Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 63: Break-ing Eggs

(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: We're already in April, and Easter break is on the horizon. Today we are discussing books that are great to read if you have a day or two of free time. Or three? Four? Wow, thank you, holidays.

Mary: If you're a gardener, it's time to start planning and planting. I've got some gardening novels for you when you need to take a break from the rake.

Rachel: (snickers)

Mary: Do you see what I did there? My first recommendation is "The Twilight Garden" by Sara Nisha Adams. The blurb says: "In a small pocket of the city, between the houses of No. 77 and No. 79 on Eastbourne Road, there's a neglected community garden. Once vibrant and welcoming, and a sanctuary for the people when they needed it most, the garden's gate is firmly closed. But it only takes a small seed of an idea for big changes to happen. And as the neighbors' need for connection grows, the twilight garden comes out of hibernation..." It's giving "Secret Garden" vibes but with adults. If your gardening itch isn't satisfied with "The Twilight Garden," try "The Last Garden in England" by Julia Kelly. This story bounces between three different time periods. "Present day: Emma Lovett, who has dedicated her career to breathing new life into long-neglected gardens, has just been given the opportunity of a lifetime: to restore the gardens of the famed Highbury House estate, designed in 1907 by her hero Venetia Smith. But as Emma dives deeper into the gardens' past, she begins to uncover secrets that have long lain hidden. Cut to 1907: A talented artist with a growing reputation for her ambitious work, Venetia Smith has carved out a niche for herself as a garden designer to

industrialists, solicitors, and bankers looking to show off their wealth with sumptuous country houses. When she is hired to design the gardens of Highbury House, she is determined to make them a triumph, but the gardens—and the people she meets—promise to change her life forever. Then we skip ahead to 1944: When land girl Beth Pedley arrives at a farm on the outskirts of the village of Highbury, all she wants is to find a place she can call home. Cook Stella Adderton, on the other hand, is desperate to leave Highbury House to pursue her own dreams. And widow Diana Symonds, the mistress of the grand house, is anxiously trying to cling to her pre-war life now that her home has been requisitioned and transformed into a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. But when war threatens Highbury House's treasured gardens, these three very different women are drawn together by a secret that will last for decades." Who doesn't love a good garden secret? Or…a secret garden?

Rachel: (laughs)

Mary: Sorry, it was only my favorite book as a child. Rachel, what cha' got?

Rachel: My first recommendation is a middle-grade graphic memoir entitled "A First Time for Everything" by Dan Santat. "Dan's always been a good kid. The kind of kid who listens to his teachers, helps his mom with grocery shopping, and stays out of trouble. But being a good kid doesn't stop him from being bullied and feeling like he's invisible, which is why Dan has low expectations when his parents send him on a class trip to Europe… He's stuck with the same girls from his middle school who love to make fun of him, and he doesn't know why his teacher insisted he come on this trip. But as he travels through France, Germany, Switzerland, and England, a series of first experiences begin to change him—first Fanta, first fondue, first time stealing a bike from German punk rockers...and first love." I don't know about you, but my middle school years were a haze of having too many emotions and not having the faintest idea who I was. Coming of age stories—or 'Bildungsroman'—are sought after through the centuries because everyone can relate. Growing up is as universal an experience as it is individualistic, so when you find a story that connects with memories you yourself can recognize, it's affirming. I think it's nice to be reminded now and again that other people exist who have gone through similar, if not the same exact, sorrows and pleasures. This is amplified tenfold when conveyed

through a visual medium. Our brains are built to pick apart symbolism and similar cues distinguished by specific artistic choice, and I found Santat's reimagining of his most awkward years was nicely cushioned by his realistic yet colorful drawings. He has a background in illustrating children's books, and that charming style carried over to "A First Time for Everything." A good readalike is "Merry-Go-Round" by Sergio Rossi. It "features the stories of a group of young people just trying to get through their day-to-day life, all while romance and simply growing up are throwing roadblocks along the way. Based on the Arthur Schnitzler play by the same name, this volume is a perfect encapsulation of growing up, and trying to figure everything out."

Mary: As winter fades out and the mud starts to dry up, we want to get out of our houses. Maybe to a little getaway by the lake? "The Suite Spot by Trish Doller" will give you the lake vibes but not so much the vacation part. "Rachel Beck has hit a brick wall. She's a single mom, still living at home and trying to keep a dying relationship alive. Aside from her daughter, the one bright light in Rachel's life is her job as the night reservations manager at a luxury hotel in Miami Beach—until the night she is fired for something she didn't do. On impulse, Rachel inquires about a management position at a brewery hotel on an island in Lake Erie called Kelleys Island. When she's offered the job, Rachel packs up her daughter and makes the cross country move. What she finds on Kelleys Island is Mason, a handsome, moody man who knows [absolutely] everything about brewing beer and nothing about running a hotel. Especially one that's barely more than foundation and studs. It's not the job Rachel was looking for, but Mason offers her a chance to help build a hotel—and rebuild her own life—from the ground up." If once you see if Rachel Beck is able to finish the hotel you still have a hankering for more time by the water, try "One Night on the Island" by Josie Silver. "Spending her thirtieth birthday alone is the last thing that dating columnist Cleo wanted, but she is going on a self-coupling quasi-sabbatical—at the insistence of her boss—in the name of re-energizing herself and adding a new perspective to her column. The remote Irish island she's booked is a far cry from London, but at least it's a chance to hunker down in a luxury cabin and indulge in some quiet, solitary self-care while she figures out her next steps in her love life and her career. Mac is also looking forward to some time to himself. With his life in Boston deteriorating in ways he can't bring

himself to acknowledge, his soul searching has brought him to the same Irish island in search of his roots and some clarity. Unfortunately, a mix-up with the bookings means both solitude seekers have reserved the same one-bedroom hideaway on exactly the same dates. Instantly at odds with each other, Cleo and Mac don't know how they're going to manage until the next weekly ferry arrives. But as the days go by, they no longer seem to mind each other's company quite as much as they thought they would...” Hopefully, listeners, your vacations do not get double-booked. While it’s a fun read, you probably used all your PTO days for that trip, didn’t you?

Rachel: More graphic memoirs? If you insist! “This Country: Searching for Home in (Very) Rural America” by Navied Mahdavian is an emotional doozie. “Before Navied…moved with his wife and dog in November of 2016 from San Francisco to an off-the-grid cabin in rural Idaho, he had never fished, gardened, hiked, hunted, or lived in a snowy place. But there, he could own land, realize his dream of being an artist, and start a family—the Millennial dream. Over the next three years, Mahdavian leaned into the wonders of the natural Idaho landscape and found himself adjusting to and enjoying a slower pace of living. But beyond the boundaries of his six acres, he was confronted with the realities of America’s political shifts and forced to confront the question: Do I belong here? [This] unflinchingly honest graphic memoir charts his growth and struggles as an artist, citizen, and new father. It celebrates his love of place and honors the relationships he makes in rural America, touching on dynamics like culture, environment, and identity…and even articulating difficult moments of racism and brutality he found there as a Middle Eastern American.” I don’t have much more to add about “This Country” other than it is a vital read if you live in the U.S., one that you can blast through in just an hour or two. A young adult readalike written in the same year is “Family Style: Memories of an American from Vietnam” by Thien Pham. “Thien's first memory isn't a sight or a sound. It's the sweetness of watermelon and the saltiness of fish. It's the taste of the foods he ate while adrift at sea as his family fled Vietnam. After the Pham family arrives at a refugee camp in Thailand, they struggle to survive. Things don't get much easier once they resettle in California. And through each chapter of their lives, food takes on a new meaning. Behind every cut of steak and inside every croissant lies a story. And for Thien Pham, that story is about a search—for belonging, for

happiness, for the American dream." Both of these recommendations center around what the 'American dream' looks like in modern day. We are living vastly different lives even though we all call the same place home. It's fascinating and terrible and joyful…and imperative to understand.

Mary: For me, spring is synonymous with organization. Spring cleaning, ever heard of it?

Rachel: (chortles)

Mary: No, but seriously, it can be a great way to reset and get your home ready for all the hustle and bustle of summer. I personally love to look at some good coffee table books to get inspo for my own space. The first one I'm going to suggest is "Organized Living: Solutions and Inspiration for Your Home" by Shira Gill. You'll be able to flip through this book and see examples of minimalist organization solutions if you're looking to downsize and a maximalist organization for all of your sentimental collections that you don't plan to part with. You can also find tips for having a zero-waste home and different ways to shop locally that you may not have thought of. Gill goes through all of the necessary tools—think bins for this and that, label makers, boxes, signs, cleaning supplies, and more. The great thing about this and my next recommendation is that if you want to casually flip through for just the pictures, that's valid. But you can also spend days with it to really reset your space. After you've organized your home, or just enjoyed all of the organized pictures of someone else's space, you can level up with "Call It Home: The Details that Matter" by Amber Lewis. Lewis takes a more interior design approach: how to choose furniture that is right for your home, paint colors, décor, and more! Lewis favors neutral color schemes and natural materials, a trend that is definitely staying for a while. Again, you can spend as much time as you'd like with this one. Spring is all about new ideas, fresh starts, and brightening up your life. No matter what your space already looks like, a little inspiration from nature feels good.

Rachel: Eh, we've talked enough about non-fiction. It's time to get lost in the world of super-powered people! I recently finished "The Human Target" by Tom King, a graphic novel duology taking place in the world of DC. You know, Batman? Green Lantern? Them. Only this is a noir detective thriller where the victim is tasked with finding out who killed him. "Christopher

Chance has made a living out of being a human target—a man hired to disguise himself as his client to invite would-be assassins to attempt his murder. He's had a remarkable career until his latest case protecting Lex Luthor when things go sideways. An assassination attempt Chance didn't see coming leaves him vulnerable and left trying to solve his own murder, as he has twelve days to discover just who in the DC Universe hated Luthor enough to want him dead by slow-acting poison. And the prime suspects happen to be...the Justice League International?"

Mary: W-wh-wha?

Rachel: To be honest, DC has never been my wheelhouse. I've read a fair amount of Batman and a little bit of Superman, but independent publications are more my type. So, I was astonished to find that I couldn't put this down. The pacing is incredible, with cliffhangers that will having you going "Huh-whaaaa…?" and storytelling techniques that assume you're paying enough attention to suss out just what is going on. Plus, Greg Smallwood's art is to die for; think 'vintage advertisement' style reminiscent of Leyendecker. Maybe a bit softer, a bit more fluid. I don't know, it just scratches a certain itch. If you are an ultra-fan of superheroes, you will hail "The Human Target." If you don't care about them in the slightest, I'm willing to bet you will still get a kick out of this series nonetheless. The perfect readalike is "Powers" by Brian Michael Bendis. This is an older comic that first came out in the 2000s, but it feels timeless enough that I honestly didn't even notice. It blends true grit, hard boiled police work with the crimes surrounding suped-up heroes and villains. Never would have thought the noir genre was right up my ally but, by golly, it sure seems to be! I haven't finished "Powers" yet—there are thirteen volumes in the mainline series—but, I can honestly say that I'm excited to keep going with it. The somewhat blocky art style reminds me of "Batman: The Animated Series." Iconic. "Powers" had its own short-lived live-action series, too, but I haven't watched that. Is it good? Is it bad? As with all things, that's entirely subjective!

Mary: That's it for today. We'll be back next month with more reading recommendations. Please remember to check the show notes for a list of everything we just talked about. Remember that you can subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library and maybe write us a nice review! Until next time, happy reading. Bye!

(Brief outro music)