

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Emerald Fennell

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by writer, director, and actor Emerald Fennell, where I ask her: Does this episode need its own royal title? Welcome to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness, and I'm so excited for our guest this week. I'm a massive fan of all of her projects. Without any further ado, welcome!

EMERALD FENNEL [00:00:31] Thank you. Thank you so much.

JVN [00:00:34] Ok, so I wanna, I wanna work through the most recent project, which is stunning. And also everyone, you're going to be, like, left to wonder, but I just, like, overshared with Emerald, like, a major moment and she's having to pivot from this major personal overshare to business. And I just want to give you validation that, yes, you're amazing and thank you for working with me on that overshare. So, thank you!

EMERALD FENNEL [00:01:00] I love, all I ever want is an overshare. My mother's, my mother's trick question if she's sitting next to someone at dinner who doesn't want to talk or is, like, not very good at talking or not very forthcoming, her opening line is: "Do you fall in love easily?" Jonathan, do you fall in love easily?

JVN [00:01:17] Ah, that's the best opening line ever, and I could literally, if I wasn't a more trained podcast host, I could have, like, taken that question and, like, talked for 40 minutes without interruption. So that's a really, such a good opening, it's such a good icebreaker.

EMERALD FENNEL [00:01:33] Yeah, it's good isn't it.

JVN [00:01:35] Is your mom from the same town that you're from? Like, are you guys both from the same place or, like, was she from, like, a city and then she moved to your home to like what happened?

EMERALD FENNEL [00:01:43] Sure, ok, no, so actually we weren't. She grew up in the middle of Wales in Monmouthshire, um in, er yeah on a farm. And she, she ran away aged 16 to go to Kings Road because she'd seen a picture of it in a magazine. She was like, "That's where I need to be."

JVN [00:02:00] Ah, oh my gosh! So she has a Welsh baby accent?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:02:04] No she doesn't actually because her parents are English, but they moved there, and she kind of, and I think she's of that age where everyone was kind of home schooled in a sort of slightly sort of, sort of ramshackle way. And yeah so she, she ran away, she ran away and she worked in a shop. She worked in a dress shop, quite a famous dress shop at the time.

JVN [00:02:26] So growing up, your mom worked in a dress shop and, like, she would tell you about cute dresses and stuff?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:02:30] Well, by the time I came on board, she was doing something else because, because, so so sadly not. But she, she's always been the coolest. She's the coolest.

JVN [00:02:41] I'm obsessed with the dress shop. *Say Yes To The Dress* was, like, my favorite show for much of the early 2000s.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:02:46] Yes!

JVN [00:02:47] It's a very, it's a, it's a major classic. So, but your most recent work, *Promising Young Woman*, just watched it; it's so good. You, like, wrote and directed this movie! So where were you, what happened, you were just, like, walking along one day and you were, like, "*Promising Young Woman*," like, how did it come to you? Like, was it a concept that had just, like, pissed you off for a long time, like, rightfully so, that you, like, wanted to, like, or, like, did you ever think is it a series, like, I want to stop answering the question for you now. How did it happen? How did you, how did it happen?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:03:23] I really liked one of your answers; they're more interesting than mine, I think really difficult to say. I'm the worst, what I've realized talking about this film is I basically have, I'm an amnesiac, like, I genuinely do not remember even the most basic facts of my life, so trying to remember exactly how, like, something like this comes is quite difficult. But, I definitely feel like, you know, a lot of us are looking back over the, to the very recent past and wondering how certain stuff could have just been so normal. And I guess I'd been thinking a lot, particularly about, like, the fact that going home with drunk people, girls waking up in bed with a guy next to them not knowing who that guy was and then going on a walk of shame, you know, losing your virginity any way you could, that was all kind of, like, normal stuff, it was banter. Not only was it banter among, like, my peers, but it was banter in *movies*, like, *really* recent romantic comedy movies.

There's nothing in my film that has not been, I mean, almost, like, more explicitly done, but as a comedy as well. I guess I've been thinking a lot about that stuff and more particularly,

like, not, not necessarily just the villains of this world, male or female, but, like, what happens when as a group we just decide that something really awful is fine? You know, and I guess that was sort of the beginning of it. But really what usually happens to me is that just a scene, it is a little bit like walking down the street and, like: *Promising Young Woman!* But, but it was a scene and it was the, you know, it was the kind of early scene where, you know, there's a drunk girl lying on a bed and somebody is undressing her and she's drunkenly saying, "What are you doing, what are you doing?" And then suddenly she sits up as her knickers are around her ankles and says, "What are you doing?" And she's sober. And that for me was like, "Ok, I think I know what this is now. I think I know who this is, this person is, and I want to, like, see where this goes."

JVN [00:05:37] I was, like, so into your answer, I didn't want it to be over, and then I, like, stopped looking at my notes. Um, so, um, so I mean, for me, I feel like, in writing my book, I really wanted to talk, and it really wasn't just in my book, I mean, I've noticed in my whole life like, really all the trauma that I've gone through, like I really like to joke about it, because if I didn't joke about it, like, I would be, like, you know, in my mom's basement, like, shoving, like, Pop Tarts and powdered donuts down my throat, like, watching, like, the 1992, 4, 8 and 2000 Winter Games, like, on loop, just, like, watching it, like, forever, um, and just really just powdered donuts and maybe, like, I would switch from, like, the powdered donuts to, like, the chocolate-dipped ones, you know, like, where it's, like, the yellow cake and you dip it in chocolate and it's, like, that, whatever. So, I need to be, do you not have those in the UK?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:06:28] I'm just, like, my stomach is just actually rumbling.

JVN [00:06:31] There's this, like, yellow cake donut that we have here that comes in, like, the gas station. So there will be, like, three powdered minis, then three, it's, like, yellow cake and it's dipped in chocolate, so it's got, like, a hard chocolate shell with, like, a yellow cake center. And then just to, like, cleanse your palate, well, it depends on what side you start eating up from because it's like a tube of little mini donuts, then there's, like, three just plain, which I always save for the last, I like to just work right through all of it, I don't like to skip around. I can't believe you've never had this. You can also get them in big versions.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:07:01] Hang on that's interesting. So do you save the best for last? Do you like the plain most or do you start with the most delicious and work your way down?

JVN [00:07:10] I start with the most delicious, which for me is powdered, then chocolate and yellow. Like, it's I mean, it's good because, like, I'm not silly, like, of course I'm going

to eat chocolate and it's like, but, like, I do prefer powdered better. And then I just, I feel like the plain cake one just kind of like, it's like at the end of therapy when you do like your safe space meditation so that you're like it's, it's just kinda like because I feel like if I ended on my favorite I feel like I would just, like, ah, I love donuts!

EMERALD FENNELL [00:07:37] It eases you back at, because I know-

JVN [00:07:40] Yes!

EMERALD FENNELL [00:07:40] -I would be, always I'm vegetables first, like, get them out of the way, get them out of the way so I can like really focus on the delicious stuff which is bad because if you have a husband like mine or a toddler like mine, it can be swiped off your plate before you've even had time because you've left this delicious part vulnerable.

JVN [00:08:02] I respect, though, that you even eat the vegetables, though, because you know what I started doing, I've started doing this horrific thing where, like, I make the vegetables and then I don't eat it or, like, I'll order a salad and then I just don't. And then, like, this lady nutritionist I was working with, she's really fierce, she was like, "So the thing with eating clean is that you have to, like, eat, like, you have to eat *it* because just ordering it or making it like it doesn't count." And I was like, "Ohhh, but, like," but I feel like in my brain, like just being like I mean I did the brussel sprouts and the broccoli, did you not, but it's like if it didn't see your innards honey it doesn't totally count. So, but whatever.

So my question was, I do feel like I, I, I, I like to process my trauma through humor, and I think that for some people who, um, I have noticed, sometimes when people haven't experienced the same trauma that I have or they have a different experience of, you know, another version of it, it's like sometimes that humor can be, it can, like, rub people the wrong way, or they're like, "Oh my gosh, I feel like I'm finally hearing someone talk about it in a way that I thought about it." And I feel like I've really experienced the spectrum of, like, "I feel like I really saw myself for the first time in reading that" or like, "No," you know.

#MeToo really hasn't stopped, which I love that story, like, let's keep talking about equality in every sense of the word, and let's really come back to having a conversation about what consent means and, like, making *that* be the fierce, gorgeous thing, which I think is so important. What has been your spectrum of experience after releasing this project about such a, you know, intense topic?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:09:37] Yeah, I mean, I think, I think it's sort of everything that you have described, really. It's so difficult when you talk about anything like this. You know you have to be so, so careful. But I think the only way you can do it, for me anyway, and, and

obviously for you, for your book, is you have to to express your, you know you firstly have to sort of be honest, I suppose, even if it's hard, even if it's not you know empowering and cathartic, these are the things I think that are often expected of us. If we talk about things that are difficult. So many-, much of stuff that's difficult *isn't* empowering and *isn't*, it is messy and it is difficult and, and so um there's that. And then I, like you, I find it *incredibly* difficult to talk about *anything* serious unless it's with humor. I've just, it's certainly the way that I communicate.

I'm, I'm, yeah I'm quite sort of, I don't know, yeah I'm bad at expressing myself in a very kinda straightforward, earnest way, and I know what's happened, so therefore it made sense that this film, you know in spite of it being dark, it is a dark comedy. But I *also* think that we have this funny idea, that comedy or being funny or using humor, somehow is designed to make something more palatable, or it sort of, it's light. I don't think comedy is any of those things. I think that often the things that hit me the hardest are funny, and they're horribly funny and they're funny because they, they hit me in such a kind of profoundly true way, and so it's really difficult if you're, if you're talking about anything like this, you have to kind of completely respect and understand everyone's experience is different and so that for lots of people they won't want to watch this movie, and I completely respect that. Or, they might watch it and they might not like the way it's done. And I, and I can understand that, too.

But for me, it was trying to talk about something that I find really difficult. I don't have any answers. I made a film; I'm not an expert. I made a film about how I *feel* about all the stuff, which is that, you know, it's horrendous and unrelenting and frustrating and scary and yeah, and all of the things that it is. But yeah, it's so, it's so difficult. You know there's this, there's a lot of pressure, I think, on anyone now to be *right*, you know, to be *good* versus bad. "This is right." "This is wrong." "This is good." "This is bad." But the thing is, is that those things aren't that useful when you're talking about people expressing themselves in any way.

You can say, "I didn't like it." You can say, "I found this difficult." "I thought it was badly shot." "I didn't like the acting." "I didn't like," you know, "your book." I didn't like, you know, this bit, this thing. But it's very difficult when you say that's wrong, that's bad, this is bad. Because, you know, it means *actually* that that is very, that means that other people who want to talk about a similar thing in a *different* way, are vulnerable as well, so it's, ah, I don't know; it's *such* a complicated thing. And I, again, if you make anything about anything complicated or difficult, that you have sort of you know personal investment in, as I'm sure everyone you now has up to a point, Yeah, it's ugh, it's there's a lot of pressure to serve everyone, and it's-

JVN [00:13:28] Yeah.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:13:28] -impossible to do, it's impossible to do, so you just have to do the thing that you feel is right. And you know, cop it if people don't love it and that's, and kind of respect that it's hard, my God, it's so hard to to sort of be like, "Ok, you know, you hated it, but fine, that's ok, that's ok."

JVN [00:13:49] People should fast forward through this question if they haven't seen it yet. But, I have a question: I noticed the different colors that she uses to mark in her journal after she's had a date, in the beginning, did she use the black one because she kills him?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:14:06] The thing about the marks in her journal is I think quite early on I just decided that it's best for people to use their imagination on that.

JVN [00:14:16] But sometimes she uses black and sometimes blue and sometimes red, right?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:14:20] Mhmm, yeah.

JVN [00:14:22] So in my imagination, I want her to have murdered the first guy because he pissed me off. Well they all pissed me off, but especially, I just thought that would be so fun if she just, like, if there was like, you know, like, keys in her knuckles and she just was like, kr-kr! You know, just, like, I thought-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:14:38] I think, ah, it's a really difficult one. It's so difficult with a movie like this because it's sort of not really, I kind of realized early on that it was going to be so tempting for me to explain every single, do you know what I mean? Like, particularly when you love something so much, you've thought about it so deeply and you really want to, you know, if people feel, if people respond to it in a way that maybe you weren't expecting, what I realized is it really wasn't for me to kind of, like, muscle it and be like, "No, no. It's sup-." Look, it's, your relationship with the film is so personal, you know, and the way that you feel about it, the way that you interpret it, is personal, so in terms of, like, plottier things like that. I've sort of, like, stepped back because otherwise I would just literally be on Twitter all day, like, micromanaging everybody's, like, feelings about the film, or, like, turning up at their houses being like, "No I'm so sorry you've misinterpreted, so I need to explain," so, yeah. So that's the kind of long-winded answer.

JVN [00:15:31] That was such a good answer. And I love that. I love using my imagination. So wait, I have a, like, filmmaker question. So when you use the term, like, you know, "plottier things," what does that mean again?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:15:46] So I guess, I guess what I mean by that is that, when it comes to characters and relationships and things in a movie, I think they're so open to interpretation that how anyone interprets them is, is great. But when it, you know, if you're writing a, yeah if you're writing a movie that is necessarily ambiguous when it comes to certain, like, plot details, then I think it's important to let, to actually let people interpret those, those beats, those story beats how they would like to.

You know, so much of this film, we do give the audience a very I think, a very clear idea of what has happened and what is about to happen and all that. But, you know, but part of it is that, you know, if you're, if you're talking about something like we are with this movie, and it always makes the movie sound incredibly dour and serious, which, you know, the subject matter is, but the movie isn't. But you know I think you just, yeah, you just kind of have to, you want to engage with the audience and so you want to kind of say "I, I think we all know what happens, I think we all know what this scene is, I think we all know what happened then, I think we all know what is happening now." And that, and that I think is an important thing: not to be didactic or preachy, but to be like, "This is something that we all fundamentally in our kind of souls understand," I guess, which makes it sound very pretentious, but.

JVN [00:17:16] No! I feel like that, I feel like I, I think I very much understand what you're saying. But let me just ask this really quick before I ask what I was going to ask. Was I the *only* person that had that question?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:17:28] Do you want to be the only person to have that question?

JVN [00:17:31] No! I mean, I just, like, I'm wondering, like, is there something the matter with me that, like, I watched the whole movie and that was one of my, it you just did kind of stick with me that I was like, "Oh, I hope she murdered that one guy when she used the *black* marker." What does that say about me?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:17:45] I think that's actually what, you know, that is exactly what the film is about, is about what we *want* to see from movies like this, it's what we *want* to see in real life versus what the reality is, you know, so it's, it's important that, you know, something might be blood, it might be ketchup, because, you know, because it's yeah, it's, it's, it's also kind of a conversation about how we process stuff and how we want, yeah, what we *want*. We're all baying for blood, right? And so it's like, *how* do we deliver that and what does it really look like when it comes and all of that sort of, that sort of stuff. But no, honestly, that has been a very common question, so don't worry. You are not the only, you are not the only murderous-

JVN [00:18:29] Basic dum dum. Ok wait, I'm obsessed with your approach on, oftentimes I feel like, this even happens in, like, I mean, I'm not creating, like, gorgeous scripted masterpieces, but I, you know, but when I think about certain ways of just, like, depicting things on, like, social or, like, whatever project I'm working on, I feel like the longer that I'm in entertainment, the longer that I'm creatively involved in everything that I'm getting to be creatively involved with, I find myself wanting to hold the viewer's hand less and, like, trust that people *can* sit with that discomfort and *can* sit with whatever I'm trying to do, whether it was in my book or whether, like, there's a lot of times I feel like where editors and other people will say, like, "Well do you like-," but sometimes it's, like, "No, like I, I have an intuition here, it's like meant for them to talk about, like, I'm not meant to be hitting everyone over the head with necessarily every aspect." So I respect that creatively and I think that's really cool and I really enjoyed the movie from beginning to end, really on the edge of my seat; love! So that's amazing.

So, did you, ok, so, I like, I, I meant to talk more about other things and I'm, like, really obsessed with the movie so I want to ask a few more questions. You might have to skip forward through this because you haven't seen it yet so we just need to mark this because I'm going to do a couple little baby plot spoilers. So, 'cause, like, I love what she, like, her little *Kill Bill*-ness when she, like, gets that, like, what she gets um, when she takes the friend to lunch and then she sets up that little thing, because I loved that the character did, like went, there, like, got kind of fucked up and got kind of dark.

I especially loved at the end of the one part when she was like, "You think I *really* do that? Like, I didn't really kidnap her honey. She's like at this diner, like, get out of here." *That* I loved so much because I felt like I was, the whole, that whole scene I was like, "Oh god, is she really, like, how deep did she go? Like, how bad did she do?" And then she kind of, like, it wasn't as dark as what you kind of thought it was gonna be, which I kind of *loved*. And I thought that her response was so funny! So, like, did you feel, like, as a director and as a writer, like, are you able to, like, disassociate, like, "Ok, this character is not, like, a real, like, she is real in the movie," but like, like did you feel protective of her or, like, of, like, the character herself or did, like, what was that like?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:20:44] That's so interesting. I don't, ah, do I feel prot-, I mean definitely I think she, you know, she's definitely a person who doesn't need protecting. I'd definitely like to be protected by her. I think I mean, obviously she's sort of, ah, I mean, I'm not very nice. I don't know anyone who's very nice, *honestly*, you know, when it comes down to it, when it comes down to this kind of stuff, when it comes down to, you know, the sorts of things that Cassie was dealing with. She has PTSD, she's in, like, *terrible* grief, she's in a sort of self-harming cycle. You know, those things make you often very difficult to love,

you know, she's made herself *deliberately* difficult to love so people don't come near her. And that's part of this whole thing, and, and so I think yeah, I think actually it's sort of quite freeing to think, "Ok," and for me with this move it was, like, "Ok, if I wanted to do something like this, if I wanted to like wreak revenge on people who would wrong somebody I loved in the past, what could I do?"

I couldn't get a gun, I wouldn't know how to get a gun. I wouldn't know how to shoot it. I know that if I was in a room with a man with a gun, he would almost certainly get it off me and shoot me instead and then he'd be fine, he'd get off, so, you know, easily. So it's kind of like it's like, ok, but what could I do? I could turn up at people's houses and I could fuck with them, and I could frighten them and I could make them think things like make them see things. And, and when you have someone like Carey Mulligan who is just so, like, supernaturally gifted and brilliant, you know it does, she *is*, you know, she is all the things that she is in this movie: she's lovable and she's funny and we're on her side, but she's also terrifying.

And I think it was because she doesn't ever do what we're *all* told to do. And this applies to everyone in all *sorts* of scenarios; she doesn't let it go. She doesn't say, she doesn't, everyone's saying, "It was years ago, get over it, you're *ruining* your life." She *is*; we can see what she's doing. We as an audience want her to choose the path of, like, candy and love and normality and all that stuff. But, but she's the person saying, "But it wasn't *right*, and I *won't* let it go," and that gives her so much power and it makes her so frightening, and I think it's, yeah, it's sort of one of those things I do think like, I do believe wholeheartedly in forgiveness, I think everyone should be forgiven, but that forgiveness is *entirely* dependent on an admission of guilt and *remorse*, you know.

And it's something that we've been talking about so much politically now with what's been happening in America, you now, with this new sort of, this new conflict between people saying, "Hey, just move on," and the other people saying, "Well, yeah, of course, we'd all love to just start afresh, but that's not how it works." That's not how any of it works. So, you know, it's all very like, ha very highfalutin answer, very complicated answer to, I was protective of her, but that never meant that I was keen to make her more likable, all, all the things I think that people maybe would expect from a movie like this, more, like, badass and, like, whip-smart. And I love movies like that, I love characters like that, but like, I also don't really *know* anyone like that.

JVN [00:24:09] I feel like she's pretty whip-smart though honey, I mean. I wouldn't know how to like find someone's fucking kid and, like, I don't know. I mean, I was really, like. I mean, the makeup artist thing, I was like, I was "uh, uh," I was just, like, on the edge of my seat. Like I just like, I just like, edge of my seat. I think that I have like a, there's a few things

that you said that I think are just so interesting in terms of just everything, but really trauma and, like, life. You know and Buddha says or someone from Buddhism said, like, you know, "to live is to suffer."

And I think that really like context is um you know so important and so when you say, like, is it good? Is it bad? Well, sometimes it's both, like sometimes, like, *both* things can be true. Not of a project, like not the movie, but just like a thing, like there, you can live through trauma, and there were aspects of it that were, that, when I think about trauma that I've lived through, it's like, there were times that were, I'd go so far as to say fun and like could, like weren't as damaging.

But then there was other stuff that, like, was in the depths of my soul and was, like, the worst, most horrific shit that I've ever been through. And sometimes those happen, like, not that far away from each other. So I think it's really interesting to think about context and a "yes, and" and I also kind of felt like that's where her character ends up because she, that was another part of the movie I just was really kind of inspired by is that, like, even after all that, she kind of still wanted to choose love, which I think is so human and, like, sweet and that is so relatable. I just loved it so much; I was really on the edge of my seat. I mean, yeah, I feel like talking to you about it now what I'm seeing is that, like, I think *maybe*, um, who's that, like, man and he made *Kill Bill*, and I saw it in eighth grade-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:25:55] Quentin Tarantino.

JVN [00:25:56] Yes! I think he made me think in movies that everyone is going to come like rip somebody in half with like a rattlesnake and like a brass knuckle like up their buttock. So every time I see, like, it's, like, what's the most horrific way you could murder someone, it's like you bury a snake and like the, like, so I think that's why in that first scene I was like, does the black thing does the black mark mean that she, like, disemboweled him and then like the red marks mean, I mean, I mean I think he just, like, traumatized me.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:26:22] Also, like, we're so familiar. That's what's so *fun* about making a film like this too, you know, for all that it is very serious, I hope that it's also a movie that like everyone would want to watch because you know it is also funny and also gripping and you know these sorts of things. But what's so interesting about this stuff and so fun, like just from a sort of, like, nerdy structural point of view, is that I'm with you completely. I was brought up on all those movies on these kinds of like revenge movies, which were like, you know, they had a sort of similar structure, like, somebody goes on a revenge journey, they visit people along the way and each person they visit is sort of like more horrific, and they died a more horrific way, and like, we love it, it's like my favorite

thing in the world. And so you know so much of making this film was, like, "Okay, how do we, like, work with those expectations and how do we deliver a similar kind of pleasure, but in a completely different way that feels like more grounded." Because, yeah, it is like, I love all that stuff so much but I also think, you know, it's really fun and interesting to look at um what would happen if a real person was put in that world and needed, and was doing that stuff.

JVN [00:27:35] I also think it just gives you like much, um, this film was so smart, like, my husband and I have talked about it every day since we watched it, because it is a, it is a story that sticks with you and you do talk about it and you end up talking about the systems that helped to create the, the systems that helped to create this sort of thing to happen like that we talk about in this movie. So, I loved it so much.

I do want to progress to 'The Crown' because thigh chills, tricep chills. Oh my God! So everyone, I don't know if you know this, and I'll tell you now, if you haven't seen *The Crown*, Emerald literally plays fucking Camilla Parker Bowles, like, I'm not kidding. So, can we talk, I know you said that you had amnesia earlier, I, well amnesia or amnesia tendencies, but, like, where were you when you found that out because obviously the, this TV series is, like, a really major deal. I'm guessing that it was already really popular when you got the role because you make your debut in season thr--, three, thank you. I finished bingeing four, like, a minute ago, so I was like you know, I'm never, I'm kind of, like, ew, I hate that now when I think Harry Potter, I just get, like, a bad taste in my mouth, which is just so devastating. But, I never had a copy of Harry Potter last more than like 48 hours, and I'm like that with the Crown, like because I read it so fast, like I have to see it, I can't, eugh, so, so, like, was your agent or your team like, "So, like, what about..." Like, what happened?

EMERALD FENNEL [00:29:18] Well, so I, like, yeah, like you, I absolutely love the show. It's, and also it's just like, in England I think, I think really we do make just some of the most incredible stuff in the world, but it's very rare to have the kind of budget that, like, you know, HBO recently, like, Netflix have brought over to us you know because usually we don't have this kind of budget and so just from a purely like, just, like, nerd point of view, I just wanted to see what something like that was like, like, I've never seen anything like that before. So but, but really I first I auditioned early on, I think for the first series before it ever came out for some, I can't even remember what the part was, just, like, a little part in it; I didn't get it obviously.

JVN [00:30:06] Thank God!

EMERALD FENNELL [00:30:08] Ha, but I said to my amazing, wonderful agent, Lindy, I just said, "You know at some point they're going to want young Camilla Parker Bowles if this carries on. And if I do, will you just please, please ask them to call me because I really wanna audition for it." And Nina Gold and Robert Sterne, who are the amazing casting directors who've just basically cast me in everything I, I owe, like, they're just the best ever, and so, yeah, they let me come in and, but it was, it was right, I think I auditioned just as we were wrapping *Killing Eve* or, you know, near the end of that. And so I was like insane, you know, I was just a completely insane person.

And I came in and auditioned and it was just like, I was just, yeah, it was a mad, I mad, I did a mad performance, I think, and they just called me back and were, like, "Look, go to sleep, come back and audition when you're not, like, you know, just working 48 hours a day or whatever it was." Um so I came in and I auditioned with Josh and with Emma who ended up being Diana, and who is just amazing and, yeah, and so I got it. But it's just, it's such an interesting thing because, you know, she's always struck me as a really interesting person, somebody who's been kind of, yeah, you kind of got sucked into a *really* unbelievably weird situation. So I was always kind of thrilled about her and, and so, yeah, so it was amazing.

JVN [00:31:35] So, like, when you play such an iconic person and you're like in the clothes, you're in the, like, you're in the scenes, like-. So here's the other thing. I'm, like, fully Midwestern, fully American, like, and Midwestern people honey like, I don't even know what's wrong with us, like there's a lot going on, but so my mom like felt a very kindred connection to Diana, honey, because they got married the same year, they had their first kid the same year, they had their *second* kid the same year, then obviously Diana didn't have a third kid; I'm my mom's third child, so that didn't happen. But then they got *divorced* in the same year. So that made my mom, I don't know if you know this, but my mom and Diana were like, literally, you know, obviously best friends at my mom's imagination. And so that made her like my auntie Princess Diana, even though I never met her. But like, you know, we were very much like this, you know. Like I was *really* into Diana.

And then obviously being the basic Midwestern person there was some time in there where we were a little bit, you know, not *understanding*, you know, not understanding. Camilla was like not, I didn't want to have Auntie Camilla when I was nine and eight and seven and six, you know it wasn't, you know, tabloids were a different world then. So, like, I guess there's like 18,000 questions in one, but it's like from growing up in England and knowing who Camilla literally was your whole, and then when you're on set and then, like, in the clothes did you like, did you feel for Camilla, did you feel for Diana? Did you like, were you like, "Oh, my gosh, what did you feel like?" What do I like, what do I need to tell my childhood self, but actually, can I just say your performance of Camilla made me like her

so much more anyway, just because I feel like there's so much more like, ah, and actually it really wasn't her fault like that it's such a big deal, but like, I just couldn't help it, Diana, honey, the clothes, I was, like, young and gay and I still am. And I just, wow!

EMERALD FENNEL [00:33:19] And also, like, well this is the other thing, you know, you can love Diana, I mean, I love Diana.

JVN [00:33:26] We can love both!

EMERALD FENNEL [00:33:27] She and, they're both extraordinary women in completely unbelievable, extraordinary circumstances; that's the thing about the royal family, and that's the thing that's so fascinating about 'The Crown.' I mean, look, 'The Crown' is completely fictionalized, so when it came to it for me, the only way I could do it was say, ok, this is just Camilla, the character. So I'm just going to play this person that we are, you know, we're making it. You can't, otherwise you just feel it's too, I'm also too lazy an actress to do any research in spite of all of the amazing research that 'The Crown' do for you so, it was kinda, they were only ever going to get like, you know, my, my sort of-

JVN [00:34:92] That's probably healthier of you, though, too, like, mentally. It's probably like, to detach it like that, like better to approach.

EMERALD FENNEL [00:34:10] I think maybe, but also just like it, you know, it's, it's important to, I can't pretend to know, nobody knows anything about Camilla really; she's actually very private. We know what the papers have told us for years and but, but really, when you talk to anyone who knew her then and anyone who knows her now, *everyone* says the same thing, which is that she's an incredibly nice person, incredibly kind person and very funny and fun.

So, and so it was really interesting for me kind of going back and saying, well, let's just put everything, I don't know anything about this, there's no hindsight, there's no nothing. I'm just going to be this person at this time, falling in love with a completely impossible person. Well look at, you know, look at the situation now. It's so, anyone, you know, in that position, it's just, like, unimaginable, it's unimaginable. And so that's the kind of thing you just have to play that, like, "What if I fell in love with someone, but everything that they represented and what they would do to my life?" It would be like me wanting to marry, like, I'm try to think of the most famous person in the world. *Who is the most famous person in the world?*

JVN [00:35:19] *Who is the most famous person in the world?*

EMERALD FENNELL [00:35:21] But who, do you know what it would be like, it's like, uh, I don't, I'm trying to think-

JVN [00:36:25] I mean, we can't even put our finger on it because it's so, it was, especially then.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:35:30] Because that was *it*, they were just such a huge thing and so like and, and there's something so awful and like um kind of touching about that scene in series four when Camilla says to him, like, please don't pitch me, you know, she loves him. It was very, everyone was having an affair, this is the other thing, everyone in those days, not just the royal family, but like *everyone* in that kind of strata of society, were kind of, they were all partying, kind of sleeping with, it was you know, it was just a different thing then. I think we're all much more monogamous now and much more sort of, yeah, I don't know anyway.

JVN [00:37:10] You know what I think it is, I don't think we're much more monogamous now, I think what it is now is that we're *hopefully* more transparent. It's like the folks who are in open marriages, it's like, you know they're in an open marriage. The people who are, like, "Uh, don't like, you know, we only play together." It's like at least in the LGBTQ world, I feel like it's, at least I think it's more about having, like, *boundaries* and knowing what your boundaries are. Because, I mean, I still feel like especially in rural places, actually no, that's not even fair to say, people still cheat like a motherfucker and people still like, you know want to be like, oh, no, we're monogamous. Liar! Um, I think, you know, there are some people that are just, it's probably one of those context things, you know, we were saying. Like is it good? Is it bad? It probably, like, hasn't changed. I'm usually disappointed when I try to think that things have changed, but then they're like, it's like no it's kind of still really a nightmare.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:04] Do you know what, you're completely right. That, you're completely right. I think what it was is that it was quite open, or, or it was tacitly understood, let's say.

JVN [00:37:15] Mmhm.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:16] It was tacitly understood that, that these people of that kind of society at that time were kind of sleeping with people, you know, discreetly, particularly-

JVN [00:37:28] I love-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:29] -and some of the women, ugh.

JVN [00:37:31] Yeah the way that they ta-, I mean it is just so, especially like all of them, er Princess Margaret's like little-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:38] Ohh she's amazing.

JVN [00:37:38] -Dabblings; obsessed!

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:41] She's so brilliant. But also, but I think that's the thing that's so awful. That is the thing that is, what is so brilliant about the series is that, that it, according, in this *series*, and I'm like very careful, particularly because of all this sort of stuff that went on when it came out, but, like, you know, it's very much a fictional, fiction.

JVN [00:37:58] Right.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:37:59] But in this series, it is, it is simply that *nobody* told Diana. She didn't know what she was marrying into. Everyone else had this tacit understanding, they kind of knew what the rules were and the rules were: "We do *this* stuff in public and we do *this* stuff in private, and that's kind of the way it goes."

JVN [00:38:19] And it seems like she *really* wanted to love him and be-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:38:23] Yeah, and she, you know, and she was very, very young and all of those things. And, and I think I do believe certainly in this series that nobody, you know, nobody ever, nobody ever starts out wanting to hurt people or wanting to be kind of cruel or any of those things. But, but it was *such* an extraordinary circumstance. Yeah, so strange. And I think so much for me for that dinner with, you know, the lunch scene with Diana. For me, I was thinking, you know, part of it is she genuinely does want to help her or she thinks she does and then she sees her and she's so young and beautiful she sort of can't help but be sort of jealous and competitive.

You know, who among us is not guilty of that? But also, it's kind of that thing of she suddenly realizes how little Diana knows about *him*, how, how completely mad this whole thing is, actually. You know that, I think, that's the thing that I'm so interested in about this kind of version of Camilla it is that she's, you know she *is* sympathetic, she is quite canny and savvy, she knows what's going on and, and I think she's quite shocked, probably, as that dinner goes on by what's kind of happening.

JVN [00:39:35] She's, like, "This is going to be a wreck and I can't even say anything."

EMERALD FENNELL [00:39:38] Yeah, I think probably. Um, but you know, who's to say if that's, I mean, God knows that was just our version of it.

JVN [00:39:46] So, ok, wait, one other, this is like trivial and I can't help it, I'm a hairdresser, like once a hairdresser, always a hairdresser. So, obviously you've got this stunning bright blonde hair and that, you are, it's very much a gorgeous wig in the series, or did you just go lighter recently, what happened?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:40:07] No, no, it's a wig.

JVN [00:40:07] Or did they just, it is, fully yeah.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:40:10] The thing is about Camilla's hair, she's got a lot. I've got quite flimsy, sort of sad.

JVN [00:40:15] She's not flimsy or sad, she's bright, she's bold, she's gorgeous; don't talk about your hair like that, yeah. But Camilla, honey, she's been rocking, you can tell she's got, like, a billion hairs per square inch.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:40:24] Exactly. So I had, so they had the amazing wig. We also had teeth 'cause our teeth are slightly different and actually so much of your smile and the way you interact with people, whether you're, you know it's just a different thing and it changes the voice and stuff. So we had all that and yeah, once I had the wig on and the teeth in and the Mackintosh and sensible skirt on, that was it. I kind of, you know, I knew, I, like, I *know* women like that too, you know I think, people who are straightforward who try and stay, you know, play with the straight bat, and all those sorts of things. But of course they're not immune to things going wrong either you know. And it's sort of almost more devastating when they do because nobody, you now I'm sure she wasn't expecting any of the things that happened to happen.

So, yeah, I mean, I *loved* it. And I *love* working with Josh O'Connor. I mean Josh O'Connor and Emma Corrin, I mean they're just the two of the *best* actors in the world. I mean, partly I was so obsessed not only with *The Crown*, but like I'd seen *God's Own Country* with Josh in it; did you see that movie? Ohhh my God; it's like the most romantic. It's about, it's, it's a love story between a farmer and his, like, in the middle of nowhere and, and the guy that comes and helps, like, lamb the sheep. And it's basically-

JVN [00:41:37] It's a gay story?!

EMERALD FENNELL [00:41:38] Oh, it's, like, the most romantic gay story of all time, it's beau-

JVN [00:41:42] Oh my God, you, I, can, ok, when you first started saying farmer I was like, are you about to fall asleep, but then when you said gay story, I'm like, oh, honey, I'm-

EMERALD FENNELL [00:41:49] I didn't say, out of respect for Josh, I didn't say an *enormous* amount of very sexy sex and lambs and adorable lambs and, like-

JVN [00:41:56] Lambs and gay sex; I'm there yesterday.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:42:00] But it's *amazing* and he's *amazing* in it. And you would, you wouldn't even recognize him you know, so, yeah, it's the best! I just you know can't believe, I can't believe I've even got a job doing anything. Very-

JVN [00:42:11] Well, you are incredible in it and I just, you're incredible in it and I love that you just shared all of that with us. Now here's the other thing that we're transitioning into part three and then, so but then here's the other thing, I don't know if everyone knows because you're *such* a multi-hyphenate, like it's not your fault that you're like multi-hyphenate in caps lock because you mentioned earlier that you had just got done shooting *Killing Eve*, which you were the showrunner for season two, right?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:42:42] So yeah, well so sort of, I mean we don't really have showrunners in England, so I was the head writer and exec. producer, which I kind of always-

JVN [00:42:49] Ahh.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:42:50] -Want to, because I don't want to give myself a title that I technically didn't have but yeah, so I wrote, yeah, so, so I wrote uh with lots of other great people series two of 'Killing Eve.'

JVN [00:43:02] I'm obsessed, I'm so obsessed. That show is so *fucking* good. Everything you do is *amazing*. Your team needs a gorgeous medal if they don't already have one.

EMERALD FENNELL [00:43:12] Oh, thank you!

JVN [00:43:14] So, but, so, I mean, I think one thing that's always kind of, like--how do I say it--one thing that's always kind of broken my heart, but I also think is really cute, is like my mom, anytime I've ever brought her on set, she always will talk to other women and be

like, "How did you do this? Like, how did you get here and like?" And then I just look at her and I'm like, "Mom, you're so smart and capable," and she's you know brilliant at everything she's ever done in her career, but she worked in my family's business. And I think, I think that there's probably very much a part of her that would have, like, loved to have gone and been a producer and a writer and just didn't think that it was necessarily, like, for *her*.

And I just, also it's like anyone, and I think this is something that I think about a lot in *Getting Curious*, like, whether I'm interviewing like an ep-, you know, like, an epidemiologist or a historian or whatever expert I'm interviewing, it's like, well, how can other people do what you've done if they're interested in this, if they want to get into this? And I think for you in terms of entertainment, it's, like, you write, you act, you produce. I mean, you create movies, I mean, you really are a quadruple threat because you're navigating this industry in such an amazing way. And so for women listening, for women *plus* people listening, for, which is non-binary, for *anyone* else listening, *how*, how would you say, "Ok, well, if you're into this, into this career, if you're into these projects that I've done and you want to, like, fancy yourself there someday, this is like, you need these resources the most, queen." Like, what would you say are the three things that people need, to be able to make it?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:44:58] Ok, mmh, I mean God it's so difficult, I mean the first thing is whenever I get asked this, I just have, I feel, really resp-, like, I have a responsibility to, like, caveat it with the fact you know I was *incredibly* lucky. I had parents who lived in London who could support me for the couple of years, whether there was, like, you know, no work. That stuff, is *so*, is still regrettably so unfair. You know things are so unfairly skewed because any job in the arts is, you know, it pays *nothing* for years. And that, that I think, just as a sort of sidebar, is something that has to change so fast. But, but so I feel like, I don't know, I feel disingenuous if I don't mention that because I'm aware that I'm, I started, I had a real leg up when I started, which is you know, which I should say.

But in terms of kind of what *I* did was I just, I guess I did everything I could try my hand at. So I, I wrote books, so I was acting the little bits that I got, the little small parts in things. But then I also, you know, I wrote a book that was 100,000 pages long; it was *terrible* garbage that was turned down by everyone, lots of scripts that were terrible garbage that were turned down by anyone. But then, but then I wrote another book, you know, one of the publishing houses said, "Well we think this book is garbage, but we sort of like something; do you have anything else that you might be doing?" And so then I went away and wrote something else, and then, you know, we ended up, that ended up being my first book that came out. And so, you know, and then while I was acting, I would be writing

books on the side. And it was just, it was just, you know, anything, anyway that I could kind of get myself in, anyway that I could sort of prove that I could do something.

And then my third book came out, *Monsters*, that was the thing that an amazing woman called Jessica Knappett, who has this incredible show, she read it and she said, "Would you come and write, you know, maybe write an episode of this show with me?" So it was just like, I think I'm just *rambling*. It's to say that I think, you know, for me, it was writing because I can, you can do it anywhere, you can do it on your phone, you can do it and, and it doesn't have to be good. I think so many, so many women in particular, and as you say, kind of so many people that, like, don't fit in any kind of like very specific, regimented, like, box, you know, we lack confidence and we're worried that what we have to say isn't interesting, or people won't listen to it or we have confidence issues, I guess.

And so it's just, like, give yourself permission to be *really* bad at the beginning, like, terrible, like, everything the first like billion words that you write, just write them off, just say, like, "I'm just doing this and like I don't have to be like Shakespeare." And I think that it's just like giving yourself ta-, like, giving, taking the pressure off a bit. Like, don't take the pressure off in terms of volume, like, make yourself get those words down. But do take the pressure off it being perfect, because that's the thing that crushes us all, really, is when, I have to be better than everyone else, immediately. But none of us can be, I guess.

JVN [00:48:14] Obsessed! And I'm pretty sure, wait, but so would you say then that writing was your first passion, like, before acting?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:48:22] I think that I am more confident as a writer. Also, you know, you can, *again*, it's that thing, I think, particularly if you're doing other stuff or if you're a mother, all the things that, you know all of our lives are busy, but, so if there's something that you can do yourself. Acting you can't really do yourself, really, directing, I mean, you can't do it by yourself, producing, all these things. But if you can, you can, you've got this, like you've got a pen and paper. So that's the thing I feel like I've always got it. If everything else goes wrong or if, like, this year we're stuck inside for a year, at least I can do that. So that I feel very relieved that I can do that and very grateful.

JVN [00:49:08] Ok, well, I'm obsessed with that. So really, this is what I wrote down, first, so obviously you did your caveat about, like, you know where you come from in your family and privilege and that's really important to caveat and I love that, 1a, 1b, c, and d though, is shame resilience. I wrote down shame, resilience, because that's one thing I feel like I've experienced a lot is, like, having so many people be like, "No, no, no, I don't, like, I don't get it." But you have to be able to, like, so many people like, pack up the tent and like I

can't, I can't bear being, like, putting my heart into this again and then being told no, like, yet *again*, because that sense of rejection is just like it just doesn't feel good sometimes.

But I think I've also learned that, like, it's actually not as bad, like that feeling of rejection. It's more of like what I've thought like it's like, it's like something I thought was going to be really bad, but really it's like, isn't it more of the fear that other people think I got turned down that's worse, than, like, I can live through this, it's fine. Then the other thing is, that I wrote down, is you've got to be willing to try things like being willing to try new things and then being willing to, like, suffer rejection if you do try them. So those kind of go together. And then the, the permission to not, to, well, don't be a perfectionist. Like, don't be a perfectionist. And that's easier said than done, but it's like one thing that you can get around that is just, like, doing it. And that's what you said, put a foot in front of the other.

Then, you know, the other thing you said that I think is really interesting, and I think it's kind of how I was able to break into this as well is like I have *hair*, and like I could do hair in the salon, like whether or not anyone was ever going to be you know into my podcast or buy my book or want me to do a series, whatever, I always loved doing hair, I still love doing hair. And that by itself was enough to sustain me, like, mentally, emotionally, financially. And so it's like I do think it's so important for you to have, like, at least one part of your job that even if you're not doing 100 percent of what you want to be doing now, you've gotta have like one thing that you're excited to go work on. So whether it's excited to go do some hair or excited to go write something, it's like I think that really helps get you, right?

EMERALD FENNELL [00:51:10] Yeah, that, you're so right. That's exactly, much more succinct than I could ever have said it.

JVN [00:51:17] No! No, I mean Emerald I'm just so grateful for your time and so grateful that you're here and you're, like, just amazing. I'm so excited that I got to interview you and talk to you and I hope I can meet you in real life someday. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was writer, director, and actor Emerald Fennell.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe.

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