

Transcript

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You're listening to the My Simplified Life podcast and this is episode number 254. 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.

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Hey friends, welcome back to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. And today we have a repeat guest who is one of my favorite people ever. It is Emma Grey. She is the author of The Last Love Note, which was such a hit last year, and the author of Pictures of You, which is out today. Emma might just be one of my favorite Australians. She's definitely one of my very favorite human beings because she's just

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the most genuine, sweetest, kindest person ever. And it lights me up to get to have a conversation with her and to have read pictures of you, which is out today with Zivy Books. It is incredible. Another amazing novel. And she just announced that her third is coming out too. So I am so excited.

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I loved getting to talk to Emma about this book, about her journey in creating this new beautiful read and can't wait to share it all with you. Hello, my beautiful Emma. Hi, Michelle. It feels like yesterday we spoke, but I'm so happy to be talking to you again. I am so happy to have you on again and to get another chance to chit chat with you because you're one of my favorite people.

02:00

Oh, and vice versa. I think this is one of the nicest things about getting published is you meet people and make these connections. And you are somebody who I remember just hitting it off with during our conversation, you know, when was that? It must've been January or November last year. So almost a year. Yeah. And ever since then we've kept in touch and it's just been absolutely beautiful. And we've gotten to meet in person too. Yes, we have. And we exchanged phone numbers. To me, when there's a phone number exchange, then.

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the friendship level is elevated so high. Oh, definitely. Well, I guess we should introduce you. We're just diving in. We're like, everybody knows who you are because you've already been on the show. Can you take a moment to reintroduce yourself to everyone, please? Sure, I'm Emma Gray and I'm in Australia and I'm the author of *The Last Love Note*, which came out with the Zibi Books last November. And my new book, *Pictures of You*, is coming out this November.

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It'll be today. It'll be pub day is when this airs. So congratulations and happy pub day in advance. I'm so lucky I got to read it. I really enjoyed it. It's funny, I don't read any reviews before I read a book. I was reading it and I went, oh, this is kind of young adult. Then it went into adult. I'm like, oh yeah, this is good. Emma is good. I loved the story. Can you give us a synopsis of what it's about?

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without spoilers, but it's so good. It's a hard part, isn't it? It's a story about a woman named Evie who wakes up with absolutely no recollection of her marriage. She's been in a relationship for 13 years and can't remember anything about that. She has survived the car accident that killed her husband and really most of the book.

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she is struggling to piece her life back together and to work out what has happened and how she has ended up in a life that she doesn't recognise and also doesn't like. And I think part of this idea came from really conversations that I've had with friends all through my life at different

chapters of life, right back to high school when we were in first relationships and talking about possessive boyfriends beside the school lockers. And then...

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all through my 20s and 30s at work when we'd be discussing people's fiancés or their husbands and the controlling behaviour that was going on in their relationships. And right through to now, and I just turned 51 yesterday and I'm still getting messages in my messenger from friends who are now in their 50s who are back on the dating circuit after.

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a divorce or a loss and they're still encountering this kind of behaviour. So there's something sinister that has gone on and we don't know what it is and she doesn't know what it is. And the only person that can really help her piece this back together is her childhood friend Drew, who she also can't remember and has to learn to trust. The other inspiration I think for this book has been that my daughter, who's 26.

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is doing a PhD in criminology and she is studying violence against women. And I think just, you know, you get surrounded by your family and what they're interested in and talking about. This is why I have a book, a teenage novel about a boy band, because my other daughter was 14. Hated reading, but loved Harry Styles. So I've got this other whole boy band universe over here. And I think

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I think it just felt like a really important topic, something that I know is very much in the media here in Australia and I'm sure in the US as well, and something that a lot of women unfortunately can relate to. But I also wanted to position what turns out to be a very toxic relationship beside something that's very hopeful and beautiful and romantic. And I love the way you did it because yes, you fall in love with Drew.

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There's your spoiler. We'll try to leave it at that. But you do fall in love with him. And I love knowing that your daughter's doing her PhD in criminology because there is a podcast element, everybody. I was very excited about that. And the other interesting part was the linguistics. Yeah. So my sister ended up with the university medal in linguistics when she did her undergraduate degree.

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And she and my daughter have been absolutely fascinated by true crime and forensics for years. So that whole storyline came from my sister's interest. So we're a very close family and we sort of absorb each other's interests and passions. And this is really a tribute, I guess, to both of them, my sister and my daughter. Oh, I love this. So how did you have them like give you research? How did you research the part of like, the linguistics part's a big.

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and we won't share with you why or how, but how did you implement the research or what questions did you ask to get that so you got it right? Yes, oh gosh, both of them were put through the ringer with this. I kept sending them paragraph after paragraph and saying, just please check that this is definitely true, definitely correct. My daughter and I actually came up with the idea, and we won't spoil it, but came up with the idea of that twist.

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when we were coming home from a book event talking about *The Last Love Note* at another event about a year ago. And then she and my sister were sort of coming up with how they could, how we could incorporate that into the story and how it might work and some true cases that had used a similar technique to crack the case. And I find that absolutely fascinating. I'm sure all writers and readers.

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love the idea of language and just the rules and how we use it and things we don't even notice about the way we speak and it's just a fascinating area of criminology. But the other research that I did was very much into coercive control and I ran this book and my poor friend, Kat Burnie, has read every draft of this book. I feel for her so much.

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But she's probably lucky. I know. She is the executive director of the Australian, of the National Women's Safety Alliance in Australia. So she advises, she and her team advise the government on policies about gendered violence and all of this. So she was all over it with a fine tooth comb, just ensuring that I had that angle correct as well. I normally steer clear of...

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books that require research. I mean, I've been known to sort of put something in a scene and think, oh, I'll have to look that up and then change it so that I don't have to look it up. So, it's a bit of a departure for me to have to do this. Oh my God, I love you. The honesty. But I love it because you have to be realistic about it and you can't fluff that and then just throw it in there and go, well, I hope so. You know.

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Because people like me would be, I'm going to go see if that's actually correct and Google it. I didn't because I trust you. I do know what happens and it's quite terrifying as an author. So you can only go as far as you can go and try to cover all bases and make sure that you've asked the right people and certainly have had numerous conversations with dear friends who've had lived experience of this sort of relationship and have actually been the friend in this book.

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multiple times, unfortunately, in helping friends move through and beyond a relationship like this. And I think it really is, has been a team effort to pull this story together. And there were surprises throughout. I remember messaging you going, what the, oh my goodness, I didn't see this coming. And I left you responsive. I didn't either. And it felt like a roller coaster to write. And this is, and this is what happens when you don't.

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plot a book and it just surprises you the whole way through and it's both exhilarating and terrifying because you hope that it's all going to come together in the end. There are times when you think, I can't even see my way through this plot yet. I don't know. I don't understand what's happening or how this is going to be resolved. And I think that's what keeps me going as a

writer is that I don't know. I don't want the spoiler. I only want that in Christmas movies. You know, I...

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I'm happy to know what's going to happen in predictable things. But when I'm writing, I don't want to know. And if I think I'm about to figure out a twist or figure out the ending and I'm not far enough into the book yet, I don't want to know then either. I'm sort of trying to push back that thought so that it doesn't spoil it for me and I'll lose interest in getting it on the page. So it's a really fun, but terrifying journey to write a book like that.

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I love knowing this because I feel like I'm at this point where I haven't plotted anything and I'm like, oh, this is probably garbage. I don't know what I'm doing. But if you're saying like, this is part of this fun process and if this process gets these beautiful novels that you're creating, then I am there for it. Do it. It's really fun. Although I did have a conversation with Kathleen Harris, my editor at Zibi Books, about my next book and saying, yeah, we might.

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we might just sort of introduce a tiny little bit of plotting this time along because I don't want to put her through what I put her through. It is, it is, um, I am almost considering using post-it notes or something this time, just to get a few ideas down. I just ordered some off of Amazon and I'm like, they're either going to be posted that they stick with Kamala and they're going in bathrooms or.

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They're going to be for plots because I also, how do you design your characters? Because I just discovered the AI tool on Canva. And so I put in what my characters are in my head and they generated fake images for me. Oh my goodness. I didn't know. Oh gosh, I'll be right on that the second we finish talking. I didn't know that existed. It's interesting because I'm sort of very early on in my next book now and I'm thinking, I was just thinking the other day, oh, I don't really know what's happening. And

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I had to remind myself the only way you're going to learn who these people are is to sit down and write and you learn them as you go along. With *The Last Love Note* it was sort of easy because there's a lot of me and Kate and there's obviously that story is very personal to me. It's about a woman who loses her husband, which I had done a few years earlier. So that felt very like me and my voice and who I am. And then...

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For this, I think I'm drawing this character from my daughter and from other people I've met over the years and just a little bit of her own self, Evie. And it's something that I think you can only learn as you go through. I think some authors definitely sit down and do very detailed descriptions of their characters before they begin and they create an entire world and a backstory for that character.

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before they put pen to paper in the actual book. And that's another way of doing it. And I just tend to work that out as I go along. And then I'll, in later drafts, often go back and flesh out that character or put in some backstory elements that hadn't been there before. And so it's often in the later drafts that the book really rises and the quality rises, the story gets deeper, the sentences are nicer, all of that, it happens.

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later on. So I think that's, you know, as somebody who, and I'm talking to you and you're writing your novel, I think the best advice I ever got was from my agent, Anjanette Fennell, who said to me, just race to the end of the messy first draft. And, and that's it. She's, you know, it's about getting it on the page and then convincing yourself there is a story here, I just need to now really work on it. And it's that if we can just get

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there as fast as possible with that messy draft and don't worry too much about the writing and just get the story down. That I think is that first crucial step. Yes, I keep going back and reworking something and then I had another idea and I'm like, oh, well, that has to literally go here and this all needs to move otherwise it's not going to fit. Yeah. Yeah, that's where I am. And then draft will never come.

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No, that's right. And you can just put notes in the side or keep a separate notebook or something for those things that you need to go back and fix later on. Because it's just so tempting to muck around with what you've already written. Yeah. And I ruthlessly edit the second draft is often completely unrecognizable. I did have a moment with this book where I got about 40,000 words in and thought I've sort of

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put myself in this corner over here, I can't get out of it, it's not working. And I deleted 30,000 of those words and got it right back to 10,000 words, which is terrifying. And, and then started, I sort of, I just read through from the beginning and got to the bit where it went off track and then I just deleted the rest and I'll put it in another file, but it's still deleted. Um, and, and that really, it's like having a haircut, you know how they say

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get your hair cut, it'll grow better. It's like that sometimes with the editing. Oh, you just gutted me 30,000 words. I know. Yes. How do you pick the stories that you're going to tell? Because I know you have other, you share, we won't share the other stuff that you shared earlier about, you have some stories in your head that you could write about. How do you select, like, this is what's going to be next? Because you're obviously working on another book already.

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How are you choosing what's going to come next? I think that a lot of writers just have a lot of ideas all the time in their head of different stories. I've got a little sort of spreadsheet, it's not a spreadsheet, I don't tend to understand those, but I've got a document with a whole lot of different story ideas that I've had over the time. And it's just sort of, there's one that will always rise to the surface as the most compelling to you at that time. And...

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And Jeanette again advises me all the time, just write the story that you're burning to tell and don't be worried about what everyone else is doing, what the market looks like, what's selling well, any of that stuff. By the time you finish writing whatever you're going to write, the market

will have changed. So I just think, you know, it's just the story that won't leave your mind. And I think just be drawn towards the most compelling one.

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and stick with that because it's such a huge commitment to sit down and write a book. You really want to love it and be driven to tell that story. Otherwise, it's going to be an uphill battle the whole way through. I want to talk about something that you put in the book and I was like, oh, yes, I know this is pure Emma because I know this about you, but I don't think we talked about it on the last interview, but you and I had talked about it. So I started implementing it and it's the 100 rejections.

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Oh gosh, yeah. Because when I read that I went, I know what part of Emma's in the book. This is it. And it's not my idea, but it's somebody else. You know, it's a popular idea amongst writers that if we're not getting rejected a hundred times in a 12 month period, we're not putting enough things out there. And it's huge, this idea of facing all of those rejections. I remember the first time I had a rejection on one of my manuscripts and I was absolutely gutted.

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and crushed and thought this is just terrible, why am I bothering? Went through all of that self-doubt. And now years later of, of experiencing all of this stuff all the time, I just, it's like water off a duck's back and it's the way through and it's essential to success because we have to be out there trying and failing and picking ourselves up and trying something different and getting feedback as well on what we're doing. And I think it's so tempting to keep everything close and not show people and not

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enter things or not submit things because if we don't do that then the dream stays completely perfect and intact in our heads and unfortunately the reality is that we do have to experience a lot of this. I don't think there's a single writer who just cruises through with this overnight success you know. I've been writing for 35 years or something since I was 14 and it's really only in the last 12 months that my my career has taken off and

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It might look like a bit of overnight success, but it certainly isn't. And I think that's a really important message that we need to talk about. So I've got on my kitchen wall a chart that I write at the beginning of the year with a hundred boxes on it for me to put everything that I, all the risks I take, all the chances I take with the name of being rejected a hundred times, because if you have been, then there's likely certain success in there as well. And I think when I...

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tallied it up last year. It was actually surprisingly a successful year. I ended up with something like, what was it? Was it 40% successes and 60% rejections or something? And I thought, well, that's actually really quite a high number of successes. And I'm using it for things that go beyond writing. So any other sort of big steps or risks or chances that I take, I'll put up there just to get in the mindset of doing it.

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And I also think it's really important that I'm doing that in front of my kids. And I actually will sometimes get them to write things on the chart for me, because I want them to see that this is normal and that, you know, they don't have this mom that just glides through life. Or they know they don't. They see that on a daily basis, but you know, but professionally, I think that's important. So do you only write the rejections in the box? Cause I'm tracking everything I do. And then I, I'm doing a spreadsheet and I highlight.

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red if I get a formal rejection, green means yes, I got it. And then I've got a lot that are just pending, but I need to go back and go, yeah, it's been almost a year. Obviously, it's been a rejection. Yeah, I'm the same. I do it that way as well. I think there are some people that will just put all the rejections up there, but I like to just put everything up there that I... It sort of turns it into a bit of a game and takes the sting out of it. And sometimes you forget what you've even applied for because...

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you're kind of attaching less importance to every single thing, rather than have all your eggs in the one basket and put that out and wait for it to either be rejected or accepted. You've got that

many things floating out there that it's just a delight when one of them comes back in unexpectedly. Yeah, and it's funny because I do forget some of the things that I've done. Like, I put all of the speaking things that I've applied for and I had written one down.

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And then I got an email that said, you know, it's the last day, the deadline's coming up to apply for this. And I went, oh, I need to do that. And I went, but why is it already on my hundred rejection list? Like, did I apply for this? Sure as heck I did when it was originally, it originally came out. So it's actually an organizational tool as well. Well, I love it. I use it for every proposal that goes out, every speaking engagement, any, I don't do it for podcasts. Oh, if I added podcasts on there.

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Yeah, you'd fly through. Then I would, yeah, we'd be way above 100, no problem. Yeah. And I think things like that where you might be reaching out to a guest on your podcast that may feel slightly out of reach for, you know, some person that you may not have once asked. I think when you're doing this sort of process, it just makes it easier to ask because what's going to happen?

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you'll get an extra thing on your chart and get through the chart faster. That's such a good way to put it. See, and I tell people all the time, I get rejected daily. That's literally my job is to send out pitches and get rejected. So to me, it's not as big of a deal. It kind of just rolls off. I'm like, yep, next, move on. Because I was also in sales for 18 years. So you get rejected all the time.

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But I think it's a great reminder. I love to be able to put yourself out there and to see, look at where I've tried to get in. And I wish that I had started earlier because I've seen this year more of the yeses to things that I have applied for before and didn't get. And so that would be great to do year, which I'm gonna add a tab to my 100 rejections for each year so I can compare from year to year.

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Yeah, I think that's great because that's something that we occasionally need to remind ourselves on is how far we've come. And it can be very easy for us to get bogged down and disappointed and to feel like we're not making the progress that we're making that we really are making. And, you know, I tend to be using Facebook, my personal Facebook page is a bit of a diary almost. I'm so sorry to all my friends. But, but I do tend to do that. And it's been helpful because sometimes

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something will pop up from seven years ago to say that I've started writing a book or, you know, I don't know where this is going to go, but maybe I'll, you know, maybe it'll be, I saw one yesterday, maybe it'll be a memoir, maybe it'll be a novel, but it's going to be about losing my husband. And now here we are, you know, it's, it's, it's that sort of reminder, I think that can really help us just to be kinder to ourselves and more compassionate about this whole career.

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want to use the word journey, but it's so overused, but that's really what it is. So yeah, I love this sort of thing. And I've got, and so I've worked that into the, into pictures of you, because I just think it's a great concept and hopefully might inspire other people to do the same thing and embrace failure and give things a go. I love that. I love it. And so what's the next book on? Well, you said you were writing it. I wouldn't do this otherwise. I know I haven't worked out how to articulate the next book without spoilers.

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So it's very hard for me to say what it's about, but I think one theme that seems to be going through all of my books recently is I had dementia in the last love note, I had amnesia in pictures of you, and there is also a memory theme in this next book, which is the working title is Start at the End. And...

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Really, I'm looking at things like who controls the narrative in a relationship. And if you were to put a couple into two separate rooms and ask them to describe the last 10 years, would you get the same story? I'm having so much fun writing this story. It's so lovely to be back in that creative phase of the work. I've been through all the editing and I'm about to go back into the, well, I'm talking to you, into the promotion phase of Pictures of You.

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But it's so nice to have this book that I'm writing as well, and so that sense of creativity back again. Oh, I'm so excited. Just give me all of the Emma Gray books. I was so excited. Somebody had reached out and she goes, did you get a Galley copy? I go, I did. She's like, I got rejected. I went, oh, I'm so sorry. I'll tell you how it went. But I know it's going to be good. So.

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I feel so lucky I get to read it before others and I just can't wait to see it. That's one of the best things. I love that too because I'm getting sent people's books before they're published now as well and it's really the biggest surprise to me and the most delightful part of being published. It's this sneak peek into upcoming new releases. Yes, it's so exciting. Then the other one that I'm reading right now doesn't come out until January. I'm like, that's so far ahead. It's...

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You know, I just have to remember all of the details before the interview. Emma, you are just such a delight. I adore you so much. Oh, I feel the same way about you. Thank you. It's just been, you know, you just hit it off instantly with some people. It's been like that with you. I really love talking to you. Oh, I love talking to you. I love everything you've been doing and the work that you do on podcasting as well and just helping us, the rest of us.

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know how to engage with the podcasting world is just so important and it's great. Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that. Where can everyone buy pictures of you and where can they find you? They can find me at emmagray.com.au on my website and then Emma Gray author on Facebook and Instagram. And I think the book should be sort of widely available.

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by the time this goes to air. So I know it's going to be in Target again, but it's going to be in all sorts of wonderful indie book sellers around the country and around the world. So anyway. Yay. I'm going to go to Target and get another picture. I can't wait. Congratulations. And thank you so much. Oh, thanks, Michelle. It's just delightful to speak with you. Oh, friends, you have to go out and grab

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pictures of you, you can go to Target and get it too. So there's my guilty, yes, another reason to get to Target and get the book and grab a picture while you're there and tag Emma. She will love it. I can't tell you how much I love to not only read such a great book, but to know this incredible author who is such a wonderful human being. I can't sing her praises enough because she's just that fabulous. I swear. And I know that it comes through in our conversations.

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I'm so grateful for Emma to have taken the time again to share her words with us and to share her journey with me and all of you. And I can't wait for the next one in 2026. So congratulations, Emma, and everybody go do yourself a favor and grab pictures of you.