



**WSIRN Episode 197: Rebuilding a life, rebuilding a library**  
*Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Amelia Mattingly*

[00:00:00]

ANNE: It has a really pretty cover with flowers on the front if that makes a difference to you.

AMELIA: It does. Unfortunately. [BOTH LAUGH]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 197.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader:  
What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Readers, before we get started, I have two things to tell you. First we just released our fall lineup in the Modern Mrs Darcy Book Club. We have an amazing reading season lined up for our members, including three fantastic reads -- well, six depending on how you look at it --three author chats INCLUDING one in-person event for members, a brand-new fall book preview, and two new classes on book journaling and marking up your books. If you hate that idea, I seriously aim to convince you otherwise. So, to learn more about our community visit [members.modernmrsdarcy.com](https://members.modernmrsdarcy.com). That's [members.modernmrsdarcy.com](https://members.modernmrsdarcy.com)

Next, my family is looking for a family assistant. This is local to Louisville, Kentucky. We travel, we have a business to run, we have four kids in schools and activities, we have a yellow lab named Daisy that maybe you've seen on Instagram, and we need a trusted person to help us keep all the plates spinning. If you think that might be you—or you know a person who would be right for the job—please visit [modernmrsdarcy.com/hiring](https://modernmrsdarcy.com/hiring). That's [modernmrsdarcy.com/hiring](https://modernmrsdarcy.com/hiring). Thank you so much.

Today's guest went through a gut-wrenching experience that ripped her book collection away from her – shelves and all – along with countless other precious signifiers of home. This experience marked a significant change in her life, including her reading life. The books she craves are different now, and every book purchase feels weighty. So today, I'm connecting her with three books that will hopefully take some of that heaviness off her shoulders and let her choose a different world to escape into, just for a few hours.

As you might have already guessed, today's episode comes with a content warning. Amelia tells her story of surviving an enormous natural disaster in heartbreaking detail, and it might be too much for anxious or sensitive listeners. If you need to skip the detailed descriptions, our book discussion starts about 20 minutes in, and mentions of the traumatic events are less detailed from that point.

Readers, Amelia's story is truly remarkable, and she tells it so well. Let's get to it.

Amelia, welcome to the show.

[00:02:49]

AMELIA: Thanks for having me.

ANNE: I don't know if Brenna told you this, but something we do in our Patreon community and listeners, if you want to see what I'm talking about, that's at [patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext](https://patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext). Something we do occasionally is ask our patrons to give us their ideas and suggestions and feedback on future episodes. And I don't want to make it sound like I'm excited about what happened to you, because that's horrible, but I think when we shared just the little glimpse into what you and your community experienced in our Patreon community with our readers, our hearts really went out to you as people, but also as readers. Amelia, I will let you take us back to November.

AMELIA: There will probably be tears. This is definitely something that hits close to home.

ANNE: Well this is a safe space. You're among friends and readers.

AMELIA: So I'm from a very small community, Paradise, California. And we made worldwide news. Last November 8th, there was a devastating wildfire. The tears have already started. There was a devastating wildfire that started in a small canyon. They think it was started by some poorly maintained PG&E equipment. We were the biggest town that was hit. I'm not 100% on numbers, but I think there was like 30,000 of us living in the town. It was post-apocalyptic, devastating. It was the stuff of nightmares. When I look back on it, I know that there is stuff I don't remember because of the trauma. But to start you out for that day, I was a night-shift nurse in ICU in a town about 30 minutes away called Chico. And I got off work at 7:30. I saw this cloud, and I thought, wow, that's a really cool looking cloud. And something hit me, and that's not a cloud. That's smoke. I knew it was in the direction of Paradise, so I called my dad and I

said, hey, Dad, what's going on? I see that there's a smoke plume, and he says, yeah, I just got off the phone with Mom. She's standing in the backyard. It sounds like it's raining, but it's ash coming down. She's packing up.

This isn't something new for our community. We frequently get wildfires. We live in the forest. Kinda comes with the territory. It's not uncommon to get evacuation notices during the wildfires, but it is uncommon for it to sound like rain. Things just didn't seem right. I said, okay. I'm heading home now. I'll see if I can help her when I get up there. My mom's usually pretty calm, cool, collected and you could definitely hear the fear and a little bit of panic. 'Cause she was like, "Yeah, I'm going around the house. I'm grabbing stuff." "Oh, okay, well, I'm leaving work now. I'll call my boyfriend, Will, that I live with to coordinate stuff. I'll see what's going on."

It's about a 30 minute drive like I said from Chico to Paradise and the whole time, I'm just staring at this cloud and I don't know if my brain is playing tricks on me, but it seems like it's getting bigger and it's an overwhelming shade of blackish, brownish, gray. About halfway up the hill, I could start feeling the winds as I'm driving. There's like bark chips and stuff in the wind that's hitting my windshield, and I'm like, well, I'm almost on empty. I should probably stop and get some gas. There is a gentleman ... There's a sheriff's officer saying goodbye to his family, saying I don't know when I'll see you guys again. And it was like, okay, this ... If they don't know what's going on, this isn't good. I said hey, are there evacuations in place? Like where are the evacuations. He was, like, I really don't know. But if you want to leave, leave.

Three minutes later, I pull into my driveway. I put one foot out of the car and I hear a police car with their PA system drive by saying mandatory evacuation. Get out now. This whole time, I've been trying to get ahold of my boyfriend. I've called him probably 10 times with no answer. I don't know if he knows what's going on. He's a night owl, so I was sure that he probably didn't go to sleep until 4 in the morning, and now that it's 7, he's probably out like a light. So the panic really sets in when the police officer drives by. I run to the back door, banging on the door with one hand, unlocking the door with the other. My dog, she's an Alaskan Malamute, so she loves to talk and she's a-rooing and so excited to see me. So excited that I'm home from work, and I fly in the house. I say, Will, you have to get up. There's a fire. We have to leave now. We gotta go. And he's like, what? And he's up and dressed, contacts in, probably within 30 seconds. I immediately put the harness on my dog. I grab the travel bag for the cat. I grab my computer and my tablet. I thought, oh, you know, I don't know if we're coming home, so I made sure to grab sandals and tennis shoes and slippers. My dad had just given us back our tent 'cause he had borrowed it, and so, I grabbed our tent, thinking I don't know where we're going to stay if something happens. So we grabbed all this stuff, we got about 10, 15 minutes to load up the car — my car and Will's car. We get into the car and Will's like okay, I'm going to do one more walk around the house.

As I'm waiting for Will to do the final path, I have a message from my mom saying hey, I was just wondering if you could come over. I want to take a load of stuff out to the hanger. My dad has an airplane, and so they rent a hanger out at the airport. I immediately call my mom back

and I say, "Mom, we're under mandatory ... Like you need to already be gone." My parents live about 5 minutes away from us. I know that's the direction the fire's coming, and I say, "Mom, you gotta go. I can't come over. We're leaving now. You probably should already be gone." "Oh, okay."

We pull out of our driveway. We are kitty-corner to a grocery store, and behind the grocery store, there's like a 50 to 100 foot tall pine tree completely engulfed in flames already, and we're in the middle of town. Seeing that tree completely engulfed, I was like, I don't - I don't think we're coming home. From this point on, I don't have a great sense of 'cause it's just a blur. It's just fight or flight and I knew I couldn't fight. It was just flight. Your body's kicking out all these hormones to make you want to run, but you're stuck in a car, you're stuck in traffic. And there's just the adrenaline. The timeline gets really skewed.

We finally get to my boyfriend's dad's house. We saw a couple spot fires on our way down there, but nothing we had to drive through. Nothing that made us feel overly unsafe. I told my grandparents, "We're coming your way, just so you know." As we're sitting in traffic, we watch them close down the gas station and rope it off. We watch a fire start in an empty lot next to the gas station. People are getting out of their cars and like, kinda walking up to it, like oh, we should put that out, but then they realize, that's progressing so much faster than anything we can do. The bush at the bottom is completely engulfed by the time you recognize that anything's happened and then the fire is 10 feet up the tree already. Embers are just blowing across this dry field.

In the scope of this fire, this is very minor destruction. It took us about 4 1/2 hours to get out of town. Two hours into our evacuation, my sister calls and says, "When was the last time you talked to Mom and Dad? I can't get ahold of them." Paradise is known as a black hole of reception. But it's uncommon to not find a spot where you might be able to get reception. So now the worry starts.

[00:10:14.]

ANNE: Oh.

AMELIA: Fast forward, six hours later, we still can't reach my parents. We convened at my grandparents' house. Finally my sister calls. "I talked to Mom." They are stuck at the Save-Mart parking lot, across the street from my house. I said, okay, but they're okay? Yeah, they're fine. Can they stand on their car and see if they can see my house? And my sister goes, I really didn't want to be the one to tell you this. It's gone. When you compare hearing that your parents are alive with your house is gone, it kinda puts some things in perspective. My parents are alive and they are safe right now. That's all I care about.

My parents finally get down to my grandparents' house, and their story is that they left their house and they were turned around. The fire was already too bad. Already jumped the canyon. Already was coming up into town. Hospital was being evacuated. My dad said he got out at one

point and there was a small fire that had started. He got out of his car and like, stomped it out, and then thought, well that was dumb. The entire forest around me is on fire. But it reminds me of the parable: When there's a fire and the hummingbird just takes one drop at a time to try to put it out. You do what you can even if in the scope of things, it doesn't seem like it'll make a difference. In front of that house where he put out that fire, that is one of the few houses in town still standing. I like to think that maybe he put out the spark that was gonna burn down that house.

[00:11:40]

ANNE: I'd like to think that too.

AMELIA: You find things that you need to cling to. The hope that you can in these sort of times. So my parents then proceed north on the road and in depth, passing a burned out ambulance. At last week at work, I actually ended up talking to one of the EMTs that was in that specific ambulance. The ambulance caught on fire. They had to evacuate the ambulance and broke into a house and sheltered in place in a garage with three patients.

ANNE: What?

AMELIA: The EMTs said that when the fire hit the oxygen tanks, it just sounded like a bomb going off. They progressed up the road, watched a church burn down to the ground. Everyone just stayed in their cars and just watched and then the authorities come to them and say, it's no longer safe here. You need to caravan over to the Save-Mart parking lot. You're going to shelter in place there. They drove past the local lumberyard and Mom said the piles of wood were just smoldering. The entire parking lot was full. They said it was about 300 people. They lived by the hospital, and behind the hospital, there was a, like, senior living home. She thinks that part of the people there were residents because there were doctors and nurses in the group who kept checking on specific people. They were handing out masks. Whatever masks they could've grabbed, and just trying to make sure people had water and trying to be taken care of.

Finally, they are able to caravan out of town. It sounds like the authorities might have said go now or we don't know when you can go next. Stuff is burning. Power poles are falling down. There's active, live lines on the ground. There's fire everywhere. Mom said that it wasn't so bad to drive through the fire. It was the fact that you were sitting in your car with fire all around you and you could feel the heat coming in at you. As you started to move your car again, you could tell the tires had started to melt, that there was a flat side on the tire, that you would kinda *think* along. These are just some of the stories our family's experienced. I have friends who had to get out of their cars and run. If 30,000 people made it out that day, there's 30,000 different stories about those eight hours. The town was closed to residents for about a month. No one was allowed in. My boyfriend was able to go up. He had spoken with, like, a family friend who was doing animal rescue stuff.

ANNE: Oh, wow.

[00:14:20]

AMELIA: So my boyfriend was able to go up about two weeks after the actual fire, and actually lay eyes on our property. We had pictures that my parents had taken of the property burning and of it smoldering, but he was able to actually put feet on the ground. It looked like a war zone. Buildings are burned out. If something burned, it burned completely. Very little was partially burned. Either it was not touched or it was gone.

We were burned. Our immediate next door neighbor was burned, but across the street is all fine. The abandoned house kitty-cornered to us is fine. That doesn't mean that people could live in it once they got back. The smoke damage, I guess, was absolutely horrendous. Walls have to be painted. Floors have to be replaced. But for us, we have a huge family support. Like I said, my brother-in-law is in the military and man, those people can mobilize. Was in the first few days, I had a cousin bring over probably six bags of clothes. You're just in this fog after something like that happens. That first day, after the fire, I'm a list maker. So I'm like okay, I need to do this and I need to do that and I need to cancel Comcast and I need to cancel PG&E and I need to file a claim with insurance and I need to do this and I need to do that.

ANNE: Yeah.

AMELIA: But the brain is just, is totally in a self-preservation mode. When you see someone from the ridge, Paradise, the surrounding communities, we feel for each other. Welcome to the club. It's a really crappy club to be in, but-

ANNE: Oh, I can't imagine. I'm so sorry that happened to you and your entire community. For listeners who may not know, the fire was enormous. It was the deadliest wildfire in California history, covered 240 square miles. Destroyed tens of thousands of structures. Had a devastating death toll, higher than any other forest fire in the United States.

AMELIA: It's hard to grasp the scope. There was a couple maps that came out after the fire that would superimpose the footprint of the campfire over well known areas, so the footprint of the campfire over like the Bay Area. Or over Los Angeles. Just to kinda give people a grasp of the size that it did burn.

ANNE: Absolutely devastating.

AMELIA: I've had to seek professional help for the trauma. There's been a lot of stressors along the way. Lots of things that will frustrate us, make us angry beyond explanation. We're really just doing the best that we can, day by day, to say okay, what can I do about it right now? One of the things that was my go-to quote after the fire was from *Gone With The Wind*: I'll think about that tomorrow. I can't think about that now. I'll think about that tomorrow. Because it's so overwhelming, the amount of stuff you need to do and you need to replace and they usually

have you itemize everything that was in your home so that the insurance company knows how much to pay you. And so we're thinking, oh my gosh, we're going to have to write down every single item that we had, every book that we owned, every coffee cup I had collected, every dance costume I had for the last 30 years?

This book, and I had this book. I notice for me, part of my coping, or my healing, or whatever you really want to call it, is acknowledging the fact that whatever happened that day, happened and is done. Nothing can undo it. My family is safe. We're all alive. We were able to find lodging. My boyfriend and I still had our jobs. The horrible destruction was countered with goodness of humankind, which is something I don't feel like this day and age really sees a lot of.

[00:18:11]

ANNE: Amelia, through all you've been through, it sounds like you have amazing people in your life. I'm pretty sure this is going to make us both cry, but I know you lost the majority of your home library, about 1500 books you've collected over the years, but there's one very special book you told us has brought you a lot of comfort since the fire. Would you tell us about that?

AMELIA: My great-grandma who had instilled the love of reading in my mom, who then in turn instilled the love of reading in me, my great-grandmother loved *Gone With The Wind*, and her dad had gifted a first edition of the book. After my great-grandma passed away, my great-grandfather gave me that first edition. My mom kept it safe at her house, and after the fire, I really did not want to be asking Mom, oh, did you save this? Oh, did you save that? Because-

ANNE: Yeah.

AMELIA: Just because she had it at her house, doesn't make it her responsibility to save it. So I don't want her to feel guilty if something didn't make it out of the fire. Like she made it out, Dad made it out, anything else is over and above. So I didn't really want to be asking questions. I turned 30 within a week after the fire. The gift that my mom gave me was that exact first edition copy. She had saved it and when she gave it to me for my birthday, it was wrapped in my childhood stocking that we always hung over the fireplace for Christmas. This copy of *Gone With The Wind*, it's the family heirloom that sits on the shelf. The ones that you don't read. That being said, I love *Gone With The Wind*, so I have to have a copy that I read all the time. And I didn't grab mine when I left. My best friend gave me one of the copies of *Gone With The Wind* that has the really beautiful cover. And on the inside cover, she wrote Scarlett made it out of Atlanta. You made it out of Paradise. You will find your Tara again. She knew that those were the words that I needed to hear. Although I feel uprooted right now, I will find my Tara again. There are so many connections that I have with this book and this story. Parts of the movie filmed in Paradise because Paradise has this gorgeous rich, red dirt that Margaret Mitchell talks a lot about in the book. I know that it's going to be hard and there's going to be struggles, but Scarlett made it out of Atlanta, and she did just fine. I can do that too.

ANNE: Amelia, I feel a little silly talking about books in the face of what you lost. [AMELIA LAUGHS] But do you want to talk about your reading life?

[00:20:40]

AMELIA: I would love to. It is my escape. I can kinda choose the world I can escape into. I have started going to the gym more, and that has been one of the times that I really have about an hour just to dive into a book. My mom and I are doing a half-marathon in Walt Disney World in February. That's also another motivator to get to the gym, to read a book. [ANNE LAUGHS] To practice and, like, train for this marathon, or this half-marathon. But I also notice that I have to make sure the book isn't too big because I have to hold it on the treadmill. [ANNE LAUGHS] That's my main reading time. I've tried listening to books on tape and I kinda have the Netflix problem there where I fall asleep, and then I get really confused.

I've downloaded some books on my, like, Amazon Fire tablet, but I notice that I don't really go to those the same way that I go to a hardcopy book. Being able to look at the cover and turn the pages and the smell and the font, just everything about a good old hardcopy book.

ANNE: Is that how you ended up with such a big home library?

AMELIA: [LAUGHS] Yeah, I bought a lot of books. Way more than I could probably ever read. Before the fire, I had written down ... I sat in the living room and I wrote down all the books that were on my shelf that I hadn't read yet, but wanted to read. Maybe like 100 books on that list and I was like, yeah, that's not going to happen in the next year. That's for sure. [ANNE LAUGHS]

The only books that I have that I have had prior to the fire, *Outlander*, which is one of my favorite books that didn't make it to my list because my aunt been borrowing it. She also had *The Nightingale*, which is another favorite that didn't make the list. And the book that was in my car is actually a library book because the library had a grant ... If they didn't have it in their catalog, you could email them and say, hey, I would really like this book. They would buy it off like Amazon or something, ship it to your house. You'd have a month to read it and you'd just bring it back in and say hey, this was a book that I got through the grant. And then it would be added into their catalog.

ANNE: Oh, wow.

AMELIA: The book that made it out of the fire that I'm still reading is one of those.

ANNE: Amelia, it seems unfair to ask you this because what you told us in your submission was that you're rebuilding your life and your library now and you wanted my input as to what books you should definitely include to fill your shelves, but what I'm going to ask you next is, how are you going to decide what to put back in your library?

AMELIA: I definitely know the books that I love and that I'm constantly thinking about: *The Great Gatsby*, *Outlander's* there, I re-bought *The Thorn Birds*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Little Women*. Those books that I grew up loving, I made sure that they're back on my shelf. I have two degrees. One is in kinesiology, which is the study of movement, and then my other degree is in nursing. I had an exercise physiology book from my kinesiology degree, and I don't know why, but I ended up having to rebuy it because I just wanted it back on my shelf.

[00:23:44]

ANNE: What's the book, Amelia?

AMELIA: It's called *Exercise Physiology*. [ANNE LAUGHS] It's just about the biomechanics of exercise and I don't know why, but it needed to be back on my shelf.

ANNE: Amelia, pre-fire, you wanted to come on What Should I Read Next and see what I would recommend to you. Post-fire, is that something you're still interested in?

AMELIA: Yes. It's definitely something I'm still interested in. I think that my desire for what I want to read might be a little bit different in the sense that I'm always game for anything, as far as any genre goes for the most part. But especially post-fire, I definitely don't want the more stressful storylines. I've never been a big fan of thrillers, but especially after the fire, things that are going to have like, really emotionally charged storylines. I had read *Beartown* before the fire, and there's just ... There's a lot of really sensitive subject matter in that one. I think that if I had been exposed to that book after the fire, I wouldn't have enjoyed it nearly as much. Just because it is-

ANNE: It's about people experiencing trauma.

AMELIA: Yeah.

ANNE: You don't need to borrow other people's right now.

AMELIA: Exactly. I've got that bucket full. Just the things that I would, I guess, would request to be recommended for me would not necessarily include such heavy material.

ANNE: Amelia, you got it.

AMELIA: Cool.

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ANNE: Now you know how this works. You're going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you're reading now and I'll see if we can put three titles on your new life, new library to-be-read list.

[00:26:41]

AMELIA: Sounds good.

ANNE: And I'm glad we've reached this moment because I'm really curious to hear what else you're going to say about *Gone With The Wind* because you said honestly, there were too many reasons to list as to why this book's your favorite.

AMELIA: There really are. I love the overarching sweep of the saga. I love a ton of the backstory about Margaret Mitchell and what she went through writing the book. I love how much there is to hate about Scarlett. [ANNE LAUGHS] And she's just a character that you love to hate. She's got some redeeming qualities, but she's also got a lot that you're like, I can't believe you did that. And having that juxtaposition of her with Mellie and then also her with Rhett. I'm a huge fan of books that are made into movies and done well. Historical fiction that when it's put on screen, it's done historically accurate. When they made the movie of *Gone With The Wind*, it was done really well. It's just that escape into another world where things aren't perfect and rosy, nor are they predictable, but there's the resilience factor of Scarlett as well. They have to adjust to the changing circumstances. I really liked that aspect of it.

ANNE: Okay. What did you choose for your second favorite?

[00:28:00]

AMELIA: *Living Downstream*. Some people might think it's a dull book because it's essentially about how stuff is added into the environment. The concept of the book is that things are full circle. There's a bumper sticker on someone's car at work that says what happens to water happens to the people. There's a current problem going on in Paradise with the water. The water company in town is currently working on trying to make sure the water's clean because during the fire, something happened and the water system got contaminated. People who are living in Paradise for the most part are still having to use bottled water for everything.

ANNE: Yikes.

AMELIA: I chose that book more as a bookmark of other books that I like that are similar to that.

ANNE: What did you choose for your third favorite?

AMELIA: *Bookshop On A Corner* by Jenny Colgan. First of all, I picked it up because it was a book about books and the cover is just a bunch of, like, book spines. It wasn't predictable. But it was easy for me. I could escape into it. This girl in the book, she ends up — spoiler alert — essentially running a bookstore out of a van. She was creative about how she could bring books and reading to this small Scottish town. So that was essentially just starting the wormhole of other Colgan books.

So I've also read like *The Cafe By The Sea*, and it's not necessarily the same format, but her characters have a problem. They have some creative ways to overcome it, but it's not necessarily predictable. I really liked that one and it was just comforting and it was a curl up on the couch with a tea type of book. I wasn't going to be necessarily on the edge of my seat, but I was going to be entertained and enthralled in it the whole way through.

ANNE: That sounds good. Tell me about a book that wasn't for you.

AMELIA: The book that I could not get into, especially with my love of books about books, was *The Book Thief*.

ANNE: One of my kids is reading that for assigned reading right now.

AMELIA: How are they liking it?

ANNE: Eh, it's not setting their heart on fire, but they're-

AMELIA: Making it through?

ANNE: They're making it. Did you make it through?

[00:30:12]

AMELIA: Not at all. [ANNE LAUGHS] And I am one of those people who I will finish a book that I do not like thinking maybe the last four pages will redeem this book. I could not get on board. There was something about the way that it was told, like the perspective of the book. It didn't keep it turning for me. I usually love stuff about World War II, but I just couldn't get into it.

ANNE: All right, well let's find you something else.

AMELIA: All right, sounds good.

ANNE: Amelia, when you told us what you're reading now, it was quite a long list.

AMELIA: It was.

ANNE: So recently you're reading books about books.

AMELIA: Yes. Books about books. I'm still making my way through that whole *Outlander* series. I'm still reading *The Toymakers*, which is the library book that I made it out of the fire with. I'm about halfway through it. I was hoping to be finished with it by the time the library re-opens, but I have a feeling that I'm probably not going to be done with it in time, but they will be getting their book back. I promise them that. [ANNE LAUGHS] It made it out of the fire. It's gotta make it back into their collection. The library did not burn, which was one of the things that made me really happy, post-fire.

So I'm reading *The Toymakers* by Robert Dinsdale. It is a book about World War I and it's this, like, fantasy toy shop. It's picking up, and it's interesting, but it's also one of those books that I have to do it in small doses and it has nothing to do with the book. It has more to do with where I am in my life than the book itself.

ANNE: And is that strategy working for you?

AMELIA: It is. And then another book that I'm currently reading is called *Subtle Energy Techniques*. One of the things that I did as ... Or I've been doing as a way to help process all this trauma, I saw a counselor. I have been going to a masseuse to help with, like, the physical manifestation. Just really trying to work on that self-care aspect, and not necessarily self-care as in like, mimosas and avocado toast, but self-care as far as like taking care of yourself because this is all you have.

ANNE: Right.

AMELIA: One of the things that I did was I got in connection with this girl who does energy work in the sense of like your aura and being able to kinda delve into past lives and stuff. Which is kinda out of my realm of what I've grown up knowing, but it's been really interesting because it's one of those things where even though I don't necessarily quote unquote get how it works, I definitely do feel better after working with her and talking about stuff that happened and she can talk about what she seen for me type of things. Some I'm not going to discount it because it definitely makes me feel better and whatever works, I'm going to keep doing.

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ANNE: All right, so, Amelia, your favorites are *Gone With The Wind*, *Living Downstream*, and *The Bookshop On The Corner*. *The Book Thief* was not for you. Okay. We are going to lean into the comfort reads.

[00:36:08]

AMELIA: I'm all for that.

ANNE: [BOTH LAUGH] I'm keeping in mind that you like stories where the characters have a problem, need to adapt, and can fix it, like Jenny Colgan. Definitely admire resilience you see in characters like Scarlett O'Hara.

AMELIA: Yes. I'm okay with those flawed characters, but they have to have their redeeming quality.

ANNE: So, the first book I'm wondering about for you is an easy reading, feel good novel from a few years ago by Ruth Hogan. It's called *The Keeper of Lost Things*. Is this one you know?

AMELIA: I feel like I've heard the title, but I don't know anything about it beyond that.

ANNE: I think this might be a good fit for you. It's a debut novel. It has a really pretty cover with flowers on the front, if that makes a difference to you.

[00:36:50]

AMELIA: It does. Unfortunately. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: No shame in that.

AMELIA: Oh good.

ANNE: It's set in the U.K. as are some of the books you have enjoyed, although I'm not sure if that's on purpose or if that just happened to be the setting of the stories. It mostly unfolds in the present day, but there is a timeline from 40 years ago. And the connecting point is two British assistants. One works in the bookish world for a publisher in the 1970s. And one is set in contemporary Britain and she works for the man of the title, Anthony. He is the Keeper of Lost Things, and because of something that happened in his past, he is very interested in connecting lost items he comes upon with the people who lost them. The characters are quirky. It's whimsical. Otherwise, I might be really hesitant to say, Amelia, you've lost a lot. Like let's look at other people who've lost things and how they get re-connected with them. So I do want you to know that that is the plot of the story and these are small, odd kind of ... I mean, they're more trinkets than knick-knacks.

AMELIA: Like the lost ring at the beach type of thing.

ANNE: Yes. But most items are much less obviously of value in the book. So if you really want a believable novel that could happen to real people completely realistic, like this is not the book for you. There's a small cluster of characters in a small town. They're all dealing with their own stuff. They all kinda find each other in a way that many readers find really heartwarming. It's a contemporary story, or at least the current plot is, but there's something about it that just feels very old fashioned. And it's definitely got a dose of magic.

Since you like to escape in your reading, but you like to choose a comfortable place to escape to, I think this could be a really delightful escape for you.

AMELIA: I've put it on my list.

ANNE: So that's *The Keeper of Lost Things* by Ruth Hogan. For our next book, you've chosen a few titles that we would consider historical romance like *Gone With The Wind*, *The Thorn Birds*, *Outlander*, and I'm wondering about another historical romance. This is a series actually. It's set during the civil war, which is interesting because the author said, I'm interested in writing historical. I have absolutely no interest in writing about the civil war, don't want to do it. But then she came across a story of a certain historical figure and thought, you know what? I think I can make that work. The author is Alyssa Cole, who is prolific. She's written a ton.

The first book in this series is called *An Extraordinary Union*. I believe there's three books in the series right now, but if you like it, there's two more you can enjoy and these are fast reads. They're fast paced. And it is set during the civil war. So hard things happen, but I think the background of how she came to write this novel is really interesting. You've shown that you have a proclivity to pick up really interesting nonfiction that appeals to you and that is similar to the way that Alyssa Cole came to write about the civil war.

[00:39:59]

AMELIA: Kinda like how Lin Manuel Miranda picked up a huge novel on Hamilton and then decided to make a musical?

ANNE: That still blows my mind.

AMELIA: Right?

ANNE: He picked up a book in the airport and thought, I know exactly what to do with this.

AMELIA: I know.

ANNE: Make a musical.

AMELIA: That is one of the books that I've repurchased. The fact that man could come up with that from a biography is amazing.

ANNE: Well I like the direction you're going with that because this is also a book that takes history as an inspiration, and then turns it into really fascinating fiction. So Cole said that she really fell in love with American history through reading the blog that Ta-Nehisi Coates kept at the Atlantic, and something that she especially liked was the way that he illuminated untold stories from America's past. But there's a specific historical figure where she thought, oh, wait, I could do something with that. And that's the story of a woman named Mary Bowser, and she was a freed slave who subsequently worked as spy for the union while working in the confederate white house. So she's the inspiration for one of the protagonists in this first book, *An Extraordinary Union*.

AMELIA: That character sounds super familiar. From something else that I have read that was about these different women who were spies.

ANNE: Is it *Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy*?

AMELIA: Yes!

ANNE: And that is by Karen Abbott. Okay, back to *An Extraordinary Union*. We have our Mary Bowser like character named Elle, and some important details are changed, and never miss the author's note on any kind of historical novel because the author will explain why they made the choices they did and the reasoning is often very interesting.

[00:41:42]

AMELIA: Yes.

ANNE: This undercover former freed slave starts bumping up against a pinkerton, I believe from my home state of Kentucky, whose name is Malcolm. They both are spies for the union. They're in this dangerous setting. They are completely wrong for each other and get on each other nerves, but of course, they fall in love.

AMELIA: Okay.

ANNE: But it's not without complications because this is how fiction works. So this historical romance is shorter than ones that you have listed by a good, long ways with ... I mean, some of those books that you love are quite lengthy, Amelia.

AMELIA: Yeah.

ANNE: So this is shorter, but if you feel like you are left wanting more than just pick up the next book in the series.

AMELIA: Perfect!

ANNE: Amelia, the thing I'm not sure about for you is that Alyssa Cole writes open door romance novels. Whenever I talk about romance with readers, the heat level comes up all the time, and that's hard to answer because it's subjective. But I do feel confident saying that if you're a reader looking for a chaste romance where any kind of steaminess is minimal or only just hinted at, these are not gonna be the books for you. Cole's level of explicit does vary from story to story, from a lot to a little, but this series does definitely get pretty explicit. And you should keep that in mind before diving in.

AMELIA: Cool.

ANNE: And for your third pick, how do you feel about another novel that is definitely *Gone With The Wind* adjacent?

AMELIA: I'm all for *Gone With The Wind* adjacent.

ANNE: The thing that tips this story into motion is the hat from the exact scene where Scarlett makes the emerald green dress out of the curtains and she makes a hat to go with it. Well, in

this book, that hat worn by Scarlett O'Hara, when filming *Gone With The Wind*, ends up in a vintage clothing boutique in California.

AMELIA: Okay.

[00:43:36]

ANNE: And the woman who spies it there, she knows what it is, and she knows it's important and she knows it can't stay there. And not just anybody can have it, but it needs to be returned to its rightful owner.

AMELIA: Right.

ANNE: Because it's Scarlett O'Hara's hat. You get a lot of nuggets about *Gone With The Wind* and *Gone With The Wind* filming and why it was so important to this particular person. That storyline begins in the modern day, and in the story, I don't know if this is true or not, you may know because you know a lot more about the movie than I think most people, Amelia. The lore was that the hat disappeared during filming and hasn't been seen since.

AMELIA: Mm-hmm.

ANNE: So, we go back in time to 1938 in Hollywood where there are two young friends who are both trying to make careers for themselves, but they're each doing it in their own way. That's *Stars Over Sunset Boulevard* by Susan Meissner. And something that I like for you about Susan Meissner's novels specifically is that there is always like a strong, drumbeat of hope throughout her stories and they don't end in devastation and despair ever. How does that sound?

AMELIA: That sounds interesting.

ANNE: Okay. Amelia, the titles we talked about today were *The Keeper of Lost Things* by Ruth Hogan, *An Extraordinary Union* by Alyssa Cole, and *Stars Over Sunset Boulevard* by Susan Meissner. Of those three books, what do you think you might read next?

AMELIA: I'm thinking *The Keeper of Lost Things* is probably the one that's pulling me the most, but they're all probably going to end up on my bookshelf.

ANNE: I am not sad about that, and I hope you enjoy it. I hope you enjoy them all.

AMELIA: My guess is that I will.

ANNE: Before you go, is there anything our readers can do to assist in the reconstruction still very much happening in your community? Where could they focus their efforts?

AMELIA: There's been a lot of devastation, but with the lost of the hospital, that also means that we don't have an ER. And I believe that there's something going on in the laws that state that

you can't have a free standing emergency room without being connected to a hospital. They were able to save the structure of the ER, but not the main hospital. So the nearest hospitals are about 30 minutes away. I have a girl that I went to grade school with. She worked at Feather River, which was the hospital in Paradise and in the immediate days after the fire, her and a group of people she worked with, other people who were being evacuated, people who just wanted to help, they've created a mobile clinic so that there can be medical resources on the ridge to help all these people who had chronic illness or some form of disability that they needed help with. They will set up at different locations and provide resources on like a Sunday, or on a Saturday, or areas that it might be more difficult to get to the walk-in clinic. They can come to this mobile clinic.

One of the things that people can do is donate to this mobile clinic. They're working on getting the resources necessary to have, I think she said they were working on trying to get, like, a trailer that they can work out of. 'Cause currently what they have is they will set up, like, pop-up tents. They don't have all of their resources in one place that they can move around and work out of their trailer. They essentially have to set up a tent every time and work through it. If we could have medical resources up there, it would help a lot of people.

[00:47:16]

ANNE: Okay. So, listeners, we'll gather all the info you need to donate in the show notes on your podcast app or at [whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/197](http://whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/197). Readers, go show Paradise some readerly love if you are able.

AMELIA: Thank you for hearing our story. Every person that was there that day or knew someone there that day has a story that they could share and everyone's story is going to sound really dramatic, but that day was dramatic and everyone is finding hope in whatever ways they can. I'm thankful that I can find escape in books. I know that other people are finding things that they can do to make their world a better place. So thank you for giving me some suggestions on little areas that I can escape into and find some comfort in.

ANNE: I'm sure I can speak for our listeners as well as for myself, we all wish you well as you rebuild your life and your library.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Amelia. You can find information about the Paradise mobile clinic, MedSpire, at <http://www.medspire.org>. That's M-E-D-S-P-I-R-E dot org, and contribute a tax-deductible donation at <http://www.medspire.org/donate>. I'd also love to hear what YOU think Amelia should read next. That page is at [whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/197](http://whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/197) and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today

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Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.