



17 September - 1 October, 2020

Dear Reader,

Tell me, have you ever appreciated your library quite as much as you have during 2020? It feels extra special that my novel, *The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone*, has been picked for OverDrive's 'Together We Read' initiative this year – above all years.

Because, how would we have got through the past few months of the coronavirus pandemic without our libraries? At some point, with our cupboards full of home-sewn facemasks, our stomachs full of sourdough, we would all have gone quietly mad if it wasn't for a steady stream of ebook and audiobook downloads to keep us company.

During the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak, Margaret Atwood wrote this wonderful article likening the pandemic to being a knight galloping towards a castle as the drawbridge goes up. We're the rider, says Atwood. And we're currently in midair, leaping across the moat towards the safety of post-pandemic life in the castle. What, Atwood asks, do we hope will be waiting inside the castle? Which bits of pre-pandemic life do you miss most?

The first thing I thought was: libraries.

Libraries are my castles and I've missed my local library like a lost limb. And so, hurrah for OverDrive – that knight in shining armour – galloping through lockdown alongside us!

All of which is to say, I'm thrilled my novel, *The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone*, is part of OverDrive's program. *The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone* is a blackly comic, coming-of-age story that occurs during a single, sweltering summer – the summer the three Van Apfel sisters disappear.

Set in 1990s suburbia, in an eerie river valley with an unexplained stink, the story is narrated by friend and neighbour, Tikka Malloy. But Tikka is only eleven and one-sixth, and far too close to the missing girls for her narration to be considered completely reliable.

Tikka explains that Hannah, Cordelia and Ruth Van Apfel vanished during the school's outdoor concert. But as the Van Apfel girls' oppressive religious home-life is revealed, and as suspicions are raised about Cordelia's relationship with a local teacher, it fast becomes apparent that something more sinister may have happened on the night the Van Apfel girls disappeared.

I hope you enjoy reading it.