

## 6.09 My Sister Chooses What I Read

**Angourie [host]**

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. I offer my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[upbeat, twinkly piano music fades in]

**Angourie [host]**

Hello and welcome to The Community Library, a podcast all about stories and how and why we tell them. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music fades out]

**Angourie [host]**

Hello and welcome back to The Community Library. It's a very special episode today because I have brought someone in to help me. She is a fan favourite guest on the podcast. Every time she is part of an episode, the audience is begging for more, so I present to you: my very own sister, Kalliope!

**Kalliope [guest]**

Hello.

**Angourie [host]**

Sound more cheerful.

**Kalliope [guest]**

[raspy breathing noises]

[laughing]

**Angourie [host]**

You sound like a dementor!

**Kalliope [guest]**

[raspy breathing stops] Hey everyone! I'm back.

**Angourie**

She's back and better than ever. And I have recruited Kalliope today to help me out with something. As we all know, as readers, we have many books that we need to read. And they pile up, and you don't know which one to read next. So I'm going to get Kalliope to help me decide which one to read next. Kalliope, do you know what you're doing today?

**Kalliope**

Yes I do.

**Angourie**

Would you like to tell the audience?

**Kalliope**

I am going to be reading the first sentence to eight books?

**Angourie**

Yes.

**Kalliope**

To eight books, and ranking them, thus determining the order in which Angourie's got to read them.

**Angourie**

Oh, well –

**Kalliope**

It's the order that you have to read them in, and I will rank them all, and if she doesn't follow the right order, then ... execution.

**Angourie**

My idea was that you'd rank them and I'd just read the top one. Like, that would be – that would determine what I would read.

**Kalliope**

Right. Well, I guess you're wrong.

**Angourie**

Okay. So I will be reading these sentences to you. You don't know the books, you don't know the authors.

**Kalliope**

Oh, right.

**Angourie**

So it's a – it's an unknowing ranking. Completely objective. The audience is going to know what these books are. I'm gonna jump in and tell the audience what they are before I read the sentence.

**Kalliope**

Oh.

**Angourie**

You're the only one who won't know what they are. I'll tell you later. What else? Oh, the other thing I wanted to say before we started is that: a good first line does not mean a good book, and a bad first line does not mean a bad book, just wanna say that.

**Kalliope**

So true, preach sister.

**Angourie**

Just wanna say that. If Kalliope is scathing about the first line of one of your favourite books, it is not at all indicative of the rest of the book.

**Kalliope**

Well...

**Angourie**

Well, Kalliope thinks she knows all, so.

**Kalliope**

No, you're right.

**Angourie**

Are you ready?

**Kalliope**

So ready!

**Angourie**

Okay. *The Twyford Code* by Janice Hallett. Line one: *Dear Professor Mansfield, I am investigating a mysterious case and suspect you may be able to help.*

**Kalliope**

Okay. So can I make a guess at the book? Because I know –

**Angourie**

You can make a guess.

**Kalliope**

I'm pretty certain this is *The Twyford Code*, not because I've read it, but because I just bought this. [clears throat] I bought this book and then someone swooped into my bedroom and took it off my bedside table. So I think that's the book.

**Angourie**

You are correct.

**Kalliope**

I don't love this first line, I don't think. I don't think it's a bad first line at all, it's just not –

**Angourie**

It definitely grabs you.

[pause]

**Kalliope**

I don't know if it grabbed *me*.

**Angourie**

Okay, maybe it doesn't grab you, it like, lightly touches you on the arm.

**Kalliope**

It, yeah, it tapped me. It said hey. I – I don't – okay, controversial – very controversial –

**Angourie**

Oh god, here we go.

**Kalliope**

Okay, no, this is not necessary, but I don't love it when it begins with a letter, or like a ... Like, I know that's kind of that whole book, but I want them to talk to me. I'm just reading two other people talking to each other. You know, I want to be involved in the first line.

**Angourie**

You don't like being excluded.

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

This is why you don't listen to podcasts, either.

**Kalliope**

I want it to always be about me all the time.

**Angourie**

Yeah, you don't like being excluded. Okay, so like ... okay.

**Kalliope**

Like, I'm giving it – like, do I give it a rating out of like, ten? Like a score out of ten?

**Angourie**

Sure. Give it a ranking – give it a score out of eight. And then we can determine your ranking. Do you know what I mean?

**Kalliope**

Yeah but they're all gonna –

**Angourie**

Oh, okay. Give it a score out of ten, then.

**Kalliope**

Score out of ten ... I'm giving it like a ... like a six out of ten.

**Angourie**

Okay, sure.

**Kalliope**

Six, seven out of ten. Six point five. Six point seven five out of ten.

**Angourie**

6.75 out of 10?

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

Then just do it out of a hundred.

**Kalliope**

Out of a thousand? 675 out of 1000.

**Angourie**

Yeah.

**Kalliope**

No, okay I – let's go from five. Three out of five.

**Angourie**

Three out of five, okay.

**Kalliope**

Hang on, can you read it again?

[laughing]

**Angourie**

*Dear Professor Mansfield, I am investigating a mysterious case and suspect you may be able to help.*

**Kalliope**

Yeah, no –

**Angourie**

Three out of five?

**Kalliope**

Three out of five.

**Angourie**

Okay. Next line. Next book. Next first sentence. *Truth and Beauty* by Ann Patchett. *The thing you can count on in life is that Tennessee will always be scorching hot in August.*

**Kalliope**

Ooh.

[laughing]

**Angourie**

Ooh.

**Kalliope**

Ooh. I like that.

**Angourie**

It gives us a setting.

**Kalliope**

It gives us a setting.

**Angourie**

And it gives us a time.

**Kalliope**

And it gives – yeah, true.

**Angourie**

Time and place.

**Kalliope**

Yeah, time and place. And I feel like it sets up the narrator pretty well.

**Angourie**

Yeah.

**Kalliope**

They use words like “scorching”.

**Angourie**

Yeah, and it’s very specific about where we are and also like, “the thing you can count on in life”, like it gives us a sense of routine.

**Kalliope**

And I feel like I know what’s important in this book. Like, for them to say that’s what they can count on in their life. Like, you know, it’s a very different book if they say: “the one thing

about life is that always follow your dreams!” Like, that’s a different book to “it’s always scorching hot in August in Tennessee.”

**Angourie**

Yep.

**Kalliope**

I like it, I’m giving it a ... eight out of ten.

**Angourie**

You ranked the other one out of five!

**Kalliope**

Yeah, I know, just being fun.

**Angourie**

So it’s a four out of five.

**Kalliope**

Yep. But eight out of ten gives such different vibes to four out of five, you know, even though it’s actually the same fraction.

**Angourie**

Wow. Fraction philosophy with Kalliope. Okay, next one. *The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel. *Begin at the end – plummeting down the side of the ship in the storm’s wild darkness, breath gone with the shock of falling, my camera flying away through the rain.*

**Kalliope**

No, I’m sorry, I don’t like that.

**Angourie**

[gasp] Ooh! Tell me.

**Kalliope**

It’s too much, I’m confused before I’ve even begun, it’s the first sentence. I thought that – like, halfway through that sentence, which was quite a while through it, it’s a long one, I was like, okay I get it, it’s like, a poem, it’s old. And then all of a sudden they chuck in camera! I’m like, woah! Where are we?

**Angourie**

[laughing] You know they’ve had cameras for a long time.

**Kalliope**

Oh, true. But like, not one that you can carry on a boat. I don’t know. Like, if I – straight out of the gate – got that in a book, I’d be like: ah!

[laughing]

**Angourie**

Okay, so what are you ranking it out of five?

**Kalliope**

Can you read it again, please?

**Angourie**

*Begin at the end – plummeting down the side of the ship in the storm's wild darkness, breath gone with the shock of falling, my camera flying away through the rain.*

**Kalliope**

Yeah, see it's a good sentence, but even – like, I didn't remember any of it.

**Angourie**

Okay, sure.

**Kalliope**

Um ... like a ... two out of – two point five out of five? Two point five?

**Angourie**

Okay.

**Kalliope**

[weird throat growl] Who was she?

**Angourie**

There's a cat in your throat!

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

Arrrwwrr! Okay, next one?

**Kalliope**

Yep. Hit me.

**Angourie**

Okay, here's the next one. *Payback's A Witch* by Lana Harper. *As soon as I crossed the town line, I could feel Thistle Grove on my skin.*

**Kalliope**

I like that.

**Angourie**

Aww!



**Kalliope**

That's fun.

**Angourie**

You like it?

**Kalliope**

I like it. We're coming home, it's warm, it's cosy, it's simple.

**Angourie**

Ooh, how do you know she's going home?

**Kalliope**

I don't know. Vibes.

**Angourie**

No, but here's the thing. I've actually read the first five pages of this and you're correct, she is going home.

**Kalliope**

What can I say? I'm a good reader, I knew.

**Angourie**

Or is this good writing?

**Kalliope**

Mmm.

**Angourie**

Mmm!

**Kalliope**

Or are you a good reader in the way you read it out, because you knew. So you read it out in a way that I was like, ooh, I'm getting home.

**Angourie**

Maybe we're all fabulous and brilliant in our own ways.

**Kalliope**

Mhm. I really like that. Yeah, I like that it's simple. And I don't know, I don't know that she's going home. It could be a mysterious place, it could be like ... the feeling her on her skin could be bad.

**Angourie**

Mmm. You want to know more.

**Kalliope**

I want to know more. I want to know what's Thistle Grove. Why do you have a feeling? I'm intrigued.

**Angourie**

Okay.

**Kalliope**

I'm giving this a ... I don't know about five out of five, but like, you know, like, four point five. Four point seven five. Four point eight. It's up there. It's highest so far.

**Angourie**

Okay, great. Ooh! Okay, it's highest so far. Great. Higher than Tennessee in August?

**Kalliope**

Yes.

**Angourie**

Interesting. They're quite similar, though, because they both introduce place. Okay. Here's the next one. *The Happy Couple* by Naoise Dolan. *They got engaged like this.*

**Kalliope**

Ooh. I feel like I need more than the first sentence for that one.

**Angourie**

Mm, interesting. Yeah, I get that.

**Kalliope**

It's not a bad first sentence, but like, I can't judge it because what happens next is really integral. Like, it's not like I read the first sentence and I'm like: ooh! Because you'd never just read – like, your brain's already skipping ahead, I feel like.

**Angourie**

It's the set up.

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

Which – I guess a first line is always a set up, but it doesn't really give us any information.

**Kalliope**

I also ... okay. It's giving sort of flashback vibes. And I hate a flashback in a book.

**Angourie**

Mm. Okay.

**Kalliope**

It's not filling me with excitement about what's happening next because it's already happened. I'll give it a two point five. Three.

**Angourie**

Okay. Here's the next one. *If on a winter's night a traveller* by Italo Calvino. *You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel If on a winter's night a traveller.*

**Kalliope**

Oh, this has thrown me in a loop!

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

What am I reading? What book did I start? I like it, though. It's fun. A book within a book.

**Angourie**

Yeah.

**Kalliope**

I've never read anything like that, so I don't know if I like it or not.

**Angourie**

Mhm. SO you assume, or you know that this is the first line of Italo Calvino's novel *If on a winter's night a traveller*.

**Kalliope**

Oh. Do we?

**Angourie**

I mean it is, but I was just wondering if, like ... could it be the first sentence of a different book.

**Kalliope**

Oh. I thought that that's not what the book's called. And this is a book within a book.

**Angourie**

Oh!

**Kalliope**

That's what it gave me.

**Angourie**

Right.

**Kalliope**

Because – can you read the start of it again, what does it start with?

**Angourie**

*You are about to begin reading –*

**Kalliope**

Yeah, you're about to begin reading. So I'm like, well, so what have I begun now?

**Angourie**

So you thought it was a different book, and the first line of this book is, wait – I'm getting confused.

**Kalliope**

Yeah, because I'm not about to begin reading that book, because I've just started. I'm not about to begin, I have begun. It has begun.

**Angourie**

It has begun. So I – so this book. This is the first line of *If on a winter's night a traveller* by Italo Calvino.

**Kalliope**

Well then, that's just incorrect, isn't it?

**Angourie**

I've read the first maybe twenty pages of this book.

**Kalliope**

Why? Why have you started all these books? All these pages and then stopped.

**Angourie**

I've only started ...

**Kalliope**

I thought I was meant to be telling you what to do!

**Angourie**

I started reading this like, many – not many years ago, maybe two years ago I tried to read this book and failed. And then someone gave me a copy of it, and I thought, ooh! I'm gonna try again.

**Kalliope**

Okay, for me, I don't like it. I don't think it's necessary because if it's not a book within a book, it doesn't make any sense. Because I know I'm about to start to read it, I just read the front cover. So for me, like, I get that it's giving the vibe of what this book is gonna be, but I don't ...

**Angourie**

It's very experimental fiction. Metafiction.

**Kalliope**

[sigh]

**Angourie**

Which you hate, okay. What do you rate it out of five?

**Kalliope**

Like a ... two. Again, it's not bad. Like, it's a two. I don't think any of these have been bad first lines, it's just personal opinion.

**Angourie**

Yeah. Okay, next one. *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson. *Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity—Good.*

**Kalliope**

Oof. Starting with an onomatopoeia, that's bold!

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

That's so bold.

**Angourie**

What is it, when you're in primary school, it's like, engaging ways to start your story! With: a sound, dialogue, action, vroom vroom!

**Kalliope**

Yeah. Look, it's bold, they went for something, they went for a choice. It's giving witchy. It's pretty fun. Right?

**Angourie**

Why is it giving witchy?

**Kalliope**

Is it not a spell? Can you say it again?

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

What?

**Angourie**

*Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity—Good.*

**Kalliope**

Oh, is it like an engine starting?

**Angourie**

Mm.

**Kalliope**

So the broom broom I got engine, but baripity?

**Angourie**

It's like, you know when a car's like ... barrrapupup, barrrapupup –

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

We've got some maracas in here! Rackackackacka!

**Angourie**

You know when a car's like ... bra- bra- broom-bt-t-t-t-t.

**Kalliope**

That was good! That one was good.

**Angourie**

Oh, thank you.

**Kalliope**

Broo-t-t-t-t-t.

**Angourie**

Yeah. Vru-t-t-t-t-t.

**Kalliope**

I wouldn't go with baripity for that, but, yeah. I think this is – it's assuming a lot of your reader, right off the bat. It's really putting their skills to test. Like, it's testing out their skills of –

**Angourie**

[gasp] Interesting. What if I told you that this was a book for young people?

**Kalliope**

Then it's better. Because then, like, I don't know. Again, I don't think it's bad, but personally I'm like ... eh.

**Angourie**

You don't love it.

**Kalliope**

Yeah. These are all – I’m sorry, this is so boring, I haven’t really said much about any of them other than like: it’s fine. I’m waiting for a banger. How many down are we?

**Angourie**

There’s one more to go!

**Kalliope**

Oh, rough.

**Angourie**

I don’t think you’re gonna like this one, but you will know this book. *My Sister Jodie* by Jacqueline Wilson. The line is: *Jodie*.

**Kalliope**

Oh. I’m in tears already.

**Angourie**

I’m planning to re-read this for an upcoming childhood favourites episode.

**Kalliope**

I mean look, it tells us what it’s about!

**Angourie**

Well, yeah, I mean the book is called *My Sister Jodie*.

**Kalliope**

Yeah. Um ... Look, I don’t think it’s a spectacular first line, but it fits a children’s book. Or not a children’s book, but you know, a young person’s book.

**Angourie**

Yes.

**Kalliope**

The first line isn’t gonna be like: “I’d never thought about the human nature—” you know it’s like. It’s gonna be: “Jodie. My sister.”

**Angourie**

Well the second line is: *That was the first word I ever said*.

**Kalliope**

Aw. Stop. I’m crying already! Such a good book.

**Angourie**

It is a really good book.

**Kalliope**

Um ... I think, I mean, look, I’m very biased, but I’m like, great first line.

**Angourie**

So, out of five?

**Kalliope**

Like, a four.

**Angourie**

Okay.

**Kalliope**

We've had no fives, we've had no zeroes.

**Angourie**

So your favourites have been *The thing you can count on in life is that Tennessee will always be scorching hot in August. As soon as I crossed the town line, I could feel Thistle Grove on my skin. And Jodie.*

**Kalliope**

Yeah, I think Thistle Grove is the best. I think then scorching, then Jodie.

**Angourie**

Okay.

**Kalliope**

Done.

**Angourie**

Done! So, that's the one I'm reading! Do you wanna know what it is?

**Kalliope**

Can you show me all the books and can I guess which one it is?

**Angourie**

Yes! Okay. Um. They're all lined up here. Let me just – [clunk]

**Kalliope**

[sings the Kahoot theme song]

**Angourie**

Okay, so. From all of those books, there are a few that you can automatically eliminate.

**Kalliope**

Yeah, so, hang on. Let's go through this. I think ...

**Angourie**

Well, you can eliminate *My Sister Jodie*.



**Kalliope**

Yeah, so *My Sister Jodie* I know is *Jodie*. I think –

**Angourie**

You can also eliminate –

**Kalliope**

Hang on!

**Angourie**

Sorry.

**Kalliope**

Okay, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, that's the *You're about to start reading*. Ooh, nice cover though. I really like that cover. Um ... Okay. My immediate thought is that *Paybacks A Witch* is the baripity baripity, but that's just because in my mind I was like: oh you're reading a spell! [laughing] But that might be *Thistle* ... or maybe *The Happy Couple*? Let me think about which ones we had. What's gonna be the experimental – not the experimental – the camera over the ship. Maybe *Bridge to Terabithia*?

**Angourie**

Is which one?

**Kalliope**

The – my camera over the ship in the water.

**Angourie**

So are you guessing all of them?

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

Or just the one that I picked? Oh, you think that one's *Bridge to Terabithia*?

**Kalliope**

Yeah.

**Angourie**

You would be incorrect.

**Kalliope**

Is *Bride to Terabithia* the *Thistle*?

**Angourie**

No.

**Kalliope**

Is *Truth and Beauty* the Thistle?

**Angourie**

No.

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

Is ... *The Happy Couple* Thistle?

**Angourie**

No!

**Kalliope**

Is *Payback's a Witch* Thistle?

**Angourie**

Yes!

**Kalliope**

Okay. Thistle. I should have gotten it. Thistle, witch. Okay, fun! "A sexy, charming, funny, romp of a novel."

**Angourie**

So I bought this book at a romance bookstore called The Ripped Bodice in LA.

**Kalliope**

Oh, yeah, cool!

**Angourie**

Yeah. So that's the one you have chosen for me to read next.

**Kalliope**

Right! It's not – like, I feel like the vibe was more sort of ... *Cherry Tree Farm*, like, *Anne of Green Gables*, or *Rebecca*.

**Angourie**

Mm.

**Kalliope**

That's what I was sort of imagining. Like, either or.

**Angourie**

Mhm.

*Angourie Rice – The Community Library*

**Kalliope**

There you go.

**Angourie**

Well, there you have it.

**Kalliope**

I think – well, hang on, no no no, I'm still going.

[laughing]

**Kalliope**

What other ones did we have?

**Angourie**

We had *Dear Professor Mansfield...*

**Kalliope**

So that's *The Twyford Code*, got that one.

**Angourie**

Which, you knew that.

**Kalliope**

What other ones do we have?

**Angourie**

We have Tennessee in August, we have camera falling off –

**Kalliope**

Okay, hang on, hang on. Tennessee in August I think is *The Glass Hotel*.

**Angourie**

Incorrect.

**Kalliope**

Oh. Is it *The Happy Couple*?

**Angourie**

Incorrect.

**Kalliope**

Is it *Bridge to Terabithia*? I haven't seen *The Bridge to Terabithia*.

**Angourie**

Incorrect.

**Kalliope**

Oh, is it *Truth and Beauty*?

**Angourie**

Yes.

**Kalliope**

That's the only one left. Uh. Okay. Cool. Next.

**Angourie**

The camera flying away through the rain down the side of the ship.

**Kalliope**

Oh, so that's gotta be *The Glass Hotel* because it wasn't *Bridge to Terabithia*? Oh my god is that *The Happy Couple*? No. It's *Glass Hotel*.

**Angourie**

Yes, it is *Glass Hotel*.

**Kalliope**

Okay I thought I was wrong again and I was upset. Cool. And then ...

**Angourie**

*They got engaged like this.*

**Kalliope**

Wow, I wonder. That's *The Happy Couple*.

**Angourie**

I can't believe you didn't – you were guessing everything else for *The Happy Couple*.

**Kalliope**

I completely forgot about *They got engaged like this*. Which, not saying great things about a first line, is it?

**Angourie**

[gasp] Ooh.

**Kalliope**

Okay, and then what's the last line?

**Angourie**

*Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity—Good.*

**Kalliope**

Ohhhh. Yeah. *Bridge to Terabithia*.

**Angourie**

See it sounds like – does it not sound like a spell?

**Kalliope**

It does sound like a spell. And the “good” at the end?

**Angourie**

I guess so. Okay.

**Kalliope**

I should watch it. Or read it.

**Angourie**

Oh, it’s very sad.

**Kalliope**

It’s for kids. I mean, so is *My Sister Jodie*, I guess.

**Angourie**

Okay.

**Kalliope**

Slay.

**Angourie**

Well done Kalliope, thank you for choosing my next read, and is there anything else you’d like to say to the audience before I go off and read this book?

**Kalliope**

Um, what are you reading again?

**Angourie**

*Payback’s A Witch*.

**Kalliope**

Um ... great first line. I feel like – okay, what do ... I was a bit harsh, I was a bit boring for this challenge. I think a great – I’m just trying to think what a good first line is. I think I’m a little bit basic, and I think that *Pride and Prejudice* has a great first line. I want the first line to be talking to the reader. Not directly, not being like: hi reader! I don’t want that, but I want it to be directly engaging to me. Not about other things. And I want it to set up the vibe well, I want it to be simple and concise. I don’t want it to try and draw in their entire reader base and everything that the book’s about in one line, that’s not necessary for the first line. So I want it to have the same vibe as the book, but just short and simple, to the reader, to the point.

**Angourie**

Mhm!

**Kalliope**

That's what I want. And I think the Thistle one did that.

**Angourie**

Okay!

**Kalliope**

The most.

**Angourie**

Well done.

**Kalliope**

Thank you, I did really well.

**Angourie**

Thank you so much for coming back on the podcast.

**Kalliope**

You're welcome.

**Angourie**

I'm sure the listeners will be very happy.

**Kalliope**

Ah, look. Stop it, guys.

**Angourie**

Would you like to say bye?

**Kalliope**

Bye!

[musical interlude]

**Angourie**

Okay, it's Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, and I'm 40 pages into *Payback's a Witch* by Lana Harper. From the first sentence, right, because that's where we left off, we continued with an introduction to our protagonist driving back into her hometown which is, of course, Thistle Grove. So we're following Emmy Harlow, a 26-year-old witch who, nine years ago, decided to leave Thistle Grove for Chicago to live a magicless life. But she's been called back to her hometown by her parents, who are one of the four founding families of Thistle Grove. And Emmy is heir to the family, she has to compete in a sort of tournament which happens every few years or so, where the four founding families compete to have magical control over the town. The Blackmoores are the current family in power, and they've been top dog for a while. And no one likes them because they are entitled and rude. Especially Emmy, she

doesn't like them at all, since the Blackmoore heir, Gareth, broke her heart when she was 17, hence why she left town. All this we've learnt in the first forty pages, and it's still Emmy's first night in town! So, we're learning lots. So far I'm liking the characters and the dialogue. Emmy is a pretty engaging and sympathetic character, and I like reading from her perspective. I haven't gotten too confused at the rules of magic yet, which is a good sign for me. The only thing that's bothering me so far is that the writing is very lyrical, and usually I love lyrical writing, but just not when it happens in the middle of dialogue. Sometimes the paragraphs between dialogue are so full of description, and metaphors, and similes that I forget what they were talking about. So I have to go back and like read the line previously. But other than that, I'm enjoying the mysterious, witchy vibes of this book.

[musical interlude]

It's the next day, it's Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, and I'm on page 94, so I'm almost 100 pages in. Now we've got to the real set up of the book. So, Emmy and her two friends – who are also heirs to two of the four magical families – have decided to take down Gareth Blackmoore, the fourth heir who's gonna be competing, and prevent him from winning the magic tournament, because Gareth has scorned all of them in some way. Meanwhile a spicy romance is developing between Emmy and one of the girls who's like, taking down Gareth with her. It's very sweet, and very cute. Now, books about tournaments can be, I don't know, tricky for me. I loved *The Hunger Games*, but *Goblet of Fire* was always my least favourite *Harry Potter* book in the series. I find plots centred around a tournament to sometimes feel a little predictable and plodding. Like, I'm always waiting for the next thing to happen but first we have to go through the ceremony of announcing, and reading out the rules, etc. So ... I don't know. So far the tournament in *Payback's a Witch* hasn't officially begun, so we'll see how I respond to it. But what I do love is a good revenge plot / conspiracy, which is what Emmy and her friends are planning. So. Onwards we read!

[musical interlude]

It's Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, I'm on page 153, and the tournament has begun. There are three challenges and the first challenge happened really quickly! Like, it took place in just one 10-page chapter and then it was over. Which was fine, I mean, I find it difficult to read constant descriptive action, anyway. But I don't know! I guess I was surprised that it was over so fast. The more exciting part to me was seeing the romance progress between Emmy and Talia, who's like, one of the other competitors. The romance is more of a prominent storyline than I expected, which is silly of me because I literally bought this book at a romance bookstore in LA, but anyway, I'm enjoying that aspect of it.

[musical interlude]

### **Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> July – finished!**

It's Tuesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, so a couple days since I last spoke to you, and I have finished this book. I apologise for not updating you again before I finished it, but it was just such a quick read. I didn't anticipate finishing it today, since I had about 100 pages left, but I always get to a point towards the end of the book where I know I won't be able to go to sleep until I finish it, and that's exactly what happened with *Payback's A Witch*. Overall, I quite enjoyed it. It

was fun, cute, and it had the perfect witchy vibes for a winter read. It's winter in Australia at the moment. It's not high fantasy, which I liked. The witches' magic exists alongside the real world. The magic system isn't very difficult to understand, since it's just confined to a pretty small town, and really just like, four magic families. As I said, I liked the aesthetic of all the witchy vibes, but I will say that I didn't feel that connected to the magic. And I think that was because Emmy, the protagonist, isn't that connected to the magic herself. She doesn't do much magic throughout the book, she's not a very powerful witch. So, the magic was fun to read about, but it felt very observational. As for the magic tournament, yeah, I felt similarly towards it as I did the Triwizard Tournament in *Harry Potter*. The structure and predictability of three tasks didn't excite me that much, and also the tasks were over so quickly and seemed kind of easy for the witches, so I wasn't super engaged. But that seems like less of a problem with the book, and more a problem with me just not enjoying reading about tournaments. The romance is probably the main focus of the book, and that I think was my favourite part. The banter between the characters was really cute, they had great chemistry from the beginning. Of course, we have the classic romance conflict in the third act, but I didn't mind it in this one, it was really understandable and made sense for the story.

And finally, I want to talk about the first line, and if I think it's a good first line which represents the whole book. I'll just remind you, the first line is: "As soon as I crossed the town line, I could feel Thistle Grove on my skin." Though I must admit, I didn't *love* the first line out of all the first lines we read together, in hindsight, it's a really good first line for the book. Thistle Grove is an essential part of the story and the way Emmy connects with the place develops as a theme throughout the book. So, well done Kalliope. I don't give books a star rating anymore, but if you're into romance and the Halloween aesthetic, then I think you'll like this book.

Thank you for coming with me on this journey, I hope you enjoyed the ride. If you want to listen to more episodes like this one, I'll have them linked in the show notes for you, and of course if you want to see what I'm reading in real time, you can follow me on Instagram @the\_community\_library. I'll chat to you next time. Bye!