



YA Café Podcast

Episode 23: *When Life Gives You Demons*

26 July 2018

- Danielle: [00:02](#) Welcome to the YA Cafe where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts, everywhere. On today's episode we'll be talking about *When Life Gives You Demons* by Jennifer Honeybourn. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage friends, and let's talk books.
- Ad: [00:17](#) This podcast is made possible by Nouvelle ELA Teaching Resources. Find Secondary ELA resources to engage and inspire, like Creative Reading task cards. N-o-u-v-e-l-l-e ELA, something new.
- Danielle: [00:33](#) Welcome, y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler-free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th grade English teacher and I blog at Teachnouvelle.com. And I am joined today by the incomparable Erin Callahan!
- Erin: [00:33](#) Yay!
- Danielle: [00:33](#) Hi Erin.
- Erin: [00:51](#) Hello. Solid reference to my book, I appreciate it.
- Danielle: [00:55](#) *laughter* Alright Erin, I am totally excited to chat with you. I have been recommending *The Art of Escaping* to every person I make eye contact with.
- Erin: [01:01](#) I truly appreciate that.
- Danielle: [01:04](#) And it's super easy to recommend because it has a great elevator pitch.
- Erin: [01:10](#) So *The Art of Escaping* is about a teenage girl who trains to become an escape artist and when she's performing, secretly leading her double life at an underground venue, she sees a classmate who may be harboring some secrets of his own. Spoiler, he's gay. *laughter* Not really a spoiler. *laughter* I didn't really mean for it to be a spoiler it just got marketed that way. But you know, live and learn. Write and learn!
- Danielle: [01:37](#) Write and learn. So for those of you who are not currently looped in, we did an *Art of Escaping* episode. It was episode #18 and you should totally go listen to it. I'm not saying you should stop listening to this one, but we reviewed Erin's book and then she liked our review enough to be like, "I'll come on the podcast."
- Erin: [01:37](#) I'm very excited.
- Danielle: [01:55](#) Yeah, I'm totally excited to have you on the podcast. And I have just been obsessed with, like, I can't stop thinking about escape artists. And especially like,

so I know we quoted this in that episode but I haven't forgotten it where Mattie's like, "I don't have claustrophobia" and Miyu's like "Yet." And I'm like, 'oh my goodness.'

- Erin: [02:14](#) *laughter* Yeah, no, I would not want to be locked in a trunk. Uh, many people have asked me, "Have you attempted an escape act?" after this book came out, and I'm like, "No, and I'm probably not going to." This is the magic of writing. I can go experience a thing and not actually do that thing.
- Danielle: [02:30](#) Yeah, and so can you tell us about Princess Tenko?
- Erin: [02:36](#) So the initial inspiration for this book occurred when I was about six years old and I was watching a show called "That's Incredible!" and an escape artist named Princess Tenko who's from Japan, performed an aquarium escape on that show and it blew my mind. So when I sat down to write a novel, the first image that came to mind was a teenage girl doing a water tank escape. And then my other primary goal with the book was to write a book that focused on friendship as opposed to romance.
- Danielle: [02:36](#) Yes!
- Erin: [03:12](#) There's some of that in YA, I just feel like not enough. And a lot of the friendship books are like, 'Ooh, let's dig into this toxic friendship' as opposed to 'let's celebrate friendship and supportive friends.' I feel like as a teenager my experiences were shaped much more by friendship and romance, so that was important to me.
- Danielle: [03:28](#) Yeah, that's well said. I guess I've never really thought about that before, but like, the books that we give teenagers are often very like, romance focused, whereas like, (in) real life, that kind of stuff is fleeting. Okay. So I want to ask you about your top secret new project.
- Erin: [03:44](#) I have several of the works, but I am currently working on a horror novel inspired by Goodnight, Moon because I have a three year old
- Danielle: [03:44](#) That you call the Goopster
- Erin: [03:44](#) The Goopess
- Danielle: [03:44](#) The Goopess, that's better than Goopster *laughter*
- Erin: [04:01](#) Because I don't want to use her real name social media, so that's what I call her on my blog. Um, but yes, uh, that's what I'm currently working on because I have read Goodnight, Moon roughly a thousand times and some people apparently find aspects of it kind of terrifying. So I just took that and ran with it.
- Danielle: [04:19](#) You are leaning all the way in. The last thing I've found on your blog when I stopped you was a set of entries that you have called #yamylife. It's basically revisionist history, right? On your own life.

Erin: [04:37](#) Yes, of my own life, yes. I was really going to try and make #yamylife a thing, but it totally did not catch on. But those entries are still there, they will exist. Feel free to go read them, and if you ever want to write a #yamylife post or ask that I do a revision of something that happened to you I'm open to doing that.

Danielle: [05:00](#) So like, the premise is she takes a cringe-worthy moment from her teen years and she re-writes it so that she is the protagonist.

Erin: [05:06](#) Yes, the spunky YA heroine I wish I had been

Danielle: [05:06](#) Yes!

Erin: [05:06](#) as a teenager.

Danielle: [05:11](#) And I was thinking, you know, our audience is primarily teachers and librarians, this would be a great classroom assignment. Like, students; "Take something that happened to you and rewrite it so that you come out totally heroic."

Erin: [05:24](#) That's amazing. Make it happen. *laughter*

Danielle: [05:29](#) Yeah! Alright, so let's talk about demons! When Life Gives You Demons by Jennifer Honeybourn is a new spin on the teenage monster hunter trope. This time Shelby has been training to be an exorcist, a secret she's kept from everyone but her Uncle and her absent mother. So yeah, on top of biology (the worst), and geometry (the worst) she has to come home and study Latin. Stuff happens, Shelby learns stuff. It's a summer romp within a terrifying sub-genre of supernatural fiction. So Erin, what did you think

Erin: [06:03](#) Overall I liked it. It's a lot of fun and it's like reading a piece of candy. *laughter*

Danielle: [06:03](#) Yeah!

Erin: [06:10](#) I mean it's a book that doesn't take itself super seriously, and I fully appreciate that.

Danielle: [06:14](#) I appreciate that too. It's short, it's a standalone, it's a great cover. I don't know, it just, this was the perfect release moment, right?

Erin: [06:24](#) Yes, it's actually, I think it would be a really good beach read that sort of a little different from your average beach read because demons, uh, so that's fun. *laughter*

Danielle: [06:35](#) Yeah. And the pacing is very snappy so I appreciate that. It's just under 300 pages or something like that.

Danielle: [06:42](#) *laughter* The right amount of pages.

Erin: [06:42](#) *laughter* Callbacks.

Danielle: [06:49](#) Um, yeah. And I think the narrative voice helps out a lot, like it's, I mean helps out, it doesn't need any help. It's a light, fun read, about demons, question mark? But ...

Erin: [06:49](#) Demons can be fun!

Danielle: [07:02](#) But I just wanted to read a little blurb, uh, we enter this book mid-exorcism, "I sigh and hold the heavy silver crucifix a little bit higher. Mrs Collins is chained to the bed, her thin arm stretched across the mattress and secured to the headboard with iron handcuffs. Sounds totally sadistic, but it's actually unnecessary safety precaution. That old lady may look frail, but if she weren't restrained she could easily tear me apart. And from the way she's glaring at me with her crazy red demon eyes I have no doubt she'd like to. So yeah, Shelby is funny. She's funny, she's likable.

Erin: [07:02](#) Likable.

Danielle: [07:38](#) So we'll circle back to the likability in the spoiler-section.

Erin: [07:38](#) Ok, cool.

Danielle: [07:38](#) So what I definitely wanted to talk to you about was Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

Erin: [07:48](#) Yes. I definitely got echoes of Buffy here. One detail I love is that Shelby carries a bejeweled spray bottle of holy water, *laughter* which is like, ridiculous and seems like it would be useful when fighting demons.

Danielle: [07:48](#) Right.

Erin: [08:06](#) She uses it primarily to test whether people are possessed,

Danielle: [08:10](#) Yeah, so she just like sprays holy water *laughter*

Erin: [08:13](#) It's like if their skin bubbles then they might be possessed. So that's, it's clever.

Danielle: [08:19](#) Yeah. I thought that was really cute, and I did want to say that we get the sense throughout the book that it's not like Buffy or Supernatural where, you know, the vampires exist, the demons exist, but so do all the other things, right? In this book, we have no sense that there's other things. It's pretty much just demons. And I did want to out you, Erin, you gave me permission in advance *laughter* Erin has never seen Supernatural.

Erin: [08:49](#) Yeah. To be honest, this is terrible, it's gonna reveal me as such a TV snob. I have hated on the CW for the longest time.

Danielle: [08:49](#) But Jane the Virgin! Jane the Virgin's on the CW!

Erin: [08:49](#) Plug it one more time

Danielle: [08:49](#) Jane the Virgin!

- Erin: [09:10](#) *laughter* Um, I mean I think when the CW first started out, perhaps with the exception of Veronica Mars. I was kind of like, "There's so much on TV. Why am I gonna watch this?" So, it wasn't something that grabbed my attention initially, but someday I will probably have to binge, like, the entire series because that sounds fun. I did read Ship It by Britta Lundin.
- Danielle: [09:10](#) Yes!
- Erin: [09:32](#) I know was inspired in part by that show, yeah.
- Danielle: [09:34](#) I really enjoyed that book a lot and we were going to do it for the podcast, but you know, then I read it. And it was amazing. I ended up writing a blog post about it called "The Unrecommended Book."
- Erin: [09:48](#) It's a great post.
- Danielle: [09:48](#) You read my blog?
- Erin: [09:55](#) You looked at my blog, and I looked at yours. *laughter*
- Danielle: [09:57](#) Well thank you. For those of you who haven't read my blog, this post about Ship It by Britta Ludin, basically I posit that, you know, occasionally a book is subversive or maybe like sexy in a way where a student cannot accept that recommendation from a teacher or librarian, and a teacher librarian really can't recommend that book. And it doesn't mean that you shouldn't give students access to the book, but you know, you walk a fine line of being able to hold it up in front of the classroom and do a book talk because then they're going to read it and they're going to be like, "Oh, Ms. such and such, you read the sex scene?"
- Erin: [10:38](#) *laughter* Yeah. It is a good book though.
- Danielle: [10:42](#) It is a good book. So we're going to talk about When Life Gives You Demons now. Okay, so the reason why we're talking about Supernatural is because these guys in Supernatural are part of the family business of demon hunting, and in the same sense we have Shelby who is inheriting demon hunting from her mother and her uncle. Her uncle serves as our mentoree/mentor, Giles figure, "Why aren't you training harder and learning your Latin, and blah blah blah." And her mother is absent, so one of the things that Shelby deals with is like, "Oh my mom and I got in a fight right before she left, maybe it's my fault." It's a funny lighthearted book, and so it's weird to have this like, very serious missing mother thing in it.
- Erin: [11:31](#) Yes, in particular, the fight that they had I thought was very well done, but I was almost like, "oh wow, there's layers here that could be a whole different story." And it's one of the few moments of like, I don't want to say genuine emotion because the book is full of like, genuine emotions. They're just sort of presented in a funny entertaining way, but it's almost like a, like a slice of YA contemporary in the middle of this book that is sort of like a fun supernatural beach read.

- Erin: [12:00](#) I really agree. So I'm not saying that it was a mistake to put that in there, like I think that it was well balanced by all of this humor, but it definitely was a part that was different from the rest of the book.
- Erin: [12:12](#) Yes. It probably needed a little bit of gravity, so I think it was a smart choice on the part of the author to put that in there.
- Danielle: [12:21](#) Yeah. And then we have this other thing which I feel that can't be ignored, which is this is a book about demons, even if it's funny. And demons are are really serious to a lot of people.
- Erin: [12:33](#) Yes. I mean it didn't offend me in any way because I just, I'm not a religious person, but I do have to wonder if some people are gonna see this and be like 'Demons are not a thing to be made light of' because they take them very seriously. But this book isn't for those people.
- Danielle: [12:50](#) It's for the people who like Supernatural and Buffy the Vampire Slayer,
- Erin: [12:50](#) Right, it absolutely is.
- Danielle: [12:56](#) And I told you before we recorded that I would feel remiss in my duties as an English teacher if I did not point out that supernatural fiction functions as like a metaphor for the human condition.
- Erin: [13:12](#) *sings* Dani can't you see, demons are a metaphor. *laughter* More callbacks!
- Danielle: [13:20](#) And would that, friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back we'll share about Things We Like A Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of When Life Gives You Demons and dig a little deeper.
- Ad: [13:45](#) Hey listener, are you listening to this podcast and thinking, "Wow, this chick is so funny!" I know, me too. Right? So you should come back and listen to next week's podcast, which is going to be about Lovely, Dark and Deep by Justina Chen. If you would like to check out that book and pre-order it and support us and the author, you can do so by checking out our Amazon affiliate link. Happy reading!
- Danielle: [14:19](#) Welcome back, y'all. It's time for Things We Like A Latte. Erin, what's your brew of choice this week?
- Erin: [14:28](#) Something that I Like A Latte is another podcast. It's fiction, so it doesn't compete with yours, that's okay. It's called Alice Isn't Dead. It's done by the same people who do Welcome to Night Vale.
- Danielle: [14:28](#) Ooooooh!
- Erin: [14:38](#) So if you're a fan of that, you've probably already heard it, but you know, in general I just recommend it. It's about a woman who takes a job as a truck driver and drives across the country searching for her wife. It is about monsters

and abandoned places and more than anything America, but in a way that is really fresh and smart.

- Danielle: [15:00](#) Is it funny?
- Erin: [15:01](#) There are moments of humor *laughter* but I would say that overall it's pretty dark, not a beach listen. How about you, Danielle?
- Danielle: [15:11](#) Well, I have watched the entire first season and half of season two of GLOW within the past week. Oh my goodness, it's so funny. So GLOW was this show in the 80s and it stands for Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling, and so this show now is like a hyper-stylized vision of what it looked like to film that TV show. So we get kind of the characters, and then we get their wrestling personas and how they interact with the ring and the things that they go through to be a syndicated television show. And I think what's most fascinating to me so far is that it's directed by the same people who did Orange Is the New Black, and so each character kind of starts to get, you know, 'oh, this is the Sheila episode', or 'Oh, this is the Cherry episode' or whatever. And so there's a lot of character development, there's some really great wrestling, there are training montages which I always enjoy and yeah, GLOW, available on Netflix. We're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on When Life Gives You Demons. The rest of the show may contain spoilers so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back!
- Danielle: [16:43](#) Welcome back to the YA Cafe. We're continuing our discussion on When Life Gives You Demons by Jennifer Honeybourn. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers. Spoilers! So Erin, let's play a game.
- Erin: [16:58](#) Oh, I'm excited.
- Danielle: [16:58](#) I call this game "Was It Foreshadowing?"
- Erin: [16:58](#) This is a good game for this book.
- Danielle: [16:58](#) So, it turns out her uncle Roy is a painter, not a very good painter, just paints for fun. Paints flowers. Here we go, "There's a new painting on the wall, a big blob of red with the black center. Uncle Roy is way into painting lately, and his rudimentary canvases are all over the house. He only paints flowers for some reason and I think this one's supposed to be a poppy. So Erin, Is It Foreshadowing?"
- Erin: [17:32](#) Apparently it was, but I totally did not pick up on it.
- Danielle: [17:36](#) I totally missed it. What was it foreshadowing for?
- Erin: [17:39](#) Okay, so it's on page 255, "Haint blue" he says, glancing up at the ceiling and snorting, 'Old wives tale', a shadow of a smile crosses my mom's lips, 'like your flower paintings?'" And then he says later "those paintings did us no good."

Danielle: [17:39](#) Oooooohhhh, okay.

Erin: [17:57](#) So it was foreshadowing.

Danielle: [18:00](#) Ding ding ding ding ding! It was foreshadowing! Next up, so she has a crush on this boy Spencer, this is the dude that tutors her and otherwise they have, like, no contact and he offers her a ride home and he says, "You live on Maple, right? Behind St Jude's?" he asks, pulling out of the parking lot, "With your uncle?" "I glance at him, surprised, Spencer in his family, go to a different church so I didn't expect him to know where I live, much less that he'd know about Uncle Roy. So, Is It Foreshadowing?"

Erin: [18:35](#) Apparently, yes, because it turns out Spencer is a demon hunter.

Danielle: [18:35](#) Of course he is.

Erin: [18:43](#) I actually kind of loved that, so Shelby and her Uncle follow a very, I guess Orthodox? I don't know what to call it, like, method of exorcism that is rooted in Catholicism and Spencer and his brother Mark are sort of like eclectic demon hunters pulling from various cultures in a way that Uncle Roy initially sort of finds distasteful, but he needs their help, so

Danielle: [19:12](#) Yes, I loved that. It was very much like 'the new demon hunters kind of butt heads with the old demon hunters, but in the end we all have to work together and accept a diversity of ideas to conquer evil.' Last one, hen she goes over to Mark and Spencer's house for the first time she meets the dog, Cerberus. "I turned around and speak of the devil, there's Mark parked in front of a massive stone fireplace. He's holding onto the collar of a big black rottweiler, the same dog that was at the tattoo shop. It starts to growl when I approach. Seriously, what is up with this dog?" Is It Foreshadowing?

Erin: [19:12](#) Yes, *laughter* sort of? I'm terrible at this game.

Danielle: [19:12](#) No? What was it foreshadowing?

Erin: [20:01](#) I mean, it kind of was because, okay, so Mark has a dog named Cerberus, which I think is clearly a clue that they are involved in the demon community in some way, but we don't know yet what that is. I mean, come on, the dog combined with the 666 tattoo? I thought I knew where that was going, but apparently I was wrong.

Danielle: [20:21](#) Did you think he was a demon?

Erin: [20:23](#) The dog himself?

Danielle: [20:23](#) *laughter* No, not the dog.

Erin: [20:23](#) Or Mark? *laughter*

Danielle: [20:30](#) I meant Mark, did you think he was going to turn out to be a demon?

Erin: [20:33](#) I thought he was going to turn out to be someone who helps demons gain access to our world. That was my theory of where that was going, but.

Danielle: [20:33](#) Gotcha.

Erin: [20:33](#) I was wrong.

Danielle: [20:43](#) Instead he's just a person who poses as a demon to like, catfish demons.
laughter

Erin: [20:51](#) Yes. That's a very good way of putting it.

Danielle: [20:53](#) Alright, so that's our game, hope it was as enjoyable for you as it was for me. And lastly, I want to talk about her mom, the big bad, and the resolution of this book. So her mom was missing, turns out not in Italy and did not leave of her own volition. She was possessed! And I thought that that was, like, the parts where she sees her mother in this book are so serious and somber because like, can you imagine going from thinking your mother was living it up in Tuscany to like, seeing your mother gaunt on a street corner, like, digging through garbage?

Erin: [21:33](#) The way the author describes how the mom looks in this like, tattered raincoat with a bag on her head and like, you know, she's lost some weight. It's kind of heartbreaking, uh, in the middle of this fun story about fighting demons. It's like, "Oh wow, that's, Shelby's dealing with some things and some stuff."

Danielle: [21:54](#) Yeah! The stakes are high. And we know from what Shelby has said earlier in the novel that like, sometimes if the demons are, I don't know, in the body too long, the exorcism doesn't necessarily bring the human back. Right? She mentions like, "Oh, this person was possessed for too long and now they walk around like a Zombie."

Erin: [22:14](#) That was a clever way of upping the stakes that like, if you don't exorcise someone quickly enough, they could be forever damaged by their possession.

Danielle: [22:24](#) Yes. I really liked those stakes. You know, I liked the setting of the resolution. I did not know that Seattle had this like artsy troll sculpture under a bridge.

Erin: [22:39](#) Me either, but I think that's a nice, like, geographical detail to throw into and it didn't work very well in that scene.

Danielle: [22:48](#) But otherwise, I don't know, the resolution felt a little easy? But maybe aligned with the general tone of the book more so than my expectations about how difficult exorcising this demon would be.

Erin: [22:59](#) Yes. I actually felt that all of the exorcisms felt almost too easy, even when they're failing. I was like, "Shouldn't this take hours upon hours of like, grueling incantations and like, throwing holy water?" and I guess that's just based on my cultural perception of exorcisms from other media,

Danielle: [22:59](#) Yeah

Erin: [23:21](#) but they are pretty quick in this book.

Danielle: [23:24](#) Well I think that that's intentional, right? Because she has this moment with like, 'Oh crap, her English teacher is possessed. Can she exorcise the teacher before the bell rings?'

Erin: [23:24](#) Did you identify with that? *laughter*

Danielle: [23:38](#) What?! Okay, well I didn't read it that way, but now I'm mad.

Erin: [23:46](#) *laughter* I just wonder if some mornings, like before you've had your coffee, your students pop in and they're like, "oh, she's possessed."

Danielle: [23:53](#) *laughter* I feel like students everywhere should just carry their bottle of holy water around. Is today the day? *squirt squirt* Okay, no. Today she, she's clear, y'all, you can come on in. *laughter* Alright, so let's circle back to the likability of this first-person, protagonist

Erin: [24:16](#) Shelby is a super likable character, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Danielle: [24:16](#) But

Erin: [24:27](#) *laughter* Here comes the 'but'. I have to admit I feel like I'm seeing a little bit of a rash of like just, I don't want to call them generically likable, but female protagonists in YA who, they have annoying quirks or maybe like funny little quirks but they don't have anything significant that makes them extremely flawed or problematic or frustrating.

Danielle: [24:48](#) A well known generic protagonist is Bella Swan of the Twilight series.

Erin: [24:48](#) Yes.

Danielle: [24:54](#) So Bella was written in such a way that any reader could kind of like, draw her on as a mask and then live the fantasy, right?

Erin: [24:54](#) Right, yes.

Danielle: [25:05](#) So I think that that obviously that was a huge sensation marketing wise and, you know, revenue wise. So I wonder if that increases the marketability of a book?

Erin: [25:16](#) I mean, sometimes it probably does, um, and you obviously want your audience to be able to connect with your main character because they're the character that is going to carry the reader through the story, but I have to wonder if we are so critical, specifically female teenage characters that we are like, shaving them down into something that doesn't resemble an actual teenage girl. Does that make any sense?

Danielle: [25:43](#) Yeah, it does. Um, I definitely think it's a valid question. I don't think Shelby was completely devoid of personality.

- Erin: [25:43](#) No, she wasn't.
- Danielle: [25:51](#) I really liked how she would like, prepare healthy food for Uncle Roy, but then like, leave and get doughnuts on her way to school. Like, I really liked that.
- Erin: [26:01](#) And that's a lovely little detail, but that's kind of like a cute quirk, right? That's something that a reader is going to go, "Oh, how dare she?!"
- Danielle: [26:09](#) I do think that, you know, it's always important to keep in mind like who benefits from generic teenage girls. Like, it's not teenage girls who are reading it. They don't benefit from just being able to like, step into the story and not like, feel any resistance from a character. I think it's, you know, it's when you have a character who's different than the reader that the reader can like, learn the most about the world.
- Erin: [26:35](#) Yes. And, and some readers read a book and they think if they're frustrated with a character that means that they don't like the book, and I kind of want to be like, "If you're frustrated with a character, it means that you're connecting with them." So that makes it effective writing at least to some extent. I think there's absolutely a need for some totally likable, non-challenging, frustrating female protagonist in YA, I just hope that they don't take over the market because I really want to see books that have complicated, frustrating, potentially problematic female characters. But overall this book is a lot of fun. I don't, in this particular case, fault Shelby at all for being likable. I think she works very well within the context of this story, and you guys should check it out
- Danielle: [27:27](#) And that's our show for today, friends, thank you so much for joining me, Erin.
- Erin: [27:30](#) Yay. Thank you for having me, this was fun.
- Danielle: [27:33](#) Come back anytime! And you can find Erin on Instagram @erinpcallahan and at Erinpcallahan.com. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast, we'd love to hear from you. And if you're enjoying the show, leave us a review on iTunes, do it! Happy reading!