

Ep. 112 | Room for a Stranger & The Erratics

[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 our discussion picks: ROOM FOR A STRANGER and THE ERRATICS.

[00:00:27] **Jaclyn** And you can find a complete transcript of this episode on our website, readingwomenpodcast.com. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:38] **Kendra** So we are well into Reading Women Month, which is our birthday month. We are celebrating five years, which is very exciting.

[00:00:48] **Jaclyn** Yay! Very exciting.

[00:00:48] **Kendra** We have been posting favorite stacks over on our Instagram. So if you want to go check out those, you can head over there. There will be links to our social media in the description. And we've been doing all sorts of just fun reminiscence. I've pulled out some old design files from our original logo, and it's been really interesting to just kind of go down memory lane. And Facebook likes to remind me of what was going on five years ago. And, you know. Yeah.

[00:01:21] **Jaclyn** The nostalgia.

[00:01:23] **Kendra** Yeah. You know, our very first post was me editing the podcast episode on my back porch.

[00:01:29] **Jaclyn** Oh, wow. Really? That's fun.

[00:01:32] **Kendra** Yeah, I was like, should I post this, Autumn? And she's like, sure, why not? And so we did. And, you know, we used to do graphics back in the day when we first started.

[00:01:42] **Jaclyn** Oh.

[00:01:44] **Kendra** We did quotes on our grid and different things. And then we kind of gave up on that and just did book photos because those tend to do better. But it was fun while it lasted.

[00:01:57] **Jaclyn** The evolution of Reading Women. For those who have been around since the early days.

[00:02:03] **Kendra** Yes, the series, the drama of our theme song. And, you know, it's really developed over time, which has been really interesting. This is the fourth edition of our theme song that we've had.

[00:02:15] **Jaclyn** Wow.

[00:02:16] **Kendra** And I think it's by far the best. So it's been very nice to see that progression over the course of time.

[00:02:24] **Jaclyn** Absolutely.

[00:02:27] **Kendra** Definitely had over there. And also we have this month, of course, our Patreon. So we have a special episode every month. And then for the middle of the month, RuthAnn, one of our contributing editors, does the Patreon newsletter. And she'll expand on maybe a different theme that we aren't covering. Like if it's a heritage month for something that isn't a theme or whatever, she'll cover that or just whatever she's reading. Plenty of photos of Ted, her Westie, the elderly, grumpy gentleman whom we love. So it's pretty great. Would definitely recommend. You can find that link in our show notes. So before we jump into our discussion picks, Sachi is here with a pick for our Golden Girls theme. So Sachi, take it away.

[00:03:18] **Sachi** Hi, my name is Sachi Argabright. And I'm a co-host on Reading Women. So you'll sometimes hear me on the podcast or see my posts on Reading Women's Instagram page. And you can mainly find me on the internet on Instagram (@sachireads). The book I've chosen today is AFTERLIFE by Julia Alvarez. And this was published in April 2020 by Algonquin Books. And the book is about an immigrant woman in her 60s named Antonia, who's coping with the recent death of her husband. And when Antonia is faced with a decision to help another immigrant in her community, she weighs the domino effect of her actions and must determine what she thinks is right versus wrong.

[00:03:57] **Sachi** And I initially picked up this book because I have had Julia Alvarez on my radar for a while. She's a prolific author with a really impressive backlist. But I wanted to start with her new release when it came out last year. And this book stands out to me because it has so many things to say about immigration. And Alvarez provides a really unique perspective that I haven't heard before. And she does it in only 250 pages, which I thought was really impressive. I also really liked what the book had to say about getting older and coping with grief. There aren't enough older protagonists, I feel, in contemporary fiction, and I appreciated how Alvarez wrote Antonia's character. She's frank, and she's pragmatic. And she isn't afraid to acknowledge her shortcomings, and I really appreciated that aspect of the story.

[00:04:52] **Sachi** Now, I would recommend this book to anyone who's interested in reading about themes such as immigration, as I mentioned before, or life and death. There's a lot of kind of contemplating the loss of her husband and what that means for herself as a widow now and, you know, how that affects her thinking and thinking that her husband is still alive and then realizing that he's gone. So a lot of those kind of inner thoughts are relayed on the page, which I thought was, you know, added another layer to the story. Also, family—Antonia has three sisters that she has kind of very distinct and unique relationships with each one of her sisters in a different way. And some aspects of her relationships with her sisters reminded me of my relationship with my sister. And so the family aspect of this book is really great as well. And ultimately, there's a lot of ethical dilemmas in this book. And, you know, Antonia wrestles with what "doing the right thing" means. She really kind of has to weigh out some ethical issues that I won't get into for spoiler reasons. But she kind of has that internal struggle and even thinks about, you know, if my husband was still here and we were to talk through this, like, what would my thought process be? And so I think a lot of that being added to the book really created another layer and dimension that I thought was great.

[00:06:30] **Sachi** And so there's a lot of different reasons to pick up this book. I feel like it has so many different themes and so many layers to it that I found it very kind of interesting and very different than things that I've read before. And so I think there's a lot of

reasons why people should really pick this one up. So ultimately, overall, I recommend readers to pick up this book because it's so great. I really enjoyed it. And I still think about it, even though I read it last year. And especially, you know, for readers who are looking for books by Latina authors, you know, I think picking up Alvarez, any of her books, I feel like would be a good choice. I have a lot of her backlist that I still need to get through on my TBR. But Alvarez is originally from the Dominican Republic and immigrated to the States when she was younger. And so I think she offers that unique immigrant experience. And that, at least in this story, is really woven throughout. So that is AFTERLIFE by Julia Alvarez, and that is out from Algonquin Books.

[00:07:41] **Kendra** So today we are going to be discussing our two discussion picks, like we mentioned. And so first, we have Jaclyn's pick, ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng. And then we have THE ERRATICS by Vickie Laveau-Harvie.

[00:07:56] **Jaclyn** So Sumaiyya and I had planned to discuss ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng, but we've had some tech difficulties. And between that and lockdowns, Sumaiyya and I are actually going to be doing an Instagram live show where we have like a virtual book club that you all can join in on. So we're very excited about that. And we will pop a link in the show notes so you can join. And hopefully that just gives you a different way to talk books with us. So we will pop that in the show notes for you.

[00:08:25] **Kendra** So in the meantime, Jaclyn and I are going to discuss ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng. So do you want to start us off, Jaclyn?

[00:08:34] **Jaclyn** Yeah. So this one is out from Text Publishing here in Australia. And I bought the e-book while I was in Texas. So hopefully if you're a reader in another part of the world other than Australia, you can still find it if you'd like to read it too. But to give you a bit of idea about what this one is about, it's a novel. And it's told in alternating chapters between Andy, who is an international student from Hong Kong. . . . And he is studying in Melbourne. He's studying biomed. And he's trying to get into medicine. And Andy's a really interesting character because he's under a lot of family pressure to perform at university and get good marks, get into medicine. But he's also in a very precarious financial situation, and he can't afford to live on his own.

[00:09:16] **Jaclyn** And this is a good point to talk about Meg, who is an elderly woman living on her own with her African grey parrot called Atticus. And she has recently had her home broken into. So she's enrolled in this homeshare program to have the security of having another person at home with her. And this is how their paths collide. They're housemates of sorts. And yeah, like I said before, the novel is told in these alternating chapters. So we're constantly getting a back-and-forth between Meg and Andy, which I really enjoyed, and gave a lot of movement to the book very, very quickly.

[00:09:51] **Jaclyn** One of the things that I thought really stood out in this was the way that Meg was written. And I think I mentioned on the last episode that when I read this book, it immediately made me want to have an entire theme dedicated to ageism in literature and depictions and representations of aging protagonists in literature. And I think the way that Meg is written is such a refreshing take on seeing a woman in her 70s being portrayed. She's written with so much complexity and nuance. She's not just sort of relegated to this two-dimensional characterization. She's robust. She's complicated. She's navigating things like body image issues. She's internalizing so much of the social conditioning and stereotypes around older women. But she's also working through things like grief and the

changing nature of her friendships, the way that she connects with society, with romance even. So I really enjoyed how complexly Meg was written.

[00:10:54] **Jaclyn** And one of the scenes that I wanted to talk to with Kendra today that really unpacks ageism and so much of the stereotypes that get written into literature in this space is a scene that happens later in the book. And it's not spoiling anything. But Meg is seeing a doctor, a male doctor. And he makes her feel very uncomfortable and makes comments about, "I'm sure you'd want this to be performed by a female doctor" and makes her feel very uncomfortable about her body and how she's connecting with it, how she's just feeling about being sick. And I just thought the scene was just loaded with so much without being sort of a heavy handed, you know, "This is ageism! Like, look at it." And I thought it was very clever how things were laid in that scene.

[00:11:43] **Kendra** Yes. I really appreciated the way that Melanie Cheng was able to illustrate how oftentimes medical professionals will belittle older people when they go to doctors. It's almost like they become children again in the eyes of medical professionals sometimes. And I, you know, that scene actually reminded me of going with my grandma to some of her doctor's appointments and the way that the doctor would talk down to her. And it was really difficult to read in certain ways, but also was just is very real. And I don't think a lot of people realize that that is the experience of many older people as they, you know, as you age, you become more disabled. And so. . . . And, you know, as your body deteriorates over time, that's what age is. And I think, you know, getting more medical care for that as you deteriorate is just a very emotional experience. And the doctor was not helping things in really any way, shape, or form.

[00:12:46] **Jaclyn** No, not at all. And I feel like there was so much in that scene that really benefited from—Melanie Cheng is actually a doctor herself. She's a practicing doctor. So I feel like she brought so much of maybe her own experiences and what she has seen and, you know, other things that she wanted to discuss into that as well, which I loved. And I think there's a whole sort of part of the narrative around health and how that is impacted by age as well. That was really cleverly drawn out.

[00:13:16] **Kendra** Yes, I read Meg's parts of the story. And you could see how she was resisting going to the doctor. And it wasn't because she didn't want to take care of herself or any form of really, like, self-hatred. It's more, you know, having cared for sick family members herself, she's very familiar with the realities of what living in a chronically-ill or disabled body is like in a lot of ways. She's familiar with seeing that and interacting with that and going to doctors for that reason and et cetera, et cetera. But admitting that to herself, that she is deteriorating, is a very emotional experience. It's something that I personally have done. And so even though I am not an older person, do not have the combined intersection of age in that as well, I still deeply connected with her story and with what she was going through with her health and, you know, admitting that to herself and trying to put it off as long as possible because all of that mindset and how she's thinking is all right there on the page. But like you said, it's not heavy handed. It's just part of who she is, which I think goes to show Melanie Cheng's skill and characterization of Meg.

[00:14:32] **Jaclyn** And I don't think this book sets out to be about ageism or to be exclusively about Meg, which I think is what makes these discussions all the more interesting for me because they're just part of the fabric of the whole story. In the same way, one of the key things for me, anyway, was this idea of first impressions. And I think the way that Andy and Meg see each other and having those parallel chapters and seeing

how they read each other is so interesting because the experience is often so mismatched to what they're finding the situation themselves.

[00:15:05] **Jaclyn** And one of the things that I thought was really clever in this—and this is something that I know Kendra and I agree on a lot—is the way food was written into this book and the way that food becomes this language of connection. And so many of my favorite scenes in this book were moments written around food, particularly when Andy would introduce Meg to more parts of his life and would do so over a meal, whether that's, you know, a midnight snack of some pot noodles in the kitchen or going out for his birthday to, you know, a restaurant, introducing her to some of the meals that he would eat at home with his family. I think there's so much about food in this that I feel like is representative of more of Cheng's writing. I know I'm reading her short story collection AUSTRALIA DAY at the moment, and I feel like food is used in perhaps a more overt way in those stories. But it was something that I'd seen commented on in a review by Robert Wood, which we will link in the show notes. And he's talking about the way that food and the expressions of identity are used in her writing. And I definitely think that comes through in ROOM FOR A STRANGER as well.

[00:16:16] **Kendra** Yes, I think it really captures that a community, like you mentioned, that that is established. And they're not really able to connect with each other and kind of move past those prejudices until they start sharing those meals. And so Meg is trying to feed this young man. And he dislikes all her cooking, basically, and will go and sneak at midnight and make like a cup of noodles or whatever. And so she, you know, comes out one night while he's doing this. And they share that meal of just a simple cup of noodles. And that's kind of where their relationship begins to shift. And so by the time they get to this birthday dinner and she sees, you know, Andy. . . . She describes it as almost like he becomes a new person. He's speaking his first language. He's eating food he's familiar with. And he feels more confident and in his own element. And she realizes a lot about him in that moment. And that was just so brilliantly written. I love scenes about relationships over food. That's definitely like, you know, the overlap in Jaclyn and I's Venn diagram of like great books. That's it. And it was just so well done. Food plays such a huge role in our everyday lives. And I really appreciated the way that Melanie Cheng uses it so effectively in this novel.

[00:17:39] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I love the way food came in. And I think I always admire when food takes on this kind of language of communication in books. But to sort of come to the end of our discussion, one of the other things that I wanted to mention was how seamless dialogue was in this, the writing of dialogue. There's so many points of conversation. I think the very essence of sharing a home with someone is that you have to communicate. And I think the way that dialogue is written into this captures so much of both characters, both Andy and Meg particularly. And I know it's something that other people that have read Cheng's work have commented on. We're going to link an interview that Elizabeth Flux did for Liminal magazine in the show notes because that was something that came up in that interview. And, you know, Melanie Cheng talked about how she really enjoys writing dialogue particularly. So we'll pop a link to that below, if you'd like to read that one too.

[00:18:44] **Kendra** I do also appreciate the way that Melanie Cheng tackles mental health in this book and how that is something that both Meg and Andy experience in different ways and how that manifests itself and some of the prejudices they face from different family members for experiencing mental health struggles—particularly Andy and his family and the pressure to perform in college because of what his parents have sacrificed and how that's affected his mental health. And so when he does struggle with mental illness,

that is something that, you know, he's primarily concerned with what is his family going to think? And instead of thinking, oh, how is this going to affect my life, per say? He's more thinking, oh, I don't want to, you know, shame my family. And I know a lot of our Asian American contributors have talked about the stigma of mental health in Asian American communities. And I think that Melanie Cheng, you know, is adding to that conversation so well with this book.

[00:19:57] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I really love what you say about mental health there, Kendra. And I completely agree. I think Melanie Cheng does such a great job of bringing that complexity to the characters. And I think it's a point at which they really bond on a very fundamental level. And it's sort of an inroad into their own vulnerabilities. And I think it definitely is a point at which they start to see in each other something special that they connect with on that level. So I thought it was done in a really beautiful way.

[00:20:27] **Kendra** Yeah, yeah. And then loneliness is a universal of all ages and all walks of life. So many people feel lonely in that way. And I think that she captures that in such a multifaceted and complex way. It's very intersectional as well in the way that she looks at the dynamics of who these people are and the different things they have going on in their lives. But they both find each other in their own loneliness, and it gives them a sense of comfort.

[00:21:01] **Jaclyn** Yeah, absolutely. So again, that's ROOM FOR A STRANGER by Melanie Cheng. And Kendra, you have our second discussion.

[00:21:09] **Kendra** Yes. So my discussion pick is THE ERRATICS by Vickie Laveau-Harvie. In the US, it is out from Knopf. And it won the 2019 Stella Prize, which is pretty fabulous because this is Vickie's debut book. And she published it in her early 70s.

[00:21:27] **Jaclyn** That's incredible.

[00:21:29] **Kendra** And I'm so excited that you told me about this book, Jaclyn, and was like, "Kendra, you need to read this" because I fell in love with it. And I know that, because I fell in love with it, that I am 100 percent biased. But I also think it's a fabulous book. So any opportunity to talk about it. So that's why I wanted to pick it for today. I really love the way that Vickie writes her story.

[00:21:55] **Kendra** So as a little recap, if you missed the summary last time, Vickie is originally from Canada. So she moved to France. And then eventually she moved to Australia, where she lives now with . . . her family is there and different things. When her mother fell and broke her hip, Vickie flies back to Canada. And she and her sister go to the hospital. And from the first moments, you can tell it's a very strange relationship with her mother. But you don't really understand entirely what's going on until they get back to the family farm where her dad is still there by himself. And so they get there, and they realize that their mom has been starving him. And from there, you kind of delve back into Vickie's childhood and her memories of her mother and kind of coming to terms with how the child she was is now the woman she's become and her father's complicity in not standing up for his two daughters. And it's just a whole . . . it's a whole conversation and discussion that she has in the book. And it's incredibly beautiful, so well written. And she reads the Australian edition of the audiobook so well. And it really captures a lot of the writing style. You can tell, like in her voice, how it's supposed to sound. And it just . . . it's one of my favorite audiobooks that I've ever listened to.

[00:23:19] **Jaclyn** I actually think I got, as I have read it once in print, and then I re-listened to it via audio. And I have to say I feel like I got so much more when I listened to her narrating it herself because there's so much in her humor that I think there's this whole other layer that comes out when you're listening to her saying it because—I mean, you still get it when you're reading it in print; I don't mean that it's not there—I just think there's just this added element that I think she really brings to the audiobook.

[00:23:46] **Jaclyn** One of the things I loved as well. . . . Your comment about her writing really resonated with me because I feel like she really brings the reader along for how she experienced the subject matter that she's writing about. And I remember one of the things that I thought of at the time was how much . . . I called them penny-drop moments because they're moments where she's writing this in a way that brings the reader along for discovering, like, how entrenched this issue is with her mother and how she's treating the father. And there's a scene where she's describing when they're going . . . they're driving to lunch in this particular town. And she couldn't put two and two together why her mother was so insistent that they go this particular route to this particular town. And as she's going, she realizes how many like left turns they had to make or, you know, there were very tricky roads they had to navigate with a lot of, you know, trucks that had been on long interstate journeys. And she realizes that it's because it was a dangerous route and that her mother was like really intentionally trying to put them in harm's way. And the way she wrote that scene was just like you were in her thought process. Like, it was incredible.

[00:25:01] **Kendra** Yes. The way that she captures her own mind, for lack of a better term, is incredibly fascinating because you can hear . . . you could . . . as she narrates, like, you're kind of inside that moment so well, like you said. And you become entirely engrossed. And she is very, very smart in the way that she reveals her past and the things that she wants you to know. And you can see her actively doing that. And you know there's things that she's not telling you, but that's because she wants you to know certain things in a certain order. And she will also tell an entire story in a single sentence. We find out that she has an ex-husband because of one sentence where she mentions that he hit a mailbox on his way out, like when he was driving his car, he hit a mailbox or something backing out or something like that. And that's like the only mention of him. But you know from that entire sentence what happened.

[00:26:03] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I feel like that's a particular skill to be able to do that in writing, to put so much in such few words. I was really, really impressed with that.

[00:26:16] **Kendra** I find the way that she chooses the different scenes to reveal about her life really fascinating. One of the things that I think a lot about with memoirs is how do you choose what scenes from your life to tell to tell the story that you want to tell it, if that makes sense.

[00:26:32] **Jaclyn** Oh, that's such a good point. Yeah.

[00:26:33] **Kendra** There's so much of your life. How would you even start? And that all depends on what you want to communicate to your reader. And she is masterful at this. And listening to her talk about writing this book, it wasn't as if she was talking about her first book. She sounded like she'd written a gazillion of them and was teaching this masterclass.

[00:26:55] **Jaclyn** So polished.

[00:26:55] **Kendra** Oh, so good. And one of the things that this book made me think about was how we often, in certain Western cultures, devalue the stories of our elders. And because, you know, we live in such a, I don't know, marketed society, we're always favoring youth and the young and, you know, what social media trend is on and, you know, how millennials are now old fogies and, you know, Gen-Z is now the new hip, whatever. Obviously, using the word "hip," I'm an old millennial. But you get the idea. But with Vickie's book, it was more. . . . It was just this beautiful story about her experience trying to care for her parents. And it's a topic that a lot of young people ignore, like trying to care for your elderly parents, trying to figure out their care. And so I feel like that's one of the reasons why maybe you may not have heard of this book because this is a book that focuses on a woman's experience caring for her parents who are in their 90s. It's not something that most twenty year olds are thinking about. Right? And so I think that it, you know, we need to think about the stories that we value, the age groups that we're reading from, what perspectives we're consuming. And so I think Vickie really not only is great at telling the story, but she also kind of looks at that from her own perspective and brings that to her storytelling. And it's so . . . it's so good. It's so good.

[00:28:32] **Jaclyn** And I think she really celebrates . . . her writing really celebrates its curation of life. I think, you know, this . . . what she has chosen to include, as much as what she's chosen to exclude, you know, she has so much material to choose from. She's, you know, she's writing this in her 70s. Like, she has an entire life catalogue of experiences to draw from. And I think so much of that connects with how I read, you know, our other discussion book, ROOM FOR A STRANGER. And I think in that book there's also—obviously that's fiction—but there's such an intent about what snippets of life we're getting because the protagonist in that case was in her 70s. And again, we're only getting so much of her story or, you know, snippets. It's, you know, the intention behind what we get is so intrinsic to what the author wants to do with that, whether it's fiction or nonfiction.

[00:29:29] **Kendra** Yeah, definitely. I felt like it was almost like she was cutting a gem. And she was cutting away the parts that she didn't need. And it was very finished and very polished. And, you know, we keep talking about what she's included or excluded, but the entire thing reads like a complete story. If you didn't sit down and think about this process of her writing it, you probably wouldn't really notice because of those sentences where she'll give you an entire background story that could be a book in and of itself, but in that single sentence. And she does that so . . . so well, so skillfully that you might not even notice. And I think that's really what speaks to her skill with that.

[00:30:13] **Jaclyn** Yeah. And I think just . . . its position as winning the Stella prize, for example. . . . Like, that a debut by an author in her 70s is, you know, was one of the most major literary prizes in Australia the recipient of that for that year was phenomenal. You know, you don't often see books by debut authors being published by authors that age to begin with. And I think it says a lot for what I hope are some certain shifts in the industry.

[00:30:44] **Kendra** Yeah, I hope so. And, you know, I think about like Annie Proulx published her first book in her 50s. And, you know, there's always stories like that about people who publish, you know, in middle age or later. But for Vickie, she's in her 70s. Like that's, you know, like . . . I just admire her so much. And she talks about the different residencies that she's had and how she came to write this book and how, you know, after she retired, she was a translator and speaks French and did all sorts of amazing things. And this was her first book. And she kind of went back to her family. And I think that says a lot about when we try to process who we are as people, we often go back to where we came from. And that's what she's doing in this book, is that she kind of started this book for

her to kind of figure out all of these complex things with her parents. And it turned into something incredible.

[00:31:44] **Kendra** And I'm just amazed by that this was her first book because, I mean, she's done writing work for academia and translating and whatever. But this is her first narrative, you know, kind of story. But it is really just something, a gem, that I feel like all the places where books are featured have not featured this book enough, essentially. Like Bookstagram, BookTube, get on this. You're missing out because this is a fantastic book.

[00:32:24] **Jaclyn** Yeah, I feel like I saw this a lot when I was looking at Australian content creators. And I know certainly around when the Stella prize was announced. But I really feel like readers around the world are going to love this book if they give it a chance because it's just so interesting. And it's so well written. Like, I have recommended this to so many writer friends from a craft perspective because I think her dexterity and skill with the way she constructs sentences and how much meaning she can carry, like, you know, what we've just been talking about. I think if you're a writer, you're going to just love this book from a craft perspective.

[00:33:00] **Kendra** You're going to want to study her sentences. And I feel like, you know, there are so few writers that have that skill with prose. And like different writers are skillful in different areas of writing. Right? It's not just one thing that makes a book. But when it comes to wanting to study people's prose, in and of themselves, for me, I tend to go towards essays in nonfiction, but also like only certain writers have really captured my attention in that way. And I just really think that the Vickie Laveau-Harvie is one of those. And I haven't seen this book as much in the US. So to my fellow Americans or American residents, please, please, please pick up this book because it is fantastic. And I want to see more people outside of Australia picking up this book because. . . . Yeah. I mean. . . .

[00:34:04] **Jaclyn** And this was so hard to get hold of when it first came out because of all those issues with the initial publisher. But I know from a lot of BookTube friends I've seen, there are a lot of people around the world, you know, lots of different countries that have been able to find this book. So, you know, hopefully if you're wanting to read this, no matter where you are, you'll be able to track down a copy somehow.

[00:34:25] **Kendra** Yeah. And if you want the Australian audiobook edition, you can get one on Book Depository, which is what I did. And it took it, you know, like three weeks to arrive, but well worth it.

[00:34:36] **Jaclyn** And that's quick for Book Depository.

[00:34:41] **Kendra** It's very true, especially from Australia, which is like. . . . They struggle. But it gets there eventually. And, you know, I have an audiobook finder program. And so now it's just sitting on my phone with me always. And I just love having it around. And, you know, we read a lot of books here for the podcast. And there's a secret like set of books that I personally treasure always. And they may not be the most popular or the most award winning or whatever, but they're my personal favorites. And this is on that shelf. And I don't know how else to get you to pick up the book. But.

[00:35:22] **Jaclyn** I mean, that's high praise.

[00:35:25] **Kendra** There's just nothing like it that I've ever read, really. You know, that perspective. Her skill with prose. The way that she tells the story. The way that she gets

into her own mind and the minds of, you know, the family members who are characters. And she's also performing the audiobook. So it's like the perfect storm.

[00:35:43] **Jaclyn** And she's also talking about, from a subject-matter perspective, like elder abuse is a very. . . . You know, it's a huge problem. I feel in terms of subject matter, she's directing readers' attention to an area of real concern for people as they, you know, progress in life. You know, how they'll be financially. And how, you know, health and family. And do they have support they need? There's so many things she touches on of this that, you know, I just find really interesting. In addition to everything we love about her writing in itself, I think the subject matter was fascinating too.

[00:36:18] **Kendra** And I knew nothing about Canada's health system. And so learning about that was really interesting. I didn't feel lost as, you know, an American wondering how the system works. She is able to explain it along the way as well. And also, you know, this is a huge book about disability as well because the elderly are disabled. And that's part of it. They can, you know. . . . The topics around eldercare are topics around disability. And so that's something that I also found incredibly important to discuss in the book. And, you know, my mom cared for my grandfather when I was younger. And so that's something that I had a front row seat to is caring for your family or caring for your parents and what that looks like. And so I hadn't really read a book on this topic before, I don't think. And it was just really . . . it was really just came at the right time, you know. It's one of those perfect match ups. And it's a topic that I would love to read more about. I'd love to see more people tackle it in the way that Vickie Laveau-Harvie has. And different countries are going to have different experiences. Right? So I would love to see a book on this in different countries to see what their experience is like as well.

[00:37:43] **Kendra** So obviously, we love this book. Please go check it out. That's THE ERRATICS by Vickie Laveau-Harvie. Again, the interview that I did with her last year will be linked in the show notes. And of course, you can go buy it wherever you find your books. It is available in many countries and territories, etc. If you're struggling to find it, feel free to shoot us a message.

[00:38:08] **Jaclyn** We'll help you out.

[00:38:09] **Kendra** We will. We will. We have navigated the international waters of literature for many years now. So here we are.

[00:38:18] **Jaclyn** I feel like finding ways to get Australian books when you are not in the country is like a special interest of mine.

[00:38:26] **Kendra** You know, I feel like you should be able to be hired as a consultant for that. You know?

[00:38:31] **Jaclyn** If anyone's listening, hit me up.

[00:38:36] **Kendra** But, yeah, I loved . . . I loved both the discussion books. And so definitely go check those out again. Everything will be linked in the show notes. So yeah, that is our theme on Golden Girls. Hope you enjoyed. Jaclyn, where can people find you about the internet for your wonderful skills at finding Aussie lit?

[00:38:58] **Jaclyn** I am on Instagram and Twitter and BookTube (@sixminutesforme). And Kendra, where can people find you?

[00:39:05] **Kendra** I am @kdwinchester on . . . most of the time, it's just Instagram, you know. Or on Dylan's Instagram (@thebookcorgi). So. So that's our show. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. And many thanks to Sachi for her recommendation as well. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester, with music by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:39:34] **Jaclyn** Join us next time where Kendra and Sumaiyya talk about books by Palestinian women writers. And in the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). And thank you for listening.