Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 61: Easy Readin'

(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: Happy new year, everyone. We hope you had a relaxing break. But enough with the niceties—we're here to talk about books! To ease us into the new year, we have easy reads. These can be books that were so gripping we just couldn't put them down or shorter books that we finished in just a day or two. Mary, start us off!

Mary: I'll get this ship sailing with "Undertow: A Short Story" by Marlena Frank. This little story is only forty pages but well worth the read. Main character June has had a complicated life. She finds herself with Jeremy, a romantic partner who isn't the best person you've ever heard of. 'Dark side' doesn't really cover it. While on a yacht with him, her foot gets stuck on a guard rail, and a strange hand comes up from the water to pull her under.

Rachel: (gasps)

Mary: While she is still reeling from this experience, Jeremy comes over and becomes very rough with her. What's worse: The danger from the sea or the danger on board? But hold on tight, because everything isn't as it seems. I love a good ocean horror story. A good readalike is "The Deep" by Nick Cutter. It is a full book, but it's un-put-down-able! A man ends up going to the bottom of the ocean to do research with his genius brother despite being—in his opinion—terribly under-qualified. The purpose of this research is to find a cure for a disease wiping out mankind. Nicknamed "the 'Gets," it makes the sufferer begin to forget little things, like where your keys are, to bigger things, like your name, how to drive, and eventually how to eat or breathe. The problem is, no one has been able to communicate with the lab eight miles below

the surface of the ocean. As Luke heads down to check on his brother Clay, he begins to see more and more that things aren't right. Go ahead and check these two ocean scaries!

Rachel: I will say that I read "The Deep" upon Mary's recommendation, and it is very, very spooky. So.

Mary: Thank you.

Rachel: Enjoy that. (laughs) My recommendation is a collection of comics by author/illustrator Debbie Tung called "Everything Is Okay." This memoir about her own struggles with anxiety and depression is accessible to all readers and features Tung's charming drawings. "She shares what it's like navigating life, overthinking every possible worst-case scenario, and constantly feeling like…hope is lost. The book explores her journey to understanding the importance of mental health in her day-to-day life and how she learns to embrace the highs and lows when things feel out of control. Debbie opens up about deeply personal issues and the winding road to recovery, discovers the value of self-love, and rebuilds a more mindful relationship with her mental health." Through this collection, "[Tung] aims to provide positive and comforting messages to anyone who is facing similar difficulties or is just trying to get through a tough time in life. She hopes to encourage readers to be kinder to themselves, to know that they are not alone, and that it's okay to be vulnerable." I read this a couple months ago when the days started getting shorter and the SADs started kicking in. Even though the story is, well, sad, there are shards of light prickling the darkness, and I found the book as a whole to be rather uplifting. Easy readalikes are Tung's other works, including: "Happily Ever After and Everything In Between," which is about her adult life and relationship with her significant other; "Book Love," all about being a bibliophile and embracing the isolating behavior it induces; and "Quiet Girl in a Noisy World," which delves into the author's introversion and how her personality conflicts with what is considered 'normal' by modern society.

Mary: Now, I have a not-so-fun disclaimer. This recommendation and the readalike have some trigger warnings: They contain topics of infant death, depression, and suicidal ideation, so please keep that in mind. I'm going with a classic for my next recommendation. At a cool ninety pages, "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is going to want to make you go

outside and touch grass immediately. Published in 1892, it might be old, but it's not outdated. The narrator is suffering from 'hysterics' soon after giving birth. Today, we would call this post-partum depression. Her husband, a physician of the time, is adamant that he knows what will make her 'feel better'. The story is formatted as a series of diary entries that get progressively more unhinged. Stuck inside a room, forced to not 'exert' herself with any tasks mental or physical, she's left with keeping a secret diary and staring at the peeling yellow wallpaper and the bars on the windows. It's a great contemporary perspective on what some women's experiences were with topics like mental illness during the Victorian era. It also shows how little agency women had over things as simple as their own daily activities despite being a grown adult. So, I invite you to give "The Yellow Wallpaper" a try and let yourself slip into the Victorian era for brief moment. A great readalike is "The Bell Jar" by Sylvia Plath. Another classic, this short novel is less than three hundred pages. Esther is a young woman just starting her plans for a career. She's at this precipice of her life: Should she settle down and marry? Should she pursue a career as a writer? While she is trying to figure this out, several things happen to her that cause her to spiral into a dark depression. But the question Esther asks herself is, "Will I ever be sane again?" "The Bell Jar" is heartbreaking to read, but readers understand her descent as it's happening. Her decisions and reasoning are so logical in the moment. It's definitely eye-opening.

Rachel: We're getting to the point with this podcast—now that it's been going for five years—that I can't remember if I've recommended something before and have just forgotten. If that is the case now, sorry! Truly. But what are the chances that you've listened to every single episode, anyway? I think it's safe to risk re-recommending "Rabbits" by Terry Miles. It is based on a dark fiction podcast of the same name wherein a woman looks into the disappearance of her best friend only to uncover a mysterious conspiracy. You do not need to listen to this limited, twenty-episode series in order to enjoy the book, but I recommend it simply because I'm in love with multi-format stories. If you have a thing for thrillers and different dimensions, then you'll trip face-first down this rabbit hole. Here's the brief: "Rabbits is a mysterious alternate reality game so vast it uses our global reality as [a] canvas. Since the game first started in 1959, ten iterations have appeared and nine winners have been declared. Their identities are

unknown. So is their reward, which is whispered to be NSA or CIA recruitment, vast wealth, immortality, or perhaps even the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe itself. But the deeper you get, the more deadly the game becomes. Players have died in the past—and the body count is rising. And now the eleventh round is about to begin. Enter K—a Rabbits obsessive who has been trying to find a way into the game for years. That path opens when K is approached by billionaire Alan Scarpio, the alleged winner of the sixth iteration. Scarpio says that something has gone wrong with the game and that K needs to fix it before Eleven starts or the whole world will pay the price. Five days later, Scarpio is declared missing. Two weeks after that, K blows the deadline and Eleven begins. And suddenly, the fate of the entire universe is at stake." "Rabbits" is just about as warped as they come, and if you are craving more, I recommend its just-as-nonsensical sequel "The Quiet Room." You won't be able to put either book down until their unavoidable endings.

Mary: Speaking of rabbits…my next recommendation is "What Moves the Dead" by T. Kingfisher. If you're a diehard fan of this podcast, you'll know I love me some T. Kingfisher. This is the first book of her "Sworn Soldier" series and is based on Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." That's already a win and an excellent next read if you haven't read it yet. "What Moves the Dead" introduces us to Alex Easton, a retired soldier who receives a letter from their childhood friend, Madeline Usher, who tells them that she's dying. Easton races to visit and finds a very strange situation indeed. Madeline certainly doesn't look well but in addition to that, there are rumors that the local wildlife—specifically the hares around the Usher land—are acting strangely…as if possessed. Easton works to solve the mystery of Madeline's illness and the weird hares while simultaneously keeping an eye on the suspicious behavior of her brother, Roderick. The ending definitely wasn't what I expected at all! I won't give it away, but don't drink the water if you go to an old estate next to a pond. If this isn't enough House of Usher for you, Netflix recently came out with their miniseries "The Fall of the House of Usher" consisting of eight episodes all in one season. In this version, "Roderick Usher, the CEO of pharmaceutical company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals, loses all six of his children within two weeks. The evening after the final funeral, Roderick invites C. Auguste Dupin, an Assistant United States Attorney who dedicated his career to exposing Fortunato's corruption,

to his childhood home, where he tells the true story of his family and unveils the Ushers' darkest secrets." Each episode has elements from Poe's other short stories in a sort of mashup of his anthology.

Rachel: I must be a sucker for reality-bending thrillers, because my final recommendation today is "The Raw Shark Texts" by Steven Hall. It reads like one of the scarier episodes of "Doctor Who" combined with Christopher Nolan's "Memento." If you have no idea what words just left my mouth, here's the blurb to help you understand: "Eric Sanderson wakes up in a house one day with no idea who or where he is. A note instructs him to see a Dr. Randle immediately, who informs him that he is undergoing yet another episode of acute memory loss that is a symptom of his severe dissociative disorder. Eric's been in Dr. Randle's care for two years—since the tragic death of his great love, Clio, while the two vacationed in the Greek islands. But there may be more to the story, or it may be a different story altogether. As Eric begins to examine letters and papers left in the house by 'the first Eric Sanderson', a staggeringly different explanation for what is happening [begins to] emerge, and he and the reader embark on a quest to recover the truth and escape the remorseless predatory forces that threaten to devour him. 'The Raw Shark Texts' is a kaleidoscopic novel about the magnitude of love and the devastating effect of losing that love. It will dazzle you, it will move you, and [it] will leave an indelible imprint like nothing you have read in a long time." Wow, this one just sells itself, doesn't it? I remember checking it out at the start of summer vacation one year and winding up a little miffed that I had read it front to back in just one evening. It needed to last longer!

Mary: That's the end of today's episode, listeners. We'll be back next month with even more recommendations. Please remember to check the show notes for a list of all the good books we just talked about. You can also subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library or write us a nice review. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Mary: Bye!

(Brief outro music)