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Cheer up, losers

Sure, an Emmy is great, but check out the loot that comes in the consolation basket.

AS A NATION built on optimism and progress, we tend to pretend that certain people don't exist: the old, the poor, the people who were nominated but didn't win.

That was until five years ago, when Distinctive Assets, one of the biggest gift-bag firms, started sending out consolation baskets to the losers of the Emmys and Oscars. On Monday, this year's Emmy acting nominees who didn't get a statue received \$42,367 worth of now-taxable swag. I don't care what Steve Lopez says, this is a city that cares.

Being someone who enjoys when people more successful than me fail, I offered to drop off a basket so I could rub it in. Lash Fary, the chief executive of Distinctive Assets, loaded my car down with a steamer trunk full of gifts and sent me to comedian Kathy Griffin's house. I protested, being that she wasn't nominated in either of the best actress categories. But Fary said her Bravo show, "My Life on the D List," lost the reality program prize to "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," and he liked Griffin a lot and felt bad for her. Fary is gay.

When I finally lugged the trunk up three flights of stairs at Griffin's house, she did not have the crushed expression of a loser that I was hoping for. In fact, she was pretty excited about the gift basket. "I'd rather have this," she said.

"Apparently, anyone can get an Emmy. All you do is give a house to someone with no limbs and you win."

That was the sweet bitterness I was looking for.

Fary makes sure to include chocolate and alcohol in the baskets, which Griffin noticed right away, excited about her year's supply of Bubble Chocolate. "Loser ladies love chocolate!" she yelled. The basket seemed to be doing too good a job of cheering her up, so I tried to get her to focus on the pain and humiliation of losing an Emmy.

It's worse than that, she blurted out once I'd broken her down. Emmy producers tried to get her to do a bit with Cesar Millan of National Geographic Channel's "The Dog Whisperer." "He would bring me on in a collar and train me, even though I'm a pretty lady and not a dog," she said. She declined, insulted, but now that she is an Emmy loser, she looks back at the missed opportunity with regret. "I should have gone on all fours and barked."

To make her feel more confident about her non-canine looks, I pointed out the \$750 gift certificate for a personal trainer. "He's got to come to the house," Griffin yelled, calling for her assistant, Jessica. "Tell them that Ms. Griffin is too famous to be seen at the gym and he'll have to come to the home." Jessica acted convincingly as if she were going to do this.

Griffin then had me scan the gift certificates to see if there was anything for "face work." When I instead found a voucher for \$1,200 from McCartney Multimedia's fan database manage-

ment services, she was uninterested. "My fans are all on *gay.com* already."

As I was about to leave, Griffin admitted that my visit had only taken half the sting out of losing. Even though she figured being nominated would help her career, an Emmy would have made her feel even more legitimate as an artist. This seemed strange because her award would have been for being awesome at reality television.

Still, I was shocked that Griffin — who likes free stuff more than any celebrity since Jack Benny — would truly rather have an award voted on by white men so old that they don't know how to work TiVo than this gift basket that included baby velour track suits from a company called Pimpfants. But she did.

Every profession gives out its own stupid little awards, like this Pulitzer thing everyone in the office talks about. But acting is such a popularity contest that even the Emmys — perhaps even the Tonys — are truly important to people. Fary got the idea for his consolation baskets when he was watching an interview with Bette Midler in which she talked about how upset she was about losing the Emmy for "Gypsy." To reiterate, Fary is gay.

"I really do believe that if you're rich and famous you still get disappointed about things," he said. Fary is just doing his part to cheer people up — playing Patch Adams to the world's luckiest people. After all, sending a 40-grand gift basket to Charlie Sheen is the equivalent of buying a beer for a guy who didn't get a promotion. Only you can't tip a hooker with a beer.