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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

At the very beginning of this year, I got super into the Marie Kondo method. I sat on the floor of my bedroom, staring up at Ms. Kondo on Netflix as she explained how to fold your t-shirts and pants into threes, how to respect your home, and how to thank the items for what they have given you and move on. And just like everyone else who watched the show, though, I got to *that part*.

You know—*that part*. Where you're supposed to do the same for *your books*. Just say goodbye! If they don't spark joy!

The internet frothed at the mouth over the audacity, and I was with them. I've always imagined myself being that old, small lady who secretly has a Beauty and the Beast-esque library in her house. I already have the small part down—I'm five-foot, one-half inch tall. Now all I need is a Beast, a huge library, and those cool ladders that slide along library columns. However, that dream has been delayed. Ten months after I scoffed at the idea of picking and choosing which books immediately spark joy, I was faced with the challenge of taking my entire collection and condensing it down to three small boxes of my most cherished books.

Things were changing. I, my mother's oldest daughter, was moving out of the house, and her youngest will be going off to college next fall. It was a transition that was both expected and sudden, and not everyone was handling it well—and by that, I mostly mean my mother.

When I told her that I was packing up my books, she gave me an unreadable look and poured each of us a cup of cold, strong sangria. I sipped it lightly as I went up the stairs and set it on the windowsill, once I got to my bedroom, planning on revisiting it as I sorted. That would not happen; instead, it would sit, warm and forgotten in the afternoon sun, as I touched book after book. This was different from letting go of old t-shirts and shoes.

In the beginning, when we first moved to this house, I ambitiously organized my books by color. That quickly devolved, leaving choices up to what caught the eye first. *The Frog Princess* by E. D. Baker, with its bright pink cover, jumped out at me immediately, along with Jean Ferris's *Once Upon a Marigold*. They weren't the only fairytale remakes that I hoarded; my favorite book, Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted*, sat near them

with a worn cover. I kept the witty, courageous, quirky girls in these titles as close to my chest as siblings, and even in my adult life they remind me that there are always possibilities, both good and bad. That's what fairytales do.

Even beyond princesses and dragons, my young adult fiction is clear: *Children of Blood and Bone*, Tamora Pierce's *Wild Magic*, and every Harry Potter book that I laid my hands on, painstakingly collected from thrift stores across Atlanta, went into my "keep" pile. Every time I look at a Harry Potter book, I feel a phantom



sugar high from the time when we raided Dollar Tree to make our own in-home Honeydukes.

If Harry Potter brought on a sugary taste, *Twilight*, my guilty pleasure, carried an undeniable feeling of teenage angst. T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland and Other Poems* brought on a different kind of moodiness though: the memory of being an exhausted college student, buying books that I didn't really want to read, hunched over a keyboard in the dark, and trying to write a 10-page paper on poems that made as much sense as a hippo riding a scooter. *The Wasteland* belonged with other books in my collection, the ones that I kept on the shelves in hopes that, should a stranger waltz into my room, they would think that I was smart: Plato's *Apology*, Rousseau's *Basic Political Writings*, and Locke's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. They were the classics, and they went straight into the donation box. For one thing, I didn't care what people thought of my reading materials anymore. For another, those books certainly did not spark any joy in me.

That's not to say that there was no nonfiction. On the contrary, a well-beaten and annotated copy of Ron Chernow's *Hamilton* went into my box, as well as Jon Meacham's *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*—but only because I'm curious about what the book will entail. A signed copy of Anthony Ray Hinton's *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row* goes in. I remember seeing the author with his big belly and jovial smile, despite the struggles that he'd



experienced, and thinking: well, I can't say no to that.

I also packed the things that simultaneously keep me going and threaten to drown me: my "to be read" books. The Lord of the Rings series, *If Beale Street Could Talk* by James Baldwin, Stephen King's *Dolores Claiborne*, and most importantly *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé, because who could ignore a book with a title like that? There were a whole host of others that I packed, carefully selected to ensure that I would actually read them during my next phase in life.

And then there were the children's books: Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hatches the Egg*, a classic about both selflessness and selfish people. *Toad Heaven* by Morris Gleitzman, one of the first chapter books that I ever read, which features Australian toads fighting

not to get squashed flat by cars as they cross the road. And finally, *The Island of Skog* by Steven Kellogg, whose illustrations both terrified and thrilled me so much as a child that I never returned it to my elementary school class bookshelf.

As I sat, with the cold, solid cover of *The Island of Skog* in my hand, I had the sense that something important was ending. Ready or not, change was happening; and with every title that made it into a moving box, it marched ever closer. I didn't feel Ms. Kondo's joy; instead, there was a sense of evolution.

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