



Read with Pride, Episode 3, Book Cafe

Transcript:

00;00;03;27 - 00;00;19;12

Voiceover

[VOICEOVER] Hello and welcome to Read with Pride, a podcast focused on LGBTQIA+ literature, brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Ocean Pride Committee.

00;00;19;14 - 00;00;25;28

Diane

[DIANE] Hi. I'm Diane, pronouns she/her. I work for the Toms River Branch and I'm on the Ocean Pride Committee.

00;00;26;01 - 00;00;32;16

Lexi

[LEXI] I'm also on the Ocean Pride Committee. My name is Lexi. I go by she/her, and I work out of Toms River Branch.

00;00;32;19 - 00;00;39;13

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Hello, my name is Elliot. I work in the Toms River Branch. I'm also on the Ocean Pride Committee, and my pronouns are he/him.

00;00;39;15 - 00;00;50;26

Frankie

[FRANKIE] Hi, my name is Frankie. I work at the Lakewood Branch. My pronouns are he/him and they/them and I am also on the Ocean Pride Committee. And we are here to talk about books.

00;00;50;29 - 00;01;01;13

Diane

[DIANE] Yup. We're here, for June is Pride month, so we have a little bit different for a podcast. We're going to talk about a bunch of different books that we're interested in. Who wants to start?

00;01;01;16 - 00;01;43;27

Frankie

[FRANKIE] My selection for this book cafe is the book, Godkiller by Hannah Kaner. It is really fascinating to me because this is what is known as a queer norm book. This is a high fantasy story that has magic and gods and warring kingdoms and political intrigue, but it does a phenomenal job of integrating queer characters and queerness into the world without having to replicate fantasy, homophobia, or transphobia. And it's really delightful as an LGBTQ plus person, to just see people like me in a story and not have to suffer for it.

00;01;43;29 - 00;01;45;27

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah. Yeah.

00;01;45;29 - 00;04;27;16

Frankie

[FRANKIE] This is a world in which different gods are created by the wishes and desires of people. Gods pop up all the time for all sorts of reasons and about three years before the events of the novel, a war was waged by the King of the Kingdom of Middren to eradicate all gods from the land. And now the worship of gods is forbidden. But you try telling people to stop wishing and desiring and wanting better than what they have. There is a class of people, de Vegas, who are effectively divine exterminators. They're sent in when a god may have popped up in a small village and decides to poison the waters until they get a particular sacrifice. Our primary protagonist, her name is Kissen. She grew up in a small fishing village as part of a favored family of a local ocean god, and her entire family was sacrificed to a fire god. She barely made it out alive, and as she has come to adulthood, she is a vega. She is good at it, and she enjoys it until one day she meets a young girl who has a god problem that she can't fix by killing the god, because if she killed the god, she would also kill this young girl. And so she has to go with this young girl, Inara, on a quest to the land of remaining shrines, this abandoned city, and figure out what is going on with this god, protect a young girl, and let herself become vulnerable to the bonds of family once again. It's quite beautiful. It's quite gripping. And another thing that I really loved about this book was that they do a phenomenal job of integrating disability into the story. Kissen has a below-the-knee leg amputation and wears a prosthetic. Some of her found family are deaf and hard of hearing. There is sign language that is kind of universally understood and used throughout the kingdom. There are discussions of war time trauma. None of it is done in a way that feels like the author is trying to push modern concepts into a fantasy world. It's all very well integrated, and it does not break the immersion of the fantasy story.

00;04;27;18 - 00;05;20;18

Lexi

[LEXI] I think for me, it's really refreshing to hear that because I tend, as a type one diabetic, I tend to stay away from anything that's a little bit dystopian, anything that's a little bit apocalyptic because it hits a little bit too close to home for me. So I like the idea that it's integrated in the story. It doesn't feel awkward or like they kind of jammed it into place out of nowhere. That's a really refreshing thing. I really like that idea. Just hearing that alone is drawing me into reading it. It's a great thing to have. I think it's so rare in books, especially fantasy books, where, you know, somebody can like, make fire with their brain or like, you know, be invisible. But yet we don't have anyone that's in a wheelchair or anybody that is an amputee or anything like that. So that's really exciting to hear.

00;05;20;20 - 00;05;28;06

Diane

[DIANE] So what did you most like about the book? You sort of were telling us what you like, but were there things you most liked and you least liked about the book?

00;05;28;11 - 00;06;13;27

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I think what I enjoyed the most about this book was I, I think the diversity of characters as I was talking about with, like, it being just a very queer norm world, very having a lot of disability representation integrated throughout all of the characters felt very believable because of their complexity and the flaws. And I felt like even if I wouldn't necessarily like everyone who I met, I understood what drove them in a way that made the story very compelling for me. What I don't like? I really enjoyed this book. So what I'll say is that the second book is out, what the third book isn't, and I want more.

00;06;14;00 - 00;06;18;03

Diane

[DIANE] So that leads to another question. Have you read any other books by this author?

00;06;18;06 - 00;06;56;02

Frankie

[FRANKIE] Yes, yes I have. There's the sequel to Godkiller, Sunbringer, which picks up about immediately after the end of this book. I will say I consumed this by listening to the audiobooks. The first one is on Libby and the second was on Hoopla. And I found that when I'm reading a high fantasy story like this, where there can be so many different characters listening to the audiobook can be a very helpful way to keep track of different characters and plot lines, because often narrators will use different voices for different characters and I really enjoyed that reading experience.

00;06;56;05 - 00;07;20;09

Diane

[DIANE] I like that you say that because I consume most of my books in audio, but I have a harder time listening to fantasy because I feel like it takes me a long time to, like, get into it in the beginning, right? That's what I feel anyway. But I guess you're right if they do the different narrations, but because I'm listening to it so fast, sometimes you don't always get the narrator then, if you're listening to it at 2.0 or something.

00;07;20;09 - 00;08;03;24

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I mostly listen at 1.75, so I understand. Sometimes I get the wrong pronunciation of something because it's so fast, but broadly speaking, I really enjoy getting to hear the story. This is a case where I think the narrator really enhanced the experience. I was able to feel a lot of the emotion of the characters, and there are several different perspectives, different chapters, multi point of view kind of story. And so each character has a very clear tone, not just with the vocal tone, but the way that they think. Their minds are all very distinct. And I think that was very helpful.

00;08;03;26 - 00;08;10;02

Diane

[DIANE] Or just tell us how the book made you feel, like, were there specific emotions you felt in reading it?

00;08;10;04 - 00;09;35;16

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I think one of the big feelings that Godkiller brought for me was this feeling of longing. A lot of this book is centered around the idea of finding your family or finding where you belong. Kissen and Inara go on a quest, we meet Kissen's chosen family and this life that she's built up after having a very rough childhood and we get to see this little pocket of love in a very hard world, and then her choosing to leave, to go on a dangerous quest with a young girl that reminds Kissen all too much of herself. When she was younger, I felt as though I was almost watching this character Kissen try to re-parent herself by taking better care of Inara, than she got to be taken care of. And it was beautiful. It was at times a little bit frustrating because there are clearly moments where Kissen was looking at Inara not as an individual, but there was always a deep place of love that all the characters were acting from, even if it isn't immediately recognizable. And I felt very touched by that. So, Elliot, what did you read?

00;09;35;19 - 00;10;05;06

Elliot

[ELLIOT] I read a romance novel called Waiting for the Flood by Alexis Hall. This is their pen name, and they use a pen name because in their own words, their day job is not compatible with writing clear romance, which I thought was a little heartbreaking and made me want to read this book more. It is a romance novel, which I haven't read a romance novel before, but a first time for everything.

00;10;05;09 - 00;10;36;14

Lexi

[LEXI] That's super interesting. I think that the idea that the author uses a pen name for that reason is really intriguing, because you would think that, I don't know, in 2024 it would be a little bit easier to have the two lives combined, but that's really interesting. I know that you said that you thought it was kind of heartbreaking. Do you think that that duality influenced the writing style at all? Did it feel different to you?

00;10;36;16 - 00;11;31;15

Elliot

[ELLIOT] No, I felt like the story went naturally. One thing that I really appreciated about this book is that the main character, Edwin, has a speech disorder called disfluency, or stuttering. And, my original major in college was speech and hearing disorders. Having a character whose focus was not stuttering was just another characteristic that they had was fantastic. One thing that I would note about this book is that there is very technical jargon peppered in through a tender prose. You might need a dictionary nearby to get through some of the jargon that is used for different sounds that he struggles with.

00;11;31;17 - 00;11;34;09

Frankie

[FRANKIE] So, Elliot, what is this book about?

00;11;34;12 - 00;12;36;12

Elliot

[ELLIOT] This book is about a man who, two years after his husband, decided to leave him because he no longer loves him, which is very sad. And when he decides to stay and live in the house that they had built together for ten years, and that was heartbreaking in itself because it went, even though the breakup had ended two years ago, was unable to move on. And the house is in Oxford, England. The author is British and all of the characters are British. This house floods very easily and a big storm is coming and the emergency agency sends a civil engineer named Adam and maybe this broken hearted character will be able to open himself up and become vulnerable enough to love again.

00;12;36;14 - 00;12;54;21

Diane

[DIANE] I think being from Jersey Shore, we could all appreciate waiting for the flood and have things flood, you know, like it and maybe waiting for some romance. I think it's so interesting you chose romance because when we were talking about this, there were specific, like nonfiction books that you were - so you not tend to read fiction as much?

00;12;54;23 - 00;13;22;00

Elliot

[ELLIOT] I am new to reading fiction. Before I started working here at the library, I had almost never read fiction except for college courses. But because we have so many novels for free, I figured why not take advantage of that? I chose not to do a nonfiction book for this podcast, just because I wanted this to be more lighthearted and not technical.

00;13;22;03 - 00;13;47;08

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I am quite a frequent romance reader, and so when I saw that you were reading something by Alexis Hall, I got really excited because I've read some of their other books, like *Mortal Follies*, which is a gay vampire romance, and I was very intrigued to hear that this was a more technical story grounded in reality.

00;13;47;11 - 00;14;01;08

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Definitely. It's definitely a book that sounds realistic, in that how they're preparing this neighborhood for a flood, and it seemed accurate to me.

00;14;01;11 - 00;14;06;08

Frankie

[FRANKIE] What did you enjoy the most or the least about this book?

00;14;06;10 - 00;14;32;20

Elliot

[ELLIOT] What I enjoyed the most was how much I related to it, somebody being scared to love. What I wasn't too crazy about was how much they hesitated to love. It was a little frustrating. I'm not going to give any spoilers, but when they are ready, it happens so quickly. I felt like it should have been more gradual, but that's just my opinion.

00;14;32;22 - 00;14;41;26

Frankie

[FRANKIE] A common experience that I have as a romance reader is, like, I frequently want to like, take the main characters in love interests and shake them like, "Why don't you kiss already?"

00;14;41;28 - 00;14;44;13

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Yeah. Definitely there.

00;14;44;15 - 00;14;49;01

Diane

[DIANE] Do you read a physical copy? Do you listen to audio? How do you read your...?

00;14;49;03 - 00;14;59;29

Elliot

[ELLIOT] I definitely like to read a physical copy especially for fiction because I like how in my own head I can change the voices.

00;15;00;03 - 00;15;04;20

Lexi

Were there any quotes or passages in this book that really stuck out to you?

00;15;04;24 - 00;15;46;26

Elliot

[ELLIOT] There's this one part towards the beginning where Edwin shares with us, the reader, "This is the story of my life: standing on the edges of things and worrying, when I'm supposed to just walk through them." Edwin is frustrated, maybe just as much as the reader. He feels like there's pressure to move on, including from his former mother-in-law that still reaches out to him. And Edwin's like, "I'm not really a part of your family anymore." And she says, "Oh, you'll always be a part of the family." That's awkward for Edwin.

00;15;46;29 - 00;15;48;22

Diane

[DIANE] I like that quote, standing what?

00;15;48;24 - 00;15;56;03

Elliot

[ELLIOT] "This is the story of my life: standing on the edges of things and worrying, when I'm supposed to just walk through them."

00;15;56;04 - 00;16;06;06

Diane

[DIANE] I like that because as an over analyzer, I do sometimes stand on the edge and worry. You know, and that's so true to life. Like, I worry about things more than just doing them.

00;16;06;07 - 00;16;10;13

Elliot

[ELLIOT] That's my story.

00;16;10;15 - 00;16;39;14

Frankie

[FRANKIE] So I have a question for you. Both of our books, it seems to deal with disability in some way. Do you feel like the discussion of disability in *Waiting for the Flood* was able to enhance Edwin's story? Or do you think that even if, say, you weren't as informed as you are as an individual with your particular background, that someone can still get into Edwin's head?

00;16;39;17 - 00;17;07;05

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Definitely. I think they would be able to relate even without having to take international phonetics courses. And I think that even if you don't know some of the words, skip past that word, you're going to know what's going on. I think you would be able to get into their head, and I like how sympathetic it is towards his fluency and stuttering. It's not an obstacle for the book. It's not an obstacle in the writing.

00;17;07;08 - 00;17;16;26

Diane

[DIANE] You picked this up because you thought it seemed interesting. Did your opinion change as you read it? Did you like it more? Did you like it less?

00;17;17;03 - 00;18;06;00

Elliot

[ELLIOT] As a romance book, first time reader, I felt like it definitely grew on me. I actually became tearful only in the first dozen pages, because how much - how shy he is, how self-conscious he is over his stutter. Even though the other characters don't seem to mind. He's very self-conscious. He actually writes - Edwin speaks and says to another character, "Most people think I'm shy, but it's more of a self-consciousness. When I was younger, I was scared of people only listening to how I say things, not what I say. And the more you think something like that, the harder it is to risk saying anything at all." So that made me cry.

00;18;06;03 - 00;18;32;09

Frankie

[FRANKIE] Understandably so. I think - and I would love to hear everyone's opinions on this - I feel like queer stories are an excellent avenue to discuss other intersections of marginalized identity because as LGBT characters and worlds and fiction seem to be getting more and more popular, authors are able to bring in more complex stories.

00;18;32;11 - 00;19;31;16

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, I think that's a really good point to make. That stories are definitely becoming more multi-dimensional and not just one thing. So while I'm really excited to see that queer stories are becoming much more accessible and mainstream, it's nice when you have stories that are more than just one thing. Like, yeah, this is a horror story, or this is a mystery. And the queerest thing about it is that the main characters queer. It's nice when it has other facets to it, like the intersection of being a person of color or of having a disability or something else that is also marginalized. So that is something that I really appreciate as well. And I think a lot of readers do. It makes it more real because people are not just one story. They have a lot of different things going on with them. So it's interesting to be able to see that reflected in writing.

00;19;31;18 - 00;20;10;00

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, I guess probably in the last few years when I've read more queer authors, but there's more queer literature out there. I feel like I'll pick up a book, I don't know what it's about, and then it's a asexual couple or asexual person, or it's a queer couple. Like, it's not as - I do feel like LGBTQ literature is getting out there broadly. And I think what's interesting is in more LGBTQ literature, you do find different abilities even more than the contemporary romances. You'll find definitely more differently abled people in the LGBTQ reads.

00;20;10;03 - 00;20;12;29

Elliot

[ELLIOT] So what did you read, Lexi?

00;20;13;02 - 00;21;13;00

Lexi

[LEXI] I was trying to pick between a bunch of books for this podcast because I was reading a few, and then I was trying to narrow it down. So the book that I really would like to talk about more is *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado. This book was really interesting because it is not just one story, it is a collection of stories. So it was interesting to have a theme throughout of fantasy and horror and sci fi and otherworldly happenings, all kind of with a queer twist. Not every story focused just on like a queer main character, but it was really interesting to have that. It was good. It was like a taste test for different stories, and I liked it because it felt like I was getting more, I don't know, more like queer stories than just one book. It felt better, I guess.

00;21;13;03 - 00;21;21;19

Frankie

[FRANKIE] So since this is a collection of short stories, can you give us possibly, summary of a couple of the stories that stood out to you?

00;21;21;26 - 00;23;17;00

Lexi

[LEXI] They were all pretty interesting, and some of them were, like, really, really different from each other. I will give a - this is important - a trigger warning - because this book does deal with very sensitive topics. There's a lot of violence, there is a lot of graphic wording, all of that kind of stuff. So if you try to avoid books that are violent towards women or are graphic, it might be better to maybe read this with a careful lens or avoid it. But for the most part, you probably would find one of the stories at least interesting. They're all pretty different with - she has a very unique voice, and that's something that I really liked about her. So a little bit of these stories just kind of like a little snippet of each one, or just a few of them. There are stories that deal with heterosexual marriage, and then through a lens of the wife discovering that she is bisexual, but she doesn't have any sort of hang up with that or any sort of, I don't know, negative feeling with that. It's really interesting. She doesn't focus. There's like an instance where she is drawing a woman in an art class and finds out that she is attracted to that woman, and she talks about how she doesn't like that attraction, not because it is queer, but because she doesn't want to see that woman as an object. And it's very interesting. And a lot of the stories kind of deal with that, and the role women play in relationships, as well as in kind of society and how they can be objects. They can view others as objects. It's really interesting. The role and how we see women is very prevalent throughout.

00;23;17;03 - 00;24;03;04

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I agree that that's really, really interesting and something else that I appreciate is that the character isn't hung up on her newfound queerness, something that is very prevalent in the bisexual community in particular, is if you are in what appears to be a heterosexual or a straight-passing relationship. A lot of the times there seems to be a hang up on like, "Oh, am I really bi enough to say that I am part of the community if it looks like I'm straight?" And so when you introduce the topic of, oh, this is a woman who's married to a man who realizes she is queer. That was my immediate like, oh no, I don't want to reinforce that. If you're bi you're bi and that's clear enough.

00;24;03;07 - 00;24;45;10

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah. And I know that's a common fear. Whenever you have a character that's bi you're immediately like, "Oh, where is this going?" Yeah, that was not the case in this. It was not a hang up. It was not made out to be kind of from a point of being like less than or not enough. It was really interesting. It was definitely less focused on the sexuality of it and more focused on the gaze. So like where normally I think a lot of media is consumed from a male gaze and a male heterosexual gaze, this one was very focused on a woman's gaze, finding another woman attractive, and it was really interesting to kind of see that flip side.

00;24;45;13 - 00;24;53;02

Elliot

[ELLIOT] So this is a collection of short stories. Out of all of them, which was your favorite and how did it make you feel?

00;24;53;04 - 00;26;25;07

Lexi

[LEXI] It was interesting. I had a couple that were in the same place for me where I was very much like, "Oh, I love this one, but it's a little bit like sci fi, but I love this one because it's a little bit horror." This book really, truly was like a good option for somebody that is either indecisive or just loves different genres. It's very good for the eclectic reader, which I feel like is very much how I live my life. So you asked me which one was my favorite and how did it make me feel? That one's kind of hard. I think that there's a lot of them I really liked. I really liked "Real Women Have Bodies" because it was very otherworldly and very kind of like magical realism. Like a lot of these, to be more specific, most of these stories have to deal with magical realism and otherworldly power and kind of things that are a little bit just adjacent of reality, things that aren't obvious, like we're not living in like, Harry Potter's world, we're going to the grocery store, but maybe on the way you see something slightly out of place. And then when you look back, it's not. It's just very natural. There's a lot of things that are more subtle, which I really liked. A lot of the stories, though, are very much like that. Magical realism is my favorite genre, just because it is so applicable, and it feels more real to me than just pure fantasy.

00;26;25;10 - 00;26;31;05

Elliot

[ELLIOT] And what does magical realism mean for someone who's listening and is not familiar with that term?

00;26;31;06 - 00;27;04;00

Lexi

[LEXI] That is a good question. Usually I start things by defining my terms, so that is a good one. So magical realism, if you're not a fan or not aware, is books that are based in reality. But like I was saying, they're a little bit off. They have themes of magic that enhance them, but it's not the main focus. You wouldn't classify them as purely fantasy, but they're not like real life either. For me, it's a very sweet spot combo of the two of them.

00;27;04;02 - 00;27;08;08

Diane

[DIANE] Do you feel like Sandra Bullock in Practical Magic is more magical realism?

00;27;08;14 - 00;27;13;21

Lexi

[LEXI] Oh, I love that movie. I just I just heard that they're making a second. Part two.

00;27;13;23 - 00;27;23;29

Diane

[DIANE] Yes, yes. And both of them. Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman are... but, like, is that magical realism like the Sandra Bullock piece, not...

00;27;24;01 - 00;27;34;25

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, kind of. So, like, that - I mean that's like, like a little bit, I would say personally more exaggerated for the movie, but yes. So, I think it's a book too. I don't know.

00;27;34;25 - 00;27;35;11

Diane

[DIANE] It is a book.

00;27;35;13 - 00;27;36;08

Lexi

[LEXI] Have you read it?

00;27;36;11 - 00;27;37;11

Diane

[DIANE] No.

00;27;37;13 - 00;27;38;21

Lexi

[LEXI] Neither have I. I would love to.

00;27;38;23 - 00;27;41;25

Diane

[DIANE] And it's an author that we might have had booked at the library.

00;27;41;28 - 00;27;48;11

Lexi

[LEXI] We did have her visit actually. This is so - I hope she's not listening to this - I had her sign my book, and I never read it.

00;27;48;17 - 00;27;52;02

Diane

[DIANE] Oh, but, you know, it's important. Signed books doesn't have to be read.

00;27;52;03 - 00;28;22;15

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, but I read other snippets of things that she wrote that I really loved. And I really loved Practical Magic. That was one of my favorite movies growing up. That movie is cool in the fact that it really intertwines, like, kind of like, I don't know, more, not like boring, but more like mundane parts of life with the little magic parts of, like, little things that are like, that's kind of off. So I guess I would like for a movie version, I guess I would say yeah. But yeah, I love that movie.

00;28;22;18 - 00;28;42;03

Diane

[DIANE] Sorry I dipped into movie because in my brain I've, I, I feel like sometimes in my librarian that maybe she did her way through her degree because I'm like, "What does magical realism mean?" And what does, you know, like sometimes the genres I don't always, like, if I like a book, I like it and I don't always category.

00;28;42;05 - 00;29;01;29

Diane

[LEXI] Oh, that's totally - you know, that's totally valid, Diane. That's totally valid. I feel like I did a little bit more of the labeling with the genres, because I like to write, and I did a lot of writing in my younger days, my college days. I'm also like that too. That's what I was saying with being, like, eclectic. Like I jump all over the place with different genres.

00;29;02;02 - 00;29;17;07

Frankie

[FRANKIE] You mentioned that this collection touches on a bunch of different genres. Speaking to the eclectic reader of horror and fantasy and science fiction, what would you say was the scariest part of the book?

00;29;17;09 - 00;30;36;22

Lexi

[LEXI] I think the scariest parts of this book are the fact that a lot of these are real life situations of violence, which is very scary to think about, but I think if we're going with more of a safe horror, if you could say that, is that some of the stories intertwine, like ghost stories or like fables and things that you heard as a kid. So the very first story, "The Husband Stitch," is about a heterosexual couple that are married and she is the one who I was speaking about before, who was in a drawing class. I'm not going to give the spoiler away, but she is a reference to the story "The Green Ribbon," where the woman wears the green ribbon around her neck and never takes it off, and no one can touch it or whatever. And you're like, "Why is she always wearing that?" And it's very well done. But yeah, so without giving it away, if you're a fan of that, I would definitely suggest this book. And they're, like, they're short. They're quick reads. Like, a lot of these stories are like a chapter or two like this is not an arduous read. And because it's so enjoyable, like you could really, like just plow through it. But yeah, I think that one story, I think a lot of people are familiar with that. Right? Like the Green Ribbon story.

00;30;36;25 - 00;30;39;24

Diane

[DIANE] Did you read the physical copy or did you listen to it?

00;30;39;26 - 00;31;16;21

Lexi

[LEXI] It kind of depends. I'm kind of like you where, like, I do consume a lot of stuff through audio, but it depends what kind of kick I'm on. So this one I did listen to, I picked up the book and I feel like this one I would have preferred to be read, and that's because of the different characters and voices and maybe because of the person that was reading it. So I did read this as an audiobook. I think I would have

actually preferred this one as a physical book, but we do have it available as both. It is on Hoopla, and we also have it physically in our catalog.

00;31;16;23 - 00;31;20;23

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Is there a passage that spoke out to you that you'd like to share with us?

00;31;20;26 - 00;32;34;03

Lexi

[LEXI] This book actually opened with one of the best quotes that I've ever heard, and I thought it was a really powerful way to open this book. So this book opened up with the quote, "My body is a haunted house that I am lost in. There are no doors, but there are knives and 100 windows." And that's by Jacqui Germain. And I thought that that was a really great, strong way to open this, because that immediately intrigued me. And I related very heavily to that through my own experiences. And I was like, I could go a million ways - not trusting your body because you are chronically ill or in an unsafe situation or in a transition period. For me, I was like, what about your body is haunted? Like, what does this mean? Where are we going? And just the sense of being lost and trying to figure things out. But the fact that there literally are no doors but knives and windows was a really interesting juxtaposition because it's like, okay, well, you're trying to find yourself, but everything feels unsafe or the wrong way or whatever. So I was very intrigued to kind of get into that and see what angle that quote was coming from. Yeah, it was a great way to start this book.

00;32;34;06 - 00;32;38;17

Frankie

[FRANKIE] Diane, what book did you bring to the book cafe?

00;32;38;20 - 00;33;52;07

Diane

[DIANE] I didn't bring my physical book but, um, the book that I'm talking about is The Guncle Abroad by Steven Rowley. This is the second book. The first book was The Guncle, which he wrote a few years ago. The Guncle Abroad just came out the end of May, and without giving any spoilers, you have to know a little about the first book. It was about a gay uncle who helped with his niece and nephew. His words while his brother was in rehab after the sister in law passed away. So that was the first book was, you know, about grief and love and family and a gay uncle. And this one is now the brother is about to get remarried. And so the children, want help from their gay uncle to put the kibosh to the marriage. And he goes on a trip with them and he takes them abroad. What I do notice about Stephen Rowley's books, I do feel like they're always from a place of privilege, like they always have more money to do things like, I love his books, but I'm also like, okay, that's great if you can...

00;33;52;09 - 00;34;27;19

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, I very much agree with you, Diane, because we read for this the first episode of this podcast. We read the Celebrants. And I remember saying that to you too. I love the idea and the energy, but it's extremely unrealistic, I think, for the majority of people, because it does come from such a world

of privilege that it - while I find him very relatable in a lot of ways, that part really kind of disconnected me, but it's interesting. And I know since you've read several of his books, that is a theme throughout his books or...?

00:34;27;21 - 00:35;12;13

Diane

[DIANE] No, it is. And I mean, in this one, the gay uncle is supposed to be an actor. So like, you know where his money came from, like he worked on a sitcom and then he, he had like a spin off of this sitcom and things like that. It's believable where the money comes from, but I think I put it aside because I love the humor in his books, like he's always got - I love like a good contemporary story. I love a lot of stories, but I like humor. Like, I think that life could be so hard and, you know, and when they talk about this heavy like grief, it's hard and it comes and goes. And this was supposed to be a few years later, but grief doesn't go away, you know, like these children lost their parent. And that parent will always be gone.

00:35;12;19 - 00:35;51;07

Lexi

[LEXI] That's really interesting that you touched upon that because it seems like in a lot of his books, there is a very strong theme of grief. And I'm wondering if he writes that from like his personal life, because that's a very big part of it. But he writes a lot about grief and kind of the process of moving through. But he does it in a way that doesn't feel like, I don't know, some of it doesn't really feel fake. It feels very much like his lived experience. While some of it might be cleaned up for a book, it still feels like that was his experience.

00:35;51;10 - 00:36;18;03

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. I mean, again, I didn't do enough research to see what his journey with grief has been, but he even one of the books of his that I read was Lily and Octopus, which is a journey of grief about a gay man and his dog, his dachshund. And then his dachshund gets a tumor. So that was also sad. And a different grief of an animal of who's your family member is very true.

00:36;18;06 - 00:37;49;26

Frankie

[FRANKIE] Just to add into the conversation, because I separately also read the celebrants on my own. And so I do agree with your points that the concept seemed nice and interesting. I do think it would be interesting to attend my own funeral, but I think that part of why perhaps the characters may come from a more privileged walk of life is because these kinds of stories can often be for people seeking escapism. It seems like we as a group, picked some very serious and difficult books, but I will say is that a lot of just like the LGBT community, LGBT literature is not a monolith and you will find all sorts of different levels of depth and severity or lightheartedness and humor, and you can really find anything that you're looking for in this umbrella of LGBT lit. When you're thinking about stories about grief and LGBT family, a lot of the times different nontraditional family structures come into focus. So would you say that the world of the uncle creates an interesting blended family, and how would that impact the reader emotionally? How does that impact the other characters?

00;37;49;28 - 00;39;46;26

Diane

[DIANE] Okay, let me think. I feel like this is an essay question or a two parter, right? No. It's good. So I think chosen family is a term that is used. I've heard several people use and I feel like in the Guncle Abroad and even the Guncle, the main character has probably now brought - came back to his biological family, more in the need that the brother needed him. And but then they expanded also because the brother is remarrying and he's the guncle. But there's a launt which is a lesbian aunt and comes into the - yes, yeah, so and then of course that like, well, who's better, the guncle or the launt, you know? So the children are so like just whatever they have this gay uncle and this lesbian aunt. And I did feel that whereas maybe he didn't have a chosen family as much. I felt like this book, more than his other book, spoke about not just gay men, whereas I feel like his older books were more focused on gay men. Like now he's expanding more. And of course, I left my notes about that at home. But he had a couple in a polyamorous relationship. He had a couple that was transgender and non-binary. He definitely interacted with more people in the LGBT community than just gay men. And I think that it's expanding, like hopefully the world is more varied. Yeah, for sure, and definitely the literature is showing that. I think that humor, like I said, you're right, this could be a lot of escapism because there's a lot of humor. There's a part where he brings them to Austria and they walk in the same footsteps as Julie Andrews in The Sound of Music. Parts of it were very lighthearted, and I think that's what you want to do in life. Some of it is heavy and some of it is light, and hopefully you have more light than heavy.

00;39;46;28 - 00;39;53;07

Lexi

[LEXI] Was there a passage or a quote that stuck out to you, or a theme that stuck out to you?

00;39;53;14 - 00;40;47;23

Diane

[DIANE] I love quotes, I usually love quotes, and as I was reading it, I was driving so I couldn't, you know, couldn't be like, "Oh, there's the quote! That's the quote!" So I don't remember what it was, but I think the theme was that love is expanding. He wants to be like the gay uncle, the best uncle for these kids and also the children, they just want their mom. They don't want their dad to remarry and I think it showed that like, oh, wait a minute, you have this heart that just can expand and the kids can love him and they can love their lesbian aunt, and they could have this new mom. They can definitely love and will always have their biological mom and their mom, but then they can have a stepmom that can love them. And in it, the young girl, she's going through puberty. And so yeah, it's just important it's helpful for to have a mom in that. But yeah, I think the theme that I would say is love is expanding.

00;40;47;25 - 00;41;55;23

Frankie

[FRANKIE] On the note of love expanding. I think that the idea that one's heart and one's capacity for love is ever expansive is a very big theme in a lot of queer books. When we have the concept of I know I've said a bunch of times, chosen family for those who are unfamiliar with the term, chosen family is the concept that you can choose people in your life who are possibly close friends, who may have started out from all different connections that you build up this relationship with, that they are family to you.

It's not just, oh, you know, this is a family friend like that person is your brother or your chosen parent. And in the book that I read, Godkiller, we see Kissen has two people who she refers to as her sisters because they all grew up in the same orphanage and even though they are not biologically related, that is her family.

00;41;55;26 - 00;42;45;26

Lexi

[LEXI] I think that's a really that's an excellent point, because I feel like a lot of times there's such an emphasis on the nuclear family or what people expect. And I think that's the beautiful thing about a lot of queer lit is that chosen family is such a broad term. It's such a expansive, you're right, warm kind of thing, where you're not a family because you're blood related. You're not. It's not because you're like forced to be in the same car with someone. It's more because you're choosing it. And I think that is a very authentic way to look at it. It's, you know, you're there and you're supporting and loving the people around you because you want to and you chose it. It's an act. I love that it's a choice and not just the default. So yeah, I think that's a good thing to kind of keep in mind.

00;42;45;26 - 00;43;57;07

Elliot

[ELLIOT] When we're talking about grief and loss, often the first thing that comes to mind is death, but also divorce can be a part of it. And about Edwin in Waiting for the Flood and having been divorced for two years, and it's really hard for him to get past it, because the biggest thing is that he's living in the house they shared for ten years and the ex has moved out. But all these memories and open spaces in the house, no longer have the same meaning. Or they used to be, I don't know, a painting in the hallway. Now that painting is no longer there, but it's obvious there used to be a painting there, but it's just an empty. One quote I wanted to add was from the back cover, actually. "Love doesn't only leave scars, sometimes it heals them too." I thought that was really nice because Edwin's attitude towards love changes throughout the story and eventually he feels healed.

00;43;57;09 - 00;44;44;18

Diane

[DIANE] I think that's a good point because yes, divorce is definitely a form of grief and it's a - could possibly be, from someone that's been divorced, could possibly be harder because that person is still there. Like when you lose someone and they die and you know that, okay, you're never going to encounter them again, you're never going to see them, or you have to move forward. Either way, you have to move forward. But I think with divorce, I was divorced to someone and had children with them, so I had to encounter them still. But like you said, love can heal too. The love that we had again just expanded that we were able to overcome the grief of the divorce and heal and become best friends and love in a different way.

00;44;44;20 - 00;45;33;26

Frankie

[FRANKIE] There's also a theme that I've noticed that in a lot of queer spaces, is the idea of the importance of platonic love, and the idea that just because someone is in a romantic relationship with someone doesn't mean that any of your friendships are less important. Which is not to say that in

straight relationships or straight spaces, that that isn't important, but I've noticed this is something that's explicitly discussed in a lot of queer spaces that there can be people again, like going back to the idea of chosen family that like, I love my best friends so much that I really do think of them as my family, and they are just as important to me as my spouse.

00;45;33;28 - 00;46;16;29

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, that's a good point because I like that a lot of queer lit, they destigmatize and deprioritize the idea that romantic love is the best, and it's singular and it's all-consuming, and you go to one person for all of your needs and everything and all of that jazz. And while it's a valid idea to have a relationship or love be a big part of your life, I do like that it's not just romantic love, it's platonic love. Or that friendship that is very, very close and intimate and you share things with. And it's not any less just because you're not a couple or living together or whatever. I do think that's a nice thing about queer lit.

00;46;17;01 - 00;46;41;09

Diane

[DIANE] I love that you say that because I haven't been in a romantic relationship in a long time, but I've still had so much love from friends and family. And then I think of my child, who's aromantic/asexual and they definitely feel that there's not always enough literature for them, that you can definitely love things, and they don't have to be on a romance level or a relationship level.

00;46;41;12 - 00;47;06;15

Lexi

[LEXI] I do think that, you know, kind of the aro/ace, like, kind of that whole identity does have a very big lack of representation, even within the queer community. I've noticed a lot of books that mention if somebody is ace or aromantic are they're not the main characters. So that's interesting. Yeah. I would agree with the fact that there is less literature.

00;47;06;17 - 00;47;47;10

Frankie

[FRANKIE] For one, I think we have an idea for another episode of focusing on aro and ace stories. But what I will say is there was a YA book, *Aces Wild* by Amanda DeWitt, that has a very - the whole primary friend group of young rascals. They're all friends who met online, the ace forum and the aromantic character says, "Well, listen, bud, coaches don't play" while giving advice to the main character about his crush on one of the friends. So I do think that things are looking up, and that would be a wonderful conversation to have in the future.

00;47;47;16 - 00;48;10;20

Diane

[DAINE] That's a great idea. I think it would be harder to find them in adult literature than YA lit. YA literature is so vast. But now we have our good research to do. Okay, that's our little talk on each of our books. So now does anyone have anything that they wanted to like add about their book or talk about a little bit before we wrap it up?

00;48;10;22 - 00;48;39;29

Elliot

[ELLIOT] Just one quick thing I wanted to mention about the book that I thought was pretty cool. The author - there's stars throughout the book, and first I was like, wait a second, what does that mean? So I flipped to the back and there's a commentary about specific passages that the author wanted to point out, and I felt that was unique for a contemporary romance that you only see annotations in more classic literature.

00;48;40;01 - 00;48;41;21

Diane

[DAINE] That was about Waiting for the Flood?

00;48;41;21 - 00;48;43;19

Elliot

[ELLIOT] About Waiting for the Flood. Yeah.

00;48;43;21 - 00;49;50;21

Lexi

[LEXI] Yeah, I'll add to like for my, author. She has written several stories and books at this point, and she also has a memoir out about her life. It also does have a little twist of magical realism to it, but it's really interesting in the sense that she discusses being in a non-monogamous relationship that does have an abusive aspect. And it's an interesting mix of, okay, I think this is something a lot of people haven't thought about or can relate to, and it's very open and very honest. It's a really interesting read. As an author, I can't stress enough how beautifully this author mixes sci fi and fantasy and magical realism. It's such an interesting blend that I truly remember, like it's just so memorable. I like I normally don't even talk about style or authors that much. I'm more focused on the story, but she is excellent at genre bending.

00;49;50;24 - 00;50;11;28

Diane

[DIANE] One last thing I'd want to say about the Guncle Abroad, Stephen Rowley, of course, this book again was filled with Gen X stuff, lots of callbacks to different music. And also he was turning 50, which I turned this year. So that called to me. And another theme of it was live life to the fullest.

00;50;12;00 - 00;50;25;11

Lexi

[LEXI] That's so funny that you said that, that it's like Gen X because I'm a millennial. I was very much like, "Oh, I can't really relate to a lot of these things." So that's really funny. I thought you said Gen Z and I was like, I also don't relate to them.

00;50;25;11 - 00;50;27;06

Diane

[DIANE] No, that's true. But no...

00;50;27;06 - 00;50;29;22

Lexi

[LEXI] Gen X too. I'm stuck in the middle.

00;50;29;24 - 00;50;32;13

Frankie

[FRANKIE] You don't relate to me?

00;50;32;15 - 00;50;51;02

Lexi

[LEXI] Like you are, but I have no idea what the slang is. I mean, to be honest, I don't know what a lot of millennial culture is either. I am rich in avocado toast, that and Starbucks coffee.

00;50;51;04 - 00;51;05;20

Diane

[DAINE] It all goes over my head as a Gen Xer. I'm like, how do we work this mic? How do we? But luckily I have some Gen Z kids that, can help me with all the technology. I'm turning into my mother.

00;51;05;22 - 00;52;53;21

Frankie

[FRANKIE] I think some final notes for me about Godkiller by Hannah Kaner - this is a story that's very rich in mythology. The author is a folklorist and studies mythology. And so for a world that's so steeped in the push and pull of faith and belief and what power is deserves your devotion, and how does that come from either the king, who in many ways seems to be styling himself as a replacement for all of the gods, or the different old wild gods, the new gods of cities? That's a really fascinating perspective, and I loved the worldbuilding that the author was able to engage. Like, not only it's a fantasy book, there's a great map. It's important. The geography is consistent. But really and truly, this is a world that forces you to come away from the book and examine your own beliefs and your own desires. I know, like even when I was younger and I was reading like Percy Jackson, that I was like, who, who would my godly parent to be? And in this book I walked away thinking, If I was here, would I have been devoted to one of these gods? Would I have continued that even after it was outlawed? I think that that was the question of love and kinship. That was in debate and up for question, as opposed to the queer kinship connections that most characters were very obviously and casually engaged in. And I just thought that was real neat.

00;52;53;24 - 00;53;02;06

Diane

[DIANE] I think we have a lot of good books that we discussed, and I put at least three new books on my list today. So thank you all.

00;53;02;09 - 00;53;23;24

Frankie

[FRANKIE] All right. Thank you all so much for listening to our wonderful little book Cafe. And for those of you who have listened to this far, please make sure to save the date for Saturday, September 21st,

and come down to Ocean County Library's inaugural LGBTQ+ Resource Fair at the Toms River Branch. We'll see you there.

00;53;23;27 - 00;53;36;19

Voiceover

[VOICEOVER] Thank you for joining us today. Be sure to visit the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events. All the titles mentioned in today's episode can be found throughout the Ocean County Library for free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading!