



The Department of Lost & Found

By Allison Winn Scotch
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Introduction

Natalie Miller has a bright future ahead of her and is using her determination and smarts to get her—and the senator she works for—where they need to be, regardless of whom they step on along the way. Passing lukewarm bills to please the constituents and leaking stories to the press are mere checkmarks on Natalie's to-do list. And that's the way she likes it.

Until, on the very same day, her doctor gives her the shocking news that she has breast cancer *and* her boyfriend dumps her, leaving Natalie to question everything she knows.

All her energy must now go into saving herself from a merciless disease (with quick breaks to catch *The Price is Right*), and she realizes it's time to take a hard look at her choices. She begins by tracking

down the five loves-of-her-life to assess what went wrong. Along the way, she questions her relationships with her friends, her parents, her colleagues, the one who got away, and, most importantly, with herself: Why is she so busy moving through life that she never stops to embrace it?

As Natalie sleuths out the answers to these questions, her journey of self-discovery takes her down new paths and to unexplored places. And she learns that sometimes when life is at its most unexpected, it's not what you lose that makes you who you are . . . it's what you find.

Questions for Discussion

1. Before her cancer, do you think Natalie had an inkling that the senator she worked for didn't really have pure intentions to help others? That is, do you think Natalie had somehow tricked herself into believing all her hard work was for a good cause?
2. Do you think a major, wrenching event like getting, being treated for, and surviving cancer always lead to other life changes? Can you envision a scenario in which Natalie goes back to her old job and old ways? 3) Do you know anyone who has faced a life-threatening situation? How did that person cope? Is there an evolution of acceptance? How did Natalie cope? Did you think that her behavior seemed realistic?
4. What should the role of family and friends be in such a situation? In your experience, realistically, how do friends react?
5. There are several political hot potatoes raised in the book. Do you think that politicians generally try to follow the view that will win them the election or do most stick to their principles?
6. Prior to being diagnosed with cancer, Natalie is more of a bystander than a player in her own life. By the end of her treatments, she realizes that she has to make her own good fortune. Do you believe that life really is what you make of it or that we're already fated to lead the lives we do?
7. Do you know anyone who was defined by his/her work who decided there was more to life and quit? Do you know anyone who was demoted or lost a job? How did the change affect the person?
8. Natalie's relationship with her mother was complex, at best. Why are mother-daughter relationships so often difficult to navigate?
9. What specific inner changes do you think Natalie experienced as a result of her cancer diagnosis?
10. Natalie tracked down many of her past loves during her treatment. These days, Google allows us all to keep an eye on our exes, if we so choose. Have you ever gotten back in touch with a lost love and what were the results or consequences? Have any exes gotten back in touch with you?
11. Sally watches as her best friend, Natalie, moves through life making some poor choices, but she still supports her as a friend until she reaches a breaking point. Have you ever watched a friend make what you believed were poor choices, and if so, how did you deal with them? Did they affect or ultimately strengthen your friendship?
12. Project into the future. Does Natalie work as a legal consultant or with Susanna Taylor? Do she and Zach live happily ever after?

About the Author

After losing a close friend to breast cancer, Allison Winn Scotch cathartically set out to write a story with a happier ending. While Winn Scotch is the first to point out that Natalie and her thirty-one-year-old friend shared very few similarities, her friend's resilient spirit and courage in the face of an illness that took her life are felt throughout the novel. Winn Scotch has contributed to *Family Circle*, *Glamour*, *InStyle Weddings*, *Men's Health*, *Parents*, *Prevention*, *Redbook*, *Self*, *Shape*, *Woman's Day*, *Women's Health*, and others. She lives in New

York with her husband, her son and daughter, and their dog.