

Wonderful! 218: Grabby Pincher

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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: Welcome to the show. Welcome to the rodeo, people. Hang on for the... ride of your life.

Rachel: [laughs] People do describe our podcast as a thrill ride.

Griffin: As a thrill ride rodeo where you're the rodeo cowperson and ridin' on the back of the biggest buckin' bronco, and that's me and Rachel, comin' at you fast and angry with our...

Rachel: Yeehaw.

Griffin: ... goofs, and yeehaw, folks. Uh... but— saddle up your horses, we got a trail to blaze.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: That is, I believe, the opening lyrics to a Steven Curtis Chapman song, and this is something that you and me just cannot vibe on. Sadly.

Rachel: Uh, no, that's 100% true. Can I say one more thing, though?

Griffin: Yeah. Is it rodeo-related?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay, okay.

Rachel: Uh, get along.

Griffin: Get along, little doggies. Yeah, sure. I mean, the *Hey Dude* theme song I think provided—

Rachel: That's fair.

Griffin: —a lot of us with a lot of sort of rodeo vernacular that we could use to impress our friends and family. This is *Wonderful!* It's a show where we talk about things we like, things that are good, things that we're into. And, um, do you wanna maybe kick things off with us— with u— you wanna kick things off with us... for a small wonder?

Rachel: Ooh. Okay.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Okay, that's a— that's a way to get into it.

Griffin: I guess so. There were a lot of— there's some particle confusion there.

Rachel: This— this may be a little blue.

Griffin: Oh, shit!

Rachel: Yesterday I was on a walk. Uh, with our son.

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: And Griffin was driving up. And when we got to the house...

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... he told me he recognized me from the back. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, I did!

Rachel: And I just kind of loved that. [laughs]

Griffin: Well, it was true. And, you know, I—[stammers] I know... [laughs] your body.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You were also wearing a baby carrier.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which...

Rachel: That's a tip-off.

Griffin: Which is a tip— which was a bit of a tip-off.

Rachel: And, like, my hair and my pants. I mean, I was not in disguise, one might say.

Griffin: No, no. I mean, you do sometimes like to cosplay when you go on walks.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, like Dr. Mario.

Rachel: And that Pikachu costume.

Griffin: That Pikachu costume that suggested to a lot of my Instagram followers that... we... have a very particular kink.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, yeah. I just, I don't know. It just made me happy.

Griffin: That's nice. That is nice. Uh, laser tag.

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Are you squinting because you're not sure if you've said this before?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's neat, man.

Rachel: Yeah, it is!

Griffin: It's the most sort of laser exposure I'll probably have in my lifetime, and what a fun way to play with lasers.

Rachel: Are you...

Griffin: We've certainly talked about laser tag before.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: I'm 100% sure of it.

Rachel: Yeah, but it probably wasn't a small wonder. You probably did a whole feature on it.

Griffin: Probably did a whole feature. I just want people to know, quick update: still thinking about laser tag.

Rachel: [laughs] I bet you are counting the days until Henry is old enough to participate in that activity.

Griffin: In laser tag?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think it'll be a while.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, that gear is pretty heavy.

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah. We also don't, like, play guns very much. Uh...

Rachel: That's true.

Griffin: Even, you know, cool guns like lasers. [laughs]

Rachel: We have made a lot of questionable decisions in our parenting.

Griffin: Oh, Christ, yes!

Rachel: Uh, but I do take it as a point of pride that Henry does not have a lot of weapons.

Griffin: Here's the thing. The Fort— here's the thing, gang. The *Fortnite* toys are dope. They're very well-made toys. You just gotta sneak those lil rifles and bazookabas and all that jazz out of the package when he's not looking and let him play with the very cool action figures that have hamburgers for heads?! Are you kidding me?!

Rachel: It is fun.

Griffin: Great toys. You go first this week.

Rachel: I do!

Griffin: I'm ready to receive your joy and warmth.

Rachel: [laughs] Thank you!

Griffin: [squeaky laugh]

Rachel: [laughs] So it's March.

Griffin: It is. March Madness, baby.

Rachel: And it's also...

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: ... the month of the woman.

Griffin: It's Women's History Month? Or just—

Rachel: Correct.

Griffin: Yeah. Cool!

Rachel: What else could— what else could I mean by that?

Griffin: Well, just, like, women's— women's month.

Rachel: Women's month. [laughs] Uh, so I wanted to bring a lady poet.

Griffin: Okay. Oh, you can't just backdoor—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You can't just sneak us into the backdoor of the Poetry Corner!

Rachel: [laughs] Ah, yes. Would you like—

Griffin: [mumble unintelligibly] some poems. Okay.

Rachel: There we go. Sorry, I didn't mean to rush that.

Griffin: Well...

Rachel: I just wanted to lead first with the timeliness of my suggestion.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And then I realized that I had kind of walked around the corner.

Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Rachel: And now I wanna get back in it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, my poet...

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: Nicole Sealey.

Griffin: Nicole Sealey.

Rachel: New poet.

Griffin: This— can I say something? And this is not a lie. I feel like I recognize the name.

Rachel: Wow, huh!

Griffin: Maybe somebody shared— did she— did she have a poem that went viral in some way? 'Cause I'm not pursuing poetry in my off time. This is literally the extent of the poet exposure—

Rachel: It's also possible she shares a name with somebody else.

Griffin: That's also possible. I'm maybe thinking of Sealy Posturepedic mattresses.

Rachel: [laughs] There you go. Uh, so the reason I would be surprised if you knew her is Nicole Sealey's first full collection of poetry didn't come out until 2017.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So this is not necessarily somebody you would've learned about in school.

Griffin: Mm, probably not.

Rachel: Because you were not in school in 2017.

Griffin: In my defense, though, I think I learned about a sum total of two poets when I was in school. Uh, Robert Frost—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: —and one of the other big ones.

Rachel: I mean, you talk a lot about E. E. Cummings. But was that a—

Griffin: Yeah, okay. Two is an exaggeration. I definitely read some Maya Angelou and... Robert Frost. Did I say him?

Rachel: [through laughter] Yeah, you definitely did.

Griffin: [giggles]

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, okay. So, Nicole Sealey. She is a Black woman poet living in Brooklyn, New York. Um, she is a visiting professor at Boston University and teaches at the MFA Writers' Workshop. Uh—

Griffin: What's a visiting tea— teacher?

Rachel: Visiting professors— this is interesting. This happens a lot with, like, writers.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, they are not like full time faculty. They are brought in kind of on, like, a— like, a fellowship or, you know— like, they are not committed to teaching there indefinitely. They're, like, brought in as, like, kind of a— I mean, for lack of a better word, show piece for the institution of, like, "Look. Look at this great writer we have. Don't you wanna study here now?"

Griffin: I feel like Marshall— I mean, it's probably... a common thing at schools— is, like, a seminar series that you can take as a class. Where it'd just be like, this person's come to give this seminar series here at Marshall for one semester and then poof, they're gone.

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, so anyway, she teaches at the MFA Writers' Workshop at NYU, which is also the workshop that she attended when she got her MFA.

Griffin: Oh, that's great.

Rachel: I did a lot of research for this 'cause she's, like, a really cool, complicated poet, and I wanted to make sure that I didn't, like, undersell her.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, in the process, I found out about the Cave Canem Foundation, which is a nonprofit that is committed to supporting African-American poets through fellowships, workshops, and a national community. She was the executive director there from 2017 to 2019.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: And so it— it seems super cool. Basically it's like— it's very accessible, like, localized workshops for African-American writers who would potentially not have the opportunity to enter in to those conversations otherwise.

Griffin: And they provide, like, grants to— to writers?

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, fellowships. So, like, if you wanted to participate in one of their workshops or, you know, just further your education through them, they have that opportunity for you.

Griffin: That's great.

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, she— so, she came to poetry... I don't want to say "late," because she is a woman in her 30's. Uh—[laughs]

Griffin: I feel like every poet you talk about is, like, "She didn't— she was a carpenter until she was 71."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "And then she released her first book of poetry... yesterday."

Rachel: I think what is interesting, like, there are a lot of people now how go straight from high school to college, straight from college to, like, an MFA program, and so they are entering that MFA program when they are 23, 24.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Um, she worked a full-time job for almost eight years, and was writing a little bit, but wasn't able to really finish or focus on it, and at that point she decided to formally begin studying poetry at NYU. Uh, which is obviously a super risky, hard decision to make.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um...

Griffin: It seems like a tough school to study, like, a demanding poetry program.

Rachel: Well, yeah. And also just the idea of leaving, like, a steady job to pursue a degree in poetry is like... I mean, it's a big investment in yourself, but not necessarily your income. [laughs]

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: So I wanted to read a poem from her book, *Ordinary Beast*, which came out in 2017.

Griffin: That's a great name.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, that is called "The First Person Who Will Live to Be One Hundred and Fifty Years Old Has Already Been Born."

Griffin: That is some Sufjan Stevens length level stuff.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm all about that.

Rachel: Her poems, like, really run the gamut of, like... you know, like, outwardly political— she did this great, like, really cool series— are you familiar with erasure? It's where you—

Griffin: The band?

Rachel: No. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: [singing] I try to discover!

Rachel: It's where you take a document...

Griffin: Oh, sure.

Rachel: ... and you eliminate some of the text, and kind of what remains is a poem?

Griffin: Uh-huh?

Rachel: So, she took the Department of Justice 2015 Report on the, uh, Ferguson, Missouri incident?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um, and erased elements of that report to kind of create poems.

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: And she took chunks of that and did, like— so for example, like, the one I just showed you is "'Pages 1-4,' an excerpt from the Ferguson Report: an Erasure." Uh... it's an incredible series. But that's not what I'm gonna read to you. I'm gonna read to you this poem that I just named, "The First Person Who Will Live to Be One Hundred and Fifty Years Old Has Already Been Born."

Griffin: You think it's me?

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Phew. I mean, we're gonna have to make some changes. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Yeahhh, I do some pretty hard livin'.

Rachel: [laughs] I wouldn't say you participate in dangerous activities, but I—

Griffin: I certainly don't participate in...

Rachel: Healthy—

Griffin: ... healthful activities.

Rachel: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Griffin: I do a Wordle every day. Keeps my mind sharp. [laughs quietly]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [holding back laughter] Today's was bullshit, by the way. Did you do it?

Rachel: Ohh, I did! I got it, though.

Griffin: It was garbage.

Rachel: I'm always happy when I get it.

Griffin: Yeah. Okay, sorry.

Rachel: Okay. Should I read the title again?

Griffin: No. [laughs quietly]

Rachel: [laughs] Okay. Uh, and there is an inscription here, "[For Petra]."

"Scientists say the average human life gets three months longer every year. By this math, death will be optional. Like a tie or dessert or suffering. My mother asks whether I'd want to live forever. "I'd get bored," I tell her. "But," she says, "there's so much to do," meaning she believes there's much she hasn't done. Thirty years ago she was the age I am now but, unlike me, too industrious to think about birds disappeared by rain. If only we had more time or enough money to be kept on ice until such a time science could bring us back. Of late my mother has begun to think life short-lived. I'm too young to convince her otherwise. The one and only occasion I was in the same room as the *Mona Lisa*, it was encased in glass behind what I imagine were velvet ropes. There's far less between ourselves and oblivion—skin that often defeats its very purpose. Or maybe its purpose isn't protection at all, but rather to provide a place, similar to a doctor's waiting room,

in which to sit until our names are called.
Hold your questions until the end.
Mother, measure my wide-open arms—
we still have *this much* time to kill."

Griffin: Wowww. God, that last line is...

Rachel: I know. Isn't that lovely?

Griffin: Buck wild, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, that poem takes you some places, huh?

Griffin: It sure d— yeah, it definitely does!

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, one of the things that is another— well, I guess I should say another thing that is impressive to me about Nicole Sealey is that she uses form a lot. So, this idea that... you know, like a sonnet, for example. There are a set number of syllables and a set number of lines. Um, I am not— honestly, I am not learned enough to tell you what form that was in.

Griffin: Uh, haiku.

Rachel: Oh. [holding back laughter] It was a long one.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, but she gave an interview to *The Believer* in 2018. You remember *Believer*?

Griffin: Yeah, I do!

Rachel: Yeah. Uh—

Griffin: Is it not around anymore?

Rachel: I don't know. I mean, I didn't know it was still around in 2018, to be honest.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Um, but she said, "For me, form is a way into and out of most poems. Form lends itself to music, imagery, and associations that probably wouldn't occur otherwise. The challenge of getting from Point A to Point B in a fixed number of beats, or the challenge of rhyming one word with another, and the poem still making poetic sense, for me, creates a heightened sense of imaginative urgency that informs interaction with my free verse poems."

Uh, and then she goes on to say, "That's how I imagine a poem like... " the one I just read. I mean, I could read the title again, but I feel like it's pretty familiar at this point. [laughs] Uh, she says that's how that one is able to leap from a conversation about getting older to the *Mona Lisa*. "The associative quality of my work comes from working in form."

Griffin: That's was ver— that was a ve— that poem was very good.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs] I know! That's why I picked it. [laughs] Um, she says, uh, in another interview— or no, I think it was the *Believer* interview. She says, uh— she says her obsessions are "Love, loss, as well as the large and small violences that have shaped me." Um, when asked kind of, like, "What is it that you write about?"

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Uh, and so yeah, it was hard for me to find two poems that were particularly similar. Like, when I was looking through her poetry it was like everything was— was very inventive, and covered a lot of ideas, and felt very, like, uniquely her, you know? Like, once I had read enough of her poems it was very clear to me that, like, nobody else could've written them.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Uh, and so yeah, I just— I wanted to share her. I'm always excited to kind of share poems that are relatively new to publishing, because I feel like, "Hey, you can get in at the ground floor." [laughs]

Griffin: I know, yeah!

Rachel: Come over here. Come over here and look at something in my jacket pocket. I've got a poem that you can't find...

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: ... anywhere else. Yeah, it's very exciting, and she is— she is continually taking on new projects. Uh, in February, as in last month, it was announced that she will write a debut essay collection, *Talking Out of Turn: Notes From the Field*, which will, quote, "Interrogate the inherent biases, racism, and sexism deeply ingrained in the literary and arts world, and ultimately within all liberal institutions and American sociopolitical structures, while imagining an equation for justice."

Griffin: Fuck yeah!

Rachel: Damn.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's gonna be a big book.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: Just to get the... all the words on it.

Rachel: Yeah. It's the same publisher that published her first books, so obviously they have faith in her ability. I'm wondering if her poems, the Ferguson Report Erasures kind of, like, motivated them to kind of take— that this idea seriously.

Griffin: Of course.

Rachel: Um, but it— yeah. Exciting.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Exciting person, exciting work. Uh, Nicole Sealey.

Griffin: Keep it up!

Rachel: Get in there.

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Griffin: Oh, we got Trumbonebobs, and here—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —in the studio today, and I want to read the first one. It's for Lulu and it's from Mish who says:

"Hey, Lulu! I still can't believe it's been eight and a half years from being dumb, anxious teens to slightly less dumb but still anxious adults. I'm thankful every day that you're my partner and that I get to spend the rest of my life with you. I love you with all of my heart and soul."

Uh, that's a very special, lovely message. And I think that going from a dumb, anxious young person to a dumb, anxious— slightly less dumb, anxious adult is, like, the new circle of life?

Rachel: Yeah. It's funny, when you look back and you're like, "Oh, I was so anxious then about totally different things." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. It's like the Mitch Hedberg joke where he was like, "I used to— I used to do drugs. I still do, but I used to, too."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's not actually what that is like. But man, that's a great joke. Hey, do you wanna read the next one?

Rachel: Yes. This message is for Amanda, it is from Demond.

"To my magnificent wife and best friend, Amanda. You are the sun. You are my moon. I am so happy to be with you and our beautiful children. I hope you pass your mammo registry test and get even more letters after your name. Greatness follows you, as well as my love and respect."

Griffin: And as we all know, the mammo registry test is the test you take to prove that you know the most about wooly mammoths and other ancient pachyderms.

Rachel: Yeah. And then what are those, uh, initials that you get after your name if you pass the mammoth test?

Griffin: If you pass the— I mean, um... JPD, and that's a doctorate in Jurassic Park. They didn't have mammoths at Jurassic Park, did they? And I think that that's a huge oversight.

Rachel: It is.

Griffin: This is me as a little kid going to Jurassic Park, like, "Yeah, there's T-rexes and velociraptors. But where the wooly mammoths, guys? 'Cause I just saw *Ice Age*, and that shit was funny."

Rachel: Can I tell you, though? Technology back then was not super great at anything wooly, so I imagine they, like—

Griffin: That's true.

Rachel: —backed away from it.

Griffin: Yeah, that's true. The CGI people were like, "Good news. Guys, we can make dinosaurs."

And they were like, "What about wooly mammoths?"

They were like, "No. It has to be perfectly... hairless."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "Sleek, beautiful beasts."

[music plays]

[doorbell rings]

Speaker One: Um, hi. I'm looking for a movie.

Ify: Oh, I've got you.

Drea: Uh, there's that new foreign film with the time travel.

Alonso: There's an amazing documentary about queer history on streaming.

Ify: Have I told you about this classic where giant robots fight?

Alonso: Or there's that one that most critics hated but I thought was actually pretty good.

Drea: Oooh, I know! The one with the huge car chase, and then there's that scene where—

Ify and Alonso: The car jumps over the submarine!

Speaker One: Wow, who are you eclectic movie experts?

Ify: Well, I'm Ify Nwadiwe.

Drea: I'm Drea Clark!

Alonso: And I'm Alonso Duralde. And together, we host the movie podcast *Maximum Film*.

Drea: New episodes every week on Maximumfun.org.

Ify: And you actually just walked into our recording booth.

Speaker One: Oh, weird, sorry. I thought this was a video store.

Drea: You seem like a lady with a lot of problems.

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

Jo: Well, Manolo, we have a show to promote. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*.

Manolo: It's a family friendly podcast where listeners submit games and we play them with callers from around the world.

Jo: Oh, sounds good. New episodes, uh, happen every other Wednesday on Maximumfun.org.

Manolo: It's a, it's a fast and loose oasis of absurd innocence and naivete and—

Jo: Are you writing a poem?

Manolo: No. I'm just saying things from my memory. And, uh, it's a nice break from reality [laughs]. Is that, are we allowed to say that?

Jo: I don't know, it sounds bad.

Manolo: It comes with a 100% happiness guarantee.

Jo: It does not.

Manolo: [laughs]

Jo: Come for the games and stay for the cats.

[music and ad end]

Griffin: I would like to tell you about my thing, today. I'm curious what you'd call it. It's one of those things that, like, has many names. If you're at an arcade and you see, uh, one of the things that has a claw that goes down to get prizes, what do you call that?

Rachel: Claw machine.

Griffin: Claw machine, okay. There's so many different ways of referring to these things. Uh, including a—

Rachel: Wait, can I guess?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Grabby pincher.

Griffin: No. Uh, claw cranes, or skill cranes are another—

Rachel: Ooh, skill cranes! [laughs]

Griffin: I like skill cranes a lot.

Rachel: Makes you feel really good about being able to do well.

Griffin: It sure does. Uh, so last weekend Henry and I visited a Dave and Busters-adjacent... establishment.

Rachel: Not in that it was next door to a Dave and Busters. [laughs]

Griffin: No, but that it was sort of, uh— it had Dave and Busters-esque elements, which is to say, a huge, huge, huge arcade...

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: ... place. That we spent, like, three hours in, and it kicked ass. It was the best.

Rachel: That's unreal to me that you spent that long in there, by the way.

Griffin: It's big, man! There a lot of things to do there.

Rachel: Well, yeah, and just the fact that our son can't really do anything for more than an hour. That says a lot.

Griffin: Well, he can— he can play crane games, uh, for sure. Uh, the highlight for me was that for the first time in forever, like, I won some stuff out of some claw machines.

Rachel: I have never won anything out of a claw machine.

Griffin: You're kidding me.

Rachel: I mean, I will say that I probably spent maybe \$3 on a claw machine my entire life.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So that may suggest why I have not been more successful?

Griffin: They are— and I'm gonna get into sort of the dark math...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... that goes into those games. But, like, you'll find some sometimes that are like, "Oh, this one actually is a— this one actually works."

And one— we stayed at some wintry resort thing for a church retreat, like a winter retreat one time, and there was a small arcade there, and the claw machine for whatever reason was tuned to the point here, like, the claw would close with an iron death grip around—

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: —like, would just squeeze every sort of thing that you closed it around, and we literally cleaned it out, uh, over the weekend. Like, we got everything out of there.

Rachel: That's wild to me. That is what has always been so discouraging about those machines for me, is that I see the way that claw comes down and I just, like, pets—

Griffin: It's like, [whiny voice] Ohh, boo—

Rachel: —lightly, like, pets the item.

Griffin: Which is, again, something that can be tuned, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, and it makes me think, like, "Oh, nobody ever gets anything out of this."

Griffin: Yeah, that one was certainly tuned incorrectly, and the owners and operators of that arcade almost certainly took a bath. Uh, but again, I'll get into that in a bit.

So, claw machines are actually part of a subset of arcade games that, like, conceptually make sense. I did not know they have a name, though. They're called merchandisers, and they literally just show you merchandise that you can win with, you know, skill and luck, and also assuming the operator of the machine has not, like, made it, like, a complete rip-off.

There's two main modes of interacting with a claw machine, and I knew this but, like, one of them is very rare in the States but is way more common in, like, the UK and Japan, and that's the two button claw machine, where you have one that affects the sort of X axis of the claw and one that affects the Y axis of claw, and you can only press each one once—

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: —before the claw just automatically goes down.

Rachel: Oof!

Griffin: It's hardcore, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's very, very, very skill-based. But here in the States we, you know, we value our freedoms, and so we do the joystick one that you can move around to your heart's content, as long as the time doesn't run out, and then you drop it down. Um, most of the prizes included in these machines obviously are stuffed toys of some variety. Uh, of course these days I feel like you see a lot more of, like, "Oh, damn. That's a Nintendo Switch in there. There's some— uh, there's some AirPods in there."

Uh, although I learned that, like, claw machine experts say, like, just don't even bother going for the ones that have boxes. 'Cause, like, you can't grab a box with a claw.

Rachel: Yeah, that makes total sense to me.

Griffin: It does. It makes a lot of sense. Uh, I also like the claw machine games where you get the little candy with the little backhoe thing that drops down and just, like, scoops 'em up.

Rachel: Oh, yeah, that's fun.

Griffin: I do like that. It's never good candy. It's like, "Here's a big— here's the— here are flavored Tootsie Rolls. Here's a lemon Tootsie roll, kids. You like these, right?"

Rachel: Oh, I do actually. [laughs]

Griffin: I actually do love a lemon Tootsie Roll. Uh, so— okay. The secret of how these claw machines work is the operator is able to tweak certain parameters to ensure that they are getting a certain amount of payout per, like, prize value. Uh, these days it's like, just an app you have on your phone, and you can adjust these different parameters, just to ensure that you are getting— like, if there's a toy in the machine that is worth \$5, and you wanna get, like, a profit of \$5 out of that, you tweak these parameters so that the machine does not pay out until \$10 has been spent in pursuit of those prizes.

Rachel: Oh my gosh!

Griffin: Yesss.

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: It's gross. Uh, but here's— here's some of the parameters that you can change, okay? And some of these, like, if you've played a claw machine, like, you can probably suss out. Um, claw strength, which is, like, how hard the claw will clamp down on the thing, and the claw aperture, which is, like, how wide—

Rachel: Ohhh.

Griffin: —the fingers of the claw. Most claw machines, by the way, are three-fingered claw machines. Um, so claw movement speed, either as a whole or an individual axis. So you have, like, that granular level of control over it.

Uh, pickup strength, which is, like, how quickly the claw, like, lifts back up. Uh, primary and secondary strength settings. Not sure what that means. Toy teasing on payout based machines. When a toy teasing— when toy teasing is enabled, the claw will pick up a prize—

Rachel: Yes!

Griffin: —for a set amount of time before dropping it, giving the player the impression that they nearly won.

Rachel: Yesss.

Griffin: Yuck!

Rachel: Yes, I have definitely seen that happen.

Griffin: Yeah. So, hearing that you're probably thinking two things. The first of all is like, "Why are you talking— this sounds gross. Why are you talking about this?"

Uh, the second— I'll answer that later. The second thing is like, "Isn't this gambling?"

And the answer to that is, like... it depends on who you ask.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, largely speaking in the United States claw machines are not governed by the same sort of statutes that govern, like, other gambling machines.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, except in, like, certain places. So in Michigan, the value of the prizes has to be below a certain threshold. Uh, so I guess that they don't have the AirPods as much? I don't know. Michigan friends can maybe confirm that or deny that for me.

Um, and also, like, the machines have to be proven to be beatable. Like, you have to show that the machine can work. But then, like, in a few places in Canada, they're straight up considered games of chance, and are therefore, like, prohibited, except in fairs and other sort of, like, specialty cases where, you know... [laughs] I guess gambling is cool.

Rachel: [laughs] Well, I think— I think if it was at a fair, for example, like, there are a lot of games of chance at a fair.

Griffin: Sure. That's a good point.

Rachel: I think you would understand more, like, "I am paying money for something I'm not—"

Griffin: For nothing, basically.

Rachel: "—I'm not actually going to get." [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Uh, in Japan, like, these types of arcade machines are... everywhere? Uh, because, like, Japan is where these electronic claw machines really came up. Uh, the first one was released in 1965 by [sing-song] Sega.

Uh, and it was called Skill Diga, uh—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —and it was followed by Super Skill Diga in 1968, which used dolls as prizes. And that is what sort of began this symbiotic relationship between plush toy manufacturers and, you know, skill claw game manufacturers that, you know, persists to this day. The most popular, like, brand of claw games is called UFO Catcher, which has been around since, like, the 80's. And what makes it distinct is one, it's, like, pretty, like, cute aesthetic. Like, especially most of the toys that are inside of it are in these sort of, uh, Hello Kitty, Sanrio, like, milieu.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Uh, but also the claw only has two fingers. So it's like a pincer that goes down and grabs stuff, which seems, like, way more difficult to me.

Um... why do I like claw machines? Well...

Rachel: [laughs] I'm glad you asked. [laughs]

Griffin: I don't know. I feel like if you know the inherent sort of, like, uh, manipulation that is— that powers these bad boys, you can be a little bit more savvy about, like, you know— when we were at this place Henry saw this claw machine with, like, these stuffed banana... characters. And he was like, "Get me one of those!"

And I was like, "Okay." And I used the claw, and it went down, and just very limply, like, "[quietly] who-o-oo!" And I was like, "Nope. We're not doin' that again. That was a waste of money." And he was like, "Aww."

But then we went to one that had, like, a bunch of, like, um, stuffed *Minecraft* toys. And he was like, "Uh, I want that creeper."

And I was like, "Okay!" And I, like, got it in one. And was like, "Okay, that's a good one!"

Although I do admit that I then spent more time trying to get a little enderman out of there that didn't fucking come out, 'cause it was a... anyway!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It is a waste of money, like almost all things at an arcade are. But when you do manage to see the light in the child's eyes—

Rachel: Yeahh.

Griffin: —that you have impressed by grabbing a creeper out of the machine... there was another one that was very small that had, like, little stuffed food toys in it. Like, little rubbery foam foods, and I got a couple out of there and was like, Dad of the year!

And I felt so accomplished.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um...

Rachel: That's a high stakes game you played.

Griffin: It is a high stakes game.

Rachel: 'Cause what if you had left with nothing? And he just would have thought about that forever. Just, like, "My father can't deliver."

Griffin: Yeah! No, yeah. It's— it's— it's, uh, it's a conce— it's certainly a concern of mine. But, uh, luckily I'm a 100% percent real gamer, uh, since birth, and crushed it, and...

Rachel: Henry does call Griffin King Gamer sometimes.

Griffin: He recognizes that... I mean, the games he asks me to play with him for, like, help, are not, like... you know.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: They're games that I can pretty confidently—

Rachel: Listen to you.

Griffin: —destroy. I'm just saying. Like—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —you know. I've been playing *Elden Ring*, and just, like, you know, grinding through boss after boss after boss. So when he is like, "Hey. Can you help me with this *Plants vs Zombies* level?"

I'm like, "[laughs] [serious tone] Yes. I will teach you of my resource ladder that I build with sunflowers upgraded to double headed sunflowers! Mua-ha-ha-ha!"

So, anyway, I'm a cool man.

Rachel: [laughs] That is— I mean, it should always be the takeaway when you listen to this podcast.

Griffin: I should just end every episode with that reminder.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: 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. Having a great time over here. Um, at Maximum Fun headquarters. They got... ping pong... table. In the break room. And we have tournaments every Tuesday. We call it ping pong Tuesday.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: And... it's a new month. We got new merch over at mcelroymerch.com. We just announced that we're goin' on tour, again, uh, for *MBMBaM* and *TAZ*. We got a show in St. Louis that we talked about doing a live *Wonderful!* at, so...

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, can we— can we say that'll happen?

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: We can say— I mean, it is our podcast. We can say anything.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You can find all that over at mcelroyfamily.com or themcelroy.family.

Rachel: Oh, they both work?

Griffin: We have, like, nine different—

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: I think we own the gamut of all of those links. But you can get tickets, and we sure do hope you come out and see us. There's, like, all kinds of— you gotta have a mask on and you gotta have your vax card or a negative COVID test within 72 hours of the start time of the show. So, like, we're not— we're not fucking around. Uh, and...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... we're excited to get back out there and do the dang thing.

Rachel: Uh, before we go, can I mention that the Cave Canem organization, uh, is a nonprofit, and does take donations.

Griffin: Oh, of course.

Rachel: Uh, so it's Cave C-A-N-E-M cavecanempoets.org. Um, I did make a donation after I found out about it, because it seemed super cool, and super important. And, uh, you know me, I'm all about those— those literary nonprofits.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh... so if, you know, it sounds good to you, check it out.

Griffin: Yeah. Um, that's it. We'll be back next week to tell you about more, um— more great stuff.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [wheezes]

Rachel: [through laughter] I thought you were gonna say, like, "More bullshit."

Griffin: No.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: No, it's great stuff. Uh, we— the show we make is, uh— we tell you, like— how else are you gonna know about, um, you know, that jelly— jelly beans are good.

Rachel: Uh-huh. Cap'n Crunch is an important historical figure.

Griffin: Cap'n Crunch is— he is a hero, a naval hero.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Different ways you can eat spam.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, cool astronauts... who like to eat space sandwiches.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: Um... you know, that's just some of the highlights, but I think we're— I think we should definitely get a [holding back laughter] MacArthur Genius grant.

Rachel: [laughs quietly]

Griffin: I don't know who you talk to about the. Like, I don't know who MacArthur is.

Rachel: Is there, like, a MacArthur Smart grant? Like, can we—

Griffin: Ohhh, I see! Like—

Rachel: Can we, like, a step down? I don't— I— I rec— hey, recognize this is not a Genius grant podcast.

Griffin: No. God, no.

Rachel: But...

Griffin: It's smart! It's smart enough.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: They get— they should give us \$50.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Just to go out for lunch.

Rachel: I would like that.

Griffin: Yeah, I would like that too. Hit me up, MacArthur.

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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