

Transcript of Book Club Girl Podcast, Season 2

Episode 4: Susan Elizabeth Phillips on *When Stars Collide*

Bianca:

Welcome to the Book Club Girl podcast, where we chat about great books with awesome authors and you, our listeners get to ask the questions. I am Bianca Flores, and today we're talking about a book that is partially set in Chicago, which made me think of the upcoming novel *On Rotation* by Shirlene Obuobi, out on June 21st, which is really this, you know, instantly hilarious and lovable novel about a medical student who loses it all. I love this book and I just cannot wait for it to come out.

Tavia:

Yes. I actually interviewed that author for a bookseller event and this book sounds amazing. Yeah, it sounds so good. And Shirlene is also amazing. She is just so energetic and so ambitious really. I mean, this is definitely one to watch for. Yes. I'm Tavia Kowalchuk jumping in. And the book that I want to talk about that's set in Chicago, apart from *When Stars Collide* which we're going to get to later, is *The Kindest Lie* by Nancy Johnson. It came out in hardcover in February 2021 and is out now on paperback. And this is such a special book. It's a debut novel. And it's just one of those books that there's so many issues going on. Like it's the perfect book club book, like there's issues about race, There's issues about family there's issues of honesty and relationships. And there's so much happening. And there's like intergenerational friendships and relationships and deceptions. And, and it is set in Chicago and it's the main character lives in Chicago, but then she returns home to like her little sort of like blue collar town in the far suburbs out of Chicago. And it's, I mean, that setting is just so bleak and so convincing. Yeah. It's, it's a, it's got a really good regional feel to it, for sure.

Bianca:

Totally. I love that. You mentioned how much there is to discuss in that book. Because there is so much to discuss, definitely a perfect book club book and we just love Nancy Johnson. We are big fans of Nancy here.

Tavia:

<laugh> Yes we are.

Bianca:

So on today's show as Tavia mentioned, we'll discuss a romance between a Chicago Stars quarterback and one of the world's greatest opera singers and a major diva. Later in the show we'll be joined by *New York Times* bestselling author, Susan Elizabeth Phillips.

Tavia:

So Bianca, Mother's Day is coming up. So like, yes, I love honoring my mother. I honor her as much as I can all throughout the year. But you know, I have such strong memories of my mom reading. She really got me into reading. Is your mom a big reader?

Bianca:

She is, but she's so, so busy. Like I feel like any mom she's, you know, she's busy, but so she doesn't really have time. She should like sit down and lounge on the couch with a book. So what she does is listens to a lot of audiobooks, you know, as she's driving to work as she's coming back home, you know, doing all of that. But I am trying to get her, you know, to take some time and sit down and read some thrillers. She is a big watcher of thriller and crime TV shows like NCIS and, and all of that. She just like loves those. I'm like, Mom, those must be stressing you out. But she watches

them anyway. Yeah. Um, but I want her to sit down and actually read some thrillers. Like I want her to read some Peter Swanson very badly, so. So I really want her to do that,

Tavia:

I have these really strong memories of my mom when I was little or like in elementary school. She like would make dinner for us and she would be reading while she was cooking. So she'd be like stirring the pasta pot or the, or the red sauce. And she'd be reading her book over the pot. I also have memories of her like chopping vegetables and stopping to like lean over her book on the counter and like keep reading. And she used to always read science fiction. And then one of the first books that she read that I then read was *Clan of the Cave Bear*. This is like a major throwback and long time listeners will know I've talked about this before. And my mom also listens to audiobooks. She listens like while she's quilting and while she's cleaning and you know, like puttering around the house, she'll just have them on. And when she's driving too like your mom, my mom loves sort of contemporary romance. She is a huge Robin Carr fan. Massive.

Bianca:

I didn't know. Oh, that's so sweet. I, I really love the image of your mom reading over, you know, boiling pot of pasta. I just think that's so touching. I feel like that needs to be included in an actual novel.

Tavia:

<laugh> It's like one of the few things better than pasta. Reading <laugh> yes.

Bianca:

That's so true. Oh, I love that.

Tavia:

Onto our book today, we present to you *When Stars Collide*, abridged

Bianca:

Thaddeus Walker Bowman Owens is the backup quarterback for the Chicago Stars and is incredibly easy on the eyes. Olivia Shore is an international opera superstar and a driven diva with a passion for perfection. When the temperamental soprano and stubborn jock embark on a nationwide tour, promoting a luxury watch brand, they engage in soul searching and trash talk. Thad's protective streak comes out when Olivia faces trouble in the form of threatening letters, haunting photographs, and a series of dangerous encounters. Thad insists on Olivia never being alone, and they begin to spend their time off together, having breakfast, hiking, and hot tubbing. Inevitably the chemistry clicks between these two talented and attractive humans, and this romance novel is off to the races. The sexual tension gets the better of them. It seems even outsiders can sense it when a series of photographs start popping up in the gossip columns and they make a deal to consummate their attraction on the last night of their tour. But the threats against Olivia escalate and put the romantic evening in jeopardy. *When Stars Collide* is a rambunctious ride of will they or won't they and they play their dueling natures off of each other until the reader is left wondering how Thad and Olivia will ever reconcile their ambitions to find true love. So Tavia, what did you think of this book?

Tavia:

I so enjoyed returning to Susan Elizabeth Phillips's world of the Chicago Stars. It is really a true delight to enter back into her sort of sports romance series. And also there's a couple Cooper and Piper. They sort of have this sort of supporting role in the book and it was so great to have them return. I love that couple. I love Piper. I adore her. So I really enjoy that about the book. It sort of like a long time reader of, of Susan's.

Bianca:

Oh, I haven't read any of her previous books. I'm so jealous. You got, you know, that closer, more in depth read than I did, but I'm definitely going to go back and read some of the previous ones. One of the things that I think I really loved about this one is how it really, you know, at first seems like this great opposites attract story, but really, you know, as you're getting more into the book, I won't, you know, give away anything away, but you know, as you get more into the book, you really start to see how much they really have in common and how that really brings them together. Right? Like, you know, their ambition, their love for their careers, their, you know, star power. And it's really nice to see how it's really those elements, you know, that sparks the fire.

Tavia:

Yeah. I appreciated that as well. And it kind of dovetails into the tension that they each felt about compromising themselves and their careers. If they were going to get into a committed relationship like that was to me, like the primary tension, keeping them apart. And that was something that as a reader and as like a woman that I could relate to like, totally, where do I, like, how do you draw the line? Like at what point, do you not lose yourself to the relationship? I need to stand on my own two feet. I need to be my own person. You know, that I think a lot of thoughtful people struggle with that in relationship.

Bianca:

No, absolutely. And I feel like it was so especially realistic for them to have those concerns at the level that they were in their careers, you know, they're, you know, they're megastars in the space that they're in. So it makes total sense that they would have those concerns. And, you know, I think we can all feel that way, but I imagine it's just tenfold when you're like that famous and that successful and that, you know, glued into what you do totally. But it was like exactly, like we were saying, it was really nice to see such a strong heroin, like Olivia, you know, takes such pride in what she does. I definitely, I was like, I need to, you know, go to the opera and I need to, you know, know more about this. And I just felt like I was constantly rooting for her to get better and do better and, you know, continue being the amazing person she is.

Tavia:

<laugh> Me too. I do think that a hallmark of our podcast is that we read books with these really strong women in them.

Bianca:

Yes.

Tavia:

And you mentioned the opera piece of it and, and how that kept you reading. I am an opera dilettante. And so I really enjoyed the way that Susan wove those different classic opera stories into the book and how the storylines of the operas would reflect the storyline of the book. And, and then the details about the singer lifestyle. I learned stuff that right. You know, I didn't know because I am just a dilettante. So I really like that a lot. And I didn't feel like an opera dummy, you know, in no way was it ever presented as an exclusive thing?

Bianca:

Right. Totally. I feel like you and I need to go to the opera soon after this.

Tavia:

<laugh> Oh my gosh. I'll happily fly to San Francisco and go to the opera with you. I actually saw Madama Butterfly at the San Francisco Opera. So long ago in 1996.

Bianca:

Oh my goodness. I, I don't think I've ever gone to the opera, which is awful. I need to like go and get more culture in my life. I need to do this.

Tavia:

It was one of the, one of the operas that really got me hooked, because I just, it ripped my heart out. Oh my God.

Bianca:

Well I'll keep that in mind. Um, on another note, Tavia, I've got to talk about Thad's style. I loved his fashion and his style and the bold colors. I felt like it was such a fun addition to his character. And it's definitely something I wouldn't have, have expected, you know, from this jock character like him. And I feel like it made for really nice contrast against Olivia's moral stark and muted colors and her severe styling. It was really nice to see somebody like Thad, you know, really go out and be colorful and bold in what he does and what he wears.

Tavia:

Thad the peacock.

Bianca:

Yes. <laugh> So fun.

Tavia:

Well, Bianca here is to us going to an opera in San Francisco together one day.

Bianca:

Yes. One day. I love it. Cheers. <laugh>

Tavia:

We love hearing from our listeners. You can rate and review the podcast on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you're listening to this episode You can also participate in conversations about great books in the lively common section of our Instagram feed @bookclubgirl. And I invite you all to follow me on the gram @taviareads.

Bianca:

Today, we're joined by Susan Elizabeth Phillips whose book *When Stars Collide* is out now.

Tavia:

So Susan, welcome to the Book Club Girl podcast. It is such a pleasure to be talking with you again about one of your books.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Oh, I am so excited to be here. You guys have such a great podcast.

Tavia:

Well thank you. <laugh> Yay. Great podcast and a great author. It's a perfect match. So I'm going to jump right in and I am so excited because you know, it was such a pleasure for me to return to the world of Chicago Stars. I've read a bunch of these books in the past by you. And as we all know, some of your most popular books come from this Chicago Stars series, but for someone unlike me, who hasn't yet read your books, can you give us like a super quick rundown on the series and what reader should expect in one of the Chicago Stars novels.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

You shouldn't expect a lot of football. Let's start with that. <laugh> Um, I started playing around with the archetype of the athlete long before I knew that you weren't supposed to write about athletes. This was actually in the early 1980s with my book *Fancy Pants*, which was about, of all things, a pro golfer, the single most boring sport in the world. <laugh> But the Chicago Stars series, which was never supposed to be a series, started when I... I kept thinking about wouldn't it be hysterical if a woman who knew nothing about sports inherited a professional football team, it was just that. I didn't really have a story to go with it. I sort of sat at my computer and I wrote chapter one. And then I started thinking about what this would be. Well, this turned into the first book in the series, *It Had to Be You*, which was not my title. But what happened was in, in that book, a wide receiver out of Tella Rosa, Texas named Bobby Tom Denton walked in and he was so arrogant and I had to know more about him. So I thought, well, write the second book. And that was only supposed to be, you know, just a one off book. It just went on from there. So this is an unplanned series, which means that I never set up a chronology in the beginning, which has led to very inefficient writing habits, including going on Facebook to ask my readers about something in the books that I have forgotten instead of actually digging back and doing it themselves.

Tavia:

It's probably more efficient to ask the readers, honestly, Susan, because we remember the quirkiest parts of your book.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Hello, and why should I do all that work?

Tavia:

<laugh>

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

So I do, I do standalone books. I do Chicago stars books. I only do a stars book if I have a great idea. I think readers would like me to, to do more of those, but then the standalone do a really popular with readers too. So I just do what I want and hope that readers will love the books.

Tavia:

Well, it's working so far.

Bianca:

Yeah, exactly. It's working so far and I know they're loving it. It's my first Chicago Stars novel and I'm like, I need to go back and read them all. They're so good.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Each one of the books is a standalone book. I don't like to leave things hanging at the end of a book, but, but it is fun to see the characters and watch them evolve.

Tavia:

Oh my God. I loved the return of Cooper and Piper. I was so happy. The second I saw Coop's name, I was like, yes.

Bianca:

I was just going to say to, was mentioning how they popped back in and how fun that was for her. Yeah.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Yeah. This was in *When Stars Collide*, which was co Cooper and Piper are supporting characters in that.

Tavia:

<affirmative>

Bianca:

Mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah. Mm-hmm <affirmative> uh, I love it. All right. So let's get into the sports side of the story. Susan, a listener of ours, Maryanne wants to know, "Are you a football fan? And who is your favorite football team?"

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

I live in Chicago. <laugh> So it's Bears all the way, no matter how pitiful they are, of course. You know what? Other than being a hiker and a walker, I'm the most non-athletic person. Anything that involves a ball. And I'm a fair weather fan. I like watching games toward the end. I love like the AFC and NFC championship games, which were fabulous this year. And the SuperBowl was fabulous, but am I a die hard football fan or sports fan? No, sort of my philosophy is if you don't have to wear mascara to do it, I'm not really super interested. <laugh>

Bianca:

I love that.

Tavia:

That's an excellent rule of thumb. Oh my gosh. Speaking of having to wear mascara to do it. I loved all the opera details in this book. I am a total dilettante admittedly, but I loved the sort of breath work that you talked about and what what's the little greeting that opera singers say to each other, like break a leg. Is it

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Toy, toy,

Tavia:

Toy toy? Oh my God. I, I was like, I had never heard that. I absolutely love that. And so one of our listeners, Elizabeth has a question, which I'm also dying to know the answer to, "What inspired you to have Olivia be it opera singer?" I mean, this is just so cool.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

The idea writing about opera. And the only thing I knew about opera going into this book was there's certain arias that I really love, but I was going through my idea file trying to find an idea for a new book. And I opened a file and had two words in it: opera singer. And I just started to laugh. I thought opera singer football player. There you go, Susan. It's the kind of thing I love writing about the most, but I had to do a lot of research because it isn't a, a world that I'm really, really familiar with. And the research was really, really fun and interesting. It's just such an interesting art form.

Bianca:

You're listening to the Book Club Girl podcast where our guest this week is Susan Elizabeth Phillips, whose book *When Stars Collide* is out now. You can read more about Susan's books at bookclubgirl.com.

Tavia:

Coming up on the Book Club Girl podcast. We ask Susan about her affinity literary character. Don't go away.

Bianca:

This episode of the Book Clip Girl podcast is brought to you by our friends at the Inside Flap podcast.

Tavia:

Welcome back to the show. Each week, we bring you a fascinating new conversation with an author who's written a book we think is a great choice for book clubs to read together. Today, New York Times bestselling author. Susan Elizabeth Phillips is here with us answering questions about her romance novel *When Stars Collide*. So did part of your research surface this very nerdy... I think his name was Rupert who kept sending Olivia all of these crazy extravagant gifts. Was that like a figment of your imagination or is there a history of opera fans doing this?

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

It is a figment of my imagination and there's definitely a history of, of, you know, super fans in any kind of art form who just get completely carried away. But I did kind of love Rupert.

Bianca:

Oh my gosh.

Tavia:

I, I felt so bad for him when Thad was like, you better not. When he left the, the bodyguard phone call. <Laugh>

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Of all the books I've written, some books are a lot harder to write than others. Most of mine, I'm just a real whiny writer. And it takes me a long time to figure out where I'm going with the story. I have to say that *When Stars Collide* was one of the most fun books I've written. I think just because of any book where I have that real, you have those opposites -- really, really fun. And the sort of sex scene in that book was the one of the two or three most fun sex scenes I have ever written in my life. Otherwise, you know, I don't, if I can't make a love scene really fun, I tend not to write it or if I can't make it interesting, it has to reveal something about plot and character. And I got to admit, I sort of patted myself on the back after that one. I, I love that scene.

Tavia:

Oh my God, that scene was amazing. And I felt like it came later in the book than the normal? And it was like they were teasing each other. You were teasing their reader. We knew it was going to happen, but oh my God, you really made us wait for that one.

Bianca:

And when it came, it was just so rewarding. And it just so good. I can definitely tell---

Tavia:

No pun intended!

Bianca:

Tavia!

Bianca:

But I know what you mean, Susan, in terms of it being like a really fun book, you know, to write because it was a really fun book to read just in terms of like the adventure and the suspense too. And I love what you mentioned about the whole opposites attract element to this because I actually go into my next question for you. Because one of the things I love most about it was, you know, how on the surface, it really does seem like an, an opposites attract story, which is true. But as you read more of the book and as you get more into the heads of these characters, you know, we find out that they have a lot more in common, um, and that they're truly, you know, more alike than we think. Um, so I'd love for you to discuss their dynamic and what you think they bring out in each other,

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Oh my gosh, this means I'm going to have to talk about my marriage. <laugh>, I'm married to an electrical engineer and he is sort of a super electrical engineer. When you think about that personality type, that's who he is. If you remember the old Myers-Briggs personality profile, Bill was on is on one end of the spectrum. And I'm as far as you can get to the other. And I've thought about this a lot because we honestly don't have a lot of common interests. Our common interests are our families, but what we do have is we have the same moral and ethical outlook on life. We have the same belief in being kind to people. And I with opposites attract that has to be at the bedrock of, of that relationship. They have to have the same moral principles and ethical outlook. And I think that's why you can take really, really different personality types and make them work because, you know, we made it work for 50 years. So I figure that, uh, that some of my heroes and heroines can make it work too. I, I just find that really interesting, that idea of couples who are not very similar, who don't have the same interests, but yet have a long and loving relationship.

Bianca:

Oh, my parents are very different from each other. So I, I feel like I, I know exactly what you're talking about. <laugh> On another note, Susan, I can tell you put a lot of emphasis on the fashion of your characters. That's definitely something that stood out to me with Thad and his, you know, both, both style and the colors and everything. So I've got to ask, can you tell us about how you use fashion to portray the personalities of your characters?

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

I have used fashion to show characters since early on in my career. What we wear says something about us and it's a shorthand you can say, instead of saying somebody, oh, she has a careless attitude. You can show that instead by what she's wearing. And it's just, it's writer's shorthand. I really need to know what my characters are wearing before I know who they are. You know, I tend to dress like a, I would say a medium high-end realtor. That is my dress code. Right? <laugh> Chiccos. What does that say about me? I mean, I'm a Midwestern woman. Uh, so I think that those things are always kind of interesting what we wear.

Tavia:

I don't know. I think we all need to get a pass on that during the pandemic, because I feel like the way I dress in my home when I'm working from home is not how, how I would represent myself.

Bianca:

<laugh> Totally.

Tavia:

So you are known in the writing community for having invented the sports romance genre. However, there isn't really a however, but word on the street is that this may be your last book in the Chicago Stars series. So we sort of talked to touch on this earlier. Can you confirm or deny?

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Oh, I totally deny because I'm about 300 pages into another Chicago Stars book.

Tavia:

<laugh>

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

And the only thing I'm going to say about this book now, because it's still such a mess. I cannot even tell you, I won't let my editor see it yet because it would just horrify her. Um, but at this point, this is going to be a book about Clint

Garrett's sister, because I started thinking about what is it like to grow up in the shadow of a sibling who does everything brilliantly? And you're kind of a screw up.

Tavia:

I should ask my brother about that. <laugh>.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

You should!

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

So that is, that's kind of where I am right now. And if all goes well and Clint tells me his story, then I'll be able to do his book, but I'm not going to do it if I can't do justice to it. So I'm not, I'm not done with the Stars yet.

Tavia:

I love the proposition of the sister growing up in the shadow of her brother. I just, I really love that proposition. I think it's going to make for a very tension filled and steamy romance. However, it turns out.

Bianca:

Totally. We need more Clint. So <laugh> I think that's good. <laugh> Susan, we have one final question for you. In every episode we ask our guests, if you could be any character from any novel, who would you be?

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Okay. You told me this before we started to tape that I needed to, uh, answer this question. And I was horrified by the question. <laugh> Fine. Question to ask somebody who's only read like 10 books in their life. I have, I have no answer to this. I have no answer clever. I have answer thoughtful. I mean, I want to be a pirate. Whoever a pirate hero is. No, I don't be that because I don't really want to hurt people. And I don't want to be a ditzy heroin who does stupid things because that just drives me crazy. I'm I'm going to ponder this and maybe next year something I'll do a Facebook post about it, but I don't know.

Bianca:

Yes, tag us.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Did you, how did you guys answer that question? You, you go around blindly asking it. Did you have an answer yourself?

Tavia:

Oh, we answer on the last episode of the season, we reveal our answer. So we have about the whole season to figure it out. <Laugh>

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Oh!

Bianca:

It's the it's you know, the, the upside to being a co-host to decide when we, the timing for ourselves.

Tavia:

Yeah. Dealer's choice.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

I wish we had more than a half hour because I have so many questions. I wanna ask you guys and see how much information I can wheedle out of you about some of the podcasts, but alas, I don't think we have the time and you're lucky because these would be really, really piercing questions that would put you on the spot.

Tavia:

My, oh my, yeah. There's a lot. There's a lot that goes on the cutting room floor of our podcast. So Susan, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. It has been such a treat to spend time with you hearing about Olivia and Thad and you know, the future of the Chicago Stars. So thank you so much.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips:

Oh, thank you. I love talking about books and I love talking with smart readers. So I really am so happy. I got to talk with you all.

Tavia:

Thank you.

Bianca:

Thank you. That was New York Times bestselling author, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, whose book *When Stars Collide* is out now to find out more about *When Stars Collide* and Susan's other bestselling novels, head to bookclubgirl.com/podcast, where you can also find links to everything mentioned in this episode.

Tavia:

Like what you heard? Subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, wherever you get your podcast. And while you're there, give us a rating and leave a review. Another way to help spread the word about the Book Club Girl podcast -- because you know you want to -- is to tell a friend. It really helps others to find us.

Bianca:

You'll hear from us again next week where we'll be speaking with Jenny Colgan author of the charming novel, *The Bookshop on the Corner*. If you want to read the book before its podcast drops, head over to hc.com and use promo code BOOKCLUBGIRL for 25% off and free shipping for any book discussed on this podcast.

Tavia:

That's a good deal I'm going to do that. We love hearing from our listeners, email us at the girls at book club girl dot com, or post in the comments on our Instagram feed @bookclubgirl. You can also leave us a voicemail. Our number is 2 1 2 2 0 7 7 3 3 6. I know it's so retro, but we love it. Your voicemail or email could very well end up being read on the show.

Bianca:

Before we go. We'd like to thank Caroline Kwash of The Hanger Studios who produced today's episode, and Rich Serbini and Aliyah Jackson our excellent engineers at Hangar Studios .

Tavia:

Until next time I'm Tavia

Bianca:

And I'm Bianca

Tavia:

Happy reading.