The Hidden Bookcase Transcript
The Seven husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Talor Jenkins Reid

Morgan
Welcome to The Hidden Bookcase, come through and get cosy. Pick a book, your favourite book, that's the one that opens this room. Inside you'll find a warm fire, a loving cat, and a wide skylight to the stars

Sorren
And a dangerously high to be read pile.

Morgan
I'm Morgan, I use they/them pronouns, and I am milkshakes from CeCe Brown's.

Sorren
I'm Sorren, I use he/him pronouns, and I'm a really exhausted divorce lawyer.

Issy
Is Issy, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm Evelyn outdoing Henry the 8th.

Morgan
Sorren and I have been friends for over a decade, and the two of us are always swapping books.

Sorren
Each fortnight the two of us, sometimes with help from a friend, take it in turns to recommend one another a favourite read. The first-time reader tells us what they know about the book, makes some predictions about what they don't, and then we discuss our thoughts with all of you bookworms. On our shelf this month is Evelyn.

Issy
So today, let's get to talking about...

Sorren
The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid.

[THEME MUSIC FADES OUT.]

Sorren
So we have Issy with us today. Hello Issy!

Issy
Hey.

Sorren
I have known Issy for... Even longer than I've known Morgan, which is saying something.

Morgan
[LAUGHS]

Sorren
I think it's now 11 years, which is horrifying actually... Maybe 12?

Issy
It is 12 years.

Sorren
And we've also been swapping books for a very long time.

Issy
Books are pretty much the foundation of our friendship.

Sorren
Exactly. So Issy is here recommending us Evelyn Hugo...

Issy
I am.

Sorren

How did you come across this book?

Issy
I came across this book because for my 22nd birthday, I was meeting up with a couple of friends, one of whom gave me a bisexual flag and then, Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo and said, "I promise it's gay." I'd seen it around because at that point who hadn't.

Sorren
Mm.

Issy
I just was there going "I'm never going to read something that literally looks like absolute trash." Sorry, Taylor Jenkins Reid it's not your fault-

Sorren
[LAUGHS]

Issy
I mean, gorgeous cover on some level, but like not the book that I would ever pick up. And I was bored having just finished my dissertation and I picked it up and I really thoroughly enjoyed it.

Sorren
And Issy, can you tell us what this is about? You have a very tall order, I'm afraid.

Issy & Morgan
[LAUGHING.]

Issy
Okay, what is on the tin in terms of: there are seven husbands. A third of the way through, the interviewer just says who was the love of your life? And she goes: Celia St. James. And I was like, "Oh, yes, it's not just going to be gal pals!" And then the sexual tension

just goes further on. You have the men be mainly irrelevant, except for the male best friend who is also her kind of true love.

Sorren
Amazing. We'll jump back in time now, I think and see what we thought about it before we read it?

Morgan
Woo!

Sound Effect
[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS ON.]

Sorren
So Morgan, what do you know about The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo?

Morgan
I know that it is not the Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And that- Believe me, it was hard enough to get here. So...

Sorren
That's fair enough.

Morgan
I know it's about an actress in maybe the 1950s, but I don't know why I think that period. I know that it's an interview format. I know that Taylor Reid Jenkins uses that in at least one other book because my coworkers are ranting about it the other day in front of me. And I had no idea what they were talking about. I know that there are seven husbands and because of a TikTok audio that went around a couple months ago, I know there's also a wife.

Sorren
I don't think I know that much more. I think green dresses are significant again-

Morgan
Oh, I know that it's literally on the cover!

Sorren
Yeah, I know there's a wife. I know it's sapphic. I don't know if Hugo is bi or lesbian. Maybe she's just getting through husbands for... What's the word? Will purposes? Divorce-split purposes? I don't know. That'd be a strategy and a half, especially if you do it eight times...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
Or s- seven times. I'm assuming she doesn't do that to the wife. I don't know.

Morgan
I think the wife is also an actress and is in a movie like a specific... I don't think it's Romeo and Juliet. But I do think it's a like famous story. And they're starring alongside each other because I saw a very specific TikTok of someone being like: "Me going to look on IMDb and seeing that this movie starring this person and this person isn't real."

Sorren
Ah. I think one of the main characters is Latina. That's the other thing that I think I know.

Morgan
I think it's Evelyn Hugo.

Sorren
Oh.

Morgan
And I believe that it's not handled incredibly well.

Sorren
Yes. I've heard a little bit about that. So I'm going in with both eyes open, if that makes sense. Do we have any insane predictions?

Morgan
There's gonna be a gunfight.

Sorren
Oh.

Morgan
(Laughing) I don't know. I'm like, there's got to be a mafia fight at some point.

Sorren
Where are the mafia? I mean-

Morgan
I don't know, it's Hollywood.

Sorren
-To be fair, weren't they involved in the Hollywood- Exactly. Yeah. So that would make sense.

Morgan
It's not completely out of the realms of possibility.

Sorren
Sure. I feel like at least one of those husbands asked to die, right?

Morgan
Oh, yeah.

Sorren

Or are they real husbands? Or is it the media, the press, getting excited and being like, "Maybe they're married!" Especially if it's the 50s because like, surely, there you could be married, if you were just hanging out for like, five minutes?

Morgan
Because I know the audio... It's like, "Aren't you annoyed that all anyone talks about when they talk about Evelyn Hugo is the seven husbands?" And then she goes "No, because they are just husbands. I am Evelyn Hugo. Besides, I think they'll be more excited to hear about my wife." That's not verbatim, but the fact that I know it so almost completely. It's concerning.

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS OFF.]

Sorren
Well.

Morgan
Well.

Sorren
The 1950s, actress, Cuban protagonists.

Issy
Mm.

Sorren
You have a whole line in there practically verbatim, that was impressive.

Issy
Yeah, it was.

Morgan
Oh, yeah. Checking it back I was like, "That's pretty close. I'm quite proud of myself. "

Sorren
Well done.

Morgan
But also, concerning about how many of those audios I got on my for you page.

Sorren
There were no mafia gunfights...

Morgan
(Sighs) Disappointing.

Sorren
Except for maybe in one of Evelyn's films, we didn't get to hear that much about all of them. So...

Morgan
So true. The film that I was talking about? Little Women.

Sorren
Little Women.

Issy
Little Women! I was thinking, Morgan, that's quite an impressive thing to know about beforehand.

Morgan
[LAUGHS]

Issy
Taylor Jenkins Reid does this quite a lot, you almost feel like half the stuff that she's writing about is actually real. Because of the interview format.

Morgan
I did get the author's name wrong.

Issy & Sorren
[LAUGH]

Sorren
That's like a rite of passage, though, I do that all the time. And actually, I feel like I should confess to the listeners that I do that way more often than you think I do. And with the magic of editing...

Morgan
[LAUGHS]

Sorren
It probably happens every other episode. So you know, I'm just glad it's not just me, for once.

Morgan
I feel like this needed one of those AO3, five plus one tags. That would have made it so much more obvious.

Sorren
[LAUGHS] Actually, no, but to be fair, all of us have been like: "This cover is not something that we would be drawn to." Which I guess isn't necessarily a fault, because maybe it's not trying to draw people who are already in the queer community. Maybe the point here is to ensnare a different audience. Thinking back on The Seven and a Half Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle, which we just read... The Seven and a Half Marriages of Evelyn Hugo? Something like that... Calling it half a marriage is reductive.

Issy
Yeah, I would say that the point almost, of it is that the marriage that never actually formally takes place is the one that everyone's most intrigued by.

Sorren
Yeah.

Issy

And the others have transactions taking place, usually for fame, for money, for some kind of disguise in society...

Sorren
For a beard.

Issy
A beard, yeah, exactly.

Sorren
It's mutual, it's a lavender marriage.

Issy
Yeah! Two gay couples live in two straight pairings down the road from each other.

Morgan
It's literally my favourite trope. I love it so much.

Sorren
I was hoping it would go that way.

Morgan
MLM WLW solidarity is the best. And it's so fun to see it in like, such a mainstream book. As an aro ace person, I like platonic relationships, they are very cool

Issy
They are. And that's the thing as well, is you get into this group of four, which is two make-believe couples, and two actual couples, you get the strength of the connections between two people who aren't couples as well. Evelyn actually really loves John. And they also have a mutual respect of: we also love a lot of the same people, and they agree with each other... On the protest scene as well.

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Morgan
Mm.

Issy
They kind of see eye-to-eye and they're like, "We're going to detract by going there because we're going to make it about us, in that moment," which I thought was a nice little like sip about celebrity culture, sometimes reducing the actual protest that's going on because it gets into very much like: what is this about this person sexuality? Rather than like, what's the actual cause.

Sorren
Feels very pertinent with Kit Connor, for example, attending London pride, and then that inviting a lot of speculation about his sexuality.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
And.. Why?!

Issy
He's showing support in that way, in that moment, and that's the thing that people need to take. And Becky Albertalli...

Sorren
The incident where she was basically outed, because people were saying, "Oh, you don't have the authorities to write "Simon Vs.." and "Leah on the Offbeat."

Issy
Yeah, because she's married to a man.

Sorren
Which is just biphobia, really.

Morgan

Mm.

Issy
Yeah! What did you both think about the like, what I would say many people have described as the heavy handedness of the biphobia, in the interruptions when you're brought back to the fact that this is an interview?

Morgan
Everything about the interviews, and everything about Monique, I did not care.

Sorren
[LAUGHS]

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan
I get what she was to the story. But it very much felt like sort of an author insert, it felt a bit self-helpy. Like, I did like that they included that black and white thinking that a lot of straight people have, and even a lot of the gay community have, about being bi. So I think it needed to be included, especially since this book does seem to be marketed in a way that sort of like, is a door for straight people to sort of get a look in on what it is to be queer. I think it was useful to have in there. But overall, I did not care for Monique.

Issy & Morgan
[LAUGH]

Sorren
Yeah, I think I'm on a similar page. I think Monique could have been interesting, but I think that the way that the interviews were interspersed was just so didactic. We understand that Monique is, for example, learning to stand up for herself from Evelyn, we don't need the narrative to tell us, "I thought about what Evelyn would do!" We get it! And a lot of lines almost feel like, deliberately written

to be quotable. Maxims about confidence that yeah, were very self helpy. And in particular, yeah, that bisexuality discussion just struck me as so didactic. It really just wrenched everything to a stop. I do appreciate that as a conversation, and I think it does need to be said, but maybe conversation within the narrative? Maybe she wanted to prove that it was still a modern problem, but I still think that there might have been other ways to do it.

Issy

I couldn't agree more. I think it was very heavy handed. But I do appreciate that it is marketed towards people who are straight. And I know a lot of people who have read it who are straight and who thought that was interesting. I have to say that in terms of the nuance of discussions about bisexuality... We didn't get more nuanced than in the discussions of the actual relationships and the nature of them.

Morgan

I think there was a lot of addressing biphobia because Celia has a lot of biphobia towards Evelyn-

Issy

Yeah.

Morgan

-Throughout the book, which uh... She doesn't entirely deal with, even by the end of the book. But as you were saying, Sorren with putting it into the narrative., I think if that conversation had happened with Celia... Because Celia was fully in the wrong every single time, but because Evelyn thinks of herself as such a morally grey person, she doesn't really get that Celia's in the wrong ever.

Issy

I love that you say Celia's in the wrong every single time because- Don't get me wrong, I feel like Celia was often in the wrong... I feel like they both were and there was also some real issues in terms of communication whereby if everyone had been a little bit more explicit about exactly what marriage meant, because it's not taken

for granted if you're- If you're doing a marriage for a beard, it's not taken for granted, you're gonna sleep with the guy. But it felt like communication issues that were on both sides. And Celia, I think was very justified in many ways to be upset and was willing seemingly to give up everything to be with Evelyn, and there was this whole thing of like, "I'm gonna marry someone to take away any kind of discussion or story about us." And then she goes and seduces a man and sleeps with him and gets pregnant.

Morgan
Communication was their main issue.

Issy
Yeah...

Morgan
There's a lot of miscommunication in this book, which I didn't hate because it was well handled.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
Yeah.

Morgan
Usually, I cannot stand the miscommunication trope, but every time they specifically got into bi discussions, and Celia, being like: "You like men, therefore I can never be secure in our relationship." Was very: "Incorrect, but you need to unpack your own biases."

Issy
But it also allowed for really interesting conversations as well about Evelyn makes the point that she's had fulfilling relationships with them in the past, and that grants her certain ease within the society that she's trying to be a part of. The nuance of the biphobia and the bisexual discussions, I feel like came out in the actual main part of the story. And then Monique was like, kind of a wrench into it- As

you say, maybe showing that modern society still has these problems- But in a way that was like a sledgehammer to the flow the book and you were like, kind of like, "Can I get back to the 1950s? Please?"

Sorren
Yeah.

Issy
Like, I really want to go back.

Morgan
We don't need this anymore. We've- We've- We've done this. Let's go.

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan
It feels very 'easy literature.'

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan
In that sort of way that Colleen Hoover and Sarah J. Maas are. I am going to slander both of them a little bit. I know that you like Throne of Glass, Issy. I'm very sorry, but...

Issy
I will survive Morgan, I have lived through Sarah J Maas slander. I've been friends with Sorren for 12 years.

Sorren
Alright!

Morgan
[LAUGHING]

Issy
It's okay.

Morgan
But yeah, they have the same sort of accessibility, very conversational tone for reading that make them very easy to read. I think people call them beach reads now?

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan
They're supposed to be easy to read on holiday. This feels very like that. But it actually is also a good book. This actually has something to say and fiction doesn't have to do anything, if it doesn't want to, fiction can just be fun.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
[LAUGHING] But I need something to happen in my books. Otherwise, I'm bored.

Sorren
I think with a lot of those authors that you mentioned, like Hoover and Maas. I think for a lot of people they're entry points, either into reading for the first time or back into reading after a long break. And I think there is very much something to be said, for that. I was at a book club recently and we were doing This Is How You Lose the Time War. And everybody hated it. And I was like, "I love this book, so this is hurting my feelings deeply." But I could definitely understand... If you had not read in years, and then you picked up This Is How You Lose the Time War... You're not going to know what's going on. That's completely fair. So I think there are books that need to bridge the gap. And I think this is an example of that where it does at least have something to say/

Morgan
I was going through such a book slump at the time, I was finding everything I was reading boring. And then I picked this book up and I was like, "I shouldn't start this book. We're not gonna be recording for ages." And I got into the bath with this book. And I got really drunk, and I read the first half. And then I went to bed. And then I woke up and I read the second half and I...

Sorren
Wow.

Morgan
Sobbed my eyes out, and I was like "This book is exactly what I needed."

Issy
[LAUGHING]

Morgan
And then I started reading again, like crazy, because it just like, reset my brain.

Issy
Exactly, Morgan. And that's what I'm talking about in terms of: This was given to me after I'd finished my undergraduate degree. I had finished exactly one book in three years of my reading history.

Sorren
Maybe this is a good one for if you're in a reading slump.

Issy
If you are in a reading slump, and you are listening to this podcast, pick this- You should already have read this by now. But anyway, pick this up-

Morgan
If you're listening to this episode without having read it... go back.

Issy
The other thing I did in preparation for this discussion...

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Issy
I picked up Daisy Jones and the Six by Taylor Jenkins Reid. And I will say that Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo is significantly better. But I will also say if you are looking for again, a very interesting nuanced perspective on relationships romantic and platonic, etc, etc. She does do that in other books. And it's just interesting. Like, I liked the nuance. I liked that Celia and Evelyn themselves were not perfect humans. I liked the fact that their relationship had so many [CENSORED] flaws, but chose to be there for each other and particularly Harry and Evelyn. They chose repeatedly to stand by each other. Having a kid- Two people who are not really attracted together, but they kind of have this attraction of each other's souls and they at one point say that they care about each other in a way of like soulmates and it's just...I absolutely love it.

Morgan
You brought up another one of my favourite things about this book, which is the whole "It takes a village," idea, of raising a kid.

Issy
Mm.

Morgan
Because at the end of the day, that's too much work for two people. It's supposed to be a village effort.

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan

I just really love to see that because it's something that I feel very strongly about. The bit where her daughter doesn't recognise Celia absolutely bodied me.

Issy
Yeah!

Sorren
I have to admit that that fell really flat for me. And I was really upset that it did because I thought that it would have been a really good moment. But then I thought Celia hadn't interacted on page with Evelyn's daughter once, I believe they had been at the picnic as a group that we had never seen any dialogue between them. You know, we knew from evidence saying "Oh, she's watching her tonight," and stuff like that. We understood that there was a relationship there. But because there was literally no show of that relationship for me, that kind of undermines that loss for me, I was kind of like, "What is their relationship," you know, "is it like that of Aunt?" Clearly, they didn't tell her the reality of John and Harry's relationship. And because we had those things, just not shown to us, that kind of made me feel a bit more that it was about, "Wow, isn't this cool?" And presenting this idea rather than actually trying to explore like the lived experience, but that was just me.

Morgan
No, that's very fair.

Issy
I am gonna disagree with you. Sorren You're right, we don't see it. We don't see it because for a while I feel like Evelyn takes us away to the set. She's away. And we hear about Harry and about Celia being the ones to take care, alternating taking care, and she details as well that the shoot runs long, that she's not there for months, that she sacrifices time with her daughter. And you see in that moment Celia being brought up and Harry being brought up as the two people who kind of step in. I think that for me established it that made it have its gut punch. Also, can we talk about the oatmeal? In terms of Harry and Evelyn's hetero domestic bliss...

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Issy
That they have because Celia is off shooting a movie and John's also away doing something? Sorry, I feel like John often gets overlooked...

Sorren
Sports?

Issy
Sports, something? John's the football guy. Celia comes in, and she makes the worst oatmeal known to mankind dry, no cinnamon, and she makes it for Evelyn for Harry and for- I mean, Connor can't eat solid foods. She makes that claim in that moment that she's going to be involved in this family. I feel like you didn't see the relationship between the two of them, but you very much felt Celia's presence.

Sorren
Do either of you have any favourite characters?

Issy
I have too many.

Morgan
[LAUGHS]

Issy
I loved Harry purely for being the strong, good human throughout it all morally not too grey, like the rest of them and just quite like a solid photonic bestie... Slash not platonic, because they did have sex, but like, you know what I mean.

Sorren
I felt like it was platonic sex in that it wasn't romantic sex.

Morgan
Yeah.

Issy
The rare occasion where sex is just to produce a child. It was the way they did it though, actually, I didn't like this fully, was when he was like, "Part of me has always wanted to bed you."

Morgan
Mmm....

Issy
I guess it was again, alluding to the fact that she's a bombshell. But it felt like a conquest line that one of her less amazing husbands would give her rather than necessarily a Harry line.

Sorren
That chafed with me as well, because Reid had gone out of her way to establish Harry as exclusively gay.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
I appreciate that sexuality is complicated and nuanced, but it felt less like that. And more...

Issy
Yeah, it felt off. What was your favourite character Morgan?

Morgan
I mean, Harry, my man, my guy, an absolute icon. He's just so solid. "Yeah, we're friends now, we're gonna stick together." I love the bit where they do become fast friends...

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
When he- in a roundabout way- lets her know that he's gay. She's like, "Well, I could be gay, too. You never know. Let's be best friends!" And he's like, "Okay, let's be best friends." And I'm like, "This is so cute." But then I also really liked Evelyn because she's just awful. And I love an awful woman. I support women's wrongs.

Issy
[LAUGHS]

Sorren
I think we might be three for three on having Harry as a favourite. I feel like that's a little bit predictable for me. I did actually really like reading Celia. Obviously, she's not necessarily the most likeable person. I appreciated her as a foil to Evelyn in a lot of ways. And she felt more nuanced in a way- I did like Harry a lot. But in a lot of ways. I felt like he didn't have the depth of some of the other characters around him. For example, the little touch on the AIDS crisis. There's like a paragraph where Evelyn mentions, Harry being broken up because he's losing friends, but we never got those friends names. And you know, they were in New York, where it was absolutely tearing through the population. It was really scary. Nno one knew what was going to happen at that period. Looking on it in hindsight, it's easy to think of it as a blip, but it was insane. And people didn't know what was gonna happen. And that felt a bit reductive to me. There were a couple of things with Harry. I'd like to have seen a little bit more from him. I believe we have some quotes?

Issy
I'm starting with this as another point about relationships that I love. "Heartbreak is loss. Divorce is a piece of paper." Loved that distinction. This is the only part of Monique's entire storyline that I really could say I love was the exploration of the failure of the marriage to David. And that is the backdrop, even though it did often feel a bit shoehorned in there. I liked the distinction between actually the heartbreak itself is the loss. But divorce isn't necessarily

the loss. It's like maybe a loss of status, but it's not the loss of the actual things sometimes

Morgan
Not exactly a quote but the moment when Evelyn reconnects with Ruby after Ruby marries and then divorces her second husband, where Evelyn realises that it wasn't just her, and that she kind of had a duty to warn Ruby what she was walking into and didn't, because she was so wrapped up in herself.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
That moment really got me.

Issy
Yeah, that packed a punch. I feel I got so wrapped up in Evelyn's narrative that you yourself couldn't see past Evelyn.

Sorren
Yeah, I think if you're carried along by the character, then it's very effective. You're in that same position. So you have that moment in parallel with Evelyn.

Issy
Circling back to what Morgan said earlier: "I hated being called the lesbian, not because I thought there was anything wrong with loving women. But Celia, only saw things in black and white. She liked women and only women, and I liked her. And so she often denied the rest of me. She liked to ignore the fact that I truly loved Don Adler once. She liked to ignore the fact that I've made love to men and enjoyed it, she liked to ignore it until the very moment she decided to be threatened by it. That seemed to be her pattern. I was a lesbian when she loved me and a straight woman when she hated me."

Sorren

Comparing that to the scene where we break out of the narrative have the interview conversation, I think that's a lot more effective. And it keeps the flow.

Morgan

I really liked- and by liked, I mean, sobbed my way through- the Spain years. I was not expecting that- I should have been expecting that to be the way the book went. She does say at the beginning, "Everyone I need to protect is dead, so I can say what I want." So you should know going in that all of her loved ones are going to die. And it still hits you like a tonne of bricks.

Issy

Yeah.

Sorren

I've got to admit the way that the book sort of changed in the last third, I wasn't a huge fan. It reminded me a lot of... I don't know if either of you have read One Day by David Nichols? Um, and I'm about to spoil One Day by David Nichols on this podcast, but it is about 20 years old. And I don't think it's our audience as usual fare. It starts out kind of as like, a regular rom com and then halfway through the female lead dies suddenly. And it kind of reminded me of that, with Celia getting ill, and Harry getting in the accident. And then Evelyn's daughter... I appreciate that these are real things that happen to real people. Good God, sometimes it can line up like that. And it can feel like the universe is literally against you. But just for this novel, it just felt exploitative of the audience's emotions to me, I appreciate that this isn't gonna be everyone's experience reading it, but I just felt like it was shock value after shock value, and just "What's the thing here that will provoke a reaction from the audience? Oh, cancer!" And I don't think that's good writing, to be perfectly honest, I think that is just "Oh, these are things that are close to people's hearts and will definitely definitely trigger discussion." I don't think that the perspectives on all of those things were nuanced enough to write it in. And in particular, I think Monique's father being the one who died, he's the only black character in this narrative. I'm very uncomfortable with him being

killed off as a big plot twist moment. I'm not super qualified to speak on this as a white passing mixed race person Bowties and Books on YouTube, they made a video about it, which is pretty interesting, and they are black, so... But particularly with him being the only black character apart from arguably Monique who also I think was treated kind of weirdly, by the narrative. At one point, she's having a discussion about David and she says "Dating David is easier than dating a black man because he wouldn't think that [she] wasn't black enough." And I completely respect that there are those issues within the community. But I think it's pretty reductive to not imply that those issues go both ways. Because, quite frankly, they do. It felt weird to me that it was only mentioned in that respect. And then this also like, sort of cascades me into some of the stuff with Evelyn... I don't think it's impossible to write about something like this from a white perspective. I just think that you really need to do your research. And there are a couple of things that kind of felt underexplored. Evelyn's identity- I appreciate that it was like, a matter of her suppressing it until towards the end of the novel- but... Even stuff like her reconnecting with her Spanish in Spain, as opposed to in Cuba, that little line about "It's not quite the same language. So it was different," kind of felt like somebody- like an editor, had been like "Reid, you know, it's not the same kind of Spanish right?"

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
...On a second read or something. But the fact that that wasn't seeded in earlier was bizarre to me, like especially with Evelyn losing her mother and grieving over that. And also obviously losing her relationship with her father, because it was unhealthy. She was completely cut off from her culture. And that's an upsetting thing to happen. She didn't tell most of her husbands. I'm assuming what her real name was, where she was from, because when she does mention that she's Herrera, I think it's to number six, she doesn't get the reaction she's expecting which implies that she hasn't brought it up before. And going into these marriages, knowing that

you're not bringing up that part of yourself is a huge thing. And I just feel like maybe Reid didn't really like, realise what kind of effect that could have on somebody.

Morgan
I think especially with Monique's father, Taylor Jenkins Reid, as a white person, very strange way to introduce a black character and to have it be your only one. Gives very weird, uncomfortable vibes because there's a whole line which is like "Harry was dating a black man. Gasp!"

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
You could have had the exact same narrative with a white gay man. And I feel like especially Monique does feel like she's treated like a white character. Like there's not much thought put into it.

Sorren
I think there was some attempts.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
Early on, she mentions a supervisor who's also a woman of colour and feeling a bit more confident because of that. But it was just the way in which he engaged with being mixed race, as a mixed race person didn't feel sort of very true to the experience to me, obviously, it's extremely different for everybody. But the subtleties of Evelyn doing this. I think that it is an element in this crime that Evelyn, as a white passing person, framed a black gay man, but also I-I do hate that line. "He was a black gay man!" I think you're sort of supposed to infer at that point that it's Monique's farther? Maybe? Which I thought was weird, because again, it's just like, "He's the only black man we've heard of. So I guess so." But um- That's not like a great- That's not a great sign for the narrative. But anti

blackness does come from other communities of colour. Being a South Asian person, I can bloody well say that I've heard a lot of it. It's a really complicated issue. And I don't know much about it from like a South American perspective, a lot tangled up in there. But I just don't think that these are thoughts that Reid really even had. And also the fact that Evelyn is probably pretty heavily based on Rita Hayworth, who was a Spanish woman in the film industry in the 50s- had four marriages, had surgeries to look more "white", you know, lightened her hair for her whole life, etc, changed her name, was also sexually abused by her father taking that story, and then manipulating it in these certain ways just feels a little bit strange to me. Not in like a "Definitely shouldn't write this kind of way." But just in a, "What are you trying to do here? I'm not sure if you've succeeded sort of way."

Issy

In the same way that I think that biphobia with Monique's storyline was a bit heavy handed the representation in terms of a mixed race woman being one of the protagonists in this was quite clunky. And yeah, especially with her father being the only black character and then killed, he felt quite- A plot point, rather than necessarily a character, fleshed out. The kind of relationship with her mother as well... I don't believe money goes too much into that. And Monique's just like, my relationship with my mother is solely good...

Sorren

Yeah. Which I mean, it easily could be like, that's totally fine.

Issy

Yeah, absolutely.

Sorren

Both the race stuff, and I think the queerness, which is why it bothered me that the AIDS crisis was like a footnote... I can't remember what bit of the book it was. But I remember being like "Thinking about the timeline. Isn't Reagan in power right now?"

Issy

Yeah.

Sorren

"Doesn't Evelyn have anything to say about that? Surely, that's freaking her out a little bit". And then there was a line about it a little bit later. But again, it just sort of felt like a throwaway. And it felt less like it was interested in engaging with these issues, and engaging with the history of these issues. Rather than being like, "Wow, this is what everybody's talking about. And this is scandalous. So here's queer characters and his characters of colour. And here's them doing scandalous things."

Issy

Mm. You've made a good point in terms of I didn't feel like this was very grounded in much of a time.

Sorren

Yeah, genuinely the pacing of it. I was like, "What- what? When are we?"

Issy

"Where are we?"

Sorren

"How old is this child that she has?"

Issy

Yeah. I thought at times, it lends itself very well. I liked the way it was slippery, especially with fame, you got the sense that her star rose and dipped very quickly. But then I feel like yeah, your points about grounding in any kind of historical context.

Sorren

There was clearly an effort, big things got mentioned, like Stonewall, and Reagan and AIDS and etc. But not necessarily the emotional realities of living through those events and everyday things, contextual things such as the Hayes Code, which would have prevented interracial marriages...

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
In any of the films that Evelyn had starred in before 1968 just aren't mentioned at all.

Morgan
I think because I went into this book with very low expectations I was just pleasantly surprised they were mentioned at all. So...

Sorren
Fair enough.

Morgan
"We're actually going to address this for even two seconds? Wow."

Sorren
In some ways, I think this is probably going to get people who maybe have never thought about some of these issues, thinking about these issues. So that is useful. But then I think it was just the daily bits of it. Evelyn's alone in LA, and she's having a bad day. And she probably just wants some of her mum's food. But the internet doesn't exist. So she probably can't look up a recipe, just little moments like that, that I think if they'd been seeded in, it would have just felt a little bit more real.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
None of those things really ever occur until Spain. And even then using Spain as a direct allegory- Like I appreciate that they couldn't emigrate to Cuba to live out their lesbian dreams at the time. That would have definitely been ignoring historical context. But um... (LAUGHS) Treating it as sort of almost one to one felt a little weird to me.

Morgan
Yeah.

Issy
I did. Like her relationship with Luis- Was it Luisa, the house maid that she has?

Morgan
I wanted more of that relationship. We had the one scene of her being like, yeah, I understand Spanish.

Issy
I'm with Morgan. I wanted more of that relationship. But I did like the fact that Evelyn was uncomfortable with her presence and speaking Spanish.

Sorren
Yeah.

Issy
Because it was another shock to the system after repressing it for so long.

Sorren
Like when she's discussing with the first maid, who also speaks Spanish, and then she decides to pretend to not understand her...

Issy
Yeah!

Sorren
I think there was a lot of weight to that moment, that definitely felt like a very deliberate choice by the author that I think was effective.

Issy
Whether or not we then can go through the lens of this as being explored primarily through her relationship with the maid...

Sorren
Because there is an implication here that there was nobody else of colour.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
In Hollywood, really working at the time, which seems bizarre, because she mentions at the beginning that there are certain roles that she doesn't want to do, because she wants to play lead roles. But as things shift over time, because she's working in the industry for decades...

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
Even then, how does she actually respond to those people who go "No, I'm not going to change, so fine. If I can only get roles as the mafia daughter or the foreign Princess, I'll just take those roles."

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
Interacting with those people on a professional level, what's that like for her? Does she ever regret it? Does she think that they're stupid? She can have any opinion. But the implication here is that like, it's just her.

Issy
The relationship with the maids is the main way through which she explores that and that is a kind of problematic...

Sorren
Stereotype?

Issy
Yeah, stereotype!

Sorren
I do feel like this wasn't written with malintent. I just think it's a little bit messy.

Issy
No, I- Yeah.

Morgan
A lot of attempts were made. And they were made in good faith. They just weren't necessarily made well.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
What are everybody's final thoughts? You wanna go first, Morgan?

Morgan
Yeah, sure. A lot of the way that I read books is how I'm feeling in the moment affects my rating. And then sometimes I'll come back to it and be like, "Hm, maybe it doesn't deserve this." It's just that I was feeling whelmed at the time. I really enjoyed this book. I think it was very outside of my comfort zone. Because I never read anything that isn't sci-fi/fantasy, it was nice to sort of step outside of that, going in expecting not to enjoy it, and then be pleasantly surprised. And it did kind of consume me. I was carrying it around with me at all times for like, two days straight. I really enjoyed that experience, because I was very slumped at the time. Originally I rated it a five. After discussion... It feels weird to sort of like, give a weighting of like, "Oh, this book is problematic. So it gets a one star reduction."

Sorren
Oh, yeah.

Morgan
That feels like a very strange thing to do. But I don't think I would rate it five stars going back. But I don't know what I would rate it. I think I'd have to reread it to decide what my new rating would be. Yeah, I wouldn't want to just be like, "I'm gonna rate it four stars because of the problems."

Sorren
"I'm equating the problems with this book to a one star rating," feels a bit weird.

Issy
Yeah.

Sorren
I see what you mean.

Morgan
It's like a weird, like, tick box of like, "Minus one star for racism, minus one star for homophobia!"

Sorren
Yeah, exactly.

Morgan
It's a very strange thing to do. So I will say, did rate it five stars. On a reread would probably be a bit more biassed. Because I wouldn't be in that sort of like, honeymoon phase.

Issy
Based on all those now I will not be doing a star rating. I really loved it. Similar to Morgan, it was the one I read in a slump. And I can say that I have now read 20 books after it. And I've reread it, so it firmly got me out of the slump. I feel like something doesn't have to be a great literature in air quotes for it to be enjoyable. And I think this had good character development in a lot of ways, had goddamn great takes on relationships. I love a good book that

doesn't do a straightforward, pun intended, relationship... Platonic best mate and viewing that as the most pinnacle and important relationship in many respects, was something that I loved... The nuances around what relationships mean for status in society versus what they mean to individuals, loss, heartbreak. And yes, I did tear up at points. And again, it was just gay. And I just didn't expect the Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo to be gay. First, I was thinking feminist Henry, the Eighth take.

Sorren
She didn't kill any of them, though. I was a little bit disappointed.

Issy
Ugh, yeah...

Sorren
No, I'm just kidding.

Issy
That is the only downside of this. There's no beheadings. Sorren, what did you think? What is your rating?

Sorren
Honestly, I think this is a two out of five from me. I did find it very readable. And I read it very quickly. And I wasn't bored, which is the worst thing for me when reading so that's good, but... Terrible, terrible things happening in a long, long list felt deliberately there to elicit the reaction- which I appreciate that is what you're trying to do as a writer, it's elicit a reaction from your audience- but to me, it felt more like a lazy, way of eliciting a reaction. I had a couple of prose/pacing issues, sometimes dialogue felt kind of unnatural to me, which I think is problematic in the context of any interview book, where it needs to be conversational.And then admitting that it does need to be conversational, certain things sort of felt told to me like for example, "Harry's my best friend, he's the love of my life!" I would have liked to see more earlier bonding, more between Evelyn and her daughter, more between Celia and Evelyn's daughter, etc. Things like that just felt lacking to me. And then the only black

character being killed off to further Evelyn's narrative... I just don't think that there was huge amounts of thought put into elements like that. So that's definitely spoiled my enjoyment of it. But I'm glad I finally read it, because I've been meaning to read it for a very long time.

Issy
I think that's incredibly fast. I wasn't expecting you to like it, Sorren, knowing you and books.

Sorren
There you go.

Issy
I was like, "Hey, he's gonna have some interesting perspectives." And as always, you do and I have definitely developed my enjoyment of this book by talking to both of you.

Sorren
Do either of you have any recommendations for other reads, for people that enjoyed The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo? The one that I was going to say, which isn't actually fiction, was "I'm Glad My Mom Died," by Jennette McCurdy.

Morgan
Ooh, yeah.

Sorren
Which I think is a very interesting look at LA, obviously a much more modern take on that- Everyone is saying it's really funny, which I didn't really find-

Morgan
[LAUGHING] No, it's not funny. It's very dry.

Sorren
Yes.

Morgan
I think that is half of what makes it so good is the tone, but it's not funny.

Sorren
I can't say that I laughed while I was reading it. In fact, I would say it was a very stressful read, but...

Morgan
Yeah!

Sorren
Feminist perspectives on the industry and what kind of pressures that brings to this day. I thought it was all very interesting.

Morgan
I would definitely recommend the audiobook because she reads the audiobook herself. And it's really good.

Sorren
Although I will say... We always say this in the show notes. But definitely for this one, please do read the content warnings before you go into it because it's extremely graphic about certain things.

Morgan
Oh boy. Oh, yeah.

Sorren
Also a non-book recommendation, maybe do some research on Rita Hayworth, she was very interesting. There's a documentary that you can find online, 'Rita'- it is a little bit old and it's worth looking at some articles... There's a particular ones that I'm thinking of that the name is escaping me, but I'll put that in the show notes as well. Do you have anything, Issy?

Issy
This is cheating, because it's just the other book that I read by Taylor Jenkins Reid.

Sorren
That's not cheating. I do that all the time.

Issy
Okay, I'm so glad well- And this is also not a niche recommendation, since you will have seen the adverts populating your page probably of the new Prime series but Daisy Jones and the Six. Daisy Jones and the Six follows a make-believe band in the 60s and interviews them all. And there's a line that starts it that is like: "You will hear lots of different perspectives in this book. As ever, the truth is somewhere in between them all." And I love that line. And I love discussing relationships, the nature of relationships, platonic romantic, duh-duh-duh-duh-duh, love it, love it and it delivered some really interesting takes on what defines a relationship, how do you define the romantic-platonic boundaries? I think it did a really good job. I don't think it's gay is the only thing I'm just gonna say: warning!

Sorren
That's okay, we sometimes recommend straight things.

Morgan
I have two recommendations.

Sorren
Two recommendations.

Morgan
They are both incredibly rogue and tangential in their relationship. But the first is The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak. The way that my brain connects it is because it's fiction set in- Feels weird to say late 1900s. But I don't remember when it's set. So we're just gonna say late 1900s.

Sorren
Fair.

Morgan
So it's fiction also set in the late 1900s in Cyprus, and it covers a lot of the civil war that occurred there, how it affected couples, and the actual story is about a woman and a man who are on different sides of the divide. But there's also a subplot about these two gay tavern owners who are both also on either sides of the divide. Half of the book is told by a tree. So...

Sorren
I'm into that.

Morgan
Technically a bit of fantasy in there. But yeah, it deals with putting fictional characters into historical events with a lot more nuance. And it's also just really interesting. The other book that I'm going to recommend is The Last Tale of the Flower Bride by Roshani Chokshi, which is sort of a Bluebeard retelling, but it's told in two separate narratives, one in the past one in the present, and it's very much about relationships and how toxic they can be, and codependence and storytelling.

Sorren
Also, sorry, while you were talking, I was like, "Oh, another recommendation!" So I'm gonna toss one more in. And I think we've all read this one, which is I Was Born For This by Alice Oseman...

Morgan
A classic!

Sorren
Which I think is somewhat similar in that it does queer relationships in the public eye, but in a more modern context. And then some stuff about race and religion thrown in there as well. And mental health stuff. That has a trans protagonist, that is very good. I know everyone's read Heartstopper now, but if you haven't read I Was Born For This, please do, because Oseman wants to write a sequel, and I want them to, more than anything in my life.

Morgan
I want a sequel!

Issy
Yeah.

Morgan
I want gays to be happy, please!

Issy
Literally.

Morgan
I've just had a thought.

Sorren
Go for it.

Morgan
One of the Into Shadow short stories, which is a group of Amazon vaguely fantasy spooky short stories is set in 1960s ish Hollywood, that's sort of alternate, and it's about this guy who's a fixer on the Hollywood lot, but he's a supernatural fixer specifically. And there's a cursed mirror. And the main actress has been cursed to be evil and it's about him trying to fix it. Pretty entertaining read, it's by Garth nix.

Sorren
I haven't read any Garth Nix at all, actually, which makes me feel like a fake fantasy fans, so...

Morgan
Me neither until this. I have Sabriel sitting on my shelf and it's been sitting on my shelf since I was 15. It's there. And I want to read it. And I like necromancy!

Issy

I think it's telling that I'm completely lost right now. So you all live out your best necromancy dreams and I'll continue to be baffed.

Sorren
Before you leave us Issy. Tragically, sadly, abandoning us to our necromantic ways. First of all, thank you for being here.

Issy
My pleasure. I had a great time.

Sorren
It was very lovely to have you.

Issy
My most unusual Friday and Saturday night and I loved it.

Sorren
I'm so glad.

Morgan
What are you talking about? This was one recording Issy!

Issy
[LAUGHS] Oh yeah, sorry!

Morgan
There were no technical difficulties in the recording of this podcast.

Issy
There were none whatsoever!

Sorren
We're very professional here.

Morgan
Mm-hm.

Sorren

But Issy, do you have anything you want to tell people? Do you have any projects or friends projects that you want to tell them to go look at? Do you have any social media?

Issy
See my issue is I don't remember my own Instagram handle so you're welcome to try and find me if you want to.

Sorren
You're on Instagram regularly, how do you not know your handle?

Issy
It's a great question, Sorren.

Sorren
Your Instagram handle is issy_kh, if you would like it shared publicly.

Morgan
I was gonna say issykh_ I was so close.

Sorren
You were close.

Issy
So close. See you two know it, and I don't. All I'm going to say to the lovely listeners is please keep supporting Sorren and Morgan's podcast. They adore all of you, I hear about you all the time. And they also love doing this and are really cool people who I always go to book recommendations. Please keep listening.

Sorren
Oh my god. Thank you. I think that is everything then apart from what we're doing next time.

Morgan
What the [CENSORED] are we doing next time?

Sorren
We're doing cosy fantasy month in May. The first book we're reading is a book that neither of us have read.

Morgan
[GASPS THEATRICALLY]

Sorren
But it is a book that we have both been wanting to read since first hearing about it. And that book is...

Morgan
Legends and Lattes.

Sorren
By Travis Baldree?

Morgan
Travis Baldree. Yes.

Sorren
That's all for today, and we will see you then to talk about cosy fantasy.

Morgan
Until then, you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sorren
Don't forget to scritch the cat on your way out.

Thank you for listening to The Hidden Bookcase, a production of Planar prod. On this episode, you heard Issy Kenny-Herbet, Morgan Greensmith and Sorren Briarwood discussing The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid You can find out more about this book at taylorjenkinsreid.com and you can follow Jenkins Reid @tjenkinsreid on Twitter.

Thank you so much Issy for coming on the show. It was so much fun to have you. You can follow Issy on Instagram @issy_kh.

You can find The Hidden Bookcase on Twitter @Hidden Bookcase and on Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and TikTok @HiddenBookcasePodcast. Find out more about Planar Prod at planarprod.com. Know what we should read next, or want to chat to us about what you thought of this episode's read? You can reach us at thehiddenbookcase@gmail.com or send us a DM on social media. We'd love to hear from you.

If you're enjoying The Hidden Bookcase, please consider leaving us a rating or review. Or you can always tell a friend how to find us. Your whispers are the best way for bookworms to discover our show.

In May, we're reading cosy fantasy. Our next episode will be out on Monday, the first of May, we'll be discussing Legends and Lattes by Travis Baldree. We hope to see you then and in the meantime, you're always welcome through the bookcase.