

Wonderful! 367: Gun-Poppin' Think Pad Stretch

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[theme song plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Welcome to *Wonderful!*, the podcast where we talk about things we like, that's good, that we're into. We're halfway through the Drive, kids!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: We're gonna stop at this... residence inn for the night, and we're gonna get out.

Rachel: Uh-huh. Here's 50 cents; go get something from the vending machine.

Griffin: Get yourself a soda pop from the vending machine!

Rachel: And then give us that money right back. [laughing]

Griffin: Give it right back, for the MaxFunDrive!

You all have been so supportive of this show, and all the shows that we do throughout the many, many years that we've been doing them. This is our 14th Drive, I believe, with the Network?

Rachel: When you say "our," you mean...

Griffin: The McElroy Family's...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You're a part of this, babe.

Rachel: I know, but I wasn't there at the beginning!

Griffin: No, you weren't. Um, I tried to— I tried to get you!

Rachel: But there were— there was an extra set of footprints. [giggles]

Griffin: But that's where you carried me, I guess, while you were not present.

Rachel: [laughs] That's where my love, my future love, carried you...

Griffin: Exactly!

Rachel: ... to the moment we met.

Griffin: Maximumfun.org/join is the link you can go to. This is our last week of the Drive. We've been doing a *ton* of streaming, and have a bunch of bonus content available for you. If you've never become a member, seriously, the amount of bonus content: *hundreds* of hours of stuff across all the shows. Uh, you are going to find a treasure trove, a dragon's hoard of good stuff in there, waiting for you.

And also, you support us, this show, directly! The money, when you choose what membership level you wanna go with - each of which comes with some great rewards - you—

Rachel: Yeah! You get, like, a list of all the Max Fun shows, and you can select the ones that you listen to, and then they will get a chunk of your donation.

Griffin: Yeah, so it is a very direct way. Max Fun [mischievous tone] skims a little off the top— uh, no. That makes it sound like they're...

Rachel: [laughs] No!

Griffin: ... doing nefarious work. They do incredible, incredible work, and they take a little bit to administrate this whole shebang.

Rachel: To have staff that, like, support all of these shows with all of the things we need to stay afloat, you know?

Griffin: And not only that, but owns the network, also, in a co-op style!

Rachel: Yeah, it's a co-op!

Griffin: It's a wonderful, wonderful group of people, a wonderful network that I am so honored to have been a part of for as long as we have. We'll tell you more about the Drive later on in this episode, but if you enjoy our work, and you are able to, maximumfun.org/join.

If you think it might be something you wanna do, go ahead and just knock it out! It's really, really quick, and then you won't have to think about it later.

Rachel: And then you will be able to listen to a whole bunch of extra stuff.

Griffin: You'll hear a bunch of extra stuff, like Hockey Talk Badokadok with us and Dave Shumka.

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: Any small wonders for us this week?

Rachel: Small wonders. I mean, I gotta say, that game!

Griffin: That *fucking* game— y'all, okay. Non-sports folks, listen, I get it, but last night's game of hockey was *insane*.

Rachel: And keep in mind, we're recording this early...

Griffin: Friday, yeah.

Rachel: ... but the game of hockey we watched last night was the game between two teams battling for the wildcard spot...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... in the Stanley Cup playoffs. And that was the St. Louis Blues and the Vancouver Canucks.

Griffin: Dave Shumka's team of choice.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, yes. And— yeah, the playoffs are looking really fucking tight. Blues, uh, the Flames...

Rachel: Every game can make a difference.

Griffin: ... the Canucks are all, like, neck-and-neck-and-neck-and-neck. There's like a dozen or so games left, I think, maybe a little bit more. And so it's just *thrilling*, and this game was just absolute Stanley Cup-level, like...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... incredible hockey.

Rachel: It went to overtime, 'cause Canucks tied it at the last, like...

Griffin: With two seconds left.

Rachel: ... yeah, the last two seconds of the game. And then overtime is five minutes, and it's three-on-three, and it's very stressful to watch, and then the Blues scored in overtime. And Griffin and I literally jumped up [laughs] and hugged each other.

Griffin: I screamed— I know!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. It's really— It doesn't, like, settle things. It's like, you know, I think we're at 77 points, Canucks are at 76, and the Flames are at 75?

Rachel: Yeah, it's still incredibly close.

Griffin: It's still so fucking close, but like...

Rachel: But we are technically in the spot right now.

Griffin: We are in it! I know, I looked at the standings this morning, and it sent a wave of warmth over my body.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, gosh, I think I was gonna say that, too. Um...

Rachel: I know. I know. Anything you say will probably pale.

Griffin: I think I talked about *Wanderstop* on this show— we did a whole episode on it on *The Besties*. I'm not sure if I talked about it on this show. It's the new game that was written by Davey Wreden, who we knew back from Austin. He made a couple great games.

Rachel: Yeah, I don't know if you've mentioned that on *Wonderful!*

Griffin: It's wonderf— it's fantastic. It's a game about burnout, and the sort of forces that lead a person to burnout, and how work ethic can be a toxic thing, but it has that conversation in a really nuanced way. Not just saying, like, "You gotta take care of yourself, man!" Like, it really gets into what it means when you have that voice in your head that is telling you...

Rachel: You mean that you don't jump from level to level, drinking vials of energy juice?

Griffin: You don't jump from level to level, drinking vials of energy j— Well, gosh, babe, you're actually not too wrong.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: There *is* a lot of sort of, like... You have to get into a very zen-like state of mind with the game.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I feel like it would drive you a little bit crazy, because it's like the anti *Stardew Valley*, a little bit. Where ostensibly, you are growing these plants for tea farming, but there's not really a *reason* you're doing it.

Rachel: Oh, man, that's hard for me. [laughs]

Griffin: And throughout certain points in the game, like, the area will just reset, and everything is gone, and now you are sort of starting fresh.

Rachel: Wow.

Griffin: So it's like, unattaching yourself from the grind...

Rachel: Oh...

Griffin: ... that is also inherent to games.

Anyway, the game's fantastic. The soundtrack is by Daniel Rosenfeld, C418, who we also know from back in *Austin*, and it's *incredible*. It is so lovely, and I've been working to it lately, because it's just, like, chill instrumental music.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: But it's definitely in my top games of the year so far. Recommend it highly.

I go first this week.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I would like to talk to you about the Small-World Phenomenon. This one scratches, like, that sociology minor itch in my brain. I don't—

Rachel: I always forget you have that.

Griffin: Yeah. You know...

Rachel: How did you pick it?

Griffin: How did I pick it? Um... [sighs] At Marshall University, there was a thing called the Marshall Plan. And the Marshall Plan was, you cannot graduate until you have taken this number of credits of these different subjects...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um...

Rachel: Was sociology one of them?

Griffin: Sociology was in one of the tracks, right?

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I didn't wanna take history. The reason I became a sociology...

Rachel: [giggling]

Griffin: ... minor is because I didn't wanna be a history minor.

Rachel: Alright.

Griffin: But also, I took a sociology class, and the teacher was fuckin' incredible.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: He sounded like Click *and* Clack from *Car Talk* combined into one human being.

Rachel: Oh, I love that!

Griffin: But every class I had in that track was so detached from anything else I was doing at college. I didn't know anybody in any of the classes. But I had so many great classes in there. I took one called Sociology of Death and Dying that was like, p—

Rachel: Yeah...

Griffin: Kind of a rough ride!

Rachel: I remember you talking about that.

Griffin: But I found that really, really— the idea of every living human being in civilization being part of this massive sort of... unobservable organism that is just chaotically sort of changing all the time, and the best you can do is sort of find patterns in that, like I found that very, very fascinating.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: This is sort of the opposite of that, in the way.

So to walk us into it, there is an Instagram account called @small.world.phenomenon. I was telling you about it, I believe, the other night. All they do is post videos where they connect any two human beings, across history to modern day, Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon style.

Rachel: Oh, yeah, you showed me one of these!

Griffin: I showed you one of these! They take on— so they take on the challenges left in the comments of these videos, of people like, "No fuckin' way you can connect these people."

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And then they'll be like, "Uh, just posted it."

Some highlights include: Archduke Franz Ferdinand to the band Franz Ferdinand...

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: ... um, Ryan from *Ryan's World* to Saddam Hussein, which I think is maybe the one I showed you...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: ... uh, Joseph Stalin to Haliey Welch, the "hawk tuah" lady...

Rachel: [laughs] Oh, Jesus.

Griffin: Um...

Rachel: How did— so—

Griffin: Anne Frank to Steven Zahn is another, uh, quick one.

Rachel: You're probably gonna get there, but like, when they were showing the connections...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... in the video you showed me, it was like images...

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: ... of people together.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Is that how they're doing it?

Griffin: That's how they're doing it.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: They're saying, "These people have met each other," right?

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: This is inherent to the Small-World Problem— or Phenomenon, or Experiment, or whatever— which I'll talk about in a little bit. But yeah, it's basically saying like, "These two human beings at least knew each other to the extent that they took a photo together," right? Or, in some cases, were in a *painting* together, when you go back to, like... you know, old, old, old, *old* days.

Some of these connections— like Ryan from *Ryan's World* to Saddam Hussein is like, so fast...

Rachel: [laughs] I know!

Griffin: ... it boggles the mind how quickly you get there.

What I find *really* fascinating is the more I watch these videos, the more I started to pick up on certain patterns. There are bridge-like humans who allow these massive leaps from, you know, past to what we would consider modern day, right?

Rachel: Yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin: So like, Charlie Chaplin— there's a Charlie Chaplin to Marlon Brando to Michael Jackson pipeline that almost all of these things run through, right?

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And that is— I find that really fascinating! The idea that there are these iconic people who have met enough iconic people that they form these little, like, social nexuses around themselves, nexi...

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Griffin: ... around themselves. Where, you know, if you want to connect this person from 200 years ago to uh, this SoundCloud rapper today...

Rachel: Yeah, you just have to get...

Griffin: ... you're gonna go through Brando.

Rachel: Yeah, you just have to get to Brando.

Griffin: You're gonna go through Chaplin. Right.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think that's very, very cool. There's another, uh, very sort of common pipeline that I see, which is Muhammad Ali to Will Smith. Muhammad Ali, you know, huge influential boxer, met a *ton* of celebrities and politicians...

Rachel: Yeah, of course!

Griffin: ... and so because there's different worlds connecting there— and then you get to Will Smith, who has also met, you know...

Rachel: Yeah, true!

Griffin: Nelson Mandela is another *huge* one you see all of the time...

Rachel: Yeah! Yeah.

Griffin: ... because there's a lot of global reach there.

But seriously, in all of these videos, you will see one of those people pop up every time. These vast social networks sort of are spiral galaxies around these few sort of pinpoints of human light. That's like, wild to me.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, so, this idea of the Small-World Phenomenon... uh, it didn't originate with this Instagram account, obviously.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: If you've played Six Degrees to Kevin Bacon, you probably could've guessed that. Six Degrees to Kevin Bacon is an interesting one, because it's a bit more limited, right? Like, it is typically limited to movie stars...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... film people who share credits on the same movie, or—

Rachel: What you're describing makes the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon game look like child's play.

Griffin: It really does. Like, I—

Rachel: They're in the same industry! Like—

Griffin: Exactly. You could do probably one degree of separation of Kevin Bacon if it was just, like, "Who took a picture together?" Um, but you know, it's just about who was in movies together. And I think because Kevin Bacon has been in such a— has such a wide, let's say, quality range in his catalogue...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: ... from like, Oscar-nominated stuff to not-as-good stuff, he's kind of like the Marlon Brando...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Well, he's not the Marlon Brando of movies, is he?

Rachel: [laughs] No.

Griffin: No, that's gonna be Marlon Brando, isn't it?

Rachel: No, but he's worked with, like, Susan Sarandon, and John Lithgow, you know? Like, people...

Griffin: Susan Sarandon's gotta be, at this point, a *huge* nexus person. Just a huge...

Rachel: Yeah. That has been in the business for a while now.

Griffin: Um, but the Small-World Experiment predates Kevin Bacon by quite a while. Uh, around the turn of the 20th Century, there were a few researchers and sociologists kicking this idea around, around the world. There was a Hungarian author named - I'm gonna butcher this, I apologize - Frigyes Karinthy who coined the term "six degrees of separation" in 1929.

But it was a social psychologist by the name of Stanley Milgram who really formalized and named the Small-World, you know, Problem. He wrote an article in the May 1967 issue of *Psychology Today* about it that was very, very formative.

Milgram also did what was called, I think, the Milgram experiment, which was, I believe, at Yale. And it was the experiment where people, through a computer, were asked to administer shocks to different test subjects.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it was an experiment to see, like, how obedient someone would be in the face of asking you to do terrible things...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... [chuckles softly] which was very, very controversial, understandably.

But Milgram also had all this stuff that he wrote about the Small-World Problem. It was all supported by other researchers and mathematicians. And the Small-World Problem put simply, this is from the article, is: "What is the probability that any two people, selected arbitrarily from a large population such as that of the United States, will know each other?" Also sort of factoring in the intermediary acquaintances, however many links in the chain you need to get to those people.

And at the time - and still now, really - at the time especially, the Small-World Problem was exactly that. It was a problem, because nobody had the tools to really run the numbers on this at the scale of just the population of the United States of America, right? Like, you couldn't...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: In 1967, you couldn't, like... [chuckles] go and find out who knew who...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... in a really wide-ranging way. But this problem, it garnered a lot of attention, it got a lot of people writing about it.

And what I find really interesting, to sort of cap off this dry history lesson, is that this Small-World Problem, both with the work of Milgram and the researchers who came before them, formalized an idea that is uh, pretty relevant today, which is that they called this web of connections between people a "social network," which is...

Rachel: Ah, yeah!

Griffin: Yeah! Which is kind of what it is now.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: I wonder how feasible it would be to do a Small-World, like, experiment using the social networking tools that we have available to us now. Obviously, not everyone is using those...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... and fewer and fewer are using them by the day.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But anyway, that was a really long walk. I just find it really fascinating, like... we think of the world as just sort of enormous, and um... its population just vast and unknowable. There's so many people who are all so different. But what the Small-World Phenomenon suggests is, "Maybe it isn't?"

And I think that's kind of neat.

Rachel: I think also it kind of speaks to the benefit of privilege in that if you are somebody of note, you will get more and more access to other people of note.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: So if you happen to know somebody who has a moment of, like, celebrity or fame, they're gonna be able to access *tons* of people in that moment. And that makes the kind of connection process a little quicker.

Griffin: Yeah. If you get a picture of yourself with Will Smith...

Rachel: [laughs] You're in it.

Griffin: You're in it!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You are way, way, way in it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um... I think that's very, very neat.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, you know what else I think is neat? The Maximum Fun Network.

Rachel: Oh, hey, me too!

Griffin: You also think it's neat?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's good. It would be a weird time of year to shit talk.

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: Um, we have so much bonus content for you. If you can support us at just \$5 bucks a month, you get access to the whole lot of it. All the bonus content. This year, we got the Hockey Talk Badokadok with Dave Shumka here on *Wonderful!*; we auditioned for *Hot Ones on My Brother, My Brother and Me*, and we're gonna release a video for that in the bonus content for you...

Rachel: Oh, yeah, is that up yet?

Griffin: It is! We hit our 4,000-member stretch goal... uh, which I'm very excited about. We did a new installment in *TAZ: Charlieverse*, which is the one-shot episodes we do where Justin's oldest daughter, Charlie, puts together a one-shot campaign for us, and it is...

Rachel: Big son has a...

Griffin: ... unhinged.

Rachel: ... a little— a monster in that.

Griffin: [lighthearted, amused tone] Big son has a monster that he put in that, too. It is some of my favorite stuff we've done.

Um, there is other pledge gifts levels, too. At \$10 bucks a month, you can choose one of a ton of different enamel pins for each of the shows on the Network. Here at *Wonderful!*, our pin is the Poetry Dragon. Uh, [amused tone] he's very neat looking...

Rachel: Got a li'l beret.

Griffin: He's got a li'l beret. He's an icon. Uh, and of course, you can get the bonus content at that level, too.

And there's other levels beyond that, but if you are able to chip in just \$5 bucks a month, that kind of support is the reason why we are still doing these shows, why we are able to do these shows. We have not run an ad on *Wonderful!* in...

Rachel: Weeks, and weeks, and weeks...

Griffin: Months.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I mean, genuinely, I can't remember the last time— and so that market has, for certain shows, fully, fully collapsed.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So it was never the *bulk* of our...

Rachel: I mean, we're just— the competition is so fierce now.

Griffin: Exactly, yeah.

Rachel: There are people of tremendous reach now that are getting access to the advertisers that once, uh, came to us. [laughs]

Griffin: Exactly. This model is obviously not entirely novel, but it is— like, I don't know a lot of people making stuff that we make...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... in the way that we make it who are not beholden to any other number of forces beyond their control determining the content of the show, or whether or not your show gets to keep being made, or not.

Rachel: Yeah. We don't have to clear our wonderful things with anyone each week. [laughs]

Griffin: We don't, no, and that only is true because of you all. And so there's a really wonderful symbiotic thing, almost, of, "This show, if you like it, it is the way that it is because we are supported by you, the listener."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That has been true of all of the shows on the Network for so long. And you can— you can be a part of that.

Rachel: Yeah. You know what I was thinking about? This morning, I was thinking about the opportunity I have to share poems and poets...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... with our listeners. And it occurred to me: I was like, "This is kind of my dream job...?" Like, it's hard for me to think of it as a job, you know...

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... because it's you and me talking, which is something we do all the time.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: But when I studied poetry in college and graduate school, I didn't necessarily think that would lead to any kind of career in the field.

Griffin: [laughs] Yeah? That's wild, 'cause you went to school for a fuckin' wicked long time.

Rachel: I know! [laughs] I know!

I know, 'cause I loved it, and I wanted more of it. And I was, I think, hopeful that it would continue to be in my life, but definitely not certain of that.

Griffin: And it wasn't, for a long time!

Rachel: And it wasn't! Yeah, I mean, it was something I did kind of on the side. But now I get to share it with a lot of people, and I get to kind of publish my own little anthology of my favorite poems and poets as often as I want, and that's kind of amazing.

Griffin: Yeah. That is amazing.

Rachel: I really appreciate people that have enjoyed that, and are able to donate to support the show, because I love doing it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Maximumfun.org/join is where you can go. If you're already a member, first of all, thank you so, so much. We are trying to, you know, obviously reach our— we have a bunch of different stretch goals, we're gonna do a bunch of fun stuff if we hit those numbers.

And you can help us reach those by boosting your membership, you know, a buck or two a month, if you are able to do so. Or you can upgrade to the next membership tier, from \$5 to \$10 a month, and so on.

If you are not a member, and you enjoy this show, and it means anything to you, you can be a part of it. And you can help us make it, and help us keep growing, regardless of the market forces of the world.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Maximumfun.org/join. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Um, what's your— can I steal y— no, I'm not gonna steal you away, 'cause we don't—

Rachel: You just kind of did, but not really.

Griffin: It was like the longest steal ever.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Like, I was crawling to second base.

Rachel: You wanna know what my thing is?

Griffin: I would love to know what your thing is, babe.

[short pause]

Griffin: [singing] Reachin' for the ThinkPad... Gotta stretch.

Rachel: [giggles] Uh—

Griffin: [spoken] Your guns really pop when you stretch for the ThinkPad.

Rachel: [laughs] Thank you.

Griffin: Quick small wonder: how much we objectify each other's muscles these days, I really...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... do appreciate.

Rachel: We're just not people that had ever been, I think, appreciated for our physical prowess. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, that's true. And it's not like I'm like, you know, fucking... poppin' chad over here, but sometimes I'll just like... pick up a thing, and you'll be like, "Ooh!"

Rachel: Yeah! And I'm like, "Hey, lookit! There's something there!"

Griffin: I like that.

Rachel: "And I can see it from here!"

Griffin: Just a real muscle daddy and muscle mommy over here.

Rachel: [through laughter] Oh, please, no!

Griffin: That's the new name of this podcast. *Muscle Daddy, Muscle Mommy!*

Rachel: [cry-laughing] No, please!

Griffin: Why not?

Rachel: We don't know *anything* we could share with anyone about muscles.

Griffin: Oh, I'll tell you about creatine... and...

Rachel: I don't think that's a thing anymore.

Griffin: Creatine? PanX?

Rachel: Are people still—

Griffin: People are mixing PanX with Creatine. [holding back laughter]

Rachel: I don't know what PanX is.

Griffin: [giggles] It's turning 'em *crazy*.

Rachel: [chuckles] Okay. Can I...?

Griffin: Please, yeah. I would love you to.

Rachel: So speaking of poetry, this week I am taking you to the Poetry Corner!

Griffin: [starts scatting, vaguely to the *Family Matters* theme]

... [singing] It's a rare condition! [cuts himself off, laughing]

Rachel: [giggling uncontrollably]

Griffin: [away from microphone] I fully—

Rachel: Did you not realize you were doing that?

Griffin: No, I didn't realize I was doing that!

Rachel: I thought you were very intentionally doing that!

Griffin: Doing the *Family Matters* thing? No, I—

Rachel: Yeah! [laughs]

Griffin: My head was just like, "Make these sounds." And I was like, "Okay!"
[scats to *Family Matters* theme]

Rachel: [laughing] That's so funny.

Griffin: [singing] It's a rare condition.

Rachel: I thought you were thinking, like, "Normally, I do the *Frasier* song. This week, I'll pick a different show."

Griffin: *Family Matters* theme song, *Step by Step* theme song, and... *Full House* theme song.

Rachel: I mean, *Full House*, of course, yeah.

Griffin: Which one— which one fucks the most? For me, it's *Family Matters*, all day.

Rachel: I mean, of those three, I only really watched *Full House*.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So it's hard for me to feel strongly about the other two.

Griffin: You *hate* Urkel.

Rachel: I— [sheepishly] kind of.

Griffin: [bursts out laughing]

Rachel: Is that okay?

Griffin: I guess so, yeah.

Rachel: Is that a hot take?

Griffin: You love Stefan.

Rachel: See, here's the thing with that show! I was supposed to hate Urkel, right?

Griffin: No, I don't think so, babe! I don't think you were supposed to hate Urkel.

Rachel: I was supposed to be endeared to him?

Griffin: I mean, he was a stinker— we can't. We can't spiral.

Rachel: Everybody in the show treated him like he was a nuisance, and I was supposed to like him?

Griffin: He was a nuisance, but he was so funny, and sometimes he got in a machine that turned him sexy.

Rachel: [laughing] That makes it sound like there were viewers that were like, watching until about halfway, and they were like, "Oh, not a sexy week," and just turned the show off.

Griffin: "Nope. No Stefan machine, I'm outta here!"

Rachel: Okay. [chuckles] This is a show where we talk about poetry and poets.

Griffin: Yes, yes, yes!

Rachel: Uh, and the poet I am talking about this week is Ellen Bass.

Griffin: I think— that sounds familiar to me!

Rachel: She's been around for a while. She's been putting out books of poetry since the '70s. She is still alive now; she's 77 years old. And she has a pretty famous poem, and I think I'll just read it real quick here at the top, 'cause it's a short one.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: Um, this is the one that I recognized right away, and it's called "The Thing Is."

"to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you've held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
your throat filled with the silt of it.
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you down like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief,
you think, *How can a body withstand this?*
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you, again."

Griffin: Fuck, man.

Rachel: Isn't that phenomenal?

Griffin: That's— that's really, really tremendous.

Rachel: A lot of people shared this poem with me. And I apologize, I can't remember who exactly. Because it's another one of those poems that's, like, right in my wheelhouse...

Griffin: Of course.

Rachel: ... of like, such precise language, these surprising comparisons, and this like... indomitable spirit. [laughs] Um...

Griffin: The idea of grief laying on you like tropical humidity...

Rachel: Yes!

Griffin: Slaps so hard for me.

Rachel: [gleefully] I know!

Griffin: Like, that is an idea that I have never really tried to put into words before, but it's...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: It's really, really, really good.

Rachel: She is really incredible about that. That's kind of one of her, like, special skills. Um, there is an interview with her in *The Adroit Journal*, and they ask her about how you take specific memories and turn them into larger themes.

And she says, "That's what I'm hoping will happen when I write a poem, and what I try to be alert to: that moment when the poem starts to veer towards something I didn't anticipate, didn't know before I started writing. Many times, the poem doesn't open up, or I'm too dense to hear what it might be offering me, but sometimes I'm able to catch it."

Um, she talks a lot about metaphor as one of her strengths. Uh, she uh, grew up in New Jersey, lived over her family's liquor store.

Griffin: Wow. [chuckles]

Rachel: And uh, moved to Boston, got a Master's from Boston University, which is where Anne Sexton was teaching at the time...

Griffin: Wow, okay.

Rachel: ... when she was one of the...

Griffin: Yeah, of course.

Rachel: ... famous female poets.

Griffin: One of, like, five poets I could probably name off the top of my...

Rachel: Yeah. And one of my kind of entries into a real profound appreciation for poetry.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And she has edited a poetry anthology of women's writing in the '70s. And then she had kind of a huge gap of, like— she was publishing in the '70s and '80s, and then like 20 years went by. And she was doing some nonfiction, and hosting poetry workshops, and kind of... um, fell out of the scene a little bit, and now she's as active as ever. Her most recent collection came out in 2020. Um, it was called *Indigo*.

But I wanna read another poem, this is...

Griffin: Oh, dang!

Rachel: Yeah, well, supersized— sweeps week. We...

Griffin: Yeah. I guess so, yeah.

Rachel: Uh, this is from a book she released in 2007, and the poem is called "Lost Dog."

"It's just getting dark, fog drifting in,
damp grasses fragrant with anise and mint,
and though I call his name
until my voice cracks,
there's no faint tinkling
of tag against collar, no sleek
black silhouette with tall ears rushing
toward me through the wild radish.

As it turns out, he's trotted home,
tracing the route of his trusty urine.
Now he sprawls on the deep red rug, not dead,
not stolen by a car on West Cliff Drive.

Every time I look at him, the wide head
resting on outstretched paws,
joy does another lap around the racetrack
of my heart. Even in sleep
when I turn over to ease my bad hip,
I'm suffused with contentment.

If I could lose him like this every day
I'd be the happiest woman alive."

Griffin: Jesus...

Rachel: [giggles] Isn't that phenomenal?

Griffin: ... *Christ!*

Rachel: It just— that pivot there at the end.

Griffin: The pivot at the, you know, 30% mark of that poem, where I'm like...

Rachel: Oh, where's it's like, "Oh, yeah, he's home."

Griffin: Rachel, if you read a poem on this fucking show...

Rachel: [laughing] Oh, no, I would never!

Griffin: ... where something bad happens to a dog, we will be ruined financially.

Rachel: I could sense your, like, tension, and I felt that tension when I was reading it too, of like, "Oh, God, this is gonna be the saddest poem ever."

Griffin: But then the idea of your worry being sort of... relieved.

Rachel: That relief! The, like— it's such a profound happiness [chuckles] when you are terrified that you are never gonna see something again, and then you *have* it, and she captures that so, like...

Griffin: "The joy does another lap around the racetrack of my heart."

Rachel: Yes!

Griffin: That— stop it!

Rachel: "If I could lose him like this every day, I'd be the happiest woman alive."

Griffin: Fuck, man.

Rachel: Ugh, so—

Griffin: Every line of that is like...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [giggles] It's pretty memorable.

Rachel: I know. I know. She's remarkable. She lives in Santa Cruz, California. She, to my knowledge, is still teaching an MFA program at Pacific University, and she's a phenomenal poet. Ellen Bass. With— I would recommend checking her out.

Griffin: Thank you, Ellen, for your great works.

Um, do you wanna know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay. We got one here from Nathan who says, "My small wonder is my call commute to work. I got a new job recently, and it's in the same direction as my mom's workplace, so sometimes we'll call each other and talk the whole drive up. It's been so nice to start the day talking to one of the most amazing people I know. Love you, Mom."

"Bonus little wondie: we also like to do what we call 'insider trading,' where we coordinate our driving during the call, like slowing down to let the other change lanes, and such."

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: I I— [laughs] I really like that a lot.

Rachel: That's so charming!

Griffin: It's really very charming.

AJ says, "I installed some ring cameras when I moved to my new house in January, and after living here for a couple months, I've realized my area has dozens of outdoor cats that are fed by my neighbors. Now, I get random notifications throughout the day when kitties come to visit my patio. And it's always so wonderful to check the footage; it's like my own real-life version of *Neko Atsume*."

Remember that little game? The little cat...

Rachel: Yeah! Yeah.

Griffin: ... collecting game. That was pretty cute.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, that sounds really nice, too. I would be a little bit annoyed, I think, getting constant notifications from my camera.

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: But then you check and see that it's a cat, and that's probably...

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And it's probably a great relief.

Hey, folks, one last time. Really, for us, for the whole Drive, 'cause this is the last week of it. Maximumfun.org/join is where you can go to become a member of the Network, support our shows, support this show directly, and gain access to a ton of great bonus content, and other gifts, depending on what you are able to give.

Rachel: Yeah. We are not gonna ask you again this year, so...

Griffin: No, this is gonna be it.

Rachel: We would appreciate it, if you made it a priority. [chuckles]

Griffin: If you are on the fence about it, and it sounds like something that you wanna do that you wanna support, don't put it off, because you won't hear our voices again, probably, [laughs] for the rest of the week.

Maximumfun.org/join is the link. At just \$5 bucks a month, you get access to hundreds of hours of bonus content, dozens just from the two of us, from

Wonderful! and *Rosebuddies*. If you don't want to do a recurring payment, I totally understand that.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You can pay upfront for the whole year, if you would like to, and you will get access to all of that stuff.

Rachel: A lot of people feel pretty confident that they can do this now, but are maybe concerned about what the rest of the year's gonna look like...

Griffin: Absolutely.

Rachel: ... and so we give you that option. [chuckles]

Griffin: Totally understand that, yeah. You know, that is also a huge, huge, huge support to us. If you are already a member, you can boost or upgrade your membership to the next level, and that will help us reach our stretch goals. We're going to be doing a lot of very silly... pretty much all embarrassing stuff. We're streaming every day during the Drive, so good work McElroy Family and YouTube channel, and you know, we're doing stuff over there all the time.

We are trying as hard as we can to pull out all the stops during this two-week period, and it is because it is pretty make-or-break, I will say, [laughs] for us. This— I'm so fortunate and thankful to get to do the work that we get to do because of the support we get from our listeners. And also it is a little stressful to have a two-week period of the year where you are... determining a lot of stuff.

Rachel: Yeah, particularly because you have an incredible team of people supporting your work right now, and you're very attached to all of them, because they're incredible people.

Griffin: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: So the pressure feels high. Uh, so we thank you for your support.

Griffin: Yes, we thank you very, very much. One last time,
maximumfun.org/join.

Thank you for listening. We will be back with a new episode, a non-Drive episode next week. Put the bad boy in park up on... Hangman's Peak... and we're gonna... [laughs] make out!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Oh, no, it's the Zodiac killer!

Rachel: [giggles]

[theme song plays]

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