

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 30: Winter Wish List

(Brief intro music)

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

Leah: And I'm Leah.

Rachel: We are absolutely thrilled to announce that this marks the 50th episode of this podcast.

Leah: The 50th!

Rachel: Woo! It is such a cool milestone. That's 50 counting both full-length and mini episodes! If you're not familiar, we uploaded a bunch of shorter episodes when the building had to close down last year due to the pandemic...but, you know what? I'm still counting those.

Leah: Me, too!

Rachel: It's been 50 uploads, no matter their individual lengths! Time to par-tay! By which I mean, time to talk about books.

Leah: Woohoo!

Rachel: Leah came forward with the idea to discuss what we both have on our winter reading wish lists. These can be new books, books that haven't even come out yet, or books that may have been available for a long time but we just never got around to picking up a copy. Leah, would you like to get us started with one of your most-wanted?

Leah: Absolutely! I'd be delighted to tell you all about a semi-new book that is on the top of my list. It's entitled "Disasterology: Dispatches from the Frontlines of the Climate Crisis." It came out in August of 2021, and it's written by Dr. Samantha Montano. The book blurb reads, "Part memoir, part expert analysis, Disasterology is a passionate and personal account of a country in crisis—one unprepared to deal with the disasters of today and those looming in our future. With temperatures rising and the risk of disasters growing, our world is increasingly vulnerable.

Most people see disasters as freak, natural events that are unpredictable and unpreventable. But that simply isn't the case – disasters are avoidable, but when they do strike, there are strategic ways to manage the fallout. In *Disasterology*, Dr. Montano, a disaster researcher, brings readers with her on an eye-opening journey through some of our worst disasters, helping readers make sense of what really happened from an emergency management perspective. She explains why we aren't doing enough to prevent or prepare for disasters, the critical role of media, and how our approach to recovery was not designed to serve marginalized communities. Now that climate change is contributing to the disruption of ecosystems and worsening disasters, Dr. Montano offers a preview of what will happen to our communities if we don't take aggressive, immediate action. In a section devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic, what is thus far our generation's most deadly disaster, she casts light on many decisions made behind closed doors that failed to protect the public. A deeply moving and timely narrative that draws on Dr. Montano's first-hand experience in emergency management, *Disasterology* is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how our country handles disasters, and how we can better face them together." End quote!

Rachel: (snickers)

Leah: I'm interested in history, research, and large-scale events, so a book analyzing how we respond to disasters sounds pretty cool. I'm hoping it might be organized as sort of case studies for specific disasters followed by analysis of what went wrong and how we could have handled it better. I guess I'll have to read it to find out! And a note: there are, at least at the time of recording, two copies of this book in the system. You definitely could pop one of those on hold. A probable readalike for this book might be, "Field Notes from a Catastrophe," written by Elizabeth Kolbert. Similar enough now I might add that one to my list, too. Whoops!

Rachel: (laughs) My first pick is a book that was published earlier this year: "The Maidens" by Alex Michaelides. He wrote "The Silent Patient," which came out in 2019 and was uber popular among Oak Creek patrons. "The Maidens" is a mystery-thriller-suspense trifecta that sounds directly up my alley. Here's the blurb: "Edward Fosca is a murderer. Of this Mariana is certain. But Fosca is untouchable. A handsome and charismatic Greek Tragedy professor at Cambridge

University, Fosca is adored by staff and students alike—particularly by the members of a secret society of female students known as The Maidens. Mariana Andros is a brilliant but troubled group therapist who becomes fixated on The Maidens when one member is found murdered in Cambridge. Mariana, who was once herself a student at the university, quickly suspects that behind the idyllic beauty of the spires and turrets, and beneath the ancient traditions, lies something sinister. And she becomes convinced that, despite his alibi, Edward Fosca is guilty of the murder. But why would the professor target one of his own students? And why does he keep returning to the rites of Persephone, the maiden, and her journey to the underworld? When another body is found, Mariana’s obsession with proving Fosca’s guilt spirals out of control, threatening to destroy her credibility as well as her closest relationships. But Mariana is determined to stop this killer, even if it costs her everything—including her own life.”

Leah: Oooh.

Rachel: I cannot express to you much I want to read this!

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: I am a big fan of college-focused murder mysteries, like Donna Tartt’s “The Secret History,” which is an absolute classic. Add to that some secret societies and Greek mythology? Already sold! Best of all, it takes place at Cambridge University. I never attended or anything like that, but I have been to Oxford, which is another English university-city that has stunning architecture and a fascinating history. My ultimate pipe dream is to pack up and move to the United Kingdom someday, so that gives you a pretty solid idea about how captivating I find that culture and landscape. “The Maidens” might be a dark, psychological tale about death, but that just makes it all the more intriguing. Plus, the audiobook version is narrated by Louise Brealey who, in addition to having a stellar reading voice, is famous for playing the character Molly in the BBC’s modern “Sherlock” television series. So, that’s right up there on my to-be-read list! For novels in a similar vein, I recommend “Black Chalk” by Christopher Yates and “The Bell Weather Revivals” by Benjamin Wood.

Leah: All right, for my next pick we’re diving into a book that came out in February of 2021. It’s the book, “Hudson Bay Bound: Two Women, One Dog, Two Thousand Miles to the Arctic” by

Natalie Warren. First of all, I think any regular listeners know—and if you're not a regular, subscribe so you can be!

Rachel: Indeed.

Leah: (laughs) I think they know that I like canoeing and outdoorsy stuff. The title itself gives you such a clear picture of what the book is about, but I'll read you the well-written blurb, as well. And it's long.

Rachel: Hmph.

Leah: "The remarkable eighty-five day journey of the first two women to canoe the 2,000-mile route from Minneapolis to Hudson Bay. Unrelenting winds, carnivorous polar bears—" and if you listened to the last episode, you might know that I'm afraid of bears.

Rachel: They are terrifying.

Leah: "—snake nests, sweltering heat, and constant hunger. Paddling from Minneapolis to Hudson Bay, following the 2,000-mile route made famous by Eric Sevareid in his 1935 classic 'Canoeing with the Cree,' Natalie Warren and Ann Raiho faced unexpected trials, some harrowing, some simply odd. But for the two friends—the first women to make this expedition—there was one timeless challenge: the occasional pitfalls that test character and friendship. Warren's spellbinding account retraces the women's journey from inspiration to Arctic waters, giving readers an insider view from the practicalities of planning a three-month canoe expedition to the successful accomplishment of the adventure of a lifetime. Along the route we meet the people who live and work on the waterways, including denizens of a resort who supply much-needed sustenance; a solitary resident in the wilderness who helps plug a leak; and the people of the Cree First Nation at Norway House, where the canoeists acquire a furry companion."

Rachel: (gasps)

Leah: "Describing the tensions that erupt between the women (who at one point communicate with each other only by note)..."

Rachel: What?

Leah: "...and the natural and human-made phenomena they encounter—from islands of trash to waterfalls and a wolf pack—Warren brings us into her experience, and we join these modern women (and their dog) as they recreate this historic trip, including the pleasures and perils, the sexism, the social and environmental implications, and the enduring wonder of the wilderness." Doesn't that journey just sound fascinating?

Rachel: it absolutely does!

Leah: My brain immediately started putting me in that canoe, as well, and I can't wait to read all about their journey. I'll suggest a few similar titles: "Far Distant Echo" by Fred Marks, which features a group of men who undertake a very similar journey, as well as "Rowing to Latitude: Journeys Along the Arctic's Edge" by Jill Fredston. I wanted to mention another book, as well, published just one month later in March of 2021. This one is called "A Most Remarkable Creature: The Hidden Life and Epic Journey of the World's Smartest Birds of Prey" by Jonathan Meiburg. I'd not heard of these birds—caracaras, which are a part of the falcon family—before. I mean, I'm no bird expert, but I do think smart animals are fascinating. Here's the book blurb: "An enthralling account of a modern voyage of discovery as we meet the clever, social birds of prey called caracaras, which puzzled Darwin, fascinate modern-day falconers, and carry secrets of our planet's deep past in their family history. In 1833, Charles Darwin was astonished by an animal he met in the Falkland Islands: handsome, social, and oddly crow-like falcons that were 'tame and inquisitive...quarrelsome and passionate,' and so insatiably curious that they stole hats, compasses, and other valuables from the crew of the Beagle. Darwin wondered why these birds were confined to remote islands at the tip of South America, sensing a larger story, but he set this mystery aside and never returned to it. Almost two hundred years later, Jonathan Meiburg takes up this chase. He takes us through South America, from the fog-bound coasts of Tierra del Fuego to the tropical forests of Guyana, in search of these birds: striated caracaras, which still exist, though they're very rare. He reveals the wild, fascinating story of their history, origins, and possible futures. And along the way, he draws us into the life and work of William Henry Hudson, the Victorian writer and naturalist who championed caracaras as an unsung

wonder of the natural world, and to the falconry parks in the English countryside, where captive caracaras perform incredible feats of memory and problem-solving. *A Most Remarkable Creature* is a hybrid of science writing, travelogue, and biography, as generous and accessible as it is sophisticated, and absolutely riveting.” If you wanted a readalike for this one and wanted to learn about owls, I might suggest “*The Hidden Life of Owls*” by Leigh Calvez. Endangered birds? Try “*The Glitter in the Green*” by Jon Dunn. All of the books I mentioned in this segment are available in the Milwaukee County Library System if you want to get your hands on them, too!

Rachel: My next pick is something that I am definitely going to want to get as an audiobook, and you’ll know why soon enough. It isn’t published quite yet but will be soon, on November 16th. “*You Feel It Just Below the Ribs*” is written by Jeffrey Cranor and Janina Matthewson, who co-create a podcast called “*Within the Wires*.” Long-time listeners might remember me talking a little bit about “*Within the Wires*” during an earlier episode of *Not Your Mother’s Library*. We called that “*The Meta Episode*” since we discussed some of our favorite podcasts! If you’re in the mood for listening recommendations, check that out. Anyway, “*Within the Wires*” is set in an alternate universe where people in normal society aren’t allowed to have families. Adults can produce children, but they then have to give them up to go through this system to be raised by quote “*The New Society*” unquote. Interestingly, every season takes place during a different time period and features all-new characters, which feels like a very original take on the format. This book that I want to read, “*You Feel It Just Below the Ribs*,” is set in that same universe, but I do think it will appeal to anyone...including those who haven’t ever heard “*Within the Wires*” before. Here’s the blurb: “Born at the end of the old world, Miriam grows up during *The Great Reckoning*, a sprawling, decades-long war that nearly decimates humanity and strips her of friends and family. Devastated by grief and loneliness, she emotionally exiles herself, avoiding relationships or allegiances, and throws herself into her work—disengagement that serves her when the war finally ends, and *The New Society* arises. To ensure a lasting peace, *The New Society* forbids anything that can cause tribal loyalties, including traditional families. Suddenly, everyone must live as Miriam has chosen to—disconnected and unattached. A researcher at heart, Miriam becomes involved in implementing this detachment process. She does not know it is the beginning of a darkly sinister program that will transform this new world and the lives

of everyone in it. Eventually, the harmful effects of her research become too much, and she devises a secret plan to destroy the system from within, endangering her own life. But is her 'confession' honest—or is it a fabrication riddled with lies meant to conceal the truth?" So, this is something that's also present in the podcast: the narrators are often...well, if not unreliable, then at least secretive. If you're interested and want more, then I suggest the listenalike "Alice Isn't Dead" by Joseph Fink. Joseph co-creates one of the most popular fiction narrative podcasts ever, called "Welcome to Night Vale," alongside Jeffrey Cranor, so the writing styles throughout all of these stories are similar. "Alice Isn't Dead" also has a book tie-in of the same name. So, go crazy! I know that's a lot of content I just threw at you. Just remember to glance at the show notes for details.

Leah: For my last book, we're hopping in the way back machine for a book from May of 2005. That's right; the *way* back machine.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: It's Gregg Olsen's "Starvation Heights: A True Story of Murder and Malice in the Woods of the Pacific Northwest." It may not come a surprise to learn I think true crime is fascinating and, as previously mentioned, history is rad, too. So, this book...it's been on my radar for a while, but for whatever reason I've never picked it up. Maybe this'll be the year. In any case, let me read you the book blurb to see if it catches your interest, too. "In this true story—a haunting saga of medical murder set in an era of steamships and gaslights—Gregg Olsen reveals one of the most unusual and disturbing criminal cases in American history. In 1911, two wealthy British heiresses, Claire and Dora Williamson, arrived at a sanitorium in the forests of the Pacific Northwest to undergo the revolutionary 'fasting treatment' of Dr. Linda Burfield Hazzard. It was supposed to be a holiday for the two sisters, but within a month of arriving at what the locals called Starvation Heights, the women underwent brutal treatments and were emaciated shadows of their former selves. Claire and Dora were not the first victims of Linda Hazzard, a quack doctor of extraordinary evil and greed. But as their jewelry disappeared and forged bank drafts began transferring their wealth to Hazzard's accounts, the sisters came to learn that Hazzard would stop at nothing short of murder to achieve her ambitions."

That whole era of “checking yourself into a place for treatment and then you can’t check yourself out” is so bonkers to me, but it truly happened. It just seems like such a nightmare to find yourself in, and I can’t wait to read all about it!

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: There is one single copy of this book in the system, so you can get your hands on it if you want. If you want a readalike that’s about the same general era of medicine and quackery, try “Charlatan: America’s Most Dangerous Huckster, the Man Who Pursued Him, and the Age of Flimflam.”

Rachel: Flimflam?

Leah: Flimflam. This is one that’s both on my personal bookshelf as well as in the Milwaukee County library system, so it’ll be easy to get your hands on. Also in the system—and something I’m going to run out to our shelves here at Oak Creek to check out for myself right now—is a book entitled “Hell’s Princess: The Mystery of Belle Gunness, Butcher of Men” by Harold Schechter. This one is again in the same general time period, but features a female serial killer and I’m here for it.

Rachel: (laughs) As are we all. The final item on my winter wish list is—surprise of all surprises—a graphic novel.

Leah: No!

Rachel: It really is Volume two of “The Montague Twins” series, titled “The Devil’s Music” will release on December 7th. This is a young adult series with darker, spookier themes. Think along the lines of “The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,” only if it was about the Hardy Boys, instead. If you’re still going, “Say what?” let me explain. The story is about Pete and Alastair Montague, who are two adopted, mystery-solving twins. They soon discover that they also possess magical powers and start to investigate the occult with their adoptive family and some of the people who live in the same area. The art in these books is sublime. I really enjoy the dialogue, too. Here’s the blurb for the latest volume that’s coming out in December: “Alastair, Pete, Charlie, and Rachel aren’t just magical teen detectives in their coastal town of Port Howl—they are also

members of a local teen rock band. Before a show one night, [they] meet a famous rockstar, Gideon, and invite him to their show. He'll never come, but why not try, right? Little do they know, Gideon does show up, and he brings the threads of his dark past with him. In fact, he might even be the source of the rumored Devil's Music, a limited-release song that entrances all of its listeners in a deadly hypnosis. When Pete quickly gets drawn into Gideon's web, it's up to his brother and friends to save him. But Pete might not be the only Montague Twin at risk for Gideon's spell..." If you think the theme of cursed music and selling one's soul to the devil is intriguing, you might also like an indie publication titled "Suncatcher" by José Pimienta. If instead you prefer dark coming of age stories, try "Incredible Doom" by Matthew Bogart. But if what you're really after is something mystical, then I recommend "Séance Tea Party" by Reimena Yee. All of these are graphic novels...and this has been the fiftieth episode! It seems I've managed to perfect the art of the segue, at long last. Thank you, Leah, for always co-hosting with me.

Leah: You bet.

Rachel: Also, a huge thank you to all of our listeners for sticking with us and helping to make all of this possible. Not Your Mother's Library will go on its usual end-of-year hiatus for the next few months, so you will hear from us again with fresh content in 2022! We hope to have plenty more guests and will talk about a lot more books. Remember to visit the show notes section of this episode to find more information about the reading recommendations we just presented. Please subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. If you happen to have any questions, you can reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending a message to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: Dreek cragedy.

Leah: Mmhm, mmhm, mmhm...

Rachel: Dreek...cragedy, Leah. (pauses) Dreek. Cragedy.

Leah: (inhales)

Rachel: That's impressive.