Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 58: Oh So Spooky

(Brief intro music)

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

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: We're getting ready for Halloween here at OCPL, so we thought we'd recommend our spookiest stories! Witches, ghosts, ghouls, vampires, cults—all of it! Rachel and I have been impatiently waiting for this episode, so we're just going to jump right in! Try not to get too scared.

Rachel: I am a 'consume scary stories twelve months out of the year' kind of person but tend to listen to them rather than pick up a book. It's like…okay, this is cheesy, but it gives me 'sitting around a campfire' vibes. The atmosphere just works, you know? So, let me first recommend some spine-tingling podcasts built on fictive horror. Lately, I have been hooked on Shelby Scott's "Scare You to Sleep." This is a weekly podcast where the host narrates "several spooky stories with added sound effects to create an immersive world. Each story is read in a soothing voice that will act as a siren song to the terrifying content you will hear." Some of these are written by Shelby herself, but for the most part they are either user-submitted or come from classical horror authors. If you dabble in the macabre, I encourage you to submit your own story! Fiction and non-fiction are both allowed. Credit is always given, and you retain every right to your own work. Anyway, I like "Scare You to Sleep" in particular for a couple reasons. One: The narration is, mystifyingly, soothing despite the horrific subject matter. I wouldn't say I have ever fallen asleep to it, but the possibility isn't entirely ludicrous. Two: The classic tales are a bit more obscure than what you get in other podcasts. I remember some earlier episodes when Shelby covered "The Phantom Coach" by Amelia B. Edwards, "The Woman in the Black Coat" by Joseph le Fanu, and "Behind the Yellow Door" by Flavia Richardson. Not household names like Poe and Lovecraft, maybe, but they are gems under a certain slant of light. If you'd

like more original stuff, I recommend “A Darker Tale.” This podcast was short lived—there were only eleven episodes released from 2019-2021—but they are all excellent “horror stories for rainy nights.” The show “center[s] around the occult, serial killers and the supernatural.” For something just as short but no less scary, give “Caledonian Gothic” a try. The blurbs for each episode are vague and bizarre…you’ll just have to listen to experience them. What I can tell you is that each episode focuses on a different yet interconnected story about missing children, and they each take place in the hollow places of Scotland. These range from subtly disturbing to outright bizarre, and you’ll be on the edge of your seat from go. In a similar vein is the podcast called “The Lurking Transmission.” They best way I can describe it is as a sort of haunted radio station based in the southern U.S., featuring anthology horror, satire, and musical guests. I will also give a quick shout out to a supernatural thriller audio drama titled “The Secret of St. Kilda.” Like “Caledonian Gothic,” this too takes place in Scotland, but it has a full cast of voice actors instead of a single creator. Follow “Lauchlan MacGregor, an ex-con man, as he flees to an island at the edge of the world in an attempt to escape his past. However, he soon finds that the island’s strange inhabitants have plans for him, and that outrunning his demons may be more difficult than anticipated.” The first season was outstanding and won many awards. Series two is currently in preproduction. For a listen-alike while you wait, my go-to is “Don’t Mind Cruxmont” by the famous Fool & Scholar Productions. “After his brother goes missing on a road trip, American I.T. specialist Neal Mitchell leaves his comfort zone to search for Colin at his last known location: Cruxmont, U.K. While there, Neal meets Dr. Gwendolyn Kingston, a neurologist with her own goal in mind; finding the source of an unrecognizable miracle drug traced back to the village of Cruxmont.” Okay. Cool. Those are plenty of recommendations from me for now, so I will pass the flashlight over to Mary.

Mary: I also love some good old-fashioned gothic horror. My first recommendation on this train is “Crimson Peak” by Nancy Holder. I know what you’re thinking! ‘Isn’t that movie?’ Yes, but Nancy Holder has written a novelization of the 2015 movie. Don’t let that deter you! Holder does an excellent job expanding the characters and really giving you those extra details that aren’t in the movie. Set in Victorian-era New York City, Edith Cushing is an aspiring writer. She’s determined to be more than just another average girl content to do quote-unquote ‘women’s

work'. She strives to be independent, strong, and true to herself. She's also still reeling from the death of her mother whom Edith thinks may be watching over her from beyond the grave. When a mysterious stranger—Sir Thomas Sharpe—walks into her life, she becomes immediately taken with him. After a whirlwind relationship, she marries him to move to his estate far away in England. Here, she meets his scheming sister Lucille. Edith's father disapproves of this hurried marriage and it seems he was correct, because as soon as she arrives nothing is as she's imagined. The house is run down and sinking into a hill of blood-red clay. There are secrets and literal ghosts crawling behind every door, trying to get her to leave. The handsome, wealthy man she thought she married may not be who she thought he was. A good gothic readalike is "A House of Bells" by J.T. Croft. The author calls this novel "Jane Eyre meets The Woman in Black." Tell me that doesn't make you want to read it all ready?

Rachel: For real!

Mary: Set just a few years later than "Crimson Peak," in 1918 Governess Grace Meadows, who specializes in children who have lost the ability to speak, finds herself again without a position. Grace is traumatized by a horrible accident involving a child she couldn't save and is now unable to be around fire—even a candle to see by. She's not someone you'd like to go camping with.

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: When she gets an offer for a job at a rundown manor to care for a young girl who won't speak after the sudden loss of her mother, she hesitates to take it even though she needs the money. Can she continue down this path of being a governess when her failures continue to literally haunt her? Can she save this new little girl from the dead that still reside in the house? You'll have to read it to find out. And, while we're at it, if you're looking for some classics that fit in this vibe, please do read "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë and "The Woman in Black" by Susan Hill. Both will leave you wishing you had a nightlight.

Rachel: It has been a while since I've recommend any graphic novels; you should be both awed and amazed at my restraint. Well, that all changes today, darlin', 'cause there's no dearth of creepy comics! Let's dive in with "Harrow County" by Cullen Bunn. Originally published by Dark

Horse from 2015 to ’18, there are thirty-two issues collected into eight volumes, four library editions, and two omnibuses. That many reprints is how you know it’s a popular series. Described as southern gothic, the story is about a young girl and the horrible, preternatural things that go on in the holler where she grew up. “Emmy always knew that the woods surrounding her home crawled with ghosts and monsters. But on the eve of her eighteenth birthday, she learns that she is connected to these creatures—and to the land itself—in a way she never imagined.” Along the way, Emmy allies with a skinless boy, an Abandoned monster, and a Hedge witch in order to quell the local haints and fight a powerful evil. I loved this series because it paints an incredible picture of the Appalachian region during the 1930s. The pages ooze historical atmosphere, and each character is woven tighter than bark on a tree. An easy readalike is the follow-up series “Tales from Harrow County” by the same author. I haven’t had the chance to read any of the three available collections yet, but they’re near the tippy-top of my TBR list, for sure. Another ghastly grimoire is by BOOM! Studios, and boy is this one a doozy! Welcome James Tynion IV’s malevolent creation from the year of our dark lord 2020: “Something is Killing the Children.” “When the children of Archer's Peak—a sleepy town in the heart of America—begin to go missing, everything seems hopeless. Most children never return, but the ones that do have terrible stories—impossible details of terrifying creatures that live in the shadows. Their only hope of finding and eliminating the threat is the arrival of a mysterious stranger, one who believes the children and claims to be the only one who sees what they can see. Her name is Erica Slaughter. She kills monsters. That is all she does, and she bears the cost because it must be done.” Think modern Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but with a corrupted Watcher’s Council. The final volume in the main story arc was just published earlier this year, but never fear—haha—because there is also a special standalone with all-new stories, plus the “House of Slaughter” and “Book of Butcher” spinoff series. Keep your finger on that deadened pulse, too, because I’ve heard tell the so-called ‘Slaughterverse’ is coming to Netflix. If you’d like something a little more standalone, I’d like to recommend a three-volume tale from 2021 titled “The Silver Coin” by Chip Zdarsky and Image Comics. “A failing rock band’s fortune changes overnight when they find the mysterious Silver Coin. Next, it helps handle some mean girls at sleep-away camp. Follow the curious token as it changes hands over centuries—from

Puritan New England to the scavenged junklands of 2467—and discover how much pain a cursed coin can purchase." Cursed objects are my jam, yo! This is a fun sorta-kinda-anthology series that contains many a horror genre trope but delivers with excruciating accuracy in both plot and artwork. No readalike for this one, listeners, because "The Silver Coin" will keep you up at night all by its lonesome.

Mary: Keeping in the theme of excellent film and their corresponding novels, my next rec is "The Haunting of Hill House" by Shirley Jackson. I saw the TV series before I knew about the book but I wholeheartedly recommend both! As a scary movie aficionado, I think this TV series is some of the scariest stuff you'll watch. The TV series follows a group of adult siblings that grew up in Hill House. When their sister dies unexpectedly after returning to the house, they all find that they have different memories of living there…but they all know one thing: They don't want to be back there. I don't want to give too much away because the plot twists are everything but, again, this is scary with a capital 'S'! The book is just a little bit different. The characters have the same names, except they are not siblings but strangers. Dr. Montague is hosting a scientific experiment and invites three others to stay the night at Hill House. As the group spends more time in the house, their lines begin to blur on what is real and what is a hallucination. What are their own thoughts, and what is the House pushing its agenda on them? While it's not a quite a watch-alike, my next recommendation does have a running theme of not being sure what's really happening. In 2023's "Malum," Jessica Loren is on her very first assignment as a rookie police officer. The old police station where she's placed is going to be closed after tonight's shift. It also happens to be the place where her father went on a shooting spree, killing several others and himself. But very quickly she realizes that this is going to be tougher than she anticipated. Besides dealing with her father's reputation of being a mass murderer and possibly being affiliated with a cult, she's getting some scary calls, having scary people stop at the front door, and way more creepy stuff. This woman doesn't get a break. Every scene is scarier than the next…every moment is twist. Absolutely watch this. It's actually a remake of 2014's "Last Shift" also directed by Anthony DiBlasi. "Last Shift" has a one hundred percent on Rotten Tomatoes if that helps your decision to add it to your list!

Rachel: That's all for now, listeners. We will be back again soon with more recommendations. Please check the show notes for a list of all the things we just drooled over. You can subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library and give us a review to justify our continued existence. Have a question? Maybe two? Message us on the Oak Creek Public Library website or on Facebook @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Mary and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)