

## Wonderful! 136: Mancala on My Mind

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[theme music plays]

**Rachel:** Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

**Griffin:** Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

**Rachel:** And this is Wonderful!

**Griffin:** Welcome back everybody. Thank you for joining us for Wonderful! This is a show where we talk about things that are wonderful. The name is what we do, and I think that that's important for a podcast, don't you?

**Rachel:** I do. You know, I wanted to—I came up with a way to describe what it's like trying to do this podcast right now.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Please.

**Rachel:** So, one could argue that the times in which we are living are not wonderful.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I think that you could make a case for that, yes.

**Rachel:** But, to give the example of, say, a shit sandwich—

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Can still be made on great bread.

**Griffin:** That is something, babe. You've painted an incredible picture there for us.

**Rachel:** So perhaps, perhaps what we are doing is describing the great bread on which the shit sandwich is made.

**Griffin:** Yeah. There is another metaphor where the shit sandwich has also always been there, and now everybody's looking, and now the shit sandwich smells so bad.

**Rachel:** [laughs] That we're noticing the bread.

**Griffin:** And everybody's looking at it and saying, like, "What a terrible, terrible shit sandwich." Yeah, it's obviously— so, yeah. We did not have an episode last week. It did not feel appropriate, I think, especially I would say this show, where tonally we kinda try to focus on the good. And that is not the best thing to do right now. Like, straight up, just trying to shy away from the, you know horrific truth of the moment and the reality that we live in is not what any of us should be doing. We hope you enjoyed FANTI. I am fully in love with that show now.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** I've been listening to it. I don't really listen to podcasts anymore, especially during this quarantine time where, you know, I don't have my commute on anything like that, but I have been diving into the backlogs and again, a huge, huge thanks to Jarrett and Tre'vell for letting us do a feed drop of that episode. Please go subscribe to that show, if you haven't already. But I don't know what else, really, there is to say. We hope that you all are staying safe and staying involved, and staying, sort of, I know it's been a while since all of this started, since the protests sort of hit critical mass, but it's— I have felt myself wanting to let up off the gas already, and I think that that is an instinct that, you know, you gotta kinda push against.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** So, yeah. It has been, like, also a challenging but very, very educational time and that is always a thing I feel good about, is when I feel like, you know, I can change—

**Rachel:** Yeah, exactly. There are so many resources out there.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** Available to people that wanna learn more. And it has been really great to see, kind of, the wealth of information that you can track down if you're just interested in looking. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yes, we will keep putting links to that in the episode descriptions for the time being. A thing also that we're doing for our shows here on Wonderful! our ad revenue we're going to be donating to a cause that is involved in the moment that we are all in right now. This week we are going to be donating our ad revenue of The Okra Project, which is an incredible thing, if you haven't heard of it. FANTI recommended it last week and since finding out about it— it's just a great project. It's a collective that is working to feed black trans people healthy and, like, culturally specific, relevant meals and provide other resources to black trans people. So, we will again provide links to them and where you can support The Okra Project in the episode description. But, yeah, just hang in there. Just stay, again, stay safe and stay active and...

**Rachel:** And we're gonna keep doing this, and we hope you'll keep listening.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Do you have any small wonders?

**Rachel:** I... now, I haven't listened to the whole album yet, but I have been listening to some of those new Run The Jewels tracks.

**Griffin:** Ooh.

**Rachel:** And woo! Fire.

**Griffin:** I have not listened to that. I just saw that they have a new album out and that it is getting critical, sort of like, perfect reviews across the board.

**Rachel:** Just as the kids might say, hot fire.

**Griffin:** Is that what the kids— I don't think the kids are even saying that anymore.

**Rachel:** [laughs] I'm always, like, eight to twelve months behind.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I just usually boot up Tik Tok, and then if I hear a word I don't understand, I'm like, "That one is the cool one now."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I'm going to say there is a game for Switch called Clubhouse Games, that is a sequel to a Nintendo DS game that I also loved, and it is just a collection of 51 games, mostly board and card games. You have your solitaire, both the spider and other main solitaire mode.

**Rachel:** FreeCell? They got FreeCell?

**Griffin:** I don't think they have FreeCell on there, no. But they have basically, like, Uno on there. They have all the, like, classic global board games like chess and other stuff. And there's certain games on there that I have known about for a long time that I just never really, like, learned about. Like Shogi, which is like Japan's, sort of, chess-like strategy board game.

**Rachel:** I saw you doing that Mahjong the other day, too.

**Griffin:** Yeah, Richi Mahjong is, like, fucking wild and incredibly complicated, but like, you know, I have known about Mahjong for a while and never really learned how to play it, and so it's been cool to finally invest in that.

**Rachel:** I see Griffin with that Switch and I'm like, "Hey, what are your turnip prices?" and he's like, "Oh ho ho, I'm not on that right now."

**Griffin:** But I can tell you about the hand I'm working for. I'm one from tenpai right now, so I'm very excited about that development. Yeah, it's incredible. If you have a Switch, get it. It is like, an incredible value. You go first this week.

**Rachel:** Oh, great!

**Griffin:** Tell me what you got.

**Rachel:** So, my first thing is language development in children.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** As my wonderful thing. I became kind of fascinated with this when Henry started using the word "very" in a very unusual way.

**Griffin:** Yes! Yeah, but, like, it doesn't take a whole lot of thinking to, like, figure out why he uses it in the way— it's so interesting. Can you explain, like, how he uses "very"?

**Rachel:** So, a lot of times he will ask for something and he wants to express the urgency of this request. Or he wants to really, you know, put a lot of energy behind it. And he will say, like, "I very like that show," "I very want that show,"...

**Griffin:** "I very don't wanna sleep right now."

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Yeah. He uses it as, like, a catch-all modifier for like, it covers "really" and all kinds of other little words, yeah.

**Rachel:** Yeah. And that kind of reminded me, so I took a child psychology class in college that talked a little bit about language development.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And it's kinda fascinating. I think a lot of times as a parent you think that a child is just, kind of, mirroring what they hear. You know? And then when you hear them construct a sentence that you know for a fact they have never heard, it becomes kind of interesting to think about how they're doing this. So, I did a little research. A lot of this starts with Chomsky.

**Griffin:** Oh, yeah.

**Rachel:** Are you familiar with Chomps?

**Griffin:** Fuckin', not even a little bit.

**Rachel:** Oh, really?

**Griffin:** The name is...

**Rachel:** Familiar?

**Griffin:** Familiar, yes.

**Rachel:** [laughs] So, Chomsky talked a lot about language development, and he specifically talked about the nativist theory, which is that human beings have this language acquisition device just built into them.

Griffin: Okay.

**Rachel:** So, there's this idea that instead of language being something that you teach a person like a robot, there's this idea that we have this device in us that kind of gives up the ability to construct sentences.

**Griffin:** Like a Yak Bak, that's in our mind?

**Rachel:** [laughs] But not a Yak Bak because you are using rules to create brand new thoughts and ideas.

**Griffin:** More like a Talkboy, or Kevin MCCal— McCallicker. What's his name? Kevin McCallister could take clips of his, you know, terrible uncle yelling—

**Rachel:** Not even that!

**Griffin:** No, but he could remix them into different clips.

**Rachel:** Yeah, but there's not even remixing. It's brand new.

**Griffin:** Aw man, you're right. Both of those things I said were wrong. So, it's more like a Speak & Spell, where there is no recorded element and you are instead punching in—

**Rachel:** Okay, there you go.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** You were so desperate to find a toy.

**Griffin:** A child's toy.

**Rachel:** A toy of some kind. Um, there's been a lot of study in this over time. There was this idea of this kind of empirical— against the nativist theory, this empirical thing of, you know, it's not like we have any ability as humans, we just over time can put together these phrases. And we're not blessed with any, kind of, hard wiring.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** But I think as time goes on, more and more people say, like, "No, you've got it in you". Steven Pinker is another, kind of, leader linguist in this field. He had a book in 1994 that came out, called *The Language Instinct*. Steven Pinker is kind of like the rock star of linguistics.

**Griffin:** [laughs] Oh, you're telling me? I'm a fucking full-blown Pinker-head, dude. What are you talking about?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Trying to talk to me about Steven Pinker, like I don't know about his theory of linguistics. Holy shit, I saw him play...

**Rachel:** Who opened? Who opened for him?

**Griffin:** Oh... Chompsky. Chumpsy? Chlumpsy? Anna Chlumpsy. From My Girl? And Veep?

**Rachel:** Oh, is that the... oh, I thought that was like, the tribute band for Chomsky.

**Griffin:** Anna Chlumpsy is from Veep and My Girl, and also is a tribute band for Chomsky. Yeah, she fuckin' brought the house down, dude.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Her on that Speak & Spell.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** So, in *The Language Instinct*, Steven Pinker said language is not a cultural artifact that we learn in the way we learn how to tell time, or how the federal government works, it is a distinct piece of our biological makeup. And the test he did was the "Wug Test".

**Griffin:** Wug?

**Rachel:** Wug. So, wug is a made-up thing. He totally made it up. He put a picture of, like, a bird on the chalkboard and said, "This is a wug," and then turned to kids and said, "Okay, now there's two of them. There are two..." and kids would just naturally say, "Wugs." Which showed that, like, this isn't something that they are parroting, or memorize, this is something that they have learned how to construct, based on this kind of understanding how syntax and language works.

**Griffin:** Plural— yeah, sure.

**Rachel:** Yeah. And so, this kind of explains why Henry will say, "I very want that." You know, like, he understands that "very" is something that expresses, you know, esteem, increased desire, and he knows that he has that and so he

has just thrown that into a sentence, because he kind of understands innately how sentences work.

**Griffin:** And we chide him every— folks, don't worry about it. We chide him every time he gets it wrong.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It's very important that he— no, just kidding, it's the fuckin' cutest thing in the whole world.

**Rachel:** Obviously, development varies per kid, and there's no evidence to suggest that a kid that develops early is gonna be any more advanced in the long run than another kid.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** But by their second birthday, most kids have 1000 to 2000 words. So there is what they call, like, a language explosion that happens. That is super great for people like us, who just want desperately to communicate with our child in an effective way.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** Yeah, between birth and adulthood, children learn about 60,000 words on average, amounting to about eight to ten words a day.

**Griffin:** That's so many words, man.

**Rachel:** I know! It's just—it's a really cool time, especially since we're spending a lot of time with our child, to just kinda see day to day, how he is putting sentences together that just totally surprise us and are delightful.

**Griffin:** It is incredible. As much as he is, like, leaning on the same words to form sentences like that, in a way that is very, very charming, he also has stepped up his adjective game in a way that is— like, hearing him say that he is "very disappointed" for the first time, instead of just like, "I'm sad," is, like, "Whoa, holy shit. Okay."

**Rachel:** Yeah. He started to say things are "disgusting" and "adorable" and it's just like, it's incredible.

**Griffin:** It's so good. Can I do my first thing?



**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I almost stepped on my first thing doing my mini-segment, because my first thing is a game that was included in Clubhouse Games and I have been playing so much of: back gammon. Back gammon. Or, as some people call it, backgammon.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I love backgammon a lot, and it occupies sort of the same space as, like, chess or you know, any of the classic, ancient sort of board games.

**Rachel:** The name of the game makes it impossible for me to remember what the game is.

**Griffin:** Backgammon?

**Rachel:** Yes. When you say it I cannot remember what it is, because nothing about the name of it gives me a clue.

**Griffin:** That is true, I will give you—well, I mean, the same could be said for chess, or...

**Rachel:** True.

**Griffin:** Checkers works perfectly, actually, because checkers takes place on a checkerboard... well, I guess it's only called a checkerboard pattern because it is a checker... by the way? Checkers is not a very good game.

**Rachel:** No, it's not.

**Griffin:** I've been playing a lot of this Clubhouse Games game trying to beat the AI on the hardest difficulty. Checkers against a high-end opponent when you are also trying to play a high-end game of checkers sucks shit. Because it always comes down to, like have two king pieces and they have two king pieces and you're just, like, jumping all around the board for an hour and a half.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Until you realize it's all a futile effort. Backgammon? You don't get that.

**Rachel:** What is it again?

**Griffin:** Backgammon is the game you play where you have two dice and you have fifteen checkers on a board with the 24, sort of like, spike spaces that you try to land on, and you are racing, essentially, to get all of your checkers off the board. You are moving in a horseshoe pattern, sort of, around this board, while the opponent is racing in the opposite direction. So, you roll these two dice and the numbers that come up on the dice determine, like, how many spaces you can move any of your checkers that you have on the board.

So, if you roll a 5 and a 3, you can move one checker five spaces and another piece three spaces, or you can move one piece, you know, five and then three. And so, you do that in an attempt to get all the way across the board, and once you get all your pieces, like, in the home stretch then you can clear them off, or bear off, all of your checkers. First person to do that wins. If you land on a space where an opponent has just a single checker, you capture it and you knock it basically all the way back to the start, right? But you can protect against that by having two checkers on a space at a given time. If you have two checkers on a space, your opponent can't land on that space.

**Rachel:** Okay. Okay, all of this is familiar. It kinda sounds like Mancala, but...

**Griffin:** It... kinda. Mancala is like its own kind of thing where there's always a legal move and you all are trying to capture, like, landing your stone in a space opposite a space that your opponent has seeds in. But this game is more about, sort of like, building walls that your opponent can't move past. So, if you capture one of your opponent's pieces and before they can move any of their other pieces they have to get one back on the board, you can also make it where, you know, you have six spaces in a row where you have two pieces. Right? And so, you have built literally an impenetrable wall, where there is no legal move for them to get back on the board. And you can cause them to what's called dance. Which means they can't move. And then it's just like, you get free move after free move after free move.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** So, what I love about the game is there are dice involved, right? So there is a heavy luck component to it. And there have been all kinds of debates, like, across the world, across the centuries, about whether or not it is strictly a gambling game. There are backgammon clubs where people play backgammon for money, typically over multiple rounds. And much in the same way that, like, pinball was legislated as is this a game of chance and then, you know, you get a pinball expert in there to show you, actually no, it's a game of skill. There have

been literal court cases about whether or not this is just a game of luck and gambling. When really, like, there is of course an extremely heavy strategic component to it that is really, really satisfying. I find that blend of the two things like, really, really entertaining. I think that it is a great, just kind of like, chill two-player board game, that there aren't a lot of. It is not sort of mentally taxing in the way that a chess is, or a Scrabble is.

**Rachel:** Yeah. See, I like a game that does have a little bit of luck. Cause it is an equalizer a little bit.

**Griffin:** It is, yeah. I feel like in this way it sort of occupies the dominoes space. Where dominoes is a game of, you know, having to build good chains and try to end with multiples of five, if you're playing with that rule set. But mostly, it's just like, "I sure hope that I have a move that I can play when my turn comes up again." Right? Backgammon is that as well. So, I never, I did not know how backgammon was played until I moved to Austin and we had some friends who had a backgammon set and just like, we'd be in their backyard drinking, just hanging out. And you can play backgammon while talking to people and, like, doing other stuff—

**Rachel:** And it's a two-person game.

**Griffin:** And it's a two-person game. That's so important. There's two of us. We could be playing backgammon right now!

**Rachel:** We could be playing backgammon right now.

**Griffin:** We're wasting time when we're not playing backgammon. Backgammon is as ancient game, it is one of the oldest games. There were sort of— there's evidence of a backgammon-like game being played in, like, ancient Mesopotamia, like 5000 years ago. They found, like, sets of dice and checkers and a patterned board game. There is a... I'd never heard of The Royal Game of Ur, which was a board game that was discovered, you know, an ancient Babylonian game. That sort of acts a precursor to virtually all board games that we know of now.

And it is, like, backgammon has spread across a bunch of different countries in the Middle East, where it has different names and different variations on the ruleset. But it is like an incredibly popular game in coffee houses and other sort of lounge type settings in, you know, I have a list. In Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and just like, a bunch of other Middle Eastern countries. And I think that that's really fucking cool, that like, it has these ancient roots that have allowed it

to, sort of like, propagate across the known world. And I think that just speaks to how fucking good a game it is.

**Rachel:** Yeah, and also that you could like, make it. You know. It's the kinda game that you could, like, pick up, you know, coins and buttons and piece of paper and—

**Griffin:** Doesn't John Locke do it in Lost? Like, there's a whole thing about backgammon, that he does in Lost?

**Rachel:** Oh, I think so.

**Griffin:** Cause they like make a set or something like that? I feel like yes.

**Rachel:** It's either that or Mancala.

**Griffin:** No, I think it was... you have Mancala on the fuckin' brain right now.

**Rachel:** I really do, I'm insistent upon it.

**Griffin:** Mancala's a great game. I really like it.

**Rachel:** It is.

**Griffin:** This is also kind of like a weird, like, thing to state. But like, I think backgammon feels good. There is a tactile, like, taking the dice and rolling them inside the box and then like, picking up the smooth checkers and moving them around the board. Like, there is a tactile, sort of—

**Rachel:** This is a big thing for you. You're big on that with, like, video games controllers and stuff, too.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I mean, I appreciate...

**Rachel:** It is important to you. And phones, and like, any kind of—

**Griffin:** Well phones I feel like everybody— like, a phone is a thing you interface with, like, literally constantly and so I just like a— you know, you play a chess set that has those hollow, cheap plastic pieces then you play one that has good, heavy wood pieces and that feels good. Like, I dunno. I just, I like that. I like that a lot. Backgammon. It's fun as hell. It's a good game that I feel like I did not know about for much of my life, until I started playing it with our friends here in Austin and then it became one of my favorite games. And this video game,

Clubhouse Games, has reminded me of that. So, backgammon. Check it out. Get involved with the backgammon scene. It's like Yu-Gi-Oh, but with far fewer dragons. There's no dragons. I feel like I should say that. Because now I don't want to get emails from people like, "I was told there would be dragons."

**Rachel:** [laughs] Okay. Can I steal you away?

**Griffin:** Please do.

[ad break]

**Griffin:** Got a couple of Jumbotrons here. And these are messages from our listeners to other listeners, and sometimes themselves. This is a message for Chloe, and it's from Ben, who says, "I had gotten this message to celebrate our previously impending nuptials, but now I just want this to be for you. I know it's been a really hard time, and I hope by now things have gotten easier. No matter what happens, I'm so grateful for you. I'll love you always. Thank you for everything. Let me know if you want symbolic ring substitute item." I mean, what are we talking? Like a sword?

**Rachel:** Yeah, if we hadn't exchanged rings...

**Griffin:** Sword is what I'd want.

**Rachel:** Yeah?

**Griffin:** Yeah, like a cool— but not like, some, I don't want you to go to fuckin' some hobby shop and get me like...

**Rachel:** You want me to break into a museum and take, like, an actual—

**Griffin:** No, not even that. I want you to make me a sword.

**Rachel:** Oh!

**Griffin:** And I don't want you to— I know you just were gonna half-ass it and like, get some boxes, some cardboard boxes and—

**Rachel:** I would say pipe cleaners.

**Griffin:** No! I want you to, like, take some smithing lessons. You know what I mean? Like, I want there to be some forging involved. I want there to be forging and tempering. What would you want?

**Rachel:** Uh... I mean, Mancala. [laughs]

**Griffin:** A Mancala set? I could make you a Mancala set, probably.

**Rachel:** You could, and I would like that.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Alright. This next message is for Sarah. It is from Mitch. "Hi, my sweetie bear. I love you and you're super Wonderful. I can't wait to marry you. Unless we already are, which in that case, hooray! I love you so much." Lot of weddings. Lotta marriage, lotta marriage talk. It is the season, I suppose.

**Griffin:** Is it?

**Rachel:** I think people say June.

**Griffin:** Is the marriage season?

**Rachel:** Yeah, it's when people have weddings, cause it's like, reliably hot.

**Griffin:** And people like that?

**Rachel:** Well, sun, you know, you don't have to worry about rain as much.

**Griffin:** I guess. I mean, we had a 23-degree Fahrenheit wedding and I can't imagine doing it any other way.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Oh, I can.

**Griffin:** No, man. It's great how all of our guests looked like Jack at the end of the shining. Just sort of icicles hanging off of their various—

**Rachel:** Did we just do that to save money? Is that why we did it? I think we were urgent—we have some urgency, we wanted to do it..

**Griffin:** Well, we did invite Olaf from Frozen. And we didn't want him to die, did we?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I'm sorry that I'm so conscientious.

**Rachel:** You're saying that, but in Frozen 2 he has permafrost, so he is able to transport in any weather, so it's not as much of an issue.

**Griffin:** I'm such a dumb asshole.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

[ad break]

**Rachel:** Hey, can I do my second thing?

**Griffin:** I want you to.

**Rachel:** My second thing is a soothing, relaxing trip to the poetry corner.

**Griffin:** Ahh. [mumbled singing in a whispery tone] Baby I hear the poetry calling... tossed salad and... scrambled eggs...

**Rachel:** Tom Waits is here, and he's—

**Griffin:** That's not what Tom Waits sounds like! What do you think Tom Waits sounds like?

**Rachel:** It was, until you got real quiet.

**Griffin:** Baby, I hear— Tom Waits's voice is a little bit more abrasive than that. [sings in a raspy voice] Hey baby I hear the blues a-calling...

**Rachel:** That's better.

**Griffin:** It's a little bit, but it's still not very good though. [sings in deep, raspy voice] They put a sign up in our town... [stops singing] I think I just try to make him sound like a scary monster.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Like that's all— my brain is like, "Oh, time to do the Tom Waits impression, lets click the scary monster lever all the way up to full. All the way to maximum."

**Rachel:** I love your impressions. I don't know what I would do without them.

**Griffin:** Um... I mean, you'd still probably be okay.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Hey, can I tell you about the poet, though?

**Griffin:** Please.

**Rachel:** I am talking about Jaqueline Woodson.

**Griffin:** Ooh.

**Rachel:** This is a poet that I did not grow up learning about, but I think should be learned about.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** So, this is somebody who is currently writing today. Written a lot of books, not just poetry. The book that I'm talking about, though, is "Brown Girl Dreaming" And it is an autobiography of sorts, but it is done entirely in verse.

**Griffin:** Holy shit. Cool!

**Rachel:** So it is an incredible experience to read, front to back. It took me about two days to read it. And she tells her story. And she's got kind of a unique one. She was born in Ohio, but her mother was from South Carolina and wanted the family to move back there. So, for much of her childhood, she lived in South Carolina, and this is during the 60s and 70s, so she's talking about her experience as a child who is black during that time period.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And it's really incredible. She won a lot of awards for it. She was awarded the National Book Award for Young's People's Literature, the Coretta Scott King Book Award, and then NAACP Image Award. It is incredible. And she, in 2015, began a two-year term as the Young People's Poet Laureate.

**Griffin:** Oh!

**Rachel:** So, she's written a lot of children's books. This is kind of more into adolescent territory. She's also written some adult novels. She's just incredible. And when I say "adult novels", I don't mean, like, erotica. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Rachel:** So I wanted to read one of her poems.



**Griffin:** Please, please. Oh, is that a signed copy?

**Rachel:** Yeah, so my dad got this for me years ago. He's big on the signed copies.

**Griffin:** He really, really is.

**Rachel:** [laughs] For me it's nice, it's cool. I don't display it, per se. But it is a very good book and I'm glad to have it.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I love how many bookmarks you have in there.

**Rachel:** [laughs] I bookmarked all my fave poems.

**Griffin:** You have like seven bookmarks in there.

**Rachel:** So, this poem is called The Revolution.

*Don't wait for your school to teach you, my uncle says,  
about the revolution. It's happening in the streets.  
He's been out of jail for more than a year now and his hair  
is an afro again, gently moving in the wind as we head  
to the park, him holding tight  
to my hand even when we're not crossing  
Knickerbocker Avenue, even now when I'm too old  
for hand holding and the like.*

The revolution is when Shirley Chisholm ran for president  
and the rest of the world tried to imagine  
a Black woman in the White House.

When I hear the word  
*revolution*  
I think of the carousel with  
all those beautiful horses  
going around as though they'll never stop and me  
choosing the purple one each time,  
climbing up onto it  
and reaching for the golden ring, as soft music plays.

*The revolution is always going to be happening.*

I want to write this down, that the revolution is like a merry-go-round, history always being made somewhere. And maybe for a short time, we're a part of that history. And then the ride stops and our turn is over.

We walk slow toward the park where I can already see the big swings, empty and waiting for me.

And after I write it down, maybe I'll end it this way:

My name is Jacqueline Woodson  
and I am ready for the ride.

**Griffin:** That's so fucking good.

**Rachel:** It gives me chills every time I read it.

**Griffin:** I know.

**Rachel:** She is really incredible at writing in that voice of a young person, which I think is why it's so appropriate that she was the Young People's Poet Laureate.

**Griffin:** I imagine that's a really tricky needle to thread.

**Rachel:** Yes! Yes, because you don't want to be too juvenile, but you also wanna...

**Griffin:** Respect that young people are people.

**Rachel:** Yeah, respect that time period and that there's value in it. She gave an interview to NPR and said, quote, "I'm writing about adolescence for adolescents and I think the main difference is when you're writing to a particular age group, especially a younger age group, the writing can't be as implicit. You're more in the moment. They don't have the adult experience from which to look back, so you're in the moment of being an adolescent. And the immediacy and the urgency is very much on the page. Because that's what it feels like to be an adolescent. Everything is so important, so big, so traumatic, and all of that has to be in place for them."

**Griffin:** That's really remarkable.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** I've never thought about, like, writing for young people in that way. Like, I've never thought about the voice that you have to use whenever you're writing for young people.

**Rachel:** Yeah. I just, like, that poem in particular starts in a very kind of nostalgic way, and then becomes so big with this idea of this carousel. And I just love it. I really would recommend, more than a book of poetry where you can pick poems here and there like I just did, I would really recommend reading the entire book. It's called *Brown Girl Dreaming*. And you go through her childhood all the way into adulthood and it's just, it's so well done.

**Griffin:** That's a hot recc from Rachel.

**Rachel:** Hot recc.

**Griffin:** R-E-C-C, not W—

**Rachel:** Get there!

**Griffin:** [laughs] Okay.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Can I do my second thing?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** My second thing is a song that I've had stuck in my head for about a week. And I must have been whistling it or something recently, because I heard you, like, humming it yesterday. And it weirded me out, if it wasn't that. It's *Pure Imagination*.

**Rachel:** Yes! I think you must have been doing it.

**Griffin:** Okay, it freaked it me the fuck out. Because, like, I prepped this segment and then a half hour later you came downstairs are you were like [hums *Pure Imagination*]

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "Whoa, what the fuck just happened?"

**Rachel:** I realized as I was doing it, "This is a song that Griffin normally hums." So, it must be...

**Griffin:** It must have been, like, a recent...

**Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, you do this a lot.

**Griffin:** It is maybe pound for pound the prettiest song ever.

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I'm bringing it up because it showed up in my Spotify, like, weekly thing, but it was just a guitar, like a jazz guitar cover. Like, a very, very simple one. And it made me realize just, like, the melody of this song is so incredible. It is—I'm assuming everybody has heard it. It is from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" and features an incredible performance from Gene Wilder, who like, I—

**Rachel:** Yeah, he's got pipes.

**Griffin:** He does have pipes. And I love that he is, like, who was cast in this film, in this musical to sing it. Because he has a nice voice, but he is not, like, a... some of the other people who were considered for the role of Willy Wonka is Fred Astaire, Joel Gray and Peter Sellers, like, begged Roald Dahl to be considered to the role.

**Rachel:** Oh.

**Griffin:** But Gene Wilder came in and, like, read two lines and they were like, "Yup!" I can't imagine anybody else doing it.

**Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, Gene Wilder was like, historically, just like a real big comedy presence. But there's such a, like, sensitivity to the way he does this role that is just so charming.

**Griffin:** Yes. I get— this, okay— Gene Wilder and particularly, like, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, makes me emotional in a way I don't really understand.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah, that's fair to say.

**Griffin:** I don't know if that's true for everybody, but for me, like, I get a little bit—there is a sweetness to his performance in this movie that is, like, truly sort of gut-wrenching.

**Rachel:** Yeah, yeah.

**Griffin:** And the song itself is, like, a masterfully written song, because it perfectly encapsulates the entire vibe of this movie. Which is, like, has a vibe that is so unto its own. And to have it all kind of captured in this one wonderful, mysterious, comforting, maybe even just a little bit ominous song is, like, it is just, it's a masterpiece. I'm gonna play a little bit of it. Because I know people have heard it before, but couldn't do you wrong to hear it again.

[Excerpt from Pure Imagination plays]

**Griffin:** To break it down, the lyrics are gorgeous, I think it is timeless in a way—like, on par with the fuckin' ABCs. Like, it is on that level.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** But the bridge of, "If you wanna view paradise, simply look around a view it. Anything you want to, do it. Wanna change the world? There's nothing to it." Like, you can't beat that. So fucking good.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And so, like, meaningful and obviously ties into the themes of the film, but also, sort of like, transcends them just beautifully. But the melody of the song is like, what really, really wins me over. Just hearing the first sort of three notes, the first three chimes. The [sings intro to Pure Imagination] No matter what context they are in. I remember there was a trailer for Ready Player One, which is not my favorite film, but it had an orchestral sort of reimagining of Pure Imagination, like playing to the, "Oh, there's this huge virtual world where imagination is blah blah blah," and I was like, so not sold on it, but then you hear the [sings first three notes] and I'm like, "Aw, here we fucking go!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "Here comes the waterworks." That scene, also, that the song is over, is like, so fucking good. I want an edible room. That's the edible room scene, with the chocolate river, where they're, like, walking around. They've just come out of the little hallway and, you know, there have been strange things. And everybody is all of a sudden, like, there's— your introduction to the factory is so disarming, cause it's like, you know, sign this waiver that says if you die it's fine, and then here's this weird elevator and "Oh no, we're all getting shrunk, isn't that weird! Anyway, here's a huge beautiful room that you can eat anything in." Like, it is

such whiplash. And then you have this gorgeous song. So, like, thematically that is staggering, but also as a child watching this scene, seeing them, like, pick up the little flower and then drink the tea out of it, and then take a bite out of it. Like, it is so magical and inventive and lovely, and then Augustus Goop has to fuck it all up. Augustus Gloop? Is it Gloop or Goop?

**Rachel:** Gloop.

**Griffin:** Gloop I think, yes, has to fuckin' ruin it. I think if he hadn't fallen in the river, they would have just, like, chilled in that room for the rest of the movie and everything would have been fine.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And there's wouldn't be so many fuckin' child fatalities. And instead we all coulda just had a chill time in this incredible edible room. This song has been covered approximately a billion times.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Because it is, you know, gorgeous and just a complete classic. A lot of jazz artists have covered it, and I didn't realize this, it's because it uses a lot of jazz chords, a lot of wild elevenths and stuff like that, that you don't typically see in non-jazz song construction. I love a jazz guitar. My Uncle Chris plays jazz guitar so beautifully and I always love listening to his performances. I think that's why this version that I heard on Spotify really, really got me. It is in the, like, the chill-hop, low-fi genre is also obsessed with this song. So like, a lot of that will show up in the playlists that I listen to from time to time. Fiona Apple also—

**Rachel:** I was just gonna look that up.

**Griffin:** I saw you reaching for your phone like, "Didn't... didn't my girl Fiona—"

**Rachel:** Didn't she?

**Griffin:** She did. Do you remember what she did the song for?

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** She did it for a Chipotle commercial.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Oh, yeah.

**Griffin:** [laughs] Which I always thought was so funny. It was the short from... oh God, what's the name? There's a studio that does that, like, stop-motion animation. I feel terrible that I can't remember. Moon... beam? No, I'm not gonna be able to get it. Somebody is for sure going to be able to correct me in the comments, or on the Facebook page, or whatever very quickly. But it was a Chipotle commercial about a scarecrow who like, moves out to the country.

**Rachel:** Yeah, it's a beautiful commercial [laughs]

**Griffin:** It's one of the better—it's one of the more beautiful Chipotle commercials. I will give them that. It's certainly more beautiful than the ones where it's like, "Come on in, we won't give you horrible, horrible, you know, E. Coli anymore with our lettuce," or whatever the fuck.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I think it's probably more better than the, like, "We won't give you diarrhea" commercials. For sure, for sure, for sure.

**Rachel:** Did you just say "more better", honey?

**Griffin:** I did. I think I'm...

**Rachel:** Are you Henry?

**Griffin:** I'm Henry again. But, like, I feel like Fiona was attracted to this song because it is a little creepy. Like, you can take it in a creepy direction.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** My favorite version of this song outside of the original Gene Wilder version is the Lou Rawls version. Cause it's just straight down the middle. Like, there is very little, sort of, rearranging going on, except it is just, like, soulful as fuck. And so, I wanna play you Lou Rawls's version of Pure Imagination to take us out. Just because I love it so much. I love this song, I love how many beautiful versions— it's a hard song to mess up, and an easy song to, like, make absolutely remarkable, as you are about to hear from Lou Rawls.

[Excerpt from Lou Rawls's cover of Pure Imagination plays]

**Griffin:** Hey, do you wanna know what our friends at home are talking about?

**Rachel:** Yes! And by the way, in a moment of panic yesterday, when I was trying to think of wonderful things, I tweeted and I got over, like, 400 responses from people that were like, "Here's my wonderful thing". And it was incredible.

**Griffin:** It was very encouraging. Lucas says, "I love when you're cutting green onions and it forms a gradient of chopped vegetables. That's really pretty and satisfying."

**Rachel:** Oh, that's so true!

**Griffin:** That's so good! I read that and I was like, "Fuck yeah, Lucas." That is so powerful. I love cutting up a green onion. It's probably, pound for pound, the most satisfying vegetable to cut.

**Rachel:** Whoa, are you sure you wanna say that?

**Griffin:** I am gonna say... well, okay. When I learned how to cut an onion good, like, really dice an onion really, really well without, like, fucking it up or making myself cry.

**Rachel:** What about a green pepper, when you take that stuff out?

**Griffin:** No. I hate cutting green pepper. Hate it, hate it, hate it. But green onion, when you're cutting it and you, like, watch the color change, and then you get to the fork sometimes in it, where now you're cutting two green onions, for the same amount of effort?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Kicks ass. David says, "My small wonder is Koji Kondo, who composed the music for the early Super Mario and Legend of Zelda games. The overworld theme for Super Mario Bros 1985 is probably his most iconic work, but the Ocarina of Time soundtrack is by far my favorite of his compositions." If you don't know, like, all of those old tunes are Koji Kondo's work. And so, like, he wrote a bunch of really, really still used video game masterpieces from the early NES era, but he also wrote the music for Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island for the Super Nintendo, that has the most, like, playful— the overworld theme in that one goes like [sings overworld theme]. It sounds like a supermarket commercial.

**Rachel:** Oh yeah, that's a nice one.



**Griffin:** I fuckin' love it. Yeah, Koji Kondo is very talented. And so is bo en and Augustus, who let us use their theme song "Money Won't Pay". For our theme song. It's not their theme song, it's ours. But they let us use it. And you can find a link to that in the episode description alongside links to the Okra Project. Again, please consider supporting them, and supporting other shows on the Max Fun network, like FANTI.

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** Which I'm going to bother you about subscribing to and listening to until you have done so. I know, we've hacked into your podcast app, we're looking at your bits and bytes in there, all of the data. What else?

**Rachel:** Uh, I mean... just, thank you all for keep on keeping on-ing.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I think, I mean, usually we give action items at the end of this episode, and there is no shortage of action items we could give you this week.

**Rachel:** And you know, hey, hey. This is what I'll say. Because this is something that happens to me. Sometimes I'm like, doing pretty good, right? And I'm like, "I've got this, I've figured this out, I've hacked it, 100%, nothing can stop me." And then I have a bad day and I'm like, "Oh, I was totally wrong." Hey, you know what? You're still gonna have bad days.

**Griffin:** You're still gonna have bad days.

**Rachel:** You can hack the system and then hey, guess what? Something sucks.

**Griffin:** Something sucks and that's it.

**Rachel:** That's life, you know? And then, maybe the next day, you'll get a new hack.

**Griffin:** But don't give up, don't give in. Keep on going.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Keep on powering through.

**Rachel:** Because that's what they want. They want you to give up. That's what they want.

**Griffin:** They do actually wicked want that, jokes aside. Yeah, stay involved, stay fighting for Black Lives Matter and against police violence. Like, I don't think there's a more important thing you could be doing right now.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Well, and wearing a mask.

**Griffin:** Well yeah, I mean, wear a mask while you're doing it. That's also very, very cool. Defund the police, but like, cover your face. It's, like, super important. And we'll see ya next week. We don't usually say that.

**Rachel:** We don't.

**Griffin:** But we fuckin' will!

**Rachel:** We probably should have been, that's so easy. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

[theme music plays]

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