

Ep. 92 | The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree and A Burning

[00:00:09] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sumaiyya Nassem. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim half the bookshelf by discussing books written by or about women. And this is episode 92, where we're talking about THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE GREENGAGE TREE by Shokoofeh Azar and A BURNING by Megha Majumdar.

[00:00:30] **Sumaiyya** You can find a complete transcript and a list of all the books mentioned today linked in our show notes. And don't forget to subscribe, so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:40] **Kendra** So last episode, we talked about why we wanted to talk about this month's theme, which is "Fight Like a Girl" and all of the different facets that are included in that kind of theme. It's very broad, but I feel like it's still very important, all the different ways that we're talking about it.

[00:00:58] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and this episode, I kind of wanted to highlight just a little bit about women's participation in revolutions and political protest because I feel like—from my perspective, you know, as someone who's grown up in Saudi Arabia and is currently living in India—I feel like people don't give Arab and Muslim women enough credit for their resistance and tend to see us as passive figures who are oppressed by patriarchy. But I feel like if you read the kind of stories that we're talking about in this theme, and if you also do a little research about women's activism, you will learn about the ways that women have actually actively been involved in revolutions around the Middle East and how women also have used social media and online activism, for example, to create spaces that redefine patriarchal gender roles. And there's actually even research about this specific topic.

[00:01:50] **Kendra** Yeah, and I feel like a lot of these books that we'll be talking about today should be translated into French and sent to the French government. So that, you know, women can wear religious head coverings of their own free will in public because that would be great. Thanks, France. You know.

[00:02:05] **Sumaiyya** I mean, I thought empowerment was all about choice.

[00:02:10] **Kendra** I'm like, we are here for this today. Because this is a great theme, and it's something we should be discussing. And I think, you know, I'm here as like Western representative of how we Western people need to really read more stories like this and really look to these women to make the first move . . . because it's not our jobs. Our job is to support and follow in these circumstances. And I think these books are a great example of women around the world who have stood up for themselves in their own countries and in their own communities.

[00:02:44] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and as we see in this episode, you know, with our discussion picks, we're seeing how powerful writing is as an act of resistance. And so these books definitely are also representative of that, how you can write that and how your writing can be how you resist. And that's also really important. That's why we love literature. That's why we love stories.

[00:03:05] **Kendra** Yes. And women have been writing these stories since time immemorial. And I think it's important to listen. And I just love the books that we've chosen

today and how complex they are and how they're all about female resistance of various kinds. And we chose them independently. And they really, though, mesh well together, which I feel like is the story . . . the story of our lives here on Reading Women.

[00:03:30] **Sumaiyya** We usually have really good chemistry with the books that we select, Kendra. Women have also taken part in political protest that happens on the streets. And I mean, after saying that, you know, writing is a great way to celebrate. I also want to acknowledge that it's not just writing. Women are very actively involved. And I think it's inevitable because wars and oppressive regimes like the ones that we will be discussing . . . they disproportionately affect women. So we do have a lot to fight for. And I wanted to mention a very powerful photograph that emerged from protests in Sudan last year. This was a photo of Alaa Salah, a university student who was standing in a traditional white outfit on top of a car surrounded by a sea of protesters as she led the protest. And with the single photograph, Alaa Salah became a symbolic figure of women's defiance in Sudan. And in fact, the photograph was taken by Lana Haroun, a female photographer. So whether it's Alaa or Lana, they both use their talent and their ways to resist. And we also had very similar, powerful images of young women emerge from protests that happened in India in December here in New Delhi and other parts of the country as well.

[00:04:49] **Kendra** This photo is amazing. I've just Googled it, and we'll be sure to link it in the show notes. But it's such a powerful photo. And in the photo, you can see all of these women also taking photos as well on their phones.

[00:05:01] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and we're living in the kinds of times where there are so many different mediums through which, you know, you are recording your resistance and sharing it with the world. So there's really no excuse for people to say that Arab women or Muslim women are oppressed and subservient when really we are very active and care about our lives and care about, you know, our communities and are fighting for them.

[00:05:26] **Kendra** Yeah, I think these books definitely illustrate that in so many different ways. And I think it's just like really the tip of the iceberg. But hopefully, we'll give people a starting place today.

[00:05:36] **Sumaiyya** Definitely. So. All right. So, Kendra, you're the first one to go and tell us about your discussion pick for today.

[00:05:42] **Kendra** So I have chosen THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE GREENGAGE TREE by Shokoofeh Azar. And this is a translated from Farsi by an anonymous translator, who's chosen to remain nameless out of safety concerns. And so this book really looks at the decades after the Iranian revolution in 1979 and looks at a single family. And so a 13-year-old girl is killed during this conflict. And so she follows her family out to a rural village, and she lives her life with her family as a ghost. And she is the first-person narrator of this entire novel. And it really looks at, you know, how the effects of this conflict affected this family in certain ways. And to be clear, this family is a family of privilege. They've had a lot of intellectual debates, and they have books available and all these different things. So it is a particular kind of family at this time. But it is really interesting the way that the author kind of unravels the story throughout the different chapters.

[00:06:54] **Sumaiyya** And I think the author mentioned that she is inspired by the South American tradition of magic realism, but there's also a lot of Iranian magic realism. Do you want to talk about that a bit?

[00:07:05] **Kendra** Yeah! So there's a really complex combination of the two with this novel. I will link the interview that I talked about last episode in this episode's show notes as well. Highly encourage you to go check it out. She's amazing. And she talks about how she loves, you know, ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE. But she also wanted to include a lot of Persian folklore. And so the interviewer is Australian because that's where the author lives now. And she asked a really interesting question about does the author think that Western readers will understand the book? And she said, you know, she laughed a little bit and said, No, I don't because this is a type of storytelling that Western readers are resistant to because it embraces the fantastical. And that is a Kendra paraphrase. But it really, I think, made me think about my own perception and my approach to this book as someone from the West reading this book because I needed to approach it with an open mind and an understanding that there are just some things I wouldn't understand culturally from the book. And so there are lots of footnotes and all sorts of things in this edition. But it's a really interesting way to approach going about telling this story.

[00:08:27] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I actually really related to that aspect of there being these fantastical elements or the magic realism, the presence of the Djinn in the story, the ghosts . . . because I—you know, even though I'm not from Iran . . . I'm from Saudi Arabia—but, you know, the Muslim tradition or the Arab tradition or folklore is very much similar to what they have in Iran because even One Thousand and One Nights is something that we celebrate in our culture. So I really related to seeing the family interact with Djinn because, in the Islamic tradition, we believe that they are real beings that live in a parallel, unseen world that exists alongside our own. So some of the situations that she described with Auntie Turan and her children and the community of the Djinn in the forest, they actually reminded me of stories that I have listened to while growing up, you know, like stories that my father has told us or people in my family, extended family in India have talked about. So it's very interesting to me how we are in this world that is kind of, you know, filled with all this logic and reason from all different directions, but we still have these beliefs that really defy that logic. And there's so much mystery and strangeness in life, especially in the parts of the world that I've lived in and especially in the Muslim culture. So it was really nice to see that in the book. And I guess that kind of explains why she feels that Western readers may not really warm up to that because perhaps that is missing in some of the areas.

[00:10:01] **Kendra** I thought it was very interesting how she has parallels genuine religious and spiritual beliefs alongside folklore and mythology. And she kind of interweaves the two together in the different chapters, which act as little fairy tales or short stories as we might understand them here in our Western English language tradition. And so I really appreciated the way that she very skillfully interwove those two things together and created these stories about the family that has moved out to the rural village area that they live in. And it was just fascinating because once I understood that it was very episodic and that each chapter could be read on its own almost, it made the reading experience change for me because then I understood that I was reading a collection of interconnected short stories that also were sort of like fairy tales, but also were commenting. . . . It was a very political novel. They're also commenting on Iranian government and what happened after the revolution and all sorts of things.

[00:11:06] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, life, culture, the way people interact, especially within a system like the religious dictatorship that we have. I was wondering, out of all of these different episodes and short stories, or retellings rather, did you have a favorite?

[00:11:20] **Kendra** I really liked the chapter about how Abita, who is the narrator's sister, falls in love with a man who can read dragonflies. And the dragonflies tell him stuff about truths about the world, essentially. They might be predictions or they might tell him what a stranger feels or if certain things are friendly. It's really fascinating. And I found that very interesting because I—being from Appalachia—I lean towards nature. I lean towards understanding nature. When I go out into the woods, it seems so vibrant and full of life to me. It's not quiet or suffocating like people might say in the city or from the city. And so reading dragonflies was like, oh, yeah, that's cool. That's, you know, that's part of my cultural tradition, looking at nature and finding truth in that. So I loved that chapter.

[00:12:17] **Sumaiyya** And I generally really enjoyed Abita's perspective because I feel like she's such an interesting and dynamic character who really represents all of the women living in Iran who had ambitions and dreams but were prohibited from following their hearts and from following through with those dreams. So her storyline, you know, and the way that it progresses and the things that happen in her particular storyline. . . . Obviously, we don't want to ruin anything for the people who haven't read the book. It was fascinating. Heartbreaking. All of the emotions.

[00:12:51] **Kendra** Yes. And I found her completely fascinating. And it was interesting because you have the three women of the story. You have the narrator, you have Abita, and then you have the mother. And the mother goes off on her own little journey off in the mountains and finds, you know, she leaves the family at some point, which is not really a spoiler because everything happens in this book. Like they climb a tree, and it keeps growing. So, I mean, like, you never know what's going to happen in the story. But she leaves the family and goes off in her own little self-actualization kind of journey. And all of the women are trying to find a place for themselves in this world that has completely changed. And they find comfort in different things. They find their place in different things. And it's really fascinating to follow each of them.

[00:13:43] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. Her mother is a really spiritual character. So the women in the story and the father figure, who's named Hershon, they all are trying to find a way. And it was really interesting to see the way that the father is always supporting them and encouraging them to, you know, pursue literature and art and be intellectually engaged in the life that they're living. But all of this is taking place in the village.

[00:14:08] **Kendra** Yeah. And they're kind of hiding out from the city, which has quickly been overtaken by figures of reason. And so there are a lot of metaphors and figurative language. And it reminds me a lot of Christian allegories that I read as a kid because stuff like this would happen in them all the time, and they have greater meanings and all this stuff. But I think when it comes to this story, you see that these opposite worlds are juxtaposed together. You have the rural village in Iran and how that is a symbol of traditional Persian folklore and traditions and culture. And then you have the new regime that is the city. And it's really interesting because I have really different colors associated with those chapters, like the way that she writes so vibrant in the rural village. And like you see the covers full of greens and oranges and pinks and reds. That's how I imagine the village chapters. But then when one of the characters goes back to the city, it's very stark and like tans and very bland, stark whiteness. Like, it's lost all of its vibrance. And it's really amazing the way that she was able to communicate that with just words on a page and storytelling and the feelings that we feel when we go to the different locations of the stories.

[00:15:30] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And one thing that strikes me about the village is how it is kind of very close to history or where the people who live there look towards history. And you also have the Zoroastrian faith, which is still very much alive and vibrant in the village. Because that faith was driven out by Muslim invasion in Iran ages ago, I think 1,400 years ago or something. So she's really preserving that time, you know, before the feudalism and capitalism because I think she mentions that people don't even have the concept of buying land in that village. So they also decide to not build any roads that lead to the city and thus further isolate the village. And to me, it represents a time before the clash, before the corruption that has resulted in all of the modernization and westernization that emerged, the way that technology changed things. People don't even know what a car looks like in that village. So it's really a time before people discover that they can use power. They can use information against each other. And they instead live in a community that is very spiritual and full of magic and very close to nature and still attached to the history and heritage. And by showing us this preserved culture, I think Shokoofeh is showing us the Iran that she wants to remember and the home that, you know, she really misses.

[00:16:58] **Kendra** And like we mentioned last time, Azar is a former journalist from Iran. And she moved to Australia and sought asylum and is now a permanent resident there and really has accepted that as her home. And I wanted to read just the acknowledgments because they're just a couple short paragraphs, but I think it really exemplifies her feelings and emotions when she was writing this book. And she says, "I would like to thank my father for teaching me to fly in the sky of literature freely. I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother without whose support I would not be living in the free country of Australia, able to write without censorship. I am profoundly grateful to the Australian people for accepting me into this safe and democratic country where I have the freedom to write this book, a liberty denied me by my homeland."

[00:17:49] **Sumaiyya** That is so powerful. That says so much about regimes these days that are, you know, banishing literature and the arts and really destroying the culture instead of celebrating it.

[00:18:02] **Kendra** I think this book is very much a love letter to Iran and the place that she calls home because even though moving to Australia, that's not where she came from. And there's always going to be that sense of loss there. And I don't think that any free country is like, you know, this perfect place that people want to go to. And like the whole American dream myth kind of situation. . . . But I do think that not every place allows people that freedom of speech, and that is an issue. And so I think that that sorrow, that complex feelings of loving your homeland, but feeling rejected by it at the same time is throughout this book. And you can see that in a lot of her work and her interviews as well.

[00:18:41] **Sumaiyya** Absolutely.

[00:18:43] **Kendra** Well, we could talk about this book for ages more, I'm sure. But that is *THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE GREENGATE TREE* by Shokoofeh Azar. And that is out from Europa here in the US. And it's out from Wild Dingo Press out in Australia.

[00:18:59] **Kendra** So, Sumaiyya, you have our second discussion pick.

[00:19:03] **Sumaiyya** Right. So my discussion pick for our theme "Fight Like a Girl" is *A BURNING* by Megha Majumdar. This was published by Knopf in the US and Penguin in India. So the story is set in contemporary India, where the right-wing political parties are gaining power and creating a narrative of Hindu supremacy. We have this anti-Muslim

rhetoric, which is kind of the background of where this story is situated and what's happening with the main character. So the premise of the story is a terrorist attack, which results in the deaths of over 100 people. At the heart of this novel, we have Jivan, who is a poor Muslim girl from the slums close to the site of the attack. And she posts a comment on Facebook to get a reaction because she's seeing people, you know, have these very interesting discussions, but also because she's genuinely moved by what's happening in her country. And instead of the internet cloud that she was kind of hoping for—because she's really new to this entire situation—so she finds herself accused of being the terrorist behind the attack.

[00:20:18] **Kendra** It's such a harrowing novel just from the outset, from like the first few chapters. I think it's really interesting because, you know, last year we talked a lot about Kashmir and looking at the conflicts there between Hindu nationalism and Kashmir. And since then, at that time, we had no idea that that would happen. But a lot of political things started happening with that as well. And then at the end of last year, there's a lot of discussion of Hindu nationalism because there was a very difficult situation and a lot of violence that happened. And this comes right on the heels of that. And I think it's a very important book to look at the political situation in India. It really has a very important commentary on that.

[00:21:02] **Sumaiyya** A lot has happened in the past year, especially since we did our episode on partition narratives like you mentioned. Even in Kashmir, things have been really turbulent over there. Lots of curfew and just a lot of oppression going on over there. So this book is very topical because of that. And I think Jivan is such a spirited, compelling character that her struggle shows you really what's going on. Like, the story that she's crafted shows you the rhetoric that a xenophobic leader is basically building.

[00:21:37] **Kendra** And as a person who's not from India, you know, reading A FAR FIELD really helped me understand a bit more about Kashmir, inspired me to go and often do my own research like you should if you're reading a fiction book. And I think it's really important for those of us in the West to read these books about, you know, conflicts outside of our own sphere, to get out of our bubble and to read more broadly. And this is definitely a book that does that.

[00:22:06] **Sumaiyya** And I wanted to actually discuss Jivan's name a little bit because it is a Hindi word, which means "life." And in the story, she is fighting for her life. So it is really symbolic. But she is, you know, it's very clear that she is persecuted because of her Muslim identity. Because she is a Muslim girl, she is underprivileged. So she does not have the connections, and she just becomes an easy target. And that shows you the kind of division that is happening in a country that is already quite divided. And I think social media is also playing a very, very important and dangerous role in the story. Jivan's perspective of all of this just makes my heart break because she is young. She is hardworking. She is ambitious. But most of all, she is poor. And she wants to improve her life.

[00:22:54] **Sumaiyya** One thing that strikes me regarding the social media thing that I mentioned is Majumdar's novel is showing us the real dangers of putting your thoughts on social media, especially if you are coming from a demographic that is being persecuted. And in a way, this is a reflection of what happens to intellectuals under oppressive regimes. This is just the beginning of that, I think. And I am Muslim. I was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, where I lived until very recently. And I currently live in India. So I am very familiar with how scary and risky social media can feel sometimes, especially when you

feel you have some things that you want to say. But instead you realize that self-censorship is probably the wiser option. And it is just very complicated when at the same time you are living in a democracy. So what does that really mean? You know?

[00:23:47] **Sumaiyya** Jivan as a character, you know, again, I want to go back to her because she's just so compelling. The tragedy of her circumstance really shows you what systems like these do and why we need to learn about them and why we need to understand what's happening in countries, you know, around the world so that we can be more supportive. Because she is only doing what the system has told her that she must do. She works hard so she can become middle class because the system is in favor of people who have privilege. She buys a smartphone, the most expensive purchase in her life, because the system tells her that it will make her look more polished and privileged and it will expand her world and give her connections. Instead, she finds herself in prison where people would rather slap her than answer a question that she's asked—which, by the way, that scene was harrowing, to just see that humiliation, to see her experience that humiliation.

[00:24:44] **Sumaiyya** But anyway, she tries to fight back, even from prison, at one point by deciding to write hundreds of letters to important people because she believes that truth prospers and that she can become free if she uses her words, if she tells her story to the right people. And that really is the key. Like, who is the right person? Shouldn't everyone be in support of the truth? And another thing that makes the story so tragic is no matter how hard she tries, no matter how courageous she is, you know, the system that she is in, it's completely flawed. And it was probably against her from the moment people used her religious identity to persecute her.

[00:25:24] **Kendra** And I mean, throughout the novel, we meet several different characters. And you can see how in, even if it's a small to a great way, they are complicit in the way that Jivan is treated.

[00:25:37] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And what we're seeing, you know, particularly through the character of Lovely and PT Sir—who are two of the other major perspectives in this novel—is a society that is very class conscious and which has a very real divide between rich and poor, which makes people want to have power, the same power that they're seeing a very small group of people in the country have. And so, you know, we have characters who have ambitions, who want to improve their lives. Jivan wanted to become a middle-class person. Lovely wants to become famous for her acting. PT Sir, he wants privileges that come with being in a political party. He wants that power also. He even loves the proximity to that power. So I think what that really shows you in this novel is when these characters are put in situations when it's clear that they must either do something to help Jivan or compromise their moral integrity for the sake of their personal ambitions, the choices they make are really revealing the responsibility that people have in communities. And by focusing the narrative on these very ordinary individuals, very simple people who are not really in positions of power—and it's not just Lovely and Jivan. We have so many other smaller characters, you know, the lawyer and the people at the prison who if they had made the right decision, could have made the difference between life and death.

[00:27:04] **Kendra** I think that's very interesting because oftentimes I think people feel like, well, my one decision. . . . I'm just one person. But really, you know, we all have that responsibility to do the right thing. And I think you can see, you know, Jivan tries so hard. She fights so hard throughout this entire story. But everyone around her is willing to

compromise their integrity just for, you know, varying degrees of power, whether it be a small amount or a great amount. And it's just really such a complex story and really disheartening sometimes to see how hard she fights. But no one will stand up for her just because she's a poor Muslim girl in this society that views her as one of the lowest kinds of people.

[00:27:51] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, because she lives in the slums. Because she's Muslim. Because her parents don't really have any connections. Or she doesn't have any connections. And that's really a very sad situation to be in. And I think it's important to read this book, whether you are in India or in America, because these are the kinds of power-play systems or, like, this is the kind of politics that eventually turns into an oppressive regime, which is achieved by actually dividing the society, by making people selfish, by creating divisions not just along class lines, but also on the basis of communal divide or religious divide. And yeah, that's why I can't believe that this book came out at such a timely moment, especially in India.

[00:28:43] **Kendra** I think sometimes when we read stories in fiction, we often are like we can distance ourselves. We are able to close the book and set it aside, you know, if we need to. But this is a very real circumstance for so many people. And I think that this book really is very thought provoking on that, in that essentially that's what other characters in the book do. They close the book, and they set it aside. And they ignore the fact that this is a very real life for a very real person. And they have to, you know, the other characters have to live with the choices that they make regarding Jivan's fate and their responsibility in that.

[00:29:23] **Sumaiyya** And I also do want to mention that the characters are very complex, especially Lovely, who comes from a marginalized community. And she has this very energetic, very lively persona. And, you know, you just don't see it coming, the way that her story goes. It just shows you that people don't have to be evil to make the wrong choice or to do the wrong thing. Sometimes, you know, it's a very quick decision that can have a huge impact that you don't even realize.

[00:29:57] **Kendra** Yeah, and Lovely comes from a marginalized community as well. And Jivan understands English and knows English. And so she's teaching Lovely English, and that's their connection there and their relationship there. So Jivan does have some privileges that Lovely doesn't. And it's, like you said, a very complex relationship. And I think it's like society pits oppressed communities against each other in some ways. And it's like when this fight for survival . . . it's a very complex thing. And I think that, you know, this book—with so many viewpoint characters and how complex the politics are—it could have been very unwieldy. It could have . . . there's so many ways that authors might struggle with. But I feel like the way that the author has successfully pulled this book together, with all these different perspectives, with this very complex political situation and these characters from all different kinds of walks of life, is it just shows to her talent and the ability that she is able to create this complex narrative that examines the politics in, you know, modern-day India just so very well.

[00:31:10] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And some chapters are literally just a page or a half. And they are so impactful because they describe perfectly, you know, exactly what is going on. The smallest of decisions, the smallest of moments that are eventually leading up to this really big ending. And it's so expertly written, like, I can't believe this is a debut. And the writing, the way that she doesn't waste a single word—it's incredible. It's really remarkable. And I cannot recommend this book enough because I feel like it has so many important themes.

But at the same time, it's really memorable in the way that each of the characters have their own voice and have a very unique perspective that is showing different aspects of society, different sections of society. It's very well done.

[00:32:02] **Kendra** And then the blurb for this book . . . I was just looking. It says, "Being a portrait of a country spinning towards extremism and what it's like to live in a country like that." And I think that's, you know, there are a lot of us in countries like that. But I think that this is a portrait of a country that maybe might be left out of conversations here in America. And so I loved how the author has been going and doing interviews and starting those conversations in different pockets of, you know, academia or in bookish worlds and different things. This book was chosen as a book club pick for, what, Books with Jenna or something? And so, a lot of American people are reading this work of Indian literature. And I just think that's magnificent. And it's such a great book. I'm just. . . . It's worth . . . Basically, it's worthy of all of the things. It's worthy of all of the accolades. And it's just as good as everyone says it is.

[00:33:04] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And, you know, when you look at other stories or stories from other countries, that can also make things clear for your own nation and for your own home and what people around you might also be going through. Because, you know, in the end, we do have some similar things going on in different parts of the world, like you said. So that was *A BURNING* by Megha Majumdar, published by Knopf in the US and Penguin in India.

[00:33:32] **Kendra** Well, those are two discussion picks for this month. Both magnificent titles that you all should go check out. And as our patrons have requested, we've added this further reading section because a lot of you enjoy certain themes and want to go read more on them. So, Sumaiyya, what's your first for the reading recommendation?

[00:33:52] **Sumaiyya** So the first recommendation that I have is *THE WEIGHT OF OUR SKY* by Hanna Alkaf. And this is a YA novel published by Salaam Reads that is set in Malaysia in 1965. It follows Melati, a Muslim girl who is sixteen years old and who is at the cinema with her best friend when riots break out in the city. The riots were the result of tensions between Chinese and Malay communities in Malaysia. So this is a part of history that I think people outside Malaysia don't usually know about. Melati is caught in the struggle and is unable to return home. And as she's trying to survive curfew and the violent world around her, she is also fighting her own demons. And I mean that quite literally because this story personifies OCD and mental illness as a Djinn who is haunting Melati, which is actually a really great conversation starter for the Muslim and Arab communities who traditionally see mental illness as a supernatural affliction. So definitely a must read. And it does have some trigger warnings for violence and OCD and anxiety. And that's on the page. So, yeah. And it was published by Salaam Reads.

[00:35:04] **Kendra** We love them.

[00:35:05] **Sumaiyya** Definitely.

[00:35:06] **Kendra** They're amazing.

[00:35:07] **Sumaiyya** Everything they have published is, like, five star for both me and Kendra.

[00:35:12] **Kendra** If I see it's by them, it's like an automatic purchase.

[00:35:18] **Kendra** So my first further reading recommendation is something that's very personal to me. And that's a book about disability rights. And that's SAY HELLO by Carly Findlay. And this is out from Bolinda Audio, here in the United States. In a strange turn of events, it's only available on audio here in the United States. I don't even see an e-book available. But it is available in print in Australia. And so Carly Findlay is the daughter of, I believe, a British man and a woman from South Africa, and she would be considered colored. And so during apartheid, they were not allowed to get married. So they moved to Australia, so they could be together.

[00:35:55] **Kendra** So Carly is born with a skin condition that makes it very painful for her. She often has, you know, red and cracked skin. And she's very red in her coloring because her skin is so inflamed. And so she has to care for that by taking care of her skin and putting ointment on and different things. And so having a visible disability has greatly impacted her life and the way that people treat her—from taxi drivers being worried that she might "infect" their cabs . . . or people laughing at her in public spaces. She has really had a difficult time because of the ableism of our society, especially people with visible disabilities. Now I have an invisible disability, so I do not experience a lot of things that she experiences. The way that she tackles all of these very difficult and complex topics was just a breath of fresh air to me because, you know, I realized a lot of the internalized ableism that I still have and am working through. And I think it's an incredible book, and it really exemplifies "Fight Like a Girl" because she's fighting for her rights as a woman with a disability. And she's fighting for the rights of others. So.

[00:37:03] **Sumaiyya** Absolutely. Sounds like an amazing book. And I think this would be perfect for prompt number 16 for our Reading Women Challenge this year, which is featuring a woman with a disability. And considering that it's also only available on audio, I think that would also encourage some people to try that format because, again, I personally feel it's really ableist when people say that audiobooks is not like reading just because, you know, there's some supremacy that prints have. So, yeah.

[00:37:34] **Kendra** And she reads the book herself, which I think adds another layer of depth to the book when the author of a memoir, in particular, reads the book themselves. And definitely check out her social media. I will link them down in the show notes because she does a lot of advocacy for people with disabilities. And she's actually the editor of the anthology GROWING UP DISABLED IN AUSTRALIA, which was delayed because of COVID until next year. But definitely go preorder it if you live in Australia.

[00:38:02] **Sumaiyya** That's another book to look forward to then. So the next book that I'd like to recommend is THE BAGHDAD CLOCK by Shahad Al Rawi. This is a novel translated from the Arabic by Luke Leafgren. And it's a story that takes place in Iraq during the Gulf War of 1991 and the subsequent years of curfew and sanctions. So this is a story that has elements of magic realism derived from local culture, and it captures the struggles of the ordinary people in a country that is literally being ripped apart by violence and by war. Female friendship, first love, and what it means to live are important themes in this book. So I would definitely recommend it, especially to those who loved THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE GREENGAGE TREE. It was published by One World Publications in the UK. And I think it's available on print and audio as well.

[00:38:56] **Kendra** And so, my last further reading pick is THINGS WE DIDN'T TALK ABOUT WHEN I WAS A GIRL by Jeannie Vanasco, and this is out from Tin House. Now the next section that I'm going to talk about does have trigger warnings for sexual assault.

So just skip ahead like 60 seconds, and you should be fine. But this book is about Jeannie's experience being sexually assaulted by her best friend when she was a young woman. And she goes and, as an adult woman, goes back and contacts him and writes this memoir about her experience interviewing him. And so this is a very difficult book to read because they go into a lot of detail. She analyzes her own experience and the way that she tries to pacify him during her conversations and how she'll take a submissive role and analyzes her own behavior as well. And I have never read anything like this before, but Jeannie really wanted a sense of restorative justice for herself. She's doing this for herself. No one else. And I'd never read a book like this. And this is a very interesting experiment that she's doing, and she kind of takes you along for the ride. There isn't any sort of big, like, wrap-up moment at the end or anything. You're just there observing this experience that Jeannie is having. And so, it has all of the trigger warnings for sexual assault because she does talk about it. She does talk about another experience of sexual assault that she has. So it is throughout the entire book, so just fyi. But it's an important book, and I think it really is very thought provoking.

[00:40:30] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and I cannot even imagine the amount of strength to go through that process of making this book happen. Sounds like such an important book to read.

[00:40:41] **Kendra** Yeah. So those are our further reading recommendations. Like all of the books we've mentioned today, they will be linked in our show notes, where you can go buy copies from bookshop.org and support your favorite indie bookstore and Reading Women all at the same time. Sumaiyya, where can listeners find you about the internet?

[00:40:58] **Sumaiyya** So I am Sumaiyya, and you can find me on Bookstagram or Instagram (@sumaiyya.book). I'm also on Twitter (@sumaiyyabooks). And I've also joined BookTube (@sumaiyya.books), so hopefully we'll have some more videos from me soon.

[00:41:14] **Kendra** I'm so happy you're finally on BookTube.

[00:41:18] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I'm going to record this week. I'm so excited.

[00:41:23] **Kendra** And you all can find me everywhere (@kdwinchester). I'm also on BookTube (@kendrawinchester), so you all can find me there as well.

[00:41:36] **Sumaiyya** Kendra, you have the best BookTube out there. You are, like, my top one.

[00:41:43] **Kendra** Well, well, thank you. I haven't put up a video in like a month, but thank you. Yeah, it's a lot of fun. We have a lot of fun over on the little BookTube space. All right. So that's our show. So if you haven't yet, please leave us a review in your podcast app of choice. And thanks to all of you who have already done that. Many thanks to our patrons, who keep our lights on and make this podcast possible. To subscribe to our newsletter or to learn about becoming one of our patrons, visit us at readingwomenpodcast.com.

[00:42:14] **Sumaiyya** Join us next time, where Kendra and Sachi will be talking about books for "Women in Translation Month." In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thank you so much for listening.