Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 67: Spooky Reads

(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, and even though my co-host Mary isn't here today, we do have a special guest from the library's Children's Department. Hello, Audrey!

Audrey: Hello! How are you?

Rachel: I'm great, yourself?

Audrey: I'm doin' great!

Rachel: This is your first time on the podcast and that is very, very exciting. I promise that it will be a piece of cake.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Listeners, Audrey is here with us to recommend some spooky reads for the fall season. You may be thinking that it's too early for scary stuff. That Halloween is in October, not September! To that I say…it's never too early to be prepared!

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: And if you're anything like the two of us, you know that horror is for year-round enjoyment.

Audrey: (whispers) Yes!

Rachel: Like it or not, autumn is here, the air has gotten much crisper, and the nights are getting longer. So, get in the mood, already! Right, Audrey?

Audrey: (scoffs) Yes!

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Audrey: Well, I feel like such a celebrity.

Rachel: (snickers) You should.

Audrey: Being on this podcast. (laughs)

Rachel: It is quite the honor.

Audrey: And, also, you have such a soothing voice! (laughs)

Rachel: Oh. By the end of this recording, that will be gone, so…

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Enjoy it while you can. Hehe!

Audrey: Well, anyways, hi everyone! I'm Audrey. I am one of the children's librarians here at Oak Creek. Um, this is my first appearance on Not You Mother's Library.

Rachel: Woo!

Audrey: Ah, I am super excited because we are talking about spooky stuff.

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey: And Halloween is my second-most favorite holiday, but that is only because Christmas exists.

Rachel: That's fair. (chuckles)

Audrey: If there wasn't a Christmas, Halloween would be right there. Um, usually I would consider myself a fan of more fun scary Halloween literature and film. So, if you're thinking, like, "Beetlejuice" or "Hocus Pocus."

Rachel: Okay.

Audrey: But recently I have really found an interest in gothic horror and suspense, and this kind of…kinda came out of left field for me. It's not something I ever enjoyed as a child. I used to be so afraid of, like, watching horror movie film trailers.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, I couldn't even watch that.

Rachel: Yup.

Audrey: And then all of a sudden, I kind of got into it. So, um, yeah, this is new for me, and I've kind of been devouring a lot of different books. So, I'm also interested to see what you have recommended.

Rachel: Oh, yes.

Audrey: Because I'm going to write it down! (laughs)

Rachel: I have many, many classics to suggest.

Audrey: Ooh.

Rachel: I think the great thing about gothic horror is it's a really nice gateway into getting darker and darker. It was…it's kind of old-timey.

Audrey: Mmhm, mmhm.

Rachel: So, you're set apart from it and you're, like, out of the moment, so it's not as terrifying as some other stuff. Um, but they do have some creepy things going on, so…

Audrey: Mmhm. Yes, yes.

Rachel: Yes. I'm going to get right into my first recommendation, if that's okay.

Audrey: Yes! I'm gonna write this down. Yes.

Rachel: Okay, so, this one goes back a long time—not just in terms of setting, but from when I myself first read it. It's "Lost Hearts" by M.R. James, and this is a phenomenal classic that has appeared in many short horror story compilations since its original publication in 1895.

Audrey: Ooh.

Rachel: Ya'll, all I have to say is that if you find yourself orphaned and a distant cousin invites you to stay at his remote mansion, maybe give it a pass.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Our protagonist, Stephen Elliot, makes the foolhardy decision to go for it and soon discovers that his cousin, Mr. Abney, is into all sorts of weird occult practices and is obsessed with the idea of immortality.

Audrey: Ooh.

Rachel: Isn't everyone?

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Extended family can be strange. But that's not all, because Stephen is soon plagued by nightmares of a young girl and boy both with their hearts torn out. I know, that just jumped up to one hundred.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Talk about upsetting imagery…

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Is it all in Stephen's head or a warning of things to come? This ghost story—and yes, spoilers, I guess, because some of the characters I just mentioned are ghosts, believe it or not!

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Uh, it sticks in my mind because as a kid, I read an illustrated compendium of horror stories that featured a lot of macabre imagery.

Audrey: (whispers) Yes.

Rachel: And this included a version of "Lost Hearts." So, there was one scene that takes place in a bathroom, of all places, and it was rendered with such disquieting care.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: I wouldn’t say that it scarred me for life…

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: But it was certainly grisly enough where I can still remember into my thirties. So.

Audrey: (whispers) Wow.

Rachel: Why their hearts are missing is a mystery, and I will let you solve that yourself by reading the tale. If you’re fond of classic stories by the likes of M.R. James or even Ambrose Bierce, then I heartily recommend another podcast called “Shadows at the Door” as a listenalike. So, specifically the creator’s series called “The Troughton Stories.” Now, the hosts perform a mix of retellings and original work, and by far the most popular is an ongoing peek into the life of a certain Professor Troughton. He is a skeptic turned paranormal believer who experiences his fair share of hauntings. Portrayed by one of my absolute favorite in the genre, voice actor David Ault, “The Troughton Stories” are sure to leave you shivering.

Audrey: Ohhh.

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: So, what do you have to recommend for your first tale of woe?

Audrey: (sighs) Okay. So, the first one I have is generally considered to be the scariest story written…ever written.

Rachel: Ohh, okay!

Audrey: Although, I have a tendency to disagree with that. I don't feel it's the scariest thing I have ever read. Maybe at the time it was considered.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: But, uh, it is a classic. “The Haunting of Hill House.”

Rachel (gasps) Yes!

Audrey: Uh, by Shirley Jackson. And… I read this last year, and there is so much to unpack!

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: But let me give you an overview to start: “Anthropologist and parapsychologist Dr. John Montague, hoping to legitimize the field of parapsychology through groundbreaking new research, invites a carefully selected group of psychically sensitive individuals from around the country to spend part of the summer at Hill House, a manor in the northeastern United States with a reputation for being deeply haunted. The only two people to accept his invitation are Eleanor Vance, a childhood victim of poltergeist activity who has spent most of her adult life caring for her ailing mother, who has very recently passed away. And Theodora, a bohemian psychic with clairvoyant capabilities (pages turning) who lives with a roommate in a large city. Luke Sanderson, the young man who stands to inherit Hill House from his relatives, also pledges his time for the summer. Montague's lease states that a member of the family who owns Hill House must be present during the experiment to keep an eye on what the renters are doing to the house, as past tenants have had troubles up at the manor.” So, there's just so much—

Rachel: (chuckles)

Audrey: —to unpack with “The Haunting of Hill House.” Like, I…you could…I mean, we could make an entire podcast just on the book alone.

Rachel: We honestly could, going chapter by chapter.

Audrey: Yeah, and you've read it, too, right?

Rachel: Oh, yeah. It’s great.

Audrey: Yeah. It’s…it’s very great. Um…I don't…it…it was definitely very unsettling in parts, but I don't feel like there was as many, like, deeply disturbing scenes or images. (laughs)

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: There was a couple, um…the scariest scene to me—and maybe you remember this one—is, uh, Theodora going into her room and finding her room and closet are covered in, like, this

odd sort of blood substance, and it has a really distinct smell to it, and it's everywhere. It's in her closet. It's in her clothes. There's writing on the wall. It's very, like, strange.

Rachel: Not something you wanna open your door to. (laughs)

Audrey: Right, right. Um…so, you know, I find it… There were other things that I found a little bit campy.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Like, the rooms are spinning and, like, you know…and people are getting lost in the house. It's campy, but it's also, you know, there are some very serious, like, moral undertones to everything.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: So, I don't know. Do you have a favorite scene from that book at all, or…?

Rachel: I… You know, I always think of that stupid Vincent Price version.

Audrey: (laughs) Yeah.

Rachel: Because I saw it on "Svengoolie" when I was a kid.

Audrey: (laughing) Oh, you saw that on "Svengoolie?!"

Rachel: (laughs) So, 'campy' is the perfect word.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: The book itself is…is different, right? To be fair.

Audrey: Yes, yes.

Rachel: Um, but I think what you said about the creeping undertones is perfect.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Because it doesn't really do that 'shock' horror.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Now, there are some scenes in that movie that…that, like, there's a skeleton jumping out at you, right?

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: And, like (mocking tone) 'Ooh, that's spooky!'

Audrey: Uh-huh.

Rachel: But in the book it is…it's much more insidious.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: Uh, which is kind of a hallmark of the time. I can't think of a specific favorite scene.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, but really the whole story, the way it builds is just so good.

Audrey: Mmhm. Yes.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Yes. And the only other kind of very strange thing…and I would find this very unsettling if I were in a house like that, was that the house was purposely constructed to be slightly off.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: So, like, your field of vision…you would think, oh, I can normally look straight down a hall. Well, the architects and designers built it to be slightly askew so that your vision and—

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey: —and your…the…your balance is kind of off, which again, it's like, if you were living in a house fulltime like that, would you…why would you build that like that? You know?

Rachel: To be creepy. (laughs)

Audrey: To be creepy.

Rachel: It's very "House of Leaves."

Audrey: (clicks tongue)

Rachel: Like, there's something going on.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: Do you know “House of Leaves?”

Audrey: I have not heard of it.

Rachel: It's…it’s a strange book from quite a few years ago, ‘d say a least a decade ago.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, and it's about this house that has, like, these impossible hallways inside, like where the owners will measure the outside and it doesn't match up with the inside.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: And that just sets me right on edge! Like, what is happening here?

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: It could be because I'm really bad at measurements and math.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: But, also, maybe the house itself is haunted. (laughs)

Audrey: Yes. Yes! Oh, that's interesting.

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey: I feel like now that you've mentioned it, I may have, like, seen it before. I’m sure I’ve see it around here.

Rachel: Mmhm. It’s very popular in modern culture because of the way it's written. It has a lot of typography.

Audrey: (gasps) Ooh.

Rachel: And you, like, read all the way around a page.

Audrey: Oh…

Rachel: There are footnotes taking up entire pages. It's bizarre but definitely worth the read if you can get a copy.

Audrey: Now I…yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Yeah, I'm going to have to figure out what that is. But yes. So, it's…it's a great story. It's a great scary story. Um, I would definitely recommend it.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: And it's kind of become, like, a staple of literary…in the literary world.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And the genre in general. Um…so, yes, I recommend that, but I also have a readalike.

Rachel: Ooh!

Audrey: And I blew through this book in, like, a few days.

Rachel: Okay.

Audrey: And it's called "This House Is Haunted" by John Boyne. Uh, I'm sure many listeners are familiar with John Boyne because he is the one that wrote "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas."

Rachel: I thought that name was familiar.

Audrey: Yes. Yes. So, um, I'm a fan of his, and it… Well, let me read you the…the summary.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: So, "In Norfolk, England, in 1867, Eliza Caine responds to an ad for a governess position at Gaudlin Hall. When she arrives, shaken by an unsettling disturbance that occurred during her travels, she is greeted by the two children now in her care, Isabella and Eustace."

Rachel: Those names are amazing.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: So Victorian. Sorry to interrupt.

Audrey: (still laughing) No, no. It's okay. It's true.

Rachel: Eustace! (laughs)

Audrey: Eustace.

Rachel: Please, carry on.

Audrey: (laughs) “There is no adult present to represent her mysterious employer, and the children offer no explanation. Later that night, in her room, another terrifying experience further reinforces the sense that something is very wrong.” And… So, it was a great book. It reads very quick. The pace is like… It's not, like, quite like the pace of, uh, “The Haunting of Hill House,” uh, which is a little bit more of a buildup. This, like, is like trajec…trajectory right away.

Rachel: Oh, wow.

Audrey: Um, which I was a little nervous about first. I’m like, “Don't give it all away!”

Rachel: Right.

Audrey: But he wrote it in Dickensinian [sic] prose.

Rachel: Ooh!

Audrey: So, it's kind of, like…it's kind of…the writing is modeled after, uh, Dickens. But, um, it was a very interesting read ’cause you're, like, why in the world would these kids be alone by themselves in this giant house? There's no adults present.

Rachel: Call CPS.

Audrey: Yeah!

Rachel (laughs)

Audrey: Call CPS! Nobody's around. They get in, it's… She comes in in the middle of the night, her first night, and…

Rachel: And there's a thunderstorm! No…

Audrey: I…I think that there was!

Rachel: (laughs in disbelief) Just hitting all those tropes, yes.

Audrey: Yeah. Yes. So, um, it's very intriguing from the start. There's parts that are very funny.

Rachel: Okay.

Audrey: So, I would definitely… If you like "The Haunting of Hill House," uh…am I saying that right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: "The Haunting of Hill House." Um, you'll definitely like "This House Is Haunted." And it's got some really, like, classic Victorian gothic horror like the rain storm, and the unattended children, and the governess, and… I suppose if you like "Jane Eyre" this might be a good one for you, too.

Rachel: Ooh, and I do love me some "Jane Eyre."

Audrey: Oh, yeah!

Rachel: (giggles)

Audrey: It's not quite as (pauses) saucy.

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Rachel: (adopting a hoity-toity accent) I should hope not with the children present!

Audrey (still laughing) But yes, so, that would be... Those are my first two recommendations.

Rachel. Cool, and that actually segues really nicely into my next one.

Audrey: Ooh.

Rachel: Because it also has a governess.

Audrey: Ooh!

Rachel: In a way. Um, so, my next recommendation is “The Old Nurse’s Story,” and an old nurse is basically a governess. (laughs)

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: And this one is by Elizabeth Gaskell. It isn’t very long…can be finished in just about an hour or so, I would say.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, bt it is well written and will stick with you long after you read it. So, the story is narrated by the old nursemaid, Hester, to her two young charges, Miss Rosamond’s children. She used to be a nurse to Miss Rosamond herself back in the day. Not long after Hester is first hired, Rosamond’s parents both pass away, so they go to live with an upstanding family of distant relation at Manor House. And I…I’ve gotta say that orphans are really common in Victorian literature!

Audrey: (laughs and giggles) Yes!

Rachel: Talking about Dickens, I mean, c’mon.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Anyway, Hester finds Manor House cold and remote, but the servants there are welcoming so she’s comfortable enough. As with most Victorian mansions, the building has two wings, and the east wing is decidedly out of bounds. Red flag number one.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Red flag number two is that Hester starts to hear an organ being played, but all the other staff deny this, which is really suspicious.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Audrey: “You guys can’t hear that?”

Rachel: “No!” (laughs) Doing some digging, Hester finds out that the old lord’s ghost is rumored to play the organ on stormy winter nights, though who, exactly, the ‘old lord’ is remains a mystery. Hester, though, isn’t buying the story at all, okay? That is, until one day she opens the organ that she hears playing only to find that the internals are completely destroyed.

Audrey: (gasps)

Rachel: So, ghost music! Spooky! (laughs)

Audrey: (laughs) Dun-dun!

Rachel: (laughs) Time passes, winter sets in, and Hester goes to church on the regular as many a lady did back in the day.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: One particularly cold morning she decides to leave Miss Rosemond in the care of the servants while she attends mass alone, because it’s decided to be too cold to take the young girl with her. Which, very nice.

Audrey: Mmhm. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) Alas, when she returns to Manor House, Rosemond has gone missing!

Audrey: (shocked sound)

Rachel: Everyone searches the place top to bottom with no sign of the poor child, and it isn’t until Hester sees footprints in the snow outside that she really starts to panic. Okay? It’s the middle of winter, okay? It’s cold—it’s a blizzard, it’s awful.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: Um, rushing onto the grounds, she comes across a shepherd who has found a nearly frozen to death Rosemond.

Audrey: (gasps)

Rachel: The girl, though, she eventually recovers! (laughs) But she claims that she saw another girl outside.

Audrey: Mmm.

Rachel: Creepy. They had walked together to the Fells and met a crying woman who rocked Rosamond to sleep. Hester doesn't believe her. (laughs) Because Hester doesn't believe anything, apparently!

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: That is, until one of the servants, disturbed by this tale, begs her to keep Rosamond safe from this 'other' child. What is that about? (laughs)

Audrey: Yeah! (laughs)

Rachel: Days later, Hester and Rosamond see the child pounding at the window, begging to be let in. Do you believe it now, Hester?

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Then she goes to help the child, right? But as she's approaching, she realizes that even though the child's pounding at the window, it's not making any noise.

Audrey: (whispers incredulously) What?

Rachel: So, there's absolutely no sound at all. It's super creepy, and, yep, that's a ghost!

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Telltale sign!

Audrey: (chuckles)

Rachel: Hester finally believes the stories and freaks out, as one does. Rosamond, though…she gets really angry at Hester for not helping her friend because she's out in the cold and she doesn't understand why she won't help her.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, but Hester's like, no, you're not seeing each other. This is…this is creepy. It's not happening. So, the mysterious identity of the old lord, the crying woman, and the child in the snow are soon revealed, as is the reason behind why the east wing was sealed shut.

Audrey: Mmm.

Rachel: Everything comes to a head with a residual haunting that I won't spoil, so go ahead and read the rest of the tale for yourself! Better yet, you can listen to a retelling of "The Old Nurse's Tale" [sic] on the podcast "Scare You to Sleep," which is where I first heard it.

Audrey: Aah…

Rachel: There's nothing like turning out the lights, wrapping yourself in a blanket, and letting a professional voice actor enrapture your senses until you're scared silly. (chuckles)

Audrey: Well, color me intrigued! Ugh! And then do you have a readalike for that, or is that just the podcast?

Rachel: That's…that's just the podcast.

Audrey: Got'cha'.

Rachel: So, "Scare to Sleep" is great because…

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, the narrator, she does…much like "Shadows at the Door" I mentioned earlier—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —they do, uh, retelling of, like, old stories, classic literature—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —but also some of her own original works—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —as well as guest-submitted works.

Audrey: Mmm!

Rachel: And she has…talk about a sonorous voice!

Audrey: Ah-huh.

Rachel: She will put you to sleep, but in the most beautiful way possible.

Audrey: Aww.

Rachel: And you wouldn't think that listening to scary stories would be restful.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But she manages it.

Audrey: Man! All right.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: I'm gonna have to check that out.

Rachel: Oh, yeah. And there's a huge backlog of episodes, so…

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: Plenty to get through.

Audrey: Oh, perfect. I'm going to download them. It's so funny that, like, characters in the book are like, "Oh, that's not a ghost."

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: Like, it's so very obvious in front…front of you. But they…

Rachel: Yeah, just gaslighting away!

Audrey: Yeah! But it's funny, I heard…I don't remember if it was on Instagram or, like, a podcast or something, so I don't know exactly where it came from, but somebody made the argument that this concept of ghosts being see-through and floating and levitating—the classic ghost image—

Rachel: Yeah…

Audrey: —really developed, uh, with the advent of photography and cinema.

Rachel: (clicks tongue) Sure.

Audrey: Where, prior to that, if you look at ghosts depicted in literature, like in "Hamlet," they were, like, full flesh and blood.

Rachel: Mm!

Audrey: They may not be exactly alive-looking, but they weren't see-through and they weren't floating. And that has to do with, um, ghosts being represented in cinema and the concept of lighting, and, you know…how do we get this ghost to appear on film as is being otherworldly? And so kind of this 'new' image of a ghost and what a ghost is developed around that time.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: But prior to that it really hadn't been.

Rachel: Yeah. That's fascinating.

Audrey: So, yeah. It's interesting then, too, when you have modern writers writing about ghosts in the Victorian era and it's, like…is that the way that they would be perceived if they were really, you know, Victorian people?

Rachel: Mm! Mmhm.

Audrey: You know, looking back at a ghost, I…I'm not sure that it would be.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: You know?

Rachel: Like if you hopped in a time machine and went back to tell the tale…

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: They'd be like, "What are you talking about?"

Audrey: “Ghost that float? What?”

Rachel: (laughs) Yeah, that's crazy!

Audrey: You know? So, it's kind of an interesting, uh, thought, because then…and this…the thought kind of freaks me out a little bit, too: If that's the case, and ghosts don't actually float and we don't see through them, is it possible that we run into ghosts regularly and don't know it?

Rachel: Just don’t know it. Yeah, that's a fascinating concept.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: And something to freak me out in the middle of the night. Thank you!

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Audrey: Sorry!

Rachel: Although, to be fair…

Audrey: Yeah?

Rachel: If a random person appeared in my house in the middle of the night I would freak out regardless.

Audrey: You’d freak out anyway! Yeah, yeah. Like, “What are you doing in here?”

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Rachel: But that's really…I…I love that idea.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: You could just be, like, out for a hike in the woods and you see someone.

Audrey: Yeah, mmhm.

Rachel: Or you're going by these old ruins that are rumored to have ghosts, and you just see someone else who's also there.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: My assumption would be, “Oh, they heard the ghost story, and they want to check it out, too,” but they could be—

Audrey and Rachel (in unison) —the ghost!

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: Oh, I love that.

Audrey: Yeah, it's kind of an interesting... Once I heard that, I'm like, oh, my god.

Rachel: Yeah!

Audrey: Like… (blows raspberry)

Rachel: Unlocking doors in my mind! (laughs)

Audrey: Mind blown!

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Audrey: So… And that actually, honestly is a good segue into my second recommendation. And this is interesting because it seems to divide people on Goodreads reviews.

Rachel: Ooh.

Audrey: And I have read this cover to cover, and I have mixed feelings about it, too. So, we'll see what the viewers think.

Rachel: Mmhm!

Audrey: Uh, this next one was written in, I believe, 2021. And it's “The Death of Jane Lawrence” by Caitlin Starling. And let me…let me read you a little bit from the book jacket.

Rachel: Please.

Audrey: “Practical, unassuming Jane Shoringfield has done the calculations and decided that the most secure path forward is this: a husband in a marriage of convenience (pages turning)

who will allow her to remain independent and occupied with meaningful work. Her first choice, the dashing but reclusive doctor Augustine Lawrence, agrees to her proposal with only one condition that she must never visit Lindridge Hall, his crumbling family manor outside of town. Yet on their wedding night, an accident strands her at his door in a pitch-black rainstorm, and she finds him changed. Gone is the bold, courageous surgeon and in his place is a terrified, paranoid man, one who cannot tell reality from nightmare and fears Jane is an apparition come to haunt him."

Rachel: What?

Audrey: "By morning, Augustine is himself again, but Jane knows something is deeply wrong at Lindridge Hall and with the man she is so hastily bound her safety to. In the death of Jane Lawrence, Caitlin Starling crafts a new kind of gothic horror from the bones of the beloved canon. Set in a dark mirror version of postwar England, this 'Crimson Peak' inspired story assembles then upends every expectation set in place by Shirley Jackson and 'Rebecca', and will leave readers shaken, desperate to begin again as soon as they are finished." So, I enjoyed the book, and I think it's because I enjoyed the main character.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: But it did end the way that I was anticipating, and it didn't end the way I think a lot of people thought it was going to. And so, I think that's what divides the readers.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: Like, "Yes, it was a great novel," or (scoffs) "This…you know, ugh, man, this really stunk." But it's… One of the reasons I like this one is that it's not set in our world, exactly. It's set in another world very similar to ours.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: It's almost…

Rachel: Like an alternate timeline kind of thing?

Audrey: Yeah, it's almost too similar, you know?

Rachel: Okay.

Audrey: So, there's some things in there where you're like, “Okay, you know, that's not our world,” but it's not so in your face that it's distracting.

Rachel: Mmhm. Yeah, so it's plenty believable.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: (murmurs) Okay.

Audrey: Um, it's much more violent than, um, my other ones that I had talked about, like, “This House is Haunted” and, um…uh, well, “The Haunting of Hill House” is violent in some aspects, but this one is more so. And it's a little bit more, um, (pauses) saucy!

Rachel: (snickers)

Audrey: There's a…there's a little bit more adult romance.

Rachel: We had to get one in there, listeners. (laughs)

Audrey: Yeah. Yeah, um, it…there's, like, a dynamic between the main characters. So, there's a little bit of that.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: It's not a romance, though, by any means. But I was just so entranced by the main character and, like, her decisions and, like… There were times I'm like, “Why are you doing that?” You know? “Why are you…” Ugh.

Rachel: Like the fated heroine in a, uh, horror movie.

Audrey: Yeah!

Rachel: “Why are you doing those things?!” (laughs)

Audrey: It's like that one commercial. Like, “Why don't we get into the running car?” You know?

Rachel: (laughs) Yes.

Audrey: Um, but it was an overall good read, or at least I think so. If you read it and then read the Goodreads reviews…

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: …you'll…you can see why people are divided about it. Um, but the ghosts in this one are a little bit more flesh and blood, kind of like what we talked about. It's not… (mimicking a ghost) "Oooh!"

Rachel: A specter…?

Audrey: "I got a sheet over my head!" Certain things…

Rachel: (laughing) Listeners, I wish you could see Audrey's impression of a ghost, it was really beautiful.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Audrey: (mimicking a ghost) Oooh!

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: Um, yeah, they're a little bit more flesh and blood, and they're a little bit grittier than, you know, your typical ghost in the night or the ghosts that you can't see. They're…they're much more, like, in your face, which I think I appreciate because I hadn't yet read, um, a gothic novel that kind of had that type of ghost in it.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: But yes, I…I do recommend it. It's not going to end the way that you think it's going to end. Um, one version of the book has a, like, post script by the writer, and she kind of explains how the story evolved the way it did. And I can appreciate how it ended based on the comments that she made about, like, how she got to the ending.

Rachel: Mm.

Audrey: Um, but yes, it's…it's a go. It's a go. And then you guys, the listeners, can decide where everything kind of falls.

Rachel: It's officially greenlit.

Audrey: The readalike—and I am not done with this one…I just started this one—is called “The Little Stranger” by Sarah Waters.

Rachel: I've heard of that one!

Audrey. Yeah.

Rachel: Sarah Waters is great!

Audrey: Yes, and I found the book on the summer ‘Spooky Reads’ display up here.

Rachel: Ah, perfect! (chuckles)

Audrey: So, I just snatched that because, of course, it's a gothic horror. Um, and it's shaping up to be very interesting. The writing: totally different. It's very detailed. It reminds me of Diana Gabaldon’s writing, um, you know?

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: The, uh…

Rachel and Audrey: (in unison) “Outlander.”

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey: Yeah. Like, it's very detailed and historically accurate. So, let me read you the…the summary for it. Um, “One postwar summer in his home of rural Warwickshire, Dr. Faraday, the son of a maid who has built a life of quiet respectability as a country physician, is called to a patient at lonely Hundreds Hall. Home to the Ayres family for over two centuries, the Georgian house, once impressive and handsome, is now in decline. Its masonry crumbling, its gardens choked with weeds, the clock in its stable yard permanently fixed at twenty to nine. Its owners—mother, son and daughter—are struggling to keep pace with the changing society as well as with conflicts of their own. But are the Ayreses haunted by something more sinister than a dying way of life? Little does Dr. Faraday know how closely and how terrifyingly their

story is about to become intimately entwined with his." And this is a post-war…but this is post-World War II whereas, um, "Jane Lawrence" was post-World War I.

Rachel: Oh, got'cha'.

Audrey: In a dark mirror. So, this one is a little bit more modern.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Uh, but it's still really kind of dips into the gothic horror. I mean, the Hundreds Hall—the Gregorian house, it's in shambles…super, like, on trend with…

Rachel: Not to mention the names.

Audrey: The names! (laughs)

Rachel: Faraday. C'mon. (snickers) Love it.

Audrey: Faraday, Warwickshire. Yeah, um, so yes, I'm very much into it. I'm interested to see where it goes. Um, like I said, it's a much thicker book. Like, um, "This House Is Haunted" is, like, a little bit smaller, a little over two hundred pages…really quick read. This is not that. Ah, but I'm excited to see where it goes.

Rachel: Cool.

Audrey: So, yeah.

Rachel: On the exact opposite of the spectrum is my next recommendation, which is incredibly short!

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: I think it's, like, less than ten pages, honestly.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, but people back in the day had a way of being quite verbose.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: So, even though it's a very, uh, easy story it does…it does waffle on for a little bit. So.

Audrey: Mmm.

Rachel: Um, but do you enjoy a good ol' mad scientist?

Audrey: Oh, I do.

Rachel: Yeah. Who doesn't? If doctor Frankenstein is your idea of an interesting fellow, then let me introduce Mrs. Merrell, a brilliant, if somewhat reclusive surgeon and pathologist. In author Christine Campbell Thompson's story "Behind the Yellow Door," we meet Mrs. Merrill when she puts out an ad for a secretary. It's answered by the young Miss Marcia Miles—these names, again, fantastic.

Audrey: (snickers)

Rachel: And Marcia discovers that her new secretarial job is secondary to her main assigned duty: to act as permanent companion to Merrill's wheelchair-bound daughter. Unfortunately, it turns out that Merrill only needs some of Marcia to fulfil this important role.

Audrey: (snickers)

Rachel: Before she knows it, Marcia finds herself strapped to an operating table. Merrill looms over her with a syringe—

Audrey: (bursts out laughing)

Rachel: —explaining how she plans to remove both of Marcia's legs—

Audrey: (laughs harder)

Rachel: —and graft them to her daughter's body—

Audrey: (cackling)

Rachel: —so that she might experience life more fully. Yeah.

Audrey: (dissolving into giggles)

Rachel: I bet you weren't expectin' that! I wasn't.

Audrey: (squealing)

Rachel: (chortles) The way these events go from zero to ten is unparalleled.

Audrey and Rachel: (chuckle)

Rachel: Not much else to say about that one…

Audrey: Oh, my god.

Rachel: …other than, "wow." (laughs)

Audrey: Tell me more!

Rachel: No, no, you're gonna have to read it.

Audrey: (clicks tongue and scoffs)

Rachel: Because the way that it's told is really interesting.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: So, even though I did technically spoil it, um, it…it's really worth the read. Because…

Audrey: Okay. Gosh!

Rachel: I mean, wow, that really came out of nowhere, but I feel so bad for poor Marcia!

Audrey: (laughs) Poor Marcia is gonna get her legs removed.

Rachel: Yeah! And this is why you don't answer an ad to be a secretary.

Audrey: (laughs) Or a governess.

Rachel: Yes. Just don't do it.

Audrey: Just don't do it!

Rachel: Avoid it like the plague! (sniffs) I will say, though, that a superb readalike is by author E.F. Benson, and it came out less than ten years before our other story. So, this makes me think that the 1910s were rife with science fiction-based horror, right?

Audrey: Yes! Yes.

Rachel: No one can convince me out of that mindset. (laughs)

Audrey: I think you're totally right.

Rachel: Yeah. It was the dawn of a new century, all these new things comin' out.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Anyway, in Benson's story "And the Dead Spake"—which is an old-timey way of saying "spoke." (laughs)

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: The narrator visits a gifted surgeon to learn more about his thoughts on organ transplantation. Sure, sure, all well and good, except the surgeon goes a bit batty.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: He explains to his visitor that what intrigues him most in his line of work is finding out what information the brain can impart (whispers dramatically) after death.

Audrey: (chuckles)

Rachel: (laughs) So, he thinks, well, if we just hook up this here brain to a battery and stick the other end onto a gramophone, voilà!

Audrey: (laughs intermittently)

Rachel: We should be able to hear exactly what it's thinking! It's brilliant, honestly.

Audrey: It's genius.

Rachel: You…you don't get that kind of, ehm…ingenuity these days.

Audrey: No, you really don't.

Rachel: (laughs) Does the narrator run away, intent on contacting the medical board about this lunatic? No, no, he decides to increase the frequency of his visits to his ad hoc laboratory—

Audrey: Ohohoh!

Rachel: —to see what crazy ideas he might come up with next! (mocking tone) I wonder what's gonna happen?

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: You're just going to have to read the rest of the story to find out.

Audrey: (whispers) Oh, my god.

Rachel: Yes. As the narrator puts it, "I suppose that violent interest in what he was doing overcame any qualm that I might have had." (snorts) What a guy.

Audrey: (laughs) What a pal. Oh…

Rachel: (laughs) Man. Yeah.

Audrey: My God. So, he was just like, "Let's hook up this brain?"

Rachel: Yeah! Literally to a gramophone. That was not hyperbole.

Audrey: With the person still alive?

Rachel: No, they're…it's a dead…the host has passed on.

Audrey: Oh!

Rachel: Yes, yes.

Audrey: What a weird guy! (laughs)

Rachel: Yes. Indeed he is.

Audrey: Well, now I got to know what happens.

Rachel: I know!

Audrey: Where have you found th…it? Have you found some of these through, like, podcasts and stuff, or…?

Rachel: A lot of them through podcasts like “Shadows at the Door” and, um, “Scare You top Sleep.”

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: But I also just trawl the internet sometimes for…

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: …like, kind of off-the-wall horror.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Or that just hasn't been popularized for whatever reason.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: I don't understand, because this is fantastic!

Audrey: (laughs) Yeah.

Rachel: Like, how has this not been made into a movie?

Audrey: I know!

Rachel: Maybe it was, I don't know.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: I didn't dive that deep into it.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But, man. Yeah. Heh heh heh.

Audrey: I would be remiss if I didn't at least bring in one children's story.

Rachel: Of course, of course.

Audrey: Being a children's librarian. Um, I have so many issues with this book for so re…so many reasons.

Rachel: Oh.

Audrey: And I actually really kind of hate it, but—

Rachel: Oh!

Audrey: I want listeners to hate it with me. So, that's why I bring it (dramatically) to you today.

Rachel: (snickers)

Audrey: So, (clears throat) the classic Brothers Grimm tale of “Rumpelstiltskin.”

Rachel: Aah.

Audrey: And I brought up one of our retellings from the children's section and have it here in front of me. And you're all familiar with “Rumpelstiltskin.” (pages turning)

Rachel: Of course.

Audrey: (more pages turning) And if you're not, let me give you a really quick overview. Basically, a crim… (laughs) Basically, a creepy imp agrees to spin straw into gold.

Rachel: (near-silent laughter) A crimp.

Audrey: A crimp! New word. A creepy imp agrees to spin straw into gold for a poor farm girl, provided that she gives him her first baby. Weird.

Rachel: (chuckles)

Audrey: Like, my first…my first question is always this: What are you gonna do with a baby?

Rachel: You know, that is a very good question!

Audrey: It just immediately raises the question, like…

Rachel: I presume, as a creepy imp—or crimp, if you will.

Audrey: Mmhm. A crimp, yes.

Rachel: He would eat it?

Audrey: (gasps loudly)

Rachel: I don’t know.

Audrey: Oh!

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: I had never considered that.

Rachel: You know, it is Grimm that we’re talking about.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But maybe it's best left to the imagination.

Audrey: Yeah. Hmm. Because I'm just, like, it…this…

Rachel: Maybe he's lonely? Maybe he just wants to raise it?

Audrey: Yeah, but it's, like, this baby's probably as big as you are, ’cause you're this tiny man.

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: And you have this human child, and, like, if it's…if he's gonna, like…

Rachel: (breathless laughter): Yeah. Fair point.

Audrey: (laughs) …crush you!

Rachel: He’s a tiny man!

Audrey: A tiny man. So, the beginning of the story is like, “I have a daughter who knows the art of spinning straw into gold. Now, the king had a passion for gold, and such an art intrigued him.”

Rachel: What? Hold up. Hold up, hold up, hold up, hold up.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: How…? (exhales slowly) (clicks tongue) How does one…? (laughs) They just blasted through that little factoid about her!

Audrey: Yeah! Yeah, so…

Rachel: “My daughter can spin gold. The king was interested.” What do you mean?!

Audrey: And this is what cracks me up, is that he says, “You may spend all night, but if you have not spun this straw into gold by morning, you will have to die.” And I'm, like, it's going to be pretty hard to get that gold if ya kill ’er. Like…

Rachel: (laughs) Yeah.

Audrey: There's just so many things wrong with the story.

Rachel: (groaning) Oooh…

Audrey: And then of course, Rumpelstiltskin…she's like, “Oh, my God, I can't spin straw into gold. I'm gonnadie.”

Rachel: ’cause that’s crazy!

Audrey: Yeah, and this imp shows up. First of all, who is this guy? Does he live in the castle? Is he an employee?

Rachel: (squeaks)

Audrey: Like, who is this guy? Where does he come from?

Rachel: Does he have benefits?

Audrey: Does he have benefits? Is he full time? Is he part time? And he's like, “Oh, so why are you crying, mistress Miller?” How do you know her name?

Rachel: (snorts)

Audrey: Like, it's…

Rachel: That’s really creepy. He's earned that name of ‘crimp’ for sure.

Audrey: Mmhm. Mmhm. And, she's like, “Well, you know, you got to help me because otherwise I'm gonna die.” And she’s like, “Well, what will you give me…” He's like, “What will you give me if I spin it for you?” And she's like, “My necklace.” And he's like, “Okay, sure.” Again, there's so, like…what's he gonna do with a necklace? Sell it?

Rachel: (gasping laugh) Oh, man.

Audrey: And it…it's just like…it keeps it going where it's, like, it…eventually the king's like, “Well, you know, she has spun a lot of gold and, um, if you spin this straw tonight, you shall become my wife.”

Rachel: Mm, no, thanks. Pass.

Audrey: No, thanks.

Rachel: Pass.

Audrey: So, first he wants to kill her then he wants to marry her because, why not?

Rachel: Beautiful. Fantastic foundation for a relationship. Yeah.

Audrey: Yeah. And it just gets weirder and weirder. Like, he wants the baby. And, again, we kind of had this conversation, like, what is he going to do with the baby?

Rachel: Right.

Audrey: And…

Rachel: Does she question it? Like, “What are you gonna do…?”

Audrey: No! She's like…Rumpelstiltskin says, “‘Then promise me that you…that when you become queen, your first child will belong to me.’ The miller's daughter gasped. How could she promise such a thing? Then she thought, but who knows whether that will ever happen? And as she could think of no other way to save herself, she promised, and the little man once again spent all the straw and gold.” So, it's either she spins it and she gets married and has to give Rumpelstiltskin her baby.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Or the guy that just offered to marry her will kill her, instead, in the morning if she doesn't do it. (laughs)

Rachel: I can think of at least twenty alternatives.

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: Like, come on, girl!

Audrey: Yes, it's such a strange…and I don't know if this is because this is just one of the retellings of the original.

Rachel: Yeah…

Audrey: And perhaps the original made more, like, cohesive sense. But this retelling…

Rachel: Aah, knowing the Grimm bros, I don't think so. (chuckles)

Audrey: Yeah. But, eventually, like, as you all know, um, she has to guess his name, and if she doesn't guess his name, uh, then he gets the baby. But one of the nursemaids was, like, in the woods and sees him riding on a cooking spoon around a great fire.

Rachel: (snorts) Sorry. (laughs) That was unexpected.

Audrey: And then…I know. It's like…and he's like, "Well, you know, my na… Rumpelstiltskin: I brew my beer, I bake my loaves, and soon the Queen's own son, I'll claim. Oh, lucky me, for no one knows that Rumpelstiltskin is my name."

Rachel: Why would you do that, bro? Why would you…it…if your condition is that she has to know your name, why would you ever say your name out loud?

Audrey: Aloud. Yeah.

Rachel: Bro.

Audrey: I don't know. And it's, like, what does this guy do for a living? Does he work at the castle? Does he live in the woods?

Rachel: (laughs) Maybe he lives in the kitchens. I mean, he has one of their spoons.

Audrey: Spoons, yeah. He's riding on a spoon around a great big cauldron fire. And look, he's got a little door there. Maybe he lives in the tree.

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: So, of course, you know, he comes back and he's like, "You know, do you know my name? If you don't, I'm gonna get your baby." And she's, like..

Rachel: "With which I will do things unknown, I guess."

Audrey: Unknown. Like, are we eating it? Starting a daycare center?

Rachel: (laughs sardonically)

Audrey: Pawning it off for more jewelry? Like, who knows? Um, and she's like, "You know, your name's Rumpelstiltskin," and he…and he freaks out, and he's really upset that he doesn't get that baby for whatever reason that he was… I mean, you know, now that I think about it, maybe he's cookin' another baby in that pot.

Rachel: Oooh. Well, surely… All right, let's just say that there's no ethical way to source babies for you stew.

Audrey: (gasping laugh)

Rachel: But let's just say (pauses) that you like to eat babies.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Okay?

Audrey: Mmhm. (laughs)

Rachel: Normal conversation.

Audrey: This is getting very dark. (laughs)

Rachel: Surely there are easier ways to obtain babies.

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: Than this whole thing.

Audrey: This whole…

Rachel: Of spinning gold for some broad in a tower…question mark? Like, what is he doin'?

Audrey: Well, it's just the whole thing is so convoluted.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And why…first of all (pages turning) let's…uh, talk about the parenting skills with this poor miller…

Rachel: (laughs in exasperation)

Audrey: …pawn…pawning off his daughter to the king.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: (sighs in disappointment) Anyways, so he flies off on his ladle, which, apparently, he can now fly.

Rachel: Uh-huh…

Audrey: And he flies through the window and he's really upset and blah, blah, blah. The chick has her baby and is married to the king that wanted to kill her and lived happily ever after.

Rachel: Brilliant.

Audrey: (pages turning rapidly) So, I am just…and I have always found this book to be very creepy and weird.

Rachel: It is horrifying.

Audrey: Yeah! 'cause, I mean, when you really break it down, it's, like, what is going on?

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And where did the Grimm brothers come up with this? And there's a note in the back, um, that kind of goes over how he put this interpretation forward. Um, and kind of all the different iterations of the tale and how it has changed. Like, the original tale was, the girl spins flax to spin into linen and, like, it developed into gold at some point in one of the editions. Um…

Rachel: Sure. I can kind of see that.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Because eventually you would be selling that linen for money, or gold.

Audrey: Right.

Rachel: You know?

Audrey: Right.

Rachel: I can make that logical leap. Yeah.

Audrey: Yeah, so it's… you know, there's some…I'd be interested in learning more, like, the historical aspect of how this came about and how the Grimm brothers kind of got to that. But it's just this particular iteration. The illustrations are nice. The story is, you know, for children. It's very, like, basic, but as an adult going through it, it's very…it raises so many questions.

Rachel: It seems like one of those books where you…you've opened it up at bedtime.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: You're gonna to read it to your kids.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: And then as you turn the page and you're mid-sentence—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —you kind of go, "Oh, uh…you know ehat, let's read something else!"

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Audrey: Do you remember…and I…now I'm gonna have to look it up, but it was…I think it was called either… There's two stories I'm thinking of. There was "The Red Ribbon" where…it's a children's book, and it's about this girl that always has a red ribbon around her neck, and nobody can figure out why she wears it. And by the end of the story she removes the red ribbon—

Rachel: (dramatically mimes having he hear drop from her shoulders in a stunning performance, trust me)

Audrey: —and her head falls off. Yeah! (laughs) And there's another one, too, with dancing shoes.

Rachel: Mm, mmhm!

Audrey: Where she can never… Any time she has the shoes on she's always dancing, and if she takes them off, like, her feet come off or something like that. Like just…

Rachel: Doesn't she, like, die of exhaustion or something?

Audrey: Yeah, something really weird like that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And so—and this would go into my readalike—would be any of the Grimm's story and fairy tales, because it's just so convoluted and distressing, I guess, in our modern mind. Like, why would you tell a ch…a child a story about this chick's head falling off?

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Like, there's just…it's so different, and I think that's why it creeps people out. It creeps me out for that reason.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And it's, like, from a historical standpoint, it'd be very interesting to really dig into that, but…

Rachel: I'd be interested in picking apart, like, the symbolism of things.

Audrey: Yeah! Yeah.

Rachel: But a lot of it is on the face. It's just, like, what were these guys smoking?

Audrey: Oh, I think I know what they were smoking.

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Audrey: But, yeah. So, that… Those are my thoughts with that. Um, I'm trying to think if there was any of their other ones. Um, I would recommend, too, Philip Pullman's…I think it's called "The Grimm Fairy Tales?" Like, it's his—Philip Pullman's—versions of classic Grimm fairy tales.

Rachel: Philip Pullman of "His Dark Materials" fame?

Audrey: Yes, yes, and the Grimm fairy tales came out within the last ten years, I feel like.

Rachel: Okay.

Audrey: It came out. It's a pretty thick book. I've read through most of it. The one nice thing about that book is that each chapter is a different story, so you can start and end whenever you want, pick it back up, read another story. So, those are my recommendations.

Rachel: Fantastic. And that is all for this episode!

Audrey: Oh, that's—okay, wow.

Rachel: That's it, yeah! We're gonna be back next month with more reading recommendations. Remember to check the show notes for a list of everything Audrey and I just discussed today. Please subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library and tell your friends about the show. Thank you so much for joining us, Audrey!

Audrey: Thank you for having me!

Rachel: I'm having you back. You were amazing. (laughs)

Audrey: Yes, we had a great discussion. I'd love to talk more books.

Rachel: Until next time, happy reading.

Audrey and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)