Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 53: Books about Bookshops

(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. This April, we observe Community Service Month as well as National Volunteer Week beginning the twenty-first. Did you know that volunteers are essential to libraries across the nation? It probably comes as no surprise that a lot of work goes into maintaining a public institution. Ensuring these spaces are well kept and orderly so that visitors can enjoy their time browsing often requires a team effort. The Friends of the Oak Creek Public Library is one such group of team players. For over twenty-five years, members have done their utmost to facilitate use of OCPL and its many free services. While often recognized for their fundraising activities, the Friends also have a hand in day-to-day operations. In fact, most patrons reap the benefit of their efforts without even realizing it.

Mary and Rachel: How?

Rachel: Well, bookshelves don't dust themselves! In addition to attending monthly meetings and working special events, the Friends of the Library hosts annual book week celebrations, facilitates necessary fundraising, and so much more. Membership is open to everyone ages eighteen and up, and locals from all sorts of backgrounds have joined in the past. If you're interested, listeners, more information can be found by visiting oakcreeklibrary.org/friends. One of the Friends' most popular endeavors is the Book Nook. Located on the first floor of the building, this is an ongoing sale where you can purchase books, media, and more at a huge discount from open 'til close each and every day. Items are added on a regular basis, and there is usually something for everyone. In fact, that sets us up nicely for today's topic of discussion. You can buy all kinds of second-hand materials at the Book Nook, and that got us curious. Are there any good books about bookshops? Let's find out!

Mary: My first recommendations for you today are going to pull from the fantasy genre.

(tinkling sound effect)

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: If you're looking for a coy little bookshop that disappears and then plays hard to get, "The Lost Bookshop" by Evie Woods is a good place to start. Picture it! Ireland, 1912: "On a quiet street in Dublin, a lost bookshop is waiting to be found... For too long, Opaline, Martha and Henry have been the side characters in their own lives." Opaline has been raised to love and treasure books since she was a child. When she flees from her family to avoid a marriage to an abusive stranger, she has only her love of books to guide her. Today, Martha is running from her own hardships when she takes a new position as a live-in housemaid to a former actress. But what about the bookshop next door? Why does it not appear on any maps? And where did it go? Henry, a Ph.D. student, teams up with Martha to learn more about Opaline and the origin of the cheeky little disappearing bookshop.

Rachel: (giggles)

Mary: The three of them learn that there is still a little magic out there if you just look for it. A read-alike is "Small Town, Big Magic" by Hazel Beck. "Emerson Wilde is an indie bookseller descended from a woman hanged as a witch during the Salem Witch Trials, but that doesn't mean her success as a bookshop owner—or youngest Chamber of Commerce president—is thanks to any magic. Or, at least, she didn't think so until the mayor sends some sinister creatures after her, and she dispatches them with ease. It turns out Emerson is a witch, and all her memories of witchcraft were erased when she failed a coming-of-age test as a teen. Now, her powers—and memories—are coming back just as an ancient evil awakens in her hometown. Maybe magic doesn't make things easier after all." It's giving…"Sabrina the Teenage Witch" mixed with a little "Halloweentown."

Rachel: Mmhm. Mmhm. The first book I want to recommend has been promoted a lot on Tumblr, so let's go out on a limb and say it's trendy. I also saw it at Half Price Books the other day in their 'New Arrivals' section, which not only means it's trendy but a lot of copies were sold! Right? I presume. I haven't worked in a bookstore, but that seems to make sense. Anyway! "Bookshops & Bonedust" is the first title in the "Legends & Lattes" series by Travis

Baldree. It “takes us on a journey of high fantasy, first loves, and second-hand books. Viv's career with the notorious mercenary company Rackam's Ravens isn't going as planned. Wounded during the hunt for a powerful necromancer, she's packed off against her will to recuperate in the sleepy beach town of Murk—so far from the action that she worries she'll never be able to return to it. What's a thwarted soldier of fortune to do? Spending her hours at a beleaguered bookshop in the company of its foul-mouthed proprietor is the last thing Viv would have predicted, but it may be both exactly what she needs and the seed of changes she couldn't possibly imagine. Still, adventure isn't all that far away. A suspicious traveler in gray, a gnome with a chip on her shoulder, a summer fling, and an improbable number of skeletons prove Murk to be even more eventful than Viv could have ever expected.” Once you read this and fall in love with the fantasy, you’re in luck because there is already another title in the series…and I’m willing to bet the author has more on the way.

Mary: If you’re into Shakespeare or you like reading about people who like Shakespeare, oh man, do I have some recs for you! The first is “The Paris Bookseller” by Keri Maher. In this novel, you’ll “discover the dramatic story of how a humble bookseller fought against incredible odds to bring one of the most important books of the twentieth century to the world. When bookish young American, Sylvia Beach opens Shakespeare and Company on a quiet street in Paris in 1919, she has no idea that her and her new bookstore will change the course of literature itself. Shakespeare and Company is more than a bookstore and lending library: Many of the most prominent writers of the Lost Generation—like Ernest Hemingway—consider it a second home. It's where some of the most important literary friendships of the twentieth century are forged—none more so than the one between Irish writer James Joyce and Sylvia herself. When Joyce's controversial novel Ulysses is banned, Beach takes a massive risk and publishes it under the auspices of Shakespeare and Company. But the success and notoriety of publishing the most infamous and influential book of the century comes with steep costs. The future of her beloved store itself is threatened when Ulysses' success brings other publishers to woo Joyce away. Her most cherished relationships are put to the test as Paris is plunged deeper into the Depression and many expatriate friends return to America. As she faces painful personal and financial crises, Sylvia—a woman who has made it her mission to honor the life-

changing impact of books—must decide what Shakespeare and Company truly means to her." Now, I'm the type of person who likes historical fiction because it lets me 'meet' other people from the past. How cool would it be to have been friends with people like Hemmingway? But if that's not enough for you, you could read "Little Bookshop of Murder" by Maggie Blackburn. "Summer Merriweather—that's a great name, by the way—career as a Shakespeare professor hangs by a bookbinder's thread. Academic life at her Virginia university is a viper's pit, so Summer spends her summer in England, researching a scholarly paper that, with any luck, will finally get her published, impress the Dean, and save her job. But her English idyll ends when her mother, Hildy, passes away from an apparent heart attack. Returning to Brigid's Island, North Carolina, for the funeral, Summer is impatient to settle the estate, sell her mom's embarrassingly romance-themed bookstore, Beach Reads, and go home. But as she drops by Beach Reads, Summer finds threatening notes addressed to Hildy: 'Sell the bookstore or die.' Clearly, something is rotten on Brigid's Island. What method is behind the madness? Was Hildy murdered? The police insist there's not enough evidence to launch a murder investigation. Instead, Summer and her Aunt Agatha muster their courage and start sleuthing, with the help of Hildy's beloved book club. But there are more suspects on Brigid's Island than are dreamt of in the Bard's darkest philosophizing."

Rachel: Ooo.

Mary: "And if Summer can't find the villain, the town will be littered with a Shakespearean tragedy's worth of corpses—including her own."

Rachel: Next up is "Confessions of a Curious Bookseller" by Elizabeth Green. It's considered chicklit—a genre no one would have guessed I'd choose—but you know what they say! Don't judge a book by its genre…or, um, something. "Without question, Fawn Birchill knows that her used bookstore is the heart of West Philadelphia, a cornerstone of culture for a community that, for the past twenty years, has found the quirkiness absolutely charming. When an amicable young indie bookseller invades her block, Fawn is convinced that his cushy couches, impressive selection, coffee bar, and knowledgeable staff are a neighborhood blight. Misguided yet blindly resilient, Fawn readies for battle. But as she wages her war, Fawn is forced to reflect

on a few unavoidable truths: the tribulations of online dating, a strained relationship with her family, and a devoted if not always law-abiding intern—not to mention what to do about a pen pal with whom she hasn't been entirely honest and the litany of repairs her aging store requires. Through emails, journal entries, combative online reviews, texts, and tweets, Fawn plans her next move. Now it's time for her to dig deep and use every trick at her disposal if she's to reclaim her beloved business—and her life." I kind of dig weird formatting choices, including stories told through email messages and social media. Done right, it can be fun. I'm not convinced Green has mastered this form of storytelling, per se, but she certainly gives it a go! I think the largest qualm most readers have is that the protagonist, Fawn, is very difficult to like. She can come across as annoying, but I suspect that's rather the point. Keep in mind characters are supposed to have many different qualities, and not all of them need to be praise-worthy in order to be realistic. For a chicklit readalike, I recommend "The Lending Library" by Aliza Fogelson. It's about an independent library rather than a store, but they both trade in the same circles.

Mary: My last pic is "The Bookish Life of Nina Hill" by Abbi Waxman. Nina has in my opinion, the perfect gig. She's in her late twenties, works at the local bookstore, does trivia with her friends, and fills her days with reading. What part of that doesn't sound amazing? Unfortunately, much of her life is centered on avoiding things that will trigger her anxiety…not relatable at all right?

Rachel: No…

Mary: She has a planner that she uses the heck out of, and that seems to help. But she's forced to get out of her comfort zone when the bookshop falls behind on the rent payments and when her 'not very involved'—and by that I mean not involved at all—father dies. Now, she has family members she never had relationships with crawling out of the woodwork. They all want to meet her and have a relationship with her. That's not so bad, though, because you see there's this cute guy named Tom that seems pretty enamored with Nina… There's some drama, some love, some angst. This relatable and fun read is sure to have you turning the pages to get to the end. If you're looking for a read-alike, "Zora Books Her Happy Ever After" by Taj McCoy is a great one! "Independent bookstore owner Zora, focused on her business, is elated when her

author crush, Lawrence, asks her out on a date after an event at her store. But his snarky best friend, Reid, seems to be a distraction she can't resist! As she navigates an increasingly complicated love life, she senses that both Lawrence and Reid are hiding something, prompting her to unravel the mystery before choosing her happily ever after." Could you imagine your favorite author asking you out and then his best friend also asks you out?

Rachel: I cannot.

Mary: Listen…you'll have to read the book to find out what Zora decides to do.

Rachel: My final choice is "The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry" by Gabrielle Zevin. "A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. His wife has died, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. Slowly but surely, he is isolating himself from all the people of Alice Island. Even the books in his store have stopped holding pleasure for him. These days, A.J. can only see them as a sign of a world that is changing too rapidly. And then a mysterious package appears at the bookstore. It's a small package, but large in weight. It's that unexpected arrival that gives A. J. Fikry the opportunity to make his life over, the ability to see everything anew. It doesn't take long for the locals to notice the change overcoming A.J.; or for the wisdom of all those books to become again the lifeblood of A.J.'s world; or for everything to twist again into a version of his life that he didn't see coming." Who doesn't love a redemption story? Also, owning a bookstore on an island? That's the dream! Losing your partner…not so much. This tale is twisty and dramatic and yes, even romantic. Zevin has more recently written a novel called "Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow" that isn't really anything like this one apart from being about business—if only tangentially—but I still recommend it in case you end up liking the author's writing style. "Tomorrow" was wildly popular during its release in 2022…I remember seeing it on top-selling lists and review magazines. There are currently eighty-eight copies in our library system—a solid sign that demand is still high!

Mary: That's all we have time for for this episode. Thanks so much for listening! We will be back again next month with more reading recommendations. Remember to check the show notes for a list of all the things we just talked about. Also, please subscribe, rate, and share Not Your

Mother's Library with your inner circle. If you need to reach us, just visit the Oak Creek Public Library's website—there's a Contact Us page—or login to Facebook and send a message to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Mary: Bye!

(Brief outro music)