

Wonderful! 71: Baby Like it Sweet

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hey, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: I got a cool lean. Don't I look co—tell 'em—hey, babe? Tell everybody how cool I look right now.

Rachel: You...

Griffin: Got one finger just lovingly strokin' the dials. That make the sound that you all hear. I look cool as hell, don't I? Like I could give a fuck.

Rachel: With your laptop precariously under your... left elbow, and a...

Griffin: Drinking a sparkling water right over that laptop.

Rachel: Sparkling water in your right.

Griffin: Hey, does it look like I give a dang?

Rachel: It does, actually. Very much so.

Griffin: Okay, so... hey, I missed you so bad.

Rachel: I missed you too!

Griffin: And so, I was trying to look seductive and cool, like a sexy man, with my cool lean, and y'know, fiddling with the sound knobs, and drinking

my flavorless sparkling water. I thought that that would make me look like a badass biker boy. Or something like that. And...

Rachel: I mean, it obviously worked, because while we were sound testing, I did make a joke about knobs.

Griffin: Yeah, you did. Umm... and you'll never guess what body part she was equating those to, folks. It was really good.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Hey, do you have any small—this is a show where we talk about things that we really like, and I'm very excited to do it this week. Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: I do!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Getting digital photos printed.

Griffin: Huh! That is one that you are actually very much into, more than anybody I've ever met.

Rachel: Y'know, I realized, like, we're probably gonna be the last generation that grows up with photo albums.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Unless...

Griffin: Unless...

Rachel: We... take it on ourselves to keep the tradition alive. I think it's important. I really like it.

Griffin: I think it's important, too. Um, that weirdly dovetails with one of my subjects.

Rachel: Interesting!

Griffin: Um, I have a small wonder. It's a book I've been reading called *Seveneves* by Neal Stephenson. Uh, it's—Neal Stephenson is like a sci-fi, hard sci-fi author. He did *Snow Crash*, and a bunch of different books. *Snow Crash* is basically like, what inspired *The Matrix*, and a bunch of stuff like that. Uh, and I've liked a few of his books, and some of them are super long and technical and scare me off, and I thought *Seveneves* was gonna be one of them. But then my therapist was like, "Stick with it, it gets good." And holy shit, he was right.

Rachel: Are you saying seventies, or seven...

Griffin: *Seveneves*. It's a palindrome.

Rachel: *Seveneves*. Okay.

Griffin: Yeah yeah. It's basically about the moon blows up, and then, the earth has two years before the moon falls down on it and kills everybody. And so, like, humanity has to figure out a way to shoot themselves somewhat into space and keep like, homosapiens, like, goin'.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: And figure out how to live up there. But it's like, super realistic. It's not like *Battlestar Galactica*, where it's like, we shoot up there with robots! It's like, how do orbits work?

Rachel: Is this what the movie was based on with Ben Affleck and Liv Tyler?

Griffin: Uh, yeah. This is—so, if you've seen *Armageddon*, or *Deep Impact*, they both are adaptations exactly of *Seveneves*.

Rachel: Okay. Okay.

Griffin: No, it's really—it's really—it's just really fucking gripping, and it goes places that I didn't expect. And oh, also, is hugely depressing for the first part of it, as you can imagine, because of what I described, but uh...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'm—I was engrossed in it the whole tour in a way I haven't been into—

Rachel: You're a real sci-fi guy lately!

Griffin: I guess I am, yeah. I mean, yeah, I guess I am.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Uh, who goes first this week?

Rachel: I think it's you.

Griffin: Um, I'll do my second thing first, because it kind of dovetails with what you were talking about, printing digital photos. And when I say what this thing is gonna be, there's gonna be... the little man who lives in your brain who tells you to pay attention to things or not, it's gonna shut off. And that's not just for our listeners.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's also for Rachel.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Because the sentence I'm gonna say is gonna sound like I'm just saying like, [slowly] "veegetablles" out really loud, or something along those lines.

Rachel: Okay, okay.

Griffin: Um, I want to talk about, uh... video game preservation. Now, listen. Hear me out. It's a fascinating topic, I promise. 'Cause I started thinking about it today, 'cause I was thinking about like, emulators and stuff like that, and I remember hearing like—

Rachel: Can I—wait, can I make some guesses?

Griffin: Yes, please!

Rachel: Can I make some guesses?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So you said 'video game preservation.'

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Is this like... art restoration, in that it's people with little brushes, preserving old Nintendo cartridges?

Griffin: You're not, uh... you're like, halfway there.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I thought you were gonna say it's when you like, put it, uh—

Rachel: When you blow on it to make sure that—

Griffin: Yes. [laughs] Actually, that's really bad for it, because your saliva is like, in your blowing, and that gets on the contacts and rusts them, which is really bad. Uh...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But this is actually kind of what I'm talking about. So like, you think about, uh, photos or art or, um... books, or film to an extent, and all of these things are relatively easy to archive. Uh, movies, actually, is maybe not a great example, because a lot of movies made before like, the 1950s are just gone forever, because they were just, y'know, printed physical media, and then, when every copy of those got, like, destroyed, like, that's it for that movie, and humanity never gets to see it again.

Maybe I'm thinking about this because of this Seveneves book that I've been reading, but anyway. Uh, games are a lot harder to do with that. It's not like a book where you can pick it up and read it. If you want to save, like, a Sega Genesis game, you have to have like, y'know, the software code that is on the physical cartridge that has to be played in another piece of technology, like a Sega Genesis.

Even then, like, how you go about ripping it off that cartridge, if you don't have the source code that Sega had when they first made the game, it's incredibly complicated. It's also illegal, because it's—according to the... what is it, Digital Rights Millennium Act? Something like that.

Rachel: I was actually gonna ask you – y'know when your brother Justin was doing that whole FMV quest?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: How was he playing those games? Do you know?

Griffin: On a Sega CD. Justin still has the Sega CD.

Rachel: Oh, wow!

Griffin: It's the DMCA. Digital Millennium Copyright Act or something like that, that basically says like, anything you do that goes around DRM, which is Digital Rights Management, which is like, uh, how you... it's what makes it illegal to like, rip a copy of Sonic the Hedgehog off the cartridge and then

give it away for free, because that copy is yours, and that's what the DRM says.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: So anything that goes around that is illegal. So there's all of these challenges, y'know, put towards saving old games. Uh, but it's gotten to the point where like, we kind of have to poop or get off the pot with some of these.

Even now, like, a lot of games, there was a video game market crash in 1983 where like, games first started to become a big, big thing in the household. And so, everybody started making these cheap, shitty, awful games, and it caused the market to crash, 'cause people didn't want to buy video games anymore.

A lot of those, while they were bad, are just gone. Because there was no way to digitize them, and these companies went under instantly, so they don't have the old, like, code for them. Which, you think about that, and it's like, oh, who cares if you don't save a bad game? These games represent, y'know, thousands and thousands of hours of work that went into them, and all of these different disciplines of art that went into them. And the idea that they can just kind of disappear is wild.

Rachel: Well, yeah! It's like any other, like, art piece in that, it inspires... later pieces.

Griffin: Oh, god yeah.

Rachel: There's relevance to it, because you're curious, like, "Oh, I wonder where they got this idea." And you can like, trace it back.

Griffin: And you can do that with pretty much any other medium. Games are so unique in that there are all of these steps that you have to go through to actually experience them, and those steps are exactly what sort of make them difficult to archive.

And then, like, modern day, you're talking about stuff like, uh, games that have to connect to remote servers to even function. Games that have to do like, uh, an authentication check, like, with an online server, like a game on Steam that has to like, check on Steam before you can even play it. Like, if those servers disappear... that game's gone. There's multiplayer only games that are just gone if the server disappears.

Rachel: Could that happen to like, Second Life?

Griffin: It happens all the time with MMOs.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There have been countless. I mean, MMOs are maybe the—get the worst of it, and uh, there's actually like, a lot of MMO developers who are like, very enthusiastic about this exact topic.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's a guy name Rave Koster? Maybe Raph? Probably Raph. It's short for Raphael, I would imagine... who, uh, was like a pioneer in like, early MMOs. He was like, a big leader in this, because a lot of his games, uh... MMOs take so much work to put up, and they have all of these technological restrictions, and they require, y'know, a server where other people can go and access it together.

Uh, all that stuff disappears, and this game that you just spent all these thousands of hours working on can be published, released, and then die and disappear forever within the span of a decade. Which is in—like, insane! That is a very, very short turnaround.

Um, and so, I think that, uh, video game preservation is like, important, and very, very fascinating. Uh, obviously, it involves getting sort of physical media off of the physical media that it's on. I didn't know this – discs, like optical discs? Uh, after like, a couple of decades, they can start to rot.

Rachel: Wait, when you say optical disks, are you talking—

Griffin: Like CDs.

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: Any sort of any CD, whether it's, y'know, an old AOL demo CD, or like, uh, old PC games printed on CDs. They can rot. Like, there's actual sort of... like, there's aluminum that is used as like, a reflective surface on a lot of old discs, and it's layers and layers of like, aluminum and plastic and all these different layers. And there can just start to be this natural decay within the layers of the disc that will render it unreadable.

And if that's the only thing that a game is printed on, and that happens to every disc, like, that game is just... just gone forever.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, and cartridges are very bad, too. I've actually experienced this. A lot of old games, especially ones like RPGs that you can like, save your progress, have batteries. And those batteries, like, are what allow you to continue to save the game.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: Right? When you take a, y'know, Zelda out of the Super Nintendo, the thing that remembers what it is needs power. Or else it's just gonna go. If that battery goes, like, then that is rendered...

Rachel: Yeah, I guess that makes sense, now that I think about it.

Griffin: And then, obviously, like, when games stop being successful, or when they're printed on things, uh, y'know, consoles that are no longer viable, uh, no longer relevant, then people will just start maki—stop making those games, and then it's like a doomsday clock is going, unless the developers of those games are forward thinking enough to like, preserve that source code. Which, in a lot of cases, they are not.

Rachel: Or GameBlaster72 is on eBay with the only copy left.

Griffin: Yeah, exactly. Um, and so, there are people out there who are like, working to preserve games. There's specifically—there is an organization called the uh, Video Game History Foundation, that is like, just enthusiastic about this. Like, doesn't want us to have another repeat of like, the, y'know, countless films that we lost just to... just to time and decay.

And then there's organizations that like, y'know, find ways to display those games, like the Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment, or MADE, is doing this exact kind of thing, too.

What's interesting is, the only way that they are able to make a legal headway in this, is working with the Library of Congress. I didn't know this. You can petition the Library of Congress every three years to make exceptions to various copyright laws that will allow you to do exactly this kind of thing.

Uh, so, like, the DMCA basically says, like, "You can't do this thing." And they went to the Library of Congress, like, "If you don't allow us to start ripping games off legally, they're gonna disappear forever."

And so, in 2003, the Library of Congress made this landmark ruling that said, uh, games that are in, quote, "formats that have become obsolete and which require the original media or hardware as a condition of access" now have an exception where you can preserve that digitally yourself, and sort of circumvent DRM.

That still makes it illegal to give it away to people, but that is what makes it legal for you to rip something off of your own thing and save it digitally. And then, in more recent years, they've sort of broadened it. Just in 2018 alone, they—this is—this is maybe the wildest thing that I found out about this. Uh, they made it legal to copy wholesale MMORPGs.

So like, there was a game called Star Wars: Galaxies that you just can't play anymore. It's just gone. Everybody who worked on it can never show anybody this game. And now it's legal to take the code from that, if you

acquire it legally, and allow people to actually play it, as long as they are inside of a museum or an archive of some sort.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: So there could be an archive or museum of some sort where you can go and play Star Wars: Galaxies with other players, but all of you have to be within museums where that game is stored.

Rachel: I wonder if there's a future where like, arcades are getting classifications as museums. So that they can still make money, and legally share games.

Griffin: That's interesting. Yeah, maybe. I mean, maybe that's—I mean, arcade machines, though. That's a—that is already a—I watched my own arcades at the Huntington Mall, like, very quickly die. Where I would go in one day, and it'd just be like, oh, that... y'know, that bass fishing game that you like is gone forever.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Because it broke, and we're not gonna pay to fix it. Um, I think that's really interesting. I think that the idea of it—the idea of going to a museum so you can play, y'know, old MMOs is interesting in and of itself.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And also, there's like, pushback from game developers and the Entertainment Software Association, which is like, the big lobbying group, doesn't like all of this stuff happening, because they hear... y'know, you can play all these games for free, and that smacks of piracy. And then, the people who actually make these games... Raph Koster has a quote where he says, "I would rather people play my game for free than have it disappear forever."

Rachel: Yeah! Of course!

Griffin: So, from an artist's perspective of like, I don't want the thing that I worked so hard on, that I poured my heart into, to just be gone forever. And...

Rachel: Yeah! No, it's not like it's like, the newest, y'know, Fortnite or whatever. It's a game that nobody can play anymore, so what's the harm?

Griffin: Yeah. There's so much that goes into this. There's so much lobbying, and so much, like, politicking. Uh, this movement that they—that got the MMOs preserved last year with the Library of Congress was like, a huge thing, a lot of people working on it, because if it didn't happen, then y'know, more MMOs go under every single year. Are we gonna lose them forever?

I just think the whole thing is so fascinating, and also, like, really super important. And I did not sort of appreciate how complex an issue it was until I started digging into it.

Rachel: I'm really excited about what this might do for museums, too.

Griffin: Yeah! I mean, there are—

Rachel: [laughs] Like, the history museum and the art museum and like, the science and industry, like, all have video games in them all of a sudden.

Griffin: There are! I mean, there are—maybe not those, but there's like, the Museum of Moving Images, and Museum of Modern Art, I believe, has a whole bunch of games. And then have like, cycling exhibits that come in with game developers in them.

Rachel: Just like a bunch of kids, saying like, "Mom, can we go to the museum this weekend?!"

Griffin: It's not gonna be—yeah! [laughs] It's not gonna be like, an uncommon thing. Like, we're, for sure, y'know, going to have more of those, and it's gonna be because of efforts like these where, if these weren't happening, like... [clears throat] Who the fuck knows? Like, Super Mario

Brothers. The original NES game. If nobody was ripping them, it could just be gone.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: But luckily, the opposite is true. Archive.org, which is like, the uh, Library of Congress website, actually like—you can play a lot of these games just on there. A lot of these games, like, old arcade and main games are just like, up there, and you can play them for free, and it's all part of these efforts.

It's super fascinating.

Rachel: That's cool!

Griffin: What's your first thing?

Rachel: Sunshine.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: The space movie? The sci-fi movie? You ever see that one?

Rachel: No!

Griffin: Alright, well, the sun stops working. So it's like, the opposite of Seveneves, but they have to fly a ship into it and blow it up to get the sun working.

Rachel: What is with this weird sci-fi trope of like, something's going wrong in space, we had to hurdle a craft at it?

Griffin: Yeah. The celestial bodies got all fucked up. It's a good flick!

Rachel: No, I'm talking about the light that comes from the sun.

Griffin: I like that, too!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's important!

Rachel: [laughing] It is important.

Griffin: That's why they sent a ship to blow it up. To save it.

Rachel: To blow it up to save it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Hmm. There's something there, Griffin.

Griffin: Mmm, kill your darlings. My—the sun is my darling, and one day, I'm gonna blow the fuck up out of it.

Rachel: I don't know if I would say that I have seasonal affective disorder. Which is like, people that, when the winter months come...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Feel like this kind of oppressive weight on their just general being, because they're not getting sunlight.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: But I will say, that it was super cloudy every single day you were gone, and rainy, and cold, and miserable. And then, today, it was sunny, and I just like... I practically like, whistled out to the car.

Griffin: Yeah, that's a different thing from seasonal affective disorder.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: But it's also—

Rachel: But I notice—like, I notice how lack of sunlight, like, really bums me out!

Griffin: Oh, for sure! It's the fuckin' worst, man! That's why I had to leave Chicago, because I was sad for fuckin' five straight months.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, a lot of the benefits of sun comes down to things like vitamin D.

Griffin: That D, though. Oh, that D make you strong, though!

Rachel: [laughs] Vitamin D, and then, serotonin levels.

Griffin: Oh yeah. I mean, that's the—

Rachel: Little increase.

Griffin: That's the sugar sprinkled on top of that D cake.

Rachel: And then, the absence of sun encourages the increase of melatonin, which is what makes you so sleepy.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Rachel: Uh, 'cause y'know how like, when Henry was having a lot of trouble sleeping, people were like, "You need to get him out in the sun during the

day. And so, the absence of the sun will like, encourage him to be sleepier at night.”

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So when it’s like, super dark and gloomy outside, people are more likely to be kind of sleepy and lethargic.

Griffin: And we had to explain to those people... you can't take babies outside, because the birds are just waitin’ to swoop down and grab these guys.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Every day, 50 babies get just like, scooped by a grackle.

Rachel: Oh, I thought you were talking about how every day, we had to fight off birds.

Griffin: No, we just didn’t fuck with—we didn’t take him outside, and so, his sleep was weird, but I wasn’t about to sacrifice our baby to the grackle gods.

Rachel: Oh. Yeah, I'm glad that he made it through that first year.

Griffin: Yeah, me too. Also, grackles don’t have a god. They're fuckin’ demon animals. No, they're great.

Rachel: [laughs] Didn’t you do the grackle?

Griffin: I love them, but holy shit, when they poop everywhere all over the central market parking lot, and you can't—I got shit on by a gra—I did do that segment, and then a grackle shit right on me while we were having a little picnic behind the central market. And then, my feelings took a shift.

If video game preservation somehow found a way to shit on me while I was having a nice picnic with my wife and son and friends, then I would not like them anymore, either.

Rachel: Yeah. So let me tell you a little bit about this vitamin D. Uh, so... you only need about five to 15 minutes of sunlight to get the benefits of vitamin D.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So that kind of assuages any fears you might have about, y'know, sunburn or sun damage. We're only talking about five to 15 minutes.

Griffin: Yes. Although, that stuff is obviously very real, and be smart, be safe out there, folks.

Rachel: Yeah, no. I encourage you, if you are thinking like, "Oh, the sun's gonna change my life," you should probably talk to a dermatologist, because uh, I am not an expert. But one thing that happens is that people that have increased melanin, people that have darker skin complexion, actually are less likely to benefit from the vitamin D in the sun, 'cause that melanin acts as like, a natural defense.

Griffin: Yeah, I guess... what is it? Wait, I thought darker colors absorbed more light, but lighter colors reflect it.

Rachel: Dark pigment in the skin reduces the skin's ability to synthesize vitamin D from sunlight.

Griffin: Huh, interesting. Okay.

Rachel: Uh, so, if you have olive, brown, or black skin, you already have a high concentration of melanin, which makes it more difficult to benefit from that.

Griffin: Well, that sucks!

Rachel: Vitamin D. I know! It's tricky. Um...

Griffin: I guess you guys just drink Sunny D at that point. Which is also good. I actually think I prefer that to sunlight on my skin. I do think I prefer that very sweet orange beverage.

Rachel: Oh, really?

Griffin: Oh, fuck yeah! Are you kidding me?

Rachel: Ugh...

Griffin: I will crush some Sunny D any day of the week. Oh! I wanna make a Sunny D mimosa!

Rachel: [laughs] You heard it here first.

Griffin: I'm gonna make a Sunny D mimosa. I will report back to you all what it's like.

Rachel: Y'know, this weekend. Let's—let's take that trip.

Griffin: I wanna get strong and drunk.

Rachel: We have some champagne right now. We could really—we could go for it.

Griffin: Fuck yeah. Alright.

Rachel: Uh, so vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium, which helps maintain bone density and prevent osteoporosis. There's also been research to show that vitamin D may also protect against diabetes, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease.

Griffin: That's a good vitamin, man!

Rachel: That's a good vitamin.

Griffin: Probably the best one.

Rachel: According to the World Health Organization, sun exposure might help treat skin conditions. Doctors have recommended UV radiation exposure to treat things like psoriasis, eczema, jaundice, and acne.

Griffin: That one I'm fully onboard with. My skin gets so garbage during the winter.

Rachel: I know people with psoriasis who have actually done like...

Griffin: I've never done like, UV treatments, but like, literally, when the summertime comes around, I look like an Adonis out there.

Rachel: Yeah, you do.

Griffin: But then, when it doesn't, I look like the... Sleeping Beauty witch or something.

Rachel: [laughs] Five to 15 minutes of sunlight.

Griffin: That's it?

Rachel: Two to three times a week.

Griffin: I can do that.

Rachel: Yeah. I think it—I think it's worthwhile. I definitely got out there for a few minutes today, just to get a little sun on the arms and the hands and the face.

Uh, sunlight also cues special areas in the retina, which triggers the release of serotonin.

Griffin: Well, that one seems weird. Your eye can see a thing so cool—

Rachel: The light induced effects of serotonin are triggered by sunlight that goes in through your eye.

Griffin: Oh, okay. I stand corrected. I love these peepers. What can't they do for me?

Rachel: Which may relate to the whole seasonal affective disorder. If your serotonin dips in the wintertime. 'Cause you're not getting all that sun serotonin. And not, y'know, again... not an expert.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: Uh, did about 20 minutes of research. But I will tell you what...

Griffin: What?

Rachel: I believe it.

Griffin: The sun is good.

Rachel: 'Cause I love the sun!

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And I miss it when it's gone.

Griffin: You mean at night time? Do you get sad every night?

Rachel: [laughs] No, I can make it through the night. It's the daytimes that are the toughest.

Griffin: She said, "The sun is going away to die." And I said, "No, babe, it'll be back tomorrow." And then I sang her the Relevant song from Annie.

Rachel: What's your next thing?

Griffin: My next thing is stealing you away.

Rachel: Oh yeah!

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Rachel: Do you want to hear some personal messages?

Griffin: I would looove it. Ooh! Who was that voice?

Rachel: I don't know, but it's fun!

Griffin: [laughs] I've never made that voice before! I can't do it again.

Rachel: Okay. Uh, this message is for Near. It is from Robin. "Hi, Near! Sorry to bug you, but I love your dork butt, even if you do have a weird obsession with eating bugs. You're a pretty fly gal and a really great mother."

Griffin: I think it might be moth-er.

Rachel: Moth-er. Yeah, it's hyphenated. "Also, P.S. Want to get married and stuff?"

Griffin: I don't know if this is a proposal or a cute way of referring to the fact that they are already engaged. If it's the former... this is one of the—this is one of the wilder ways we've seen doing it, and congratulations. I hope I'm not talking over it right now. But I do want to know what a moth-er is. I think it's somebody who owns moths. Which is its own story.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Can I read the other one?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: This one's for JB, and it's from Connor, who says, "Hi, baby!" Hi, babyyy! "I just wanted to remind you that you are amazing, talented, and deserve the best. I can't wait to spend the rest of our lives making the world more wonderful together. If we're in the same city, come hug me once you've heard this. If not, let's call. Hopefully we're having an excellent 20-Bi-Teen."

I hope so, too. I hope so, too. I hope you're in the same city, and I hope that you can give each other the deepest hug. Now, by deep hug, you're probably wondering what I mean.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's my own secret technique. And you gotta get way up in those armpits. *Way* up there.

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

Griffin: Can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes, please.

Griffin: My second thing is going to sound strangely worded. My second thing is... visiting New Orleans. Going—being—being in New Orleans.

I didn't want to just do New Orleans, because I feel like that there's a whole bunch of like, culture and history there that I wouldn't be able to tap into in the span of this.

Rachel: See, I read it as like, you saying, like... "Wouldn't wanna live there. Happy to visit."

Griffin: Oh, no! [laughs] That's not it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm sure that people who live there are having themselves a great time, too. I just want to talk about visiting it, because I've only visited it, and I've never really learned a lot about the... even if I had sort of come up with an exhaustive report on its culture and history, this would—

Rachel: Yeah, I feel like you have barely scraped the surface of New Orleans.

Griffin: That's exactly it. I have been there four times now. We went for a tour last week. And by the way, this is not a judgment on Birmingham, which we also went to on this tour. It was lovely, but I was there for all of like, 16 hours. We spent a nice three days in New Orleans, and Rachel and I have gone up there a few times.

Um, and... I genuinely feel like – and this is gonna sound like I'm in danger of that one SNL sketch where they talk about New Orleans. Uh, I really feel like there's not really another place like it on earth.

And I've been to lots of very cool cities, and I love traveling to new places. Uh, and obviously, cities have their own sort of unique stuff going on there. But New Orleans has so much unique stuff that it feels like the word 'city' shouldn't even apply. Like, there's towns and villages and cities, and then, New Orleans is like a... a sector.

Rachel: Something like, always kind of magical happens when we go to New Orleans. I feel like we always end up having some kind of like, really unique, magical experience.

Griffin: Unique, like, kismet—yeah!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, and that's what I really like about it. I had a day on this tour where like, before everybody kind of got up and movin', I just like, left the

hotel. Which, if—I've never really talked about my sort of tour habits, but that's not something I even do a lot of the time. I just like, left the hotel, and just like, walked around for a couple hours. And it was so good.

It's such a good place to walk around. It's like a living... there's so much living history there from all of the different sort of cultures that have gotten a hand on that ball and helped shape it, so just from like, an architectural standpoint, like, why the fuck is there a garden there? There, there, there, there, there, and there, and there. Uh, like, that stuff is very interesting.

Everything is really tight and compact and very walkable, and there's just all these different places that you want to, y'know, dip your snoot into. Uh, and there's like, entire streets that's just like, every storefront here is an art gallery, or an antique shop.

Rachel: You're talking about downtown New Orleans.

Griffin: I'm mostly talking about the French Quarter, yes. Although, we've spent some time in other places, sort of walking around, and obviously, it's not quite as... as compact. It's not as condensed. Uh, but even—we—Rachel and I were lucky enough to stay at an AirBnB in, I forget which neighborhood. But that—that street was so wild. Like, every house on that street looked so completely different.

We stayed in a house once that I think was—they actually shot some of Treme in, which was also like, very strange.

Rachel: Yeah, it was in the neighborhood where it was shot.

Griffin: Yeah, but obviously, I'm focusing mostly on the French Quarter, 'cause that's where I spent most of my time. It's where our hotel was. But there's obviously a lot more going on in New Orleans than just the... than that.

Uh, but man, that spot makes for some good aimless wandering. Like, you can just be walking around and like, dipping into like, these different art stores, and then you can just turn the corner, and there's a huge, like, park

where people are, y'know, painting. And there's a dance troupe, and there's a half dozen buskers, and there's a dude doing some magic. That's not an exaggeration.

Like, these are things that you can just see there. And then there's a big church you can go inside, and that's really nice. And then, you go a few more blocks, and there's an open market by the river, and like... you can just keep going—going around without much of a destination, and just like, see a bunch of cool shit. And I like that a lot. Because I get very anxious that I'm not gonna see cool shit if I put in the work to actually like, go out and walk around.

Rachel: It's nice, too, 'cause I went to New Orleans the first time when I was like... 20 years old, maybe?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And it's nice to go as an older adult, because I feel like when you're very young, the biggest, most exciting thing about New Orleans is just drinking a whole lot.

Griffin: Yeah. I don't even like that.

Rachel: Uh, but... as you get older, it's like a whole new nice experience, too. To be like, an adult in a city that is that beautiful.

Griffin: And it's like, a very localized, like, culture. There's a lot of stuff there that you can't really recreate in a lot of other places.

Yeah, I'm not a big Bourbon Street fan. I think it's kind of—I don't like it. It doesn't—there's a smell there that's quite bad, and then there's a lot of...

Rachel: Yeah. There's like a desperation, and just a... just a weird energy.

Griffin: Yeah, there's just a lot of sort of, um... just sort of roving packs of midlife crises, just sort of going around, and making bad smells in places. That's not... that's stuff's not great.

But there's great bars there. There's really cool bars where you can go in and get like, a very fancy, weird cocktail. Rachel and I, in our group of friends, once went to a bar. I forget where it was, but it didn't—

Rachel: In bad hurricanes.

Griffin: Well, we did that. That was not the story I was gonna tell, 'cause that makes it sound like the walking midlife crises people.

Rachel: Oh. [laughs]

Griffin: But we went to a bar that had no electric lighting in it? It was all like, gas lamp lit, and there was a dude just like, playing piano, like, inside the whole time. And it was so weird, and such a cool experience.

And then, like... I'm very picky about, uh, food. I get sort of, um... the idea of going out with my whole big, big family to like, a restaurant, uh, stresses me out, because there's a lot of us now. And so like, y'know, if we're gonna make reservations at a place, I want it to be super nice.

Uh, we made some pretty, like, quick fire reservations for some places that we all got to eat at and share these nice meals, and every fucking one of them was so good. There's food that I only eat there that I forget that I really like until I come back.

For three straight days, two meals of the day, I basically ate some sort of fish or seafood with rice, covered in a sauce, that was flavorful, and it was red to brown. It was in the red to brown spectrum, somewhere in there. And every single bite of it was so fuckin' good.

Um, this is sort of just a lot of uh, uh, aimless talking. But like, that's kind—the thing I like about New Orleans is, any other city we go to, I wanna have a fuckin' plan. I want to know where we're going. I want to know where the best stops are. And just like, go there. And New Orleans is the only place, really, in the world, that I've been to where I feel like I can just like, walk out the front door, and like, let's kind of see what happens.

And I feel like that that is the—that's the cliché about New Orleans.

Rachel: I know, that's what everybody says about New Orleans. [laughs]

Griffin: But there's a functional reason behind it. It's not just like, "Mm, things are different. Everything's the destination, baby." But like, yeah, kind of.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Kind of, SNL sketch. Kind of.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I guess what I'm saying is, kind of.

Rachel: When I—[laughs] The first time I went to New Orleans, we stayed in a hostel. And my friend and I woke up a little bit earlier than everybody else, and the guy that worked there just decided to make us these really nice omelets.

Griffin: Alright!

Rachel: And it was just like—it was just this moment of just like... everything is so magical here. [laughs]

Griffin: I just stumbled on this—I stumbled on this store that sold like, handmade, wooden crafts, and I found this like, wooden train set for Henry, so I bought it. And the woman—the cashier took like, 15 full minutes to ring me up. Which I would've been frustrated by, but it was really nice talking to her about all of her cool, like, wood projects!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, yeah. These are like, the experiences that you want to have when you travel, and I feel like, New Orleans, it's not just like... it's not just

like a company line. It's not just like a motto. It is engineered from the ground up to just be sort of that all over, and I really like it a lot.

Rachel: Me too.

Griffin: We went to a wedding once in a wax museum there. This city fucking kicks ass.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, what's your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing... is umami.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: I just had me a big umami—umami dish. Had that romesco chicken from Snap Kitchen. It's got that smoky flavor, and then the earthy mushrooms, and the kale. It's just all umami, all the time.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. I uh... I was thinking about this, uh, recently, because umami, the concept of umami is a relatively new thing. Which is kind of rad to think about. Like, the established name for...

Griffin: The word of it that... yes.

Rachel: Yes. Yes. Like—

Griffin: Not the flavor itself.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: No. Obviously, the flavor has existed, but there wasn't really a name for it for a very long time. It was just, y'know, like the standard, like... sweet, salty, sour, bitter.

Griffin: Yeah. I love that show on Netflix. That's so good.

Rachel: [laughs] In the early 20th century, a Japanese chemist named Kikunae Ikeda was puzzled by this dashi broth that he was eating. The broth contained no meat or kelp, which were kind of traditional things you would find in dashi, but it had this seaweed, and it was like, this flavor that he was just like, "Y'know what? I don't know that there's really a word for this."

So he chemically treated the seaweed, and found that the crystals were chemically identical to... glutamic acid? Which is a type of amino acid found in the human body. And when those crystals were dissolved again into liquid, or sprinkled on food, the flavor exploded. And so, he coined this as the fifth taste, umami, or deliciousness.

Griffin: [laughs] Okay.

Rachel: Which is what umami means.

Griffin: There's so much shit in that story that I want to dive into.

Rachel: I know!

Griffin: That is very—first of all, that's a very presumptive, "Hey, guys, I invited a new flavor."

"What is it?"

"Deliciousness."

Rachel: [simultaneously] "Deliciousness." [laughs]

Griffin: Alright, dude, alright. But at the same time, can you imagine how psyched you would—this would be like seeing a new color, and it's like, "Oh. Oh, okay. There it is."

Rachel: Yeah, hey guys, do you notice this? It was here the whole time.

Griffin: Third thought – if I eat a tennis ball, how would you describe that flavor?

Rachel: I mean, probably... bitter?

Griffin: Yeah, probably.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [bursts into laughter] This is fun. I'll do another one. Um...

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: What about a crab apple?

Rachel: A crab apple? Probably sour.

Griffin: Oh, maybe. What about a...

Rachel: [laughing] This is fun. This is fun for everyone.

Griffin: What about a car tire?

Rachel: Probably bitter again.

Griffin: Yeah, most things are—

Rachel: Very similar to the tennis ball.

Griffin: When you think about it, most things—if I tried to—if I licked everything in this office, and I kept a graph of it, I feel like it would be 99.9% bitter.

Rachel: Yeah. So... [laughing]

Griffin: I'm looking around. Is there anything in this room that's sweet, sour, or salty, or umami?

Rachel: I mean, salty, probably.

Griffin: What, like, our skin?

Rachel: Well, like, y'know, the stuff that you get sweaty. With your sweatiness.

Griffin: Oh, grody!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Why'd you have to go there, babe? So grody.

Rachel: So this glutamate that is kind of the main characteristic of umami flavor can be found in beef, pork, chicken, tomatoes, mushrooms, soy, potatoes, carrots, parmesan cheese, green tea, tuna, and shrimp.

Griffin: Is this what monosodium glutamate is, like, derived from?

Rachel: Yeah, so I'm gonna get there.

Griffin: Okay, interesting.

Rachel: Uh, so yes. So like, a lot of proteins. But then, also stuff, y'know, like mushrooms, as you mentioned. And then, uh, parmesan cheese, which I'd never really thought about, but that's definitely true!

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, that's definitely not a salty cheese.

Rachel: I never really thought of like, pasta as like, a particularly umami dish, but it has tomatoes and parmesan. So...

Griffin: Yeah, sure!

Rachel: Yeah. Uh—

Griffin: You spice it up, though. You make it—you make it spicyyy. Rachel makes it spicy in all things.

Rachel: [laughs] Thank you!

Griffin: If you know what I—if you know what I'm sayiing.

Rachel: Griffin, thank you.

Griffin: I'm talking about pasta, mostly. No, just kidding. All things. [makes a strange sound] That's my wink noise.

Rachel: Ooh. [laughs]

Griffin: Well, the eye is wet.

Rachel: So, as you mentioned, MSG, or monosodium glutamate, is a compound molecule that contains glutamate and binds with sodium in order to stabilize into something that can be packaged and sold in seasoning bottles. MSG became widespread in the US after World War II, when uh, people in the industry realized that the Japanese military had been using MSG to make things taste better.

And at that point, Campbell's Soup, among other companies, began to incorporate MSG as a flavor enhancer.

Griffin: Wasn't there kind of like a run on people saying MSG is like, super bad for you, that was actually deeply stee—oh, sorry.

Rachel: You're really—you're just—you're...

Griffin: [laughs] I guess I'm kind of, uh—I guess you can call me Dr. Umami! [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs] No, you're just like, you're servin' 'em up, and I'm... I'm just ready.

Griffin: And knockin' 'em down? Yeah, please.

Rachel: So in the 1960s, there was an infamous controversial letter from a doctor about what he called... and again, controversial... he called "Chinese restaurant syndrome."

Griffin: Oh, god.

Rachel: The doctor wrote that he experienced symptoms similar to those of an allergic reaction.

Griffin: This is—it was all from one fucking doctor, having a bad Yelp review?

Rachel: Yeah. So, he started it up, saying like, y'know, MSG is dangerous. And then, there was, uh... a study in which researchers injected laboratory mice with MSG. Which they found led to brain lesions and other neurological problems. But there were problems with the study, because the researchers, one, *injected* MSG...

Griffin: I was about to say! What the fuck, guys?!

Rachel: Under the mouse skin... which, obviously, is not the way that we ingest MSG.

Griffin: [laughing] Oh no, I totally do. I get it up in there.

Rachel: And also, mice were injected with doses fit for horses. Which obviously, like, no human being is gonna take in that much MSG...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: In one meal, or like, a hundred meals, most likely. So, yeah, so there were a lot of flaws with that study. And obviously, the MSG stigma kind of prevailed for a long time.

Griffin: Deeply—deeply rooted in racism, which is like, if you denied yourself this good flavor because of this bullshit, then you deserve not to have the good flavor in your mouth.

Rachel: So, umami picked up speed in the 1990s when they started doing studies on taste receptors. In 2000, molecular biologists at the University of Miami published a paper where they discovered a unique taste receptor for umami on the tongue of a mouse. So back to the mice. This time...

Griffin: Mouse doses. [laughs]

Rachel: In favor of MSG.

Griffin: They didn't just throw a snowball of MSG at a mouse's, like, exposed brain. "This is science! Pff!"

Rachel: The paper demonstrated that the presence of glutamate sent a signal to the brain and caused the taster to experience the sensation of umami, uh, and that then contributed to kind of the sea change in the past, y'know, 20 years or so.

Griffin: Fuck yeah. And then, like, people looked at that one study from that one doctor and were like, "Oh wait. That's just not how science works, gang."

Rachel: Yeah. So back in the 1920s, like, "Oh, this is an interesting taste, and I'm gonna give it a name! And then, now, they're like, "Yeah, no, there's actually a taste receptor on your tongue for that taste."

Griffin: Interesting!

Rachel: Like, it's a real thing, guys. And it's incredible and wonderful, and I love it.

Griffin: I mean, obviously, the best umami sort of zone for me, the obviously, like, winner, is any ramen sort of experience. I'm trying to think of—

Rachel: I mean, just soy sauce, y'know?

Griffin: Soy sauce is, yeah, for sure.

Rachel: But yeah, like, if you think about ramen, that's got like, pork, too. Y'know, like, there's a lot of umami elements to that.

Griffin: I'm trying to think of my other, like, favorite umami shit. Um... like—I like a mushroom cooked well. A nice mushroom.

Rachel: Well, like, a mushroom pizza, you think about, that's the tomato and the mushroom...

Griffin: Oh, that's good stuff! Man!

Rachel: Y'know, parmesan cheese. Like, that's—that's super umami, too.

Griffin: Is this your favorite flavor, would you say?

Rachel: I think—honestly, I think it is. Like, I tend toward savory, most of the time. Like, if I'm gonna do a breakfast, for example, or like, a drink. If there's a savory drink a lot of times, I like that, too. I think it is. I think it's my favorite.

Griffin: I like sweeeeet.

Rachel: I know you do.

Griffin: I like sweeeeet.

Rachel: You like sweet and sour combo.

Griffin: Baby like sweeeet.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Do you like him?

Rachel: No!

Griffin: Baby like it... [in a nasally voice] ... sweeeeet. Baby like it... sweet.

Rachel: This is—so I don't know if our listeners are familiar with this thing in our relationship.

Griffin: [laughing]

Rachel: Where you just do something over and over and over again 'til you get me to laugh, regardless of how terrible it is.

Griffin: Baby like it sweeeeet.

Rachel: Oh, and he's adding some gestures.

Griffin: Baby like it... sweeeet.

Rachel: He's doing a real Jim Carrey over there.

Griffin: Baby like it sweet?

Rachel: Okay. [laughing] Okay. That one got me.

Griffin: [laughing] I was getting into some like, some real Bob Fosse in there for a little bit.

Do you know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Please tell me.

Griffin: Well, I'll tell ya. Allie says, "I think accidentally matching outfits with your friends is wonderful. It's pure coincidence, it's always funny, and it makes me feel like my friends and I are on the same wavelength, even if it means we look a little silly."

Rachel: I love this too!

Griffin: I do too.

Rachel: This happens a lot with our friends. I feel like we spend a lot of time doing it with each other, and everybody favors, like, gray and khaki.

Griffin: Exactly. [laughs] Yeah. There's been a lot of parties where it's like, oh, you got the black pants, gray shirt memo. Congratulations.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This happens a lot on more of a specific skill, thanks to Stitch Fix, and how everybody in our family uses it. I saw so many Stitch Fix shirts on the bodies of my brothers. You would not believe it.

Here's one from Emily who says, "My small wonder is the moment when street lights turn on at sunset. I walk through a park on my way home from work, and if I get lucky, they'll turn on as I walk by, and it makes me feel like a wizard."

Rachel: Aww.

Griffin: Rachel doesn't like that, though, 'cause it means the sun goes away, and that's her best friend.

Rachel: No, it reminds me of Mary Poppins, so I like it.

Griffin: It reminds me of Harry Popper. [pause] Harry Potter. Is what I said.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Here's a different Emily who says, "My wonderful thing is seeing movies at the drive-in. There are two drive-in movie theaters within an hour of where I live, and I go every chance I get. There's something so magical about watching movies under the night sky with friends, family, and strangers. If the movies are good, watch those, but if they're bad, you can just look at the stars." Holy shit.

Rachel: Do you think she saw Harry Popper at the drive-in?

Griffin: Pretty sure I said Pobber.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which is not even a word. We used to have a drive-in here in town that died. Which sucks.

Rachel: Yeah. Well, it just moved far away.

Griffin: Yeah, I'm not gonna do that. It used to be right next to like, the new, fancy HEB, so you could go and like, get yourself a bottle of wine and a nice meal, and just like...

Rachel: We got to see Independence Day at a drive-in, which was incredible.

Griffin: Oh, yeah!

Rachel: On Independence Day!

Griffin: It was so good. And so is the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. That one's from Bo En and Augustus, and it's fuckin' fantastic.

And so are all the shows on MaximumFun.org.

Rachel: Hey, Griffin, do you like when two or three nice people talk to each other?

Griffin: I do.

Rachel: MaximumFun.org has a lot of good shows for you, then.

Griffin: Mm-hmm. Some of them just have one. Just talkin'... of nice stuff about themselves.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's really great. Uh, MaxFunDrive's comin' up soon. There's gonna be a bunch of bonus stuff, but we're gonna talk about that when it comes around.

Rachel: Yeah! There's gonna be a Wonderful pin!

Griffin: Yeah, there is! I'm very excited for that. Uh, thank you to... uhh... Rachel. I love you. You're doing a dang good job over there.

Rachel: [laughs] Thank you to the fun folks in our Facebook group. If you're looking for a Facebook group, it is still under our previous show title.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: But it is worth the joy.

Griffin: Um, and... oh! If you like MBMBaM or TAZ, we're doing shows in April in San Jose and Salt Lake City that we just announced. You can find tickets to that at McElroy.family. I think they go on sale on Friday, if you want to come out and say hey. I mean, we probably won't get a chance to meet, but... we'll say hey at you.

Rachel: Griffin and his family do real good live shows.

Griffin: Thank you!

Rachel: I would recommend it. It's always a really good time.

Griffin: Thank youuu! Gosh. You're making me blush over here. Makin' me all red and rosy all over. [pause] [in a weird, strained voice] Baby like it sweeeeet!

Hey, you gotta look at me. It doesn't work if you don't look at me.

Rachel: Thanks. Thanks for listening, guys.

Griffin: [in a weird voice] Baby like it—

Rachel: You can stop listening now.

[theme music plays]

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