

Wonderful! 385: Who's My Big Honey Guy

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

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hey, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful.

Griffin: This is wonderful. This is a podcast. This is a podcast where we—

Rachel: This is a podcast.

Griffin: This is a podcast where we, Griffin and Rachel McElroy, talk, with our mouths, about things we like.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Our preferences. Shit that's good.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Movie, TV show, music, whatever. Things that we're into, and that's real shit.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Sometimes we catch ourselves. We're like, "I'm about to talk about some shit that I'm not into." And we're like, "Stop." We stop the show.

Rachel: Or we put it off a day. We say, "Hey, Griffin, I have been researching garden hoses, and I'm realizing maybe we shouldn't record today."

Griffin: And I'm proud of you.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I'm proud of you for realizing, it's tough sometimes to do the world's smallest—it's an average-sized violin. It's tough sometimes to do a podcast about how great stuff is.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And sometimes, you really stretch. And Rachel came to me and was like, "I'm looking up garden hoses, I'm spinning out." And we were like, "Let's push. Let's push." And I think it was the right choice.

Rachel: Can I tell you, though?

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: I will make that Small Wonder.

Griffin: Garden hoses? You did the research.

Rachel: Well, and turns out you don't really need research.

Griffin: Yeah, it's a hose.

Rachel: I mean, here's the thing, though, small son has discovered he loves a hose.

Griffin: And god almighty, it's so much easier than like filling up a whole pool or doing a bunch of other garbage outside—hose? Connect it, turn it on, it's ready. It's ready to party.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes he realizes, "Hey, you know what? It sometimes is more fun to just play with the hose." And I'm like—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Go for it, man.

Griffin: Go for it, dude. Love that spray. So good. Tastes different, too, doesn't it?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think now it's common knowledge you're not supposed to drink it.

Rachel: But who hasn't?

Griffin: But I used to just chug it. I mean—

Rachel: Me too!

Griffin: I used to—I used to just kind of put it in my mouth, turn it on, open the glottis, and just... like—

Rachel: It was—

Griffin: Become an extension of the hose.

Rachel: A special kind of refreshing.

Griffin: It was, a naughty, leaden kind.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I'll say, for my small draft, we just started watching a show called Final Draft.

Rachel: Did you say "for my small draft?"

Griffin: Did I say that? I have Final Draft on the—on the brain.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'm deep in book mode, and so I have drafts sort of front and center, and now we're watching a show called Final Draft.

Rachel: Yeah, well, and the show is also called—yeah.

Griffin: It is—stop me if you've heard this one before, a Japanese reality competition athletics show. Not—

Rachel: Thank you to my dad, David Weiner, who—

Griffin: Thanks, David Weiner. Plugged in!

Rachel: Instantly the day it went up, knew that we would be into this show, and we are, in fact.

Griffin: Clutch. Got it.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Got it in one. You've got us pegged, man. It is not too dissimilar from Physical: 100, except the cast is much smaller. There's like twenty-four of them, or something like that, when they start. And the whole premise of the show is that they are all retired athletes. Except for one, who is currently, I believe, a baseball player, and a very lazy man. Which is weird to see on this show.

Rachel: [chuckles] I mean, some of them are towards the end of their career.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: But yeah, most of them are in their like mid to late thirties, and have either like recently retired or don't compete at the same level they used to compete at.

Griffin: And they do athletic challenges, like in Physical: 100. Like, hey, climb this big, tall mountain. Or there's one where they had to just do crunches on an apparatus called the crunch pit.

Rachel: The crunch pit!

Griffin: Which Rachel really enjoyed, until they physically couldn't do it anymore.

Rachel: It just looked like a bunch of slides that all met together at the top.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And they would all suspend themselves from the top of the slide.

Griffin: So when they stopped doing sit ups, they just *err*!

Rachel: Yeah, they just slid right down.

Griffin: Very satisfying. Very satisfying to watch.

Rachel: One of the contestants looked familiar to Griffin.

Griffin: Dude, yes. I clocked this dude, I was like, he's been on a show we've watched before.

Rachel: It was incredible. We had seen this man on camera all of like ten seconds.

Griffin: Yeah. But I clocked him because he's from a show we just watched, which is Offline Love. There was a guy named Atsushi, who ended up being kind of the best guy from the season, I think. Like, just kind of the most solid dude of the season.

Rachel: Yeah. Like the least problematic.

Griffin: And the most enjoyable. And him and—he found romance. I wonder if they're still together. I hope so. And they found romance in Nice. And here he is, finding... you know, a career—

Rachel: [chuckles] Romance with fitness.

Griffin: Romance with fitness. He's fucking crushing. He's an absolute maniac.

Rachel: He's a water polo player.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And he, like many of the athletes on the show, really wants to positively represent water polo players.

Griffin: I love this, when it's like, "I've got to set a good example for the highlight community, and let people know that we are here. And it's our—"

Rachel: And he's very strong.

Griffin: "And it's our turn!"

Rachel: Very strong.

Griffin: Anyway, we're only like an episode or two deep, but it's good. It's scratching that Physical: 100 itch. I can't get enough shows about people demonstrating their athleticism in a non-traditional, competitive environment. That's my shit. That's all I want. Football? No thanks. Football players doing push—doing push-ups, on a big stage, that looks like a child's playground? Yes, absolutely.

Rachel: Yeah, it's refreshing, too, because you don't have to learn a lot of rules.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: It's not difficult to follow. It's just like, "Hey, do this hard thing for a long time."

Griffin: Love it.

Rachel: Like, I know what that is.

Griffin: And you watch it and you're like, this is going to be boring. They have to do one sit up every five seconds, or they're eliminated. This is going

to be super-duper boring. But then when you see them *struggling*, it's like, oh, never mind. Now I get it. Pushing people to their breaking points.

Rachel: And they're all just so genuinely impressed with each other.

Griffin: Yeah. A lot of support, like a lot of—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: This— "I'm a boxer, and this is like a legendary, older boxer, who has like back problems, and I'm gonna impress him, by doing so good at my athleticism." Very sweet, very good. Again, two episodes in, it could get nasty. That's the—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That's the caveat we have to put on all these. You go first this week. What would you like to talk about? I know it ain't gonna be hoses, so... It's gotta clear that bar.

Rachel: You know, Griffin, when in doubt...

Griffin: Oh, yeah, I know just where we're going, baby.

Rachel: I turned to a familiar place.

Griffin: Yeah, baby, we gotta go there.

Rachel: And that place is the Poetry Quarter.

Griffin: [sings] Dun, dun-dun, dun, dun, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I kind of turned into Beetlejuice at—I mean, it turned into Beetlejuice at the beginning.

Rachel: You know what? It's not like Frasier makes a lot of sense.

Griffin: No, it doesn't.

Rachel: So, why not turn to Beetlejuice?

Griffin: Why not? [sings] Pah! Pah-pah, pah, pah-pah. What a... that's the theme song to Beetlejuice.

Rachel: Oh, the Beetlejuice—okay. You did it in kind of a Ray Romano voice.

Griffin: [sings] Pa-pa-pa, pa-da-da. [spoofing Ray Romano] Ah, Deborah.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: [spoofing Ray Romano] Deborah!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [spoofing Ray Romano] Deborah, Beetle juice is back again.

Rachel: [chuckles] So, I had a moment where I was like, is this Everybody Loves Raymond?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Are we switching—

Griffin: [spoofing Ray Romano] Deborah, we died.

Rachel: From what? [laughs]

Griffin: [spoofing Ray Romano] Deborah, we're dead, and now we're in the underworld, Deborah!

Rachel: I'm wondering if this is the first time that America has gotten to hear your incredible Ray Romano impression.

Griffin: Probably not. I've been doing it on MBMBaM for—

Rachel: Oh, have you?

Griffin: At least eleven to twelve years. Yeah, I mean, early in the—early in the days when Ray, let's say, had a little bit more cultural relevance—

Rachel: When more people loved him, perhaps?

Griffin: Yes. By which you mean his show was maybe still even on the air, or within a decade of—

Rachel: It's definitely still in syndication, right?

Griffin: Yeah, but I don't think people watched—

Rachel: I have a lot of that show on syndication, by the way.

Griffin: Of course, of course, of course. But we're the last generation, I think, to do that. The idea of watching a very, very old television show that's on sometimes is, frankly, un-fucking-thinkable.

Rachel: [laughs] No, that's true.

Griffin: That you don't have complete control over when you watch this ancient television program is just crazy.

Rachel: Yeah, I don't even know what platform it would be on. But great performances.

Griffin: Great... [titters]

Rachel: Have you watched it?

Griffin: Everybody Loves Raymond? Brad Garrett?

Rachel: When I—when I hold the scale of times you've watched Everybody Loves Raymond in one hand—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And Frazier in the other, which side is heavier?

Griffin: And you got King of Queens balanced on your butt cheeks.

Rachel: Well, I've never seen King of Queens, so I can't participate in that conversation.

Griffin: Pff, it's like a New Jersey Everybody Loves Raymond.

Rachel: Have you watched much?

Griffin: I think I've probably watched more—Frasier was always too much for me as a child. I didn't understand it, with my childish ways. I only came to it—but Everybody Loves Raymond, that's a crowd-pleaser across all the verticals. Now? Frasier all day. Especially once I found out about Kelsey Grammer's politics.

Rachel: You still haven't answered my question, though.

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: Have you watched—

Griffin: More...

Rachel: Raymond?

Griffin: Yeah, I've watched quite a bit of Everybody Loves Raymond.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: That's all I wanted to know.

Griffin: But really, you've seen one of 'em, you've seen 'em all, huh?

Rachel: Yeah, maybe that's fair.

Griffin: It's not like Roseanne, where there's like, all of a sudden, one arc—like one season is just like, Ray is on his deathbed and he's having like a vision of—

Rachel: With Raymond, it's right there in the title. Like you know by the end of the episode, most people will have loved Raymond. [chuckles]

Griffin: And I sometimes wish him and Chris had gotten together and kind of just like balanced out. Become like love neutral, you know? Because there is that show—

Rachel: Chris?

Griffin: Everybody Hates Chris.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: And now that I think about it, those two shows were very much in conversation with each other.

Rachel: Mm-hm...

Griffin: You were gonna talk about poetry ten minutes ago.

Rachel: [chuckles] Oh, yeah, I was. I was.

Griffin: Have you had this tea yet? It's still very hot.

Rachel: I'm dangerously balancing it on my leg right now.

Griffin: So you know, it's too hot. It smells spicy.

Rachel: Well, what tea are we drinking?

Griffin: It's the ginger peach tea you picked out, my love.

Rachel: Oh my god, I'm so excited.

Griffin: From the Tiesta Tea company, yeah.

Rachel: I can't wait to make loud tea drinking noises into the microphone.

Griffin: Oh, we're gonna—by the B segment, we're gonna be slurpin' like hogs.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: So, who are we talking about today?

Rachel: The poet we are discussing this week is Richard Siken. It is a poet that I was not familiar with until this week. But gosh, my timing is incredible, because he has a new book coming out literally next week.

Griffin: Fuck yeah, babe.

Rachel: And after reading some of his poems this week, I went ahead and pre-ordered it.

Griffin: Awesome.

Rachel: Because I am already a huge fan.

Griffin: Did you get those pre-order bonuses?

Rachel: I don't know what that means.

Griffin: You get extra poems. You get extra poems if you pre-order.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: You get like different fonts.

Rachel: You get little box tops to get free—

Griffin: Yeah, get stickers you can put on the cover to like make it look different.

Rachel: [chuckles] No, I don't think so. But, I mean, who knows when my package arrives? I guess we'll see.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, it comes out—the new book is called *I Do Know Some Things*, and it's set to be published August 26th.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Rachel: So, a week from the day we're recording, actually.

Griffin: Awesome.

Rachel: Richard Siken. So, he has published, after this new one comes out, he will have published only three books of poetry. His first book came out in 2005, it's called *Crush*, and it won the Yale Series of Younger Poets competition.

Griffin: That sounds good.

Rachel: In 2004. And he has made comments about how he only publishes a book of poetry every ten years, and he has held true to that. His second didn't come out 'til 2015, and now this next one is coming out in 2025.

Griffin: I fuckin' love it, man! There's lots of people that turn out lots of stuff. If it takes you ten years to put out a dope bundle, then keep—then keep it. And then drop it when you're ready, baby. I'm in no rush.

Rachel: He is widely published. He currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Griffin: The publishing capital of the Southwest.

Rachel: [chuckles] He's gotten a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He's gotten a Pushcart Prize, which, for those of you that are like familiar with like the publishing world, particularly if you've written like short stories or poetry, that's like kind of the prize, if you are somebody that publishes poetry and short stories. Here is the thing that is very interesting, and why I'm giving so much preamble to reading his poem.

Griffin: He's a computer.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Oh?

Rachel: In 2019, he suffered a stroke.

Griffin: Jesus.

Rachel: And basically had to rebuild all of his like physical and language skills, from scratch, more or less. Which, as you can imagine, fundamentally changed his ability to write poetry.

Griffin: Yeah, of course.

Rachel: So, this new collection of poetry is largely about that experience. And it's complete—like a complete tangent from the work he's done before.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Not to say the work he's done before is like a totally different author, it was just, it stood... The poems he wrote before stood out as kind of still the same voice, but more kind of typical subject matter for a poem. Whereas this is very much like very confessional.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Very narrative. And really remarkable, considering all that he has been through. He gave an interview in 2024, and he said that his neurologist said that the fact that he was a painter and a poet is why he recovered. He

said, quote, "Because of the building of pathways, I already had such weird pathways built on lateral thinking, that continuing to paint and write poetry would help with the neuroplasticity. I made an amazing recovery. I'm lucid and I can walk, and when I'm rested, you can't really tell I have a limp. I can use my right arm pretty well, so I can make a pretty good recommendation for the power of language and the need for poetry and painting. And maybe I do need to write, but I don't need to publish, and I don't need to share. And that's a different thing."

Griffin: That's crazy. That's so good.

Rachel: Yeah! The other thing that is different about his work now is it is all justified, and in like a paragraph block. And he talks about how most poetry is left justified. And when you read a line, you come all the way back to the baseline, and then you read the next line, and you come all the way back. And the movement of the eye coming left felt like starting over. And he wanted to kind of keep the momentum the same throughout. And then he also said that he couldn't break a line, because he would get lost and trail off. And he still gets kind of lost. Like his ability to focus and stay in a thought and kind of follow what is happening has gotten more challenging since he has had his stroke.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so, now when he writes poetry, he kind of puts it together in this like block paragraph formation, because it's easier for him to interpret, and kind of captures what he's trying to do—

Griffin: That's really fascinating.

Rachel: Better. Yeah, so it's—anyway, so I'm really excited about this new collection. It seems really... intimate and... just amazing. So, I wanted to read one of the poems that's going to be in this collection. It is called Guest House.

"James wouldn't let me move back into the condo because there were too many stairs, so he moved me into a one room studio while we figured out

what to do with me. It had brick walls and concrete floors. There was a sink and a small fridge.

It used to be a one car garage. The owner had added a bathroom in the back. It was one step up from the main room. Everyone was worried, but I had practiced doing steps in rehab. I could do four of them without getting muscle cramps. The first night was hard. I slept on the floor, so I didn't fall out of the bed. I left the bathroom light on. The second night wasn't any easier. Or the third night. A series of friends were commissioned to make sure I ate. Someone came by every evening and took me to a restaurant.

The rest of the time, I was on my own. The single step to the bathroom wasn't a problem, but getting in and out of the bed was tricky, and the bed didn't have rails. It made me uneasy. I slept on the floor. The plan, get on with it. During the day, I slept or did my exercises, and practiced using my walker. Even when my leg gave out, I could keep myself from falling, which was nice. I couldn't get my walker in the shower, so I sat on the tile floor to soap up and rinse. It was hard to stand up, so I would crawl out and lay on a towel until I was dry enough to pull myself up to the toilet without slipping.

In the evenings, I would go out to dinner with someone, and I would have to ask uncomfortable questions. Where did we meet? How do you spell your name? Why did you like me? And then there were the questions I couldn't ask, did we love each other? Did I do bad things? Should I be ashamed? I cautiously circled the blank struck out spaces. I forgot most of what they told me once I got back to the guest house. It wasn't a real house. I didn't have a real body. I feel like there's more to say about it, but there's not."

[pause]

Griffin: That's a... that's... that is... that's haunting.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's really incredible, but extremely—like you weren't kidding about how personal and intimate a kind of retelling of your experience that is.

Rachel: I think a lot about how I want a poet to capture every experience, because there is something to me that is so... oh, gosh, just like emotionally useful about the way that a poet can reflect an experience to you. And to have somebody like him who has gone through something very challenging, who has to kind of rebuild himself. And to use his like ability to communicate and his way with language, and his kind of artistic inclination. To like capture this experience in this very unique and powerful way, it just—it just makes me think like, man, if every challenging part of our lives had a poet that could like capture that. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like how much more connected people would be, generally. Because I just—I just feel like I'm so excited to read this collection, because it's going to help me understand this experience so much more. And I just feel like... I don't know, I just feel like he... he's got a lot of... I don't know, just got a lot of like exciting insight and—

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, you've shared a lot of poetry on this show... And it's like, I don't know, interesting, as a poem about kind of like rebuilding your memory, how incredibly detailed and sort of evocative this, essentially, memory of this time it is.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And the idea of like the poetry that he writes being the medium for that, and also the thing that makes it... that makes it possible for his brain to kind of put that all back together. It's really a lot to kind of process.

Rachel: Yeah. He wrote a poem that I read, just about like the experience of like when he had the stroke, and like going to the emergency room. Like, he details the whole experience like all along the way.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It's amazing. And I just wanted to say one more thing. He gave this interview with The Common Online in April 2025, and he says about poetry, quote, "You have to lock them in at the beginning, or they won't follow you."

And you can't let it sag or falter. You need multiple propulsions. You need the new propulsion already in place before you let go of the current one. People will go to great lengths to avoid feeling difficult things, so you have to reward them for putting up with the discomfort. People have limited attention, limited bandwidth, so you have to cut every dead word and every false gesture."

Griffin: Fuck, man.

Rachel: "It has to be relentless and inevitable. It has to be economical and precise. And above all, it has to be compressed. You have to get as much as you can into their heads before they turn away. A poem can be a hundred pages long, but it has to be a five-hundred page poem compressed into a hundred pages."

Griffin: That's really good!

Rachel: [chuckles] Isn't that so good?

Griffin: Damn, that's all really fuckin' great!

Rachel: I know!

Griffin: Does he, or did he teach?

Rachel: Not that I can find.

Griffin: Because that felt extraordinarily professorial.

Rachel: I know, I know.

Griffin: And I mean that in a positive way.

Rachel: I—there's—it's hard to find a lot about him. But what I did see suggested that he has—he has to have some experience teaching, because he talks a lot about poetry in a way that feels very knowledgeable and like—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Like he is some kind of educator.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But yeah, man... just really refreshing to find a poet like that, who's just like not so poety, you know? [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, no, for sure.

Rachel: And...

Griffin: I like the poety ones too.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure! But it's like, it's good for me to find poets like that, because it takes away some of the intimidation, and reminds you that like you can just talk in your voice.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: And if you're like precise enough, like it can be incredibly powerful.

Griffin: Yeah. What was his name again? Richard Siken.

Rachel: Richard Siken. S-I-K-E-N.

Griffin: Cool. Incredible. Really, really, really incredible. I feel like that one's gonna stick with me. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Have you had the tea yet? By the way.

Rachel: No, I'm about to go in,

Griffin: Go—I just had a sip. I'm crazy about it. But we have different tastes sometimes, and like what we enjoy. This is the ginger peach tea. Yeah.

Rachel: Huh.

Griffin: Yeah. *Weird*.

Rachel: I'm getting both. I'm getting ginger and peach.

Griffin: It's like sour and you're like, what is that—and then the ginger hits you and you're like, whoa! And then the peach just kind of opens up.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's really, really, a great—

Rachel: I feel like I would benefit from some honey, maybe. You're like—

Griffin: That's a good idea.

Rachel: You're like a big honey guy, right?

Griffin: I put a little splash in. I wouldn't say I'm a big *honey guy*.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I wouldn't say I'm a big honey guy.

Rachel: Sometimes—

Griffin: You're a big honey girl, right? Who's my big honey girl?

Rachel: [chuckles] Sometimes you take offense to the most surprising things.

Griffin: Big honey guy! Me? I'm a big, fuckin' tough dude. Built Ford Tough.

Rachel: Should I have said little honey guy? [titters]

Griffin: "You put honey in your tea sometimes," would be good. I'm a *big honey guy*.

Rachel: Okay, anyway, I feel like this tea could benefit from a big honey guy.

Griffin: I did put some big honey guy in mine, and I—it is fantastic. Do you know who else is fantastic? Is Jensen McRae, who is my Big Wonder this week. Big shout out to the Las Culturistas culture awards, which were just genuinely delightful, start to finish. You've listened to the podcast more than I have.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: So you can probably give a brief background on that, if you want to.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, Bowen Yang is definitely the most recognizable of the two, on Saturday Night Live. Played the iceberg in the great like correspondent on Weekend Update, Titanic situation, that like propelled him. Prop...

Griffin: Propelled.

Rachel: Propelled. [chuckles] Propelled to him to stardom. His like best friend from college, Matt Rogers, the two of them have had a podcast for a very long time, well before he was famous. And they talk about things in culture, and bring on famous people now. And they have had this like idea of an awards show that was not really anything for a long time, and was just silly things that they liked. And then this past year, it was an actual show on Bravo. And had like actual budget and—

Griffin: Huge budget!

Rachel: Yeah, and they had guests and performances, and we watched it, and it was very heartwarming, because it was these two very sincere, enthusiastic men, like doing all the things they wanted to do with the people they liked. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, and also like, it is exciting to see a podcast adapted in such a like original and also incredibly successful way.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, that's—it's so, so thrilling. So, the show was great. We watched some of it here in Huntington, but then we—or in DC, but then we went to Huntington for a quick little family trip. And we watched the rest of it with Juice and Syd. Just like, they had finished putting the kids to bed, and came into the living room, and we were just like, "Yeah, we've got this thing on, if you want to watch it." And then Jensen McRae comes out to perform one of the songs that was, I think, nominated for song of the year, or track of the year. There was like a different category for song of the year, like album of the year—

Rachel: There was song of the year, there was album of the year, there was song of the summer. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah. There was also a category for best Batman woman.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: There was a lot of really good stuff. So, one of the nominees was Jensen McRae, who performed her song, Massachusetts, on stage with just her singing. Her brother was there playing piano. And so like, we were talking to Juice and Syd, just kind of catching up on the day. And just kind of one by one, we realized we all kind of went silent, and were just kind of transfixed by this woman's performance, because it was really, really, really, breathtakingly good.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So Jensen McRae is—she describes herself as a folk, alternative pop, singer songwriter. She's from Santa Monica. She has this just insanely rich, deep alto voice that has earned her like a million comparisons to Tracy Chapman.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: She has cited a lot of musical influences like Stevie Wonder, James Taylor, Alicia Keys, Carole King. And I think if we play a little bit of the song that she played at the culture awards, it's a song called Massachusetts, off her most recent album, I think it'll give an example of sort of how apt those comparisons are. So, here is a little bit of Massachusetts.

[an excerpt of "Massachusetts" by Jensen McRae plays]

Lyrics: When someone tells me they're from Massachusetts, now I always ask, "What part?" I wonder if you kept the pilgrim ashtray, if it's still propped up on your bar cart. Could make a grand off of the chain you bought me, but goddamn, it's not for sale. When someone asks me who's my favorite Batman, I'll think of you and say, "Christian Bale." As long as I live, I'll remember the names of your favorite beers and your video games.

Griffin: I've listened to this song so many times since we got back to Huntington. Partially because like her voice is just bonkers, but the imagery that she is able to evoke about this sort of abstract idea is, I think, really powerful. And I think you and I have talked about this a lot, very recently, specifically on this show, whenever we bring like what is essentially a breakup song, how we don't necessarily have the immediate resonance with that. Like, oh, this song isn't really for—it's been a long time since I've needed a sad breakup jam to help me out. But like this one's one of the best ones that I've maybe ever heard.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And I think the first line is just a really breathtaking—I keep using that word, but it is...

Rachel: Yeah, that's what—I mean, that's what it is.

Griffin: It's a really great example of this concept of like a song about the minutia that is left over when a long-term relationship comes to an end.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: The first line is, "When people tell me they're from Massachusetts, now I always ask what part." That like implies so much shit. It like is suggestive of a moment where someone says something, and you recognize that now you know something about it, and you are excited to talk about it. And the source of that excitement is someone who used to be like really special in your life. And that, I don't know, that feeling is really, really, like I said, like abstract, but also pretty relatable, I think?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I definitely, I probably have a few things that if I were to like think pretty hard about it, like I would only have known about because of, you know, past relationships or past perhaps friends that I don't necessarily speak to as much anymore. And I don't know, I think that that that feeling is very... is very relatable. I also want to give credit to the line, "When someone asks me who's my favorite Batman, I'll think of you and say Christian Bale." There's, it's just like everything that's in the song that is referenced is so specific.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: All the way down to, and I gotta give credit, "Your favorite beers and your video games—your video games." The most I've heard video games sort of referred to in a song since like Lana Del Rey's whole thing.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And I do think that this one handles the subject matter a little bit more delicately.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: But this idea of like the media you—the stuff you were into, I was into. There's a line of, "My tongue is turning over all your phrases. Now I say it's aces, but it sounds so strange. I wonder if your tongue is turning over anything I used to say." Like it feels like really... I don't know, like so, so personal. It always astonishes me when a songwriter can write something

that is so obvious, I imagine who it's about. Like, it feels like the kind of song that there's a person out there who heard it, who's like, "Oh, shit."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: "There's no denying who this is about. I'm from Massachusetts. I have video games."

Rachel: [chuckles] But like, think about how many breakup songs there are in the world, how much overlap there is between all of them, how intimidating, like daunting it must be to sit down to write a breakup song and not step on like hundreds of them, just in the first like ten seconds.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And like that's what's so like gorgeous about this one, is that it's just so precise.

Griffin: Yeah. While also sort of referencing a lot of stuff.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, "Your wall of guitars and your video games." Like, okay, that's a lot of—

Rachel: Evocative.

Griffin: That's a lot of—

Rachel: Evocative is the word I want—

Griffin: That's a lot of people.

Rachel: Is—yeah, it's evocative.

Griffin: Yes, very much so. So, Jensen McRae is, she decided to pursue music as a career at a very young age. She got sent to Grammy Camp in high school, and then got a music degree at USC, and started releasing EPs

in college. She released a few singles like at the end of college and shortly after, but she really started to gain some recognition with some songs that she dropped during the height of COVID. So, she had this tweet that went viral in January of 2021, where she said, "In 2023, Phoebe Bridgers is going to drop her third album, and the opening track will be about hooking up in the car while waiting in line to get vaccinated at Dodger Stadium. And it's gonna make me cry." And like a bunch of people, you know, interacted with this tweet.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: Bridgers retweeted it. And so, Jensen McRae wrote a whole song called Immune, that is specifically about this, about hooking up with someone in line to get vaccinated at Dodger Stadium. And it, I don't know, I—some of the stuff I read about it was like, "Yeah, it's like, written in Bridger's style, and it's a really interesting sort of tribute." I think it kind of stands on its own as just sort of a really... really, again, very specific moment that is crystallized in amber. Like a COVID romance song is not something that I've really heard before. So I also want to play a little bit of that song, it's called immune. And here it is.

[excerpt of "Immune" by Jensen McRae plays]

Lyrics: Someone's smoking in the Camry just ahead. Yeah, I know the irony would never be lost on me. You don't have to point it out, again. What will we say to each other when the needle goes in? What will we be to each other if the world doesn't end?

Griffin: This—she just dropped an album back in April called, I Don't Know How But They Found Me, and it's the album that Massachusetts is on, and it's really, really, really great. I have listened to it front to back, and I would recommend it to just about anyone. I think she is a really, really incredible writer with a really unique voice. And I don't know, I think it is telling that I am as into this music and resonating with it, even if it's not as personally sort of like immediately relevant.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's just, it is... I don't know, it kind of reminds me of a time when I listened to a lot of music like that. And there was a... it was incredibly worthwhile to have music like that in my life at that time. And so, I don't know, it kind of transports me to this other era. And I think it's just really great.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Please.

Griffin: Here they come. Here's one from Sarah, who says, "Hi, Rachel and Griffin. My Small Wonder is when you go to name a folder on a computer and find that you have already named one the same thing. I think it's so funny that our brains will follow the same paths and set off the same thoughts. Thanks for a wonderful podcast to listen to on my way to work." I find this quite relatable. I, every two or three years, I'm like, all right, let's clean up all these files. And then it's like, I'll go look at my documents folder, which is like my boneyard, and I'll be like, fuck, man, I've already got—I've already got one in there called like "taxes and stuff."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I've already got one in there called like "old sprite sheets." Like it's, I—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I need to—I need to hire a professional. I need—is there like a cyber-Marie Kondo who will go through and be like—

Rachel: Whoa.

Griffin: You don't need a—I have a folder on my desktop called "music production," right underneath a folder called "music files."

Rachel: Oh, Griff.

Griffin: What's going on there? What's the distinction? I don't know. I forgot. I made these folders such a long time ago.

Rachel: You just put 'em together. That's what I do sometimes.

Griffin: If I do that, then Ableton's gonna freak the fuck out. The first time I'm like, "Hey, Ableton, play some drums," it'll be like, "Where is it?!"

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Here's one from Holly, who says, "My Small Wonder is sliding into clean bed sheets just after shaving my legs. There's something so nice about the buttery glide of baby smooth skin against fresh, soft cotton."

Rachel: Do you want me to weigh in on this?

Griffin: I mean, I understand the feeling of like nice... like a clean, soft sheet, getting in there. There's obviously—

Rachel: Do you ever slide in face-first? [titters]

Griffin: After shaving?

Rachel: Yeah. [titters]

Griffin: It's been a while since I've shaved. So, I don't—

Rachel: That's true, you haven't gone like fully clean face—

Griffin: I'm a—specifically like lately, I'm a pretty rough man. I don't have a lot of sort of smooth surfaces on me anymore. Working on that, working on it with my dermatologist.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: Trying to get smooth for the world. Ow, I just dropped my phone on myself. But is it nice?

Rachel: It is, it's very nice. Especially like if you put some lotion on there. Like if you really smooth yourself up.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And then really just *whoosh*.

Griffin: Bobsled.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Right in there. Yeah.

Rachel: Cool Runnings style.

Griffin: Cool Runnings it. You and three other women immediately behind you.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Hey, thanks for listening. Thank you so much 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. And thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the show. You can go to maximumfun.org, check out all the great stuff that they have going on over there. We've got some live shows coming up in Atlanta. We're doing MBMBaM and TAZ in Atlanta, next week! So, you should come out and see us. The TAZ show is going to be TAZ Versus Popeye. Dad's running it. Last time dad ran a show, it was a fuckin' hoot. I'm real excited for him to get back in the saddle.

We're also doing stuff at Dragon Con. So, bit.ly/mcelroytours is where you can get tickets for those shows. And also, we're coming to Texas, San Antonio and Austin. We're coming to Utah and California later in the year. And you can get tickets, again, at bit.ly/mcelroytours. Dad's doing DnD in a Castle in November, and you can get tickets to play at his table, if you so

choose. I'm not sure where to do that, because it's not included in the list of end of show notes details. But I bet if you search up DnD in a Castle, you could—you could probably figure it out.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: And we've got some merch over at mcelroymerch.com. We've got some back to school stuff, back on sale. So, you can check all that out over there. Thank you so much for listening! We hope you had a good time. Heavy episode. Emotionally taxing.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But—

Rachel: It probably felt good, though, you know?

Griffin: Cathartic.

Rachel: Like a—like a good cry.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? Like you really cleansed some things.

Griffin: Well, and last week, we talked—I think last week, we talked about Bachelor in Paradise, and Perfect Match and American Ninja Warrior.

Rachel: We did.

Griffin: So, this was sort of a—we owed a sort of karmic debt.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: A tonal debt, if you will. Next week, we'll try to balance our humors a little bit better.

Rachel: [titters] Swing back and forth, episode to episode?

Griffin: No, we'll balance it out. We should make it a point that one of us does like a smart or sad thing. And then the other one can be like Frito chips.

Rachel: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

Griffin: So, that's probably next week. Dibs On Frito chips! Ha-ha-ha!

Rachel: [chuckles]

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

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