

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 8: Scary Stories

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hi, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a reader's advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library! I'm Rachel.

Melody: And I'm Melody.

Rachel: And today we are going to be talking about spooky stories! So, disclaimer: If you get scared easily or don't like the horror genre, turn us off now. We won't be offended. (laughs)

Melody: Go to a different episode. Don't turn us off. (laughs)

Rachel: We also have three special guests joining us from the North Shore Library in Glendale! Welcome Alyssa.

Alyssa: Hi!

Rachel: Sam.

Sam: Hi!

Rachel: And Lizzie!

Lizzie! Hi!

Melody: Hi, guys! We're so happy to have you. Welcome.

Lizzie: Thanks for having us.

Alyssa: Thanks!

Melody: So, I actually know Alyssa and Sam. We used to work together at the North Shore Library, and Lizzie you're there now. So they're...they're coming to us from the North Shore Library. We're doing a co-library podcast. And Sam is no longer at the North Shore Library—you just started a new job in the Franklin Public Library.

Sam: Correct, yeah, Franklin Public.

Rachel: A lot of changes.

Melody: Yes, but...so, we used to be part of a podcast—which is still at North Shore Library—called Book Chat, and I used to record with Alyssa and Sam. And so, doing that—when I started this job at Oak Creek—inspired me to start this podcast, so thank you guys. (laughs) So, do you guys want to tell us a little about yourselves just to give us a background, let us know who you are? Alyssa?

Alyssa: Sure, yeah, I will go first. So, I'm now the Assistant Director at the north Shore Library. I started out as a children's librarian. So, I've been at the North Shore Library for about five years now, and this year I switched roles, so it's been interesting seeing how much my job has changed, and it's been fun to

interact with patrons in a different way than I was before but still seeing a lot of, like, families I got to see before and things like that. Yeah, so I have a lot of eclectic reading tastes, if you want to jump into that. So, I do not read, like, one genre. I used to read a lot of YA, but I also like kind of psychological thrillers. So, that's as far as I usually get into the horror genre. I am a huge scaredy-pants. Like, I cannot watch a scary movie without having to watch, like, a palate cleanser afterwards, like a Disney movie, or I will not be able to sleep! And I will probably run up the stairs as fast as I can (laughs) after watching it. So, yeah. So, psychological thrillers is, like, as spooky as I get.

Melody: Okay, so I remember you had a book recommendation for me, and I was wondering if it was going to fit with this episode?

Alyssa: (gasps) Oooh!

Melody: It's that young adult book set in the Civil War era, but it's an alternate timeline history.

Alyssa: (gasps) Yes! "Dread Nation?"

Melody: Yes.

Alyssa: Absolutely, yes.

Melody: And would that fit? Is that horror?

Alyssa: I think so. So, it is a historical fiction alternate history of Civil War era. If all of the dead came back to life as what they call—I think—"shamblers"? So, it is, like, a zombie meets Civil War, which is really intriguing given how many people died during the Civil War. I think it's the largest death count of any war in U.S. history. So, that kind of, like, adds this other element to it, and then there's a lot of, like, social justice talked about and how reforms did or did not change based on their new impending doom. You know, and they also talk about the Native American population and how what sort of expansion is encroaching on those territories and that kind of...that deals with it. So, yeah, I think it definitely would fit. It's...but it's, like, my type of horror. Like, it's very gentle. (laughs)

Melody: That's what I felt, too. I was going to try and read it for this podcast, but I just...

Alyssa: Yeah, that would be a great one. I've also been really obsessed with historical fiction recently, so I've been reading a ton of it. I'm not sure why, but...

Melody: We talked about narrative nonfiction in our last episode, so that was really fun.

Rachel: Mhm. It's a good genre.

Melody: Lizzie, do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Lizzie: Yeah, absolutely. So, I am Lizzie. I'm the head of Youth Services at the North Shore Library. I have been a children's librarian for a long time. I've been working with kids in libraries for, like, a little over 10 years, I think. So...but always have worked with kids in some way, so now I get to talk to them about books and their homework and slime and fun stuff.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: So...and my...I'm sort of the opposite of Alyssa in that my favorite genre is anything, like, spooky, anything with horror, anything with some sort of weird ghost or, you know, haunted places. I have always really liked that genre. I remember my mom said when I was just, like, a toddler, preschooler, my favorite movie was "Beetlejuice," and I would just watch it every single day. I'm the type of person who, you know, when I'm feeling kind of down and I need a pick-me-up, I, like, watch some sort of horror movie.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: And then that puts me in a better mood.

Melody: That's completely foreign to me. (laughs)

Lizzie: (laughs) Yeah, I, you know, try to watch and read as much as I can, but because I'm a children's librarian—I work with teens as well—I read a lot of the books for kids that deal with, you know, suspense, thrillers, mysteries, horror... And yeah, when a kid comes up to me and says they want something I, like, slam my hands down on the table and am like, 'Do you really want something spooky? Because I know it'. And yeah, and so this is perfect, because this is my favorite time of year, as well. I call it the 'spooky season'. It's, you know, foggy right now, it's perfect.

Melody: Yeah, it is. It's very ominous outside.

Lizzie: So yeah, I love anything...anything spooky.

Alyssa: I usually read, like, one spooky story a year, and it's always this time, so this is perfect, because I'm like, this fits in!

Melody: Pretty appropriate.

Lizzie: Well, I've noticed that most—at least for kids and teens, like, the most mainstream...and this is just my own observations. I have no idea if this is actually true. But that most, like, good horror books come out during this time of year. They kind of time it right, so I make a big list every October and then I try to read them all year long. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, that's cool. Sam, do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Sam: Sure, yeah. So, I am...I just started a new job at the Franklin Public Library. I'm an adult reference librarian, and my emphasis there is just kind of working with technology and doing technology instruction as well as kind of troubleshooting. So, I worked at the North Shore Library the last couple of years, and I worked at a couple other places in Milwaukee County within the last—about—four years. My reading...most people would describe it as probably boring?

Everyone: (laughs)

Sam: I was an English literature major, so I really like literary fiction, which a lot of people don't really dig. But I also like science fiction, fantasy, thrillers, mystery, I...I'll read anything as long as it grabs me. I love listening to audiobooks. That's, like, my thing. I always have one downloaded through either Hoopla or Libby and...just always listening to something. Yeah, I don't know. I just...yeah, there's really not a book that I'll turn down just based on genre, it's more so if I'm not kind of getting into it within the first, like, 30, 50 pages or so.

Melody: How long do you usually last for an audiobook? Because sometimes, you know, you get a bad narrator or it's just not grabbing you.

Sam: Yeah, I try to give it at least an hour of listening, but if the narrator's really bad or if something just, like, totally turns me off I'll...I have no problem getting rid of it as soon as I kind of determine. But I try to give it a chance to really get into the story proper and get rolling.

Melody: I know you're an advocate of giving up on books, right?

Sam: Yes. Yeah. A lot of people would probably gasp when they hear that, but there are only so many books you can read or listen to in your life, and don't waste it on bad books! (laughs)

Melody: Or just might not be the right time for you to read that book.

Sam: Right, and I shouldn't say 'bad books', but books maybe you don't like or it's maybe not your style, but there's no reason suffering through a book that you don't enjoy when you could pick something else up that you do enjoy.

Rachel: I could get behind that.

Melody: Do you read horror often, Sam?

Sam: Not super often. It's not one of those genres that I kind of seek out. It's something that I feel like I kind of come across and kind of realize that it's a spooky story or a horror book after I've started reading it, but that's not necessarily why I went and picked that book out.

Melody: Got'cha, but do you enjoy them? That's the other question.

Sam: I do enjoy them. Yeah, yeah I definitely enjoy them. I enjoy reading scary books more than I like watching scary movies. It's, like, less real. There's, like, a disconnect.

Rachel: Because it's at your own pace.

Sam: It's at my own pace.

Melody: You can put the book in the freezer if you need to.

Everyone: (laughs)

Sam: Yes, yes.

Melody: Rachel, do you like reading scary books?

Rachel: I do a lot more now than I used to. When I was younger I could pretty much only handle "Goosebumps" and "Are You Afraid of the Dark?". Classic, Universal black and white monsters, you know? But I've tried to build up a resistance to horror as a genre by listening to horror anthology podcasts. I don't know how successful that's been, but I've tried. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, okay. I'm not a...I don't usually go to horror books, either, but I actually—reading for this episode—found myself enjoying some of them, so I think I might try to dive in more, especially during this spooky season. All right, so Lizzie, do you want to start off by telling us about your book?

Lizzie: Sure, so my book is called “The Invited” by Jennifer McMahon, who I just realized I’ve been calling Jennifer McManon, but there’s not a second ‘n’ in her name, so. (laughs)

Melody: I thought it was Jennifer McMahone?

Lizzie: McMahone. It probably is.

Melody: I don’t know, though. It’s just my guess.

Lizzie: Yeah, well, I’m embarrassed to say she is, like, my favorite adult author.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: And I’ve never learned how to pronounce her name, so I...

Melody: You just call her ‘Jen’.

Lizzie: Yeah, I...and so I’ve read—I believe I’ve read—all of her books, but this one is her latest book. It is called “The Invited,” and I have to stop myself from saying ‘the uninvited’ because it’s sort of different. They’re not uninvited. They are invited. And it takes place in, you know, the northeast in sort of a rural area, and this couple buys some land to build a house themselves on the land kind of out in the middle of nowhere. They buy a bunch of land, and on this land there is a bog. And I don’t know if you guys know anything about bogs, but they are just inherently creepy.

Alyssa: I was in Ireland this spring, and there’s lots of bogs there. A lot of, like, spooky things, like the bog people or the bogman, they have, like, people who are preserved in bogs.

Rachel: Do you mean the ‘bog-y man’?

Everyone: (laughs)

Rachel: I’m so sorry.

Lizzie: Years and years ago there was a traveling exhibit at the Milwaukee Public Museum about mummies, and it’s the best exhibit they’ve ever had. In my...one person’s opinion. (laughs) And they had...they brought the mummies there, and they had a bunch of bog mummies, and I feel like that, like, creeped me to the bone. That these people were not preserved on purpose but, like, fell into the bog and then were preserved, and ever since then I’m like, ‘Oh, bogs!’

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: They are creepy!

Rachel: And that’s only the bodies they’ve found. Imagine how many more there are!

Lizzie: Right? Right? Yeah, so it has a lot to do with this bog. Like a lot of her books, it’s told by multiple peoples’ point of view. So, it’s told by the main character who’s building this house, it’s told by a child who lives on the edge of the bog who is really...becomes obsessed with the bog because the other character—Hattie—who, you know, is a character from the past, was supposedly a witch who buried her treasure somewhere in the bog, and so this child’s obsessed with finding it because she’s got a lot of things happening in her home life she thinks it will solve. And, you know, all these characters sort of intersect. Two actually in person, one maybe in spirit. (laughs) And, you know, I like it because the main

character becomes really obsessed with the history of the area and the history of Hattie, this bog witch—maybe—and yeah, it’s really spooky, and a lot of things are happening, and a lot of, like...a lot of her books you don’t know if it’s, like, something supernatural or something, like, easily explained. People might be playing tricks on them or grabbing different things from them and then trying to scare them away. Or maybe it’s a spirit trying to scare them away. So...so, yeah. It’s a really interesting read. It took me, like, two days to read it. I stayed up super late at night to finish it, and I just...I really...I really liked it. I enjoy all of her books, but I thought this one was a really...a really great read and a good...the twist is, you know, that the main character is trying to get Hattie or whoever to, like, come in and show herself. Like, she’s trying to kind of connect with this ghost or this witch or whatever and, you know, it’s a lot less like, ‘Oh, I’m afraid of this thing. Get out of here!’ and more just like, ‘Come in. I want to hear your story’, so. It doesn’t make it any less spooky, though.

Sam: So, how spooky is it on a scale of, like, not spooky at all to checking under your bed and sleeping with the lights on?

Lizzie: See, and that is hard. I feel like my scale is going to be different to a lot of people.

Sam: That’s okay.

Lizzie: Because I would say it’s about halfway.

Alyssa: So, for me, all the lights on in the house when I go to bed?

Lizzie: Yeah, it’s a good...I mean, it’s one of those, too, that just has a really good revealing story about all the characters. Like, it’s really kind of character-driven, and so, if you don’t focus on the spooky stuff it’s really not that spooky. It’s just some people who happen to live near a bog.

Melody: Just ignore the ghost in the corner.

Lizzie: Yeah, right?

Alyssa: I should read it and then be able to judge, like, okay. This is, like...this is Lizzie’s spectrum.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: I would say it’s about medium spooky.

Melody: Okay, so I actually read two short stories for this podcast episode. I’ve never...I hate to say this, but I’ve never read a Stephen King book.

Rachel: (gasps)

Sam: Mm.

Alyssa: I hadn’t until recently—one of his newer, like, short story collections.

Melody: Yeah, so I read “Stationary Bike” by Stephen King. I actually listened to the audio. I was limited on time, so I just did one short story from him, and then I’ll talk about another short story after that. Has anyone read this?

Everyone: No.

Melody: So, “Stationary Bike” is this...the main character’s name is Richard. He’s slightly overweight and he goes to the doctor, and the doctor says ‘Your cholesterol is getting high, you probably want to start doing something about that’, and the doctor gives him this analogy that kind of takes over his life and all of his thinking...thought processes. So, the analogy is that there’s a group of construction workers who are working to make sure his metabolism works well, but he’s...because he’s eating the same way he used to eat 10, 15 years ago, they’re...they’re not being given a rest at all. They’re going to get tired out and soon they won’t be able to work as hard as they have been. So, he takes this analogy and just runs with it. He buys a stationary bike, screws it into his apartment basement—which, I have some logistical questions.

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: I don’t think my apartment would let me do that. (laughs) He’s also an artist—that’s what he does for a living—and he paints this mural on the wall in front of the stationary bike instead of buying a TV or listening to an audiobook or something.

Rachel: Like a normal human being.

Melody: Right? He paints a road that the construction workers are working on in his mind, and he also paints a second mural with all of the construction workers. He gives them all names and characters and backgrounds. And so he starts biking on this bike, and eventually—he’s doing it every day, and eventually—he kind of falls into a trance and sees himself biking on a road. He also buys a map and marks a trail that he’s going on. So, it starts getting a little weird. He starts having conversations with these construction workers. And, eventually, he has to set a timer for two hours after being on the bike, because he’ll, like, fall into this trance and be biking in the woods somewhere, and then when the alarm goes off he, you know, wakes up from the trance and goes back to his normal life. It’s...

Sam: Interesting.

Melody: Yeah. It’s really bizarre. He starts having, like, weird dreams. It’s a short story, so the build up to that...I feel like if it was a novel there could be more buildup and...the ending is not quite as creepy as I thought it would be.

Rachel: Isn’t Stephen King notoriously bad at endings?

Sam: Yeah.

Melody: Is he? Okay, well, that explains a lot.

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, but it was really interesting. The audiobook was pretty good, too. I would...I wasn’t put off by the author or anything like that. So, that’s my first book, and then my second book is—the short story, I should say—is “The Dunwich Horror” by H.P. Lovecraft, and has anyone read this?

Rachel: I have, actually. Yeah. Love me some Lovecraft! (laughs)

Melody: I’ve never jumped into Lovecraft, and I think this was probably the wrong book to start with.

Rachel: (laughs) He’s an acquired taste!

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: So, it's set in this haunted, old town. There's all these weird noises in the hills and the forests, and foul smells that appear out of nowhere, and there's this family. I feel like all of the characters are kind of decrepit and grotesque in some way. So, there's a grandpa with a mother and a son, and the mother is this albino woman who goes wandering in the woods where the creepy, scary thing is that the townspeople talk about. And then she's pregnant, one day, and we don't know who the father is.

Rachel: Surprise!

Melody: Yeah, and her son starts growing at this, like, ridiculous rate. So, by the time he's probably three years old he looks and acts like a 14-year-old kid. So, it's pretty...and he also looks nothing like her, he's...has a lot of dark features. So, obviously something ominous is going on within this family. And then he also...so there's a part in the story where he goes to the library to check out...well, he tries to steal, but he eventually checks out a book called the...I think it's called the "Necronomicon?" Which is, like, a book of magic and spells, which also is kind of ominous. And then, eventually, his body is found—dead—and he always used to wear, like, very fine clothing from neck to ankle, and when they find him dead they realize that his body has scales on it, there's tentacles out of his...coming out of his torso, there's slime everywhere.

Sam: (laughs)

Rachel: Hubba, hubba.

Melody: Right?

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: And so that's kind of where we learn about this concept of this horrible monster that's got this foul smell and may look something like this. So, some things happen further on. Again, I was kind of underwhelmed by the ending. I feel like this could have gone further but, doing some research after I read this, I realized that this is one in a series of books about this particular monster that if you...I think if you read all of them you'll...you'll learn a little bit more. But it was really fascinating, and so the mon...the mythology of this monster...it's supposed to have a squid head, it's huge, and then kind of like a...I have pictures here if you.

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: I brought pictures if you guys want to look at them. So, it has this squid head and this very large body, and then it has dragon wings on the back.

Rachel: This is Cthulhu we're talking about?

Melody: Yes. I couldn't remember the name, but yeah, it's pretty ominous.

Sam: Yeah, and that's something to keep in mind with Lovecraft is he wrote for a lot of pulp fiction, like, magazines, so a lot of his stories can kind of stand alone but are also part of a series so that it makes more sense the more you read which then can also lead...that if you're reading all of the series sometimes he has, like, a paragraph in the first, like, page, that kind of summarizes what we've already read. Which, if you're reading it as one kind of book is really redundant and kind of annoying after a

while. But, you have to remember that it came out kind of monthly, and so people would need, 'Oh yeah, that's what happened the last time around'.

Rachel: Right. That's a good point, yeah.

Melody: Yeah, so I actually was kind of surprised because—listening to both of these books, I listened on audio—I felt kind of underwhelmed. I wasn't that scared.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: You had, like, built yourself up to be, like, scared, and then had your defenses up and were just kind of let down.

Melody: Yeah, and then I was...I was, and I also think partly because I was listening while I was doing other things might've been an aspect, and I also kind of separated my listening session. I spread out listening to the books over a longer period of time, so I don't...I'm not sure why, but I wasn't...

Alyssa: I had a similar experience when I read...I listened to something by Stephen King, and I can't remember...it was a book of two short stories, it...think it was, like, republished recently. The first...the story I remember is about a man who...his body composition isn't changing but he is becoming lighter. So he's, like, losing mass, and his doctor doesn't understand what's happening, and basically gravity's having less of an impact on him. So, it, like, goes through, like, how he chooses to live his life, you know, and, like, make decisions based on that. And it was...it was kind of, like, creepy and interesting and different, but I wasn't scared. So I...I came to appreciate that about Stephen King. Like, he has, like, horror that is very scary. Because he wrote "It," right?

Sam: Yes.

Alyssa: Yes, and so I—this might be why I hate scary things—I watched "It" when I was way too young to watch that movie, and I think I'm traumatized. So, it's nice to know that he has, like, this spectrum of writing.

Melody: Yeah, that's true. That's a very good point.

Rachel: Layers of fear.

Alyssa: Yeah, and I felt I was also kind of underwhelmed in terms of, like, the...I really liked the story, but I wasn't, like, really scared.

Melody: Right. That's kind of how I felt. Lizzie, do you have any recommendations for someone who wants to be scared?

Lizzie: Oooh.

Melody: (laughs)

Lizzie: I was saying yesterday to Alyssa that's there's a book I read. It's from a long time ago. I say that—it's probably, like, 10 years. And it's a young adult novel, and it's called "The Replacement" and it's by Brenna Yovanoff, and it...like, on the cover—at least, on the one that I had—it's, like, a bassinette with, like, a mobile...mobile?

Rachel: Is that for babies?

Lizzie: Mhm, yeah, made of, like, knives and, like, splinters and stuff.

Everyone: (laughs)

Rachel: That escalated quickly!

Lizzie: And I found myself really, like, really scared from it. Like, it...you know, the premise—and it's been a long time since I read it, so I might get it wrong, but—is that, you know, there's this underworld under this town and the people from this underworld come and switch babies. (quietly) Sorry, Alyssa.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: And switch babies when they're born, and then these kids grow up and they're not really human. Like...they look just like the babies and they grow up just like the babies.

Rachel: Like changelings?

Melody: Yeah.

Lizzie: Yeah, and the main characters actually discover—hm, I shouldn't say, sorry. Big spoiler!

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: No spoilers.

Lizzie: He...he discovers this underworld and, you know, has to kind of navigate his world as it changes, so that one I found quite spooky.

Melody: On a scale of, like, zero to 10?

Lizzie: Seven point five. I can't say that I've ever truly been 100% scared.

Melody: You've never found, like, an eight or nine?

Lizzie: No, I can't think of it.

Rachel: (ominous voice) I have a book for you in the next episode.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: Oh, you know what, though? The one book that you, I believe, are going to talk about in our North Shore podcast.

Melody: Yes!

Lizzie: We'll...you know, you'll have to listen to that to figure out which one it was. I tried reading that on a plane and I had to put it down and, like, throw it under my seat.

Melody: Really? Yeah.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: And part of it might have just been that I was on a plane, so already...you know, my nerves are already kind of up there. But yeah, the...and it was in the very beginning of it that I had to be, like, mm-mm, nope!

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: So yeah, I guess maybe I don't finish those books.

Melody: That's a good point, because I read that one before I read these short stories, so I think my expectation was pretty high.

Alyssa: You were already terrified.

Melody: Yeah.

Everyone: (laughs)

Lizzie: I think, though, the difference for me...like, the reason I like horror is because I like, like, double-checking that my door is locked and, like, thinking, like, 'Ooo, what's out there!', you know? Like, I like that feeling. And yeah, I think people who don't like horror don't like that feeling, but I like if...if it makes me sort of be like, 'Should I leave a light on?' then it's a good book.

Alyssa: I'd like to say I just have an overactive imagination. I once made my husband check our house floor to bottom while I had, like, 911 on speed dial because I was convinced there was someone in our house.

Everyone: (laughs)

Alyssa: Because I'd read a scary book.

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: Clearly, that's the time when an intruder will actually come.

Alyssa: Right, exactly. Exactly.

Melody: They know.

Rachel: Which could be a scary story in itself.

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: All right. Rachel, do you want to talk about your recommendations?

Rachel: Yeah, I wanted to change things up a bit and talk about something other than books. In the other episode of this month's podcast available on Book Chat feed, I'm going to talk a bit about the popular horror anthology podcast called The NoSleep Podcast, so for this episode of Not Your Mother's Library I wanted to give recommendations for other scary podcasts existing out there in the twilight. Insert mandatory mwahaha here. So, I first dipped my toes into podcasts with Welcome to Night Vale, which I don't know if any of you guys...

Sam: Yes!

Rachel: Okay.

Everyone: (laughs)

Rachel: It's really popular these days, and it has a touring live show. I've seen one called "Ghost Stories," and it was beautiful—you have to see it in person. (laughs) It's loosely based on horror, but I would say it's more satirical in nature. It comes in the form of community radio updates about a fictional desert town called Night Vale, and I would describe this podcast as darkly quirky yet heartfelt. It really gets you in the feels sometimes. It's sort of like the 'News from Lake Wobegon' section of the Prairie Home Companion, but with more spiders and secret police.

Melody: (laughs)

Sam: If you've ever lived in a small town, which my college town is a very small town, you will find it beyond hilarious because you can, like...it's just...if you've experienced that kind of area you get the podcast so much more.

Melody: That's cool.

Rachel: And one of Night Vale's writers wrote another podcast called Alice Isn't Dead, which is in my top three all-time favorite podcasts list, so you guys have to listen to it! 'Alice' is about a truck driver going across America in search of her missing wife, and she comes across these monsters called 'Thistle Men', and I won't get any more into it because spoilers, but it is so good...it has peak performances. Both Welcome to Night Vale and Alice Isn't Dead have book tie-ins, so check those out, as well.

Melody: Nice.

Rachel: Then there's another podcast network called Minnow Beats Whale, and they have a series of horror docudramas. To run through them quickly, because there are a few: The Black Tapes is about a journalist's search into the paranormal and some influences on her life, and she starts doing research and then things start impacting her. Tanis is about a mythic legend inhabiting the Pacific Northwest. That's one that's really, really good and super creepy, so try that one. The Last Movie is a bit of a Tanis spin-off about a film that kills people who watch it, which is kind of a horror movie trope, right? But I've not heard about it in podcast form because it doesn't seem to really match, but they did pretty well with it.

Melody: That's cool.

Rachel: The Last...or, I just talked about that one! Rabbits is about a woman's disappearance into the mysterious underground game of 'Rabbits', and her friend is trying to find her, and it's really where we don't know what's happening. It's, like, this game that everyone around the world plays but no one really knows what it is...yeah. And finally, The Leap Year Society focuses on cults and conspiracies, which we all love, right? (laughs) These stories are all serialized and fictional, but they are so well done that it seems as if the creators are drawing from actual events. Yeah, that one...highly recommend. Then there is Fool & Scholar Productions, and this is a group behind an ongoing narrative called The White Vault. It's about a team of five people who go to repair an arctic archipelago waystation, and they end up trapped by a storm and some other things hidden beneath the ice...super spooky!

Melody: Spooky things in storms.

Rachel: Yes, especially in the Arctic, right? It's not just polar bears out there. (laughs) The voice cast is diverse and it has a super-immersive soundscape, and I would also recommend Fool & Scholar's other production, Dark Dice, which is a playthrough of a horror Dungeons & Dragons campaign featuring all the same voice talent from The White Vault. If you're into that sort of thing...yeah.

Sam: Interesting, yeah!

Rachel: Finally, for a little bit of non-fiction, there is a podcast called Lore. Have you heard about that at all?

Alyssa: I've heard of that one, yeah.

Rachel: It's written, produced, and narrated by Aaron Mahnke, and it's all about real-world, quote-unquote (laughs) scary stories. It's a bit of folklore mixed in with historical true crime, I'd say. There are books, a TV show, and it has even spawned two spinoff podcasts in a similar vein, so judge for yourself how popular that one is.

Melody: Nice!

Rachel: And there are a bunch more out there, but those're already plenty of recommendations from me. Do you guys have any that you would like to recommend?

Sam: I do! I am ashamed that I didn't think of this one in preparation for this, but Limetown the podcast...

Rachel: (gasps) Yes!

Sam: ...was the single scariest thing I've ever experienced. It's so immersive and so intense in parts. I was disc golfing—or frisbee golfing—in Abendschein Park in Oak Creek in broad daylight, and I had to leave the park, turn the podcast off, and drive home because an episode was that scary.

Everyone: (laughs)

Rachel: Yeah.

Sam: It's just...it's so immersive it's, like, sometimes too intense that you have to, like, pause it and, like, get your heart rate down a little bit. They came out with a season two last year and also have a book, and they're actually making a TV show for Facebook Watch. So, again, it's very popular.

Rachel: That one was in Hollywood purgatory for a while. I was worried they weren't going to make it, but it's finally coming out!

Sam: Yes, yeah. Season one came out and it was fantastic, and they said 'Yeah, we're going to do season two!' and...

Rachel: Years go by!

Sam: Years go by with no word! (laughs) But yeah, season one of Limetown I would say is a must-listen, and if you enjoy horror it was, again, the single scariest thing. (laughs)

Alyssa: So, while I do not like horror I really like true crime, which is probably why I'm, like, searching my house at midnight.

Everyone: (laughs)

Alyssa: But I...I don't know if this counts, but has anyone listened to Broken Harts?

Sam: Yes:

Alyssa: I think, Sam, we've talked about it. So, it's a podcast that follows the Hart family, I think, and it's this couple that has a large adopted family. They lived on the Pacific Northwest, and they were tragically all killed when the van drove off a cliff. And, after the accident, the police were investigating and they don't think that it was an accident. They think it was an intentional suicide-murder of the family, and they also then go into some records of, like, child abuse that was happening between this couple and their adopted kids. They get into the process of adopting and some of the politics. The couple, they're both white, and they adopted—I think—nine black children, and they kind of became very famous. The son was hugging a police officer at...I don't know if it was, like, a Black Lives Matter rally or...it was kind of, like...it became this symbol of police and, like, social...just joining, and that, you know, they had this kind of, like, public life, and then the podcast dips into this private life that wasn't really known or discovered or handled, and you kind of learn more and more, and I had to stop it because I was getting, like...it was pretty intense. But it's really good, and it's true crime. It's...it's pretty dark, pretty...pretty sad, pretty traumatic.

Melody: Yeah. Those...those true crime stories really get me, because they're real! Which is a lot more scary.

Alyssa: Yeah, and that's the kind of—or, like, scary stories—I typically like.

Melody: Yeah, that actually kind of lets us transition really well into your recommendation.

Alyssa: (gasps) Perfect! Looks at that. So, the book I read for today is, of course, nonfiction, because I was just saying. So, the book I read is called "Lady Killers: Deadly Women Throughout History." It's by Tori Telfer. And this I would say on a scale of, like, one to very scary is going to be, like, a two. The most recent person profiled in this collection is from, like, the 1950s, and what the author is really focusing on is how there aren't...there have not been a lot of female serial killers. There's, I think, a statistic that 10% of all serial killers are female, though those records are not well...I don't know how valid they are. It's hard to study, and what the book is really focusing on is how...because these are all from the past, how media records or, like, social action has chosen to characterize these women who were very dangerous and were, you know...had these, like, psychological issues and obviously, you know, they were serial killers, but how they were characterized and how a lot of these women were, like, falling into archetypes. So, either they were like a motherly grandmother that is, you know, just a little off, or they were like a very, like, voluptuous woman who is, like, meant to be chased after and that's kind of, like, allure. And so, the first story that they talk about is almost, like, the birth of this, like, vampiress or vampire, you know, like...and I forget her name—let me look it up. I believe there are eight heavy metal or, like, death metal bands named after her.

Melody: Oh, my gosh.

Alyssa: So, she was alive in the 1700s, I want to say. Her name is Elizabeth Báthory. She was a countess. She lived in Hungary, and she killed a lot of her servants. And, you know, there's a big...you know, they go into the history of it, how she was, like, part of the noble class and how she was hard to prosecute

and things like that. So, a lot of the profiles in this book range from, you know, the 1200s in Ireland all the way to, like, 1950s America. A really interesting one is in 1920s Chicago and how female murders—so, women killing typically men, I guess—in the 1920s in Chicago increased by 400% in the 1920s. And so, the movie...the musical “Chicago” is largely inspired by, like, that phenomenon.

Rachel: Oh, sure.

Sam: (laughs)

Melody: Wow.

Alyssa: And it was very sensationalized with the media, and how a lot of these women were, like, glamorized and, you know, if...there’s a line here that says, like, ‘If you’re pretty, you probably were going to get off, but if...if you were not attractive you were probably going to go to prison’. And so, the one in here...I think she was...she received the harshest punishment of any of them. Tillie Klimek? And she, you know, was not attractive, is how she’s described in this book—that’s how the media described her at the time—and she was convicted, and you’ll have to read it to find out what happens to her. So, it really goes into how these female serial killers are uniquely discussed, especially when the media...or handled by the courts at the time. It was a really interesting book to listen to because you’re listening to it and these...it’s nice because you’re removed from it—it’s all in history—so it’s not, like, you know, it can be kind of handled with some afterthought. And I thought the author did a really good job of not glamorizing any of them but really just talking about and, like, presenting how they were talked about. It is...her voice is pretty satirical throughout it. She definitely talks and writes about it very...in a very light way. That seems very counterintuitive to the topic at hand, which can be jarring and is kind of, like...it’s a little kind of...it could be off-putting to some people, I could see.

Melody: Yeah, I can see the appeal, though, too.

Alyssa: Yes. So, I was able to get through this whole book and I didn’t have any trouble sleeping, and she has a really good introduction and conclusion. Kind of talking about the source material and the challenges she had approaching this material because all of these women in this book did very, very horrible things, and not to glamorize them or, you know, quote-unquote make excuses because of the harsh social circumstances that they lived under. But, yeah, so it was really interesting. A fact I learned is the first recorded, like, witch hunt took place in Ireland in...well, in recorded history, and she was probably a serial killer, the person that they...they killed in the witch hunt. So that, like...you could do, like, a whole dissertation on that.

Melody: Yeah, you could.

Everyone: (laughs)

Alyssa: So, that was really interesting. So, there’s lots of unique tidbits. That first story I talked about, or the first woman I talked about. The book is...it has an introduction and conclusion, and then each chapter focuses on a different person, and the first one...it kind of says how there’s all these other, like, characters that have been, like, built up after her with some reference to her just based on, like, her life and the things she did. And it actually made me think of the movie “Crimson Peak.” Have any of you seen that?

Rachel: Yeah.

Melody: I've seen the trailers for it.

Lizzie: I know about it.

Alyssa: It has Jessica Chastain, Tom Hiddleston, there's another person.

Rachel: Mia Wasa...what's her last name? (laughs)

Alyssa: I've forgotten how to say her last name, thank you for trying.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Alyssa: It came out in 2015, and it was directed by Guillermo del Toro, so it's...it's a pretty strange movie. It is horror mixed with paranormal, and that is all I could picture when I was reading that story. So, it was interesting to have, like, my own references of, I don't know if this was like a, you know, any inspiration for that, but it definitely...

Melody: ...has some similarities.

Alyssa: Yes, yeah. So, this was pretty light. I had some recommendations if anyone wanted something a little bit, like, heavier. So, another true crime...so, I listened to this one on Hoopla. I also tried listening to one, it's called "I'll Be Gone in the Dark."

Melody: (gasps) Okay, so...

Rachel: (laughs)

Melody: I wasn't going to name this, but in our last episode I talked about "The Monster of Florence," and I mentioned that I had tried listening to a different book that was similar.

Alyssa: (gasps)

Melody: And I just couldn't.

Alyssa: I had to stop.

Melody: It was so...

Alyssa: I could not sleep. I was not sleeping at night because of this.

Melody: Oh, I...

Rachel: Had a different reaction.

Melody: ...couldn't even get through, like, the first 10 minutes because I was bored.

Sam: (laughs)

Alyssa: Really? Oh, my gosh, no.

Melody: Yeah!

Alyssa: So, I made it, like, four, five hours in. So, "I'll Be Gone in the Dark" is a book, it's called "One Woman's Search for the Golden State Killer" and it's written by Michelle Mc...McNamara?

Melody: Sure.

Alyssa: She, I think, is passed, but she was a journalist and she did a lot of research and investigative reporting into this person that ultimately led to his conviction. And so, it's basically reporting all of these attacks that were escalating throughout California in the seventies? I can't remember.

Melody: I think that sounds right-ish. Give us...give, you know, plus or minus a decade.

Sam: (laughs)

Alyssa: Yeah. So, it's more true crime, but it is very vividly described, all these attacks and how...you know, she definitely had done a lot of research and really, like, fallen into this person's, like, MO and their profile and all that, and I couldn't finish the book! It was too scary, so if you like true crime and you like that, that would be a great one to listen to.

Melody: Apparently, give it more than 10 minutes and then you'll enjoy it.

Everyone: (laughs)

Sam: I...I do, I did listen to this, as well, and I agree with Melody. There are parts that really drag, but once they get into it, they really get into it.

Alyssa: The author has a high attention to detail, and I think it's an edited...a compilation of all of her research and writings on this topic. She had a blog that would follow true crime, and so it's kind of edited so it's a little—I think—rough around the edges. But it...it...you have to warm up into it.

Melody: But apparently it's worth...worth waiting out the not so interesting parts.

Alyssa: Yeah, I mean, I couldn't sleep with my windows open. They had to be locked.

Everyone: (laughs)

Alyssa: So, you know...know your limits, I guess, listeners.

Melody: All right. Sam, do you want to give us the last recommendation for this podcast?

Sam: Yeah! So, I'm going to be talking about Edgar Allan Poe short fiction, and I'm...

Melody: Which I'm so excited about. (laughs)

Sam: Yes, and I'm so happy you talked about short fiction, because I'm a huge advocate. I don't think people read it nearly enough. It's so good! It's so good. A short story is considered, I think, anything less than, like, 30 pages. So, that's not a big time commitment. It ramps up really fast and ends very quickly. It's like you're reading a chapter in a book, but it's a whole story in just a few pages. So, it's "Edgar Allan Poe: the Complete Stories" that we have. There are, like...I don't know how many, like 50 just mystery and horror stories. So, I'm going to talk about a couple of my favorites. You'll probably recognize some of the names. "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Masque of the Red Death." I think, in totality, you could read all of these and they're under, like, 20, 25 pages. So, like, "The Tell-tale Heart" is four pages in this book. And that one is a classic of man murders another man and the police come to investigate, and he hears the thumping of the heart and it basically drives him insane. "The Pit and the Pendulum" is...just totally, like, sucks you in and it's...takes place

during the Spanish Inquisition. It's this prisoner who's in a dark cell just kind of describing what is happening to him and the horror that he experiences. "The Cask of Amontillado" is about these two guys and one is...just doesn't like this other guy. He doesn't even really get into it, he just doesn't like him and decides that's he's going to bury him alive in the catacombs under the city!

Everyone: (laughs)

Sam: And then "The Masque of the Red Death" takes place during the Red Death and is about this kind of wealthy guy who has all his friends over for a party in his walled-off palace where the Red Death can't get in because no one is allowed in. Again, they ramp up really quickly. They're a handful of pages each. I think "The Pit and the Pendulum" is the longest one at 10 pages, so you can get a lot of bang for your buck by reading short fiction, and my favorite thing—again, I'm one who won't be afraid to put down a bad book—is if you read a short story and you don't like it you can just move onto the next one, and at worst you wasted half an hour of your life reading a story you didn't really like versus reading four chapters of a book and deciding to put it down. That's a big...bigger time investment. Yeah, I don't know. I guess I love short fiction. I get so excited about it.

Rachel: And Poe is definitely a master. Yeah.

Same: Yeah.

Melody: Oh, yeah. I also was an English major, as Rachel was, too. Were either...Alyssa or Lizzie? No?

Alyssa: No.

Rachel: Can't join the cool-kids club!

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: So, I really remember enjoying going through Poe and how...just being so surprised at how scary the stories were with just a few pages and how that ominous feeling would just come over me, and I'm like, I've only read two pages. Yeah.

Sam: Yeah, and the great thing about Poe and a lot of writers who wrote a long time ago is that it's not that gory, brutal, like, super graphic-scary. It's very subtle and it's that, like, spine-tingling, hair on the back of your neck standing up, just kind of uncomfortable. But he's also just such a good writer, and he's very smart. So, in "The Cask of Amontillado" he's convincing this guy in...into looking at this, like, cask of wine—Amontillado wine—and he's trying to convince him along the way to kind of trust him to keep going, and at one point he says that he's a mason, and the guy's like, 'Oh, prove it to me! Tell me, like, a secret, like, phrase or whatever', and he pulls out a trowel and says, like, 'Oh, no, I carry a trowel with me. I'm a mason!'

Everyone: (laughs)

Sam: But it's really just foreshadowing that he's about to wall him off in this little room in these catacombs, and so...I don't know. As a...as a English major it just, like...you pick up on these little things, like, the more you read it, and it's just...it's really smart writing.

Melody: If you're hanging out with someone who hates you and they have a shovel, maybe you should leave.

Everyone: (laughs)

Alyssa: Alarm bells going off.

Rachel: 'My, these catacombs are certainly dark!'

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: 'Why do you have a trowel?'

Alyssa: I read "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-tale Heart" in high school, and I still have, like, very vivid, like, visualizations or memories of reading them, and I feel like that is a mark of a really good story and really good author if pieces of that can leave an impression on a person for that long.

Melody: All right, well, I think we've covered all of our reading recommendations. So, if you've been listening and anything caught your...I was going to say 'caught your eye', but that's not right.

Lizzie: Caught your ear.

Melody: Right, caught your ear. If you've heard anything that you want to check out, we're going to have all the links in the show notes, so don't worry about trying to scribble down book titles or anything. Please subscribe to the podcast. That's very helpful for us, and you can contact us through our website or Facebook page. Again, the links will be in the show notes, or you can use the #notyourmotherslibrary. So, big thank you to Sam, Alyssa, and Lizzie. Thank you so much for coming. This has been really fun.

Rachel: It's been good having you.

Lizzie: Yeah, thanks for having us.

Sam: Thanks for having us!

Alyssa: This is great.

Melody: Awesome, so next month we're going to be talking about comics.

Rachel: I'm very excited!

Melody: Yay!

Everyone: (laughs)

Melody: All right, well, talk to you next month. Happy reading.

Rachel, Melody, and Alyssa: Bye!

(Brief outro music)