

## Ep. 111 | Golden Girls

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Jaclyn Masters. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about books around the theme Golden Girls, women authors or protagonists over fifty.

[00:00:26] **Jaclyn** You can find a complete transcript of this episode on our website, [readingwomenpodcast.com](http://readingwomenpodcast.com). And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:36] **Kendra** Well, happy birthday to Reading Women!

[00:00:38] **Jaclyn** Yeah, happy birthday, indeed! Very exciting.

[00:00:42] **Kendra** This is our fifth birthday. On June 1, 2016, we launched our first episode. And I mean, our tech has been upgraded, so I can't necessarily recommend that you go listen to it. But it was a first step into podcasting back when, you know, not everyone had a podcast like they do now. But, yeah, I can't believe it's been five years. I mean, it's changed so much, but it's been a great journey, really.

[00:01:15] **Jaclyn** It has. I'm very excited because Reading Women was actually one of the first podcasts I started listening to with any regularity when I first started listening to them. So to now be part of it, I feel like is very exciting for me.

[00:01:29] **Kendra** I mean, I love that you are. I love the perspective that you and the other co-hosts and contributors bring. And I think that's honestly why Reading Women has been so successful—that we have a great team, and that it's now expanded viewpoints. We have gone more international, which is great. And always, you know.

[00:01:52] **Jaclyn** Always growing.

[00:01:53] **Kendra** Yes, exactly. So I am very. . . . I don't know. I have so many feelings. I have so many feelings that it is five and that we have reached this stage. And so I hope everyone has enjoyed coming along the journey and, you know, still continuing to feature wonderful books by women. So to celebrate, we are doing things a little bit differently for June. So we have a wonderful group of team members, like we mentioned. And so instead of just Jaclyn and I, you know, chatting about books on this month's theme, we have the team coming on. And they're each going to share some books here on the podcast. They will all be around this month's theme. And then on the grid, we're supposed to have some wonderful favorites stacks going up so you can get to know the team members well and there should be some fun things too. We have some things planned. RuthAnn, MVP organizer of the team, has a lot of stuff that she's working on. So I'm very excited. So definitely head over to our Instagram if you haven't already where there'll be even more fun celebrating.

[00:03:04] **Kendra** All right. So intro to the theme, which was something that we have had on our possible theme list for probably three or four years. Got on there very early, and we've never just tackled it. So I appreciate Jaclyn being up for taking this on and to the rest of the team members who are going to recommend books. But we wanted to feature authors who published books as older writers. I think we so often talk about young debut

writers and younger voices. And I don't think we really talk about older women who write great literature unless they already established their career earlier in their life.

[00:03:40] **Jaclyn** And featuring protagonists, like when they were writing fiction, featuring protagonists that reflect that stage of life too. But this is a theme that I'm very excited about that I know . . . like particularly the books that Kendra and I have chosen, I read them very closely together. And I immediately wanted to do an entire theme on this because I think it's such an underrepresented part of literature, you know, fiction and nonfiction. I think there's always room to include, you know, perspectives from people that are over fifty.

[00:04:12] **Kendra** Yes. And so we have some great picks for you today on this theme. And, you know, I couldn't be more thrilled. And there's just so many wonderful selections here. There's a wide range of books. So let's just jump in to our first team recommendation.

[00:04:34] **Didi** Hi, I'm Didi. I'm the new contributor for the Reading Women. And I am an American living in Normandy, France. And I love reading literary fiction. People can find me (@browngirlreading) on Instagram, on YouTube, and on my blog. So the book that I've chosen to talk about today is called LIKE A MULE BRINGING ICE CREAM TO THE SUN by Sarah Ladipo Manyika. Okay, so this book is about a Nigerian woman who is living in San Francisco. And she is about to turn seventy-five. And she is quite the character. She drives an old vintage red Porsche. And she has a snazzy way of dressing with lots of bright colors. And she is a lover of literature because she is a doctor of literature. And so we are going to follow her journey. She is very active and loves people and chatting and just living life to the fullest. And one day she has an accident, and things develop and change.

[00:06:03] **Didi** I chose this book because, number one, I really love the books by this particular publisher, which is called Cassava Republic, because I feel like they tell very special, different stories by and about Black people. And secondly, I chose this one because it is very rare to have a protagonist be as old as seventy-five years old. We don't often get stories like that. And I feel like this one being as short as it is—it's still a story that sparks a lot of emotion, makes you think about a lot of different things. Okay, another thing to point out in this book that's really good is . . . I love . . . there's a part in the book where the main character—who was called Morayo Da Silva, Dr. Morayo Da Silva—and there's a part in the book where she talks about how she stores her books, how she classes them on the shelves. And I just thought, this is brilliant. But she doesn't put her books alphabetically on the shelves. She arranges them according to which characters that she believes should be talking to each other. And I just feel like that is just so brilliant that I almost want to do the same for my shelves. But I think it would be a little complicated because I own too many books. But it's a wonderful story for people that are super big book lovers that have a lot of books and understand the worth of owning a book and reading a book. You will enjoy this story. I feel like you should definitely check out books by Sarah Ladipo Manyika. She's an excellent writer. And she has another book out called IN DEPENDENCE, which is also another really good book. The book that I'm speaking about today is called LIKE A MULE BRINGING ICE CREAM TO THE SUN by Sarah Ladipo Manyika.

[00:08:23] **Kendra** So, Jaclyn, you have our next pick.

[00:08:26] **Jaclyn** I do. So my pick is ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng. This is a book that has been on a lot of awards lists in Australia. And I love it because it is set in

my hometown here of Melbourne. And this one is a story looking at two different characters at very different ages in their life. We're following Andy, who is in his second year of university. And he has . . . he's an international student studying in Melbourne. And he is looking for somewhere to live. He's short on funds. So he's looking for somewhere that's going to be able to, you know, be affordable for him. And he ends up moving in with Meg, who is seventy-five. And, you know, prior to Andy moving in, she was actually living on her own with only her African grey parrot, Atticus, for company.

[00:09:17] **Jaclyn** And what I love about this book is that it tackles so many issues about first impressions and the stereotypes that we have about people that are, you know, students or, you know, elderly women. There's so many misconceptions that these characters address and how, you know, their unlikely friendship sort of comes together. I think it's a really important commentary, particularly around ageism, though. And I remember when I read this book last year, I just had it immediately on my mind for a theme to talk about on the podcast, because I think it's so engaging. And it taps into so many different issues. It's, you know, looking at loneliness and connection. And I think these are such important themes, particularly as people have experienced the pandemic. So I think there's a lot in this that people will relate to beyond the theme of ageism as well. But yeah, that, again, is ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng. And that is out from Text Publishing in Australia. And I believe you can purchase the e-book internationally. I know I did from Texas when I was living over there. And Joce, I believe you have our next pick.

[00:10:31] **Joce** Hi, I'm Joce, and my book-related content can be found on the internet (@squibblesreads) on Twitter and Instagram and my old YouTube channel. I am also a co-blogger at our blog, thequietpond.com. And I love being a contributing editor here at Reading Women. The book I have chosen is THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR by Yewande Omotoso, who is a South Africa based author. She was born in Barbados and grew up in Nigeria. THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR is her second novel and was published in 2016. This book is about two women: Hortensia, who is Black, and Marion, who is white. They have both lived a long life and are now in their eighties and live in an affluent, very insular housing community in Cape Town, South Africa. Another thing they have in common is that they are both widows.

[00:11:22] **Joce** THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR talks about their experiences living through apartheid, and each woman's worldview is shaped by how they are treated because of their race. Hortensia, again, is Black. She is also married to a white man. And how folks treat them presently and in the past speaks a lot to how a South African social structure is set up and how pervasive and lingering the effects of racial trauma can be. Marion, on the other hand, is coming to terms with things that she did in her past, her internalized racism, and how it affects the way that she treats people both in and out of the housing community. However, all of these things are presented and set up in a more lighthearted way where it is about these two elderly, grumpy ladies that are feuding, almost like how people complain on like the Nextdoor app or HOA meetings and all of the stereotypes surrounding that. But I very much appreciate the discourse underneath this type of lighthearted presentation.

[00:12:24] **Joce** I chose this book because it is so layered. On the surface, it is about these two women who seem to be feuding within a wealthy community. But underneath is a deep contemporary narrative. And it's really kind of about moving through the stages of adult development. Obviously race during apartheid times and all the South African history that comes along with that and having two different experiences—contrasting Hortensia's

experience with Marion's experience—because of a variety of demographic factors, including race, race being the prominent one that's presented in the book.

[00:13:03] **Joce** Marion, on one hand, as a white woman, was in denial at the time of how devastating apartheid was. And you see her coming to terms with and facing her privilege throughout the book, learning and unlearning. Hortensia, on the other hand, is judged by a lot of the wealthy white folks as the angry Black woman stereotype because of a lot of the history of the country and how that shaped folks' worldviews, especially this predominantly white and wealthy community. In the beginning, both of these women appear curmudgeonly, but you see later on that it is so much more underneath that. This book is important because it describes a relationship between the two women that is not necessarily friendship. It's not really an enemies type of relationship, but it is very complex and nuanced. And even when they have to come together due to a series of events that takes place, it is more so a type of begrudging understanding that they can work together in some capacity despite their differences. And of course, the piece where Marion is confronting her previous ignorance. Yewande Omotoso highlights that these two women in their eighties have so much history individually. And she presents them with the gravity of their narratives and also really illustrates and highlights again how trauma can shape a person and follow them through the decades of their life.

[00:14:28] **Joce** I also chose THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR because obviously this episode focuses on this age group specifically. And it shows the different lenses with which we can look back on our lives. There is a certain wisdom that each of these women speaks with and nostalgia that they feel when they review their memories. They each look back on their experiences with this wisdom and they examine whether they think they made the right decisions, having had to learn and unlearn things over their lifetimes. I would recommend this book to really anyone. It moves quickly. It made me laugh. And by the end of the book, I wanted to have dinner with both of these women again and again. I would also recommend it to anyone who wants to learn more about this specific part of South African history through fiction. But again, I really would recommend this book to anyone. It's got such a great balance of levity and kind of looking underneath and seeing what's there. Again, this book is called THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR by Yewande Omotoso.

[00:15:37] **Jaelyn** Kendra, I think you have our next pick.

[00:15:39] **Kendra** Yes, so I picked this because I love it so much. And that is THE ERRATICS by Vickie Laveau-Harvie. Listeners may remember that I interviewed Vickie last year. And I loved talking to her. It's the longest recording I've ever done with an author. We just sat there and talked for almost like an hour and a half.

[00:16:01] **Jaelyn** Oh, wow.

[00:16:02] **Kendra** And it was a fabulous conversation. And, you know, I grew up with my parents volunteering for a senior group through our church. And so every year we would go to Amish country for this trip. And I spent a lot of time playing things like Hand and Foot and Chicken Foot (Dominoes), all sorts of different games with basically a group of grandparents. And so I have always connected well with the older people in my life and love asking them questions about their life and the stories behind who they are, you know, as I knew them as a kid. And so when I talked to Vickie about her book, that really all came back to me. Vickie is a fascinating person. She's originally from Canada, moved over to France, and then eventually where she is now in Australia. And so she wrote this book and published it in her seventies. And it is fabulous. Her writing is gorgeous. And so this is

a memoir about her experience flying back to Canada from Australia when her mom breaks her hip. And when Vickie and her sister arrive at the hospital, you know, you kind of know as a reader, you get the impression that there's something more going on. But it's not until Vickie and her sister go back home to the family farm to check on their dad, who is staying there still, that they realize that their mom has been starving him. And so this book really delves into her relationship with her parents, her very manipulative mother. And she kind of tries to figure out how the child she used to be became the woman she was currently. And she is very good at her prose in the way that she only reveals what she wants you to know about her life for that particular part of the book. I listened to the audio, and she reads it in the Australian version of the audio. And I actually ordered it from Book Depository so I could have it for always because I love. . . .

[00:18:09] **Jaelyn** That's commitment.

[00:18:10] **Kendra** Right? But she's so funny. She's has this, like, dry sense of humor. And on video, you can like . . . she just has this twinkle in her eye. And she knows she's being clever, but it's just perfection. Like. And so you can hear that on the audiobook. And once you hear her read her own prose, you can hear that's how she kind of speaks in her mind. And it's so good. It's so good. So I am fully aware that my love for Vickie Laveau-Harvie makes me a little biased, but I still hope you all go and check it out. And that is THE ERRATICS by Vickie Laveau-Harvie. So it's out in the US from Knopf. It's also available in Australia. And the audiobook is available in both territories. But I bought the Australian version on Book Depository, if you're an American interested in the one read by the author. So anyway, that was extra details for you.

[00:19:09] **Jaelyn** Very helpful, though.

[00:19:11] **Kendra** I am all here for anyone who wants to get this book. All right. So our next recommendation is coming from RuthAnn, who is one of our contributing editors. So I'm going to let RuthAnn take it away.

[00:19:26] **RuthAnn** I'm RuthAnn, and I'm a contributing editor with Reading Women. So that means behind the scenes, I work on the Patreon newsletter as well as helping with team communication and contributing to social media on occasion. Today, I am talking about LATE MIGRATIONS, which is a collection of essays by Margaret Renkl. LATE MIGRATIONS is a beautiful collection of micro essays, I've seen them called. They're each maybe one or two pages long. And they cover natural observations, sort of backyard nature musings, as well as personal history and family reflection. Margaret Renkl has been a writer and editor for many years. She was actually a high school English teacher for ten years as well. And so she is coming at this collection with a real sense of personal history, which I really loved. She was born in Alabama, but she currently lives in Nashville. So there's a real sense of the South coming through. It's very location specific, I think. I don't live in the South, but I loved reading about it and hearing her voice.

[00:20:39] **RuthAnn** So I read a couple of interviews with Margaret Renkl where she talks about how she lost her mom. Her mom passed away. And in the grieving process, she really started reflecting on their relationship and her memories of her. And her friends encouraged her to turn it into a book. And she kind of felt like, I don't even think I have a book here, but maybe it can be something. And it just turned into a beautiful collection. I can't stop saying that word when I talk about this book because the writing is wonderful, and she just evokes lovely images of the natural world and of her memories growing up. I read this book last year, in 2020. And so it was a real bright light for me during that year. It

helped me slow down because the tone is so meditative. And I want everyone to read it. So I'm very excited to talk about it. I think that the essays are lovely little jewels, and it's a great book to dip in and out of. So if you feel like your attention span is short, this is a wonderful book for you.

[00:21:42] **RuthAnn** Also, I think it's really interesting because this book was published when Margaret Renkl was fifty-seven, and it was her debut book. So that's pretty amazing, I think. I love that she was actually identified by poets and writers in 2019 as someone to look for *Five People over Fifty*. She was in that list of folks, and I just love that. I think that her career has really evolved over time, like a slow burn. And it's wonderful, I think, to have that. I think it's a different perspective, honestly, to have an older person writing these essays and reflecting really over a very full life and all the wisdom and insight that comes from that. Another thing I love about *LATE MIGRATIONS* is that it includes wonderful, beautiful art by her brother, Billy Renkl. And it's kind of—I don't know if I'm going to use the right word here; I'm not an art person—but I think it's mixed media. So I think it's a combination of drawings and found items and things like that. They look collage-y to me. And so I just loved it. I wanted to frame every plate in the book. They're full-color illustrations. There's not . . . I don't think there's one per essay, but there are quite a few throughout. And so I just thought it was a really great, special thing about this book. And I enjoyed it much more than I would have thought. It was like a lovely little bonus as I was working my way through this book, to see these works of art throughout.

[00:23:18] **RuthAnn** I would recommend *LATE MIGRATIONS* to anyone who already likes memoir, essay collections, or nature writing. But I don't think that you need to be in that camp in order to enjoy it. I think that they are really good examples of strong writing in a short format. So I would . . . I think they would be good for use in a classroom and to prompt other writing as a springboard. And I think that you can move throughout this book in a very free-form way. So if you just have it on a side table or something, and you open it, read a couple of pages, put it down, I think it works really well that way. And it is a beautiful book in and of itself. So the cover art is lovely. It's a bright yellow color. I think it's very cheering, even though there are some essays that are a little bit sad. So I think that it's really good if you know someone who likes to garden or birdwatch or lives in the country or has a vacation home in the country or something like that. I think it's a great gift book as well. So that's *LATE MIGRATIONS: A NATURAL HISTORY OF LOVE AND LOSS* by Margaret Renkl.

[00:24:34] **Kendra** Jaclyn, what are you currently reading?

[00:24:36] **Jaclyn** I am currently reading Anita Heiss's latest novel, *BILA YARRUDHANGGALANGDHURAY*, which is a Wiradjuri title, which translates to a "River of Dreams" in English. And this I'm recommending to people that enjoy books like *SALVAGE THE BONES* by Jesmyn Ward because it's very much a narrative built on a flood story and looking at a community, both a First Nations community and also a white community that are living in an area that is essentially built on a floodplain and the sort of displacement that has come through colonialism and with, you know, different legislation that is really setting up how this community is going forward. And I'm loving it so far. I believe it's available on audiobook, Kendra. I think you mentioned you had found it on Scribd, if there's anyone listening outside of Australia who'd like to read this too. But it's a beautiful book, and it's getting rave reviews from a lot of my favorite readers here in Australia. So definitely recommend that one. That is *BILA YARRUDHANGGALANGDHURAY* by Anita Heiss. And Kendra, what are you reading at the moment?

[00:25:50] **Kendra** So a mutual friend of Jaclyn and I is Matthew Sciarappa. And I have a love of queer history books. And so the most recent one that we are both like fanatically messaging each other about is LET THE RECORD SHOW: A POLITICAL HISTORY OF ACT UP NEW YORK, 1987-1993 by Sarah Schulman. And this is out from FSG Books. It's this colossal, beautiful nonfiction book that kind of listens like a podcast, if you listen to the audiobook. And it's a topical chapter. So it's not linear per se. So she more tackles different topics, and that lends the podcast feel to each of the sections. And so Sarah is sixty-two, and she is writing this like magnum opus history of ACT UP New York. And she has so many beautiful sections. And having researched a lot about this time period, she engages with the documentaries and the other texts that have come out about the period. And that's something I really love about it so far. So definitely go check that out. It is quite the book. It's like 700 something pages, I think, with notes. So it is a lot, but I am very excited about it.

[00:27:14] **Jaclyn** Oh, cool. It sounds like a good one.

[00:27:15] **Kendra** Yeah. And if you're like me, and your summer reading equals giant books, then this is a book for you. So to close us out, we now have our last recommendation from one of our contributors, Bree, so I will let her take it away.

[00:27:35] **Bree** Well, my name is Bree. And I am one of the romance contributors for the Reading Women. You can find me on Instagram (@falling4romance). So the book that I chose for today is actually a cozy mystery, which is another reading love of mine. I love them because in a lot of ways they do have romance in them. They just tend to like play out over the course of the series. But in this one that I chose, it's called a CRIME & PUNCTUATION by Kaitlynn Dunnett. And it is the first book in a Deadly Edits mystery. And what I loved about this one, the sleuth is a sixty-eight-year-old woman. And her husband has passed away. She kind of retired and like, you know, kind of just stayed to herself for a little while. And she literally packs up and moves back into her childhood home and starts working as a freelance editor. So I thought that was really cool. It was just a lot of . . . like, regardless of what age you are in life, you never know when you'll be starting over again. And a young woman by the name of Tiffany brings her a manuscript to edit. And she begins reading it. It's actually pretty good. And then the girl is found murdered. And it's like really spot-on with this book that she's written. So she finds herself, as happens in cozy mysteries, like "I've never solved a crime before, but I want to get down to the bottom of what happened to this girl" as she's reading the book. And I just loved it. It was so much fun.

[00:29:06] **Bree** I just. . . It was the first—and I'm sure there are others out there, but I haven't come across one yet, and I've read a lot of cozy mysteries—but it was the first time—I mean, I know like Murder, She Wrote, the sleuth in that one is an older woman—but I loved having a sleuth that was in this different season of life from what I normally see. And it felt so natural. Like there was a scene where she was walking with one of her girlfriends. And the girlfriend's in a wheelchair. And it just felt so natural, like there are these two older women and just having that girl talk. And I just was like, I don't see this that often. And I—it just . . . it felt really natural rather than like the age being this really big deal. And it was just cool to see someone in that perspective trying to solve a crime and like seeing how different it is being sixty-eight and trying to solve a crime versus like being twenty-eight. So yeah, I loved it. I think it's a good choice. I would recommend this to anyone who enjoys cozy mysteries. I also really enjoyed the aspects of her . . . the scenes where we get to see her editing the book. So I love books about writers and editors. So if

you're a fan of that as well, I think this is a really good book to pick up. The book is CRIME & PUNCTUATION. And it is written by Kaitlynn Dunnett. It is the first book in a Deadly Edits mystery series.

[00:30:38] **Kendra** All right! So, Jaclyn, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:30:43] **Jaclyn** So, people can find me on Instagram and BookTube and Twitter (@sixminutesforme). And Kendra, where can people find you?

[00:30:52] **Kendra** Folks can find me (@kdwinchester) primarily on Instagram. And also, basically I just take photos of books and Dylan. So, you know, it's a good place there.

[00:31:08] **Jaclyn** It's consistent content.

[00:31:09] **Kendra** Yeah. Yeah. Many thanks to the team for coming on the show today and recommending various books. I am greatly appreciative to them. And it's a wonderful way to celebrate. Also, many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. We are forever grateful for you. Thank you so, so much. This episode was produced by the team and edited by me, Kendra Winchester. Our music is by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:31:38] **Jaclyn** Join us next time when we dive into our discussion picks, ROOM FOR A STRANGER and THE ERRATICS. And in the meantime, you can find Reading Women over on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And thank you for listening.