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You're listening to the My Simplified Life Podcast and this is episode number 206.

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Welcome to the My Simplified Life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life, and start taking action today. I'm your host, Michelle Glogevac, and I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you while taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life.

00:41

Hello my friends, welcome to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogevac. Today my guest is an author and someone who has written the most beautiful novel that I have said in my reviews is a true love story meets, meet cute meets Hallmark movie minus any of the cheesiness. It is a book filled with grief and loss and

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beautiful love and is the story of how one woman loses her husband and finds love again after Grieving him and while grieving him and it is the most beautiful book. I have read in a long time I love a book that makes me cry at the end. This one had me crying from the middle to the end Of course, I have yet to even say her name. It is Emma

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and her book is The Last Love Note. It is out today here in the United States. She is Australian and the book was out January of this year in Australia and is out today with Zibi Books. Emma is so wonderful and I can't wait for you to hear from her and to pick up your copy of The Last Love Note. Hi Emma. Hello, how are you?

02:02

I'm so good. I'm so happy and excited to talk to you. You've made me cry, but now it's making me smile to talk to you. So can you introduce yourself to everyone, please? Yes, thanks Michelle. It's lovely to be here. My name's Emma Gray and I'm Australian, if you can't tell from my accent. I'm the author of a novel called *The Last Love Note*, which is coming out with Zippy Books in the US.

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and I'm currently sitting in a hotel room in New York, which is a dream come true, as part of my book tour here in the States. This is a book that means a lot to me personally, because I lost my husband, Jeff, in 2016, and I knew that I would need to write about this loss to make sense of it. And I sort of thought about a few different ways that that might happen over the couple of years after he died.

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you know, could I write a memoir or would I write a self-help book? And in the end, it turned into a bit of a romantic comedy novel. So it's, it's a novel that encapsulates all of the pain of grief, but with a lot of light and shade and humor and, uh, and with a second chance love story attached. It's absolutely beautiful. I compared it to in my, I did a review on Goodreads and then there's a video review coming out with Zibi that

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I say it's a true love story, meet cute meets Hallmark movie, but without any of the cheesiness. Oh, yes, yes. And I'm a big fan of Hallmark movie, so that's a great comparison. Me too, even though they're all the same. I keep telling my daughter, I'm like, someone's going to try to kiss, someone's going to open the door, they won't kiss, but in the end, they will live happily ever after. But it's beautiful. The book is...

03:54

I cried from the middle and let's talk a little bit about what it's about. Cam is the husband and he has dementia very early in life and he writes all of these Post-It notes to remind himself of things around the house, hence the last love note. Share how you came up with this before I start crying while interviewing you.

04:22

How did you come up with this whole plot line and all the hunky men that are in it? Well, I know you said it's such a dream. They've pretty much ruined all real life men for me now. But it's interesting because I'm one of those writers that doesn't plot the novel. And so I just had a concept of a woman who would be around 40. She's lost her husband. And there will be a story about...

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processing his loss while falling in love again. And that's all I knew when I started. And I actually don't like to know much more than that when I start writing a book, because it's the exploration of that that keeps me going and keeps me wanting to sit down at the computer every day and get this story out. It's almost as if I'm watching a movie.

05:15

and just trying to desperately keep up with the action and the dialogue and get everything down on paper that's in fault that's folding in front and folding in front of me. And it's a really fun process to write but also quite hair raising because you don't know at first whether this story will work out and how it will all fall into place. And in fact there was one very hair raising moment when I had to get the structural edit back to my editor in because it came out in Australia with Penguin Random House earlier in the year.

05:44

and had to get the structural edit back. And we all came down with COVID. And my dog was in the 24-hour veterinary hospital with meningitis. And it was just one of those awful dark times in our lives. And I remember thinking, I think I could just restructure this book. And so I picked up enormous passages and moved them around in the Word doc and posted that on Facebook. And my agent sort of had a panic attack.

06:14

Um, and I, I'm sure I was delirious at the time with COVID and I thought I'll just, I'll get up in the morning and reread and make sure it makes sense. And then of course I woke up the next morning and was so unwell, I couldn't do that. So I just sent it off. Anyway, the publisher loved it.

So it, it's, it was, I wish I could say there was a more sort of, uh, routine driven and more professional sounding approach rather than this chaotic, style, but.

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I guess that's what creativity is, isn't it? It makes me happy to hear actually, because as I'm writing what might be the next book, what will be, I've got two different docs going. They're completely different. And depending on my mood or like I'll be in the shower and I think of something and I come out in my row and my hair is in a towel and I'm typing, typing, typing. And then all of a sudden like, oh, but this has to come in and I have no idea where this is going. And I'm thinking I need like

07:12

multiple folders with multiple docs for each thing. It's a mess. Version control is terrifying at times. My agent is really great on this. She says to me, when whenever we're starting a first draft of a new book, she said, just race to the end and then worry about fixing it up later. And I think that's true. We have to embrace the mess of the writing process because for all of us,

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And particularly if you've, I'm finding this writing another book that the last love note has been through 11 drafts in Australia before it even got to the US. So that included edit editorial drafts, proofreading, all of that sort of thing. And then some more editing here with, with the US editors. And, and so then when you turn around and sit down to write a new book, you think, can I even write anymore? You know, what am I writing? What are these words? Because.

08:08

you're comparing it in your mind to something so polished. And we do this whether we've written books before or not because we're comparing them to all the books we've read and the ones that we've picked up off the shelf in a shop, which of course I've fully edited and have had so much work done to them. And I think we need to be really gentle with ourselves in this first draft phase because we need to embrace that mess and just race through to the end. And then we've got something to work with.

08:38

So you bring me to two questions because I want to know what your background is, where we've come to today that Emma's in New York with this book tour. And how did that happen that you have a book that was published by Penguin Random House in Australia and then you're here in America under the Zibi publishing house? Well, I can only say that it seems like some sort of magical miracle really. I ask myself this question every day. How did I?

09:06

possibly get here. It seems like a dream. It is a dream come true. My agent, Anjanette Fennell of Story of Life Literary in Australia, sent the novel to the editor at Penguin and she loved it and the book came out there. And then Anjanette had been following Zibi and following just everything she does. And you know, Zibi does so many different things. I don't know how she does it.

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And so she's listening to her podcast, Mums Don't Have Time to Read Books. And she said to me, you know, she said, I just feel like this woman would be so aligned with this story and it would be great to get you on her podcast in the US. And so she sent Zibi a message in Instagram DMs saying, I've got this novel, would you like to have it read? And perhaps, you know, with a view towards interviewing me on the podcast.

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So Zibi, who is just so gracious and so excited about everyone's books, said yes. And we sent that through on the Friday. And by the Saturday, I think Zibi took it with her on a flight. She started reading it. And then as soon as the plane landed, she sent Anshan a message and said, have you sold the rights to this book in the US? Which was not what we'd be, we just wanted to get me on the podcast at this point. You know? Yeah. So then by the Wednesday.

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I was having a Zoom meeting with Zibi and about eight different people from her team and I was sitting at home in Canberra, Australia with my little dog in my little kitchen and having this unbelievable meeting with Zibi in the US in New York and we'd had this recall of some spinach in Australian supermarkets and they said it was causing hallucinations and I remember thinking, have I had one of those? Is this really happening?

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And by 7.30 that morning, she'd already emailed Penguin Random House with an offer on the book. So it was so different from previous experiences I've had as a writer. So this is my first adult novel, but I've got a couple of teenage novels out as well in Australia and a couple of other books that are nonfiction. And

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you know, of course I'm much more used to the whole roundabout of submitting books and getting rejected and, you know, having to hold on to that persistence and keep the faith that it's going to work and be picked up by your friends and family every time you fall in a heap when another publisher says no. So I've been through all of that to sort of to turn around and have something like this happen that feels just like some sort of fairy tale was just...

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something from another world. And and Zibi's whole approach is just so different to, I just feel, I mean sitting here beside a beautiful bunch of flowers in this hotel in New York thinking, I feel like I'm pretending to be an author. It's like a movie about this, you know. I just am so grateful for everything. And it's also then the book's been picked up as book of the month, with the book of the month. Yes. And

12:19

So I've been spending my days responding to the most amazing messages from readers. Some of whom are reaching out and saying that they've been through loss themselves and they're halfway through and they just needed to reach out and talk to me about it. And so that's just such a privilege to have those kinds of conversations as well. When did the book come out in Australia compared to this is going to air that when it is launching in America. So between next week today and.

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Australia, what was the time difference between the two? It came out in January in Australia. So it's almost a year. So this is like the biggest book launch tour anybody could be on, right? Yeah, it has felt like I've been switched on with promotion now for nearly a year, which is not, I think in

future, in fact, I do have a book coming out with both the same publishers next year and it's going to be much closer.

13:13

event which will make it a lot easier because I was talking to a friend who said really with writing you have seasons you've got the season of writing then the season of editing and then the season of publication and promotion and I feel as I've had all those seasons at once all year so that's been exhausting but but you know exhausting in a wonderful way. Ah I love it I'm so excited for you.

13:38

Thank you. Tell us, what was your background? What have you been doing? What's your career been like that has brought you to today? Because today is really freaking exciting. So what would that look like? I spent 10 years, my early part of my career was 10 years in the Australian Public Service, so doing administrative jobs, where I would sit there all day thinking I can't wait to get home and write my novel. And so I'd been...

14:05

I'd identified as a writer ever since I was 14 and fell in love with Anne of Green Gables and fell in love with the fact that she was a writer and recognised in myself that same drive to write and be published. And I never stopped writing from that moment. And so I had a book published in 2005 which was a memoir of working parenthood based on the chaos in our family. And then I hadn't written a novel until...

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My daughter was 14 and she hated reading, but she loved Harry Styles. So I thought I would just write a little story. He was on repeat. While I wrote my book, he was on repeat. Oh, really? He's been on repeat in the family for years. I feel like I'm his future mother-in-law because both my daughters are going to marry him apparently. I don't know how that's going to work. He might enjoy that. He is a little eccentric, so that could be okay for him. Yeah, that's right.

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So I wrote this novel called Unrequited about a boy band and a girl who's a singer and songwriter and hates this boy band and the course inevitably ends up with one of them. Anyway, that became this bigger than Ben Hur project which turned into a two-book deal with Harper Collins in Australia and then my high school friend who was a composer and has won some big Australian music industry

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back home, sent me a message and said, I love this book, I have to write a musical about it. The two of us co-wrote a musical, which we put on in my daughter's high school. Oh my goodness. It was the most joyous and this was all happening around the time that Jeff died. He knew about this project and he actually wasn't a fan of musicals, but was a big fan of me following my dream. He was so supportive and

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We put the show on in 2017, which was the year after he died. And you might think that's counterintuitive to stage a, you know, glitzy high school show with disco ball and glitter cannons and, you know, all of that. But it was actually the thing that saved me. It was, it was just a beautiful experience. And then I went on to write this book about grief and loss and love. And it's really a very hopeful story and, you know, hopelessly romantic as well.

16:29

I think it is. I, uh, yes. I'm like, take me to the beach. Uh, I want all the things I want the walks and yes. And to have Hugh say, you know, you need the beach house. You need to go and yes. Yes. Me too. Hugh, me too. I absolutely loved it. And so now you're writing another book for, or is it done already?

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Yeah, it's in editing at the moment. So still working on the editorial process. But it's a psychological thriller and romance all in one. I love it. I feel like you're, it's like all over the board in like such a good way. Like it's so much fun that you're not choosing just one, you know, it's not, I read all romance novels and this is it.

17:17



Yeah. You're like, no, there was teen stuff. And then I went on and helped write a musical. And now there's a love and grief. And I've done nonfiction. I love it. It gives me hope that you don't have to stick to one genre. Well, I think that's right. And I mean, I'm sure there would be people that would advise against that. But I think you have to go. You're having success. Well, you have to go where your heart takes you. And my agent often says that to me. She said, write the project that you're called to write at the moment.

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And she has never once said, we need more of this, or looked at the market and said, right, this is the stuff that's selling, you know, we need to write something along those lines. It's always driven by where my imagination wants to take me and where my heart is. So I don't think you can go wrong in writing from that place. I think that's the key. And you never want it to feel like a job, although parts of it always will. I mean, there's an awful lot of the editing process. It's like a job that is a job.

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But, you know, and writing's very hard. It's very hard to write a novel. It's, you do tear your hair out during the process, but it's just so rewarding. And it's something that I can't imagine not doing. People talk of, I actually, I turned 50 recently and one of my friends posted on Facebook that their husband had just retired. And it's the first person in my circle that's announced their retirement. And there was a part of me that just thought,

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retired, I feel like my career is just starting, you know, and it, and, and I also can't imagine never writing or saying, right, that's it, I'm finished writing now. You know, it's not that sort of thing that you can, I think you just, it's, it's within you and part of you and that's who you are. I feel like being an author is a very different career than working in nine-to-five or a corporate job or

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You know, it does feel like you could retire from a regular job, but then you're like, OK, now what? Well, I can see myself writing. It's like journaling also. You know, these are things that if they're bringing your pleasure and joy and you can do it and then you can make money too while doing it, who would retire? That's it. And in fact, I've got other work that I do as well. And of course, I'm a single mom since my husband died. And so with three kids and so.

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you know, most writers will tell you that you do need to be doing other things as well. So I bet all of my other work now tends to involve writing. So I do copywriting for businesses and governments and that sort of thing. But I've also been an accountability coach. My colleague, Audrey Thomas, and I, we wrote a book called *I Don't Have Time*, which is about productivity. But she and I have been offering accountability coaching for for about 10 years in Australia.

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which is my career that I had after I left the public service. And so that's also brought me a lot of joy. And I think I'm just one of those people that loves variety in life. And it can be a bit scary at times because you're jumping from one thing to another and don't know where the next paycheck's coming from. But I think it keeps life interesting. And what do your kids think about all of this? All three of them.

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Well, two of them are with me on this book tour and the other one is being entirely supportive from home and they are just so proud. Honestly, I had them with me last night. I did an event at the New York Public Library, which was this incredible moment of coming full circle for me because I actually wrote the opening lines of the book in the New York Public Library in 2017. Oh, I got chills. Jeff was a military historian and he was sort of internationally

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well regarded and he was, there was a conference over here that they flew me over for and I'd been at this conference in Jacksonville that was in his memory and spoke at that about him and it was the first time I'd been away from my kids. It was eight months after he died and I really hit rock bottom. I was going back to my hotel room at night and just crying and you know it was like being in a second funeral.

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really because everyone was talking about him and it was beautiful but it was just incredibly difficult. And then I came to New York for the first time just for a couple of days and fell in love with this place and I thought for the first time since he'd died I felt a glimmer of hope for my own

future. And I think it was because New York has experienced so much grief and yet it's just so vibrant and exciting and it continues on and I sort

22:05

message on board for my own life and I thought I need to go to the library and start writing something even if it's just a symbolic start of this novel that I'm going to write. And so the day I flew back to Australia I went there and I took a photo of my computer with the opening lines of this book and there was just something about that day as I walked down the steps of the library I felt like I'm going to be back here one day and I don't know how or why or

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But I just had this sense that I would be. And then two nights ago, I walked out of the hotel and stood in front of the New York Public Library in the dark. And I got so emotional about the full circle, you know, event of coming back here with my New York publisher, speaking at the New York Public Library. And I just felt for that earlier version of me that it walked down those stairs, you know, six years ago, absolutely devastated.

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struggling, emotionally overwhelmed. And I knew what, you know, now I look back in retrospect, I knew what she was going into and all the difficulties to come in the next few years, but also just this real sense of pride to have pulled together this book and to have now being able to bring back my children and have this beautiful tour in this gorgeous country. It meant the world to me. This is the best story ever.

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This is incredible. I absolutely love hearing how it all has come together and just so beautifully. It's like Kismet. This is a Hallmark movie. It is. It is. You are a Hallmark movie. Maybe I just need to go and stand on the steps of the library and wait for my hue to appear out of the streets. That would be the only thing left. I bet we can do that in New York.

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We can absolutely do that. If you don't do it this trip, we'll do it next month. Okay. In January. Well, we will just stand there. We can get, there's dude with a sign. I don't know if you follow him on Instagram, but he's the one with the cardboard sign. Oh yeah. Maybe we can get him to do a sign. Right. Emma's looking for her hue right here. Nothing desperate about that, but no, that's fine. No, no, no. Other people will be involved. It won't just be you. Yeah. It'll be common. We'll make it happen. One of those big stories that'll go viral.

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you know, somebody will step out of the shadows somewhere. Yeah. And then you will have another book to write about. That's right. I love it. Since it is a book of the month club pick, I have a friend who, and we met actually because of Zibi's Bookshop, her sister lives here in town. She lives down in Los Angeles area. And I was like, I'm going down to the opening of the bookshop. And the one sister's like, my sister lives there. You should meet up. So strangers who have become friends.

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And she posted the other day that she was reading your book and absolutely loving it on her drive up here. And I went, Oh, I have Emma coming on my show. Her name's Helia. She, she tagged you and she's like, Oh my God, you're going to have Emma. I'm like, Oh yes. We've been chatting. She's adorable. And she'll listen to, so she'll be excited that her name has been mentioned once again. Yeah. I mean, I love it.

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Well, that sort of thing from readers is, I mean, because when you write a book, you hope that people might engage with it and like it. You're terrified about the response. You know, you're worried about criticism and reviews and all of that stuff. If you even get it published in the first place, which is also a fear, you know, there's so much, so many of these steps as a writer that are quite terrifying. And so to have readers like her respond in that way just means so much. It's just.

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So comforting, reassuring, encouraging, and exciting. And I love that I feel like, I don't know if it's because I'm talking to more authors, but I feel like we can connect more with authors. Probably because of social media, but we can reach out and get to know you as an actual

person. And I've had a couple of people do that and say, they've never done it before. That's the first time they've reached out to an author and they didn't know if they should.

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And I just think, gosh, authors are desperate for people to reach out and say, Hi, I love your book. You know, it's just always so lovely. And I think with this one in particular, the way that people are reaching out has been really sort of extra special because a lot of them are sharing about their own life stories and their losses. And that is one of the reasons I wrote this. I just think we don't talk about grief enough and we don't do it well.

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and certainly not in Australia. And it's one of those taboo topics almost. And so to be able to write a piece of creative fiction that can get a conversation going that might be comforting and helpful, is a big part of the dream come true aspect of this for me. It's absolutely beautiful. And you put into perfect words what the book is really about because there is grief and loss and there's sadness, but at the same time,

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you feel so warm inside and happy and it's just adorable. And for some reason, the moment that just popped in my head is when she's in the dressing room and she's like half dressed and she's on FaceTime and then he's walking in. I'm like, oh my gosh, you're a hot mess, sister. Yeah. Well, that part of the story is all very much based on my own personality because, you know, I have a lot. In fact, that entire grenade scene at the start of the book is based on reality. So we had.

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We had all of that minus the hot neighbor and the, although my new neighbors like to think that's about them. But all of that came, was straight out of real life. I didn't have to look far to find the hot mess aspects of her character. I love that. Everybody has to go read that because the opening, yeah, it's just, it's beautiful. You've got your wine and now all of a sudden the bomb squad's coming and.

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It sounds like something that could happen in my house too. My husband's a World War II lover. We have all kinds of things and a World War II Jeep is in the garage and I wouldn't know half of what we have. So a grenade could be here. I don't know. Well, that's true. It's not a stretch of the imagination. I actually was interviewed on the radio in Australia the other day about that because another story happened in our city where somebody just walked into a police station to hand in a grenade that they'd found at home.

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and it caused a massive security incident. And so the local radio station said, would you like to come on air and talk about your book? And so, come on here talking about this. And then there was nothing but people calling in saying, I've got a grenade. So, you know, it's quite a common thing. You know, a lot of people collect memorabilia and it's quite terrifying what people have in their houses. Oh my goodness, that's hilarious. What a great way to promote the book. Yes.

29:13

Oh my goodness. You are absolute pleasure. I am so excited that we got to talk and I got to read your book and that we're going to see each other in person in less than two months. Congratulations on all of this. You deserve it so much. I can't wait for the next book. Where can everyone find you, follow you and buy the book? If they follow zibbimedia.com, there's a whole lot of stuff on there about my book and also all the other books that Zibi's publishing.

29:41

And then on Facebook and Instagram, I met Emma Gray, author, Gray with an EY. Thank you so much. I hope you have a wonderful rest of your stay and I can't wait to share with the world your beautiful book. Oh, thank you, Michelle. I so appreciate your enthusiasm. What an absolute delight Emma is. I cannot wait to meet her in January.

30:06

She's just that story of being in the New York Public Library and coming full circle was absolutely beautiful and it truly reflects the kind of writing that she does. She is incredible. I can't recommend *The Last Love Note* enough. It was such a good read. So please do yourself a favor and go grab this and grab a box of tissues while you're at it. If you can join us, Zibby Books is having an author.

30:35

event in January in New York. So I will be there and 40 other plus authors will be there. I cannot wait to meet all of these people in person. It's going to be amazing. And as a reminder, I'm plugging away how to get on podcast is available for pre-order now. Don't forget, the pub date has been moved to January 11th. And right now if you follow me on TikTok or threads, I am doing 50 tips for the 50 days counting down

31:05

to the launch of How to Get on podcasts. You can purchase it anywhere you love to buy your books, Barnes and Noble, bookshop.org, Amazon, Books a Million, all of the wonderful places. I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving and I'll talk to you soon.