

Wonderful! 130: Jawbreaker Julie

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Yeah, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Yeah. Sure is, babe. Cool cool cool. Yeah, man. I'm just gonna be keepin' it pretty cool and cas' this time. Hm? What you think? You like this energy?

Rachel: [laughs] No, not at all.

Griffin: It's whatever. Y'know? It's like... are we making a podcast, are we not making a podcast? It's whatever, dude.

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: This is how I'm sort of gettin' through it now. I'll step outside the bit. It's to just be like, psht, okay. Whatever, man. It's cool. Alright.

Rachel: Does this character have gum in his mouth?

Griffin: Kind of. Maybe.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Maybe this character chews gum. That's fun, babe. See, we're building the bit together. We're working in the space together.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: This is Gum Chewing Dan, and he doesn't have a care in the world, does he? 'Cause he's kind of above it all. Do you want to be one?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Do you want to be a Gum Chewin' Dan?

Rachel: No, but can I be somebody else?

Griffin: Sure, yeah.

Rachel: Um, I am Jawbreaker Julie.

Griffin: Oh, hit me with what that sounds like.

Rachel: [garbled, as if with a jawbreaker in her mouth] Uh... it's a hard... here's the thing.

Griffin: Oh, she's great.

Rachel: [garbled] I set my alarm, but then, I didn't wake up. So I'm late. Whatever.

Griffin: [bursts into laughter] That's really good, babe!

Rachel: Thank you!

Griffin: This is so powerful.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And this is what's gonna get us through this thing, together, as a community.

Rachel: Just escapes into fantasy worlds.

Griffin: It's escapes into fantasy. A little light roleplay.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which you know I've been trying to get into for a long time.
[laughing] I think this is indicative of uh, my small wonder this week, which is the Schwartz and Middleditch special that we watched last night on Netflix.

Rachel: Oh my gosh.

Griffin: With uh, uh, Ben Schwartz and Thomas Middleditch. Uh, holy shit, it is the hardest I have laughed at anything in...

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: For certain, since all this started, but also, maybe in the last, like, year or two. It uh, absolutely busted me up. Had me in stitches, that special.

Rachel: So, so, so good. Long form improv, which I think, at first, made Griffin a little nervous. But uh, delightful.

Griffin: No, see, I adore it when I know I'm in the trusted, capable hands of people who are really, really good at it.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: I can't remember, uh, the guys that you made—that you introduced me to.

Rachel: TJ and Dave.

Griffin: TJ and Dave, from the—I think from the Sonic—or one of them is in the Sonic commercials.

Rachel: Yeah. They're Chicago icons that... at least, for a while, did a weekly show, where they would just start out with a—with a prompt or a suggestion, and they would just go for like, an hour.

Griffin: Just go and go and go. And that is what, uh, Middleditch and Schwartz is, and... holy Christ, no joke, like, I am recommending it to everybody that I'm talking to, now, because it's like, a little, beautiful little levity balloon to enjoy.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Do you have a small wonder?

Rachel: I do. This is not gonna surprise anybody, but uh, Fiona Apple's new album, Fetch the Bolt Cutters. Uh, downloaded it. Like, actually bought it in the iTunes, uh, first day it came out, and I've been listening to it... pretty frequently. I would say I listened to that whole album maybe five or six times already.

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: It's phenomenal. Everything you're reading about it is true. It is exceptionally good, and uh, I would recommend it.

Griffin: I haven't dipped in yet. I've been listening to LMFAO's new album.

Rachel: Oh, and what's that called?

Griffin: Fetch the Bolt Cutters... also.

Rachel: Oh. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. It's a weird...

Rachel: Weird!

Griffin: ... sort of coinky-dink.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But yeah, it's good. It's got a lot of emotional emotions in it, and it's sort of a turn for them.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Because it's just one, um, vocalist, and it's a woman, and she is singing—she's singing a lot of sort of quiet, non-party songs. And now that I'm saying all this, I think I may have actually been listening to Fiona Apple?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But they mixed up the thumbnail on Spotify.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Yeah, so...

Rachel: Somebody should fix that.

Griffin: Someone should fix that, I think, immediately. You go first this week. What's your first thing?

Rachel: Um, my first thing is a trip to the Poetry Corner.

Griffin: Oh, wow, right away, huh?

Rachel: Yeah, I'm gonna start right there.

Griffin: I barely—let me put on my shoes. Gosh. [sings] Poetryyy, poetryyy! Radioactive poetryyy!

I started singing the Spider Man melody.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And I don't regret it. [sings] Watch out!

Rachel: Uh—oh!

Griffin: [singing] Here comes the poetry!

Rachel: I like that!

Griffin: Alright.

Rachel: And y'know, there's a lot of similarities between Spider Man and poetry.

Griffin: I think so, too.

Rachel: Y'know, when you're swinging from building to building? Like from stanza to stanza?

Griffin: Yeah. It's like there's a rhythm to it, and... you fight Doctor Octopus.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Like you do in poetry.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. You hang upside down, and...

Griffin: You kiss Kirsten... Stew—Kirs—whoops. Why can't I remember her name?

Rachel: Kirsten Dunst?

Griffin: Kirsten Dunst. There's not that many Kirstens.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, the poet I am bringing this week is a Polish poet, uh, and her name is Wisława Szymborska.

Griffin: Oh, I know her!

Rachel: Oh yeah?

Griffin: Noo...

Rachel: Ohh. I always think it's gonna happen!

Griffin: You thought it would happen with this one?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Huh. Interesting.

Rachel: She's relatively well known!

Griffin: Oh. Wow. Okay.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Wow. I guess there's something well known that I don't know. Wow.

Rachel: I actually—

Griffin: Egg on my face.

Rachel: I actually am relatively new to her work, so I probably shouldn't. But she won a Nobel Prize, which makes her, y'know, one of the more recognizable poets.

Griffin: Yes, for sure.

Rachel: Actually, she won it in 1996. And the academy praised her poetry that, quote, "had ironic precision; that allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality."

Griffin: That's... it's hard for me to follow what that meant, but I bet it's good.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Cool and smart. [laughs]

Rachel: Uh, she, as I mentioned, grew up in Poland. Is well known there. Uh, and got recognition once she won that Nobel Prize, kind of globally. She didn't have a lot of collections of poetry. From what I could tell, there's about four, uh, that have been translated into English. Maybe she has more that have not been translated.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Uh, she, um... said in her Nobel speech that, quote, "In the language of poetry, where every word is weighted, nothing is usual or normal. Not a single stone, and not a single cloud above it. Not a single day, and not a single night after it. And above all, not a single existence. Not anyone's existence in this world."

Griffin: Do you think after she said that, she was like, "And oh damn, hold up, I gotta go write that down, 'cause I think it was a poem?"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "I can't just give those away for free. Yes, that was a poem, and it was mine. Trademark trademark."

Rachel: The other thing that she said in her Nobel Prize is, she joked about lives of poets. She said, great films can be made of lives of scientists and artists, but not poets. Quote, "Their work is hopelessly unphotogenic."

Someone sits at a table or lies on a sofa while staring motionless at a wall or ceiling. Once in a while, that person writes down seven lines, only to cross out one of them fifteen minutes later. And then another hour passes, during which nothing happens." [laughs]

Griffin: Even that... does she ever say stuff like, "I want to eat a ham sandwich for lunch today."

Rachel: [laughs] I mean, that's what they're talking about. That, um... ironic precision.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Y'know? Uh... I—I really liked her poetry, because I found it... um... very playful, y'know? And very, um... the translations must be incredible, because like, the language in the translation is so rhythmic and perfect, and I have to imagine, um... that she's one of the few poets that got that kind of treatment in translation, because I love it.

Griffin: I've never thought about that before. Obviously like, translation and localization is like—

Rachel: Oh, can you imagine?

Griffin: Yeah, it's an important thing. But in terms of poetry, where every...

Rachel: To get like, the meter right.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And if there's rhyme. So I wanted to read a poem, from View With a Grain of Sand. The poem is called The Acrobat. And I enjoy it particularly for kind of the rhythm and the language, 'cause it very much mirrors, y'know, an acrobat.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: "From trapeze to
to trapeze, in the hush that
that follows the drum roll's sudden pause, through,
through the startled air, more swiftly than
than his body's weight, which once again
again is late for its own fall.

Solo. Or even less than solo,
less, because he's crippled, missing
missing wings, missing them so much
that he can't miss the chance
to soar on shamefully unfeathered
naked vigilance alone.

Arduous ease,
watchful agility,
and calculated inspiration. Do you see
how he waits to pounce in flight; do you know
how he plots from head to toe
against his very being; do you know, do you see
how cunningly he weaves himself through his own former shape
and works to seize this swaying world
by stretching out the arms he has conceived—

beautiful beyond belief at this passing
at this very passing moment that's just passed."

Griffin: That is a poem ass poem right there.

Rachel: [laughs] I love, though—you can just picture this trapeze swinger,
swinging back and forth.

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: Like, the way the lines are constructed, and the rhythm of the
poem... it's just like—it's so visual, and just, how she chooses the language.
It's incredible.

Griffin: Yeah. That's really cool. I've never quite heard a poem like that, I don't think.

Rachel: Uh-huh. Yeah. It's, um... I mean, it has to have been a little experimental in its time. I don't know. I just find it really inspiring to see somebody who is not... I mean, is obviously concerned with transmitting an image and a meaning, but also, trying to do this very clever, creative thing of making the language kind of communicate that message, as well.

Griffin: Yeah. I like that.

Rachel: It's nice.

Griffin: Hey, my first thing is seeing... seeing a deer. Seeing a deer.

Rachel: Ooh! I like that!

Griffin: Maybe this is uh, selfish in a way. Maybe this is too sort of like, human-focused. 'Cause I'm not talking about deer themselves, I'm talking about how cool it is when I, Griffin McElroy, a human being, see a deer.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: But every time I see a deer, it's like... I'm not a superstitious person or anything like that, but whenever I see a deer, my mind goes to like, "What does this mean?! This means something!"

Rachel: [laughs] I took a picture not long ago. Uh, put it up on the Instagram. I was going on a walk in our neighborhood, and there were just a few deer, and you could tell, like, they had just kind of taken over. Like, there's been less traffic in our area, and thus, more deer appearance.

Griffin: Yes. I read something about – and this is maybe a dark way to start out this subject – but just that the, uh, behaviors of deer, and really, most sort of like, uh, urban wildlife, is like... they are changing, because of the way that we are now living our lives, sort of in seclusion. And that,

y'know, it's kind of a neat transition, now, because you see deer fucking everywhere.

Uh, but once things get back to normal, for a while, it is not going to be a neat transition.

Rachel: Oh yeah, that's gonna be tricky, huh?

Griffin: Gonna be quite tricky and bad. I would love to not focus on that, though, during this segment. Uh, there are estimated to be 30 million deer in the US, and uh, that's quite a bit. And under, quote, "optimal conditions," that number can double every two years.

Rachel: Ooh! Man.

Griffin: So, that's—I mean, it's not optimal right now, obviously, due to various different, like, habitat loss factors. Um, but regardless, we see deer all the time. We moved into, uh, this house in 20... what, 2018? And uh, it's just—it's deer city up here, baby. But even though I see them all the time, it's still so special.

Outside of my office window, they will like, come in our front yard and eat the jasmine. And even though they're eating our plants, I'm still—it's reframed how I think about plants in our yard, where it's just like, "Well, that's deer fuel. They need that."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's serving its ultimate purpose, which is filling up these beautiful, beautiful deer. Um, I just—I really like it. I think I like looking out my office window at animals regardless. I have a branch of a tree that extends just out past the—it's actually a glass door, so it's quite a large little portal to the outside world. And I'll see squirrels just like, chillin' out there. And I've taken to just kind of looking out the door at those squirrels, and just kind of watchin' `em for a while.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which is... squirrels are cute as hell, man. Like, I don't know why everybody's not talkin' about these things all the time. They're really cute. Those tails? Fucking forget about it.

Rachel: They are good.

Griffin: They're really good.

Rachel: They can be quite destructive, I will say.

Griffin: Well, not—personally, I don't feel the effects of that very much. So, for me, they're still good in my book. Deer are way bigger than squirrels.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: They command your attention. I think seeing an animal... where you didn't expect one kind of catches the eye. Uh, especially when they are as big as a deer. Can you think of another animal that you see frequently in the wild that's as big as a deer? No. A deer's just like, "Hey, what's up?" And your eye is like, "Whoa, wait. What's that doing there?"

Rachel: I mean, man.

Griffin: Wow, babe. That's pow—that's—I feel like I'm back in the poetry corner!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: They're just so quiet and majestic, too. Like, they hold themselves so regally.

Rachel: And there's something about those eyes, right?

Griffin: Those eyes!

Rachel: The stillness, y'know?

Griffin: What do they know that I don't know? Some of them also have big antlers, which is just like... that's like, some like... fairy time magic bullshit.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: That's like, you've wandered in from the fae wilds, and you have these antlers. And it's like, you're on some Princess Mononoke shit over there.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And that's incredible!

Rachel: Mm-hmm. For a long time, we had a—what I assume was a mother deer and her two children, that just kind of hung out in our area. We'd see them all the time. Watch those kids grow up. It was nice.

Griffin: It was really nice. They ate a whole lot of our plants.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: Like, a lot of our plants. To this day, our plants are still reeling from the deforestation that these deer visited upon it. But they're so beautiful, and they represent this crossroads between man and nature that just delights me to no end.

Although, when I do see them when I'm driving... on our street, obviously, it's a residential street. I'm not driving very, very fast. So I will see them, typically on the side of the road, thinking like, "Are we cool, deer? 'Cause you could just jut out right into the middle of the road with no warning right now." Like, I always inch past them like, "Are we good? Are we good? Okay, we're good."

Deer have had like a sort of special significance, or spiritual significance, to like, all kinds of different civilizations throughout human history. But almost

always, they represent a sort of quietude, and also, intuition. Which I really like. `Cause I just—I just—it's like they're living in another world than I am.

I sound like an elementary school art teacher right now.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But I just like `em. I want to know their secrets. Tell me your secrets, deer.

Rachel: Yeah. I always—I always kind of interpret that stillness as a like, "We cool? We cool right now? We cool?"

Griffin: They're feeling us out.

Rachel: Right?

Griffin: I like—the mom deer and kid deer, I liked—eventually, it hit the point where like, we would like, walk down our steps after coming back from doing something. They would be eating shit in our front yard, and they would like, just watch us as we walked into the house instead of running away, `cause they knew...

Rachel: Yeah, we cool.

Griffin: We're not packing. We're cool. We like that they're here.

Rachel: Yeah, no. You feel like a certain amount of pride when a deer is like, "Oh no, she's okay."

Griffin: Deer are like—if we weren't together, and I had to put together a Tinder profile, I would put in, "Deer like me. Deer trust me."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And that would attract, I think, a certain type of person.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, that elementary school art teacher.

Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Hey. Can I steal you awa—I don't like thinking about not being with you. Even in like, a fun, like, roleplay experience.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break stinger plays]

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Griffin: Hey, can I read a jumbotron for ya?

Rachel: Please!

Griffin: This one is for Grammary, and it is from Soren, who says, "Dear Grammary, thank you for being my best friend, my DM, and my kissin' buddy. You've supported me through my transition so far, and I can't wait to grow with you and become your full-fledged boyfriend. I can't wait to travel with you and explore the world and figure out who we are. Love, your smol boyfriend, Soren."

Smol.

Rachel: I love kissin' buddy.

Griffin: Kissin' buddy is a good... job, that I think you should be able to put on LinkedIn.

Rachel: Yeah! And then people could endorse you.

Griffin: And people could endorse you, and that would be... actually extremely weird and a breach of trust and privacy.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Uh, do you want to read this next one?

Rachel: Yes. This is for Jenny. It is from Olen. "Jenny, thank you for being such a great partner while I've been in grad school. Coming home to you made the stressful days so much better. I'm grateful for you, and I can't wait to keep building our life together. You're my good, good computer lady, and I'm your librarian ghoul. I love you."

Griffin: I knew it! I knew every library has a ghost or ghoul, or mummy, or skeleton, or Dracula in it.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: I've been saying that—how long have I been saying that, babe? How long have I been saying that?

Rachel: Oh gosh, what, six, seven years?

Griffin: If not longer!

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Because I had one experience in a library that I'm like, really sure was spook—

Rachel: Are you thinking of Ghostbusters?

Griffin: Yeah! I was in the library...

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: And this big, nasty monster started knock books all over the place. And I was like, "I'm just trying to find the latest Dan Brown novel."

Rachel: [amused] Uh-huh.

Griffin: And now, I have to be spooked by a specter?

Rachel: Slimed and spooked.

Griffin: Slimed and spooked! No thanks! This is why I don't go to libraries anymore.

Rachel: [laughs]

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Griffin: Hey, what is your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing is traffic lights.

Griffin: Oh!

Rachel: Just kind of came to me, just like in a burst of clarity.

Griffin: Can I admit something to you?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: The other day, we were playing with Henry, and I had like, a red ball, a yellow ball, and a green ball.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And I was gonna be like, "This is a traffic light." But it has been so long since I've driven in a car, that I couldn't remember the order...

Rachel: Whoaaa.

Griffin: Like—yeah, bud. Like, I couldn't remember if red is on top, or if red is on the bottom. And this mom—red is on the... top.

Rachel: Top! Yeah! Wow!

Griffin: Red is on top. Obviously!

Rachel: I'm a little freaked out! [laughs]

Griffin: I'm a little freaked out too, man!

Rachel: Uhh, I mean, obviously, red light, green light. Great game. We play it with Henry all the time.

Griffin: Love that.

Rachel: Um, but... also, just kind of the thought... the innovation that went into this. Because what happened... I was doing some research. What happened... cars came out.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Cars started going faster and faster. There was nothing in place.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: I mean, there were like—there were policemen, who were like, "Hey, you stop, and you go." But there was like, nothin'... [laughing]

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: There was nothin' ready for it. Y'know? Um, the world's first traffic light was manually operated and gas lit, and it came out in London in 1868. But then... [laughs] Less than a month after it was implemented, it exploded.

Griffin: Oh, that's not good!

Rachel: So, whoops.

Griffin: Was it—were the first traffic—like, did we crack the red, yellow, green sort of thing? The yellow light seems like such a bold innovation.

Rachel: At first, it was just red and green.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: It was just—it was like, "Oh, whoops, we need something in between there, huh?"

Griffin: Yeah. 'Cause people are really stopping extremely quickly.

Rachel: Uh, so, the first automated traffic control system was patented in 1910, and just included the words "stop" and "proceed," and neither was illuminated. [laughs]

Griffin: What?!

Rachel: So, it was just like... I'm guessing like, an arm would go down that said 'stop,' but at night...

Griffin: You're just not gonna...

Rachel: Pretty useless. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Um...

Griffin: God, what did they do at night? Did they hold a torch out in front of them as they drove? What were they doing?

Rachel: Y'know, I... [laughs] Things took off pretty quickly, if you think—so, in 1913, the Model T started to roll off.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And y'know, they could go about 40 miles an hour. And in that same year, almost 4,000 people – or actually, more than 4,000 died in car crashes. And so, there just wasn't—y'know, policemen would stand in the center, but it just wasn't safe for them, and it wasn't particularly effective for drivers.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: A Cleveland engineer named James Hodge, um, borrowed the red and green signals being used on railroads already, and then, tapped into the electricity that ran through the trolley lines.

Griffin: Oh, interesting!

Rachel: And created the first municipal traffic control system.

Griffin: Still didn't have that yellow light in there, though.

Rachel: Nope.

Griffin: Dang. Dang.

Rachel: Um, they uh, made—the light made its debut in Cleveland in 1914. And then, a police sitting in a booth on the sidewalk controlled the signals with a flip of a switch.

Griffin: Interesting!

Rachel: Yeah! So they were still—

Griffin: I guess we didn't have—we didn't have computer.

Rachel: Still figuring out... [laughs]

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: By 1930, all major American cities and major small towns had at least one traffic light. And the vehicle fatality rates fell more than 50% between 1914 and 1930.

Griffin: Wow! That's amazing! Did we have seatbelts yet? Probably not.

Rachel: No, no.

Griffin: Ohh, no.

Rachel: I mean, our parents didn't even really have seatbelts when they were kids.

Griffin: Jesus.

Rachel: That's a real new thing.

Griffin: Jesus.

Rachel: The yellow light, um, was 1920. A Detroit policeman invented the first four-way, three-colored traffic lights.

Griffin: Oh, huge. Massive.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Massive. I always think of the Simpsons episode where I think... I think like, Lisa is the mayor? There's something going on where they have control over the city, and I remember this one gag about how she has completely eliminated traffic by getting rid of the green light. So people just see the yellow light, and they're like, "Oh, I gotta get through it!!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So everybody like, gets through the intersections like, very hastily.

Rachel: Oh, that's good.

Griffin: That is good.

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, I just—this is like, one of those things that you kind of take for granted. But like, if you think about the work that went into addressing kind of the innovation that was happening, like... y'know, just like, hurry up and catch up with this like, incredible thing that's happening in the country.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Being like, oh, let's make everybody safer, and let's do it in a way that's like, very easy to, um... uh... understand.

Griffin: Wow, yeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, I imagine there had to be some level of like, uh, PSA going out there. Like, "Okay guys, this is what we're doing now."

Rachel: Well, that's what a read about, was the whole game, red light, green light, was part of this whole instructional campaign.

Griffin: Oh, wow!

Rachel: The thing I read said that like, a Cleveland teacher created the game, and like, gave the name of the teacher. And I was like, "Wow, this is... how can this be confirmed?" But yeah, there was all this just kind of instructional effort, starting with kids, like, going all the way up, of like, "This is what a traffic light is."

Griffin: But then when that yellow light joined the mix... there must've been drivers who saw that yellow light pop up and just like, swerved and careened into a building like, "What does that one do?!"

Rachel: [laughs] "What does that mean?!"

Griffin: "What is that one?!" Uh, can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: My second thing is, uh... what is probably my favorite Broadway musical... Into the Woods!

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: God, I love Into the Woods.

Rachel: Me too!

Griffin: It packs probably the most sort of, uh, emotional weight for me, especially in that like, mondo heavy second act. Uh, but it is also just so good, and so well written, and so, so, so, so clever.

Rachel: I find it so—this is like, so miraculous for me, because Griffin is somebody that grew up with a lot of access to musicals. I did not have a lot of familiarity with it, but one... one particular production that I loved as a kid was Into the Woods. It was the Bernadette Peters, like...

Griffin: Joanna Gleason. Chip Zien. Like... uh, yes. That production, we also had on VHS. I think it was two tapes, actually. One was act one and one was act two.

Rachel: Oh, ours was like, literally taped off of PBS. [laughs]

Griffin: Ohh, okay.

Rachel: [laughs] This was a VHS of David Winer's creation.

Griffin: Right. Uh, it was... it is an amazing, amazing show. And I think the reason for that, the fact that it is also your touchstone for theater, is like, the first time you see it, like, it is so clever that it leaves, like, an indelible mark.

Rachel: Well, and also, like, the fact that it relies on like, so many established fairy tales, like, makes it very, uh, conducive to sharing with your kids.

Griffin: Yeah, absolutely. Although, uh, again, the second act gets, uh...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Pretty heavy.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There are actually lots of stories, uh, of people like, taking their kids to the original Broadway run, and like, pulling them out in the second act when, y'know, like, Rapunzel fuckin' dies.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah...

Griffin: Or, uh, y'know, Cinderella's prince has an extramarital affair. Like, there's a lot of uh, stuff in there. That is sort of the magic trick that this show plays, uh, of act one is essentially like a mash up of all of these... it's like the Marvel Cinematic Universe of fairy tales, that blends Jack and the

Beanstalk, and Rapunzel, and Little Red Riding Hood, and Cinderella, and a bunch more. And they just sort of interweave their stories very, very cleverly.

It was written by Sondheim, who, obviously, is a absolutely legend.

Rachel: Now, who is that? What did he do?

Griffin: Uh, Craig Sondheim...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, no, it's Stephen Sondheim. He did, y'know, uh...

Rachel: Everything.

Griffin: Everything. Uh, Sweeney Todd. Uh, West Side Story. I think he actually just did lyrics for West Side Story, but um... and it is such a wildly ambitious show. Not just in like, its, uh, storytelling, or its scale. Like... act two, the magic trick I was eluding to is that like, everything goes to shit. And it gets like, very, very heavy. Much, much heavier. It is like, a completely different show, uh, tonally and narratively than the first act was.

Uh, and like, there's a literal giant fight scene at the end of the show, which like, productions have—I saw a community theater production that uh, like, First Stage did back in Huntington. That was the theater troupe that I did shows with. And like, seeing how everybody handles the giant fight at the end, uh, is always like, entertaining to see.

But more than that, like, what is so ambitious about the show is like... all of the themes that it is tackling. Uh, most of which are sort of centered around parents, and like, relationships with parents. The loss of parents. The forgiveness of parents, and parental, like, failings, uh, as you...

Rachel: Yeah, and also kind of the private life, the like, personal ambition of parents that goes, like, beyond their children and their family, y'know?

Griffin: Right. As you watch, uh... characters in this show go from like, wanting to be parents, and then, becoming parents or losing parents, and then, reflecting on, uh, y'know, the things that their parents taught them. That's like, a main theme of the show is, careful of the things you say. Children will listen.

Uh, just saying that, like, made me like...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Verklempt a little bit. Um, it is... it is—it is an amazing, amazing show. Uh, and... the movie adaptation also isn't that—isn't that bad. It's got, what, Meryl Streep, and...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Anna Kendrick, and James Corden...

Rachel: James Corden, yeah.

Griffin: And a bunch of like, really, really great performers in it. Um, but for me, yes, it all goes back to that original Broadway performance, the cast of which is fantastic.

Rachel: It blew my mind. Like, I feel like I still remember seeing it for the first time, and the moment where there's like, interaction with the narrator...

Griffin: Mm-hmm!

Rachel: You think is like, for you, as an audience member. And then, when suddenly, the narrator—

Griffin: They break the fourth wall.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, blew my mind.

Griffin: Yeah, they bring in the narrator. Uh, that is just one of the interweavings that happens in this show. The opening number of this song... all the music is incredible. Like, it is, uh, syncopated in a way that is like, so fascinating, and it is built around like, a handful of motifs that they just wring every drop out of throughout the course of the show.

Uh, and also, like, some of the songs last forever. The opening song in this show is called Prologue (Into the Woods), and it introduces all the characters, all the storylines that you're gonna see throughout the course of the show. It is 12 minutes long, start to finish, and that's fucking incredible.

Uh, and yes, the performances in the original Broadway cast is like, amazing. Joanna Gleason plays the baker's wife. She was also on West Wing for a long time.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: She's fantastic. Chip Zien is the baker, and he has this like, delicate, uh, voice that is like, so incredible. But yes, the stand out. The like, star, is Bernadette Peters as the witch, which is such a fuckin' cool part of the show, because she's obviously like, framed as the antagonist for the first half, which is just sort of leaning on these fairy tales.

And then, in the second half, where again, everything falls apart, she becomes this almost like, ambivalent third party who is there to just like, render judgment and fuckin' tear down every other, like, member of the cast, and every other event that they have done.

Rachel: Such a like, incredibly complex character. For like, somebody that starts as a witch, y'know?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: The musical really plays with like, what is good and bad.

Griffin: Right. She has a line in uh, this song where she like, stands in judgment of every other character in the show, called Last Midnight, where

she says, uh, "You're so nice. You're not good, you're not bad. You're just nice. I'm not good, I'm not nice, I'm just right."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, it's so like...

Rachel: Such a powerful line for a Midwestern child. [laughing]

Griffin: Yes. [laughs] Uh, I want to play some of that song, Last Midnight, because it comes close to the end of the show where she is just like, just reading these fools. And it is... happening at this sort of apocalyptic moment in the show, and it scared the shit out of me as a kid. Like, the idea of somebody singing at the edge of the end of the world, like, really, really, stuck with me. And of course, it's Bernadette Peters just kind of killing it. So uh, here's a little bit of Last Midnight.

[‘Last Midnight’ from Into the Woods plays]

Griffin: I think that represents sort of the emotional ability of this show, uh, to like, really land these big, heavy, emotional swings. Like, these really, really heavy, emotional punches. So like, Last Midnight does this with the uh, regret of everything that has happened in the show, and the sort of like, turning of the story from like, oh, these guys are just all flawed and doing their best, to like, actually, they've been pretty bad up to this point.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And maybe they deserve what's coming to them. Uh, and then, the show, uh, has this one last number called No One is Alone, where uh, a lot of the members of the like, surviving members of the cast, who have all lost something very, very important to them throughout the show, like, experience this like, powerful found family that is like, so, so incredible. And this song just breaks my heart every time I hear it, so of course, I'm going to do that to our listeners now by playing a little bit of No One is Alone.

[‘No One is Alone’ from Into the Woods plays]

Griffin: That's—I love this show so, so much. And uh, I get it stuck in my head. Like, I get weird, weird parts of it stuck in my head, just like, lines of, uh...

Rachel: Yeah. No, you were whistling it yesterday. I heard you.

Griffin: ... of different songs. I was, yes! 'Cause I decided I wanted to talk about it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And yeah, since prepping for this, like... oh, all I've wanted to do is watch it again. Can we watch it again tonight?

Rachel: Yeah, of course!

Griffin: I would watch either one. I really do think—I think nailing a Broadway musical movie adaptation is real tough. And I think that they did, uh, y'know, diligent work with that in the... I think 2014 adaptation? I don't remember exactly when the movie came out. But if it's all you have access to, it ain't bad. It's pretty good. But the Broadway performance just—

Rachel: Had you seen Bernadette Peters in anything before that?

Griffin: Uh, The Jerk, and...

Rachel: You saw The Jerk before you saw Into the Woods?

Griffin: I'm pretty sure.

Rachel: Really?

Griffin: I mean, our dad, like, didn't... our parents didn't really restrict, like, different comedy movies to us.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Uh, at a very young—I saw *The Jerk* very, very young.

Rachel: 'Cause I—that was my first exposure to Bernadette Peters, and I was like, “Oh, she’s a really talented singer and theater performer.” And then I was like, “Oh, she’s in movies, too?” That like, blew my mind.

Griffin: Yeah. God, she’s so good. Okay. Uh, hey, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Uh, we got a cool email from Shrea, who uh, together with her sister, has put together a project called Letters Against Isolation, where they are organizing people to write letters to self-isolating elderly folks who are, y'know, super, super lonely right now. Shrea says, “Letters Against Isolation has grown really fast. Right now, we have over 300 volunteers writing to almost a thousand seniors across the country. In the last week alone, we sent 500 letters. We need more volunteers to keep up, and you can learn more about this project at LettersAgainstIsolation.com.”

I was looking at it today. It’s really, really cool, and such a like...

Rachel: That’s such an incredible idea!

Griffin: Yeah. So I would encourage everybody to, if you've got some time, you want to brighten somebody’s day... LettersAgainstIsolation.com. That sounds really, really cool.

Uh, Elise, and also somebody else wrote in about Pomplamoose this week. The YouTube music. Do you know about Pomplamoose?

Rachel: I mean, I just know that it’s a French word.

Griffin: Oh, yes. Uh, they are a... well, they started out a very long time ago as a two person, uh, musical outfit that would do covers of songs on

YouTube videos, where you would like, sort of watch—sort of Vulfpeck-y, in a way. But they have gone onto like, release a bunch of albums and do a whole bunch of stuff.

Anyway, uh, Elise said, “What instantly puts me in a good mood is watching a Pomplamoose video. The duo works with super talented artists to pull off an incredible mix of mash ups, originals, and collaborations that all slap. The musicians all smile at each other, and you can just tell that they love what’s happening in that room.”

Man, it’s—that’s a good—if you don’t know about Pomplamoose, that’s a good, like, drip feed of positivity.

Rachel: Yeah, I'll have to check that out! Yeah!

Griffin: I adore those two. They are, uh... they are fantastic.

Yeah. That’s enough good stuff, I think, for one week.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Right?

Rachel: I think so.

Griffin: Let’s save some for next week.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I want to thank 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 I take it back, here’s more good stuff. Go to MaximumFun.org, check out all the shows on there.

Rachel: Yes! There... there is so much content. There is just so much content. Uh, and it is nice to have my little feed update with my Max Fun

shows, because they're all just like... they're so charming. Max Fun is just a network full of charming people.

Griffin: Yeah, I think so too. I think so too. And that's gonna wrap it up. Uhh, positive, like, uh... send off for this week. Any advice? Anything?

Rachel: Hmm...

Griffin: Why don't ya... why don't ya... hey.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Why don't ya... why don't you cook something new this week? Experiment. There's that thing that you've wa—maybe not cook—make something. You've wanted to make that thing for a bit.

Rachel: Yeah. A lot of people are using this time... 'cause the idea of writing can be kind of daunting for a lot of folks, but you get into that visual art, let's say.

Griffin: Visual art. Yeah. It doesn't have to be words.

Rachel: Do a little sketchin'.

Griffin: Do a sketch.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Twist some coat hangers together, and make... a mobile.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: I do too.

Griffin: I'm gonna go make a mobile right now!

Rachel: You're not.

Griffin: I am! It's gonna have rocket ships on it!!

Rachel: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

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