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

"I have never in my life felt anything as powerful as whatever force was in that room while those women talked, and I began to believe that it was the talking itself that did it, that perhaps women's voices in harmony were like some sort of flintstone sparking, or like the hot burst of air that comes through a window, billowing the curtains, before rain."

- Kaitlyn Greenidge, *Libertie*

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 February. [00:01:00] February is a short month and it was a month in which I felt a little discombobulated in my reading life.

I felt like I read, the best way I can describe it is in fits and starts. I would binge a book in a day or take a book with me almost throughout the entire month. Like, it just felt like the books I was reading, I either could finish in one sitting or I had to sit with them for weeks. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that, but it is a different kind of reading rhythm than I'm used to.

One of the things I found to be true for me in 2021 is that my attention span and my capacity for reading seem to be diminished a little bit. And I experienced that really kind of back in maybe March and April, like toward the beginning of this pandemic that we're still living through, but I have found it to be true now, too.

And that has been odd and kind of hard to [00:02:00] navigate as somebody who reads partly for a living. So that has been kind of difficult and it just feels like even though the want of reading is there, the capacity is not. And yet then when I looked back at the month, I realized I had read seven books and I'm also finding, I don't know if other people are the same way, but I am reading books in bits and pieces.

And so therefore I have a lot of books going at once and that is pretty unusual for me. Pre Bookshelf, I would read one nonfiction book and one fiction book at a time. In my Bookshelf life, I typically just read one book at a time so that I can finish it and review it and talk about it.

And this month, and really last month, I instead I've had to think at the end of every month, wait, what did I finish because I'm still in the middle of so many. So as of this recording, I am still in the middle of probably probably two or three books for February, but I [00:03:00] just, I don't want to review them cause I haven't read them yet.

And so the books that I am recapping here are books that I have read and finished, uh, as of, as of this recording. So these are the books I read in February. The first book I finished is *This Close to Okay* by Leesa Cross-Smith. This is a book that I think got an early release thanks to book of the month so you may have seen this one for a little bit now, like out in the world of

the internet and maybe on Bookstagram and maybe you've seen some reviews. This was my first Leesa Cross-Smith book to read.

One of my former employees, coworkers, Kate. She currently is the manager at Bookmarks in North Carolina. You've maybe heard us talk about Kate a little bit in her avid reading life. Kate had recommended long ago, the book *Whiskey and Ribbons* by Leesa Cross-Smith. And I just have never read it. So when this one released, I literally went to the store, I think on a Monday. The Bookshelf right now is not technically open on Mondays, our staffers, [00:04:00] Caroline and Erin work, and kind of get the store ready for the week and process online orders and things like that.

But I sneaked in on a Monday to do something or other, and just saw this book sitting on the shelf. And I, at the time was in the middle of a lot of heavy books and I wasn't, I don't want to say I was slogging my way through them because some of them you'll hear about in this, in this episode. And slogging does them a disservice, I wasn't slogging through them, but I was kind of taking my time.

I was not reading anything really page turning at the moment. And so I grabbed this one off the shelf, knowing nothing about it, which my friend Hunter, who is frequently on this podcast, he will say that he, and I think he still does this, reads a book really without ever reading a blurb. Um, and I think that's still true.

I know that's something that he practiced when we first met. And I was such, I was in such awe of that because I typically kind of like to know what I'm getting into, but instead I just picked this one up, truly did not read the back [00:05:00] cover, had not read any reviews. Like I said, it had released early, only to book of the month subscribers. So we had not seen it yet.

So I started reading on a kind of rainy Monday and I was blown away by the utterly compulsively readable nature of this book and I was startled by the synopsis. So if you are not familiar, this book is about a therapist named Tallie, uh, short for Tallulah and Tallie is a therapist she's driving around, Louisville, her town at this one day when the evening and it's raining and she crosses this bridge and she sees a man about to jump.

And she gets out of her car. She engages him, she converses with him and eventually kind of convinces him to not jump. And he gets in her car and they go to a diner and then next thing, you know, he's, he's staying the weekend at her house. All of that I will admit was a [00:06:00] lot. I just, first of all, just did not know that we were dealing with heavier subject matter for this book.

I, I, again, I had no preconceived notions. I don't know why. I don't know. Like no one had told me that I had, I have no idea why I assumed that about this book, that it would maybe be a little bit lighter. It's not a light book. However, what Leesa Cross-Smith does, I think is really fascinating. So you've got this kind of inciting incident, the start of the book that leaves me or left me as a reader not really sure if I was going to be on board with this because it felt a little odd.

In fact, it felt. I never saw this movie, but I was talking about it with my friends, because I was like, this premise reminds me of a movie. I cannot remember it because I never saw it. But this woman like takes in a criminal over the weekend. And it was, if I'm not mistaken, a movie based on a book. And I did read the book, the movie is called Labor Day and it's, I believe it's starring Kate Winslet, maybe Josh Brolin. And anyway, she [00:07:00] takes in a criminal. I don't even know why, but she but he stays in her house over the weekend and I'm 90% sure I read a book that this movie was based on.

Anyway, that's what I kept thinking of as I was reading this book. And again, just wondering about the ethics of it, right about this therapist who kind of brings this man into her life and into her home, yes, to care for him and to help him but there is, as you read the book, a slight bit of attraction there of romantic attraction or, or even platonic attraction. I just kept wondering about the ethics of it all.

But the book is so good. I really liked it a lot. And part of the reason I liked it is I think Cross-Smith does handle this stuff with a with a tentative hand, like I think she knows and I think the point of the book is that this relationship at the heart of it might not be the healthiest, but she is guiding these two characters, Emmett and Tallie, through their [00:08:00] own maybe healing and healing from trauma or healing from tragedy and grief.

And I adored this is going to sound so weird, but Tallie, the main character, she has the most delightful sounding, cozy home I think I have ever read in literature. Like I, especially in modern literature, I just was blown away by the descriptions of Tallie's home and the life she has built for herself.

I just felt like I wanted to step inside her house step inside her life. I wanted to be her friend. Even though maybe the relationship at the heart of the book had me scratching my head a little bit, I think you can trust the author, you can trust Leesa Cross-Smith to kind of guide you through this. Even if you're like me and you're a little bit like what's going on here, I think you can trust the author. I now really want to go back into Leesa Cross-Smith's backlist. I sat on my, this is kind of my long-winded way of saying I opened this book [00:09:00] on a Monday had finished it like in a, in a few hours and because I was so swept away and caught up in the story itself and also I really loved these characters.

We talk a lot on this podcast about plot driven versus character-driven fiction and I think every so often you get a book that really is both. This is a book that is heavy on the character development, and yet stuff is happening. Like this plot is moving along at such a pace that I could not put it down. The chapters are short, which we've talked about before in the lending itself to the readability of this book. I loved it. Four-star read for me.

If you are in a reading slump, I think you might want to try this. I was not necessarily in what I would call a slump, but I needed something every so often I need a book that I can finish in one or two sittings so I can feel like I did it. So I can feel like, Oh, I am reading. Cause sometimes you can get bogged down in a book, even a good book that's taking you a long time and it can make you feel like you're not accomplishing anything and [00:10:00] I think that says some not great things about my personality that I feel like I need to be accomplishing things.

But if you are in a reading slump or you find yourself just kind of meandering through a book right now and you need something that is compulsively propulsively readable, then I think you should read *This Close to Okay* by Leesa Cross-Smith. She is dealing with heavy issues here so take that you know, for what it is, depending on the kind of reader you are.

She is dealing with heavy issues. I think the premise, the premise that, which you now know, uh, has hinted to that, but she handles it in such a way that I feel like I can trust her implicitly. And I really do want to go back and look at her back list.

Next up, *How the One Armed Sister Sweeps Her House*. This is a debut novel by Cherie Jones. I think if you listen to the podcast, you may have heard me reading this book, you may have heard me talking about this book, hinting that I was, I was headed toward finishing this book. This is one [00:11:00] of the titles that I was in the middle of, again, not slogging through, but I entered into this book with the wrong perhaps assumption for what it was.

So and in my winter literary lunch, I think I told readers that I envisioned this to be a book about class and race, maybe in the same vein as *Such a Fun Age*, but also a story about a vacation gone wrong. So I was thinking *St. X*, *Do Not Become Alarmed*, that kind of thing. It's set on the Island of Barbados.

The two characters I was introduced to first are Lala, who winds up being the main protagonist of the book and Mrs. Whalen. Lala is a woman who has been born and raised on the Island of Barbados. She is with, uh, her boyfriend, Adan, they are pregnant and we opened the book like immediately with Lala giving birth and trying to find Adan so that he can get her to a hospital.

And so she's knocking on [00:12:00] people's doors, kind of along the coastline and partly to find Adan, but mostly now just to get some help because she is really, truly about to give birth. And so she knocks on the door of this really nice, beautiful beach home, kind of on the coastline and as she is about to knock, she hears a gunshot and she starts to flee the scene.

And then coming out of the home, running out of the home is her boyfriend Adan and he, you know, has a deer and has a deer in the headlights kind of look. They leave and flee together. We, the reader know that what Adan has done is he has shot someone in the middle of a home invasion and he has killed Mr. Whalen. So Mrs. Whalen is a woman who was actually born on Barbados, but has left. She wound up marrying a tourist who took her back to London and now they vacation here every summer.

This is the premise with which you are greeted immediately upon starting the book. Like this stuff happens within the first 10 to 20 pages. I assume then that this was going to be about the relationship between [00:13:00] Lala and Mrs. Whalen and kind of this, this crime that happens at the start of the book. Instead, what unfolds is a really dark, almost suffocating story of domestic violence and abuse. I would like to be clear that I think this book is so well-written and so well done.

I, to say I liked it would feel weird because this book is not for the faint of heart. It is intense and heavy. Suffocating is the best word I can use to describe it. It took me a long time to read not because it was not propulsively readable like *This Close to Okay*. I do think this is a

book it's got short chapters. I think this is a book that you could potentially fly through except what Cherie Jones is talking about and writing about and what her characters are living through is heavy and intense and it sits, I wish you could see me. This is not a video podcast, but it sits like right on your [00:14:00] shoulders and you just feel burdened with Lala's story.

And look, I think that's the sign of a great writer. And I hesitate to talk about the heaviness of this book, because I know for some readers that's a real deterrent, especially maybe right now, do what we're living through. It. It's hard to read books like this, and yet I cannot tell you, I'm so glad I read it. This is another four-star book. I read a lot of good books this month, actually, but this is another four-star book for me.

Lala is a character I think who will stick with me for a really long time. Getting to see things and understand her and Adan's relationship. I mean, there are some things that happen in this book that are absolutely brutal. There, they are hard, hard, hard to read, right. And yet it is Lala's survival that kept me reading.

I desperately wanted good things for Lala there. The book is kind of told in alternating voices. At first, I assumed it would [00:15:00] be told between Lala and Mrs. Whalen. Mrs. Whalen does function as a narrator in a couple of parts, but really this book mainly belongs to Lala. You also get kind of a backstory of her own mother and her grandmother.

You also get Adan's perspective at one point, which is really interesting. And you get, Lala's kind of friend love interest, and one of Adan's friends Tone. You also get his storyline and I really liked that. Yeah. Again, plot driven character driven this kind of perfectly melds, the two, but those characters are at the heart of the book.

And to get insight into Tone and Adan was something I was not expecting or anticipating, but I'm really glad I did. I can't wait to see what Cherie Jones write next writes next. She is originally, I believe from Barbados. I loved what she did here. It is hard and it is not for the faint of heart, but I think if you can handle it, you should try it because the writing is beautiful.

And I think Lala will like sit in your soul for a long time. [00:16:00] So this is called *How the One Armed Sister Sweeps Her House*. I feel like I got that title wrong a lot. *How the One Armed Sister Sweeps Her House* by Cherie Jones.

Okay. Then I finished a book that I had been reading for a couple of months. This one is *Share Your Stuff. I'll Go First* by Laura Tremaine. You heard our conversation with Laura Tremaine back a couple of weeks ago. Sh- we talked a lot about *Share Your Stuff*, the heart behind it, the conversations that Laura Tremaine has with her friends, has with the people she interacts with and how we too can have those conversations.

I loved this book and I'm not just saying that, like, I really did love this book. I took my time reading it because here is one of the things I really like about it. I have not read anything like this. The book is part memoir and make no mistake. Laura Tremaine is a really gifted writer. I was sucked into her essays and her stories.

But it's part memoir part like personal growth, [00:17:00] inspiration for your own journaling and writing. Each chapter really is a writing prompt or a thinking prompt or a conversational prompt. It's a question that she kind of presents to you, the reader, and she's encouraging you to, to ask that question of yourself and to ask it of your friends.

So yes, journal, yes be introspective, but also her point really is share these conversations and share these questions with the people in your life. So she starts by introducing the question, talking about maybe the heart behind the question, and then she answers the question for you. So she goes first.

I think this premise just was so great. I've never, like I said, I've never read anything like it. I have been encouraged to write for myself some of my answers to these questions. Like some of these answers, I was like, what would I say? What would I answer? And then this, this month I had the wonderful opportunity [00:18:00] to finally get to see another human being outside of my family or the Bookshelf staff.

I, uh, was able to travel to Asheville. You'll hear about some of what I was able to read, but I was able to travel to Asheville, to be with a friend, but we were able to take precautions and be together. And as a result, we used Laura Tremaine's book for the occasional conversational prompt. And so we answered these questions for ourselves and what was such a gift was to be able to answer the question for myself, like to really think through my own answers, but also was to hear someone else's story.

And you know, I think for a long time we have used this, this narrative of we each have our own story. Like, I feel like I've heard that for a long time. Maybe particularly in evangelical Christian cultures, like the power of sharing your story and using your own narrative to kind of guide your life's decisions.

I feel like Donald Miller may be addressed that I feel like I read that, you know, a decade or more [00:19:00] ago. I think Laura Tremaine is putting a new spin on it, which is yes, we all have stories, but are we sharing them? And are we hearing them? Are we listening to each other? And in a world where I think it can be hard sometimes to listen to people and maybe where we're asking the wrong questions first, I loved this book.

I thought it was so great. Um, it's one of the books I was in the middle of, because it took me awhile to read because I wanted to kind of read it one chapter at a time and then kind of think about each chapter. I can also see, I think I have one of my friends, she read it in a couple of sittings because she just was so intrigued, I think.

And so moved by Laura's own answers to these questions. So we put this book in our Galentine's day boxes for a reason. I think this is the perfect book to share with your friends. I was inspired to, it had been a long time since I had shared a book with the people I love. So I mailed out a couple of copies, including, and I do love this idea, which is why I'm sharing it with you, [00:20:00] the I, my friends and I, my friends are scattered others.

A group of us who are kind of scattered all over the country. And we used to have a sister of the traveling book club. And so we would, I or another friend would start by reading a book and then mailing it to the next person. And we would each mark it. Like write our notes,

mark our favorite passages and then mail it to the next person. And whoever started the book, the book would find its way back to them.

So I mailed out my copy of *Share Your Stuff, I'll Go First* and encouraged my friends to like, get this thing started back up again, where we write our notes and then send it back and then it'll ultimately find its way back to me.

But I, I just love that idea. I love anything that is going to get us talking. I think we're some of us too. Uh, I'm talking about myself. I'm a little bit out of practice. Like I have not talked to another person maybe about deeper things in a long time, unless it's Jordan, because that's who I've seen the most out of the last year.

So I just think it's going to be [00:21:00] a great tool as we maybe reenter the world and reenter our friendships. And I really liked it. And I think the writing is great too. So this is *Share Your Stuff, I'll Go First* by Laura Tremaine.

From maybe in the middle of some of the other things I was reading this month, again, I would just on a Monday and I see a pattern when I look at the books I read this month, I would just occasionally need a book that I could finish on a Monday. Mondays are my day off. And so I typically clean my house and do my laundry and get caught up and also read. And so I read the book *Anne of Manhattan* by Brina Starler. This is exactly what you might have guessed it is.

It is a modern retelling of *Anne of Green Gables*. Very much in the romance fiction genre. So I picked this up because the love story between Anne Shirley and Gilbert Blythe is one of my favorites of all time. Not only do I love sure the, the romcom trope of haters to to [00:22:00] lovers, sorry for using the word lovers.

But I also really like perhaps the more under appreciated romcom trope of friends turned romantic partners and competitors. Like I love competitors. I think it's why, it's one of the reasons I like *You've Got Mail*. It's not really about that initial hatred for me, it's really about seeing someone as a competitor.

And again, not sure what that says about my personality type, but I've always loved this story of Anna and Gilbert who sure, maybe hate each other at first but then they become friends and competitors. Like they make each other better. And I love that. I love that in a love story. So, *Anne of Manhattan* is set on the Island of Manhattan.

Anne Shirley is a graduate student and she reacquaints herself with Gilbert who has been over, not overseas. He's been in California for [00:23:00] undergrad, and now his dad has become sick and he has come back home to, to finish up his graduate degree. Home is a little, I believe, Oh, I don't want to get this wrong, but I think it's kind of on Cape Cod, like that, that type of like Martha's vineyard, like that is kind of a replacement for Prince Edward Island in this book.

I think this book is really clever. I loved if you are an avid Anne Shirley, *Anne of Green Gables* reader, then there are a lot of like Easter eggs. This must be how super hero fans feel like. Like I re I read, it was such a big grin on my face cause I was like, Oh, like it had just a bunch

of shout outs, I think, and little Easter eggs to the LM. Montgomery works. This is a romantic piece of modern literature. And so there are some PG 13 kind of sexy scenes.

And I mostly, I feel like I did have to skim a couple of pages if you're like [00:24:00] gauging your own capabilities on mine. If you are not a prude and if you love romance literature, go out and get this book. It's not out yet. I'm so sorry, but it will release. I believe in, I should always come prepared with this information and I'm sorry that I didn't, it'll be in the show notes. This book will release later this spring.

I think if you're a romance reader, you will enjoy this book, particularly if you are an Anne Shirley fan. If you're like me and you're more of a closed door romance reader, I still think you can read this one and enjoy it. You might have to skim a couple of pages and that's just my personal preference is a closed door romance.

But it's just so fun. There are just so many shout outs to the little, to the stories I loved as a little girl that I couldn't help, but enjoy this one. And again, sometimes you just want to read a book that brings a smile to your face. Uh, and this one definitely did. So that is *Anne of Manhattan* by Brina Starler. It is going to be a paperback original.

Then I finished [00:25:00] *Libertie* by Kaitlyn Greenidge. This is another book that I started a while ago and it just took me a while to finish and I'll tell you why. I know exactly why. It is not written in chapters. It's written in sections. And if you are like me and you like shorter chapters, this one presents a challenge just because again, there are not chapter breaks. There are section breaks.

However, Please, please, please read this book. It's so good. You're going to, I think you are going to see it everywhere. This one releases late March, early April, I think maybe March 30th and it is already on track, I believe to be an indie next pick. If you're familiar, indie, next is the list that compiles the favorites and the best sellers of independent bookstores.

And so I think it is already going to be the featured title in Indie Next. It has received rave advanced reviews. It's been on a lot of most anticipated lists. Kaitlyn Greenidge wrote a book called, Oh, I think it was called *We Love You, Charlie Outlaw*. One of [00:26:00] my former bookshelf staffers, read that book and really liked it.

I did not read it. So I was not as familiar with Kaitlyn Greenidge's work. *Libertie* as I understand it is a departure from that novel. This is a historical fiction book, loosely based, and I think inspired by one of the first Black female doctors in America. In the book that is *Libertie*'s mother and *Libertie* is her daughter who is drawn to poetry and music rather than science.

And so *Libertie* is really this beautifully told mother daughter story. It is set right kind of after like right post civil war and the opening scene is, you're I believe you are seeing the underground railroad being utilized and practiced. And so that is kind of the era in which this book takes place.

I loved this book. I think, I hope you can tell. I love this book. I do not typically read historical [00:27:00] fiction, but I was intrigued by the premise. It is going to be sold and perhaps

rightfully so as a, as, as really, again, being loosely based on the first *Libertie* by Kaitlyn Greenidge Black female doctor in America or one of the first, however, the book is really *Libertie's*. I mean, that's the name of the book,

And *Libertie* and her relationship with her mom and how she grows up. So the book really each section is a different phase in *Libertie's* life. Um, so the first section is really about her growing up with her mother and what it was like to grow up in this Black community, where her mother was a doctor, where her mother also would treat white patients and how those white patients in turn treated her mom and kind of her observations of that.

It's also about growing up in this community where Black people from the South who had been formerly enslaved would come to *Libertie's* community and what freedom looked like for them. I found those [00:28:00] descriptions of the book to be really beautifully wrought bittersweet stories and because it was, you know, it's *Libertie*, this young girl observing and she was born free.

So it's her observing an *Inslee*, a formerly enslaved people coming to freedom and her being kind of wondrous and confused as to why at first glance, freedom seems hard. And so I was really struck by that first section of the book. The second section is *Libertie* going to college. And at her mother's kind of insistence because her mother's dream is for *Libertie* to inherit her practice and kind of work alongside her and little does her mother know that *Libertie* has very little interest in that. She is drawn again to music and to poetry, but she's also been turned off by how her mother, how her mother interacts with white patients and also with Black patients and how her mother is treated in their community.

It, [00:29:00] interestingly, there's so much happening in this book. I think you can, again, probably hear in my voice, like there's so much happening with such nuance, but there is also at the heart, just a mother daughter story about a daughter who does not want to follow in her mother's footsteps. So at its simplest form, I really think that's what this book is. It's *Libertie* not wanting to grow up and be a doctor. And so there's a lot of other, there are a lot of other elements to the story, but at its heart, I think that's what this book is. The third section and I think I've got this right. There are three or four sections, but the latter part of the book is about *Libertie* as an adult.

And a part of the book then takes place in Haiti, which I also found really interesting. I've I've been to Haiti and so I appreciated that part of the book as well. So this book crosses years, crosses decades and also spans continents or spans spans locations and geographies, but all through it, you're really getting great insight into *Libertie* and her [00:30:00] relationship with her mom.

Libertie also has a beautiful and interesting relationship with two of her college classmates. And I don't want to spoil anything. I just love that story and how it unfolds. There is so much rich goodness in this book. Rich is the best word I can think of because part of the reason it took me so long, yes, was the sections rather than the short chapters. Certainly that changed my changed how I read this book, but also this book is so immediate. Like there's so much happening for a fiction work and I, and I loved it. Like I loved that meatiness.

I did, I want to be clear. I did not. I did not get bogged down in the meatiness. I relished in it. Like, I love that, but it did take me a little bit longer than maybe a more bingeable book might, uh, partly because I was really enjoying the journey I was on with *Libertie* and with her mom. So this book is called *Libertie* by Kaitlyn Greenidge. I cannot recommend it enough. I thought it was excellent.

Next up, I finally finished *The Cross and the [00:31:00] Lynching Tree* by James Cone. If you've listened to the podcast for a while, you know that you might remember that this was a book I started last summer and it is a thin little book. Like it is, Oh, probably 150 or so pages. My brother had read this and recommended it a few years ago, or a couple of years ago.

My dad read it last summer and I started it and probably read half of it last summer. And as you might be able to guess from the title, this is a really heavy book. And so I wound up really taking my time with it. I also took my time with it because, and I think my brother, so my brother has his master's in theology.

And so as a result, sometimes he, he is a very different reader for me. And so he's reading a lot more academic works and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is really dense. So it's 150 pages, but it's really dense and a really insightful look [00:32:00] into the Black church and Black theology. And so that is part of the reason it took me so long is it's smart.

And I felt like I was underlining like every other word or every other sentence. There's just so much in here. And then I also was Googling things like that I didn't know. And look, I'm an Enneagram five, so is my brother. I love things like that. Like I definitely felt like I was at my best research, Sherpa self. Like I really delved into this book.

But that's part of the reason it took me so long was it's 150 pages and you think you're going to fly through it, but instead you're learning so much that you really want to take your time. It's if I'm not mistaken four or five chapters. So they're very long chapters and each chapter is really a different aspect of Black theology, particularly as it relates to the cross.

If you are not a Christian, I think you could still read this book and get something out of [00:33:00] it because I think you would learn about maybe the history of the Black church, or again, Black theology. If you are a Christian and particularly if you are a white Christian, I almost think this book is a must read. That that being said, I, it is dense.

Um, I think it is a harder book simply because of the academic nature, maybe of the work itself. But like, I've already told Jordan, I want him to read it, there's just so much here that I didn't know. And, and particularly as it relates to how Black Christians view the cross and I, I found it to be so worthwhile and so important.

And I really am so glad I finally made the time this month to really sit down with it and finish it. I think, you know, I think it's a book that you really do have to kind of sit with and not just wrestle with, but really just think about, and ask yourself some hard [00:34:00] questions and ask some hard questions of your own upbringing if you're like me and you were raised in the white, I don't know about the, I don't know all the time if I, if I really grew up in the evangelical church, but certainly in the white Christian Church.

And so if that is you, or if you like, or typically read or are drawn to the books that I read about faith, I think this one is worth your time. Lots of history here there. The first chapter is about African-American spirituals and hymns and I love that chapter. The second chapter is about a theologian, a white theologian who I was not at all familiar with. Again, sometimes I feel sometimes I feel slightly removed from evangelical culture. Others of you might be familiar with him.

So the second chapter was really about this kind of white, progressive for lack of a better term theologian and his relationship to the civil rights movement and to the enslavement of people and to the lynching tree. And [00:35:00] it was. Oh, it was, it was, this book was particularly, I'm really glad I actually read it now because I read it right after *Jesus and John Wayne* and the two books, I think pair really well with one another.

So if you've read *Jesus and John Wayne*, you weren't sure where to go next, I think this would be a good option. And then the third chapter is about Martin Luther King Jr. The fourth chapter is about Black women and then the fifth chapter, I believe kind of ties it all together if I'm not mistaken, that's kind of the trajectory of the book.

I really am so glad I read this again. If you've read *Jesus and John Wayne*, or if you have read other books about the Christian faith that I have read, and you've liked those, or you've been intrigued by them, or you've enjoyed them, then I think this could be a good one for you, as long as you're willing to kind of take your time with it.

So that one is called *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone. I read a lot of heavy, heavy books in February. So I closed out February by listening to *Persuasion* by Jane Austen. So one of my reading intentions for 2021 was to read Jane Austen. I am starting to [00:36:00] get nervous about that goal I set for myself because I also am reading *Middlemarch* and Jane Austen and George Elliott, I think you know, intertwine with one another beautifully, but also because I'm reading *Middlemarch*, it feels like a lot to also be reading Jane Austen novels while also reading front list and not yet released titles, like it's just a lot happening.

But I got to drive to Asheville. I had the I had the gift of being able to drive to a place away from my town. And so on my drive to Asheville on the way up, I listened to *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, which is a fantastic audio book, by the way, if that's a book that you've been wanting to read like me, but you haven't quite been able to start it. It's a great audio book. I just haven't finished it yet.

And then on the way back, I decided to listen to *Persuasion* by Jane Austen. As of this recording, I am two chapters away from finishing, but I'm going to finish. Here's a tip for you too. I use Libro FM for my [00:37:00] audio books, Libro FM benefits indie bookstores, like the Bookshelf. So I really encourage you to use Libro FM. However, for *Persuasion*, Spotify is doing these classic books, I guess, classic audio books.

I have not kind of delved into figure out which ones they're doing. But I had seen that they were doing *Persuasion* narrated by Tony award-winning actress, Cynthia Erivo. It is so good. At first I was not sure I do not read. I did not listen to a lot of fiction books for a reason. I get

distracted. I am not a huge audio book reader to begin with, but when I listened to an audio book, it is probably nine times out of 10 nonfiction.

So this was a departure, but I was like determined to have Cynthia Erivo read to me. So, so I started it. And at first I was like, I'm not gonna be able to do this because there are so many different characters. It's Jane Austen book. And so I was just hesitant that I was going to be able to keep it all straight, you know, while driving and listening to an audio book.

[00:38:00] But Cynthia Erivo prevailed. I very quickly realized, you know, who the main characters were. *Persuasion* is not a book I was familiar with at all. I've never seen a movie adaptation didn't know what it was about. Had heard like murmurings of Anne Elliot, maybe as an Enneagram five heroine. And I think I'm pretty convinced that I don't know. I'm, I think I'm like 80% convinced that that's true.

Anyway, I loved it. I am so glad. It just made me- again, I was driving with like a big old grin on my face thinking, Oh, like it's been so long since I've read a Jane Austen book and *Middlemarch* is great, but like it is hefty. This book *Persuasion*, as many of you probably know is so short.

And so it's 24 chapters. I was able to finish almost the entire thing on my eight hour drive. So I can't recommend it enough. And it's a little tip that it's on Spotify with Cynthia Erivo. So *Persuasion* by Jane Austen. And I feel really good because my goal is to read four of those this year, four Jane Austen books.

So that was [00:39:00] my Jane Austen for the first quarter of the year. So now I can kind of take a little breather. I can focus on *Middlemarch* and then start back in the second quarter. So also, if you are listening to this and you have read *Persuasion*, I need to know the best movie adaptation. I Googled and found that there are a couple, and I think the 1995 one is fresh on rotten tomatoes. But it was made in 1995. Uh, but so it was, I think Emma was around that time.

But anyway, I'm just curious if you've seen a film adaptation of *Persuasion* or even like a modern retelling of *Persuasion*. I'm just curious what I should watch to like reward myself for reading, for reading Jane Austen, which sounds silly. You should not have to reward yourself for reading, for reading Jane Austen but I'm having so much fun with it that I kind of want to like watch a film adaptation now. So if you've got a film recommendation for me for after finishing *Persuasion*, I'd love to hear it.

Those are the books that I read in February. I had a wonderful time with each of these books, even when they were heavier subject matters. I'm very glad I read them and all in all [00:40:00] I was, I was not sure what kind of reading month February was going to be, but I think it was a really good month. And I think I'm sticking to some of those reading intentions I set where I wanted to read more nonfiction.

I wanted to dive deeper into subjects. I think I'm doing that. And I'm reading Jane Austen and I'm also, you know, reading for work, like I'm reading for shelf subscriptions and for literary lunches so we can talk about good books. So I feel looking back, I feel better about February as a reading month than I did when I was in it, if that makes sense.

So I would love to hear what you read in February. We'll post a picture to the Bookshop Instagram so that you can kind of comment and share with each other what you read in February

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Special thanks to Dylan and his team at Studio D Production for sound and editing and for our theme music, which sets the perfect warm and friendly tone for our Thursday conversations.

This week, I'm reading *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson and I got my audio book on Libro FM.

If you liked what you heard on today's episode, tell us by leaving a review on iTunes. Or, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon, where you can hear our staff's weekly New Release Tuesday conversations, read full book reviews in our monthly Shelf Life newsletter, follow along as Hunter and I conquer a classic, and receive free media mail shipping on all your online book orders. Just go to patreon.com/fromthefrontporch.

We're so grateful for you, and we look forward to meeting back here next week.