



Library podcast

Carmen Maria Machado discusses "Her Body and Other Parties"

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[00:00:36] Hi everybody. Thanks so much for coming out on such a stormy night. I'm Desha Brandon. I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library. Welcome to the evening's program with Carmen Maria Machado. And thank you to our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Thank you as well to our program partner Elliott Bay Book Company for being here tonight and we are just very grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help everyone in our community have access to free programs and services. So if any of your library foundation donors here tonight thank you very much for your support.

[00:01:23] Now without further ado please help me welcome Karen Mayita Olman from Elliott Able Company who will introduce Ms Machado so a few months ago Carmen Maria Machado's publisher Graywolf Press contacted us about scheduling reading with her and I think this was in the works for a while as this is a book that our booksellers and our writer community has embraced. Very early on and this has always been a community in which short story writers and science fiction especially by people of color by women of color has really found an appreciative audience. But as you know we had to postpone the initial reading as the author's short story collection her body and other parties was then named as a finalist for the 2017 National Book Award and the ceremony was actually right during the times when she was supposed to be here. So and as I was telling Carmen a few months ago we were obsessively looking at Twitter that night. Come on come on. So but she's a finalist and very much deserved. So this collection her debut book won the Bard Fiction Prize and was a finalist for many other words including the carcass prize the pen Robert W. Bingham prize for debut fiction and the National Book Critics circles. John Leonard prize the husband stitch the first story in the collection was nominated for the Shirley Jackson and Nebula awards and was long listed for the James Tiptree award.

[00:03:00] She's an alum of hedge book Women Writers Retreat and recipient the recipient of fellowships from the Elizabeth George Foundation and also the Cintas Foundation and many others. She's currently writer in residence at the University of Pennsylvania. She's also a critic and I hope you'll take a minute to look at some of the articles that she has linked on her web. Her really

wonderful. There are some in the New Yorker and Granta in other places and she has a new memoir coming out and it looks like house in Indiana is forthcoming for 2019 from Graywolf Press. And so we look forward to that. So I'd like to read from the judge's citation from the National Book Award Carmen Maria Machado. Machado's debut story collection is a thunderclap blending the intimate and the fantastical the most personal revelations with the most speculative fictions. Machado expands what short fiction can do her characters explore sexual desires while fleeing deadly viruses that promise human extinction. They try to control the shapes of their bodies but cannot control the phantom children living in their basements with a gorgeous muscular language and mordant wit. Machado pulls us into her worlds one of corporeal longing and spiritual hunger. The sensual and Gothic Tinchy alternate reality both dangerous and addictive.

[00:04:33] So please join me in welcoming Carmen Maria Machado to Seattle Public Library hello.

[00:04:53] Oh my goodness look at all of you. I've never spoken to a group that's like a send up to the back of the room.

[00:05:02] It's really amazing. I feel like I'm a mess. I'm a sport. Like I'm

[00:05:07] Like I'm about to do a sports. I don't know. Thank you so much for coming out on this very rainy day.

[00:05:16] It was 8 degrees when I left Philadelphia this morning so it's actually gorgeous to me out there. It's quite balmy but I'm really excited to be here. I love Seattle. I was actually incredibly anxious about missing this event when I found out that the National Book Awards we're going to we're going to run into this event and I was like Should I have to honor my commitments. I wish I was like. And it's OK. And I was like very panicked about it. But it all worked out.

[00:05:43] And here I am so I'm actually going to do a thing that I don't get to do very often which is read an entire story. So usually when I read I'm reading an excerpt and that's fine. But I actually have enough time tonight to read a whole story which is just my absolute favorite. So

[00:06:03] Yay. Yes.

[00:06:04] Yay.

[00:06:08] So I'm going to be reading the husband Stich which a friend or another friend somebody I met called My hit single and I was like oh I guess this is my hit single. It's like you can't avoid it. It's like playing at the pool it's like playing on the radio all the time you're like you get away from the story. So yeah.

[00:06:26] Who here has read Alvin Schwarz's Scary Stories to Tell in the dark or in a dark dark room or read them in your closet. Excellent.

[00:06:33] So like a lot of people of a certain generation those books were like seared into my consciousness in this really intense way. So much so that many years later when I was in graduate school some friends and I were having a very drunken conversation and the book came up and we all were like let's share the story from those books that scared us the most. And my first immediate visceral reaction was the girl with the green ribbon. And I remember it clearly because I they were books that I read that like I said were sort of seared into my consciousness. I also was a Girl Scout and I did a camp. And I discovered early on that even though I was the weird girl scout even though the other girls made fun of me and even though I was very I mostly just talked to the other adults. Turns out you can tell scary stories and scares the shit out of your fellow Girl Scouts and it's super satisfying. And the Alvin Schwartz book has amazing instructions so you like grab the person you know be like you have it which I did and I made someone cry and it was like the greatest moment of my whole life so.

[00:07:41] So yes so sort of you know that sort of came upon me very suddenly then many years later and I was like you know like I can imagine a version of that story sort of being retold that I couldn't think of any examples of having seen it being retold in a way that was interesting to me. So I was like I am going give it a shot.

[00:08:01] So husband stretch if you read this story out loud please use the following voices me as a child. High pitched forgettable as a woman. The same boy who will grow into a man and be my spouse robust with serendipity.

[00:08:25] My father kind booming like your father or the man you wish was your father. My son as a small child gentle sounding with the faintest of lisps as a man like my husband. All other women interchangeable with my own. In the beginning I know I want him before he does. This isn't how things are done but this is how I'm going to do them. I am at a neighbor's party with my parents and I am 17. I drink half a glass of white wine in the kitchen with a neighbor's teenage daughter. My father doesn't notice everything is soft like a fresh oil painting. The boy is not facing me. I see the muscles of his neck and upper back. How he fairly strains out of his button down shirts like a day laborer dressed up for a dance and I run slick and it isn't that I don't have choices. I am beautiful. I have a pretty mouth. I have breasts that heave out of my dresses in a way that seems innocent and perverse at the same time. I am a good girl from a good family but he is a little Cragie in that way. Men sometimes are and I want he seems like he could want the same thing. I once heard a story about a girl who requested something so vile from her paramour that he told her family and they had her hauled off to a sanitarium. I don't know what deviant pleasure she asked for though I desperately wish I did. What magical thing could you want so badly. They take you away from the known world for wanting it. The boy notices me.

[00:10:13] He seems sweet flustered. He says hello.

[00:10:17] He asks my name I have always wanted to choose my moment. This is the moment I choose on the deck. I kissed him he kisses me back gently at first but then harder and even pushes open my mouth a little with his tongue which surprises me and I think perhaps him as well. I have

imagined a lot of things in the dark in my bed beneath the weight of that old quilts but never this and I moan when he pulls away he seems startled. His eyes dart around for a moment before settling on my throat.

[00:10:53] What's that. He asks. Oh this I touch the ribbon at the back of my neck. It's just my ribbon.

[00:11:01] I run my fingers halfway around it's green and glossy lengths and bring them to rest on the tight bow that sits in the front.

[00:11:08] He reaches out his hand and I seize it and pressed it away. You shouldn't touch it I say you can't touch it.

[00:11:16] Before we go inside he asks if he can see me again. I tell them that I would like that. That night before I sleep I imagine him again his tongue pushing open my mouth and my fingers slide over myself and I imagine him they're all muscle and desire to please and I know that we're going to marry. We do. I mean we will. But first he takes me in his car in the dark to a lake with a marshy edge that is hard to get close to.

[00:11:47] He kisses me and clasps his hand around my breast my nipple nodding but beneath his fingers I am not truly sure what he is going to do before he does it. He is hard and hot and dry and smells like bread and when he breaks me I scream and cling to him like I'm lost at sea. His body locks onto mine and he is pushing pushing and before the end he pulls himself out and finishes with my blood slicking him down.

[00:12:14] I'm fascinated and aroused by the rhythm the concrete sense of his need the clarity of his release. Afterward he slumps in the seat and I can hear the sound of the pond loons and crickets and something that sounds like a banjo being plucked. The wind picks up off the water and cools my body down.

[00:12:34] I don't know what to do now.

[00:12:36] I can feel my heart beating between my legs. It hurts but I imagine it could feel good. I run my hand over myself and feel strains of pleasure from somewhere far off. His breathing becomes quieter and I realize that he is watching me. My skin is glowing beneath the moonlight coming through the window. When I see him looking I know I can seize that pleasure like my fingertips tickling the very end of a balloon string that has almost drifted out of reach a pull and moan and ride out the crest of sensation slowly and evenly biting my tongue all the while I need more he says but he does not rise to do anything.

[00:13:18] He looks out the window. So do I. Anything could move up there in the darkness.

[00:13:24] Hook handed man a ghostly hitchhiker forever repeating the same journey an old woman summoned from the repose of her mirror by the chance of children. Everyone knows those stories. That is everyone tells them even if they don't know them. But no one ever believes them.

[00:13:42] His eyes drift over the water and then return to me. Tell me about your ribbon. He says there's nothing to tell. It's my ribbon. May I touch it. No.

[00:13:54] I want to touch it he says. His fingers twitched a little and I closed my legs and set up straighter.

[00:14:00] No something in the leg muscles and rise out of the water and then lands of the splash. He turns at the sound of fish he says. Sometime I tell him I will tell you the stories about this lake and her creatures. He smiles at me and rubs his jaw a little of my blood smears across his skin. But he doesn't notice and I don't say anything. I would like that very much he says. Take me home. I tell him and like a gentleman he does. That night I wash myself the silkies said to him my legs are the color and scent of rust.

[00:14:36] But I am newer than I have ever been.

[00:14:43] My parents are very fond of him. He is a nice boy. They say he will be a good man. They ask of him about his occupation his hobbies his family. He shakes my father's hand firmly and tells my mother flatteries that make her squeal and blushed like a girl. He comes around twice a week sometimes thrice. My mother invites him in for supper and while we eat I dig my nails into the meat of his leg. After the ice cream puddles in the bowl I tell my parents that I'm going to walk with him down the lane we strike off through the night holding hands sweetly until we are out of sight of the house.

[00:15:21] I pull them through the trees and when we find a patch of clear ground a shimmy off my panty hose and on my hands and knees offer myself up to him.

[00:15:31] I have heard all the stories about girls like me and I am unafraid to make more of them. I hear the metallic buckle of his pants and the shush as they fall to the ground and I feel his half hardness against me. I beg him no teasing and he obliges. I moan and push back and we rot in that clearing groans of my pleasure and groans of his good fortune mingling and dissipating into the night.

[00:15:56] We are learning he and I there are two rules he cannot finish inside of me and he cannot touch my green ribbon.

[00:16:04] He spends into the dirt. Pat Pat patting the beginning of rain. I go to touch myself but my fingers which have been curling in the dirt beneath me are filthy. I pull up my underwear and stockings.

[00:16:17] He makes a sound and points and I realize that beneath the nylon my knees are also caked in dirt.

[00:16:23] Pull the stockings down and brush and then up again smooth my skirt and ripping my hair a single Lock has escaped his slicked back curls and his exertion and I took it up with the others. We walked down to the stream and I run my hands in the current until they are cleaned again. We stroll back to the house at arm's length chastely inside my mother has made coffee and we sit around. My father asks him about business. If you read this story out loud the sound of the clearing can be best reproduced by taking a deep breath and holding it for a long moment then release the air all at once permitting your chest to collapse like a block tower knocked to the ground. Do this again and again. Shortening the time between the held breath and the release.

[00:17:13] I have always been a teller of stories when I was a young girl my mother carried me out of a grocery store as I screamed about toz in the produce aisle concerned women turned and watched as I kicked the air and pounded my mother's slender back. Potato's she corrected me got back to the house not toes. She told me to sit in my chair a child sized thing built just for me until my father returned. But no I had seen those toes pale and bloody stumps mixed in amongst the russet tubers.

[00:17:46] One of them the one that I had poked with the tip of my index finger was cold as ice and yielded beneath my touch the way a blister did when I repeated this detail to my mother. Something behind the liquid of her eyes shifted quick as a startled cat. You stay right there she said. My father return from work that evening and listen to my story. Each detail. You've met Mr. Barnes. Have you not. He asked me referring to the elderly man who ran that particular market. I had met him once and I said so. He had hair white as a sky before snow and a wife who drew the signs for the store windows. Why would Mr. Barnes Sotos as my father asked where would he get them. Being young and having no understanding of mortuaries or graveyards I could not answer and even if he got them somewhere my father continued. What would he have to gain by selling them amongst the potatoes. They had been there. I had seen them with my own eyes. But beneath the sunbeam of my father's logic I felt my doubt unfurl. Most importantly my father said arriving triumphantly at his final piece of evidence.

[00:18:54] Why did no one notice the toes except for you as a grown woman. I would have said to my father. There are true things in this world observed by only a single set of eyes. As a girl I consented to his account of the story and laughed when he scooped me from the chair to kiss me and send me on my way. It is not normal that a girl teaches her boy but I am only showing him what I want. What plays on the inside of my eyelids. I fall asleep. He comes to know the flicker of my expression as a desire passes through me and I hold nothing back from him. When he tells me that he wants my mouth the length of my throat I teach myself not to gag and take all of him into me moaning around the saltiness when he asks me my worst secret. I tell them but the teacher who had me in the closet until the others were gone and made me hold him there and how afterward I went home and scrubbed my hands with the steel wool pad until they bled. Even though the memory strikes such a chord of anger and shame that after I share this I have nightmares for a month. And when he asked me to marry him days shy of my 18th birthday I say yes yes please. And then on that park bench I sit on his lap and fanned my skirt around us so that a passer by would not realize what was happening beneath it.

[00:20:15] I feel like I know so many parts of you he says to me knuckle deep trying not to pant and now I will know all of them.

[00:20:24] There is a story they tell about a girl dared by her peers to venture to a local graveyard after dark. This was her folly when they told her that standing on someone's grave at night would cause the inhabitant to reach up and pull her under.

[00:20:39] She scoffed scoffing is the first mistake a woman can make. Life is too short to be afraid of nothing she said. And I will show you pride is the second mistake.

[00:20:51] She could do it she insisted because no such fate would befall her. So they gave her a knife to stick into the frosty earth as a way of proving her presence and her theory. She went to that graveyard. Some storytellers say that she picked the grave at random. I believe she selected a very old one. Her choice hinged by self-doubt and the latent belief that if she were wrong the intact muscle and flesh of a newly dead corpse would be more dangerous than one century's gone. She knelt on the grave and plunged the blade deep as she stood to run. For there was no one to see her fear. She found she couldn't escape. Something was clutching at her clothes. She cried out and fell to the ground. When morning came her friends arrived at the cemetery. They found her dead on the grave. The blade pinning the sturdy wool of her skirt to the earth. Dead affright or exposure. Would it matter when the parents arrived she wasn't wrong but it didn't matter anymore. Afterward everyone believed she had wish to die even though she had died proving she wanted to live. As it turns out being right was the third and worst mistake my parents are pleased about the marriage. My mother says that even though girls nowadays are starting to marry late she married my father when she was 19 and was glad that she did. When I select my wedding gown I'm reminded of the story of the young woman who wished to go to a dance with her lover but could not afford a dress she purchased a lovely white frock from a secondhand shop and then later fell ill and passed from this earth a doctor who examined her in her final days discovered that she had died from exposure to embalming fluid and it turned out that an unscrupulous undertakers assistant had stolen the dress from the corpse of a bride.

[00:22:44] The moral of that story I think is that being poor will kill you. I spend more on my dress than I intend but it is very beautiful and better than being dead when I folded into my hope chest I think about the bride who played hide and go seek on her wedding day and hid in the attic in old trunks that snapped shut around her and did not open. She was trapped there until she died.

[00:23:08] People thought she had run away until years later when a maid found her skeleton in a white dress folded inside that dark space. Brides never farewell and stories. Stories can sense happiness and snuff it out like a candle we marry in April or an unseasonably cold afternoon. He's season before the wedding in my dress and insists on kissing me deeply and reaching inside my bodice he becomes hard and I tell him that I want him to use my body as he sees fit. I rescind my first rule given the occasion he pushes me against the wall and puts his hand against the tile near my throat to steady himself his thumb Prussia's my ribbon. He does not move his hand and as he works

himself in me he says I love you I love you I love you. I do not know if I'm the first woman to walk up the aisle of St. George's with semen leaking down her leg but I like to imagine that I am for her honeymoon.

[00:24:08] We go on a tour of Europe. We are not rich but we make it work. Europe is a continent of stories and in between consummation. I learn them. We go from bustling Aints ancient metropolis says to sleepy villages to Alpine retreats and back again sipping spirits and pulling roasted meat from bones with our teeth eating Schmader soil and olives and ravioli and a creamy grain.

[00:24:31] I do not recognize but come to crave each morning. We cannot afford a sleeper car on the train but my husband Ribes an attendant permit us one hour in an empty room and in that way we couple over the Rhine. My husband pinning me to the rickety frame and howling something like something more primordial than the mountains we cross. I recognize this is not the entire world but it is the first part of it that I am seeing and I'm electrified by the possibility. If you are reading the story out loud make the sound of the bed under the tension of train travel and lovemaking by straining a folding metal chair against its hinges.

[00:25:09] When you are exhausted with that sing the half remembered lyrics of old songs to the person closest to you thinking of lullabies for children. My cycle stopped soon after you return from our trip. I tell my husband one night after we are spent and sprawled across the bed he glows with real delight. A child he says. He lies back with his hand beneath hands beneath his head. A child. He is quiet for so long that I think he's fallen asleep. When I look over his eyes are open and fixed on the ceiling.

[00:25:44] He rolls on his side and gazes at me will the child have a ribbon.

[00:25:50] I feel my jaw tighten and my hand fondles my bow involuntarily. My mind skips between many answers and I settle on the one that brings me the least amount of anger.

[00:26:02] There is no saying now. I tell him finally he startles me then running his hand around my throat. I put up my hands to stop him but he uses his strength. Grabbing my wrist with one hand as he touches the ribbon with the other he presses the silky length with his thumb. He touches the bow delicately as if he is massaging my socks.

[00:26:23] Please I say please don't. He does not seem to hear please. I say again my voice louder but cracking in the metal. He could have done it then untied the bow if he chose to but he releases me and rolls on his back as if nothing has happened. My wrists ache and I rub them. I need a glass of water. I say I get up and go to the bathroom.

[00:26:48] I run the top and then frantically check my ribbon. Tears caught in my lashes. The bow is still tight.

[00:26:56] There is a story I love about a pioneer husband and wife killed by wolves. Neighbors found their bodies torn apart and strewn around their tiny cabin but never located their infant daughter alive or dead. People claim they saw the girl running with a wolf pack loping over the terrain as wild and feral as any of her companions. News of her would ripple through the local settlements upon each sighting she menaced a hunter in the local woods. She mentored sheep. She measured a hunt menaced. She menaced a hunter in the winter forest though perhaps he was less menaced than startled at a tiny naked girl bearing her teeth and howling so rawly it quakes the skin on his bones. A young woman on the cusp of marriage age trying to take down a horse people even saw her ripping open a chicken and an explosion of feathers.

[00:27:50] Many years later she was said to be resting in the Russia's near EverBank suckling to Wolf Cubs. I like to imagine that they came from her body. The lineage of wolves tainted human just the ones they certainly bloodied her breasts. But she did not mind because they were hers and only hers.

[00:28:09] I believe that when their muscles and teeth pressed against her she felt a kind of sanctuary peace she would have found nowhere else. She must have been better among them than she would have been otherwise of that I am certain months pass and my stomach swells inside of me.

[00:28:27] Our child is swimming fiercely kicking and pushing and clawing in public. I gasp and stagger to the side clutching my belly and hissing through my teeth to little one as I call it to stop. Once I stumble on a walk in the park the same park or my husband proposed to me the year before and go to my knees breathing heavily and near weeping a woman passing by helps me to sit up and gives me some water telling me that the first pregnancy is always the worst but they get better with time. It is the worst but for so many reasons besides my altered form. I sing to my child and think about the old wives tales of carrying the baby high or low to carry a boy inside of me the image of his father or a girl. A daughter who would soften the sons that followed. I have no siblings but I know that the eldest girl sweetened their brothers and are protected protected by them from the dangers of the world an arrangement that buoys my heart. My body changes in ways I do not expect my breasts are large and hot my stomach lined with pale marks the inverse of a tiger's. I feel monstrous but my husband seems renewed with desire as Zeff my novel shape has refreshed our list of perversities and my body responds in line at the supermarket receiving communion at church. I am marked by a new and ferocious want leading me slippery and swollen at the slightest provocation. When he comes home each day my husband has made a list in his mind of the things he desires for me and I am willing to provide for them and more.

[00:30:04] Having been on the edge of Cumming's since that mornings purchase of bread and carrots I'm the luckiest man alive he says running his hand across my stomach in the mornings he kisses me and fondles me and Syndrome's takes me before his coffee and toast.

[00:30:20] He goes to work with a spring in his step. He comes home with one promotion and then another money from my family he says.

[00:30:28] More money for our happiness.

[00:30:33] I go into labor in the middle of the night. Every inch of my insides twisting into an obscene knot before release. I scream like I have not screamed since that night by the lake but for contrary reasons now the pleasure of the knowledge that my child is coming is dismantled by unyielding agony. I am in labor for 20 hours I nearly wrenched off my husband's hand howling obscenities that do not seem to shock the nurse.

[00:31:00] The doctor is frustratingly patient peering down between my legs his white eyes making unreadable morse code across his forehead. What's happening. I ask. Breathe. He commands. I am certain that if any more time passes I will crush my own teeth to powder. I looked to my husband who kisses my forehead and asked the doctor what's happening. I'm not satisfied that will be a natural birth. The doctor says you may have to deliver the baby surgically. No please I say I don't want that please if there's no movement soon we're going to do it. The doctor says it may be best for everyone he looks up at I'm almost certain he winks at my husband. But pain makes the mind see things differently than they are. I make a deal with little one. In my mind little one. I think this is the last time we are going to be just you and me. Please don't make them cut you out of me. Little one is born 20 minutes later they do have to make a cut but not across my stomach as I feared. The doctor draws his scalpel down instead and I feel little just tugging. Though perhaps it is what they have given me and the baby is placed in my arms. I examined the wrinkled body from head to toe the color of a sunset sky and streaked in red. No ribbon. A boy. I begin to weep. Uncurl the unmarked baby into my chest. The nurse shows me how to nurse him and I am so happy to feel him drink to touch the curls of his fingers.

[00:32:32] Little commas each of them if you are reading this story out loud give a paring knife to the listeners and ask them to cut the tender flap of skin between your index finger and thumb afterward thank them.

[00:32:47] There is a story about a woman who goes into labor when the attending physician is tired. There is a story about a woman who herself was born too early. There is a story about a woman whose body clung to her child so hard they had to cut her to retrieve him. There a story about a woman who heard a story about a woman who birthed wolf cubs in secret when you think about it stories had this way of running together like raindrops in a pond. Each one is born from the clouds separate but once they have come together there is no way to tell them apart. If you are reading the story out loud move aside the curtain to illustrate this final point to your listeners. It'll be raining I promise. They take the babies that they made. Fix me where I cut. They gave me something that makes me sleepy. Delivered through a mask pressed gently to my mouth and nose.

[00:33:41] My husband jokes round the doctor as he holds my hand. How much to get that extra stitch she says. You offer that right. Please say to him but it comes out slurred and twisted and possibly no more than a small moan. Neither man turns his head toward me. The doctor chuckles. You aren't the first. I slide down a long tunnel and then surface again back covered in something heavy and dark like oil. I feel like I'm going to vomit. The rumor is something like. Like a.

[00:34:14] And then I am awake wide awake and my husband is gone and the doctor is gone and the baby whereas the nurse sticks her head in the door. Your husband went to get coffee she said and the baby is asleep in the bassinette. The doctor walks in behind her wiping his hands on a cloth you're all sewn up don't you worry. He said nice and tight everyone's happy. The nurse will speak to you about recovery. You're going to need to rest for a while. The baby wakes up the nurse scoops him from his swaddle and places him in my arms again. He is so beautiful I have to remind myself to breathe.

[00:34:54] I recover a small amount every day I move slowly and ache. My husband moves to touch me and I push him away. I want to return to our life as it was. But such things cannot be helped right now. I am already nursing and rising at all hours.

[00:35:11] Take care of our son with my pain.

[00:35:14] Then one day I take him in my hand and afterward he is so content.

[00:35:18] I realize that I can save him even if I remain unsated around her son's first birthday. I am healed enough to take my husband back to my bed. I weep with happiness when he touches me fills me fills me as I want to be. I have wanted to be filled for so long. My son is a good baby. He grows and grows. We try to have another child but I suspect that little one did so much ruinous damage inside of me that my body could not house another. You were a poor tenant. Little one. I say to him rubbing shampoo in his fine brown hair and I shall revoke your deposit. He splashes around in the sink cackling with happiness. My son touches my ribbon but never in a way that makes me afraid. He thinks of it as a part of me and treats it no differently than he wouldn't ear or a finger. It gives him delight in a way that houses know wanting and this pleases me I don't know if my husband is sad that we cannot have another child. He keeps his sorrows close to himself as he is open with his desires. He is a good father and he loves his boy back from work. They play games of Chase and run in the yard. He is too young to catch a ball and my husband still patiently rolls it to him in the grass and our son picks it up and drops it again. And my husband gestures to me and cries look look to you see he's going to throw it soon enough of all the stories I know about mothers. This one is the most real. A young American girl is visiting Paris with her mother. When the woman begins to feel ill they decide to check into a hotel for a few days so the mother can rest and the doctor doctor the daughter calls for a doctor to assess her after a brief examination.

[00:37:08] The doctor tells the daughter that her mother all her mother needs is some medicine. He takes it out to a taxi gives the driver instructions in French and explains to the girl the driver will take her to his residence where his wife will give her the appropriate remedy. They drive and drive for a very long time and when the girl arrives she is frustrated by the unbearable slowness of the doctor's wife who meticulously assembles the pills from powder when she gets back into the taxi the driver meanders down the streets sometimes doubling back over the same avenue. Frustrated the road gets out of the taxi to return to the hotel on foot. When she finally arrives the hotel clerk tells her that he has never seen her before. She runs up to the room where her mother had been resting. She finds the walls a different color the furnishings different than her memory and her mother nowhere in sight.

There are many endings to this story. In one of them the girl is gloriously persistent and certain renting a room nearby and sticking out the hotel eventually seducing a young man who works in the laundry and discovering the truth that her mother had died of a highly contagious and fatal disease. Departing this plane shortly after the daughter was sent from the hotel by the doctor to avoid a citywide panic the staff removed and buried the body repainted and refurnished the room and bribed all involved. So they never met the pair. In another version of the story the girl wanders the streets of Paris for years believing that she is mad that she invented her mother and her life with her mother and her own diseased mind. The daughter stumbles from hotel to hotel confused and grieving though for who they are for whom she cannot say each times she is ejected from another posh lobby. She weeps for something lost her mother is dead and she does not know it. She won't know until she herself is also dead.

[00:39:01] Assuming you believe in paradise I don't need to tell you the moral of this story. I think you already know what it is.

[00:39:13] A son enters school when he is 5. And I remember his teacher from that day in the park when she crouched to help me and predicted easy future pregnancies. She remembers me as well and we talked briefly in the hallway.

[00:39:26] I told that we've had no more children since our son. And now that he has started school my day will be altered towards sloth and boredom. She is kind. She tells me that if I am looking for a way to occupy my time there is a wonderful women's art class at the local college that night after my son is in bed my husband reaches his hand across the couch and slides it up my leg. Come to me he says and I twinge with pleasure. I slide off the couch smoothing my skirt very prettily as I shuffle over to him on my knees. I kissed his leg running my hand up to his belts tucking him from his bonds before swallowing him whole. He runs his hands through my hair stroking my head groaning and pressing into me and I don't realize that his hand is sliding down the back of my neck until he is trying to loop his fingers through the ribbon.

[00:40:17] I gasp and pull away quickly falling back and frantically checking my bow.

[00:40:22] He's still sitting there slicked with my spit come back here he says. No I say you'll touch my ribbon. He stands and tucks himself into his pants zipping them up. A wife he says should have no secrets from her husband. I don't have any secrets. I tell him the ribbon the room is not a secret. It's just mine. Are you born with it. Why your throat. Why is it green. I do not answer. He is silent for a long minute.

[00:40:54] Then a wife should have no secrets. My nose grows hot. I don't want to cry I've given you everything you've ever asked for I say. Am I not allowed this one thing. I want to know. You think you want to know I say but you don't. Why do you want to hide it from me.

[00:41:14] I'm not hiding it. It just isn't yours.

[00:41:18] He gets down very close to me and I pull back from the smell of bourbon. I hear a creak and we both look up to see our son's feet vanishing up the staircase. When my husband goes to sleep that night he does so with a hot and burning anger that falls away as soon as he is truly dreaming. I am up for a long time listening to his breathing wondering if perhaps men have ribbons that do not look like ribbons. We are all marked in some way even if it's impossible to see. The next day our son touches my throat and asks about my ribbon. He tries to pull at it and though it pains me I have to make it forbidden to him when he reaches for it. I shake a can of pennies. It crushes discordantly and he withdraws and weeps. Something is lost between us and I never find it again. If you are reading this story out loud prepare a soda can full of pennies when you arrive at this moment. Shake it loudly in the face of the person closest to you. Observe their expression of startled fear and then betrayal. Those. Notice how they never look at you exactly the same way for the rest of your days. Enroll in the art class for women. When my husband is at work and my son is in school I drive to the sprawling green campus and the squat gray building where the art classes are held. Presumably the male nudes are kept from our eyes in some deference to propriety. But the class has its own energy. There is planning to see on a strange woman's naked form played to contemplate as you roll charcoal and mix paints. I see more than one woman shifting forward and back in her seat to read it to redistribute blood flow.

[00:43:02] One woman in particular returns over and over her ribbon is red and is knotted around her ankle. Her skin is the color of olives and a trail of dark hair runs from her bellybutton to her Monds. I know that I should not want her not because she is a woman and not because she is a stranger because it is her job disrobe and I feel shame taking advantage of such a state. No small amount of guilt come comes along with my wandering eyes. But as my pencil traces her contours so does my hand in the secret recesses of my mind. I am not even certain how such a thing would happen with the possibilities and sends me to near Madness one afternoon after class I turn a hallway corner and she is there the woman clothed wrapped in a raincoat. Her gaze transfixes me and this close I can see the band of gold around each of her pupils as though her eyes are twins solar eclipses. She greets me and I her. We sit down together in a booth at a nearby diner. Our Knees occasionally brushing up against each other beneath the formic. She drinks a cup of black coffee which startles me though I don't know why. I ask if she has any children. She does she says. A daughter a beautiful girl of 11 11 is a terrifying age she says. I remember nothing before I was 11. But then there it was all color and horror. What a number she says. What a show that our face slips somewhere else. For a moment as if she is deep beneath the surface of a lake and when it comes back she briefly speaks to her daughter's accomplishments and voice and music.

[00:44:41] We do not discuss the specific fears of raising a girl child. Truthfully I am afraid even to ask. I also do not ask her if she is married and though she does not volunteer the information she does not wear a ring. We talk about my son about the art class I desperately want to know what state of need is centered send her to disrobe before us but perhaps I do not ask because the answer would be like adolescence too frightening to forget. I am captivated by her. There's no other way to put it. There's something easy about her but not easy the way I was. The way I am she is like DDO how to give beneath needing hands disguises its sturdiness its potential.

[00:45:28] When I look away from her and then look back she seems twice as large as before perhaps we can talk again some time I say to her. This has been a very pleasant afternoon. She nonstick me. I pay for her coffee. I do not want to tell my husband about her but he can sense in me some untapped desire. One night he asked what royals inside and I confessed to him I even described the details of her ribbon releasing an extra flood of shame. He is so glad of this development that he and Sam mutter along an exhaustive fantasy as he removes his pants and enter me and I cannot even hear all of it. Though I imagine it within its parameters she and I are together or perhaps both of us with him. I feel as I feel as if I betrayed her somehow and I never returned to the class. I find other amusements to occupy my days. If you are if you are reading the story out loud force a listener to reveal a devastating secret. Then open the nearest window to the street and scream it as loudly as you are able.

[00:46:31] One of my favorite stories is about an old woman and her husband a man mean as Mondays has scared her with violence of his temper and the shifting nature of his whims.

[00:46:41] She was able to keep him satisfied with her cooking to which he was a complete captive. One day he brought her a fat love fat liver to cook for him and she did using herbs and broth but the smell of her own artistry overtook her and a few nibbles became a few bites and soon the liver was gone. She had no money with which to purchase a second one and she was terrified of her husband's reaction. Should he discover his meal was gone. She crept to the church next door where a woman had been at least recently laid to rest. She approached the shrouded figure then cut into it with a pair of kitchen shears and stole the liver from the corpse. That night the woman's husband dabbed his lips with a napkin and declared the meal the finest he'd ever eaten. When they went to sleep the old woman heard the front door open and a thin wail wafted through the rooms.

[00:47:32] Who has my liver who has my liver although I can hear the voice coming closer and closer to the bedroom. There was a hush as the door swung open. The dead woman posed her Querrey again a woman flung her blankets off her husband.

[00:47:53] He has it she declared triumphantly.

[00:47:57] Then she saw the face of the dead woman and recognized her own mouth and eyes.

[00:48:02] She looked down on her abdomen remembering now how she carved into her own belly. She bled freely there in the bed whispering something over and over as she died something you and I will never be privy to. Next to her as the blood seeped into the heart of the mattress her husband slumbered on. That may not be the version of the story you're familiar with but I assure you it's the one you need to know.

[00:48:30] My husband is strangely excited for Halloween.

[00:48:33] I took one of his old Tweed coats and fashioned one for our son so that he might be a tiny professor or another stuffy academic even give him a pipe on which to gnaw our son clicks between his teeth.

[00:48:45] In a way that I find unsettlingly adults mama. My son says What are you. I am not in costume and so I tell him I'm his mother. The pipe falls from his little mouth onto the floor and he screams so loudly I'm unable to move.

[00:49:01] My husband swoops in and picks him up talking to him in a low voice repeating his name between his sobs is only as his breathing returned to normal that I'm able to identify my mistake. He is not old enough to know the story of the naughty girls who wanted the toy drum and who are wicked toward their mother until she went away and was replaced with a new mother one with glass eyes and a thumping wooden tail. He is too young for the stories and their trueness of advertently told him one anyway the story of the little boy who only discovered a Halloween that his mother was not his mother set in the day when everyone wore a mask.

[00:49:38] Regret sluices hot up my throat. I try to hold him and kiss him but he only wishes to go out into the street where the sun has dipped below the horizon and a hazy chill is bruising the shadows. I have little use for this holiday. I do not wish for the wall. I do not wish to walk my son to strangers houses or to assemble popcorn balls and wait for trick or treat callers to show up demanding ransom. Still I wait inside with a whole tray of sticky confections answering the door to a tiny queens and ghosts. I think of my son when they leave. I put down the tray and rest my head in my hands.

[00:50:15] Our son comes home laughing gnawing on a piece of candy this turned his mouth the color of a plum. I'm angry at my husband. I wish he had waited to come home for permitting the consumption of the cash. Has he never heard the stories the pins pressed into the chocolates. The razorblades sunken to the apples. It is like him to not understand what there is to be afraid of in this world. But I am still furious Exame my son's mouth. But there is no sharp metal plunge into his palate. He laughs and spins around the house dizzy and electrified from the treats and the excitement he wraps his arms round my legs. The earliest earlier incident forgotten the forgiveness taste sweeter than any candidate that can be given at any door. When he climbed into my lap I sing to him until he falls asleep. Our son grows and grows. He is 8 10. First I tell him the fairy tales the very old this one with the pain and death and forced marriage Parad away like dead foliage mermaids grow feet and it feels like laughter. Naughty pigs trot away from grand feasts reformed anine evil witches leave the castle and move into small cottages and live out their days painting portraits of small woodland creatures as he grows though he asked too many questions why would they not eat the pig hungry as they were and wicked as he has as he had been. Why was the witch permitted to go free after her terrible deeds and the sensation of fins to feet being anything less than agonizing. He rejects outright after cutting his hand with a pair of scissors. It would go quite he says for he is struggling with his arms. I agree with him as I bandage the cut it would so I tell them and stories that are closer to true children who go missing along a particular stretch of railroad track lured by the sound of the Phantom Train to parts unknown.

[00:52:07] A black dog that appears at a person's doorstep three days before their passing a trio of frogs that corner you in the marshlands and tell your fortune for a price.

[00:52:17] My husband I think would forbid these stories. But my son listens to them with some solemnity and keeps them to himself.

[00:52:28] The school puts on a performance of a little Buchel boy and he is the lead the buckle boy and I join a committee of mothers making costumes for the children and the chief costume maker in a room full of women all of us so and the other little pink pedals for the flower children making tiny white pantaloons for the pirates. One of them mothers has a pale yellow ribbon on her finger and it constantly tangles in the thread. She swears and cries one day even half to use a delicate sewing shears to pick the offending threads. I try to be delicate. She shakes her head as a free her from a peony.

[00:53:03] It's such a bother isn't it she says. I nod outside the window the children play knocking each other off the playground equipment popping the heads off of dandelions. The play goes beautifully. Opening Night or sun blazes through his monologue perfect pitch and cadence. No one has ever done better our son is 12. He asked. He asks me about my ribboned point blank. I tell him that we are all different and sometimes you should not ask questions. I assure him that he'll understand when he is grown or destruction with stories that have no ribbons. Angels who desire to be human and ghosts who don't realize their dead and children who turn to ash he stops find like a child milky sweetness or place with something sharp and burning like hair sizzling on a stove. Our son is 13 for Tang. His hair is a little too long but I can't bear to cut it short. My husband scrambles the locks with his hand on his way to work and kisses me on the side of my mouth. On his way to school our son waits for the neighbor boy who walks with a brace.

[00:54:07] He exhibits the subtlest compassion my son no instinct for cruelty like some world has enough. Bullies have told him over and over this is the year he stops asking for my stories. Our son is 15 17. He is a brilliant boy. He has his father's knack for people. My air of mystery. He begins to call a beautiful girl from his high school who has a bright smile and a warm presence. I am happy to meet her but never insist that we should wait for their return. Remembering my own youth when he tell us he has been accepted to a university to study engineering. I am overjoyed. We march to the house singing songs and laughing when my husband comes home. He joins in the jubilee and we drive to a local seafood restaurant. His father tells him over halibut we are so proud of you our son laughs and says that he also wishes to marry his girl. We clasped hands and are even happier. Such a good boy. Such a wonderful life to look forward to. Even the luckiest woman alive has not seen joy like this.

[00:55:12] There's a classic a real classic that I haven't told you yet. A girlfriend and her boyfriend went parking.

[00:55:19] Some people say that they were kissing in a car but I know the story I was there they were parked on the edge of a lake. They were turning around in the back seat as if the world was moments from ending. Maybe it was. She offered herself and he took her in after it was over they turned on the

radio the voice on the radio announced that a mad Hoque handed man ok and murder had escaped from a local asylum. The boyfriend chuckled as he flipped to a music station as the song ended. The girlfriend heard a thin scratching sound like a paperclip over glass. She looked at her boyfriend then pulled her cardigan over her bare shoulders wrapping one arm around her breasts.

[00:55:59] We should go she said. And the boyfriend said let's do that again. I've gone all night. What if the killer comes here. The girl asked the asylum is very close. We'll be fine baby the boyfriend said. Don't you trust me. The girlfriend nodded reluctantly well.

[00:56:16] And he said his voice trailing off in a way that she would come to know so well. He took her hand off her chest and placed it on to himself. She finally looked away from the lake side. Outside the moonlight glinted off the shiny steel hook the killer waved at her grinning I'm sorry I've forgotten the rest of the story.

[00:56:38] The house is so silent without her son. I walk through it touching all the surfaces. I am happy but something inside of me is shifting into a strange new place.

[00:56:49] That night my husband asked if I wish to Chris Chris and the newly empty rooms we have not coupled so fearlessness since before our son was born. Bent over the kitchen table. Something old is lit within me and I remember the way we had desired before we left. Love streaked over all the surfaces he relished in my darkest spaces. I scream with ferocity not caring if the neighbors here not caring if anyone looks through the window with its undrawn curtains and sees my husband buried in my mouth I would go out into the lawn if he asked me let him take me from behind in sight of the whole neighborhood.

[00:57:27] I could have met anyone at that party when I was 17. Stupid boys are prudish boys are violent boys were little boys who would me moved to some distant country to convert its denizens or some other such nonsense.

[00:57:40] I could've experienced untold numbers of sorrows or dissatisfactions but as I straddle him on the floor riding him and crying out I know that I've made the right choice.

[00:57:55] We fall asleep exhausted or sprawled naked in our bed. When I wake up my husband is kissing the back of my neck probing the rhythm with his tongue. My body rebels wildly still throbbing with the memories of pleasure but fucking hard against the betrayal. I say his name he does not respond. I say it again and he holds me against him it continues. I wedged my elbows into his side and when he loosens from me in surprise I sit up and face him.

[00:58:23] He looks confused and hurt like my son the day I shook the can of pennies resolve runs out of me. I touched the ribbon.

[00:58:32] I look at the face of my husband the beginning and end of his desires all etched there. He is not a bad man and that I realized suddenly is the root of my hurt. He's not a bad man at all to describe him as evil or wicked or corrupt but do a deep disservice to him.

[00:58:51] And yet do you want to untie the ribbon I ask him.

[00:58:55] After these many years is that what you want of me. His face flashes gaily and then greedily and he runs his hand at my bare breast and to my bow.

[00:59:05] Yes he says yes.

[00:59:08] Do not touch him to know that he grows at the thought. I closed my eyes. I remember the boy of the party the one who kissed me and broke the open by that Lakeside who did with me what I wanted. Who gave me a son and helped him grow into a man himself. And I say do what you want with trembling fingers he takes one of the ends the bow undoes slowly the long bound and crimped with habit. My husband groans. But I don't think he realizes it he loops his fingers through the final twist and pulls the ribbon falls away.

[00:59:47] It floats down and curls onto the bed or so I imagine because I cannot look down to follow its descent. My husband frowns and then his face begins to open with some other expression sorrow or maybe preemptive loss. My hand flies up in front of me an involuntary emotion for balance or some other futility and beyond his image is gone. I love you. I assure him more than you could possibly know. No he says I don't know to what he's responding if you are reading the story out loud.

[01:00:23] You may be wondering if the place might have been protected it was wet with blood and openings are smooth and neutered like the nexus between the legs of a doll.

[01:00:32] I'm afraid I can't tell you because I don't know. For these questions and others and their lack of resolution I am sorry my weight shifts and with it gravity seizes me.

[01:00:45] My husband's face falls away and then I see the ceiling and then the wall behind me as my lopped head tips backward off my neck and rolls off the bed. I feel as lonely as I have ever been.

[01:00:59] Thank you.

[01:01:16] Sir are we to question time now. Excellent. All right. I don't have a question I can.

[01:01:22] I can sort of wave your hand around if I'm not.

[01:01:28] No question I'll answer any question you have any any question. Yes. Oh right. As to the question yes so the question is that since I've I've gone to both Iowa Writers Workshop and also the Clarion Science Fiction of Fantasy Writers Workshop. Like how was that conversation going. Am I Am I repeating that correctly. Or did it make the communities or the genre's are okay. Sure yeah. Yeah.

So I mean yes so I did an MFA program at the Iowa Writers Workshop and then I did Cleary and actually immediately afterwards. So for those who do not know about Klarion it's just really amazing. 6 week sort of. I guess you call it a science fiction and fantasy boot camp. There's actually one here in Seattle called Klarion west and there's one in San Diego called that's just Klarion and it's really incredible. If you are interested in writing science fiction or fantasy it all recommend you check it out it's pretty amazing. Yeah. Both of those programs are really amazing. Actually one of my Klarion teach I'm not going to blow up his spot but what am I going to do is actually here in the audience right now. But yeah they're really different. So like the thing about Iowa that was so amazing was I had to go in for two years. I just had like I was funded and I just got to let go right. And just like experiment and play around and that was really incredible and really useful for me and could have helped me grow as an artist and it gave me that space.

[01:02:44] Klarion I mean it's really different because you're writing a story a week. So imagine writing six stories in six weeks and then workshopping 17 other people's stories that they are also writing. And then also a lot of alcohol and like zero sleep. And that's basically Cleri. And so it's like a really compressed kind of a different energy than an MFA program.

[01:03:06] Yeah and I mean both. I mean I'm really interested. I sort of one of those words I try to kind of have a relationship with both the so-called genre community and the literary community which in many ways overlap in terms of the work.

[01:03:21] But it's weird it's like do these two sort of distinct communities with distinct lineages so do you have like Asimov's an analog and like you know the old pulp magazines and Klarion and then you also have things like I might say programs like the New Yorker and it's like sort of a different track. And there is some overlap like. Jeff VanderMeer is a good example of a writer who likes started off in the Schoener world and has now sort of crossed over. You could call it what say you like into the lit world. Kelly Link You know she was a finalist for the Pulitzer a few years ago but she got her start you know in the New World.

[01:03:55] So they're both really amazing they have a lot to offer. I sort of wish there was more crossover because like for example like there's a show on a writer Sofia Samatar who I'm like literally obsessed with she's like one of my favorite contemporary writers and a lot of people who only sort of follow the lit worlds don't really know about her as much as they should which is a crime because she's a genius.

[01:04:13] So yeah I mean I feel like I'm not sophisticated in like in like what genre my work occupies. But both communities are really acts have a lot of exciting things to offer and also a lot of the genre magazines pay to get that money. So it's like it's like amazing you know because it's sort of comes from this tradition of like you know you get a certain certain number amount per word.

[01:04:42] You know it's this very sort of old tradition and it's like the community it sort of like maybe we'll give you an issue and like a hundred dollars maybe 50 dollars and maybe two hundred dollars maybe no dollars you know. So yeah. So

[01:04:55] Yeah I'm really grateful to have done both. I mean I loved Klarion and I met some amazing people there and I also really love my MFA program so it was like a really long answer.

[01:05:05] Other questions were Oh yes.

[01:05:12] So the question is you're asking about especially heinous the story about Baz Luce's law and order as few as its framework and like what my relationship with the show. Do I plan on doing that in the future. So I didn't think so. I actually like that this would be that would be like my only sort of TV story and then reasonably so Hulu just put all of E.R on Hulu. And. I. I saw it I was like well getting worked out for like a month and a half because I love. That

[01:05:42] I haven't seen it in a really long time.

[01:05:44] It was actually a good TV show that I watched as he I wouldn't say now I'm like I do want to write like a medical show story. Can I do that twice. Could I do it a second time. I don't know we'll see. Yeah surrealist loner view is like pretty complicated. So I mean obviously like most human beings on this earth I used to watch Larmer for you because like you would be on USA Today.

[01:06:07] Turn the channel on you'd be like two thirds the way through an episode you'd be like Huh interesting and you have no idea who the characters were or what was going on. You would still watch it and then it would end and you'd be like well the next one starting out just watch this one and seven hours later you're still watching like a marathon of water rescue.

[01:06:22] And I'm really interested in the fact that it's the only currently running version of Monitor s law and order is the rape or the rape. One is the one that like we keep watching and it's still on on the air.

[01:06:36] I'm fascinated by the way this show seems both aware and utterly oblivious to its own sort of like Mission. So like it's a show about rape and how rape is bad but like the teachers are constantly threatening rape like suspects they're like you're going to go to prison and then guess what's going to happen.

[01:06:51] You know it's like it's like well you're literally like the wife.

[01:06:57] And I feel like there's a lot to say about like how this intense sort of commodification of women's bodies is like this sort of massive cultural engine that drives it is like sort of the centerpiece of this like Dick Wolf universe or whatever.

[01:07:15] Yeah. And then also one time I got swine flu and was and it was right when or when Netflix started that thing where instead of had to click to the next episode they would just keep playing. So that so I was I was like getting kind of sick and I was like I don't feel that I call that of work.

[01:07:31] Started playing Wanner s view from the beginning which I had never seen in any kind of order before. And then I was like You know I had like a fever like last three days of my life and the whole time line RSV you is just playing in the background. And so I sort of also sort of believe that. That very surreal sort of Linda Sheen fever hell scape that I experienced. It's also very influential sort of impact of that story.

[01:07:56] So yes so I mean I was like I watched a lot of television and I feel like if I can justify that I'm right I'm watching it to expand my mind. And like write a story that it's like not wasted which is really what I hope because otherwise I've wasted a lot of time. This is the same logic with video games.

[01:08:13] It's like well I'm going to write a videogame story so this 130 hours. But I'm like this game is like fine or whatever. Anyway yeah.

[01:08:23] So yeah so maybe I'll write another TV story I don't know but that story is really I love that story.

[01:08:31] People it's very controversial. People really hate it.

[01:08:35] People are often like I love this book except for that horrible horrible law and order thing. Memento was like.

[01:08:44] Sorry. I really love that story a lot so I'm glad you love it.

[01:08:47] Thank you. Oh yes here yes.

[01:08:55] So just to repeat the question. How does it feel like how many books come out this like weird cultural moment that we're having that sort of seems to sync up with this book. So it's really weird because I've sold this book two years ago. And I've wrote it five years before that this book has been in progress for a long time. Obama was president when I started writing it.

[01:09:14] And it's weird because like now and like I would give away my book like I would just give it away to the universe. If like Don trebles not president like I would do that but I can't unfortunately. So it sucks that it's relevant. Like I don't want I wish it wasn't right. I'm glad that people find it cathartic. It's been really weird just like have to like sort of inadvertently entered this cultural conversation. But it's like it's like things are bad now but like they're not actually worse. Like I feel like women's lives have been garbage like all of human history right. And like right now we're having a particularly bad particularly visibly horrible moment. But all it is is like this sort of weird late and shit like coming to the surface. Sorry just for the record for the radio. Ok sorry. So there's all this stuff that's been buried and sort of sublimated is just coming up. And so it's like it's not like I've written it's done to become president and I was like now I got to write a feminist book like I had you know I had to do that because like this is what it's like to be in a woman's body and a person's body like that. You know that is necessary before and will be necessary into the future. And honestly I'm not super optimistic about anything changing.

[01:10:37] You asked me like how do you feel about the future and I'm like real real bad.

[01:10:40] I don't think I actually don't think things will get better and I think that we're having a woman right now but we have moments constantly and I think it's going to eventually get like chewed up by the news cycle and then like we're back to square one.

[01:10:53] What I was saying so. OK.

[01:10:55] But yes. So yes. I mean it feels weird to have it just like be in that space. I'm glad it's been. People have found it very cathartic and very helpful and useful but that's really awesome and I love that.

[01:11:06] I wish I could just like give it away and then like Trump would not be president but you know he went out there and two more. OK. Oh yes.

[01:11:19] So sorry you know you're asking like how. Like why do I choose to do these are nested narratives is that. Yes. I mean I yes so like storytelling is very important. My family my grandfather was sort of my my first storyteller. My father had an ongoing series of stories told me at bedtime called Boss Mo Bozzio.

[01:11:39] The Beamish boy who would frolic on the forest and it was friends with the bears and stuff and he would just make up chapters of this like ridiculous weird story about like basically Peter Pan I guess. So that was like a storytelling thing. I read a lot and I feel like I was really interested in the ways in which stories like I really love a little princess. Do you guys really a little princess. So I'm up. I was recently looking through it again. This is an amazing book. I really love it. I wanted to go to boarding school as a child. I think that's that's why.

[01:12:12] And you know in that story like she's telling stories right and like sort of the thing that sustains her and keeps her going. Are these stories and narratives that she learned as a child. And I think the stories are the engine that sort of push us through our lives.

[01:12:29] And so it seems weird. I mean so it feels like obviously I'm very explicitly met affectionately calling attention to those nested narratives. But I think that actually it's sort of the building blocks of storytelling already because you're always responding and to that you've heard or that you've experienced or like a story someone's told you or a story someone has read. So it's just like it's part of the DNA. It's not like a Muriel Rukeyser quotes and the stories being Atom's.

[01:12:57] I'm not I'm not going mess it up. It's a good quote you should look it up. Last question burning question. Yes.

[01:13:08] Oh my God. Where do I start. So last year was like a bonanza short story collection year. Probably my favorites actually them.

[01:13:21] Well Sophia Salvatore who I mentioned earlier had a book come out called Tender that's her collected short stories include some new some new work. She's amazing. Bennett Sims has had a new collection called White dialogues. That's amazing. Jenny Zang sour heart. I absolutely loved play my favorite of the whole year was Leslie Nunga are among what it means sort of landfall from the sky. I'm obsessed with Leslie in kind of a slightly unhealthy way. So yeah I feel like last year was like. I mean I was like good Caulkins come out every year but I feel like last year I just like was falling all over him. So yeah there's some some good recent books that I checked out. I also just read Mallory or peruse new collection that's coming out and it's like it's perfect.

[01:14:03] So buy it when it comes out. It's really good excellent.

[01:14:08] Thank you so much everybody.

[01:14:20] 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.