

Wonderful! 151: Michaels Soul Connections

Published 24th September 2020

[Listen here on themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Folks, we're not gonna BS ya, we're up against it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: We're up against it. [sings] We only got 40 minutes to save the world.

Rachel: Yeah. Sometimes, at least for me, the topics don't come.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I sit in front of my computer and I think, "What's wonderful?" and I told Griffin the other day, "I literally wrote down as a potential topic, the color green."

Griffin: Yeah, and I'm—

Rachel: Which I probably shouldn't be saying out loud, because I may still do that.

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I was more talking about the timetable—

Rachel: That too.

Griffin: —that we have to record this particular episode.

Rachel: But I feel some responsibility for the timetable, because it did take me some time to come up with ideas.

Griffin: Yeah. But you know, life finds a way. We got 40 fuckin' minutes, baby. It's gonna be like an episode of 24. Just, like, us trying to bang this thing out. We're like two Jack Bauers, but we don't hurt people.

Rachel: Yeah, maybe less torture in this one. [laughs]

Griffin: But we help people. So, whatever the opposite of torture is... I guess presents? I don't know what the opposite— love? I dunno. But whatever, this is Wonderful, it's a show where we talk about things that we are into, things that we like. Gonna keep it tight today, but do you have any of those small wonders? I bet I can guess what you're gonna say.

Rachel: Oh, I mean, are you thinking I'm gonna talk about PEN15?

Griffin: PEN15 is a good show. Rachel's got me watching it. It's fun. It is— we've talked about, it's dredging up middle school memories for me that I... not a joke, have suppressed. Like, I don't remember anything from middle school because my experience there was straight-up traumatic, and this show is like, "Hey. Remember?"

Rachel: [laughs] The second season is now available and I was going to watch it, but I really wanted Griffin to watch the first season with me, because I watched it solo and I thought, "He would enjoy this." So here we are.

Griffin: Yeah. It's so good. It's very, very good. Premium recommendation. I'm gonna say Clair de Lune by Debussy? Is that right? De-boo-sy? De-bus-y?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is a good track.

Rachel: One of those has to be right.

Griffin: That's the one that they play during the fountain scene at the end of Ocean's 11, the [sings] bum, bum, bum, ba-ba-bum... Uh, I just really like it. It's been stuck in my head. I've been trying to like, do it by ear in Ableton, which is a fun— sometimes I like to do that, as like a fun exercise. I could very easily find the sheet music and, like, learn to play it that way, but I don't know. I'm broken inside.

Rachel: It's a very classy thing to have stuck in your head. Instead of like, a commercial from the 1990s.

Griffin: Yeah. Well, I'm sure that I could get one of those in there if I really tried.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I go first this week.

Rachel: Great.

Griffin: My first thing that I'm gonna do is Hubble, the telescope. The telescope up in the sky. The big space telescope? Just takes pictures of things that are, like, wicked far away. Like, really far away. I didn't know anything about Hubble aside from that we saw, I guess, a model of it at the— or I saw a model of it at the Air and Space, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. And they have some really incredible pictures there, and there's no shortage of amazing pictures that this thing has taken.

It's been up in space since 1990 and it's just been taking great pictures ever since then, except for the first three years where it was up there, because somebody made a whoopsie-doodle on the Hubble that was apparently a huge debacle. A fiasco, one might call it, that I will get into. And over the last 30 years, it's helped astronomers solve, like, these pretty big, existential questions, but more than that, it's served as sort of a PR, like, godsend for NASA and really all global space agencies. Because, you know, you see a picture of the... whatever, there's one, the iconic picture of a galaxy that's like this orange cloud with these three fingers, like, sticking up out of it. And it's called, like, The Pillars of Creation, I think is what it's called. Takes some incredible pictures and gets people super stoked about space. You've seen some dope Hubble pics, yeah?

Rachel: I mean, maybe? But not daily. I don't have like a daily calendar, or like a daily alert. I feel like I haven't been in touch with Hubble in a while.

Griffin: Well, you should tap back into your love with Hubble.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Because there's a lot to look at there. So, it's got a big-ass mirror in it, like an eight-foot wide mirror. It can observe ultraviolet, visible, and near-infrared regions of the electromagnetic spectrum and it has captured images from as far as... this might be a fun game. How far away do you think it the farthest that Hubble has taken a picture of?

Rachel: ... oh...

Griffin: I know, I know.

Rachel: I hate estimating distance.

Griffin: I know, I'm putting you on the spot. I definitely woulda wiffed this.

Rachel: Are we talking about miles?

Griffin: No.

Rachel: What's our metric here?

Griffin: More than miles. Ten to fifteen lightyears away.

Rachel: Okay. I have no concept of what a lightyear is, Griffin.

Griffin: It's how far... fast... it's how... light takes a year to travel that distance. It's big. It's very, very big.

Rachel: Okay. [laughs]

Griffin: It's so far away that it can see into the past, right?

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Because of, uh, relativistic time dilation. Like, it can see way, way, way in the past.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Isn't that cool?

Rachel: That's... I can't even...

Griffin: It's a time machine!

Rachel: My brain, I can't, with saying this.

Griffin: It's because it's not on Earth, because it's not a terrestrial tele— we have amazing terrestrial telescopes, but they are all effected by, like, background, you know, radiation, light leak and all that stuff. Hubble doesn't

have to worry about that. So, it can just take these crystal-clear pictures super, super far away.

It was actually funded in the 70s and it was supposed to launch in 1983, but it ran into a bunch of budget problems, and then of course in 1986 there was the Challenger disaster, which basically put everything that NASA was doing, you know, at a standstill. Especially the shuttle program, because they would have to launch it with a shuttle. And ultimately that is what happened in 1990. It was launched by the space shuttle Discovery, and once it was up there NASA realized that the big mirror that is responsible for, like, its optics wasn't installed correctly. And so, the pictures that they were able to take were, like, not... not great.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, what a mess.

Griffin: What a big, big mess.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, the first of five Hubble servicing missions went up in 1993. Fixed the issue, and it's been nothing but big, beautiful pics ever since. Other servicing missions added sort of like different features or, you know, just repaired various things. The last servicing mission was in 2009. That was an important one, because, I didn't know this— Hubble's orbit is pretty fucking precarious. And that's by design, because, you know, it's gotta be able to beam— I guess, get stuff back to— I don't know why it's in such a low, precarious orbit, but it is, and because of orbital decay it's likely to come down some time in the 2030s, and before this servicing mission that comedown was gonna be potentially catastrophic.

Like, if it landed on land, it could be, because of the way it's built it was not going to break up a lot and so it was going to be a big disaster. So, 2009 they added a module to it to help them, you know, rendezvous with the space shuttle and bring it down safely. A good update, I would say. So yeah, we've learned about the age and the expansion of the universe and the prevalence of black holes, and there's another powerful satellite that was actually supposed to launch this year that is like the successor to Hubble, called the James Webb telescope. Which features a 21-foot mirror array that is going to be able to take some, like, really, truly, staggeringly far away pictures. Way, way even further than Hubble. And now, due to different delays and because of COVID and because of, you know, NASA funding and stuff, it's now scheduled to launch next October. So, something to look forward to if you're a fan of space pics.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's just like, an amazing achievement. You can file to use Hubble. Like, you can apply to use Hubble.

Rachel: Wow.

Griffin: There is certain cycles that Hubble is available to use and most of them are spoken for, like, most of the available hours are spoken for, but there is time set aside for amateur astrologists to—

Rachel: For like a children's birthday party.

Griffin: Not for a children's birthday party. Like, it's extremely competitive, but it's like, available for you to use. And it's like, it's expensive, right, but it's pure good, I think. Like, we're using Hubble to see things out in the universe and answer these incredible scientific questions and you can use it, hypothetically, like, if you want to. I think that's fucking rad. And it's sort of, in my mind, like, the aesthetic ideal of what a government program could potentially establish for you. I know the European Space Agency and somebody else helped contribute to Hubble, so it wasn't purely NASA, but it's just good. Hubble's just good.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's just straight up good.

Rachel: Yeah, you're not gonna find out years from now that Hubble's been doing bad stuff. [laughs]

Griffin: Hubble's not gonna— I don't think we're gonna milkshake ducked by Hubble. That would be wild. Anyway, what's your first thing?

Rachel: My first thing is kinda silly.

Griffin: Oh, boy!

Rachel: It's the Shake Weight.

Griffin: The sha— [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I have to imagine that you don't actually care about the sort of physical benefits of the Shake Weight as much as you enjoy— it looks like a jerk-off.

Rachel: [laughs] I enjoy the kind of the fine line it walks in its existence and promotion. It is just one of those kind of delightful, at least seemed to be, happy accident that just created so much joy.

Griffin: Did we— I feel like— did we have a Shake Weight or some derivative?

Rachel: Somebody we knew did. I think our friend Grace had one.

Griffin: I've used a Shake Weight before.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's— y'all? It's hard.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You look at the Shake Weight, you see that and you're like, "Oh fun, a jerk-off weight."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's fucking— it's really quite difficult to use the shake weight.

Rachel: Uh huh. No, that's true. Like, there was research done and there are actual benefits to it. It's not a complete, you know, hoax. I mean, it is a weight.

Griffin: It's a weight that is even harder to lift than a regular ol' weight.

Rachel: For those that are not familiar, when it was originally marketed, it was marketed towards women. It is a two and a half pound, dumbbell-shaped device with spring-loaded weights on each end. So the idea is that you would grip it and shake it as if you were priming a bottle of soda.

Griffin: Oh ,is that—

Rachel: To explode.

Griffin: Is that what it would look— is that— is that what the action is?

Rachel: I love the Wikipedia description said, "Shake weight has gained popular attention and parody because it involves using the appearance of pumping a phallic object." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. That's a very, that's a very Wikipedia, very clinical way of— I want dirty Wikipedia that's like, "Yeah man, looks like it's jerking it! Right boys?" [howls]

Rachel: So, the idea was— so they promoted it as something that they called dynamic inertia, which would ignite the muscles in your arms. So instead of just lifting a regular dumbbell you would be, you know, moving the weight up and down, which would work additional muscles instead of just the ones you would get from a regular dumbbell.

Griffin: Yeah, basically as you are lifting it up, the weights are pushing down, and as you are pushing it down, the weights are pushing up because of the springs.

Rachel: Yeah, exactly.

Griffin: And you do it very repetitively very quickly, like a jerk-off might do, and it gets very, very difficult super fast.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, the suggestion was that in just six minutes you could burn as much— as many calories as you would in 42 minutes with a standard dumbbell.

Griffin: That doesn't seem... right or fair.

Rachel: Yeah. So there was research done, there was a professor at San Diego State University that said that it is a good workout and that it does require, quote, "300% more muscle activity" than a dumbbell, which is a claim that they made.

Griffin: Huh.

Rachel: But that six minutes isn't— isn't gonna, like, change somebody's life.

Griffin: [laughs] Right, yeah.

Rachel: You know, as much as a more focused, lengthier workout would. But it does force your muscles to contract more in the time frame, and so there is value to it. Did you know they made a Shake Weight for men? [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] No! I mean, I assumed that the Shake Weight itself was fairly gender neutral.

Rachel: Well, here's the thing: So, the Shake Weight for women was two and a half pounds. The Shake Weight for men was five pounds.

Griffin: No thanks.

Rachel: And the suggestion is that it's— I mean, it's... six minutes is almost impossible. Like, people just can't do it for that long, because it is, it's a heavy weight to be shaking back and forth and six minutes is a pretty long time to be doing one motion over and over again.

Griffin: Did... the assumption that people who identify as men have literally, mathematically twice—

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

Griffin: —the power is such a wild... like it goes beyond sexism into the realm of, like, sci-fi. It's like... wow.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I've never read Enders Game but like, I assume this is the shit Orson Scott Card is up to. I just assume.

Rachel: So, I found an interview with the creator.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: That is delightful. So, this was something that was popular in 2010, the creator is Johann Verheem. And I found the interview from Ink.com with him, and they try and kind of get at the suggestive nature of the product.

Griffin: Oh, they hint at it?

Rachel: And whether or not it was intentional, basically.

Griffin: Can't wait to hear this quote.

Rachel: Cause this is an ad that was— you can find it on YouTube, it was parodied by Saturday Night Live as well as a number of talk shows, because the ad is somewhat suggestive for a number of reasons. Not just the product.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So, the interview asked him kind of about the success and he said “Well, you know, we had evidence that it worked, but it also looked provocative. It’s not just that sex sells, but one of the other things that was very important to direct selling is that a product looked different enough for someone to stop and watch it.” And the interviewer said, um, you know, kinda pushed on that a little bit more and said, you know, what do you mean looks different? And he said, “Well I think there are sexy bodies selling a lot of things, and there are a lot of 30-minute infomercials that use sex and good-looking bodies to get people’s attention.”

Griffin: [laughs] The outright honesty of this person is, like, really taking my breath away.

Rachel: “So, we probably got more attention than most because our product was funny, and back when we were making the show there were a couple jokes going around the set about what it looks like if you do it a certain way. But that wasn’t our master plan and we had to spend a lot of money on PR so people knew that it actually worked.”

Griffin: Didn’t think ‘plan’ was gonna be the thing that came after ‘master’ in that one.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Is there stories of people who ended up in the hospital because they used the Shake Weight and then they went to pleasure a penis and just yanked the wiener, just like, clean off?

Rachel: [laughs] I did not see that.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: They talk about marketing the Shake Weight for men and whether or not that was a trickier video to make. And he said, “Well, in the men’s there’s no room for sexual innuendo there, because it’s such an intense workout.”

Griffin: That's fucking— that sucks, dude! That's rough.

Rachel: [laughs] And so they said, well, "Does that mean then in the women's infomercial there was room for innuendo?" And he said, "The lighter device for women is for toning, but the one for men is a really tough workout. We never intended for the women's device to have innuendo. We had a bunch of people here from industry and a lot of women on the set and they didn't make many comments. But it depends how you shake it as well. If you do it based on the free exercise that we have laid out, it's not that suggestive. Some of the women would say, though, if you shake it this way, it looks like... well." Period. [laughs]

Griffin: A jerk-off! Say it!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Say it. You saying that the dude weight has to be twice as strong because men can't joke around because they have to get their muscles so big is way worse than saying, "It looks like a jerk-off when you do it".

Rachel: I did watch the men's infomercial and it is remarkably less suggestive. The placement of the weight and the, uh, the faces are not as suggestive, perhaps.

Griffin: What a tangled fucking web this person has woven.

Rachel: Uh huh. The parody that Saturday Night Live did stars Bill Hader, and the suggestion is that the problem with the infomercial is that you never know when it's going to be on. [laughs] And so it's difficult to set your schedule by it, but they are marketing it as a DVD that you can purchase by itself. [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: It is just the Shake Weight commercial, and it's just a bunch of testimonials from, like, Bill Hader and Will Forte and Kenan, kind of suggesting, like, their favorite parts. [laughs] I guess, uh, this was a simpler time.

Griffin: It was.

Rachel: That I have fondness for. [laughs]

Griffin: I appr— I think we both have an appreciation for an infomercial.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Like, we both very much enjoy watching people try to do things and—

Rachel: And this one actually, like, there are benefits associated.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: So, you know, there are a lot of infomercials out there that I felt uncomfortable kind of supporting, but this one, it's like, you know, it's a weight. It builds muscle because it's a weight that you move. [laughs]

Griffin: Right. And it looks, uh, well folks. Can't overstate it enough. Looks a lot like that dirty thing.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Hey, can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Griffin: It looks like the Shake Weight is one of our sponsors this—

Rachel: Oh, how great!

Griffin: No. We got some jumbotrons though. Here's one for future Noah, and it's from past Noah, who says, "I know the past few months have been rough, but you are killing it. You started your first teaching job, you moved to a new state, and you're crushing this new, adult life. Remember to take a deep breath and watch an episode or five of GBBO," [whispers] that's Great British Bake-Off, "if you're feeling down. And hey, forget about calories and buy yourself a Peanut Butter Blizzard. You've earned it." You don't even have to earn it to get the Peanut Butter Blizzard. You can just go get one of those.

Rachel: Yeah. Hey, past Noah, this is really nice that you did this for future Noah. Some really good advice in here. And I think past Noah and future Noah would be friends.

Griffin: It's been so long since I've had a Blizzard. It's been forever since I've been to a Dairy Queen.

Rachel: Yeah, I can't remember the last time I had one.

Griffin: Yeah, Last one I had— I used to get the Nerds Blizzard, which is such a mistake. It would hurt your teeth. I would get, like, little rocks.

Rachel: On Stop Podcasting Yourself, they were talking about the seasonal flavors of Blizzards. Apparently, there's a Pumpkin Pie one.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'd fuck that up.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: What's the other jumbotron here, can you read it?

Rachel: This is for Emily. It is from Alice. "Hi, Shmosby, it's Punchy. While you were the best maid of honor ever, I'm excited to be the best matron of honor for you. So glad you fell in love with my husband's best friend, and now you'll never be able to get rid of me. Let's have a girls' night, I'll bring the wine."

Griffin: Speaking of a tangled web. There's a lot of relationships going on in— well, I guess it's not that complicated. [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs] No. Turns out when people are friends, sometimes they marry other friends.

Griffin: They fall in love. Yeah. Cool.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Cool how that works.

[ad break]

Griffin: I'm so excited to do my second thing. Can I please do it?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: My second thing is the Michaels online shopper chat. Do you know about this?

Rachel: You know, a lot of websites have that feature. It is never one I have taken advantage of.

Griffin: Oh, you seem to misunderstand, my dearest. A lot of websites have a feature where if you're having an issue you can reach out to customer service through the chat pop-up that exists.

Rachel: Yeah. Is that not what this is?

Griffin: Michaels took it a different direction. And that direction was pointed out by a Twitter user named @LouBegaVEVO—[laughs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Very powerful.

Rachel: That's so good. [laughs]

Griffin: In a now viral tweet. Instead of just chatting with a customer service representative, which I think you can still do on the Michaels website, the Michaels website— Michaels is an arts and crafts store, if you've never been to it. They're like Hobby Lobby but not deeply—

Rachel: No agenda.

Griffin: —fuckin', like, bigoted, yes. Their website has a little window that you can click in to ask or— you can ask questions about products or your local Michaels or whatever and then you, the customer, can also answer other people's questions.

Rachel: Whoa.

Griffin: It is a— yes. It is a Q&A— a crowdsourced Q&A, basically shopper chat. That you— you can just go to Michaels.com, you don't even have to sign up for anything, you can just start firing away questions and responses. And Michaels, like, introduced this to sort of reduce the load of basic customer service questions from their CF team, right? And to, I guess, save a few bucks. And I love what happened, because I love when companies, like, exhibit hubris in that way and then they pay for that hubris when things go terribly, terribly awry.

Rachel: So, the idea is that somebody could get in there and be like, “Hey, my son has to make a solar system, what kinda stuff should I buy?” and somebody else could be like, “Oh, we did that, here’s what I’d recommend.”

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: You could do that. Or you could go what @LouBegaVEVO and then a bunch of other people did, which is take this idea and take it some places. This tweet from @LouBegaVEVO went up on August 27th and it just had some screencaps of conversations that he had had with other Michaels shoppers. And they have turned this website into just a sort of unusable hellscape for anyone looking for actual arts and crafts advice.

This is the purest— these are the purest laughs I think I’ve had since all of this quarantine started, and so I’m very grateful to this concept. I would love to read some of the actual interchanges that have happened between shoppers on the Michaels website. Some of which were from @LouBegaVEVO, some of which I just found elsewhere on the internet. So. These are conversations between two shoppers on the Michaels.com website.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: “Hi everyone. I want yarn.”

“Don’t we all, brother?”

Rachel: [laughs] Okay.

Griffin: “How are my fellow Michaelheads doing tonight?”

“Pretty good.”

“Me too, I wish.”

“Oh?”

“Divorce.”

Rachel: [laughs] Aww.

Griffin: "Hi Michaels, can I get a free t-shirt?"

"Are you a veteran?"

"No."

"Then yes."

Rachel: [laughs] So... is this—

Griffin: "I am looking for my wife, Brenda. She was last seen in paint aisle. I cannot find her."

"She belongs to the store now."

Rachel: Is this stuff everybody can see? Like, when you log in, do you have to seek this out?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: You can click "I wanna answer questions" and then there's like a little inbox.

Rachel: Oh, okay, okay, okay.

Griffin: "Would anyone like to meet at Michaels and fistfight me?"

"My reach wouldn't be long enough to maintain social distancing guidelines per the CDC, so I'm afraid an in-person fistfight would be too unsafe for now."

"Bro, I'm on stilts, it's all good."

"I think you're supposed to be six feet apart, not six feet up, but that's sick as hell, bro."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "Looking for a coffin."

"They may have decoration coffins for Halloween, but if you're looking for a full-size coffin you may be outta luck here, buddy."

"I'll make it fit."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] This one— "I don't live near a Michaels and it makes me sad." Sad face emoticon. "What do I do?" Somebody just responded, "Michael."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It is— I really— this is the kind of humor that I very much enjoy.

Rachel: Yeah, this is like a good Amazon review except it's interactive.

Griffin: It's interactive! Michaels, what were you thinking? There're gonna be so many people who log onto Michaels.com actually thinking that they are talking to a customer service representative.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: And then they get this.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: And it's very, very, very good to me.

Rachel: Yes. So, it's still active?

Griffin: Still active. Did it yesterday. Had some fun. Talked to some people.

Rachel: I wonder who advised that? Who was like "You know what? People are generally good, let's just open it up to the people." [laughs]

Griffin: These people are good! That's the— they're just having fun, communicating. Listen, we're all isolated.

Rachel: I mean, so far.

Griffin: We're all lonely.

Rachel: This is a dangerous endeavor they are on, though.

Griffin: It is a dangerous endeavor, but it's also something that I wish every single, like, shopping outlet in the world would incorporate.

Rachel: Yeah, that would be incredible.

Griffin: It would be my full-time job. Just like, hopping around. Going to, you know, the, uh, Sur Le Table website and just having some— just reaching out, making soul connections. That's what it's all about, people.

Rachel: Like, "Don't buy a colander, just put holes in this pot. It's cheaper."

Griffin: "That's all you have to do. Get a drill! You can use that for other things, too."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Anyway, that was a short one, but holy shit, I love it. There's a lot of these to look up. Just find Michaels customer shopping chat and there's a cornucopia of goofs waiting for ya. What's your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing is a trip to the poetry corner.

Griffin: Oh boy, here we go.

Rachel: Here we go.

Griffin: [sings] Everybody buckle up, we're going on a drive, vroom vroom, to the poetry corner...

Rachel: [sings] Get your pencils and your pens and your stanzas and your rhyming...

Griffin: [sings] Get your pencils and your stanzas and your rhyming, poetry is here, poetry is here, poetry is here.

Rachel: [laughs] Thank you, honey.

Griffin: Hey, you helped. It was a real round that we had going there.

Rachel: It was, I liked that. The poet I am talking about is Kay Ryan.

Griffin: Nope, ugh. Don't know that one.

Rachel: [laughs] You can be forgiven for this, because she's kind of an outsider. Kind of of a rebel. Kind of somebody who doesn't traffic in the typical poetry circles.

Griffin: Oh, she uses numbers.

Rachel: [laughs] Explain?

Griffin: Well, a number poem is like a words poem, but you just use sort of evocative numbers instead of poem. But not that— not the one evocative number that— if you use 69 in a number poem, it's like come on, what year is it?

Rachel: Mm hmm. But you could do, like, a three plus three and a ten minus one? And just like, get people there, you know?

Griffin: Three plus three... that's six. Well that's six and nine. And love that you didn't just use a math equation that added up to 69.

Rachel: No, no, no.

Griffin: Not like 70 minus one.

Rachel: I really like to make you think.

Griffin: Yeah, you sure did. Anyway, sorry.

Rachel: Kay Ryan has published seven volumes of poems. She is currently living in California. She's 75. From 2008 to 2010, she was a poet laureate. She also has been a MacArthur fellow and has won a Pulitzer Prize.

Griffin: Jesus.

Rachel: So, she's like, she's got the accolades, for sure.

Griffin: The triple crown.

Rachel: But she is not somebody with an MFA or a PhD. She also is not particularly active in the poetry community. She's said that she does not typically read poetry because, quote, "Like eucalyptus trees, they poison the soil beneath them so nothing else can grow there." [laughs]

Griffin: Wow. Hey, you weren't fucking kidding.

Rachel: [laughs] She finds herself more influenced by things that aren't poetry. Which I can kind of understand, you hear that from song writers sometimes too, like when they're making an album, they don't listen to other music because they don't want it to, like, interfere with their own process.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And she just has kind of always seen herself as somebody that doesn't go to conferences, doesn't kind of fit into the traditional poet mold. Because for those of you that have been interested in creative writing, there is kind of a circuit now of, like, you go and you get an MFA and you go teach creative writing at a university. There's a way, like, a process to follow if you wanna make a living as a poet. And that just has not been her process. And it has worked for her.

She gets compared a lot to Emily Dickinson and Maryanne Moore in that she is kind of quirky and focused on meter in her poetry. And you'll see that a lot, she focuses a lot on kind of surprising rhymes. So, she recently, in 2020, released a combination of essays about poetry called *Synthesizing Gravity*. And she gathers, like, 30 years of writing about aesthetics and poetics and the pursuit of art, and it sounds really cool. I haven't read it yet, but I'm kind of excited to look at it because her writing is really— I don't know, there's a lot of energy to it. So, I wanted to read one of her poems called *Atlas*. And you'll kind of hear the musicality of it.

Atlas

Extreme exertion
isolates a person
from help,
discovered Atlas.
Once a certain
shoulder-to-burden
ratio collapses,
there is so little
others can do:
they can't
lend a hand
with Brazil
and not stand
on Peru.

Griffin: Jesus.

Rachel: Wasn't that fun?

Griffin: That is fun, and I had trouble kinda following it.

Rachel: Yeah, do you want me to read it again?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: This is one of those, like, it's a very short poem. But to even read it and to follow it is tricky because you get so fixated—

Griffin: Hung up on the last thing—

Rachel: —on the rhythm.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Extreme exertion
isolates a person
from help,
discovered Atlas.
Once a certain
shoulder-to-burden
ratio collapses,
there is so little
others can do:
they can't
lend a hand
with Brazil
and not stand
on Peru.

Griffin: Okay. That's really cool.

Rachel: Isn't that kind of a treat?

Griffin: Yeah, it really was like I was trying to follow the different rhymes that were happening in the middle of the lines and then I would, like, space out and miss the next line completely.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh huh. Yeah, people kind of talk about economical use of rhythm and line, and so her poems are very short often, but there's so much work being done by language and rhythm. And it's— it's just, it's fun. I would really encourage people to check out Kay Ryan. She's very accessible and just like, a lot of kind of almost, like, some fun hip hop rhythms in the 75-year-old woman's poems.

Griffin: Hell yeah. Do you want me to tell you what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes please.

Griffin: Amanda says, "I think that the kalimba, aka the thumb-piano is wonderful. I just bought one and the sound is soothing. I'm having so much fun learning how to play it." I don't think I've ever owned a kalimba. It's the one that, um, our friend has one. It has, it's like the metal bars that, like, come down and you just kinda flick them with your thumbs.

Rachel: Yeah, it's like hand-held.

Griffin: Yeah. You do it with your thumb. It's a great sound.

Rachel: Mm hmm.

Griffin: I've used a, like, you know, synthesized, fake, digital version of it, I think, in some TAZ songs. In Logic and Ableton and stuff like that. It's cool. It's a cool sound.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Really liked this one from Crystal, who says, "Pulled pork." The end. End of submission.

Rachel: Wow.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Alright. I'm into it. I'm into it.

Griffin: So good. God, I love pulled pork.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's really good. For a while it was like, my favorite— before I moved to Texas and, you know, brisket was a thing that was very good all of a sudden, pulled pork was like my absolute jammy jam.

Rachel: Just a messy, tasty sandwich.

Griffin: Just a messy, tasty, sloppy boy. Not sloppy joes, that's—

Rachel: Too messy.

Griffin: Different. Yeah. Pulled pork? Yes. Go for it. That's it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Thanks to bo en and Augustus for the use of our theme song "Money Won't Pay". You can find a link to that in the episode description. Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

Rachel: I would encourage everybody to go to Maximum Fun and see all the great shows on there. There's a lot of time-sensitive content that is really enlightening, and there's also just a lot of little funny, escapist pieces that I would encourage y'all to check out. There's good times on there.

Griffin: Yeah, wherever your heart is leading you.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. Hey, register to vote please.

Rachel: Yes!

Griffin: If you go to Vote.org that would be radical. Yesterday, I think, was voter registration day.

Rachel: Yeah, and the deadlines are coming up for a lot of states. I know Texas is October 5th, I believe.

Griffin: Yes. So please do that.

Also, I'm dropping this in after we recorded, because after we recorded, the Kentucky Grand Jury ruled on the case of the murder of Breonna Taylor by the police officers that raided her apartment while she was asleep. And we are furious about the outcome, as you probably are and should be as well. We're gonna have links in the episode description of where you can donate money and support for Breonna Taylor's family and Black Lives Matter Louisville and the Louisville Bail Fund. It didn't feel right to put out this episode without addressing it because it's the— it is the most important thing happening right now, and we would encourage you to raise your voice to demand justice for Breonna Taylor and to demand police reform, both locally and nationwide, wherever you can.

And yeah, I think that's it. Did we get in under the time— oh, just barely.

Rachel: Just barely!

Griffin: Just— we're like, fucking, zipping under the door, the big stone door that's lowering down and we see, like, "Oh no, I've left my hat on the other side!" I fucking whip out my hand, I'm like, "I got my hat!" And put it on. But it's a fedora, and you're like, "Really?"

Rachel: "Really?" [laughs] "That? That was what you saved?"

Griffin: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Audience supported.