Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 76: Back to School

(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 back from summer break, and I don't know about you, Mary, but I am ready to go! Let's dive in with our reading recommendations that ease you back into the school year. Already graduated? Don't worry—these books should still appeal.

Mary: When we picked this topic, I immediately thought of the young adult series "Crave" by Tracy Wolff. Grace recently lost her parents in an accident and has to travel—by way of helicopter and snowmobile—all the way to Alaska where her uncle and cousin Macy live. Her uncle runs the Academy. Regular teen angst and pranks ensue, but Grace soon finds out that the other students at the Academy aren't like those at her old school. Especially Jaxon Vega. She seems to be drawn repeatedly toward him. Is there, perhaps, magic afoot?

Rachel: Mm…

Mary: Could it be that Jaxon and the other students aren't humans at all? Is her cousin even human? There are some parallels to "Twilight," so if you're a fan of that series you should give "Crave" a try. If you're looking for something more adult, "Zodiac Academy" by Caroline Peckham has a very similar feel, but the characters are college-aged. In the first book, "The Awakening," twins Darcy and Tory are making their way in the big city of Chicago, Illinois the best they can since their parents passed away. Suddenly, a professor from a placed called Zodiac Academy comes to tell them that they actually aren't human at all but that they are fae and that they need to attend this academy to learn how to control their 'powers' because they are actually members of the royal family!

Rachel: What?!

Mary: And the four most attractive boys in the school are members of the current ruling families that took over after the king and queen met their demise, and they are not happy that Tory and Darcy are back. Phew! That's a lot to take in. The twins understandably have a very hard time believing this. In fact, even when they are at the school and attending their classes, seeing the other students using their powers, they still are in denial.

Rachel: Huh?

Mary: But after some crazy bullying from the other students—which the teachers will not step in to stop—the twins are forced to admit that they do have powers, and maybe they are the long-lost princesses. It's easy to get absorbed into this world, which is great because all together there are nine main books but over twenty that take place in this universe. So, if you enjoy the first one, buckle up and tuck in!

Rachel: I'm all for the dark academia aesthetic, and the "Atlas" trilogy by Olivie Blake is a shoe in! "The Alexandrian Society, caretakers of lost knowledge from the greatest civilizations of antiquity, are the foremost secret society of magical academicians in the world. Each decade, only the six most uniquely talented magicians are selected to be considered for initiation. Enter the latest round of six: Libby Rhodes and Nico de Varona, unwilling halves of an unfathomable whole, who exert uncanny control over every element of physicality. Reina Mori, a naturalist, who can intuit the language of life itself. Parisa Kamali, a telepath who can traverse the depths of…subconscious, navigating worlds inside the human mind. Callum Nova, an empath easily mistaken for a manipulative illusionist, who can influence the intimate workings of a person's inner self. Finally, there is Tristan Caine, who can see through illusions to a new structure of reality—an ability so rare that neither he nor his peers can fully grasp its implications. When the candidates are recruited by the mysterious Atlas Blakely, they are told they will have one year to qualify for initiation, during which time they will be permitted preliminary access to the Society's archives and judged based on their contributions to various subjects of impossibility: time and space, luck and thought, life and death. Five, they are told, will be initiated. One will be eliminated. The six potential initiates will fight to survive the next year of their lives, and if they can prove themselves to be the best among their rivals, most of them will." This series is a

fun ride. There's magic, romance, and inordinate amounts of time spent in the library. I will admit that some of the physics-based magic was difficult for me to grasp, but don't mistake that for a lack of skill on Blake's part. She writes very well, I'm just dense when it comes to that particular subject. I found myself rereading a few passages before things clicked. If you are in the market for an 'easy' read, then give this a pass. Instead, you could try the much more accessible "Vicious" by V.E. Schwab: "Victor and Eli started out as college roommates. In their senior year, a shared research interest in adrenaline, near-death experiences, and seemingly supernatural events reveals an intriguing possibility: that under the right conditions, someone could develop extraordinary abilities. But when their thesis moves from the academic to the experimental, things go horribly wrong." Schwab is a masterful writer who can weave an entire mythos in just a few short chapters, creating fully dimensional characters from nothing but paper and plain typeface. I've read a few of her novels now, and they always hit the target dead center.

Mary: My next recommendation is on the other side of academics in "Girl in Ice" by Erica Ferencik. Linguist Valerie Chesterfield was working at Smith College in Massachusetts before she was called away to the Arctic Circle. She is told that her twin brother, a highly accomplished climate scientist, committed suicide. Wyatt, a fellow researcher on the site, tells her something impossible: That they found a girl frozen in the ice that when unthawed, was still alive! The problem is, no one can understand what language she is speaking. They ask for Valerie's help, and how can she say no to a chance to find out what really happened to her brother and to see this impossible girl? This is one of my favorite books, so I hope you do take my recommendation to read it. There's a lot of action as the story progresses so, if you're hesitant to read about a stuffy professor going to the arctic, have no fear. If the career academic solving a mystery vibe is calling to you, another great read is "The Archivist" by Martha Cooley. "Set mostly in the 1960s, this story revolves around three people: Matthias Lane, an archivist at a prominent northeastern university, Judith, his wife, who is confined to a mental institution, and Roberta Spire, a graduate student working temporarily [in] the archives. The archive contains a collection of letters written by T.S. Eliot to his paramour, Emily Hale, while his wife, Vivienne, resided in a sanitarium. Roberta asks to see the letters, but they are to be kept private until the

year 2020." This book was originally published in 1998, so that was in the distant future at the time. The story explores the parallels between the two time periods and the relationship dynamics of a detached husband and a depressed wife. As someone who minored in English and went to graduate school to be an archivist, this book really called to me. I hope you enjoy it, as well!

Rachel: For tween and teen readers, I recommend Ransom Riggs's series "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children." It's an adventure; the characters travel far and wide over the course of this story. But the first book does a solid job establishing the old-world boarding school feel of the orphanage that started it all. Here's a quick blurb: "A horrific family tragedy sets sixteen-year-old Jacob journeying to a remote island off the coast of Wales, where he discovers the crumbling ruins of Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. As Jacob explores its abandoned bedrooms and hallways, it becomes clear that the children were more than just peculiar. They may have been dangerous. They may have been quarantined on a deserted island for good reason. And somehow—impossible though it seems—they may still be alive. [It's] a spine-tingling fantasy illustrated with haunting vintage photography." Technically, the Home isn't a school, but orphanages stuck in time bubbles are sometimes forced to supply their own daily curricula. The overall vibe is there, I promise. If you end up enraptured by Mr. Riggs's realm of fantasy, you have multiple other installments to look forward to including such delights as "Library of Souls" and "The Desolations of Devil's Acre." Oooh, spooky. There is even a graphic novel duology and a surprisingly decent film adaption to round out the experience. The orphanage's exterior was filmed at Castle Torenhof in Belgium. If you perform an image search, you will see how perfect it is from the spiraling architecture down to the foundation. It's giving 'fairytale sanatorium'. Cottage core convalescence with a dollop of "the roof could fall in at any moment because the upkeep on this place is pricey." Are you picking up what I'm putting down?

Mary: I'm moving to sillier waters now with some light-hearted romance. The first of these is "What You Wish For" by Katherine Center. "Samantha Casey is a school librarian who loves her job, the kids, and her school family with passion and joy for living. Duncan Carpenter is the new school principal who lives by rules and regulations, guided by the knowledge that bad things

can happen. But he wasn't always that way. And Sam knows it. Because she knew him before—at another school, in a different life. Back then, she loved him—but she was invisible. To him. To everyone. Even to herself. She escaped to a new school, a new job, [and] a new chance at living. But when Duncan, of all people, gets hired as the new principal there, it feels like the best thing that could possibly happen to the school—and the worst thing that could possibly happen to Sam. Until the opposite turns out to be true. The lovable Duncan she'd known is now a suit-and-tie wearing, rule-enforcing tough guy so [determined to protect] the school that he's willing to destroy it. As the school community spirals into chaos, and danger from all corners looms large, Sam and Duncan must find their way to who they really are [and] what it means to be brave, and how to take a chance on love—which is the riskiest move of all." A high school crush coming back in an enemies-to-lovers trope? Sign me up! More you say? Don't worry, I have another great title that is also enemies-to-lovers! It's "Teach Me" by Olivia Dade. "When Martin Krause arrives at Rose Owens's high school, she's determined to remain chilly with her new colleague. Unfriendly? Yes, since a loathsome administrator gave Rose's beloved world history classes to Martin, knowing it would hurt her. But keeping her distance from a man as warm and [as] kind as Martin will prove challenging, even for a stubborn, guarded [woman like her]. Especially when she begins to see him for what he truly is: a man who's never been taught his own value. Martin could use a good teacher—and luckily, Rose is the best. Rose has her own lessons to learn about trust, about vulnerability, and about her past. And over the course of a single…year, the two of them will find out just how [much they've learned]."

Rachel: I'm going to let my love for classic whodunits show with "Cat Among the Pigeons" written by none other than our holy mother of mysteries, Agatha Christie. "Unpleasant things are going on in an exclusive school for girls—things like murder… Late one night, two teachers investigate a mysterious flashing light in the sports pavilion while the rest of the school sleeps. There, among the lacrosse sticks, they stumble upon the body of the unpopular games mistress – shot through the heart from point blank range. The school is thrown into chaos when the 'cat' strikes again. Unfortunately, schoolgirl Julia Upjohn knows too much. In particular, she knows that without Hercule Poirot's help, she will be the next victim…" Who the heck is Hercule? Well, he's Christie's "most famous and longest-running character, appearing in 33 novels, two plays,

and 51 short stories published between 1920 and 1975." This Belgian gentleman touts a famous waxed moustache and utilizes his mind—or, as he might out it, his "little gray cells"—to solve crimes across the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East during a rather tumultuous time in history. A "Cat Among the Pigeons" features more than mere murder, though. There's jewel smuggling, a fatal plane crash, assault, blackmail—even espionage! I love it when characters are sort of trapped in one location for the duration of the story; that is what's known as a 'bottle episode' on TV. Make that location a boarding school full of hidden nooks and murderous assassins, and hot-diggity we've got a recipe for a good time. Maybe it is my fear of having to go back to school that gets so far under my skin, or maybe crime resulting in a death penalty just makes me bite my nails down to the quick. Whatever it is, it works!

Mary: Join us here again next month for more reading recommendations. Check the show notes for a complete list of everything we discussed today. Please consider subscribing to Not Your Mother's Library so that we can notify you about the next release. Until then, happy reading.

Rachel and Mary: Bye!

(Brief outro music)