

Wonderful! 165: Commonwolf

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Sorry, everybody. [in a strange Bostonian accent] Had to drink my coffee! [normally] Try saying that word...

Rachel: That's a great character.

Griffin: I had a sociology professor in college, 'cause that was my minor. I don't like to talk about it a lot, because I'm worried it'll make people think I'm smarter than I actually am.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But he sounded exactly like... a fusion of both car talk guys. Like, a perfect fusion, like a DragonBall Z fusion of these two gentlemen into one sort of perfect—and he said that word a lot. [in a Bostonian accent] Some coffee.

It's so powerful. This is Wonderful. This is a show where we talk about things that are good and things that we like, things we're into, and it's—I think we recorded our last episode in a bit of a um... a weird spot, and uh, guess what? We're doing that a second time in a row, today, I would argue. Things are still a bit weird, but we're gonna talk about things we like and things that are good. Things that we're into. Like my old sociology professor, whose name I've forgotten.

Rachel: [laughs] Aw.

Griffin: How are you feeling? How are you?

Rachel: Uhh... I mean—

Griffin: Mind, body, spirit.

Rachel: Okay. It depends on the vector, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I am very pregnant.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Which is challenging.

Griffin: You sent a Marco Polo, it snowed in Austin. You sent a Marco Polo to your friends of, uh, the snow outside.

Rachel: [laughs] I was breathing so heavy.

Griffin: And Rachel was breathing so—like, literally, like... [breathes heavily] Like a pervert was spying on a Marco Polo or something.

Rachel: We... we wanted a house with stairs.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: 'Cause we wanted some separation, back when we had people over.

Griffin: From each other—from each other. We have our own bedrooms, and we needed them on different floors.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: No, come on.

Rachel: No, we wanted to be able to put a child to sleep in a room that would not be interrupted by noise. And we got that, but now it doesn't matter, and all it means is that I am doing stairs all day long.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I can't breathe.

Griffin: But folks, you look at either one of our calves... oh my god.

Rachel: I mean, great calves.

Griffin: The calves in this household are out of control. Even Henry's got calves for days.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, yes.

Rachel: So yeah. So to summarize, uh... okay. I guess I would say that I am. How about you?

Griffin: Okay. I think okay. Yeah, I'm okay too. Who knows when this thing's—this thing is gonna go up Wednesday morning. Right now, we're recording Tuesday morning, where it's weirdly sort of like—for the past half hour, it's been kind of quiet, so this is, I guess, as good a window as any for us to record in.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: We hope you are all are doing okay, and hanging in there, and um... uh, do you have any of the small wonders that the people crave and are always asking about?

Rachel: I mean, I started reading again.

Griffin: Yeah, reading's great.

Rachel: Yeah, that was kind of—I decided, my unofficial new year's resolution was to read more. Um... I have always really enjoyed it. Easy to stop doing it when you have a small child, and all you want to do is sleep in the interim. But I thought it would be good to read, because it's something I like to do.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So I started doing it again. I'm reading *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle. Very like, motivating book, uh, for people that are trying to kind of tap back into what makes them happy. Uh, and I would recommend it.

Griffin: I just finished a book that you got me for Christmas, I believe, about uh, deep sea exploration. I think it's called something... *Eternal Darkness*? There's a game called *Eternal Darkness* that I also really like. It's not that. It's about, uh, deep sea exploration, and it's very interesting. I've been researching that for reasons, uh, and that was a good book.

Rachel: Yeah, I was gonna say. That probably sounds confusing to our listeners, but Griffin is working on a project in which that book will hopefully...

Griffin: Will be helpful.

Rachel: Helpful.

Griffin: Yes. Um, yeah. There's a lot of good books out there. I want to just give a quick shout out to that snow. Snowed in Austin. That never happens. It was beautiful. It was idyllic. It destroyed a tree in our yard, but that's the price. Sometimes you gotta crack a egg.

Rachel: Definitely, I've been in Austin for 11 years, 12 years now. No... it'll be...

Griffin: Doesn't—couldn't matter less.

Rachel: I don't know. Doesn't matter. Uh, but I will say, we have had snow, but that was, by far...

Griffin: That was the best snow.

Rachel: We got like two inches or something.

Griffin: It was great. It was rowdy. But my real small wonder is, they aired—they simulcast football games on Nickelodeon, and they added a bunch of visual effects based on Nickelodeon characters, like SpongeBob SquarePants occupying the field goal posts. Like, between them. The perfect rectangle. There was just a huge SpongeBob in there, which was hysterical, because whenever anybody missed, it was like... hell yeah, SpongeBob done did it again. Great defense, Bob.

And there were also slime cannons. Virtual slime cannons that would shoot anytime anybody scored a touchdown. Uh, I don't really care much about football, really at all, but I was heartbroken that I missed out on that, because it sounded like a really wild times.

Nickelodeon games and sports. They should have unfettered access to whatever sports that they want. That they can kind of put their own sort of Nickelodeon spin on. It's time, I think.

Rachel: Wild and crazy kids, y'know?

Griffin: They should blend Wild and Crazy Kids with... what's a sport that needs it? Baseball?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Yeah. You gotta like, chew a bunch of bubblegum and stick it into like, a huge ball. That's the only challenge from Wild and Crazy Kids I remember, is you had to chew Bubble Yum, and stick it to this scale to make the heaviest ball of chewed gum possible. And I remember seeing that and thinking, I now have like, a thing for gross stuff. I now no longer like gross sort of spit-stuff. That's gonna stick with me my whole life.

Rachel: Um, my small wonder is breakfast for dinner.

Griffin: Breakfast for dinnerrrr!

Rachel: We order food out a lot. Mostly because we're not very good at meal prep or planning.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: But I will say that... we always have eggs!

Griffin: We always got eggs!

Rachel: And uh, so, we had a little breakfast for dinner last night.

Griffin: Scrambled them up, threw some sausage in there, sliced up some `tatos, cumin'd them, fried `em up...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Ate `em on some two-month expired tortillas, but they were okay.

Rachel: [laughs] When I—when I put—and y'know, I'm gonna get some tweets about this... when I put a bread product in the fridge...

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Which is one thing you're not supposed to do. But it's just—it's what I've always known. Uh, it lasts forever.

Griffin: It lasts a long time.

Rachel: And so, expiration dates—

Griffin: Does it get hard and weird and kind of unpleasant to the tooth?

Rachel: Yeah. Yes.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, I go first this week. Uh, my first thing is the beautiful sonorous sounds of the steel guitar. The steel guitar is, uh... I guess that could refer to a few things. If you want to talk about the uh, y'know, categorization of stringed instruments, like, a steel guitar could be any sort of metal-bodied guitar, because that makes its own sort of unique sound.

But uh, technically, when you're talking about a steel guitar, you're talking about a guitar that is played with a metal bar that you slide across the strings. Which was actually how I kind of got into the instrument. The first guitar I ever got... Justin got into the guitar before me, like, when we were young. And I was like, curious about it, and I would mess around with his.

So for Christmas, I think, he got me like, an old guitar that I think was like, a Smirl family heirloom or something like that. But the neck was so bowed that I couldn't press the strings to the fret board, because of my—I had, y'know, weak gamer fingers. But also, like, it was just impossible, like, the neck was so crazy bowed.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: But... I could put, y'know, a sharpie on the strings and kind of recreate a steel guitar sound, so that's kind of how I played it for a while.

Rachel: See, I thought that implement is just called a slide, and not...

Griffin: A slide guitar—well, there's lots of different kinds of slide guitars. The Venn diagram overlap is pretty huge, right? Like, a steel guitar could be played – if you want to talk about like, Mississippi Delta Blues style, like, they just hold it like a guitar and slide the thing around. Usually, they'll have a metal rod on their pinky that they can slide around, so they have their other fingers to play. But uh, a lot of folks do a lap guitar, which is another way of doing it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's like a standalone console steel slide guitar. Like, it's one of those, uh, every slide guitar is a steel guitar, but not every steel guitar is a slide guitar, I think? Anyway. I just really have always been obsessed with like, that sound. It gets like, a great portamento of the sliding notes, and a really good vibrato that you can really not get out of a guitar in any other sort of way.

And I think there's something that I really like about playing an instrument in like a novel way. Like, it really makes you think about the fact that like, these are just things that make sounds, and the way that you elicit those sounds from them is not like, inherently incorrect.

Rachel: Yeah, no, that's true. That especially goes against like, if you've ever like, learned formally a instrument, you are always taught very specifically, like, this is how it is played.

Griffin: Not me, though. I'm a frickin' rebel, because I couldn't play the guitar. I literally would shred my—I got like, really good callouses, and they're completely gone now, but I got really good callouses on my fingers trying to play that guitar, 'cause it was just a... it was essentially a um, mandolin, but not the stringed instrument. The fuckin' kitchen instrument

that you use to slice potatoes very thin. It was essentially that, but for fingers.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, so, the steel guitar... uh, it's also referred to as the Hawaiian guitar. It was invented by a guy named Joseph Kekuku, who was a kid in Oahu walking along some railroad tracks with his guitar, and he saw this big ass bolt on the ground. So he picked it up, and the story goes that he like, accidentally banged it against the strings of his guitar, and he's like, "Oh, that's good."

So then, he started to find other things that he could bang against the strings to make it like, make this cool sound, going with like a bottleneck. Bottleneck guitar is another name for this style of instrument. But he eventually just sort of landed on a metal bar that he would slide across the strings to make this noise, and sort of took that sound on tour, all over the contiguous US.

Like, indigenous Hawaiian music was super popular in the US in like the 1910s. There was a musical, I believe, called The Bird of Paradise that kind of popularized the sound. But in 1916, indigenous Hawaiian music was like, the number one, like, music sold and enjoyed in the United States.

Rachel: That fascination with Hawaii, like, carried into the Elvis years.

Griffin: Yes. I mean, that also sort of lined up with when the US annexed Hawaii, so I mean, y'know, that fascination was timed to that, as well. So, Joseph Kekuku took this instrument all over, and that is sort of how it proliferated around the US. And then, it influenced like, all these other kinds of music.

I mentioned, Mississippi Delta Blues is, y'know, probably the one that was most informed by it, because it's hard to find any artist that like, didn't use a slide guitar in that genre. But also, like, other types of blues. Bluegrass. Bluegrass traditionally leans on a dobro, which is a really fun name for an

instrument. But it's basically a resonator box, which is a type of guitar, that you just slide a thing on.

Uh, it's very cool. It looks like a juicer. A dobro is actually the virtual instrument that I used for the TAZ: Amnesty theme song. Uh, there's a lot of dobro in there.

Um, but yeah. I just—I really like that sound, and it's also really fun to play. I haven't fucked around with it in a while, but it's actually, in some ways, kind of easy, 'cause you usually do an open tuning. So if you're new to guitar, you don't have to worry about like, chord formations and stuff. You just... [makes a noise imitating a slide guitar] That's the sound of a slide guitar. And a race car.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And a motorcycle. Um, so there's a bunch of different songs I could play, but I want to play a track by Ben Harper, who is kind of like an aficionado of the steel guitar. He has a very special kind of steel guitar that I can't remember the name of, but there was a manufacturer who made like, five thousand of this one very specific type of like, very sort of uh, just... straight steel guitar that you play in your lap. It doesn't have like, this huge open body like a guitar has. It's just kind of like this—this long bar that you play.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. I sent you the video of him playing this song. It's Paris Sunrise #7, and this was on his 2007 album, Lifeline, which he played under Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals. Uh, and this song—that whole album they recorded... I love that album. It came out when I was in college, which is like... if you need make out jams, like, Ben Harper has got you when you are in college.

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: And they recorded the album in analog in seven days while in Paris, which I did not know. All of a sudden, the title of the song makes a whole lot more sense.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And it's just five minutes and 17 seconds of just unadulterated slide, steel guitar. So uh, I'm gonna play a bit of that right now.

[‘Paris Sunset #7’ by Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals plays]

Griffin: Yeah, that's it. I like it. I like a slide—have you ever been—were you—did you have like, a Ben Harper phase? Did you like, ever get into the steel guitar at all?

Rachel: No, missed that. Missed that entirely.

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: I mean, I... so, in college, uh, my boyfriend at the time, his dad was a musician. He spent a lot of time learning instruments, and he had one of those like, little slides. And so, he would kind of like, tinker around. But I don't know that I ever like, went to a performance where it was done.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, I don't know that I've ever—actually, I think I saw Ben Harper at Bonnaroo. That feels right. That feels right to say. That sounds like something that could be true.

Rachel: I really think it was the time period, right? ‘Cause I was in college, y'know, like, starting in the year 2000. It was coming right off of that like, ‘90s rock and roll heat. And so, I feel like I was still very entrenched in that.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so, I was very much like, “Have we stopped listening to Smashing Pumpkins, or is that still...” [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, in the late aughts is when we got tender. So... T-E-N-D-E-R, not the app. The application will come much, much later. But y'know, we got gentle. We got gentle. I would go—I definitely saw Damien Rice at Bonnaroo. Like, we would get tender.

Rachel: I remember, like, hearing people talk about Dashboard Confessional, and—

Griffin: Oh, that's different!

Rachel: And thinking like, "I'm too rock and roll for this new music."

Griffin: Uh, yeah. I mean, everybody—everybody was too rock and roll for fuckin' Dashboard.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm not gonna hate on Dashboard. We probably have plenty of Dashboard fans in the crowd.

Rachel: Yeah, I'm sure we do!

Griffin: But hey, that's it for my thing.

Rachel: For my first thing... you wanna drink the coffee?

Griffin: No, I can do it quietly. I don't have to make a big production out of it every time. But okay. Yes. What is your first thing?

Rachel: [laughs] I don't want to say something to make you spit take.

Griffin: I've never actually organically done that. Did you know that?

Rachel: No, I didn't, but I'm adding that to the Wiki.

Griffin: I don't think I've ever—I've like, choked before. Uh, there was like a MBMBaM bit that Justin made me laugh while I was drinking, and it made me sort of gag. But I've never done a like, a spit-out. That would be gross.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I don't think anybody does that naturally. I think it's always a play. Who spits?

Rachel: Ever.

Griffin: Ever. It's 2021.

Rachel: Did you ever have a friend that like, would walk down the street and just like, casually spit all the time?

Griffin: Yeah, sure. No, yeah. Sure. No. Yeah.

Rachel: What is that?

Griffin: I mean, I had friends who dipped, so like, that was... not uncommon.

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: For the dipping. Ooh, yeah, get you a good dip goin'? You're telling me you didn't dip?

Rachel: [laughs] I'm telling you, 100%, I did not.

Griffin: I didn't dip either.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I just did Big League Chew.

Rachel: [laughs] Would you spit it out?

Griffin: Absolutely not.

Rachel: Uh, I, for my first thing, wanted to take us to a oft-forgotten corner of the past several weeks, which is the Poetry Corner.

Griffin: Hey, okay!

Rachel: It's been a while!

Griffin: It has been a while. We need to class up the joint, don't we?

Rachel: Yeah. I uh... y'know, so, I would say, in the first couple years of this show, really tore through a lot of my top poets. And now, I'm kind of trying to learn about new ones.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Which isn't always easy.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: 'Cause it's not like I walk into a CVS, and there's like a poetry section, y'know?

Griffin: Although, you—I know you have been asking for that at CVS.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh. Yeah, no, I walk in, and I ask the woman at the register. I say like, "Okay, I see your hair care products. But where would I find, y'know, the newest anthology?"

Griffin: I need Pringles, vitamins, and a poem. And I know where to get two of those.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, the poet I wanted to talk about is Anna Journey.

Griffin: I don't know that one.

Rachel: Yeah, she's pretty new. I mean, relatively new, in the scheme of poetry. Her first book came out in 2009.

Griffin: Okay. That was 12 years ago.

Rachel: Yeah, but not anybody I learned about in school. Because when I was in school, she did not have a published book yet.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So she is from Virginia. Born in 1980. She is a poet and essayist who got an NEA fellowship for poetry in 2011. And she got her MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University, and earned her PhD at University of Houston.

Griffin: Did you say Commonwolf?

Rachel: I wanted to say Commonwealth.

Griffin: I'm pretty sure you said Commonwolf, which is way cooler.

Rachel: That is pretty cool.

Griffin: Which is way, way cooler.

Rachel: I imagine some people... some people have done that before.

Griffin: You go there... I'm not making fun of you, I'm celebrating you right now. And that's an important distinction. Because I'm imagining a school where people go, and they like, really wolf out. And people are like, "No no no no no. It's a com—you gotta be a common wolf. Like, don't—you're going crazy right now. That's not how wolves do it. I want you to be the median, every day, off the store shelf wolf."

Rachel: [laughs] That opens a lot of doors, doesn't it?

Griffin: It does.

Rachel: I mean, who is to say what a common wolf is?

Griffin: That's a good—I mean, probably, uh, scientists who study wolves. They would be a good candidate for that, I think.

Rachel: But I mean, what is a common person? Y'know?

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: Right?

Griffin: Wow. You just blew up my—all my prejudice, and all my—

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: You just really—you really opened my eyes just now.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There is no common—maybe that's what you learn. When you get your degree at common wolf school, when you walk out, they hand you the diploma, and they're like—and you unroll the diploma, and it just says, "There is no common wolf." And you're like, "Wow. I paid \$65,000 for this."

Rachel: [laughing] Is this degree still good, or...

Uh, okay, so! She has written several books. The first that I mentioned, in 2009, was *If Birds Gather Your Hair for Nesting*. Which I love.

Griffin: Very good. Sounds like a Fiona Apple title.

Rachel: As a title. Yeah, very good. Uh, she has a book called *Vulgar Remedies* that came out in 2013. *The Atheist Wore Goat Silk* in 2017, and then, a book of essays called *An Arrangement of Skin* in 2017.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Her poems are very kind of rooted in her experience. They're very, like, visceral, and at times, kind of graphic. But there's something very, like, kind of refreshing and exciting about reading her work. It's hard to tell, sometimes. Y'know like when you read, like, a David Sedaris book, and you're like, "How fortunate that his family is so unusual, because that gave him so much content." And then you think like, "Maybe all of our families are that unusual, and we're just not as good at writing as he is."

Griffin: Ooh, yeah! What's a common family, y'know?

Rachel: Yeah! Right? Her poems, a lot of times, kind of are based in her own history, and you're just like, this is extraordinary. The stories you tell about your family... are you just really good at telling these stories, or do you really have just this really kind of unusual experience?

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: So I wanted to read a poem that kind of exemplifies that called Mississippi: Origins.

"My parents come from a place where all the houses stop
at one story

for the heat. Where every porch—front
and back—simmers in black screens that sieve

mosquitoes from our blood. Where everyone knows
there's only one kind of tea:

served sweet. The first time my father
introduced my mother to his parents,

his mother made my mother change
the bed sheets in the guest room. She'd believed it

a gesture of intimacy. My grandmother
saved lavender hotel soaps and lotions

to wrap and mail as gifts at Christmas. My grandfather
once shot the head off a rattlesnake

in the gravel driveway of the house he built
in Greenwood. He gave the dry rattle to my mother

the same week I was born, saying, "Why don't you
make something out of it."

And that's the poem.

Griffin: Is that it? That's fucking great!

Rachel: That's the poem.

Griffin: What a good poem! God, maybe it's just because it's been a while since you've brought the Poetry Corner to this show, but I was enraptured that whole time, like, "Yes! Aw, yeah!"

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, I wanted to bring the kind of personal narrative. This is like... when I started out in graduate school trying to write poems, specifically for my program, I really wanted to write from personal experience. And I just had a hard time not being, like, overly sentimental.

Griffin: Absolutely, yeah.

Rachel: Or like, finding what was interesting, and kind of leaving it on its own. And I think a lot of times, when you sit down to write a poem, you're

like, y'know, how do I get this magical turn of phrase that's gonna make everything seem more meaningful?

And I feel like Anna Journey is really good at just saying like, this is poetic in itself, and I'm just gonna tell you it plainly, and you'll kind of enjoy the story along the way, and it'll be a poem when I'm done. [laughs]

Griffin: It requires like, a superhuman amount of self-awareness, I feel like, to be able to pick and choose the stuff from your story that is, like, beautiful in that way, without you needing to like, fluff it up all over the place.

Rachel: Yeah. So this poem, I actually found the Missouri Review, which is the literary magazine I used to work at when I was at the University of Missouri Columbia.

They asked her kind of to tell the story of this poem, and she said, "In my poem, Mississippi: Origins, anecdotal fragments, sharp and sweet, poignant and stark, combine to create a locust for the family lyric. And that dried up rattlesnake rattle, which my mother declined to make into a baby rattle, definitely ranks as one of my family's stranger heirlooms.

That, and the pair of brass knuckles my white-haired great aunts, Mary and Joanna, kept in their shared house in case they were called upon to punch potential burglars in the face. And the skull fragment from medical school my other grandfather used as an ash tray. We're a well-adjusted bunch." [laughs]

Griffin: Even that was poetic in an incredible way!

Rachel: [laughing] I know! Just to be able—I mean—

Griffin: That was like a sequel to the poem!

Rachel: [laughs] It's just like, it's a good exercise, I think, to like, kind of zero in on those like, kind of novel family stories, to kind of figure out like, is there a poem here? So I just read that and was very inspired. I was like, this

is a really good way to approach like, a writing exercise, if you're trying to figure out how to put something together.

Griffin: Yes. Um, that was incredible. Thank you for classing up the joint again. Um, can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Cool.

[ad break stinger plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Oh, we have jumbotroooongs! Do you want to hear `em? Because I have them.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay. Well, this one's for Brian, and it's from Kayla, who says, "Hey, cutie. I hope you're having a good day, but if you aren't, I hope it gets better soon! You don't have to believe in yourself. Just believe in the me that believes in you. Your drill is the drill that will pierce the heavens. Also, you're cuter than baby bunny jump kicks." What is your preferred time frame for this message to air... is not part of the message, I've just realized. And I apologize for that, Kayla. And Brian.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: But um, congratulations on your great drill, and...

Rachel: Oh my gosh, Griffin has a great drill.

Griffin: I do have a great drill. I feel like that's an anime thing? I don't know a lot about that scene. I don't want to put that on Brian and Kayla if I'm inaccurate there. But in my heart of hearts, it feels like a anime thing.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm sure I'll hear about it from our beloved fan base.

Rachel: Can I read the next message?

Griffin: Please.

Rachel: This one is for Nate. It is from Benji. "Hey, Nate. I thought your happy time podcast would be the best place to say this. I'm so happy to have you as my big brother and a best friend, and I'm so proud to watch you grow and adapt to these hard years. It's been a long journey, but we've always worked through it together, and we always will. Love, your dingus brother, Benji."

Griffin: That is super nice.

Rachel: That is super nice!

Griffin: Gotta have teamwork. Gotta have teamwork with the—with the bros. And that's all there is to it. When bros work together, that's it. That's it.

Rachel: What's it like having a bro?

Griffin: It's like knowing you can do anything, as long as you work together, and you form up like a Voltron robot.

Rachel: That's beautiful.

Griffin: Thanks, yeah, no. I mean, we literally do have sort of interlocking joints. Y'know how I have that flap on my shoulder that, when you pop it down...

Rachel: I do! What is that for?

Griffin: And my arm goes inside—that's—Travis' knee goes in there.

Rachel: Ohh. [laughing] That makes so much more sense.

Griffin: Uh-huh.

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

Griffin: Can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay, my second thing is an episode of television that me and you watched very recently, and... it was one of the hardest I think I've ever laughed, like, in my whole life. And so, I want to share that with people. Although, I imagine, in our audience, a lot of folks have already seen this episode of television.

Rachel: Yeah, there's definitely some overlap.

Griffin: Uh, it is an episode of The Chris Gethard Show called One Man's Trash. Uh, and even if you don't like, follow, I feel like, The Chris Gethard Show... this episode, when it came out, uh, got so much buzz, because it was kind of incredible, and a perfect little hour of television. And it's... boy howdy, it lives up to... it lives up to everything I think everybody has said about it.

Rachel and I have just started to watch Chris Gethard Show, which is kind of wild, because like, I know a lot of people who like, worked on it.

Rachel: Yeah! Especially because your show runner...

Griffin: Yeah, JD.

Rachel: That you all just hired, just kind of based on a good impression, like, had a whole body of work that you all could've like, sat down with.
[laughs]

Griffin: Well, no, I mean, we knew about his body of work, and y'know, that makes it sound like we just picked some random dude off the street.

Rachel: Well, no, I'm just saying like, when he said that he was intimately involved in that, it seems like everybody could've been like, "Should we see if he's..."

Griffin: Yeah. It has been great, though, 'cause we've been friends with JD for like, five years now. And seeing him on The Chris Gethard Show, as he is frequently sort of depicted, as the sort of object of torment that is sort of raked over the coals in the production of live television...

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, The Chris Gethard Show was live, and it involved a lot of comedians, and a lot of kind of...

Griffin: Hijinks.

Rachel: Hijinks, exactly. And to have somebody be able to kind of turn that into an episode, uh, was a very... very powerful thing, and definitely boded well for your experience with JD making this show. [laughs]

Griffin: Yes. And we've also been getting a lot of recommendations from Sarah, who does our social media stuff, and, well, a ton of stuff with our business.

Rachel: Yeah, and she was also there.

Griffin: She was also there, yeah. She worked on the show, also. Uh, anyway, One Man's Trash. Uh... do not... this is one of those things that you can spoil for yourself, and you should not. To that point, I think all The Chris Gethard Show episodes are on YouTube, like, on his channel. There's two versions of One Man's Trash, and one is like, the dumpster edition. Do not

watch that. Do not watch the dumpster edition, which is longer, because it spoils like—it spoils the whole episode, basically, right away.

The premise of this show... I mean, the premise of The Chris Gethard Show is, it was like, a live public access show, and then it was an internet streaming show, and then it was on like, a few different networks, and... it is oftentimes, like, a complete mess. But there is something about that that like, Chris Gethard has always kind of celebrated, and said like, that is more entertaining to me than like, very well-produced, traditional comedy television.

Rachel: Yeah, he has like, kind of a real clear mission statement. For a show that is as chaotic as it is, I feel like he makes it very clear of like, I am trying to make something that is unusual and that is more real than a typical, like, talk show format.

Griffin: Right. So even when, like... it makes me uncomfortable, watching a live performance not go well. And there have been segments that have like, *not* gone well. But still watching them, like, give the thing form is like, so rewarding, and so cool to watch. And then, it makes the episodes where everything fires off perfectly, which is the case in One Man's Trash, makes it like, a truly spectacular feat.

So, it's a great show. It's all on YouTube. It's a treasure trove. We've been diving deep into it. But One Man's Trash is the best episode I think we've seen so far. It has two guests, Jason Mantzoukas and Paul Scheer, who have been on the show a few times. One of the episodes, they just fuckin' take over. Chris Gethard decides to leave, and just like, as punishment for bullying him so much, just like, make them host the show by themselves, and they do it sort of empirically. It is—it's a wild watch.

Rachel: Yeah. I will say—so, Chris Gethard has UCV training, as does Paul Scheer and Jason Mantzoukas.

Griffin: And the same thing—like, they try to steamroll him like, this entire episode. They bully him like, this entire episode. And this episode, the premise is, there's a dumpster in the studio, and there's something inside

the dumpster, and Paul and Jason and all the callers, the live call-in callers, have to guess what's inside of it. And like... there's a twist in the episode... the guesses are like—they range from like, silly, to like, weirdly accurate.

And then, there's a twist about halfway through the episode, after Jason and Paul Scheer have just been really riding Chris Gethard's jock, where he shows them what's inside the dumpster. And there is a switch that is flipped. There is a reaction from them.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: 'Cause he talks up—Chris Gethard talks up like, "It is life-changing. What is in this dumpster is going to change the tone of the entire show." And Jason Mantzoukas and Paul Scheer are just like, "Yeah, whatever, man!" And then, they see it, and immediately just like, shut up.

Rachel: They are super invested.

Griffin: Super invested, like...

Rachel: Because the promise of the show is that, if nobody guesses it, they are just not gonna reveal.

Griffin: They never will show what's inside of it. Uh, and... I do not want to say much else. I know this is like, a short segment, but like, it is a... it is perfect. It is just like, perfect. I have been thinking about this episode of television like, every day since the day that we watched it, because there were so many times... they set up at the beginning, like, if somebody guesses what this is in the first ten minutes, we don't have 50 more minutes of show. Like, that's just gonna be it.

Uh, it is... the pace at which the answers, like, dial into the correct answer is perfect. Like—

Rachel: Yeah. 'Cause what happens with the callers is, they will guess something, and they can ask a question, and a lot of times, they will ask questions that will help people kind of zero in on what it is. I will say, the

thing that I told Griffin that I thought was interesting is that it was such a phenomenal idea, that they could never do again. 'Cause once, like—once you realize what it is in the dumpster, that like, sets the tone for like, following episodes, if you were to do the gimmick again.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So, uh... so yeah. I was just like, "What a great idea that you could never replicate." [laughs]

Griffin: Never ever do it again. Um, yeah. And then, after you have watched it, there is an inside the dumpster edition, which you can watch the perspective of the episode from within the dumpster. It is—it is, uh, seriously... if you need a laugh right now, not to minimize the horrible shit that's going on. But uh, it's—it's amazing. It's so good.

It's funny on an objective level, and then from like, a live television production level, it is a literal miracle. Like, it is a perfect thing. Uh, that I just love to pieces. We've also been watching *The Night of Zero Laughs*, which is also right up our alley. It's a series they do where they get a big panel of comedians, and nobody can laugh, or they get kicked out of the studio. It's got big Documental energy. I think we've talked about Documental on the show before.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Anyway. What's your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing kind of came to me in just kind of a—like a bolt of electricity.

Griffin: You mentioned this.

Rachel: It wasn't anything that I'd really thought much about, but as soon as I found it, I was like, "Well, yeah, this is what I should be talking about." And that is auctioneers.

Griffin: Hey!

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: You like that!

Rachel: Yeah! It's fascinating! It's a fascinating talent, and there's so much that goes into it that I did not realize. There's this like, kind of musicality to it, and this like, performance element. And it's such a like, specialized skill that's been around for such a long time. I've never known anybody to actually... doin' it.

Griffin: Have you ever been to a cattle auction?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: I have.

Rachel: You have?

Griffin: Yeah, man. Yeah. I've been to a cattle auction. I've been to two cattle auctions.

Rachel: For... [laughs]

Griffin: I've been to two different cattle auctions.

Rachel: How? How did this occur?

Griffin: Uh, one was our youth pastor growing up... his parents lived on a farm, so we would do like, camp out trips out onto the farm, and like, go spelunking in wild caves and shit like that. It was very good, very fun. Uh, but then like, one morning after, like, one of these camp outs, we went to a cattle auction. And it was—I mean, it's rad. It's as rad as you think it's gonna be. It's—they go—they have bars, y'know? They go very fast with their talking. I like that a lot.

Rachel: Yeah, but you said you went twice.

Griffin: I can't remember the other one. I just have a second vivid memory of being at a cattle auction.

Rachel: [laughs] So, the way of speaking is called chanting. And... there is kind of a reason that they do it that way. Not only to give kind of a sense of urgency, but to kind of create this structure of call and response. Like, people get kind of like, pulled into the rhythm of it, and it kind of encourages them to participate, and to kind of keep the bidding going. And apparently, auctioneers take home 10 to 20% of the sale price.

Griffin: Whoa!

Rachel: So that is a big motivator, obviously.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: [laughs] There are all these techniques about, y'know, identifying... first of all, identifying what a bid is. Because a lot of times, y'know, you'll like, have to scan the crowd and figure out who is actually bidding, and who is just very warm, for example.

Griffin: We were explicitly told to like, be a statue, because you don't want to accidentally buy, like, a \$900 black angus steer.

Rachel: [laughs] And then, to also, once bidding has started, and you've kind of narrowed down your bidders, to kind of look back and forth and kind of build that sense of competition between the people that are bidding.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There are about 50 schools in the United States that teach you how to do this. Um, and the, uh... 27 states require auctioneers to be licensed, which is why those schools exist.

Griffin: What a wild thing to require a li—not to diminish the job or whatever, but what a wild thing to require a license for.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, so they—the articles I read—so I read one from Slate, and one from Vox, and they talk about how this is not a style you would see, for example, at Christie's or Sotheby's. [laughs] There's a more restrained British style of auctioneering that does not require this kind of performance.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But uh, y'know, as you mentioned, livestock... this is the way to go.

Griffin: They get wild in there, man. It's a party.

Rachel: Uh, so, what happens at these schools, um... some of them require 80 hours of training, or you complete an apprenticeship. Some states require you to stand up and auction an item as part of the test. Uh, and there are written questions dealing with auctioneering ethics and legal obligations.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So I mean, this is—this is a licensed program. Y'know, you are—you are learning something that has a certain amount of knowledge and expertise behind it.

Griffin: Yeah, I guess I don't know what the ethics of auctioneering is.

Rachel: I think—I mean, you're saying a lot of stuff, right? And you're trying to motivate people to bid.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: But in the process of motivating people to bid, you could potentially, y'know, bully somebody into spending more.

Griffin: Yeah. Come on, don't be a baby! Come on! What are you, a little baby?

Rachel: [laughs] Hey, stupid hat, stupid hat. What's your bid? Stupid hat?

Griffin: Stupid hat. Stupid hat. Don't have enough money, stupid hat? Is that what's up, stupid hat?

Rachel: [laughing] And so, there are different exercises. Um, basically they said, it's not... so, the interview I read was with a, uh, a 2015 winner, who said that, y'know, you're not actually going that fast. You're basically saying the same thing, but you're developing these like, compound phrases. Like "what I want to give" and "now a dollar" and a lot of like, "dollar bidder now, two dollar bidder..." You're like—

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: You're kind of getting into the chant of it. And there's all these phrases, like, "alright, how many dollars there," "what do you want to get for them," y'know, like, that kind of have this musicality built in.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Like, you say it altogether, it becomes this kind of like, rhythmic, y'know, poetry almost.

Griffin: Yeah, and then there's other lines where they're like, "Hey, pretty baby, won't you give me a sign? I'll do anything to make you mine all mine. I'll do your bidding, be at your beck and call."

[pause]

Griffin: Come on! John Michael Montgomery? Soul?

Rachel: No, I know, I know. But I don't know the lyrics.

Griffin: You don't know the lyrics...

Rachel: I don't know how to participate in this.

Griffin: [strange, fast, muffled singing] You really don't know every word to that song?

Rachel: Only since I have met you has that song hit my radar.

Griffin: Entered your life? Yeah, that's fair.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. So, there is a world championship.

Griffin: Oh yeah!

Rachel: That is the livestock marketing associations championship. Uh, they do it each year. The Vox article from 2015 was from the winner of that year, who, uh, was actually from West Virginia!

Griffin: Hey, alright!

Rachel: And this kind of competition, like... people spend a very significant part of their lives trying to win. He had been in the competition for nine years before he won.

Griffin: Woo!

Rachel: But he said... [laughs] In this interview, he said, "We used to play cattle auction with my cousins," when he was growing up.

Griffin: Awesome.

Rachel: He said that he was like, 12 or 13, going to auctions, and then at 15, he got his first job. Uh, and he now lives in Alabama, and has been an auctioneer for over a decade.

Griffin: Rad.

Rachel: For whatever reason, the Vox article felt the need to list out the things that he has sold, including swine, sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and cars.

Griffin: Cars, I was gonna ask. That's a high pressure... that's a high pressure sale, I feel like.

Rachel: This winner that I am talking about, uh, is Brandon Neely, and he took the step of securing the WLAC champion Twitter account. Which he still holds, despite not being the champion, so good on you for securing that.
[laughs]

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: So at the competition, judges evaluate the 30 auctioneers on the livestock knowledge during the interview, as well as on their performance in a real auction, including bid catching ability. Meaning like, noticing everybody in the crowd. Clarity of chant, voice quality, and overall knowledge.

Uh, the 2019 winner – they did not do the competition in 2020, because of everything. The 2019 winner, Russell Sleep, is a graduate of the Missouri Auction School.

Griffin: Ohh.

Rachel: Lives in Iowa. He was also a nine time top ten qualifier before he won the whole thing.

Griffin: He's a natural.

Rachel: There—[laughing] If you go to the website, the Livestock Marketing Association website, you can purchase a CD of these auctions. [laughs]

Griffin: Oh! Yes! That's awesome. I'm gonna rip that and do remixes of it.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Hey, can I tell you what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Carina says, "My small wonder is tea sets. I never enjoyed tea, because it got cold too fast. But now, I can make a big pot of it and drink it from small, cute, manageable cups. And it doesn't get cold nearly as fast as making a big mug of tea. The process also feels very fancy and ritualistic." I miss tea. I used to have a little cool tea press. You remember I was into tea for like, a little bit?

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin: I should get back into tea. Maybe that'll be my weird 2021 affectation.

Rachel: We always have tea. Somehow, uh, neither of us are particular tea drinkers, but for whatever reason, our cabinet always has like...

Griffin: We have a lot of tea. If we wanted to drink tea, we would have a lot—I don't know if tea goes bad. Probably not. It's just dry leaves. What's it gonna do, get drier?

Rachel: I mean, spices go bad. I think they lose their potency.

Griffin: Yeah, that's a good point. Logan says, "My small wonder lately has been the YouTube channel, Up Up Down Down. It is ran by the wrestler, Xavier Woods, slash Austin Creed. The channel is all about wrestlers as themselves and not their characters playing video games." That's, uh, The New Day. Xavier Woods.

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: And he has other wre—I've watched it. I adore... I adore that channel.

Rachel: What a delight. I love The New Day.

Griffin: It is a delight. It is so fun. Like, he really knows his stuff about games, and a lot of the wrestlers that he brings on there does, too. I missed him at a, uh... he was on—I was on a giant bomb live show, and he was on the panel right before me. So I missed my opportunity to say what's up.

Rachel: Aw, that would've been great.

Griffin: Um, thank you 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. Go to MaximumFun.org and check out all the great shows that they have there, please.

Rachel: Uh, I'm gonna recommend this week... Bullseye.

Griffin: Whoa!

Rachel: I'm gonna say Bullseye.

Griffin: What a bold choice! No, Bullseye is amazing.

Rachel: It's amazing. There is a great interview that we promoted, if you haven't checked it out, between Jesse Thorn and David Letterman.

Griffin: Ooh, yeah.

Rachel: Jesse Thorn... if you've only listened to Jesse Thorn on Jordan, Jesse, Go, you've gotta check out Bullseye. Because he is an incredible interviewer, and it is not something that you get to experience on Jordan, Jesse, Go.

Griffin: Well, you do. I've been on Jordan, Jesse, Go before, and I felt thoroughly interviewed by the end of it.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Just about, like, Pokémon and stuff like that. Uhh... yeah. And that's it. Uh, I—it's—please take care of yourself out there. We, again, we're a day in advance recording this, so we don't know, like, what the vibe is when you are hearing it. I hope it is okay, and I hope you all are doing well. Um, and I don't want to make light of that, but I have to go to bathroom so bad, I might actually pass—

Rachel: Ohh, there's the urgency.

Griffin: I don't know if you could tell, the energy that I've been putting out for the last, like, ten minutes, but it's the "uh oh, there's about to be a whoopsie in the studio" energy, so let's cut it off in three, two, one, bye.

[theme music plays]

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