

Ep 98 | Say Hello and If I Had Your Face

[00:00:09] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sumaiyya Naseem. 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 98, where we are talking about the books IF I HAD YOUR FACE by Frances Cha and SAY HELLO by Carly Findlay.

[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.

[00:00:39] **Kendra** Well, our October theme is Beauty Privilege. And Sumaiyya, you chose this theme last year, and we've been very excited for it. So what were some of the things that you wanted to talk about in this theme and what kind of inspired you to want to talk about beauty privilege?

[00:01:00] **Sumaiyya** So as I mentioned in the previous episode that we did on this theme, beauty is something that I've been conscious of ever since I was quite young. And I think as a society, we don't address how beauty in itself is a privilege. People who are beautiful, you know, they have a certain privilege that people who maybe don't live up to society's standards of ideal beauty have. I'm really interested in that idea of beauty and aspiring for beauty and the way that our media and culture and the social media platforms that we have are kind of feeding into this idea of ideal beauty. And it's quite interesting because it changes based on the decades and the region that you're based in.

[00:01:51] **Kendra** Yeah, and we were talking about before we started recording about how oftentimes beauty privilege goes hand-in-hand with wealth privilege.

[00:02:02] **Sumaiyya** Absolutely. I think that, you know, especially on Instagram, we're so used to seeing celebrities and models. And we start to compare ourselves to them, to their perfect bodies and to their flawless skin. And we don't realize that we are making that comparison, not taking into account the fact that they have financial privileges that we don't have. They have wealth privilege that we're not getting access to because that's on a different level. Like I mean, when you're really rich, then you don't have to worry about so many things. It's not just about getting access to a certain beauty product. It's also about the food that you're consuming, the kind of breaks that you're able to take, the kind of self care that you're able to give yourself, you know? And also like the tone that you're able to set for your life in general, the way that you're able to take care of your health, whether it's your mental health or physical health. Even access to doctors and being able to address your medical conditions can become a privilege. Unfortunately, when you have a lot of money, that becomes a lot easier.

[00:03:04] **Kendra** Yeah, definitely. Definitely. And the types of jobs that you're able to work as a wealthy person are easier on your body and don't age you as quickly, and all of those things as well go hand-in-hand with that. And I think when we talk about beauty, we don't often use the word "privilege" in it. And we definitely need to because there is a lot of privilege that goes with being a societally deemed beautiful person and how you're more likely to convince people to do things for you or to receive special privileges. . . . Or in one of the books we're going to talk about today, she was partially chosen as a scholarship student because she was beautiful and looked good on their brochures and all this stuff. So there's definitely something there. And I appreciate the way the two books that we have today talk about that.

[00:03:52] **Sumaiyya** Most definitely. And I think something that we do need to become more mindful of—just to add to the stuff that you said—is the way that Instagram is also influencing, very consciously influencing, you know, the way that we think of beauty and the way that we make beauty an aspiration for ourselves. If you're interested in this topic, I would recommend the British activist Jameela Jamil, who is also an actress. And she definitely talks about this a lot. So she is someone to follow if you want to be more mindful of the way that society conditions women to aspire for beauty instead of giving us the space that we need to actually focus on ourselves and develop ourselves into well-rounded individuals. And I think the problem is that, you know, beauty is that one aspect of a person that is so often the only aspect of a woman that is commented on and valued. So that's the reason ultimately that I wanted to pursue this theme and read books under it. And I'm so excited about the books that we'll be discussing today because they are, like you said, they are looking at this issue from different angles. All right. So, Kendra, tell us about your discussion pick.

[00:05:08] **Kendra** So my discussion pick is SAY HELLO by Carly Findlay. And I chose this book because I think it's important that we look at beauty privilege in a wide range of ways. So one of the ways we can look at is bodily difference. So people who have some sort of bodily difference, either it's a condition that they're born with or maybe that they had an accident or something happen later in life. And so they might look differently. And I really appreciate a lot of the Instagram kind of movement of celebrating the bodily difference in that way. Everyone from amputees to people's skin conditions, like Carly Findlay, are doing a wide range of things to that, which is great to see.

[00:05:54] **Kendra** But I think in particular, like we talked about in our last episode, when we look at bodily difference in the context of a visible disability in that way, it's definitely a different experience. So there's privilege in beauty, but there's also privilege in having just a "normal" kind of appearance. Even if you aren't beautiful, if you have "normal" kind of face or body, you're not going to experience the stigma as someone with this kind of bodily difference. And that's something that Carly Findlay goes into in the book, particularly about facial difference because that's something that she experiences a lot with her condition Ichthyosis. It's a skin condition. And so she often appears bright red because her skin might be inflamed, and then she uses cream to kind of soothe it. And she talks about her body care process as well in the book. But there is a lot of stigma, especially around facial difference. And so she talks about those differences in the book as well, which was incredibly insightful.

[00:07:01] **Sumaiyya** Absolutely, and I think there's two things that I wanted to actually talk about based on what you've said. And the first is, you know, the way that facial difference is portrayed in the media and in the films, in films that we see. This is something that Carly talks about in her book. And I really appreciated her thinking about this critically and bringing up this topic. A lot of this is represented in the films that kids are watching in, you know, like Disney films. And this obviously goes back to your other pick for this theme, which is DISFIGURED. Yeah, that was something that I found one of the most essential points that she raises.

[00:07:40] **Sumaiyya** And the second thing is the way that she writes about getting access to making changes to yourself. And the easiest of that is obviously makeup. So I really appreciated the way that she talked about how there is this idea these days that being makeup free means that you're being brave and that you are, you know, doing something that requires a lot of courage when in fact, it's just your bare face. It's just who you are. So

being yourself shouldn't be such a challenge. And I think that women have all of these impossible beauty standards that we are constantly reminded of, that we should aspire to. And what we end up doing is making changes to our bodies, you know, whether it's through surgery or Botox, eyebrow threading. . . . All of these things that are in easy access. And I think at one point she talked about how women often just go to the salon during their lunch break. And what I found fascinating is how similar these ideas are in Australia—which is where Carly is based—and also in Saudi Arabia, which is where I'm from. Because I've seen this in Saudi Arabia when I was working in a media company, and we had times when people would take a break from work during the lunch hour and go to the salon and get something done. There's just so much pressure to look perfect that we stop valuing, you know, our natural beauty and just who we are. And what this does is that we stop valuing difference in people. And difference doesn't have to be bad or wrong. And this is something that Carly really goes into detail about. And I appreciated reading that.

[00:09:25] **Kendra** Another thing that she goes into is relationships. And one of the things that you will experience quickly if you have a disability—whether it's visible or not—is people saying, oh, how grateful you should be that someone would want to marry you. For Carly—because she is visibly disabled and does have that bodily difference—it's just amplified. And so she talks about how most people assume that she's not with someone because who would want to be with her? And then people keep telling her she should be so grateful that her husband is with her . . . and like all of these things. Sometimes you just can't believe that somebody would say that to another human being. But they think that they are allowed to.

[00:10:10] **Kendra** And we talked about this a little bit last time about how people behave around people with disabilities, especially people with bodily difference, that they have the right to ask them really intimate questions or make assumptions about them. One of the things that Carly has done on her Instagram is to model lingerie. And she pointed out that, as we know, disabled people are like desexualized, but also . . . you want to be able to see someone like yourself if you have a bodily difference. And so I really appreciated the way that she did that and the things that she points out in her own activism on Instagram and different things. And she also talks about having a really supportive mom and how a lot of people come to her saying, "My kid has Ichthyosis. What should I do?" And like . . . how that's a very complicated situation because there are a lot of things that able-bodied parents do that is kind of trying to make their child more like a non-disabled person as opposed to trying to help them be the best that they can be, you know? So it was very interesting to see her talk about how her condition affects relationships in a lot of different ways.

[00:11:30] **Sumaiyya** It's a really vulnerable position to be in, especially, you know, like I . . . I appreciated the way that she wrote about online relationships and getting to know a person online and making yourself vulnerable. And then there's always this risk that they will reject you once they find out that, you know, you have a disability or . . . Even chronic illness, I think, is something that makes you feel a bit vulnerable in that sense that people might not like it or people might not be ready for someone like you. And again, like you said, there is this idea that people with disabilities or with chronic illnesses should feel grateful for the attention and love of a person who's able bodied. And I think that's really toxic because what it does is it devalues the person who has a disability or a chronic illness.

[00:12:24] **Sumaiyya** And I think the idea here is that we really need to start seeing how disabilities actually give you a unique experience in life and that it's part of a person's

growth that gives you a unique experience. So I think it's important to realize that we are all unique individuals, and no one can replace us.

[00:13:19] **Kendra** And, you know, Carly talks about her job and her professional career, particularly, because she is very visible on the internet in that way as well. And so what's interesting is she talks about the accommodations that she's made and the experiences in the job field that she has had. And her skin condition often makes her sore, and she just doesn't have as much stamina maybe. And so she has to care for herself in that way. And she talks about her journey of realizing she could no longer work in an office or full time. Or . . . she had to cut back her hours and that experience. And this particular part of the book I deeply related to—because coming to the terms with, you know, addressing your own internalized ableism on what you should be doing and how much work you should be producing. And there's this instinct to do more and to produce more and to do it better than nondisabled people that you have, like you have to go above and beyond. And so she talks about accepting that part of her disability was very much a huge part of it, as well as accepting what she looked like. It was also like how ill she was and that she shouldn't force herself to be productive just because society says so. And I thought that was very interesting because it looked at different parts of her disability in that way.

[00:14:45] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And I think in a professional setup, it's important to have that conversation with the people that you're working with so that you understand the unique challenges that you might have because of your condition. And another thing that she talks about is social barriers and how they contribute to disability. . . . And not seeing disability as something that is negative and really embracing that because it's part of your identity. And I think she writes at some point what she says is, "Overlooking disability denies people our identity." And I think that is so true.

[00:15:23] **Kendra** One of the things that I have seen is that oftentimes people, like me, who have invisible conditions but "look" like I'm not a disabled person get more promotion or more credit than people with visible disabilities. And that is a huge problem because we definitely need to be lifting up especially people with visible disabilities because there is that stigma. There's definitely, when we talk about beauty privilege, that's also within the disability community. So that's a conversation that's been going on and continues to happen and should continue to happen within disability-activist communities.

[00:16:05] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and you're absolutely right. And I appreciated reading about that as well. One of the other things that I think, you know, she raises a really good point about is activism and awareness in the sense that so much effort is being put into awareness that we tend to overlook championing rights. I think she says that championing rights is so much better than raising awareness. And another thing that I think of—and she also mentions—is nondisabled people are actually the ones who need to do the work so that disabled people can actually live their lives. And the way that I see her book, you know, is so generously written. But I think this is the book that I feel like she is writing this book for all of the kids, you know, who have disabilities, who have conditions that put them in the margins of society. And I feel like she's writing this as a letter to them while also obviously doing brilliant work to give us the understanding of life from her perspective.

[00:17:09] **Kendra** One of the things I really love about what she does in this book, in that vein, is that she celebrates bodily difference, especially facial difference. And it's not something that you should be ashamed of. And she reinforces that idea that this is just who you are, and you can love yourself. She has this great eye for fashion. And she talks about how she has to wear often long sleeves and skirts and different things because her

skin can get irritated, and she has to be very careful with that. So she talks about how she kind of, you know, she embraces that and started experimenting with her fashion and really loving it. And that shocked a lot of nondisabled people. Like, why are you embracing your bodily differences? She's like, obviously, because it's who I am. And hello. And she is fabulous. And I just want to say, like, all of you need to stop listening to this or pull up your Instagram while you're listening to this on your phone and look up her Instagram because she has so many great outfits. And recently a graphic was made out of a bunch of her outfits. And it's . . . it is amazing. I will link it in the show notes. And I can only imagine what, you know, kids who also have bodily difference will feel like seeing her Instagram and reading her book. And I just think that is amazing. Yeah.

[00:18:32] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And she also shouts out a couple of hashtags that were started by people in the disability and chronic illness community. These are #UpAndDressed and #HospitalGlam. And I think the idea with both is to, you know, see image as something that is really powerful because not only can it change other people's perception of living with a disability, but it can also be—I don't like to use this word all the time—but it can also be really empowering for the self because wearing glamorous clothes can contribute to you feeling good about yourself, even if, you know, you have other things going on that are not really easy to deal with.

[00:19:15] **Kendra** We just love her, in summary. And so I will include all of the links of the things that we have talked about for this in the show notes. You can go check it out because she is fabulous. And that is SAY HELLO by Carly Findlay. And that's all from Harper Collins Australia. You can also find it on HarperAudio in the US. Sumaiyya, you have our next discussion pick.

[00:19:39] **Sumaiyya** So my discussion pick is IF I HAD YOUR FACE by Frances Cha, which is set in Seoul, in Korea. And this looks at four young women who live in close proximity to each other, and their lives are sort of loosely connected. So we have four perspectives in this novel. And they actually felt like short stories, to me, that were kind of connected and then moved the story along. So from the lens of these women's perspectives, what we understand is that Korea has these ridiculously impossible standards of beauty that kind of functions as an oppressive force in these women's lives because they always feel like they need to change the way that they look or alter their appearance in order to fit into the society and also move up in society in terms of social and class mobility. So there are quite interesting, complex social structures in place that we get to see in this book. And we also get insight into plastic surgery culture and the beauty industry, which is pretty much profiting from women's insecurities.

[00:20:49] **Kendra** And also the realities of, you know, in these women in particular, they are of lower economic status. And they're able to get better jobs if they appear more beautiful to society. And so it's that tension of wanting to better yourself. But the only way you can do that is if you change the way that you appear. So because of their economic status, they're not even given a moment to sit and think. They're just trying to survive. And if this is how you can get a better job, that's often the way it goes. And it was really interesting to see that tension play out in the different characters' lives.

[00:21:28] **Sumaiyya** So we have the idea here that a woman's face is basically her fortune. And in order to move up in life or in order to become more successful in life, you need to look a certain way. And you need to obtain or, you know, like create a certain kind of beauty in yourself, which was actually quite difficult to read about because these women, you know, who get plastic surgery done, they go through some really drastic

procedures to alter their appearance in order to fit in or in order to actually grow in their lives.

[00:22:06] **Kendra** And they take it to such extremes. And they consider, you know, not being able to feel your jaw for the rest of your life, possibly, like an okay price to pay. And there was this one moment where one of the characters had recently had surgery, and she didn't realize she had a piece of food stuck in her mouth because she couldn't feel it. And the other one laughed it off like, "Oh, yeah, that happens to me all the time. How embarrassing." And I'm like, What? And it just really hit home the realities and lengths that these women are willing to go because of the societal pressure placed on them and those impossible beauty standards that we see throughout the world, but particularly in this context.

[00:22:54] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And there is a great deal of scrutiny in the way that they're looking at their own bodies and their own appearance and the way that society is also looking at them. And, you know, I do want to acknowledge that I understand that getting plastic surgery done is a person's choice. Like, if that's what they want for themselves, I'm not going to be the person who says, oh, this is too toxic. Like, why are you doing this yourself? Like, it is their choice. But I do think it's important to think critically about where the desire for that change comes from and what is really feeding that dissatisfaction with yourself. Because a lot of times it is, you know, society telling us that this is acceptable and beautiful and that is not okay. And it's because of those distinctions that we start to compare ourselves and feel like we don't measure up to what is acceptable in society. So I think it's a strenuous process to actually go through to accept yourself the way that you are already made. And again, like I understand that there are, you know, there are a lot of things to consider.

[00:24:01] **Kendra** So it's the difference between making a choice for yourself—and plastic surgery has done a lot of women a lot of good—versus making the choice based on societal pressures because you feel like you have to, versus "I want to." "I want to make this change in myself to make me happy" versus making society happy because of those impossible beauty standards.

[00:24:24] **Sumaiyya** Right. Absolutely. And I think another thing that we should mention, which is, you know, Kyuri's unique context, is that it is the world's most-educated country. And when you have, you know, this great access to education that everyone has, social mobility or class mobility—because it is definitely a class-based society—those things, you know, start to depend on the only remaining option, which is your beauty and the way that you look. So people start to pay a lot of attention to their appearance, to how they behave with each other. You know, just their general appearance consciousness. . . . Making yourself more beautiful in order to climb the ladder is basically the kind of context that these characters are living in because most of them are struggling financially, and they're not born into wealth. So the only thing that remains is, you know, when you're educated and you don't have money, the only thing that remains is how you look.

[00:25:26] **Kendra** The other thing about this book that I really appreciated was how perfect the title is, which is IF I HAD YOUR FACE, which really . . . there's actually a character who says the line, "what I would do if I had your face." And that really hit it home like, oh, this is the tone we have for the book. Like, it really set that. And really that theme played out throughout the novel.

[00:25:52] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And this was a really important scene. It was actually one of the first things that I immediately tabbed when I was reading the book, also because I love when I finally see where the title gets its inspiration from. I love seeing that. That's one of my favorite things to look forward to. So the scene actually takes place in a clinic. And she sees this . . . I think she's a model. I think there is a celebrity or a model that she sees at the clinic who's quite well known and who's seen as, you know, one of the most beautiful women in that context. And she thinks to herself, you know, this character thinks to herself, Oh my god, what I wouldn't do with my life if I had your face. And I think the line was, I would live your life so much better than you if I had your face. And I . . . Yeah, that is quite a profound way of looking at it because I think there is definitely this idea that our lives would be better if we looked a certain way. I'm not saying that you or me have this idea. But I think that there's generally this perception sometimes in people that, you know, I would be more successful or maybe I would be happier or more fulfilled if I looked a certain way or if I was prettier or if I had more beauty. And I think, you know, that definitely explains the title. And it's quite a powerful way of positioning the narrative and framing the narrative and the way that we're looking at the story because the title, I think, works powerfully to let the reader know what they have to be thinking about when they're reading this book.

[00:27:28] **Kendra** Which is a great way to give the reader a thematic heads up, like look for these things in the text. And we see how this theme plays out in these women's lives, as they are beautiful, as they do have these procedures and experience the benefits of them. And it really comes back to are they really happy? Are they fulfilled with their lives? Do they even have a moment to think about their life and if they are fulfilled with their lives? Which is interesting as well, which goes back to the class discussion.

[00:28:00] **Sumaiyya** Right. And I think these ideas of how we perceive beauty and think about our appearance, we get to see this contrasted in two of the characters that we have, Kyuri and Miho. I think they're quite interesting individually and also in the way that they contrast each other. So Kyuri is one of the characters who's got a lot of plastic surgery done. And the way that she's introduced to us is basically, you know, that is the premise of who she is, that she is really beautiful. So that's how we see her at first as the really beautiful woman who's done a lot of work to get to that beauty. And as the story progresses, we realize that she's actually a lot more complex. She has a lot of other things going on in her life that she's actually had to struggle a lot. And there are different dynamics with her family. So I think what this at least represented to me was how when a woman is really beautiful, we tend to just have that shallow perception of her rather than seeing her as a complex individual. This is, I guess, the downside of beauty privilege is when people don't really, you know, consider the vast spectrum of your experience as a human being.

[00:29:11] **Sumaiyya** And in contrast to this, we have Miho, who is this artist. And she has an interesting life because she's pursuing her art, and she's quite in touch with the elite community. She is an orphan, and her experience in the orphanage eventually led her to get this scholarship, which gives her entry into high society in a way. And one of the other characters at one point comments and tells her that, listen, you wouldn't understand this, but it's actually your beauty that has given you all of these opportunities. And then, you know, looking back, we realize that as someone who was naturally beautiful, she's actually quite proud of that fact. You know, she's quite proud that she hasn't had to make any changes to herself. In fact, people at her workplace don't want her to cut her hair because it's so long, and they really love her long hair. So she is quite proud of her natural beauty and ignorant of the fact that it is actually what allowed her to get all of those opportunities.

And to me, this was like a clear example of beauty privilege—it's when you have access to things that other people don't have access to.

[00:30:28] **Kendra** It was really interesting to see her experience as well, like you mentioned with the other women who are going through this, kind of, together in their apartment complex. And Ara, who is the character who is mute—and we find out late in the book why, and I don't want to go into that—but I really loved her chapters in particular because she is the only person who is not considered necessarily naturally beautiful, and she has not had any surgery. She's a hairdresser.

[00:31:04] **Kendra** And it's interesting because there's always this undertone of coverage of people with disabilities at the orphanage where a couple of the characters grew up. They were also housed with people who are mentally ill and people with physical disabilities. And there is some ableist language in there, so just a heads up. But it's more of a commentary on the ableism that the other characters have. And it's kind of like another layer of beauty privilege because you have them who have these ableist ideas of some of the people that they grew up with in the orphanage. And, oh, well, at least we're not like that. And then you have these levels of beauty. And it's very interesting to see all of those things interact together, that even these women who are working to try to obtain beauty privilege in some ways, they also are more privileged than others already. And it was just an interesting contrast throughout the book. This book has so many moving parts. But I think ultimately it comes together really well.

[00:32:15] **Sumaiyya** I think it really gives us this perspective on the day-to-day scrutiny that women have to experience and the pressures that that creates in society. And also, like, you know, the dynamics that women have between each other because what happens is that, you know, you start competing in some ways. So I definitely noticed that as well in some of the characters where there was this consciousness that, oh, what if she gets surgery done and starts to look exactly like me or becomes more beautiful than me? So I think it's . . . you know, there are many interesting aspects to this. And we definitely need to think a bit critically about beauty. And this book is definitely a great place to start with that.

[00:33:00] **Kendra** The themes in this book are incredibly strong. I think that's, for me, that's the biggest strength of the book, is that by using this cast of characters, these women from a different range of backgrounds and different variations of beauty privilege, she's able to give you a full picture of this story and how it plays out. And I think it's just really well done, and it's very thought provoking. Since I finished it, I keep thinking about the different characters and their lives. And I kind of wonder what they're doing now. It kind of ends a bit on a cliffhanger for one of the characters, a little bit. Like you kind of want to know what her future is going to be in a lot of different ways. And I don't give any spoilers, but, um. Yeah. I wonder what they're doing now.

[00:33:47] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And I felt like their lives and the things that they're dealing with were so complex. And in contrast to that, the men were quite one dimensional and flat, which I really liked because it kind of shows you how when you are born into privilege, you know, especially as a man, when you have all the privilege, you become, you know, quite lazy. And when life is easy for you, you don't have complex . . . you don't have a complex reality happening for you. I felt like, in some ways, this book definitely portrays that to a certain degree. And so that was IF I HAD YOUR FACE by Frances Cha, which was published by Viking in the UK.

[00:34:26] **Kendra** Those are our two discussion picks. What are some of your picks for further reading, Sumaiyya?

[00:34:32] **Sumaiyya** So my first selection for the reading is WINTER IN SOKCHO by Elise Shua Dusapin, and this was translated by Aneesa Abbas Higgins and published by Daunt Books. If you are interested in the kind of story that we get in IF I HAD YOUR FACE, then this is definitely a book to follow up with that. So the protagonist of this novel is a young woman who works at a guesthouse where she meets a tourist who is a Frenchman, and he is a graphic novelist. What's interesting is that Sokcho, the town that this book is situated in, it's a tourist town at the border between North and South Korea. And this book kind of looks at their quirky, unconventional romance. But I think the beauty of this story is in the way that it captures a sense of winter and calm, controlled atmosphere of a small town. And the reason that I've selected this is because our main character is someone who is constantly criticized by her mother for the way she looks. We get to see how she internalizes that insecurity and how it manifests in her as a person and affects her relationships. And one of the characters who appears in the novel is a young woman who is staying at the guesthouse with her boyfriend while she is recovering from facial plastic surgery. So definitely a book that I really liked just for the atmosphere of it and the kind of characters that we get to see.

[00:35:58] **Kendra** And one of my picks for further reading is BETTY by Tiffany McDaniel. And I want to give some trigger warnings for violence against animals, children, and women. It has all of the trigger warnings. So just know that going in. And some of it is a bit graphic. So just fyi. But this book looks at Betty. She has a father who is Cherokee, and her mother is a blonde, blue-eyed, white woman. And so she has two other sisters. And they have a blonde sister who is considered the most beautiful. And there's a brunette sister. And then there is Betty, who looks very much like her father. And so she's always picked on more so than her sisters. And I think that this is really interesting. You know, she is a biracial child and having siblings who might favor her mom. It really. . . . She struggles with her identity growing up. And so I thought that was a very interesting take on that and how that's something that people would always comment on is how she'd look like her father and how she received worse treatment in school and in society because of her appearance. And so I thought that was a very interesting take on it. Yeah. And it's set in Appalachian Ohio. So.

[00:37:21] **Sumaiyya** That sounds really good. And I generally like reading books that have this kind of theme of proximity to beauty where you have, like, either siblings or the mother/daughter dynamic, where you get to see, you know, one person being more conventionally beautiful than the other. And how that kind of affects their relationship.

[00:37:41] **Kendra** Yeah, her mother, her mother really resents her daughter for looking like her father, and that plays a huge role in the novel as well.

[00:37:49] **Sumaiyya** So my second pick for my further reading is MODESTY: A FASHION PARADOX by Hafsa Lodhi. And the reason I selected this is because of the unique cultural context that, you know, that exists for a lot of Muslim women and for women who choose to dress modestly. And I think with Instagram culture, we do have this exposure to modest fashion, which I think is incredible because we get to celebrate modesty as a way of life in the way that it presents in our clothing. So I thought that it would be an interesting book to supplement the kind of discussions we've been having about beauty and look at it from the perspective of fashion because that's also something that Carly has talked about in her book. So I really liked this book as a supplement to that. So a couple of other books

that are on my TBR, which are also nonfiction reads that I quickly wanted to shout out because I think they'll also be perfect reads on this topic are *WHITER: ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN ON SKIN COLOR AND COLORISM*, edited by Nikki Khanna. This was published by New York University Press. And *TWISTED: THE TANGLED HISTORY OF BLACK HAIR CULTURE* by Emma Dabiri, published by Harper Perennial.

[00:39:08] **Kendra** And my last one is *THE VANISHING HALF* by Brit Bennett, which you've probably all already heard of. It was long listed for the National Book Award, etc. But this book looks at two twin sisters. And they come from a town in Louisiana where it's a town of Black people who are very light skinned, and they're very much favoring that you also marry a light-skinned Black person so that you can continue their culture and their way of life, I guess. Well, these two twin sisters go to a city. And one marries . . . he was described in the book as . . . this one townsperson was like, "She went and found the darkest man she could find." And then the other sister marries a white man and actually leaves the community to pass as white. And so when we talk about beauty privilege, it's always whiteness that is favored. And there is a just complex discussion of colorism in this book that I think is incredibly important, but also very well written. And this discussion of two sisters, who look exactly the same, who make different choices. . . . And then their daughters. . . . One daughter of one of the twins is blonde haired and very white, and the other one is a very dark-skinned Black girl. But they are cousins. And it's just a very complex story. I read it very quickly. The audiobook is amazing, and I would recommend highly. So that's out from Riverhead.

[00:40:42] **Sumaiyya** Perfect. That's one of the books that I feel everyone is reading right now.

[00:40:47] **Kendra** Yeah. Yeah. And it's perfect for the topic too, I think, as well. So.

[00:40:51] **Sumaiyya** Yeah.

[00:40:52] **Kendra** So where can people find you about the internet?

[00:40:55] **Sumaiyya** So I'm primarily on Instagram (@sumaiyya.books) and on Twitter (@sumaiyyabooks). I also have a BookTube, by the way. But I'm going to get back to it over the next few weeks. But yeah.

[00:41:08] **Kendra** And you all can find me on Instagram and Twitter (@kdwinchester). I am also on YouTube at just plain Kendra Winchester. You put it in the search bar. I'll be there. But that's it! That's our show. And so if you haven't yet, please leave us a review in your podcast app of choice. Thanks to all of you who have already done that. And many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. To find out more about becoming one of our patrons or to subscribe to our newsletter or to find the transcript for this episode, visit us at readingwomenpodcast.com.

[00:41:47] **Sumaiyya** Join us next time where we'll be announcing our first shortlist for the Reading Women Awards. In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thank you so much for listening.