

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 49: Enemies *and* Lovers?

(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.

Mary: And I'm Mary.

Rachel: Time is weird in podcast land. You might be listening five years from when this originally went out, but right now, for us, it is November two-thousand twenty-three after Common Era. Which is actually setting me on edge, because how on earth is this year already drawing to a close? I haven't...I haven't done nearly as much as I was supposed to. My resolutions? Out the window. My bi-monthly diet goals? Ha! What're those!? Mary...I...am...going to have a panic attack. [struggles to breathe] Is there anything on this earth that can keep me from spiraling into the dark and murky depths of my own ineptitude?

Mary: Um...yes. I hear you on the resolutions. However, if one of your resolutions was to read more books, you have plenty of time! It's currently still spooky season—everything before the snow hits is considered spooky season, in my book. This means that it is the perfect time for dark romances. If that doesn't get you out of this spiral, Rachel, I really don't know what will. I don't know about you, but I have been waiting all year for this podcast episode! I have so many recommendations. If you would ever like more suggestions, please contact either of us at the library. Before we dive in, I want to give a quick disclaimer to our listeners: many of these books have trigger warnings. This means that they may contain situations or themes that may be triggering for some. Please be kind to yourself and read these warnings before you start reading the book. Your mental health is more important than your TBR. With that being said, these recommendations we are about to give you cover several tropes and worlds. There's something for you here, we guarantee it! Okay, I'll stop rambling and jump into my first recommendation. If you like retellings of popular fairy tales, I have just the thing for you: "The Never King" by Nikki St. Crowe. Fair warning, this is a very spicy book. The story takes place generations after

the 'First Darling', Wendy. Darling women have been kidnapped on their eighteenth birthday for nearly two centuries and always return broken. No one knows what happens to them but their minds are always shattered. Winnie is finally eighteen, and she knows Pan will come for her. Her mother has tried everything to protect her daughter from the same fate she suffered, including traveling con artists who have left lasting marks on Winnie. But it doesn't matter. She's taken anyway. But things are a little different this time—instead of returning home, Pan and the Lost Boys aren't letting her go. In this world, we meet versions of fan favorites like Captain Hook, Tinkerbell, and the Crocodile, but they are not the characters you remember. We also meet new characters that really transform this realm into something completely new and something much darker. This is actually a four-book series, so get ready to take on the plunge. A great readalike is "Hooked" by Emily McIntyre. This book is a USA Today Bestseller! The relationship structure in this book is a bit different than the traditional story: "James has always had one agenda: destroy his enemy, Peter Michaels. When Peter's twenty-year-old daughter Wendy shows up in James's bar, he sees his way in. Seduce the girl and use her for revenge. It's the perfect plan, until things in James's organization begin to crumble. Suddenly, he has to find the traitor in his midst, and his plan for revenge gets murkier as James starts to see Wendy as more than just a pawn in his game. Wendy has been cloistered away most of her life by her wealthy, cold father—but a spontaneous night out with friends turns into an intense and addictive love affair with the dark and brooding James. As long as she knows James is dangerous, Wendy can't seem to shake her desire for him. But as their relationship grows more heated and she learns more about the world he moves in, she finds herself unsure if she's falling for the man known as James or the monster known as Hook." It's very mafia romance meets billionaire. Let us know what you think!

Rachel: My first brush with dark romance was as a teenager. Pre-teenager, maybe? It's all a bit of a blur. I got my hands on some paperback copies of L.J. Smith's "The Vampire Diaries." These were the original four books from the nineties, and let us just say that the first is appropriately titled. "The Awakening" follows high school ice queen Elena Gilbert as she navigates life after the tragic deaths of her parents. She survived the car crash that took both their lives and soon after awakens into a world where preternatural beings including vampires, witches,

doppelgangers, and werewolves exist in the shadows. A love triangle quickly forms between Elena and two blood-thirsty brothers who will stop at nothing to possess her. Listen to me. I am holding your face between my hands and squeezing it ever-so gently. Listen: I know this plot sounds overdone and contrived. But think about when this series first came out! It's a progenitor. "The Vampire Diaries" walked so that series like "The House of Night," "The Morganville Vampires,"—and yes, even "Twilight"—could run. I have read and reread "The Struggle," "The Fury," and "Dark Reunion" too many times to say aloud without hiding my face from public view forevermore, so believe me when I say the story ages well. Weirdly, though, I have not gotten into the other books in "The Vampire Diaries" universe which I suspect were published because the television series became so popular. It just seemed to me like the original run ended where it was supposed to, and I remain content. That said, if you start reading and find yourself unable to stop, there are many novellas and spinoffs—including three shows made for The CW—that will keep your hunger sated. The books are not super saucy because, in the end, they are young adult fiction, but I found the amount of gothic romance and supernatural spice to be a perfect blend. Delena forever. Delena for life.

Mary: "Vampire Diaries" is actually one of my comfort shows. I love it. For my next pick, I have to recommend this next duology. I'm absolutely cornered here. I loved it, but it isn't for everyone. This is a story you'll definitely need to check out the trigger warnings for. I know you've seen this book on TikTok, or the USA Today's bestsellers list, or Amazon's bestsellers list, or even Barnes & Noble's bestsellers list.

Rachel: Jeez.

Mary: It's "Haunting Adeline" by H.D. Carlton. This is another very spicy read. Addie is a successful author who, while at a book signing, catches sight of a man unlike anyone she's ever seen—the scar on his face, the mismatching eyes, the height... Little does she know that she quite literally will never be rid of this man! As she tries to organize and move in to her recently passed grandmother's house, she can't seem to shake the feeling that she's being watched. As she finds roses sitting on her kitchen counter, she knows she is. Even after installing security cameras and changing the locks she is unable to escape this man. But does she really want to?

Told through both the perspective of both Addie and her 'shadow', Zade, we find out that things are not always as they seem. There's just a hint of a ghost story that will keep you reading and wanting to solve the mystery, as well. Though it isn't required, it is highly recommended by the author to read the novella, "Satan's Affair" which gives a little bit of context to some situations in the book. The sequel, "Hunting Adeline," is also available. Since the first book ends on a cliffhanger, you will definitely want to check out the second. And if you love these books as much as I do—which I hope you do—it will please you to learn that H.D. Carlton is thinking of adding more books to the series! A readalike is "You" by Caroline Kepnes. The story begins with a similar introduction: Guinevere is an author doing an event at a bookstore that Joe works at. He is immediately taken with her and knows she is the one for him. She begins to think that Joe is made for her—he seems so perfect. But there is way more to him than meets the eye. They quickly become obsessed with each other and, before you know it, there are deadly consequences. "You" has been made into a Netflix show, so you could also check that out.

Rachel: My next pick is another that probably had far too much of an impact on my teenage development: "Blood and Chocolate" by Annette Curtis Klause. This one isn't about vampires, I promise. Because it's about shapeshifters! The narrative is more focused on the main character's coming-of-age story than pure smut, however there are certainly aspects I remember that would make anyone hot under the collar. "Sixteen-year-old Vivian Gandillon is trying to fit in to her new home in the suburbs. But trying to act 'normal' isn't always easy, since Vivian and her family are werewolves. It's glorious to have the power to change, and Vivian is a beautiful loup-garou with all the young wolves howling for her. But she wants no part of her squabbling pack, left leaderless by her father's recent death. Then Vivian falls in love with a human. If she reveals herself, will he relish the magic of her dual nature? When a brutal murder threatens the pack's survival, Vivian's divided loyalties are further strained. What is she really—human or beast?" There are two main love interests in this book: Aiden, a human, and Gabriel, a werewolf. Both have scenes with Vivian that will make you say hubba-hubba. In this case, definitely read the book instead of watching the movie, because their plots are weirdly reversed and I hate it, thanks. A great readalike series is "Den of Shadows" by Amelia Atwater-

Rhodes. Every book features a different power couple, though I recall being especially fond of Christopher and Sarah's relationship in "Shattered Mirror."

Mary: I'm taking us back into retelling territory with some Hades and Persephone re-imaginings. "A Touch of Darkness" by Scarlett St. Clair has been super popular among bestseller lists and social media. "Persephone is the Goddess of Spring by title only. The truth is, since she was a little girl, flowers have shriveled at her touch. After moving to New Athens, she hopes to lead an unassuming life disguised as a mortal journalist. Hades, God of the Dead, has built a gambling empire in the mortal world and his favorite bets are rumored to be impossible to win. After a chance encounter with Hades, Persephone finds herself in a contract with the God of the Dead, and the terms are impossible: Persephone must create life in the Underworld or lose her freedom forever. The bet does more than expose Persephone's failure as a goddess, however. As she struggles to sow the seeds of her freedom, love for the God of the Dead grows—and it's forbidden." All the best romances are, aren't they?

Rachel: Hell yeah.

Mary: If you like this type of modern retelling, you'll love my next pick, "Neon Gods" by Katee Robert. "Society darling Persephone Dimitriou plans to flee the ultra-modern city of Olympus and start over far from the backstabbing politics of the Thirteen Houses. But all of that is ripped away when her mother ambushes her with an engagement to Zeus, the dangerous power behind their glittering city's dark façade. With no options left, Persephone flees to the forbidden undercity and makes a devil's bargain with a man she once believed a myth...a man who awakens her to a world she never knew existed. Hades has spent his life in the shadows, and he has no intention of stepping into the light. But when he finds that Persephone can offer a little slice of the revenge he's spent years craving, it's all the excuse he needs to help her—for a price. Yet every breathless night spent tangled together has given Hades a taste for Persephone—and as you said...hubba-hubba—and he'll go to war with Olympus itself to keep her close..." Doesn't that sound divine?

Rachel: Like many, I love the Persephone mythology, so I'll be adding that one to my reading list. My last recommendation is not about vampires. Nay, t'isn't even about werewolves. It is

still a paranormal romance, though! “The Forbidden Game” by L.J. Smith is a trilogy of books featuring a villainous love interest hailing from the ‘Shadow World’. Hell yeah. “When Jenny buys a game for her boyfriend, Tom, she finds herself inexplicably drawn to the guy behind the counter. There is something mysteriously alluring about Julian's pale eyes and bleached-blond hair. And when he places the Game into her hands, she knows their connection is something deeper. But as Jenny and her six friends begin to play the Game at Tom's birthday celebration, a night of friends and fun quickly turns into a night of terror and obsessive love. Because the Game isn't just a game—it's the seven friends' new reality, where Julian reigns as the Prince of the Shadows. One by one the friends must confront their phobias to win. To lose the Game is to lose their lives. And that is only the beginning...” Another aspect of the Game that has me daintily daubing the sweat upon my brow is the fact that if Jenny touches Julian somewhere, he can touch her in the same spot—everywhere else is forbidden. Eeeh? Eeeeh? I’m raising my eyebrows at Mary in a downright lascivious manner, listeners. For a readalike, I recommend fanfiction. [retro radio voice overlaid by old-time newscast music] That’s right, fanfiction: Bringing readers everywhere the rarepairs and fix-it-fics they so desire, and a healthy dose of slow burn and/or dub-con in the tags. Fanfiction, available on a website near you. Please read responsibly. [music stops]

Mary: And that’s the end of the episode, listeners. We hope you enjoyed it! Rachel and I will be back with more reading recommendations next month. Check the show notes for a list of everything we just talked about. Remember to subscribe and rate the podcast if you liked what you heard. You can reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending messages to @OakCreekLibrary. As always, we want to know which books on this list you’ve read and if you’ve taken our recommendations to heart. Get it? Heart? Dark romance?

Rachel: [chuckles]

Mary: Okay. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Mary: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: Sixteen-year-old Vivian Gan-dil-li-on—

Mary: No.

Rachel: Gan-dil-lon.

Mary: Yep.

Rachel and Mary: [laugh]

Mary: That's not right.

Rachel: As soon as I said it I'm like, "Hm, nope."

Mary: [laughs]

Rachel: [English accent] She hosts a cotillion!

Mary and Rachel: [laugh]

Rachel: It was one in a million!

Mary: [laughs harder] Stop!