

Intro

Hello everyone, and welcome to Novel-Tea from the North Scituate Library. I'm your host Katherine, and every month I review a couple books and give you a look behind the shelves at the secret and sometimes, maybe, not-very, scandalous lives of library workers.

Review of *The Factory Witches of Lowell*

Today I'm reviewing [*The Factory Witches of Lowell* by CS Malerich](#).

The Factory Witches of Lowell is a historical fantasy about girls working in the mills of Lowell, Massachusetts in the 19th century. They are striking for fair wages, hours, and working conditions - and to keep everyone in The Factory Girls Union of Lowell true, they use a little magic. Just a little bit. The leaders of the union are Judith - who is an experienced organizer - and Hannah, who has a natural gift for magic that has haunted and helped her all her life.

Once again, this book tempted me by being very very short, plus labor movements and witchcraft are both special interests of mine. At first I was a little nervous, to pick up a book about Lowell! I thought that I might end up reading about the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, which is a little too traumatic for my current reading tastes. Fear not, this book takes place much earlier in the history of Lowell, back before the civil war - and yes, that means it's still a bit heavy. For such a short book, it had a very deep understanding of the stratified society driving the economic system of the time. It depicts the wealthy owners in Boston, Mr. Boott, their middle-class mill manager in Lowell, the workers, and the slaves. It doesn't even hesitate to make the connection between the fact that spinning cotton picked by slaves is what's making the rich ever richer - including in the North.

One negative that I'd like to mention, I think that the brevity of the book actually hurt my experience a little. It could be pandemic brain fog, but I just could NOT keep the characters straight. All those 19th-century names kept getting twisted in my head. Judith, Hannah, Lucy, Abigail... I don't know why, but it was rough. I felt like I needed a list - who is the witch? Who is the charismatic leader? Who is the one who is foreshadowed to turn against the union? I never got a chance to settle into the characters.

On the whole, however, I enjoyed it! It was kind of like a spell in itself. It was a little twisty and dreamlike, mixing history and fantasy on every page. I loved the way that Malerich built the rules of magic in this world, where herbalism is something one can learn by rote, but also one can have the Sight, which is a blessing and a curse. I also really appreciated its understanding of the history of manufacturing and of ownership, in a time of chattel slavery. The Factory Girls Union's

work ends up being not just about getting fair wages, but also about removing a level of alienation that they have from the manufacturing process.

The library has *The Factory Witches of Lowell* available in print, and as an audio book through the ezone - as you like it. I recommend it to historical fiction and fantasy fans alike, especially if you are interested in mutual aid and labor movements.

Reading list?

The Factory Witches of Lowell isn't the only thing I read this month! I like to give some airtime to any books that I don't have the time or words to give a full review - this month I also read [How to Keep House While Drowning](#) by KC Davis. I discovered Davis and her website, [StruggleCare.com](#), through tiktok, where she posts videos about her philosophy for chores, which she calls care tasks. If you ever struggle to get your chores done, whether it's just out of frustration because it seems like there's always dirty dishes and laundry, or because you have depression or ADHD or a physical disability I strongly recommend checking out this book, or visiting the Struggle Care website.

That's it for books, but I'd like to give a little note on adult programs, this month! In April, we have a really great set of financial literacy programs for Money Smart Week. Bryan Schmeling from Thrivent will be teaching classes on budgeting, identity theft, and more. Bryan is a member of the library board and does really great programs for us every month. Money Smart Week is the week of April 12, and I'd love to see you there.

Youth Services Corner

Hi everyone this is Miss Alyce! I hope everyone's having a great March and getting ready for the spring. I just want to let you know what's happening for kiddos and teens. We have a lot of fun stuff coming up in the next couple of months, but first I want to tell you about a great book I just read. The name of the book is [The Cousins](#) and it is by Karen McManus who has written some other teen books you might have heard of including *One of Us is Lying* and *One of Us is Next*.

Cousins Milly, Aubrey, and Jonah barely know each other until they each receive a letter inviting them to work at their estranged grandmother's island resort for the summer. They had never met their reclusive and wealthy grandmother Mildred Story before. Years before they were born she had disinherited their parents by sending them a letter from her lawyer which said "You Know What You Did!". All of their parents claim to not know what caused them to be disinherited and banned from the family home on Gull Cove Island. In hopes of getting back in Mildred's good graces Milly, Aubrey, and Jonah are sent by their parents to work at the resort for the summer. When they arrive, their grandmother goes out of her way to avoid them and they start

to realize that there is much more to the story they've been told. Will Milly, Jonah, and Aubrey finally learn the family secrets once and for all, and will they survive the summer?

The Cousins was a really good mystery book and it had a few twists and turns along the way. I would highly recommend it to both teen and adults who love mysteries or who are big fans of Karen McManus.

We have lots of exciting things coming up the library. First, I'd like to let you know about an opportunity for any teens that need to earn community service. You can earn community service just for writing book reviews! They don't have to be very long, just write a little bit about the plot and what you thought of it. You can send me your reviews at alyce@scituatelibrary.org. I'll also post them on our social media and website. So, if you have read any good books write a review and earn some community service hours.

Although March is almost over, we still have a couple of programs including a kid's yoga for ages 3 - 9. Join me for some mindfulness and movement on Wednesday, March 24th on Zoom. you can find the registration link on our website scituatelibrary.org, under events. During April vacation we are finally going to have an in- person, outdoor program at the Gazebo across the street from the library, so we will hope for nice weather! Come join us for a cool Earth Day craft. Make a cool reusable tote bag using just duct tape and an empty bird seed bag! This fun recycling craft will take place on Wednesday, April 21st at 12 the rain date will be Friday April 23rd at 12. We just ask that you wear a mask for safety. Registration is required for this program so we have an idea of how much materials we will need. You can sign up at the library or call 647-5133 ext. 103 you can also email me at alyce@scituatelibrary.org.

I hope to you there! I wish all of you a happy spring, hopefully we are in store for lots of sunshine! I will see you soon! Bye!

Behind the Shelves

Now for our little peek Behind the Shelves.

I don't have anything to report from the cook book club this month, because club didn't happen. A bunch of people lost power in Scituate, right at the worst possible time. Not that there's a good time to lose power. Anyway, with so many people unable to connect, we just put it off until next time. I am very sorry to hold you in suspense, dear listener. However, there is no lack of tea this month, regardless.

Jenn and Megan both work at a big busy library with a large staff, a big building and grounds, some branches, and lots of resources. I'm not going to say which one, for the sake of privacy. A few weeks ago there was notice in the staff room from their Board, talking about how an auditor from CdB Industries would be arriving at the library soon! He was here to help the board and

administration see how well the library was managing changes in the way they work because of the pandemic, and to “increase their performance and productivity.” Or as Jenn put it - “They’re hiring someone to come in, do staff evaluations, and probably lay people off.” She is, I would have to say, furious, but also determined to kill this “auditor” with kindness.

The auditor, who we’ve taken to calling “Gary Industries” instead of whatever his actual last name is, arrived last week. As we suspected, he’s immediately shadowing staff members, asking annoying questions, and scheduling what he calls “Evaluation Engagements” to talk with everyone about their jobs. He is strangely pompous - he dresses like he thinks Jesse Thorn’s fashion blog is some sort of holy writ, so... on the hipster side of formal and extremely overdressed compared to the library workers.

I should mention that I know all this because I met him, when I went to drop something off for Jenn - and his personality seems to match the style. As I approached Jenn’s desk, I saw two guys standing nearby, she and the others in a social distancing triangle. At first I assumed that Gary was a patron and the other man was a coworker, because he was looking at Gary with the same customer service smile as Jenn. But it turns out, it was the other way around. Jenn had been talking to the patron about DRM, and Gary pushed his way into the conversation and was monologuing about the “great financial harm of digital piracy.”

When they realized I was waiting, Jenn introduced me to both of them, Gary, and the patron, Danny. He seemed really pleasant, despite his conversation being twice-interrupted. On her break, Jenn told me that they’ve been chatting for a few weeks, and if it wasn’t way against every personal and professional rule she holds dear, she’d be seriously thinking about asking him out. They always find something interesting to talk about, and share a lot of book recommendations. Spring has sprung, apparently, my friends. I think we all need to get out of these libraries more.

Anyway, back to the point - Gary’s going to be working his way slowly from department to department and the environment in the building is even more dismal than the pandemic-normal. Megan, who is not hiding her frustration at ALL, does a great impression of him. “*Oh, I would love to be a libraaaarian, and have time for reeeading again, huehuehue.*” Hers is better. He’s heading to the reference department next, so Jenn invited him to the next cook book club, as an example of superb virtual programming for adults. She’s also hoping that he will appreciate that it’s a collaboration between libraries. New Guy Bill is going to be under multiple kinds of scrutiny, it seems.

Review of *Cook With Me*

This month’s cook book is [Cook with Me by Alex Guarnaschelli](#). (pron. Gornashelli).

I had never heard of this chef, but I brought it home to cries of “Oh!! That’s my favorite chef from Chopped!” So here we have, another celebrity chef!

Cook with Me has a lot of really good recipes that I would try if I had more time. It has corn fritters, black pepper crusted roast beef, a dish called “chicken paprikash’s tomatoey cousin,” lots of great soups, and a few very tempting desserts. The recipe I sampled this month, was Sheet Pan Blackened Salmon with garlicky kale, by request of my housemate. I’m not completely sure what their obsession with cajun spices is, but I will say that this dish was extremely tasty and simple. I like sheet-pan recipes that actually give a lot of thought to the processes and ingredients - so often you’ll find just a bunch of stuff dumped onto a pan and you cross your fingers that it works out. This one was well-considered! The kale was more like kale chips than a traditional side, but I’m a big fan.

A small thing that I really loved about the book was a paragraph about confidence in the kitchen. Guarnaschelli says that confidence is the most important ingredient of all, to trust your senses, especially touch and smell, and to not be afraid to experiment and make mistakes. I think that a lot of people go into the kitchen thinking that everything has to be perfect right away, but really, I’ve been cooking for over 25 years and I know it’s a constant learning process.

Something that I thought was a bit inconsistent about the book were the food pics. The pictures were lovely, but some dishes had no picture, and some had several. The salmon dish we ended up eating had a main picture of the plated dish, plus a two-page spread of the meal still on the sheet pan. But there was no picture of the whole roasted fish - which seems extra weird, because a whole fish is all about the presentation! Then, when it comes to chicken paprikash’s tomatoey cousin - I’d really like to see what this hungarian/italian fusion should look like. When I cook a dish out of a cook book, I really like to know what I’m aiming for. It seems like a silly thing to keep coming up in reviews, but it’s important to my understanding of what the recipe wants from me.

Overall, I think that this book is really beautiful and has some good recipes. If you like taking time to read cook books, definitely check it out! If you just need some recipes, it might be better to look up Guarnaschelli’s recipes online. The book is kind of big and clunky for working in the kitchen.

Closing

Thank you for listening to Novel-Tea. Please note that the opinions in this podcast are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the North Scituate Public Library. The Behind the Shelves segment is a work of fiction, and any similarities to real people is unintentional.

I’m including links to all of the books we discussed in the show notes, as well as a link to a transcript of the episode, and to all our social media. If you can’t get enough library content, visit

scituatelibrary.org to learn about all our services and programs. Also, please send us feedback on this show! Leave us reviews wherever you can do that, or even just drop us an email. I'm at katherine@scituatelibrary.org and Alyce is alyce@scituatelibrary.org. We'd love to hear from you!