

Wonderful! 115: Experimenting with Conditioner

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Mm, let me hike this leg up. Let me throw it on over the big ol' horsey. Ohh, get it up on over there! Back in the saddle again.

Rachel: Oh, yeah, you are! Good for you.

Griffin: I'm up so high. They don't tell you that about horses, do they? The first time you get on a horse, you're like—

Rachel: Yeah, really. Really high up.

Griffin: You're like, "Here we go, baby. Time for an equine adventure. I've always dream—whoa, I'm like fuckin', 11 feet off the ground right now."

Rachel: When have you been on a horse? I feel like we've talked about this, but I—

Griffin: I was on a horse one time, and—

Rachel: Oh, it was like a church thing.

Griffin: It was my youth pastor's farm, and I climbed up on a horse bareback, baby.

Rachel: Really?

Griffin: Yeah. It was a—

Rachel: How did you get on there?

Griffin: Uh, gumption.

Rachel: No, but you don't have like, a foot to put in the saddle.

Griffin: Physics. I was helped up by the aforementioned youth pastor, and uh, got bucked pretty quickly, just one little buck, as if to say like, "No, child."

Rachel: [laughs] "You're not ready."

Griffin: And just the... just the—they also don't tell you about the bones in there. There's bones in the horse. And so, that—those got me just a little bit in my... delicate little china cabinet down there.

Rachel: I can't believe your youth pastor thought it would be a good idea to put a person who had never ridden a horse before on one without a saddle.

Griffin: Well, he wanted me to have that, obviously, very spiritual connection between man and beast.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But anyway, this is Wonderful. This is a show where we talk about things that we're really into. Things that make us happy.

Rachel: It's been a long time since we've done one.

Griffin: It's been 800 years.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But we're here, we're back, it's a new year, new you, new me, new us, new them, and... do you have any of those small wonders?

Rachel: I mean, I have a lot.

Griffin: Oh, shoot. Alright.

Rachel: I'm not gonna share all of them. It's just been a long time since we've recorded.

Griffin: Yeah, that's true.

Rachel: Um, but I'm really likin' my e-reader.

Griffin: Oh, yes, I got Rachel a Paperwhite for, uh, Christmas, and it, uh, is so—I like e-ink. I like it. It's my favorite type of ink is this e-ink.

Rachel: I was really hesitant, because I thought, "Oh, this is such a small screen. You're gonna read like, two paragraphs per page. That must get really old, like, constantly swiping." But it actually increases the sense of accomplishment.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You see the little percentage at the bottom. That's great.

Griffin: Yeah, I love mine. I love it. I love the idea of it being like a, um... like your... like, cyber... knowledge companion.

Rachel: [through laughter] Uh-huh?

Griffin: Uh, there's a Neil Stevenson book called *The Diamond Age*, or *An Illustrated Manual for Young Women*, or something like that. And the whole premise is just like this, uh, young, poor, uneducated, like, little girl somehow happens along this magic, essentially, like, Wikipedia book that teaches you how to become like—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And she turns into like, this superhero. I like that idea of just like, "This is my knowledge bank."

Rachel: Yeah! Fits in my purse, battery lasts forever...

Griffin: Yeah. I've been uh, I've been—my small wonder is, I've been reading Medallion Status on it.

Rachel: Oh, isn't that good?

Griffin: It's such a good book! It's the new John Hodgman book. We had him on the show on MBMBaM to talk about it, and, uh, I am late to read it. But, uh, I am enjoying it quite a bit.

It's very—he's so fuckin' funny, and this is like, one of, uh, a handful of books that I find like, kind of deeply relatable, especially the sort of chapters about like, uh, more menial observations about like, a travel-based lifestyle.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which is, y'know, hence the title of the book.

Rachel: I'm reading—also a friend of Max Fun, uh, City of Girls by Elizabeth Gilbert.

Griffin: Oh, how is it?

Rachel: It's so fun. She, in a lot of interviews she's given about the book, she's described it as a 'romp.' And I thought, "I don't really know what that means." Now I do. That's exactly what it is. It's a romp.

Griffin: Is it mad cap in any way?

Rachel: Yes. Yes.

Griffin: Are there capers?

Rachel: Yes. Oh, so fun.

Griffin: Oh boy. Hey, what's your first topic for today's episode of Wonderful?

Rachel: My first thing is the wintertime pastime of ice skating.

Griffin: Oh, okay! One of mine is also a wintertime pastime, but if you had duped mine, it would've been pretty wild.

Rachel: This is gonna happen some week, and I'm kind of excited about it.

Griffin: I think 2020 is the year where we dupe it.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: So, ice skating.

Rachel: Ice skating.

Griffin: Give me some background here. What's your background?

Rachel: I—so, I went roller skating a couple times, but the thing where I was growin' up was ice skating. And your parents would drop you off at the ice skating rink for like, hour and a half, two hours.

You'd maybe get like, a few stickers out of the vending machine. Uh, and you'd skate around. If you were lucky like me, you had your own skates. I had hockey skates that I asked for one Christmas.

Griffin: Whoaaa.

Rachel: Uh, which is much easier. They're much easier to skate on. Like, the figure skates with the toe pick? It's a real hard time. But ice skates for... with hockey, no toe pick.

Griffin: I would have to imagine that they would be a little bit broader blades, yes? Because like, you don't gotta like, y'know, fuckin' spin on 'em. You don't gotta...

Rachel: Yeah, that's probably true.

Griffin: Yeah. Although, what if there was a hockey player who was like, "Nah. I want that very, very slender, delicate blade."

Rachel: Mighty—Mighty Ducks.

Griffin: Mighty Ducks is—

Rachel: Remember the woman on Mighty Ducks who was the figure skater that they brought on their team?

Griffin: No. It's been so long since I—

Rachel: She'd spin around and distract all the players, and then she'd score a goal. [laughs]

Griffin: That's probably... that's maybe not how it would pan out.

Rachel: No, I don't think so. Um, but y'know... she did it.

Griffin: She did it. It's a fantastical, uh... it's a fantastical movie.

Rachel: Also, I super have always loved watching figure skating during the Winter Olympics.

Griffin: Oh, hell yeah.

Rachel: I could name like, a dozen figure skaters.

Griffin: What's Tokyo? Summer is the next one. Summer is this year, right? In Tokyo?

Rachel: The next winter one is 2022, I think.

Griffin: Right. This is summer in—ah, shoot. I like summer. I—y'know.

Rachel: Swimmin'.

Griffin: Swimmin'.

Rachel: It's good.

Griffin: But you seen one wet person...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You seen 'em all.

Rachel: [holding back laughter] Okay.

Griffin: Nobody tapes knives to themselves and goes really fast on a hard surface in the summer ones, y'know what I mean?

Rachel: True.

Griffin: So, ice skating.

Rachel: Ice skating. Um, been around for a super long time. Used to be primarily for traveling. In the 15th century in the Netherlands, people used to...

Griffin: Holy shit.

Rachel: ... use it to get around.

Griffin: This probably started with like, a sled, right? And then, somebody was like, "That's cool, but what if it was just our shoes?"

Rachel: Ice skates were made from leg bones of horses, ox, or deer.

Griffin: So, no.

Rachel: They used to be like, bone skates.

Griffin: Then my thing is probably—that's way wilder than my thing. Their thing is like, "Ooh, look at that leg bone. I'm gonna put that right on my feet. Whoa, I'm goin' really fast on this cold stuff!"

Rachel: [laughs] They were attached to the feet with leather straps.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So, y'know, usin' all parts of the animal, y'know?

Griffin: That is taking it in a very literal direction.

Rachel: Um, it didn't really become a sport, uh, until... well, first, there was ice skating as like, races.

Griffin: Ohh.

Rachel: The fens, in England, they would flood the meadows, and then they would race. The fastest skater would like, go around a barrel and whatever, and they would win. So not really like, figure skating as we understand it; just like, skating as a racing...

Griffin: I mean, they're on that Apolo Anton Ohno shit, it sounds like.

Rachel: Yeah, exactly. I can't believe you remembered his middle name, too.

Griffin: Who calls him Apolo Ohno?

Rachel: Me!

Griffin: Really?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: For me, this is like a... like a Judge Lance Ito thing. You can't not say Lance. That's Judge Ito. It's Apolo Anton Ohno.

Rachel: Alright. Um, so, the fastest skater... this is a world record that was set in 2015. Uh, 36 miles an hour.

Griffin: That is... wild.

Rachel: Isn't that incredible?

Griffin: If you bump into something going that fast... that's it, right? Like, 36 miles an hour is quite a bit of...

Rachel: How do you even get up to that speed? Like, was it a really long track? I don't know enough.

Griffin: Or were they going downhill?

Rachel: Mmm.

Griffin: Ohh. Were they doing that Tsubasa shit where they goin' down like that, um, the Red Bull, like, uh, BMX track, except it's fucking ice and you're on ice skates?

Rachel: Yeah. I don't know. Um, can I tell you about figure skating, though, as we know it today?

Griffin: Mm, I wish you would.

Rachel: So it's actually an American named Jackson Haines who was a trained dancer who brought, uh, dancing to skating in 1860s. He would play music, and he would dance around with his—his twirls and his jumps. At the time, people were just used to skating for like, racing purposes. They weren't used for this like, kind of graceful art form.

Griffin: Mm.

Rachel: So he couldn't really get it to take off in America, so he headed to Europe. Uh, set up a skating school in Vienna, and his style of ice dancing became known as the Viennese, and later, the international style, apparently.

So, he's seen as kind of an icon, because he did the first paired dancing with another man. The man, uh, and him did a routine where one of them dressed as a bear, and the other dressed as a trainer.

Griffin: Fuck yes.

Rachel: And they did a whole like, routine on the ice as a pair.

Griffin: Yuri on Ice season two. Fuck yeah.

Rachel: Yes. [laughs] Uh, it first started the Olympic Games, actually in the summer Olympics, 1908. And then moved to the Winter Olympics in 1924.

Griffin: Because it makes... that makes sense.

Rachel: Makes a lot more sense. [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: Um, I... I love it. I don't know what exactly about ice skating really appeals to me. Like, whether it's the athleticism or the grace... uh, I don't know. I just have always loved it. I mean, I don't—it's not the whole reason, obviously, that I love hockey, but it's a big part of it.

Griffin: Uh, I do too. It's been a very, very long time since I have done—it's been—I can't remember the last time I did it. I was on the ice when we went curling. I've been curling much more recently than I've been ice skating.

Uh, hey, can I tell you about my first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I'm glad you went that deep. I hope your second topic, you go deep on, too, 'cause both mine are pretty little. But my first one here is... you know me, I like a product that like, I know accomplishes... what I use it for. Like, that I can rely on 100% of the time, that it's gonna do what it's gonna do. And today, it struck me while I was in the shower... how much I like conditioner.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is the, uh, this is the soft, gooey stuff, and it makes your hair feel really good. And you—

Rachel: Are you gonna speak... are you gonna speak to your complicated history with conditioner?

Griffin: I have a tough history with conditioner, which is to say, I thought it was a myth.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I didn't think it was a thing that you *had* to use?

Rachel: It's like an extra step that you maybe didn't need.

Griffin: That I didn't think I needed. Uh, all the way through college...

Rachel: Whew!

Griffin: Uh, probably about 2010 is when I started—

Rachel: I feel like when I met you, you were still doing the two-in-one.

Griffin: Uh, that's... not possible.

Rachel: I'm pretty sure.

Griffin: Maybe. I mean, that was, what, 2011? Yeah, I was still kind of a fuckin' dirtbag back then.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, yeah. So I didn't really know that conditioner was like, a thing that people u—used. I think if you go back and—I think maybe even the first episode of MBMBaM, we really dive into my like, sort of, um...

Rachel: Yeahhh, your complicated shower habits. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Well, not knowing that like, soap is different from shampoo is different from conditioner. I thought it was all kind of just the same.

Rachel: So that wasn't just like, a bit. That was real.

Griffin: No, yeah, that was uh, tragically, very real. So I didn't condition for... y'know, twenty... three years or so?

Rachel: Did you have like, a real bristly hair?

Griffin: I had very bristly hair. Uh, it was—it was incredibly bristly. It was very dry, very poofy, just uh... huge, dry ass hair. And I think I am a very

special, like, supporter of conditioner for that very reason, in that I was late to the game, and the first time I put conditioner in my—well, it's not instant.

But like, after I started conditioning for a while, I was like, "Oh! Hey! My hair is like, resting tenderly on the top of my head like hair does sometimes for other people. How wild."

I think—and nowadays, like, it is—it does feel kind of instant. Like, if my hair is feelin' really dry and kind of gross, I know if I go in the shower and I do put that cream on it... it's gonna—

Rachel: Confession for me—sometimes I still skip it.

Griffin: Oh, I still skip it, too. 'Cause you do gotta like, use your natural oils. Your natural oils are, y'know, are still fuckin' top notch.

Rachel: Well, and as somebody with real fine hair, like, I don't want to put product on top of product on my hair. It'll weigh it right down.

Griffin: That's fair. That's fair. Uh, for me, though, I still get very dry. Still get very crispy up there. Rub a little bit of conditioner. Now, I had no idea how conditioner worked, so I looked it up, and the explanation is very scientific.

Here's a quote. "The outermost layer of a hair follicle is called the cuticle, and it's composed largely of keratin, which is rich in cysteine group..." Okay, I'm gonna skip past all of this.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "When hair is washed, these groups can deteriorate, giving the hair a negative charge. Positively charged quaternary ammonium species, such as..." big word, "or," big word, "can then become attached to the hair via electrostatic interactions."

Rachel: Whoaaa.

Griffin: There's a lot of—I expected it to just be like, "This cream is creamy."

Rachel: Like lotion. Like, you put it on and it's soft.

Griffin: "It's lotion for the hair." Maybe this is what lotion does to the skin. Anyway. Anyway, it just lubricates the surface of each of your hair follicles. And so, it reduces that rough sensation, and it reduce—it also sort of, uh, pushes the hairs away from each other, electrostatically.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Uh, which is another benefit, so it can like, redu—that's why it feels so smooth to like, run a comb through it, is because it's not clumping.

Rachel: You reduce the tangles. Yeah.

Griffin: The tangles have gone away. Uh, the frizzing goes away. The outsides of your hair gets all lubed up. Uh, one last fun fact—in the 1800s, before conditioner was, uh, came around, they used to use what was called macassar oil. Have you ever heard of that?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: It's just a oil. This is an oil.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is oil, like an olive oil. But it's an oil, and you just put it all in there. And you lube it up in a very, like, non-scientific sense. Uh, everybody was using macassar oil, and it started to fuck up everybody's upholstery on their chairs.

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: So, this led to an invention called the antimacassar, which is a washable cloth that you drape over the, like, head of a chair. And to this

day, you can still find antimacassars in like, buses and, uh, some like, trains will just have those like, cloths draped over the head rest that you can uh... just pop—

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: I didn't know that those were called antimacassars, which is a very, very long name for what should just be like, "head oil catcher stopper."

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Anyway...

Rachel: Can I ask you a question that's personal in nature?

Griffin: Yeah. Do I do it on my bush?

Rachel: Yes! [laughs]

Griffin: Whoa, really?

Rachel: That was exactly my question!

Griffin: Wow, babe!

Rachel: [laughing] I remember not—that didn't even occur to me, and then I remember being in college and talking to some girls that I was living with, and them suggesting that that was an effective way to make, uh, your downstairs softer. And I just didn't believe it. So I never tried.

Griffin: Oh, you never—you never tried? You never even accidentally tried? You didn't experiment with conditioner in college?

Rachel: [laughs] 'Cause the idea with conditioner, right, is that you like, put it on your hair, and then you kind of like, wash your body and do other stuff, and then you rinse it out. So it sits on your hair for a little while. I'm

not gonna like, put it downstairs and then wait. And just twiddle my thumbs until...

Griffin: Wait. Keep your business out of the stream of water.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. Just do some—

Rachel: So, I guess you have.

Griffin: Do some heavy butt work. Uh, yeah, sure. Sure.

Rachel: Based on your response. Have you found a noticeable difference?

Griffin: I mean, yeah. It's fuckin' hair, man. It's hair. It's not like the conditioner particles are like, "W-wait a minute! Are these pubes?! I'm out of here, dude!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "No, guys—guys. It's pubes. Let's get the hell out of here."

Rachel: [laughs] The hair down there is coarse in nature, and so, I figured like...

Griffin: I don't know how to break it to you. 23 years without using conditioner, my hair and my pubes in college... were indistinguishable.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This got very real. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break music, but very distant and echoing]

Griffin: Aww, it's Rothy's. Here it comes.

Rachel: You know I'm your go-to.

Griffin: Spit some righteous Rothy's game.

Rachel: Yeah, so, here's the thing about Rothy's. Um, a lot of people wear flats. It's not unusual to wear flats. But do you have flats in a variety of colors? Probably not.

Griffin: No, no, no.

Rachel: Probably have like a black pair and a brown pair, and whatever. Listen... I've got a red pair.

Griffin: Whoa! Holy shit!

Rachel: I've got a black pair that has little gold stripeys in it. I've got a *teal* pair.

Griffin: Yep.

Rachel: These are colors you don't find in the wild. [laughs]

Griffin: No.

Rachel: Rothy's provides them to you. Uh, and they also, uh, have diverted over 35 million water bottles from landfills.

Griffin: Yeah, that's, uh—

Rachel: Through the creation of these shoes.

Griffin: That's a ton. That's a lot.

Rachel: Lot of 'em. Uh, you can check out all the amazing styles available right now at Rothys.com/Wonderful. That's Rothys.com/Wonderful to get your new favorite flats.

Comfort, style, and sustainability. These are the shoes you've been waiting for. Head to Rothys.com/Wonderful today!

Griffin: MeUndies is here. They are here to cradle you. You are sad because the holidays are over, or maybe you are stoked out of your mind. In either case, you deserve to be comfortable. MeUndies are here for that exact purpose. They are underwear. They are lounge pants. They are, uh, big, big onesies.

Rachel: Socks.

Griffin: They are soocks. They're also comfortable. They all look so good, and, uh, they are kind enough to send us, uh, packages of MeUndies with most of the new designs, which is pretty rad. It's a pretty um, uh... it's probably the best benefit of this life that we lead together.

Rachel: It's real surprising. Every month I think, "They're gonna cut us off. We're never gonna hear from them again."

Griffin: Surely, they'll cut us off. Like, yeah. But uh, and y'know what? I don't want to keep revealing too many sad things about sort of my hygiene...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But when I do reach sort of the end of the rainbow...

Rachel: Oh, when you put off laundry.

Griffin: I put off laundry and I'm down to like, the snicklefritz.

Rachel: It's not unusual for Griffin to do four loads of laundry in a day for this reason.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Thanks, MeUndies.

Griffin: I will ride that shit til, y'know, the needle's way past empty, and then, what's that in the mail? It's more MeUndies. That's what I'm wearing. I'm wearing, currently, my like, "break glass in case of emergency" MeUndies.

Rachel: Oh, have you not done laundry since Christmas?

Griffin: Anyway, so—

Rachel: Whew!

Griffin: —it's a—they're great. Anyway, if you want to get 15% off your first pair, free shipping, and a 100% satisfaction guarantee, go to MeUndies.com/Wonderful. That's MeUndies.com/Wonderful.

Rachel: Can I read a personal message to you?

Griffin: Uh, uh-oh! Yeah.

Rachel: This one is for Peter. It is from Tiffany.

"Hey Peter! I just wanted to let you know, I think you're a cutie, and you know it's official because I paid \$100 to do it. I hope your day is going great, and hopefully, this will make it just a little better. You're my best friend. Here's to lazy Sundays drinking mimosas and playing video games, and the occasional train town party. Love you."

Griffin: Lazy—lazy Sunday. That's what I took away from that message. You remember that funny video? Where they're like—

Rachel: Yeah, Red Vines.

Griffin: Red Vines, crazy delicious! Matthew Perry!

Rachel: Yeah. What's a train town party, do you think?

Griffin: That is a funny—it's funny that you bring that up. So, train town... is... a very special... town.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That...

Rachel: Your improv skills are incredible. [laughs]

Griffin: Train tow—train town... you know, uh, Thomas the Tank Engine?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's not that.

Rachel: Oh, that's what I thought of.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: You know Shining Time Station?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's not that either.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: It's a—

Rachel: What about Soul Train? Or C'Mon Ride the Train N' Ride It.

Griffin: That's what it is.

Rachel: Okay. I know that party.

Griffin: Uh, so, you go—uh, you go there, and um...

Rachel: If you feel like dancin'...

Griffin: If you feel like dancin', you go for it.

Rachel: Come on.

Griffin: But if you don't feel like dancin', nobody's gonna pressure you.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Can I tell—uh, the other jumbotron?

Rachel: Yes. [laughs]

Griffin: This one's for Natalie, and it's from Carlin, who says, "To my Wonder Woman wife and favorite D&D buddy Natalie. When I'm writing this, you're on the road to starting a new career in programming. I hope when this gets read, you are super successful and coding the Matrix like Neo. If so, please let our robot overlords know how much I love you."

I mean, that's gonna confuse 'em. That's gonna confuse the robot overlords.

Rachel: Do you think robots don't understand love?

Griffin: Um, the ones that are programmed to, I think, probably do. Maybe that's what Natalie is workin' on, is just like, y'know...

Rachel: Love robots?

Griffin: Well, the sort of love algorithm. Y'know what I mean?

Rachel: Ooh.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: That sounds like a Michael Crichton novel.

Griffin: Uh, a bad one. Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's like, if, colon, y'know, personality equals good, and, uh... if, y'know, single, then, let's do this, baby. Michael Crichton wrote. And then, ten dinosaurs showed up.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: He has to put big dinosaurs in every one of his books now.

[music plays]

Allie: Hi, I'm Allie Goertz.

Julia: And I'm Julia Prescott. And we host... Round Springfield!

Allie: [simultaneously] Round Springfield!

Julia: Round Springfield is a new Simpsons podcast that is Simpsons-adjacent, um, in its topic. We talk to Simpsons writers, directors, voiceover actors, you name it, about non-Simpsons things that they've done, because, surprise, they're all extremely talented!

Allie: Absolutely. For example, David X. Cohen worked on the Simpsons, but then created a little show called Futurama.

Julia: Mm-hmm.

Allie: That's our very first episode, so tune in for stuff like that with Yearley Smith, with Tim Long, with different writers and voice actors... it's gonna be so much fun, and we are every other week on MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

Griffin: What's your second thing?

Rachel: It's actually interesting that we're talking about robots, because my second thing is kind of a trip to the Poetry Corner...

Griffin: Wh—kind of?

Rachel: ... that has to do with robots. Um, so I guess the Poetry Corner song would go a little bit like... badoo boom boom boom... [high pitched] beep beep beep bop bop beep beep bop bop bop beep bop one zero zero one!

Griffin: [pause] I think that's just six. Like, I was trying to figure out—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's not a very big nu—the robot just...

Rachel: [high pitched] One zero zero one one!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: [high pitched] Zero zero zero one one one zerooo!

Griffin: So it's a song, then—

Rachel: [high pitched] One one one zero zero zerooo!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Is that enough? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. That's—you've just said, actually, that was the word 'poetry.'
You spelled it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, what do you mean this is kind of a trip to the Poetry—

Rachel: Well, 'cause it is about robots that write poetry.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: Yes sir.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Are we talking about Robert Frost? 'Cause I've always had my suspicions.

Rachel: No, we're not. We're actually talking about literal robots that have composed poems using code.

Griffin: Are we talking about like, some deep mind shit? Like, uh... uh... like, cloud-based AI, like, generating scripts for like, an episode of Seinfeld? Like that?

Rachel: A little bit, yeah.

Griffin: That kind of shit? Okay.

Rachel: Yeah, a little bit. Uh, so this was actually a New Yorker article that I saw today, called, uh, From the Mechanical Muse. And it was about two different poetry robots. One that was an art project in 2012, and one that is a little bit more recent, like, 2015, 2016.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, the first one is Pentametron.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: And this was an art project created by Ranjit Bhatnagar, who made tweets in two sonnets.

Griffin: Okay. Not really a robot. Not exa—it's a—

Rachel: Well, he created code that did this.

Griffin: Right. For me, if you don't put it into some sort of lifeless, metallic husk, then it's just software.

Rachel: So you wanted like an actual Conky that was like, spittin' out full sonnets.

Griffin: I mean, he doesn't have to print them out of his chest. I'm just saying, there needs to be hardware in addition to the software.

Rachel: So what should I call it then, if not poetry robots?

Griffin: One day, they're gonna put these applications inside of, uh, a robot. A sleek robot body.

Rachel: A guy. Yeah, okay. Okay, so I should've—what—poetry programming?

Griffin: Uhh... no, I think poetry robot is still actually the best.

Rachel: I mean, it's catchier, right?

Griffin: It's way catchier.

Rachel: Okay, so do you know what a sonnet is?

Griffin: A sonnet is... it's got 15 syllables.

Rachel: Nope.

Griffin: It's got 17 syllables.

Rachel: Nope.

Griffin: It's got iambic pentameter.

Rachel: Yes, that's true.

Griffin: It's four lines. It's eight lines.

Rachel: Alright. Uh...

Griffin: It's six lines.

Rachel: [laughs] 14 lines. Each is ten syllables in iambic pentameter.

Griffin: I had the—I had the ideas right, I just had the numbers very wrong.

Rachel: [laughs] Three stanzas, four lines each, and then they end with a couplet, following the ABAB rhyme scheme. So, first one...

Griffin: Right. Abab, as we call 'em.

Rachel: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Uh, so, Pentametron would use a pronouncing dictionary created by Carnegie Mellon, which counted syllables and recognized meter. Um, and then, used tweets. The code required that each line be an entire tweet, or essentially one complete thought.

And so, he put together for, uh, National Novel Generation Month, uh, in 2013, put together a collection of 504 sonnets that he called 'I Got an Alligator for a Pet.'

Griffin: Okay. Is that the title of one of the sonnets?

Rachel: That's the title of the collection.

Griffin: Okay. Did a robot also generate that?

Rachel: Oh, I don't know.

Griffin: I'm assuming so.

Rachel: I have not read the work.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Um, more recently... so here's the thing with these. Unsurprisingly, they seem like they are written by a robot. Um, and so, when he did a second collection of computer-assisted sonnets, he relaxed his rules a little bit. He had like, a log of all the lines that had been rejected, and many of them were because he had such rigid constraints around, y'know, the iambic pentameter and the complete thought.

And so, he built a new program to comb through the sonnets with enjambed lines. So, enjambed lines is where like, the thought carries over into the next line.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, and made a new collection based on that. Um, and he talks about kind of the difficulty of... y'know, in order to make it sound human generated, it can't be perfect. But then, you can't make so many mistakes that it seems fake.

Griffin: I love this shi—this is so absolutely my shit.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: This like, Turing test robot poetry stuff.

Rachel: Well, it's funny you bring that up, 'cause the next robot... actually, they did submit it for like, a Turing test competition.

Griffin: Ooh!

Rachel: Uh, so, this next robot, Hafez, uh, came, um—came on the scene, let's say, in a little café in Paris.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: Rolled up to the microphone.

Griffin: It was an espresso maker that just like, kind of got...

Rachel: [laughs] Became sentient.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, it came from Marjan Ghazvininejad, and there were two parts to her project. First was figuring out the rules, and then deciding, obviously, what the content was gonna be. Uh, and so, the rules were easy, because it's just programming. But where were they gonna get their source material?

And what they ended up doing was, building their program around the 95,000 songs in the music lyrics database.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So they used like, existing songs to pull from to create the sonnets.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: How did that work out for this robot?

Rachel: Well, so the—it's pretty sophisticated, actually. So for each poem, the robot was given a topic. So like, presidential elections. And then, programmed to collect rhyming words from within the database, and string them together in kind of like, related content to the topic.

Griffin: [sighs] Okay. I'm just now thinking of... it would be a really, really fun recurring segment on this show for you to read a robot poem and then read a regular poem. 'Cause I—dollars to donuts, I'm not gonna know.

Rachel: It's pretty obvious, though. So they—so, they submitted it to the 2016 Turing test competition at Dartmouth. The machine, obviously, would pass the Turing test if it could prove itself to be indistinguishable from a human. While the robot won the competition, it did not pass the Turing test.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Um, but, it can generate a four line poem in two seconds. [laughs]

Griffin: That's faster than I can do it!

Rachel: Obviously, like, I don't think robots should take over poetry. But... I do think it adds some importance to poetry. 'Cause y'know, like, any time a robot or code is created, it is to fill a need.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And the idea that they created this to fill the need of poetry suggests that poetry is a need!

Griffin: I feel like if we don't read one of these robot poems on the air, people are going to revolt.

Rachel: Okay, so these are from the article I mentioned in the New Yorker, written by Dan Rockmore. Uh, do you want to hear... Pentametron, or do you want to hear Hafez, or...

Griffin: Uh, I don't care.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: They're both soulless robots, creating human art.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, okay, so I'll read, uh... the Twitter ones... are a little bit rough. Although, so, I mentioned how his second collection was a little looser on the rules.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: This one's kind of neat. Uh, okay.

"I wanna be a little kid again.
I'm feeling kinda empty on the low.
You should unwind a little now and then.
Team Stacie looking like a sleepy hoe.

Back to the Sunshine State. The devil is
a lie. I hate myself a lot sometimes,
I mean, possessive, holy shit, this is
the second time. I'm always catching dimes.

I'm not the only one, I'm pinning this
again. I love a windy sunny day.
Not coming out until tonight. I miss
the happy me. I gotta find a way.

I always fall into the bullshit. Why?
Socks on in bed—the devil is a lie.”

Griffin: I could—I would—

Rachel: You don't think that seems like a robot poem?

Griffin: No. But in my defense, I didn't go to school for poetry for 200
years.

Rachel: [laughs] That's not true for me at all. Uh, okay, and then... so, this
is... the... poetry robot that took song lyrics and turned them into poems.

“People picking up electric chronic.
The balance like a giant tidal wave,
Never ever feeling supersonic,
Or reaching any very shallow grave.

An open space between awaiting speed,
And looking at divine velocity.
A faceless nation under constant need,
Without another curiosity.

Or maybe going through the wave equation.
An ancient engine offers no momentum,
About the power from an old vibration,
And nothing but a little bit of venom.

Surrounded by a sin Omega T,
On the other side of you and me.”

Griffin: That's fucking good! That's a good poem, little robot!

Rachel: It's definitely—I like robot two better than robot one.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: But if you think robot two is using actual song lyrics, whereas robot one is using Twitter. So the source material is maybe a little better.

Griffin: Yeah, I guess that's fair. Uh, that's neat.

Rachel: I thought so.

Griffin: I like these neat little robots.

Rachel: Neat little robots! See, isn't it better if you think of them as little robots?

Griffin: It is.

Rachel: With little quills?

Griffin: With little faces.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Little mustaches. I love them. Uh, here's my second—

Rachel: Little berets.

Griffin: Oh, dang. Forget about it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, I was gonna do, for my second thing... I was looking at some New Year's Eve traditions, 'cause there's a lot of fun ones. Uh, like, y'know,

black eyed peas. Eating black eyed peas, or the 12 grapes, which we learned about like, a few years ago.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Which I believe is a Spanish tradition, where you eat the 12 grapes with every chime of the clock at midnight. Um, and so, I was looking around, but then, I found out about uh, this topic, and it's not exactly a New Year's Eve one. It's sort of a general holiday end of year tradition I've never heard of before, and it is the magical holiday peppermint pig. Do you know about the peppermint pig?

Rachel: This is totally unfamiliar to me.

Griffin: This is, uh... well, this is what it says on the tin. This is a pig made out of, uh, peppermint candy. And it's about, like, a softball sized chunk of smooth, pink peppermint that has been sort of molded into an incredibly realistic looking pig.

Rachel: How big is this?

Griffin: About... that big. I mean, it's about—

Rachel: Like a...

Griffin: Like a grapefruit.

Rachel: Like a piggy bank almost.

Griffin: Uh, kind of small for a piggy bank. You could easily hold it in one hand. Sort of like a piglet. Like a newborn piglet.

Rachel: Aww.

Griffin: But it's very realistic, this big, peppermint pig. Uh, it looks like— Google it. It looks like it's got a nice heft to it. It's a very attractive looking, just like, object. Where it's just the kind of thing where you see it and you

think, "I'd like to hold one of those. I bet it's got good heft and I bet it's really smooth."

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: These peppermint pigs are made and sold in Saratoga Springs, New York, uh, and that is more or less where the tradition resides. It's a very, very localized tradition. It is based on a Victorian holiday tradition where uh, the pig, the animal the pig, is sort of honored as, y'know, a symbol of good health and prosperity.

Uh, and so, there were candy makers in the 1880s in Saratoga Springs, back when it was sort of a thriving resort town. So I guess the like, prosperity symbolism was working out for them very well. Uh, they started to make these, uh, these pigs, as this holiday tradition that people would have. And then the—y'know, there were a couple big wars and the great depression, and so they stopped temporarily.

But now, the peppermint pig is back, baby, in a big, big way. The tradition is this. After a big holiday dinner with your family, your friends, whatever... you all pass the pig around. This peppermint pig.

Rachel: Oh no.

Griffin: And you... say a fortunate thing that happened to you that year. And also, for this next part, you gotta understand – when you do buy one of these, it does come with a cloth bag and a small metal hammer.

Rachel: [laughing] Okay.

Griffin: Because what you're also supposed to do is, you tuck the peppermint pig inside the bag, and then you be like, "Uh, I got a promotion at the big office job!" And you fucking *smash* it with the hammer like you're fucking candy Gallagher.

Rachel: Ohh. Okay. I was picturing people holding this pig in their hot little hands, saying something, just doing a big... [exaggerated licking sound] And then passing it.

Griffin: That's horrifying.

Rachel: Yeah, I know. I know. That's what I was worried you were gonna say.

Griffin: I'm talking about taking this attractive looking, smooth—

Rachel: [laughs] And just destroying it.

Griffin: —extremely masterfully crafted little candy pig, and then tucking him a little cloth bag for his discretion and comfort, and then you take the pig, and you say like, "Well, I met Susan this year, and that's what's special to me." Fwoop cha! And you smash it up a little bit, and then you reach inside the bag, and you grab a little piece and you eat it. You pass it to the next person. They take it. They say something great that happened to them that year.

Rachel: Okay. I kind of like this.

Griffin: They say some bullshit. They take this little hammer. The hammer is awesome. The hammer is like a little, uh... uh... I don't know how to describe—it's like a rock hammer that Andy Dufrain uses to escape the prison.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's essentially that. And I don't know, just aesthetically, it's my shit. It is this like...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: These pigs are so beautiful. They're like this bright, neon pink.

Rachel: Can you show me a picture? [pause] Oh, wow! I didn't expect that level of detail. It looks like an actual pig.

Griffin: Right? It looks like an actual—

Rachel: I thought it would look like a little, like, a little animated...

Griffin: Like a cartoon pig. No, I'm saying—

Rachel: No, it looks like a real pig.

Griffin: It's a real ass lookin' pig. It just looks really nice, and you smash it up, and you eat it, and it tastes, apparently, a lot like candy canes. My actual theory as to the origins of this is some candy makers fucked up making candy canes, and so, the red and the white mixed together to make this pink, and they were like, "Well, I guess let's shape it into a pig and say that it's a tradition now, here in Saratoga Springs."

Uh, but I—I like it. I like it. And you know next year...

Rachel: Yeah, I want to import.

Griffin: We're gonna import. They do sell them online. It's like 25 bucks for a pig, a bag, and a hammer. And the courage that you need.

Rachel: [laughs] That's my favorite song, by the way.

Griffin: A pig, a bag, and a hammer? That does sound like some, uh... yeah.

Uh, anyway, hey, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes, please!

Griffin: Ain't peppermint pigs! Uh, Aurora says, "It's wonderful when I'm in the middle of cooking and missing an ingredient, and I actually have all the things to make a decent substitution. Christmas morning, everyone was psyched for waffles, and we actually could have them, because I had baking soda and cream of tartar..." Tartar? Cream of tartar?

Rachel: I've always heard 'tar-tar.'

Griffin: Yeah, I have too. Cream of tar-tar. "... to make up for the missing baking powder." I like that too—

Rachel: I do too.

Griffin: But I also feel like it never, ever, ever happens. And I'm so chickenshit.

Rachel: We did that recently. We didn't have eggs, uh, and I read online how you can like, substitute eggs using, y'know...

Griffin: Yeah. Play-Doh.

Rachel: Vegan ingredients.

Griffin: You roll them into egg shapes. Uh, Erica says, "My small wonder is going through the car wash. It's fun to experience such a super powerful cleansing process, and get all the benefits of cleaning while sitting still and letting a giant machine do all the work."

Rachel: I haven't been through a car wash in forever.

Griffin: It's been a while for me too.

Rachel: We should take Henry through one. I bet he'd like it.

Griffin: I bet he would too, or—

Rachel: Or be scared.

Griffin: Or he'd be scared, and then there's nothing we can do about it.

Rachel: [laughs] And you're trapped in there.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, hey, folks, thanks for listening. Thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. And thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

Rachel: Yeah, thank you Maximum Fun for hosting our show and other great shows that are funny, that are insightful, that are poignant, that are, y'know, topically relevant in a way that ours is not. You can check out all the shows at MaximumFun.org.

Griffin: And uh, hey, thanks to everybody who came out to Candlesnights for our live show and for bearing with us as we, uh...

Rachel: Yeah, it was so fun!

Griffin: As we sort of took some time off during the holidays. But now we're back. This—this episode—has this episode felt weirdly like, even more chill than usual to you?

Rachel: Yeah, it does.

Griffin: I'm not hating it. Like, I'm like—god knows that like, I could use like a nice, chill sort of 45 minute period.

Rachel: I feel like we just went out to lunch together and just caught up on things we like.

Griffin: Yeah. I do too. I like that. Maybe we lean more into like, the NPR fuckin' just like...

Rachel: Maybe we start lying down while we record.

Griffin: Maybe we start lying right down when we record. That would be a weird... energy to talk about... like, pube maintenance during...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But maybe we'll give it a shot.

Rachel: Well, we have any number of shows left to talk about pube maintenance. [laughing] We can try it in any number of positions.

Griffin: That's a fair point, babe.

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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Speaker 4: [shakily] Mission... accomplished.