

Wonderful! 220: Folding Chair Zone

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Hi.

Rachel: Hi!

Griffin: Ooh, hi.

Rachel: What do you think of that new flavor of the sparkling?

Griffin: So we're working with a cherry limeade Waterloo sparkling water.

Rachel: Yeah, what do you think?

Griffin: Uh, I enjoy it quite a bit.

Rachel: Okay, good. I am always in a quest for a flavor that I actually like.

Griffin: Yeah. Well, it's gross, isn't it?

Rachel: Yeah, it turns out... I always like a sparkling water for the first half of the can.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And then the second half I'm like, "I'm not enjoying this at all." [laughs]

Griffin: Well, by the second half you can no longer sort of suspend the disbelief that you're drinking a real cherry limeade. I say that. This is good stuff.

Rachel: Yeah, I think so.

Griffin: I think this is just fine. Um... and what a boring sort of conversation to start the show.

Rachel: Oh, did you have a good— did you have a bit ready that you were gonna do?

Griffin: Yeah, yeah. I was gonna do one where it was like, um... I was gonna do like, "[mockingly] I'm a mummy!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And I would try to, like, scare you, and I would do, like, a toilet paper all around me? And then I— and then you would be like, "What are you doing? You're such a goofball."

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And then people would listen to that and be like, "They're so in love!"

Rachel: [laughs] That's the formula. That's the magic formula we have.

Griffin: And we are in love! Would don't need to put on sort of *Dharma and Greg* style goof-em-ups to sort of make people believe. Like, we're so deeply in love, and we work so hard for each other and for our family—

Rachel: Oh, I just got an idea for our—

Griffin: Oh, thank God! 'Cause I was going nowhere with that.

Rachel: [laughs] I just got an idea for our bonus episode.

Griffin: Oh yeah?

Rachel: Maybe we watch an episode of *Dharma and Greg* together. [laughs]

Griffin: Oh, that's fucking great, babe. That's so good. Yes, the Max Fun Drive is coming up. We've been wrestling with what to talk about, and as it turns out I

think we're gonna watch... one episode doesn't seem like enough work for bonus content.

Rachel: Oh no!

Griffin: I think maybe the whole first season?

Rachel: Okay. [sighs]

Together: No!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: I just— I just visualized a full season's worth. Uh...

Griffin: I had to pot you down a little bit. You were— you've been laughing really hard about *Dharma and Greg*. I had to turn you down so you don't blow out the— blow out the vox. But, oh, man. Now, I'm not telling you not to laugh loud! I fixed it! Man.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, this is *Wonderful!* It's a show where we talk about things we like, things that are good, things that we're into. Uh, and I'm into Rachel. Real, real deep.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: I'm feeling you.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: I'm feeling you. I'm vibing. Are you feeling this?

Rachel: I guess?

Griffin: Okay. Alright.

Rachel: [laughs] I was just caught off guard.

Griffin: We've been parenting so hard these last couple weeks, and you're so good at it.

Rachel: Aww.

Griffin: And it makes me, like, so happy that I'm the one— you're the one I'm doing this with. You know what I mean?

Rachel: Aw, babe. That makes me feel really good.

Griffin: Well, good! It's supposed to.

Rachel: I will tell you, I feel like...

Griffin: There's things I could do better? I know.

Rachel: No. [laughs]

Griffin: There's—

Rachel: No, I feel like unconsciously you and I have, like, picked a team.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And that's always kind of challenging... for me. And I feel it sometimes when, like, you are not around, and I realize I am used to being on team Gus, and I am used to you being on team Henry, and then sometimes—

Griffin: Yeah, we kind of divide and conquer a little bit.

Rachel: You'll be like, "I'm gonna take a shower." And then I'm just, like, sitting with Henry, and I'm kind of like, "So... what you been up to?"

Griffin: [extended snort]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, it's— it's— I think that is— it comes with the territory of having two kids, is that one is a baby, they require about 500 times more work than the one that's not a baby, it's a boy.

Rachel: Yeah, and big son is like a person, now.

Griffin: Big son's a real guy.

Rachel: He's got interests and a personality, and I feel like I really do have to be like, "So, what do you like these days? [laughs]

Griffin: Well, um... he likes a trampoline. He likes a *We Bare Bears*.

Rachel: Yeah, that's very recent. That's, like, as of this morning.

Griffin: He likes chocolate ze— well, [laughs] 'cha boy did win him a *We Bare Bears* stuffie at the crane game this past weekend. Uh, don't wanna brag, because I won't, 'cause I did try to win all three of the bears, and did only successfully retrieve Grizz from the device. But, um, yeah. Hey, do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: I do, actually.

Griffin: Good.

Rachel: I wanted to talk about this last week, but I forgot. There is a Twitter account called Pay Gap App.

Griffin: Oh wow.

Rachel: Have you heard of this?

Griffin: No, is it like anonymous reporting of your— of your salary? And it shows...

Rachel: So, here's what the bio says. So it's Pay Gap App, A-P-P, and the Twitter bio says "Employers: if you tweet about International Women's Day, I'll retweet your gender pay gap."

Griffin: Whoa!

Rachel: And so it's been— I've been following it. It just started this month, March— or, no, no, no, sorry. Last year. It's 2022, it turns out.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It started March 2021. But yeah, so anytime an entity gives their little, "Hey, in honor of International Women's Thing," it'll come out and say—

Griffin: Yeah, here's an extra commercial with the green M&M in it.

Rachel: Yeah, it'll say "In this organization, women's median hourly pay is 31% lower than men's." [laughs]

Griffin: How do they get that da— how do they get that data?

Rachel: I don't know. That's the thing. I imagine a lot of people have, like, gotten at this account and said, like, "Hey, figure this out." I don't— I don't know how they do. I will say, um, you know, it's— it's usually not the big dogs. This is also a UK account. So, you know, maybe you're not gonna see, like, your beloved Applebee's on here.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um, but it's— I don't know. I really— I enjoy it, especially when the, like, tweets are, like, super, like, pompous. Like, "[fake laughter] Look out for how much we love women!" And then the thing's like—

Griffin: "You love women about 31% less than... "

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It's delicious.

Griffin: Um, speaking of delicious, I'm gonna mispronounce this, but sambal oelek... is that— the chili paste, uh, that is... I was gonna do a whole segment about it, and then I realized, like, I don't actually know a whole lot about— I mean, it is a wild mixture of spices that is used in, like, a lot of different types of

cuisines. Uh, we purchased it— it's vaguely in the sriracha family, but I've been doing a lot of sort of, um, more like East Asian cooking. And, uh, I enjoy this stuff so much. I feel like it adds just the right level of spice to the things I cook. 'Cause I always wrestle with that when I'm cooking something that's like, "Add this spicy ingredient." And I always either, like, way undershoot it or way overshoot it, ruining the dish either way.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I feel like sambal oelek adds, like, just the right amount of— right amount of stuff. And it smells amazing. It's like, chili paste, garlic, uh, fish sauce— there's, like, a ton of stuff in it, and it's all good, baby!

Rachel: It's a very complex flavor.

Griffin: Yeah. You go first this week, I believe.

Rachel: I do.

Griffin: [whispering] What do you got?

Rachel: Um, I am going to say, your city's best park.

Griffin: Your city's best park.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I'm talking about, like, the Central Parks, the— in St. Louis it's Forest Park.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: For you, it was Ritter Park, right?

Griffin: Oh yeah. Accept no substitutes.

Rachel: Uh, and I'm talking today about Austin's Zilker Park.

Griffin: Zilker Park, a phenomenal park.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. I actually, like, had no real sense of how it stacked up to other parks. So, Zilker Park is 350 acres. Central Park is 843 acres, and then Forest Park where I'm from, St. Louis, is 1300 acres.

Griffin: Wow!

Rachel: It's a big 'un.

Griffin: I had no idea Central Park was that big.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I guess that makes sense. You look at Manhattan on a map and it's like—

Rachel: It seems really big when you're in it.

Griffin: —a big chunk, yeah.

Rachel: Like, the way that they have the paths all snaked through, like, you feel transported.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um... I— like, when I think back to my early days in Austin, like, Zilker Park is such a big part of that. Like, not just because of Barton Springs.

Griffin: Barton Springs being the natural spring-fed swimming pool that is right down there.

Rachel: It's always, like, 68 degrees, and it's— it's lovely. It's got, like, a natural rock floor and it's very nice. Uh, also, Austin City Limits music festival, like, that was, like, every fall for me was there. Uh, when we were first in our courtship, we went to Blues on the Green.

Griffin: We did. Who did we— oh my God. We saw Los Lonely Boys.

Rachel: Los Lonely Boys. [laughs]

Griffin: We— and just got, like, wine drunk and just boogied to "How Far is Heaven?" Yeah, that was a great— that was a great night.

Rachel: And then we used to bring, like, a croquet set.

Griffin: Yeah, you could play big croquet down at Zilker Park.

Rachel: And just, like, set it up out there.

Griffin: Yeah, we would set the wickets, like, 100 yards away from each other and then just, like—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —blast shit into the parking lot. Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah. We brought Henry out there, and we have pictures of Henry and our friends' kids playing out on the park.

Griffin: Yeah, it's a great park.

Rachel: Uh...

Griffin: There's not— there's, like, one tree. And it's, like, a huge-ass tree.

Rachel: It's a big 'un, yeah.

Griffin: And then the rest of it is just, like, wide open, lush, green pastures.

Rachel: So that— so that area is called Peace Grove. It's also known as Rock Island. And the tree is, like, 100 inches in circumference and 70 feet tall. It's a pecan tree.

Griffin: Oh. Beautiful.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, but yeah, I was really curious, because I didn't really know the story of Zilker Park.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know?

Griffin: Used to have a train. Doesn't anymore, I don't think

Rachel: It does now! They brought it back.

Griffin: [gasps] The train came back!

Rachel: Yeah, people freaked out so much about the absence of that train, they brought in a new company to, like—

Griffin: It was like a little train for kids.

Rachel: Yeah. We've never been on it.

Griffin: We haven't, no. Uh, scared of trains. Little ones.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Big ones don't scare me. Little ones do.

Rachel: Little ones.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: What are you worried is gonna happen?

Griffin: I'll break it, and it'll go off the tracks, and it'll fall on me and I'll die, and people— people— my obituary'd be like, "This dummy... got squished by the little train. Can you believe it?"

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, okay. So, Zilker Park, named after Andrew Jackson Zilker, who made his millions, or probably not millions, probably made a million—

Griffin: It was like a hundred bucks, but with inflation it's about 300 trillion dollars.

Rachel: Uh, selling ice. [laughs]

Griffin: Great!

Rachel: Back in the day, when you needed somebody to sell you ice.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Uh, so he moved to Texas when he was 18, uh, and he went from foreman to opening his own plant, uh, in ice manufacturing.

Griffin: Ice plant?

Rachel: Ice plant.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Part of it was purchasing property surrounding Barton Springs, uh, used to kind of raise the horse and mules, and then also, you know, make the ice.

Griffin: Yeah. You gotta— you gotta make-a da ice.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, so, um, he also built a pool and amphitheater at the site for the members of his local Elks Club.

Griffin: [scoffs]

Rachel: I have no idea if any of those, like, relics still stand today. But, like, clearly he recognized, like, this is a space where people wanna party. Uh, so in 1917, he donated this land to the city of Austin, with the stipulation that an endowment be produced to create shop and home ec classes in local schools.

Griffin: Hm!

Rachel: Hm.

Griffin: But just for elks.

Rachel: [laughs] So Zilker Park, a lot of stuff on this property. You know there's Barton Springs, which we talked about.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Uh, there's the Zilker Botanical Garden.

Griffin: Beautiful.

Rachel: There's the Austin Nature and Science Center.

Griffin: Cool.

Rachel: Which I do not think we've been to.

Griffin: Never been to it. Henry went once, and he won't take us.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: We're, like, waiting for him to say, "Come with me to the Nature and Science Center."

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, the Umlauf Sculpture Garden. Have you been there?

Griffin: Uh, yes.

Rachel: Okay. I have, but I don't remember if we were there together.

Griffin: Why would we have not been there together?

Rachel: Well, because I don't remember going recently.

Griffin: Hmm. Maybe I haven't gone.

Rachel: I remember I went really early on in living here.

Griffin: I may be thinking of a different sculpture park.

Rachel: That's possible.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It's pretty small.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um, and this is also the home— so, part of the thing when I moved here is I felt like, you know, I had come from the Midwest where everything was pretty old, and I moved to Austin and I felt like everything was brand new. And it kind of bothered me a little bit that there wasn't, like, real, like, history in this town? At least that's what it felt like when I moved here. Um, but Zilker Park is kind of part of that in a way that I didn't really realize. Like, the kite festival has been around since 1936.

Griffin: Holy shit!

Rachel: That's an old kite festival!

Griffin: That is a very old kite festival!

Rachel: Yeah. The Zilker Holiday Tree has been around since 1967. Uh, the Hillside Theater, where we have seen many a production...

Griffin: Uhh, two. Maybe. *Oklahoma* and *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Rachel: *Oklahoma*, yes. [laughs]

Griffin: Name another one.

Rachel: [through laughter] That's two!

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: Uh, been around since 1959.

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: That is a big deal. Like, for a city that feels like the skyline changes 100% every, like, five years, it's cool to have this place in the city that is still hosting some—

Griffin: You just sounded like you were about to spin off on your own little, like, Randy Newman adventure.

Rachel: [laughs quietly]

Griffin: "[singing, Randy Newman impression] The skyline keeps changing."

Rachel: [laughs] You do the worst Randy Newman. [laughs]

Griffin: I do the worst Randy Newman impression. "[singing, poor Randy Newman impression] Every time I look up! The skyline is changing." That doesn't— that's just not what he sounds like.

Rachel: No, not at all.

Griffin: I'm sorry, everybody.

Rachel: [laughs] So, the train that you were mentioning earlier, uh— so, in 1961 was when the little mini train was built.

Griffin: Cute.

Rachel: Uh, it was the Zilker Zephyr, and then went out of commission in 2019. Now it is the Zilker Eagle, as of 2022 it is back.

Griffin: I don't like that name as much.

Rachel: Oh, really?

Griffin: The Zilker Zephyr?

Rachel: Yeah, it's great.

Griffin: Zilker Zephyr.

Rachel: You can't really replicate that, though.

Griffin: No. The Zilker Zip— Zipper.

Rachel: Zanies.

Griffin: The Zing Zilker Zipper.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, and then as I mentioned, the Austin City Limits Music Festival, which has been here since 2002.

Griffin: Yeah. Great music festival. Probably my favorite, like, accessible music festival, in that you go to it and then you— I guess that only works if you live in the city. But you go to it, and then you get to go home.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, I will say, like, Lollapalooza is enormous. And I remember when I used to go when I lived in Chicago, walking from one side to the other side was legitimately tiring. Um, but ACL is pretty easy. Like, you can stand at one end and pretty much see the other end. Uh—

Griffin: Is that Grant Park? What park—

Rachel: Grant Park, yeah.

Griffin: Grant Park.

Rachel: Uh, but yeah, and then they have, like, all, like, local foods in the little food court area.

Griffin: Yeah, it's really nice.

Rachel: Which is fun. Um, they, like, work really hard to try and keep everything kind of regional.

Griffin: A lot of what our friend Evan would call CZs, or chill zones.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, which I appreciate, in my twilight years.

Rachel: A tremendous number of people bring folding chairs, and so much so that they have created folding chair zones that you put your chair, and you can't get any closer.

Griffin: Or FCZs, if you will.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, yeah. I... I love Zilker Park, it turns out!

Griffin: I do too.

Rachel: I—I—

Griffin: I don't love how there's one road that goes all the way around it, and there are red lights... on either end of that loop. And so, like, if you are there during rush hour, you are going to be stuck on this one road with no way to get off of it. We were on it with Henry for close to an hour, I think, just trying to leave.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Zilker Park. And it was— uh, it was pretty terrible.

Rachel: Yeah. They— so, they have had city council meetings about just that, of what the future of Zilker Park looks like. Um, because they're limited by how much parking they can do. Like, they are pretty much— they've maxed parking. And so now the age-old, "What does transportation look like?" question is coming up.

Griffin: If there was a way... [sighs] and this is probably impossible. But for people... to— I know what I just said about small trains, but what if there was, like, a somewhat smaller train that you could go on to get to different places in the city, uh, instead of having to drive a car.

Rachel: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh? How many people could ride this? Like, two or three?

Griffin: No. I mean, it would have to be more than that in order for it to make sense, for it to not be a car.

Rachel: Hmm, okay.

Griffin: I was thinking, like, maybe 10 or 20.

Rachel: 10 or 20, yeah.

Griffin: People. And they could take this somewhat smaller train, instead of having to do a car. And what's good about that? Not as much parking, and good for environment if we make the train not, you know, chuff a bunch of diesel or whatever.

Rachel: Well, I think that's just the plan. I think we just have to wait 15 years, right? [laughs]

Griffin: 15, 20 years for this technology. Yeah, sure. Aw, what am I saying? You can't have a train that runs through the city, 'cause people would just drive into 'em, and not know how to—

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh?

Griffin: Like, a train in the city? Dangerous, much?

Rachel: It's never been done.

Griffin: Right?

Rachel: It's never been done.

Griffin: And this is a skit that I've been working on—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: —to present at the Austin City Council meetings, um, about our lack of a light rail system. And, um...

Rachel: It's coming.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: We paid a bunch of money for it, in the taxes.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah. Fat lot of good our taxes do us, right?

Rachel: Hey.

Griffin: Just goes to—

Rachel: Hey!

Griffin: Hey.

Rachel: This is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Not mine— not—

Rachel: Not Andy Rooney.

Griffin: [nasally] Wah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's Wario. Andy Rooney and Wario aren't the same. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Griffin: Gonna knock out the Gumbotrons by myself here today, 'cause we're recording them later. Here's a message for Maybe, and it's from Rya, who says:

"My beautiful silly Maybe. Every day you remind me that life is wonderful. I can't wait to spend more time doing great goofers, playing *Star Wars* TTRPGs, and listening to Basket yell. Let's kiss now. Also, pee pee poo poo. I win the game forever and always for all time now. Love, your very amazing girlfriend, Rya."

And I know that you all at home are wondering, did they just make Griffin say "Pee pee poo poo"? Is that something that I can do, um, if I manage to get a Jumbotron? And the answer is, apparently, yes. So, um, pee pee poo poo everyone.

Uh, here's another one, for Carly from Shaun, who says:

"I'm so glad you joined my *Wonderful!*-themed *Minecraft* server. I never would've imagined I'd meet the love of my life in a video game about a podcast during a pandemic. But now that I know you, of course that's how we'd meet. I love you so, so much, and I'm so excited to nest with you in your polycule compound in the woods. My heart is so very full."

That's... that's the purest... that's just the purest thing. Um, that's just a wonderful thing. And people say love can't bloom on a battlefield... of... blocks, and creepers, and skeletons. But obviously the opposite is, of course, true.

[music plays]

Jesse: Hi. I'm Jesse Thorn, the founder of Maximum Fun, and I have a special announcement. I'm no longer embarrassed by *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*. You know, for years each new episode of this supposed advice show was a fresh insult. A depraved jumble of erection jokes, ghost humor, and— frankly, this is for the best— very little actionable advice.

But now as they enter their twilight years, I'm as surprised as anyone to admit that... it's gotten kinda good. Justin, Travis, and Griffin's witticisms are more refined, like a humor column in a fancy magazine. And they hardly ever say Bazinga anymore.

So, after you've completely finished to listening to every single one of all of our other shows, why not join the McElroy brothers every week for *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*?

[music and ad end]

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

[music plays]

Adam: Are you ready to binge watch something... old?

Ben: *The Greatest Generation* is a podcast about *Star Trek* by a couple of hosts a little bit embarrassed to even have a *Star Trek* podcast. Hosted by me, Ben Harrison...

Adam: And me, Adam Pranica. we get into the critical, the technical, the science fictional aspects of the show we love, while roasting it and each other at the same time.

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Trek: Voyager, so now is a great time to start watching a new *Star Trek* series with us.

Adam: So subscribe to *The Greatest Generation* on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts, and become a friend of DeSoto today.

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

[music and ad end]

Griffin: Uh, mine's gonna be pretty quick. And you just started drinking my water like it was, like... and this is— I want you to be hydrated. You're the love—you're the love of my life. You just really go for it these days.

Rachel: I used to ask, and you used to make fun of me for asking, so I stopped asking.

Griffin: No, I used to make fun of the way that you would ask me. Okay.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Sidebar. And I love this about you. I love your brain, I love the way it works.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But you used to say, um...

Rachel: Do you remember?

Griffin: Yeah. You would say, "Is there water in your water bottle?" Which then would make me think about the *Tune-Yard* song.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Griffin: And I would sing that back to you like, "[singing] No water in the water bottle!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, but then I would say yes, and then I would say that most people when they would ask that question would say, "Is your water bottle empty?" Or simply, "Can I have some water?"

Rachel: Do you remember my reasoning, though?

Griffin: You didn't want to ask me to drink water that wasn't there? I don't know.

Rachel: Yeah, my thought was if your water bottle was empty, I didn't want to ask for water [through laughter] in a way that would make you have to get up and get it.

Griffin: God.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Our love for each other is too strong.

Rachel: So I thought, "I'll ask if there's water in it, and if he says no, I'll continue to sit here and be thirsty." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, what am I gonna do? If I say no, and you say, "Oh, okay." And then I won't go get water for my— my parched wife?

Rachel: [laughs] I just— I didn't wanna ask in a way— 'cause I recognize, like, I could have my own water. If I were—

Griffin: You could!

Rachel: —forward-thinking, I would also have a water container. But I was asking to have yours, and so I thought, I wanna make sure there's water in it before I ask to have it.

Griffin: You go through the effort to— yeah.

Rachel: This is also like the other day when I asked Griffin to get me [laughs quietly] grapes. And then decided I didn't need water also, because—

Griffin: Wow, this is a whole nother thing!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Where I was like, "Do you want anything from the kitchen?"

And you were like, "Yeah, lemme get some grapes."

And I was like, "Okay. Do you want some water, too?" 'Cause I—[clicks tongue] I keep my head on a swivel, and I notice when you don't have hydration. And I said, "Do you want me to go get you a water too?"

And then Rachel said, "No, I won't need the water. I'll have the grapes."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: As if the juiciness of the grapes— as if you could go "I'm thirsty. Cronch, cronch, cronch, cronch. Now I'm not thirsty anymore, 'cause I made grape juice in my mouth."

Rachel: [laughs] All of this is true.

Griffin: You're not wrong, is the thing! I also love that about you.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: I'm gonna talk about kids' graphic novels. Or...

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: I guess this is a broad— I don't wanna be reductive, right? Like, you know, young adult graphic novels, too. There's— it's a wide range of ages that they are makin' these things for these days. But, uh, Henry has been ravenously reading graphic novels for young kids.

Rachel: It's so perfect, if you think about it. It's not anything that would've occurred to me.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, because Henry is at an age now where he's kind of past the picture book, but he still need—

Griffin: Well past it, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, but he still needs, like, an illustration. You can't just, like, straight up read a chapter book to him.

Griffin: Yeah, man. I remember the first time I was like, "Let's read *Flat Stanley*."

And we read it, and it was like, where's the pictures, *Flat Stanley*?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Where are the pictures? A lot of words, *Flat Stanley*! Don't make me read "[mockingly] Flat Stanley is so flat!" Show me a flat Stanley. You know what I mean?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Anyway, there's, like, a Renaissance of graphic novels for young people that is happening right now, and it is so rad in every way, because I feel like it is, uh, for so many reasons, a more accessible and exciting thing for new readers. Uh, and I have, like— there's— I couldn't find any, like, formal studies about this but, like, a lot of different sort of places like Scholastic and other sort of book publishers wrote sort of extolling the virtues of graphic novels and comic books for young people.

Uh, Henry has been tearin' these down. I think probably where we got started was *Captain Underpants*, where most people do sort of start. I was surprised the first time I read a *Captain Underpants* where I was like, "Oh, this is... this is a graphic novel." It is about, um... you know, a... underpants-wearing bald man fighting a living toilet. And... it's not the erudite sort of, uh— sort of concept.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh?

Griffin: But it is— it is— there's fun stuff in there, and there's also a billion of them. Uh, we also hopped off of that straight into *Dog Man*, which is sort of the spiritual successor, also by Dav Pilkey, creator of *Captain Underpants*. Uh, which Henry is more into *Dog Man*. Uh, I think they're much funnier than *Captain Underpants*, myself, personally. Uh, and from there, like, we have branched out—

basically, you have been bringing home, like, graphic novels from the library, and pretty much every one of them has been a hit.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, there's the *Magic Treehouse* series by Mary Pope Osborn. It's about two kids that find this treehouse in the woods filled with these magic books that when you read them they, like, transport you to the worlds that they depict.

Rachel: Yeah, so the books have been around forever, but they have just now started turning them into graphic novels, and I looked on Amazon, and they're, like— they're staggered. Like, the next one comes out this summer. Like, they're very slowly translating them.

Griffin: Yeah, and that's true of actually a lot of, like, classic literature, too. So there's a lot of, um... I forget the name of it, but they— there was this recent adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*, which is, you know, not— not Henry-age appropriate. But a lot of graphic novel adaptations of heavier books that are much more accessible in this different format.

Uh, we just started reading *Super Sidekicks* by Gavin Aung Than, who— and it's a more sort of straightforward, like, superhero series, but it is, like, really smart in the way that it still tells, like, a really good superhero story, just one that is about kids who are, uh, you know, the— the jilted sidekicks of crappy superheroes, and now they've started their own team. And it's like... I don't know. It's— you know, obviously that's been done with Teen Titans, and *The Runaways* is like that, but *The Runaways* is more YA than Henry is sort of ready for.

Rachel: Yeah. We're just really lucky in that our libraries have a really large graphic novel section, 'cause at this age it's really hard to, like, buy a book knowing that your kid may not like it at all.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Uh, and the library gives me this opportunity to kind of, like, hands-on look through it and see, like, how long is it? Like, what kind of action is happening? Like, what do the illustrations look like? You know, like, is this something he's gonna be into? Uh—

Griffin: The answer has been almost unilaterally yes.

Rachel: You know, it's making me think I should've been a librarian.

Griffin: Uh, yeah, maybe. I'm so glad you finally turned around on libraries, by the way.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You've talked so much shit about libraries, but you're right, they are places where you can just try books out.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: And they're good. Uh, the one that we have really fallen in love with is a series called *Hilo* by Judd Winick, uh, who has done a bunch of stuff in the comics industry. He was also— when I revealed this to you it was a shock. He was on *The Real World*, like an old season. I forget which one.

Rachel: San Francisco.

Griffin: San Francisco. Uh, one of the first seasons, and was, like, kind of a character on there. Uh, and—

Rachel: He was, like— he was a cartoonist, which was wild. Like, you think I would've, like— I don't know. I guess there are a fair number of people named Judd.

Griffin: That is— yes.

Rachel: I wouldn't necessarily have automatically made the connection.

Griffin: Sure. Uh, he— so, *Hilo* is a book about a little blond boy, so, like, of course Henry's into at, as one himself. Uh, who falls to Earth and has, like, all these powers, and then has to, like, befriend these human beings and fend off this, like, robot invasion from his homeworld. And the amount of, like, worldbuilding that has taken place in these books, which we have read all seven of the books that are currently out in the last month, maybe, uh, is so rich and so complex and, like, satisfying for, like, me to read, and also Henry. Like, now at bedtime Henry only wants *Hilo* bedtime stories. He, like, wants to create his own—

Rachel: Ohh! That's great.

Griffin: —*Hilo* fanfiction, which is fucking amazing. Uh, it's, like— it tells a mature story sometimes about, like, grief and loss, and tackles all of these things while also threading the needle of being, like, funny for a five-year-old to read, and exciting for a five-year-old to read. Uh, there's— I mean, there's so many, right? *The Bad Guys* is a big one, *Bone* is one that we have had recommended to us a few times that has been around for a very, very long time.

Um, there's countless, like, graphic novels for, you know, young adults to young kids like Henry's age. Uh, and that's so exciting, because I feel like Henry would read virtually anything in this format. Um, so there's, like, a lot of reasons why— like, there's resources out there explaining why comics and graphic novels are great for kids this age, and should be encouraged and not sort of shunned because they are... funny books.

A big thing is that they are just straight-up easier to read, right? Like, there is less reading involved by the very nature of what they are. Um, and that alone, that they are easier to read, builds self confidence in the kids who are reading them, uh, which is the most important thing for, like, encouraging more reading, or, you know, happiness [laughs] sort of in general.

Rachel: Well, and they're also, like— they're big books. Like, because of the number of illustrations and the amount of, like, real estate words get, like, sometimes I'll be reading about a book, trying to figure out whether or not to purchase it, and I'll see that it's, like, 150 pages, and I'm like, "Okay. That seems like too many pages for a young child."

But then I realized, like, oh. Most of that's illustration.

Griffin: 'Cause it's all dialogue, right? Like, there's no— there's not a bunch of floral descriptive prose, which is where, for, you know, new readers, like, that's where you get in the weeds a little bit. It's all dialogue, in short sentences, that is way, way, way more digestible. And then if there's things that you don't understand in the words that either you are reading or is being read to you, you get the context of the illustration on the page, right? And that helps you feel even more confident in your— your reading and your comprehension of the book, which is awesome for a kid Henry's age who is, like, a new reader. Um, but for kids who are, like, on the autism spectrum, or kids who are dyslexic, like, it's

huge! It's huge. It helps them sort of put together the words and the meaning and everything way easier than it would be in a more sort of, you know, straight up book format.

Uh, and there's a lot of writing about, like, how amazing that is. But it just builds on this cycle, right? Of kids reading these graphic novels and feeling confident in their ability to either read or understand the book that they're reading, which makes them want to read more, which builds more confidence. Uh, and I'm just focusing on the reading side of things. Like, there is, you know— when graphic novels are sort of present in the school, like, it builds art appreciation also, for, you know, kids who enjoy sort of the illustration side of things more than— more than just the writing and reading.

Rachel: Yeah. That was part of why— the one I got recently was, like, *Dot & Jot*, I think?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's about these kids who make their own graphic novel. And I just thought, like, oh man, I hope Henry gets into that. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah! Like, it is a boon to creativity in general. Uh, they— I'm reading off this Scholastic article. "They offer a plethora of learning benefits. Critical thinking, sequencing, imagination, storytelling, and creativity."

Specifically even graphic novels that are wordless. Like, there are graphic novels that are— that are sans writing entirely. That, like, pretty much most kids can pick up and understand the story that they are telling just through the illustrations. And in doing so, like, builds their— their creativity, and capacity to, like— their hunger for more sort of advanced storytelling, and that's fucking amazing! Uh, I did not— I didn't have any of this growing— like, I did not—

Rachel: Well, I feel like when we were kids it was just like, *Maus*.

Griffin: It was *Maus*, yes, which is— which is, like, you know, there's been recent controversy about some school, I think in, like... Jacksonville? Or something. I— I— I'm not gonna credit that to Jacksonville. Maybe they're not the ones who did it. But, uh, that banned *Maus*, which is a graphic novel, uh, about sort of interviews that the author did with his grandfather, I wanna say,

who was a Holocaust survivor. And, uh, it was banned from schools, and then became, like, an Amazon number one best seller.

Um, but yes, there is much more of it happening right now. Like, there are much more people writing it. There are way more publishers publishing these kinds of books. Uh, they are becoming more successful, right? *The Bad Guys* is a book about, um... I don't know if it's explicitly the Big Bad Wolf, but basically, uh, who teams up with, like, a piranha and a venomous spider, and a big snake.

Rachel: There's, like, a shark in there.

Griffin: There's a big shark in there, and they're, like, evil guys, but they wanna be good guys, and those books have— they are very charming, and they've done very well, and they're making an animated movie out of it. Uh, obviously the *Captain Underpants*-verse has been very... successful. [laughs quietly]

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, I just think it's amazing. I think it's amazing. I was not the biggest reader growing up, outside of, you know, *Animorphs*, and *Harry Potter*, and *Goosebumps* and stuff like that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It was always begrudging for me. I would— I would've...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: I would've wrecked these books. I would've read them until the bindings collapsed.

Rachel: [through laughter] Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, and it's so exci— it feels like a whole new ball game now. Like, I do not, uh... it has activated something in Henry that is so amazing to see as his dad. Like, it is so cool to see him— like, story time before bed, we always tell a story together before bed where, like, I ask him what he wants to do a story about, and then we kind of just go back and forth doing pro— like, his capacity to, like, think up new scenarios and ways that those resolve is— is way richer than it ever was before we started reading these books, and I think that's incredible.

Rachel: He has kind of an inherent understanding of, like, how a story is developed. Like, he knows there has to be conflict, you know? There has to be, like, a good guy, and good guy has to be coming up against some... obstacle. And, like, he just kind of, like, absorbed it, you know? Which has been really helpful.

Griffin: As long as that story doesn't involve somebody disobeying their parents and getting caught, or being embarrassed in any way.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which made our attempted viewing of *Turning Red*... somewhat unsuccessful, 'cause there's a lot of that in that film. Delightful, what we've seen so far. Rachel and I are probably gonna have to polish off the back half of that film ourselves, because Henry...

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, it was the same thing with *Coco*, right? Like, it was just like, "Oh, no! He's fighting with his grandma!"

Griffin: And we say that out loud. It makes it sound like we're terrible parents!

Rachel: [through laughter] I know, he's so afraid of the punishment.

Griffin: He's so afraid of disobeying us! But that's— it's not that as much as he's just a very sweet boy who, uh, is very anxious about breaking the law. But, uh, yeah. It's— it's... you know, I'm sure that most parents of kids, you know, around Henry's age, are tuned into this. But if not, like, check out some of the books I've recommended, *Hilo* especially. Like, I am in love with this series.

Rachel: Yeah! I feel like we really kind of found our way to it on our own?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Um, just because I have always, like... it's very rare that, like, two weeks will go by where I don't get Henry new books, just because I'm, like, so excited. And just very recently, really with, like, *Captain Underpants*, I realized, like, oh, I can't— I can't really get him books that aren't novels anymore. Like, he is like— he's in that mindset now.

Griffin: Yeah, if we get him more sort of traditional— I mean, he'll fuck around with, like, a Seuss, a Seussian sort of fun book like that. But, uh, he needs a story, like, a story to be in there.

Rachel: Yeah, so that's why the library has really become, like, a regular thing. I'm putting stuff on hold again, and really I'm in it.

Griffin: I wanna make clear, I'm not self-promoting, 'cause I would never consider *The Adventure Zone* graphic novel series—

Rachel: [through laughter] No!

Griffin: —kid-appropriate. Um...

Rachel: No. Actually, you should look. We— I was exploring whether or not they were an appropriate donation for Austin Bat Cave, and the executive director sent me the Common Sense Media posting?

Griffin: [laughs] Oh, I've never read it!

Rachel: Oh, you—

Griffin: Oh shit. Here. Yeah.

Rachel: I can pull it up.

Griffin: [wheezes]

Rachel: But I was saying, like, "I think it would be appropriate for, you know, maybe 13 or 14-year-olds."

And he said, "Okay." He's like, "Actually, I included a snippet from the Common Sense Media, which is honestly pretty funny." And then it says, "Parents need to know that *Adventure Zone: Here There Be Gerblins* is a fantasy graphic novel based on a popular podcast," blah, blah, blah. "Swearing is frequent, with at least a dozen uses of fart and shit, and less frequent uses of hell, damn, bastard, and goddamn."

Griffin: Wait, does it say fart, or fuck?

Rachel: No, it says F - - T, which I'm assuming is fart. I think it only— you only use the big one in the abra-ca.

Griffin: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's fair.

Rachel: In the abra-ca sense.

Griffin: It has to bleep out fart?

Rachel: I don't know.

Griffin: Common— that doesn't seem like common sense to me!

Rachel: "Violence is mostly directed toward trained wolves, giant spider, and the gerblins: small, annoying, orc-like guys who bleed green blood, until the climactic magical firefight. One character drinks brandy and cocktails." [laughs quietly]

Griffin: I don't even remember that happening. Okay. Um, yeah, that's not as bad as I thought it would be. Uh, anyway, yeah. That's not—

Rachel: Well, that's just the first one.

Griffin: Yeah, they get— they get far raunchier.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Uh, thank you all for listening. 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! It's a great network, great team. Uh, proud to be a part of it. Um... we have stuff, over at mcelroymerch.com that it would be cool if you checked out, and we're bringing MBMBaM and TAZ on tour, uh, throughout the rest of the year. Uh, we're also doing a show— we're doing a show in St. Louis. It's, like, our first stop, I wanna say, in mid-April.

Rachel: Yeah, I think it's on 420.

Griffin: It's on 420, which is very funny. Uh, and I think we're gonna try and do *Wonderful!*

Rachel: Minneapolis is the next stop, right?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Or is it— there's something in between St. Louis and Minneapolis.

Griffin: We're terrible at this.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: If you go to mcelroy.family you can find all the info about the tour. Um, I think we're gonna try and do *Wonderful!* in St. Louis, though, 'cause that's where Rachel is—

Rachel: Yeah, that's the plan! I gotta— I gotta, like, flex in front of my old stomping grounds, you know?

Griffin: Yeah, of course. Um... that's it. Let's— let's— let's stop. Thanks— thank you for listening. Thank you for being here for us, with us. On us? To us?

Rachel: No. No, no, no.

Griffin: No, no, no, no, no.

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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