

One Last Stop Transcript

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Lizzie: My name is Lizzie and my pronouns are she/her.

Amber: And my name is Amber and my pronouns are also she/her. Kasey McQuiston is a New York Times bestselling author of romantic comedies and a pie enthusiast. She writes stories about smart people with bad manners falling in love. Born and raised in southern Louisiana, she now lives in New York City with her poodle mix, personal assistant Pepper.

L: (Synopsis) For cynical 23-year-old August, moving to New York City is supposed to prove her right, that things like magic and cinematic love stories don't exist, and the only smart way to go through life is alone. She can't imagine how anything could possibly change that. But then there's this gorgeous girl on the train, Jane. August's subway crush becomes the best part of her day, but pretty soon she discovers there's one big problem. Jane doesn't just look like an old-school punk rocker. She's literally displaced in time from the 1970s, and August is gonna have to use everything she tried to leave in her own past to help her. *One Last Stop* is a magical, sexy, big-hearted romance where the impossible becomes possible, as August does everything in her power to save the girl lost in time.

A: Other important characters include August's roommates, Myla, Nico, and Wes, co-workers at Pancake Billy's House of Pancakes, Lucy, Winfield, and Jerry, and an accountant by day drag queen named Isaiah, drag name Annie Depressant, as well as August's mom.

L: Some content warnings for this book are mentions of police violence, racism, and homophobia. Okay, Amber, first impressions.

A: So I love this book. I read it when it first came out last year, and then I read it three more times, including this one, so this is my fourth read-through.

L: Oh my gosh!

A: It makes me so happy. It's just, it's really sweet. There are parts that are just so tender. There are parts that are just, like, very spicy. And, like, just, Casey McQuiston just has a way of writing that just portrays queer love in a way that I really love. And this book specifically also has this, like, soft sci-fi feel to it, which is just so nice. It's very much a comfort read.

L: Yeah, for sure. I loved it as well. This was my first time reading it. I had read *Red, White, and Royal Blue*, her first book, last year, and I loved that one. And then I wanted to read this one. It was on my TBR, but, you know, school and stuff. So I was really excited to be assigned it for "Reading the Rainbow." Yeah, I loved it as well. It was definitely very cozy, but, like, not in, like, a predictable way. I don't typically read cozy, because maybe, I don't know, because I don't read them, but I find them to be a little predictable, but I didn't think this one was. And it's queer, and it's great, and yeah, I definitely loved it as well. And yeah, Casey McQuiston does write queer love and queer relationships in, like, a special, she's got a special sauce, and I want to mix it into all my reading pasta.

A: Exactly.

L: Casey McQuiston, use that as a pull quote for your next book on the cover.

A: It's perfect. Perfect promotion. So one of the, obviously, central points of this book is queer love and queer relationships. What I love about this, and her other books as well, but in this book, it is about a romance between August and Jane, but so much of the book is also about her relationships with other queer people, her friendships, her roommates. It's just, it's so good. It just makes me really happy. Her relationship with her roommates is just so...I'm trying to think of the best word for it. There's a kind of, like, closeness you can have with other queer people, that's really difficult to achieve with people who don't understand that kind of experience. And I think that's portrayed really well in this book.

A: Yeah, absolutely, for sure. I loved to see it. Definitely now, we're getting more and more queer characters, just like in media and life, but just to constantly see different kinds of queer characters and with different backgrounds and with different interests and stuff. Myla was a sculptor, but she had an engineering background. Not that queer people don't normally, but I mean, it's just a different thing. They were all so weird and unique, and it was great. And then, of course, we got the drag scene in there with Miss Annie Depressant, which is a fantastic, fantastic name. It was really good. And I love found family. That's one of my favorite tropes. So it has a really strong found family, but also it doesn't, like, disregard your biological family. That was really good because Jane talked about her family at home, and then August had that relationship with her mother that she related to Wes, and Wes's relationship with his family. It was really good to be like, they're both important, because I think sometimes found family can be like, "this is your only family, and the only one that matters." And this one had a really healthy mix of like, here's people you find, but also here's how to make it in the different kinds of relationships with your home family, your related family.

A: Yeah, because I think, as you mentioned, it's portrayed in a lot of, especially queer literature, found family is portrayed as the only family. But I think a more, I'm not going to say more realistic, because everyone's experiences are different. But I think for most of us, there probably is a little bit of a mix. I think you're right. That was portrayed really, really well here. And I also like the different kinds of blood relationships that were there. With August, her mom was like her only family for a long time. And that shaped a lot of who she became as a person. For Jane, her relationship with her family is a lot more complicated, because she loves her family and she misses her family. But she also wants to protect herself and them in a way. And she's, especially closer to the end of the book, trying to navigate how to do that, how to still have a relationship with her family, while not hurting them or hurting herself more in the process.

L: So the book also deals with queer joy, but also difficult parts of LGBTQ+ history, such as being queer in the 1970s and a little bit into the AIDS epidemic. And especially being, like, a queer woman and being a lesbian Asian from Jane's point of view. And then it was really interesting to see that compared with how she sees queer people today. Because she said she'll see queer couples on the train holding hands. And she's like, "I couldn't even imagine that in the 70s." Like they can hold hands and most of the time nobody cares or like says anything to them. But you couldn't do that. I mean, like if you held hands with your partner, you got harassed. So I thought that was really interesting.

A: No, I think that's really, I mean, it is interesting. I think it's like really good to mention though, because I think, especially in the last like 10 years, so much more normalized to just see queer people out living their best lives. And like there are people who are still going to be awful, but it's a lot, it's a lot more accepted. It's a lot more public. So I think it's easy to forget that that's a really new thing. And Casey McQuiston's books are great because it's always a positive thing. But yeah, it's important to remember how we got here. The 70s were a huge time. I mean, obviously the AIDS epidemic was starting and that,

that seriously impacted just like the landscape of queer people just existing. There are so many people who died during that and it's not taught very widely. I think a lot of queer people who spend time on the internet probably have learned about it, either through like passing or active research, but it's not something that's widely taught. It was also a time where queer liberation was huge. And I don't think a lot of the freedoms that we have now would exist if those people back then, like Jane does when she's talking about her past, without those people doing that. So, I think it's a really interesting contrast that this book provides of like getting that sort of window into queer history, while also getting to kind of celebrate the way that queer people get to exist today, especially with the drag shows and the parties that are just full of those people just living their best lives and just enjoying their youth and their queerness without having to worry about the things that Jane would have had to worry about.

L: And then on the reverse side of that, I guess is what you started to allude to is the queer joy that we experience in the book. I mean, like the big parties that they go to, not that they go to a lot of parties, but like the parties that they have and they go to are so joyous. And I'm like, I want to go. I want to go to that. And I don't like things like that. Like I don't like big parties because I get nervous, but I'm like, wow, that sounds so fun. And like just partying. There is, I got to reference Parks and Rec and everything I do, but an episode of Parks and Rec, Leslie's at a gay bar and she says, you know, "what's so great about tonight is everyone is who they are and who they are is just stone cold gay."

A: (laughing) Yeah, exactly.

L: It's just like, that's, that's what it is. I loved it. And I love like getting to see the queer joy through Jane's eyes of like, man, it's great here. Like you get to hold hands and you get to just like wear your pride pins and you get to live. And this is what we've worked for is just so you can be queer out in the world and go to your drag shows.

A: That drag show sounded like so much fun.

L: I know. I was like, I've never been to one, but I want to go to one and I want to go to that one.

A: I recommend.

L: I want to see Antidepressant and I want to eat pancakes.

A: That's, honestly, that sounds like the perfect combo. I went to one that was Halloween themed once and it was the best thing. There were a lot of people and it was very crowded and anxiety-inducing, but the drag show was incredible.

L: That's awesome.

A: So that's, that's what I was thinking of whenever I read about the drag shows and Antidepressant, I'm like, she would have loved that.

L: Yeah. And I loved when they were at the parties in August would be like, Jane would love this. She was like, I don't just want her here because I want her here and I love her. She was like, I want her here because she would just thrive. Like because I heard about her stories, protesting and being in violent situations to get here and then like to have the party and like she would just love this and this is what she would do. And I just like, I was so sweet. I love Jane. Sometimes when I read books like this, I get sad because I'll never meet these people because they don't exist in real life.

A: Yeah!

L: Versions of them do, right? But like also.

A: Jane. I love Jane.

L: Same. Cozy science fiction fantasy. That's micro genres.

A: Yeah.

L: And I'm like, this is a new favorite genre of mine. Like I already like science fiction and fantasy, but like to like put some cozy in it.

A: It's so interesting because I don't think I'd ever come across it until much more recently, but like this book and books by like TJ Klune and then there's all sorts of, I mean, when we were putting together the list for Reading the Rainbow, all sorts of titles came up where it was like they run a bakery and their bakery is magic and they are gay. I'm like, oh, what a great synopsis.

L: That's all I need!

A: Exactly! And so, it seems like a newer type of genre. I might be slightly biased because this tends to be the kind of books I read, but they all seem queer. I'm sure there are some out there in sort of soft sci-fi that are not, but it seems to be a very popular genre for queer lit. It's like it's sci-fi, but it's like kind of low stakes sci-fi.

L: Yeah, you're not having like all the time big intergalactic battles for the fate of the universe. It's just love and stuff and whatever. Stakes that are smaller, but also, I mean, obviously big to the people in them and it's good stuff. I love it. And then another big theme in this book is being a young adult in a transitional phase of life. August is, she's like 23 and she's in her senior year of college, but she's been in college for a little, maybe just like a year longer than normal because she keeps transferring schools and changing her major. She's a little bit freaked out about what happens after that, which is not an impulse I relate to. I want to be done with school as soon as possible. I graduated early. I'm doing my master's degree while working and I'm ready to be done with it. But I get also not being like, I don't know what to do next. Like, I don't know how do I live without like this structure and who am I outside of this? And so that's like a big theme that she goes through, which I think is really interesting to see. And she's, you know, working as a waitress. Her friends are working kind of more gig jobs, almost. Not all of them, but some of them. And it's just like, what, what do I do? How do I live?

A: Yeah, I found that extremely relatable. I immediately went into grad school after undergrad. But then when I was coming towards the end of grad school, I was like, what am I going to do with my life now? Because like, that's so many years of your life where you know what comes next. And then you're like, I'm sort of like out in the world and no one's telling me what I need to do next. And I have to make decisions for my life and who I'm going to be. And like, it's very scary. My initial solution was to go on an archaeological dig, which was a great time for me. It was great. It had nothing to do with either my degree nor what I wanted to do afterwards. But, you know, sometimes you have to just delay life for a little while.

L: Sometimes you got to go on an archaeological dig.

A: Sometimes you do. I liked that it showed a very realistic, well, as realistic as you can get when somebody's stuck on a train. A realistic, like, experience of the realizing that you're almost done. You have to figure out what's next. And then, like you said, towards the end of it, figuring out what you're

good at and what you can apply your skills to. I think this sort of, I want to say it kind of applies to Jane as well, even though her experience was very different. Because for her, she sort of went off into the unknown without much preparation. Which is such an interesting, like, dichotomy between these two characters. Because August is freaking out about what comes next after years of structure. And Jane was just like, “well, we’re just going to toss a coin and see what happens.”

L: Yeah. I mean, Jane is, you cannot get more transitional than what Jane’s in. I mean, she’s just stuck on a train. Which, I don’t know if that’s a metaphor intentionally for, like, in being stuck in a transitional phase. But yeah, and she was just kind of chill about it. She didn’t really think about, I mean, like, I guess her time before August is a little fuzzy. She doesn’t really think about her situation. Even when August tries to bring it up, Jane’s like, “whatever happens, happens,” I guess, you know. And August is like, “no, I have to know what’s going on at every second of every day. And I have got different notebooks that are color coordinated. And they’ve all got lists. And if I don’t have that, what am I?” Jane’s like, “chill, baby,” you know. So, yeah, you’re right. I didn’t think about how dichotomous they are. But yeah. Jane, she’s kind of hot.

A: She very much is.

L: But also, I liked Wes a lot. I think Wes, I like Wes so much because he reminds me of a character from a different series I really like. I mean, they’re all good. Oh, we haven’t even talked about Billy’s—

A: Oh my gosh, we haven’t!

L: —Pancake Place. Yeah, August works at Billy’s Pancake whatever.

A: Pancake Billy’s House of Pancakes.

L: Pancake Billy’s House of Pancakes. There it is. Which is a fantastic name. And I thought it was very funny because they were all very invested. And I get being invested in Billy’s as like a cultural thing. And like, we have to fight against gentrification. And like, this is a cultural, historical, almost like important to the area thing. But also, I think about my time as a waitress. And I was like, “I wanted that building to burn down every day.” Like, so if they were like, this building is closing. I’d have been like, how can I speed that up? Not like, how can I raise money for this? So I thought that was really interesting. Like, I was also like jealous. Because I was like, oh, like, that would be really nice to have such a something you just.

A: Functionally, I don’t think there was ever any like actual like magic or sci-fi in Billy’s. But they always talked about it like there was some kind of magic there. Which I just, it’s so nice.

L: Yeah. It also made me want pancakes. Every time they were like.

A: Oh my gosh, yes. You smell like pancakes. I never smelled like pancakes. And I worked in a breakfast diner. I smelled like ranch and onions, maybe some syrup. But they were like, August always smells like pancakes. I’m like, “I wish that were me.”

[laughter]

A: See, I never worked in a diner. I worked in a cafe. And I think it really has to do with like the people you’re with. Because that was probably the most fun I’ve ever had at a job. When you find like people who you just like being around. That makes the work a little bit, sounds so corny—“It makes it feel a little magical.”

L: Yeah, I guess that's true. Every day I hated being a server. It was a trial. But that was good. And then those people just ended up being queer. They were just like, oh yeah. I was like, oh yeah, of course. Just like casually. I loved it.

A: I think queer people subconsciously attract other queer people.

L: This is true. In *Cemetery Boys*, which I read, but not for the podcast. They say queer people are like wolves. They travel in packs.

A: Yes. 100%. That is true.

L: Yeah. And that's not even a quote from this book. I'm sorry. [laughter] Listeners, go listen to our *Cemetery Boys* episode from last season.

A: It is true though, everyone in this book is just—

L: who they are.

A: Yeah!

L: And who they are is stone cold gay. [inaudible] All the things at the beginning of each chapter, the like social media posts or the Craigslist ads. Those were cool.

A: I love those. My understanding is that those are like part of August's investigation of Jane.

L: Yeah.

A: Which out of context sounds a little bit stalkery, but I promise it's not to those. Read the book. For context, at the beginning of each chapter, there's a snippet of like a Craigslist post or an article or something where Jane is, is in the, like in some of the pictures where Jane's in the background or where somebody mentions somebody that fits Jane's description and they range in date. And it's so cool. You get to see a little bit of August's research. Yeah.

L: They're like missed connections.

A: Yeah.

L: People finding Jane, seeing Jane and experiencing her. It's very cool. When August would bring her food to try or like music to listen to. And I thought that was really sweet.

A: Yeah. The things, the way memory comes up in this book is really interesting. And like the triggers for memory, which as you mentioned, there's food triggers and songs that bring up memories. It's really interesting in exploring memories and how they've shaped her. I know one thing that comes up a few times for August is she's from New Orleans. So she brings up Hurricane Katrina a couple of times and how both the event itself and like the memories of the event have helped shape her as a person. I just think that's really interesting how that in this book, memories and their influence are, are just important, I guess.

L: Yeah. It was really cool. I forgot about her talking about Katrina. I guess Casey McQuiston must've gone through Katrina cause she's from New Orleans.

A: Yeah. I know she's mentioned in interviews that elements of her books are at least partially influenced by things she experienced. I can't, I mean, obviously I can't guarantee that this one's one of them, but.

L: Final thoughts, 10 out of 10, very gay, cozy, good vibes. Read it, check it out.

A: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. I mean, like I said at the beginning, I love this book. This is the fourth time I've read it. I probably will read it again. It's just so good. The audio book is incredible. Just reading the hard copy is incredible. No matter how many times I go through it, I still cry at parts. I'm still just like full of warm and fuzzies at other parts. It's just a good book. Highly recommend.

L: It really is. Absolutely.

A: That wraps up our discussion of *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston and concludes season two of "Reading the Rainbow." We'll see you soon for season three.

This has been Reading the Rainbow, a Dauphin County Library System podcast for books by and about the LGBTQ+ community. If you enjoyed this podcast, please follow us for new book discussions. And if we've piqued your interest in this episode's selection, consider borrowing it from your local library. Thanks for listening!