

Transcript

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You're listening to the My Simplified Life podcast and this is episode number 232. 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. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac, author of How to Get on Podcasts, the podcast matchmaker.

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and CEO and founder of the MLG Collective. I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you while taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life. Hey friends, welcome back to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. If you haven't, as a reminder, and I gotta keep plugging it.

00:50

Please leave a review for how to get on podcasts on Amazon. And while you're leaving reviews, go hit five stars for the podcast, My Simplified Life. I greatly appreciate it. And today I am bringing you a fun guest whose name alone makes you wonder, is that really your name? You'll find out because I do ask her the question. My guest is Swan Huntley, whose novel, I Want You More is out today.

01:19

It is such a fun and interesting read and it's going to make you look at cooking shows very differently, but it's a little twisted, a little fun, and you'll probably wanna also end up going to the Hamptons to spend a little summer there. Swan is someone who has always had writing on her mind in her life, and she shares with how she's gone back to her journals and what those have looked like.

01:50

along with what her plans are for what's coming up. So I know you're going to enjoy listening to our conversation and meeting the one and only Swann Huntley. Hi. I am so excited to talk to you, just so I can say Swann. Very nice of you, thank you. Can you introduce yourself to everyone, please? My name is Swann Huntley and my new book is called, I Want You More.

02:20

I love it. That was the simplest introduction I think I've ever had. It's beautiful. Can we say I'm going to start off with the question that I have because it's the only question that I've come up with that I'm like, I'm very curious. Swan Huntley. Is this your real name? Did your parents really name you this? This is my real name. Yes. And my full real name is Swan Fairchild Huntley. And before my first book, I asked my brother like, do you think I should put

02:48

Swan Fairchild, aren't they on there? He's like, too much, too much. It's like, yeah, but Fairchild is not a family name. It's just something that they liked. And the reason I named Swan is unclear to me. My dad is dead now, so we can't put them in the same room and have them agree on one story. But my dad's story was that my mom wanted to name me after a bird, but not something conventional, like not Robin. And...

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she gave my dad the options of either Ibis or Swan and he chose Swan. That's his version. My mom's version, she's like, that never happened. I don't know what you're talking about. This is a family name. There's like someone who came over from England a thousand years ago named Emma Swan. It's in this genealogy report. I'll get it for you. But I'm like, okay, get it for me. Like you've been saying that you're gonna get it for me for years. I've never seen it. And then there's another small detail, which is,

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My mom went to college in Norman, Oklahoma, and we were driving across the states, and we stopped there, and she was like, I used to work in a clothing store here with somebody named Katie Swan, and there was another Katie, so everybody called her Swan. So that seems like potentially to have influenced her too. I don't know. So somewhere in there is, I think, the truth.

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to be an author, a writer, because you get to put this name on the book cover. And it seems like it would be like the perfect pen name, but this is truly your name. It's truly my name. Yeah, I'm happy with it now. When I was a kid, people called me like Flamingo and Pigeon and stuff. And also Adam Sandler single-handedly ruined my high school years, with that line in the movie, Billy Madison, stop looking at me, Schwann. That was like...

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every day in high school for me. So if I ever meet him, I'm going to let him know he really ruins some years. Yeah, that's not cool. My son is Declan and they call him Ducklin. Declan's such a good name. I like it. Yeah. His kindergarten year when they started that Ducklin thing, he was like, this is not cool. He was crying and now he's like, whatever, I embrace it. Call me Ducklin. Call me Declan. It's no big deal. Yeah, I'm too cool for that.

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But I just, I love your name. So I was so curious about that. And let's be honest, you are like a beautiful swan. Oh my God. You are. I told you, I stalk you on Instagram. I'm watching you and I'm like, you are. You're just this elegant, tall being. That's like a swan. That is so great. God, well, great to hear that as I'm crawling out of my Mexican green juice sickness. Thank you.

05:35

Well, I didn't see you on the plane, so it's okay. There we go. We have no footage of that, thankfully. Okay, let's talk about the book. I want you more. It was amazing. And I told you, we won't spoil it, but the end, you guys, you have to read it and get to the end because the ending, I was like, oh, yes, I love the ending. And I felt like throughout reading it, as slightly far-fetched, I think, as some fiction can be.

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It felt like it could really happen. Yeah. Okay, good. I'm glad you think that. With the whole premise of the book. And I love that it started out here on the West coast in the Bay area. Thank you for that. Yeah. I set it in Marin County because I lived in San Anselmo for a couple of years, which was like really nice. Then I was like, what am I doing here? This is like, I'm too young and single to be living in Marin County. But, uh, yeah, it was beautiful. So I set it there and I.

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I think I placed the character next to a dog grooming salon, which is I really live next to a dog grooming salon called the House of Dog. And so like out my window, I heard many conversations about how breeding is the worst thing that's ever happened. But okay, I, and then I decided to set the book in East Hampton because I spent some time there. My friend has a place there. I spent some time there a couple of years ago and I was like, this would be a really fun place to set up.

07:02

And now I'm going there to do some press stuff and I'm like, oh, you should always set the book somewhere you want to go. Oh, that's genius. If you take nothing else from this podcast, please take that. So the original idea came from, I was writing the memoirs of a real housewife of New York City. And this was during the pandemic and she said,

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you're coming to my manor October 21. That's a direct quote. I remember the date and I was like, we're in a pandemic, like I'm for sure not coming to your manor ever. But I thought that's a really good setup. Like what if I had been trapped in a house with this person or what if I had been trapped in a house with somebody? What would that be like? And so that was like the original seed and then I sort of just started cobbling things together.

08:01

I think that's what I do. People are like, how do you get your ideas or what's your inspiration? And it's really a non-magical process. It's like, okay, I have like this person said this one thing that I have in Rain County, then I have my own experience. My sister's name is Zara. My other siblings names are Flannery, Zara and Fletcher. And when I told Zara that I'm naming my main character Zara, she's like, ugh, you're gonna make it a more popular name. I'm like, dude, it's a store. Like everybody knows it.

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You heard the Royals all shop, right? Yeah, exactly. Oh my God, I watched this thing about fast fashion yesterday though, and I'm never shopping at Zara again. Dark, Brandy Hellville. It's a

documentary on HBO Max, so I know. But yeah, that was pretty much it. And I think it, you know, I love the movie Single-Way Female.

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I love the movie War of the Roses, which is all about being trapped in a house. So it has elements of both of those things and some other stuff as well.

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writing the memoir as the ghostwriter of a real housewife? Cause I'm a huge real housewife junkie. Oh. Did that come to fruition and is it out? Oh yeah. Dorinda Medley, make it nice. When you said manner, I'm like, it has to be her. Like nobody else has a manner. Like they don't, she's the only one. Right. On a blue stone manner. That's true. I don't know how many other people refer to their manner.

09:37

Yeah. And all of her. Oh, I, I watch a lot. So you could have been there for Christmas time when she takes out all the weird decorations. Oh God. Yeah. I haven't really watched it, but you wrote the memoir for her. I love it. I did. Yes. That is okay. So let's talk about you and your career too, because how is it that you, I'm fascinated by a ghostwriter, like how do you take on this persona and then write the way they sound?

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And that's very much included in the book too. That's basically what the book is about is the ghost writer who's coming and writing this memoir of this cooking show personality. Right, you sort of have to become the other person for a little while and that plays perfectly into some of the other themes of this book. I think, I really feel like eavesdropping is my favorite hobby and maybe my profession. Like I think that being a writer is like. Yeah.

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My favorite place to eavesdrop is the beach because you can be really close to people and you can sneak your one eye out of your towel and look at people and you can get a lot of info. And a lot of people are on vacation too when they go to the beach. I used to love going to this beach in

Hawaii where my dad lived and there were a lot of expectations around vacations and people are like, okay, should we go to the volcano now?

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Okay, do you want some watermelon? People are just trying really hard to have fun sometimes and you're like, oh God, this is horrible. But yeah, eavesdropping. So I think that's basically what it is, when you go straight or just trying to understand what the person sounds like, which I think is, I don't know, you kind of just figure it out naturally if you're paying attention.

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And then the trick too is to make them sound like a real person and you don't want it to be... It needs to be like elevated to the point of a book, so like writerly, but not overly writerly so that it becomes unreal.

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How do you feel as the ghost writer that it's not your name, it's not your book, but yet you've, I mean, obviously you get the money out of it, which is awesome, but I mean, this is your work of your fruits of your labor. And then it's not your name that's going everywhere. It's very interesting, you know, because you do become like somebody's therapist. Every single person I've written anything for says at some point, I feel like you're my therapist. I'm like, yeah, it's a funny one-sided.

12:08

relationship, you know, where like I get to know so much about this person. They don't know anything about me really. Yeah. And then it's interesting too, because I've written books before where the agents and the people around the person will be like, Oh my God, you really captured this person. And then the person will be like, what? This isn't me. So it's like, well, how do you see yourself then? Some people are seeing themselves through like a rosier lens or that's the self that they want to give to the public, you know? So then.

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Sometimes things get changed so that it becomes more of like a fictional memoir or a memoir with like a lot of omissions in it that reflects how the person wants to look rather than maybe who they really are. I mean, I want to do my own work full-time, you know? I don't want to write other people's books. Like it's fine. And it's like, it uses a skillset that I have and I've never been somebody who's like, I don't think I, I could never have a nine to five. I had a nine to five for a little while and it was like just not.

13:08

I would go home for lunch. This is like after college. I moved to Boston for no reason. And I went to a temp agency. They placed me at Coldwell Banker residential brokerage, Cambridge, Mass. And I was like, lived down the street. So I would go home for lunch and I would see who's gonna be on Oprah. And I was like, oh my God, I can't go back. So then I emailed my boss and be like, my stomach really hurts, I can't come back. I can't believe I didn't get fired. It's really hard to get like, fired.

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But it was just not my thing. So ghost writing is something I can do on my own time, you know. Oh my God, you're hilarious. And tell me exactly how it is that you have two books coming out right now. Because you literally have two books coming out right now. God, thank you. I have to remember me mentioning both books all the time. Okay, so the other book actually it's right here is my coaster.

14:07

You're grounded an anti self-help book to calm you that F down. I don't know if we're allowed to cast. You can. Yeah, you can. Sure. Coming the buck down. And this is, it features me as like a bird stick person and I'm hanging on a tree because there's a whole thing with tree imagery in here. And so it's basically just like a fun, it's these books are so fun to make. It's an interactive like journal style book about how to, how to get grounded. And.

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how to be in the present moment in like a not annoying way, I hope. And this is my second illustrated book. The first one is called The Bad Mood Book and it came out about a year ago. And this is like a totally, a surprising tangent in my career. I went to a residency to write a novel, the novel before this one, Getting Clean with Stevie Green. And so it's...

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supposed to be writing this novel at this residency, but I was just like, oh, I don't feel like doing this. So I started doodling and then I put the doodles on Instagram and I got like immediate feedback and I was like, this is the coolest thing ever. And this is so unlike writing a novel where you're by yourself for years. And then by the time it comes out, like I forget that people even read my books really. It's like

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It sort of feels like it just happens in a vacuum. So to get the immediate response to. And also, most of the time, you don't get any response from your readers. It's not like everybody's contacting you. You don't know. So yeah, then I was on a walk with my friend who Nicole Tordelot, who's an agent. And I was like, dude, I cannot ghost write anymore. And she was like, you should do something with those illustrations. Here's what you should do. You should.

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She told me that this is what should be in your proposal, et cetera. So I wrote up a proposal and then it became a real thing. I can't believe I get paid to do this. It's such a blast. I feel like rebel is the word that should describe you. Oh, really? Okay, good. You were like, I didn't want to go to work. I wanted to watch Oprah, so I'd call in sick. I went on this residency and I was supposed to write a novel and I didn't feel like it. I'm just doing my own thing. You're just rebelling against what you're supposed to be doing.

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It's all working out. Yes, it's it's it's working out for now. Yeah. So what did you want to do like in high school? And I know you went to Columbia, you got your MFA, but at what point you obviously went to Caldwell Banker for a blip. Where was the writing in this or was it always there? Always. I always wanted to be a writer from the time I was very small. I was trying to get my little friends to write books of me when I was like.

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in grade school, you know, and they were like, you know, they didn't really want to do it, but I was like, this is going to be fun. We're going to do it. My dad was a scientist and he worked at

Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Moya. And he would take us to the lab and like put us in coats and give us some curl to look at under the microscope. I wrote poems about the curl. Like it was clear that I was never going to be a scientist. I could barely add like.

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I barely know what photosynthesis is. I can remember staring at this page in biology class and being like, seeing the leaf and then the photosynthesis thing, and just being like, I just don't, I don't get it. Like, this is just not my thing. And I was always interested in recording things. My mom gave me my first journal when I was nine. My first entry is, today we played dodge ball.

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I accidentally sat on the ball and the teacher said, swan laid an egg. By the way, in my memory, I had remembered that it was another student. And then I went back and looked at this journal. I was like, oh my god, it was the teacher? That's horrible. Oh no. Actually, the teacher's name is in there. I should try to figure out who that is. But not really. That's not a good use of time to find that person and be like, look at this. But yeah, I just always, I was like,

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I'm just so into writing everything down. I popped my first zit and taped it in a journal. I have some of my sister's hair in a journal. This guy gave me a box of nerds when I was in seventh grade who I had a quote unquote crush on. And I taped that in. Like, I just wrote everything down. And I've been confused about other things in my life. Like, it took me a long time to realize, like, I'm gay and I'm an alcoholic. Took me a really long time. But writing, I just always knew that this is what I was gonna do.

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And so you probably wrote about that too. And you're like, I can't figure it out, but I've written it all down. Exactly. So at what point did you become a published author and what you wanted to do actually became your career? I published my first novel in 2016. I was 30 or 31, I think I was 31. And now I'm 41. And...

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that's crazy. What happened? I mean I took a pretty traditional route. Like I went to college, I got an undergrad degree in... actually was it... I don't know. I took some creative writing class. It feels like my degree was in creative writing even if it wasn't technically. That's what I'm going to say. Dennis Lahane was one of my teachers. The guy who wrote like Mystic River and Gone Baby Gone and he was really generous with me and a great influence. And he was the first person I met who was like really doing what I wanted to do.

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So I thought he was so cool. I still think he's cool. And then, yeah, then had a couple years, I call it my blue period, lived in Boston for no reason, worked at a bar, et cetera. And then I went to grad school, got an MFA in creative writing. And the road to getting published was, it's really a story about how this is all about determination. It's really...

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talent is cool, but talent is kind of like the add-on at the end. Like you really have to have, you just have to be sure you're going to finish and then you have to finish. You know, I can remember this teacher saying to me, like, I wrote a draft of a book as my thesis in grad school. And this teacher was like, don't let it go. And I was like, that's not going to be my problem. I'm going to like keep writing this till I'm dead. Are you kidding me? Let it go. What are you talking about? But yeah, I wrote that book.

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and I sent it out and all the agents who received it said, this is, you're a good writer, but nothing happens in your book. And I was like, oh, okay. So I finally, after years, I put this book aside. And this is like, I mean, I had designed the cover, I had painted the cover on canvases like multiple times. Like I was ready for that book to happen. Finally, I set it aside. So I was like, okay, everybody said no. I wrote another book.

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The agents were like, all the agents I sent us to said, well, you're a really good writer, but nothing happens in this book, except for one agent said, but if you do these six billion things to the book, I'll consider repping you. And I had a moment where I was like, I have made it. This is my like moment. Like I remember walking down Fifth Avenue afterwards and being like, okay, this is it. I'm gonna like.

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not be a nanny anymore. You know, I've had like all the most random jobs that like the types of jobs where you really can't get comfortable and like stay there. You know, I was like, this is not gonna last. So then I made all those changes for that agent. I gave it to that agent and it was like, he didn't even remember who I was. He was like, what? And I was like, oh, okay. So then I got really upset and wrote, we can be beautiful. And also between

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Just before that I had taken a workshop with Anne Hood who I believe has a novel coming out herself right now I think it's a novel. Maybe it's a memoir, but she Passed out this She called it the novel template She passed it out in this class and she was like if you want to write a novel you have to be able to fill This out and I looked at this thing and I was like this is so beneath me That's really what I thought, you know, because my MFA program was not like if you said the word plot you were like dead

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It was not about plot. It was not about like nothing logistically useful. Nothing about the business. It was like craft and like white space. You know, like it was. I like the way you said that. Yeah, it was just like not, I didn't, I wasn't getting the memo about like, oh, things have to happen. Like actually you're trying to entertain somebody. You know, that's why people are reading. It's because they.

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want to escape their lives and be entertained. And I think Hollywood really understands that. And for some reason in the book world, we don't hold it to the same standards, which in some ways is great, but I don't personally like reading books with no plot. So that's, so yeah, it's also a personal preference thing. I finally, I filled this thing out and it just asked some really basic questions. Like, what is the time container of your novel? You know, that's the thing that a lot of people don't think about. When does this begin and end? And then from there,

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you can divide the time up into sections according to what you need to happen. It's just like some really basic stuff. And like what are your, what are the main like plot points in this novel? You know, not like a fully fleshed out outline, but just like, okay, what's going to happen? Before that, I was operating according to that quote, like writing a novel is like driving in the fog. You can only see three feet ahead of you or something. I have to look up who said that because I quote that all the time. But

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I was just like, okay, it's cool. I'm wandering through the dark, but it wasn't getting me when I wanted. And by the time I sat down to write that third novel, *We Could Be Beautiful*, which ended up being my first published novel, I was so pissed. I like, and I titled the document like things have to happen. Like things are happening, you know? I was like, okay, there's going to be a plot. It's going to be moving. Things are happening in this book because yeah, I was like, I can't be a nanny in Soho for that much longer.

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I was also living in this cooperative house in Fort Greene, which was entertaining, but also not somewhere I wanted to stay forever. After I wrote that, then things happened really quickly. Then I got the agent, it sold, et cetera. Everything happened so fast. And then it's just continued. Yeah. That was a really long way of answering your question, but that's when I feel my career started. But I will say, I thought that was going to change everything.

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and it's turned out to be more of like a slope climb. Like it did change a lot.

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It didn't mean that I became like a full-time writer who didn't have to have other jobs. You know, I don't even know what I thought that would happen. Maybe I did. One could hope. I think we all hope that it just means, oh, I can just sit here and write all day now and get paid. Yeah. That never happens. Rarely. When did you start ghostwriting? I guess like maybe five years ago, something like that. I moved to LA. I met this woman who had this

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kind of publishing hybrid thing that she was doing. And I started, I like ghost read a book from one of her clients. And then, and then did some other books for some celebrities who like, whatever. So it's, yeah, not something I wanna be doing with my, like too much more of, but it does, it's like not that hard for me because it's.

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It's just about organizing information. But it's still a talent, like I said, to take on someone's voice and to do that. I love that you incorporated it into I Want You More. When everybody reads it, the funniest part, because now I have it in my head, is that this celebrity cooking woman is doing this game with, was it onions? Or what was the? Oh, cucumber? Cucumber, yeah.

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I want you more. I want you more. Because when you look at the cover and you're thinking about, oh, I want you more, I'm thinking, oh, like, no, I want you more. Like there's something and there's some twists to it. Right. But I have in my head this this alone is like, I want you more. No, I want you more. Well, yeah. It's hilarious. So I love that you've combined all this. Did you have to watch some cooking shows to?

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Um, well about what you just said, I'll also say like after I did that, a lot of the time I don't realize like where I'm getting information until later. I'm like, Oh, I guess I got that from that. Like make it nice or in the bed, at least make it nice. She says nice all the time. And then that became the cover of the book, you know, that her title. Uh, I used to watch the food network just all the time. It was just always on in my house. So I haven't watched it recently, but I like grew up watching like barefoot Contessa and Jada De Laurentiis and Sandra Lee and

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You know, they're all still kind of in my head when I go into a kitchen. I don't like cooking, but. We either did Zara in the book. Yeah, I know. Also, I think like in an earlier iteration, Zara was like, I hate ghost writing so much. And one of the editors was like, could she eat it a little bit less? And I was like, I don't think so. She is me and I am her and we do not like ghost writing. Yeah.

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Oh my God, that's hilarious. So what's next for you? You've got two books coming out. I have two books coming out. And then I recently sold a memoir, which I'm really excited about. I have always wanted to write nonfiction. I actually, when I applied to grad school, I applied to both fiction and nonfiction programs. And I got into both at Columbia, but the fiction people gave me money. And I think

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If that hadn't happened, I'm not sure what I would have chosen. Um, which is all to say like, I'm happy to be writing this nonfiction now. So yeah, just sold a memoir. It's called how to escape yourself or die trying an addict and a really long bike ride, and it's two interwoven narratives. One is my addiction history. And another is my pilgrimage on the Camino through Spain, which is.

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500 miles from the south of France across Spain. And it's something that people did in like, I think it started in like the 10th century. It's like a penance you would walk a really long way to, be forgiven for your sins. And now it's kind of just a vaguely spiritual thing or a religious thing if you're religious. And I'm very excited about that because I think that I have read a lot of addiction memoirs and I...

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I'm hoping that this one will be different in that I wanna paint a picture not just of the time when I was like wasted in doing drugs, but also of the time afterwards. Because when you stop drinking and doing drugs, you don't just get fine, you just get it to other things. That's what really happens. And I feel like the memoirs always end at like, I got sober, I got happy, bye. And I'm like, no, this is not, no.

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Like what about when you couldn't stop eating the cookies afterwards or the binge smoking or that, you know, it just goes on and on. But it'll be funny. It'll be, you know, depressing, but also funny. So we can handle it. It'll be swan. I love it. When that comes out in 2025. Yeah. Next

summer. Oh, then you'll come back next summer too. Oh, good. I will read that one too. And I need to get my hands on the journal. And yeah, we're going to do all the things.

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All the swan things. Thank you. Can you share where everyone can find you and stalk you the way I have, please? Yeah. At swanhuntly on all the things. Instagram is where I'm most active on social media and websites, swanhuntly.com. Thank you so much and congratulations on both books. Thank you.

30:46

for interviewing me. This has been so fun. Okay, friends, you have to go out and purchase I Want You More because I promise you, you will get to the part of I want you more, no, I want you more, and you will not be able to get that out of your head. It's absolutely hilarious. I loved hearing Swan's story from everything from her childhood and what names the kids and the teacher were calling her to what she's working on now. And

31:16

And you know that I was just all, oh my goodness, when she mentioned Dorinda from Real Housewives. This was such a fun conversation. I'm so grateful to get to know Swann, the author, the human being behind this incredible book. And I can't wait for you all to read. I want you more. Out today with Zibby Books. Go grab yourself a copy.