

Wonderful! 347: Take Those Crackle Bones Away

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[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Ha—[spoofs ghostly wail] oo-oo! This is Griffin McElroy. [spoofs ghostly wail] Whoo-oo!

Rachel: And this is Wonderful.

Griffin: Clackel, clackel, clackel. That's the sound of skeleton bones.

Rachel: Is this our Halloween episode?

Griffin: Man, I don't freakin' know. Let me see.

Rachel: Probably not.

Griffin: So, yesterday was the 16th... seven—is 23. No, man. I guess the next one is gonna be the Halloween one, huh?

Rachel: Yeah, take those crackle bones away.

Griffin: Well, I'm gonna have to redo my whole segment. [guffaws] Listen, this is Halloween episode observed.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I mean—

Rachel: I love that you could have so easily checked.

Griffin: Yeah, no, I mean, it wouldn't have taken very much for me to check out.

Rachel: That's all right, everybody—you know, people want to extend the season, I've heard.

Griffin: Sure, I've extended it forwards. So as not to encroach on Christmas time and all the rest.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But this is Wonderful, a show where we talk about things we like, that's good, that we're into. This one's going to be, I would say, half spooky. And then next—

Rachel: I mean—

Griffin: Next week's might also be half spooky.

Rachel: Mine can also be spooky.

Griffin: I'm excited to hear that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: What an exciting tease.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do you have a small wonder, spooky or not? Here you come.

Rachel: Um... Can you go first?

Griffin: Man, I just... we keep talking about it like every episode, but Golden Bachelorette continues to deliver on emotional payloads that no other reality TV is really given for me right now.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'll tell you—

Rachel: These men love each other. And most of them have been alone for some time.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it is just beautiful to see them together, supporting each other.

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah, this last episode, like when the dudes got kicked out of the house, they were like really sad. Not because they weren't gonna get with Joan, but just because like they hadn't had an experience like this, like hanging out with a bunch of very similar dudes, in probably three decades or so.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And the friendships that have come out of this is truly—

Rachel: Man! Something just occurred to me.

Griffin: What's that?

Rachel: It's been like a relatively peaceful season, at least so far.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And it occurred to me that as men get older, their testosterone level drops.

Griffin: Oh, you think...

Rachel: And maybe that's why these men haven't been super competitive.

Griffin: That's so fascinating.

Rachel: And also very willing to kind of accept like, "Yeah, she's not for me." [titters]

Griffin: Yeah. Also want to give a shout out, something that I haven't talked about yet is a little game called Metaphor: ReFantazio. Which is a real mouthful. But it's from the creators of the Persona franchise. And I have been really head over heels for this one game.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Been really, really deep into this one.

Rachel: Is it—

Griffin: Not anything you would like even remotely a little bit at all.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's an interesting—it's like a fantasy story with like this sort of corrupt religious monarchy that rules everything. And then someone casts a spell that turns it into like a democracy overnight. And so, it's like what happens when this world has to shift suddenly to become a democracy. It's interesting subject matter, but it's mostly just like that good Persona shit that I crave. And it's hitting real good for me. Do you have a small wonder?

Rachel: Okay, my small wonder exists more as a concept than an actual thing that I would want.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: So, we've been asking the boys what they want to be for Halloween.

Griffin: I have some movement on this I haven't told you about.

Rachel: Oh, okay, good, good. I can find out live on air. [titters]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And Henry has already reached the phase where he is entertained by the idea of an ironic costume.

Griffin: He has tapped into ironic humor at age seven.

Rachel: [chuckles] So, apropos of nothing, this is not a media property he knows really anything about.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But he decided, when we asked him what you want to be, he said a Teletubby. And we were like, well, that's strange. And he was like, "I think it'd be really funny." [titters]

Griffin: And I was like, "Which Teletubby do you want to be?" And he was like—

Rachel: He didn't know their names.

Griffin: He said, "Bing-Bong?" And I was like, "Nah."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I don't mind him being a Teletubby if he really wants to be one. But this situation smacks to me of, Halloween night, he's gonna put that costume on and walk to the front door and be like, "Actually, I don't... I don't want to be—I don't want to do this."

Rachel: He doesn't realize that he's in this gray area age where people could see him as a seven-year-old and think maybe he sincerely still likes Teletubbies.

Griffin: Which like, who cares if other people think that, but—

Rachel: But he doesn't. [chuckles]

Griffin: He doesn't. He's falsely representing himself.

Rachel: He's presenting it as like, "What a good joke that people will enjoy."

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And we're telling him people will not get that it's a joke.

Griffin: Let me tell you what him and Gus both kind of like bounced off of each other.

Rachel: Okay?

Griffin: Henry started talking about how he really wants to be Waluigi.

Rachel: Okay?

Griffin: And then I was like, "Oh, that would be really good."

Rachel: That would be really good.

Griffin: And Henry was like, "And Gus could be Wario." And I was like, "That's also really good."

Rachel: Oh, that's good too.

Griffin: So I asked Gus, "Do you want to be Wario?" And he was like, "Yeah, Wario!" And then I thought you and I could dress up like Mario and Luigi, and have the whole Mario family go trick or treating.

Rachel: Oh, that's lovely. And thank you in advance for not making me be a girl character, just default.

Griffin: Sure. Haven't we been Mario and Luigi? No, we were Ash and Pikachu in the past. That was a weird Halloween.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, I think that would be good. I don't know if we can find a child's Waluigi and Wario costume.

Rachel: [chuckles] No kidding. Like our children, I mean Henry in particular, they're not large children.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: So, even getting them in a size that is age appropriate is not easy.

Griffin: But guess who is also slender and slight? Waluigi!

Rachel: True.

Griffin: Wario a little thick, but like that's okay. We can get a little padding or a little something.

Rachel: We can also get crafty, because these costumes are essentially clothes and just—

Griffin: Yeah, they're overalls with long sleeve shirts underneath.

Rachel: They're just clothing items.

Griffin: Yeah, easy.

Rachel: And hats.

Griffin: No problem.

Rachel: And the children's heads are so large, it wouldn't matter if we can't find a child's hat. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yes, that is also true. I'm so excited for your segment today.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You sent me some pictures and at first I was like, why is this a thing? And then I remembered why this is your topic. And it made me so delighted, baby.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. So.... and I'm not saying this to plug my own Instagram. Although, if you want—

Griffin: You gotta get—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I's a primo follow. Not a ton of posts on there.

Rachel: Not a ton of posts.

Griffin: More than I do, but it's quality stuff.

Rachel: We went to New York over the weekend, which very easily could have been my small wonder. I just didn't even think about it.

Griffin: It was a lot of fun.

Rachel: And it was a lot of fun. And on the train ride back, our small son, unsurprisingly likes to find all of the various pamphlets available to you on a train. And the one that he found was like the safety brochure. And in the safety brochure there was a picture indicating that you should help your children off the train and onto the platform. But the child in the photo looked like an adult man.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And it reminded me of paintings I studied when I was minoring in art history, from the medieval time. Where this was like the trend.

Griffin: You specifically minored in art from the medieval time?

Rachel: No, I minored in art history. And one of the periods I studied was medieval paintings.

Griffin: Okay, that's amazing.

Rachel: I mean, not as like a class. Just like, you know, you take those like introductory classes and they go through, you know, the history of art.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: As one might expect in art history. [titters]

Griffin: Absolutely.

Rachel: And I just thought to myself, like this is an interesting topic. And one I actually never really researched, I just kind of took the word of my professor at the time, who kind of just gave us like a one word or one sentence answer on this. So anyway, so my wonderful thing this week is old man babies in paintings.

Griffin: Old man babies in old timey like Renaissance paintings, would you say?

Rachel: I mean, it started in the medieval period, and like kind of ended at the beginning of the Renaissance.

Griffin: Okay. Renaissance people figured out how to draw babies.

Rachel: Well, there's a whole—I mean, there's—this is the topic.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: We will get into this. [chuckles]

Griffin: I'm so excited. I don't know—can I tell you something?

Rachel: Yeah?

Griffin: I'm not an intelligent man.

Rachel: [snickers] You're just not an art guy.

Griffin: There's many subjects that I—I'm not an art guy. I'm barely a science guy. I'm—

Rachel: Well, there's already a science guy.

Griffin: That's true, and I don't really want that title. Art though, I think, and art history, is number one. We went to the Met while I was—we were New York. And like every museum-going experience I have, especially one that has as many classical works as the Met, I just walked around like, "That's cool. Is that real?"

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That's about the extent of what I can bring to the— "Is that real? Holy shit!"

Rachel: I don't mind that so much. What bothered me a little bit is when you started making stuff up and telling our children. When we saw that painting of the very large people, and you couldn't really figure out what style it represented, so you just said people were larger back then.

Griffin: [laughs] That was funny!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Well, you accept that it was funny, though. You laughed. You said you're upset by it, but you were bustin' up. You liked that. I won't stand for this revisionist history.

Rachel: I just—we have to be careful. This is like how you were led to believe that children were given pasta to snack on.

Griffin: That was a cruel joke for my brothers! That's different from a funny little observation.

Rachel: I just don't want Henry to like expertly walk into a situation like—

Griffin: And be like, "People used to be very big."

Rachel: [chuckles] I mean, which may—

Griffin: Now, the opposite, if anything.

Rachel: Anyway. So, there are a few paintings I'll talk about in particular, but I wanted to first see if you were familiar with this. This is a word that I kind of knew, but I didn't know the exact definition, and that is homunculus.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Which—

Griffin: I watched Fullmetal Alchemist.

Rachel: Whoa, I don't even know what that is.

Griffin: It's an anime.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: It's got about a bunch of—

Rachel: Which is a miniature, fully formed human that was believed to exist like prior to birth. Like in the egg was like—popped out, fully formed.

Griffin: Whoa? So wait, is this like a folklore mysticism thing? Or is this like a medical, they think that—

Rachel: The definition says, "The concept originated in folklore, alchemy and preformationism."

Griffin: No way.

Rachel: And was popularized in the 16th century alchemy, and in 19th century fiction.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And some of this connected to Jesus.

Griffin: It all does!

Rachel: Part of the reason in a lot of these medieval paintings that you would see like a fully formed looking adult as a baby—

Griffin: Yes?

Rachel: Was that the portraits were usually commissioned by churches, and medieval concepts of Jesus were deeply influenced by the homunculus. And the idea that Jesus was perfectly formed and unchanged, and it became kind of a standard way to depict Jesus.

Griffin: The baby Jesus?

Rachel: Like he didn't—they didn't want him to look weak and vulnerable. They wanted him to be like ready to—

Griffin: Fight and save you from the devil.

Rachel: Ready to roll. [chuckles]

Griffin: Sure. That's interesting!

Rachel: The reason—the thing my art history professor told me, and it is somewhat true in some of the research I'd done, is like people just didn't have babies in front of them when they painted babies.

Griffin: Sure!

Rachel: You know? Like the—and this is some of what I found. Like the idea of accuracy was not a huge piece of art at the time.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: It was more expressionistic.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And it was also because there wasn't a lot of portraiture happening in medieval times.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: It was mostly like the churches, or you know, these institutions commissioning these paintings. It wasn't individuals saying, "Paint my baby."

Griffin: Well, I have to imagine it was hard, if not impossible, to make a living as an artist back then, right? Like, if you worked on the illuminated scripts, you could probably scrape by. But otherwise—you could paint the ceiling of a famous church, and they would probably compensate you for that. But you couldn't be—there was no, you know, "Buy me a coffee, support my Patreon," back then. [titters]

Rachel: [chuckles] So there is a Vox 2015 article called, "Why babies in medieval paintings look like ugly old men." [titters] And they interviewed an art history professor, Matthew Averett, who edited an anthology called *The Early Modern Child in Art and History*. And he kind of mentions again that painters were less interested in realism.

He says, quote, "The strangeness that we see in medieval art stems from a lack of interest in naturalism, and they veered more towards expressionistic conventions." And then he says when the Renaissance happened, Florence's middle class flourished, and people were able to afford portraits of their own children.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: When it was their own child being painted.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: They didn't want it to look like an ugly old man. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: There is another article. CBC in 2020 had their own article called, "Why do Renaissance babies look like little old men?" [titters]

Griffin: Great, that—wow, word for word, huh?

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Not ugly old men, little old men. Which I appreciate the Tinder—

Rachel: [chuckles] And they said, "It ranges from tiny old man to a really muscular baby. Sometimes they are more on the ugly side than on the pretty side. They often have large heads."

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So, the photos I sent you were two examples of that. The first one I sent you is just a real ripped baby.

Griffin: This baby, guys, is... fucking jacked! Like really, really strong; pecks, six pack, the whole deal. Head is about one-fifth the size of its torso. Just a wild-looking human being.

Rachel: Yeah. So this is Madonna and Child Enthroned, from 1350. It is Paolo Veneziano. And it is just, I mean, it's just a small man on the Madonna's lap. Just standing up, looking at her, like he just finished some reps. [titters]

Griffin: Like he just, he did not skip any day. On the third day, he did leg stuff.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And he got so strong.

Rachel: And then the other one I sent you is less focused on like a jacked baby.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And more focused on that face. And this reminded me of the face that was in that Amtrak—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Like descriptor picture. It is Benozzo Gozzoli's The Virgin and Child with Saints, from 1476.

Griffin: This baby's not serving as much, I think, as the Madonna and Child one. If it's supposed—is it supposed to be Jesus?

Rachel: I mean, I think when we're talking about the Virgin and Child, I have to imagine.

Griffin: That's like a curly redhead, like toddler version of Jesus. Which is like cool, it's art, it can be whatever it wants to be.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: All them dudes in this picture look amazing!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: The dudes in this picture are so detailed, you can really see the emotion on their face. And then, yeah, this is a better picture, I think. I'm not an art history guy, again, but this is a better picture.

Rachel: [chuckles] Well, yeah, and what you're doing is you're looking for like accuracy.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? I mean, I will say there's a lot about this picture that is very artfully done.

Griffin: Sure!

Rachel: And I don't know that this baby is better than the other babies.

Griffin: It's weaker, physically.

Rachel: [chuckles] But it is more naturalistic. I will say, again, this baby is standing on her lap, just fully ready to go.

Griffin: Yeah. Ready to party, ready to save us.

Rachel: Anyway, that that is my—that is my topic. I would encourage you—as you can tell, if you just google 'medieval babies ugly old men,' you will get several articles—

Griffin: You'll get where you need to go, for sure.

Rachel: With that exact title. [titters]

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Thanks.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Okay, this isn't our spooky episode. But I do, in the Halloween season, tend to bring a scary movie as my topic every year. And this year I've decided to bring... It Follows.

Rachel: Oh, it's a good one.

Griffin: This scary movie did give me the nightmares.

Rachel: Have you not talked about this?

Griffin: So, actually, back in episode six, I did a segment on Disasterpeace, who was the composer of It Follows.

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: And I think I played the title track of the film back then.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: But according to wonderful.FYI, I have not done a full segment on It Follows. It Follows is a 2014 indie horror film. Crazy that it's a decade ago. It was written and directed by David Robert Mitchell. And like I said, it was scored by Disasterpeace, who's one of my favorite sort of like composers. Does a bunch of video game stuff, a bunch of like soundtrack stuff, is really excellent.

I actually learned about this movie because I followed him on, you know, whatever platform. And he like shared an announcement like, "Hey, I did the score for this movie." And I watched the trailer and I was like, "Fuck yes, this looks good as hell." So, it was like at the top of my list of like wanting to see it. And I went and I think I saw it on like opening day. And you came with, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And then I had really bad dreams for like a long time after that.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: So the premise of this movie is established quickly. There is a curse that if you are inflicted with the curse, it causes a monster to pursue you, endlessly, walking slowly but like ceaselessly in a straight line towards you. And the monster can take on any human form that it wants. It can sort of

like shape shift that way. But the monster can't be seen by anyone who doesn't carry the curse.

Rachel: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: And you can pass the curse on to someone if you have sex. But that doesn't mean that you're like saved, it just means that person is now higher priority on the monster's list than you.

Rachel: Oh, I forgot about that.

Griffin: Yes. So like if the person you had sex with gets killed, the monster comes back after you, it just goes down the line.

Rachel: Geez.

Griffin: And if it does kill you—if it does catch you, it kills you really, really bad. Which is sort of demonstrated in the opening minutes of the movie, which is super, super duper scary. It is just an extremely scary, disturbing premise, because it establishes this world where you can't rest. You can't get comfortable for too long, because this thing is constantly pursuing you. At a snail's pace, but it's constantly pursuing you. All you can do is like buy time by getting away from it so you can like sleep or whatever.

Some of its appearances in the movie are horrifying. Like a lot of nudity in this movie, like nude, withered humans of different like shapes and sizes. And you get—watching it, you get really paranoid. As paranoid as Jay, who's the protagonist in the movie. Played by Micah Monroe, who's gone on to be in like a bunch of horror movies. Because like anyone in the background of any shot could be the monster.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So you're constantly like scanning to see if you see someone walking straight towards the camera. And when you do, it's fuckin' super, super scary. So like, it establishes all these rules about like what the monster does in like the first 20 minutes of the flick. And then it sets off like, okay, and now you have the curse. Good luck.

I know a lot of people who did not enjoy this movie because it sets up those rules for the monster, but then like anything else that comes up does not get answered. They leave a lot to the imagination, and a lot up to sort of interpretation. Of like, can you kill the monster? What happens if you do X, Y or Z? You see the characters making these... seemingly making decisions to like gain some sort of advantage, do some sort of thing. But it doesn't actually show those moments happening. There's a lot that happens off camera in this movie.

And I get sort of the reasoning behind that, like this movie centers around this group of teens. Only one of whom has the curse. And you feel as clueless and as powerless about this situation as they do. Which is like very... very immersive and very, very cool. But I know lots of people who like, in a horror movie where it's like, these are the rules of the monster, but then they don't actually answer all of the questions, that drives them fuckin' crazy.

Rachel: Yeah. Well, and there is something to be said about like, if you knew what it took to kill them, there would be some relief. And then the whole movie I think would be about like, are they gonna get it done? You know?

Griffin: It is the hopelessness of the situation that makes this movie so scary. And it's what makes it really, really stick with you I think for a long time afterwards. The soundtrack is fucking spectacular. It's one of the best horror movie scores ever made, in my opinion. Disasterpeace like works mostly with these like really chunky synths. He did the soundtrack to a game called Fez, which is like one of my favorites. And Hyper Light Drifter, and all these really great indie games.

And in this movie, he uses those like really crunchy, heavy sounds to create this leitmotif for the monster that is like a car alarm going off. And it happens with this like rhythmic sort of step to it that kind of feels like the monster walking towards you.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It is so, so, so rad and scary. And I actually want to play a clip of a song from one of the first encounters that Jay has with the monster, which is called Old Maid.

[audio excerpt of "Old Maid" by Disasterpeace plays]

Griffin: Because this movie leaves a lot of things unanswered, it kind of lends itself to all manner of interpretation. Like the base level layer that I think a lot of people walked away with is it's some sort of allegory about, you know, STIs, or what have you. But the director of the movie has said that he believes it goes like way deeper than that. The interpretation that I like the most is that it's a horror movie about how the choices you make, or the things that happen to you in your adolescence can have consequences for the rest of your life.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: Which is fuckin' scary! It's heavy—

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: And super, super scary. It's a heavy, challenging concept for a movie. And like, this is not an empowering horror film. There is no final girl moment of like she found the sword that she needs. Like, it is just this non-stop treatise on anxiety and death. And it makes it a somewhat unpleasant film to watch, but buddy, if you want to get scared this Halloween season, I can pretty much assure you *It Follows* is the film to watch.

Rachel: Yeah, man, you talking about it makes me want to watch it again. But also, I don't want to be that uncomfortable.

[group chuckle]

Rachel: You know?

Griffin: I think knowing sort of where the movie goes would probably make it a little bit easier.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: But yeah, I'd watch that movie again, definitely.

Hey, let's talk about what our friends at home have suggested. Carly says, "My husband and I love crokinole, but the board is really hard to find a place to store easily. We made a foam clock to fit over the pegs, and now it hangs on our wall as a pretty decoration. And when we want to play it, it comes off really easily. It's my favorite nerdy decor." They sent a picture. It's just like the wood circle, but over the center hole where the pegs are, they have a little clock. And they can just pop it off, set the board down, play crokinole.

Rachel: Oh, that's cool.

Griffin: I thought that was so neat. I love crafty people. Tiffany says, "I love getting through the first chapter of a thick book and realizing it is absolutely my shit. The excitement of having a whole brand-new world to dive into and that I can sit reading for hours on end and not have made a dent."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I do like that a lot.

Rachel: I'm kind of in the middle of that right now, where I feel like I never have enough time to read this book.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's just exciting to know that that's there for me.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure. I love that. We're hurrying a little bit because Rachel has to get to an appointment. But thank you so much for listening. Thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. That's to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. Go to maximumfun.org, check out all the great stuff they have there.

We got some shows coming up, one last leg of shows for MBMBaM and TAZ in Indianapolis and Milwaukee. You can find tickets and links and everything at bit.ly/mcelroytours. And we got some new merch up in the store that you can go check out before the month of October winds down. Thank you so much for listening! We appreciate you. Have a spooky Halloween!

Rachel: And then again maybe next episode!

Griffin: And then again probably next week, [spoofs ghostly wail] whoooow!

Rachel: [chuckles]

[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

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