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My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian

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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Jasmine Rizer

I hope that I'll never humblebrag about my "problem" with buying books, as if my large and disorganized book stash is somehow more virtuous than, say, five hundred pairs of shoes. I have a small apartment, and some of my favorite books are stashed so far under other books that I don't even know where to find them.

I give away many of my book purchases once I'm done with them, but there seem to be a lot of Shirley Jackson books at my house that refuse to leave. You've probably already heard of *The Haunting of Hill House*, but there are more. Maybe it's my own battle towards mental wellness over the years that first made me love them. *The Bird's Nest* shines a drily humorous light on heroine Elizabeth's struggles at times without losing sight of her real suffering. *Hangsaman's* Natalie Waite experiences a more private fall from sanity, and the idea that she should receive any kind of psychiatric help, instead of a toxic mix of derision and "tough love," doesn't seem to occur to anyone. Then there are those short stories. "The Lottery" is justly famous, but if it is all the Shirley Jackson you know, you are missing out. Read "The Tooth." Read "The Daemon Lover" also.

Demon lovers in my fictional worlds aside, I am forever trying to introduce some sort of

meaningful spiritual practice into my life. I accumulate collections of prayers in the same way I buy pretty office supplies hoping to unleash amazing organizational skills. Keepers in this category: *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, which I stumbled upon more or less at random;

The Book of Common Prayer, because so many of its prayers are so eminently practical; and *With a Grateful Heart*, an eclectic mishmash of prayers and reflections of thanksgiving. I can't profess to have read any of these cover to cover, but I am glad to have them to dip into when I need them.

Some books I simply cannot part with because I may need to laugh sometime. Ms. Jackson also has an entry in this section of the library, a battered omnibus edition of her two "domestic chaos" books *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons*. (The "demons" in this title refer to mischievous rambunctious children rather than to pettily mean-spirited and possibly imaginary

entities who run around getting engaged to lonely women for laughs.)

Also unlikely to depart from my own private book stash any time soon: an enormous collection of the best of many decades' worth of cartoons from *The New Yorker*, which I found for an obscenely low price at a second-hand bookstore, and a slim volume of George



Herriman's *Krazy Kat* comic strip. To me, there is no more poignant emblem of the pitfalls of romantic love than Krazy Kat getting beamed in the head with a brick by Ignatz.

Libraries, as people are fond of pointing out, are more than just books, and certainly this handful of books alone does not begin to cover the stacks of material in my personal library. I still own a lot of music on CDs partly because I buy most of my music second-hand. A random sample from my towering stacks of CDs: *Kurt Weill: From Berlin to Broadway, Vol. 1*. A lot of country music, and, while I could pretend to be an old-school country music purist because of all the Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn in there, there is also a Faith Hill compilation, so maybe I should just shut up. I also own an awful lot of David Bowie albums, most notably *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, which, along with Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, is one of very few albums that sound as magical in my ears as they sounded in my expectations.

Also hiding out in the stacks are countless soundtracks and music I got to love during my childhood and never changed my mind about, from eighties Cyndi Lauper to assorted indie-rock of the nineties that have held up surprisingly well for me to about as many R.E.M. albums as you might expect a resident of Athens, Georgia, to have—maybe a few more, maybe a few less. I do not have my finger on the pulse of Athens, Georgia, coolness, to be honest. (I think the CD-ROMs of cartoons from my *New Yorker* collection are hiding out in

there as well. I told you my library was disorganized.)

There are also books that don't fit neatly into any of the above bookish categories but which will almost certainly never leave my apartment on a permanent basis; for example, *The Man*

Who Fell to Earth (no, not just because of David Bowie). In fact, my profound and tender love for the novel prevented me from ever being able to get through the movie. No offense intended to anyone who loved the movie also. Assorted titles by Francesca Lia Block. A sorely abused Dover edition of some of Christina Rossetti's poems because seriously you never know when you might just suddenly need to read at least part of "Goblin Market." Children's books like the Paddington omnibus and *The Wind in the Willows* that were there for me when I had had a sudden and shattering mental health crisis and was slowly re-building my ability to read anything with chapters. *Cries of the Spirit*, an anthology of poems about

female spirituality so full of good words that I haven't managed to read all of them yet in all the years I've owned it.

I could easily run to ten more pages listing the books that, in my dream future where I have a spacious home filled with bookshelves, I will buy—probably only to discover that I already own a copy of each of them, squirreled away at the bottom of a box somewhere.

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