

Wonderful! 300: Exponentially Increased Clenching

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Madness? No. ["This is Sparta" impression] This is Wonderful!
And that's a 300 joke.

Rachel: See, I knew you were gonna do that.

Griffin: Oh.

Rachel: But I don't know anything about that film.

Griffin: I hate how predictable I have be—you didn't see it?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Aw, man. Badass stuff.

Rachel: It's like a Gladiator kind of thing, right?

Griffin: Yeah, but Spart—big, burly Spartan dudes just fucking other dudes up! For two hours.

Rachel: Uh-huh?

Griffin: Gerard Butler, shirtless?

Rachel: Yeah, back—mm-hmm.

Griffin: A bunch of oily bros just kicking other dudes.

Rachel: I feel like when you hear the... the name Gerard Butler...

Griffin: Yeah. You think quality.

Rachel: Well, it's a very specific time period. Like—

Griffin: If a film has the Gerard Butler seal of approval you know you're in for a good time.

Rachel: But we're not here to talk about films of any kind.

Griffin: In fact, we can't, actually. And so yeah. But we are going to talk to you about things that we like that's good that we're into. Thank you so much for sticking with us for 300 whole-ass episodes. That's so much.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah!

Griffin: We—we love doing this show, and appreciate everybody. I feel like every time we're out and about we see people who are like, "Love it. Love your stuff."

Rachel: I know! It warms my heart so much.

Griffin: Yeah. Right down to the cockles. You got any small wonders, though?

Rachel: Uh... ooh! I can say...

Griffin: Yes?

Rachel: That we got to be guests last night on a live Judge John Hodgman here in Washington, DC.

Griffin: On the Van Freaks Roadshow tour, yes.

Rachel: Yeah, and it was so great.

Griffin: It was such a hoot. I love those guys, uh, to the moon and back. If you live in... let me think. Portland, Maine, Boston, or Brooklyn, you can still catch one of those shows. Uh, I mean, if you're in Portland you need to act fuckin' fast, 'cause I think it's tonight, the episode that this comes out.

Um, but you should go see that show, 'cause it's really, really fun. I don't have the link to tell you, but if you go search for Judge John Hodgman Van Freaks Roadshow, you'll probably be able to get there, I bet.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, I'm gonna say we went out to a nice, uh, Izakaya restaurant last night with John and Jesse before the show. Uh, and it was real good. I loved that sort of vibe.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: At that Izakaya restaurant where it was just like, whole, like, fish, uh, cooked over fire and rubbed with salt. And then you just go at it. That's great for me.

Rachel: And it's very small, like, intimate setting.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: We've been to a lot of restaurants at DC that are, like, big and fancy and—

Griffin: Not this one.

Rachel: This one felt very, like, comfortable and—

Griffin: Like, five tables in the whole thing, Sapporo on draft and just salty fish.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's the dream for me. Uh, so I'm gonna say all that. And also, I was gonna prep a topic on pumpkin carving, 'cause I really enjoyed pumpkin carving this year. I already did it. I already done did one on jack-o-lanterns, which is a same.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: But I did a Snorlax one.

Rachel: Really?

Griffin: At Henry's behest, and it turned out so good. I was so proud of myself.

Rachel: I know. It was one of those moments that you have a lot as a parent where it was very clear that Griffin did an incredible job, and he did exactly what Henry asked him to do. And Henry was like, "Looks good!" [laughs]

Griffin: No, Henry was very sweet. Henry was very complimentary. He continued to say stuff—once we, like, put a candle in at trick or treat night he was, like—he was, like, really impressed.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: And so it was a—it was an excellent moment for me as a father.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Um, so yeah. Uh, I go first this week, and I actually—my topic today is connected to the fact that we were on Judge John Hodgman, live on stage last night at the Lincoln Theater here in DC. I want to talk about the physiological response to performing live.

Rachel: Whoa! Okay!

Griffin: It is something that I have been—that I've witnessed and been subject to my whole life. It is sort of also in the realm of, like, theater

superstition. And so, like, ever since I was doing plays in children's theater, I have been sort of feeling the effects and hearing about sort of, like, stage fright and stage adrenaline and all that jazz.

Rachel: Yeah! This has been really interesting, I think, for Griffin and me, is that I have no real performing experience.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But it's obviously something I've had to start doing. Like, since we have started doing shows. And so I talk to Griffin as if I am traveling in a new land. Like...

Griffin: Yeah, it's fun!

Rachel: Like, "It's fun out there, huh?" [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. It is a, uh—it is a singular feeling, the feeling of going on stage in front of a bunch of people and doing anything, right? And I have been fortunate enough because of the shows that we do to have done, I don't know, well over a hundred, like, live performances at this point? I don't know the exact number. I feel like we figured it out one time a few years ago and it was dramatically higher than I would've anticipated.

Um, and I really like guesting on live shows like we did last night, 'cause I feel like you get all of that, like, feeling, with only half the responsibility, if that.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: 'Cause you could just tank out there and, like, it's not your show, so...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Whatever. Um, so I—if I could pull back the curtain a bit, which feels appropriate, I feel like I have a bit of a complicated relationship with,

like, live performance with regards to, like, how it makes me feel and the things that it does—the wild effect that it has on my actual, physical body.

Um, because I think anybody in my family will attest to the fact that, like, I get really, really nervous for a very long time before we even go on tour. Like, I start sort of clenching up, uh, sort of exponentially increased clenching as days pass leading up to when we go on tour and do live shows.

Part of that is, like, travel, right? Part of that is, you know, when you're traveling and not doing your usual routines, like, it throws you off your game a little bit. It is really hard to sort of stay in the drift when you are not in your home, and then you sort of add on top of that the stage fright and adrenaline element to it. Like, it is not ideal, I think, in how nervous I get and how tense I get.

Wild—I've never seen that from you. I feel like I have never—even before our first live show, which was that Austin? Was that when we went out for the ACL show in Austin? Was that our first one?

Rachel: Oh! Um...

Griffin: I think it might've been.

Rachel: Maybe? Maybe?

Griffin: You were, like, cool as a cu—you were so fucking chill, and I couldn't wrap my mind around it.

Rachel: Yeah. Here's the thing. It's funny, what you just said about guesting on a podcast. How you don't feel a tremendous amount of responsibility when you go out onstage. I feel similarly. And this may be my own, um, imposter syndrome, but I think of it as, like, this is Griffin's arena.

Griffin: Aw, man!

Rachel: And I can show up and chip in when the mood hits me, but, um, I don't know. I feel like I have to carry anything.

Griffin: I think you are fooling yourself in that supposition, but I also am jealous of the fact that—

Rachel: [through laughter] I know!

Griffin: —that it doesn't—it does not get to you in that way.

Rachel: 'Cause I would think you're going out with your brothers and sometimes dad...

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... who you have performed with your entire life.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And have demonstrated over and over again to be very competent live performers.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: I would think you would feel similarly to me.

Griffin: It's not—but it's—it is beyond logical. It is beyond, uh—

Rachel: [through laughter] Okay.

Griffin: —[holding back laughter] evidence-based, uh... this fear is not one that is based in logic.

Rachel: I have never gotten particularly nervous public speaking, which is a strange thing. I can't really explain it.

Griffin: You used to do that, like, quite a bit, right? When you were, like, in the spoken word, uh, you know, Louder than a Bomb sort of scene?

Rachel: Well, I mean, I wasn't doing spoken word poetry. But, um, in all of my jobs I have had to give presentations. Definitely not on the scale of a live

performance like we have done, but it never made me that nervous. Um, which is strange, 'cause I'm a pretty nervous person generally. [laughs]

Griffin: It is... again, astonishing that you do not have this issue. For me, it gets worse and worse and worse. I get more and more nervous until I am, like, barely, like, functional as a human being. Uh, until, like, maybe 15 or 20 minutes before we actually go onstage is when the tide finally starts to turn. And then every time that we walk on stage, all of that stress that has been accumulating in my body for, like, the better part of a week just, like, immediately, like, alchemically... just becomes, like, adrenaline. And then it is enough to sort of—like a sort of emotional trebuchet just, like, launch me across the stage for the duration of the live performance right until I get off. And then on the tail end is also rarely great in that, like, that sort of adrenaline peak that I have that sort of gets me through the show—

Rachel: Yeah, that's true.

Griffin: —than also stays up there for a long time, so it's hard—I have a really hard time falling asleep after a show. Last night I had so much, like, fatty sardine meat in my body from the dinner we'd eaten beforehand that I did not have that issue. But usually I am up until, like, one or two AM after a live show, which is super-duper unfortunate, especially when we're with kids.

Rachel: Yeah. See, I understand that. I understand that. Like, the momentum that you get during a performance, like, you can't just shut it off when it's over. So, like, I understand that aspect of it. I think it's just surprising to me for as long as you've been doing this that this, like... I mean, do you think it's gotten better, I guess is my question?

Griffin: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I used to be, um... I still—[sighs] there is a separation I think that has happened in my mind between the, like, emotional, uh, way that I think about how I feel before live shows and, like, the actual physiological, like, effect, right? The actual... and this has been really helpful for me in so many avenues in my life where, um, you know, my body feels incredibly stressed out and tense, but it is because of the experience that I have with that, like, I am partially more used to it. And also, I feel like I can count on the fact that the show is going to go well, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, we've prepared for the show most of the time, and I know that my brothers and dad and you are going to, like, have my back out there. And so, like, that is how I am able to rationalize the feeling that I feel, and it makes it way better. Because I used to just be straight up terrified all the time when I knew that there was a tour coming up.

Now it's not like fear as much as it is stress.

Rachel: What about when you were, like, a kid and you were performing onstage?

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, I had terrible stage fright as a kid, but it always, like, um... it always sort of resolved the same way which is, you know, you would go onstage and you would do the show, and that would be that.

Rachel: See, that is harder for me. Anything that involves memorization is crippling for me. Like, I cannot... I cannot go out in front of people and have to recall something that word-for-word I should know. Like, that is difficult. I have always had a lot of anxiety around, like, "You have this that you're supposed to say at this time in this way, and you get out in front of these people and you do it exactly as you're supposed to." And that is terrifying to me.

Griffin: Well, I think—I mean, I understand that. I also think that the rehearsal process is much more effective than I think most people would give it credit for.

Rachel: That's true, yeah.

Griffin: Like, if you do the same thing even a small number of times, it is easier to kind of, like, [crosstalk].

Rachel: That's true, and I don't have a lot of experience in that.

Griffin: Right. But it—I mean, it was very much the same way. Where I would sort of be scared, and then literally the curtain would open, and it was—it would be scary still, but then all of a sudden it's like an exercise in, like, trying to channel that energy into [dramatically] Drama! And acting!

Rachel: [laughs] Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And song and dance. Um, which is different from what we do know. There's also a phenomenon that I was very familiar with when I was doing children's theater that is, like—it is a weirdly I think commonly known thing for people who do a lot of performing whether, you know, at whatever level.

But I couldn't find, like, a common name for it, but our dad always called it show health. Which is, like, if you're feeling sick or crummy before a show, when you hit the stage the, like, effect of this, like, transformation of—of, uh, fear into adrenaline makes it possible to just completely push the, you know, physical symptoms that you are feeling out of your mind.

Which is, like, not theater-exclusive. That's just how, like, adrenaline and a lot of sort of hormones in your body work, right? This is how you're able to lift a car off your baby or whatever.

Rachel: Uh-huh. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Um, is because of this. Obviously this is a way lower stakes situation.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: But there have definitely been a couple of shows that we have done where I have not been, you know, at my physical peak that it, you know, I wouldn't have known that while I am onstage.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, and I think it's—I think it is easy to—when you hear about stuff like this, especially if you don't, like, perform live or do anything like

that, uh, to see it as some sort of, like, folklore or superstition of, like, "Use it. Use it, Timothy. Use this energy."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, because there are definitely, I think, like, theater folks—maybe not at the higher echelons of the craft, but when we were growing up there were theater folks who talked about show health and, you know, the adrenaline as if it were some sort of magical spirit moving through you, uh, to empower you to do this cr—it's Thes—it's Thespis himself touching you with his mighty finger.

Rachel: People still talk about that a lot. I feel like actors, particularly those that have just done, like, television and film prior talk about the experience of doing, like, a live performance on a stage and how invigorating it is in, like, a completely unique, powerful way.

Griffin: But now that I've done it, like, so many times, so many more times that I ever would've guessed I would have when I, you know, graduated from my children's theater company, I probably thought then, like, "Well, that's it for me and the stage." Uh—

Rachel: Did you really think that?

Griffin: Yeah, I thought so. I wasn't planning on pursuing acting or theater or anything beyond that. And I really didn't. Now that I've done it, like, so many times, like, I recognize it not as a magical thing, not as a... a spiritual thing or some sort of element of the craft, like, it is... it is body chemistry, and it is hormones, and it is fight or flight response, and it is how your body responds any time it is afraid, basically, of a situation. Whether it is a rattlesnake in the woods, or a bunch of clapping people. It is sort of the same thing. Your body does similar stuff. How you use it is different, but it is not some magical effect. It's just like, that's what your body does! That's what it's good at, and—

Rachel: I think what's interesting, though, about performing—and I was talking to Griffin a little bit about this. Like, I don't get nervous, but I feel like I have to kind of warm up when I am in front of people. Like, I can't just

minute one come with 100% energy. I feel like I'm kind of, like, getting my footing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so that's what's I think kind of surprising is that you have all this adrenaline, this nervousness, and then for some reason it goes away at a certain point, and then is just transformed into, like, power. And I don't know.

Griffin: Well, no, that's wh—that's why—[laughs] that is what I'm sort of arguing against. It's not—I don't think it is a conversion to anything—

Rachel: Like, why don't you just keep being nervous? Like, what changes?

Griffin: Um, I think that there is an understanding that allowing that nervousness to cause me to freeze up is—is wrong. Is, like, not the correct response, right? And so it is partially, I guess, sort of, like, guiding the—the hormones that are coursing through your veins at that moment, there is a sort of willfulness to it.

Because there is also, like, a type of stage fright that doesn't go that way, right? Like, it is a type of stage fright that—and again, like, it is an abstract concept for the most part. Um, but there is, you know—you get terrified before you go onstage. You go onstage and oops, you're still terrified and you can't do what the fuck you're supposed to do out there.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: But I think that it is sort of part of theater and performance that most of the time, like, you are able to kind of get over that hump. And that feeling is bordering on the supernatural, which is why, like, you treat with the level of—because I have no other element of my life that is even remote—this physical change that happens in my body when I go onstage is not like anything else that I have in my life. I don't have moments where I feel like, "Oh, fuck yeah! I'm on, baby! Thanks—thanks, adrenaline!"

Rachel: Well, you know—you know what I compare it to? So, the things that I do get really nervous for are when you're gonna be out of town and I'm gonna be alone with the children.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, and that kind of builds and builds. And then very rarely does it go completely smoothly, but I'm busy. Like, as it is happening in that moment, I am too busy. Like, I have to use all my facilities to, like, manage the situation. And maybe that's what's similar to what's happening onstage is that you are building up all this potential energy, and then you have—I mean, you have to stay engaged and focused, and it harnesses that and, like, lasers it into what you need to accomplish.

Griffin: And that's what the—that's where the, like, trust comes in. Like, it is a—it is an agreement you make with this change in your body of like, "Okay. I can use this... to get through the next hour here onstage."

I have done the thing that I didn't want to do with this segment which is, like, talk about it in some sort of, like... reverent tone. I just find it really, really, uh, scientifically fascinating that I feel so fundamentally different from 30 minutes before we go onstage, to 15 minutes before we go onstage, to when I'm onstage, to after I'm onstage. It's four different Griffins.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: With four different brains. Uh, and I don't say this, uh, dismissively, because I genuinely do not like the way that I feel when I am, like, completely coiled like a fuckin' snake for a week before the show, and I don't like not being able to sleep. So I'm not—this is not me saying, like, "It's always worth it." But I do love performing. I do love doing these shows in front of people, and that sort of connective experience, and it is nice to have this thing that I feel like at this point I can count on every time to be there.

Not saying that I get out there and I'm fucking crushing it every single night, but I at least am able to, uh, you know, do it and feel good about it. And that feels awesome. And so that is my topic this week.

Rachel: Yeah. No, it's fun as, like, your partner and somebody that sees all the different Griffins. Uh, it is fun to see that Griffin, for me. And I always really enjoy watching you, and your brothers. Like, now that I am as connected to your family as I am, like, I have a real appreciation for, like, the differences in who you all are onstage when you're performing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And then who you are, like, three minutes before when you're backstage. [laughs]

Griffin: What's great is there are, uh, a handful of venues at this point—not a handful. Maybe, you know, close to ten that we have done multiple times. And so, like, when we show up, I will see a hallway and be like, "Oh yeah. I've paced this hallway... a lot of times. My ol' pacin' hallway."

Rachel: Well, and the bathrooms too. [laughs]

Griffin: I'm very familiar with some of the bathrooms. And y'all, one day I'm gonna write a book, and the book's just gonna be shit talking some of the worst backstage bathrooms, and some of the best backstage bathrooms. I'll go both ways.

Rachel: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Griffin: Um, but whew, boy. Some of them wonder theaters built in the 1920's, uh, have some wonder toilets also built in the 1920's.

Rachel: It's such a contrast, right? Because usually the performance space is gorgeous.

Griffin: Is amazing!

Rachel: Like, immaculate. Like, upheld in a very authentic, like, painstaking way. And then backstage. [laughs]

Griffin: The reliefs in front are—have aged very well. The relief backstage... has not aged very well since 1920.

Rachel: [through laughter] No. No.

Griffin: Um, anyway. Thank you all so much for letting us do this thing for—for you. I genuinely am very, very grateful. Um, but I do need to—I do need to steal you away.

Rachel: Okay.

[ad break]

[music plays]

Jordan: I'm Jordan Crucciola, host of Feeling Seen, where we start by asking our guests just one question. What movie character made you feel seen?

Speaker 2: I knew exactly what it was.

Speaker 3: Clementine from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.

Speaker 4: Joy Wang/Jobu Tupaki.

Jordan: That one question launches amazing conversations about their lives, the movies they love, and about the past, present, and future of entertainment.

Speaker 5: Roy in, uh, Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

Speaker 6: I worry about what this might say about me, but I've brought Tracy Flick in the film Election.

Jordan: So if you like movies, diverse perspectives, and great conversations, check us out.

Speaker 7: Oof. This is real.

Jordan: New episodes of Feeling Seen drop every week on Maximumfun.org.

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

Dave: Oh my gosh, hi! It's me, Dave Holmes, host of the pop culture game show Troubled Waters. On Troubled Waters we play a whole host of games, like one where I describe a show using limerick and our guests have to figure out what it is. Let's do one right now. What show am I talking about?

This podcast has game after game, and brilliant guests who come play 'em!

The host is named Dave, it could be your fave, so try it. Life won't be the same.

Speaker 2: Uh, Big Business, starring Bette Midler and Lily Tomlin.

Dave: Close! But no.

[incorrect buzzer]

Speaker 3: Oh! Is it Troubled Waters, the pop culture quiz show with all your favorite comedians?

Dave: Yes!

[chimes]

Dave: Troubled Waters is the answer.

Speaker 3: To this question and all of my life's problems.

Dave: Now, legally we actually can't guarantee that. But you can find it on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[music and ad end]

Rachel: Okay. My thing this week...

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: And it feels like it's been a long time, is a trip to the Poetry Corner.

Griffin: [scatting] [singing] Can you hear the poetry calling, tossed salad and scrambled... words? [pause] [scatting]

Rachel: No, that's good. You can stop. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Good.

Rachel: Thank you. Thank you for that. Um, I always pause because I expect you to do something, but I imagine that's not a joyous experience for you.

Griffin: It's the adrenaline, baby. It's the adrenaline. It gets me fucking over the hump of doing that for you.

Rachel: Uh, this is a poet that I just recently became familiar with, but actually has a lot of connections to Texas, which I didn't realize. Her name is Carrie Fountain.

Griffin: Cool name.

Rachel: She's from New Mexico originally, but she got her MFA at the Michener Center at UT Austin, and in 2019 was the Poet Laureate of Texas.

Griffin: Hey, alright!

Rachel: Yeah! Didn't—didn't—was there for years, was not—

Griffin: Didn't know—didn't get the email.

Rachel: If you can believe it, I lived in a place and didn't know about the poetry in that place.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I imagine that probably true for everybody all over.

Griffin: Well, we knew about the poetry of the wind through the pines... the... cicadas, and the—the longhorns in the field, grazing their grasses.

Rachel: [laughs quietly] I think you've gotten better. I think that we have been doing Poetry Corner long enough that your improv skills related to poetry does—it seems better.

Griffin: I say some really dope poetic shit sometimes.

Rachel: This is seems better to me.

Griffin: For sure.

Rachel: Uh, okay. So... Carrie Fountain. Actually, she's also written fiction and a children's book, but, um, what I'm talking about is her poetry. Um, and I wanted to read... maybe two poems?

Griffin: Oooh! I've been a good boy!

Rachel: [laughs] Um—

Griffin: "[posh voice?] I want a bonus poem!"

Rachel: So she writes—this is something that I'm kind of fascinated with, and I'm always hesitant to explore. But it's this... this poetry about being a mother.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: And it's something that we talked about a little bit when I brought Kate Baer in a previous week. Um, how it's this incredibly rich, you know, personal, intimate experience, but it always feels strange to try and smash it into a poem.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so I think that she has done this really well. Um, several times. And so I wanted to read, um, maybe two poems. These were both published in the Adroit Journal. It was issue 37, for those of you that are...

Griffin: Great issue.

Rachel: ... planning to seek this out. [laughs] Uh, okay. So, the first poem I'm going to read is called The Answer.

“When my son cried out
in the night I woke—ready—

and scrambled to his room
without even putting on

my glasses, pulled through
the dark living room and down

the dark hall by this instinct
I’m still sometimes surprised

to possess. By the time
I got to him he’d fallen back

to sleep, of course, and so there
I was, awake, squinting down

on him, twisted up in Paw
Patrol sheets, his body emitting

that constant low heat of the still-
growing. What a miracle,

I thought then, that I’ll always
get to recall the slant look

he gave me when the nurse
first brought his new face up

to mine and I could see even
then, from the start, he was

sizing me up, finding me
somewhere in the adequate-

to-lacking range, though
he must've known—must've

come knowing—that I'd
have to do. Trying to untangle

him from the sheets, I woke
him, of course, and he looked up

at me, mystified, my face
inches from his. When he asked

what I was doing there,
I answered, I'm not here, go

back to sleep, and he did.
Once, my life was neat.

It was a handkerchief, folded,
slipped into a back pocket.

No one had to know
it was even there. Now,

it's opened. And wasn't it
this I prayed for in some

distant, quiet place, all

alone, all lonesome and alone?

Wasn't it God I asked
to allow me the grace

to one day learn the names
of all the dogs on Paw Patrol,

all the ponies on My Little
Pony, all the Pokémon, good

and bad, the Care Bears,
the Transformers, the enemies

of Batman, the friends of
Batman, all the good guys

and all the bad guys forever
and ever, amen? Make it

real. Wasn't that exactly
what I'd asked for?"

Griffin: I can't believe you are going to do another one of those.

Rachel: [laughs] Well, I don't know. I mean, I don't know—

Griffin: That's—that one—I feel like I need to sit with...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, yeah. That's a—that's a very good poem.

Rachel: It's a very good poem.

Griffin: That's a very good poem. It is—it feels, I will say, extremely targeted, uh, there.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, but very good.

Rachel: I read this interview with her, actually also in the Adroit Journal but a later issue, where she gets asked that question about, like, how do you write about being a mother, basically? Like, how do you approach it? Like, how do you think about the way it will be judged?

And she said in the interview, "The way I think about motherhood poems now is that it's not writing about children. It's writing about the self, and children enter the poem. I hope it's not reductive to say children in poems are employed for metaphorical purpose, but I think you use what you experience with them, those bits of life, the true life, and then shape it to create an image to observe yourself."

Griffin: Fuck yeah!

Rachel: Isn't that nice?

Griffin: God damn, that's good stuff!

Rachel: Isn't that nice? 'Cause I feel this. I mean... [pause] as somebody who—I feel like I didn't have any kind of grand delusions about having children and what that experience would be like, and I didn't set a lot of parameters around what I wanted it to be. So I'm always very sensitive to the fact that a lot of people don't live this life, and maybe don't want it for themselves, and maybe don't find it particularly interesting because they're not in it. Uh, so I'm always hesitant. But I really appreciated the way that she approached that. Of just like, it is a thing that you do that tells you more about yourself, and offers you this experience that can let you see things in different ways. You know?

Griffin: I—I have been thinking a lot, a lot, a lot lately. It is, like, pretty much the star of the show of therapy, I feel like for me lately. Of like, we don't talk about our kids that much, because we want to afford them a level of privacy that they cannot choose, uh, or elect to choose at this point, right?

And we aren't very, like, forward about them. We don't post, like, a bunch of public pictures of them or any of that.

Rachel: Yeah. And not saying either that, like, you're a James Van Der Beek. You know? Like, we—[laughs]

Griffin: No, yeah.

Rachel: We don't have a level of scrutiny that, you know.

Griffin: No, of course not. But it is something I feel like we can do for them, and so we do it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: At the same time... the image of myself that is projected out into the world—

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: —is such a narrow fuckin' sliver of the rest of my... experience. And the rest of that experience is in that—I feel like is in that poem, or reflected in that poem so much.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: And that is, like, you know, it is I guess a type of, like, narrow casting. But I always feel like when I am talking to parents of kids around this age, like, it is, uh—it is like a topic of conversation that is, like, filled with excitement because, like, you don't get a chance to really, like, talk to other people about, uh, the day to day sort of minutiae of the stuff you do with your kids.

Rachel: Yeah. And it was so—you know, I felt like when I went into therapy right after we had Henry, maybe a year after we had Henry, I thought, like, I am uniquely bad at this. But then I realized pretty soon after that almost everybody that see—[laughs]

Griffin: Is bad in the same way.

Rachel: Well, and that it is very common to seek out therapy after you have children because you are suddenly aware of all of these things about your yourself and all of these concerns you have that you will bring to the experience of your children. And it just, like, shines this light on like, if you don't deal with this, this is going to continue... forever.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: You know? Like, you feel this responsibility.

Griffin: Anyway, we're the best parents who've ever fuckin' lived.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And we're here to tell you that, um...

Rachel: Do we have time for my second poem, do you think?

Griffin: I think so, yeah! I mean, the first one was pretty, uh, devastating. But [crosstalk].

Rachel: This one I think is a little—

Griffin: Do a silly one.

Rachel: —lighter? [laughs] It's a little silly.

Griffin: Do a silly one.

Rachel: It's called Summertime.

"I flush the latest dead fish down
the toilet before the children
come home. We bought the fish
to be little responsibility lessons
and then little death lessons

for the children, though the fish
keep dying for no clear reason
and somehow I am the only one
who is ever home to partake
of the death lessons. The children
are at camp learning to be bored
and itchy with a few moments
of wonder and one to two friends
each. They are having childhoods
and I am having adulthood,
watching the silver body that just
this morning contained a life
flash like money one last time
before vanishing down the drain,
trying to decide whether or not
to tell them when they arrive,
their faces red from sun and chlorine.
I pray here, over the toilet, that in
the moment, I will tell them the truth
and that I will tell it well enough.”

Griffin: Man alive!

Rachel: Lovely.

Griffin: This shit is so good, Rachel!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Have you been holding out on—how long have you known about...
about this? About this good poetry?

Rachel: [simultaneously] About poetry?

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This shit's so good.

Rachel: Um, yeah. I was very excited to find this poet. So Carrie Fountain had a book recently called *The Life*. It came out in 2021. Um, prior to that, she had a book of poetry called *Instant Winner* in 2014. [through laughter] Which I love as a title.

Griffin: That is very good.

Rachel: And then in 2010, *Burn Lake*. And those are kind of her three big books of poetry, so I would encourage—

Griffin: Not a joke, that is some of my favorite poetry I think you've brought to the show. That was really incredible.

Rachel: Yeah! I immediately added all of those books to my list to purchase, because I just felt like she's doing it right.

Griffin: Yeah. Hell yeah. I love—I love when this happens.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I love when—it's so outside of my, like... thing.

Rachel: I know, I know!

Griffin: That when I hear, like, poetry, it's like I've, like... eaten a very good gazpacho. And it's like, "I don't know anything about this, but that's great! You're telling there's more good gazpacho out there?!"

Rachel: "You mean there's more of this?!" [laughs]

Griffin: "There's more gazpacho?!" Um, hey. 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. Uh, we got some new merch over at mcelroymerch.com. We've got a Hog's Gotta Hunt sticker, inspired by my brother's weedsona that he brings out when we play video games together.

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

Griffin: Um, and we're doing a bunch of discounts on all of our apparel items.

Rachel: Oh, I didn't know that.

Griffin: Uh, yeah. So now's a great time to stock up for the holidays. And... uh, I think that's probably it.

Rachel: Yeah, thanks everybody who maybe still expects this episodes to come out on Wednesday. We also would like that.

Griffin: So cute. So adorable.

Rachel: We also hope that that will continue at some point.

Griffin: Real quick, two small wonders. Liz says:

"My small wonder is getting home after a long day, taking off my shoes, and popping my toes on my soft carpet. Maybe it was the years of ballet and marching band, but there's nothing more ethereal than a good toe-poppin' foot stretch."

I do love that. That's, um... I learned that from Die Hard.

Rachel: Of course, of course.

Griffin: Make little balls with your feet. That's so good. Samuel says:

"My small wonder is when someone needs to merge into your lane at the same time you need to merge into theirs and you're able to swap places in a graceful ballet of mutual accommodation."

Rachel: That is nice.

Griffin: I do like that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It feels like, um... sometimes I wanna just, like, do it back too, and just, like, go back and forth a bit.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: But that would be being two big assholes on the road, so...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: We don't usually do that. Um, thank you. Thank you all again. And, uh, have a good—have a good rest of your week. We'll be back next... Wednesday to Friday.

Rachel: [laughs] On to the next 300.

Griffin: On to the next three—to six—to see in si—next year in 600! No. It'll be—it'll be, like, six years.

Rachel: [simultaneously] No, it'll be many years, yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: It'll be a long time, yeah. Anyway, bye!

Rachel: Bye!

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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