

Wonderful! 112: Tidal Brain Force

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful.

Griffin: And here's the tea, folks.

Rachel: Okay. Oh! Literal tea.

Griffin: [slurping sound] I thought we could do more prop comedy. We've been getting a lot of reviews lately that have been scathingly negative because of how little prop comedy there is.

Rachel: And not scathingly positive. [laughs]

Griffin: No, scathingly negative. They say, like, the words that we do?

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: The skits that we do? The jokes? The songs we do? We sing them together? They're great. They love those. But there's not enough sort of, um, tangible physical interaction with props for the purpose of jokes.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And so, I was thinking—

Rachel: Can you give me an example of a podcast that does have that, that you feel like we should emulate?

Griffin: Oh my god, Serial season three.

Rachel: Mmm. Lot of props?

Griffin: Very funny. There's, um...

Rachel: Lot of bicycle horns?

Griffin: All the Malcolm Gladwell ones. That dude is always fuckin' rippin' it up with a lot of really funny...

Rachel: Lot of whoopee cushions?

Griffin: Yeah. He'll say like, "Here's an outlier liar," and then he'll pick up Liar, Liar on DVD and point at it. But you won't—you won't see it.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: That's really funny. He'll be like, "Here's the tipping point." And then he'll fall over in his chair.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And that's fucking funny to me.

Rachel: It is. Yeah. I get it.

Griffin: And... only me.

Rachel: I get it.

Griffin: This is Wonderful. It's a show where we talk about stuff that's good, and that we're into. I'm gonna—my small wonder is this cinnamon tea that is the only reason why you're hearing my sounds at the moment.

Rachel: We've had some wild temperature changes here in Austin, and Griffin's body, um...

Griffin: Doesn't respond well to that.

Rachel: Is reacting negatively to it.

Griffin: My body is like one of those old, um, thermometers that you would find at a Gadzooks, that had all the little multicolored balls, and it would float inside of the little glass cylinder full of water, and it would show you—

Rachel: Ohh. At Gadzooks? [laughs]

Griffin: They would be at Gadzooks. Would they not have them at Gadzoo—or, Spencer's Gifts would be more likely.

Rachel: A Spencer's, I feel like, really specialized in erotic comedy.

Griffin: They had plasma balls. They famously had pla—anyway...

Rachel: And thermometers? [laughing]

Griffin: I'm like that, only instead of little colorful balls floating to the surface...

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's plague. It's disease. It's miasma. And uh, yeah. It's rough. Rough stuff. But this isn't a complaining podcast. It's a podcast where we sing songs and do skits. Do you have a small wonder?

Rachel: Gingerbread.

Griffin: Gingerbread! The concept. I almost did that as a big wonder, so I'm glad I didn't. Glad I sat back on it.

Rachel: Yeah. I was trying to think if I know what's in gingerbread, and obviously there's ginger.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I imagine there's nutmeg.

Griffin: Prolly.

Rachel: Some cinnamon.

Griffin: What's the brown?

Rachel: Probably some cloves.

Griffin: What's the brown? Molasses?

Rachel: Molasses. Yeah. That sounds right.

Griffin: This is a fun—this would be a fun cooking podcast that we could do, which is, you'll say—

Rachel: What's the brown? That's what it's called.

Griffin: You can say like, any food. You'll be like, "Yeah, so, uh, this right here is broccoli casserole." And I'll be like, "What's the green?" And you would say, "Well, sweetheart, that's the broccoli."

Rachel: I would like it if it's always brown, and the podcast is called What's the Brown? And every week... [laughing]

Griffin: That could be good. That could be good. Who goes first this week? It can't be me.

Rachel: I think it's me.

Griffin: I think it's you. Let's just do it. I can't—I can't go to the website right now.

Rachel: [laughs] Oh, okay. 'Cause of your really comfortable talk show pose that you're in?

Griffin: I'm seated in a very comfortable talk show pose. I have tea in one hand, and I'd have to set that down in order to go to the website.

Rachel: And your legs crossed at the knees. You look very conversational.

Griffin: Thanks. I always cross my legs at the knees. I used to get a hard time for it when I was like, in like, first grade, second grade, when boys were like, real shitheads about stuff like that.

Rachel: Oh yeah. You're supposed to put your ankle on your knee to look like a real man spreader.

Griffin: Because of my huge hog! Right guys?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: 'Cause of my huge first grade dong. Fuckin' weirdos. What's your first thing?

Rachel: Uh, my first thing is superstitions.

Griffin: O...kay.

Rachel: I realized this today. It's the knock on wood thing. The knock on wood thing is real important to me.

Griffin: Okay. Like, you're talking about harmless superstitions.

Rachel: Yeah, like the little rituals people do to kind of ward off possible negative repercussions.

Griffin: Okay, yeah. I knock on wood. You knock on wood, right?

Rachel: Yeah. I find myself feeling very nervous if I make some kind of declarative, positive, like... "This is gonna be great!" And then I feel this desperate need to knock on wood. And then I realize, like, a lot of those rituals are very entertaining to me.

Griffin: Okay. It is the kind of thing I don't think about, but I do do that every time I say anything remotely positive.

Rachel: Well, and when I was trying to kind of research the history of it, there's a lot of kind of conflicting stories as to how these things came about.

Griffin: Well, tell them all to me.

Rachel: Which I found interesting. So, knock on wood. So, there's a few things. A lot of it either goes back to kind of religious origins, or just kind of ancient things that may have been religious and may not have been religious.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So, knock on wood... ancient Pagan cultures believe that spirits and gods reside in trees, and that knocking may have chased away evil spirits, or prevented them from listening when you boasted about something, thereby preventing a reversal of fortune.

Griffin: Okay. So you're punching—you're punching the spirits right out them trees.

Rachel: Or... or, Christians have often linked the practice to the wood of the cross, for Christ crucifixion.

Griffin: Okay. That's probably...

Rachel: Or, and this one's my favorite... British folklorist, Steve Roud, traces the practice to a 19th century children's game called "Tiggy Touchwood."

Griffin: Tiggy Touchwood?

Rachel: Tiggy Touchwood, which is a type of tag in which players were immune from being caught whenever they touched a piece of wood.

Griffin: That seems... apocryphal.

Rachel: Tiggy Touchwood.

Griffin: It's a fun thing to say.

Rachel: I think it might be my roller derby name.

Griffin: Tiggy Touchwood's a really, really good roller derby name.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh, so it sounded kind of like a home base. Like, if you were playing tag, you would go to home base, and then you couldn't be it.

Griffin: Sure. It was the Pagan one, though, that was like, explicitly for the exact reason that we still do it to this day.

Rachel: Yes. Yes.

Griffin: Which makes me think that that's... that's where it is.

Rachel: That's the one that holds the most weight with me. The knock on wood feels very, like... I am acknowledging this thing I'm saying as chancy, and so, I'm gonna knock on this wood, and that's gonna address that I know what I'm saying might be foolish. So I like that one.

Griffin: That's a good one.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. There's a few other ones I wanted to talk about, just because I learned a little bit about them, and I didn't realize anything. So the mirror. The mirror thing. Breaking the mirror?

Griffin: Oh, yes.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, ancient Romans believed that souls regenerated every seven years.

Griffin: Wh—that's... news to me.

Rachel: That your like, your health and your body, like, regenerates every seven years, and that a mirror contains fragments of your soul. So if you break the mirror, that's seven years bad luck, until everything regenerates again.

Griffin: That—are you sure? That's—

Rachel: That's what I found on the internet.

Griffin: That's wild!

Rachel: That's what I found on the internet.

Griffin: Ancient Romans thought every seven years, you—you—

Rachel: Well haven't you heard that, about like, your skin? Like, every... I don't know if it's seven years.

Griffin: I don't think it's—it's like 36 hours.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Every 36 hours, you're a bunch of new cells.

Rachel: But like, your skin sloughs off, and basically, the person you are now isn't the person you are—

Griffin: Sloughs off?! Jesus, this is visceral! Every seven years, my soul is regenerated, and it lives inside that mirror, so please don't—I think that this whole thing came from back-then mirrors were very expensive.

Rachel: That's possible.

Griffin: And so people were like... this—like, if you break my mirror, your soul will be destroyed. Just to keep people from, y'know, horse playing.

Rachel: Yes. Do you want to hear about the ladder?

Griffin: Yeah, yeah.

Rachel: Walking under the ladder. This is the one with kind of conflicting source material. So, in Christianity, there's the doctrine of the trinity. And when you lean a ladder against a wall, it forms a triangle.

Griffin: This can't be it. That's such a wild stretch.

Rachel: [laughs] And that like, breaking the triangle is like, desecrating the trinity.

Griffin: That's not true for anything else!

Rachel: I've also seen it tied to Egypt. The ancient Egyptians obviously placed a lot of, uh, value on the pyramid, triangle, and to break the triangle, again, that's a problem.

Griffin: I don't think it's either of those. Again, I think it was some sort of foreman situation. Was like, on top of a ladder, and little kids kept running under it, and he's like, "That—that's 50 years—"

Rachel: "That's bad luck!"

Griffin: "You'll go to hell!"

Rachel: There was also—and so, there's a lot I don't know about Christianity. Just heads up, guys. Like, I don't have a lot of exposure to it.

Griffin: Well, hit me. I got you.

Rachel: Uh... there was a ladder that rested against the crucifix, which became a symbol of wickedness, betrayal, and death?

Griffin: This is... again, they probably—I mean, okay. There—they probably used a ladder to get... them up there...

Rachel: And then the ladder was just there.

Griffin: But in like—I don't—but my, y'know, me growing up, if I had like, a crucifix necklace, it didn't have a little ladder on it.

Rachel: A little ladder. [laughs] A little ladder charm that you could attach.

Griffin: That's nothing. The ladder is nothing. I'm not like a deep Biblical scholar, but I don't think the ladder is anything.

Rachel: So you feel comfortable walking under a ladder?

Griffin: Do I feel com—no. But not because of Jesus. It's just because like... it's—you shouldn't. [laughs]

Rachel: What about opening an umbrella indoors?

Griffin: Uh... that one, I feel like, is just rude. I feel like it's rude to do that, because it's probably wet, and you're gonna get drippy drips on people.

Rachel: I saw two explanations. One was like, some culture placed a lot of value on their very fancy umbrellas. And another one was like, umbrellas

used to be super dangerous, and so, it was a good idea not to open them indoors.

Griffin: Umbrellas used to be super dangerous?

Rachel: 'Cause they were very, like, faulty. Like, the mechanism was not reliable. And so, you could very easily hurt yourself.

Griffin: Just the top would go launching off and impale somebody? But they'd be dry.

Rachel: I don't know. I don't know. Um, I have two more. One is about the number 13, which is actually relevant, because this Friday is Friday the 13th, by the way.

Griffin: Oh, interesting. This one's religious, right?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Of some—okay, yes.

Rachel: Judas was the 13th guest at the last supper. Uh, and then, also... and this is—

Griffin: Wait, that's it?

Rachel: Yeah. He's just—y'know, he's a bad guy, and he was number 13.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So you don't want to be 13, because...

Griffin: That's really it? I thought it was different.

Rachel: Well, there's another one. So, there were 12 gods invited to dine in Valhalla. Loki was the god of strife and evil, crashed the party, raising the

number to 13. The other gods tried to kick Loki out. Baldr, the favorite, was killed.

Griffin: So not a great time for...

Rachel: Yeah. So just 13... not a good idea. Here's the one I think you'll like. This is about your friend, the moon.

Griffin: I love the moon!

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Greeks knew that the moon and its goddess, Luna, held the tides in their thrall, and Aristotle considered the human brain to be the moistest organ. [laughing] Particularly susceptible to Luna's pull. So, your brain is like, the wettest. And since Luna oversees the moon, the moon pulls the tides, on a full moon, you have to be really concerned about the impact on your moist organ.

Griffin: Aristotle, you said, said this?

Rachel: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Aristotle was like...

Rachel: That brain's the gooshiest.

Griffin: What that brain do, though?

Rachel: It's the gooshiest gooshiest.

Griffin: That's a gooshy brain you got there. Gotta be careful the moon doesn't pull it right out of the top of your skull.

Rachel: People still talk a lot about—[laughs]

Griffin: I'm Aristotle, the smartest one alive... right now. But folks, don't worry – it's gonna get a lot better than me. I know you hear me say stuff

like “the brain’s the wettest organ, and so, the moon’s gonna whip it around in your head like a bumper car,” and you’re gonna think, “This is the smartest one?” Don’t worry. It’s gonna get smarter from here.

Rachel: Hippocrates apparently also said, “One who is seized with terror, fright, and madness during the night is being visited by the goddess of the moon.”

Griffin: Is that better or worse than “your wet, wet brain is slip-slidin’ away”?

Rachel: [laughing] I... I love it.

Griffin: It’s fun.

Rachel: I just—I love it. I think it’s fun. I think—I think superstitions, by their nature, are just like, doing things without really understanding why you’re doing it, but just being a little terrified that if you don’t, there’s gonna be some kind of negative result. And who doesn’t want a little more luck in their life?

Griffin: Sure. It’s the original chain letter. ... Kind of. I guess a little bit.

Rachel: Yes. I think a little bit.

Griffin: Can I do my first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: My first thing is murder mystery parties.

Rachel: Ohh, Griffin.

Griffin: I’ve only done a couple of these, but they’ve left quite an impression, uh, because there’s a lot of things about a murder mystery party that is just right up my alley. Um... I guess, for one thing, it’s a party that you can win. And that’s rare.

Rachel: But isn't it—okay, so, this is what's been hard for me in my previous experience with murder mystery, which has only been twice here in Austin. Have you done them prior to living here?

Griffin: Nnnno.

Rachel: Okay. I find that if people don't share the commitment to it, it becomes very frustrating for me.

Griffin: I—but I don't know that that has been true for the murder mystery parties that we have attended.

Rachel: I recall—

Griffin: Are you about to put our friends on blast?

Rachel: No no no, these are people we don't actually know very well. I recall having conversations with people who seemed deceptive to me, just because they were approaching it differently than me. And so, a lot of times, I'll be like, "I can't trust that guy. He's a shady character." And then I find out later, like, he was just kind of drunk. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Was this—are you talk—are you subtweeting me right now?

Rachel: No, no, no.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: You know I enjoy you inebriated. It's one of my faves.

Griffin: I didn't enjoy me inebriated at this—the first murder mystery party I ever went to.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: 'Cause um, I didn't exactly Knives Out it. I didn't necessarily use my little gray cells.

Rachel: You did disappear for a while, and then I find out later, it was not—

Griffin: I was out—I was out front doing some heavy breathing.

Rachel: It did not have to do with your character. [laughs]

Griffin: No. A lot of people did think that was a clue, though, which is fun. Um, I like it. It brings out the spirit of competition with your friends, in a, y'know, a setting where that's not normally true, and I think that's really fun.

A big thing for me is that it is a guaranteed party activity. Sometimes, before I go to a party, I get anxious about like, what I'm actually gonna be doing at that party. Like, am I gonna find—am I gonna find a zone where my friends are hangin' out, where we can all chill and talk? Or y'know, have snacks, or whatev—I would like to know that I'm going to have some sort of nice activity.

'Cause I've been to parties where, uh, even I might know some people there, and I still feel unmoored in a way, of just like, I don't really—I don't have a headquarters at this party.

Rachel: You need a job, kind of.

Griffin: I'm not a—not a job. That makes it sound like I don't know how to party. I do. I'm a fuckin' monster.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, okay.

Griffin: But I do like knowing that like, I'm gonna have a comfortable area there. And knowing that there's gonna be a murder mystery to solve, like, that fixes that for me. Solving mysteries is also, like, fun as hell, and not something that you usually get to do.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: Uh, unless you have a—like, a mystery solving job, in which case, you're probably not going to be invited to parties like these.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um... roleplaying is fun to do. Also, it's fun to see your friends do roleplaying. Especially if they're the types of friends who like, you don't play D&D with or anything like that.

Rachel: Did you feel like either time, you were close to, and or solved the mystery?

Griffin: No. God, no.

Rachel: And that wasn't frustrating to you?

Griffin: Uh, I guess a little bit. I think I more enjoyed being a... [in a fancy accent] Player in the—on the stage.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [fancy voice] I enjoyed being me, Dr. Hatfield. [laughs] Have I seen the vial of... the shrinking potion? [normally] It's been a long time since we did one of these.

Rachel: As... as somebody who likes to win... I'm not saying that you're like, a super competitive nightmare, but like, you're somebody that likes to figure something out and do it well, it wasn't frustrating to you not to crack it?

Griffin: No, because like you mentioned, like, it is actually—there are a lot of ways that these things can break bad. You could have one person there who is just being shifty for no reason.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And then, that can just like, throw off the whole thing. 'Cause it's tough to ask a bunch of people to come into your house and pretend to be other people, and also, here's clues, and don't spill the beans, and play your part. And there's gonna be people who aren't equipped for that. I am, for whatever reason, not especially competitive when it comes to this specific, and only this, thing.

Rachel: [laughs] Only this.

Griffin: Um, I just—I really like being—I think I just like being... I think I might like LARPing. Like, if we could get all of our friends to go out to the park and just LARP a little bit...

Rachel: Yeah. Oh man.

Griffin: Just a little LARP around. Maybe for like, my 40th birthday party, like a big one that I can be like, "You all fuckin' owe me!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "Take this, y'know, foam sword."

Rachel: What do you think I'm missing? Right? Like, why do you think that it's not—it's not a thing *I'm* comfortable with? 'Cause I'm open to it. But it also makes me very uncomfortable, and I'd like to know kind of... what hurdle I need to overcome.

Griffin: What if we could like, Murder in a Small Town exit? Or, to use a reference that more than six people are gonna get, what if we could like, Truman Show it? Where you're the only person trying to solve the murder, and everybody else is actors?

Rachel: Ohh. That might be fun.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: That might be fun. Unless it became this thing where it was like, very embarrassing that I hadn't figured it out. It's like, y'know, when you're watching somebody play charades, and like, everybody else has figured out what they're doing, and the one person that's guessing has no idea.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, that would be pretty savage. Uh, but you would just have to not do it. It would add extra pressure for you to crack it.

Rachel: And that's always fun. [laughs]

Griffin: That's always fun. I also—my last thing, I like that they have a built-in conclusion.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: So if you're hosting the party, you can be like, "Welp, get out. That's it. Murder's solved."

Rachel: [laughs] We—yeah, we've been to a couple of them. I think they were both kind of purchased off the internet as little packages, if I remember correctly. They were like, you said how many people were in your party, and they would give you the right number of characters for that many people.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, this was a, y'know, there were various variations on different parlor games, like, in the early 19th century that were kind of this... Mafia basically came out of this. The game that Werewolf was sort of originated from.

But they had these very, very brief, like, year-long swings, like, in the '80s and '90s where they would sell them in box sets called How to Host. And they would be like, little box sets—it's like the thing that they played in that one episode of The Office. It was basically that. But then, once the internet sort of became a thing that everybody had everywhere all the time, uh, distributing those became, obviously, a much easier prospect.

Rachel: I just realized, the second time I did this, you weren't in town. And maybe that's why I didn't enjoy it as much.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: The first time, we got to be this like, sweater vest couple, and we both wore turtlenecks and sweater vests, and I can't remember—it was a cruise ship.

Griffin: Yeah. But then—yeah.

Rachel: But then, the second one, it was like a high school reunion theme, and I was the girl that went to Harvard and wanted everybody to know she went to Harvard.

Griffin: Did that hit a little... did that hurt?

Rachel: [laughs] Well, so, I like, went to the trouble of buying a Harvard sweatshirt, but I don't think people really got that was my character. I think they thought I was just kind of a dick. [laughs]

Griffin: Aw, no! Well, uh, I'm sorry I abandoned you like that. I was out solving real murders.

Rachel: Real murders. Yeah.

Griffin: Sorry, everybody. I guess Rachel wanted them to get away with it. But uh, I don't have—I don't want to talk anymore, 'cause my throat hurts. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes, please.

[ad break music plays]

Rachel: Can I tell you about our first sponsor?

Griffin: It's Rothy's.

Rachel: Uh, here's the thing about Rothy's. Alright? Tons of colors and patterns. And they're shoes.

Griffin: [laughs] That's two things!

Rachel: [laughs] I realized last time I went through the whole ad without saying they're shoes, and I'm not gonna make that mistake again. They're shoes.

Griffin: [laughs] You almost fell right in my trap.

Rachel: They're definitely shoes.

Griffin: It says there to say that they're definitely shoes, and they say—it actually says here, I know it's gonna sound really, really, like, suspicious that you have to say they're definitely shoes, but... legally, you have to say it.

Rachel: [laughs] Um... like, a lot of dress shoes you get, you can wear for like, one season, and then they kind of have to be done, because you just really wrecked them. But these are washable, and they're made from recycled water bottles, so they're super durable, and you can just throw them in the washing machine, and they're good to go. You can get a lot of usage out of these guys.

Uh, if you want to give them as a Christmas present, turns out you can order by December 20th for delivery by December 25th.

Griffin: Heck yeah.

Rachel: That's like—you have a lot of time to figure this out. Uh, comfort, style, sustainability... they're all those things. So if you're interested in buying a pair of Rothy's, go to Rothys.com/Wonderful. That's Rothys.com/Wonderful.

Griffin: Uh, I want to talk about ID Tech. ID Tech is a good way to teach youngsters STEM skills. STEM skills. STEM obviously stands for science, technical... excellent... maaan.

Rachel: [laughs] That's perfect.

Griffin: So whether you know a youngster who is interested in—I don't know why I keep saying 'youngster.'

Rachel: Yeah, I don't know what happened to you.

Griffin: It makes me sound like I'm 600 years old.

Rachel: It's this tea. It's this tea you're drinking.

Griffin: Uh, maybe it is the tea that I'm drinking. Uh, it's important to like, get kids excited about, uh, like, y'know, fanning the flames of the stuff that they're interested in by teaching them, in the best way possible, about those things.

Rachel: Yeah, I feel like you didn't start to get interested in programming until you were like, in your late 20s. And then it's too late.

Griffin: Then it's too late.

Rachel: Sorry guys, it's too late. [laughs]

Griffin: My brain is cement at that point. Nothing's getting out, nothing's getting in. But ID Tech, they got you. Whether you're interested in coding, video game development, robotics, or video production, ID Tech can help your child build the STEM skills employers are desperate for. ID Tech has programs at 150 prestigious campus destinations worldwide, from Cal Tech and NYU to Cambridge and the University of Hong Kong. There are courses for all skill levels, so nurture their interests now with help from ID Tech.

So, visit IDTech.com/Wonderful today to reserve your child's spot, and receive \$75 off. It's a great gift for the holidays. That's IDTech.com/Wonderful for \$75 off. IDTech.com/Wonderful.

Rachel: Can I read you our first personal message?

Griffin: Mmm.

Rachel: This is for Squawks. It is from your best gal. "To my dearest Squawks, you are made of light and love. The life we've built with Peepums and Piwacket reminds me every day how lucky I am to know your patience and kindness. I only wish I could tell the whole world how truly spectacular you are. For now, I'll start with letting the Wonderful listeners know. I've done it, I've found the best boy."

Griffin: Sorry, Derek. I'm talking to Derek, who's standing in the room with us.

Rachel: Oh, who thinks he's the best boy?

Griffin: Derek, you're finished.

Rachel: Yeah, sorry.

Griffin: You're nothing now, Derek.

Rachel: It's Squawks.

Griffin: It's Squawks now, Derek. Hold on. Derek left. I feel terrible. Derek didn't deserve this.

Rachel: Derek had to know that Squawks was nippin'...

Griffin: Bitin' his ankles. Yeah.

Rachel: Nippin' at his heels.

Griffin: Here is another message. This one is for Leah, and it's from Alex, who says, "To my wonderful sister, Leah, I know I won't be able to afford a good wedding gift for you and Brandog, because I'm just your poor dumb baby sister. So I hope this dose of McElroys will do. Wishing you a lifetime of love, like Rachel and Griffin have for hot dogs and each other. LYLAS, because you are my sister. Alex."

Rachel: It almost sounded like you said Girffin there.

Griffin: Did I say Girffin?

Rachel: It sounded like you were saying Girffin a little bit.

Griffin: I for sure said LYLAS.

Rachel: Yes. Which I imagine...

Griffin: That, of course, stands for... Love...

Rachel: ... you like a SpongeBob.

Griffin: Exactly.

[music plays]

April: Hi, it's me, April Wolfe, the host of Switchblade Sisters and co-writer of the new horror film, Black Christmas.

Katie: And I'm Katie Walsh, film critic and occasional host of Switchblade Sisters.

April: We're here to announce that, for one episode, we will be doing something a little different. Much like Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's The Fly, I will be going through a truly disturbing transformation.

Katie: April will transform from the interviewer into the interviewee. I will be asking her all about her new film, *Black Christmas*, her writing process, and ongoing existential dread.

April: But I will also be discussing John Carpenter's perfect masterpiece, *Prince of Darkness*.

Speaker 1: You guys seen any movies you like?

Katie: So tune into *Switchblade Sisters* for a one of a kind episode with April Wolfe, and me, Katie Walsh.

April: See you then!

Speaker 2: Only the corrupt are listened to, now.

Rachel: Can I tell you my second thing?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: My second thing... is moon towers.

Griffin: These are the—is there a murder history to these?

Rachel: Maybe.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: But not confirmed. [laughs]

Griffin: Okay. So we pretend, maybe, that it's not.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: We can—we should talk about it, 'cause I can't just say something like that, and we don't return to it.

Rachel: No, we will talk about it.

Griffin: Cool cool cool.

Rachel: Wasn't planning on spending a lot of time on it.

Griffin: Alright alright alright.

Rachel: It's a great way to start this segment, though.

Griffin: Yeah. I'll just do as many Dazed and Confused—

Rachel: When I said superstitions, you didn't jump to murder. But you could've, maybe.

Griffin: Right. I guess.

Rachel: But with moon towers... they're only in Austin. They don't exist anywhere else.

Griffin: Nowhere—then maybe you should explain what they are.

Rachel: Okay. Moon towers. So, in 1894, Austin purchased 31 used moonlight towers from Detroit. The whole idea behind moon towers was that um, cities all over the United States were starting to produce outdoor lighting. And with a moon tower, you could get a significant amount of light, and it was more, in that way, cost effective, than getting a bunch of different lamp posts.

Griffin: It's basically a street light if a street light wasn't a fuckin' baby about it.

Rachel: Yeah. It's like a water tower... I mean, the reason they're called moon towers is that they shoot, like, 15 feet up in the sky, and they are able to shoot light over a much larger amount of space. Let me find... what am I having—okay. Okay, they're much taller than 15 feet. [laughs]

Griffin: I was gonna say. That's not very tall, babe.

Rachel: So, moon towers are 165 feet tall.

Griffin: [laughs] That's way bigger! That's eleven times bigger!!

Rachel: [laughing] I remembered that there was a one and a five in there. Forgot about the six in the middle.

Griffin: Hooly shit.

Rachel: 165 feet tall. And they illuminate a 1,500 foot radius.

Griffin: They're bright as hell.

Rachel: Yeah. They're super bright. Um, Austin had 31 when they bought them from Detroit.

Griffin: Did Detroit—was Detroit using them at that point, or was—were they just making them?

Rachel: They were making them.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: But they bought them—they bought them used from Detroit.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, in this time period, Austin's population was only around 18,000 people. Uh, they first went up in the Hyde Park neighborhood, which was Austin's first suburb. Now there's only about 15 in existence in Austin, so about half that many. Uh, cities all over the United States were starting to explore these options. The hilly terrain of Austin made it a little difficult to do the street lamps. So, this is why the—

Griffin: So instead, they used 165 foot tall uber street lamps.

Rachel: [laughs] They were connected to electric generators at the Austin dam. Um, and in 1920s, their original carbon arc lamps were super bright, but time-consuming to maintain, so there was a big kind of overhaul of them in the '90s, where they dismantled every tower and restored them to make them last, like, y'know, 50 more years.

Um, the way you may know about them... because again, they don't exist anywhere outside of Austin, is from Dazed and Confused.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: In 1993, there was a party at the moon tower in Dazed and Confused, and this was actually one that they artificially created for the movie.

Griffin: Really! I didn't know that.

Rachel: Yeah, 'cause moon towers aren't designed to be climbed.

Griffin: Ohh, right.

Rachel: They're not like water towers in that way. And so, they had to construct one that was climbable for the film.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You just sounded so Texas, by the way, when you said the word 'water tower.'

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It was like you were on some for real Tammy Taylor shit, and I've never been more turned on in my life.

Rachel: [laughing] May be the Tammy Taylor sized glass of wine I've had this evening.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Uh, here's where the murders come in. So, around that time period, there had been some serial killings. And so, there was a suggestion that maybe the moon tower movement was motivated by a desire to kind of light up these neighborhoods to make them safer.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But obviously, there's nothing written down anywhere of like, "And we shall erect these towers to address the murder issue..." Like, it's not documented, so they can't say for sure.

Griffin: Right. And serial killers are also famously very skittish. So you turn a light on one of them, like a cockroach, they just zip right away.

Rachel: It did say, actually, when I was reading about it, that after these were installed, the murders did cease. So...

Griffin: What—were they murdering to get more street lights so that their kids could play hockey in the street at night? Was it just a very ill-advised protest? What's goin' on?

Rachel: Who's to say? Who's to say?

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Um, there's a little documentary online. It's called The Last of the Moonlight Towers. It's like 50 minutes long. Uh, it's available for rent on Vimeo. It seems very cute. You can watch the trailer for free, talking about the different reasons for the creation of the moon tower. But it's just a really beautiful thing, and they're like... the way they're set up in Austin, they're kind of total surprises. Like, if you're walking around Hyde Park for example, you'll just be walking down the street, and you'll just kind of run into one.

Um, they're all, as of 1970, recognized as Texas landmarks. Um, and they are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Griffin: Huh.

Rachel: Um, of... only six are in their original locations, and the one in Zilker Park that makes the Zilker Park Christmas tree is still there.

Griffin: Ohh, that's right!

Rachel: So the big Christmas tree they string all the lights to that they claim is the world's largest Christmas tree...

Griffin: Naw.

Rachel: ... is actually attached to a moon tower.

Griffin: That's neat. I had no idea. They're so neat. They're so pretty. If you've never been to Austin or never seen them, like, they are... for a city that is as sort of hippie-dippy as Austin is, to have these monolithic, like,

industrial... pieces of like, electronics all over, is like, really kind of... I mean, they're not—I don't know. It's not like brutalist or anything like that. But it—they do stick out, I feel like, in a really neat way.

Rachel: And the thing about Austin that was a little troublesome to me when I moved here is, I felt like it was a city that was abandoning its history, y'know? Like, everything was brand new. There were all these new high rises. It seemed like the city was constantly under construction. And it wasn't until I spent some time at Hyde Park that I thought, "Oh, there are pockets of Austin that are really connected to the history."

And what's great about moon towers is, yeah, I mean, they've been around for over a hundred years. It's like a real reminder...

Griffin: Of those grisly, grisly murders. Yeah, Rachel never letting people move on. Like, they've grieved already. Let's... drop it, y'know? Uh, I want to do my second thing.

Rachel: [laughing] Please.

Griffin: I'm gonna be so brief with it. I'm gonna let the singing do the talking for me for the most part.

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: 'Cause I'm gonna talk about key changes. Key changes are the most powerful things that you can do in a song, scientifically speaking. It's formally known as modulation. I mean, a key change is what it says on the tin. You don't have to be, I think, especially well-versed in music to know what a key change is. It's where you take the key of a song, and you make it different from what it was where it started. A lot of the times, following certain sort of harmonic rules.

Uh, and I just really love 'em. I feel like they were the original sort of dubstep drop, before we had dubstep drops.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a good point.

Griffin: And that goes all the way back to like, classical music. There are certain, like, forms of classical music where key changes play like, a defining part in that form. Uh, I learned about the sonata form is a, y'know, a formal

piece of classical, uh... a formal type of classical music, where uh, there are three movements, and a key change separates two of them.

Rachel: I know about the moonlight one.

Griffin: The Moonlight Sonata, yes, famously. Yeah, 'cause I've talked about it on this show, where it pops off. I think it's the second movement that's like... [imitates the Moonlight Sonata with his mouth sounds] That kicks ass, man.

Uh, but yeah. To establish the kind of raw power that I'm talking about, I'm going to start by discussing sort of the most influential, uh, hit song that really revived this particular phenomenon. It wasn't until this song came out that I think musical artists sort of realized what they were capable of doing with their craft. Um, and the song that I am talking about is, of course, Billy Ocean's Get Out of My Dreams and Into My Car.

Rachel: Ohhh. [laughs]

[‘Get Out of My Dreams and Into My Car’ by Billy Ocean plays]

Griffin: You're not—you haven't—you didn't just listen to it, but...

Rachel: I didn't.

Griffin: Do you remember the—the incredible... a lot of people like to talk about, uh, Coming in the Air Tonight as having like, the best drop of a song from that era. That... [imitates Coming in the Air Tonight by Phil Collins] I would argue that the key change in Get Out of My Dreams and Into My Car is like... there's so much pretense to it. They like, stop the music, and there's like... dun, dun... get out of my—there's like, a pregnant pause there that I could just take a nap in.

Uh, but of course, that's not the only song to really benefit of a key change. I mean, it hits hard, and it hits good. But what I like about key changes is that they can make good songs great... but they can make terrible songs kind of good. And to illustrate that point, I would like to play Mr. Big's To Be With You.

Rachel: Ohh, Griffin, this is perfect.

[‘To Be With You’ by Mr. Big plays]

Griffin: Mr. Big's To Be With You is not a good song, traditionally speaking, by any metric that you could measure it by.

Rachel: I used to love it, though, as a youth.

Griffin: Sure, sure, sure. Yeah. I would roller-skate to this one. Absolutely. What really fascinates me... this song, I think, only stands to the test of time because of the key change that you get in the middle of it, and because of how much stink they put sort of on it. What I love about the key change in To Be With You is that it only lasts for one, like, repetition of the chorus, and then they drop back down to the original tonic. You fucking cowards.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Like, I've never—I can't think of too many other songs where they do that, where they're like, "Aw, brace your asses! [sings] I'm the one who—" But then they're like, "No guys." It's almost like they went, "It's too high. Too high."

Rachel: "Too high." [laughing]

Griffin: "Too high. Drop it back down." Uh, of course, this is not the only song that has more than one key change, and to sort of leave us—leave us off, and really, the song I was thinking about when we started doing the segment, the song that everybody's probably wanting me to talk about... what do you—what's the song that you think of as having most key changes in it? 'Cause I feel like this answer is pretty set in stone.

Rachel: Oh, I'm so bad with this stuff, Griffin.

Griffin: Love On Top.

Rachel: Oh, god. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Love On Top is...

Rachel: Oh, that's so good.

Griffin: Exquisite. It's a good song, and just... it's a good song. It's a good, good song. And if she had had no key changes in it, and just had that like, fun music video, I would've been like, "This is a good song." But instead,

Beyoncé was like, “Let’s do a key change. And then another one. And then another one. And then a fourth motherfucking key change. ‘Cause I’m Beyoncé, and I just have these key changes lying around.”

[‘Love On Top’ by Beyoncé plays]

Rachel: I mean, it’s like Mariah Carey, right? Like, people—there are people that realize they can do it, and then it’s like, how far can I go, y’know?

Griffin: Probably... I think—I think Beyoncé probably could've done about four or five more. It’s just that the song—they ran out of tape on that one.

Rachel: [laughs] It’s like, hey, Beyoncé, we gotta get home by eight. It’s 7:58.

Griffin: You've done 64 key changes.

Rachel: You've gotta stop.

Griffin: You found a new octave. We’re all very tired. We’re very impressed. But we’re very tired. Key changes. They're powerful. Use them responsibly.

Rachel: Are you gonna play some Love On Top?

Griffin: I already did.

Rachel: Oh good.

Griffin: Uh, I got some submissions from our friends at home.

Rachel: Please.

Griffin: Uh, Kaleigh says, “My wonderful thing this week is the Rubik’s Cube. I finally learned how to solve one this week, and the absolutely joy and adrenaline I felt when I saw all the sides solved was amazing.”

Rachel: Have you prioritized this as a thing you want to learn how to do?

Griffin: Never in my life.

Rachel: Me neither. I can't care about it. I understand why people do. There's no part of me that wants to know how.

Griffin: Justin's deep into it. Travis is just now gettin' into it. I can't... I cannot be... I hate—I love puzzles and games and all that shit. The two things I don't fuck with is slide puzzles and Rubik's Cube, which is basically six slide puzzles.

Rachel: I know that there is a way to do it. I understand that it takes some skill and some practice, and like anything that takes skill and practice, it can be very impressive. It is—man.

Griffin: It just—it makes me tired.

Rachel: Yes. It's like if I dropped 100 pencils on the ground and I had to pick each one up one at a time.

Griffin: And also you could mess up very badly how you pick—yes. Uh, Emily says, "Well, hi! Something I love is small town weirdness. I'm from a very small community that's obsessed with squirrels. I mean, there's a giant squirrel statue in the civic circle, enough squirrel bridges to be in Ripley's Believe it or Not, and in 2013, The Spin Doctors performed at the annual Squirrel Fest."

Rachel: [laughs] Wait, what's a squirrel bridge?

Griffin: Is this a bridge between like, buildings, so that squirrels can run... across them?

Rachel: Oh man. That is delightful.

Griffin: I like that. I just made that up, but that might be what it is. I like that.

Rachel: I mean, when I think of Huntington's small town weirdness, I just think of the endless food festivals.

Griffin: The many food festivals that we do. Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, there was the big... the time that our mayor got abducted.

Rachel: I don't think I know about that.

Griffin: By uh, aliens. Jean Dean, her name was. Mayor Jean Dean.

Rachel: Tell me more.

Griffin: Patron of the arts. Biiig booster for the local community theater productions. Got sucked up in a spaceship once. Never saw her again. It made the news.

Rachel: Huh.

Griffin: She came back bristling with tentacles.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Covered in slime.

Rachel: Are there Jean Dean bridges between buildings now, so that she can skitter between?

Griffin: There are no more buildings. She smashed them all up under her huge, gooey feet.

Rachel: Its' weird that I haven't heard about this.

Griffin: It's weird you didn't hear about this, the time our mayor got sucked up and turned into a big alien Godzilla.

Rachel: Jean Dean. Huh.

Griffin: She fucked it all up. She exploded a whole town, and we've been rebuilding ever since.

Rachel: Huh.

Griffin: But y'know, it's home.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, thanks 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. Tell me everything you know about Maximum Fun.

Rachel: So here's the thing about MaximumFun.org. Uh, they are a site that hosts, uh, just dozens of incredible podcasts.

Griffin: Hundreds!

Rachel: That are funny, that are topical, that can be narrative, that can touch your heart and your soul and your funny bone. And I would recommend you check it out.

Griffin: It'll grab you right by the funny bone, folks. Both of them. You got two. You're only gonna need one. Two would be redundant.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm—I don't feel good.

Rachel: Do you want to stop?

Griffin: Yeah. I don't feel good.

Rachel: Do you want to stop the show?

Griffin: I don't feel good. I don't feel good.

Rachel: Can I tell you a funny story about a mayor that I'm gonna make up right now?

Griffin: It would be a little derivative.

Rachel: But this mayor...

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: ... was a ghost.

Griffin: Are you makin' fun of my mayor?

Rachel: And then... and then we created a whole throne for the ghost mayor. And... the throne was haunted. And so, the ghost mayor was scared to go on the throne, and nobody would go on the throne, and then that throne became a White Castle.

Griffin: I don't know that that makes sense. My alien one had a beginning, a middle, and an end. It had a whole dramatic arc, and also was the truth. And I think yours was a freaking lie.

Rachel: [laughs] Burger King—

Griffin: Why would the ghost be afraid of a haunted chair?

Rachel: Would you believe Burger King?

Griffin: ... Yes.

Rachel: Okay, it was a Burger King.

[theme music plays]

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[music plays]

Lisa: Hey, if you like your podcasts to be focused and well-researched, and your podcast hosts to be uncharismatic, unhorny strangers who have no interest in horses, then this is not the podcast for you.

Emily: Man, what's your deal?

Lisa: [laughs]

Emily: I'm Emily.

Lisa: I'm Lisa.

Emily: Our show's called Baby Geniuses.

Lisa: And its hosts are horny, adult idiots. We discover weird Wikipedia pages every episode.

Emily: We discuss institutional misogyny.

Lisa: We ask each other the dumbest questions, and our listeners won't stop sending us pictures of their butts.

Emily: We haven't asked them to stop, but they also aren't stopping.

Lisa: Join us on Baby Geniuses...

Emily: Every other week...

Lisa: On MaximumFun.org.