



Library podcast

Conversation Hearts: An Inclusive Love Fest for Romance Readers and Writers Part 1

[00:00:00] This podcast is being presented in two parts. You are listening to Part 1.

[00:00:11] [music] Welcome to the Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the Library Foundation support the Seattle Public Library, go to foundation.spl.org.

[00:00:42] All right. We are just about ready to get started. How's everyone doing today? Awesome. My name is Misha Stone, she/her, and I'm a librarian in reader services. And before we begin, I do want to acknowledge that we are gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. Let us honor their elders, past and present. I want to mention and encourage you to go to an exhibit that's happening up on the eighth floor put together by the members of the Chief Seattle Club, called "We Are Still Here." And it's going to be in the Level 8 gallery art space until December 15th. Thank you so much for coming out to Conversation Hearts: An Inclusive Love Fest for Romance Readers and Writers. Libraries are not historically great at doing things to celebrate romance, and we are trying to make that change. And we wanted to make this event centred on own voices, LGBTQIA and POC romance, and our featured author today is Rebekah Weatherspoon. [applause] And we are so glad that she could fly up from L.A. to join us. Thank you, Rebekah. And let me tell you a bit about how we got to this day. We are going to start with a fireside chat.

[00:01:57] Those lights, you can just envision a fire, OK.

[00:02:00] With Rebekah in conversation with Jasmine Silvera. And after that, we are swiftly moving up to Level 4, room 1 for our subsequent panels. And we have some amazing panels for you today from two to six o'clock. Our panelists include Austin Chant, Piper Jay Drake, Eilis Flynn, Amanda Jean, Jasmine Silvera, Rebekah Weatherspoon and Olivia Waite. Robin Bradford, who was one of our amazing co-conspirators, we had hoped would be here, could not join us today. Hopefully, next year. We see this as the beginning of hopefully many years ahead of romance programming. Our panelists are authors and librarians, so we don't want you to miss hearing from all of these amazing folks upstairs. And I just want to thank our amazing community. I want to thank the Seattle Public Library Foundation that makes so many of our free programs possible. I want to thank Old-growth Northwest and Tracy Timmons-Gray, whose generous donation and whose advocacy for LGBTQIA,

romance and books of all genres over the years with Read with Pride, inspired and bolstered this event .

[00:03:10] Thank you. And now I want to introduce our authors so that we can get to this little fireside chat situation.

[00:03:17] Jasmine Silvera spent her impressionable years sneaking kissing books between comics and fantasy movies. She's been mixing them up in her writing ever since. She is the author of the *Grace Blood* series, including *Death's Dancer*, *Dancer's Flame*, and the newly released *The Talon and the Blade*. Rebekah, after years of meddling with her friend's love lives, Rebekah Weatherspoon turned to writing romance to get her fix. Her BDSM romance *At Her Feet* won the Golden Crown Literary Award for Erotic Lesbian Fiction. Her novella, *Fit*, number one in the *Fit Trilogy*, won the Romantic Times Book Reviews, Reviewers' Choice Award for Best Erotica Novel. *Sated*, number three in the *Fit Trilogy* was nominated for the Romantic Times Book Reviews Reviewers Choice Guide for Best Digital Erotic Romance, and most recently *Soul to Keep VSS#3* won the 2017 Lambda Literary Award for Best LGBTQ Erotica. *Rafe: a Buff Male Nanny* - I know you've all read it. Me? Yes - received praise from both Entertainment Weekly and The New York Times. And you can look for the new romantic comedy, *Xeni: A Marriage of Inconvenience*, and forthcoming, a retelling of Sleeping Beauty, *A Cowboy To Remember* coming out from Kensington Books in March 2020. Please welcome Jasmine and Rebekah. [applause]

[00:04:41] Hot Mike. Let's do it. All right. How's that sound? Good. Check one. Check, too. Thanks for having us today, guys, this is awesome. Yeah. Thank you for coming up here, in the best part of the year in Seattle. Listen.

[00:04:55] Right. Everybody. Right. It's been very dry in L.A.. OK. Well, there you go. Your dose of hydration. If you go, little moisturize.

[00:05:06] So I first met you online through Twitter, as one does these days. Most people meet me on Twitter. Yeah. Yeah. You have quite a Twitter presence. Also a preference, because you seem to be there a lot. I am, it's called procrastination. Yeah. Well, you do it so well. But I actually met you through Women of Color and Romance. Yes, because my first book had come out and I was looking for places to promote it, and there was this incredible site that was focused on women of color and romance. And so then I went through the backstory of how this started as a hashtag. What was that black woman in romance? Yes. OK. And your desire to continue that movement of promoting the work by authors of color. Yes. Beyond even just black women. But to include indigenous women. Trans non-binary. So that it became this awesome website. So if you haven't been there, WOCin romance.com. Yes. And it's a searchable database. So you promote 10 to 15 books...

[00:06:09] Yeah. So it started out I was getting annoyed with people walking up to me and telling me that black women didn't write romance after I had like four books out.

[00:06:19] And I was like, this is a weird conversation. You're looking at me. You're telling me I don't write books, sometimes while you're holding my book in your hand, so that's bizarre. So I decided for Black History Month one year, I was just going to go through and promote a different black woman writing romance every day. And by like day four, I was overwhelmed with the amount of titles I had. I had so many books that I was like, OK, something here is very wrong if I have too many books to fill up, you know, 28 days. So I wanted to keep going, but I wanted to also highlight, you know, I live in L.A., it's a very diverse city, I wanted to highlight books by other women of color, not just black women. And so it started off as kind of like a Twitter thing, and then I won't name her name because I don't want people to go flocking to her, but a wonderful author friend of mine who's very internet savvy was like, I'll build you a website, let's do this. So it's a searchable database, we share 15 to 20 books. We try to do it every week. Sometimes, I'm busy, but we try to do it every week.

[00:07:21] What would you be busy doing, writing? Just as long as this isn't another procrastination.

[00:07:25] No, it's not more procrastination, just writing and working. But yeah, it's WOCinromance.com and you can go and it's searchable by tropes. So if you're looking for a romance in space, you can just click on the space tab and there's a ton of romances set in space written by women of color. If you're looking for rom-coms, or marriage of convenience romances, it's very searchable, very user friendly, and the bio links are right there. So you don't have to go searching further for where to buy them.

[00:07:51] So it eliminates this idea that, you know, they're not out there, I can't find them. We don't know where they are. And it's also an exceptionally generous thing to do for other writers.

[00:08:00] Yes, so we have a patreon, which is great.

[00:08:03] Yeah. So people do donate so I can get a little bit of money for running the service and it helps pay for the website and everything like that. So that's great. But I wanted to provide something, because when I started writing romance, I went to a website that was very popular and I asked them you how much does it cost to run an ad? And it wasn't a ton of money, but it was more money than I had to spare on an ad. I thought, a lot of authors of color are not making a lot of money, and writing is their side hustle, or their third side hustle or their fourth side hustle.

[00:08:32] And I didn't want to create something where I had to ask authors to pay me to help them out. So that's why I set up the patreon, and it's great, and, you know, a lot of authors also give to the patreon. But bless their hearts, it's a lot of authors who do make a lot of money, so they are also like, you know, paying it forward in that way. So that's also very nice.

[00:08:50] That's great and it's a wonderful thing for you to do to pay it forward to others and to help us out. And so you've been writing and publishing since 2012? Yes. Excuse me, 2011, and your most recent series, that's *Xeni*, is the most recent book, *Loose Ends* is the name of the series. Yes. And I love the concept for this series, because it's this idea that all the side characters in the books that you've loved who've occupied supporting roles for the hero, or the protagonist, and there are the two

main characters, get a turn at having their happily ever after. So how did you come about this idea of having tying up your loose ends? Sure. And tell us a little bit about my favorite bearded ginger man.

[00:09:36] So, we talked about this briefly earlier, but I just I was trying to like remember kind of the seeds of this. So when I wrote the *Fit* trilogy, that was my first hetero romance series that I had written. And there was a side character in that named Megan, who like popped up a bunch of times and then I put Megan in a bunch of other books. So if you've read *Haven*, she's the submissive who's with Shep in the beginning of *Haven*. And so she pops up here and there. She's in one of my Christmas stories.

[00:10:05] She's friends with the main character in that book, and one of my friends who is very forward, and reads all my books, and one day we were at a Janelle Monae concert together waiting for the show to start, and she turns to me and she was like, "why do you got my girl Megan out here in the cold?"

[00:10:20] And I was like, oh, I got it. Cause I always set Megan up where she's with some great guy, who then leaves her for someone else.

[00:10:29] Always a bridesmaid, poor Megan. And so I was like, OK, I've got to write her a story one day. And then I wrote the *So Sweet* trilogy and I introduced Kayla's best friend, Daniela. And I was like, I really got to give her and this Bruno Mars character I created, their happily ever after one day. And then I wrote Rafe, and as I was writing that I was having so much fun writing Sloane, who's such a sweet person. But I needed to give her more of like a spunky friend to kind of insert a little bit more of myself into it, really, because I'm not as sweet as Sloane is. And Xenia kind of came to life and she was kind of like, the most like me of any characters I've ever written. And I was like, I really need to give her her own book. And so I was like, you know what? Why don't I just do a series. That's all the characters that I've created that haven't gotten their happily ever after yet.

[00:11:22] So I love it because for me as an author, and then also as a reader, I like going into the same world a couple of times. And I write urban fantasy and everybody talks about worldbuilding in urban fantasy, and fantasy and science fiction, but we don't often, I don't think, give credit enough to contemporary authors for building worlds and creating, you know, a kind of continuum where we can return to.

[00:11:47] And so, I love this, that we get to see these people over again and catch up with characters that we've already gotten to know a little bit. And so maybe, you know. And also, sorry to pop around a little bit, but I love what you said about Sloane being very sweet, because I also see her as someone who's uber competent, and like, and in such a dynamic way.

[00:12:09] And she's not humble or self-effacing about it.

[00:12:13] She's like super stoked that she's a really great god damn cardiac surgeon, and that's really reassuring and kind of a wonderful thing to read, yeah, for a heroine who's really just feeling herself. Yeah. I mean, I was writing, I started off writing paranormal.

[00:12:31] That was kind of, was very pornographic, but also like, very dark. *Better Off Red* is like a dark book and it's kind of a dark ending. That whole series is like kind of depressing, but fun. Fun at the same time. And I kind of, I mean, around the election, everyone was like, so sad. And I wanted to then, I was like, let me pivot away, well, actually, no. First I wrote *Haven* because I, like, wanted to murder someone really bad. And I was like, I'll put it in a book. So I, like, killed a couple people in *Haven* and then killed a couple people in *Sanctuary*. And then after that, I felt a lot better. Get that out of your system. Flush that right out. But after that, I was like, you know, everyone's still really sad. So let me write some really happy books. And I was like, let me write some really happy books for black women, where they get to see themselves as uber confident, competent, having great jobs, having good friends, but also just like really being like loved on. Like really just taken care of and just like, loved, loved, loved. And so that's why, that's another reason why, Rafe, if you guys haven't read Rafe, Sloane is, she's a child genius, basically, who became a cardiac surgeon at a very, very young age. So she's very smart, but she was a young surgeon and a young mom. And so she's not really socialized to being in relationships. So she's, that's the one part of her life where she's kind of missing things. So she meets a man who kind of like, actually fills in all the gaps that she needs filled in, figuratively and emotionally. Oh, all the gaps. Rafe is also very pornographic.

[00:14:10] Rafe is wonderful. Don't change a word. I wouldn't, I wouldn't have you change a word. I mean, can I just quote? Can I quote this? Sure. I love this. This was like, one of those lines where I put the Kindle down and went, yeah! This is Sloane talking about, because she's got two small children, they're twins, and her nanny has quit in spectacular fashion. I mean, like, almost too good to be fiction, fashion. I don't want to ask you, like, somebody told you this story, didn't they?

[00:14:33] Oh, okay. No, no, no. So here people ask me, sometimes I write some books, people are like, that never happened, and like, oh yeah. I was working on a movie set, and I hired one of my friends, and he quit at lunch and didn't tell anyone. He, it was raining, he like, came out to me. I was the AD, he came up to me, and he was like, I'm going to go off set to go get lunch." And it was a low budget, like low budget movie, so like, lunch service, like, wasn't that great anyway. So I was like, go, just come, but you got to be back in an hour. He left and did not come back. I was calling him, I was calling his sister, like we were freaking out cause we thought he got in a car accident cause it was raining. A week later,

[00:15:14] I hear from him, and he was like, oh, I had actually gotten into an altercation with someone and I was like, well, why didn't you, like we're friends. Why didn't you at least just text me, and say, like, ...

[00:15:26] So the foundation this sets for the nanny, basically ditches these two kids in the afternoon.

[00:15:32] At some point, and leaves them alone for four hours, because as a parent, I was like,

[00:15:36] [gasps]. OK.

[00:15:37] And in comes this amazing, enter Rafe, on a motorcycle with a big ginger beard and tattoos, and he is, but he is also, like he's not just some dude off the street, like he's a professional nanny, like he's been doing this. Yeah, he's very competent. Super competent. Let's talk about competency porn. Like a guy who can diffuse two six year olds, like losing it at the same time, is like, deserves a medal. But I just quote this because I love that Sloan is sweet, but she's also like super no bullshit. She says,

[00:16:11] and she's thinking this, "no politics, no religion, no money mentions were a thing of the past. Rafe might be qualified, but she was trying to raise two young biracial black girls, and she'd be damned, if she'd let someone who is a fan of walls and assault rifles and playing fast and loose with general human rights, spend their time around him." And I was like, yes, this is gonna be good. And then his mother, his stepmother tells, I'm sorry, I'm just gonna read you this whole book. His stepmother at some point, who is also black, tells him, you know, he's trying to figure out what to do because he's attracted to her and she's attracted to him. And they're having this really mature, like, sorting out their feelings. They're talking about it. Look, there's enough drama because there's kids involved, but they're actually like, making these conversations, they're being honest about their feelings. It's wonderful. And he goes to mom, step mom for advice. And she says, "I know she's got the nice house and the nice job and the cars, but the last thing any black woman needs is a white man making her life more difficult. If you can't be what she needs and what she wants, you leave her the hell alone." Whoa, mama.

[00:17:15] And you're, I mean, you're writing characters who are addressing these real issues, and a very funny, engaging sort of way. And I appreciate that. So can you talk a little bit more about your, your world building process, and getting into these characters and populating this world, with people that look like you and me, and you and me, and how that works to then reflect the roles that they do, the jobs they do. I'm gonna keep talking.

[00:17:40] No, no. So you take over.

[00:17:41] I mean, usually, I mean, this can just turn into like, kind of an overall craft question, really, but usually when I start writing something, I'll come up with either like a scene or a concept. So if Rafe I can't remember, exactly. I can't remember exactly what was like, the initial seed for that, but I had this guy in mind, that I was like, oh, I really want to write like this hot ginger dude, who's. But then I had to like, fill out the story and like, give it a semblance of a plot. It's thin, it's mostly porn. Don't worry about it. But I wanted, I think, when you're, so when you're writing contemporary romance, especially to keep people engaged in tropes that are grounded in everyday reality, and also aren't chasing people away from the books. I think that's the other thing that's tricky about contemporary romance. I love paranormal, because it's so far outside of the realm of reality, so it's like anything goes. But when you're writing contemporary, you're dealing with people's feelings about what's actually happening

right now. So I think it's important, a couple of things are important. I always think about social responsibility.

[00:18:51] So that's one of the reasons why I wrote Rafe the way he is. So Rafe is this white guy who's from Boston, but I created this family for him where his step mom is black and he also has bi-racial younger sisters. So he was raised by a black woman and has the sort of sensitivity towards what black women need. So when he finds himself in a relationship with a black woman, she is not doing all this extra emotional labor for him. And I think that's also really important. A part of romance that's important to readers, I think is the fantasy to step outside of your day to day. And so if you're reading a character, and they're going through some sort of emotional trial, the payoff needs to be that they're not paying. You know what I mean? I don't want them to have to, like pay more just to be loved. Right? And I think that's a, I've seen reviewers say stuff like, oh, I don't think this romance is earned, which is like a weird thing, because it's like, how much suffering do you have to get before you deserve happiness?

[00:19:54] Would you, would you walk up to your friend who, if they're like, oh, I'm seeing someone new, would you be like, did you earn that?

[00:20:00] You would never say, you know what I mean, like, you would never say that to somebody!

[00:20:04] Does that particularly mean, that when you look at women of color, as, you know, being centered in these stories, like, haven't we been through enough?

[00:20:12] Like, what else do we need? Before...Also, it takes me, like, 17 minutes to fall in love with somebody.

[00:20:17] So I don't, like the idea that it needs to be this, like, dragged out thing is like, you know, like no. I'll fall in love with you if you like, buy me a slice of pizza. That's not. But then you have to like work to keep me. Then it's like deeper, after that, I promise. But it's to me, I think, creating a scenario where the reader feels comfortable that the characters involved are not going to be like, emotionally beat up by the other person. It's one thing if there's other stuff going on outside of their relationship. But I want to create a scenario where together, the two of them are like, what the other needs. And that's what I really tried to do with Xenia, because, I don't want to spoil it for people in the room who haven't read it. It's a marriage of convenience plot, but it's also like a secret baby plot. Like there's a lot, Xenia's got a lot going on. I put her through the ringer, but I knew I was going to put her through the ringer with her family. So I gave her a guy who was everything she needed to help her get through that. And I think that's important in contemporary romances, like, bringing two people together who are actually, like, actually good for each other.

[00:21:26] Yeah, and so then talk a little bit more about where the trouble comes from. Are there writers in the crowd? Please tell me I'm not the only one who's dying for craft tips, OK? Because there is this thing that, you know, there's trouble, there's gotta be trouble in the book, conflict, right? But the trouble doesn't always have to come from within. And I like this idea that you're taking the trouble

from without, and creating and using the relationship to be a safe space. Yeah. In the trouble? Does that, am I describing that?

[00:21:53] Yeah. I mean, I've had some readers tell me they don't like that.

[00:21:57] I think sometimes, I think as romance is maturing, I think some people still kind of like the jerk. If you're writing male female stories specifically, a lot of people really like the jerk hero still, sometimes. And some people do also like scenarios where like, communication is the problem. I don't like that. And that's me as a person. Like, I'm very straightforward. I can't. I'm like a, I can't go to bed angry kind of person. I'm very straightforward so I know if I have a problem, I have to talk to you about it, it'll just eat me up if I don't. So I think that kind of transfers to my characters, too. So if they do have internal conflict, they're, Mason and Xenia do have a moment in Xenia, where it's, things are a little rocky between them, but it's more of a we just met and everything is moving so fast. And so it feels more of a like, realistic stepping back. Not, I'm going to hurt you, because I'm confused. More of a like, we're gonna pump the brakes because this is going very fast. And that can also be, that can be hurtful, too. Do you know what I mean? When you're feeling very strongly about someone and then they have to be like, whoa, this is overwhelming. That can also be hurtful and a source of conflict, but it's not a hurtful poking at your person.

[00:23:11] That's wonderful. You are, your cast of characters in your books, are incredibly and effortlessly inclusive.

[00:23:20] I mean, they feel like real places and real people and they also represent a wider swath of people than we're used to seeing in the pages of romance fiction.

[00:23:33] So can you talk a little bit about how you look at creating representation that is, that feels true or authentic, versus a lip service of checking a box of having this person and this person and this person in your world.

[00:23:48] Well, I will preface this for everyone who is a writer in the room. It is not effortless. So don't for one second think I'm just like, this is like, no, it's not effortless. It feels effortless. Right. As a reader, it feels natural and it doesn't feel forced. And the writers in the room, that is also like a craft thing that you have to work at. One of my really good friends is Sarah Kyun. She writes romances. She also writes comics and stuff. Her books are action packed, and very funny. And she does a lot of her normal worldbuilding and that takes a lot of work, to like, layer all of those things.

[00:24:21] I don't..I see it as effortless in the sense that it's the thing that makes the most sense to me.

[00:24:30] I grew up in a very white town, but I still, I was friends with the people of color in that town. And then as soon as I was able to move out of that town, it only made sense to me to continue to make friends with a wide variety of people. I live in a city that has a wide variety of people. And any given day, if I'm walking down the street, there is interracial couples, same sex couples, non-binary

couples. I just, I work part time at the robotics bookstore in Culver City. And even our customers, we get everybody in our store. So to me, it's like, it doesn't make sense to not include everybody. With the caveat of, I do try to pay attention to like, what stories are not mine to tell. I, in one of my cowboy books I was thinking about having a Navajo chef, as a character. One of my friends who is Navajo was gracious enough to introduce me to another young woman that we went to high school with, but we were in different classes. I had a wonderful conversation with her.

[00:25:40] She was so open, so gracious, and at the end of the conversation I was like, this is not my character to write. I was like, I have no business writing this. Why was that? She talked about a lot of spiritual stuff that I was like, this is not mine. And I just, it was not mine to talk about. It was not mine to delve into. She was so gracious to share that with me. But I was like, this is not, this is not mine. I can't do this. So I do try to write stories, too, that I feel like I can speak to, honestly. And that's where right now I'm focusing mostly on giving black women their happy stories. So that's a lane I feel comfortable in. And then I do have, you know, a lot of Latino friends, a lot of Asian friends, that kind of thing. So in our day to day hanging out and talking to them, I feel like when I craft characters, I can be honest because I'm also writing about people that I care about in my real life.

[00:26:29] So that's an important distinction, is that you're, you're writing about people, but there's a care factor, you know, and a sense that you, it's important to you, to your friends and to your relationships in real life, to also then be representative in a way that just demonstrates caring, and not just, like, I need some people to fill in a story.

[00:26:50] Yes. And I think a lot of times, you know, when you write outside of your lane, I think you need to, I had a friend who is not Muslim, and she was going to write a Muslim character. She was a woman of color, but she's not Muslim. And she was going to write a Muslim character and she was talking about her Muslim character not covering her hair and all this stuff. And as the conversation was going along, I was asking her why. My sister is Muslim, and she's raising Muslim girls and everything. So I was asking her like, why? Why are you trying to include these elements? And she didn't actually have a good reason. So she didn't include them. And I think when you're writing outside of your lane, if you're going to have something, like, one, do not visit violence on people who are outside of your lane. Don't do that. That's just like, unnecessary. Don't do it. And if you're going to have a story that even includes violence or includes bigotry or anything like that, there has to be a voice of reason pointing out that it's wrong, and why it's wrong, and why it shouldn't be happening. I think sometimes people, I've seen romances where like, the conflict is like, the heroine's a woman of color, the hero's white and the conflict is that his family is racist.

[00:28:00] That happens a lot, and, that happens in real life. It's not that that doesn't happen in real life. But where's the voice of reason? One, saying that this is wrong. Where's the hero saying this is wrong? Where's the hero saying, girl, I'm going to take you away from this, so you don't have to put up with it. And if my family decides to come around and you decide to forgive them, that's a whole other thing. But then to have the heroine just be the bigger person and like, take that abuse and then the end, that sort of thing is like, no. And that happens a lot in queer stories, too. It's just you have to be. I think people need to take care, with the way, because it's very easy to traumatize readers. And I

think especially with romance, which is something that people invest a lot of their free time in. I don't want to traumatize people during their free time. I wrote a book *At Her Feet*, which is like, bonkers. Don't read it. It's a mess. And I had a trans character in that.

[00:28:54] And I thought I was writing a great scene for her. And I loved the character, too. I thought I was writing a really great scene for her that was like, inconclusive and spoke to all these things. And I got a couple emails from trans readers that were like, hey, like this actually, like, hurt. And I was like, you know, thanks. And then when I came back around and wrote Daniella again, I didn't want to leave transwomen out of my stories. I realized I was like, what Daniella deserves is just a happy romance. That's it. She doesn't need any extra stuff.

[00:29:23] What she needs is a happily ever after that I would give all my other characters. I don't need to give her all this other crazy crap. I just need to give her a happy story. But I had to, I had to learn that. And thankfully, people were nice enough to reach out to me and say, hey, you messed this up, and I was like, thank you for telling me that. I appreciate it.

[00:29:42] That takes a lot of courage for someone who has encountered something like that. You know, I think we all sort of hold, there are authors that I have a very hard time sometimes being in the room with and not feeling a little nervous by, right? And so then to have a reader who is able to reach into their heart and respond to you in a way that sounds constructive.

[00:30:00] Right? It sounded like it was very helpful, is an enormous gift. Yes, it is. And we're all learning. We're all learning. Yeah, right. So we all make the mistake, or a mistake, or probably multiple mistakes along the way.

[00:30:12] I think the difference is that, especially with social media, which is hard, I think sometimes when people make the mistake, the reaction is to hop on social media and say, "I didn't make the mistake," or "you don't understand me," like, say you're sorry, and just try better. We all mess up, in one way or another. Learn from it. Do better, move on. That's all. That's all you can do is like, take the loss and try to do better.

[00:30:37] Maya Angelou, that's, when you know better, do better. You do the best you can and when you know better, you do better. So, we're all trying, we're all doing our best.

[00:30:46] So, I want to talk to you.

[00:30:47] I don't want to just talk about your newest stuff, or your hetero stuff. I want to also get into your writing in the queer community.

[00:30:56] And you're writing, because that was where your original published novel was, right? Yes. Yeah. So maybe talk a little bit about, boy, what not to talk about? How that is, how you approach either differently and or similarly. Yeah. And what you've learned from writing both. Oh man.

[00:31:13] So I wrote *Better Off Red*, which is a lesbian paranormal romance. Basically it's like Trueblood meets Greek.

[00:31:20] There's a university, and underneath two of the sorority houses, or the sorority house and fraternity house, a group of vampires is using the members of that sorority and fraternity to feed their population.

[00:31:31] Vampire sorority sisters. There you go. I actually wrote that because I was reading the *Black Dagger Brotherhood* series and I was very frustrated because there was, they were in New York and there was no black people, and there was no queer people. And it was like, driving me nuts. J. R. Ward, who's very interactive with her readers, kind of like made it clear that that was never gonna happen. So I was like, I got to write this myself. And for me, it was freeing because it was how I came out to my dad, so that was great. I was able to email him and say, listen, like I'm queer. I have not figured it all out. But if I show up with a lady or, you know, anybody who's not who you're expecting to walk through the door with me like, this is kind of where I'm at right now. And I want to write these stories to kind of investigate what's going on in my own head. And that was great. And it was very freeing.

[00:32:23] And it was just lovely, you know, just lovely to do, and to me, it's,

[00:32:28] I don't think it's too, too different for me writing, if I'm writing a male and female character if I'm writing a hetero story. Only because, it's all kind of like, coming from the same place in my heart, really. I mean, it just depends on what kind of story I'm trying to tell.

[00:32:49] You know, I have a novella called *Treasure*, that's two black girls that they're in the same computer science class, and they meet. And I just wanted to talk about two black girls in college falling in love with each other. So it really just depends on like, what story I'm trying to tell. But I feel like it comes from the same, it comes to the same place.

[00:33:07] Did I stump you? No, no. That was wonderful. And I'm getting at, I'm getting at the right follow up.

[00:33:11] But I want to, I want to sidestep a minute and talk about novella length, because you are exceptional at writing the novella length story. Oh, thank you. Sorry, the writer sometimes and the reader sometimes are fighting for control of the mind. So you're telling a very, you're telling very I think very layered, in depth stories in a very short and succinct length. Yeah. So everybody knows the difference between like a, a full length novel and a novella? Everybody?

[00:33:34] So like a novella, it's going to be like, page wise, like 100, 150 pages, whereas, like, you're full length novels mostly cap at around like, 300 and some odd pages, I might, Olivia, am I right? You've got a lot of ground to cover.

[00:33:50] And because these are, these are full romances, they are, you know, a you have a full arc of a story of people coming together.

[00:33:57] I feel like my brain works really quickly.

[00:34:01] So writing short is actually not too hard for me because my brain is kind of like, rapid fire. And I think it's just a matter, I think writing longer is actually harder for me because I always, I don't want the reader to get bored. So like, as they're reading, I don't want them to be like, oh this scene, like, let's get to like, something else.

[00:34:20] I want to get back to this character. I want to get to this. So I'm always nervous that my full length novels are like, boring people. I know, they're not. They're great. I don't know what I'm talking about. Yeah, I know. I mean, for me it's actually easier to write shorter.

[00:34:33] Yeah. Does it give you an ability to, to take on a topic or a couple, or an issue, in a shorter length? And I imagine it goes quicker, and you can move from one to the other? Do you feel you spend the same amount of time, really kind of, getting into the nuance of these characters and their stories?

[00:34:52] I think again, like novellas are just easier for me, so it's easier for me to, like, crank it out because I think when I, when I write full length novels I usually include more people, because if you've read any of my books, I like giving everyone 98 friends and then like, maybe seven dogs.

[00:35:07] And a giant what's app twitter thread. Or I'm going to try and do a graphic of like, all the dogs I've included and like, we're up to like a lot of dogs right now. I'm still trying to keep track of all the dogs on the farm. So many dogs. I had to kill a dog, and then had to get a puppy in there to fill in the hole. It's just a mess. I think no there's a puppy.

[00:35:25] Come on. Dirt. I have to have a family tree for the dogs.

[00:35:28] I gave the little girl a puppy named Dirt. It's a really, really cute puppy. If you read Xenii, you'll meet Dirt. Sorry. Where were we? Oh, yeah. Novellas are easier, though, because I just, I can like, cut down the number of people, I give the hero one dog instead of seven. Like, I just, it's easier in that sense because it's like a tighter, compact, thing with less stuff in the world. When I do a full like that, I got to put like, more stuff in the world.

[00:35:52] You still manage to get those worlds pretty full of people. Thank you. Amazingly, that all feel pretty well realized, like, that clearly they have their own stories now. True. I get to get their ends tied up.

[00:36:03] Talk a little bit about switching between genres, and what moves you between from vampire sorority sisters, to bearded mountain men and nannies and bearded farmers, and lots of beards, lovely beards.

[00:36:18] Well, I wish I was like, I see some authors who are very calculated and like, it's good for their sales, too, because they're like, I'm going to write this, and I'm going to write this many books, and blah, blah, and their readers love it. I am like, all over the place. I'm, I did two romantic suspense and then I've got to go back and finish that. And I jumped over to, I'm a mess with that. It really is how I'm feeling. It really is. Like, I just jump around. Right now I'm dying to write more paranormal. I am like, chomping at the bit. If you, I will give like, a little spoiler. If you read Xeni, I'm gonna write Sex witch, the book. So, Sex Witch is coming. It's coming. But yeah, I'm like, dying to write more paranormal right now, but I went and signed a contract so I got to write all these cowboy books. but, you know. Luxury problems, luxury problems. But, you know, it's tough. It just depends on like, how I'm feeling.

[00:37:11] But right now I really want to write panormal.

[00:37:12] Well, it makes sense too, and you're talking about the way you're using some of the fiction and some aspects of your fiction are used to explore things that you're thinking about, and feeling and talking about, that you're not confined to just writing contemporaries. Some of that stuff has to happen.

[00:37:27] And, did you say Sex Witch? Sex Witch. She's a witch, who can control sex.

[00:37:33] Yes. Here's my money.

[00:37:36] My purse is over there. Just hold on a minute. Yeah. So, so then, you are going to continue to move around genres? Oh, yeah. We're all praying for romance to come back. Or wherever. Or paranormal. Yeah. Or paranormal, rather. Sorry. I talked to my agent about that, too. She's like, it's coming. It's coming.

[00:37:53] Yeah. I love shifters, too. So I'm like, really. Okay.

[00:37:57] So right, now we've heard it. I've done vampires. I haven't done shifters yet. So, it's official, shifters and witches. Coming from Rebecca, soon, to a bookstore near you. Don't anybody forget, we all have to hold her accountable. They're coming, I promise. Anybody on Twitter?

[00:38:10] All right. You spend a lot of time on Twitter. I know it's a procrastination issue. Yeah. You also engage in it really well. So what about Twitter works for you?

[00:38:18] Well, I think it's, um.

[00:38:22] I mean, Instagram is kind of it's like weird own thing, because that's actually just, it's an image board. So it's like, it's own weird thing. Unlike, I guess, Facebook. Okay. So here's like, my like, little weird backstory. I went to high school with Zuckerberg. So like, it's a whole thing. At our school, we have this thing called Facebook. So like when you come in, like, as freshman at the beginning of

the school year, you come in like the first week of school and they take your picture. They compile it into a book that has like your dorm in it, and you're like address and stuff, and then you get your Facebooks like, at the end of the year to you if you want to, like, write your friend letters, whatever. It's all in the Facebook. They've had the Facebook since like, photography existed. This thing has been around like, forever. And it's literally called the Facebook. Like, it's, that's what it's called. So I go to college minding my own business. And all these people are like, are you going to join Facebook? And I'm like, excuse me, what? And then it just turned into this whole thing, where it's like grandmas fighting about like, and I was like, you know, I need to like, backflip away from Facebook. So, and now listen, homeboy's like testifying before Congress and stuff. So it's like, I just need to back away from Facebook altogether, because there's some shady business going on over there. Twitter, which also has its own problems. It's just easier, I feel like, for me, to just, I don't know. I feel like I know the rules of viewer engagement over there.

[00:39:40] I think it's easier to just, like, connect with people over there. It feels like, more organic. The upside of Twitter also, I've met so many amazing black women through Twitter. Like, so many, my friend Nani, who I mentioned earlier, who I went to the Janelle Monae concert with. I met her on Twitter. We were live tweeting Game of Thrones, and that's how I met her. Now we're like, really good friends. And so I feel like Twitter has this, I think Twitter really works with fandom really well, too. So if you like a show or you like a movie or whatever, I mean. I know some people in here notice how like, Yuri on Ice blew up on Twitter last year. Like, just all of a sudden it was like, everywhere. I really like that kind of instant engagement of Twitter.

[00:40:21] I find that, you know, as a black woman writer, author, like it's, that's where I found my group of people. Yes. On Twitter. Like, that's how I, we're just few and far between. Yeah. In a geographic area. So it's nice to have, kind of extends the network a little bit.

[00:40:37] I also think it's so much easier to find people who aren't like you on Twitter. Like, now I follow like all these really cool women like, Native American artists who like, are doing really cool beadwork and stuff. And I don't think I'd be able to find that as easy, because people can just retweet stuff and it pops up on your feed and then you're following all these other cool people. And it's just easier to do that on Twitter. I feel like.

[00:40:58] Ok, so I've led us out of writing, and into procrastination. That sounds like a typical writing session for me. I think one more thing I kind of really want to touch on before we get to our like, rapid fire questions.

[00:41:13] And, I want to talk to you a little bit about the way that you approach, including BDSM and things that are considered kink sexuality, in your writing, and how you do that, again, in this respectful, very inclusive way. Because we've been introduced with several, and several different layers and several different kinds for, that fit books very well for the story that the overall novel is taking. It doesn't feel like, and I'm specifically, sorry, I'm talking around this, but I specifically thinking about *Haven*. Sure. And the way that it doesn't feel like a device for the plot, but it actually legitimately

feels like something going on between these characters. Right. That would happen irrespective of the kind of, this traumatic entrance she's had into his life. Yeah. And then *Fit* is also very different. Yeah.

[00:42:01] So if you can talk a little bit about, and I'll just leave you to it. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:42:07] So, *Fit* was my first hetero romance that I wrote for publication, and I was reading a lot of BDSM novels that were overly violent, in a way that like, was not about consent. Yeah, that's, I think that's a little bit what I'm trying to get at. So yeah. Yeah. And I read, I was on like a personal level, I just like really pornographic books. That's like, what I like to read. And I was trying, I was reading all these BDSM romances, I was looking for more of it. And I would get lucky with like, one or two. And then I would like, read another one and then it would be like, really violent and like, OK. Or I've read like, one from one author,

[00:42:46] that would be like, great, like hit all the marks, and then like, book two in the series would again just like be hitting on all this like really weird sexual violence that like, wasn't, that had nothing to do with consensual BDSM. And that was like, really, really, really frustrating me. And so I was like, can I write a BDSM romantic comedy? Can we do all these things? Can we do the bondage? Can we do the submission? We do all of that, and still be like, laughing about like, how much it sucks to go to the gym. Right?

[00:43:19] So, *Fit* basically starts off with a Chinese-American woman who is a producer on like a Food Network reality show. And she's like, gained all this weight because she's eating all the food on set. So she finds a personal trainer and then he basically hits on her and is like, I want to be your Dom. And she's like, are you drunk? And, but then they decide that they're actually going to try this out. And then there's two more subsequent books that are also romantic comedies.

[00:43:44] And they're very funny. And I think whether or not you intend for some things to be romantic comedy specific. Like, I think there were even a few lines in both *Sanctuary* and *Haven* that I found were hilarious. And I love that your ability to move between things that are very dark or scary or intense and then also bring it back to something that's, you know, just laugh out loud. It just shows, I imagine, that is who you are a little bit, too. Yeah. Your sense of humor.

[00:44:11] Well, I think, I mean, especially in the African-American community, I feel like humor is such, that's like how we deal with pain. Humor is like, really how we connect with pain and with *Haven*, I was in a very dark place when I wrote that book. I was very, very unhappy, very sad. And I wanted to write a dark book about BDMS, where going to therapy was also something that the characters had to do. They could not avoid going to therapy, like sex is not going to fix you. Bondage is not going to fix you. You need to go to therapy and you need to talk to someone about, you know, that early on the heroine loses her brother in a very violent attack and she needs to go to a therapist to talk about it.

[00:44:53] And I think that was what I felt like, because I had read one lesbian BDSM book that came highly recommended, and it was so violent and non-consensual. And I was like, what? I was really, and I think that also comes back to the social responsibility.

[00:45:07] And the caring. Yeah. Yeah. So I was thinking immediately, is that you care for the people who might be encountering this.

[00:45:11] Yeah. I never assume someone who's reading my books is a BDSM practitioner, I never assume that. So, unlike, *50 Shades of Grey* is like a perfect example. A lot of people who were not BDSM practitioners read that, and got the complete wrong idea about BDSM. I don't want to give someone the idea that like, someone violating your consensual boundaries is BDSM because it's not. And so I wanted to create a space where the submissive and the dominant were really talking about like, their feelings, what they wanted, what was actually a safe space, and then really drawing those boundaries, and then going to therapy. And getting a laugh in or two. And there's always a dog.

[00:45:50] There's always the dog. So glad there's a dog, who makes me so happy. Nothing bad ever happened to the dog, either. Always a dog. Again, so we're about to wind up, I think, and I just want to do a couple of quick, rapid fire questions before we move everybody onto the next stage of our event.

[00:46:09] I also have books to give away to people in the crowd, too. So if we do rapid fire, then we do like, a quick Q&A from the audience, I can give books away. Oh, yeah.

[00:46:16] Oh, yes. Let's. Well, maybe let's do this. I think the rapid fire is less important than the question and answer. You guys should get a turn. I've been talking a lot. So those who have questions for Rebekah, please raise your hand. Misha's got a microphone and she'll be happy, to. And you'll get a free book. And how about this? I'll ask you a question while we're waiting. Sure. So favorite thing in your closet right now. I'm like, what?

[00:46:36] No, because, you know, it's funny. I need to like, Marie Kondo, my whole closet. Right now, I'm like, so annoyed with all my clothes. I'm sorry. That was a tough one. Look, we have a question from the audience for you. There you go, you stumped me, I hate all my clothes.

[00:46:49] I have a question. So you're doing this for like seven or eight years now? Yeah. How has your writing process changed from writing that first book to these latest ones? Has it changed at all or is it pretty much the same?

[00:47:02] Oh, no, no, no, it totally changed. So, for anyone in the room who is also a writer and also has, like, a full time job. It just depends on like, how much I'm working. So like, I was unemployed when I wrote *Fit*. So I'll just, I wrote *Fit* in eight days, but I was unemployed. That's the only thing, I was unemployed. I had no kids. Like, I didn't have kids. I literally woke up every morning and I was like, you can't watch TV, do anything until you finish your words for the day. And I edited the crap out of it, too. It wasn't like I just, I didn't, like, write it in eight days, and then I was like, done! Like, I mean,

I had to go back and like, edit it. And then I've had other books that've just like, taken me forever. Just absolutely pulling teeth. But, I just, I had to, like, come to terms with the fact that like, every book is going to be different, because every day of your life is different. Some days you're going to wake up and be like, I feel like writing. And other days are like, I just want to cry and eat ice cream. But I have to, like, turn this in because I, like, told people I would turn that thing in. So.

[00:47:56] Did we have another audience question? Or would you like another one of my not rapid, rapid fire questions? Oh, hey, I can relate.

[00:48:06] But.

[00:48:08] I assume you, well you were just talking about writing about BDSM. Yes. BDSM. Yeah. Yeah. I can never get those right.

[00:48:15] And you write like, largely from African.

[00:48:22] You know, a woman of African perspective. I think, like for me, I always try to reconcile that. Like, I love reading Dan Savage. You know? Oh, sure. You know, and, you know, some of his, his writers or readers.

[00:48:38] Talk about like, you know, S&M and things like that. And I think for me, like, getting a beating was not a good thing.

[00:48:46] Yeah, yeah. Oh, let's talk. I mean. And then, being a person of African descent. Yeah. I mean. We can go get a drink after this, and we can talk about just.

[00:48:56] I mean, I've read, I've had to stop reading BDSM novels if like, one of the people slaps the other person in the face. Like, I can't, there's certain things. Yes. Because, my parents loved to belt. Let me tell you. So I, yes, I'm with you there.

[00:49:09] Yeah. So I guess, you know.

[00:49:10] Like, how do you? Hopefully one day you'll get to read one of my BDSM novels. I mostly focus on domination and submission. And a lot of that too, is I basically approach it from the lens of being an adult is very exhausting and tired, and being able to be in a sexual relationship with someone who will let you put that all down. So you can have someone who's going to say, for this couple of hours, just forget about everything and we're gonna have a good time.

[00:49:45] You kind of compartmentalize it.

[00:49:48] This is the last book I have to give away, sorry.

[00:49:52] I would love to have a craft question, but I don't because [unintelligible] is kind of killing me right now. No, it's all good. So you were saying you're dying to write paranormal, right now? So like, shoot me like, a couple of paranormals that you were totally into it. Because I love your, I love your voice when you're writing. Oh, sure. So I'm just kind of, I always ask authors for their recommendations when I love their books. Yeah, my like, top two favorite right now or not right now,

[00:50:19] Like ever. Yvette Hines, she's a black woman. I don't think she's writing anymore. I hope she like, comes back. She's, life is whatever.

[00:50:26] But she has a series about bear shifters, and the first book is called *Bear's Gold*. And I think it's, it's all of her books are like, plays on fairy tales. She, like, inspired me to do the fairy tale thing again. The first one is like, based on Goldilocks and she likes, stumbles into a guy's house and he's a bear shifter and he has two bear children. It's really cute but really sexy. And what I loved about it was that she builds like, a bear community and they're all bear shifters. It's just like, it's really fun.

[00:50:54] It's like Gilmore Girls, but like, sexy. But, like with people of color, and they're bear shifters. So I really liked that.

[00:51:03] And then if you ever read or heard of Ruby Dixon, she has a series called *Ice Planet Barbarians*, and it is bonkers. And I love it. A group of women are abducted by aliens and they crash on like this planet, and the aliens that live on the planet, not the ones that abducted them, have to basically like take them in, because they're on another planet. And so, it's, they're just like, boning ice dudes. And it's ridiculous. But it's so good. So good.

[00:51:30] And if you're here later today, come to the recommendations panel at 3:00.

[00:51:35] Ok, great. Yes. Because that would be another good place to crowdsource some more recommendations for you as well. Do we have, how're we doing Misha? Maybe one more. Because we are transitioning shortly, up to level 4, room one. A hundred kittens, or three baby sloths?

[00:51:53] Well, what am I doing with them?

[00:51:57] Do I have to fight them?

[00:51:58] Cuter! Oh, I was like, what? Oh, what do you think is cuter. Oh, I would say a hundred kittens. Sloths kind of like, confuse me. Have you ever seen a sloth, not in a tree? They're kind of weird. The baby ones are so cute.

[00:52:13] No, they're cute, but their claws are like, really unnerving. Well, we'll go with kittens. We'll go with kittens, for sure.

[00:52:17] Favorite word. Fuck. The next one was favorite cuss word. So I guess we're done with that. We knocked that out. Way to go. First album you bought.

[00:52:32][inaudible].

[00:52:35] I want to say, I'll say the first album I remember buying. I'm the youngest, so I have like a lot of hand-me-down cassettes too, that kind of thing. The first album I like, remember specifically buying was NSYNC had an album that they only put out in Europe. And, my local bookstore had it. And I saw one of their videos on like, the Disney Channel. And I was like, oh, they seem interesting. And I went and bought their European release.

[00:53:02] That is a bit of NSYNC ephemera that might be worth something now. If you read *Fit*, Grant used to be in a boy band.

[00:53:10] Oh, no kidding. Well, Easter eggs abound. All right. They're going to kick us out of here. Thank you guys so much. Thank you.

[00:53:24] Thank you, Jasmine. Thank you, Rebekah.

[00:53:26] This was an absolute pleasure. I really enjoyed it. Thank you. And thank you all for coming.

[00:53:33] This concludes part one. Listen to part two for the conclusion of this podcast.

[00:53:41] [music]This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.