

Wonderful! 373: Another Group of Guys to Disappoint Me

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[theme music, "Money Won't Pay" by bo en and Augustus plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Welcome to *Wonderful!* a show where we talk about things that's good, that we are into, and we don't usually start out the show like this, but we do have sort of a big like kinda update to the general list of things that we like, that's good, that we're into, and hockey is... [blows a raspberry] Off.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Off of that particular list.

Rachel: I saw you, you mentioned it on your *McElroy Family Clubhouse* too.

Griffin: Yes, so overpresent in my mind, has the bad feelings that hockey has instilled in us been.

Rachel: The Blues, it's just such a like cinematic story.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And I think last time that we had a cinematic story, we won the Stanley Cup.

Griffin: Yeah, that was a cool movie. That was a cool screenplay.

Rachel: So it was hard not to get your hopes up when it's game seven and—

Griffin: Against the number one ranked Winnipeg Jet.

Rachel: Yeah. And the Blues over and over again in St Louis demonstrated that they were the superior team, and then whenever they get to Winnipeg.

Griffin: They also were the superior team.

Rachel: Well yeah, game seven.

Griffin: In game seven, they were up by two goals.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: With two minutes left, and then they came back and they scored a goal, and then they scored another goal with 2.2 seconds left.

Rachel: I felt like a real idiot because we're watching the game and Griffin and I have both been on different journeys over the weekend.

Griffin: True, spiritual.

Rachel: So we're like catching up, and I'm like casually talking to him about what's going on with all of our friends that I got to see. And he's like, "Why are you not more stressed out?"

Griffin: I'm doubled over in anxiety.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: For the entire game.

Rachel: 'Cause I was three one in the third period.

Griffin: And it's like this is gonna be great, they're gonna have this amazing underdog victory.

Rachel: And I just kinda felt, I don't know, not confident but not freaked out, and then I was like, "You know what? I'll start to get nervous when it's three two." And like a minute later.

Griffin: It was three two, and then with seconds left it was three three, and then they won the penalty in overtime.

Rachel: Double overtime, which double overtime in the playoffs means you had a full 20-minute overtime, and now you're going into your next 20-minute overtime, so it's like the equivalent of like four full periods of hockey.

Griffin: It was genuinely the saddest sports has ever made me. And I was not— Obviously the Blues have had highs and lows, and I'm not the totally unknowledgeable about the sort of emotional impact of sports, but this was the saddest sports has ever made me, and it made me question whether this whole enterprise—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: — was worth it at all.

Rachel: It's just— It's the story, right? Like I realized for me what was most upsetting was that I was really enjoying the story of the season.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Which was like they got rid of their coach, they got a new coach, they completely turned their game around, they won like a 13 games in a row or some—

Griffin: And—

Rachel: I mean they just had this incredible end to the season, and then—

Griffin: And we had two and a half periods of watching very sad Winnipeg Jets fans.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Which I don't nim— I don't typically sort of engage in that level of schadenfreude.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: But I was very much enjoying it, and I think I spoke that aloud and that was probably the moment that—

Rachel: Both of us, honestly it came down to both of us. [chuckles]

Griffin: So Blues Nation, we apologize, we fucked this up for us. The Blues also fucked it up in having the absolute most abysmal empty net record of any team in the league.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Not doing themselves any favors, but yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, it got— This season, it got so that when the other team would pull their goalie, instead of feeling optimistic about like, “We’re close to the end and now there’s no goal tender in the net,” I started to feel like, “Uh oh.”

Griffin: We did— I am— I guess, give out a lot of exciting feelings to fans of other teams who scored in their sort of empty net dance breaks.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Like I— The Blues used to do that, and that always felt really great when they would get— You know, they would be in the empty net—

Rachel: Yeah. [sighs]

Griffin: — and then they would get that goal and they would tie it up and win or whatever with these incredible comebacks. And so we did get— I mean that’s a night that those Winnipeg Jets fans will never forget.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And so I am glad that we have provided that to them, I suppose.

Rachel: And that was the thing, like Blues couldn’t beat Winnipeg in Winnipeg all playoffs because so loud, so exuberant.

Griffin: They’re so loud.

Rachel: And this game had been going so well because they had been losing, everybody was quiet. And then when they tied it up, like miraculously, it just felt like, "Well this is ov— Winnipeg's gonna be super loud now."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: We'd have been in St Louis.

Griffin: [sighs heavily]

Rachel: Probably would've won it.

Griffin: So listen, we know there's some folks out there who are maybe tired of hearing us talk about hockey.

Rachel: And congratulations. [chuckles]

Griffin: One, good news, done definitely for the season, and I might be done for good.

Rachel: Although—

Griffin: I do not know if I could subject myself to this again.

Rachel: — I was talking about it this morning, we are in Washington DC. The Washington Capitals did make the second round.

Griffin: They're still very good.

Rachel: So I'm trying to decide if I have room in my heart—

Griffin: [sighs heavily]

Rachel: — to watch the local team.

Griffin: And they still got T. J. Oshie. I gotta put in—

Rachel: Do they? Or is—

Griffin: I don't know, I gotta learn.

Rachel: I thought he was injured.

Griffin: I gotta learn about these fuckin' guys, man.

Rachel: I thought he was injured. Yeah, I don't know man. [chuckles]

Griffin: I have to learn about a whole different group of guys?!

Rachel: I know that there are people that like multiple sports teams in the same like genre of sport at the same time. I don't know how you do it.

Griffin: Am I just gonna find another group of guys to disappoint me? I can't, I gotta stop being— allowing myself to be disappointed by guys.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I'm fucking drawing the line right here. Anyway, do you have any small wonders? 'Cause this fuckin' definitely isn't one. This is a big un-one.

Rachel: I'm gonna say right now that I feel like the part of a performing trio, which is kind of a fun feeling for me, in that I am in between your fan and your plant, and I feel like the three of us are really bringing—

Griffin: You could do your own podcast together.

Rachel: We're bringing a lot of good energy to this podcast.

Griffin: Yeah, one of you creates the oxygen.

Rachel: Wait, can I?

Griffin: Be gentle, it's— I've— There've been a few leaves and— You're— You done— You can move the mic over to the plant if you really wanna do some incredible foley work.

Rachel: I— Was that not enough? You don't think that'll pick up.

Griffin: I don't think that's gonna pick up.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: It was very quiet. Make it talk.

[plant rubbing microphone sounds]

Griffin: Those are some waxy leaves, huh?

Rachel: Those are some plant leaves. That's my thing.

Griffin: My small wonder is watching my wife—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: — fondle a money tree. [sighs] I don't have a— I had a kickass Caesar salad from Whiteman's yesterday. And it helped dull the pain.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Of sports. I like a premade Caesar— I've talked about it, we've done a big wonder of Caesar salad.

Rachel: You could talk about the trip.

Griffin: Going to see the Huntington— We went to Huntington to help out—

Rachel: This is where—

Griffin: Me and small son and big son—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — took a boys road trip to Huntington for the weekend, to attend and help out with the Harmony House Renaissance Faire, which went to benefit Harmony House, and organization that helps people experiencing homelessness in Huntington, where that is a big problem.

And we've worked with them on, you know, a bunch of stuff, we support them during Candenights, we've raised money for them there. And it was a real whirlwind trip, it was six-hour drive down, six-hour drive back, with two kids. It was a little stressful, but—

Rachel: For two nights.

Griffin: [chuckles] For two nights. But the event was amazing, we had so many people come out and raise money for such an amazing cause. And I've only been to one Renaissance Faire before, and it's really just a kickass— it's a kickass environment for myself and for the kids who, you know—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — they love seein' all the little handmade stuff, and watchin' people fence, and seeing a horse? What a wonderful little world.

Rachel: Our boys are pretty good travelers, I would say.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Particularly like when you get to the destination.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: In that they are just kind of delighted to be wherever they are most of the time.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It's just the getting there and the getting back that can—

Griffin: Especially if there's a little donkey you can pet.

Rachel: — get kinda tricky. There was a little donkey?

Griffin: There was a little donkey. He would just sort yell sometimes, which scared them, but then made them laugh.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It's fun. Not in like distress, just in like the way that donkeys do sometimes.

Rachel: I also support the work of Harmony House, I had just made previous plans to see a bunch of my friends in Texas.

Griffin: Yes, so that's where—

Rachel: So that's where I was.

Griffin: No, I mean no-one's judging you. You— I'm glad that jet set.

Rachel: I didn't want people to think that I had taken a stand against this worthy cause. [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles] Yeah.

Rachel: I decided to stay home alone.

Griffin: "Rachel is weirdly anti-Harmony House."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: "I don't understand why she is this way." You go first this week.

Rachel: I do.

Griffin: What would you like to talk to us here, and the *Wonderful!* audience?

Rachel: He—

Griffin: I'm a member now, when I'm not doing my thing, I'm a part of the audience, so let me sit over here with them. The chairs on this side are so much more uncomfortable.

Rachel: You know you don't have to vamp. This time could be edited out.

Griffin: Babe, you know that I do these things.

Rachel: [chuckles] I wanted to talk about a musical artist this week.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Sea Lemon.

Griffin: Frickin' Rachel McElroy, comin' up out of the boneyard again with some certified jammers—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: — that I had never even heard of before, and now I'm gonna be hearin' a lot, 'cause I fuckin' liked what you sent me.

Rachel: Yeah, I thought maybe you would. Sea Lemon fits into a genre I didn't know existed, but is a perfect label, and that is "dreampop?"

Griffin: Dreampop.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's interesting, well how— how would one define that?

Rachel: Well here's the thing, so I looked up, because I was kind of trying to understand what dreampop was, and I feel— felt like I kinda had a hunch, because Sea Lemon's sound is so like specific to a lot of the kind of music we like.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so I typed in, "Is Soccer Mommy dreampop?" and yes.
[chuckles]

Griffin: Yes, okay, interesting. I guess I considered that sort of indie rock, but.

Rachel: Yeah, kind of like shoegaze-y, I don't know like this kind of time period of music. The influences cited include like Air.

Griffin: [chuckles] Sure, yeah.

Rachel: Which is another good example. I mean dreamy just feels like the right word, man.

Griffin: It absolutely does.

Rachel: I don't know, but it—

Griffin: Once we play some, dear listener—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — you'll get the vibe.

Rachel: I found Sea Lemon because I was doing what I do sometimes, which is I will go to a variety of music websites and I will see what they are recommending, because I have no other way. [chuckles] Like I don't use Spotify.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I don't have, you know, cool friends that are—

Griffin: I mean even if you did, your Spotify recommenda—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That platform is not useful to me in finding new music.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Unless it is *Kirby* music with lyrics that people have added to it, which is the— our traditional genre we listen to in the car with the boys.

Rachel: [chuckles] Gosh, the way Henry shouts out those song titles.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like they make any sense at all. What is the one he does?

Griffin: "Mystaline Ruler Without a Crown" I think is— Or "Mystaline Crown Without a Ruler" I believe is the name.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I mean it's a— Yeah, it's a *Kirby* soundtrack name— game title.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: So it's— [chuckles] It's Sufjan Stevens-esque in its verboseness.

Rachel: So anyway, so I did kind of what I do for *Poetry Corner*, which is I start looking around at like artists I know I like. I know of do what Spotify does for you, honestly.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I'm like, "Oh, I like this one. What's somebody that's related or like has just put out work?" And so anyway, that's how I found Sea Lemon.

Griffin: I'm imagining you like at the music mill, with like a music churn, like doing the work.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Doing the analog work you need to do to find what you need.

Rachel: I was thinking more like at— I'm like at a forge, you know?

Griffin: Yeeees.

Rachel: Like it's very warm and I'm sweating, and I'm like—

Griffin: Whoa.

Rachel: [chuckles] Going through music.

Griffin: Alright.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Maybe you got big leather apron on, and a set—

Rachel: That what you want?

Griffin: — a set of tongs.

Rachel: That's what you wanted when I created this scenario?

Griffin: Yeeeeeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You dip a broadsword in like a big tank of water and it hisses dramatically.

Rachel: The music sword.

Griffin: Yeah, and then you hand me the sword, you say— you— “This is—” and it has like a cool name like Wolf's— Wolfbane.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Or something cool like that. That's cool.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: That started erotic.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: But then it turned more—

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: — like fantastical.

Rachel: Part of me wondered if it was still erotic for you.

Griffin: It's hard to separate.

Rachel: Yeah, I know. Okay, so Sea Lemon is Natalie Lew, she is somebody that is currently located in Seattle. And what is coming up is

her first album, actually. What has happened previously, in 2022 she released a five track EP called *Close Up*. And then it says different things on YouTube, it says June 13, but everywhere else it says May 30th, so like later this month.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Her first full album is coming out, called *Diving For a Prize*. And so the song that I wanna play is “Dramatic.”

Griffin: Well what’s it— I get that the vibe or tone—

Rachel: Ha. The name of the song I would like to play is “Dramatic.”

Griffin: A-Bazinga, gotcha.

Rachel: [chuckles]

[audio clip “Dramatic” by Sea Lemon plays]

Rachel: So, interesting thing about Sea Lemon, the song that didn’t end up playing, but also selected as possibly to play, was “Crystals.”

Griffin: I mean we should do that one too. We can do two songs.

Rachel: Oh, we can do two ones?!

Griffin: I think so! If I had known that you were not gonna do the other one, I definitely would’ve picked “Crystals” to play.

Rachel: Did you recognize—

Griffin: Fuck yeah I recognized the—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: — the guest on that track.

Rachel: Yeah. So seven months ago on YouTube, “Crystals” was released, and it includes a collaboration with Death Cab for Cutie frontman, Ben Gibbard.

Griffin: Been a while since I've heard Mr. Gibbard on a track. So, so excited. When I heard his dulcet tones sneaking in there in that second verse.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I was just absolutely vibing.

Rachel: Should we go ahead and play?

Griffin: Let's just play! Like why tease it?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Why not just like drop some of that good stuff in there.

Rachel: Alright, here's a little bit of "Crystals."

[audio clip of "Crystal" by Sea Lemon plays]

Rachel: Okay, so. I'm not sure how she met Ben Gibbard.

Griffin: Seattle. Just like was out, was in Seattle.

Rachel: Possibly.

Griffin: If you are out in Seattle and you do music for long enough, like a week and a half, two weeks, you're gonna collab with Ben Gibbard.

Rachel: I will say that also her album was produced by Andy Park, who did Death Cab for Cutie as well.

Griffin: Sure. Yeah.

Rachel: So that may have been where the introduction was created, I don't know.

Griffin: Is Death Cab dreampop? Mm, I don't know. And I don't know how to find out.

Rachel: So I read a little bit from an article that called it “shoegaze but with pop structures, songs have a knack to be earwormy when you least expect it, embedding themselves in the listeners’ psyche.” That might be a little bit of an overreach, but— I do appreciate the “shoegaze with pop structures.”

Griffin: I listened to that “Crystals” song a single time, and I do have its chorus kind of like stuck in my head. [chuckles]

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: So I do think that that is— And I feel like, I don’t know, the best kind of like Death Cab songs were kind of similar. I know that I’m probably making too much of an attachment there just because they both had Ben Gibbard up in it, but yeah, really, really good tune.

Rachel: So the story of Sea Lemon is that she was in New York City and then moved all the way across the country, and says, quote, “I really found music as a solace during the pandemic while I was isolating in the Pacific Northwest with nothing else to do.

I practiced my songwriting, took mixing classes, et cetera. So in that way I’m so grateful that I made the decision to move back to the Pacific Northwest.” So she started there in Washington State, moved to New York, came back, really, really took off from there.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean who would she have collabed with in New York City?

Rachel: Oh, there’s no-one there.

Griffin: I mean, there’s no-one. [chuckles]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: There’s— I’m always saying this, there’s just no music scene here, in our nation’s artistic capital.

Rachel: She also collaborated with a band called American Football?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Okay, I have never heard of this band.

Griffin: I can't remember any of their songs off the top of my head, but I've definitely heard them before.

Rachel: Okay. Yeah, again, like the dreampop genre seems like right up my alley, but it still seems like I am just beginning to explore this.

Griffin: To explore. It strikes me as one of those things that if we looked at a list, a roster of dreampop bands, there would be a lot of familiar names on there that we just did not really know how to classify into it.

Rachel: Yeah, heaps.

Griffin: I mean give me a steady beat, and a fuzzy guitar riff going at like 90BPM, and we are—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: — we are made in the shade.

Rachel: There is a suggestion that she has also been inspired by Beach House, and The Cure, which I appreciated.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like there's something that feels kind of like '80s-ish about dreampop to me, don't really know what it is, but like hearing The Cure felt right to me.

Griffin: Beach House definitely.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Definitely, definitely hit for me. I feel like that is a, I don't know, Rosetta Stone that I return to a lot when I hear this kind of— Shoegaze sounds so— I love that term, except for how pejorative it sounds.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: Because I feel like it's used to describe a sort of, you know, annoying aesthetic in film.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But in music, it—

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: — it feels a bit more descriptive of like a tempo and vibe.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: In a way that is maybe not as explicitly like bad?

Rachel: Yeah, I will say my instinct is not to use labels like this, but I recognize that it may mean more to our listeners than it does to us.

Griffin: Sure, yeah, this is true.

Rachel: So I'm just trying to be helpful. She—

Griffin: We should say shoegaze (complimentary).

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Just so that people know.

Rachel: Start doing that with every bit of compliment I give out there.

Griffin: This is a thing, I don't know when it started because I'm not especially plugged in to online.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: But people expressly stating the—

Rachel: "Complimentary."

Griffin: — intent and tone of—

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: — a thing that they say as like, “complimentary” or “pejorative” or whatever.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which I find extremely useful, absolutely.

Rachel: [chuckles] That is helpful.

Griffin: It is very helpful.

Rachel: Natalie has said of her music, part of the reason that she turns to Beach House and The Cure is she says that she likes music that, quote, “toes the line between sorrow and happiness into a gray area of somewhere in the middle. It’s the kind of sentiment that I love to feel and write about when it comes to my music.”

Griffin: Beautiful.

Rachel: And like Seattle seems like the place to do that, man.

Griffin: Got to, all that frickin’ rain.

Rachel: [chuckles] Just the whole energy of like being kind of lovely but also kind of depressing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Just feels like just right.

Griffin: I mean there was time period, I never have cared about like a record label or anything like that. But I remember getting so into so many bands that were on I think it was Sub Pop, or Bar Sip, one of those.

Rachel: Mm.

Griffin: And like just going through their like catalogue, and just like checking out every band that was on that record label, and being like,

"Yeah, those are all really, really good bands that all live in the same city. There's gotta be some reason behind it."

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, I just— I kind of wanted to bring Sea Lemon because I don't really go in for like atmospheric music typically. Like if I am working on something, like I still like to have, you know, something like melodic.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And this just kinda like fits right in that sweet spot for me of like well I could have this on—

Griffin: It's easy listening.

Rachel: Yeah, well. [chuckles] While I'm doing anything.

Griffin: Easy listening (complimentary).

Rachel: Complimentary. Yeah, it like sets a vibe that feels very cozy for me, and I enjoy that.

Griffin: For sure, I am definitely going to be listening to more of this band.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: But not right now, because we're recording a podcast, and I would like to steal you away.

Rachel: Okay.

[*Home Improvement* transition music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: For my segment this week, it has been a while since I have brought any marine life content—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: — to this show, and that is why today—

Rachel: Oh! I should also say Sea Lemon is like a like a— a yellow like phosphorescent slug.

Griffin: Oh cool.

Rachel: In the Pacific Northwest.

Griffin: That's so funny.

Rachel: That's where Sea Lemon comes from.

Griffin: That's crazy. Fish I'm talking about today is not native to the Pacific Northwest—

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: — as far as I know. Specifically I would love to talk about damselfish, and specifically the behavior of damselfish of coral gardening.

Rachel: Ohhh!

Griffin: So damselfish live— There's lots of different parts of the world where they live, traditionally water.

Rachel: Can you tell me what they look like?

Griffin: A big sorta— I mean kind of— There's lots of different species, there's like a bright orange damselfish that I did look up the name of, now I can't remember. There's lots of different types. I mean they just kind look like a fish. Kind of like the aesthetic ideal of what you would think of as a fish. Sort of football sized.

Rachel: Oh yeah.

Griffin: Just fish-shaped fish. Just a fish.

Rachel: Colorful sometimes.

Griffin: Colorful sometimes, sometimes spotted, sometimes— They are, you know, tropical, subtropical—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — sort of coral dwellers, so you know, naturally they do have a bit of panache for them.

Rachel: Oh, and they've little guys.

Griffin: Sometime— I mean I guess it depends on what you mean by little guys. They are—

Rachel: They're not like my sunfish.

Griffin: No, I guess that's— If you compare something to a sunfish.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It's not as big as a sunfish. They are occasionally like aquarium, exotic aquarium fish. But anyway, they live in coral reefs, and I found for whatever reason a few TikToks about them organically this week, about damselfish and their gardening habits. One I guess went viral and then got picked up by a million different content farms, as is the way of things on social media.

But I learned so many fascinating facts about these little fish, because they keep these little gardens on the seafloor. And they are extremely territorial about their little agricultural operations. They raise like seaweed and algae on these little plots that they fiercely protect for their like main food source.

And I just— I love that, but the behavior that they exhibit while keeping these little gardens is really, really fascinating. They don't just like adopt these little plots of land where they grow seaweed and swim around it and protect it. Like they actually go to great lengths to maintain the yield of their little farms, okay.

Rachel: How do— [stammers] So, fish.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Don't have arms or legs.

Griffin: Thank you so much for clearing the up for me.

Rachel: You're welcome.

Griffin: I didn't have that— I didn't include that in my notes—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: — to say to our listeners, just because I figured that they would know that.

Rachel: When I think of tending an area.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I think that you are doing things to manipulate the space.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: How are they manipulating the space?

Griffin: Well allow me to tell you about the longfin damselfish.

Rachel: Oh okay.

Griffin: It's this specific species found off the shores of Belize, and the longfin damselfish is believed to have formed a really wild symbiotic relationship with a breed of planktonic shrimp called the "mysid shrimp."

And mysid shrimp poop fertilizer for seaweed and algae, and it's a really effective fertilizer, so damselfish, the longfin damselfish will keep these algae farms, and they will allow mysid shrimp to live in their little gardens, and then they will work tirelessly to protect these little tiny, tiny shrimp from predators.

Mysid shrimp are not typically found organically in swarms out in the open ocean, except for in these damselfish gardens. So chill a spot, so chill a hang zone and safe and comfortable an environment—

Rachel: Yeah...

Griffin: — these fish create for these little plankton shrimp that they are able to grow and flourish in these little compounds, because of the relative safety and comfort that these damselfish provide.

Rachel: Yeah, it's like they have a little gated community.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Just set up for them.

Griffin: What is especially wild is that damselfish, in addition to seaweed and algae, they also— their diet also consists of plankton and small invertebrates, like the mysid shrimp.

Rachel: But they don't.

Griffin: But they don't eat these guys.

Rachel: [sighs heavily]

Griffin: Because they know that they can fertilize their little algae farms.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And they effectively keep these little planktonic shrimp as pets, but pets that they could eat if they would like to, but they don't, because it's good for their algae.

Rachel: What? Like what an amazing like almost like tribal instinct that they must pass down to their, you know, later generations.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Because I have to imagine a fish is born with the instinct to—

Griffin: "That's food. That's food, that's food."

Rachel: Yeah, and the older fish must be like, "Nope, not that one."

Griffin: “Not that food. That is food!”

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: “But if you let it chill and you take really good care of it, your algae operation is going to absolutely explode rather.”

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: So across the different sort of damselfish populations around the globe, the most common predator to their gardens that they keep are sea urchins, because sea urchins can invade a reef in like enormous quantities, and consume all of the seaweed, not just the leaves, which like there are lot of fish that will swim up and try to gobble up a leave. But like roots and all, just destroy— turn these gardens into these barren wastelands.

So they are the number one sort of pest of the damselfish, and so damselfish will swim up to an urchin, brave the spines of the urchin, just kinda grab one by the spine with its mouth, and swim it away from their garden and drop it. A lot of the time, when they remove their sea urchins from their garden, they will actually drop it in another damselfish’s garden.

Rachel: Oooo.

Griffin: Under the— Not just to like sabotage, but to hope that like, “Hey, maybe you’ll enjoy this garden so much that you will not return.”

Rachel: Wow...

Griffin: “And you will not come back to my garden.” Damselfish are incredibly territorial, so this doesn’t usually go down so swell. However, that is not the most like craziest thing about this. There’s a lot of video evidence and anecdotal evidence to support the fact that damselfish have actually developed a symbiotic relationship with human divers who collect sea urchins for, you know, culinary purposes.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It is not uncommon for a damselfish to come right up to a diver.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And lead them to their garden.

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: Where humans will then go through and effectively clean out all of the sea urchins there.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: The damselfish get the sea urchins out of their space, and the urchin divers find a trustworthy like easy source of sea urchins.

Rachel: They're like little street vendors, like selling hotdogs, like in the ocean. Just like, "Hey! Hey, you there! You want one of these?"

Griffin: They are— It's really, really astonishing when you see these videos of damselfish just swimming up like, "Hey, come with me."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And then they lead them to, sure enough, a garden where there are dozens and dozens of sea urchins that have moved in, that they—that the fish alone could not hope to possibly clean out themselves.

Rachel: That's kinda— That's kind of amazing.

Griffin: There's also lots of videos of more generous divers cracking open a sea urchin for, you know, nearby damselfish or any other fish to then swim over and gobble up, I guess out of the kindness of their own hearts.

Rachel: Jeez, man.

Griffin: Just like, "Okay, I guess, thank for the tip. Here's a little bit of sea urchin for you to devour." I say that's generous, I guess it's generous for the damselfish, less so for the sea urchin. This is not—

The relationship between urchins and damselfish isn't like completely black and white, good marine life versus bad marine life, because sea urchins can be helpful to coral by eating the algae that kind of grows on it, because if that algae grows unchecked, it will begin to compete for nutrients and nourishment—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: — with the coral.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it will stunt coral growth. There is, I forget where, somewhere in the Caribbean, there is like this long spined sea urchin population that got wiped out in the 1980s by some like plague that marine biologists struggled to understand, and their efforts to like grow this population again were thwarted by this particular breed of damselfish, the three spotted damselfish, whose predators were overhunted, overfished.

And so this three spotted damselfish blew up, [chuckles] and just like would not let this sea urchin population recover. But also sea urchins can breed and multiply really, really, really quickly, and you know, then overpopulate coral reefs and actually begin to damage those coral reefs. So like all things in nature, it's a question of balance. I just think it is... just wonderful. I love an industrious animal.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And the— Like I think it's easy to say like, "Oh, this animal exhibits behavior that reminds me of certain human behaviors, and I think that that's so charming."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But this is like there's so much best practices put into place—

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: — by this— these species of fish.

Rachel: It suggests like a purpose, you know? Like I think sometimes particularly with like fish, it's easy to think that they're just kind of aimless, like they're just kind of moving around without direction, and that there's not a lot going on.

Griffin: Not these guys.

Rachel: But like in this example, it's so clear that they have identified a trade, and a reason for existence, and a you know just like a real passion, and I love that.

Griffin: And I love that divers are just having these little fish bros.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And those fish bros might have their own shrimp pets. It's so—

Rachel: [giggles]

Griffin: It's so great, the ocean is so great.

Rachel: I like you reminding me about the ocean, because I'm gonna be honest, I'm somebody that grew up in the middle of the country with no access to ocean, and it's—

Griffin: Unlike me, beach bum Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: [chuckles] Well you were definitely significantly closer than me.

Griffin: I mean, I guess.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: If you go up to anyone in Huntington and say, "How close are you to a beach?" they're not going to say particularly close. But I do— I mean it all started with *Ethersea*.

Rachel: Did some research.

Griffin: Like I found out like hey, there's a lot of cool shit down there.

Rachel: Yeah, you just— you don't learn a lot about the ocean growing up.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: And it's nice to have a little reminder there's a lot going on down there.

Griffin: Lot of really interesting politics.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And castle intrigue happening. Do you wanna know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Julia says, "When you realize a bug bite that's been bothering you for a while doesn't itch anymore. I got my first mosquito bite of the season last week in a really annoying place. Today however I realize that it wasn't there anymore. It's not something I actively think about once they're gone so I decided to share this small but welcome wonder."

Rachel: Huh. That makes me wonder if a bug bite... Can you still see it and it just doesn't itch anymore? 'Cause I've—

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: [chuckles] 'Cause I feel like they stop itching when they disappear, but maybe there's this brief window.

Griffin: Where it's there and it doesn't itch anymore.

Rachel: Where it's there but it doesn't itch. I've never—

Griffin: I don't know why your mind jumped to that.

Rachel: I've never— Well, I've just never really tracked the experience of a bug bite departing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And now I'm curious about it.

Griffin: And you won't know what you got til it's gone.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Or you do know what you got, and then I guess in Julia's case, it's a reason to celebrate and write in to your favorite podcast.

Rachel: Not a great song though.

Griffin: No, not as catchy. Edward says, "My wife loves to save the paper bags we get at farmer's markets, or 'Brahms', and stash them under the kitchen sink." I assume "Brahms" is a grocery store chain. "I always forget that they're under there until I've sold a random Funko Pop or toddler toy/clothes on Facebook Marketplace, and it always feels nice to deliver the buyer's new treasures in a solid and sturdy paper bag."

Rachel: I'm so glad that somebody has found a use for bags under the sink.

Griffin: Mm.

Rachel: I feel like my instinct is always to put them there as if I were to use them again, and then what ends up happening is that whenever we move, I end up pulling out [chuckles]

Griffin: A lot of them.

Rachel: Just a whole under the sink's worth of bags—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: — that I've never found a purpose for.

Griffin: And I tell yah, we used to be— I mean I remember growing up and the— We had a bread box, and behind the bread box is where our mom would store all the paper bags, and it would accordion out to the point where we're talking about like two and a half good feet of just straight up paper bags piled in behind—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: — behind the bread box that would inevitably, you know, we would have to get rid of when it got too crazy.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But I feel like tote bags have really, really cornered the market.

Rachel: I know, now I have a closet full of tote bags that I don't use.
[laughs]

Griffin: That is true. I mean we do use them, sometimes.

Rachel: We do use them, particularly for travel.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But yeah, I've, you know, got a lot of bags in this house.

Griffin: I loooove, I love a good paper bag. Hey 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'll find a link to that in the episode description. We got some new merch up in the merch store including, I'm very excited about this, a collaboration we've done with Good Store Tea, it is the Flaming Not Poisoning Raging Tea of Doom. A spicy caffeine free tea, we have some— I have it here.

Rachel: Oh good good good good good.

Griffin: So I'm very excited. You know me, I'm kind of a tea guy.

Rachel: We're real tea people.

Griffin: We've got a Plato's Rave 1000-piece puzzle designed by Daniel Mijo Birch. Mijoburch_art on Instagram, and as well as some other stuff. That's all over at mcelroymerch.com. And 10% of all merch proceeds this month will be donated to the Center for Reproductive Rights.

We also have some *MBMBaM* and *TAZ* live shows coming up, tickets are on sale now for shows in Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio, we have some new dates coming soon. All the *TAZ* shows are going to be *TAZ Versus*. We're also going to be at Origins Game Fair in Columbus and DragonCon in Atlanta. Go to bit.ly/mcelroytours for ticket links and more information.

Thank you so much for listening, we hope you'll join us again next week, We'll be in higher spirits. I mean we're definitely not talking about sports ever again, but we'll be in higher spirits.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: We're gonna get really into like, nerd shit now I think.

Rachel: Oh wow. Did you make that decision for us? 'Cause I'm kind of a coool person.

Griffin: You know what, I'm finally gonna give into the sweet siren— I will surrender myself, finally, to nerd culture.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Really, really excited, and you know I've been on the fence for a long time.

Rachel: Alright, well let me know how it is when you get there, because I'm over here in cool kid town.

Griffin: I know, and I'll be sad to leave you.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'll be sad to leave you. I like cool kid town, it's so cool over here. What is it like in being a cool kid? What do cool kids do?

Rachel: Skateboards.

Griffin: Alright.

Rachel: Uhhhh... and—

Griffin: Perfect. Thank you—

Rachel: Acai bowls.

Griffin: That's— Thanks for listening.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Real— Bye!

[outro theme music plays]

[ukulele chord]

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