Craig Silva:

Hi, I'm Craig. Welcome to the Libro.fm Podcast where we talk to authors, narrators, book sellers and more.

Karen Farmer:

And I'm Karen and we are very happy to be back this month with an episode where we got to sit down with Neel Patel who is an author and screenwriter based out of Los Angeles. And Neel's debut novel, Tell Me How to Be was released last year and that was following his book of short stories, which is called, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi.

Craig Silva:

I loved both of these books. I actually listened to Tell Me How to Be last Christmas right around the holiday season. We had rented a house down the cape in Massachusetts and I was like, went for a walk by myself with my AirPods on and was listening to it, walking down the beach in the winter. It was a whole moment. So when we decided to start this-

Karen Farmer:

It's lovely.

Craig Silva:

It was lovely. It was really nice. There's the beach. The beach when there's snow on it is a weird thing that I enjoy. So when we decided that we were going to do this podcast and we were kind of brainstorming who we were going to have on it, Neel immediately jumped into my head as someone that I wanted to talk to because I loved the book so much. And then I also then read the short stories. Those I only just read though when Neel said yes to doing the podcast. But loved both.

Karen Farmer:

Well, I'm so glad that you introduced me to Neel Patel's work because I had not read either of these books yet, and I loved them both. I could not put them down. Unlike you, I started with the short stories because I love short stories with all of my heart and then moved on to the novel. Loved that as well. I need to know from the author Neel Patel, when the next book is coming out because I need more of his words in my life, Craig.

Craig Silva:

Well, luckily we're recording this intro after we recorded the podcast and I know for a fact that he's going to answer your question.

Karen Farmer:

Oh my gosh. It's like you're predicting the future. I love it.

Craig Silva:

It. Yes, I am a psychic. No, I really enjoyed doing this episode too. It was fun to talk with Neel and I feel like he was so casual and easy to talk to. I'm glad that we did the lightning round thing again. It was fun with Anne and it was also fun with Neel, so I think we're just going to have to make this part of each episode moving forward.

Karen Farmer:

I agree. I do feel like in round two our questions are getting increasingly strange, so I'm excited to see how far this goes.

Craig Silva:

I was going to say silly. We talk about teeth disintegrating. It's disgusting.

Karen Farmer:

I still have recurring dreams, Craig. We weren't to get it right.

Craig Silva:

Well, if that sounds interesting to you, keep listening to the rest of the episode. Before we get into the interview, we wanted to play a clip from Neel's 2021 novel, Tell Me How to Be. We hope you enjoy the clip and then the interview will come right after it.

Vikas Adam:

I would not have chosen to live in this town with its quiet roads and its dark winters, but back then, I didn't have much of a choice. I married Ashoke. He brought me to Illinois. There was no alternative. I could not have been what the whites call a spinster, drinking martinis at 3:00 PM. According to my parents, women like those were failures. They were dangerous. But what's so wrong with a dangerous woman? Women have choices now. What to wear, whom to marry even whether to be a woman at all. It's all fine with me as long as everyone shaved their legs. I didn't choose this life for myself, but now I'm choosing to leave it.

Craig Silva:

Welcome to the podcast, Neel. Both Karen and I have been super excited to have you. We are both fresh off a read of both your short story collection and your novel. So we were both just reading it and texting each other nonstop like, "Oh my God, I can't believe what this happened." And back and forth. So we both really, really liked it.

Karen Farmer:

Yes, I specifically love short stories, which Craig hears me talk about all the time. And so I was carrying around, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi in my purse, in my backpack. It's like all banged up and dogeared. I just loved it. So I can't wait to ask you lots of questions about that one too.

Neel Patel:

I love that you love short stories. I feel like more people need to love short stories.

Karen Farmer:

Yes. I'm trying to spread the good word. They're my favorite.

Craig Silva:

I like short stories at the end of the year when I'm trying to hit my reading goal. I like a nice shorter... Got to hit those numbers. So during our little intro that we recorded, we gave a little bit of information about

you as we were kind of teeing up the episode. But for folks who may not be familiar with their work, we'd love if you could just give a brief synopsis about yourself.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. I'm Neel Patel, obviously. I'm a writer from Champaign, Illinois. I grew up in a small Midwestern town and then I moved to Los Angeles. I first started writing short stories and publishing them in little journals and that led to a two-book deal, the first of which is a collection of stories called If You See Me, Don't Say Hi. And the second of which is a novel called Tell Me How to Be.

I primarily write through the perspective of second generation South Asian Americans. I write about love and family and relationships and ambition, and what it's like to be brown in America and to be the child of immigrant parents, and also about the queer experience on top of that.

Karen Farmer:

Awesome. Well, diving right into it, I have a question that seems very minute, but there was a clue I feel like I found in the acknowledgements of, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi. I always read the acknowledgements. You had a note there to your editor that said, "Thank you for plucking me out of the slush pile." And I felt like this was a little secret insight into what your experience has been like as you started out on this journey with the short story collection then with a novel. So could you talk a little bit about that with the slush pile? What does that mean? What happened and how did you get to where you are?

Neel Patel:

Yeah, so the slush pile is basically a pile of unsolicited manuscripts that no one asked for. And so that was actually, I think that was to my agent because I had submitted to her. I had just emailed her and she had actually told me after she signed me that most of her clients come through referrals through MFA programs or through editors and things of that nature. So I just sort of blindly emailed people my manuscript, but I think I chose the perfect time to do. It was I believe two days after Trump won the election in 2016.

I realized, "Okay, it's now or never." I remembered feeling when he won, I felt this fear and I was feeling these things like what is it going to be like for me as a brown person? What is it going to be like for my parents who are still living in this small Midwestern town? And then on top of that being queer. I remember I had this moment where I was like, "Oh my God, maybe I shouldn't have come out of the closet." When I thought that, I was like, "No, no, no, no. You can't go to that place." And that really motivated me to go out. So I sent my manuscript out and she was one of the people who read and responded to it.

Craig Silva:

That's insane to me just sending that email 'cause I'm sure she gets a million emails, just any other literary agent. Did you ever ask her what stuck out in like she pops open Gmail and decides to open this one and move forward?

Neel Patel:

I think it was that I made it very personal and I wrote it in my voice. I think some people have a tendency to be very formal and business like, but this is the art world and people don't really care about that. It's funny you bring that up because I don't really remember specifically what I said, but apparently she said

that my query letter was so good that she uses it as an example when she like [inaudible 00:08:28] talking to students and stuff. I was like, "Oh wow."

But I think I must have just been very honest. And obviously, I talked about my background and why I think stories like these are important and the lack of representation both in the sense of queer stories and stories about immigrants and children of immigrants. So I think she responded to that.

Craig Silva:

You had mentioned that you signed a two-book deal. Was the plan always to be one short stories collection and one novel, or did that just organically happen because you were writing short stories?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. I think that the plan was always to do a novel as a followup. That's like an industry standard in a way. Most publishers aren't super thrilled to just publish a collection of stories because they don't really pull in the numbers that novels do.

But if you can promise that you will have a novel following it up, then they're more excited about it and they look at it, then it's like they're discovering a new voice who can go on to write tons of books for them. So I think I wrote 50 pages of a novel, and so they read that and then signed me up.

Karen Farmer:

They were hooked.

Neel Patel:

Incidentally, those 50 pages, I don't even think made it into the actual book.

Craig Silva:

Maybe you can turn them into a short story.

Neel Patel:

Yeah, I know.

Karen Farmer:

Send them to me. I want to read them. I want to read more of your words. I have a lot of questions about themes across both of your works, but before I go too far down that path, there were some similarities that we noticed thematically across the two. One of the things that Craig and I wanted to ask you was, as you wrote the short stories, did some of those themes inform then the arc of the novel? Was that interplay in your mind as you were writing the first book?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. Well, I think after I wrote it and I stepped back from it, I realized that there... I feel like with, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi, it's interesting. I feel like you can create different novels from just that collection. There are some stories that are more traditional and they're more family-oriented stories. And then there are other stories that are just out there and they're about crazy people going against the grain of society.

So I think there were two stories at the end that were very emotional. And then I think the title story that was more emotional. I tapped more into that when writing the novel. It's funny. When I first started the collection, the first story I wrote was a story called These Things Happen, which is really bizarre story. And then the last two, three stories were the title story and the two stories at the end, which were more kind of... I don't know. I felt like I was getting closer to the core of my experience.

I started doing stories that were a little bit more out there and then I came closer and closer and closer to who I was and what my experience was as a child and just my family. So that became the inspiration for the novel.

Karen Farmer:

Oh my gosh, that's really powerful to hear and to have that insight into where as you were writing those. A couple of the themes that I was referring to that were just very top of mind for me reading these, they just have stuck with me for weeks after this. The first one that I wanted to ask you about was this idea of characters that aren't there. There's this absent you frequently that somebody is writing towards or referring to yearning for. And even though they're not on screen, I'm putting that in air quotes, these offscreen characters are just as important as the people who are narrating and speaking. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how that came to be and why that's so important across both of these books.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. I think a lot of my work is about longing, I realize, and I think as somebody who was on the outside of things, I was always longing to be inside. I was always longing for companionship, for friendship, for love, and growing up... Because I came of age in the '80s and '90s. And so being queer, no one was really out of the closet, especially in a small town. And then on top of that, being the only brown kid in class, I was often overlooked or recognized for the wrong things for being an outcast or for not fitting in. And so I think that writing in that kind of you form is my way of addressing, I don't know this collective audience that I wanted to connect with that I never could.

Karen Farmer:

That makes a ton of sense and especially in terms of the next question I wanted to ask you about this idea of how different versions of ourselves collide with each other based on the situation that we're in. And so a lot of that yearning also showed up for me with Akosh in the back of his mom's car when he goes home and they're driving past the gay bar and comments are made in his presence. Just the idea of returning home in general, reconnecting with a former love. So in an interesting way, it's like these timelines that are stacked on top of each other like here's the memories that I have from the last time I was here with who I am now and how these are intersecting with each other.

Is this still something that you think about? I know you're doing different kinds of work now, which we'll ask you about later, but is this still central to what you're playing with in your writing?

Neel Patel:

Yeah, I think so. I don't know, I think a lot about the past. I'm one of those people who's like, I'm really nosy on Facebook and I want to know all the people I went to high school with.

Craig Silva:

That's a theme that I saw in the books a little bit too like Facebook sleuthing.

Neel Patel:

All the things my high school classmates are doing. It's funny now that I have a couple books and certain things have happened, I'll get messages from popular kids from my high school who are like, "Oh, that's so cool." And I was telling a friend, I was like, "Isn't it sad that it still makes me feel like, 'oh wow, this person thinks I'm cool' so many years later?" But I mean, I think that's how powerful the past is.

I tell people who we are in high schools, who we are in life, we just get better at hiding it. And so the insecure people are always going to be insecure no matter how beautiful or rich or powerful they may become in their life. The assholes are probably always going to be assholes just in different versions into the equation.

Craig Silva:

Do you just respond to the Facebook messages telling them if they see you not to say hi?

Neel Patel:

I try to play it cool so I don't want to do too much like, "Oh cool, thanks."

Karen Farmer:

I love it.

Craig Silva:

When we were prepping for this podcast and any podcast we do with an author, we tend to watch and listen to other interviews they have done recently. One, just it's good research, but two, we want to make sure we don't ask the same questions a million times. And I think you did an interview recently with a, I don't know if they were a podcast or just a website, but they're books and beyond. I apologize if I'm butchering this, but I'll paraphrase. You said something like, one of the reasons you wanted to write these books is that when you were growing up, you didn't have a book that was anything like this and that if you did have a book like this in your small town, et cetera, it really could have helped you. I guess I was just curious, what was that process like writing that book that you wish you had as a kid?

Neel Patel:

What's interesting is for Tell Me How to Be, especially, I remembered watching the movie Love Simon and I had this really strong emotional reaction to it. It wasn't even just the movie or the performances or anything, it was just this realization that I'll never have what Simon has at his age because it's too late. And that's a part of my life that I was robbed of and that I missed out on. I can't go back in time and come out at 16 and have a boyfriend and a date to a school dance and everything. So I thought, "Well, if I can't have it then I'm going to write it for myself." I was like, "Well, I want to write a love story." Even though it wasn't always happy.

Craig Silva:

It's putting it lightly, yeah.

Neel Patel:

It wasn't even that I was so concerned necessarily about, "Oh, let me give this to someone else who didn't have it." It was kind of selfish. It's like, "Well, I want it for myself. I want to write a book that I would've wanted to read," and that's kind of where it started.

Karen Farmer:

Awesome. Are we correct that you are now writing for film and television? Is that where your time is now?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. I have a couple projects in development. One was based on the book and one is a feature film that I wrote a script and we're working on getting it filmed hopefully next summer.

Karen Farmer:

Oh my gosh. Okay. Two follow-up questions. With the feature film, what has that been like to be working on someone else's project versus the very deeply personal stuff you've been working on the last several years?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. It's definitely an adjustment, but I like doing it because, I don't know, it takes the pressure off when you have other people involved. Because it's like, "Okay, if this bombs, it's not my fault." That's one of the things actually that I love about TV and film. Especially with TV is that you can or go write on someone else's show and if everybody hates it, well, you're not the star of the show. But when you put out a book, it's all you. No one is going to point the finger at your editor or somebody else. It's all your agent. It's really, you're the face of this project. So there is a lot of pressure. So I actually welcome that where I think a lot of fiction writers are so precious about their work and so they couldn't do that. I actually like it.

Craig Silva:

So you said one of the projects is based off your book, off of, Tell Me How to Be?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. So it's a TV adaptation. So that's how-

Craig Silva:

You're acting very nonchalant about what seems like amazing news.

Neel Patel:

You know why? Because I think I'm at that place now where... I was adapting my first book, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi for AMC Network, which was super exciting. They do Breaking Bad and Walking Dead and all this stuff. It's like, "Why do they want to do this?" But they wanted to [inaudible 00:19:55]. So I was riding the pilot and everything was my first pilot and I was like, "Yes, this is definitely going to be a show." I was very naive and the thing is in Hollywood stuff is in development all the time. It doesn't always mean it's going to happen. So now I'm at the place where I'm like, "Okay, let's just do this and see what happens."

Karen Farmer:

Gotcha.

Neel Patel:

But if I was talking to you three years ago, I would've been like my head would've been in the clouds.

Craig Silva:

Any author we've spoken to who has some sort of TV adaptation or film adaptation has basically said exactly what you said is that it's so slow. Sometimes it doesn't happen. So I'm sure this one will though. And I'm super excited to watch it when it comes out.

Neel Patel:

Thanks.

Karen Farmer:

We should ask you about audio books. This is the point in the podcast where Craig and I typically get in trouble with the people we're interviewing. They're like, "Don't you work at an audiobook company? Do you want to ask me about that?"

Craig Silva:

Yeah. We have been lambasted on the last two episodes.

Karen Farmer:

Ann Patchett, she was like, "You got to ask about audiobooks."

Craig Silva:

So moving into audiobooks for... Well, we'll start with your audiobooks, obviously. Karen and I, I think we both had the paper books and the audio and we're flipping back and forth between them depending on what we're doing during the day. And one thing we've heard from both narrators who are just professional narrators and then also authors who narrate their own work is that it can be very grueling to sit there in the booth hour after hour doing take after take. I'd love to hear about what that process was like for you.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. It was crazy. So I narrated the first book, If You See Me, Don't Say Hi. And they had me go to a studio. It was two days and they were like eight-hour days. I felt like I had a job. It was very grueling because those microphones are so sensitive too. And they pick up, they're like, "Oh, you sound hungry."

Craig Silva:

You're not the first person to mention that to us, by the way.

Neel Patel:

Oh, really?

Craig Silva:

That's insane.

Neel Patel:

They're like your stomach is making noise. I was like, "Okay. Well..." So it picks up everything and then you have to redo lines sometimes. It's really strenuous. I have mad respect for people who narrate anything or do voiceover acting. It's really hard.

Craig Silva:

So is the fact that it was so grueling, is that why you didn't do the second book? Or is it just because-

Karen Farmer:

I was...

Neel Patel:

Well, you know what's funny-

Craig Silva:

I'm sorry. Did I steal your question, Karen?

Karen Farmer:

I was going to ask the same thing.

Neel Patel:

Well, what's funny is they didn't actually even ask me, so I'm like, "Oh, did I do a really terrible job?" Generally, I think they have... Unless you want to do it, maybe, I think they have professional people do it. I think because the novel was a bigger book. Maybe they're like, "Okay. Let's spend money and have somebody else do it." I actually haven't listened to that yet, but I've heard such amazing things about Tell Me How to Be audiobook. And the narrator, Vikas Adam did a really good job. I did hear a little bit of it and so many people were surprised that it was one person doing both.

Craig Silva:

Yeah.

Karen Farmer:

I had that reaction too. I think I said something to Craig about it. I'm like, there were two narrators for this one. And he said, "No, no, there are not." I had to go back and look.

Craig Silva:

It's crazy sometimes the talent that it takes to do that, different accents and different tone of voice and everything. For someone who has listened to it, it did come out really well, by the way. You should listen to it.

Neel Patel:

I want to, yeah.

Craig Silva:

I know an app where you could download it.

Karen Farmer:

Well, I have one more question about your novel that I would love to ask as we... I just keep looking at the time, but we have a million questions for you. But one of the quotes that has stuck with me is when Akosh says, "Hate is a self-inflicted wound." I feel like that's so simple and true, but it also very much complicates how we have understood that character who has gone through so much directly targeted hate throughout his life. I was reading something or maybe listening to an interview with you where you talk about the process of writing this.

Obviously, the pandemic has been with us. There was quarantine. There was lockdown, and you were writing these really challenging things from a place of isolation about someone who feels very isolated. So I was wondering if you could share any thoughts on what that was like for you, because I can't imagine the difficulty of even creating anything during that time period.

Neel Patel:

There was this kind of underlying just sense of doom. Yeah. At one point I was like, "What's the point of even doing this? Will we even survive this?" That one point I was really bad where... I mean, I wasn't even leaving my apartment to do anything. I was getting things delivered. It was hard. But I think if anything, I just needed something to live for and something to do. I don't know. I just fell into it.

And then there was this period where the lockdown, at least in LA, ended for a week. As soon as it ended I was like, "I'm going to my hometown." I ended up staying there for several months writing the bulk of this book. I think that really helped me to be back in this place that I had such complicated emotions about.

Because on one hand it was home and then on the other hand it was the place where so much happened to me. I don't know. I don't know if I mentioned this in another interview, but my parents, they put their house on the market and that was what also inspired this book because I was suddenly being told, "Oh, you should come home and hack up all your things."

My house was very special to me because it was the only place that felt safe. I remember on weekends just really looking forward to the weekend, not because I was going to go hang out with my friends and have a good time, but because I hated school so much because I was so scared to go to school every day.

In fact, I didn't even like going to the mall sometimes 'cause I would run into kids from school and I was scared of what they might say to me or do to me. So I was always home and I just associated home with being safe. So to be there and to write the book and confront these dark themes, I had that kind of sense of security because I was in my childhood home.

Craig Silva:

Do you think the book would've come out differently if you would've just stayed in LA during that period? I mean, I'm assuming, like you said, being home was such a powerful part of that experience. Do you think you could have written the book the way you did if you didn't go home?

Neel Patel:

No, I don't think so. I think had to be there and I had to see everything and experience everything and remember all these things. It wasn't even necessarily... The book isn't super autobiographical, but it's just the feeling behind it. I wouldn't have had that feeling in LA.

Karen Farmer:

Yeah. Did you unearth anything interesting or funny that you can share with us as you were cleaning out your childhood belongings?

Craig Silva:

Karen lightening the mood. I appreciate it. It's funny.

Neel Patel:

It's funny because when my parents had told me about this, the only thing I could think of was like, "Oh my God, I think I have dirty porny stuff." In this one briefcase, I remember it was this briefcase and I put-

Craig Silva:

How fancy. You put your childhood in a briefcase.

Neel Patel:

Well, 'cause it had a lock on it. It was a combination lock, so I was like, "Okay, well, they'll never find it in here." And so I put that briefcase in my shelf and I was like, "Oh my God." That was where my mind went also so many decades later. It was like I have to get to-

Craig Silva:

That's amazing .

Neel Patel:

Yeah. It was funny to see what kind of stuff I was printing off the internet. This was during the days of dial up internet.

Craig Silva:

Like pixelated. Yeah. So was it there? Did you rescue it before prying eyes got to it?

Neel Patel:

It was there. It was in the pocket in the briefcase.

Craig Silva:

That's amazing.

Karen Farmer:

I'm so glad I sporadically asked that question.

Craig Silva:

Yeah. Oh, man. So I think we alluded to this in the beginning, but we've been doing this little lightning round thing where we asked some kind of sillier questions, which we kind of already have started, which is fun. But before we get into those, we did want to ask you what you are working on. I see you mentioned you're at your parents' house. Are you're writing another book? But yeah, we'd love to know what you're working on right now. Either short stories, books, TV, whatever.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. That film is in development and my part is done. And then I'm doing another book. So I'm actually finishing it. I'm hoping to be done in the next week or so. And that's definitely a departure from Tell Me How to Be, but in a way it's kind of inspired by some of the stories in If You See Me, Don't Say Hi. There were these stories about these darker stories about these women that were edgier and funny. And so yeah, it's like a darkly comic psychological thriller.

Craig Silva:

Nice.

Neel Patel:

So yeah, it's funny, but it's kind of like HBO's Barry but with a little bit of Ottessa Moshfegh in there because she's really funny. She's really wickedly funny and I'm a big fan of hers.

Karen Farmer:

Awesome.

Craig Silva:

That's awesome. I mean, I know you're still writing it, so the timeline is probably pretty squishy right now, but do you have a rough idea of when you're hoping this will be out?

Neel Patel:

Yeah, I mean it would probably be a while because... So I'm actually out of contract, so I'm a free agent now. So we're going to sell it probably to my publishers, but we'll see. But at that point it would probably be a year after that. So maybe a year or so.

Craig Silva:

Are you going to do the audiobook?

Neel Patel:

Oh, actually no, I don't think.

Karen Farmer:

You're like, "I had enough of that the first time."

Craig Silva:

Your stomach is growling. You're like, "Nevermind." Cool. So getting into our fun little... Or hopefully fun lightning around questions. Our first one is a little bit still about the books. So music played a massive role in both the short stories and book. In many of the stories and obviously in the book not only was the main character a musician but was dating a producer and there was so much music mentioned. Like you said, you grew up in the '80s and '90s so there was a lot of R&B and hip hop of that era. And our question is, if you had a desert island, you can only bring one or two albums with you, what would they be?

Neel Patel:

Wow. Okay. One of them would be Brandy's album, Full Moon. I'm a big Brandy fan and it's an amazing album. And then another one because I want to have some high energy. I have to say Beyonce's Renaissance because it just came out. I'm a huge fan of it.

Craig Silva:

There you go.

Neel Patel:

I would say those two because that's a good party album.

Karen Farmer:

True.

Craig Silva:

Are you having a party on this desert island?

Neel Patel:

I would be alone. Right? Well, I don't know. I like to party by myself too.

Karen Farmer:

Exactly. Okay. Curve ball question. When you wake up in the morning, do you remember your dreams?

Neel Patel:

Yes. Not all, but yeah. Though usually the ones that are like I just had in the morning.

Karen Farmer:

Do you have any recurring dreams that you could tell us about?

Neel Patel:

No, I never do actually. They're always different.

Karen Farmer:

Really?

Neel Patel:

Yeah.

Karen Farmer:

Oh, interesting.

Craig Silva:

I don't have any recurring ones either.

Karen Farmer:

Really?

Craig Silva:

Karen, what is your recurring dream now we need to know.

Neel Patel:

Yeah.

Karen Farmer:

I have one frequently about this... I can't believe I'm sharing this, but that all of my teeth have fallen out and apparently it means-

Neel Patel:

I have those. I have had those. They disintegrate and I'm like-

Karen Farmer:

Yes.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. There's a-

Craig Silva:

Are you guys okay?

Neel Patel:

No. That's like common because I was Googling stuff when I think something like... Yeah. Apparently that's a common theme, but I can't remember what it means. It's supposed to mean something.

Karen Farmer:

So I looked it up recently too and apparently it means that... So you and I Neel feel like there's something in our life we don't have control over and it's stressing us. We're losing control of something.

Neel Patel:

Oh. I mean, I feel like I'm always out of control.

Karen Farmer:

Exactly. I was like, "Oh, that makes sense."

Craig Silva:

Oh my God. I hope I never have this dream. It sounds terrifying.

Karen Farmer:

I hope you don't either.

Craig Silva:

The next question is, what is the best compliment that you've ever received?

Neel Patel:

Oh my god. Oh, well I love when people compliment my food. I'm a big foodie. Actually, I considered culinary school at one point. And so when people say My food is amazing, that makes me feel good.

Craig Silva:

Yeah. Reading those books, there is a lot of descriptions of delicious food. You need to do like a Neel Patel companion cookbook of some of the recipes in there.

Neel Patel:

Yeah.

Karen Farmer:

Next question. We have been asking people at Libro.fm this and the answers always make us laugh. You can choose. Either what was your first job or what was your worst job? Or you can answer both as a bonus.

Neel Patel:

I'm trying to think. Oh my worst job. I know what my worst job was, was at an accounting office in Beverly Hills when I first moved to LA. I joined the office during tax season, which was the worst time to join because I'm somebody who likes to do nothing at work and just be on Facebook and look busy. But no, you actually had to do stuff. And the bosses, the accountants were so stressed out, I was terrified. I would actually drink during my lunch break. I would go down the street and have two glasses of wine.

Karen Farmer:

I got to calm down.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. I come back all relaxed like, "Hey, guys."

Craig Silva:

I think some of these stories are autobiographical.

Neel Patel:

Yeah. That's true.

Karen Farmer:

That does sound like a terrible job, yeah.

Craig Silva:

Yeah. I will never do that job. I hate taxes. Cats or dogs? And why?

Neel Patel:

Dogs. Because I feel like cats are shady. I'm shady and I don't think we would get along. And dogs are just so lovable. How can you feel bad about yourself when you have a dog? Because a dog just loves you unconditionally.

Karen Farmer:

That's true.

Craig Silva:

If I go outside to take the trash out and come back in my dog acts if I was away at war. He's like...

Karen Farmer:

Yeah. And as a host of two cats, a roommate of two cats, I can confirm they are very shady.

Craig Silva:

Oh, thanks for doing the lightning around questions with us. That was fun.

Karen Farmer:

Yes. And so not a lightning round question, a standard question, but we are required to ask this for our own sakes and the sakes of all of our coworkers. What are you reading or listening to or enjoying right now? Do you have any recommendations for our listeners?

Neel Patel:

Yeah. It's funny. I always talk about things that I like and then when someone asks me to recommend, that's when I forget everything. So let me think for a second. What did I read recently? Well, I really loved Leave the World Behind By Rumaan Alam. That was a really brilliant book. I'm re-reading Eileen by Ottessa Moshfegh. I love that book. It's so dark and funny. Oh, My Sister, the Serial Killer.

Karen Farmer:

Oh, yeah.

Neel Patel:

Oyinkan Braithwaite. See, I love things that are funny too, like dark, like funny.

Karen Farmer:

Totally agreed.

Craig Silva:

Well, thank you so much for the time, Neel. T.

Neel Patel:

Thank you.

Craig Silva:

It was fun. I really enjoyed hearing about not only your process, but also the funny desert island jokes and all that.

Neel Patel:

Yeah.

Karen Farmer:

I am so excited. I will rest easy knowing that there is another book on its way. I cannot wait.

Neel Patel:

Thank you.

Craig Silva:

We were wondering that it was hard to find any information and we were talking like, "I hope he doesn't just do TV now. We need more books."

Neel Patel:

No, no, no. Definitely one more coming.

Craig Silva:

Awesome. Well, we'll look forward to it.

Neel Patel:

Thank you.

Karen Farmer:

Thank you, Neel.

Neel Patel:

All right. Thank you both.

Karen Farmer:

All right. Well, thank you for listening to our interview with Neel, everyone. As always, Craig and I would like to chat a little bit about what we are reading, maybe give you some ideas about what you can add to your TBR list. Craig, I know as we're recording this, we're towards the end of the year and you have confessed that you panic read to try to hit your quota. So I'm curious.

Craig Silva:

I'm not panic reading. I'm just picking shorter books. Okay?

Karen Farmer:

Okay. All right.

Craig Silva:

I'm not picking up any epic fantasies right now. Oh, that-

Karen Farmer:

That's not true.

Craig Silva:

I was just going to say that's not actually true.

Karen Farmer:

Tell us what you're reading.

Craig Silva:

I am reading a couple of different things right now, but what I recently finished was True Biz by Sara Novic. Absolutely loved it. It was our book club book at Libro. So you also just read it, so feel free to chime in with your thoughts. I'm actually curious what you have to say about it as well, even though I know you loved it. But it is a book that is from multiple perspectives and it's all centered around this school for the deaf and it's from the adults, the principal and from a couple of the different students and some of the parents.

It's just super layered in a book unlike anything else I've ever read. We also had the author come and sit down with us and we got to ask a bunch of questions and have a really good conversation there. So loved it. What about you? What did you think about it?

Karen Farmer:

Yeah, I loved it too. I was really glad to have the print copy and the audiobook available to me because within the print copy there are lots of visuals of ASL. And so it was very interesting to see how that was carried across into an audiobook. I learned a lot. I thought it was very poignant. I loved it. Highly recommend.

Craig Silva:

Yeah. The way the audiobook was done was so interesting. So for folks that haven't listened to it yet, when there's a deaf character who is signing, you can hear it on the audiobook. You can hear their hands moving, which I found super interesting. I've never heard that in a book before. And when the author came, she explained that process and all of that to us and it was really, really interesting. So highly recommend going to get that.

The other book that I'm reading, which is also awesome is the Mistborn Series by Brandon Sanderson. I read the original Mistborn series, which is three books and then this is technically part of the Mistborn series, but it's in the future, different characters, so they call it Book four, five and six, but you don't necessarily have needed... No, you didn't have to read the first three really. It's helpful because they do mention it and the magic system is the same. So you need some of that information, but it's not imperative. It's not picking up from where book three left off per se. So when I said I wasn't reading an epic fantasy, I suppose I lied.

Karen Farmer:

These are like 8 million pages long, right?

Craig Silva:

No, they're long, but they're not crazy long. His other ones are... You know what I mean? They're heavy.

Karen Farmer:

Door stoppers.

Craig Silva:

Yeah, big time. Or life stoppers. You could kill someone with those books. They're so big. These are more manageable, but also really good.

Karen Farmer:

Lovely.

Craig Silva:

What about you? What are you reading right now?

Karen Farmer:

I'm reading two books as well. Oh my gosh, I'm so excited. I got my hands on an arc of the new Megan Abbott book that is coming out next year. It is called Beware the Woman. It is so good, Craig. So Megan Abbott, have you read any of her stuff?

Craig Silva:

I don't know. I'm terrible with names. I always say, "Oh no, I haven't." And then I go look up who the author is, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I have."

Karen Farmer:

All of them, I've read them all. She writes thrillers primarily and she is an author who was on my immediate purchase, no questions asked list. So I was super stoked that she was coming out with a new book and I'm 80% of the way through it. It is so good. It's about a young couple who have just gotten married and the wife is pregnant. They go to the UP in Michigan to the middle of nowhere to visit-

Craig Silva:

Sorry, what is the UP, for people that don't live in Michigan?

Karen Farmer:

The Upper Peninsula.

Craig Silva:

Oh, thanks. Is there a lower as well, the LP?

Karen Farmer:

The regular state of Michigan. I'll show you a map of the mitten after this.

Craig Silva:

Wow. Can't wait. Sounds enthralling.

Karen Farmer:

My God. So at any rate, they're in the middle of nowhere and strange things start happening. It's terrifying and I love it.

Craig Silva:

Oh, I'm intrigued. I might also have to go on NetGalley and beg for this book. Although, I haven't read it, I did quickly go on the internet and I have not read anything by Megan Abbott. I guess for me and for anyone listening, if they've never read anything and they're going to pick up one to start, where would you recommend we start?

Karen Farmer:

Oh, that's a good question. I would say You Will Know Me by Megan Abbott would be the one.

Craig Silva:

Why are you saying it so spookily? I'm scared now.

Karen Farmer:

It's because it's a thriller.

Craig Silva:

I'm looking at the cover right now and it is spooky looking. I will head down to the Brookline Booksmith after we record and go pick this book up.

Karen Farmer:

It's so fun. I hope you enjoy it.

Craig Silva:

On the next episode, I will let you know. I mean, I'll probably let you know before than I guessed.

Karen Farmer:

I'm kind of scared now if you're going to be like, "Hated it." The other book I'm reading is very different. It's a middle grade reader and it's called Sisterhood of Sleuths.

Craig Silva:

You've told me about this before.

Karen Farmer:

It's so cute. I gave my sister a copy of it too, and it is just delightful. It's about a sixth grade girl who stumbles into a mystery via a box of Nancy Drew books that shows up at her home.

Craig Silva:

Did you write this book? Is this book about you?

Karen Farmer:

Autobiographical. I did not write this book, but it is so sweet. It's also illustrated and the illustrations are phenomenal.

Craig Silva:

Nice.

Karen Farmer:

Very pleasant, enjoyable read.

Craig Silva:

I probably won't go get that one. I'm glad you're happy with it. It doesn't sound-

Karen Farmer:

That's fair.

Craig Silva:

... up my alley. But I will definitely pick up the other one.

Karen Farmer:

The audiobook is also fantastic of that as well. So you'll miss out on the illustrations, but the audio is delightful.

Craig Silva:

Well, that was a fun way to end the podcast. For folks who do not use Libro or haven't gotten into it yet, if you use the code, Libro Podcast, you will get two credits when you sign up instead of one to use on any of the books we've mentioned or any books that are on your to be read list.

Karen Farmer:

That is correct. And as always, Craig and I would like to say thank you so much for listening.