

Ep. 83 – Women in History

[00:00:09] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Jaclyn Masters. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim half the bookshelf by discussing books written by or about women. And this is episode 83, where we're talking about this month's theme: Women in History.

[00:00:25] **Jaclyn** And you can find a complete transcript and all the books that we mentioned in today's episode linked in our show notes. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:36] **Kendra** So we have some news to talk about. First, we have the Stella Prize news, which I'm very excited about.

[00:00:44] **Jaclyn** I am very excited about it too, as you probably already know.

[00:00:50] **Kendra** So what is the latest from the Stella Prize longlist?

[00:00:55] **Jaclyn** So the Stella Prize longlist has been announced. And we now have twelve books that have been longlisted, across fiction and nonfiction, that are eligible to win the ultimate prize. And the shortlist itself is due out on the 6th of March. So very excited to see what will make the shortlist.

[00:01:15] **Kendra** And the Stella Prize is Australia's prize sort of like the Women's Prize for Fiction, just in Australia.

[00:01:22] **Jaclyn** Yeah, it's for women and non-binary authors. And like I said, it traverses fiction and nonfiction. So you always got a really good mix of content on that list.

[00:01:32] **Kendra** So what are some of your favorites from the longlist?

[00:01:36] **Jaclyn** Oh, that's a tricky one. It's actually a couple that I've really enjoyed. But I'd say from the—I think I've read five—of the five that I've read, I really, really loved *THE YIELD* by Tara June Winch. She is an indigenous author. She's now living in France. But this book was just so good. It was very based around language itself as a sort of mechanism to tell the story. And yeah, I just loved it so much. I'm really hopeful that will be on the shortlist.

[00:02:04] **Kendra** And last year, there was some buzz about, you know, they really struggled to have a wide range of diverse books across their longlists and a lot of different ways that diversity can be presented. Is there any updates on that with this longlist in particular?

[00:02:23] **Jaclyn** Yes. There was nothing mentioned expressly in the judge's report that I recall seeing, but there is quite a good mix across fiction and nonfiction. So there's seven fiction titles and five nonfiction titles. And they've had a YA title again. I don't believe it's the first time I think Alice Pung's *LAURINDA* was one of the first YA titles that had been listed. But it is the first time that a collaborative text has been listed. So there's a book called *SONGSPIRALS* by the Gay'wu Group of Women that's been listed. And it's also the first time that a graphic text has been on the list. And there's a graphic memoir called *WHEN ONE PERSON DIES THE WHOLE WORLD IS OVER* by Mandy Ord. There's also a memoir by an author with multiple sclerosis *DIVING INTO GLASS* by Caro Llewellyn. So

there's a lot of different representation on this list that is really exciting to see the sort of depth that the field is offering this year.

[00:03:23] **Kendra** I really appreciate how they're looking at diversity in a lot of different ways. And I appreciate how they, you know, acknowledge that it's kind of like a process, like they're trying to include more things. . .

[00:03:37] **Jaclyn** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:03:38] **Kendra** . . . over the course of time. So I really appreciate there's a wide range of . . . you know, there's nonfiction. There's YA. There's short story collections. There's a lot, well, a little bit of everything you might say.

[00:03:49] **Jaclyn** Yeah. I feel like there's something on this list for every reader, which I think is important when you're trying to have a prize that's meant to be representing so much.

[00:03:58] **Kendra** These are all Australian titles. Do you know some of the best ways that readers maybe here in America could find them? Maybe on Book Depository? Or maybe as an e-book or something like that?

[00:04:09] **Jaclyn** Yeah. So most of them are on Book Depository in print form. There are a couple that are coming out in the US. So I know THE YIELD, which I mentioned before, is actually coming out later this year. I think it's in June from Harper Via. And THE WEEKEND by Charlotte Wood, which is another one of the titles, is actually being picked up by Riverhead.

[00:04:30] **Kendra** Wow.

[00:04:31] **Jaclyn** And I've also found a few on Scripd, if you're wanting to read them as e-books. But there are, like always with Australian books, there are a couple that I just can't get hold of internationally. So hopefully you can find one or two that interest you from the list if you are looking to.

[00:04:47] **Kendra** Yeah. And I am really excited about this list. And I think personally having done this a few years now, I think it's so frustrating how other women's initiatives. . . . Sometimes it's so difficult to find books that they're promoting and looking at. And while the Women's Prize for Fiction has a pretty decent international coverage, I always feel like the Stella Prize doesn't really get the international coverage that it definitely deserves.

[00:05:15] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I'd love to see more people picking it up and seeing more buzz around the book.

[00:05:20] **Kendra** Yeah, but thankfully, most of the winners of the Stella's Prize come to the United States in print form. I think the only exception so far has been Alexis Wright's TRACKER, which was, I think, the first nonfiction book to win the prize.

[00:05:33] **Jaclyn** I think so, yeah.

[00:05:35] **Kendra** Yeah. So at least there's a, you know, a good percentage that the winner, if not some of the longlisted books will make it to the United States in print form. So.

[00:05:46] **Jaclyn** Fingers crossed.

[00:05:47] **Kendra** Yeah. All right. So that's our big piece of news for this month. I'm very excited that was your month that we could talk about the Stella Prize, and you'll definitely have to come back on and give us an update.

[00:06:00] **Jaclyn** Yes, definitely will.

[00:06:02] **Kendra** So this month we are talking about women in history, and we might be able talk a little bit about why we wanted to go with this theme. We picked it a while back, I think, last fall.

[00:06:14] **Jaclyn** Yeah. I think when we're talking about this last year, this was one of the early topics that we came up with.

[00:06:20] **Kendra** And you'd double majored, I think, in undergrad in history and English. Is that right?

[00:06:24] **Jaclyn** I did, yes. Yes.

[00:06:27] **Kendra** So this is right up your alley.

[00:06:28] **Jaclyn** Very in my wheelhouse.

[00:06:32] **Kendra** How many figurative metaphors can we used to say that this is Jaclyn's stuff. So I'm very excited to talk about it. And we are going to be playing with the theme a little bit. Women in history. And we have a wide variety of books, really. Have a lot of different types of history featured. So I'm pretty excited.

[00:06:52] **Jaclyn** Hopefully to encourage people to read history books. So I realize that after studying in high school, people are not always. . . . You know, reading a history book is not always front of mind when people think of fun reading. So hopefully we can change your mind on that.

[00:07:07] **Kendra** Yeah. And all of the books that we're gonna be talking today are, I feel like, very accessible as far as reading. Like I don't think they felt like history text to me. I think the writers are so good in that creative nonfiction style that can come through.

[00:07:23] **Jaclyn** I think having that narrative element to it, it's like reading a story. So I feel like that's a really good inroad with a lot of history texts.

[00:07:31] **Kendra** Yeah. So you have the first pick for us today.

[00:07:36] **Jaclyn** I do. Thank you. So the first book that I wanted to talk about today is AUSTRALIANAMA: THE SOUTH ASIAN ODYSSEY IN AUSTRALIA, and it is written by Samia Khatun. And in Australia, it's out from the University of Queensland Press. And here in the US, Oxford University Press published it. And I just want to put in a disclaimer. I've tried to find a pronunciation of this book online, so I do apologize if I am mispronouncing it.

[00:08:02] **Jaclyn** But the way that the author describes herself on her University of London academic profile is that she's a feminist historian of the British Empire, and she

focuses on the life, worlds, and experiences of colonized people. And I think that's a really interesting way to describe her work, particularly in the context of this book.

[00:08:23] **Jaclyn** So the premise behind this book completely grabbed me the minute that I heard about it. And it's it's not a book that I've seen widely across Bookstagram or BookTube or anything like that. But the way it's described was the author came across a photo in a history book, and it was documenting a book, an old book that had been found in a 19th century desert mosque in Australia in an area called Broken Hill. And it was captioned to be a copy of the Qur'an. When she looked more closely at the book itself, she recognised Bengali writing and wanted to investigate a bit further.

[00:09:05] **Jaclyn** So she actually traveled to Broken Hill to look at the document itself and discovered that it wasn't actually a copy of the Koran. It was a collection of Bengali stories of the prophets, this text that is quite famous, called the KASASOL AMBIA. And again, I do apologize if I'm mispronouncing that name. But when she was looking further into it, she consulted her mother. And apparently the text itself is not intended to be read in just a literal sense. It's a collection that's meant to be sung and performed. So there's a lot of emphasis the way that she tells history on how it's heard.

[00:09:49] **Jaclyn** And she uses this book as this sort of framework to tell her history of South Asian people in Australia in this very early colonial period, particularly. And she uses each of the chapters within the book to focus different elements of that history. And she's using these narrative motifs that appear in the KASASOL AMBIA to do this. So it's a really clever structural, as well as thematic, thing to think about as you're going through this book. She looks at different things like the camel trade, immigration records, and the way that marriages are recorded and the way that indigenous people were systematically erased from South Asians' accounts of Australia. So she's very much looking at the sort of process of writing history itself as part of her own writing of history. So it felt very meta at times.

[00:10:49] **Kendra** Yeah. Yeah. And you mentioned how, when you're reading it, that it uses a different way of telling history and kind of examines the way that we tell history in our, you know, the Western sense of things and how she kind of wanted to do a play on that a little bit.

[00:11:06] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And a lot of that had to do with looking at the fact that a lot of Australian history is very monolingual. So it's very reliant on English documents, like primary documents. And, you know, obviously she has more than one language background coming into the study that she's doing and she's able to look at documents in a different way.

[00:11:26] **Jaclyn** So one of the examples that really stood out to me was the fact that when a lot of historians are talking about—or if they even do so—when they're talking about South Asian people immigrating to Australia, a lot of the time there's an emphasis on men and how there's a lot of men. And she actually said when she went back to read the passenger records that came of ships that came into Australian ports, having that background of being able to recognise what South Asian women's names look like, she actually saw a lot of them in those lists. So it's not that women weren't there. It's just that the ability to recognise those names wasn't present within the historians studying these documents, which I just thought was fascinating because it's not something that I guess is front of mind for me when I have been studying Australian history. So that totally changed

the way that I started thinking about the history that I have traditionally known, I guess, when I've learned Australian history.

[00:12:27] **Kendra** Yes. I mean, it sounds so different. And I like the idea of her taking you on this journey of her examining this document, like she's kind of including you on that historical academic kind of process.

[00:12:41] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And I think one of the other things that really helped engage the reader was that there was this memoir element too. So she starts the book with this story about her mother and then kind of returns to that towards the end of the book. So there's this sort of full-circle element and really personal engagement with the content and the context within which she's trying to track the history of this book. So having that narrative aspect to the way that she's telling history and using this recurring imagery of this book as a thematic and point at which to tie all these different parts of history back to was really effectively done. So I just . . . I can't recommend this one enough. I just found it such a fascinating look at Australian history. And I think if Australian history is a topic that you're new to as well, I think this is a really great way to gain a really different introduction.

[00:13:34] **Kendra** I know I'd never heard of a book like this before—that kind of takes you on that journey, discovering the document. And I've never actually read a book on Australian history. So.

[00:13:45] **Jaclyn** Yeah, it was it was very different. Like a lot of Australian history is that you look at. . . . Like I was just trawling through my library app, for example. And a lot of them are, you know, history of the first fleet and the "explorers." And it's very masculine for the most part. There are some wonderful books by women historians that are coming out that are detailing particular women that were pivotal in a lot of Australian history. But again, it feels very white. A lot of it is very much from, I guess, the colonial perspective. So it's really interesting to hear a part of history that I don't feel like I got taught when I was learning Australian history or that features prominently in big textbooks or things like that. So I really enjoyed reading this one.

[00:14:36] **Kendra** I definitely am going to be looking for this one. I feel like as an American, we're not really encouraged to read other histories besides maybe some British history. Like there's not this encouragement in our culture to go read the history of other countries. And so the fact that this is not only a history of Australia, but also a people group in Australia that, you know, I didn't even know it was a movement or that it existed is pretty cool and sort of like some of the books that we'll be talking about today, but for Australia, you know, looking at a migration kind of movement.

[00:15:13] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And you end up learning a little bit about like what motivated people to come to Australia. And so you're learning a lot about, I guess, those trade routes and the decisions behind why people would even want to come to Australia at that point. So, yeah, it's just really fascinating, really different approach to history.

[00:15:32] **Jaclyn** So that was AUSTRALIANAMA: THE SOUTH ASIAN ODYSSEY IN AUSTRALIA by Samia Khatun. And it's out from the University of Queensland Press in Australia and the Oxford University Press in the US. And Kendra, you were going to talk to us about the first discussion book that we'll be talking about the next episode.

[00:15:51] **Kendra** Yes. So there's a bit of a story behind this one, too, which I think is always fun. I love learning about how people came to discover books. But our first discussion pick is THESE TRUTHS by Jill Lepore. And this is out from W.W. Norton.

[00:16:07] **Kendra** And I first had this book recommended to me by Amanda Nelson at a panel that I was on in D.C. for Old Town Books, their Emerging Writers Festival. It was really delightful to have Amanda, who she did history in undergrad. And so I realized, as she was talking about it, that I hadn't read a comprehensive history of the United States since I was in high school, which just blew my mind. Like, I just didn't realize that. But then I thought about it. And unless you're taking some sort of topic or subject that overlaps with history or are a history major, you're not going to take a ton of history. You're mainly going to focus probably on world history or something like that, like I was required to take. So I thought this would be a great opportunity to learn more about it. So I picked it up, and then I got the audio book, which she reads, which is lovely. And it's over like twenty hours long.

[00:17:10] **Jaclyn** It's a big one. I think it was about twenty-one hours.

[00:17:14] **Kendra** So I asked you. I was like, We're doing this. Would you be okay if we decided to tackle this as one of our discussion picks. And so I started reading this back in the fall, and it was amazing. I was so impressed with the way that Jill Lepore covers American history because she doesn't just look at America. She looks at pre-America, North American continent and indigenous peoples. And she was very adamant that when we look at American history, this continent didn't just magically appear when Columbus landed on it.

[00:17:46] **Kendra** And so she really looks at that, and she looks at a bunch of different people groups that now make up modern America. And she kind of rewinds and looks at how these different people groups came to be. So she looks at, you know, African Americans and the history, different points in history, where they come into play and their history as well. And one of the things I thought was so impressive was she would make comments like when George Washington died, there were more Black people in the room than white people.

[00:18:14] **Jaclyn** That was fascinating.

[00:18:16] **Kendra** You just don't hear history told this way.

[00:18:19] **Jaclyn** Things you wouldn't. Yeah, you wouldn't hear that in another history text necessarily.

[00:18:24] **Kendra** Exactly. And she looks at, you know, Asian American history and Latinex history and just covers a lot of that. And I feel like she's very fair. And how she is like, you know, America did these things so well. But we also have a lot to answer for because some of the things we've done to other people groups and, you know, colonization and all these different things.

[00:18:49] **Kendra** And so I really appreciate how she did that and how she also divides American history into chunks. So when you read the text, even though it is huge, it's almost like she breaks it down for you into achievable goals. And it was like listening to a podcast where she's just sitting down with you and telling you this history. And there are pictures and different things in the text. And there are pictures and different things in the text. And it is very readable. I always feel weird saying that. But it's definitely one of those

textbooks I would feel . . . it's definitely one of those history books, I would feel like I could just give to anybody if they wanted to learn more about American history. f

[00:19:33] **Jaclyn** I felt like—what you were saying before about how she really examines, you know, what America did—I feel like a lot of why it's so engaging for me was that it felt like she was telling history, but also holding up a mirror to how history has been traditionally told. So it was this really active engagement with the way that history gets written and who gets to tell that story and the impact of that. So I found a lot of crossovers with this and the book that I just was talking about.

[00:20:01] **Kendra** Yeah, as you were talking about it, I was like, oh, that sounds so similar. And, you know, I feel like a lot of people are intimidated by history textbooks. And you'll always have these people saying, I don't like learning about dates and events and whatever. But I feel like this particular book, she doesn't tell by dates or events. She follows people. And so like I said, she follows George Washington. And by the time that he dies, she has kind of handed off the narrative baton to a different character, a person from history who takes it, and then you follow that person and some of their family.

[00:20:38] **Kendra** Like Thomas Jefferson, for example, we do follow the Black woman who was his common-law wife, as it were. She was, though, his slave. So there was that inappropriate power dynamic there, obviously it was, you know, something that we need to definitely include more into Thomas Jefferson's discussion of what he's done and different things. But she stayed with him so that her children could be free, so their children together could be free. And so we also follow like Thomas Jefferson's daughter and what happened with her. And I feel like oftentimes, especially Black people are left out of history around that time. Like, we only know like the end of slavery. And then the civil rights movement. You know, like.

[00:21:19] **Jaclyn** There's not much in between, like in terms of the way that traditional texts look at it.

[00:21:23] **Kendra** Right. Exactly. And that definitely, you know, reading that inspired me to read more of the books that we'll be talking about here in a second because there's definitely a lot of history that is glossed over and that she makes sure to not gloss over in this text.

[00:21:39] **Jaclyn** Yeah, she'll definitely give you all the ideas for further reading inspiration for what you want to go off and do a deeper dive into, which I thought was one of the things that I really took away from reading this too.

[00:21:51] **Kendra** She does such a good job, and she makes it look so easy. I just can't even imagine.

[00:21:58] **Jaclyn** I can't imagine how long this would have taken to write. The work involved in this must be astronomical.

[00:22:04] **Kendra** Yes. And you know, if you had told me a couple years ago that I would be reading this book and loving it, I would just would have laughed at you. You know, I'm more of a . . . I like to learn about a singular event and do a deep dive. But this overview was so fascinating and I learned so much about American history. I feel like anyone who wants to learn more about it—maybe you're not from America; maybe you haven't taken history since high school like me—but you could definitely get a lot out of this text.

[00:22:32] **Jaclyn** And definitely do it by audiobook if you're intimidated because Kendra totally sold me on the audiobook with the podcast comparison. And I think that's a really good way to digest it. The chapters were sort of anywhere from one to three hours, I think, from memory. So they were sort of palatable in that way.

[00:22:51] **Kendra** I just really enjoyed this book, which is why it's our discussion pick. One of them. And we'll be talking about it more in-depth in our next episode. So that is THESE TRUTHS by Jill Lepore. And that is out from Norton. And Jaclyn, you have our next discussion pick as well.

[00:23:12] **Jaclyn** The second book that we're gonna be talking about is THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS by Isabel Wilkerson. And this one is out from Random House. And this is another one that I listened to and read the print alongside. And the two books work so well together because I feel like when I read the part in THESE TRUTHS where the Great Migration was mentioned, I then had this whole other book that I knew I could learn more about in THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS. So for those that don't know, this book is about the Great Migration, which was a movement of around 6 million Black Americans who fled southern states for northern and western cities. And it's sort of looking at the period from 1915 to 1970. And this one . . . and again, in terms of the scope behind what Wilkerson has done with this text, she has interviewed thousands of people over countless hours. She looked at official records, new data. And one of the more interesting things that I found about her methodology, which she talks about at the end of the book in her author's note, is that she tried to reenact all or part of the journeys that her three people that she talks about in this book underwent. So she's following three different people that made the decision to move north and is following them. And yeah, I just found that fascinating that she actually went back and recreated that journey as part of her methodology in writing this book.

[00:24:44] **Kendra** And it was so interesting how the three different people, two men and one woman represent different aspects of the migration. They go to three different places. I think it was New York, Chicago, and LA. And how these three different people came from different class backgrounds and different educational backgrounds. And she covers a different part of the migration with each of them. They're so well selected. And yeah, at the end, the author's note where she talks about the process. . . . Everything is just so well done. I think the degree of difficulty that she was going for with this book was so incredible, and she does such an amazing job with it.

[00:25:23] **Jaclyn** And I think the idea of trying to write a history of six million people and finding a way to communicate that and make it personal at the same time, I think using these three people and following them for not just the move itself, but what I really liked was that you got a lot of the period in which they were when they settled in those northern or western cities and the impact on their life and, you know, when they had children, what that impact again was. And you really felt like you got a real slice of insight into a whole raft of different experiences.

[00:25:57] **Kendra** I had never read anything about the migration besides maybe a paragraph that, you know, it happened. And each of the characters, they come from the South and they go to the North. And they talk about the prejudice that they face, not just from white people in the North, but also other Black people from the North who treated Black people from the South as even more "less than," as it were. And I . . . it's just so

incredible. The nuance of that was something she documented so well and in multiple places.

[00:26:29] **Jaclyn** And it just sounds like it's had such a huge impact on American history and has had so many different spin offs. And I just feel like this has been such an important part of history. And the way that she documents that she shows so many of the spin-off impacts that it had on other parts of social history. This was fascinating. So that is *THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS* by Isabel Wilkerson, and that is out from Random House. And Kendra, you had the next book that we were going to talk about today.

[00:27:01] Yes. And my second pick is *WAYWARD LIVES, BEAUTIFUL EXPERIMENTS: INTIMATE HISTORIES OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL* by Saidiya Hartman. And this is also out from Norton. They seem to do a great job with their history, apparently.

[00:27:14] **Jaclyn** They really do.

[00:27:17] **Kendra** I didn't realize that both my pics were from Norton until just now. But this was a recommendation from Tressie McMillan Cottam, who we interviewed about a year ago. And this is kind of a micro-history of women in the 1920s. And I think goes into the 1930s. And I feel like, like we were talking about earlier, Black people's history is often glossed over or erased like nothing was going on and especially Black women. And so what Hartman does in this book is look at these women's lives. And at first I was kind of thrown by the structure because it felt kind of disjointed. But then I realized it's more like she's flipping through a photo album and pointing at the photos of these women and telling their stories. Oh, Esther, she lived in this tenement house and was arrested because policemen saw that she was hanging out with another man and she wasn't married, and so they decided to randomly arrest her because they could. You know, like she's pointing out these women and their experiences, their triumphs, their losses, their sorrows. And it looks at these women's lives, just like a portrait, like a chapter on each woman or a group of women living in the same house or something like that. And each chapter is kind of its own little mini-history on that woman's life. And she has photos. She's looked at documents about these women, like their arrests and any court documents she could find. And these women mostly come from Philadelphia and New York City.

[00:28:49] **Jaclyn** Oh wow, I find that really interesting when books include excerpts from those historical documents. I feel like it really brings to life and makes the reader feel like they're part of that journey of, you know, looking at the primary material.

[00:29:02] **Kendra** Yes, exactly. And she has these photos in the text of about, I think, each woman that she talks about with each chapter—or just about. And she tells the story of that girl. So you get, for example, there was one of the most heartrending photos that I found was a young girl. She looks about ten in the photo or something like that, maybe younger. And she has very little clothing on, if at all. And she's in the tucked back in the couch. And what Hartman does is examine that photo and do an analysis of it. Like what from her expression, what the girl might be feeling and what actually happened to her based on the documents and different things that she found. And just doing this history of different women from history, Black women in history at this time was just so impactful because you realize that, you know, oftentimes the North is described as this land flowing with milk and honey that, you know, Black people found this wonderful place that they could be themselves and no longer have the horrible racism of the South. But in reality, they faced really intense racism. And it might look differently and might be a more roundabout ways, but it still deeply affected these women's lives on a daily basis. And that

is something that society really has something to own up for. And I really, I was really moved by this book and how illustrated that on a kind of woman-by-woman basis.

[00:30:39] **Jaelyn** That sounds like a really deep dive into something that Wilkerson mentions in *THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS*. So that sounds really fascinating.

[00:30:46] **Kendra** And some of the women were migrants from the South as well. I had no idea that there were so many laws against young women and sexual deviance, which means sleeping with someone when you're not married to them. Or even being seen with a man like, say you lived in a tenement building and there was a man that lived on the same floor as you. If you were seen walking up to your own room at the same time he was walking up to his room, you could still be arrested.

[00:31:12] **Jaelyn** Wow. I definitely need to read this.

[00:31:16] **Kendra** It's so good. It's out in paperback now from Norton as well. So that is *WAYWARD LIVES*, *BEAUTIFUL EXPERIMENTS: INTIMATE HISTORIES OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL* by Saidia Hartman. And that's out from Norton.

[00:31:27] **Kendra** So next up, we have our guest spot. And I want to do something a little different for our guest spot since we are doing so many really lengthy history texts, and that is talk to Bree Hill, who is one of our newest contributors, and she focuses on romance. And so she was a guest about a year ago on the podcast and she joined the team earlier this year. And so she is going to be talking about two novels that she thinks would be great for our theme, *Women in History*.

[00:32:00] **Bree** Well, my name is Bree, and I am most active on Instagram. My Instagram is @fallingforromance. And I tend to dabble on YouTube, and I have a blog as well. I'm pretty much an avid romance reader. I started reading romance back in 2017, and it's just become my favorite genre ever since. I also read a lot of women's memoirs. I'm currently going through this crazy phase of reading food memoirs. I'm just loving them so much. And I also really enjoy reading poetry as well.

[00:32:36] **Bree** So the first recommendation that I have is *SCANDAL TAKES THE STAGE*, and it's actually book two in a trilogy. But I feel like it can totally be read as a standalone, which I'm assuming will go for the first book as well as the third book. And how I actually found this trilogy is there's a TED talk out there that—I believe she's a professor—and it's called *Romance Novels are Feminist*. And she mentions the third book in this trilogy in that video, along with an Alyssa Cole romance. And so I got really interested in it. So I pulled up all three titles. And the second book is the one that stood out to me the most as wanting to read.

[00:33:17] **Bree** Each of the three books follows a woman writer. The first one, she's a gossip columnist. And in this particular book that I'm recommending, *SCANDAL TAKES THE STAGE*, the heroine, Maggie, is a playwright. And the company, obviously, that she hosts her plays at, that they come to her and they're like, you know, it's been a while since you've written a new play. And the the company, the theatre needs money. So you have two weeks to produce something new, to write something new, or we're going to get new writers in, and you're going to be out.

[00:33:48] **Bree** Well, Maggie's been suffering from writer's block. And so this really is an issue for her. And there's a viscount named Cameron. And Maggie actually has a history

with the aristocracy. So she's . . . he's totally fascinated with her. He's so smitten with her. And she wants nothing to do with him because of what she's went through in the past. And once they start to open up to each other a little bit more, and she lets him know the predicament that she's in, he's just like, you need to get away from the city. You need to get away from the theatre. I have a country estate—as a viscount does, I'm assuming—and you need to get out there, and you need to write.

[00:34:35] **Bree** So he lets her go out there. And really her taking herself away from her norm, away from the city of London, away from all the actors and actresses that are depending on her to write something new because their livelihood depends on her writing. . . . Really, her taking a step away really kind of inspires her writing. But then she also gets to know Cameron without him being there, with her being in his country estate and being in his library and seeing the books that he likes to read and seeing that once upon a time he actually really liked to write—because even though he's this rich viscount, he is so in love with the theatre. He loves being in the theatre. And his favorite playwright has always been Maggie. So when he gets the chance to meet her, he's like, I will help you however I can. And this is their romance.

[00:35:23] **Bree** It's a really slow burn. But I think if anyone's new to romance, and you want to give historical romance a try, I think this is a really good place. I, for one, am still very new to the world of historical romance. Beverly Jenkins—for the longest, I told myself she was where my historical romance reading would start and end. But in 2020, I'm trying to do better with exploring that subgenre a little bit more. And this was one of the first books I read this year, and I absolutely loved it. It really . . . it just . . . it's a wonderful insight into how happiness, I think, is inspiring. She—Maggie, the heroine—is just really, really suffering from writer's block. But as we see her start to live life a little bit more and open herself up to love and happiness, the words are just like spilling from her quill. She's writing again. And it's such a good story. So I highly, highly recommend that one.

[00:36:18] **Bree** The next one, the third book is actually a heroine who everyone's trying to figure out who she is. She's this erotica writer. And people are like women should not be writing these type of stories. We need to figure out who she is. And she's . . . we meet we meet her briefly in this book. And I'm just really excited to continue on with this trilogy. So that is SCANDAL TAKES THE STAGE by Eva Leigh. And it's, again, it's book two in her quick Wicked Quills of London series. So if you're worried about, you know, it's book two, I'm going to be totally confused—you do meet the heroine from the previous book, but I did not at any point feel as though I should have read that one before reading this one. It was really good, and I feel like it stands really strong on its own.

[00:37:03] **Bree** The second one is Okay, so I'm pretty sure we all at our local Wal-Mart see the Harlequin Desire novels or the different Harlequin lines. So this is TEMPORARY WIFE TEMPTATION by Jayci Lee. You probably seen it at Wal-Mart. It's probably like five or six dollars. These romances, I wouldn't say that I was hesitant to read them, but romance is such a huge genre. So they were kind of a line that I had passed up on. But I'm trying to do better this year with reading these as well. And this one was so good. So I read it maybe two weeks ago. And my favorite thing about this is it has wonderful Korean representation in this. I lived in Korea for a year. I fell in love with the culture. But there was still so much about it that I didn't know about.

[00:37:57] **Bree** So in this one, our hero is Garrett, Garrett Song. And his grandmother basically built this big fashion empire in Los Angeles once she moved over from Korea. And he is who they've been prepping to take over the company. Well, his grandmother

wants to merge their company with—basically their company and their family—with another really big fashion empire family that's still over in Korea. So she wants to arrange a marriage with Garrett and the daughter over in Korea. Garrett is not having any of this. So he has a coworker named Natalie who's very, very headstrong. She's Korean American. Her father was an American soldier who came over there and met her mom.

[00:38:43] **Bree** And he's just like, I need a fake wife. Basically. We need to get married so that, you know. . . . He kind of takes that power back where he would have been married regardless. His grandmother was going to set it up. But in his mind, he's like, no, I'm doing this for myself. And so he gets with Natalie. And Natalie has motivations of her own. Hers is she wants to adopt her niece. But obviously, the American system makes it really hard for single women to adopt a kid on their own. So she's like, I need a fake husband as well.

[00:39:16] **Bree** So I want to recommend this one because these category romances, these harlequins, I think if you're new to romance, and you're trying to figure out what tropes work for you, I think these are really interesting places to start because they write specific tropes very well. So when I walked away from reading TEMPORARY WIFE TEMPTATION, I was just like, this is how a fake marriage romance should read. I mean, it kind of just goes step by step, beat by beat, how this trope should work and how it plays out, both Natalie and Garrett. They both have their motivations for why they need this fake marriage. And obviously, okay, now we're fake married. We need to play the part of a married couple. And now there's this close proximity. And now we're starting to have feelings for each other. But we're trying to remember that, you know, at the end of the day, I'm only doing this because I want my niece. But now I'm also kind of having feelings for you. So it just . . . it reads really well.

[00:40:21] **Bree** They're really short novels. They're less than 300 pages. So if you want a quick read, they definitely fulfill that as well. And just seeing Natalie learn a little bit about her culture; having been raised in America, she doesn't really know much about her Korean culture. So she actually learned a lot of her culture through Garrett's grandmother, who was against them marrying because obviously she wanted him to marry someone else. But once she opens up to Natalie, they realize how much they are alike. Natalie's a businesswoman, and his grandmother was a businesswoman. So it's kind of this clash of old Korean culture and new Korean culture. But Jayci Lee just did it. I think she did a fantastic job with it.

[00:41:03] **Bree** So, again, that's TEMPORARY WIFE TEMPTATION by Jayci Lee. It's a Harlequin Desire novel. And yeah. If you're just trying to figure out what tropes work for you in romance, I think that these are really good places to look. So I really enjoyed this one.

[00:41:23] **Jaclyn** I'm definitely gonna be checking those out, Bree. You have not steered me wrong in the past. You've put me on to some great historical romance recommendations. So I think I picked up my first Beverly Jenkins because of Bree. So definitely check out Bree's recommendations.

[00:41:39] **Kendra** Beverly Jenkins really is the queen, isn't she?

[00:41:41] **Jaclyn** Oh my god. She really is. I've got a new one that's coming out this year on my Net Galley.

[00:41:48] **Kendra** Oh, really?

[00:41:49] **Jaclyn** I don't even know what it's about, but it's in the same series as REBEL, the one set in New Orleans. So I'm really excited.

[00:41:57] **Kendra** You can't go wrong with Beverly Jenkins.

[00:41:59] **Jaclyn** No.

[00:42:03] **Kendra** All right. So to close us out, we're going to talk about a little bit what we're currently reading. And next time we'll talk about some further reading after we have our discussions.

[00:42:11] **Jaclyn** One of the books that I literally just picked up today, so I'm only about 60 pages in, but it's a creative nonfiction work called BLUEBERRIES by Ellena Savage. And she is a Australian author that is currently living in Athens, Greece. Now, this one is out in March from Text Publishing in Australia. And I believe that Scribe has picked it up in the UK. So look out for it over there if you're interested. But this one is described as being like a collection of essays, but it's kind of hard to pin down because it's a very creative approach to writing. And she starts with a very memoir-like recollection of a sexual assault that she experienced while traveling overseas and her trying to piece together what happened about a decade later. And it's very engagingly written because it's sort of like this interior monologue that she's having during this process. And it's obviously quite an emotive and reflective process for her. But I'm too early in to sort of give you more than that. But I'm flying through, and I'm really, really enjoying it. Thematically, it reminded me a lot of another Australian book that I loved called AXIOMATIC by Maria Tumarkin. And I thought that was interesting because Maria Tumarkin actually blurbs this book on the back. So I like that kind of creative approach to nonfiction. So I'm intrigued to see where this one goes. And what are you reading at the moment, Kendra?

[00:43:43] **Kendra** So I am prepping for a special episode in April because we have a fifth Wednesday. So I decided to do something a little different this year, and I kind of like to experiment on those days. And so I'm reading RUST: A MEMOIR OF STEEL AND GRIT by Eliese Colette Goldbach. And this is about her experience beginning to work at a steel mill in 2016. And like the process of doing that.

[00:44:09] **Kendra** So that's it for this episode. Where can people find you around the internet, Jaclyn?

[00:44:14] **Jaclyn** So I am on Instagram and Twitter. My handle is @sixminutesforme. And I'm also on BookTube, if you are over there watching bookish-related videos. Also my channel name is just "Six Minutes for Me" over there too.

[00:44:29] **Kendra** But that is our show for today. If you haven't yet, please leave us a review in your podcast app of choice. And thanks to all of you who have already done that. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. To subscribe to our newsletter or to learn about becoming one of our patrons, visit us at readingwomenpodcast.com.

[00:44:49] **Jaclyn** And be sure to join us next time where we'll be discussing THESE TRUTHS by Jill Lepore and THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS by Isabel Wilkerson. And in the meantime, you can find Reading Women over on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And thank you for listening.

