

Fiction Prescriptions: Superstitions

Ella Berthoud and Isabelle Dupuy

[Intro music]

Isabelle Dupuy (ID): Hi, everybody. Welcome to *Fiction Prescriptions*. Our episode today is about superstition. I'm Isabelle Dupuy, and I'm a writer.

Ella Berthoud (EB): And I'm Ella Berthoud, and I'm a bibliotherapist.

ID: We have a question about superstition and magic from Baptiste in Milan. And he's asking what books have brought superstition and magic to the forefront of our lives?

EB: It's a great question. Well, there's been a few books that have come into my life like magic, really from childhood, but the ones that come to mind with that magical feeling

are ones that I—that came to me during my gap year in between school and university. And one of those was *Jitterbug Perfume*, which is a book that we've talked about on a previous podcast, which is one of my favorite books of all time, and it was given to me while I was traveling around Thailand.

ID: And what effect did—did you read it over and over again? I mean, what effect did *Jitterbug Perfume* have on your life?

EB: It probably transformed the way I looked at the world completely because it's all about the quest for immortality and it's about making anything happen, really. And the characters are just fantastic. It also made me look at writing in a completely different way because I love the way Tom Robbins writes and I had never encountered that kind of writing before then. What about you? Have you had—?

ID: I was thinking that this question probably has two parts to it because the question I was also asking myself when I read the question was: does the magic fade with age? So, when I was in my 20s, I was working in business; I was not at all in the literary world. And I missed it. And I started reading *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy. And I discovered that I would read this book at least twice a year. And I knew the book almost by heart, although it's a very big book, and I was in love with Vronsky on and off.

EB: Aren't we all [both laugh].

ID: And it was a bit like a lifeline for me. It was a lifeline to a life that I wasn't part of but that I somehow missed without really knowing it, and just knowing that I loved the emotion, the fantasy, that it was enriching my own perspective in ways that I can't even describe. Because I liked my job, I was very busy, it's not like I—I wasn't bored, but I was missing something, and that was the magic in those years that literature brought to me.

EB: So, do you still go back to *Anna Karenina* every year?

ID: No.

EB: Why not? You said you would twice a year.

ID: Yes.

EB: Forever.

ID: Well, that's what I'm saying, if this sense of magic fades with age? It's hard for me now to go reread a book. Although, now that we're talking about this, I'm wondering if it's not something to revisit.

EB: I think you should, definitely. It's something I talk a lot about with bibliotherapy clients, actually, is to revisit books they read in their childhood or teens because you get that sense of time travel when you read a book that you read at a formative age and you're 10, 20, 30, 40 years older. Then you go back and read it again, and it takes you back to your younger self, which I think is a really valuable experience.

ID: It is. So, what have you reread lately?

EB: Well, *Jitterbug Perfume* I go back to a lot.

ID: You still do?

EB: I do, yeah. And there's—one of the books we're going to talk about today is one I reread often too. But before we get to that, I wanted to also mention this idea of bibliomancy. So, one of the ideas in terms of thinking about books as magic is you can treat them as a kind of fortune telling device. I met this guy the other day at the

Catalyst Club, who was telling me that whenever he's at a crossroads in his life, he stands by his bookshelf with all his favourite books on it and sends out his left arm randomly [ID laughs] without looking at the shelf to a book, grabs the book, opens it, whatever page it falls on tells him what he needs to do at this time in his life. And he's a believer in that, and he said it's often given him really fantastic profound advice.

ID: That is a fantastic idea.

EB: Yeah [laughs].

ID: But that would only work if you're the kind of person who has very well curated bookshelves.

EB: That's true.

ID: And not full of half rubbish books.

EB: Yes, and I think it's a difficult thing to curate because do you allow yourself to put random books on there, or do you put all your favourite books on that shelf, which is what I would do? I'd have *Jitterbug Perfume* and *The Master and Margarita* [both laugh].

So, that's another book that, actually, I was given on the same trip when I was in Thailand and what was then Burma, travelling around, and this guy handed me *Master and Margarita*.

ID: As I'm about to hand it to Ella right now.

EB: And that is a book that I read with my then boyfriend, Hugo, and we were both completely obsessed with the book at the time and read it over the next few weeks and shared it. And it also then became a very important book in my marriage because me and my husband read it as well. And it's one of those books that is a bit of a cult.

ID: It's a cult, but it's also a magical book about—for a couple. It's true, because the same thing happened to me. We were talking about this earlier how I also bumped into this book completely by accident about 25 years ago, and it became really important in my marriage, in my relationship. We both shared this book just like you did.

EB: Yeah, amazing.

ID: Isn't it funny?

EB: And I think it is, as you say, the fact that it's a romance is one of the things that makes it such a symbolic book in many relationships, and it's also a book that you want to pass on to people all the time. So, for people that have never read it, it's got three strands of the story. One is that the devil comes to Moscow in the form of a slightly sinister academic called Woland, and he's accompanied by a giant cat called Behemoth, who talks, and he's got a couple of other people in his entourage. And he creates havoc in Moscow, but he's kind of dealing out justice to the bad politicians.

ID: So, this is Moscow in the 1930s. This is big time Stalin, right before World War II; it's bad.

EB: And Bulgakov was very much satirising the events of the time. So, there's the devil in Moscow, then there's also the Master and Margarita. So, the Master is a writer, who is probably Bulgakov, and he's writing a book within the book about Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ, who's called Yeshua in this novel. And so, that's kind of a separate novel within the novel. And because of the political events at the time, the Master's manuscript is burnt. But one of the key phrases in the book is 'manuscripts don't burn' because the Master manages to rewrite his whole book because it's still in his head. So, it's very much about creativity and creativity conquering all. But it's also about love because Margarita is the Master's lover, and she makes a deal with the devil that she

will do his bidding in return for being able to eventually get back together with the Master. So, it's a love story, and she has to do all kinds of crazy things, like she becomes the chief ball master of the devil's ball, which takes place in Moscow; she has to fly over Moscow on a broomstick. It's all very witchy and crazy and magical and full of superstition.

ID: It's full—and it's also full of premonitions.

EB: Yes, that's true.

ID: This book is full of premonitions, and it's basically a guide, which is quite current if you think about it, about how to survive in authoritarian times – that's really what it is as well – and through the device of magic, through the device of premonitions, through time travel and devils and weird powers. But the core of the book is so good because it is about courage. And I think that Bulgakov thought that courage was the highest of all virtues, and he himself didn't think that he was a saint or anything like that because he knew where he had gone wrong in terms of yielding to the regime, to Stalin, and to—but this book was not published in his lifetime; it was published after he was dead, many years after, under Brezhnev, actually. So, it's a very inspiring story. And it's an interesting—and this is part of the question about this topic of superstition is how it is

used to expose things that are difficult to say in a straightforward way, either because you're living in a repressive state or because you don't have the courage exactly to actually just put it out there, so you need a bit of help.

EB: Yeah, that's true. And it's also very much about magic in a world where magic is not accepted. So, in the 1930s in Moscow, there was no religion allowed, there was no sense of any kind of—anything that was beyond reality. But then here is Bulgakov writing this incredible story about the devil literally coming into Moscow. And that's of course why the book was banned, and the book within the book was also banned because that's about religion too, Pontius Pilate and Jesus.

ID: Which takes up to a poem also about Pontius Pilate.

EB: By Carol Ann Duffy, which is called 'Pilate's Wife'.

[**EB** reads 'Pilate's Wife']

'Firstly, his hands - a woman's.
Softer than mine,
with pearly nails, like shells from Galilee.
Indolent hands. Camp hands that
clapped for grapes.
Their pale, mothy touch made me

flinch. Pontius.

I longed for Rome, home, someone
else. When the Nazarene
entered Jerusalem, my maid and I
crept out,
bored stiff, disguised, and joined
the frenzied crowd.
I tripped, clutched the bridle of an
ass, looked up

and there he was. His face? Ugly.
Talented.
He looked at me. I mean he looked
at *me*. My God.
His eyes were eyes to die for. Then
he was gone,
his rough men shouldering a
pathway to the gates.

The night before his trial, I dreamt
of him.
His brown hands touched me.
Then it hurt.
Then blood. I saw that each tough
palm was skewered
by a nail. I woke up, sweating,
sexual, terrified.

Leave him alone. I sent a warning
note, then quickly dressed.
When I arrived, the Nazarene was
crowned with thorns.
The crowd was baying for

Barabbas. Pilate saw me,
looked away, then carefully turned
up his sleeves.

and slowly washed his useless,
perfumed hands.
They seized the prophet then and
dragged him out,
up to the Place of Skulls. My maid
knows all the rest.
Was he God? Of course not. Pilate
believed he was.'

ID: I love the end of that poem.

EB: It's great isn't it?

ID: It's great.

EB: Yeah.

ID: She does a great job in this book of *The World's Wife*, Carol Ann Duffy, and popping
myths.

EB: Yes, and I love that.

ID: As if there were spots on somebody's face, like she just pops them.

EB: Yes. Yeah, it's a really good read, all of those *World's Wife* poems. But I think it links really well with *The Master and Margarita* because of that whole description of Pontius Pilate. And in *The Master and Margarita*, that's amazingly vivid. You completely live that story with Pontius getting these terrible headaches because he knows he's got to condemn a man that he believes is the Messiah, but he still has to do it for political reasons.

ID: And a lack of courage.

EB: Exactly. Yeah.

ID: So, it's, yes. So, from here, we're going to go to our next book, which is called *Godwin*. It came out a few years ago, by Joseph O'Neill. And this story is about superstition because it's about football. And as we all know, there's a lot of superstition around football, football players, games, the World Cup, and all kinds of other football competitions. This is a story of a down and out English white scout, football scout, whose last chance really to succeed, he thinks, is to find this mysterious, young African

player somewhere in West Africa. He's not even sure where. This all comes from a mysterious video that's made its way somehow to London and then to Paris, where you see this prodigy play on some dirt football field. And he recruits his brother, who's a technical writer, a failed scientist in a way, a man who's got some self-esteem issues but is happily married now with a daughter and has finally slowed down his ambitions. And it's also about this guy's mother, who is a woman who only believes in emotions and nothing else and is not afraid of saying that she's only ever married for money, which is why she has two sons from two different fathers, and only looks at people in terms of their suffering, their parenting, their parenthood, and how she can play her way into that. And the story is told from the eyes of an also older, almost down and out French scout, who's been used to going to West Africa to go look for talented players, who thinks he has no more illusions in life. And yet, and yet. And he gets wrapped in this kind of quixotic quest for this guy called Godwin.

And I'm going to read you a passage here. Because this book has fantastic parts about poverty, about the contrast between Europe and West Africa, and about the exploitation that happens, but not just the exploitation, the dreams also that arise from that interaction inside the football industry. There is exploitation, but it goes both ways. And it's—I thought it was a very fresh way of looking at the inheritance of

[inaudible] in terms of that, where the magic comes in, and how innocent is football.

So, Lefebvre is the French scout.

[ID reads from *Godwin*]

'Lefebvre gives a troubled shake of the head. The question of the value of football weighs on him these days, he says. Football is a diversion, a pastime, something that is extra. It revolves around the simplest, most childish activity, loved even by dogs: playing with a ball. The ball game was not supposed to be the difference between having nothing and having plenty, between having faith and not having faith, between having life and not having life. A sport is not supposed to have that importance. Someone like Lefebvre, a functionary of football, is not supposed to have the power of a wizard, the power to click one's fingers and, abracadabra, in an instant change the outcomes not only for a young footballer, but also for his mother, who now can have the medical treatment she needs, for his sister, who can stop walking to the well multiple times a day, for his brother, who can stay at school and get his diploma, and for the children in the village, who will have a new schoolhouse. Such is the power of the European football man in Africa.'

EB: Great. Who would you prescribe this book for, do you think?

ID: I think this is a great book to understand, through a very clever mixture of real facts and real historical facts as well, the magic of football.

EB: Yes.

ID: Because he cannot explain why is that kid so good? Why would this kid succeed in a big club in Europe? There is an element of superstition and of magic in this because none of this is guaranteed. He can trip tomorrow on a rock and then he's injured and then it's over, the career. This is all done on a lot of faith. And then, of course, the question about superstition that comes in this book is that superstition probably becomes very important in lives that have not much space for planning and control.

EB: That's true.

ID: And he talks here about the infinity of poverty in some places. So, they go to Benin, which is a very, very poor country. And he talks about, yes, Lefebvre comes from a poor family in France, but it's like in France, there's a beginning and an end to the poverty, whereas in Africa, there is no end. Poverty can be infinite, infinitely behind you and

infinitely in front of you with no limits, no boundaries, no ways out. And this is where magic comes in because when the practical space doesn't give you anything, where do you turn to?

EB: Yes. And there's also that sense of believing in possibility through the power of football, the power of magic, that makes you an incredible footballer.

ID: Exactly.

EB: So, I think it's a really good fiction prescription for people who feel hopeless because they will feel like things can turn around.

ID: Yes, if they can play football [both laugh]. Well, this is a book for anyone who wants to play football, I would say.

EB: So, that leads us to another book, which I think is a great prescription for people who are feeling quite hopeless, actually, and feeling like they might need to turn to magic as a way out. So, this is [*The*] *Ibis* by Justin Haynes. And it's a Trinidadian novel. It's about a very small village called New Felicity, fictional village, where one day a scarlet ibis turns up unexpectedly on the roof of a shop. And scarlet ibises never travel

on their own, so it's seen as a very bad omen that there's one ibis sitting on this rooftop. And it slowly becomes apparent that there's been a lot of bad things that have happened in this village over the last few years. There was a witch called Catherine the Great Disemboweler, who was murdered in the village by the villagers because she actually was responsible for two deaths in the village. And she was an old traditional woman that would have been hated because she was really—had great sexual powers. So, she had lots of lovers, and that's partly why she was killed. So, there's a lot of bad stuff going on. And this is set in the present day. They've also got a Venezuelan refugee called Milagros, aged 11, who's been fostered by the village. So, she's like the good, lucky omen of the village in a way, but because she's being fostered by all these people – it's illegal, they're not meant to have any Venezuelan refugees – so, she has to be kept hidden. And some people think that she's bringing bad luck on the village because she has to be kept hidden from the authorities. And meanwhile, we also go back in time to 150 years ago when this village was actually part of a slave plantation, a sugar plantation, and we see lots of terrible things happening during that time. There's a hell of a lot of rape.

ID: Also is it a bit of a trauma being translated into superstition?

EB: Yes, very much so.

ID: Oh, how interesting.

EB: Yeah. So, there's a lot of omens within the book, such as the single flying fish. I didn't realise that single animals were a bad omen, but it seems to be in this case. So, there's the single scarlet ibis, then there's also a single flying fish, because flying fish always travel in shoals.

ID: And where is the fish? In the sea?

EB: Yeah, it's just going along by a boat in the sea, in fact, by a refugee's boat. And when they all see the single fish, they're all really terrified because they know it means bad things are coming. So, there's all these omens that take place throughout the novel. But it is actually a trajectory that takes you to a good place, in a way, without giving too much away. And there's also a lot of interesting natural phenomena that are going on, not just the flying fish and the birds, but also the wind that is going around the village and going around the sea. And there's ghosts. There's—Catherine the Great, Disembowelers' mother is a ghost.

ID: Was she also a part of the action women?

EB: I think she was also one of the, [both laugh] yeah, one of the Diabliesse. And so there's a lot of folklore from Trinidad woven into the book. But there's also these ghosts who very much live on the edge of reality, they come through. They perforate the consciousness all the time, the ghosts of the recent history, but also the ghosts of the slaves from the plantation and also of the British colonial people that were in charge of the slaves. So, there's a lot woven into this. It's quite a complex and intricate story. But if you sink into it, it's a bit like being in a dream. And I think it's a really good prescription for people feeling disconnected with nature because it gets you back into nature.

ID: Because it does get you back into nature through the wind and through the sea and the animals.

EB: Yeah. Yeah.

ID: And that's another interesting—we haven't touched much about this yet.

EB: No.

ID: About nature and superstition. And *Ibis* is a good beginning for that, and if you want to go deeper into that, we have this book called *Helm* by Sarah Hall. And this is the story – imagined story, of course, because winds, I guess, don't talk very much – and this is the story of a wind, a wind in the North East of England. And it was called Helm. And this wind—and it's seen from the perspective of the wind, and the wind is watching humanity evolve around it, against it, with it, worshipping it sometimes, and eventually destroying it.

EB: Yeah. It's a very beautifully written book. And it's set in Cumbria. And Sarah Hall's written a few books about—set in Cumbria. And so, it's lovely to read actually recognising some of the places as well. But—and so it is about a real wind called Helm. And there's many different viewpoints taken in the book, one of which, of course, is Helm itself.

ID: Yeah, Helm is quite—is a bit like—it's like a god that's not sure it is a god.

EB: Yeah.

ID: And Helm is watching humanity rise upon Helm. In the beginning, we're talking about prehistoric people, and Helm is watching them die and live, and Helm is

completely in control of everything. And then you go from there slowly to the Middle Ages, where you encounter, actually, probably the most superstition about Helm. And you meet this exorcist, like a dragon slayer-type of man. And the man is interesting because he wears—he never takes off his helmet. He's some kind of a knight. And he's got this helmet that's melted into his skin, into his skull. And so, it's rotten, and it's disgusting, and his hair has fallen out, and he can't take off the helmet. He sleeps, he lives with this helmet that's where his flesh has grown into it. And that was—but it's a beautifully written book, indeed, it's quite striking. And this man, he goes from monastery to monastery, and he's fighting Helm. That's what he's doing.

EB: Yes. And there's another lovely character called Janni in the book, who's a girl, it's written—I think she's meant to be maybe 30 years ago. And she has this incredibly intense relationship with Helm, the wind, and she's always going to talk to Helm, and she's trying to find a little sweet wrappers to keep for Helm, the entity, to give them. And she seems to be crazy to her mother. And her mother sends her to a mental institution. And it's so tragic because then all of the delight and joy and fun is knocked out of her. And she stays there for a few years, and she comes back a completely transformed—

ID: Windless.

EB: Windless, exactly. A transformed person.

ID: So, *Helm* is about also a loss of innocence to a certain extent and a loss of magic. Because Helm was magical, and it had a magical relationship with the people of Cumbria, the people of that area. And Helm talked about his cousins, the African winds, the winds in Asia, the winds in North America. But then eventually, you realise that with industrialisation, Helm is losing—he's losing steam. As the steam engine comes up, Helm is losing steam. And now, with so much pollution in the air and global warming, Helm is, again, losing its power. And so, it's about the end of an innocence that is translated into an end of magic as well. And a very beautiful way of talking about nature and our relationship with nature that becomes more violent, more dominant, and less of a partnership. And if that partnership is through magic, then that's a beautiful thing.

EB: Yes. And there's an environmental scientist in the book as well, who's obsessed with all the micro plastics that she keeps finding in the middle of nowhere in the fells in Cumbria, and she is also studying the wind.

ID: Well, exactly, the demise of Helm. She's monitoring it.

EB: Yes. So, as a fiction prescription, I think it's a great one for people worrying about the environment because it makes you want to reconnect with the environment as much as possible.

ID: And also people looking for a way to talk about it.

EB: And talk to the wind. Yeah.

ID: Looking for a way to communicate this in a way that is magical, in a way that is inspiring, and in a way that is not so scientific and perhaps a bit dry.

EB: Yes. And it's asking about superstition, really, as to whether it might have a kind of reality, even in the modern world.

ID: And use. And use. Yes.

EB: Yeah. Yeah.

ID: Exactly. And use in terms of relating to certain phenomena.

EB: Yes. So, that's a beautiful book to read and very much thinking about different aspects of superstition. Then—

ID: We go from here to a modern god'. It's a short story. It's a Nathaniel West, a very long, long passed away but classic American writer. It's not *The Day of the Locust*; it's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, the second short story in this collection. It's more of a novella, I guess; it's about 60 pages long. And *Miss Lonelyhearts*, this happens during the Great Depression in the United States. And so, the situation is very dire, people have no money, there's no jobs, there's no food, there's nothing. And Miss Lonelyhearts is a man, actually, and he writes the agony and column for a newspaper in New York. And he is having a crisis of faith because he can't help anybody. He keeps getting these letters, and they're all horrible, situations are terrible: people dying of disease, people orphaned, people abandoned, people who can't eat. He's like, *what can I do? What can I write for these people?* And his boss tells him, 'You're the modern Jesus. That's what you are. So, you figure out something. You tell them. You tell them how to appeal to their higher selves.' But he doesn't believe it. He can see that what he's doing is useless in his eyes. And so, I'm going to read a little piece here about how he's losing his faith, even in his own, if you want to say, control or power over reality.

[ID reads from *Miss Lonelyhearts*]

'Miss Lonelyhearts found himself developing an almost insane sensitiveness to order. Everything had to form a pattern: the shoes under the bed, the ties in the holder, the pencils on the table. When he looked out of a window, he composed the skyline by balancing one building against another. If a bird flew across this arrangement, he closed his eyes angrily until it was gone. For a little while, he seemed to hold his own but one day he found himself with his back to the wall. On that day all the inanimate things over which he had tried to obtain control took the field against him. When he touched something, it spilled or rolled to the floor. The collar buttons disappeared under the bed, the point of the pencil broke, the handle of the razor fell off, the window shade refused to stay down. He fought back, but with too much violence, and was decisively defeated by the spring of the alarm clock.'

EB: [Laughs] That's great.

ID: And it's basically, yeah, I think the book is a bit of a story about technology as well, in a way, an attempt to replace religion with a newspaper, with something with very—with a commercial venture. Because as the boss says, 'I don't care. This agony and column

brings us subscribers. People buy the paper, and they write in, and they feel like there's an interaction, so they're going to stay with the paper.' And it's a business venture, but it's supposed to be a faith venture.

EB: Yes, and Miss Lonelyhearts has to take on all the pain of all these poor people that are writing in. So, is it a fiction prescription for people looking for meaning, do you think?

ID: Well, for people who want to criticise capitalism, definitely. And for people who want to say how you cannot make a commercial venture into a faith, a magical venture. That doesn't work.

EB: Yeah, that's good.

ID: And it kind of relates back to *Helm*, in a way. It's a way also for us to respect that space that is not respected here. And what happens is, Miss Lonelyhearts, he becomes kind of nasty because he gets so fed up with these demands on his goodness, the generosity of his soul, that he cannot solve, he cannot solve these people's problems. So, he actually goes into these giant bouts of quite hateful behavior. And so, this—because he's a human being, he is not a god. And that is what comes through.

EB: Yeah, you're reminding me of Helm getting all the blame for all the bad things that happen to humans, like all those objects that go missing. In the book, *Helm*, Helm is blamed for all those things that are stolen or taken or gone in the wind. But also, people talk about when Helm comes, that's when suddenly lots of babies are conceived because everyone gets a bit more amorous because Helm is whipping up everyone's passion. So, I love that entity.

ID: But Helm can take it. Helm can take it.

EB: Because he's a kind of god.

ID: That's the whole point. And that's the point of *Helm*, that's the point of this book, why we need nature. But Miss Lonelyhearts can't take it. And that's the difference.

EB: Because he's just a man.

ID: Because he's just another man. And he needs to be loved, he needs to be cared for, he needs—and so, this is—and it's about—and again, this book is also – this

novella, I should say – is about what happens when you take out the magic and you try to make it into a business venture.

EB: Yes. You're also reminding me, thinking of the magic in books with *Helm*, there's that idea that he's gradually disappearing because of our relationship with the climate and the fact that we're ruining our own climate. It leaps back to *Jitterbug Perfume*, [both laugh] where—my magical book—

ID: The beauty of reading a book many times over many years.

EB: Where Pan figures heavily. And Pan, I think he's a bit like Helm in some ways. Pan is disappearing in *Jitterbug Perfume* because people are not believing in him anymore. Pan, obviously, representing nature. And he slowly disappears from sight, but you can still smell him because he smells like a goat. So, during that book, Pan kind of disappears, but then he gradually reappears with people believing in him again.

ID: And that's a good point, actually, that you're making here about the necessity, even for the god, for Helm, for Pan, not for Miss Lonelyhearts, though, to be believed in.

EB: Yes.

ID: Because at the end of the day, I mean, I guess, everything lies in our imagination, and if we forget, then that's it.

EB: Yeah.

ID: Isn't it? I mean, we are the repository as humans of all of this knowledge or this energy that we don't quite comprehend.

EB: Yeah. So, the question was: have books brought magic into our lives? Or which books? How have they brought magic into our lives?

ID: Or are some books magic? That was the question. And my response was another question, which is: can we get too old for that? I think we all agree that books can be very magical when we're young. But when we hit later ages—

EB: I still believe in the magic of books. I think they're still bringing me magic on a daily basis. And I think not just the contents of the books, but the books themselves, the physical books. And that leads us back to the idea of bibliomancy.

ID: Yes. And waving your hand on a shelf.

EB: Exactly.

ID: I should try this in a bookstore because that would be really random, [EB laughs] wouldn't it? That would be a really good idea. And I like this because I thought maybe that it was over that, like by a certain point in your life, you've seen—you've read too many books, and you, a bit like that poem, that French poem, you've read too many books, you've seen too many things, just all you want now is some quote, unquote, 'peace'. But I think now I disagree with that. I think that it is good to challenge yourself and to have the courage to look at mysteries.

EB: Yes, I agree. I think all our listeners should try a bit of bibliomancy [ID laughs]. Send out their arm to their bookshelf, pluck a book out—

ID: I'm going to try it. I'm definitely going to try it.

EB: —get a response, and then report back to us. We'd like to hear what happens and if people get any amazing revelations or guidance as to the next step.

ID: Or ideas.

EB: Yeah.

ID: Yeah. I love that. Definitely.

EB: Excellent. [Outro music] So, this has been our episode of *Fiction Prescriptions* about superstition. And our next episode will be:

ID: Money.

EB: Which is going to be really interesting. And do send in any questions that you have on that subject.

ID: Thank you so much for joining us. This was *Fiction Prescriptions*. I'm Isabelle Dupuy.

EB: And I'm Ella Berthoud.

A recording of this interview can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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