

## Wonderful! 156: Wonderful Teen Tournament of Champions

Published October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

[Listen on TheMcElroy.family](https://www.themcelroyfamily.com/)

[theme music plays]

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

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

**Rachel:** And this is Wonderful!

**Griffin:** On this show, we like to talk about some in-your-face stuff. And we like to get bodacious about it, and you might think, "Why are they so in my face about it? I feel like I'm watching some edgy program on MTV, like Spring Break, or Road Rules, or Nick News." I know that wasn't on MTV. And it wasn't really in your face. Although, I felt like Linda Ellerbee was kind of confrontational from time to time.

**Rachel:** Y'know, she was brave.

**Griffin:** She was brave, for sure. Brave and bold. Kurt Loder is another person whose name I still remember.

**Rachel:** Still brave.

**Griffin:** Still very brave.

**Rachel:** Still brave.

**Griffin:** But on this show, typically, we do take it a little bit easier on you and your ears, and... we give you what you need, which is a little bit of—

**Rachel:** Pop-Tarts.

**Griffin:** Pop-Tarts. A little bit of Pop-Tart. Can I interest you in a Pop-Tart in these trying times?

Do you have any small wonders?

**Rachel:** Ooh, I want to talk about a thing that I did that I'm very proud of.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** I already... got online for a grocery store, and I ordered our Thanksgiving dinner.

**Griffin:** Oh yeah.

**Rachel:** And I have never planned so far in advance for Thanksgiving. And to know that this dinner is going to be made for us, and available for pickup... oh, it's incredible.

**Griffin:** Don't get it twisted – I'm still making the sweet potato casserole. I'm still making my pecan pie. My two sort of road dogs.

**Rachel:** Griffin will make the sweet treats, but the other staples will be made for us.

**Griffin:** Just don't even sweat it. We—yeah. Y'know how we feel about these foods. We've talked about it before.

**Rachel:** In these trying times, it is nice to know that I can take a little stress off my plate, and put a little food on my plate.

**Griffin:** And just sit and watch your fuckin' football—watch your Buffalo Bills do their thing out on the grid iron!

**Rachel:** Safely!

**Griffin:** I don't think... is foot—here's—

**Rachel:** How are they playing football now?

**Griffin:** This is what I'm s—I'm—

**Rachel:** Are they not touching each other, I'm guessing?

**Griffin:** I'm detached from Tweeto, and I'm detached from professional sports to the extent that, I, gun to my head, don't even know if they're still doing football. I feel like they're not?

**Rachel:** They should do the flag football is what they should do.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I don't know. Hockey could figure it out. They could—I don't know. Anyway.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Uh, my small wonder... I have taken my first trepidatious steps into the world of ASMR. Uh, because I have—I have so much trouble sleeping, and it has been recommended to me that it may soothe me in a way that will make sleep a little bit more possible. So uh, I've uh—

**Rachel:** Did you do it last night?

**Griffin:** No, I did not try and do it last night. But I have taken a few, uh, anxiety naps, uh, and just sort of thrown the ol' ear buds in, and uh...

**Rachel:** Griffin was a big hold out. Those of you familiar with the McElroy family will know that Justin and Travis are big proponents, but Griffin's always been kind of the rebel.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I don't think I really understood the... the genuine kind of therapeutic effects that it has on a brain. Uh, especially a brain as sort of busy and horrible as mine, and so, it's—

**Rachel:** Y'know, I could do this for you, Griffin. You don't have to turn to the YouTube.

**Griffin:** For real, you do have a very pleasant voice.

**Rachel:** I know! I know. I could just—I could pull out one of my old poetry books, and just sit next to you and quietly read it.

**Griffin:** I'm more into like... just sort of like, people scratching a mic. Or people just like, squeezing a microphone.

**Rachel:** Whoa, interesting.

**Griffin:** Or like, raindrop sounds. I'm not big on talking, because then it gets in my dreams. And I don't like—I ain't tryin' to get incepted. 'Cause I saw a movie about that once. And it can get really complicated. Do you want to tell—

**Rachel:** You need a chair.

**Griffin:** You need a chair.

**Rachel:** Right?

**Griffin:** Let me see if I remember.

**Rachel:** There needs to be a kick.

**Griffin:** Someone does a prank on you to get you out, and... Ellen Page *has* to be there. Like, as far as I know, like, if Ellen Page isn't there, then you can't even do it. And she's always hangin' around.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Do you want to do your first thing for me?

**Rachel:** My first thing is something I was thinking about yesterday, that is kind of a relic of a very specific time period. And that is the flash mob.

**Griffin:** Oh man!

**Rachel:** I kind of forgot about them. Obviously, now, they're not really happening for many reasons, but...

**Griffin:** There's probably a lot of people who don't know—who, when you say that, think of something scary.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** But it's not. It's dancing, for the most part.

**Rachel:** It's not. [laughs] Uh, so this is something that I believe I became familiar with, uh, with the uh, 2008 Grand Central Station flash mob.

**Griffin:** That was a big one. That was a cool—that was one of, I will say, one of the cool ones.

**Rachel:** Yeah. From like, 2008 to 2010, 2011, these kind of blew up YouTube. And it was a seemingly spontaneous assembly of strangers, all kind of doing some kind of choreographed movement, without any kind of advanced notice. So a lot of people would kind of... it'd be in a public place, and a lot of people would stumble upon it and be like, "What's happening? This is crazy!"

**Griffin:** I remember the name Improv Everywhere? Or Improv Anywhere.

**Rachel:** Improv Everywhere did the Grand Central Station one.

**Griffin:** Okay, yes.

**Rachel:** Um, the origins of this... everything I found said 2003, there was a senior editor at Harper's named Bill Wasik who organized his own flash mob,

where he created an email account – a Yahoo account, just to give you a sense of the time period...

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** ... uh, called The Mob Project. And he sent a message to himself, and forwarded it to 40 or 50 friends, pretending like this was this like, cool event he had found out about. And it was getting people to go to a 9<sup>th</sup> floor rug department of a Macy's in New York, and approaching the same rug, and any time any kind of sales assistant came by, they were to say that they were shopping for a "love rug" for their commune, and that they made their purchase decisions as a group.

And so, everybody—he ended up getting like 40 or 50 people there to participate in this.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** His, uh, intentions for this were a little... cynical. He was kind of making fun of hipster culture, of like, "Oh, this is, y'know, like, everybody wants to be at the spot. Y'know, everybody wants to do this like, crazy hip thing, and this is like, a commentary, blah blah blah."

**Griffin:** I would say this trend was not especially kind to our retail workers.

**Rachel:** No. [laughs] No, actually, when I was researching this, there is a particular flash mob that led to significant damage. It was a, uh, a pillow fight in San Francisco, 2009, on Valentine's Day. They did an annual mass pillow fight that caused more than \$20,000 in damages.

**Griffin:** Where at? In like, a store?

**Rachel:** Uh, in a park.

**Griffin:** In a park—how do you do \$20,000 worth of damage in a park?!

**Rachel:** You gotta clean up those feathers, dude.

**Griffin:** Ohh, I see, I see, I see.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Somebody's gotta do it.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Uh, the more, um, harmless ones, the ones that I always found really great, are the choreographed dances.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** There have been a lot of performances of Thriller, uh, throughout the country. There was a performances of Single Ladies in London's Piccadilly Circus, where 100 women performed the choreographed dance together.

**Griffin:** Huh.

**Rachel:** Uh, Ohio State University did one in 2010 to Don't Stop Believing. And... it, of course, like, led institutions everywhere to be like, "Should we be doing this? Is this a thing? Are colleges gonna do it now? Should we do one?"

**Griffin:** Yeah. I think The Office is like, the one that kind of like, lampooned this.

**Rachel:** Well, that was Harlem Shake, right?

**Griffin:** No, they did the walk down the aisle to like, the one song that was like, sort of a proto-flash mob.

**Rachel:** Well, they also did their own—they were trying to do their own viral... yeah.

**Griffin:** Yeah. They did a lot of that stuff.

**Rachel:** This was a thing. Uh, the record was a performance of Thriller where they had 14,000 people in Mexico performing the Thriller dance.

**Griffin:** Wowzers.

**Rachel:** The largest flash mob.

**Griffin:** That's... intimidating.

**Rachel:** Yeah. [laughs]

**Griffin:** I feel like if I saw 14,000 people all starting to move in unison, I would just like... I would open a manhole cover and just jump inside and hide and wait.

**Rachel:** Yeah. I, um... I don't know if I would ever actually want to participate in anything like this.

**Griffin:** No way.

**Rachel:** But watching the videos is so charming, uh... because it, uh... I don't know! There's just something kind of beautiful about all those people working together for a particular goal that is kind of silly, but it is fun, and nice to see.

**Griffin:** The dance ones never did it for me.

**Rachel:** Really?

**Griffin:** But you mentioned—we haven't actually talked about what the Grand Central Station one was. It was... easily over a hundred people. Do you know how many people were involved with that?

**Rachel:** Two hundred people.



**Griffin:** Two hundred people were involved with that, where, at a specific time, I think there was some sort of signal, uh... all of the people froze in place. Like mannequins.

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** And so, the people who were not part of this would just be walking, and then the world froze around them. Like, that's the kind of thing that I think is really fucking cool.

**Rachel:** It is cool. I mean, it's like a very busy, noisy location. And to just watch this video of people walking through in the silence, like, just staring at these still people is very incredible.

**Griffin:** Yes. I also recall, they've done a lot of stuff, obviously, on subways. Uh, and like, public transit systems are kind of perfect for this, because it's like, a captive audience, inherently. I remember one where they got a bunch of twins. A bunch of sets of twins. And uh, one part of the twin's set, like, 15 people all got on this train at the same station, dressed a certain way. And then, on the very next station, the other half of the twin pairings got on, dressed the exact same way, and sat like, the exact same way, opposite their twin without addressing it. And the other people in the train were like, "What the fuck is going on?"

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, Improv Everywhere is a little different. Like, a lot of what they do comes across like a flash mob. But the purpose of a flash mob is more that it is... it is strangers participating in this... either whether it's like, emailed or texted, like, this instruction that everybody is following... whereas, Improv Everywhere, I'm sure, is a little more mapped out and coordinated in advance.

**Griffin:** God, this is hurling me back into like, an internet hole. There was, a like, early aughts group called Prangstgrup that did like, really early versions of this stuff. There was a musical that just broke out in the middle of a library about how much they loved reading.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Oh my god, I was like, obsessed with them. This was like, early-ass internet stuff.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I'm not familiar with this one.

**Griffin:** Um, hey, can I tell you about my first thing?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** My first thing is... I'm a little bit embarrassed about. Uh, it is—we've talked about Top Chef before on this show, and how much we really, really do enjoy that program. Well, today, I want to talk about the opposite of Top Chef, which is Chopped. Chopped.

**Rachel:** Whoa.

**Griffin:** Chopped is the opposite, I think, in almost virtually every way. It is a show on the Food Network, uh, that there is about infinity episodes of.

**Rachel:** Yeah, this is like our hotel room go-to.

**Griffin:** So yeah, we've talked about that before, about like, HGTV is a channel that has a bunch of programming that Rachel and I do not watch. Unless we're in a strange place, uh, and in a hotel room, and y'know, we don't have access to our usual streaming shit, and it's like, "Well, I guess we can just turn on HGTV and watch whatever is there."

Chopped is like the HGTV of television shows. Because at some point, Chopped is—on some channel, there's gonna be Chopped. Chopped is airing right now, I bet.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** I have no way of proving that, except that Food Network run—like, Food Network shows one of their shows, and then gives you a palate cleanser of Chopped before it gets to its next program.

**Rachel:** I don't know that I've ever turned on Food Network and not seen Chopped.

**Griffin:** Yes. Uh, so, there are nearly... why don't you—well, I guess I kind of revealed it. There are nearly 600 episodes of Chopped. There are nearly—

**Rachel:** [laughs] Is it weird that I would've thought there are more?

**Griffin:** That's so many—it's only been on the air since 2009. In 11 years, they have produced 600 episodes of the television show.

**Rachel:** Damn. I mean, they could definitely film a few a day.

**Griffin:** So they actually shoot four seasons at a time.

**Rachel:** Oh my god. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Which is wild, because this show is a pretty brutal shoot. It is a 12-hour day, filming this program.

**Rachel:** Really?!

**Griffin:** Yeah! Uh...

**Rachel:** Oh my gosh! I mean, I guess they have to clean and reset every time. But it seems like the—I mean, the show itself seems like... so fast-paced.

**Griffin:** I mean, that is not super uncommon for a television show, I feel like. 12 hours to shoot a whole episode, front to back, with like, very little... y'know, they don't need a lot of extra B-roll or shit like that. Like, 12 hours is not especially wild, except you consider that they're shooting four seasons *at a time!*

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It is one of the more grueling, like, production schedules of a television show that is on, uh, online. I've seen some horror stories, actually, from contestants, of just like, "Yeah, the craft services... they gave me two rubbery eggs to eat."

Ted Allen has—Ted Allen from uh, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, the original... right? Isn't that what he is from?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Uh, has said that he isn't allowed to sit down. [laughs]

**Rachel:** [laughs] I mean, he is always standing.

**Griffin:** He is always standing up.

**Rachel:** That's typical for a host, though.

**Griffin:** If you've never watched *Chopped*, which seems unlikely, it is a cooking competition show where each episode, there are three chefs, uh, who are... or, no, there's four chefs, aren't there? Who are competing... I should really know how many chefs there are.

**Rachel:** I believe there's four.

**Griffin:** Uh, there are three rounds that they are whittled down over. So yes, there would be four chefs. There is the appetizer round, the entrée round, and then the dessert round. And in each round, they have a mystery box that they open up, and it will have a wide array of... garbage, that they then have to make a dish out of.

**Rachel:** And they have to use all the ingredients.

**Griffin:** And they have to use all the ingredients. They get dinged if they don't. Uh, so, usually, the ingredients will have some sort of weird outlier or

two in them. So it'll be like, here is some, uh... y'know, pork ribs, and uh, some BBQ sauce, and some chocolate ice cream, and some... like...

**Rachel:** Oysters.

**Griffin:** Oysters, and some Atomic Warheads. Like...

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** And good luck, chefs. Have fun. Uh, and so, the odds are like, so stacked against them, that there's—

**Rachel:** And there's judges. Celebrity chef judges.

**Griffin:** Right. Uh, who then tear these meals, usually, apart. The odds are so stacked against them that it makes it genuinely exciting when somebody cooks something that looks even remotely palatable. Those are usually the people who end up winning.

And like, there's a lot about the show that's bad. Like, the—it has a sort of manufactured, over-dramatic tone that is like, absolutely repellant to me. Um, but like... it's always there.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It is reliably—it is reliably hitting at a six to seven out of ten in a way that's just like—

**Rachel:** It's kind of like you're talking about a bad relationship. Like, y'know, it's not great, but it's consistent.

**Griffin:** I mean, it can't hurt me, Chopped can't. But it can be bad. But it's never so—I've never hit the threshold with Chopped where I'm like, "This sucks! Click!" It's always just—it's always there.

**Rachel:** Well, and it's the variety of it, right? Like, the three meals, the three baskets, the different contestants every episode...

**Griffin:** You can set your watch by Chopped.

**Rachel:** Yeah, and it switches up so much. It's like I was saying, it's relatively fast-paced. So like, if you're like, "Oh, I don't like, y'know, this basket." There's another basket coming in like, seven minutes!

**Griffin:** Just around the river bend. Um, it has had some sort of positive effects. Like, it has launched a lot of chef careers. It is, uh—each episode, the chefs usually hail from a restaurant in various parts of the country, and they do a little feature on that restaurant, and it's been, for the most part, like, pretty positive for the businesses featured, which is nice.

Uh, but it's also created this weird sub-category of professional chefs who are known for appearing on Chopped. Because Chopped has had so many different kinds of seasons, uh, that... I'm gonna—I'm gonna list all of the seasons, okay? All of these are real.

Chopped Champions, Chopped All Stars... I guess that's different than Chopped Champions? Chopped Grill Masters. Chopped Tournament of Stars. Chopped Ultimate Champions.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Chopped Impossible. The oddly convention-breaking, uh... Teen Tournament. That's all it's called. Welcome to Teen Tournament. Uh, Chopped After Hours.

**Rachel:** Ooh!

**Griffin:** Uh, Chopped Star Power. Chopped Sweets Showdown. Uh, and Chopped: Beat the Judge. And there's also been like, a ton of like, holiday specials, and one-offs, and things.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** There's so much of this show! It is wild to me! I cannot think of a show that there is more of it, except for maybe like, daytime soap operas and talk shows and things like that. Uh, you talked about the sort of consistency of it, and that is one of the more appealing aspects of Chopped. But Ted Allen did an interview where he talked about the show's unaired pilot episode, and I would like to read, uh, a little bit about the unaired pilot episode, because it is... uh, bonkers.

It was filmed at the culinary school at the Art Institute of New York. And according to Ted Allen, it was originally a lot more elaborate. It was set in a mansion. The host was a butler. The butler held a chihuahua, and when a chef was chopped, the losing dish was fed to the chihuahua.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** The Food Network found the pilot episode, quote, "a little too weird," but decided to keep the general premise of the show in a more straightforward competition format.

**Rachel:** Oh my gosh. That...

**Griffin:** Sliding—sliding fucking doors.

**Rachel:** That would've been... incredible. And kind of like a murder mystery. [laughs]

**Griffin:** I mean, we're thinking about Whodunnit. It elicits images of Whodunnit, the very short-lived, not great reality murder mystery show.

**Rachel:** It's that butler thing. Yeah.

**Griffin:** Um... but yeah. It's, again, not my favorite show, but in a lot of ways, it is my favorite. It's my fav—one of my favorite things that I know is just gonna be there.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** There's always Chopped. And I don't know that I've ever seen... the same episode twice. Because the law of large numbers would prohibit that.

**Rachel:** That's very true, yeah.

**Griffin:** There's so much fucking Chopped.

**Rachel:** There is.

**Griffin:** Teen Tournament? [pause] Can I steal you away?

**Rachel:** Yes.

[ad break stinger plays]

[ad break]

**Griffin:** We have a couple bumbojams here. Can I read the first one?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** This first one is for Matias. It is from Alex Wi, who says, "My dear Matias, hey look! A jumbotron! I'll always think of you when I listen to Wonderful, and I'm so thankful for that, just as I am for all the big and small wonders you've brought into my life. I can't wait to hug you again, and go eat tacos. Also, if you hear this before November 3<sup>rd</sup>, happy early b-day! I love you so much! Colby does too."

Got this one in... right under the wire, for ol' Matias.

**Rachel:** Yeah! Happy early birthday!

**Griffin:** Happy early, I would imagine, anxious birthday. But uhhh... make it—make it fun! Grab some tacos! Celebrate! And then go vote, if you can, if you're able to.



**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, this next message is for Ana. It is from Daniel. "Ana, my wonderful thing this week, and every week, is being with you and our two tiny dogs, Carl and Jenny. Though I did purchase this jumbotron before the Nintendo Switch arrived, so who can say how the next weeks goes? Just kidding. Happy maybe anniversary. I love you, and I like you so much, and big time, and a lot."

**Griffin:** [laughs] That's a great deal of liking someone. Um, they requested end of October, so I think we did come in... around the anniversary date. We've been really good about sort of our time—timing.

**Rachel:** And when you say 'we'...

**Griffin:** I mean Maximum Fun.

**Rachel:** Maximum Fun. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Rachel:** They have sent these to us in an appropriate... structured calendar.

**Griffin:** That is true.

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

**Rachel:** Can I tell you about my second thing?

**Griffin:** Oh, that look on your face tells me that you're a real stinker about it, and it's something you think I'm gonna be really into. Whatcha got?

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, okay, so this is a trip to the Poetry Corner. Now, I know I've been spending a lot of time in the poetry corner. But it's where...

**Griffin:** You've never left.

**Rachel:** ... I feel safe. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Right. [gruff] I was born in the Poetry Corner!

**Rachel:** [laughs] The room really is just a room with one corner now, and that is the Poetry Corner, and that is where I always am.

**Griffin:** It's a weird, almost sort of light bulb shaped room with one corner and the rest of it is just sort of round edges.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, the reason I am particularly excited is, the poet I am bringing is one that I know for sure Griffin knows about, because it is E.E. Cummings.

**Griffin:** Heeey! [laughs]

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Is it Your Heart, I Carry in My Heart?

**Rachel:** Yes. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Oh, is that really it?

**Rachel:** Uh-huh! [laughing]

**Griffin:** Oh, I'm sorry, babe. I didn't mean to burst your poetry bubble!

**Rachel:** No, I expected you to come ready.

**Griffin:** Okay. This is—to be fair, you've said like, "Griffin knows a lot about E.E. Cummings." I know this one poem by E.E. Cummings.

**Rachel:** You know this one poem.

**Griffin:** And I know the style of E.E. Cummings. Otherwise, I know nothing about E.E. Cummings.

**Rachel:** Mm-hmm. The uh... [laughs] I have often noticed that, when Griffin has to call a poet, or a particular style of poetry, this is who he goes to.

**Griffin:** Or Shel Silverstein. It's one of the two.

**Rachel:** True. It's either Sylvia Stout, Taking the Garbage Out, or it's E.E. Cummings and his crazy lines of crazy words.

**Griffin:** [laughs] And his many, many commas and periods.

**Rachel:** [laughing] Um... I have never been a huge fan of E.E. Cummings, but I thought this would be fun for both of us, because you could get a little more background on this guy you're always shoutin' out.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And I could kind of figure out what the fuss is about.

**Griffin:** Arguably, the worst poet to read their work over an audio medium. Because E.E. Cummings' work is also very much about how it is... arranged and laid out, and it has a sort of visual element, by virtue of how it is organized on the page.

**Rachel:** I feel like a lot of people know about E.E. Cummings, just because... he was kind of head of the class on creating poems in this kind of crazy spacing and punctuation and lower case.

**Griffin:** I learned about him in school, and like, I can't—I cannot remember too many other poets... like, obviously, I learned about probably... Robert Frost, and uh...

**Rachel:** Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes...

**Griffin:** Maya Angelou, yes. But like, E.E. Cummings, I think, stuck with me for whatever reason, and became my like, go-to poet reference, because of

the uniqueness... the visual unique—I don't have an ear for poetry, but I have an eye for like, word layout, and that's what E.E. Cummings has.

**Rachel:** Yeah. So he was born in Massachusetts, got his BA and MA from Harvard, uh, and... uh, was writing in the very early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Um, and so that—that's kind of interesting, I think, given the time period, to be this kind of avant-garde in that time period.

Uh, he started writing poetry very young. The article I read about him said that, between the ages of eight and 22, he wrote a poem a day.

**Griffin:** Well, I—were they all good, though, E.E.?

**Rachel:** [laughs] Of course not. I'm sure they weren't. But just the practice of it... I think a lot about, y'know, that uh, thousand hours or whatever it is.

**Griffin:** Ten thousand, I think.

**Rachel:** Ten thousand hours? Oh, well... [laughs]

**Griffin:** That's a bit more.

**Rachel:** Guess I have a little more to go. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Rachel:** Uh, but just investing the time creating a practice out of it, like, says a lot for kind of how he became who he was. Um, he was in the first world war, and then, uh, returned home. He did what apparently a lot of people were doing in the time period, which was volunteering for ambulance service, which was a popular choice among people who were pacifists.

**Griffin:** Isn't that what Hemingway did?

**Rachel:** I don't know.

**Griffin:** I thought that's what Hemingway did.

**Rachel:** I don't know. Um, but... so, he—once he came home from that, he resumed his, uh, long affair with this woman, Elaine Thayer, who was married to his friend.

**Griffin:** Uh ohhh!

**Rachel:** Uh, but here's the interesting thing – his friend knew about, and approved of the relationship.

**Griffin:** Huh!

**Rachel:** Elaine ended up giving birth to E.E. Cummings's daughter, and then, Thayer got divorced from Elaine so that she could marry E.E. Cummings. And then, a year later, she divorced E.E. Cummings and ran off with somebody else.

**Griffin:** Huh.

**Rachel:** So kind of a, uh, an interesting but tragic love story that he like, carried on this relationship, kind of in controversy for years, and then they were finally together, and she called it.

**Griffin:** But it sounds like they were all pretty cool with it.

**Rachel:** Yeah, no, everybody was on board. I think it just... y'know, ultimately, it wasn't meant to be. But I think it informed a lot of his poetry, 'cause he wrote a lot of love poems.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** The thing that's interesting about E.E. Cummings that I didn't really realize until I started doing research... so, he started kind of experimenting with form in the 1920s. Uh, and those kind of experimentations actually got him an award. In 1925, Dial magazine chose

him for their annual award of \$2,000, which was a full year's income for the writer. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yeah!

**Rachel:** And then he was able to publish an additional collection, kind of furthering his experimentation with style. But the thing about E.E. Cummings is that, what he was writing about was not particularly avant-garde. His experiments with language were more about getting you to kind of rethink these kind of standard topics in poetry. 'Cause he was writing about, y'know, like, nature and childhood and love, in kind of a way that was pretty... pretty typical to poetry at the time.

**Griffin:** Well, and pretty explicit. There was never—I don't remember reading any of his poems and being sort of confused about what they were... addressing.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I remember picking up an E.E. Cummings book at the library and thinking like, "Oh, this is a lot more accessible than I was expecting."

**Griffin:** It's super accessible, yeah.

**Rachel:** Yeah. A lot of poets talked about his work, and said that, um... he had a—this is, uh... Richard Blackmur, who wrote essays about craft, and he said that "E.E. Cummings has a fine talent for using familiar, even almost dead words, in such a context as to make them suddenly impervious to every ordinary sense. They become unable to speak, but with a great air of being bursting with something very important and precise to say."

**Griffin:** Huh.

**Rachel:** So, he wrote a lot of, as I mentioned, love poems. And uh... the one I was gonna read is the one that you... you caught on early!

**Griffin:** I kind of read all of it in the span of about a second and a half. So don't blink, or you'll miss it.

**Rachel:** There is—so, this poem... I don't have any real sentimental attachment to it, but there is a line towards the end that has always stuck with me.

**Griffin:** Oh, is there more to it than what—just that one line?

**Rachel:** Oh yeah, honey.

**Griffin:** Oh, I always thought it was just that.

**Rachel:** [laughs] No!

**Griffin:** Sort of like, half a haiku, and he was like, "I'm done."

**Rachel:** So, there are a lot of brackets and parentheses and line breaks, which is not necessarily gonna come across in my reading. But I think it will kind of communicate what I said, which is that, y'know, he's not writing about anything particularly experimental. And so, you can develop a connection to him, even if you may find the punctuation a little intimidating.

*"i carry your heart with me (i carry it in  
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing, my darling)*

*i fear*

*no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want  
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows  
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart*

*i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)"*

**Griffin:** That's really good. The wonder that keeps the stars apart is so good.

**Rachel:** That line—yeah! That line, keeping the stars apart... like, I had to Google it, 'cause I was like, "Are other people usin' this line, or did this line really stick with me for like, over a decade?" And I think... I think that's what happened.

**Griffin:** I think—I remember that—I remember Justin saying that. I think it was part of... I think maybe Justin and Sydnee had it as like, part of their vows or something like that.

**Rachel:** Oh, really?

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** It's a very good line.

**Griffin:** Yeah. [laughs] No kiddin'.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, I don't know. E.E. Cummings is not somebody that, uh, y'know, I keep on my bedside table. But it's admirable, y'know, that he was like, it's not like I have to write about something crazy and abstract. I don't have to like, take a flower and make it sound like it's the Grand Canyon. But if I do some work with the spacing, and if I think about kind of the cadence that most people read with, y'know, and put something inventive on the page, it will make the topic new again.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** So... it's cool.

**Griffin:** Um, can I tell you about my second thing?

**Rachel:** Yes.



**Griffin:** I'm really excited. I struggled a long time with what to—what to talk about here, because this is our last episode before Halloween. And I'd like to talk about like, classic horror movies that I like, because I really love this genre a whole lot. But I couldn't think of one that was like, exciting... one that got me excited enough to like, really want to focus on it.

So, I've talked about like, the Alien franchise, I adore. The Thing. Um, Evil Dead. Like, they're classics that like, I wanna watch every year around this time, and I just remembered another one that I love talking about. It's the movie Poltergeist.

**Rachel:** Ohh!

**Griffin:** Have you seen Poltergeist?

**Rachel:** Yes, I have!

**Griffin:** Fuckin' Poltergeist is so good. It's got everything.

**Rachel:** That's the Craig T. Nelson, right?

**Griffin:** It's got the Craig T. Nelson in it. You gotta have Coach. You must have Coach in your movie. This film, if you have not seen it, is like... the ultimate Trojan horse of horror movies. Because it was written and produced in part by Steven Spielberg. And back then, it was released in 1982, which was two years before the PG-13 rating was invented. And the motion picture association, originally, gave this film an R rating.

**Rachel:** Whoa!

**Griffin:** But Steven Spielberg and the director of the movie went to the NPAA and like, appealed that, and pushed for a lighter rating, so that more people could come see it. And because there was no PG-13, they were like, "Alright, we're gonna kick that... right down to a PG! Right on down to a PG rating!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And this film is fucking terrifying! And it has some genuinely, like, gory practical effects, and super scary practical effects. I saw this film as an adult, and I'm glad I did, 'cause if I saw it as a kid, it would've ruined my *life*.

**Rachel:** A lot of children in danger.

**Griffin:** A lot of children in danger. A lot of, uh, undead activity, visualized in ooey, gooey ways. It is a ghost story about a family living in this sort of planned neighborhood that has been built, you find out throughout the film, sort of unceremoniously on top of a cemetery.

And so, the spirits of that cemetery are, uh, haunting this one particular household, and uh, you... you watch this film, and you kind of think you know what it is at certain points. Like, you think it has reached the threshold of the horror that it is going to present. But it just keeps escalating more and more and more, that by the end of it, I genuinely was in shock that I was watching a PG film.

**Rachel:** Yeah, that's a good point. Y'know, 'cause a lot of Halloween movies, they like, they have their villain, and the whole movie is just the villain chasing people. And so, you kind of like, are like, "Alright, I know this, and okay, that's gonna happen." But this one surprises you with the different approaches it takes, I feel like.

**Griffin:** I think because it is a—you think you know it's a ghost story. And you think you know like, what that means. And that's what's great about this movie. There's so many things that are great about this movie, but what is great is that it plays into that expectation at the sort of start of the movie. You get the little girl looking at the TV screen static, and there's the earthquake, and the little hand coming out of the TV, and she looks at the camera and says, "They're heeere!"

And then, the next day, these parents are like, responding to chairs moving in the kitchen, with almost a sort of, um... curiosity. Like, "Isn't this delightful? Watch, watch! The chairs are moving!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And you think like, "Okay, so it's gonna move stuff around and sort of scare them that way." But then, it gets pretty wild. The little girl is sucked into the house by the poltergeist, and there's a beast demon that is—

**Rachel:** That backyard pool scene?

**Griffin:** The backyard pool scene at the climax of the movie, where undead hands shoot out of the pool.

**Rachel:** Ugh!

**Griffin:** There's a tree that smashes in through a window, and tries to abduct a little boy. There is... there is a scene that is one of the scariest things I've ever seen in a film, where uh, there's a team of researchers that comes to the house, and one of them stays the night, and goes into the kitchen for a midnight snack, and sees a raw steak like, explode from within itself, like, regurgitating meat from out of its body. And then, the drumstick he was eating has maggots all over it. And then he goes to the kitchen—or he goes to the bathroom to like, wash his face off, and then he washes his fucking face *off!* Like pulls the skin off of his face! In your PG movie, Steven!?

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** It's fucking—I watched it this morning to like, remind—it is fucking grotesque and horrifying, in a way that like, caught me in like, my late 20s, off guard. It is—but at the same time... [sighs] The nonchalant way that the parents sort of respond to this spectral activity in their house slowly, like, transforms into this weirdly practical rescue mission of their daughter, who has been sucked into like, the ghost world.

And that ghost world has, uh, an internal logic, and a rule set that is like, absolutely my shit, especially in horror movies. And they bring in the spirit medium, who's like, "Okay, we need to figure out where the entrance to the

portal is, the exit to the portal, we need to find out who's got her, what they want, we need to figure out how to communicate with them..." And they just like, go on this mission to save their daughter.

**Rachel:** Don't they like, tie a rope?

**Griffin:** They tie a rope to the mom and like, send her into the ghost world. Like—and I love that stuff! I love when the victims in horror movies, like, become proactive. That is like, the entire conceit of the final girl in slasher flicks. Which, y'know, I love that shit, too. But this is like, a different take on it, where it's like, the whole family is like, "We're terrified of this obviously horrifying thing that's in our house, but like, fuck it, we are going to do whatever it takes to save our daughter."

And it plays with this balance of like... "Yeah, guys, yeah! Coach, fuckin' get 'em!" And also like, "Get outta there, Coach!! It's so bad in there, Coach!"

**Rachel:** It's such perfect casting. I feel like this is one of—this is like, Craig T. Nelson's like, breakout film.

**Griffin:** I mean, it is his break—it is like, I feel like, the only film that people regard, uh, with a lot of admiration that stars Craig T. Nelson. Uh...

**Rachel:** He just seems like such a like, practical dad in this film, y'know? And so, you're watching him, and you're kind of like, "Yeah, I mean, that's what a person would do, because it's Craig."

**Griffin:** But what's great about this movie also is that it has a false ending. And at one point, Craig T. Nelson's like, "Alright, we need to get the fuck out of here. I'm gonna go talk to the manager." I think one of the kids is like, on a date, and like, the denouement has happened, and you're like, "Oh, everything's fine." And then the poltergeist like, strikes back in this huge and terrifying way, and like, it's just the wife and the two young kids at home, and it's like, holy shit! I cannot believe—it's like a second wave.

**Rachel:** Oh, I'd forgotten about that!

**Griffin:** The movie is brilliant. Like, it is structured brilliantly, and it is like, a fun watch. Like, it is a fun horror movie I think about. Uh... yeah, I just—I—I really like this movie. I think it hangs with like, *The Thing* and the *Alien* flicks, as like...

**Rachel:** Spielberg, man.

**Griffin:** A classic horror film. Yeah, and it's Spielberg. Another sort of—it's like, oh, I think we're gonna have some fun *E.T.* action! And it's like, nope!

**Rachel:** We'll learn a lot along the way and become closer friends!

**Griffin:** Yeah. It is, uh... it's—yeah. I just—the house is the sole setting for the film, and is a haunted house, and like, that's cool, 'cause you watch it kind of deteriorate over time. It has a lot of really memorable characters, like the spirit medium who comes in and kind of saves the day. Uh, it's... man. It's a great flick. If you have not seen it, and you have the stomach for it, I would highly recommend tuning into it this *Hallow's Eve*.

**Rachel:** I'm glad you brought that. I feel like I have kind of shied away from the scary film, uh, this season.

**Griffin:** I would watch *Poltergeist* tonight for sure.

**Rachel:** Yeah. That one sounds good.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Uh, can I tell you what our friends at home are talking about?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Emily says, "Seeing lost Nerf darts! My partner and I don't have kids, but we've been spotting this little blue and orange darts in yards along our cul-de-sac lately while walking the dog. It makes me smile to see the remnants of kids having fun."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I think I've probably spent about 10% of my life looking for Nerf darts that I fired off.

**Rachel:** We had a Nerf gun before we had Henry, specifically to keep our cat in line. And I remember that—

**Griffin:** We did not shoot our cat with Nerf darts.

**Rachel:** No. There was the suggestion that it would—it would de-incentivize some actions we didn't like.

**Griffin:** It was a water gun. It wasn't like—we weren't shooting Nerf darts at our cat.

**Rachel:** How did we end up with a dart gun? We definitely had a Nerf dart gun, 'cause I remember...

**Griffin:** I think I just bought it for fun.

**Rachel:** ... finding those darts under the couch. Okay, well, it...

**Griffin:** I think I got them for goof-em-ups and fun.

**Rachel:** Griffin just had a good time gun.

**Griffin:** Yeah. The good time... Nerf is fuckin' rad, man!

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Okay. Michael says, "Keyboard shortcuts! I do a lot of digital art for fun and as a job, and being able to switch between tools quickly is wonderful." I remember when I discovered keyboard shortcuts. I was like, four years into editing the shows. Probably even later than that. And it like, halved my editing time, because I'd like, have all of my shit so, so specific. Uh... it's like—it is the first thing I do when I get a new piece of software.

I've started using Ableton instead of Logic for all my music composition stuff, and it is like, a whole different set of keyboard shortcuts that I spent so long learning in Logic, and now I'm having to deprogram my brain. But it's, uh... ah, I love it.

**Rachel:** Y'know what's funny, is that I know copy and paste, uh, in my Microsoft Word. I don't know cut, though. Never memorized that one.

**Griffin:** Really? Babe!

**Rachel:** I know.

**Griffin:** It's just right next to it. It's X. It's control X.

**Rachel:** I will go up, I will copy something with my little shortcut, and then I will go up to the edit menu, and I will select 'cut.' [laughs]

**Griffin:** You know you don't have to copy and cut it, right?

[pause]

**Griffin:** Oh no.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** When you cut it, it puts it on your clipboard so that you can paste it.

**Rachel:** I think—I think I knew that.

**Griffin:** I think, babe... the way you're looking at me makes me... makes me question that. You should learn—I recently learned, uh... me and Dad have been doing a lot of writing, and uh, I just learned all the Google Docs keyboard shortcuts. There's so many, and it's so—it is invaluable to know that stuff.

Uh, hey. I want to thank... and this is an important one... Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** This is the song that is by that artist. You can find a link to it in the episode description. And maybe last week, did I attribute a different song to the very talented Bo En and Augustus? Yes. I did. Am I super tired? Are things... kind of buckwild right now, and maybe you should cut me a little bit of slack before you...

**Rachel:** We got a lot going on.

**Griffin:** Got a lot going on.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Lot on our minds.

**Griffin:** Lot on our minds. Y'know, we're expecting. I'm gonna use that now. "Oh, y'know, brain fart. Y'know? Pregnancy brain!" I don't think I get to claim that.

**Rachel:** No. You have had a lot of sympathy pains, though, and I appreciate that.

**Griffin:** Those are just—I had those before you were pregnant. I just hurt.

And also, thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. Go to [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org), check out all the great shows that are there.

**Rachel:** Yeah. You may have heard an ad for the new show on Maximum Fun, called Tiny Victories. But it seems like it would be of great interest to our audience. It is a 15 minute show, comes out weekly, and the hosts talk about the little wins they've had.

**Griffin:** Yeah.



**Rachel:** And I think... I think y'all would like it.

**Griffin:** There's so much good stuff there. Triple Click. FANTI is fuckin' fan—more like FANTastic. That should be the name of that—should be the name of the show. Uh, and... I think that's it. And um... so I'm gonna—we're gonna stop. We're gonna put this one to bed, folks.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Thanks to everybody for your nice congratulations on our... on our new child comin'.

**Griffin:** Yes. It was, uh, very nice to see that. I mean, this is—folks, you may not realize that... that was our announcement. On this episode. So you can come here for the fucking exclusive scoops and skinnies on everything that's goin' on!

**Rachel:** Maybe one of us will get a piercing, and you'll find out about it here first.

**Griffin:** You'll know before anyone else! I don't know what I would get pierced.

**Rachel:** No, I don't know.

**Griffin:** Nothin' below the neck.

**Rachel:** I have thought that your ears... are perfect... for a piercing.

**Griffin:** They're certainly load-bearing.

**Rachel:** I just love your ears, I think is what it is.

**Griffin:** Okay. Well, let's uh... let's bejewel them!

**Rachel:** [laughs]

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org  
Comedy and culture.  
Artist owned.  
Audience supported.

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]