Live with the Librarians

# S01E02 - Transcript

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Kirsty: Good evening. Welcome to the second episode of Life with the Librarians. To begin, I would like to acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin Nation being the traditional custodians of the land on which we are recording and on which Wyndham is being built. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

My name is Kirsty, and I am here tonight for the second episode of Life with the Librarians, with my colleagues Gary, Anu and Jess. We’ll be talking about a book that we are currently reading, a book that we’re finished reading, and something we’re looking forward to. Hopefully this will give you a bit of an idea of something you’d like to read yourself. And at the end of our discussion we’ll be opening up for questions and comments, so please send everything through, and I’ll be checking at the end. So I think I’ll start with Gary. What have you been reading recently?

Gary: Okay, so the one that I’m currently reading is this one, it’s called “At the Wolf’s Table”. It’s the fourth novel by Rosella Postorino, an Italian author. The first of her books that’s been translated into English. And it follows the main character, Rosa Saur, who’s a German lady in her mid-twenties, 26-year-old German from Berlin, and it’s set during the Second World War. So it takes place in 1943, and she’s a married lady, and her husband, Gregor, they’ve been married for four years, but her husband, Gregor’s signed up for the military, and he’s gone off to the Russian front – the German front to fight Russia. And because she’s got no family of her own, she’s gone to stay with his parents in the country. And it’s there that her story really starts, because while she’s there she gets a visit from the German SS, and they essentially conscript her into a position for the SS, where she suddenly becomes one of 15 women who are taken to – and if there’s any German-speaking people watching, forgive me for this, but it’s called the Wolfsschanze, which is the Wolf’s Lair in German.

Kirsty: That sounds ominous.

Gary: Hitler is – the Fuhrer was known by the SS as The Wolf.

Kirsty: Okay.

Gary: So this – so the Wolfsschanze was one of his secret headquarters during the Second World War. So Rosa becomes one of 15 ladies that travels twice a day to the Wolfsschanze in order to be one of Hitler’s food tasters.

Jess: Oh, wow. Okay.

Gary: So Hitler was notorious for being afraid of being poisoned by the Allies, and so they conscript these young women, some of whom are married, some of whom are single, some of whom are fully behind the Fuhrer. They get known in the book as the fanatics. And some of whom say they’re not for the Nazi Party at all, they don’t want to be there. But at the same time, there they are, eating Nazi food, and …

Kirsty Well, it would be a dangerous thing to refuse.

Anu: Yeah, that’s true, yeah.

Gary: That’s it, they can’t refuse. They can’t refuse, can they? That’s the thing, you know.

Anu: And how was she chosen?

Gary: So she was chosen – well, this is actually – this is actually based on a true story.

Jess: Oh, wow.

Gary: So the real lady was called Margaret Wolk, and she was the only survivor, actually, of the 15, after the war.

Jess: Wow.

Gary: And she – in her biography she says that she was chosen by the mayor of this little rural town. And so, as I say, they travel twice a day to this Wolfsschanze and then back home again, but every time they eat a meal – and it’s high quality food, of course, it’s the Fuhrer’s food. So they eat this meal, and then for an hour afterwards they just have to sit and wait.

Jess: Oh, okay.

Gary: Waiting to see –

Jess: See if there’s any effects.

Gary: - whether there’s any poison.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Gary: So, if not, they go home.

Female Voice: Wow, that’s rough.

Anu: Very interesting.

Gary: The next day they get brought back again. And it’s a fantastic story, and it’s told against a backdrop of the husband at the front, he doesn’t know what’s going on, he thinks she’s safe with his parents. And there’s these two factions – actually at the Wolfsschanze itself, some are for Hitler, some are not. And I’m only about a third of the way into the book, so it’s obviously going to develop a little bit more with her relationship with the SS officers and bits and pieces, but at the moment fascinating story. And –

Kirsty: Yeah, it sounds really [unintelligible 00:05:21].

Anu: Yeah, it sounds very interesting, yeah.

Gary: Very, very interesting. And to think that it’s based on a true story as well.

Female Voice: Yeah, that’s –

Gary: Incredible. As I say, so she was the only lady after – I think her story came out when she was 95, the real lady behind this, and she’s the one remaining person from all the other 15. So –

Female Voice: Wow.

Gary: - fascinating. The others got rounded up by the Russians, and executed. So she was the one survivor, and she only told her story when she was 95. So, yeah, so if you get a chance to read this one, Rosella Postorino, “At the Wolf’s Table”. It was published in Australia this year, so it’s a new story.

Anu: That’s very interesting.

Gary: Very interesting.

Kirsty: Anu, what have you been reading recently?

Anu: So I’m currently reading two books. By reading I mean I’m reading this book, “Milkman”, by Anna Burns, and I’m listening to the audio of John Grisham’s “The Reckoning”. So both books are poles apart, but I find it much more easier to follow one story while I’m driving, and when I’m sitting down and when I have time, I like to read the physical copy of the book. So John Grisham – I’m much further on to this book, “The Reckoning”. It’s a very intriguing story, it’s full of suspense, and it talks about a decorated war hero, Pete Banning. He returns to his state, Mississippi, he lives in a place called Clanton, and he is a rich farmer, and after he returns, I think after a couple of months – the story begins with him deciding one day to do something really out of the ordinary.

You know that something bad is going to happen, something sinister is going to happen.

But he’s getting prepared for something, and you know that he is a good guy, from his thoughts and what he thinks, and he prepares well in advance before doing a deed. And the suspense – the first chapter itself, it reveals that he goes and murders the – he shoots the pastor of the Methodist Church that he’s also a member of. So it begins like that, it begins with a bang. And then – so there’s no mystery in there. So the whole book revolves around the fact or the question of why did such a man, a hero, and who’s well off and who’s having a good life, would do such a deed. So the whole book revolves around that. And I’ve only reached the first part of the book, and I read the review, and it says that the book is divided into three parts. And the first part says it is about the trial of Pete Banning.

And so typical of a John Grisham book, it has got a lot of legal terminology, courtroom scenes, and it’s not boring, it’s very well written, and it’s full of suspense. Because Pete refuses to reveal the reason for his murder, and because of that he is – he would be sentenced, he would be given a harsh punishment. He understands that, and he is ready to go with that. And in the second part of the book I didn’t read it but I read the reviews and I know in the second part it talks about his military past, and his actions and how brave as an officer he was, etcetera. And the third part mostly talks about is family. So he has got a wife, and in strange circumstances – she is in a mental asylum. So we’re not revealed the reason why she’s in the asylum. And he’s got two kids, they are both grown up, and they are studying in universities. And so the third part is about how the kids find out the truth behind the –

Kirsty: How it affects them.

Anu: Yeah, how it affects them, yeah. It really – I think it’s going to affect them in a really bad way, I guess. Yeah, so the first part, I really enjoyed it, because some books, when you read the first or second page, you feel that you are into the book and you want to know what is going to happen. So this is that kind of a book. It’s a real thriller.

Kirsty: So you’ll be listening to that on the way home.

Anu: Yeah, on the way home. Every day. Yeah. But this is a different kind of book, “Milkman”. So this is a total – if this is a thriller, I would say this is a kind of realistic literary fiction. Yeah, so it won –

Kirsty: It’s an award winner, isn’t it?

Anu: Yeah. Yeah, it won the 2108 Booker prize, and so it’s a – this is the kind of book that I’ve never, ever read so far in the sense that no characters have got any names. So –

Jess: Oh, wow.

Gary: [Oh, that’s different].

Anu: Yeah. I’ve never read any book like this. It’s kind of hard to follow in the beginning, because the main person is I, it’s a first person narrative, and then it goes like sister – all the other characters, the sister, middle sisters, husband, it goes like that. And, yeah, I think it’s just based on something that happened in Northern Ireland, the troubles there, but no place or anything is specified so far. And the title, “Milkman”, stands for a very influential political figure. Yeah, who takes an interest in this particular young person, who is the protagonist of the story. And she’s afraid of him, because she’s – there are scandals and rumours in the society about these two people, because he follows her around. And because of his proximity she gets – people are afraid of her and at the same time respect her. I’ve not gone much into the story.

This is the kind of book I feel it takes patience to read it. Because – yeah, so – but when you start reading it you’ll find I don’t know where this is going, you can’t relate to it, but the more you read it, you can understand it better. Because it’s written in a stream of consciousness style, so you get to know of all the character’s thoughts, and it’s got an undercurrent of feminism as well.

Gary: Could I ask: what’s the relevance of not revealing the names? [Unintelligible 00:12:04]?

Anu: Yeah, I really didn’t figure it out so far, but it is kind of interesting. That’s all I can say.

Kirsty: Have you gotten far enough in that the style is starting to settle and it’s getting a bit easier to –?

Anu: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think I have read like probably like a quarter of the book, and now it’s kind of sinking in now. Yeah, it was kind of hard to begin with, but now I can follow it a little more better.

Kirsty: Excellent.

Gary: Sounds good.

Jess: Just a word with the format: do you find that when you’re listening to titles on audio compared to when you’re taking time to actually sit down and read, do you find that you tend to go for a particular style of book on audiobook? Like something like a thriller or …?

Anu: Yeah, I understood what you meant.

Jess: Yeah, something more to relax for a hard copy?

Anu: Yeah, I haven’t – yeah, mostly it is thrillers or autobiographies that I listen to while I drive, and I find that listening to audiobooks is – I get into the space more quickly than when I’m reading a book. I don’t know, probably it’s just me, but I feel that because I shut everything [out] and I’m like – I can imagine things in a better way. Only if the narrator is really good.

Jess: Yeah, yeah.

Anu: I think, yeah.

Kirsty: That can make a huge difference.

Gary: Do you get home faster when you’re listening to a thriller?

[Laughter]

Jess: Listening to a thriller.

Anu: Yeah, I don’t know. Yeah, but I definitely don’t want to switch the car off, sometimes, yeah.

Gary: Yeah, sit in your driveway listening for a while, yes.

Jess: Yeah, I’ve done that.

Anu: It works well for a busy lifestyle.

Jess: Yeah.

Gary: [Unintelligible 00:13:54].

Kirsty: Now we all know your secret.

[Laughter]

Kirsty: And Jess, what have you been reading?

Jess: So I have just … I won’t say just started, because I’ve sort of picked – I’ve got “Milk and Honey” by Rupi Kaur. I picked this one up and put it down, and I haven’t quite gotten all the way through it. So it’s a book of poetry, it deals with trauma and working your way through trauma, and it’s broken up into chapters. I originally picked it up because there was a lot of hype around it. A lot of people – it’s one of those things that some people either really love it or they really don’t like it. And I sort of wanted to see why, what is it doing that is getting some opinions.

Gary: Yeah, pushing people’s buttons, that sort of thing.

Kirsty: It’s certainly popular.

Jess: Yeah.

Anu: [Unintelligible 00:14:54] popular ones.

Jess: Yeah, so I don’t know whether this is a bit of a unpopular opinion, but I think subject matter wise and as a whole I think what I’ve read so far, it’s effective. It’s got – everything is split up and there’s illustrations, and it’s very nice as a whole. The strength of the poetry, though, I’m just – I found myself to be, so far, a little bit underwhelmed. A lot of it is very … It is a bit stream of consciousness, it is a bit … Looking at pieces by themselves, if you didn’t know the wider story or if you didn’t know the wider themes, you’d maybe be a bit dismissive of some of the individual pieces.

There are some great lines, but some of it just falls a little bit flat for me. I will continue to read it, because I do want to see, after I finish the whole suite of poems, whether it ties all together in a way that’s – or does something surprising. I think that’s something that I’m a bit wary of, especially with poetry, if what’s being said is not being treated in a really fresh and new way. I think the subject matter, the fact that some of the trauma that the author or the protagonist has gone through, is even being spoken about, and that’s adding to –

Kirsty: What’s not being said.

Jess: Yeah, and adding to what’s out there. That’s powerful enough.

Anu: So is this all – is it individual poems?

Jess: Yeah, so there’s individual chunks of things, and then there is longer poems, but some of the –

Anu: [Unintelligible 00:17:08] –

Kirsty: Is there … Sorry. Is there a through line, would you suggest, possibly more than a collection of poems, it’s more like a [unintelligible 00:17:17] poetry narrative?

Jess: Yeah, yes, yeah, so it’s almost like the thread of the journey throughout it of healing and sort of … when something has happened or broken you, working your way out of that. So some of them read a little bit like what’s happening is being worked through as it’s being written, and if you look at it from that perspective I can see why people are like, you know, they get into the narrative throughout it, and they can get on board that way. But –

Anu: Do all the poems have the same theme, or does it …?

Jess: So it goes – so the chapters work through different parts of what has happened, so the hurting, the loving, the breaking, the healing, like different stages of that journey. And I think if – like some people who may have had something similar happen, or have just not seen a voice like this, or have not seen the subject matter treated like this, it could be a very exciting book. But some of it is a little bit conversational in a way that I wanted something different. But I’ll continue to read, because I want to get a picture after I’ve read everything.

Gary: Yeah, you might find it collectively come together.

Jess: Yeah, yeah. And it’s hard when you’re halfway through and [unintelligible 00:18:51] –

Gary: Have you read the author before?

Jess: No, I haven’t, but the … A lot of hype for the book, and it’s been recommended by customers as well, so, you know, it’s good to pick up something and go, oh, okay, let’s see if it lives up.

Kirsty: Excellent.

Anu: Is it a YA book or is it –

Jess: No, no, this is poetry, so this is in the language.

Gary: Very good.

Kirsty: So, Gary, have you finished something recently?

Gary: Yes. Yes, Kirsty, I have. [Unintelligible 00:19:20] –

Kirsty: That’s a bit of a loaded question, I know.

Gary: [Unintelligible 00:19:22]. Yes, I have, by chance. So the next one, this one I completed a while ago now. I had to refresh it recently just to refresh my memory. It’s called “Vox”. It’s by Christine Dalcher; it’s a first novel. Christine Dalcher, she’s a theoretical linguist in America. And, yeah, I really enjoyed this one. It’s got so many good write-ups that I just had to pick it up and read it. I was really – I think the image on the front just sort of drew me. I don’t know, I just saw it and thought, oh, must get this one.

So this is set in a potential near future in America, and when they’re at the far right of politics and religion taking hold. The Southern Bible Belt in America has spread, and it’s spread to politics, and women’s rights are being diminished slowly. Slowly, slowly. And in a way that is not immediately perceptible to a lot of people, and for those people that do know it’s sort of in the background, oh, it’s just something going on, nothing really is going to happen. And then of course the book starts in the middle of what’s actually happening, which is women have lost their voice. Not physically but their rights. They have to wear special bracelets that limit them to only speaking 100 words per day. They have to have –

Anu: Tough.

Kirsty: That’s tough.

Jess: That’s tough.

Gary: Which would be tough for some of us in the library service.

[Laughter]

Gary: So women have to have spousal or parental permission in order to do anything. They’re not allowed to access their mail; their husbands have got a lock and key on the mail. And, yeah, I’ve just found it a really absorbing book. This woman who – Dr Jean McClellan, who is a scientist in the book, she pretty much mirrors –

Kirsty: So she can still be a scientist even though –

Gary: She was a scientist.

Kirsty: Oh, okay.

Gary: I should’ve said she was a scientist. She deals with a special area of the brain where there’s aphasia, and once all these different laws come in then she’s – 50 percent of the workforce lose their jobs overnight, the female 50 percent. The males have to take all the slack, the women become homemakers and mothers, and they lose their voice. And this story is about this –

Kirsty: I already want to –

Gary: Yeah, it’s –

Jess: Yeah, [unintelligible 00:22:31] –

Kirsty: Want to stab someone.

Gary: Yeah, that’s right, because – and in a way you can almost – you know, you think, okay, it’s amazing, it’s impossible, but, you know … The way things can change overnight, I don’t know. So, yeah, this is – this woman, she’s a scientist and a mother of a daughter. She’s also got three sons, and in her oldest son you see something like the Nazi youth party, you know, the way suddenly the boys turn on their parents, you know, start dobbing in their parents and bits and pieces. Similar sort of thing you see working through this son, Steven, in the way he treats women and starts talking to his mum. So the story’s about her, and how suddenly amidst all this that’s going on, suddenly something happens in the government – I won’t spoil it by telling you what. Something happens in the government, and suddenly the government need her.

Female Voice: [Unintelligible 00:23:36].

Gary: Suddenly she becomes important. She has a little bit of leeway about what she – negotiation power. And, yeah, sure. And –

Anu: Like what it says, silence can be deafening.

Kirsty: Yeah.

Gary: Yeah, that’s right.

Kirsty: Yes, that tagline.

Gary: That’s it. And “Vox”, of course, is voice or the ability to switch on and off a voice.

Anu: Oh, okay.

Gary: So, yeah, so it talks about her sudden involvement in the government, and how she then creates the downfall of the government, so –

Kirsty: Spoiler alert.

Gary: I think it says that in the book. But it’s a great read, and for me it was quite a refreshing read, you know. It’s not science fiction, it’s not fantasy, it’s just something that’s on the edge of potentially being real, or, you know –

Jess: I will go make the comparison between that and similar things that happen in “The Handmaid’s Tale”. Is there a … something – so in “The Handmaid’s Tale” there’s something specific that happens that causes this whole shift of the removal of women’s rights in that people’s – the generations start becoming barren and they need women as breeders. And it starts the ball rolling there. Is it tied to anything specific, or is it just a …?

Gary: It’s tied –

Jess: Just a change of power?

Gary: It’s tied to religion, really, the Christian far right and their belief that women should be the homemakers, they shouldn’t have such a strong voice in society, and given these brace – having them wearing these bracelets, they slowly lose their voice.

Anu: To limit them, yeah.

Gary: There’s one point in it where the daughter comes home from school and she’s won a prize because she was the one that day that spoke the least amount of words.

Jess: Wow. That’s rough.

Gary: You know, and she’s – yeah, it’s very – and you think wow, if that was happening really, what would I do as a husband? What would I do as a woman?

Kirsty: A sobering thought.

Gary: Yeah. So totally recommend it. So that one is –

Kirsty: Excellent.

Gary: “Vox” by Christina Dalcher.

Kirsty: And Anu, I think we’re running out of time a bit, but we’ll see. What have you read recently?

Anu: So this book, “The Thing About Jellyfish” by Ali Benjamin, this is the one that I read recently. And this book, there’s a big surprise to me, not just because of its content but because I chose to read it. Because it’s kids’ fiction, junior fiction; it has been decades since I read a junior fiction, but I really, really loved this book. It’s an amazing book. My daughter, 12-year-old, she recommended this book to me. I just flipped through the pages and I fell in love with the book instantly. So this book – and I couldn’t put it down. I finished this in a day. It’s such a great book. Yeah, it talks about grief and loss, and how a 12-year-old girl gets – or comes to terms with the fact that her best friend died. And at the time her best friend died, the last time she saw her best friend they did not part in good terms, so that guilt is there in her. And so she internalizes the grief. And in it there is a line that says everybody grieves in different ways.

And the way this girl, Suzy Swanson, she chose, is not to speak to anyone. She stopped talking to everyone. And she is a girl who is fascinated by science, and she wants a scientific explanation to everything. So she couldn’t accept the fact that her friend, Franny, died drowning because in her mind Franny is a great swimmer and she can’t drown. So she tries to find a scientific explanation for that, and the whole book – the half of the book is like a quest to find out what caused the death, and then she stumbles upon – like one day it’s like an epiphany, a revelation to her. And she was researching something in the internet, and then she found that many deaths that are deemed as drowning deaths, are actually caused by jellyfish stings. Yeah, so it’s a very sweet way of –

Jess: Oh, [that’s the jellyfish].

Anu: - a girl trying to find some logic in what happened. And throughout the book she is questioning not why Franny died but how did Franny die. But at the end she realizes that whatever way she died, it’s a big loss, and she comes out of the grief step by step. And it was such a refreshing read, and you get to see the world from the point of view of a 12-year-old, and apart from dealing with grief this book also deals with other issues that middle schoolers go through. Yeah, like the need to fit in, bullying and coming of age, and so many things.

And the main character, Suzie, is a girl who doesn’t fit in with the rest of the tribe, you know, so she’s always interested in science, she’s not interested in makeup or boys or anything. And this book celebrates the fact that it is okay to be different. You should be comfortable in your own skin. And I feel that if those kids – this is a good read for kids aged about 10, definitely, and for those kids who feel that they are different in some sort. They would find a lot of relief in reading this because there are lots of kids who are like that, and who are smart. And that’s how the world is. Everybody doesn’t fit into the same mould or … You know?

Gary: That’s a good recommendation.

Anu: It is, it is a fantastic read.

Kirsty: I’ve read it as well. It’s really, really quite brilliant.

Anu: It’s powerful and emotional – it is, what you say? It’s deep. Yeah. I didn’t expect it.

Kirsty: [Unintelligible 00:29:56] the light moments of humour as well.

Anu: Yeah, light moments of humour as well. Yeah.

Kirsty: It’s not depressing.

Anu: It’s not depressing at all, yeah.

Gary: I’ll read that after you.

[Laughter]

Gary: [Unintelligible 00:30:07].

Anu: It is good for the parents who like to read with kids; they can have a conversation about it. Because so many topics are being addressed, and nothing is like – nothing feels like it’s put there for a purpose. It is integrated well, it all –

Gary: [Unintelligible 00:30:22].

Anu: It’s seamlessly interwoven together. It’s a beautiful book. I recommend this to everyone, even to adults [who love] –

Gary: Everyone.

Anu: Yeah, everyone. It’s a beautiful book, yeah.

Kirsty: Excellent. And Jess, quickly [unintelligible 00:30:37]?

Jess: Yeah, yeah, I can do mine quick if we’re running – so I saw a lot of the posters for “The Darkest Minds” – this is a YA book by Alexandra Bracken. I saw a lot of the posters about it getting turned into a movie, which makes me want to read the book first rather than see the movie first. Just quickly, it’s a dystopian YA, so there is an inciting incident where the teens or the young people in the world develop this sickness, and most of them die but the ones that survive, survive and are changed and have certain levels of powers. And it’s about how authorities deal with young people that are suddenly potentially more powerful than anything, and it’s a good look at that. Having said that, I found it a little bit slow, especially – I don’t know whether any of you have read “The Hunger Games”. After reading “The Hunger Games” it’s sort of for me that’s a new level of pacing and dealing with dystopian themes. And since it’s been hard to have anything live up to that, so –

Gary: Is this part of a series?

Jess: Yes, it’s part of a series, and I think the rest of the series has been optioned for a movie. So I think I’ll see the movie and see what they do with the movie.

Gary: Yes. See how faithful it remains to the book.

Jess: I’d be interested to see, like anyone watching, whether they’ve read both “The Hunger Games” and this or whether anyone has any opinions as to whether it’s worth reading the second book. You know, do I stick it out or do I just pop it on the shelf? But that’s “The Darkest Minds”.

Anu: Are there pictures of the other books at the back?

Jess: Yes. And we’ve got these in the library as well. So, yeah.

Gary: Cool.

Kirsty: Excellent. All right, so maybe just a quick –

Gary: Quick, just a quick –

Kirsty: - two-sentence about the book you’re looking forward to reading.

Gary: Okay. So I’m looking forward to reading this book, it’s called “The Wall”. It’s by John Lanchester, a British author. The reason I picked this one up was because I love Philip [Pullman], author of “Northern Lights” and “Golden Compass”, and on the back it says “The Wall” is something new, almost an allegory. Almost a dystopian future warning, partly an elegant study of the nature of storytelling itself. Well, that sold me. I was hugely impressed by it. So it takes place on a wall, which is a 10,000 kilometre long coastal wall. The book itself, in the flyleaf it tells you very little about the wall, what its purpose is, we just know that the people on the wall are defenders, the people on the other side of the wall are the others, there’s three hun – was it 300,000 people on the wall itself, or 200,000 on the wall, in shifts, and another hundred at the back of the wall.

Yeah, it’s very much the people on the wall are on there on 12-hour shifts, it’s very cold, there’s a lot of fear, and there’s a lot of time to think. And the narrative of the story is a bit like that, it stretches out ideas as if you’re on there and you’ve got lots of time to think about the small things that are going on, what could happen, the fear or the cold. And so it’s an interesting narrative, but I picked it up because of Pullman’s little blurb at the back. I love Pullman, and I think anything that he recommends is fine by me.

Jess: The power of recommendation.

Anu: Okay. And the one I’m going to read is – listen to, it’s another audiobook. It’s written here it’s a popular book [unintelligible 00:34:40] very, very popular book. It’s “Becoming” by Michelle Obama. I think she is a very influential and iconic lady of our century, and I would love to hear about her journey from a normal house to the most famous address in the world. Yeah. And I would like to read about her struggles and what makes her such a smart, independent woman and yet humble at the same time. And I feel – this is read by author. That’s what I’m really looking forward to.

Gary: Oh, fantastic.

Jess: You look forward to, yeah.

Gary: That’s good.

Anu: Yeah, and I had read – I had listened to Barack Obama’s “Dreams from My Father”; it’s also an autobiographical memoire by him. I got only halfway through it then I had to return it, so I plan to read it sometime later in the future. But it was so nice to hear Barack Obama speaking about his life, and I think I will have the same experience when I listen to this, because it’s Michelle Obama who’s doing the narration.

Kirsty: Excellent.

Gary: So now you’re going to have to drive home slowly to listen to that in two weeks.

Kirsty: Well, I think it’s also just broken or just about to break a lot of the records for –

Anu: [Unintelligible 00:36:05].

Kirsty: Yeah. For biographical –

Gary: [Amount sold].

Kirsty: Yeah, amount sold.

Gary: Oh, okay.

Anu: Yeah, it’s a bestseller. Yeah, it’s hugely popular.

Gary: Not surprising, I guess.

Kirsty: Right, Jess, lightning recommendation for what you’re looking forward to.

Jess: Lightning recommendation is Louise O’Neill, “The Surface Breaks”. It’s a reimagining, feminist reimagining of “The Little Mermaid”, more in line with the Hans Christian Anderson “Little Mermaid”, and definitely not Disney. This is not Disney, guys. So it’s a YA fiction, and it actually has – I picked it up because I love retellings, but I also picked it up because it says contains adult themes and are unsuitable for some younger readers. So I’m thinking that it’ll go in that dark sort of more tragic –

Gary: [Unintelligible 00:36:52].

Jess: - fairy-tale rather than the sort of lighter fairy-tale, and I’m really interested to see whether – this one’s got mixed reviews, and I’m really interested to see whether it hits the mark or it’s not quite there. So [excited for this one].

Gary: Those older ones are more interesting because they are darker, like “The Grinch”.

Jess: Yeah. So it explores a lot more.

Kirsty: Have you ever seen that warning on a book before?

Jess: I haven’t actually seen anything like that before, so I’m really interested that they’ve –

Anu: What is the dark theme there?

Jess: So the original story is very, very dark and very tragic, but this explores the lives of the female characters, including Ursula, the Sea Witch, and things like that, and all the emotional complexity behind some of these characters. So I’ll be really interested to see whether it hits the mark.

Gary: I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Kirsty: Oh, excellent.

Jess: Yeah, interesting.

Anu: And is it a new author or …?

Jess: Not as far as I know. She has done several others.

Anu: Okay.

Jess: But I haven’t read those either, so it might be something that [unintelligible 00:37:54].

Kirsty: It’s such a great cover too.

Jess: Yes.

Gary: Yeah.

Anu: Yeah, it looks very nice.

Jess: The cover’s part of it.

Gary: There’s so many good illustration covers in YA and junior fiction now.

Jess: Yeah.

Kirsty: All right, I’m just going to quickly check if any of you have sent through any questions or comments for us. So I’ll just be a moment. Talk amongst yourselves.

Gary: Oh, talk amongst –

[Laughter]

Gary: We’ll put that one on hold [unintelligible 00:38:17]. Well, that was –

Anu: So you have to read – you wanted this as well. “The Thing About Jellyfish”.

Gary: Yeah, this happened last time. I ended up with a couple of books I wanted to read. That one sounds really good as well, because I like the darker fairy stories –

Anu: Yeah, I would also love to read that.

Jess: There’s actually – there’s quite a lot in the collection at the moment of the retellings of “Beauty and the Beast”, “Cinderella” –

Gary: They’re all interesting, aren’t they?

Jess: Yeah, and they really seem to dig at the heart of the original tales more than the Disney.

Kirsty: I have one question for Gary.

Gary: Okay.

Kirsty: Gary, you mentioned Dalcher’s book, “Vox”. Do you think Dalcher wrote this novel … Why do you think Dalcher wrote this novel at this point in time?

Jess: Oh, a good question.

[Laughter]

Gary: I guess you can see … I wouldn’t say parallels, but there are certainly certain things going on in America right now – so she’s an American author. I mean, she mentions the war between Mexico and the US, that exists in this novel, so you can’t cross the border and just go down there now. If you hadn’t have got out of America beforehand, before all these new laws came in, you know, then you can’t because your passport’s taken away from you as a female. Only the men have passports.

Jess: Oh, wow, [unintelligible 00:39:37].

Gary: And so – I don’t know, with the war and the anti-foreigners, those sorts of policies that you hear a lot about – not just in America but around the world, you know, this sort of far right extremism …

Anu: Is it happening in the present? Like borders – when is it happening, the story?

Gary: Well, it’s not disclosed. I mean, it is America, and it just sort of starts in the middle of the story.

Anu: You don’t know the time, yeah.

Gary: So there’s no specific timeframe involved, but … Yeah, I think there are parallels with the increasing voice of the people on the right of society who are demanding we close our borders. And women’s rights – women are still fighting for their rights, aren’t they, you know?

Jess: So it has that [unintelligible 00:40:33].

Gary: And different cultures are still fighting for their rights, you know. And one part of this book was once women lose all their rights, who next? You know? Is it the minor cultures in society, then suddenly they lose their voice? And then suddenly you’ve just got white men –

Jess: Everyone’s on a hundred words a day.

Gary: So, yes, I think it’s got – there’s a lot going on that parallels what could potentially go on in the future if we don’t start voting with our – using our votes and –

Kirsty: Paying attention.

Gary: - speaking out. You know.

Kirsty: Excellent. Well, thanks for that, and thank you for submitting your question, and for joining us for Life with the Librarians. We had a good time.

Gary: Fantastic.

Jess: Yeah.

Anu: Yeah, a great time.

Kirsty: I hope you did as well, and we’ll have a book list up probably next week for you to have a look at from what we’ve mentioned here tonight. Good evening.

[End of recorded material at 00:41:29]