

Molly: Hey, everyone. Before we begin today, we want to thank our newest patrons, Avi Lee, Joanna, Liz, Fionuts and Julia. Welcome to the team. And as always, if you're interested in hearing Becca's first thoughts on *Persuasion*, hanging out with us on Discord and submitting your very own study questions, check out our Patreon at patreon.com/podandprejudice.

Now, we're taking a quick break from *Persuasion* this week to discuss a brand-new book called *Dashed* by Amanda Quain, which happens to be on sale today, July 16th. We're going to be back with a new episode about *Persuasion* in two weeks, followed by another quick detour to discuss another brand-new book, *Elizabeth of East Hampton* by Audrey Bellezza and Emily Harding. And then after that, we will continue full steam ahead with *Persuasion*. But until then, please enjoy this week's episode covering *Dashed* by Amanda Quain with none other than Amanda Quain.

[Pod and Prejudice theme] [00:01:00]

Molly: If Becca were here, she would say, "This is Becca." And I would say, "This is Molly." And then Becca would say, "We're here to talk about Jane Austen." And then I would say, "We are here specifically to talk about *Dashed* by Amanda Quain, and we are joined today by Amanda Quain." Hello.

Amanda: Hi. Hi, Molly and Becca's ghost.

Molly: [laughs] Yes. So, listeners, you probably have figured out by this point that it is just me today. Becca sends her regards, but she unfortunately is unable to make it to this recording. But I'm so excited to be chatting with Amanda, the author of *Dashed*, who you all may remember when we had her on for *Accomplished*, her story that followed Georgiana Darcy. So, Amanda, welcome. Do you want to just tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Amanda: Yes. So, I'm so excited to be back here. My name is Amanda Quain, and I am the author of now three Jane Austen retellings for a young adult audience, [00:02:00] which is wild to say. Because last time that we recorded, I hadn't even had one come out. And now, here we are.

I work for indie bookstores by day as well as a university administrator, and then by night and also by day sometimes. I write these fun, little romance books that talk about different characters from our favorite, Jane Austen novels.

Molly: You're literally living my dream. Working at an indie bookstore and writing novels in your free time, that's literally the dream. So, we always ask our guests, what their relationship is to Jane Austen. Since you're a returning guest, we also are going to ask you how your relationship to her has changed since we last spoke, if it has.

Amanda: Yeah. It's interesting. So, I was thinking about that. On the one hand, it feels weird that it hasn't, but on the other hand, I don't know, I feel like I've been lucky that I've always seen her books, and what I've drawn from them as an inspirational-- She's obviously not a peer, because she's wonderful and [00:03:00] fantastic and dead, [Molly laughs] all of which really rules that out. But I do feel so lucky that over the last few years, I've been able to make a very small mark on the Jane Austen canon, and that I am now a tiny part of her legacy.

But I've always been a huge Austen fan. I got my first copies of her books. I got a full set of the *Dover Thrift Editions* when I was 13. Started *Pride and Prejudice* first. Finished *Sense and Sensibility* first. That was my-

Molly: Ooh.

Amanda: -first love. Yeah, had to come back to *Pride and Prejudice*. I was like 14. We pick

and choose. And then in college, I was super lucky to take a class that was just called Jane Austen, where we read each of her books. They had a different professor come in and discuss each book based on what their specific discipline was. So, we had a gothic professor come in for *Northanger Abbey*, that thing.

Molly: Oh.

Amanda: It was amazing.

Molly: That's so cool.

Amanda: Yeah. And then I've just never stopped. I've always been a fan of adaptations and retellings and essentially fanfic, which is basically what we're doing. I know we talked about Neopets fanfic last time I was here. [laughs]

Molly: Oh, my gosh, yes. **[00:04:00]** I remember that. So, you have three. Now, you have *Accomplished*, you have *Ghosted*, which is *Northanger Abbey*, right?

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: Yes. So, we'll read that eventually.

Amanda: Yes. [laughs]

Molly: And now, *Dashed*, which is a *Sense and Sensibility* inspired.

Amanda: Yes. I decided for my third book, I had to do something that I knew you had read, so that we could come on and talk about it. So, it was like, "Well, that was no fun if we couldn't chat about *Northanger Abbey*."

Molly: Right. Honored to be a part of that decision, honestly. So, you talked about what your first Austen love was. What is your current favorite piece of Austen content, whether that's a book that she wrote, or a spin off piece of content, or a song or anything?

Amanda: Honestly, I just rewatched the other day, *Fire Island*, and I think it's still standing as my—Normally, it would be *Clueless*. I feel like I have to separate the adaptations as a separate category, because they're obvious-- [crosstalk]

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: *Sense and Sensibility* is my favorite Austen novel. And so, that's always a special place in my heart. But *Fire Island* is a perfect adaptation.

Molly: It really is.

Amanda: I'm obsessed with it.

Molly: **[00:05:00]** We being, me and my girlfriend, went to the Las Culturistas Culture Awards.

Amanda: [gasps] Oh, my gosh.

Molly: It was the cast of *Fire Island* was there, and we were just like, "Wow, we love this movie."

Amanda: Oh, my gosh, the perfect combination of queer culture and Austen culture. Congratulations, honestly in nailing that.

Molly: Yeah. It's so good.

Amanda: It proved to be a very good treadmill movie, which I appreciated.

Molly: Oh, yeah.

Amanda: Yeah. it's just bouncy enough, but also like, "I know the story. So, if I'm zoning out in the pain zone, I can come back to it." But that script just doesn't stop. Plus, they literally say Way Harsh Tai.

Molly: I know, which I didn't get.

Amanda: Yeah.

Molly: When I first watched it, and then when I was watching *Clueless*, I was like, "I get it now."

Amanda: I literally screamed when I heard it the first time, and then screamed again on the treadmill because I forgot that it was in there.

Molly: Yeah. Oh, my God, it's so funny. So, Austen characters, we normally ask which Austen character you relate to the most. But since you're a returning guest, we're going ask you which Austen character you love to hate.

Amanda: Ooh, that's interesting. **[00:06:00]** Honestly, it's probably-- I feel like it might be Willoughby, frankly.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: Because there also are *Northanger Abbey* ones that I won't go into for your sake. But Willoughby is such a tragic hero, because he's not the villain that Wickham is. He and Marianne were so well matched. Would it last the distance? Impossible to say. But theirs was such a good love story. And then he messed it up so badly by his own stupid decisions, and I'm just like, "Ugh, I just want to hit him."

Molly: Yeah. I feel like Willoughby and Frank Churchill are two characters that you want to be more clean cut or clear cut than they are, think you're like, "Ooh, you're bothering me, but also, there are good aspects of your story." Frank Churchill more so is like-- He's not a bad guy.

Amanda: Yeah. His situation's just funky.

Molly: Yeah. But Willoughby, he really loved her. **[00:07:00]** That's valid. It's just that he's also an asshole.

Amanda: Yeah. So, I actually in a slight honor of Willoughby, I named the cruise ship that they sail on in *Dashed* after Willoughby's horse, the Queen Mab.

Molly: I loved that. There were so many good tidbits in the book.

Amanda: I'm so glad you picked up on that. Like, that's probably the most subtle Easter egg in there.

Molly: And it's such a good name for a boat.

Amanda: Exactly. Actually, I was like-- I always when I start these books, I do read the SparkNotes summaries of all the books or of the novel that I'm doing just to make sure I'm not missing any major plot points that maybe don't stand still in my heart, but are important

for the books. When I hit that, I'm like, "Oh, done. That's perfect."

Molly: Yes. So, that's actually a great segue into talking about *Dashed*. So, we are going to be releasing this on the day that *Dashed* goes on sale to the public, which is very exciting.

Amanda: Yes. And so soon. Oh, my goodness.

Molly: So soon. Literally, we're recording this on Saturday, and it's going on sale on Tuesday. [00:08:00] What? You must be bouncing off the walls.

Amanda: Yeah. literally, after we do this recording, finishing, packing my car and driving out to start hitting my tour stops for [crosstalk] I'm doing.

Molly: Oh, my gosh, amazing. Where is your first stop?

Amanda: So, I'm going back to D.C., which is where I've lived for eight years, where my bookstore still is. Well, in northern Virginia, but we're staying in D.C. So, I still do my launches there, even though I live in Pennsylvania now. So, we're going down there, and we'll be there for a few days and then we're heading up to Ocean City, New Jersey, where my parents live and where I went to high school, and I'm doing an event there on Saturday.

Molly: That'll be awesome.

Amanda: Yeah.

Molly: So, we don't want to give away too many spoilers, but we are going to talk about a lot of plot points in this story. So, I guess you all should go buy the book.

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: But we're going to do our best to not give everything away. So, without giving away everything, what is the concept of *Dashed*? Tell us about it.

Amanda: Perfect. So, I will start by saying that I love that in this context, I can actually talk about the Jane Austen version of it, because I normally try when I'm pitching my books to [00:09:00] not just be like, "Hmm, here's my Jane Austen nerd out." Because I wanted to be approachable to people who aren't huge Austen fans as well and they are.

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: But for you all, I can say that this is a contemporary retelling, or excuse me, a contemporary sequel to *Sense and Sensibility*. So, because I am a big fan of the original novel, it is my favorite of Austen's works, and I couldn't find anything I wanted to change. So, I was like, "Okay, well, what happens next?" That's a good way to solve that problem.

So, this follows Margaret Dashwood, our youngest Dashwood sister. She's 18 now. And basically, the end of *Sense and Sensibility* messed with her head. We're really seeing for her the fallout of how she's always idolized Marianne, and her adventurous spirit and how she always went after love. And then she saw what happened to Marianne over, in our case will, which in our novel is that she got into a really terrible car accident after they broke up, and was hospitalized for a long time and Margaret saw that and was like, "Nope, love is [00:10:00] not worth it. Love is terrible." I see what Elinor is doing, which in her mind is like finding a nice man who she loves enough to settle down with and have a nice, sensible life, and I'm going to do that.

So, she basically senses what happened with Marianne six years ago. She has really stuck to the line. She's a real rule follower. She doesn't have time for romance, and she's about to go on a little adventure with Elinor's husband, Edward, who we all know and love, has taken

a six-week post on a cruise ship, the Queen Mab, as a ship's chaplain, which is a boat priest. And he's allowed to bring his family along. So, Elinor and Margaret and him are going to go on this six-week Caribbean cruise.

At the last second, Marianne shows up in tears and is like, "Brandon and I are over. We broke up. I'm coming with you," and throws Margaret's life into an absolute tailspin. So, that's where we start off here. I am sorry in advance for breaking up Marianne and Brandon. I feel bad about it.

Molly: I read that and I [00:11:00] was like, "No." But I won't spoil how that ends, but I was devastated.

Amanda: [laughs]

Molly: So, we're on a cruise ship.

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: I know that you posted on Instagram that you also do a lot of cruising yourself or have throughout your life. So, first of all, what made you put this specific book on a ship? And second of all, what about the setting of *Sense and Sensibility* lent itself to telling this modified story or sequel in the modern era on a cruise ship?

Amanda: Yeah. It's funny, because this book gave me some trouble, Molly. [chuckles]

Molly: [laughs]

Amanda: This book was a challenging one, which I think a lot of third books are, because this was the first book. I think for a lot of folks, it's their second books that give you trouble, but I was lucky that I wrote the entirety of *Ghosted* before *Accomplished* came out. So, I was dealing with a little bit less public pressure. I don't know, I haven't dealt with that much public pressure. But you still, like, I wasn't dealing with any of the public's thoughts on my book. So, for this one, it was a weird one going into it. [00:12:00] And initially, this was an extremely different book.

Molly: Hmm.

Amanda: Initially, this was Margaret going to stay with Edward and Elinor in the tiny beach town they live in.

Molly: Oh.

Amanda: And having to discover that their way of life is a nice way of life, and that it's okay to have a boring way of life.

Molly: Yeah.

Amanda: And that being settled is a good thing. My editor was like, "This is a very quiet story." I'm like, "I know the point is that quiet stories are nice." And she's like, "That's not a sellable point, actually."

[laughter]

Amanda: So, I had to go entirely back to the drawing board, and I was literally just brainstorming with my critique partner, and I just out of nowhere, I was like, "What if they were just like on a boat? What if we just put them on a big boat for a long time?" We're like, "Wait, what if they were on a boat, actually?" It was a really fun setting to get to explore.

Like I've mentioned on my social media, I grew up cruising. I'm from Florida originally, and cruises are just a thing people do a lot there, because you just drive to the port and you get on the ship, and off you go. Plus, my grandparents are huge cruisers. Before my grandmother died, my grandparents [00:13:00] went on 55 cruises together.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Amanda: I know. They would just stay on the ship between cruises sometimes.

Molly: Wow.

Amanda: They knew all the crew. It was wild. So, I got to do a lot of that. And so, I was just very familiar with the setting. I was like, "This will be a really fun, over the top, really exciting summer setting." Since *Northanger Abbey* and *Ghosted* was a much darker and more emotional book-- It's still fun and funny, but it's definitely darker than *Accomplished* is. I wanted to go in an entirely different direction and have like a real summery book.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: And so, once we came up with the setting, we almost like-- the story came together because of the setting.

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: It was not the way I usually do things, but it was an interesting way to go about it.

Molly: It really felt like reading it. This story could only happen on a cruise ship, and a cruise ship is such a good incubator for--

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: Any enclosed space is a good incubator for a story. Like, when you're literally on a boat and you are in the middle of-- You can only get off at the various ports that you're on. So, that's obviously going to inform the story, I think that worked really well. [00:14:00] And jumping back to something you said earlier about this appealing to people outside the Austen fandom, I think doing it as a sequel really helps with that, because there are elements of the original story and they're in Margaret's flashbacks-

Amanda: Right.

Molly: -and such, but it is its own story, which I think is really smart on your part.

Amanda: Thank you. Yeah, this one is definitely a lot more self-contained than my first two books. It really can be read as just a fun summer romcom. And if you happen to pick up the Austen references, amazing. But since it is a sequel, yeah, it's completely its own thing.

Molly: Yeah. So, we've got *Accomplished*, we've got *Ghosted*, we've got *Dashed*. I want to know why *Sense and Sensibility* was your next choice aside from obviously wanting to talk about it with me-

Amanda: Yes. [laughs]

Molly: -and whether you intend to do a book for each Austen book.

Amanda: I would love to, eventually. It's not in the immediate cards, but I'm going to be taking a little pause [00:15:00] from this at least like basic genre for now. But I would love to eventually reach all of them. Honestly, a lot of it is like, I knew I wanted to do another Austen, because that's what my publisher wanted, which was amazing. I love doing them. And so, I

was looking at what was left.

For me, retellings are interesting. I think this is the way for a lot of retelling authors, because it can't just be a book that you love. It needs to be a book that you have something to say about.

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: Because I love *Persuasion*, deeply and thoroughly. I'm so glad you all are talking about it right now. But, it's like, well, if I don't have anything to say about except for I love this very much. That's not so much a retelling as it is like a book club, which was honestly challenging, because I was like, "Well, *Sense and Sensibility* makes sense because it'd be good to go back to a more well-known Austen after I threw *Northanger Abbey* at everybody." But I don't have anything to say about it except for I love it.

So, that's when I was like, "Okay, but what elements exist that are ripe for retelling and adaptations?" Well, we don't know much about Margaret. I always loved her, especially in the [00:16:00] adaptation, the movie. She's such a cute, little, fun adventurer with her big map hiding under the table from Hugh Grant.

Molly: Oh, I love it.

Amanda: It's so cute. I was very curious where she would end up. I think also *Sense and Sensibility*, although it's my favorite, does always have the Marianne and Brandon question, like, is this what Marianne deserves? Is this what Brandon deserves? Is this a love story that can stand up to Elinor and Edward? Darcy and Lizzie? There's has always been a little bit more of a confusing one for me, a little bit more of a subtle. I don't want to--

Molly: You could say it.

Amanda: Yeah. It's never been my absolute favorite. Obviously, Alan Rickman pulls it out. But when you look at the books on its own, it's like, "This is fine," but you always-- I've often felt a little weird about it for Marianne, because it does seem like she had to give up on her dreams and what she really wanted. And so, this was an opportunity to not only explore Margaret, but Marianne is a fairly major character in the story as we explore what her journey [00:17:00] should be and what her journey ends up being with love now that she and Brandon have broken up and Margaret is determined to find her new love, because this is, of course, also a fake dating book-

Molly: Of course.

Amanda: -and we are throwing Marianne into as many situations as possible to try to find her love again.

Molly: Yeah, I'm glad you said that about Brandon. Becca's not here, and we're going to go off the rails. But when we first read *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne and Brandon got together in the last two pages of the book.

Amanda: Yeah.

Molly: And I was like, "I feel like something's missing here." And Becca was like, "No, he's so romantic." And like, listen, Becca, I know you're going to listen to this, and I agree with you, he is so romantic. But did Marianne ultimately-- Well, actually, I guess we did talk about this. But ultimately, Marianne had the sensible-

Amanda: Mm-hmm.

Molly: -relationship settle that Margaret in your book thinks of Elinor is having, and Elinor

had the big romantic-

Amanda: Right.

Molly: -sweep me off my feet. So, they did a swap season what you expect from each of them, actually, although [00:18:00] I can see how Margaret would see it the other way around and not fully know the internal life of her sisters and their romances, because she's only seeing the outside of it.

Amanda: Exactly. She's so much younger than them too. I made the age difference even a little bit longer in my book than it is in the original just because I don't have my 17-year-olds getting married.

Molly: Yes. [giggles]

Amanda: They're not that young in the novel, but we stretch it out a little bit just to play with marriage and things like that.

Molly: Yeah.

Amanda: But yeah, it's hard because, we do love Brandon. Yeah, it happens so quickly and it does seem so subtly, and so a lot of this is like exploring, was this the right thing for Marianne too?

Molly: Yeah. So, I'm sensing a theme.

Amanda: [chuckles]

Molly: You have Georgiana Darcy.

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: I don't know about *Ghosted*, so I won't get into that.

Amanda: *Ghosted*, our main character is a middle of three.

Molly: Okay. So, we've got the siblings.

Amanda: Yes.

Molly: Like, the adjacent [00:19:00] characters that you're bringing as your main characters of your spin offs. So, you've talked a little bit about it, I think, with talking about what you have something to say about within the novel. But why did you choose Margaret if you had to distill it as your narrator for this book?

Amanda: Yeah, it is interesting that I do tend to pick a lot of younger siblings, despite being the oldest of two siblings myself. [Molly laughs] Like, I am such an older sister. I've got big Elinor energy.

Molly: I love it.

Amanda: Like, this is not my vibe at all. But I also think there's something very interesting about exploring different types of relationships within novels. If I was just putting my own personal big sister dump on this, that's at a point that's just therapy. I pay somebody to do that. [chuckles] I don't need to [Molly laughs] make you all read about that. But I really enjoy sibling relationships. It's one of the things that first drew me to Jane Austen and *Accomplished* was-- The way that she does families, which is obviously something we all love about her. Like, the family relationship is such an important part of her books alongside

the romantic [00:20:00] relationships.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: This is like maybe more of a writer flaw than a reason. I lose friends so easily in these books. I cannot tell you how many friends have been cut from the page,-

Molly: Oh, my gosh.

Amanda: -because I just get too excited about the siblings, and I forget to do anything with the friends.

Molly: Yeah.

Amanda: So, you have to cut. Like, I couldn't do a Lucy novel or anything like that, because I just would have lost half the characters along the way.

Molly: Right.

Amanda: *Dashed* was the earliest I ever caught a best friend type, because early in my *Dashed* drafting, Gabe, who's our love interest crew member had a cousin, Claura, who was Margaret's best friend on the ship, and she didn't even make it out of the outline.

Molly: Oh, my God. That's so funny.

Amanda: It's so funny. I lost a couple of friends in *Ghosted*, although we did keep more friends in *Ghosted*. You'll see when you get there. But the friends are important, which I was very proud I managed to do. We lost half the friends in *Accomplished*. So, I don't know, siblings are just what I always come back to, and [00:21:00] I find that the family dynamic of how they all interconnect and how it's not just like Margaret has a friend and that friend isn't really connected to Elinor and Edward. Like, that's not as interesting to me as Margaret and Marianne are doing all these things together. Then there's also Elinor and Marianne drama and Edward and Marianne thoughts.

Can I take a quick side note, by the way, and say how annoyed I am at Jane Austen for naming these two characters, Marianne and Margaret?

Molly: Oh, my God. Yeah.

Amanda: The amount of times I typed the wrong name in this book is absurd.

Molly: I do that in my notes all the time with so many of her characters, first of all, being named the same name.

Amanda: Yeah, they're just all Jane, anyway.

Molly: Yeah, exactly. Or, just like the same last initials. So, I like to in my notes shorten things like Mr. Blank or like Mr. L or--

Amanda: You can't.

Molly: There's no Mr. L. But you can't, because then I'm like, "Who am I talking about?"

Amanda: Mr. L would be helpful. That would be nice. Please, Jane.

Molly: Yeah, exactly. Instead, all of her villains are Ws-

Amanda: Right.

Molly: -and everybody else is John or Jane, which is also, like, " Uh, okay, yeah. Agreed with you."

Amanda: If I say the wrong name here, I apologize.

Molly: [laughs]

Amanda: It's still not **[00:22:00]** nearly as bad as when I was writing it out, especially the first three letters are the same.

Molly: I know.

Amanda: Disaster. That's almost why I had to give Margaret, a nickname-

Molly: Mags.

Amanda: -just to make it easier to type. Yes, she goes by Mags among her family, which is both a fun reference to the way my family always nicknames. We take a syllable and add an S. And also, my editor, Sarah, despises it, so I had to do it.

Molly: I love that.

Amanda: Just to bother her, I was like, "Hmm, look at these fun nicknames. What do you think, Sarah?" She's like, "I'm going to murder you. Please stop."

Molly: [laughs] I love that. Well, I think that the family dynamic also for Margaret, it is so important to her character that even in the original books, she's so young and she looks up to her sisters, and you do get that vibe of she's just with their mom all the time, so who's she going to think is cool other than her sisters-

Amanda: Right.

Molly: -and want to emulate them. And so, her getting this six weeks with her big sister who she idolizes.

Amanda: Oh, my gosh. Yes.

Molly: It makes so much sense for her. But **[00:23:00]** she doesn't get a lot of attention in the original book.

Amanda: Right.

Molly: So, I'm curious, like, how you built her character and wondering if you took any inspiration from particular adaptations, like the Hugh Grant one or did you build her from scratch?

Amanda: So, the Hugh Grant one is always my go to adaptation for *Sense and Sensibility*. I know that there are others, but I frankly don't care as much about them.

Molly: Yeah.

Amanda: That is the gold standard, absolutely. Like, Emma Thompson, the casting is perfect, the script is perfect, the vibes are perfect. No notes. So, she's definitely who is in my head as Margaret at that age. So, that was definitely a starting point for her at 12, but obviously, we had to age her up an additional six years. So, it was a lot of time thinking about how you go from somebody who was that adventurous, and that wild and that romantic.

We see in the book as well. You see it a little bit more in the book than you do in the movie, how much she was like, "Oh, my gosh." She and their mom are all about Marianne and Willoughby. They are Team Willoughby, they are Team Big Love, they are [00:24:00] Team Romance. I feel like that's an easy person for me to imagine, especially if you're the hopeless romantic like myself. But then too is experienced basically this giant trauma of your big sister who you adore, almost dying, because of the thing that you've always thought is most important in the world.

To have to rebuild your own personality based on what you think it should be led to, what to me, was a very interesting character to play with, because she's very cautious, but underneath the caution is still that little girl, still the girl with the maps of hiding under the table. She still enjoys all the places she gets to go to, but it's under this layer of fear, and that led to some really fun character work for me.

Molly: Yeah. She's on a boat getting to do all of that.

Amanda: Yes. She's so scared of it. She's so regimented and so afraid of things going off the plan, but you just want to be like "Let go. It's fine."

Molly: Yeah.

Amanda: It's a cruise ship. It's pretty regimented whether you want it to be or not."

Molly: Right. Exactly. So, [00:25:00] aside from the characters that we already know, you're also creating some original characters. So, we were curious if you were inspired by any of Austen's characters when creating these new characters/also when you're fleshing out the well-known characters that we know and love, or do you pull from other sources or both, what's your character-building process for these books?

Amanda: Yeah. So, it's a little bit of pulling from like -- At least for the smaller characters, I'm definitely pulling from some fun Austen tropes, like, your fops and your silly friends. The small, minor characters in Austen are always the most fun, just running around doing quips. So, I feel like some of the fake dates that Marianne goes on, like, Torden, my favorite fake dates character.

Molly: Torden.

Amanda: Torden, who's this Norwegian crew member who decides out of nowhere that he's going to pretend to be a member of the British Royal Family.

Molly: Iconic.

Amanda: He is, by the way, named after my favorite love interest in my friend, Anna Bright's book, *The Beholders*. That's my little reference there. If [00:26:00] you're a fan of romantic fantasies, that's an amazing book, and you should absolutely read it.

Molly: You know, our listeners all are also read it.

Amanda: Yes. [laughs] You'll have a great time. So, that was just like, I love getting to take those little characters and just make them extremely silly. That's just such a blast. That's for our larger side characters, specifically Gabe, who was really our biggest original character. For those I feel like I don't draw as much inspiration from Austen, if only because there are such good archetypes that already exist within her work for the romance heroes, but they're usually also in the book.

Edward is there. Brandon is adjacent. You can't have that same character wandering through again. So, he draws just a lot of inspiration from other romance tropes that I enjoy. I

really wanted to go for a grumpy sunshine thing.

Molly: Love him.

Amanda: Margaret, for all of her cynicism, is a very sunshiny and bright person. And so, I had so much fun putting that in for him. I drew some extra inspiration from my husband for this one, which was fun. Gabe is Brazilian, [00:27:00] and that was an homage to my husband's family, who are all from Brazil. So, that was a really fun little character flavor toss into that.

My husband is not a smiler, and I love the idea that you get to know people like that over time and how rewarding it is when you do get to know them. People who are shy are a little bit quiet, it is almost more joyous when you finally break them open and see the super delightful person inside, because you had to work for it a little bit more, and that's really what I wanted to do with Gabe as well, as be like, "Oh, yeah, here's this just slightly broody, quiet crew member. When the right person breaks him open, he's just a soft, romantic cuddle ball inside."

Molly: Yeah, I love that. He was a tech guy too. I was reading reviews and such of the book, and everyone was like, "Gabe, he's such a little dreamboat."

Amanda: Oh, my gosh, I love Gabe. He's a delight. [laughs]

Molly: Yeah. So, Elinor and Marianne are side characters [00:28:00] in this book, aside from being obviously Margaret's biggest inspirations in life.

Amanda: Right.

Molly: What elements of their stories and their characters did you feel were most essential to carry over to this story?

Amanda: Yeah. So, I'll start with Elinor, because for her, it really was just carrying over how in love she and Edward are even if Margaret absolutely doesn't really pick up on that right away. They are my favorite Jane Austen love story. Edward is my favorite Jane Austen hero. So, capturing that was just such a joy to write. I probably could have written half a dozen more, just Elinor and Edward being cute and in love scenes. They would have done nothing for the plot, but I would have had a great time doing them.

So, having her there, but also showing the ways that she was still a person and the parts where you see her break down in the original novel, I wanted to show that she still did that. She still gets frustrated with Marianne. She's still frustrated with the situation she finds herself in. But for her, it really was just making that love story for her and Edward, showing that they were happy, that [00:29:00] they were still killing it.

For Marianne, because Marianne is a bigger character than Elinor really. Initially, she's a lot more involved in the plot. For her, I really did just want to delve into that like, "Did she make the right decision, and what is she after she went through this big event?" Because you see so little of her post accident. She's sick for a lot of it. And then she and Brandon get together very quickly, and Austen only does so much dialogue anyway. A lot of it is pretty straightforward descriptions. You don't see as much of her.

I wanted to see what had happened to her and delve into that while still not losing who Marianne as a character and also not making her seem like a silly flop of a person herself, which I think would be an easy trap to fall into with Marianne, because she is still bright, she's bubbly, she's fun. She shows up with her big, floppy hat, and her Lilly Pulitzer and it's 5 o'clock somewhere attitude, but I still wanted her to be this very complex person who was going through a pretty major traumatic event [00:30:00] even now, like, breaking up with the

guy she'd been with for six years.

Molly: Totally. You see that a lot, I think, when Margaret is trying to set her up with people and her mood shifts so subtly, being in a good mood to being like, "Okay."

Amanda: Yeah.

Molly: And her smile falling a little bit, and Margaret not really understanding what that's about because she's assuming that Marianne is that butterfly person flitting from-

Amanda: Yeah, exactly.

Molly: relationship to relationship.

Amanda: Yeah. Margaret definitely sees her as a Manic Pixie Dream Girl. Margaret sees-

Molly: Absolutely.

Amanda: -both of her sisters as the archetypes of themselves. So, a lot of this is like Margaret having to unpack, like they're not just these older sisters who are specific molds. Like, they're complex people.

Molly: Yeah. And then also having to understand for herself that there's a Margaret Dashwood beyond just following in one of her sister-s-- [crosstalk]

Amanda: Exactly. Yeah.

Molly: Yeah. A beautiful arc for Margaret.

Amanda: Thanks. [laughs]

Molly: So, [00:31:00] you have really developed a niche in writing romcoms, following these side characters, as we've discussed a lot. In the Austen world, what does that feel like for you as an Austen fan?

Amanda: It's such an honor. Like I said earlier, to be able to have even the smallest dip into the canon, that people would look at my books alongside things like *Emma Approved*, *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* or the movies and be like just even an ounce of that. Or, the idea that I could be someone's introduction to Jane Austen. Since the books are written for a teen audience, and not every teen has read Jane Austen, it's a very reasonable thing to not have picked up at 15.

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: That's an amazing idea too that someone would be like, "Oh, I like this book. Let's read the source material." Even my mom had not read any Jane Austen. She read *Pride and Prejudice* after reading *Accomplished*. And I'm like, "Oh, that's such a nice thing." I get to even bring folks who are not teens into that world.

Molly: That's so beautiful. I love that. [00:32:00] I feel like when we've talked about things like *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* or *Emma Approved*, that's also been the general consensus is that anything that brings in more audience to reading Austen is good stuff.

Amanda: Absolutely.

Molly: Yeah. I love that about the Austen fandom too, is that they just want more people to know about this stuff. It's a very non-gatekeep community we found, as opposed to other fandoms that we're a part of like *Star Wars*, for example, is very gatekeeping, and Austen is

just like, "Oh, you're interested in the Regency Era?" Yay.

Amanda: Yeah. Please, please come in. I have found that all the Austen fans I've interacted with have been so lovely and generous and so willing to embrace a different take on their favorite characters, which is just lovely to see.

Molly: Yeah. Because there is so much to be mined there in her characters, and they do lend themselves so well to modern adaptation. I found this, because obviously, we read a lot of [00:33:00] Austen adaptations-

Amanda: Sure.

Molly: -is that like some people are very much purists, like, "I want the story as it is." But that's why you watch the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, for example. I'm like, "That exists."

Amanda: I don't think that's the reason you need adaptation, personally.

Molly: Exactly. You read adaptations to see what other interpretations of these characters there can be. And so, I've personally released myself from worrying about the plot.

Amanda: Yeah. I think I just serve different purposes too. For *Accomplished*, I was going through much more of like a beat by beat just because it was happening alongside the story. And for *Ghosted*, I stuck slightly closer to the plot. It's still pretty loose compared to *Accomplished*. I'm doing my best to not say any details about *Ghosted*, Molly. [chuckles]

Molly: You're doing so well. I have no idea what it's about.

Amanda: Fantastic. There could be ghosts, there might not be. It's impossible to say.

Molly: [chuckles]

Amanda: There's a place called Northanger Abbey there. There's no more details than that.

Molly: Amazing.

Amanda: But since this is its own thing, it is a secondary story on top of that [00:34:00] story, I got to have even more freedom, which was just a fun and different exercise. It was harder, because I did like in *Accomplished*, I will say the benefit of the beat by beat is that someone else has made the outline for you, and that person is Jane Austen,-

Molly: Totally.

Amanda: -and she's very good at plots. [laughs]

Molly: Yes.

Amanda: It's harder when you to make your own plot, but it's a good exercise and still just brings a different type of book into the world.

Molly: Yeah. You get to pull out different elements of the character that may or may not be there in the original.

Amanda: Yeah.

Molly: But that you get to see what would happen if this character was this way or what would happen if this character did this thing. I just think that's so fun.

Amanda: Yeah, I agree.

Molly: So, what was the hardest part of this story to write?

Amanda: I think, honestly, getting the slot was probably the most challenging part for this, because you are dealing with two to three different arcs, which is the main characters going through things that I've done in a book so far, just because you have Marianne and Margaret each on their own journey, even though Margaret is the main character by far. Marianne's still going through [00:35:00] her own character journey there, closer to the way that a main character would. So, you have to deal with that.

And then also dealing with that alongside a pre-constrained timeline that actually, I changed my mind. The hardest part was that I put a timeline on this ship and I said, "When you would be in certain places, and then I had to deal with that." And that sucks. [chuckles]

Molly: Yup.

Amanda: Like, it did make more sense for them to immediately go from this dinner into NASA. But they went to NASA yesterday, and that means that we have to go to the private island and the Key West still, and we have to deal with two sea days. Now there's been too many weeks since the last thing happened, but also, I need to have this major event happening near the end of the book, but I need enough time left in that for this character development to have happened, that was a nightmare. I'm never doing that again.

Molly: [chuckles]

Amanda: Never saying real times. I'm also never saying real places. My poor copy editor who had to re-explain the geography of Key West to me, a place I've been many times and looked-

Molly: Oh, my God.

Amanda: -at maps of to [00:36:00] do this. I still have such a poor sense of direction.

Molly: Me too.

Amanda: But she would be like, "This is not the direction that anything is. I'm so sorry. Just honestly, just shoot me. It's probably easier and have someone else write the book at this point. [Molly laughs] We can't." So, I'm going back to my made-up boarding school settings after this. [chuckles]

Molly: Yeah. That's so funny. But it is like so important that those things all were adhered to, because then in the experience of reading the book, you don't have to worry about like "But wait, how did they get from this place to this place?"

Amanda: Oh, it's so crucial. Yeah.

Molly: Yeah. And so, it made as hard as it was for you, and I'm sorry, it made this experience of reading the book very smooth.

Amanda: I'm very glad. Honestly, all the props in the world to my copy editor, who at one point just had to make me a timeline, because I was like, "I've lost it. I don't know, I think it [Molly chuckles] might be in week three, I think it might be in week four. I couldn't begin to tell you."

Molly: Oh, my God. That's so funny.

Amanda: Especially editing things and then moving scenes around, having to move scenes around while still keeping the timeline intact. [00:37:00] Drafting a timeline is fine. Editing a

timeline's a nightmare.

Molly: Oh, yeah, I bet.

Amanda: But all the dates work out. This is technically set in the summer of 2024.

Molly: Amazing.

Amanda: The Saturday's lineup, the Wednesday's lineup. It's great.

Molly: So impressive. So, on the flip side of that, what was the most fun part to write? Or, not even part, if there isn't a specific part, but what was the most fun element of the story to write?

Amanda: Oh, Edward.

Molly: I love Edward.

Amanda: I love Edward so much. Edward and Elinor. But also, I really loved doing my Edward and Margaret scenes, because they have such a beautiful big brother-little sister relationship-

Molly: They really-- crosstalk]

Amanda: -that I just adored writing. There were a few scenes that had to get cut from that just for time. But every time that they were together and you got to see who Edward is, and it was just like such a delight. So, I loved writing the emotional core of those, but also just the silly details of who Edward and also Elinor are as people. Like, there's a pickleball scene where they show up in intense matching pickleball outfits and they're like [00:38:00] "We play pickleball all the time. We're so good at it." I'm like, "Oh, of course, you are."

Molly: Yeah, that made perfect sense to me.

Amanda: You know that Elinor and Edward are down at the public courts beating every 75-year-old couple in the immediate 10-mile radius, just crushing it. So, that thing was just like a blast.

Molly: They were couple goals. I loved them so much. I couldn't stop thinking about Edward and Margaret sword fighting during all of their interactions. I was like, "Wait, that's so sweet."

Amanda: That's honestly what it comes down to. That's one of my favorite scenes in the movie. I was just like, "I need to capture that exact moment of him just doing his best and doing a pretty great job." Some of my favorite emotional scenes in the book are Margaret and Edward scenes where they're just together.

Molly: Yeah. So, you probably answered my next question, which was, who was your favorite *Sense and Sensibility* character?

Amanda: Oh, it's Edward. Sorry, was it not clear that it's Edward?

Molly: [laughs] Yeah. So, I'll skip to who was hardest to adapt?

Amanda: Probably, Marianne, for similar reasons of needing to like-- The core of her character is so important, [00:39:00] but also having to deconstruct what happens to her at the end of the novel, because we do break her and Brandon up. Obviously, that's saying that something is different than what happened in Austen. And so, that was the trickiest weave that thread of moving her through the story in a way that was still authentic to her and didn't--

I don't think that the character of Marianne in this book is very different from the character of Marianne in the original Austen. It's just six years later. She is reverting to who she was with Willoughby and stuff like that in this attempt to try to get her life back. But ultimately, just like working her through line through was probably the most challenging, but also very rewarding. I'm really pleased with how she turned out and where she ends up. No spoilers, but I think people will be happy with where she ends up.

Molly: Yes. I was very happy with where she ended up.

Amanda: Yeah. Her final scenes were also some of my favorite to write. They were just like, "There's some swoon worthy magic going on there."

Molly: Yeah. There was also some high drama- [crosstalk]

Amanda: Oh, yeah.

Molly: -in this book.

Amanda: There's a hurricane, Molly. [laughs] [00:40:00]

Molly: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, we're going there."

Amanda: We're just throwing a hurricane into things. Yeah.

Molly: Which is one of the reasons I'll never go on a cruise. One, because I get seasick. So, when I was reading the book, I've always had the thought maybe a cruise. Like, maybe I wouldn't get so seasick, because so many people do cruises and they're fine. But even just reading your descriptions of like, "Oh, she thought she had gotten used to the swaying of the ship, but then she wasn't." All of a sudden, I was like, "Oh, wait, no. I would be miserable the entire time."

Amanda: I do think if you get seasick, you should avoid a cruise. Because even though you don't necessarily feel it, if it hits a little bit of roughness, you will feel the movement of the ship, although the patches and the wristbands and the Dramamine mean do amazing things, but cruises are not for everyone, and that's okay. You probably won't hit a hurricane though. Or, if you do, you probably won't get lost.

Molly: Right. I think that if there was a hurricane, I would not wander into [laughs] the middle of the woods.

Amanda: Right. I had to fudge a little bit some of the safety procedures that would happen [00:41:00] with the situation that we find ourselves in with the hurricane. I'm trying to be vague because I don't want to spoil too much of it, like the back of the book tells you there's a hurricane, but we don't need to go into details. The situation that I describe happening could happen logistically, which was also a pain in the neck to write, because I had to figure out a way for that to happen in a way that wouldn't have every cruise cast member I know beating down my door and being like, "We would never. How? What? No."

Molly: [laughs]

Amanda: So, it could happen, but it's not going to.

Molly: Right.

Amanda: Just don't wander away and you'll be okay.

Molly: Yeah. That's good to know.

Amanda: Yeah. Stick with the group, you'll be fine.

Molly: I don't think I'll ever find myself in that position, [Amanda chuckles] because I sometimes get motion sickness just if I become aware of my body in space and I suddenly, I'm like, "Oh, my God, the world is turning and I am spinning at however many miles per hour." I sometimes get aware of that. I don't want to make any of our listeners suddenly aware. I know that's not actually possible.

Amanda: Yeah. Trigger warning for the sudden [Molly laughs] awareness [00:42:00] of your body in space? Wow.

Molly: [laughs] I know it's not actually possible to get seasick from the spinning of the earth, but sometimes I just do. Maybe this is a medical condition that I should get checked out like in my inner ears.

Amanda: Yeah. "Are your inner ears okay?" I'm like, "Worried, if they're not."

Molly: Anyways, so I probably won't ever find myself in a cruise but--

Amanda: Yeah. Oh, my God, never get on a boat.

Molly: Happy to read about it though.

Amanda: I'm not going to take you on the closest you should ever come to that journey within the pages, perhaps standing still in the grass, so you know you're safe.

Molly: Absolutely. Yeah. Well, that is the end of my questions for you. Thank you so much for allowing us to read this book before it is on sale to the public. We were so excited that you were doing a book that we were actually able to cover.

Amanda: I know. I was so glad to.

Molly: And thank you so much for coming on the podcast and talking with me. And Becca, obviously, sends her regards.

Amanda: Yes. Love to Becca. But on the bright side, we could bash Brandon and Marianne's relationship more than we perhaps could if she was here. So, there's that.

Molly: Yes. Again, apologies to Becca and [00:43:00] all of the Brandon, Marianne purists out there. But there are things to be interrogated about it.

Amanda: Yes. If you're like, "I'm afraid of this book because I don't want to see Brandon and Marianne broke up," don't worry.

Molly: Don't worry too much.

Amanda: You'll be okay. Don't panic.

[laughter]

Molly: Yeah. Ultimately, they do love each other so much, just like their relationship comes together in the original source material as a very comforting thing which is okay.

Amanda: It's okay to have things that are-- I do stand by the original point of the book, which is that you don't need to have a big, dramatic romance to have a romance.

Molly: Absolutely.

Amanda: But people just get confused. Your 20s are hard. I think we can all agree. That was an interesting-- I realize I'm jumping and we're like in the outro, but that was a fun thing as an adult to get to play with Marianne and Elinor's like being adult because I got to cheat and put a little bit of adult romcom in my YA.

Molly: Yes. Again, we are in the outro, but who cares. Elinor and Edward, [00:44:00] even though they do have this big romance, and that is one of the points of the book is that Margaret doesn't necessarily see everything that's going on with them. They are couple goals in that they are just happy and calm, and they have their routines. I love that.

Amanda: Yes. And they have matching Hawaiian shirts

Molly: Of course.

Amanda: That's the goal right there.

Molly: Yeah. That's all I need in a relationship.

Amanda: Honestly, I could have nothing else than just the matching Hawaiian shirts, and I'd be happy.

Molly: Yeah. It's amazing.

Amanda: Anyway, now we can outro the podcast.

Molly: Yes. [laughs] So, thank you again so much for coming on. Listeners, thank you for listening. For next episode, we will be back into *Persuasion* with Chapters 6 and 7.

Amanda: I love that I got to come on, but I also need you to get back to *Persuasion*, so we can keep hearing your thoughts on that. So, I'm glad we're just taking a one-week break.

Molly: Yeah, we have this one. We're going to be taking another little break in a couple of weeks for another Austen adaptation, which we will reveal shortly. [00:45:00] But before we end, Amanda, where can the listeners find you?

Amanda: Yes. So, you can find me physically in the world for the next couple weeks, which is very exciting. Normally, I'm just ephemeral. But at the moment, you could find me physically. So, if you listen to this very early on the day of my book release, I'll be doing my launch party at One More Page Books in Arlington, Virginia at 07:00 PM. Then I'm heading to Sun Rose Books in Ocean City, New Jersey on Saturday, July 20th. I'll be there from 11:00 to 01:00 doing a fun little outdoor signing. I will be purchasing saltwater taffy to give out in bulk. So, I want to see-

Molly: Oh, my God. Amazing.

Amanda: -if you care about books, but you like saltwater taffy and you're somehow still listening to this podcast, that's a good stop. And then that Monday, I will be back in Pittsburgh, where I live, doing my Pittsburgh launch at White Whale Books at 07:00 PM. That's Monday, July 22nd. I have a couple of Virginia stops in August that are on my social media, so you can find me there @Quainiac, Q-U-A-I-N-I-A-C. That's my handle on all social media. I'm [00:46:00] trying to do TikTok. Pity, follow me. I really appreciate it.

Molly: Honestly, same. I've done two reels or what are they called videos, TikTok's, ever.

Amanda: I don't even know. TikTok's, I guess?

Molly: Yeah. I really want to get into it because I know that's where the growth is.

Amanda: I know. I don't know why we can't just write long letters to each other. Not that I'm great at that either, but I understand it.

Molly: Yeah, exactly. Well, until next time, listeners, stay proper.

Amanda: Toodle-oo. It anchors away.

Molly: Nice.

[music]

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