

Wonderful! 44: Hot Dog Destroyer

Published July 25th, 2018

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Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: The podcast, the adaptation of the movie, of the novel, based on a book.

Rachel: [laughs] No, I love it. Keep it. Keep it going.

Griffin: No, it stinks.

Rachel: Let's keep going with that.

Griffin: I've run out of intro juice.

Rachel: Oh, no.

Griffin: I know. It's like the last—

Rachel: You know, you could toss it to me every once in a while.

Griffin: Okay, let's start over.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Hey, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: And this is *Wonderful!*

Rachel: Hey, it's, it's a hot one.

Griffin: Yeah, all right. Yeah. Shit, why didn't I think of it's a hot one?

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: 'Cause then you could— There's so many directions you could go with that.

Rachel: Right?

Griffin: You could be like, "Hot enough for you?" You could be like— like [singing] "Like somethin' somethin' in the midday sun".

Rachel: Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Griffin: Is 2018 the year of Carlos Santana and Rob Thomas's "Smooth"? Do you think 2018 is the year of "Smooth"?

Rachel: Like, is, is it coming back?

Griffin: Do you think it is the year of "Smooth"?

Rachel: If they were gonna remake that song with two different artists, who would they be?

Griffin: [makes a noise of intense thought] Rob Thomas—

Rachel: Okay, let's keep him [laughs]

Griffin: And Carlos Santana.

Rachel: Okay. [laughs] I mean, why mess with perfection?

Griffin: Yeah, that— And here's why I picked them.

Rachel: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: As sort of my fantasy draft for—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — remaking “Smooth” by Rob Thomas and Carlos Santana.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: Is because they know the song pretty good already.

Rachel: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Griffin: And if I'm looking at people's résumé for this job I'm hiring for, which is to remake “Smooth” by Carlos Santana and Rob Thomas.

Rachel: Uh-huh. [chuckles]

Griffin: Is I want you to have some experience, at least five years experience, making “Smooth”.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: By Robert Thomas and Carlos Santana.

Rachel: Uh-huh. No, I like that. I like it.

Griffin: I can't think of too many other people who did it, so.

Rachel: See, that was a good intro.

Griffin: You're right and that was all you.

Rachel: That was all me.

Griffin: You brought that— that— that four-seamer right over the plate.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: You got any small wonders, though, for me?

Rachel: I do actually. I wanted to mention the thing we watched this week, which was *Nanette* by Hannah Gadsby.

Griffin: Yes. It was very good.

Rachel: It was very, very good. We knew literally nothing going into it, other than it was supposed to be good, and it was very, very good.

Griffin: And it had— it had been written about a lot of times and it is, not immediately apparent why— I almost said it's immediately appar— it's not.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: But by the time you hit the end of it, you're like "Oh, okay. That's why everybody's talking about this."

Rachel: Yeah. You think, like, you're just watching a comedy special. And that, it is that.

Griffin: It is that. And it's just extremely funny.

Rachel: And much, much more.

Griffin: And so much more.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Go watch it. It's on Netflix. I wanted to say queso. Just had some downstairs.

Rachel: Ooh.

Griffin: Pretty good. It's basically like hot cheese that's in a liquid form.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And it's pretty good.

Rachel: Now, if you were gonna remake queso.

Griffin: Mmm...

Rachel: Who would you put?

Griffin: Rob Thomas melted down. His bones.

Rachel: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: I had another one, but I cannot remember for the life of me. We finished *Great British Bake-Off* season five.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: I don't know why that took so long to go stateside, but, you know, it was a good one. There's nothing, there are very few shows that kind of, like, fill that gap—

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: — in my life. I did not, I remember when we watched, like, the first three seasons in a row, back when we, like, discovered the show. That's when I, like, bought I mixer and a big board and a rolling pin. I was like, "I'm gonna bake." And I baked.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: And now I did not really have that with this. And I just was trying to think what the difference was. And it's approximately one child.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: It's about one son. It's about one son's worth of just sort of constantly, low level exhaustion.

Rachel: That's true. Griffin and I tend to prioritize our free time with sleeping.

Griffin: Sleeping and eating queso while watching *American Ninja Warrior*.

Rachel: Yes [chuckles]

Griffin: I'm not ashamed of it. It's what we were literally doing before we walked up the stairs. Anyway. I think I go first this week.

Rachel: You do.

Griffin: And I wanna talk about starting out a YouTube channel, because this is what I spend, apparently...

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: ... 90% of my day doing, 90% of my free time that is not, dedicated to sleep or *American Ninja Warrior* cheese party... is watching YouTube. And there's a YouTube channel I have discovered, because it just showed up in my sidebar, which I showed Rachel yesterday is fucking buck wild.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: It's like videos of, like, these guys who throw huge darts into, like, old printers from 45 meters up.

Rachel: And Griffin tried to present this to me as if this was some sort of fault of YouTube.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: It was like, "Look at this garbage." And I was like—

Griffin: It's like that—

Rachel: "No, you made that."

Griffin: It's a history of speed running and, like, *Destiny* guides. And then it's like, so much Bon Appetit, it's wild. Anyway, the one I wanna talk about is a YouTube channel called Kiwami Japan, and this channel is very good.

It's a channel where one, very dedicated, very inspired craftsman, he... who goes under the username Kiwami Japan, has created this channel that is entirely dedicated to kitchen knives. I've shown you, I think one, if not two of these videos. We may have watched it in bed the other day.

And it's all about kitchen knives. Some of the videos are about, like, restoring these old, like, fancy Japanese kitchen knives to like their former glory, just by like polishing them up.

Rachel: Oh, this is the one where they make knives, too?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They have stuff where they take like a \$1 knife and then like polish it with very expensive whetstones until it's like— it can cut through space and time. But the thing that they are like— I find those videos, like, those sort of nov— less novel videos very satisfying in a way that I can't really explain.

Like, I'm really into sort of craftiness these days, but like practical craftiness. I'm also into... bad craftiness. Like the videos we watch on Facebook when we wanna have a quick laugh before we go to sleep.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: There's one, y'all. And it's like hot tips.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: And this woman walks into an apartment with a guy and she has a hole in her black sock and she looks all embarrassed and then the video, it says, "Here's what you should do." And she pulls out a little black Sharpie

and just colors in her toe so it matches the sock. It's the wildest fucking thing—

Rachel: Do we wanna talk about the hot dog destroyer?

Griffin: We have to have talked about the hot dog destroyer.

Rachel: I'm not sure that we did.

Griffin: Somebody takes a big...

Rachel: Like, a syringe.

Griffin: Syringe, cuts off the front of it, pokes holes in the front of it, and then sort of does a crisscross of wires and then they put the plunger back in the syringe. And then they put a hotdog in that sort of channel.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: And push it through these wir— this wire grid.

Rachel: Acting as if it is a commonplace need to have a shredded hot dog.

Griffin: It's wild to me. It was like a—

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: It was like a trap in one of the *Cube* movies.

Rachel: And the amount of time they like burn little holes—

Griffin: It's—

Rachel: — one by one into this syringe. And very carefully place little wires through it.

Griffin: There's no way you save yourself more time than cutting up hotdogs for the rest of your life.

Rachel: Exactly.

Griffin: Anyway.

Rachel: Anyway.

Griffin: What they also do on this channel is they make knives. And when I say make knives, I mean they make them out of things that aren't knife stuff. I'm talking about things like wood and ice. That's wild, right. Oh, a wood knife? They actually make it really, really sharp. And then they can, you know, cut— cut up foods in the kitchen.

All of the things are very, very practical. But that is like the—that is the tip of the substance iceberg. He's made knives out of cardboard before. Out of plastic bottles. his latest episode he makes a knife out of underwear.

Rachel: Yeah, that's the one I watched.

Griffin: He makes— he makes knives out of food, which is cyclical in a way that I really appreciate. Things like chocolate, and like gummy candy, and rice.

Rachel: Gummy? Oh, I wanna see the gummy one.

Griffin: The gummy candy one is very, very good. And if you're wondering how like this is possible, most of the videos involved him like sort of reducing these materials down to some sort of pliable state, like stewing the cardboard in water.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And then kind of, like, pressing it together into one, like, solid block and then dehydrating and drying it out for like a super long time until it becomes firm. And then, you know, cutting that into a knife shape and then using whetstones, turning it into a knife.

And that's kind of the process he goes through and it's really satisfying to have watched enough of his videos to like watch him make a knife out of gummy candy and be like, "Okay, so next he's gonna pop it in the old dehydrator. Yup, here we go."

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: Like, knowing his— this weird craft that this guy does. These videos though, they aren't just like DIY overviews. They are— there's, like, a lot of humor and, like, personality in them, too. He never speaks. Never shows his face. It's just him doing stuff in the kitchen.

So, like for instance, there's an episode, a fairly recent one, I think, where he makes, two knives out of pasta. Where he like mills it down to this fine pasta flour, which he turns into a kind of a paste. And then he forms that into a knife. And he dries it out. And then sort of sharpens it into a knife. And then he does a demonstration, with each of these two knives. And one of them is not as sharp as the other one. So, he throws it into boiling water.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: And then makes a bechamel sauce and then eats that knife. It's, like, very— there's like so much like prop comedy going on in these videos. And there's a lot of like really fe— ex— like, a lot of experimentation that's kind of fun to watch.

Like the rice video. He had to mill the rice down to this very, very fine powder. So he invented this tumbler where he put these heavy stones in with the rice powder in this glass bottle and then built a sort of like rotation device out of rolling pins and a drill. And he had to like dial in like how fast he wanted the drill to go to spin the rolling pins to roll this bottle full of rocks and rice dust.

It's like really, really entertaining to watch. It's so good. A lot of the videos are really like straightforward. But a lot of them are like— he goes through some pretty unexpected lengths and then makes some surprisingly extremely practical, very useful kitchen knives. I just like this idea. I find

myself drawn to like crafty videos like this that are especially like transformative.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And especially like, "We're gonna transform this, seemingly useless thing into something very useful." Like videos of like people building houses in their backyard, using like you know, mud like is my shit.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And this is— this is peak to me, because not only is it like kind of surprising that you can make a knife out of underwear. It's like— it's— it's very entertaining, too. Again, it's call Kiwami Japan.

Rachel: Do you think he'll expand to like other implements? Or do you think he's just doing knives?

Griffin: I almost think he has. I think maybe he has. There's probably other people doing— I like the idea also of just a— there's a person out there who has found this thing and become the best person in the world at it.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: That really appeals to me.

Rachel: Of course.

Griffin: What's your first thing?

Rachel: My first thing is kinetic sculpture.

Griffin: This is sculpture that can move stuff with its mind?

Rachel: That's— that would be telekinetic sculpture. I think.

Griffin: It's a sculpture that you mo— can talk to with your mind?

Rachel: It's just a sculpture that moves. [laughs]

Griffin: Oh, shoot. I messed up.

Rachel: So, I thought of this because I've always been really into mobiles.

Griffin: Yes. Mo-bills or mobi— mo-biles?

Rachel: I— oh man.

Griffin: Or mo-beels.

Rachel: I spent a fair amount of time trying to figure this out?

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: 'Cause I knew I was gonna have to say it over and over again.

Griffin: I think I say mobiles. But I'm from Appalachian and say like 40% of words incorrectly.

Rachel: I think I'm gonna stick with mobile.

Griffin: Okay. Don't be pedantic. You know what fucking word we're talking about, people at home.

Rachel: [laughs] So, I've been, for a long time— But it kind of became a big thing for me when I was actually writing poetry. And my, preceptor at University of Chicago, who was kind of—

Griffin: What's that?

Rachel: Oh [chuckles] It's like a— it's like a fancy word for like teaching assistant, kind of. It's like a mentor, but in like a teaching capacity.

Griffin: Is this, like, a common grad school word?

Rachel: I don't know that it is.

Griffin: It sounds badass.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: It sounds like something that's at like at Hogwarts, that like patrols the halls at night to make sure the kids don't get up to pranks and hijinks.

Rachel: We were— we were divided. Because, so, there's a bunch of research that says if a student is in a cohort, they're more likely to finish their program.

Griffin: In a what?

Rachel: Oh, jeez.

Griffin: No, come on!

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: You can't act like I'm the weird one here. "My cohort preceptor."

Rachel: In— in— [laughs] In education, specifically higher education, there's a bunch of research that says if you pair like a group of students together and do a lot of relationship building among those students, and enroll them in similar classes, and have some kind of mentorship, they're more likely to finish their program.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: And— so the program I was doing was very rigorous. It was a year long. And so, they clustered us all into these groups and gave us like a one like post-grad like doctoral candidate person who would kind of supervise us like meet with us once a week, help us—

Griffin: And they were the preceptor.

Rachel: Preceptor.

Griffin: Of your *Breakfast Club* that you were in?

Rachel: Yes. Yes.

Griffin: Okay. Which one were you? Because I think a lot of people would say Ally Sheedy.

Rachel: I—

Griffin: But I do not think that's—

Rachel: I— I mean, if I was gonna be anybody, I'm not Molly Ringwald.

Griffin: You ain't Molly Ringwald. You did tape a kid's butt cheeks together that one time.

Rachel: Okay. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: I'm so sorry to derail you. It's just you said some really fascinating words there and I love learning from you.

Rachel: [laughs] So anyway, so my preceptor used that as an analogy to writing a poem of— of— like a mobile, if you change one word or change the rhythm of a particular line, you can set the whole piece in motion in a different direction. And I just found that like idea really captivating. And I had always really liked mobiles. And so, I like kind of latch onto it.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And the kind of the famous kinetic sculptor is?

Griffin: I don't know.

Rachel: It's Alexander Calder.

Griffin: Why would I— why on God's green earth would I know that?!

Rachel: I don't know. I feel like his mobiles are very iconic. Like, they're— they're just like the standard go-to if you're thinking of mobile.

Griffin: I know. But like you know how— Let's say—

Rachel: You know, I don't know.

Griffin: Let's talk off mic really quick.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: [whispers] I'm not very cultured.

[Rachel chuckles]

Griffin: And you know this.

Rachel I mean, you talk about E.E. Cummings a bunch.

Griffin: That's one— I learn about that in middle school. Everybody knows about E.E. Cummings. He does the silly word poems.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: You know how you learn about him in school and they're like, "Look at all these fucking silly words." It's like, "Dude, learn how to make a fucking paragraph already."

Rachel: Why don't you capitalize some letters, E.E.?

Griffin: I know, dog. Anyway, we can get back on the mic now. It's just you've hum— humiliated me.

Rachel: I'm sorry. [chuckles]

Griffin: In front of all my friends.

Rachel: So, Alexander Calder, in the 1930s, started creating these kinetic sculptures. That it was actually the avant guard artist, Marcel Duchamp, named mobiles. And I read a couple different things, but the idea is that it's a French pun, because mobile means both "motion" and "motive". Or like a word similar to that. I don't know.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I didn't research that. So for a while, he was making these motor or crank-driven moving sculptures. And... he kind of found those to be a little predictable and repetitive. And— and it became kind of less exciting to him.

Griffin: Sure. You want that, you want that chaos theory in there.

Rachel: So he— what he did is he took many balanced parts joined by lengths of wire, whose individual elements were capable of moving independently, when prompted by air movement or direct contact.

Griffin: Interesting.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. These were... often outdoor pieces, which were set in motion by the open air. The wind mobiles features abstract shapes, delicately balanced on pivoting rods that moved with the slightest current of air. What was funny is that later, in his artistic career, he started creating this static abstract sculptures that didn't move. And one of his artist friends called them "stables". [laughs]

Griffin: [snorts] That's very good. I also imagine people would be like, this talk of the town, like "Did you see the new Calder piece up? It's at the museum. I'm gonna go there." And then you roll up and you're like, "Let's give this motherfucker a shove."

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: And it's like, "Wait, what? It didn't, didn't go."

Rachel: So, there's a huge collection of them at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. They have more than 40 sculptures and paintings. And

then 19 long-term loans from the Calder Foundation. I've never been to the National Gallery, but I was looking online.

And it's just like... the entrance has them kind of, like, hanging from the ceiling. And then there's a whole room dedicated to his mobiles. And they have all these lights set up, so you can see like the shadows on the wall.

Griffin: Oh, that's cool. But wait, if, if it's indoors, how they go?

Rachel: I mean, there's air conditioning. Maybe just the little breeze.

Griffin: I guess so.

Rachel: Gets them going. There's some stop-motion videos on YouTube, too. Which I definitely watched today.

Griffin: Oh, wow.

Rachel: Like a nerd. [laughs] It's like a minute and a half and it's just an entire day's worth of slight movement. [laughs]

Griffin: It didn't move and then you realized you were looking at one of his— it was just a JPEG of one of his non-moving sculptures.

Rachel: [laughs] One quote that I found of his talking about these mobiles, he said "I have made a number of things for the open air. All of them react to the wind and are like sailing vessels, in that they react best to one kind of breeze."

Griffin: What's that mean, dog?

Rachel: That's just kind of— I mean, they're all very delicately balanced. And so depending which direction the wind's coming from, you're gonna get like the most interesting movement.

Griffin: Right. But that must be shitty for everybody around him when he's like unveiling it and he's like, "Yeah, I wish it was good. But the breeze isn't—"

Rachel: I mean, they're still interesting to look at.

Griffin: "The breeze is wrong." Yeah, but he knows and you know—

Rachel: Have you seen— do you know what I'm talking about when I like talk about his mobiles?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Do— I didn't know if you—

Griffin: They— there was something like this, probably not one of his, at the Huntington Museum of Art, right?

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: Yeah. I think they're interesting to look at whether they're moving or not. But I like this idea that it is a piece of art that continues to change. I mean, well some of this was at like the Hakone.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: They had some— at the Hakone Open Air Museum they had some kinetic sculptures. And I just always find it like so engaging. Because it's just like it's— it's more dynamic and— and you feel more like you're watching a performance.

Griffin: Hmm, interesting.

Rachel: And so I just— I don't know. I always find them really enjoyable.

Griffin: And also like the engineering that goes into the art of it, I think is fascinating.

Rachel: Yeah. No, exactly. That was his— his background, if I remember correctly, when I was researching him, he has kind of an engineering background.

Griffin: Hmm.

Rachel: So I just found that interesting that he kind of channeled that into his art. So I just wanted to end, there's this quote, by Jean-Paul Sartre, that I used when I was doing research for my thesis. And I just, I love it, so I wanted to share it.

Griffin: Yeah. Let me know this Sartre.

Rachel: [giggles] "A mobile, one might say, is a little private celebration. An object defined by its movement and having no other existence. It is a flower that fades when it ceases to move. I possess a bird of paradise with iron wings. It needs only to be touched by a breath of warm air. The bird ruffles up with a jingling sound, rises, spreads its tail, shakes its crested head, executes a dance step. And then, as if obeying a command, makes a complete about turn, with wings outspread."

Griffin: Sartre.

Rachel: Isn't that lovely?

Griffin: Always gets me. That is really nice.

Rachel: I— I— I just— they're like these little, live... things. You know? I've always kind of wanted one.

Griffin: Well, let's get one.

Rachel: But when you look up mobile online, it is—

Griffin: It's baby stuff.

Rachel: It's baby stuff. [laughs] You can buy, like, recreations. But I'd wanna hang it in a partic— You know, it's— there's some work to be done.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But I love `em.

Griffin: Well, somebody's got a birthday coming up.

Rachel: Not—not especially soon.

Griffin: I was talking about my dad.

Rachel: [laughs] That's true. Next month.

Griffin: Yeah, I'm gonna get him some... probably some DVDs.

Rachel: Okay. [chuckles]

Griffin: It's unrelated. I just remembered that his birthday's coming up and I need to get looking for those DVDs.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

[Rachel sings the Home Improvement transition music with a series of high-pitched beeps]

Griffin: You started doing some experiment with, like, tempo these days.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And like tempo and like meter. In a way that like— I feel like you're on the cutting edge—

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: — of like, discovering a sort of new genre.

Rachel: I like this idea that this is somebody's first episode and they have no idea what just happened.

Griffin: Sorry, that was the Home Improvement interstitial music. And we still do that, because we made a joke about it once and couldn't think of anything better. And that's the truth.

[ad break]

Rachel: Hey, Griffin.

Griffin: Huh?

Rachel: We have some messages.

Griffin: Tell me all about it. [singing to the tune of "Tell Her About It" by Billy Joel] "Tell me about it."

Rachel: We have a message for Crisanna from Alex. "Happy approximate birthday, Crisanna. Thank you for nearly seven years of friendship, courtship, and moreship."

[Griffin laughs]

Rachel: "I love you so much. I wanna tell the world that you, a 24-year-old adult, thought BYOB stood for 'bring your own bananas' until recently."

Griffin: [from a distance] Why would it— why would that— why?

Rachel: [laughs] "And that's adorable. Please forgive me for exposing your deepest shame."

Griffin: It's very good. I think I thought BYOB was something other than it actually was. Like, I knew it was "bring your own". But I didn't think it was bananas. I thought it was something a little more universal than that.

Rachel: Yeah, I thought it was more like beef, or burgers, or—

Griffin: A breakfast.

Rachel: I don't know that I thought of breakfast.

Griffin: But, um—

Rachel: I just know that like usually the— it's listed on like barbecue invitations.

Griffin: Yeah. So, obviously it's—

Rachel: I thought it was like—

Griffin: — bring your own barbecue sauce.

Rachel: [chuckles] “We're having a barbecue. Bring your own.” [laughs]

Griffin: [wheezes] That is a very sweet message. What— how far off did we fuck that up by?

Rachel: It was preferred April, so.

Griffin: Okay. So, that's about— and on the average these days, across all of our podcasts, we're fucking up about three months' worth every time.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: So, it's good that we're consistent.

Rachel: This next message is for Sarah. It is from Jill. “I can't believe we're turning 30 this year, which means that we're basically been together half our lives, but I couldn't be happier with where our life together has taken us. Thanks for being an amazing wife and loving me through all my sour candy overdoses and late nights of video games, long after I should have come to bed. Love you bookworm.”

Griffin: Sour candy overdose is not anything to joke around about.

Rachel: And late nights of video games. Griffin, this sounds...

Griffin: I mean, it might be me. But...

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: — you ca— you gotta be careful. You eat enough of those Atomic Warheads, it will... just... it's like you've poured paint thinner all over your mouth. And gets it all raw. And then you eat the ranch Pringles while you're at Church Camp. And it's a miracle I'm standing here in front of you today.

Rachel: [chuckles] Well, sitting. [chuckles]

[ad break]

Griffin: I have a second thing.

Rachel: Oh, good.

Griffin: It is a thing that I mentioned it to Rachel that I was going to do it and her response is "I cannot believe you haven't done this yet." And then she actually went to Wonderful.fyi, a very good website.

Rachel: And double checked.

Griffin: And double checked that I hadn't done it. And I haven't. It is a musical artist. His name is Tallest Man on Earth. And I specifically kind of wanna focus on one of his albums that was released in 2010 and it's called *The Wild Hunt*.

So Tallest Man on Earth is a Swedish guy named Kristian Matsson, who is a Swedish singer/songwriter who's been making music since like 2005 or so. And I just absolutely adore his work. It's kind of perfectly in my wheelhouse. It's just like real good, acoustic folk music, a lot of open tuned guitars. Just like exactly my shit.

His musical inspirations are like Bob Dylan, which I think is gonna be immediately apparent if you've never heard him before, as soon as we play

some of his music. But like also like Nick Drake and Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger and folks like that.

Rachel: Can I tell you something?

Griffin: Mm-hmm.

Rachel: I had never really listened to his stuff before I met Griffin.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And... now when I hear it I think of you.

Griffin: Aw.

Rachel: It just feels very quintessentially Griffin to me.

Griffin: That's very sweet.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, there was a long time there where it was all I listened to kind of. [chuckles]

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And so he has all these like folk inspirations that I really like find attractive. And his lyrics are like really invocative and kind of inscrutable in a way that I really enjoy.

So, this album, *The Wild Hunt*, came out in 2010. It was his second album. His first album, *Hollow Grave*, came out in 2008. It's also very good. But I heard this album, *The Wil— The Wild Hunt*, for the first time when I was living in Chicago. This was in— this was in 2010. And, I gotta tell you, I cannot think of a better album for like walking to the train station on like a nice, cool, autumn day in Chicago than this. Like, that was sort of—

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: — that's the mental connection that I kind of make with it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Just sort of like walking to the train by myself with my headphones on, going usually nowhere important. Just somewhere to kind of get out of the house for a little bit.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: I listened to this album for like a fucking year. Like, pretty much every day. And that was kind of a— a lonely year for me. Like, I had my— I had friends. Like, my roommates and I were— were good friends. But like I didn't know that many people in Chicago.

And so this album was just kind of a— kind of a nice companion during that time. So, if you've never heard, Tallest Man on Earth before, he has a very distinctive voice, which you're going to hear in this. I'm going to play a little bit of the title track to *The Wild Hunt*, which really encapsulates like what I like about his music.

[clip of "The Wild Hunt" by Tallest Man on Earth fades in]

Griffin: It's just these pretty, open-tuned chords, just like some gentle banjo backing, and then just these piercing vocals shooting through all of them. So, this is "The Wild Hunt".

[clip of "The Wild Hunt" by Tallest Man on Earth play, then fades out]

Griffin: Do you think he sounds like... he sounds a lot like Bob Dylan.

Rachel: Yes, he does.

Griffin: And I think that's kind of undeniable. I think in the same way that Bob Dylan's voice is kind of... divisive. I think there's a lot of people who li— try listening to it and say like, "Oh no." And then there's people who say,

"Oh, yes." And then they listen to his later stuff and they go, "Oh, no"
[chuckles]

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: "Oh, no. It's gotten so much, so much worse." It's kind of the same thing with, with Tallest Man on Earth. I feel like I've had friends who I've tried to get into his music and just the voice. Like, they— they don't enjoy it. And I very much do.

Rachel: Yeah. You have to kind of—

Griffin: It's like cilantro.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: Like, it just tastes like soap to some people.

Rachel: You have to kind of settle in. Like, you have to kind of accept... I mean, that was the way I was when I first listened to Bob Dylan.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You have to kind of like familiarize yourself with it.

Griffin: But at the same time, like I never really go into Bob Dylan. Like, I enjoy a few of his songs, but like I never really had the Bob Dylan phase.

Rachel: Oh man, you know my dad listens to this and he's going to immediately send you a list of things.

Griffin: I said I like a few of his songs.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, that's probably true. But, like I've— I— I enjoy all of Tallest Man's stuff. And, I don't know. On the subject of— of Bob Dylan, like that is

the— 90% of the pieces that get written about Tallest Man on Earth are about like—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: "Hey, so you sound a lot like Bob Dylan." I can't imagine how fucking exasperating that must be.

Rachel: You know who does know the answer to that?

Griffin: Who?

Rachel: Is Jacob Dylan, from The Wallflowers. [laughs]

Griffin: Oh, yeah. Probably, he probably also doesn't love that. In— in his defense, he had an interview where he was asked and, he listed all these folk inspirations. Like Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger.

And he has a quote where he said, "I don't consider my work to be part of any tradition. This is how I play. This is how I write songs". Again, like, I do think he sounds a lot like Dylan. And he talks about like "I was 15 and I heard Bob Dylan and, like, it was very, very formative for me". He also covers "I Want You" by Bob Dylan.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Which is— such a good song.

Rachel: I bet.

Griffin: On one of his earlier albums. Anyway, that was a little tangent.

[clip of "Burden of Tomorrow" by Tallest Man on Earth fades in]

Griffin: I also wanna play a song that kind of shows off— I mentioned inscrutable lyrics. This is a song off *The Wild Hunt* called "Burden of Tomorrow" that I'm gonna play now, that I just really like.

[clip of "Burden of Tomorrow" by Tallest Man on Earth plays, then fades out]

Griffin: Sometimes when I talk about songs on this show I like to go to songmeanings.com and see how other people interpreted them. It's just like a website—

Rachel: I didn't know that's a thing.

Griffin: Yeah, it's a website where like they post the lyrics and then people like comment on what they think it is. And you can like vote for who you think—

Rachel: Oh, interesting.

Griffin: — who has the best interpretation. So like I'll look at that sometimes just to see if I missed anything, or to see like what other people are interpreting it as.

The entry for this song is fucking great, because the theories that people are floating are wild. And I don't blame them, because like I wouldn't know how to begin putting this song together into a message. The lyrics are just... they're very clever and they're full of imagery, but like, they're kind of hard to interpret. Like the line "Rumor has it that I wasn't born. I just walked in one frosty morn'. Into the vision of some vacant mind".

Like, all of the lyrics of this song are like that. And I don't really know what it means, but I— I like it a lot. So, I wanted to just talk about this album, *The Wild Hunt*, because I love it. And I think you would really enjoy it too, or maybe you won't, listener at home. You should listen to it.

But while I was prepping for this segment I found a YouTube video that he posted of a cover that he did of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now". Which I immediately sent to Rachel, because it was so good. He covered this song for like a video series that he did, and has this like intro where he explains that it's the greatest song ever written. And that is such a relief to him.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: Because now he's free to not try to write the greatest song ever written. And then he did this cover of "Both Sides Now", which I also adore. If you are not familiar, if you've seen *Love, Actually*, it's the very, very sad song that plays.

Rachel: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: When... oh my god, I can't remember her name. What's the actress's name? I always get her confused with the woman who plays Hermione in the *Harry Potter* movies. I'm gonna get there. Emma Watson. Emma Thompson. [laughs]

Rachel: Wow. Good work.

[clip of Tallest Man on Earth's cover of "Both Sides Now" by Joni Mitchell fades in]

Griffin: So, anyway, when she's like crying it's— this is the song that's playing.

Rachel: [laughs] It's a very, very good song.

Griffin: It's a really good song and it's a really good cover. I'm gonna play it now.

[clip of Tallest Man on Earth's cover of "Both Sides Now" by Joni Mitchell plays, then fades out]

Griffin: I don't really have anything else to add about this. Like, it's— it has broken my sort of theme of talking about this one album. But it's so, so good.

Rachel: Have you seen him besides the time we saw him here in Austin?

Griffin: No, I only saw him that one time. I would love to see him again.

Rachel: There was a heckler in the audience. The heckler, after he finished playing a song, yelled out, "Stop being so talented." [laughs] Which—

Griffin: It was very, very pure. It was very, very good. That— I think that was the same person— there's a song he has, I think called "Brother" or "Brothers", that has this like wild sort of not solo, but just like instrumental break.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That he just like goes down the whole neck of the guitar. And that same dude just went like, "Damn!" in the middle of this like pretty, acoustic song. Anyway, this cover is really good. He has a lot of other covers. I mentioned "I Want You" by Bob Dylan. He has a banjo cover of Paul Simon's "Graceland".

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: That is my favorite cover of my favorite—

Rachel: I don't know that I've heard of that.

Griffin: — Paul Simon song.

Rachel: I'll have to check that out.

Griffin: It is fucking great. And he puts all these, like— when he covers a song, he doesn't just like cover it. He puts like a very distinctive spin on it that I really enjoy. I just really love his music. It occupies a very singular space in my mind. Not just for— like, in terms of genre. Like, he is kind of the ideal folk music creator for me. But also in like, you know, I have a lot of sense memory, I feel like, tied to— tied to his music and this album, in particular.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: What's your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing is also a musician. It is Charles Bradley.

Griffin: Hell yes.

Rachel: Okay. Charles Bradley is somebody that I was introduced to by a listener of the show, Anna Roach.

Griffin: Oh, yeah.

Rachel: Who is a big fan of soul music and was very insistent that we all go see him when he came to the Austin City Limits Music Festival.

Griffin: He was— I feel like there was a very— there was a connection for Austin and him, because it's where... and where the movie— there's so much— Sorry. I don't wanna spoil—

Rachel: Oh, so the movie about his life premiered at South by Southwest.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, that may be what that is.

Griffin: Yeah, I feel like everybody I know in Austin is a huge Charles Bradley fan.

Rachel: Yeah. I know.

Griffin: Like, it's a weird like everybody here like knows who he— who he was.

Rachel: It occurred to me when I was researching this that maybe there were some listeners that hadn't heard his story

Griffin: Yeah, for sure. I do not think that that is the case for everywhere.

Rachel: Yeah. So Charles Bradley— And once we play a clip from his music, you'll be able to hear it right away. Actually started his musical career at 19 as a James Brown impersonator named "Black Velvet".

[Griffin makes a chef's kiss sound]

Rachel: Yes. And you will hear that in his music for sure. But prior to that, he was born in 1948 in Florida, raised by his grandmother, until his mom returned at age eight and took him off to New York. And then he led kind of a turbulent life. He didn't get along with his mom and so he ran away and was homeless briefly. But then at 14, his sister took him to the Apollo to see James Brown and it just changed his whole life.

And then— so after he was a James Brown impersonator, he eventually went back to odd jobs and periodic gigs and continued to kind of have this rough life. And then in 2001, at age 53, he was introduced to the co-founder of Daptone Records, who took him to the producer/songwriter and guitarist, Tom Brenneck, which became, the Menahan Street Band, which backs Charles Bradley.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And that's when they recorded some 45s in 2011. And then at 62, he released his debut LP, *No Time For Dreaming*.

Griffin: And it is a fucking masterpiece. [laughs]

Rachel: Yeah.

[clip of "How Long" by Charles Bradley fades in]

Griffin: It is so good.

Rachel: So I want to play a little bit of the song, How Long.

Griffin: Here it is.

[clip of "How Long" by Charles Bradley plays, then fades out]

Rachel: So you'll— you'll hear, obviously, the James Brown connection right away. He also gets a lot of comparisons to Otis Redding and Al Green... in that he is— he is very soulful and very passionate and emotional. And that was my experience seeing him.

So, I saw him twice at Austin City Limits Music Festival. And then actually once during South by Southwest, this little party that was being sponsored by Rolling Stone. And it was him and a bunch of other artists. Although it was a real small venue. And he— he— it is— It was not unusual to see him onstage just, like, weeping. Just so engaged and tapped into what he was singing.

Griffin: I feel like shit I never got to see him.

Rachel: I know. Yeah.

Griffin: Because I— he played here all the time. And I just— I just never made it.

Rachel: So, he had two other albums that came out. *Victim Of Love* in 2013, and *Changes* in 2016. And then, unfortunately, at age 68 in 2017, he died after battling stomach cancer.

[clip of Charles Bradley's cover of "Changes" by Black Sabbath fades in]

But that last album *Changes*, actually he covers Black Sabbath's "Changes".

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And I wanted to play a little of that, too.

Griffin: Yeah, here it is.

[clip of Charles Bradley's cover of "Changes" by Black Sabbath plays, then fades out]

Griffin: Obviously, it's very sad that he— he died.

Rachel: Especially after it took him forever. Yeah.

Griffin: Forever. To— to have a career that bloomed this late in life.

Rachel: And that documentary about him, you can really kind of see just how like... difficult his life was. And then just, like, out of nowhere he became successful.

Griffin: Well, it wasn't out of nowhere, I would argue.

Rachel: Well, no. I mean, but like, just suddenly, like all of the like... insecurity just like instability. You know, just he had tremendous opportunity all of a sudden.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Was playing to these like sold out crowds and getting like a lot of recognition for how talented he was. And he was so grateful. And just humbled by that. And it was just like, I would say even more than like James Brown or, you know? It— he— Obviously, the performance was great and the voice is— is great. And— and the lyrics and everything. But just how much of himself he brought to the music. Like, you just feel very connected to him when he sings.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It's very nice to listen to. And— and to feel that much emotion from an artist. So yeah. So I— I immediately developed this like very strong fondness. And I feel like anybody who kind of spent some time with his music feels that.

Griffin: Especially people that saw— I feel like that's why everybody I know here in Austin, why they like love him so much, was because they all saw him perform at South by Southwest and stuff like that.

Rachel: Yeah. I— well, yeah. I— I saw him perform like three times in like, you know, four years or whatever.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It was like, I never missed an opportunity to see him. Just because it was so powerful. And you just, you felt so happy for him, you know? That

he was somebody with this immense talent that was finally getting an opportunity to be recognized for it.

Griffin: Yeah. That's our episode. Before we wrap up, I wanna tell you about some of the things that our friends at home, playing the home version of *Wonderful!* are into. And here's Danny, who says, "My nightly routine has always been brushing my teeth, then going straight to bed. It's always been a chore, though. I've never liked brushing my teeth. So, a trick I've developed is brushing them well before I hit the hay. That way, when I go to sleep, it feels like I've cheated the system and I'm a happier boy."

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: [claps with each syllable] Danny, my dude. [normal] I've started doing this, too. It is dope. It is so good.

Rachel: Well, you kind of do it out of necessity. Because I go to sleep much earlier than you.

Griffin: That's true. And I don't want to disturb you with the sounds—

Rachel: But what if you wanna have like a little—

Griffin: — the moans of pleasure I do when I brush my teeth.

Rachel: [laughs] What about like if you want a little snack, though, you know?

Griffin: Oh, I'll still eat it.

Rachel: Griffin.

Griffin: I'm supposed to not eat for like a couple hours after I brush my teeth?

Rachel: Once I brush my teeth, like, I have closed—

Griffin: Your mouth—

Rachel: — up shop. [laughs]

Griffin: [claps in delight] [laughs] I don't know who's wrong here.

Rachel: I think you are.

Griffin: Am I— Is it wild to— if you brush—

Rachel: The— the part of brushing your teeth is to get your mouth all clean before you go to sleep and if you eat something, you're getting it all dirty again.

Griffin: But I brush my teeth in the morning and then I drink coffee and eat breakfast right away, so what's—

Rachel: But you're letting those food particles just sit in your teeth all night.

Griffin: Who gives a shit? Like, I've got—

Rachel: Your teeth do. Griffin, you have no leg to stand on here. Like, you're—

Griffin: Oh yeah, cavity count, ready? Count of three. One, two, three.

Rachel: [simultaneously] Two.

Griffin: [simultaneously] Like, 12. Okay.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: Our second one is sent in by Sarah who says, "The thing I wanna talk about is working on homework with friends. It's especially good when you aren't working on the same things. I just love sitting with a friend or two and getting shit done. We're all in grad school, so there's endless work, and this way we can hang out and be productive all at once. It's even better because we usually meet up in libraries. I love libraries. That could be a

whole other email. But yeah, I love doing homework with friends and quietly motivating each other through the endless grad school slog."

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: [whispers] No... [normal] I mean, I love the idea of it.

Rachel: Did you never do like study group? You—

Griffin: Oh, we did.

Rachel: Where you eat a bunch of snacks and just hang out?

Griffin: Yeah. Except for the last thing.

Rachel: Oh, Griffin.

Griffin: It was mostly me and Patrick Stanley, hanging out, writing our capstone paper the night before [chuckles] it's due.

Rachel: Oh, Griffin.

Griffin: Pulling an all nighter. Taking a quick break to go and play through all of *Mega Man X*, then go back into the— the study, crank—

Rachel: You are exactly the kind of student that I resented. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. And I got, you know, a good A on that capstone. So, no big deal.

Rachel: Ooph.

Griffin: But I like the idea of it. I bet you can't do that in grad school. I bet they'll find out.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: "Did you beat *Mega Man X* last night, instead of writing..."

"Yes, I did. I'm sorry."

Rachel: "Your second page is really influenced by *Mega Man X*."

Griffin: "It's a walkthrough of *Mega Man X* that you printed out in the same batch as your capstone. I mean, I ne— I do appreciate knowing how to beat, Spark Mandrill. But, I'm— I was wondering what Flame Mammoth's weakness was—" now I'm just trying to remember all the bosses in *Mega Man X*. There was a penguin. There was a chameleon.

Rachel: Did you say Spark Mandrill?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Be a good roller derby name.

Griffin: Yeah, it would.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: A lot of the names.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: One of them was like, a boomerang head man. I've lost it. Eric says, "A summer threat—" [wheezes]

Rachel: That can't be right. A summer treat?

Griffin: "A summer treat I find quite wonderful are snow cones."

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: They're everywhere. The silent killers. "Everyone has fond memories of them, which ma—" That's my fuck up and not this person's. I hope everybody at home knows that. It says "treat". "Everyone has fond memories of them, which make them feel immediately nostalgic, especially with friends on a hot summer day, enjoying your time off school. Plus, all the

different flavor and color combination make them endless fun and weirdly beautiful for just being shaved ice covered in sugar juice.”

Rachel: We gotta get some snowballs before the summer's over.

Griffin: We do. I'll say this on the subject of snow cones. They are the most... mercurial, in terms of quality, food out there, I think. Because if you get the shit that's like pebbles of ice with a little bit of just sugar water poured on it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's gross.

Rachel: And then the water goes all the way to the bottom.

Griffin: Gross. No good.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And the juice like goes all the way to the bottom. Yeah, and then, like, the top is just straight ice and—

Rachel: Yeah. Terrible.

Griffin: — flavorless ice? Fuck that. Proper shaved ice, and I'm talking about that fine powder, that sweet cotton.

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: Mixed in with like heaping helpings of juice that's like actual—actually tastes like something? Oh my God, it is— there is nothing better.

Rachel: Especially if it's, like, flavors that aren't just like, cherry, blue raspberry, but like—

Griffin: What's the place down—

Rachel: Casey's Snowballs.

Griffin: Casey's Snowballs makes a plate— makes just, like, the best, snow cones you've ever tasted.

Rachel: It's like New Orleans inspired somehow.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Or from New Orleans.

Griffin: They also do like an ice cream thing, where you can get like a snow cone ball on top of an ice cream scoop.

Rachel: Oh my God, it's incredible.

Griffin: Oh my God. It's so fucking good. Anyway, yeah, snow cones are dope and really dangerous.

[Rachel chuckles]

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. Hey, if— Hey, tell a friend about our show if— I don't think we've ever asked anybody to do that. But we would really appreciate it.

Rachel: Yeah, if you get some good vibes from this show and you have a friend who could also use some good vibes, please recommend it.

Griffin: We try to be a good vibes show, and I think there's people who could be helped by that. Instead of just, you know, the bad vibes show. Like, you know, the show where they talk about all this stuff that they hate and the stuff they thinks really stinks.

Rachel: And that's basically the news, am I right?

Griffin: Am I right, people?

Rachel: Thank you to Maximum Fun for hosting our show and for putting out all sorts of great programs.

Griffin: *Bubble* is very good. If you haven't heard *Bubble*. It is good. I listened to a lot more of it while we were traveling to San Diego.

Rachel: Oh yeah, and you got to see all those folks when we were there.

Griffin: I did. Well, not all those folks. I saw Jordan Morris at a— at a fun party. But I think that was it. I was only there for like about 13 hours.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: It was a wild one. And, yeah, I think that's it. And—

Rachel: Oh, if people wanna send in their own submissions, how do they do that?

Griffin: Wonderfulpodcast@gmail.com.

Rachel: If you wanna hear more McElroy shows, you can go to mcelroyshows.com.

Griffin: One more quick note. We've mentioned our PO box in the past. We are having to transfer that. So stop sending stuff to it [laughs]

Rachel: Yeah, we'll let you know—

Griffin: Until we tell—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: We will let you know when we have a new PO box. Yeah, so just sort of chill on that for a little bit. Okay, that's it. So, hmm... I'm out of outro juice, too.

Rachel: Oh, Griffin.

Griffin: Could we— Are there more jokes about “Smooth”? Is there another Santana song?

Rachel: You didn't ask me who I would replace it with.

Griffin: Oh, yeah. Who'd you replace it with? For “Smooth”, the song by Carlos Santana and Rob Thomas?

Rachel: John Mayer.

Griffin: Oh God.

Rachel: And... Blake Shelton. [laughs]

Griffin: Oh my God. You have to legally say that was a joke.

Rachel: I'd call it “Smoother”.

Griffin: Oh my God, Rachel. You have to say this is a joke. Out loud. Because people will cut it and they'll lose the context of it being a joke. And then we'll be run out of town on a rail.

Rachel: It drops September 2018. Look for it.

Griffin: For “Smoother”, the sequel to “Smooth”, with John Mayer and Blake Shelton.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

[theme music fades in]

Griffin: Get— You gotta say you're joking. Because now I don't know if you—

[Rachel laughs]

Griffin: — think this song would be smoother than “Smooth” by Rob Thomas and Carlos Santana.

Rachel: It is a joke, Griffin.

Griffin: Oh, thank God!

[theme music plays, then fades out]

[ukulele chord]

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[ad break]