

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:19] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Michaela Watkins thought she was gonna become an actor-actor. Like a serious actor—Shakespeare and Ibsen and that kind of thing. She got an acting degree. She did regional theater, but it didn't turn out to be *A Doll's House* or *King Lear* that made her career. It was the *Groundlings*.

She was almost 30 when she moved to LA and joined the comedy theater that changed the course of her life and five or eight years later, when she got cast on *Saturday Night Live*, she thought she'd made it, finally. In her late thirties after 20 years in the game. Then, nine months after that, she was out on the street—fired after one season.

But Michaela and her career have only kept growing. She started writing. She sold a pilot. She got parts, then she got bigger parts: prestige TV, movie roles. Now, 25 years into her career, she's still finding new highs. This year she's starring in three movies. Three. The latest of those is *You Hurt My Feelings*, which was written and directed by the great Nicole Holofcener, Watkins Stars alongside Julia Louis-Dreyfus. They play sisters.

It's a movie about honesty, both its upsides and its downsides. Watkins's character, Sarah is married to an actor named Mark—a very worried actor who can't deal with people telling him what they really think of his work. And when Mark gets fired from a part, he's basically ready to quit forever.

So, Sarah knows that as his wife, a big gesture is in order. So, she buys a gift that caters to her husband's greatest passion, one that speaks directly to his heart: a giant bag of socks.

[00:02:17] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:02:18] **Clip:**

**Music:** Upbeat music fades out.

**Mark:** Honey, what is all this? (Cheerfully.) Oh my God.

**Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

**Mark:** (Chuckling.) Wow.

**Sarah:** Those are very special for wicking.

**Mark:** Oh, I love wicking.

**Sarah:** These are, are gonna keep you apparently very warm, if you are cold. But you won't get sweaty. And unlike these, which are specifically for if you like to sweat. And it's also vegan so you can eat them. And then these are made from pork, but these, uh, from eyelashes.

[00:03:07] **Jesse Thorn:** (Laughing.) Michaela Watkins, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you. Thank you for being here.

[00:03:13] **Michaela Watkins:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:03:15] **Jesse Thorn:** I love this movie so much. You're so—you're so great and so funny in it, both.

[00:03:19] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh, thank you! Thank you.

[00:03:20] **Jesse Thorn:** That's as silly as the movie gets, the eyelashes line.

[00:03:23] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, that scene was a little improvised, I think, of the whole movie, that's like the only part where Nicole's like, "Just say whatever."

(They laugh.)

[00:03:34] **Jesse Thorn:** And you're like, "Well, I've got something distressing to say! Pork and eyelashes!" You're like, "Ma'am, you've hired a comedy writer to appear in this."

[00:03:45] **Michaela Watkins:** I mean, you know, when you're talking about what socks are made out of, yeah. I guess. The most ideal sock would be a pork sock.

[00:03:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Were it one of the wonderful, delightful comedies of 15 years ago, you could have just made a whole movie out of you listing specifics of things that the socks were made out of.

[00:04:04] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, but—yeah, no, there's not that attention span like there used to be.

(They laugh.)

[00:04:10] **Jesse Thorn:** For movies that maybe have a little too much improvisation in them. Maybe kind of like 30% too much, but they're great!

[00:04:18] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:04:20] **Jesse Thorn:** It is really wonderful to see you in this movie, and you're so great in it. And like the movie is about, you know, trying to make things and about white lies that we tell ourselves and others.

And I wonder if you were forced to consider lies that you've told yourself. Well, let's start with lies that you've told yourself.

[00:04:48] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh, my whole life is a lie. Like think about the delusion and the things I had to tell myself to cut a path in as an actor and choose that that was the way I was gonna go with absolutely nothing to fall back on.

[00:05:05] **Jesse Thorn:** What specifically is the lie that you had to—like, did you convince yourself you were good?

[00:05:11] **Michaela Watkins:** I think, you know, it's like a tug of war between—you've got something to say. You're unique enough. You can do this. That thing that that person's doing, you can do that. That's very—that comes with ease for you. With, um, (chuckles) “Why would anybody wanna look at you or listen to you?” Like those two things are always happening simultaneously.

And then you get to a point where you just go: I don't care. I don't care. You know, it's like maybe they don't wanna look or listen to me, but somebody keeps hiring me. (Chuckles.) So, that's on them, you know?

[00:05:47] **Jesse Thorn:** But you were an actor-actor. So—

[00:05:51] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. I was a very bad actor-actor. (Laughs.)

[00:05:57] **Jesse Thorn:** I think you were probably good. One of the things about being an actor-actor is that—especially when you're learning acting—people are basically openly contemptuous of being funny. Like, they think that's bad.

[00:06:15] **Michaela Watkins:** My institution that I went to, the conservatory that I went to at Boston University—I didn't get any points for cracking a room up. I got points for walking and talking the way that a leading actress should.

So, there was no points for unique voice at all. And I—so, that was such a fixed mindset for me that I was never gonna be a real actor. And it took me years to get over that.

[00:06:49] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you want to be a lead actress?

[00:06:51] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. I wanted to, you know—I grew up—I grew up in Syracuse, New York. We didn't have—nobody was shooting a film in Syracuse.

[00:06:58] **Jesse Thorn:** It was only supporting players?

(Michaela laughs.)

It was all character work.

[00:07:03] **Michaela Watkins:** Like we didn't—we didn't turn out a lot—let's say we didn't turn out a lot of famous actors, but I always went to Syracuse Stage, so my

entryway into acting was to watch sort of classical theater. And that was what I thought acting was. And then of course, movies and television.

But I thought that's for people who grow up in Los Angeles. That's a—that's a California thing. But here in the freezing Northeast we go—we do summer stock. We do, you know, um, like a LORT A or LORT B theater would. You know, doing regional theater would just be the dream. That's what I thought.

[00:07:42] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, that is a real job. That's one of the neat things about it.

[00:07:46] **Michaela Watkins:** It is, but what nobody ever tells you is that in classical theater—which was mostly all that was happening in that kind of realm. It wasn't—they weren't really dipping their toe into a lot of modern stuff so much. You know? They would have like a repertoire that was a lot—like it always had a Shakespeare play, an August Wilson play, a one woman show, and a—like whatever contemporary play had just left Broadway and was kind of going around at that time, like *Closer* or something, you know? You know what I'm saying?

And uh—and then the fifth one would be like a Molière. Like some other kind of classic but not Shakespearean. And those plays, if you look at them, they're so inequitable. Because it was always ten men and like two or three women. And my chances of getting into that lead pulpit position was slim, especially when I didn't look, talk, move, and you know, stand like a leading lady.

[00:08:49] **Jesse Thorn:** And there's so few where the women get to be funny.

[00:08:53] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. It's true-ish. I mean, yeah, it's very—yeah. Yeah.

[00:09:02] **Jesse Thorn:** But you don't think you could—would you wanna go do *Macbeth* or something?

[00:09:09] **Michaela Watkins:** I mean, yes, I would love to play Lady M. I think that would be great. You know, I'm not longing to; I'll be honest. You know, I did this reading one night. Well, it was like a staged reading where we all, you know, carried our scripts. But it was to raise money for the Shakespeare company here. And it was with Tom Hanks and Martin Short, and Christina Applegate, and Hamish Linklater. Do you know who he is?

[00:09:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah.

[00:09:37] **Michaela Watkins:** He—we did much *Ado*. It rolled so effortlessly off his tongue that I just thought, "I'm not doing Shakespeare unless it looks like that." It was like a Shakespeare massage, where everything was crystal clear and it didn't feel like he was pushing in any way or trying—or arch or trying to adjust his voice to make it sound like, "I'm an American person." Like even as an American person doing Shakespeare, which is rare, that it just felt like it lived in his tongue.

And I know who his mother is because she's, you know, the prominent voice coach for all theater, basically, Christina Linklater. But he's unbelievable. And I just don't really wanna do it unless I can be as like close to that kind of thing.

[00:10:30] **Jesse Thorn:** But do you actually want that? Or do you—or is it good that you figured out that that isn't what it takes?

[00:10:39] **Michaela Watkins:** I want that. I want that. I'll tell you what I want. What I really, really want is to do a—(Laughs.)

[00:10:52] **Jesse Thorn:** That was really funny. (Laughs.)

[00:10:56] **Michaela Watkins:** I just really want to do a period biopic, a period piece biopic where I have to completely, fully immerse myself in dialect and time period and go all the way in on that.

[00:11:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you want to—

[00:11:15] **Michaela Watkins:** I do so much contemporary stuff, you know? And I just wanna abandon my, my sort of Syracuse flat As. And I just really, really wanna just grab by the, you know, shoulders something that's like—someone who's so—that I can emotionally and psychologically get into them, but whose entire live life existence is outside of my parameters.

[00:11:41] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got so much more with the great Michaela Watkins. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:11:49] **Music:** Thumpy rock music.

[00:11:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I am talking with Michaela Watkins. She's one of the stars of the new movie, *You Hurt My Feelings*, which was written and directed by Nicole Holofcener. Watkins and Julia Louis-Dreyfuss play sisters in the film. It is in theaters now. It is hilarious.

Okay, so we started with the lies that you told yourself, which was that you could do this. Which is actually true because you have done it.

[00:12:23] **Michaela Watkins:** Thank you. Yeah, it's surreal. Like I can't believe it. (Laughs.)

[00:12:31] **Jesse Thorn:** The last time you were here was shortly after you had been fired from *Saturday Night Live*, and—you know, you were already in your mid to late 30s when you were on *Saturday Night Live*. You were like 36 or 37 or something like that?

[00:12:47] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, I turned 37 while I was there.

[00:12:50] **Jesse Thorn:** So, that could have been like—and I mean, it's an amazing achievement.

[00:12:59] **Michaela Watkins:** It definitely—I would say I was on my knees grateful that I got to acknowledge and check that box, 'cause it was a dream. And I can't—I still can't believe that I am one of few people that get to have lived that. It was short-lived but lived. The fact that I don't in any way feel like I identify myself as somebody who was on *SNL* is so fascinating to me, because the fact that I don't feel like that's the most interesting part of my career is fascinating to me.

But I am floored that I get to say that I was on it. (Chuckling.) It was really--I mean there will never be another call like that call, I don't imagine again. And I'm doing way more interesting stuff now, but there will never be that—a phone call, like that phone call ever again.

[00:14:00] **Jesse Thorn:** The first person you told was Julia Louis-Dreyfus, right?

[00:14:04] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. Yeah. I was shooting her show, *New Adventures of Old Christine*, and it was during a scene that I was not in. And I was running back and got my phone call, talked to Lauren, and walked out for the curtain call and I was like hit by lightning. I was just dumbstruck, and I was in shock. And I walked onto the stage, and she hugged me like, “Hey!” And then looked at me like I saw a ghost.

And I said, “I just got *SNL*.”

And she was like, “What?!”

(They laugh.)

She doesn't even remember this. I had to remind her. And I was like—the first thing she says is, “We're going to get drinks.”

And I was like, “I gotta get on a 5AM flight, but okay.”

[00:14:48] **Jesse Thorn:** By the time you get you got fired, did you have enough actor muscles to feel like not getting something or getting fired from something isn't necessarily because you were bad?

[00:15:07] **Michaela Watkins:** I will say that there was a nice sort of—I mean, to be fired is one thing. To be so publicly fired on such a scale where it's like it was just—my friend called and said, “Hey, you're trending on Twitter,” and I just wanted to crawl under my bed. I just thought, wow, I'm known right now for losing a job. This is crazy.

[00:15:31] **Jesse Thorn:** There's like people who get fired from 200 million movies where no one notices.

[00:15:36] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, nobody notices. Yeah. And so, it was—so, I was embarrassed, you know. And I've said this before, but I felt like if people watched the show and thought I was funny, they would be like, oh, she must be an

(censor beep). And if people didn't watch the show, they must have—they thought, oh, she must not have been very funny.

And so, I just felt embarrassed, and I didn't think either of those were true. So, I guess it was hugely growthful. I wish it didn't have to be so awfully painful, but it was very growthful and it was very humbling. I went back to Groundlings, and I took a class in song improv. (Laughing.) Like talk about fall from an ivory tower! It was just like back at my theatre, taking a class and good old song improv, picking out—you know—clothes at Goodwill to wear for sketches again. You know.

[00:16:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Did that feel good, or did it feel like you were a—you know, a quarterback who got cut from the JUCO team and was back at high school wearing his letterman jacket?

[00:16:44] **Michaela Watkins:** Well, I'm proud of the Groundlings. I love the Groundlings. I don't think anybody's too good for the Groundlings, that's for sure. I think the one line I wasn't willing to cross was I couldn't go back to waiting tables. Like that was where I thought, no, I can't. That'll be—that'll crater me right now, just 'cause there was so much celebration at my restaurant, you know, when I got this job and, you know, got to like quit. (Laughs.)

I didn't—I didn't even really quit at that point. I'd gone down to like one night a week, 'cause I was doing other jobs. I was doing, you know—like I said, I was on *Old Christine*. I was doing other jobs. I just liked the restaurant. I liked the people. (Chuckles.) It was like a family, you know.

But there was such a warmth when I left the show. Like there was such a—there was a nice outpouring of support from people who were like, “Oh, that's where—” You know, and from people who worked at *SNL*, like the cast and writers were so warm. So, I got a little cushion out the door, you know. Everybody was like, “This is so weird.”

[00:17:46] **Jesse Thorn:** But I mean, I don't think there's a lot of—like many people have been fired from *Saturday Night Live*: the most famous job in comedy to get fired from. But it seems so different to me to do that when you're not only a grown up but also have an entire real chunk of career behind you. Like, you know, you had 15 years as a professional actor behind you before you were on *Saturday Night*—as a professional and semiprofessional actor.

[00:18:21] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, I was gonna say commercials. A lot of commercials.

[00:18:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, that counts! That counts for sure. But you know, you weren't 22. And so, nobody can be like, “Well, you've just started. You're just taking your first steps down the road. Who knows what the future will hold?” So, you had to decide. You had to pick like, “Okay, but this actually means the good thing, which is that I got cast on this show and people thought I was funny there.” Not the bad thing, which is (blows a raspberry).

[00:18:52] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah, it's interesting. It was—it did make me feel like I got a little street cred for sure, you know, coming off that show. Especially if people had watched it, you know. It was just the confusion, you know? It was a mass confusion because I didn't understand why they didn't want me back, you know? And I don't have to, and I never will. I can guess, but I don't know, and I don't really genuinely care anymore. I can't say I do. But—

[00:19:20] **Jesse Thorn:** Was it going back to the Groundlings that made you feel like there was a path forward or was it something else?

[00:19:28] **Michaela Watkins:** Groundlings was where I went to sort of lick my wounds. You know? (Laughs.) It was with my favorite comedic people, collaborative, warm family, like got-your-back comedy people. And—

[00:19:40] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there a day at the Groundlings when you were backstage at the Groundlings and somebody came in there like, (whispering) “The casting people from *SNL* are here tonight! So—”

[00:19:48] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. That did happen after I was let go from *SNL*. Yeah. Um, Seth Myers showed up and I was like, “Oh my god.” Because he was the head writer when I was there, and I just was like, “This is so embarrassing. I don't—I don't—like this just feels weird. It feels weird.”

That was such a—that's so funny that you bring that up, 'cause I had totally forgotten about that. I just felt so creepy and weird. And I felt like if I didn't have a good show that Seth would be like, “Yeah. See? We knew what we were doing.” But Seth has always been so, so nice, so supportive. He's a great guy. I just adore that guy.

[00:20:29] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you say hello to him?

[00:20:30] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh yeah. I said hello. He's so nice. And that was the thing. He was just so nice, and it made me miss him even more. And yeah, it was just weird. It's all weird.

[00:20:39] **Jesse Thorn:** So, what convinced you that there was something besides licking your wounds?

[00:20:45] **Michaela Watkins:** So, I got together with Damon Jones, who was another Groundlings member, and he was kind of bummed out. I think he was going through a breakup or something. The two of us were these two sad sacks sitting backstage of a show. And he was like, “Do you wanna write, try to write something?”

And I was like, “I guess, I don't know. You wanna throw me off a cliff? That's fun too.” And, uh, we started getting together and banged out this idea. We were both really interested in—(chuckles) this is sounds so random—the broken justice system that is, you know, our country's justice system. And—

[00:21:21] **Jesse Thorn:** That's what I imagine people are talking about backstage at the Groundlings.

[00:21:26] **Michaela Watkins:** (Laughs.) And so, we wanted to write a comedy about, you know, public defenders and just sort of highlighting what a hellscape it is for them. And I have a sketch that would have been a good kickoff for a pilot like that. So, we incorporated that and then, you know, that gave us our lead character.

It was—you know, it was something that I would ostensibly play. And then we sold it, and we sold it to ABC. And then, it ended up going for a whole season at USA and John Enbom from *Party Down* was our showrunner, and we had all these great directors. And it only went one season as well, you know, but I didn't even know I could write. So, it was so buoying. And I had gotten—I was on a sitcom at that point, called *Trophy Wife*, that also went one season. Wow! I got a real—I was on a real roll there of one season situations. And then I broke the spell finally when I did *Casual*.

[00:22:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, it seems like one of the differences with writing something—other than the fact that it was, you know, full on gainful employment, which you were looking for, is agency. Right?

[00:22:49] **Michaela Watkins:** Yes, exactly. Exactly. When you feel like you have no power in this town, go write something for yourself. And that's what the groundings did give me in spades, because we wrote so many sketches, so many sketches, that I knew how to write five-minute sketches; why couldn't I write a 28-minute sketch, basically? And why can't I turn that sketch into a, you know, arc—a whole arc of a story. So, nothing could prepare me for this business like the Groundlings did. I know I'm waxing so sweetly about them, but I don't think I ever worked as hard as I did there.

I don't think I ever expanded my repertoire as much as when I was there. And you know, you had to play straight people, silly people. You know, you wanted to get cast in other people's sketches. So, you were constantly pivoting, and you had to show—you had to stretch yourself and stretch yourself. And when you didn't think you could stretch yourself anymore, you would just be sitting in your apartment and start talking in a voice that was a higher register. And then you would think, oh, is there something there? No there's not. Or a lower register! (Chuckling.) Or, you know—or put on a mustache or whatever it is.

And all of a sudden, you start to find real people that are outrageous, but they're real.

[00:24:09] **Jesse Thorn:** But you found a way to. Have control over your work in a way that actors don't always get to have.

[00:24:21] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. Again, I mean, I think if you can write for—if you know your comedic voice and you can write to it—I didn't get to play that part, because I was on another show. So, if you know your comedic voice and you can put it on paper and then you are totally in the driver's seat, even if it—even if nobody's buying it. Even if when you're sitting with somebody else and you're drawing up a world and it's your world and nobody else can, you know, take it from you? That filled me up big time. It filled both of us. I feel like we both crawled out of a depression during that process.

[00:24:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Are you critical of your own work or do you think that it's good?

[00:25:04] **Michaela Watkins:** I'm critical of my own work and sometimes I'm—sometimes I think something was good and I—like sometimes I'll revisit something that I did a long time ago and I remember I watched it a long time ago with such a critical eye. And I'll watch it later and go like, “I was good! That was good. That was like very imaginative! I don't know that I would make that same choice right now.”

I think I was really a creative person at that time, and I always look back and think, “Oh, but I didn't know then what I know now! So now I'm—I must be a better actor now.” And I look back sometimes and I'm like, “No, no, no. You were—you were maybe in some ways better then.” I don't know. (Laughs.)

[00:25:43] **Jesse Thorn:** What about looking at yourself? How do you feel about that?

[00:25:46] **Michaela Watkins:** I don't have vanity over that (censor beep). I just can't. I—you know, I just—life's too short. I get to be alive. I'm gonna age. My teeth are crooked, my nose is wonky. That's fine. It's like me. That's me.

And if you don't want that, if you want perfection, go get perfection. But if you want a real person, that's me. And I do not—I do not get hung up on my face and my stuff. I mean, sometimes, yeah. Okay. Sometimes, you know, as I age—right?—my body changes and I'm like, oh, look at that. You know? I see age in myself, but I don't look at it with contempt.

I look at it with just like, (chuckling) wow, okay. Alright, here we go.

[00:26:27] **Jesse Thorn:** Folks, it's the question on the tip of everyone's tongue. What does Michaela Watkins ask her pet psychic? Well, you won't have to wait long for the answer, because we're bringing it to you after the break. Hard-hitting news on *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

[00:26:47] **Promo:**

(Sci-fi beeping.)

**Music:** Cheerful synth.

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(Sci-fi beeping. Music ends.)

[00:27:31] **Music:** Bouncy, cheerful synth.

[00:27:35] **Jesse Thorn:** This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Michaela Watkins. She's starring in three new movies: *You Hurt My Feelings*, *Paint*, and *The Young Wife*.

Are you able to, in the moment, celebrate wins? Like, do you come off stage or get into your trailer and be like, yeah, I kicked butt on that one?

[00:28:00] **Michaela Watkins:** I just talked to a pet psychic last weekend—and I'm going somewhere with this—which is, I don't know how we got off the dogs so quickly, because I really wanted to talk about my dogs. But she said, (nasally) “You know what?” She was hilarious. She's like, (nasally) “You know, you're the kind of person that could—” She didn't know what I do.

She doesn't know what I look like. She doesn't know my name. She goes, “You know, you're the kind of person who could win an award, and you might! You might win an award. You could, but you know what? 90 minutes later, you're gonna be bummed out again.” (Laughing.)

And I go, “What?!” And I thought—

She goes, “Well, you'll just find some reason why you don't deserve that award.”

And I thought, oh, that—okay. There might be some truth in that.

[00:28:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Your pet psychic is a character from a '70s sitcom?! (Laughs.)

[00:28:41] **Michaela Watkins:** Swear to God. She's like Fran.

[00:28:43] **Jesse Thorn:** Like a grumpy secretary type?

[00:28:49] **Michaela Watkins:** (Laughs.) I was gonna say she's Fran Lebowitz, is my pet psychic.

[00:28:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Oh my god. If Fran Lebowitz was a pet psychic?!

[00:28:55] **Michaela Watkins:** That—wouldn't that be something?

[00:28:55] **Jesse Thorn:** I am in!

[00:28:56] **Michaela Watkins:** I know! How in would you be? I would be all the way in.

[00:29:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Why did you go to a pet psychic?

[00:29:03] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh, my dogs are, um, (chuckles) complicated.

[00:29:07] **Jesse Thorn:** They're trying to make some tough decisions about their future and love lives?

[00:29:12] **Michaela Watkins:** (Laughs.) Well, you know, one of them hates men and dogs, and the other one hates women and children. So, it's—you know. They're an interesting bag of wax.

[00:29:22] **Jesse Thorn:** And this is a psychic that is specifically a pet psychic? Or a psychic—a broader psychic who does pet work?

[00:29:28] **Michaela Watkins:** You know, I was hoping she would be specifically a pet psychic, as was advertised by my friend who convinced me to call her. Here's the thing about pet psychics. (Stammering.) Fool me once! Right?

(Jesse laughs.)

But this was my—this was my second—my second pet psychic! And the first pet psychic, I got off the phone and I thought, "Wow, that was fascinating! Everything he said was perfect." And then, I realized that every single thing he said could be pulled from my Instagram. So, I just thought, "Either this person is incredible, or they are just literally scrolling through my Instagram."

The second person just wanted to talk about me and how I—I don't know. Yeah. (Chuckling.) Like, was like, "You know, dogs are a mirror of you. What are you so stressed about?"

And I was like, “I’m not! I’m not. I’m working on it. I’m working on stress.” I don’t think of myself super stressed. I know I always play high-strung people, but that’s ‘cause it’s fun.

[00:30:40] **Jesse Thorn:** So, I—before we went on, I mentioned to you that our booker, Mara Davis, had pitched you as a guest on this show. I was thrilled. And looking for an opportunity to talk to you again.

[00:30:53] **Michaela Watkins:** Thank you.

[00:30:54] **Jesse Thorn:** But Mara pitched you and she said, “I think—I think that Michaela Watkins is having a real moment.” And I’m not—that sounded like I was making fun of Mara. Mara’s great. But, um—

[00:31:11] **Michaela Watkins:** She sounds great to me!

[00:31:13] **Jesse Thorn:** But it must be neat to have a real moment! Like you’ve earned it. You’ve had other—plenty of moments; you’ve had a claim. But like here you are in multiple movies. You got to be really the co-lead alongside Julie Louie-Dreyfus in a Nicole Holofcener movie, which is about as good as it gets in showbusiness. You know what I mean?

[00:31:34] **Michaela Watkins:** It’s—I can’t complain. I’m lucky. I’m so lucky. I can’t believe it. I told you; I can’t believe it! Um, I know that I am somebody who has to kind of hit every rung of the ladder, but I am—it’s been—it’s a nice journey, you know? It really is.

And it feels like—it feels like it’s blooming in exactly a way that is the right tempo for me. You know, I was—I think I could be too overwhelmed if—I don’t know. I think now I’m ready to do the next *Mission Impossible* movie.

(They laugh.)

[00:32:16] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you think that you’re ready to—so Jeannie Berlin is in the movie. She plays your mom.

[00:32:23] **Michaela Watkins:** That’s right.

[00:32:24] **Jesse Thorn:** And she’s a level of hilarious in this movie. Also, a wonderful actor.

[00:32:30] **Michaela Watkins:** I know. Wonderful actor. And so similar to my mother.

[00:32:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Really?

[00:32:35] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. In this movie.

[00:32:36] **Jesse Thorn:** So, this is the question I was gonna ask you. Jeannie Berlin’s out here in her 70s, just destroying, just laying waste to this movie. She’s so fantastic.

[00:32:46] **Michaela Watkins:** So great.

[00:32:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Like you're doing great at middle-aged, but are you ready to be an old lady actor?

[00:32:55] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh yeah, I've been ready to be that since I was—since I was eight.

(Jesse laughs.)

I'm not kidding!

[00:33:01] **Jesse Thorn:** I just feel like you're gonna be really good at it!

[00:33:03] **Michaela Watkins:** Thank you. I wonder if I'm gonna be—if I'm gonna seem like a young, spry 80-year-old, because I've been an 80-year-old my whole life.

I mean Edie Patterson. Do you know who she is?

(Jesse confirms.)

Incredible actress and comedian. And she always—

[00:33:18] **Jesse Thorn:** So funny.

[00:33:19] **Michaela Watkins:** So funny. And she always said to me— She used to describe me in my early 30s. She'd say, "Michaela is a 75-year-old in a hot girl's body." (Laughs.) I was always like, that is the nicest compliment! 'Cause I—that is where I—that's my happy place, is like old—is like older lady humor. Old lady humor. That is just—I read scripts sometimes and I'm like, can I play the 85-year-old? Because that's an awesome part. Yeah.

[00:33:52] **Jesse Thorn:** ready to like talk mess, point at people?

[00:33:56] **Michaela Watkins:** Not give a (censor beep). Yeah. That'll be great. That'll be great.

[00:34:04] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm ready for my walk-around-with-my-hands-behind-my-back, like clasped behind my back while I look at things.

[00:34:09] **Michaela Watkins:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

[00:34:11] **Jesse Thorn:** That's my main thing that I'm excited about.

[00:34:13] **Michaela Watkins:** Yeah. My husband walks like that sometimes. Always has. And I hated it. I was like, "He's a great guy. I just hate his walk."

(They laugh.)

And then I realized like that's a guy who's happy! Like he's a happy guy. He's totally great with himself. He doesn't wish he was anywhere but where he is right now.

And then, I just realized like that was what I was talking about when I say I had to work on myself, is I had to stop projecting into the future and the past. You know? I just like—look at this guy. He's just so present and he made me so present and it—I just really appreciated him. It didn't matter how he walked; it's just he was a happy guy.

[00:35:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Michaela Watkins, I'm so grateful to you for coming back and being here. And the movie's so great, and you're wonderful in it.

[00:35:08] **Michaela Watkins:** Thank you. Thank you so much.

[00:35:11] **Jesse Thorn:** Michaela Watkins! Always a delight. Love her so much. Catch her in the new film, *You Hurt My Feelings*. It is a classic Nicole Holofcener joint. Funny, sharp, insightful, in theaters now.

[00:35:24] **Music:** Bright, brassy music.

[00:35:26] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I made it up to the Southern Sierras this past weekend. And, uh, hey. It's been rough up there. Climate change is real, folks. Uh, some catastrophic snowstorms and some catastrophic fires. But the people up there in Tulare County are hanging in there. So, shout out to Sequoia Crest and all the Southern Sierras.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in those places and follow us. Please share our interviews. Tell a friend, please. If you thought something was great on this show, send it to your uncle. Put it on your Tumblr. Got an anime Tumblr? Put it on there. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

[00:36:50] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.