



**WSIRN Episode 176: Books in the freezer, & other horror stories**  
*Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Mallory O'Meara*

[00:00:00]

ANNE: Mallory, that sounds fascinating. I will take it under consideration. But if I never sleep again, we're going to have words.

MALLORY: Phew. Just read it during the day. [ANNE LAUGHS] You read it out on your porch in full sunlight and as soon as it gets dark, put it in the freezer.

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 176. Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

ANNE: We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

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ANNE: Readers, here on What Should I Read Next? I've helped a lot of readers get out of THEIR comfort zones, but today's guest Mallory O'Meara is taking me out of MINE. Her wheelhouse is everything bizarre, paranormal, and downright scary... so as you'll hear it took SEVERAL TRIES -

more than several - to find three books I had experience with that she hadn't already read. So yeah, you'll hear about a ton of books that have never, ever been talked about on the show!

And it so much fun. When we dug past the surface differences, Mallory and I actually have a lot in common, especially a desire to understand how an author DID that. How did they pull off the magic trick that turned regular words on a page into an extraordinary reading experience? We had a great time chatting about the magic of rereading a favorite book, arguing with critics, how comfort-reading looks way different for different readers, and her pro tips for dealing with the post-scary-book jitters. Let's get to it.

[02:19.29]

ANNE: Mallory, welcome to the show.

MALLORY: Anne, thank you so much for having me.

ANNE: Well you were kind enough to host me over at your podcast, Reading Glasses, back in the fall and it is a pleasure to have you in the What Should I Read Next? space today.

MALLORY: Yeah, it's very exciting. We were so pumped when your book came out and I thought, oh my gosh, my book is never going to come out. It's never going to get here. [ANNE LAUGHS] And now it's March.

ANNE: It has been a long time, but not in publishing terms. I mean, you blink, and here we are, in spring 2019.

MALLORY: Yeah. You know, I've been working on this project for three years and it seems like so long but it ... Gosh, it feels like I just started writing it.

[ANNE LAUGHS]

ANNE: It's easy for me to say it goes fast when I didn't have to do the writing and the research. And we will get to that. Mallory, I know that our reading tastes are very different because some of your favorite books scare the ever living daylights out of me.

[MALLORY LAUGHS]

MALLORY: I feel like I'm coming on one of those fashion makeover shows [ANNE LAUGHS] where you get really excited to see what outfits the host picks out for you. Being on What Should I Read Next? and getting book recommendations from you is so exciting. So I'm like, waiting in the wings.

ANNE: I can't wait to hear about your story and especially because even though I know we do gravitate toward different books, I feel like you are really a kindred spirit. I so enjoyed -- after listening to your podcast -- but especially seeing your own words that you had planned out and carefully written to tell your readers who you are and why you're telling this story in *The Lady From The Black Lagoon*. You talked about how the story just got a hold of you. Held the door

open and invited you in and you love to hear the story behind the story and you love to find out how things are made and want to know how the artist pulls off their magic trick, and those are all things that had me going, yes, me too. Me too. Yes. Exactly that. Does your wanting to know what happens behind the scenes interest go way back in your reading life and the rest of your life?

MALLORY: Oh, absolutely. I feel like a part of me, being a fan of any kind of art, whether it's books or movies, is wanting to know how it was done. That's actually what drew me to film in the first place is just watching things and thinking, gosh, how did they do that? How did they make that? So when I started writing *The Lady From The Black Lagoon*, I really brought that into it.

[04:36.01]

ANNE: I was talking with a novelist friend this weekend who said she used to read books like she specifically was talking about *The Time Traveler's Wife*. She'd read it and she'd get to the end and go what an amazing experience. How did she do that? But now, she knows how they did that. It's a lot of hard work and a lot of intricate craft and the magic's kind of gone. And I was like, wait, what? I'm assuming that you're not in that camp.

MALLORY: Yeah, it's funny. I've actually heard that from a lot of my own author friends and I hear them say oh, now that I'm a writer now, I don't read for pleasure. It's like a boxer watching a boxing match and while I'm reading, I'm constantly trying to figure out what they're doing and I don't feel like that at all. For me, it adds to the magic. Especially if I see an author pull off some amazing, emotional manipulation, I'm just like oh my gosh. What do they do to get me here? What did they do to make me cry? It just makes me want to read more.

ANNE: Hard work is magic, Mallory.

MALLORY: It totally is.

ANNE: We'll just put that on an inspirational poster.

MALLORY: I'll get my needlepoint out right now.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I am a re-reader for that very reason. The first time I enjoy the story, but after that you can notice how they told you the story and why it worked. Do you like to revisit your favorite books and movies also?

MALLORY: Oh, absolutely. I am a complete re-reader. Actually in the lead up to the launch of this book, I've been ... As you'll understand, very stressed out and that's my favorite thing to do. [ANNE LAUGHS] is comfort friends are my re-readers because if I really love a book, I'm going to get something new out of it, every single time I read it. You know, especially if you really love something and you're kind of reading it as fast as you can 'cause you're desperate to know what happens, you miss things and all of my favorite books, as I've re-read them for the second, third, fourth, fifth time, I notice something new, something magical, something I've sort of overlooked the first time and that's why if I love a book, I probably read it at least ten times.

[ANNE LAUGHS]

ANNE: [LAUGHS] That is comforting for me to hear as a fellow writer because I know that you must have revisited the same material over and over and over and over writing your book just because of the research process. And I can't wait to hear more about it. But first I want to say that I was so happy to see some of the early reviews for your book. They're really flattering, Mallory.

[06:47.06]

MALLORY: Oh, thank you so much. It's been sort of overwhelming as a debut author. It's funny because you have nothing to compare any of this to, so I would constantly ... my agent would send me things and I would say, is that good?

[ANNE LAUGHS]

MALLORY: 'Cause you just have no frame of reference. And every book's journey is so different and so much of it is just sort of luck and timing that mixed up with all of your hard work and it's been a very, very interesting journey as such a big reader to finally see what things are like in the publishing world. And it's been really exciting, but as I said, also a little bit overwhelming.

ANNE: I can imagine. But I feel like I often argue, especially with Kirkus. I'm like, did we read the same book? But it was very gratifying to see that their response to *The Lady From The Black Lagoon*, your new March release, was similar to mine. Like as a reader, I love that experience of reading a nonfiction book, usually at the urging of someone whose taste I trust because I may pick it up going, I don't think I really care about jellyfish? Or sidewalks. [MALLORY LAUGHS] Or space dust or the digestive system or the creature from the black lagoon. Like I don't watch a lot of that kind of thing, but then you read a good book by an author who can show you why this subject that you knew nothing about, or even care about reading, is fascinating. At least in their hands.

Publisher's Weekly said, that your enthusiasm for your subject overcomes all objections you may have to wait, do I care about this topic? [LAUGHS] They said, yes. Yes you do. So congratulations on pulling that off.

MALLORY: Thank you. Yeah, it's funny you say that actually. Part of the reason why I included some of the memoir parts of the book is I have a really good friend named Kate and while I was in the very early stages of putting this book together, Kate does not like monster movies. She does not like horror and she said-

ANNE: Oh, Kate and I would be such good friends.

MALLORY: You and Kate would really get along. [MALLORY LAUGHS] And she's wonderful, but she's said why should I care about this book? And the first thing out of my mouth was well, what happened to her, you know, still happens to women in every industry, and she said, well there, that's your key. That's your in to get people interested in this book. She's like because people who like creatures from the black lagoon are already going to read this. It's the people who don't really care about monster movies that you're going to want to attract. And so I

decided to put some memoir parts of it. And the cool thing about Milicent, as you now know, is that her life crossed over with so many other parts of history that the creature from the black lagoon stuff is only, you know, a small chunk of her life. She did so, so much more. So that's ... People are always asking me, they're like, oh, do I have to watch Creature From The Black Lagoon to read this book? I'm like no, you absolutely do not.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Well I was going to say I don't know if I ever will, but should I?

[09:31.09]

MALLORY: You can if you want to. It's actually not too scary. It was scary in the '50s, but I don't know if it's so scary now. We're so used to horror movies being the scary, scary, and you know, being perfectly calculated with jump scares and with scary noises, you know, to terrify you. When back in the 1950s, just seeing a monster was scary, so I think it's a little tamer now ... compared to movies nowadays. But if you're not a monster person, you really don't have to watch it.

[BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: We started by talking about how sometimes a story just grabs you and pulls you in. How did that happen for you with this story?

MALLORY: For me, with Milicent Patrick, it was more about what wasn't there than what was. Because after she designed the creature from the black lagoon, and her ... one of the guys that she worked for at the Universal Monstershop, he backlisted her and fired her, and no one really knew what happened to her after that. So she's been this great mystery in the film world for decades. And whenever I would think about her or talk to people about her, that was always the question that was left hanging, is you know, what happened to her? As a big reader, that's the question that we all want to answer all the time, is what happened next? What happened? So it really drew me in just wanting to know the rest of her story.

ANNE: Now her claim to fame was designing that costume, being the only woman to ever design a monster costume in Hollywood, correct?

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: And she had a successful career up until that point.

MALLORY: Yeah, she had actually ... I mean, she was one of the first female animators at Disney. She had a really incredible, really very career in all kinds of film, so that was just sort of the pinnacle for her work up until then. But it was also her downfall.

ANNE: So you started looking into who this woman was and I think it's so interesting that your explanation about how you chose to consistently call her Milicent Patrick in the book because she went by many different names. I can't imagine how difficult it made your research, but you started looking into it and I want to know what happened next for you, Mallory.

MALLORY: Well it took me so, so long to find anything about her. The problem with her is that so many people had dismissed her because of her gender. All of her contributions were just sort of hidden, so I had to turn into this sort of Indiana Jones kind of person and teach myself how to privately investigate her, which ended up being great for me because I am such a library nerd that I got to go into so many different libraries and so many different archives and sorta root around. And you know, when you hear stories like this, you think oh, well it would be so cool if I could do that too. And I was having that experience constantly while I was sitting there and I was thinking, they're allowing me to come in and look at this stuff. You know, you feel like you've gotten one over on someone. You know, do they know that I'm a big fan and I'm a big nerd? [ANNE LAUGHS] To finally ... They're allowing me in here

[12:16.24]

MALLORY: So it took about a year of that before I could even get enough material to put together a proposal to get a literary agent and to think that I could do it. There were a few points in the research that I thought maybe I can't find her. Maybe I won't be able to do this.

ANNE: But it pulled together.

MALLORY: Yes. [~~MALLORY~~ LAUGHS] I just kept butting my head against the wall with stuff like that you know, I just kept asking new people, finding new historians, I got a lot of weird leads on this ... It feels weird calling it a case because I'm not actually a private investigator, but I kept getting really interesting leads from the strangest places. So I just sorta had to keep going out there and talking and trying everything that I could.

ANNE: Tell me about a strange lead you got along the way.

MALLORY: Well the .... probably the strangest one was going to the Mormons. I have no religious background, so I didn't ... wasn't really familiar. The Mormon Church has such an incredible connection with genealogy and when a friend of mine, you know, if you're looking for anybody, you should go to the Mormon Church. I was like, that's very strange suggestion, but okay. And I just went in there and it ended up breaking open my entire investigation. And it was just a strange resource that I would have never thought on my own.

ANNE: Would you tell your fellow library nerds about some of the libraries you visited and what you found there?

MALLORY: One of my favorites is probably the Cinematic Arts Library at the University of Southern California 'cause it's very strange if you're a library nerd to go into a library that's not for books. It's all film archives. So it's like being a strange, parallel universe where it sounds like a library and it smells like a library and it looks like a library, but it's all film stuff. There's film posters everywhere and there's film archives and there's just all sorts of treasures everywhere. So it was such a fascinating experience to be in a library that was for something else besides literature.

ANNE: How interesting. I would love to hear a few of the things about Milicent that made you know that this story really needs to be told. What really got you about this story?

MALLORY: Well it really always impressed me and it still impresses me about Milicent Patrick is her resilience. I mean, she worked in Hollywood for decades and she reinvented herself so many times, which was funny because it ended up being a huge pain in the butt for me because her reinventing herself included changing her name. It was very, very difficult. By the end of the research, three years in, I was looking up seven different combinations of names in databases. But I was just so surprised ... I think especially now in this world of media, so many of us wear so many different hats. You know, you and I are writers, but we're also Podcasters and bloggers and you do so many things, but Milicent was doing this, you know, in the 1950s. She was ... She did art of so many different kinds. She was animator, she was a designer, she was a fashion designer, she was a makeup designer. She tried so many things and I think it's just so incredible to read about someone doing that all the way back then, especially as a woman, an unmarried woman. Just sort of trying to live her art dream.

ANNE: Something I've found really fun about the book as a reader who doesn't enjoy liking to see how the pieces come together, well in addition to the structure, your chapter titles were so, so fun and perfect. But I loved the footnotes you shared along the way. Publishers don't always like that, but you point out to readers like oh hey, this is the highway that you've seen in Donnie Darko. [MALLORY LAUGHS] By the way, this is the animator of Bambi's Girlfriend, not a correct zoological term, but you get me. [MALLORY LAUGHS] I'd love to know your thought process behind wanting to let the reader in and showing them these glimpses about what it was like telling the story and giving them little, like, I almost feel like you're nudging me and being like, hey, hey. You may appreciate what's going on here more if I can just tell you this one thing.

MALLORY: The footnotes thing was such a funny process because one, I am a big footnotes nerd. I am a huge fan of Mary Roach, who is my favorite nonfiction writer. [ANNE LAUGHS] And I just love that. I love her humor, so when I sold the book to my editor, Peter Joseph at Hanover Square Press, our very first phone call with each other, we were talking about nonfiction authors we love. And both of us said, oh my gosh, we love Mary Roach. So when I got off the phone, I said this is the editor I'm going to work with. This is someone who gets me. This is someone who will be able to appreciate footnotes and some silliness and then as I was writing it, I really decided to go all out on the footnotes because you know, I talk about some really difficult things in the book. You know, there's a lot of sexism that Milicent had to deal with and that I've had to deal with and you know, it's not fun to read about. It's really sad. So I needed to break it up a little bit and I wanted it to feel like going out to brunch with your friends. Them telling you a stressful story that they had to deal with that week. You know, making jokes along the way 'cause if you can't laugh, you're going to cry. So it just made it, the tone of it, feel a little easier. Just for me as a writer, it's hard to write about sad things. Like I cried at the end of writing this book, so putting in some jokes and putting in clarification on things too. Like I said before, I don't want listeners and readers to think oh my gosh, I have to know everything about film making, I have to know about creature from black lagoon. I have to know about monster movies. I wanted it to feel really accessible, so as I was writing, I would say oh, you know what? Maybe you don't know what this is - I'm just going to clarify this for you. So I really wanted it to feel like a friend telling you a story and it's totally okay for you to not know everything.

ANNE: Yeah. I appreciated that as a reader and found it a lot of fun. Mallory, what has writing this book done to your reading life?

MALLORY: You know, I think it's just made it better. Like I said before, some writers really lose their love of reading, but for me, it just made me want to read even more deeply and more widely as someone who is normally a big reader. When I'm stressed out, I read even more, so I feel like I've just been a book woodchipper for the past few months. [ANNE LAUGHS] I just finished an audiobook that I really, really loved. It's a memoir called *How To Be Alone* by Lane Moore. Lane Moore is a comedian and a writer and she wrote this whole story about being estranged from her family, having romantic difficulties, and sort of, the joy that she finds and like being alone and having her own life, I just thought it was so, so funny and so wonderful and it was such a great collection of essays. Some people are like oh, you wrote a part memoir, how can you listen to memoirs now? Or how can you read memoirs now? And it just makes me love them more 'cause I just want to know how it's done and how to get better.

[19:03.23]

ANNE: Okay, I'm ready to hear more about the books you love. Are you ready?

MALLORY: I am so ready.

ANNE: Okay.

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*ANNE: Readers, I know all TOO WELL that it can be hard to squeeze in a workout between work, getting the kids off to school, needing to be done and showered and presentable by a certain time with dry hair. That's a lot but add to that being on someone else's schedule for when classes start and it can just be too much. That's why I love OpenFit, the brand new, super simple streaming service that allows you to work out from the comfort of your living room in as little as 10 minutes a day!*

[19:34.02]

*ANNE: Openfit has classes for any fitness level and schedule. And because everyone's bodies and goals are different OPENFIT is personalized to your needs with custom tailored original content. Check out Xtend Barre with Andrea Rogers, the founder of this world-wide sensation. Xtend Barre has 30 different 30 minute workouts so it's not like watching the same thing again and again and again. With Xtend Barre, I can do full barre routines in my own home; I don't even need a bar, I just use a chair, and it just takes 30 minutes—which is about how long it used to take me to get to the gym and back.*

*But even if I don't feel like I have time for a full workout I have been setting an alarm to get up from my desk and take a yoga break. I might not make it all the way through the Yoga 52 videos on Openfit, but I can start a video right there, anytime right from my laptop.*

*OPENFIT will change the way you work-out. Use the code Read, and join me on a fitness journey personalized just for you. Again, use the code Read and start using OPENFIT for your journey to a healthier life. Right now during the Openfit 30-day challenge, What Should I Read Next? listeners get a special extended 30-day free trial membership to Openfit when you text [Read] to*

303030. You will get full access to Openfit – all the workouts and nutrition information---  
TOTALLY FREE. Again - Just text READ to 303030.

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[20:55.01]

ANNE: You know how this works. You are going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you've been reading lately, and then we'll talk about what you may enjoy reading next. Let's start with your favorites. Mallory, what's the first book you love?

[21:05.28]

MALLORY: First book I love is a collection called *Get In Trouble* by Kelly Link. I am such a huge Kelly Link fan. I think she's the queen of short story writing in America right now. She writes these incredibly woven short stories that take bits of sci-fi, bits of literary fiction, bits of fantasy, bits of horror, and you know, swirl them all together. It's just so, so magical, and she's very funny and very poignant. I can't get enough of her. I read every single short story collection she has and I know she's working on a novel right now. And every time she tweets, I'm like, oh my gosh - [ANNE LAUGHS] - is it done?

ANNE: We had a guest, it's Nicholas Segal if you're listening and you want to hear more about Kelly Link, who cited this as a favorite too and he's like she's just so weird and I love it.

MALLORY: I love weirdness. That is one of my favorite things. I love books that are not confusing. I'm not here for books that, you know, intentionally make it so that you don't know what's going on. But I love, love, love strangeness and the unexpected novelty and it makes me so thrilled when I'm reading a story and something happens that's just so strange and fascinating that I'm just ... Oh my gosh, a fairy just popped out of that thing. [ANNE LAUGHS] A fairy popped out of this character's coffee mug. I have to know what's going on.

ANNE: Someone rather well respected, like Gaiman or King, called her darkly playful and that seems to fit in with what you were talking about telling your own story.

MALLORY: Oh, absolutely. She is ... you know, darkly whimsical. She makes it so wonderful to read these ... you know, some of her stories are horror stories, but she weaves in so much joy and novelty that it makes it almost fun. And it's almost you know, being lead to the witch's house with gingerbread. [ANNE LAUGHS]

ANNE: That's a great analogy. Mallory, what's another book that you love?

MALLORY: My second book is called *A Head Full of Ghosts* by Paul Tremblay and Paul, I think, is one of these most important and best horror authors that are working in America today. This novel is sort've ... *We Have Always Lived In The Castle* with Shirley Jackson mashed up with an exorcism story. It is about this working-class family in modern day in Massachusetts and one of the teenage girls in the family, they can't tell if she is sick or if she's possessed, but things get stranger and stranger and scarier and scarier. Paul Tremblay is the master of walking this line between is this actually happening or is this supernatural? Or is there a rational explanation and

he walks this perfect razor line between the two and it's so masterful. He's one of those authors that you have to read again and again 'cause you're like, how did he do this?

ANNE: I almost never read horror and I haven't read this book, but I'm so intrigued by it and think I actually might. How scary is it, Mallory? Because here's what really gets me about it - I really like the way I've been told he plays with that tension. What's really happening here? The way that he tells this story sounds fascinating to me, to step up different voices and tell it in different formats so that the reader has to decide what they think.

[24:17.25]

MALLORY: I really think he is a master of craft. After you reach the final page of the book, you almost feel like you just watched a magic trick because he keeps that confusion of whether ... is this supernatural or is it not? Almost to the last line. And so when you're reading it, it is very scary. I will warn you, but-

ANNE: No. That's not what I wanted you to say. [MALLORY LAUGHS] I wanted you to say you'll be fine, you'll be fine. Because School Library Journal has recommended it for teen libraries, which gave me some hope, but I'm sure there are a lot of teens that are braver than I am when it comes to content.

MALLORY: Teenagers are very brave.

[BOTH LAUGH]

MALLORY: The two things that I think are really exciting about this book for people who might be really scared by things is one it's such a really great mystery 'cause while you're reading it, you really are ... every chapter saying, oh my gosh, does this mean that this is just a physical ailment or oh my gosh, does this mean that she's actually possessed? You know, that fascination in that wonder whether it's really happening can pull you through some of the scariness. It's also very, very ... there's a lot of girl power in the book which is really fun and sort've rare for an exorcism story. And there's a really funny line that I love where everyone's standing around and they're talking, trying to figure out if she's actually possessed, they say well, oh, she was speaking. She said this thing in Latin and somebody else goes, she's a 14-year-old girl with a laptop. You think she can't figure out this stuff on her own? [ANNE LAUGHS] And it just made me laugh so hard and it's just ... that kind of stuff is so, so refreshing, so when people tell me, oh, I don't really read horror, that's one of the ones I like to recommend if they want to try out the genre. And another part that is really cool and exciting is that mixed up with the structure is ... are these blog entries about the events of the book years later, so it's that sort of amazing mystery structure that a lot of thrillers have that sort've pull you along ... The first time I read this book, I read it in one sitting because I could not put it down. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Wow. It's not small.

MALLORY: No. I stayed up all night and I just could not stop reading this book.

ANNE: So what happens is the desperate family agrees, ready to try anything, to be the subjects of a reality TV show. Yes?

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: Okay.

MALLORY: It's such a strange and brilliant part of the book where the family ... One of the things I really, really love about it is that it explores some economic horror. You know, it's this family, the father has just gotten laid off, so they really don't have a lot of money and they can't afford these medical bills because they're trying to figure out ... while they're trying to explore the sickness, they're like well maybe it's spiritual. You know, they keep taking her to the doctor because they want her to be okay, but you know, as we all know and in 2019, medical bills are not an easy thing to shoulder. So this reality TV show approaches them and they agree to be on it in exchange for money. So that's also a part of the book is that this camera crew coming in and filming this teenage girl and filming the family's reactions and it makes it more surreal and more tense and more strange. And that's what the blog entries are reflecting on, the episodes of the reality TV show. The foreshadowing and the tension and the dread that builds up is just amazing.

[27:32.29]

ANNE: Oh, and I really admire writers who can slowly ratchet up the sense of urgency in the story.

MALLORY: Yes and that's why I had to read it in one sitting. [ANNE LAUGHS] And lost of night of sleep. Thank you, Paul Tremblay.

ANNE: NPR described this book in such a brilliant way. They called it something like a book about a book about a TV show about something that really happened, but we're not exactly sure what was running commentary by the blog that has its own secret issues. Okay. Mallory, that sounds fascinating. I will take it under consideration, but if I never sleep again, we're going to have words.

MALLORY: Phew. Just read it during the day. [ANNE LAUGHS] You read it out on your porch in full sunlight and as soon as it gets dark, put it in the freezer.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Does that work?

MALLORY: You know what, I did it when I read Stephen King's *It* when I was a kid. And it does help a little bit just not having the book in your bedroom. [MALLORY LAUGHS]

ANNE: Placebos are powerful.

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: Mallory, tell me about the third book you love.

MALLORY: So the third book is a book called *Priestdaddy* by Patricia Lockwood and it is a memoir about you know, the author Patricia Lockwood, her father is a Catholic priest. For people listening who said, wait a minute, Catholic priests can't marry and have kids. But her father started out as a different kind of priest. I think he is an Episcopalian priest and moved laterally into the Catholic church, but he already had a wife and kids, so they, through some you know religious loophole, let him be a Catholic priest with a family. But her father is the wackiest, most hilarious person and only became a priest because while he was in the navy, he saw the exorcist on a submarine and it scared him so badly, that he decided to join the church. He's a, you know, guitar playing, pants hating, hilarious guy, so it's just her memoir of growing up in this religious household and with this hilarious weird Catholic priest dad. And it is without a doubt the funniest book I have ever read in my entire life.

ANNE: High praise.

MALLORY: I read it twice and I listened to the audiobook because she narrates it and she does all of her family members voices which is extra funny. [LAUGHS] It's incredible.

ANNE: I didn't know the story of how her father converted. I didn't realize a submarine was involved.

MALLORY: I mean, I guess when watching the exorcist on a submarine would be pretty scary, but the fact that it scared him enough that he had to go join the church is just so funny.

[BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: So we were talking about Kelly Link being darkly playful. On the other hand, *Priestdaddy* is funny, but also really sad and moving. Is that fair?

MALLORY: Yes. And actually that's one of the books I reread in anticipation of writing my own book. There are a lot of sad parts to *Priestdaddy*. She talks about some of her own experiences that are tragic. Her telling it in this way that is so open and vulnerable, but also being just so, so funny, you so feel for her and you want to know more about her within the first chapter. You're with her. You know, when you start reading a book and you're like oh my gosh, I love this author. I will go on any journey with them. I am here for them. That's how I feel about Patricia Lockwood.

ANNE: That's such a great feeling when you start a book and you're like “yup, I will follow you anywhere. Let's go.”

MALLORY: Whatever you want to talk about, whatever weird story you want to tell me, I am here for it.

ANNE: Now I can't wait to hear about the book that you said was not for you.

MALLORY: Yes. We have a rule on my own podcast, Reading Glasses, where we don't like talking about books that we don't like, but this book is so popular, that I feel like it's okay. The author will be okay with me saying that I don't like her book. My book that I don't like is *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon. And I tried to like this book so, so much and I feel like my reading *Outlander* is like how some people feel about bleu cheese or cilantro.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I love bleu cheese and cilantro. I'm also looking forward to the next Diana Gabaldon book.

[31:23.28]

MALLORY: You know when you're reading a book and you're like, this book is so well written and I see why people love it? But gosh, this is just not for me. And that's how I felt about *Outlander*. I just couldn't find my way into it. I got ... I think it was 300 pages in. Sometimes I will make a cocktail for my partner and I know it's a really well-made cocktail, and he'll say, you know what, I just don't like these ingredients. I know you do it as well as you could, but I can't drink this, and that's how I felt about *Outlander*. [ LAUGHS]

ANNE: Not every book is for every reader. And that is okay. Have you been able to put your finger on what the elements were that made it not the right book for you?

MALLORY: I think it was a combination of things. I do have a hard time ... I think maybe because I'm so fascinated by how things work, I was the kind of person who when she fell through ... and I don't think it's too much of a spoiler for people to know that the main character winds up falling through a portal into another time period. I'm the kind of person who was like, wait, go back. I don't want to hear about what she did when she went through the portal - I want to know how the portal works. [ANNE LAUGHS] Hold on, how is any of this happening? How is this affecting this world? But it's very, very character driven and I felt kinda bad for her husband. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: The husband left behind in 1945?

MALLORY: Yeah. I did feel sorta bad for him.

ANNE: That's fair.

MALLORY: I wanted her to maybe feel differently about things. Gosh, I just have such a hard time talking about books that I don't like. [MALLORY LAUGHS]

ANNE: Mallory, it sounds like you really just wanted everybody to be happy. Forever.

MALLORY: Yeah.

ANNE: But we just listened to the books you love. I mean, that doesn't really fit with Paul Tremblay.

[BOTH LAUGH]

MALLORY: I know. It's so weird.

ANNE: This is what makes readers and their reading life fascinating.

MALLORY: I think I have a problem with internal conflict and I think that's why I like horror so much. I'm a very anxious person, so I have a hard time reading about other characters that are dealing with their own personal issues. Like I can fight off a demon, but please don't make me fight off my own problems. Reading *A Head Full of Ghosts* or *Get In Trouble* where the people are tangling with the devil and fairies and vampires, that is actually more relaxing to me than someone dealing with a complicated relationship issue.

ANNE: That is really insightful.

MALLORY: I actually have a hard time with some romance novels. You know, some people will read them and they're like oh, this is so amazing, but for me, it's very stressful. Especially regency romance. Etiquette issues and social climbing, it makes me so stressed out.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Okay, no regency romance for you, Mallory.

MALLORY: Oh, gosh, it's just when someone's in a situation and they're mortified because they didn't use the right fork, like I get so - [ANNE LAUGHS] so vicariously stressed out, but if someone is in a book fighting off a werewolf, that is like my comfort food. I don't ... it's so strange. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I think that is amazing. And a really useful thing to know for your reading life.

MALLORY: It does help out a lot, especially now when I'm in this ... I mean, you know, launching a book can be such a stressful endeavor, so I'm like ... the past few weeks, I've just been like give me all the scary things. Give me all my scary books and they will make me feel better.

ANNE: All right. I'll see if I can help with that. Right now you are reading the memoir *How To Be Alone*, what else are you reading right now?

MALLORY: I am re-reading my favorite Ray Bradbury book, which is *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

ANNE: Ooh.

MALLORY: When the book came out, it wouldn't be called YA, but now I think it would definitely be called YA. 'Cause the two main characters are boys like right on the verge of teenage-hood. I love Ray Bradbury. he's one of my favorite authors anyways. *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is my favorite, favorite of his 'cause it's spooky without it being too scary and

it's just like the perfect October-esque book, which is definitely my comfort month, which is why I am reading it right now.

ANNE: Spooky without being scary. That's a great description. Mallory, what do you want more of in your reading life right now? Aside from werewolves and you know, fairies that jump out of things that scare you.

MALLORY: I am an enthusiast. So I love the things that I love so much, so I am always looking for more books in my wheelhouse and conversely, I am always trying to try new things. So I am one of those people where you know, if people say, oh, I don't really like horror, but here's something you might really love because I loved it. I'm always willing to try something different. 'Cause I love novelty. I love new things. I will read in any genre. I love westerns, I love nonfiction. So I like to vacillate between something totally new and my comfort stuff, so like werewolves, carnivals, horror stuff. It's a pretty wide range for me.

[35:51.24]

ANNE: All right. Mallory, this is going to be fun.

\*\*\*

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*Readers, I'm not out chasing 18 again (in fact I have no desire to go back to my teen years), but I wouldn't mind looking like I actually drink 8 glasses of water a day and don't One-More-Page my way way past my bedtime. Like I did last night. Seriously.*

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[38:50.16]

ANNE: So we're thinking about comfort reading slash exploratory, trying new things reading for you and what is going to be a really exciting, but also stressful time in your life.

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: You're an enthusiast. I love that word and the way you apply it to your reading life. I'm really noticing a complexity in all your favorites and what you're drawn to. You don't seem to be looking for either or, you want both and. Kelly Link ... You described it as a scary and joyful. I mean, those two words don't usually go together. *A Head Full of Ghosts* is very lifelike, but also not.

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: And *Priestdaddy* is really funny and really sad. *Outlander*, you don't get to see behind the curtain, you see what happens out front and that's not working for you. Something I'm struck by is you say that you really like horror and I just really hadn't noticed before how much horror writing is deeply imaginative, making up situations and worlds and monsters that do not exist. Is it - imagination something you look for in your writing? Is that something you appreciate? Or is that just a coincidence there?

MALLORY: No, that is incredibly insightful. Like I said as an anxious person, my brain is constantly working in overdrive to think of what could happen, what's going to happen, always trying to be 15 steps of myself. So when I'm reading writing that does that and sort've extrapolates this one crazy idea or has this brand new thing with all kinds of you know, world-building around it, I just ... it's like candy for my brain.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I want to start by saying thinking about Milicent Patrick, who she was in Hollywood and how she was a kind of classic and how she was ahead of her time and how that was really hard for her. There are a couple of recent historical fiction books that are set in that era in Hollywood. They're about actresses and I think readers who are fascinated by that time period may enjoy taking a look at *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid. And Susan Meissner's *Stars Over Sunset Boulevard*. I don't know if these are right for you, Mallory. These are back and forth historical fiction set both in the present day and then the '40s, maybe the '50s for Taylor Jenkins Reid. Each character in the present has a strong link to the past, but they may or may not realize it. And for those who want to experience both the glamour and the underbelly of Hollywood in that era, those could be really fun reads.

[41:12.20]

MALLORY: I mean, they sound great to me.

ANNE: Maybe when you want to step outside your comfort zone.

MALLORY: I've heard so much about both of those titles and you know when you see ... We as readers have this weird experience where something might not be normally for us, but when we see so much buzz about it, you're kinda like ooh, I wanna try that, even though I normally wouldn't pick it up. That's actually how I feel about both of those titles because both of them got quite a bit of buzz and I kept seeing them on lists and then on Instagram and I was like, they both have nice covers. Maybe I should read them.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] It's hard not to have a nice cover when you're writing about that era of Hollywood.

MALLORY: Oh, absolutely. So much glamour.

ANNE: Okay. But going into the Mallory has a stressful time coming up, let's give her all the werewolves wheelhouse. How do you feel about literary fiction?

MALLORY: I actually love literary fiction. Especially if it's weird.

ANNE: Have you read *The Essex Serpent* by Sarah Perry?

MALLORY: I have and I loved it so, so much.

ANNE: So, yes, on the right track?

MALLORY: Yes.

ANNE: There's a big monster in the lake.

MALLORY: Oh, my God, I love that book so, so much. Especially love books that are you think it's about one thing, but it's really about another.

ANNE: Ohhh.

[42:21.27]

MALLORY: And *The Essex Serpent* is amazing because you think it's about this lake monster, but it's actually all about the emotional arc of this woman in this small town and how people affect each other. Ugh, I love that book so much.

ANNE: I'm glad to hear that I'm on the right track. I feel like you've probably read this but tell me about Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.

MALLORY: Oh, I love *House of Leaves*. [ANNE LAUGHS] You're so good! This is probably why you picked this - it's a book about a book about a documentary about a house.

ANNE: You know, that kind of sounds like something we discussed already.

MALLORY: Yes. [LAUGHS] It's like a lozenge. You can't bite ... I mean, you can bite right into it, but you're going to miss a lot of it. It's just you have to sort of immerse yourself in this world and it is very weird. It is very strange. It took me actually a long time to read it because it is just a strange, strange book. The structure is weird. You know, sometimes the footnotes will be upside down and there's certain words that are in certain colors, but ugh, I loved it so, so much.

ANNE: I'm happy to hear that and I think I need to point out to listeners who are like that sounds amazing. One of my favorite GoodReads review of that book says something like, goodbye sleep. It was nice knowing you.

MALLORY: [LAUGHS] It is a haunted house book, but it is so much more than that. It's sorta like why I love *Head Full of Ghosts*, you know. The main plot is about this strange house that is scaring this family and is getting bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. But then you read about all these other characters as they deal with that and the characters trying to tell their story and those characters' emotional arcs. It's so complex and it's fascinating.

ANNE: Now I'm nervous, Mallory.

MALLORY: [LAUGHS] Well you shouldn't be. You've nailed it every - you're two for two right now.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Have you tried *The Hike* by Drew Magary?

MALLORY: I have. And I also loved that book. I feel like this is like the rare thing where you read your horoscope or something and you're like yes, this is 100% right. [ANNE LAUGHS] This is all me.

ANNE: Well, at least at first, what you think is happening is not what is happening. I mean you know you like that.

MALLORY: Yes. *The Hike* ... it's sort've like a science fiction *Alice in Wonderland*. It's about this guy on a business trip and he ends up going for a walk. As he's walking, it's very bizarre and he meets these strange cast of characters. I adored it because it's just so bizarre.

[44:41.23]

ANNE: Well as a reader and as someone who talks about books, I'm always grateful to either land upon or hear a really pithy description like that. It's so easy to imagine what that might be like.

MALLORY: Oh, yes.

ANNE: Now this is a little bit of a departure for you because it's not ... it wouldn't be slated in the same section of the bookstore as the books we talked about already. But have you read anything by Tana French? Especially *In The Woods*?

MALLORY: I've read everything by Tana French. [MALLORY LAUGHS]

ANNE: Okay now I really am going to run out of books.

MALLORY: Her and Megan Abbot are my two favorite mystery writers. And *In The Woods* is my favorite of hers. I feel like you have opened a little keyhole into my brain [ANNE LAUGHS] You have completely nailing my entire literary taste. *In The Woods* is amazing because it does the Paul Tremblay thing where right up until the end, you don't know if what's happening is supernatural or man-made. So brilliant. Her writing is very dense and it's one of those books where you pick it up and go, oh, this is going to take me a long time to get through and I've never finished any of her books in more than two sittings.

ANNE: Wow. Did you have to put them in the freezer?

MALLORY: No. They're not ... Well *In The Woods* is a little bit spooky, but it's not too scary. It's a ... it's more thrillery than horror. I would give it a five on the scary scale.

ANNE: Okay. Mallory, what about *Experimental Film* by Gemma Files?

MALLORY: I've never read it.

ANNE: Hallelujah. [MALLORY LAUGHS] What do you know about it?

MALLORY: Nothing. I'm so excited.

ANNE: It's a ghost story wrapped around a film and you just spent three years writing a book about a film.

MALLORY: Oh, my God. I'm going to go buy it today.

ANNE: This is about a teacher. A teacher of film history. She gets sucked into investigating a very old mystery about how and why an experimental filmmaker in the past disappeared.

[46:27.29]

MALLORY: Oh, my God.

ANNE: And she starts digging around, she finds out that the film itself is a clue. And possibly more than the clue. Are you tracking?

MALLORY: Oh, my Gosh. I feel like you're laying breadcrumbs and I am running through the forest. I'm like, this is so in my wheelhouse. I am so excited.

ANNE: I'm happy to hear it and also really relieved. [MALLORY LAUGHS] Okay. Next have you read *the Hazel Wood* by Melissa Albert?

MALLORY: I have not.

ANNE: This is a YA book that came out maybe a year ago. It reminds me of *The Hike*, but it's got a whole fairytale element going on. Although interestingly, there is an Alice connection. The 17-year-old protagonist named is Alice and that is not a coincidence. She lives in Manhattan with her mom. They have been on the run for 17 years ever since Alice was born. It seems like bad luck follows them wherever they go. But what Alice's mom knows and what Alice does not, is it's not bad luck exactly. It has to do with this really, creepy, bizarre unsettling book of stories that Alice's grandmother wrote. This book is very hard to find. There are very few copies, but it has this cult-ish fan base who obsess about this book. And Alice's been told, stay away from it. But then one day her mom disappears, leaving behind just a page torn from the old book and a note that says, stay away from the hazel wood. And this is a YA story and Alice is 17-years-old, so of course you know what happens next.

MALLORY: Oh, my gosh.

ANNE: Conveniently, Alice has a friend at school who is obsessed with the book her grandmother wrote, who's always thought that like, oh, hey, Alice, how cool that's your grandma. Hey, hey. So with his help, they go and they have to do ... find their way into the wood and when they get there, holy buckets. This is like the original Grimm brothers fairytales, not the Disney version.

MALLORY: Ohh.

ANNE: This is really twisted. You're a horror reader, you'll be fine, [MALLORY LAUGHS] but for me, I was like - wow! That's pretty plenty for a YA book or for anything that I'm reading. It reminded me a lot of *The Thirteenth Tale* because of that family connection in the story and the hidden history, but it also had a little bit of the Matrix to it. There is this other world just on the other side of Manhattan.

MALLORY: Oh, I am so in for this. This sounds so amazing.

ANNE: Okay. Now you said that you are up for trying new things.

[48:50.28]

MALLORY: Always.

ANNE: Okay. Now the title's going to sound like you, I may have to sell you on the description. So have you read *The Terror* by Dan Simmons?

MALLORY: No. But I own it.

ANNE: Do you really?

MALLORY: Yes, I am one of those people that buys a bunch of books and then will read them all eventually.

ANNE: I thought this would be a stretch for you, but something called out to you when you came upon it. Do you remember how that happened?

MALLORY: Well one it is called *The Terror*, so I will pick it up off the shelf. [ANNE LAUGHS] But I know that Dan Simmons is a classic, horror writer and this is probably why you thought oh, I'm going to have to sell her on this description. You know, just reading about a bunch of people who are on a boat that gets stuck in the ice-

ANNE: In 1845.

MALLORY: I said okay, I don't know if I really care about ice or the Arctic, but I've heard that it's very scary, so I said you know what, I'll give it a try eventually, but now I'm going to have to bump it up on my list.

ANNE: So the creature from the black lagoon is ... I still want to call 1950s like 50 years ago like I'm 100.

MALLORY: Oh, my God, I do the same thing.

[BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That makes me feel better, but we've talked about all 20th century books, late 20th century books and your favorites have all been in the last 20 years. So I wasn't sure how you would feel - this is a recent release, but the setting is 1845.

MALLORY: Oh, I am always game to try out historical fiction and stuff that was written a long time ago - or that's set a long time ago.

ANNE: And it's true, it is called *The Terror*, which note to self, never get on a boat called the terror. Bad things are going to happen.

[50:23.19]

MALLORY: I know, can you believe that?

ANNE: That is some serious foreshadowing. [MALLORY LAUGHS] The men on board get stuck. They're surrounded by the ice. They need a thaw that will set them free, so they can either go forward as they search for the northwest passage or they can go back. Time goes on and they're running out of supplies as you do when you're on a mission in the Arctic. Nothing good comes of being trapped in tight spaces over time. Already you've got some pretty tense situations happening on board the HMS Terror. But then they slowly come to realize that they are not alone. And there is something out there.

MALLORY: Oh, my gosh.

ANNE: I know. This does sound like you. Why did I doubt it?

MALLORY: [LAUGHS] Just the phrase they were not alone [ANNE LAUGHS] They could put that as a blurb on the front of any book and I would pick it up.

ANNE: Some publicist is listening to that somewhere. [MALLORY LAUGHS] Your mailbox is going to be full, Mallory.

MALLORY: That phrase elicits such a thrill of terror for me. I get such a ... I mean, it's such a primal fear you know, when you're a kid and you're alone in your room or you're out in the woods or you're walking home one night, and you're not alone ... immediately, I'm in.

ANNE: Or I'm thinking get me internal conflict any day.

MALLORY: It's so funny. I love finding out about different reader lives and for me, I will 100% take a scary monster out on the ice while I'm trapped there than like a crush that I have to figure out how to talk to. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: You know what though? The thing that makes me think I'll try that is talking to a reader who loves *A Head Full of Ghosts*. When I come over to the literal dark side, that's how it's going to happen.

MALLORY: Sometimes I feel like I'm a cheerleader for ... You know, do you ever have a couple of books where you feel like you just have pom-poms for? [ANNE LAUGHS] You know, you're like a kiosk for that book where as soon as someone mentions it, you pop in their window and you say, oh, hi. Oh, my gosh. Can I tell you about it? 'Cause I love it so much. That's how I feel about *Head Full of Ghosts*. [MALLORY LAUGHS]

ANNE: Every author wishes they had a kiosk.

MALLORY: [LAUGHS] Paul Tremblay, I am your *Head Full of Ghosts* kiosk. I am here. You don't even have to pay me.

[52:26.19]

ANNE: All right, Mallory. So we talked about *Experimental Film* by Gemma Files, *The Hazel Wood* by Melissa Albert, *The Terror* by Dan Simmons. Of those three books, what do you think you'll read next?

MALLORY: I think I'm going to have to go with *Experimental Film*. So it was a big tie between *Hazel Wood* and *Experimental Film*, but I am such a film nerd and I love weird movies as you can imagine as someone who loves weird stories and weird books. You know when you hear about a book and it feels like someone put a hook in your brain? And you just are getting tugged towards it? That's how I feel towards *Experimental Film* now.

ANNE: I love feeling that way about a book. And I hope you enjoy that one.

MALLORY: Thank you so much. This is ... Again, it feels like I just got a book makeover and [ANNE LAUGHS] that I have to go rush out and read these books.

ANNE: A book-over.

[53:13.26]

MALLORY: Yes!

ANNE: But no zippers or buttons. Definitely no tight pants.

MALLORY: It has everything has pockets.

ANNE: Now you're talking! [MALLORY LAUGHS] Thanks for talking books with me today, Mallory.

MALLORY: Thank you so much for having me on.

[CHEERFUL ~~INTRO~~ OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Mallory, and I'd love to hear what YOU think she should read next. Maybe it'll be easier for you to come up with titles than it was

for me. That page is at [whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/176](http://whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/176) (that's 1-7-6) and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today.

[53:46:04]

~~ANNE:~~ We've got another great episode lined up for you next week. Here's a sneak peek...

KATE: If you really want to get something extra out of your reading, it will not harm you to annotate your books. [ANNE LAUGHS]

ANNE: I can hear people like rubbing their hands together like ooh.

[54:05.08]

KATE: Yes. I'll read with a highlighter and a pen and a stack of sticky notes and highlight words or phrases or even themes that stand out to me. Just the action of physically highlighting and writing down some notes really makes my brain think harder about the book than I would otherwise. I'm able to look back later and say this book stood out to me in these different ways.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

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