

## Ep. 119 | She Writes Crime

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sumaiyya Naseem. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about books around October's theme, She Writes Crime.

[00:00:26] **Sumaiyya** 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, I am so excited that it is spooky season, Sumaiyya. I've been waiting for fall. And even though I don't really get fall down here in the South, I'm still like living vicariously through my phone.

[00:00:46] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I mean, in Delhi, the weather is a bit unstable right now because it's sometimes it's like really humid. Sometimes it's rainy or like super hot. So it's kind of confusing. But I don't know why. But like September onwards, it definitely feels like there's a shift in the mood. And so I end up reading a lot of crime fiction, which is why this theme feels perfect for this time of year.

[00:01:17] **Kendra** It really does. And I really love how spooky stuff—which I feel like we've done before; we did like ghosts, basically, was it, back in the spring—so now we're to crime fiction. So people have lots of options. And I really liked that this theme got me to, like, spread my wings and discover new subgenres that I never really read a ton before. So that was pretty great.

[00:01:46] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And for me, like I've been reading crime fiction for the longest time because when I was a kid, the books that I used to read were a lot of mysteries like, you know, Agatha Christie. Or I used to read a lot of Goosebumps and R. L. Stine books in general. So I feel like this mystery element is something that I've always really enjoyed. So over the years, like I've become really fond of the genre. And I've liked exploring. And, you know, I think I'm drawn to psychological thrillers and police procedurals, which some of this we'll discuss later in our episodes. But yeah, I really love the genre. It's weird because it's so disturbing, but it's fascinating that we also end up enjoying it. And I think the success of whether you were able to enjoy a crime book or appreciate it really depends on how much you're able to detach it from reality. And with some of the books that we're discussing, I feel like that's not entirely possible to detach completely.

[00:02:57] **Kendra** And that's something that I think that women are doing well, especially. So we're going to be talking about that a little bit next time for our discussion episode. But I think that's something definitely that I'm excited to chat about because that's what I think women are doing for the genre in recent years in particular. So that's pretty cool to see.

[00:03:16] **Kendra** So before we get too far ahead of ourselves because we're obviously very excited about this theme, we do have some news and just general updates. So per usual, we want chat a little bit about our Patreon. Our Patreon really keeps the lights on here and has been very helpful during the pandemic and has really kept this project going. And we're so grateful. And so if you're interested in our Patreon, please check it out. There's a lot of different cool things that our patrons receive, including weekly Fur Baby Friday updates, a quarterly book club. And what I wanted to mention today, our exclusive Patreon podcast. Our transcript editor, Beth, and I are going to be talking about mental health in our next episode because I want to chat a little bit about this past summer and

just be really transparent about my mental health and that experience. And Beth is a very good friend of mine and has her own mental health experience that she will share as well. But it's something we don't really talk about a ton. And I feel like it's something that, you know, we're making efforts to be more transparent about as a society, but it's a . . . it's a process. So I really appreciate Beth agreeing to kind of facilitate that conversation.

[00:04:42] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I'm really looking forward to that conversation because I feel like mental health has been something a bit difficult to manage because of the pandemic and, you know, just the conditions that come with it. And I feel like it's often the last thing on our list of priorities when we're taking care of ourselves or just, you know, have goals for our life. People often prioritize things like fitness and, you know, their career goals or whatever. But when it comes to mental health, we don't really focus on it as a priority. So that's definitely a conversation that is important to have.

[00:05:25] **Kendra** Yeah, yeah. And hopefully, it'll encourage others to have conversations with the people in their lives. So that will be on our Patreon if you all are interested. And definitely, please go check that out. So we did want to give some updates. Now, everyone has already heard about like the National Book Award and the Booker Prize, and like all of that. So we will link those. And you can go check them out on your own. But we did want to talk about the JCB Prize because that is part of our, you know, Reading Women Challenge. But it also just is a great prize to keep track of. And there's so many great books featured this year.

[00:06:02] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, the JCB Prize for Literature is basically this Indian Literary Award. It's very recent. I think it was established 2018. And it's this annual prize that celebrates literature published in South Asia, particularly in India. And so it's usually like featuring books by Indian writers who write in English or whose works have been translated into English by an Indian writer. So this year's list is quite interesting because it has six debut novels out of the ten that are in the long list. There are three translations from Malayalam, and there are three women writers. So one of them is actually going to be published in the US in the coming months. That book is A DEATH IN SHONAGACHHI by Rijula Das. And it's a literary noir mystery novel, so it's definitely very on brand for this theme. And it's also . . . the JCB Prize is also in our Reading Women Challenge, like you said. So this book is definitely one that people should keep an eye out for in the US. It's a great list this year, and I'm looking forward to reading all of the books.

[00:07:21] **Kendra** Well, how cool is that? I know I'm putting that on my list when we get off the phone.

[00:07:27] **Sumaiyya** Also, I think the shortlist will be announced on the 4th of October. The winner will be announced in November, like early November, maybe on the 13th, I think.

[00:07:40] **Kendra** Well, that's cool. They always have such a great list. And I always feel very excited to read these books. And I feel like that's just something that a few different literary prizes kind of lost that kind of glamor for me. But I really enjoy seeing these books come out. And I always, you know, stay tuned until they they come to the US or somewhere close enough where I can get my hands on a copy. So that's always exciting.

[00:08:07] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I'm not going to sugarcoat it and just be honest that I feel like a lot of the major literary prizes have been going for the obvious picks, you know, based on what's really worked for the crowd. At least, that's the impression I get rather than really

looking at books of literary merit. And I don't mean that the books that are featured are not good. I just feel like a lot of books that deserve attention. . . . You know, that's how people discover books that are. . .

[00:08:37] **Kendra** Yeah.

[00:08:38] **Sumaiyya** . . . you know, not in the mainstream. It's through literary prizes. And so I feel like those books are missing out recently.

[00:08:47] **Kendra** Yeah, I feel like that discovery aspect has been missing from a lot of the prize shortlists because they're like, oh yeah, of course they are going to be on this list, and so on and so forth. But that's what's great about the JCB Prize is they're that . . . still that element of discovery. And oh, I might find a new favorite author as opposed to reading a favorite author I already have. You know, it's a different experience.

[00:09:10] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, for sure. I feel like they've really done a great job with their selections. And you can tell that a lot of thought has gone into the books that they've selected.

[00:09:21] **Kendra** Well, we are very excited to jump into our discussion of the theme. And so Sumaiyya, you chose the "She Writes Crime" theme for October. So I thought I'd start by asking you, you know, what really drew you to choosing crime fiction?

[00:09:40] **Sumaiyya** So I, like I said earlier, I really enjoy reading crime fiction novels, especially psychological thrillers, domestic thrillers, or like feminist thrillers in general. Like, I feel like these are fascinating books to read, not just because of the thrill of the mystery and, you know, feeling like a detective yourself as a reader because you're piecing all the clues together and like trying to figure out who did it or why they did it, but also because through these books, we actually dive deep into so many issues that are faced by our society, especially like violence against women. And, you know, I feel like that opens up like an avenue. You know, the genre opens up this avenue for discussions and a really proper insight into why these crimes happen. Or, you know, what is it that leads human beings to commit such terrible crimes? So I like the psychological aspect of it because we don't really feel comfortable facing the fact that human beings can be really terrible sometimes. And I feel like it's important for us to think about it because, you know, it basically then helps you figure out what the issues are and like, what is it that we can do as individuals? Because every day there is another woman that goes missing or another woman who's been murdered by, you know, her partner or by her significant other. So I feel like crime fiction really allows us to deal with these topics, but through fiction. You know. And while it's not always easy to read, I feel like the discussions that come out of it are definitely worth the discomfort that also can come with it.

[00:11:40] **Kendra** And I definitely think that the best crime fiction, at least for me, are the books that inspire that kind of thought where you're sitting down, you're thinking about society and how these characters came to be there. And so for me, I usually am drawn to character-driven in mysteries and thrillers. And it's not as much as the whodunit as more as like the whydunit, which is something that Paula Hawkins recently said in an interview. And I thought that was very interesting because she was approaching her fiction through her characters as opposed to having a plot already in mind for those characters, which was really interesting. So it was definitely something I was thinking about as I was reading picks for this theme.

[00:12:27] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and I feel like this issue of women in particular writing crime novels and like how they approach it is something we'll discuss more of in the next episode for the theme. But I quickly wanted to add that from my experience of reading, you know, like a wide range of crime novels over the years, written by men and by women, I feel like there's a lot of complexity in the work written by women because they really do go into the depths of the human psyche and try to understand what motivates people to do something like murder. You know? And I feel like the way that female writers write characters or like write about men or women in general, regardless of the genre is like more complex and layered than compared to when, generally, like men write about . . . especially about women. So that is definitely something that stands out to me in crime fiction because I feel like people have this perception that crime novels or, you know, the genre is male dominated. But the fact is that I feel like there's definitely a trend where women writers are standing out.

[00:13:45] **Kendra** Well, we're very excited to jump into our picks today. And Sumaiyya, you have our first one.

[00:13:51] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. So the first book that I have selected for this theme is THE KHAN by Saima Mir. And this was published by Westland Publications in India and originally published by Oneworld Publications in the UK. I don't know if you remember, but Saima Mir was actually one of the contributors in IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BURQA, which is an anthology of essays by Muslim women. And I've been following Saima's work ever since I read that anthology back in 2019. So this crime novel was literally one of my most anticipated books to read this year, ever since I found out that it was going to be published. And it absolutely did not disappoint. It's a really fascinating book about, you know, this young woman who becomes the heir to her father's vast British Pakistani criminal organization. So he is basically the leader of the the crime syndicate. So it's based in Bradford. And their code of conduct or like how they, you know, the ways they justify what they're doing or the laws that they follow within the crime business is basically based on the cultural laws and values of the Pashtun community.

[00:15:15] **Sumaiyya** So Jia is a fascinating character. And she is very central to the story because she is a successful lawyer, and she has a troubled past with her family. So she's kind of, you know, had some issues with them. And, you know, knowing who her father is definitely created complications. And so she has detached herself from them, and she hasn't seen them in fifteen years. But her sister is getting married, so that kind of becomes the event that brings her back to the family. And then there is some issues that happen. Her father is killed, and that opens up the position for her to, like, take up the, you know, the seat of the leader. And this novel kind of looks at what happened in the past between her and her family and who she is as a person because she's really stoic. And she's very, like, quite a bold character. And we really get to understand who she is as a person and what has caused her to become the person that she is.

[00:16:21] **Sumaiyya** What I loved about this book is the way that the past and the present kind of work together to form that well-rounded picture of Jia Khan and also the elements where, you know, there's like a lot of questions about justice and the need for people like Jia Khan's father or the need for like these people who do terrible things but in order to keep the community safe, especially in a country like Britain, where you have such a huge divide between the ethnic minorities and the white communities. So it's a fascinating novel. And I think that anyone who's read and loved THE GODFATHER should read this book because it's like, obviously, way better. And it's within that genre of the mob boss and his family and like, you know, the succession and all of those things. And I kind of want to end

with this fascinating motto that, you know, that Jia Khan follows that her father has taught her. . . . Because her father is this fascinating figure in this book. I really loved him, despite all his flaws, despite him being literally like a mob boss. He tells her, "Be twice as good as men and four times as good as white men." And I feel like it's a fascinating look at the way that she kind of takes up this position as a woman in, you know, a leadership role that is usually, you know, taken up by men. So it's like a woman in a male space, especially like in a traditional community like the Pakistani Pashtun community. So, yeah, I definitely recommend it. I really loved it. It was a brilliant book.

[00:18:19] **Kendra** Well, it sounds fabulist. Fabulist. Oh my word. It sounds fabulous. And in our picks today, we tried to pick different subgenres for each pick. And so organized crime is a subgenre I have not really delved into until this theme. So I'm very excited. And as soon as I can get my hands on the audio, I will be listening to that one.

[00:18:46] **Sumaiyya** So that was THE KHAN by Saima Mir, published by Westland Publications in India and Oneworld Publications in the UK. So, Kendra, tell us about your first pick for this theme.

[00:18:58] **Kendra** So I chose a book that's been on my TBR for a long time. And that is OUT by Natsuo Kirino. And that is translated by Stephen Snyder. And that is. . . . This book. This book, Sumaiyya. I don't even know where to start. And we're especially not giving spoilers for these episodes because, you know, there's a whole whodunit part of this. But this is Japanese crime fiction. And it won and was nominated for several awards, including winning the Grand Prix for Crime Fiction in Japan, and it also was an Edgar Nominee for Best Novel when it came out. And this features four women who are working the night shift at this boxed-food factory. And this one woman has a very terrible husband. And she kind of snaps after one night when she comes home and he is abusive. And so she snaps, and she strangles him. And this is the very beginning of the book. This is the whole, like, premise. So I'm not spoiling anything. And so she kind of freaks out. And her friend is like, "I'll take care of it." So they end up taking care of it.

[00:20:17] **Kendra** And so I do want to give a content warning that if you are squeamish about bodies and like disposing of bodies and descriptions of stuff like that, this may not be the book for you because there is a lot of detail about how they dismember this body. So just as a heads up, you know, just know what you're getting into.

[00:20:42] **Kendra** And this is a rather long book. It's about 18 or 19 hours on audio. And so it is about these four women. And they're each these well-rounded characters that play on expectations of what women should be. And they're all working class women trying to make it. And they also have this very weird thing that they were having to do of like throw these trash bags into random dumpsters around Tokyo. And it's very surreal. There's a lot of dark humor. There is also like organized crime as like a subplot in there. And oh my stars. I mean, how do you even describe a book like this is the question that I have right now?

[00:21:29] **Sumaiyya** Like, all of the dark and gritty details of committing a murder, like, what is it that you have to deal with after you do it? You know, like, it sounds like this is what the book is all about is, you know. . . . Like. . . .

[00:21:45] **Kendra** Basically.

[00:21:45] **Sumaiyya** It doesn't end with the murder, but it comes with all of the, yeah, the insanity of like . . . it's crazy.

[00:21:56] **Kendra** You've kind of switched teams, right? Like instead of being on the side of the people who are trying to solve the murder, you're on the side of the people who committed the murder. And it's just like a mind warp. And I just found that thought process fascinating. And the way that she was able to get into the heads of each of these characters, I mean, it's definitely one of a kind. I don't . . . I don't even know how to describe it. But I understand why people have been talking about it for almost two decades.

[00:22:29] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I think it's a very unique quality that crime novels have is they put you in the shoes of the person who's probably a terrible person. But you root for them. And it kind of brings out all these questions about morality and like, you know, what is appropriate? And why is it that this person has done a terrible crime, but you don't want them to get caught? You're kind of like, okay, I hope this doesn't happen, you know. I hope they get away with it. It's . . . yeah. I really like TV shows that also do that. So I don't know if you've watched it, but "How to Get Away with Murder" is fascinating.

[00:23:09] **Kendra** Yes, oh my word.

[00:23:13] **Sumaiyya** It's so good.

[00:23:13] **Kendra** I love it. I love Viola Davis. Like, ugh.

[00:23:16] **Sumaiyya** She is. Wow. She's brilliant. And another show—for people who love "Breaking Bad"—another show that I really loved, which kind of switches the genders of that situation, is "Good Girls." I don't know if you've watched it, but that is another brilliant show that kind of flashed in my mind when you were talking about these characters disposing of a body in like garbage cans because there's a lot of gory stuff that happens in that book as well. And these women, you know, who are like moms, they become criminals. And you root for them. So it's like you said. It's really strange where your mind goes and, like, how your loyalties kind of leave with the person. Because I guess, like in the end, these books and shows, these stories basically, you know, they manipulate what . . . the life around the law. And like some, because sometimes things might be illegal, but they make sense. And it's weird. But I like that, you know, we get to that point as readers. Strange.

[00:24:31] **Kendra** It's definitely . . . it makes you think. And that's something that I think that stands out about this book is that it does make you think about who you're rooting for and what's going on and how basically everyone is terrible in this book. So if you have to have likable main characters, this is also probably not for you. So, yeah, so that is definitely something that, you know, if you're interested in, you know, Japanese crime fiction—which has its own beautiful, amazing subgenre—this is definitely one to check out. And from there, you will get all sorts of recommendations if you really enjoy it. So that's definitely a rabbit hole worth exploring.

[00:25:10] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. I honestly can't wait to read it because, you know, I love Japanese literature. And I feel like Japanese crime novels are something that I haven't explored as much as I have with other areas of crime literature.

[00:25:27] **Kendra** So that is OUT by Natsuo Kirino, and that is translated by Stephen Snyder. And I have the copy from the UK, and that's out from Vintage. It's been out so long. There's so many different editions in so many countries. You'll probably be able to find something where you're at because it came out in like the mid 2000s. So, all right. Well, Sumaiyya, you have our first discussion pick.

[00:25:51] **Sumaiyya** So my discussion pick for this theme as THE UNQUIET DEAD by Ausma Zehanat Khan. This was published by No Exit Press in the UK. And I actually read the book on Scribd. And Ausma's books have been, you know, on my TBR or on my wish list for so long. But it's difficult to find copies of them locally. But working on this crime fiction theme kind of gave me the push that I needed to pick up the e-book because I remember, Kendra, when we were having conversations about the books that we should read, you had mentioned this. And I was like, oh my god, yeah, that's a book I really want to read. So this is the first of six novels, or, I think, five novels in the Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty series. And they were all published within a span of like the last five years or so. So these books, including Ausma's fantasy novels, kind of show you what a brilliant and prolific writer she is. And I have to say that from the start, the research and eye for detail in this book was incredible.

[00:26:58] **Sumaiyya** So the premise of this novel is that Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty are police officers who work for the community relations branch, which basically looks at crime or issues related to minority communities. So the novel kind of begins when they are assigned this case, who is, you know, of a man who fell to his death. But he's a wealthy white man. So it's curious that these, you know, officers in the community relations branch have been assigned this case. And so they start investigating, and they realize that he might not be who he looks like. And so with this investigation and the story that unfolds, we kind of learn about the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the '90s. So the larger historical event kind of serves as the backdrop of this murder mystery that is the Bosnian War and the Srebrenica massacre.

[00:28:02] **Sumaiyya** So I think it's going to be quite tough talking about this book without spoiling it. But I'm just going to say that THE UNQUIET DEAD had all of the elements of a really good police procedural. Things like, you know, detectives with a dark past or trouble in their personal lives, a tight and very well-constructed plot that keeps you guessing until the end, and of course, a crime that kind of reveals deeper issues in the community—or, in this case, we have a possible murder that reveals how your neighbor might not even be who they say they are. So I think that, overall, this book kind of raised some complicated questions about justice and the way that it is served or even pursued extensively kind of grapples with the pain and the trauma of survivors of war and genocide. So it is quite a fascinating police procedural. And weird to say, but I really loved it.

[00:29:03] **Kendra** Her books are fabulous. And I've read the first three in the series. And then there's a novella in between two of the novels at some point that you can get online. But I love the way that she takes Esa's character and just makes him this fully fleshed-out human being. And I have this memory of him standing at various crime scenes and holding . . . is it prayer beads that he's holding?

[00:29:36] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, the rosary. Yeah.

[00:29:37] **Kendra** Him holding them and and moving them in his hands, like fidgeting with them, I guess I should say. And like. . . . And that just stuck in my mind. And she has a

way of creating those moments that are very detailed. And you're like, I see this person. It's like, you're watching a television show or something. I love her writing.

[00:30:00] **Sumaiyya** Exactly!

[00:30:00] **Kendra** Mmm hmm.

[00:30:01] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And she creates such vivid scenes, especially when they're, you know, like at a crime scene or if they're interrogating someone. And I really like the balance that, you know, he is a second-generation Canadian Muslim of Pakistani descent. And she is a, you know, a white Canadian woman. So they really balance each other out, especially in their beliefs. You know, him being someone who has faith. And she is more, I think, like she is—what's the word—she's more liberal or is not really tied to a specific belief or faith. And she's more like practical in that sense. Like she believes in logic, I guess. So it's a very fascinating balance that we get from this duo. And I really liked the way that they were written as characters. There's a lot to discuss. And we're obviously going to try and keep it spoiler free, which is why talking about this book as a preview was so difficult. Like.

[00:31:06] **Kendra** Yes.

[00:31:07] **Sumaiyya** I didn't know how to introduce it. Again, I'm the kind of person who likes reading novels without really knowing what's going to happen. Like, especially crime novels, I want a completely fresh, you know, like an MP. Like, what do you call it? Oh my god, what's the word?

[00:31:28] **Kendra** Blank slate?

[00:31:30] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I like having a blank slate to work with when I'm starting a crime novel. So I feel bad for all of our listeners who also like that. So I feel like the details that we will discuss will obviously be things that are already mentioned on the blurb. And so, you know, let's see how that goes. Yeah. So that was *THE UNQUIET DEAD* by Ausma Zehanat Khan, published by No Exit Press in the UK. Okay. Next up then. So, Kendra, tell us about your discussion pick for this theme.

[00:32:09] **Kendra** So I chose a book that you actually recommended to me, which is *QUICKSAND* by Malin Persson Giolito. And this is translated from Swedish by Rachel Willson-Broyles. And so this is a Scandinavian crime novel. And there is a whole subgenre there that we will talk about next time in our discussion episode. But I have not read a lot of like Nordic noir or any of the Scandinavian, you know, branches of crime fiction, really. And so I was very excited to read this book. And it's out from the Other Press here in the US, but it has been published in so many different countries. I imagine you'll be able to find a copy. I bought one used. So if you're here in the US, that is also an option because there is a Netflix miniseries. So they're everywhere, which is great when you're looking for a backlist book.

[00:33:08] **Kendra** But I really love this book. And it starts with Maja, who is eighteen and on trial for a situation that happened where her boyfriend brought guns to school and shot and killed several people. And then it starts out, we know she's on trial. And they're trying to figure out . . . basically decide whether or not she had a role to play in that. And so we meet her at the beginning of this trial, and she kind of introduces you to her situation. And then we go into flashbacks where she meets Sebastian, her boyfriend and how that



started. And we get to know her and their relationship. And it's very character driven. And you begin to wonder of all about these ideas of justice and what that looks like. And of course, you're trying to figure out did or didn't she not have a part in this school shooting? And there's just so much going on that you're trying to figure out as you're jumping back and forth in time from the present trial to her flashbacks.

[00:34:16] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, it's quite a fascinating novel, which, you know, I felt like really dived deep into the issue of why a school shooting happened and made it quite fascinating to read about the, you know, the situations or the conditions that led to that crime. And I really liked her perspective as the character changes. You know, your perception of her changes as the novel progresses. So, yeah, I'm really looking forward to discussing it with you.

[00:34:50] **Kendra** This all starts out where you are kind of meeting her in this courtroom setting. And you kind of have an idea of who she is and why she's there. And you have all these assumptions going into it. And then we flash back, and she kind of challenges those assumptions in certain ways. And that is something that I loved experiencing reading the book. We also watched the miniseries, so we're going to talk about that a little bit. And I love the miniseries probably more than the book, which might . . . that might be a sin to mention here in Bookishlandia. But I love . . . I love them both. So I would definitely check it out once you've read the book. Check out the miniseries. But we're excited to talk about that too because of some of their casting choices and all sorts of things. So we won't be spoiling the book. We're more going to talk about the genre and different things that are spoiler free, so never fear. But if you'd like to read along, you can definitely go check that out. So next time, we'll be talking about QUICKSAND by Malin Persson Giolito, translated from Swedish by Rachel Willson-Broyles.

[00:36:03] **Sumaiyya** So for this episode, we have a very special guest, Abby, who is known as @crimebythebook on Instagram. And she is one of my favorite Bookstagrammers who talks about, you know, who talks exclusively about crime fiction. And she is definitely an expert on the subject. And I'm so excited that we have her as a guest. I definitely recommend everyone to check out her Instagram. She does a lot of author interviews and definitely has a very consistent brand and very dedicated to introducing people to new books in the genre. So I'm so happy to introduce Abby. And let's hear from her.

[00:36:49] **Abby** Hi, I'm Abby [00:36:50] **Endler**, [0.0s] I'm the creator of Crime by the Book, a crime fiction review website and Instagram account. You can find me on Instagram (@crimebythebook) or at crimebythebook.com.

[00:36:59] **Abby** The first book I've chosen to talk about is MY SWEET GIRL by Amanda Jayatissa. MY SWEET GIRL is a psychological thriller that moves between present day San Francisco and an orphanage in Sri Lanka in our protagonist's childhood. The story follows a woman named Paloma, who comes home to her San Francisco apartment one day to discover her roommate dead in the apartment. Paloma is, of course, terrified. And she flees the apartment in fear. She passes out in her building stairwell. And when she kind of comes to, she realizes that she should go back to the apartment and call the police. But when she gets there, she's greeted by a very confusing sight. The apartment is pristine. There's no sign of her roommate's body. There's no trace of a crime being committed there whatsoever. Paloma knows what she saw, but now she has to figure out how to prove it. And the deeper she digs in this mystery, the more convinced she becomes that this bizarre event may have ties to a dark secret from her past. So that's the story's

present-day timeline. And the book also has an amazing past timeline that takes readers back to the Sri Lankan orphanage where Paloma grew up. So we uncover bit-by-bit in that timeline the dark secret from her childhood that has been following Paloma all these years.

[00:38:15] **Abby** This is one of those books that I will just be recommending to anyone and everyone who will listen. I was lucky enough to read an early copy of this book this summer. It just published a couple of weeks ago, and this will easily be one of my favorite books of the year. I think there's so much that makes this book stand out. I loved Paloma's voice and getting inside her head. I think the author does an amazing job depicting a character who really has to keep it together on the outside while on the inside, her entire world is in upheaval. I loved that we, as the reader, get to see what Paloma is really thinking and how she's really feeling. She's angry. She's sometimes bitter. She's sometimes afraid. She's sometimes very funny. I loved getting to know her character in such an honest way. I also think that this book's past timeline really stood out for me. It felt to me like this past timeline had some gothic influences to it. You obviously have Paloma growing up in an orphanage, which feels very gothic to me. And you also have this amazing, spooky urban legend that is woven into the past timeline as well. This book was just incredible to me on so many levels. It's one that I truly, honestly have not been able to stop thinking about since I read it.

[00:39:26] **Abby** I would recommend MY SWEET GIRL to anyone who wants just great psychological suspense. But in particular, I would say readers who love unreliable narrators—but unreliable narrators done really well, not the kind of cliché stereotypical kind—will love MY SWEET GIRL. And of course, I also think that that gothic element that I mentioned is just a huge selling point of this book as well. If you love stories with those gothic influences with maybe a touch of a ghost story here or there, I think that you will love MY SWEET GIRL. That was MY SWEET GIRL by Amanda Jayatissa.

[00:40:01] **Abby** For my second recommendation, I would love to talk a little bit about I REMEMBER YOU by Yrsa Sigurdardottir. I am obsessed with crime novels coming out of Scandinavia. And one of the authors in this space who I don't think gets enough recognition is Yrsa Siguroardottir. Yrsa is Icelandic. She writes both series and standalones. And the book I want to tell you about today is one of her creepiest standalone stories. I REMEMBER YOU is a missing persons mystery meets ghost story. It has two plotlines that end up converging over the course of the book. The first plotline follows a doctor whose son has gone missing. And he's desperately chasing down any clue he can possibly find as to where his son might have gone. In the other plotline, readers follow a group of friends who decide to purchase and renovate a rundown, abandoned house in the Icelandic west fjords. But as they dig into the renovation, they begin to feel like something isn't quite right in the house. And when a terrible storm delays the return of the boat that's going to bring them back home, the real terror sets in. This book moves between the father's search for his missing son and the very unfortunate series of events that befall this friend group.

[00:41:10] **Abby** As I mentioned, Yrsa is one of these hidden-gem authors that I just hope anyone who's interested in Scandinavian crime fiction will check out. Yrsa's work in general really stands out to me on a number of levels. My personal reading tastes definitely lean pretty dark and gritty. And Yrsa's work always exemplifies those qualities. I also love books that allow me to "armchair travel." And to me, there's nowhere better to go than to a chilling wintery corner of Iceland. Yrsa's books also tend to have a bit of horror inspiration to them. She herself is a big horror fan. She loves anything creepy and spooky, and I'm the exact same way. I love books that blend crime fiction with those extra creepy,

horror-inspired touches. And that's exactly what I loved about I REMEMBER YOU. It's a perfect blend of a down-to-earth realistic missing persons mystery that will satisfy your inner armchair detective, coupled with a spooky ghost story that is really perfect for the Halloween season that we're heading into.

[00:42:09] **Abby** I would recommend I REMEMBER YOU first and foremost as a perfect Halloween read. This book will also work really well for anyone who maybe has dabbled a little bit in the Scandinavian crime fiction tradition but wants to expand their experience and exposure to this genre. It will be a hit for anyone who loves a great ghost story and wants something slow burning and spine tingling. And true to form for Yrsa and true to why I love her work, readers who just want that kind of dark, chilling, sinister mystery to solve will love this book as well. That was I REMEMBER YOU by Yrsa Siguroardottir.

[00:42:44] **Abby** My love of the crime fiction genre really started when I was a kid when I discovered Nancy Drew. I remember I was home sick from school one day, and I was poking around in our attic. I don't know why I was up in our attic to begin with. But I found this box of my mom's old Nancy Drew books that she had from when she was growing up. And I distinctly remember cracking one open and falling in love with the stories that I found in those pages. And I've really been reading crime novels, mystery novels ever since. As I grew up, I kind of graduated into Agatha Christie books. And from there I began exploring the genre in a more widespread way. I think for me, as an adult crime reader, I really fell in sync with the Scandinavian crime fiction tradition. That's become my personal favorite subgenre within the crime fiction world. But I have loved and continue to love exploring this genre as widely as I can. And that's kind of why I started Crime by the Book was to share my love of these books with other readers and to connect with like-minded crime fiction readers from around the world. So you can find Crime by the Book online at [crimebythebook.com](http://crimebythebook.com) or over on Instagram (@crimebythebook).

[00:43:58] **Kendra** Well, thank you so much, Abby, for sharing those two books. I will definitely go pick them up after we're done recording this. I love her Instagram. So again, please go check out Crime by the Book. It is gorgeous. Also, I'm not sure if we mentioned that or not. But like, perfection. Well, those are our six picks for the month. Sumaiyya, what are you currently reading?

[00:44:25] **Sumaiyya** So I'm currently reading HEAVEN by Mieko Kawakami, and this was translated from the Japanese by Sam Bett and David Boyd. I really loved BREASTS AND EGGS by Mieko Kawakami. It was one of my favorite books in August. And HEAVEN is about a young boy and I think a girl who, you know, who are both bullied and tormented at school. So it's kind of about, you know, their friendship and their relationship. And it looks at what a relationship is like when the common factor that you both have is the fact that you were bullied or tormented. So I love Mieko Kawakami. I think she's a brilliant feminist writer. And yeah, I'm excited to be reading it. It's HEAVEN by Mieko Kawakami. This was published by Picador. What about you, Kendra? What's your current read?

[00:45:29] **Kendra** I am reading our Patreon book club pick at the time of this recording, which is BLACK WATER SISTER by Zen Cho. And it's about our protagonist, who is flying back to her family's home in Malaysia. And she is having to kind of start her life over a bit. And so she's queer, and she doesn't know how that's going to work. And when she arrives, she kind of learns about this family spirit. And I don't want to say anything else because of spoilers. But Zen Cho is such an incredible writer. I'm very excited to discuss this with our

patrons. And she wrote *SORCERER TO THE CROWN*. And I hadn't read anything else besides her until this book, so definitely go check out her back list as well.

[00:46:20] **Sumaiyya** That sounds amazing. I'm definitely looking forward to reading her books. As you know, I'm super into Malaysian literature at the moment. And yeah, I haven't actually read her work before, so it's really exciting to have an author to look forward to.

[00:46:35] **Kendra** Yeah, and *SORCERER TO THE CROWN* is kind of like cozy and delightful in a lot of vibey ways. So love her. She has so much versatility in the fantastical things that she writes. So, so love that about her work. Well, Sumaiyya, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:46:55] **Sumaiyya** My main online presence is my Instagram, where you can find me (@sumaiyya.books). That's about it. I don't really have any other socials that I'm active on at the moment.

[00:47:08] **Kendra** And folks can find me (@kdwinchester). And fair warning, you will probably just see puppies for the next foreseeable future on my social media as we've added a new member to our family. So go check that out. But that's our show! Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester. And our music is by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:47:40] **Sumaiyya** Join us next time when we dive into our discussion picks, *QUICKSAND* and *THE UNQUIET DEAD*. In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thank you so much for listening.