Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 55: Last Three

(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: Usually, we shake things up by observing a holiday or promoting a program. But we know you've been wondering…what the heck do librarians read? So, we are going to talk about the last three books each of us has read. Go ahead and sit back, relax, and let us do what we do best: recommend some great reads! (whispers) All of these reviews are all spoiler free.

Mary: Now, I'm one of those people that cannot just read one book at a time. I'm definitely a mood reader, so I have to have at least three books cookin' at all times. My first book I'm going to talk about is "Starling House" by Alix E. Harrow which I basically read in one sitting. It was amazing. I messaged Rachel before I was even finished with it, I was so excited.

Rachel: It's true.

Mary: Opal is a young woman who has gotten through her life by lying, stealing, and only doing what she needs to do, not what she wants to do. She has a mental list of what she needs and who she needs to be responsible for. Some people have sadly been crossed off the list too early. Opal and her little brother, Jasper, grew up in extreme poverty, only having a place to stay at the crumbling motel in town because of some agreement their mother made before she was killed in a car accident. All Opal wants is to get Jasper out of the tiny little town of Eden, Kentucky before he's stuck there just like her. She wants him away from all of the problems that come with being a brown boy in a small, southern town built on the backs of enslaved people. But her dreams at night won't stop. Sometimes, they're nightmares of horrible memories. Sometimes, they're a remix of the disturbing childhood book she's been obsessed with. Sometimes, they're of a house Opal's never been inside of. These dreams escalate when

she finds herself standing outside Starling House for the umpteenth time—an old, haunted mansion, according to the locals. But this time, she's not alone. The newest owner of Starling House is standing on the other side of the gate.

Rachel: (gasps)

(thunder crash sound effect)

Mary: The shock doesn't really wear off as he rasps a single word: "Run!" It's a wonderfully written story about regular people whose luck…fate…destiny?—whatever you believe in—is running out. A story about families that hurt each other, and a story about how important the family you find can be. It's also a story about how important dreams are. They show you who you are, what you want, and can help you cope with the real-life horrors you face. I would compare "Starling House" to T. Kingfisher's "The Twisted Ones," which I also made Rachel read if you can remember back that far. Alix E. Harrow has other titles that I'm excited to read: One is called "The Ten Thousand Doors of January," which sounds just as great. It's about another huge mansion that has secrets. The protagonist, January, finds a book that "smells of other worlds." I mean…sign me up!

Rachel: I forced myself to stick to a strict format and looked up the last three books I've read instead of picking out any graphic novels. It was a tough choice, but I made the hard decision for all your sakes'! My most recent read was "Good Bad Girl" by Alice Feeney. It took forever for the hold to come through on Libby but, when it did, I was so pumped! This is one of the few authors whose bibliographies I've read in their entirety, so you could say that I am a bit of a fan. And I have Mary to thank for getting me into it!

Mary: Yay!

Rachel: (laughs) First, the blurb: "Twenty years after a baby is stolen from a stroller, a woman is murdered in a care home. The two crimes are somehow linked, and a good bad girl may be the key to discovering the truth. Edith may have been tricked into a nursing home, but at eighty-years-young, she's planning her escape. Patience works there, cleaning messes and bonding with Edith, a kindred spirit. But Patience is lying to Edith about almost everything. Edith's own

daughter, Clio, won't speak to her. And someone new is about to knock on Clio's door…and their intentions aren't good. With every reason to distrust each other, the women must solve a mystery with three suspects, two murders, and one victim. If they do, they might just find out what happened to the baby who disappeared, the mother who lost her, and the connections that bind them." This is probably the most soap opera-esque of all Feeney's novels. There are four character perspectives throughout, but I had no trouble keeping track of everyone. Like many thrillers, it is also a page-turner. I love when writers are masters of the art of the chapter-end cliffhanger. This is when you're reading the last few sentences, ready to place a bookmark or dogear the page and come back to it later, but then the author drops a twist or an otherwise eye-widening plot point that has you going, "All right, maybe just one more." Before you know it, you're over halfway through the manuscript and haven't had so much as a coffee break. Looking for a readalike? I wholeheartedly recommend another of Feeney's novels—possibly my favorite so far—"His and Hers." It centers around murder, a tarnished romantic relationship, and frayed familial ties. "When a woman is murdered in Blackdown, newsreader Anna Andrews is reluctant to cover the case. Detective Jack Harper is suspicious of her involvement, until he becomes a suspect in his own murder investigation. Someone isn't telling the truth, and some secrets are worth killing to keep." I recommend the audiobook version, because it is narrated by Richard Armitage and Stephanie Racine. Both of them have luxurious English accents.

Mary: I loved me some Alice Feeney when I read "Rock Paper Scissors!" But another book I just recently read was "The Hurricane Wars" by Thea Guanzon. I'd seen this book everywhere on social media, and I had to add it to my list. The main character, Talasyn was born in a time of war. As a young woman, she is a soldier fighting for one side of this ever-raging conflict called the Hurricane Wars. She and the other soldiers stationed with her have formed a tightknit group that is as close to a family as many of them have ever been. They are trying to find time for things like relationships and having children of their own when they are continuously interrupted by attacks from the enemy. But Talasyn has a secret: she has light magic. This is something she's hidden from those around her. It was this type of magic that had felled the old Night Emperor generations ago. Now, that emperor's grandson, Prince Alaric, has been sent to take out any threats to the Night Empire. When he sees Talasyn using her light magic, he knows

he has to neutralize the threat with his own dark magic. This is a classic enemies-to-lovers trope on an epic stage. How will they reconcile their feelings for each other while doing what's best for their respective kingdoms? There is excellent world-building in this story. The tone feels more 'young adult' than a true, dense fantasy. That's something to keep in mind if you decide to pick up this title. If you know me, I'm not a fan of the angsty-teen vibe of some YA novels. For this reason, this book took me a little longer to get through…but the plot is there. If you or someone you know enjoys YA fantasy, have them add this to their list!

Rachel: My second-latest read was a lot quirkier than I usually go in for. It's "The Kamogawa Food Detectives" by Hisashi Kashiwai, translated to English from its original Japanese by Jesse Kirkwood. "What's the one dish you'd do anything to taste just one more time? Down a quiet backstreet in Kyoto exists a very special restaurant. Run by Koishi Kamogawa and her father Nagare, the Kamogawa Diner serves up deliciously extravagant meals. But that's not the main reason customers stop by. The father-daughter duo are 'food detectives'. Through ingenious investigations, they are able to recreate dishes from a person's treasured memories—dishes that may well hold the keys to their forgotten past and future happiness." It's listed as a cozy mystery, but I see it more as a slice of life than anything else. Each chapter covers a different customer, providing a little vignette that allows us to peek into their lives while supplying us with a wider and wider glimpse into how the detectives operate. To be perfectly honest, I picked up this book because the cover features an orange cat chilling out in a noodle bowl. While the cat doesn't feature heavily in the story, it does make an appearance in every chapter. Bonus points! There is already a sequel to this bestseller called "The Restaurant of Lost Recipes," and on that cover the kitty is sniffing a plate of sushi. So, I am undoubtedly going to read that one, too.

Mary: My last recent read is "Divine Rivals" by Rebecca Ross. This is another one I kept seeing everywhere. People were saying it was so beautifully written and, I have to say, it really is. It was refreshing to switch it up from my great big thousand-page fantasy books to something a little quicker but no less impactful. It's the story of two nineteen-year-olds who are affected heavily by not only their families' political views on the war raging between two gods but, eventually, the fighting on the frontlines. Iris Winnow, who just misses her brother after he

went to fight in the war for Enva—a goddess we are led to believe has been wronged by the god of the Underworld, Dacre—has been writing letters to him. Those letters have been disappearing out of her closet. What's even more surprising is that one day she gets a response, but it isn't from her brother. She's been neglected by her mother and treated unfairly in her job. She's a talented journalist that works for a newspaper heavily skewed by propaganda. The mysterious letters are her only momentary reprieve. Her rival at the newspaper, Roman Kitt, has his own family issues that lead him to make some hard decisions. His father thinks being a columnist for the paper is more prestigious than pursuing his dreams in literature. As time goes on and Iris and Roman see more and more of what is truly happening on the front lines, they must decide for themselves what side of the war they are on, what and who is important to them, and what to do about it. Technically, this is another YA or new adult novel, but it doesn't feel that way. Some topics in this book are very timely and a little gruesome. The second book of this series, "Ruthless Vows," just came out this year! I'm going to start that one next. Since this book ends on a cliff hanger, I would say go ahead and check out both right away. You're not going to want to put them down.

Rachel: This final book took me an entire year to read! It's less than two hundred pages, but you'll be able to understand just why it took so long in a minute. "A Year Unfolding: A Printmaker's View" is by one of my favorite artists, Angela Harding. Chapters are divided into different seasons, so I read each one 'in real-time', as it were. "A Year Unfolding is a journey through Angela's year in nature watching the seasons unfold in front of her from her studio in Rutland, and giving the reader detail into how nature transforms and evolves over the course of the year. [It] also tells the stories behind some of Angela's most popular images, giving context to [her] celebrated work, as well as new art created specifically for the book. The beautiful illustrations and evocative imagery of the prose make this the perfect book for…readers and art lovers everywhere. Angela has created the covers for many bestselling books, including 'The Salt Path' and 'The Wild Silence' by Raynor Winn, 'October, October' by Katya Balen, 'English Pastoral' by James Rebanks, 'Christmas is Murder' by Val McDermid, and 'RSPB Birds' among many others." I keep my copy on the fireplace mantel. Don't go getting any ideas—I'm not that bougie. The fireplace hasn't worked since I moved in, and it costs too much to get fixed.

However, it does provide a free bookshelf! If you're looking for another book to display in your living room, be it on the mantel, your coffee table, or another place of pride, I recommend "Wild Light: A Printmaker's Day and Night" by the same author/artist. "With more than seventy original illustrations, 'Wild Light' invites you to look at how light changes the world around us and how that changes us in turn." It was published just a year after "A Year Unfolding," so clearly Harding's work is popular enough to warrant multiple tomes! She specializes in linocut prints of animals, foliage, and landscapes. If you're into traditional art and illustration, you have to check out some of her amazing works.

Mary: That's all, listeners. Thank you for tuning in. Rachel and I will return next month with a special guest or two. You can check the show notes for a list of all the books we just talked about. Please subscribe to, rate, and share Not Your Mother's Library. Remember, you can always reach out to us on the Oak Creek Public Library website or through Facebook @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Mary: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Mary: I love me some Alice Feeney.

Rachel: (wheezes)

Mary: Should I say it like that?

Rachel and Mary: (laugh)

Rachel: (still laughing) You don't even have to say it again—that take'll do!

Mary: (laughs harder) And cut.

Rachel and Mary: (laugh again)

Mary: I loved me some Alice Feeney when I read "Rock Paper Scissors," but another book (cracks up) I just recently read was "The Hurricane Wars."

Rachel: So sordid.

Mary: (laughs weakly)

Rachel: Is there something you're not telling us, Mary?

Mary: (skeevy voice) I love me some Alice Feeney.

Rachel: (laughs harder)

Mary: It's supposed to be funny.

Rachel: Yes, yes.

Mary: It's just not supposed to be that creepy.

Rachel: No. (laughs) It's a fine line. You do it again and I swear I won't laugh. I swear.