00:00
I was working on this book and one day the cat came over and tried to get in my lap and I've got my computer out there and you know I had to push him off which broke my heart to have to push this beautiful cat off with these beautiful green eyes.

00:12
And I looked down at it and in the way that I used to with my now dead dog you know I just started I could hear what it was saying and I was talking to it and I was like well yeah I understand that you think I'm being a total bitch right now but and you know then I'd like give it pause so it can talk to me and I can like you know I'm supplanting what it's saying.

00:29
And then I just sort of looked at what I was writing and I thought oh this is that's it like the cat is the key.

00:39
This is the lawyers guns and money podcast.

01:00
Hello and welcome to the lawyers guns and money podcast. My name is Rob Farley joining me today is the ever familiar Scott Lemieux from Seattle. We are delighted today to have coming from Lexington Kentucky where I also happen to be the delightful Hannah Pertard who is a professor at the University of Kentucky and the author of several well known books.

01:19
And how are you and and would you like to say anything else about yourself before we get started. Well thank you for having me. I was intrigued immediately a huge Warren's Yvonne fan.

01:31
Like you said I'm the author of a handful of books I'm at the University of Kentucky and just this year I became the guy Davenport professor in English which I'm pretty excited about.

01:43
And that's that's it. Yeah.

01:45
Can I ask you who is Guy Davenport. He is a legend here a writer researcher just a brilliant capacious brain and we're lucky enough to have an endowed chair and his name and it's it's been a pretty amazing list of people who've had it before me Michael Trask who is a great friend of mine and one of the smartest people I've ever met in my life had it before me.

02:14

And before that the poet Nicky Finney so also just having his name is wonderful but then also the legacy that I'm following in of the people who've had it is a really wonderful compliment to me.

02:29
For those of you unfamiliar with the University of Kentucky basically everything is now named after the Gatton family and pretty bad to the extent that when one is trying to navigate around campus it has become quite difficult because there are at least three different large spaces.

02:43
Three different large building complexes which are named Gatton and if you are not careful you'll go to the wrong one so much like exactly like Gates on the University of Washington campus you will often have the wrong building but is this the Melinda Gates building or the Bill and Melinda Gates.

02:57
Oh, much like on much like much like the Knight family on the University of Oregon campus except that the Knights are wonderful right and we love the Knights and the Knights are really important people and more buildings should be named after them because good.

03:08
Anyway, Scott why don't you why don't you kick us off.

03:12
Well, obviously, you know we're in here in part to discuss a Hannah's new novel. If you love it let it kill you and we don't put this on video but it's I like the dick cabin vibe of you know holding the book up.

03:24
But where I first started reading Hannah's writing.

03:28
And after that I would like to say that it long predates anything, but being a country political scientist. You know I read the, the New York article about the sort of love quadrangle that preceded Hannah's memoir.

03:46
And after reading that I immediately downloaded the audible.

03:49
And after the first couple of chapters, one of which Hannah's former best friend informs her of her new relationship in the abstract,

03:58

which was of course about her husband without saying so.

04:01
And I immediately knew I was listening to this for the rest of the afternoon.

04:04
So I was hooked immediately by these choices.

04:09
Hannah's wondering if you, you know, and I'm going to add quickly that the new novel is not really a novel.

04:15
It's not really about this at all, despite some reports.

04:18
But if you would be willing to sort of describe that sort of incident in as much or as little detail as you would like.

04:24
So I don't have to do it to sort of to sort of set up your memoir and then and then your new novel.

04:30
Yeah. And really also your previous novel and some some of them as well.

04:35
2016 was a surreal year for me.

04:38
My marriage was at its nadir.

04:43
And I had a book under deadline.

04:46
My fourth book was under deadline.

04:47
And it was at the same time that my third book had just been released.

04:51
July 2016, it was called Listen to Me.

04:55
And my husband at the time, thank you.

04:59
Oh, this is great. I'm getting visual effects of the books being held up.

05:02
And I absolutely.

05:04
My my husband made the decision or we made the decision together that because I was under deadline and he and I were not in a good place.

05:13
That we would spend the summer apart.

05:16
And this was made possible because he had gotten a few different writing residencies,

05:22
which are very useful to people like us, academics and non academics alike.

05:27
I think having that time to get away from your house, your chores, your regular life and just commit to a couple of weeks or a couple of months of writing.

05:37
And he was able to do that. He had one residency in France and then another in at Yado in upstate New York.

05:47
And between those residencies, there was a week off.

05:51
And we also decided that it was ridiculous for him to fly from Paris back to Kentucky and then back to New York.

06:01
We were still paying off a lot of credit card debt, a lot of just school debt in general.

06:06
So we made the decision that he would fly to New York and stay with our very, very dear friends who lived there for a week and that this would save us some money.

06:17
And then he'd take the train up to Yado.

06:19
And what I did not know is that my dear friend's husband had recently moved out and she was in the apartment alone so that when my husband showed up, they were together and they'd known each other for a very long time.

06:36
In fact, she was the one who had introduced to me.

06:38
And I guess with two marriages in trouble, it was an opportunity for them that they could not resist.

06:46
And they began an intimate relationship, which I found out about maybe two weeks later when I flew to New York for the launch of my third novel.

06:59
And I was I was told by a mutual friend about the affair.

07:04
And the memoir sort of We Are Too Many, the memoir follows the immediate aftermath, the kind of like surreal discovery and the way in which it happened.

07:19
And then it also we are too many has a very fragmented and experimental structure.

07:28
So the conversations really that I could not get out of my mind in the aftermath of the divorce, the conversations that I'd had with my best friend for the last 10 years and with my husband for the last 10 years, those become the anchor of part one of the memoir, just really trying to drop the reader in to my experience with as little guidance as possible.

07:56
I wanted to try to tell our story without providing too much judgment.

08:03
And I also wanted to make sure that everyone got held accountable, including me, definitely me.

08:10
You know, I didn't cheat, but I privileged my writing over the marriage.

08:16
And I think probably at a time when he needed help, I wasn't interested in helping him because I was so mad at him.

08:22
And so I I chose that very fragmented dialogue, heavy structure, hoping to let the audience come to their own conclusions.

08:34
Anyway, so we got a divorce and my husband and I worked together.

08:39
So he came back to the University of Kentucky and that was kind of surreal.

08:44
And I hadn't intended to write a memoir about it, but Covid hit and I wasn't interested in fiction.

08:51
I had zero interest in make believe.

08:55
I thought the world outside felt make believe enough.

08:58
And I just somehow started writing this book that became the memoir.

09:03
And the day I want to say literally it was the day I know this seems sort of too serendipitous,

09:10
but the day that my editor was going to announce, you know, because books come out, they get sold about a year and a half before publication

09:20
because of all of the various copy editing and coming up with covers and publicity.

09:25
That all takes about 18 months.

09:27
So the very day that we were going to announce that my memoir had sold to the publisher, I got an email from my agent and it included

09:39

the announcement for my ex-husband's debut novel and the debut novel had a synopsis that identically aligned with my memoir.

09:51
In fact, when I first read it, I thought it was a memoir.

09:54
I thought that he and I had both written memoirs.

09:56
And when my very good friend, Ada Lamone, pointed out to me, I sent it to her and I said he wrote, I think I said, son of a biscuit, a biscuit.

10:07
He wrote a memoir. Oh, my gosh.

10:16
You know, and of course, I'd written one, too, but I wasn't prepared for him to have written a memoir.

10:20
And Ada read the screenshot and sent me a text message immediately back and just said, oh, honey, this is a novel.

10:27
He's written a novel. And and that kind of sent me down this rabbit hole of, you know, it had been years since we'd been divorced.

10:36
I had not googled him in like six years.

10:39
But of course, I wanted to find out as much as I could about his novel.

10:42
But in Googling him, I found out nothing about his novel.

10:47
But what I did find, and this is where the next book comes in, If You Love It, Let It Kill You, what I did find was a story that he had published

10:55
while we were still colleagues, we were divorced, but we were still colleagues.

11:00
And in this story, there is a woman that's just like me.

11:03
She started dating a man who was just like the man that I was dating and now I'm home with.

11:10
And there was an ex-husband who was just like him.

11:12
So it was it was all of us. The story was about us.

11:16
And in the short story, the me of the story gets murdered by a homeless man.

11:23
And I read that and I was like.

11:28
Son of a bitch murdered me, you know, and I've been walking around with it for three years.

11:33
And I had no idea. And, you know, I thought this was hilarious.

11:36
Ada did not think it was funny. My sister thought it was funny.

11:41
My mom thought it was questionable.

11:44
And I couldn't stop thinking about it.

11:47
And it became the catalyst for the next book, which, like you said, Scott, is not at all about the marriage and the infidelity, though.

11:56
I think a lot of a lot of reviewers like to say it is just so that they can put these three books like in a kind of bundle.

12:02
But it really became about something else.

12:06
But I did use that idea of being an appropriator.

12:10
That would be, you know, the me character who has herself been appropriated.

12:14
What's she going to do with that? That becomes the catalyst for the next book.

12:19
And I haven't actually read your ex-husband's novel, which I'm like says purely solidarity.

12:23
I tried to get it for research purposes and was not available anywhere in our like Summit Library system.

12:28
So if you get any schadenfreude about that, that's maybe as like seems to have like Olivia Newsy level sales.

12:34
So that's any before we get to the new one.

12:37
I was really fascinated by something you said in terms of, you know, how you intended.

12:43
We are too many to be unsparing towards anybody.

12:46
And it's fascinating because the novel I read right before listening to it for the first time, you know,

12:53
was a romantic clef about a collapsing marriage written by a really talented novelist.

12:59
And, you know, sort of the issue was that there were so little distance that, you know,

13:07
again, I'm not trying to white knight heterosexual marriage here,

13:09
but there's a certain point in which patriarchy becomes an unconvincing explanation for,

13:15
you know, why you can't tell this guy is an obscenely self-centered dickbag with no redeeming qualities

13:20
when we can tell on page 15 and are never given any conflicting information.

13:25
And it's also, you know, basically never self-critical about the author.

13:29
And again, for human reasons, there may be very good reasons for that.

13:32
Sounds like it's not George's credit at all.

13:34
But artistically, it's not fully satisfying, even if it's entertaining at page level.

13:39
So the first of these is that, you know, readers may not be surprised that you do not present a particularly flattering picture of your ex-husband

13:49
or your former best friend who slept with them.

13:51
And yet, you know, there are all those set pieces, you know, where, you know, sort of you and Trish are the Trish, the character in the memoir.

14:01
And you are, you know, sharing an ice cold martini at a bar in Charlottesville.

14:05
You know, she dressed up in a nice outfit and you're just coming from waitressing.

14:09
And you can see in these scenes, you know, despite the seeds of the problems and there's this amazing sequence where,

14:16
you know, she sort of suggests that you should lose five pounds and you're like, why are you so nice to me?

14:20
Which is very identifiable.

14:22
But, you know, you can still, despite the fact that this is not a particularly flattering portrait, you know, I can think to myself,

14:29
you know, would I let Trish ruin me in the certain?

14:31
Yeah, probably. You know that.

14:34
You know, you can also see why, you know, you sort of these people appeal to you to why you wanted to please them.

14:40
I mean, I think, you know, so I don't know if you're conscious of that.

14:42
But it seems to me that if you can't convey sort of why this friendship and why the relationship were important in the first place,

14:49
you know, there's no sense of betrayal. There's sort of no juice.

14:53
So is that something you're conscious about that even in a state which you're obviously sort of very angry in this place of betrayal,

14:59
you also sort of wanted to make it clear what had unraveled and what the stakes were.

15:03
That that that came through even amidst the anger sort of, you know, sort of the almost, you know,

15:08
those sort of conspiratorial scenes where I can also understand the bond that you had.

15:12
So I approached, you know, by trade, I'm a fiction writer.

15:16
I'm I'm I'm I make shit up. And and that is my comfort zone.

15:21
Somewhat ironically, when I was editing, listen to me, which is the story of a couple in crisis,

15:30
it takes place over 24 hours there. You know, it's a road trip gone wrong.

15:35
And one of the very last edits that my editor had me do, you know, she's she's very she was very good at

15:42
whispering to me if I get too many too much feedback that's negative all at once.

15:48
I can't see the forest for the trees. And so we would go in these kind of like onion skins of, you know,

15:54
fix this and I would fix it and she would say fix this.

15:57
And so I thought we were almost done. And then the very last thing she said to me was you're going to think this is big,

16:03
but I don't think it is. She said, I need to know why these people are together in the first place.

16:08
I love the story. I love the arc. But I don't understand why they're together because they're in so much crisis.

16:17
So I had to one of the last chapters I wrote became the second chapter,

16:20
which was their origin story, and it just showed how much they had done for one another.

16:25
And when I was writing the memoir, I was very aware of the the need to explain to the reader

16:37
why I had found them both so compelling and seductive.

16:42
Because like you say, if if you don't understand that, then you don't understand the loss.

16:47
And I'll I'll also tell you this, though, one of the things that everyone close to me for most of my friendship with Trish,

16:56
my sister would say, I don't see what you see in her. I don't see what you see in her.

17:00
And I never felt that I needed to explain it because it didn't matter.

17:04
You know, we I kept that friendship separate from my sister.

17:07
And then it was after the marriage ended and it was actually Aida who said to me, she said,

17:14
you know, I still just don't understand why you kept her close for so long.

17:20
And those questions were in the back of my mind.

17:24
And, you know, I thought about it a lot because there were so many times when she was so cruel to me.

17:32
And I just kept going back for more.

17:35
And part of it was I'd never really had a female friend before.

17:39
And I hadn't had one as a grown up who made me feel.

17:44
Interesting, sexy, not completely like a loser.

17:51
And she really just when she focused on me, she focused only on me.

17:58
And I had this kind of I mean, I felt like a little bit like the ugly duckling that had been I was being made.

18:06
I was finally being seen, you know, at home in my bedroom alone as a teenager.

18:11
You know, I could look in the mirror and I'd be like, someday, someday someone's going to see me as,

18:17
you know, the bright, interesting person that I know, like my mother knows that I am right.

18:21
Always telling me that I am. And here was this beautiful.

18:25
I mean, she's a Trisha's a beautiful person.

18:27
Men look at her all the time. She gets attention everywhere she goes.

18:31
And she's also very funny and she's also very smart and she's also very mean when she's mean to other people,

18:38
especially when I was still young, that was compelling and funny when she was mean to me.

18:42
It wasn't. But I just I'm a little sister.

18:46
And I think that kind of thick skin that I developed being a little sister, I would just I would just push it aside.

18:54
I'd put, you know, I'd get over it.

18:56

And and it meant that I had a friend group.

19:00
I was like walking into an automatic friend friend group.

19:02
And I felt that I had to be honest and say all that, which meant I had to talk about my own insecurities and vulnerabilities

19:10
that made me completely susceptible.

19:13
But I was kind of a loser.

19:15
You know, I was a loser because I didn't stick up for myself.

19:17
But now I do.

19:21
I learned a lot and and that's one reason I'm so grateful for the way the marriage ended,

19:27
because I don't think that I would know what I want and don't want so clearly as I do today.

19:35
So, you know, thanks, guys.

19:37
People ask me all the time, why do you keep Scott in your life?

19:41
Right. I mean, the kind of the kind of person he is. Right.

19:43
It's just it's such an effort.

19:45
I struggled to answer that. Right.

19:47
So that's why we're a company.

19:48
Nobody's ever come up with a good answer.

19:49
And you really spit my water out when you said that.

19:51
I'm really glad you thought of the computer situation.

19:54
That would have been bad.

19:55
We had we had spoken sort of in the in the in the pre conversation about this.

20:02
So just so people who are not familiar understand this right.

20:06
So we worked in the same building for several years. Right.

20:09
So myself, Hannah, you and myself.

20:11
And, you know, I went through not something exactly like this at exactly the same time,

20:17
but at exactly the same time. And I only really learned.

20:21
So we all people in the rest of the Patterson office tower talked about,

20:25
oh, my goodness, the mess in the English department.

20:27
And so that sort of thing was was discussed.

20:31
And I only sort of really came to know it again from the from the

20:35

from the New York magazine article.

20:38
So, you know, as someone who has, you know, these

20:41
they're sort of very often distant relationships with people

20:45
who are not really core to your story in both the memoir and then

20:49
and then the later the later novel, but who are often on the tangents of the story.

20:56
Right. Whether whether it's part of the memoir or sort of fictionalized versions of them

20:59
in the novel. My question was, you know, sort of what

21:04
what sort of rules do you set for yourself?

21:08
What how do you think about

21:11
sort of using people in both the memoir and and the novel

21:15
who, you know, are real, who people might recognize

21:19
who are but are not really the core of the story? Right.

21:24
Do you have like a set of rules you use to think about those people or

21:28
to protect them or sort of otherwise how to how to treat them as sort of real

21:32
individuals who may end up reading this stuff or other people are going to read about them?

21:36
Like, how do you think about that particular?

21:39
I guess I would call it a responsibility to the people who are at the edges of the narrative.

21:44
Yeah, I thought about that.

21:46
And I think about that a lot, the responsibility that I have

21:50
to other people's privacy and then the responsibility that I have to

21:55
what I am trying to do, you know, the my artistic endeavor, if you will.

22:00
And the first thing I'll say is I think that especially when writing

22:08
personal nonfiction or when writing fiction with an autobiographical bent,

22:13
AKA auto fiction, you you have a writer is almost like a child.

22:20
You know, when we're kids, we don't know immediately

22:24
what makes us feel good and what makes us feel bad about our actions.

22:27
That's part of the horrible thing of learning and getting older.

22:30
You know, you can you can be on the playground and trip your friend

22:34
and trip your friend deliberately and you see that everybody laughs except your friend

22:39
who got tripped and is crying and you either go home and you think that felt horrible.

22:45
I never want to do that again.

22:46
That was the worst thing I've ever done.

22:48
Or you go home and think everybody laughed at me.

22:51
That was really cool.

22:52
So that that's how a kid sort of feels their way into adulthood.

22:57
I did I did this thing and I didn't like it or I did it and I liked it.

23:02
And I want to do it again.

23:03
And I think with. Writing about these personal topics, it's it's some it's somewhat similar.

23:11
I knew that I had to include for the memoir,

23:18
I had to include a version of my husband and a version of my former friend.

23:23
I decided with my editor to change their names

23:28
and I decided to change some of their basic backgrounds

23:35
so that you wouldn't necessarily know where they were from or who they were.

23:39
They are not they were not public people.

23:42

And at the time, he didn't yet have a book, very little and limited social presence.

23:48
So I wanted to respect who they are now.

23:52
But I also needed who they were in my life.

23:56
And when they were in my life, that was that's that's what I was trying to focus my story on.

24:01
I didn't want to write about them as they are now or anything like that,

24:06
because I have no idea with regards to the people whose names I did not change.

24:12
Those are all family members.

24:15
And all of those family members gave me, you know, a blank check and said, we trust you.

24:23
I offered each of them my mother, my sister, my brother features very, you know, he's not in a lot,

24:30
but I offered each of them the opportunity to read it and all of them said, surprise us.

24:35
We got it. You know, you've you've you've fictionalized us before.

24:39
We're fine. We trust you. And so that was very useful.

24:44
I did change the name of my friend who told me about the affair.

24:51
I just thought that that was the right thing to do because he isn't pivotal,

24:56
but he needed to be there because how I found out and how he said it to me was,

25:00
you know, just like a devastating and memorable moment.

25:06
So it needed to be in the book in the.

25:10
In the the novel, if you love it, let it kill you.

25:14
I am very intentionally stealing major figures from my life, including myself.

25:22
And I am corrupting all of us on the page.

25:25
You know, I like to say of my protagonist, Hannah P., I've changed her spelling from mine, which is

25:32
without an age, I was going to try.

25:35
That's right. You know, she's she's missing a little something.

25:42
But I I've changed everyone else's names or I don't use their names.

25:47
You know, there's father, there's mother, my sister.

25:50
I thought it would be hilarious just to drive her a little bit crazy to call her Sissy,

25:54
which is a moniker that she cannot stand.

25:58
And I would never call her that.

25:59
But it did crack us both up that I would name her that.

26:02
But, you know, none none of them are like that really in real life.

26:08
But I also got their permission.

26:10
You know, I asked my quote unquote life partner, my the man who I will not marry.

26:16
But, you know, I'm spending the rest of my life with.

26:18
I asked him if I could use him.

26:23
And he said, absolutely.

26:24
I made sure that the manner in which I use my stepdaughter is very limited.

26:31
And it is a fictionalized version, but I don't use her name.

26:35
And I wanted her to be more symbolic than actually based on a person.

26:41
But my mother, again, my mother gave me permission.

26:45
My sister gave me permission.

26:47
My father, I didn't I never asked my father if I could corrupt him on the page.

26:54
But I will say that there is not a conversation that I have with him where he does not say

26:59
I would like to be a charming character in one of your books.

27:03
So I felt that though I had not his explicit permission, he has kind of been giving me

27:08
explicit permission.

27:10
But but back to a little bit back to, you know, how do you decide what to include in the

27:17
memoir? I'll tell you this.

27:18
I have a very close reader.

27:20
He's read everything I've ever written.

27:22
And he is he's a friend that I inherited from my ex-husband.

27:28
And he was as close to the disintegration of our marriage as you can get without being

27:33
involved in it.

27:33
When I wrote the memoir and I knew that it was going to be published, I sent it to him

27:41
and I asked him if he would be willing to read it because I didn't want to hurt his

27:47
friendship with my ex-husband.

27:48
And he said he would absolutely love to read it.

27:51
And I said, please tell me before this goes into any kind of copy edits, tell me if I've

27:56
gone too far, if there's anything that I shouldn't do.

28:00

And he had, by the way, he'd read the first 50 pages and his response to the first 50

28:05
pages was I had a I had no idea that this was going on.

28:10
And he said, be more sex, more booze, more more all of that.

28:15
You know, he said, I had no idea how bad it was with you guys.

28:18
And and he said, I just I want more.

28:20
I want more. So he knew I was working on this.

28:23
When he read the whole thing, he called me and he said that there was one place where I

28:32
had.

28:32
I had included information about my former friend that was not mine to include.

28:41
It did not help the story.

28:43
It only portrayed her as it only put her in a negative light and and it was unnecessary.

28:53
It was it was extra.

28:54
It was decoration.

28:55
And it was it was me being cruel because because I could.

29:00
And he said, this this doesn't help anything.

29:04
Your narrative doesn't need it.

29:06
And the one thing that it could do is cause tension between the two of them now.

29:10
And I said, that is the last thing I want to do.

29:13
I do not want to impinge on their relationship.

29:17
And I took it out.

29:18
And I'm really glad that I had I included it because if I hadn't, I wouldn't have thought so

29:24
much about this with the next book and really realized that certain stories are not yours to

29:30
tell.

29:31
They're stories that you overheard.

29:33
I try to focus on the things that if it impacted my life, then it's part of my story.

29:39
And I try to just limit the wedge of the pie that also includes somebody else's life to only

29:47
what is necessary to my story and only to what impacted me.

29:51
But if there's other stuff, even if it's like really juicy, that's not mine.

29:56
That's theirs. And and I give it to them with fiction.

30:00
I don't know. You know, like Lauren Groff said, I loved I love this thing that she said a

30:05
little while ago about I can't remember who was after Catperson, you know, that viral story

30:10
in the worker.

30:11
It might have been that or the kidney fiasco, the one that happened in Boston.

30:16
The woman wrote about a kidney donor donation and she stole it from somebody else's life.

30:20
But Lauren Groff was interviewed saying, well, where do you fall on?

30:24
What can you take and what can't you take for fiction?

30:27
And she says something wonderful like there isn't a person I've ever met who I, as I'm talking

30:32
to them, have not flipped over upside down and shaken them like shaken out their pockets to see

30:38
what's in there.

30:39
And whatever I find is, you know, fodder.

30:43
And I don't know that I necessarily go that far, but with fiction, you know, straight fiction

30:49
where I'm not asking like in auto fiction, I am asking the reader to the tension is in not

30:56
knowing what's real and what is real.

30:59
So I'm I'm asking for them to conflate reality with e-reality.

31:04
But with straight fiction, yeah, I think that you can steal anything pretty much.

31:10
And because how can like how can you not?

31:13
How can you resist?

31:15
Yeah, I love that you tell your student in the new novel, you tell your students in the

31:20
creative writing class, tell the truth, but make it up, which I think is a good and excellent

31:25
one sentence.

31:26
One sentence summary, you know, speak to kind of unite our themes, both of kind of thing

31:30
fictionally and also the fact that, you know, one way that your memoir works is it in not

31:37
sparing yourself and not sort of just sort of making this about two villains.

31:41
There's sort of a tour de force scene in If You Love It, Let It Kill You, which I guess I

31:48
could invoke Salter.

31:48
It's almost more to me like the plot of like a Joni Mitchell song.

31:52
But, you know, sort of as the characters, this is Hannah without an age, her marriage is

31:58
disintegrating.

31:59
You know, she's kind of in veiled in this online flirtation with somebody who's called the

32:04
Irishman.

32:05
And so at one point, the Irishman invites some, you know, invites her to a bar, only it turns

32:10
out he's with like, you know, several other bros, you know, not necessarily what Hannah

32:15
without an age was expecting.

32:16
So Hannah without an age goes to the bar, kind of sits next to a sort of horny husband who

32:21
doesn't want to do anything, but is willing to buy her, you know, I like to think blends, but

32:25
some sort of top shelf bourbon.

32:27
And so making sure that this is visible to the Irishman, you know, the sort of texts that are

32:33
sort of traded there, that sort of, you know, just sort of brilliant.

32:36
And then this finally kind of ends up in a kind of surreal, but that sort of back and forth in

32:42
which sort of, you know, both parties are trying to some degree to sort of disguise the

32:45
flirtation, but also attract the other person's attention.

32:48
You know, I just thought that was sort of just sort of an amazing set piece, you know, sort of

32:54
and again, very much, you know, sort of almost a throwback to the 70s.

32:57

And again, that I take I'm not interested in what like really happened.

33:02
But I thought that was really just sort of a, you know, just I just love that the whole way that

33:08
that scene came off.

33:09
You know, I was at a bar once and I don't know for a fact that that was what I was watching

33:15
happen. But I saw a woman sitting alone.

33:19
And it was a bar that I used to go to after my divorce because I could walk there.

33:26
They I didn't really know how to cook for myself.

33:29
My husband had been the chef and it was the way that I could make sure I was getting enough

33:33
like food in my body.

33:35
And so I'd go there, eat a burger, sit at the bar and the bartenders all knew me.

33:39
They left me alone. I could read.

33:41
And, you know, I became a kind of bar fly and I was I was there a lot and enough to know when

33:47
somebody new was in and other people weren't in.

33:50
And I think it was around the holidays.

33:51
But a woman came in and was sitting alone.

33:53
And there was a group of men.

33:55
If if you ever go to Lexington, Kentucky, it's Coles that that I'm writing about.

34:01
There's have you.

34:02
I was about to ask. And Scott, I think probably it's it's like a block away from the synagogue

34:08
that Mary and Alicia go to.

34:09
So is it is it near like the Marriott?

34:12
No, no, not really.

34:15
It's it's it's just outside of downtown.

34:17
OK, so I don't think I was there the last time.

34:19
Anyway, this reminds me, I need to come back for Keeneland.

34:21
And so it's been too long.

34:22
But I think I think you may have taken me there on my my first visit.

34:25
This restaurant is like the regal beagle.

34:28
It's amazing. You walk in and there's a dining room on the left.

34:30
That's a lot. That's very formal.

34:33
And then there's this bar dining room that's dark wood.

34:37
You know, just there are a couple small tables and then there's a bar.

34:42
And there were it's just a great it's a wonderful.

34:46
It's like Rob should have taken me there.

34:47
That's all. And they have an excellent drink.

34:49
It's like a variant of a Manhattan that has let's go.

34:51
They call it the Lexingtonian and it has like some extra orange.

34:53
It is fantastic.

34:54
Delicious. For a little while, they had a Hannah Petard martini.

34:57
Wow. Let's get that back on.

35:00
I know it's it's it's it was it was quite amazing.

35:03
But I was sitting at the bar and I I was watching this woman

35:07
and she was texting and I was watching this man who was sitting with

35:12
what seemed like a bunch of his colleagues.

35:14

It was definitely a work thing.

35:15
And when he would put his phone away, she would get her phone out.

35:19
And when she put her phone away, he got his phone out.

35:22
And I heard one man ask him, you know, how's your wife?

35:26
And he answered to that.

35:28
And I just saw it like there was electricity going back and forth.

35:31
And I thought I could be making this up and it could just be the timing.

35:36
But I think that's what I'm seeing.

35:39
And I thought it was just like wonderful.

35:42
And to see an affair blossoming.

35:46
And then I had this whole idea of, you know, she thought she was meeting him.

35:51
But it was them.

35:53
Of course, he's not there alone because he's married.

35:55
So he's there. And it's and I just invented this entire scene.

35:58
And I'm glad you liked that.

36:00
I was pretty excited. Yeah, it was awesome.

36:02
And Scott, I think you phrased it right.

36:04
It feels like something out of the 70s.

36:06
Yeah, is that. Yeah.

36:07
It's like the comment about we're all headed to the strip club

36:10
and that sort of thing, too. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

36:13
Exactly.

36:15
Another thing that I really like about about both books is that you're just

36:19
you know, you're such a so many like little masterpiece details

36:23
about like domestic life and sort of the little nuances.

36:26
And I think that's what's useful in that we don't only get them in the memoir,

36:30
but also in the new novel about, you know, like a stable and loving relationship.

36:34
And yet, you know, anybody who's married knows that, you know, these little things.

36:38
I think one of my favorite scenes in We Are Too Many

36:42
is when your husband decides to spend 60 dollars

36:46
of the hundred dollar weekly food budget on lamb chops.

36:48
You know, does Hannah like lamb chops? Absolutely not.

36:51
You know, and and then, you know, it sort of concludes with saying,

36:55
well, now I don't even feel like cooking.

36:58
I will never forget that day.

37:00
I will be 99 years old and I will never forget that day.

37:04
I hate I hate lamb and home.

37:08
And I saw that price because, you know, it's whole foods.

37:11
It says right there how much it is.

37:12
And I was just looking at it like this pre

37:15
was on sale. This is on sale.

37:19
And he's like, it's whatever price it is.

37:20
And I'm like, we don't that's we don't have a budget

37:23
that allows us to say it's whatever price.

37:25

That's not right.

37:28
Right. Yeah. But I'll go ahead.

37:32
I was just going to say, I think

37:35
I don't think it's uncommon at all.

37:36
I don't think it's a gendered thing either way

37:40
that you can be in the best relationship in the world.

37:43
You can be content and you can still want to buck against it.

37:48
And you can still want to look around and see, well,

37:53
what if I had made a different decision or what if I weren't?

37:56
What if what if I allowed myself to do things that are incompatible

38:01
with this content and cozy life that I've chosen?

38:05
And for me, one of the beautiful things about being a fiction writer in general,

38:09
but specifically with the auto fiction is I created a character

38:14
who's modeled after me.

38:16
Or problematic, a little more unhinged.

38:20
But I I let her loose in the world.

38:24
And she does things that are incompatible with my life

38:29
and the contentment and the stability that I have.

38:32
And but like her, I crave stability.

38:37
I crave transparency.

38:40
But also like her, I completely buck against domesticity.

38:46
And I know on an intellectual level that the stability that I have

38:52
and the contentment I have is what allows me to have the success that I have

38:56
and to have the crazy thoughts that I have, because if I didn't have

39:01
the stable relationship that I have now,

39:05
I would not be able to be the lunatic that I am.

39:09
I mean, I very much think of, you know, my my boyfriend now is

39:13
it's not that he's some sort of stayed, not fun person.

39:18
But I think of him as like my three piece suit that he keeps the crazy in.

39:21
You know, you might work with a colleague that wears a three piece suit

39:25
and you're like, you know, the minute that blazer comes off and then the

39:27
the vest underneath, like the freak is on.

39:32
And I like to think of him as like he keeps the freak

39:35
like safe. He keeps her safe.

39:38
He keeps me safe is what he does.

39:41
There's only so much damage I can do with him in my life.

39:43
And that's a good thing for me.

39:45
I love that.

39:47
So I think that this this sort of builds off part of the conversation here.

39:52
You know, I found, of course, living here, right.

39:55
I found Lexington to be very present in both of these books.

40:00
Right. You know, one, you know,

40:02
I used to live on Sycamore, right?

40:04
And so, you know, so I'm familiar with a lot of places, not familiar with others.

40:09

Like I didn't try to check down the bench,

40:11
try to figure out the bench that you're talking to the dying cat on.

40:13
Right. Or the fictionalized version of you is talking to the dying cat on.

40:16
But, you know, I mean, Lexington, it can be a familiar place.

40:21
It can be a friendly place.

40:22
But like much of the American South, it has a pretty intense identity.

40:26
Right. And an identity that can be off putting to transplants

40:31
like yourself and myself.

40:33
You know, how I guess, how have you

40:37
worked with the idea of being of being identified as a Lexington author

40:44
or as perhaps more dreadfully a Southern author,

40:47
which is this sort of much broader genre,

40:51
which carries with it all manner of residences in American life?

40:55
Because, you know, you don't have magnolias here, but you do have ginggo trees.

40:59
Right. And that's a that's a very Kentucky thing.

41:02
And for people who are familiar, right.

41:04
I mean, everything about this read says this is a Kentucky novel.

41:07
This is a person who lives in Kentucky.

41:09
So how has that how has that mattered for you?

41:11
And I know you've lived in lots of different places, but but, you know,

41:15
how does that work for you now as a Lexingtonian?

41:18
Yeah, that's such an interesting question.

41:21
So I'm from I'm from Georgia.

41:22
And so I am I am quote unquote Southern.

41:26
But my and on my father's side, they are backwoods,

41:31
hardcore, rural southerners who, you know, came up from

41:36
from a very poor background and and, you know, became sort of.

41:42
Whatever they became, I don't know.

41:45
So I have this very Southern identifying side and my father's people.

41:49
And on my mother's side, she was a transplant, a Minnesotan transplant.

41:53
And, you know, the one thing that she guaranteed as she raised

41:57
my siblings and me was that we didn't have an accent.

42:00
And so from the time that I was in the South,

42:05
I was always a little bit other outside the South.

42:10
And then when I went to boarding school in Massachusetts when I was 14.

42:15
And it was funny because up there, people could clock me as not being from New

42:19
England, but it was because I was they always told me that I overarticulated

42:24
and that it often sounded like I was foreign.

42:26
And so even up there, I didn't quite fit in.

42:29
But I liked being from the South in New England.

42:32
That was actually kind of a it was cool to be one of the five.

42:35
I think there were five southerners or non New Englanders.

42:39
There was the Texan, the Floridian.

42:41
There was a girl from Louisville.

42:43

There was me. And I think that was that was it.

42:46
So that that was kind of cool, like prestige that you're not from from up there.

42:50
Lexington is I feel like I have a bunch of sound

42:56
bites about Lexington and you you totally probably get it, Rob.

42:59
Like so Lexington is a really easy place to live. Right.

43:02
I love parking at the airport.

43:04
I love that it takes 15 minutes to get to the airport.

43:07
I love that I moved here from Chicago where you had to park an hour away

43:13
and you were still paying 60 dollars a day, whereas here I can park

43:17
and literally walk across the street and I'm at the airport

43:21
and I can be gone a week and it might be 60 dollars for the whole week.

43:25
So these little things, I've been here 12 years and they still excite me.

43:29
Like paying for street parking is delightful.

43:33
I will never forget how expensive it was in Chicago, you know,

43:36
and that it went into like midnight in Chicago.

43:38
So it's a really easy place to live and

43:43
but it is also I will always be a transplant here, especially as a writer.

43:47
We have Kentucky has a rich, rich history of writers.

43:55
I will never be considered one of them.

43:58
I could be here for the next 50 years and I anticipate being here for 50 years.

44:02
And if I ever went to a Kentucky book festival,

44:06
I would be made to feel that I am an outsider.

44:10
So that's its own interesting thing. And I do think I don't think it is unique

44:14
to Kentucky, but I don't think it is everywhere.

44:17
I think that there are particular places that will embrace an outsider

44:21
and they're just like, you're here, you're with us.

44:23
You know, you're you're you're in Austin now.

44:26
You decided to move here.

44:27
You're going to be a weirdo with us like you're you're in Austinite, just like we are.

44:31
But in Kentucky, at least as far as being a writer goes,

44:37
I will always feel like an outsider.

44:40
And that's OK for me.

44:41
I'm very comfortable in that mode.

44:44
And I think that was also it was essential for both books

44:48
because it was when we got here as a married couple

44:52
that we lost all of the stuff that we had in Chicago

44:57
that was clearly acting as scaffolding in our marriage

45:01
that wasn't real to our marriage.

45:03
But, you know, we could we could go hear live music,

45:07
which appealed to my husband, which would make him happy,

45:10
which would mean that he wasn't depressed.

45:12
And so there were a lot of things that just disguised our various

45:16
inclinations to be dissatisfied with one another.

45:20
When we got to Chicago, those things were removed.

45:23

And it meant that.

45:25
Everything that.

45:27
Had been disguised about him was present.

45:31
He complained every day.

45:33
He complained that the sidewalks were too narrow.

45:36
So he stopped walking the dog with me.

45:38
He complained that when he did walk with me and the sidewalks were too narrow

45:41
and we couldn't walk side by side, there was nothing to look at

45:44
because we were just in this residential area.

45:47
So he complained about that.

45:49
He complained about what the houses did look like.

45:51
He complained that there was only one bar within walking distance,

45:54
you know, and because of how much he liked to drink,

45:57
he needed to be able to walk if he was going to be safe.

45:59
At least the one bar that we could walk to, which was Coles,

46:02
made an excellent martini.

46:04
So that was like his one concession.

46:06
There was one bartender who could make one good drink.

46:08
And that was at Coles.

46:10
But it was just complaint, complaint, complaint.

46:13
And meanwhile, I moved here and I finished my third book.

46:17
I was under contract for my fourth book.

46:20
And it was for the first time we were paying our bills.

46:24
And I in Chicago had been the bill payer.

46:28
I had been the money maker.

46:29
And so we got to here.

46:31
And for me, it was just this weight that I would go to sleep with every night

46:36
as much as I loved Chicago.

46:38
I mean, my favorite city on the planet.

46:40
But I didn't have the money to live there.

46:42
And I was also paying for somebody else.

46:44
But when we got here, we both had full time jobs,

46:46
paid off all of our debts.

46:49
My dog had a yard and we had a house.

46:54
I never thought we'd have a house and we could pay our mortgage

46:57
and we could like actually spend money and he could buy a new instrument

47:01
instead of us going to debt to buy more instruments than he needed.

47:05
So I found it was liberating.

47:08
You know, all of the stuff I missed was being supplanted

47:13
by other things that I was getting, you know, was I excited to be living in the South again?

47:18
Not necessarily.

47:19
Was I excited to be surrounded by so many people who are not as politically

47:23
minded or minded in the political way that I am?

47:26
Not exactly.

47:28

But I was able to see in general, I think

47:31
I go towards half full and I was able to see I can do all of these things,

47:36
which creates a blank space for me to be able to go to my office or,

47:42
you know, to the library and write because I'm not panicked about money

47:47
and I'm not panicked about, you know, all of this other stuff.

47:50
But there was just this one new thing that I had to panic about.

47:54
And that's that for the first time in my life, I didn't like going home.

47:57
And so and Kentucky was just such a part of that for us.

48:01
Like it was the beginning of the end.

48:03
And with the new novel, If You Love It, Let It Kill You, I think that's more about,

48:07
you know, feeling like an outsider and feeling like you are other,

48:13
but also somewhat embracing it and thumbing your nose at it and saying,

48:17
well, you've got me now.

48:19
You might never consider me a Kentucky writer, but guess what?

48:22
Here I am.

48:23
Like, what do you do with a boomer who decides to stick around?

48:26
Like deal with her.

48:28
Right. Right. And and, you know, sort of another name that that occurred to me

48:33
really when I was when I was experiencing the second novel was Walter Teves,

48:36
who sort of has.

48:38
Arrived at Kentucky earlier in his life, and I think is considered a Lexington

48:43
author, is considered a Kentucky author, but, you know, it's not afraid

48:48
to sort of show the same sort of strangeness of the essential strangeness of this area,

48:53
which which it seems to me, you know, especially because the second novel

48:56
does have so much of this discomfort with the degree of it has.

48:59
It shows a discomfort with comfort, right?

49:01
A discomfort with the necessity.

49:03
But the weirdness of Kentucky kind of makes up for that.

49:07
And the strangeness of being a stranger in this land kind of it seems like

49:11
sort of makes up for a little bit of that.

49:12
So I found that very interesting.

49:14
Well, you know, I mean, you know this because you're here.

49:16
Lexington is a big city that feels like a small town.

49:19
You know, we we are different from many university towns

49:22
because we have the horse industry and because we have the bourbon industry.

49:26
And so that makes us a very unique kind of campus community.

49:32
But and we also have, you know, our suitcase students where they leave

49:36
on the weekends, but we don't. We're here.

49:38
You know, the the faculty are here and we're known commodities.

49:43
And so part of this new book was also dealing with the fact that I moved here

49:48
with a husband and then my husband left and I started a brand new life.

49:52
And in this brand new life, I flourished.

49:54
I found somebody who, you know, when you're in an unhappy relationship,

49:59
when you know that you're just every day you wake up

50:02

and you wish that you weren't next to the person in bed.

50:04
I don't know if this was your case or if you've experienced this.

50:07
But for me, I didn't want to be happy.

50:10
And I didn't want other people around me to be happy.

50:12
And I didn't like to be near people who are having fun.

50:16
And so when I'd go home

50:18
over the holidays, when I was in my unhappy marriage towards the end,

50:21
my siblings would be having fun.

50:24
I would be killjoy.

50:25
I would just be like the the the one of those old people in the Muppets

50:30
or something up in the, you know, Waller and Stadler.

50:33
Those guys are great. They're the best.

50:35
It was that was me.

50:36
Like I was just like a young old.

50:39
Person who didn't want to have any fun. And so

50:45
becoming this person who was flourishing, my mom came to visit and she said,

50:49
oh, you're happy now. Like you're you again.

50:52
And I said, yeah, me again.

50:53
And she was like, I'm moving here.

50:56
This is amazing.

50:57
So then my mom moved to town.

50:58
I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a minute.

51:00
I no longer can like if I go to a bar now,

51:03
my mom might get a text from somebody saying, hey, your daughter's here.

51:07
So I was like, OK, I guess this is cool. It's cool.

51:10
I do like it. But then my sister moved to town.

51:13
I was like, this is a little bit like the not what I was intending as a,

51:20
you know, late 30 something.

51:21
And then my father moved to town and now everybody knows.

51:25
Everyone knows my father.

51:28
Like everybody, you probably have seen him walking around.

51:31
He's he's very I did not know who he was, but yes, I have seen him.

51:36
Yeah, I just I love the way you portray that is like he's this how he does business.

51:40
He was outside, let the car doors open, the radio.

51:43
It's just like such a vivid scene.

51:45
It's like, you know, if you spend any time in downtown Lexington

51:48
for at least one week, you will know who my father is.

51:51
I go out. You will not know who I am.

51:53
You can you can be here for the same amount of time.

51:55
My sister knows everyone.

51:58
She was here for six months.

52:00
And you would think that she was born here.

52:02
I mean, she knows everybody because she and her husband own a cidery.

52:06
And so they're in the hospitality business.

52:09

And it so they're known commodities.

52:12
And that's wait, wait, wait, do they do they own Weisberg?

52:14
They went Weisberg. Oh, my God.

52:16
Oh, wow. Here.

52:17
And they started there.

52:19
They just they they came to visit when I was living with my mom.

52:23
And my sister basically said, this is unfair.

52:27
And my mom was like, well, you can come.

52:29
And within six months, they had sold their house in D.C.

52:32
They quit their like very professional jobs.

52:35
And my brother in law was making cider.

52:40
And the two of them opened Weisberg cidery.

52:43
And now they are as ingrained in this community as like anybody I've ever seen.

52:48
It's just wild. Oh, that's crazy.

52:50
I love that place. So it's really.

52:52
Oh, good. No, no, no, no.

52:55
Yeah. So I wanted to, you know, and I said, I really want to,

52:58
you know, sort of tell our readers, you know, and again, I've seen,

53:02
you know, not just like on social media, but even some relatively positive reviews

53:06
suggest that this novel is basically just a fictional recapitulation of We Are Too

53:11
Many, which is just not true at all.

53:13
You know, obviously, the short story does linger over it.

53:15
And yes, when your ex writes a short story in which a not even disguised version

53:20
of you gets brutally murdered by a homeless person, as Adam Sandler said, funny people,

53:23
you had to comment on it.

53:25
So I'm saying, but that's really not it's sort of a one instigating incident.

53:29
What's really, you know, a novel about your family and your new relationship

53:33
and your teaching.

53:35
So I have to ask about, you know, the sort of the interesting device.

53:38
You know, I don't know if magic realist is too pretentious way of putting it,

53:42
but there is obviously a talking cat in the center of the novel,

53:45
which really appears when there's stresses about this sort of quasi stalker

53:49
senior student in your classes, you know, the sort of periodic text

53:54
you're getting from the Irishman, you know, the sort of tensions involved

53:57
in having your entire extended family there, which is, again, is blessing

54:00
in some ways, you know, tension in some other ways.

54:03
And so how I, you know, and again, do not try this at home.

54:08
I do not actually have any literary expertise, but as I interpreted it,

54:12
you know, it's kind of almost a signal of, you know, that this is fiction,

54:16
you know, that that that yes, you know, it's auto fiction, but, you know,

54:20
that it's still, you know, that that this don't don't treat this

54:24
like you you sort of treated the memoir.

54:26
So I'm sure that's not the only reason you did it.

54:28
But what why did you choose to sort of have the place, the

54:33

the sort of talking cat at the center of the novel to sort of help the

54:37
Hannah without an age, you know, sort of deal with some of these

54:40
kind of tensions and conflicts?

54:42
You know, the cat the cat surprised me.

54:45
The the cat is loosely based on my neighbor's cat.

54:49
I do a lot of writing in the summer on my front porch.

54:52
I mean, talk about Southern and Kentucky, right?

54:54
If the day is nice, we are on our front porch.

54:58
It is the extension of our house.

54:59
We live for it.

55:01
But I do a lot of writing out there and I was working on some early

55:04
chapters of this book.

55:06
And, you know, in my real life, I have issues with boundaries.

55:11
And sometimes I'm told I go too far, like, you know, Colby

55:15
in the Donald Bartholomew story, some of us have been threatening

55:18
our friend Colby because he'd gone too far.

55:20
Like, I feel like I'm constantly going too far.

55:22
My neighbor's cat started coming coming over when they moved in.

55:27
And I love this cat.

55:29
We don't have an animal.

55:31
But I loved this cat.

55:32
And so I bought it a brush and I made sure that the brush was

55:36
camouflaged with our Adirondacks so that the neighbors don't know

55:39
that I'm over there like brushing their cat.

55:41
And, you know, it had fleas when it first came over.

55:44
And so I got some like flea medication.

55:46
So there's all of this stuff that I'm doing that's completely not right.

55:50
That I know that I shouldn't have done, but the cat looks really good now.

55:52
And it likes me anyway.

55:55
So I was working on this book and one day the cat came over

55:59
and tried to get in my lap and I've got my computer out there.

56:02
And, you know, I had to push him off, which broke my heart to have to push

56:05
this beautiful cat off with these beautiful green eyes.

56:08
And I looked down at it.

56:10
And in the way that I used to with my now dead dog, you know, I just started.

56:14
I could hear what it was saying and I was talking to it and I was like, well, yeah,

56:17
I understand that you think I'm being a total bitch right now.

56:20
And, you know, then I like give it pause so it can talk to me and I can like,

56:23
you know, I'm supplanting what it's saying.

56:26
And then I just sort of looked at what I was writing and I thought,

56:30
Oh, this is that's it.

56:33
Like the cat is the key.

56:34
And I needed an interesting way to have this woman essentially have a break

56:41
in which she is two sides of herself.

56:45

She is the side that is saying, this is so obvious.

56:48
What you're doing is so wrong.

56:49
Like, who are you fooling?

56:51
And that that becomes the cat, you know, and the cat has access to all of her

56:55
memories and sometimes she's like, how do you know that?

56:57
And the cat's like, how dumb are you?

57:00
You know, like, how's bro on you?

57:01
And the cat uses some of the language that the stepdaughter uses, you know,

57:05
talks about a thingy, like go get that towel thingy,

57:08
which is what the stepdaughter says.

57:10
And she's like, how do you know?

57:12
How do you know about the Irishman?

57:13
And the cat's always just like,

57:15
do I have to explain it to you?

57:18
So it was a way to to make, I think, an internal monologue more interesting.

57:24
And then I will also say this is kind of an interesting story, I think.

57:30
When I delivered this book, because my my first editor bought the book

57:34
and she bought it based on just a couple chapters that were only about the family.

57:38
And it was pretty much a comedy.

57:40
And when I turned it in, there was this darkness, you know, there's this Irishman.

57:44
There's an assault that this woman doesn't know was an assault.

57:47
Was it not an assault?

57:48
So she's trying to figure out a lot of things and it's just it is dark.

57:52
And and then there was the talking cat and my editor.

57:56
Hated the book, she actually asked me if I had anything else in a drawer

58:03
that I wanted to publish instead, and I was struck dumb by this,

58:08
like literally speechless, and she did it over Zoom with me, too,

58:11
which meant I was looking at her like, what?

58:14
But and one of the things she said, and so, Scott,

58:18
I really appreciate what you have said.

58:20
But one of the things my editor said was this is just too much

58:23
in the same territory of your memoir.

58:26
And I said, this has nothing to do with my memoir.

58:28
And she said, I'm afraid that we won't know how to market it.

58:31
And people are just going to think that you're rehashing the same material.

58:34
And I said, have you read the book?

58:36
And she said, are you even are you even thinking of this as fiction?

58:39
And I said, there's a talk.

58:41
And then she gave me the weekend to decide whether or not

58:47
I wanted to insist on publishing this book.

58:50
And I called my agent immediately and my agent was like,

58:53
I love the book. This is the book.

58:55
And then my agent talked to my editor and my agent called me back.

58:59
And she said she said that my editor kept saying, is it even fiction?

59:03

Is it even fiction?

59:04
And my agent was like, there's a talking cat.

59:07
Like what? What are you?

59:09
And so, yes, talking cat did also it became a very early

59:14
and useful thing for me to be able to say when people would say, well,

59:18
how much like is isn't this just you?

59:20
And I'm like talking cat talking cat cat that can talk.

59:24
Fiction, not real. Yeah.

59:28
Thank you. I mean, the cat surprised me.

59:31
And it's you know, it's what I love about fiction is I'm not somebody who plots.

59:36
And because I don't plot, I am I leave myself open to surprises.

59:42
And those surprises often end up defining a project.

59:47
And as as an artist, that is just so satisfying.

59:51
And sometimes it means that you can look back at something you've made and be like,

59:55
I have no idea how I did that, but I will always love it.

59:59
And just there's there's just a sort of ability to admire that is pretty cool,

01:00:06
especially because you're not making it now.

01:00:08
So it doesn't feel as conceited as it might sound.

01:00:11
I don't know if I could write this book now, but I wrote it then.

01:00:14
And I'm very proud of the person I was when I wrote this.

01:00:18
So I want to go back at the very beginning.

01:00:20
Scott said he started reading this and then he picked up the audible.

01:00:24
I have found now that if it's not an academic book, right?

01:00:28
I mean, if it's not something I literally have to cite and do footnotes on,

01:00:30
almost all my reading now is on audible.

01:00:33
Right. And so sometimes I struggled even to call it reading.

01:00:36
Right. So say, did I read your book or did I just listen to your book?

01:00:39
Right. Am I being dishonest if I said I read your book when I just listen to your book?

01:00:42
Anyway, I just listen to your two books.

01:00:44
So I'm not even sure I ever read them.

01:00:46
So take that with what you will.

01:00:48
I don't got to say I do.

01:00:50
I read physically.

01:00:52
I read books for blurbing.

01:00:53
But and then obviously for whatever I'm teaching and I do teach fiction.

01:00:57
So I get to read a lot of fiction books.

01:00:59
But everything else is audible.

01:01:01
It's the only way I can stay up to date on.

01:01:03
I listen to everything.

01:01:05
So I appreciate it.

01:01:07
I have to think of it as reading.

01:01:09
Otherwise, I don't read.

01:01:11
So I have not been fortunate enough to this point in my career

01:01:15
to have a book that has justified an audible recording.

01:01:18

But I found it very interesting because I had to go back after after finishing the novel.

01:01:24
And you you made the decision to narrate the first book.

01:01:29
Right. You're the narrator in of the memoir.

01:01:31
And then someone else is I forget that I forget the name, but she was wonderful.

01:01:35
Someone else is the narrator of the second book, I guess.

01:01:37
So two connected questions.

01:01:40
One, you know, was that a very intentional decision?

01:01:42
Right. That you wanted to be the person who was who was reading the first book

01:01:47
and that people would then sort of, you know, identify with you.

01:01:51
Right. And this is you. Right.

01:01:53
And then sort of the the novel is someone else. Right.

01:01:58
So a and then B.

01:01:59
What is it like, you know, even for something that's auto fiction, right?

01:02:04
Hannah without an H listening to it in somebody else's voice.

01:02:08
Right. Was that is that weird?

01:02:10
Right. Is that is that troubling or is it satisfying?

01:02:14
Like, what's the what is the feeling that that it inspires when you're listening

01:02:18
to someone speak your words in it, even for a fictionalized version of yourself?

01:02:23
OK, I love this question.

01:02:25
Nobody ever asks me this question.

01:02:27
So I think like a lot of people, I do not like the sound of my own voice

01:02:32
when I hear it recorded, but the minute they asked

01:02:36
if I was interested in reading the memoir, the answer was 100 percent.

01:02:40
Yes, because only I could understand

01:02:44
all of the intonations and where the stresses went

01:02:47
and where the syllables should just where where the italics,

01:02:52
the sort of the hidden italics were and where the emphasis was.

01:02:55
And I just believed that it would be the most honest in my voice.

01:03:00
And also what I did with the memoir was something I never planned to do again.

01:03:08
People laugh at this when I tell them, but in my family,

01:03:12
I am known as an incredibly private person.

01:03:14
I mean, I keep so much hidden.

01:03:17
And so this memoir, which a lot of people say, wow, like my mom,

01:03:22
you really opened your kimono, literally what she said,

01:03:25
was so interesting to me because I opened such a small aspect of the kimono,

01:03:30
but it was still the most vulnerable I have ever made myself.

01:03:35
And I very intentionally wanted to tackle

01:03:37
things about me that had been private and that at earlier times in my life,

01:03:45
I'd been ashamed of like my eating disorder, which I am in full recovery from.

01:03:49
But it it's so defined how I was and also was

01:03:54
was part and parcel and a symptom of what allowed me to be so vulnerable

01:04:01
when it came to Trish and Patrick and why those friendships were able

01:04:06
to sort of infect me so much.

01:04:09
You know, I had significant and severe body dysmorphia.

01:04:12

So again, to have the attention from them

01:04:14
was kind of making me feel that perhaps I I had I might have been

01:04:20
beautiful or different looking than I'd always thought.

01:04:23
So I wanted to include stuff like that.

01:04:26
And I wanted to be the one reading it.

01:04:28
If they had let me audition for If You Love It, Let It Kill You,

01:04:32
I absolutely would have.

01:04:34
I'm glad that a professional did it because I don't like doing the different

01:04:39
voices for the different genders.

01:04:41
I've not so uncomfortable.

01:04:43
But I will say I think she did a great job.

01:04:46
But and I only listened to the first

01:04:50
maybe five minutes of it once it was finally recorded.

01:04:54
And I picked her. She she was

01:04:57
she did one of the short stories in that book that just came out by Tony.

01:05:02
I want to say is I'm going to massacre his last name, Tony Toutemayo.

01:05:07
Rejection rejection. Yes, yes.

01:05:09
He does one of the rejection stories and they had given me three actresses

01:05:14
and all of them sounded A.I.

01:05:17
And they were very frustrated with me.

01:05:19
And they said, well, who do you like?

01:05:20
And I said, well, this this woman is great.

01:05:22
And they got her. And I was thrilled with that.

01:05:26
The five minutes that I listened to, I did think that she was really sad.

01:05:32
And I wanted I wish that she had had a bit more of a sense

01:05:36
of the absurdity of her situation.

01:05:39
But they never they didn't let me hear any of it until after it was,

01:05:44
you know, packaged. But when I listened, I thought, boy,

01:05:49
like today, I am restless.

01:05:51
I love that as an opening line.

01:05:53
And the way she reads it, it's like

01:05:56
today, I am restless.

01:05:59
And it's like sad.

01:06:01
And it's like it's more like today I'm restless.

01:06:04
Like I have chosen.

01:06:06
I literally woke up today.

01:06:07
And this is like the fifth time that I've said it.

01:06:09
And I'm like, I'm I'm throwing out a dart to see which person

01:06:13
is going to actually engage with it.

01:06:15
You know, she says it to her boyfriend and her boyfriend is like all day

01:06:18
or intermittent, you know, like refuses to engage.

01:06:21
So she like throws it out to her friend and her friends like I'll play.

01:06:25
Like I'm like you. Let's go.

01:06:27
So I wish there had been a little bit of playfulness, but it is

01:06:32

it is pretty cool getting to hear a professional read your work.

01:06:36
I mean, it's as I've been lucky that all of my books have been made into

01:06:41
audibles and it's very cool hearing someone else perform it.

01:06:47
It just makes it feel real, you know.

01:06:49
Yeah, yeah, it's cool.

01:06:53
I also want to ask you, given the impacts are shared profession.

01:06:57
There's also a sequence in if you love it, let it kill you,

01:07:01
you know, where you sort of have a difficult creative writing class

01:07:05
and that ends up in sort of accusations that you're sort of treating people

01:07:09
differently based on gender and race.

01:07:11
And this ends up being called into, you know, you're you're sort of

01:07:14
called into administrative discussions.

01:07:17
You know, and it's sort of interesting in that, you know, the sort of

01:07:21
the balance of that is sort of very much, you know, sort of, you know,

01:07:25
sort of campus, you know, PC, you know, sort of criticism, you know, from,

01:07:30
you know, sort of from from the the left of campus.

01:07:33
But obviously, you know, in a striking this, you know, is being part of the

01:07:37
the last search we're likely to have in many years as you know,

01:07:40
even a blue states, you know, our entire administrative staff is getting fired.

01:07:43
Let's not situation is not great.

01:07:45
But, you know, so many applicants are from states like, you know,

01:07:48
West Virginia and Florida where it's like, you know, yeah, I have tenure,

01:07:52
but I've got to get out of here. It doesn't mean anything.

01:07:54
So, Scott, I'm going to pause you.

01:07:56
I'm going to pause you like literally the new regulations for for a faculty review

01:08:01
annual faculty review came down today.

01:08:03
Like we literally got them in our in our inbox today.

01:08:05
Yeah, for me, it doesn't matter.

01:08:07
But but for I think for Hannah, this tenure does.

01:08:10
So, yeah. Yeah.

01:08:11
So I was also I was interested in that that, you know, that sort of,

01:08:14
you know, kind of potential threat was sort of how we think of threats

01:08:19
and the sort of, you know, the the late 2010s, early 2020s.

01:08:24
But, you know, I'm also wondering, and I know Kentucky is not a deep self state.

01:08:28
It has a Democratic governor.

01:08:30
You know, but still is that something that that that both of you are concerned about

01:08:35
now that there's, of course, also this seal that sort of anything you say in class

01:08:39
can you turn up on turning point USA or or or whatever.

01:08:43
And this is new. I once when I was teaching at CUNY, I got an autographed copy

01:08:48
of David Horowitz's indoctrination.

01:08:50
You just like said to me, so respond to you with like saying that.

01:08:53
So it's like, like, I'm watching you.

01:08:55
It's like, yeah, great. Yeah.

01:08:56
But anyway, so it's not like this is a new new thing.

01:08:59

But, you know, so I was I was interested in that you sort of chose to sort of have

01:09:04
that conflict resolve around that.

01:09:05
And of course, you know, it's not like one, you know, both can exist.

01:09:09
It says you could be the oppression from both sides.

01:09:12
But but what is it like to to to be an academic in in in Kentucky right now?

01:09:18
I find it precarious.

01:09:22
I have never been so aware of every word that I say in front of students.

01:09:32
I think a lot of what has made me I love teaching.

01:09:35
I absolutely adore it.

01:09:36
And I think what makes me an effective teacher is how personable I can be

01:09:43
and how how honest I can be, especially about my the profession of writing.

01:09:50
And I think that a lot of a lot of that is getting neutered right now.

01:09:56
I'm self neutering and self censoring.

01:09:58
And to be aware of it is pretty soul killing at times,

01:10:04
because I feel that my students aren't getting the best version of me that they could be getting.

01:10:10
But if I gave them the best version, I think that's the version that could potentially wind up on in a headline.

01:10:18
And I don't I don't want to be the center of attention.

01:10:21
I want to keep writing and I want to be able to keep teaching.

01:10:26
And so I it means that I am thinking more and more and more about how to effectively teach.

01:10:32
And I am trying new things constantly because I want to be as effective as possible.

01:10:37
But I also do not want to end up in a lawsuit.

01:10:40
I don't want to lose my job because these are all the things that I have that pay my my health insurance and allow me to write.

01:10:48
You know, I think of myself as a writer, but I cannot do it without this job.

01:10:54
And this job has been and is, you know, I have been acknowledged for what I've done.

01:11:01
I have this endowed share. I don't take that for granted. I have a wonderful teaching load to two.

01:11:07
I'm nervous that that schedule is going to change soon.

01:11:09
I think that's part of what these annual reviews might be doing, that we're going to be looking at a lot more teaching and a lot more students

01:11:19
and that the research component is going to become less and less important.

01:11:23
And that's that's a real bummer, man. But but mostly it makes me.

01:11:29
I understand why there are certain precautions in place.

01:11:34
Absolutely. Right. Any anybody who is even remotely aware of things that used to happen in the academy understands why there are precautions in place to protect students.

01:11:46
But there is a kind of there is an infantilization that I do think is occurring where students are being coddled

01:11:58
in ways that I don't think are going to help them when when we when we set them free at the end of four years.

01:12:06
And that especially as somebody who truly believes in what a teacher can do, that can that gets me down sometimes.

01:12:14
You know, I'm not I'm not prone to depression, but it can it can bum me out quite a bit.

01:12:21
So I want to take I want to take Scott's questions and I want I want to turn it just a little bit because the same sections that he was talking about also intrigued me.

01:12:28
Right. You know, we all know because we're all teachers that students don't read anymore.

01:12:33
Right. I mean, that fundamentally, and this is a crisis. It's not just the UK.

01:12:37
It's a lot of other places. Right. I know what that means in terms of teaching national security and diplomacy, which is what I do.

01:12:43
Right. I know how it makes my work harder in terms of what I do.

01:12:48
How does that and how is everything goes with it?

01:12:51

Jadgep and everything else. How does that make your job more difficult at this point?

01:12:56
But the teaching part of your job, the changes we're seeing in how students are interacting with the written word.

01:13:00
The change really happened. I think the biggest change that I've seen or where I felt the difference the most significantly was post covid.

01:13:09
That that does seem to be where students after covid, the attention span just seems shorter than it's ever been.

01:13:20
And even the way students will talk in class, sometimes they say things that inside my jaw is dropping open when, for instance,

01:13:30
a young person recently said that she had a difficult time understanding the the text that we were reading because she was sleepy and had been out with friends and had had something to drink.

01:13:45
And she had the TV on. And I I'm listening to this and she she wasn't embarrassed.

01:13:51
And I just said, well, that's not reading. You didn't read the text.

01:13:55
And she said, well, it's a confusing text. And I said, you didn't read it that that if you're watching TV, you have you had something in your system that had affected your capacity to take it in.

01:14:08
And you were tired. That's not engaging with it.

01:14:12
And honestly, I thought I was going to get in trouble for that.

01:14:16
I after that class, I came home and I was like, I don't think I should have said that.

01:14:20

I think that that could have been perceived as embarrassing her. But in a math class, you can say you didn't do the equation.

01:14:29
And one thing I have gotten good at when I assign certain prompts for my creative writing students, I no longer let them write whenever whatever they want.

01:14:39
I say that you have to respond to this. And sometimes I get pushed back where they say, but this is creative writing.

01:14:45
And I said, this is this is an artificial environment, just like everything else.

01:14:49
This is a creative writing class. And I have to give you a grade.

01:14:53
That grade has to be based on something. And this is the same thing.

01:14:56
Think of this as a math class. I have given you an equation.

01:15:00
You don't go to your math professor afterwards and say, can I have a different one?

01:15:03
Or I don't want to say that. Or here I saw this equation in my last class.

01:15:07
Can I just turn it in? So there's I think that there's that kind of pushback that I'm getting, which is frustrating.

01:15:14
But with regards to reading, I assign shorter and shorter and shorter things.

01:15:20
And even sometimes as few as six pages, they won't read them all.

01:15:25
I had a quiz earlier this semester in a 100 level class and I had to stop giving this type of quiz because I didn't quite understand the effect of A.I.

01:15:38

and chat GPT until just this year. I had one hundred and seven students and it was a quiz about Bullet in the Brain by Tobias Wolff.

01:15:48
Beautiful story. It's literally four pages. And one of the questions was, you know, what's the most memorable detail here?

01:16:00
Ninety percent of them had the exact same answer and it all started with, well, during my time in Little League, I remember being on the baseball field and I'm like, 90 percent of you were in Little League.

01:16:15
Huh? Interesting. Because, you know, chat GPT will make it personal.

01:16:20
And so I came to class and I had to tell them, I was like, listen, the thing that you're not understanding is when you cheat, which it is cheating,

01:16:29
and you use A.I. to answer the question, you're all using the same A.I., which means I'm getting the same answer from all of you.

01:16:38
And so I just threw that quiz out, but it really was eye opening because I'm telling you that even the phrasing was the same and they didn't make it about the story.

01:16:48
They made it about this personal response. And that just blew my mind.

01:16:53
And it made me very sad because they're missing out on I cannot make a person read. I cannot sit there and make them read it.

01:17:00
I can do more in class writing. And so that's happening.

01:17:03
I'm doing a ton of in class writing and it's with handwriting and I'm having them make zines now at that hundred level instead of typing anything.

01:17:12
Because I don't I don't want to I line at it. My students work. I engage with it.

01:17:17
I don't want to line at it. Something a computer made. That's that's not that's a waste of my time.

01:17:22
And it's not they're not going to look at it. They don't care. But I do have students obviously who don't use it.

01:17:28
But I think it's a temptation. I think it's a temptation for everyone at every level, not just our students.

01:17:33
And it's it saddens me. I know it's coming. You know, I if you don't change with the times, the times are going to change you.

01:17:40
But I can buck against it. And that's kind of what my tears I've done.

01:17:44
And so some class like Internet American, I'm just going back to blue books.

01:17:48
But in class with us, I'm viable. Just the grading criteria is just you get credit for saying specific things about the text or lecture that are.

01:17:57
So I'm not going to bother to try to prove whether you got this from a or not, which I'm not sure.

01:18:01
It's just that you don't get credit for it either way.

01:18:03
I think that's the you know, like but you only get credit for things that actually prove that you read, you know.

01:18:08
And I guess if you could train a well enough to be that specific, whatever.

01:18:12
But like, you know, that's really the only almost the only way you can do it.

01:18:16
I just don't. Yeah, I just don't know, you know, you know, how you know that it's going to be really difficult to deal with over the years.

01:18:23
But that's that's the imperfect solution we have now is just that it's not sort of whether or not you're cheating.

01:18:29
You're not getting credit because you're not showing that you've actually engaged with the test.

01:18:33
I want to say the one the one nice thing about especially upper level creative writing classes so far.

01:18:39
Most people who come to these classes come to these classes because they want to express themselves.

01:18:44
I will not say that they want to read necessarily, but they want to express themselves.

01:18:48
And so at least with, you know, everything past that 100 level, I do think so far I am getting actual human generated work because it is an outlet for these students who, you know, want a place to to come and process their feelings, really process their life.

01:19:09
And that's what they're doing in my classes. And so I'm grateful for that.

01:19:12
But and they read each other's they definitely read one another's work and they engage with it.

01:19:16
And that's wonderful. And so I just try to focus on the positive of that and, you know, keep it student centered and there and we'll see.

01:19:27
We'll see what happens. And that's actually the same experience I have with my teacher, 15 students, Supreme Court seminar.

01:19:33
And I make them do oral presentations for every class.

01:19:36
But yeah, like that level of student like wants to read about the shadow docket like they want to know about the story of Michael Hardwick.

01:19:43
So again, they're not necessarily doing close reads of every, you know, but, you know, they're sort of reading enough and they're genuinely engaged with the questions.

01:19:51
Like they're genuinely interested. And so I do think we don't want to be too defeatist.

01:19:55
You know, I think that especially as you get to upper levels, you know, you do get students who actually are interested and want to pursue further studies.

01:20:03
And so I do think that's the positive aspects. I think are still there. And I think I hope that in the discussions about that, that doesn't get lost either.

01:20:10
So I think that there are still a lot of students who are engaged in and trying hard.

01:20:14
And I think that sometimes gets gets lost as well. Yeah. Scott, do you have any final questions?

01:20:19
I'm done with mine. So yeah, I just said one one last thing.

01:20:23
So as again, I kind of want to try to encourage our readers to to take a look at the take a look at the book.

01:20:32
But I had to mention there's an amazing you know, I mentioned earlier that, you know, the if you love a lot of kill,

01:20:38
you just have so many great domestic scenes, like a real eye for that.

01:20:42
And so there's an amazing scene where you get a text from Bruce, your boyfriend in the book, you know, sort of, you know, basically, you know, you ask,

01:20:51
do you want it to the grocery store and he says bananas?

01:20:53

You're like, I throw out five bananas every fucking week. I'm not like, why am I getting you bananas?

01:20:59
And so this leads, you know, you're wondering down there, you know, you imagine the possibility of dating somebody who doesn't start in the produce aisle with with with some horror.

01:21:08
But then you finally end up sort of getting some celery.

01:21:12
And like most people, you know, if you buy a whole thing of celery, you use two ribs for me, or pull on the rest gets thrown into the compost.

01:21:18
So you just you know, you finally rebel and you'll break off two things of celery.

01:21:23
And then somebody from the store says, well, you can't do that.

01:21:26
And then you say, wait a minute, you go to the bananas, you could take two. So, you know, why can't you take it?

01:21:30
It's different. And then you just literally like leave your car in the store and walk out.

01:21:34
I know that was particularly funny because like literally like two hours after reading that chapter, I was on Instagram, your story came up and a friend of yours found celery available by the stock.

01:21:49
And then you said, you know, you're a woman, send me that. She was like, Lucy, this is what you can get. Yeah. Yeah.

01:21:55
And my wife told me that there's a local market that does that, too. So I'm like, you know, brilliant.

01:22:00
So that's actually funny to have that come up. But I just thought, you know, I I really love, you know, and again, I think we've talked about, you know, some of the dark aspects of the novel,

01:22:11
which are quite remarkable, too, but I just love so much domestic comedy, you know, something that's actually relatively hard to pull off.

01:22:20
But but, you know, it's really impressed with your gifts as both some of you sort of understand as foundations, but also as a comic writer.

01:22:28
So, you know, I don't know if that was your conscious about that. I wish I had written down the line. Right.

01:22:33
I did bookmark it on the audible. Right. Because, you know, I'm listening to it, not writing it down. Right.

01:22:38
But it was like it and I hope this was intentional, but it was like it took the Matthew McConaughey time as a flat circle.

01:22:45
But you said time is like spread camembert or something like that. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was so fucking funny.

01:22:53
Yeah, I just laughed. I just couldn't stop laughing.

01:22:56
I have to tell you something very funny. So Bruce in real life, his name is obviously not Bruce, but I do love calling him that in real life.

01:23:03
When he read that chapter, he was laughing and I have to he's always like, you have to leave when I'm reading your work,

01:23:10
because I always anytime anybody laughs and they're reading my work, I'm like, which one, which one?

01:23:16
Because I love being funny. And so finally I had to leave the room, but he came and he found me and he was like, did this happen?

01:23:24

And I said, did I walk home from the grocery store after having been caught stealing? And he said, yes.

01:23:35
Like you've never seen the car not in the garage. And then he said, did you get caught stealing?

01:23:41
And I said, yeah. But it made me so happy that the way that I'd written it was so realistic that this person who knows me so well was like,

01:23:50
I don't remember when this happened. When did it happen? And like my dad, after he finished it, he said, I'm so sorry about that whole thing in the dean's office.

01:23:59
And that's why you had to go to McDowell. Like, I'm real sorry to hear that. And I said, Dad, I never got kicked out of school to go to that didn't happen.

01:24:08
And he said, boy, it just seemed really believable. But it didn't happen. I didn't actually get in trouble.

01:24:14
And novel, everybody. Novel. Well, anyway, thank you so much for this. This was wonderful. Thank you.

01:24:23
Thank you. This was a lot of fun, really. And by the way, I wish if I ever get to go back and retitle the We Are Too Many.

01:24:30
Rob, I think the mess in the English department would have been the best title, that mess in the English.

01:24:39
Well, I think both of you, I want to thank all of our readers and I want to suggest to all of you that there is still time.

01:24:46
This is still a perfect these are these books are still perfect Christmas gifts. And so do someone a good favor and pick one up.

01:24:55

And so thank you so much. Thank you again for listening to the lawyers, Guns and Money podcast.

01:25:04
We would like to thank Elizabeth Nelson of the Paranoid Style for supplying as our intro and outro music.

01:25:10
I'd bet my lands and titles a track on the album for executive meeting.

01:25:14
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01:25:20
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01:25:28
Thank you.

01:25:29
[Music]

01:25:38
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