasionally I would like get lost in the narration and suddenly be reminded, Oh, this is an interview. Like the language of it. And the dialogue would remind me, Oh, well, he's, he's in her being interviewed right now. So the narration was great.

[00:31:40] Thought it was very clever thought. The setting was really, really unique. I've never read anything like it before. Um, again, Yaya sisterhood comes to mind, maybe Yana Laci Writing Camp, but it just is so different because these are adult women who are at this essentially almost summer camp waiting for their divorces to be [00:32:00] finalized.

[00:32:00] I just think. If you, and if you have any interests, you know what else? It reminded me of just kind of a good, like black and white movie, like a good old movie. Um, if you grew up watching like Rock Hudson, then I think you would really like this book. I loved it. I thought it was very clever, smart, loved the characters, loved their spunk, their heart, and.

[00:32:22] Just again, unlike a lot of other stuff I've read. I thought it was really unique, really enjoyable. I think it'll be a great January release because who knows what January is going to look like? No one. And so we don't know what life will look like in January, but I imagine that this would be a very comforting book.

[00:32:38] I think it would be a great book club book as well, which I think might be Julie Clayborne Johnson's specialty. I think she's very good at that. So this is *Better Luck Next Time* by Julie Clayborne Johnson.

[00:32:51] Next I read *Anna K* by Jenny Lee. I'm not going to go into a ton of detail. I'll give you some detail here, just overall reviewing the book. But if you want [00:33:00] to hear me do a deep dive of *Anna K* with Hunter, we are doing that on Patreon as part of our wrapping up of conquer classic. *Anna K* is a young adult retelling of Anna Karenina.

[00:33:12] I really liked this book. I would like to be clear. I am maybe I am naive. Actually I probably am. I would be shocked if I had been like a 17 year old reading this book, like this is one of those young adult books where I'm like, wait, is this really for young adults? I feel like this is soundly adult.

[00:33:31] There is a lot of drug use in this book. A lot of language, I really wound up liking it. I think because I had just come off of Anna Karenina. So it was, I was able to easily follow the story. And this is essentially, and I believe this was her intent. This is essentially Anna Karenina meets Gossip Girl meets Crazy Rich Asians.

[00:33:54] Like that's exactly what it's like, because it takes place in this super, highly privileged upper-class [00:34:00] world in New York city that is, feels totally unfamiliar to me. And yet, because of Gossip Girl, I do feel like it is vaguely familiar. And so it definitely captures you because of the setting and then because they are so wealthy.

[00:34:16] Um, it does remind me of the opulence of Crazy Rich Asians. So it is Crazy Rich Asians meets Gossip Girl meets Anna Karenina. So I liked it a lot is the basic premise of it. But if you like, we're going to hand this to your 16 year old because it's a young adult book. I would just, I don't know. I don't have teenagers, but it just felt very, there's a lot of, um, PG 13 stuff here if you catch my drift, I want to be careful if you have kids in the car.

[00:34:47] But like there's some drug use there is, um, there are some scenes that are super romantic if you catch my drift, I'm trying to be careful. Um, so just go into it, knowing it's a young [00:35:00] adult novel, but to me very much feels like an adult book.

[00:35:03] And I think if you go into it, knowing that, then you'll be fine. I wound up listening to this. I, I thought I was reading it on more of a deadline than I really was. And so I wound up listening to this and reading it, and I really liked the audio book. It has been a long time since I have felt like I could recommend an audio book to you.

[00:35:20] I'm not a huge audio book listener, but I listened to Anna K using Libro FM and I thought it was great. The narrator is Jenna Ushkowitz. You might recognize her from Glee and she did a fantastic job. So I highly recommend the audio book version. I listened to most of it and then supplemented it with, um, in the evenings, when I had time to sit down and read, I would read the physical copy.

[00:35:47] So I did both, but I've really liked the audio book a lot. So in fact, I even found myself and. It wasn't just because I was on a deadline to read it, but I found myself listening to it instead of watching TV, which feels rare. Cause [00:36:00] I do, I do like my TV.

[00:36:01] So anyway, Anna K, the audiobook is great. I, if you like Anna Karenina, I think this is very fun to kind of compare. It obviously reminds me of a lot of the Jane Austin retellings I have done, maybe *Eligible* comes to mind, where I think the author does a really good job of taking the story of Anna Karenina and turning it into something very modern, very relatable, well, somewhat relatable, relatable to a certain extent.

[00:36:30] Uh, I do not live in New York city and I do not dwell in the upper echelons of society, but I could, I could put my imagination cap on and. I get a pretty good

understanding. So very modern, relatable, and timely, I guess, and also stay true. I think to the themes of the book. Now, does *Anna K* deal with politics and religion in the same way?

[00:36:55] No, I think *Anna K* really takes the parts of the book that Hunter and I [00:37:00] really loved, which is kind of that soap opera stuff. I think that's really what *Anna K* and what Jenny Lee really captures best is this kind of soap, opera story. There are, I think some lovely ways that the Levin character plays out.

[00:37:18] I think she handles really beautifully, but obviously sadly drug addiction. So she is making some of it modern, but also staying true, I think, to the overall feeling and theme of Anna Karenina. So if you want to hear more detail about that, you can listen to us on Patreon, but I really did wind up liking this book, just go into it, knowing that to me, it's used more adult than young adult. It is *Anna K* by Jenny Lee.

[00:37:47] Last but not least, I am wrapping up right now well, not as we record, but you know, after we recorded, I am wrapping up the book *Wintering* by Katherine May. I am [00:38:00] finding this book to be just a delightful, quiet. I mean, it is super quiet book about it is Katherine May's memoir more or less.

[00:38:11] She winds up. She's an author who is diagnosed with, in fact, she really goes undiagnosed for a long time. She starts to have these stomach pains and she doesn't know what's wrong with her. And so her body kind of 10 is starting to almost deteriorate. It feels like her body is betraying her. In that way it reminds me a little bit of the beginning parts of *Miracles and other reasonable things* by Sarah Bessey. So you've got this memoir where Katherine May is dealing with this, um, medical diagnosis. And she's trying to come to terms with her, her new body and the ways to treat her body, but she ties it into the concept of wintering and this idea that we, as a society choose to relish in the spring and summer and choose to focus on the spring and summer of our lives.

[00:38:57] And we're talking both the literal and [00:39:00] metaphorical springtime instead of really giving winter it's due. And in the book, she is really arguing that winter is necessary too and that we all at some point are going to go through a winter in our lives.

[00:39:14] And for her, her winter was this kind of mystery illness and then a period of deep grief. And I think this is so profound. I just love this idea that we are meant to go through different seasons in our lives and the world is taking away our ability to I think her hypothesis as, or her thesis statement is that the world is slowly taking away our ability to endure winter because we're eliminating the uncomfortability of it.

[00:39:47] And so I, I think that premise is really interesting. This is a beautifully written book and. I just find myself like tearing my little pages, like highlighting different marks, different sentences, [00:40:00] marking different pages, because I think it's such an interesting look at seasonality and because we are entering, right, we have daylight savings time has happened or whatever we call it. It's darker now.

[00:40:17] And so many of us are trying to figure out, okay, like, can I go for a walk at 6:00 PM anymore? Can I do I need to turn all my on my lamps on at 4:30? Like whatever. And so I

think she is really writing beautifully about accepting winter for what it is and finding ways to enjoy it and appreciate it for what it offers us.

[00:40:39] And then tying that into when we inevitably go through a winter in our lives. And I think many of us have been there this year. When we go through a winter in our lives, what do we do with it? And I love it. I'm thinking like, Anne Lamont. I'm thinking weirdly also Year of Living Danishly, because she does tie in a lot to other cultures.

[00:41:00] [00:40:59] She lives in great Britain and she ties into kind of some Icelandic culture, which I find interesting. It also reminds me of house lessons because of almost the liberal arts nature of it. Like one minute you're reading about her personal experience. And then the next minute you're reading about like I said, a period of Icelandic or a piece of Icelandic culture.

[00:41:19] So she's doing a good job of weaving memoir with nonfiction and I really am liking it. So it is called *Wintering* by Katherine May. I think it would be great reading for late December, January. Another reason I'm recommending it. Um, I'm almost done with it, but I'm also recommending it because it's great pick up and put down.

[00:41:40] Like each section is divided up by month. So I'm on December right now, but it started in October. And so I think you could also buy it and like, save it, save parts of it for next year and read the October section in October of 2021, the November section, because I do think she has so much to say [00:42:00] about those.

[00:42:00] This book is very much, it very much leans on the concept of time. And so I think it would be really cool to read the October piece in October. I read, I was fortunate enough to read the November piece in November and now I'm kind of reading ahead to finish up, but I just, I just really like it. If you like quiet, maybe Anne Lamont type non-fiction then I think this is for you.

[00:42:24] Okay. That's it. Those were the books I read in November. It was really a good reading month. I felt like I read an another good kind of wide range of literature. I do think when I look back on 2020, my reading life will have been really, uh, improved. Like I think I read good backless titles this year. I think I read a wide range of literature.

[00:42:45] And so I'm really grateful for that. If nothing else, I do think 2020 did interesting things to my reading life. In some ways it turned it upside down. I definitely broke reading rhythm several months this year, where it just felt like I wasn't reading as much, but when I look back, I'm [00:43:00] really pleased with the titles that I got to read.

[00:43:01] So that is my list for November.

[00:43:10] From the Front Porch is a weekly podcast production of the Bookshelf, an independent bookstore in South Georgia. You can follow the Bookshelf daily happenings on Instagram @bookshelfTville. And all the books from today's episode can be purchased online through our store website, www.Bookshelfthomasville.com.

[00:43:28] A full transcript of today's episode can be found @fromthefrontporchpodcast.com special. Thanks to Dylan and his team at Studio D Production for sound and editing, for our theme music, which sets the perfect, warm, and friendly tone for our Thursday conversations and for the aforementioned transcript. This week, I'm reading *Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zouner.

[00:43:49] If you liked what you heard on today's episode, tell us by leaving a review on iTunes, or if you're so inclined to support us on Patreon, where you can hear our staffs weekly, new release Tuesday conversations, read [00:44:00] full book reviews on our monthly Shelf Life Newsletter, follow along as Hunter and I wrap up conquer a classic and receive free media mail shipping on all your online book orders.

[00:44:10] Just go to patreon.com / from the front porch. We are so grateful for you. And we look forward to meeting back here next week. .