

Wonderful! 121: Lady of the Bracelets

Published February 19th, 2020

[Listen on TheMcElroy.family](https://www.themcelroyfamily.com)

[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, I'm Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: We're about to sneak up on ol' Grandfather Winter. And we're gonna push him right in the well. Aren't we? You feel it? You feel this 80 degree heat coming from outside, and you just see Grandfather Winter. He's looking in the well, 'cause he dropped something down in it.

Rachel: Is he whittlin'?

Griffin: He is whittlin', which is why any—he dropped his favorite whittlin' knife that he got from his Grandfather Winter.

Rachel: Oh, no!

Griffin: So anyway, we're gonna sneak up on him. We're gonna push him right down in the well. And that's where he's gonna live. And die. Because it's springtime, baby.

Rachel: And who does he usher in? Uh, for the spring?

Griffin: Baby Spring. Baby Spring. Baby Spring has uh, green hair, and a leaf hat, and a diaper, and flower shirt, and... grass shoes, and... bees.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: And he's spring, and you get excited to see him, because it means Grandfather Winter has died in the well. Because of us.

Rachel: Does Baby Spring grow up over the course of a year and become Grandfather Winter?

Griffin: Well, no...

Rachel: And then he is reborn in the spring months.

Griffin: I hate to say this... but once Cool Guy Summer gets in...

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: Baby Spring is going wellward.

Rachel: Ooh, okay.

Griffin: But the baby—he's fine in there. He's got a whole little—we got a playroom set up down there. And then, pretty soon, Cool Guy Summer is gonna be down there, too. He'll keep him comfortable. Really, the only one that doesn't survive the fall is Grandpa Winter.

Rachel: Okay. That seems fair.

Griffin: So, looking forward to that, and I'm looking forward to doing this show, where we talk about things that we're really excited about, things that we really love, things we're really into. Do you have any of those small wonders that I crave?

Rachel: Can you go first?

Griffin: Aw, shoot. I usually use the small wonder time that you put forward to consider and think about my own small wonder.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I mean, mine are all gonna be pretty... nerdy. If like, gun to my head, um... there's some new... there's some new content for Fire Emblem: Three Houses on the Switch that is um, good stuff.

Rachel: Fire Eblem: Three Houses?

Griffin: Emblem.

Rachel: Emblem, three...

Griffin: Eblem's not a word.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And you should know that.

Rachel: Now, let me tell you what I'm picturing with that. I am picturing a Property Brothers style video game in which you build a house for a young couple.

Griffin: Oh!

Rachel: And these new updates you just got are a new Fire Eblems...

Griffin: A third—a third Property Brother. There is a third Property Brother, actually.

Rachel: There is, yeah. A fourth. A fourth.

Griffin: Oh my god, really?

Rachel: Fifth?

Griffin: A fifth? Well, that's what the DLC is. Uh, no, it's the anime-ass strategy game, and uh, there's new stuff out, and it's really hard. And it's

like a—I like a good strategy game that feels kind of chessy. Like, it feels like doing chess puzzles. I don't really go for a lot of strategy games, so like, it really takes a lot to... to get me there. And yeah, it was a good one. You can play it on the go. I like it.

Do you have—now you've certainly got a dope small wonder.

Rachel: I do! Yeah, Griffin made a really good short rib meal.

Griffin: Oh my.

Rachel: On Friday.

Griffin: I did.

Rachel: There was some dutch oven work.

Griffin: For lover's day.

Rachel: There was some... some short rib tomato sauce.

Griffin: A little Ragu on a...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Mixed in with a little gnocchi.

Rachel: Gnocchi. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Uh, yeah. I rarely like to toot my own horn, but uh, it was the fuckin' most ballin' thing I've ever cooked by a pretty wide margin.

Rachel: Yeah, I think it's my favorite. It's my new fave.

Griffin: Yeah. That dutch oven, wow. It can get shit done, man.

Rachel: Gets real hot in there.

Griffin: It gets really hot in there. And on the lid. Which I may have touched, forgetting that lids are also in the oven, and they do get hot. You go first this week.

Rachel: Ooh, great!

Griffin: What are you, uh... set the tone for us, why dontcha?

Rachel: My first thing... is the hero's journey.

Griffin: Alright! Is it sad I only know about this because of Brian David Gilbert?

Rachel: Um... uhh, a little bit. A little sad.

Griffin: Okay. Didn't really learn about it in school. I learned about it from... I forget what episode that was about. I think the Zelda games, maybe?

Rachel: Yeah, that sounds right.

Griffin: Uh, yeah, I don't remember.

Rachel: I learned about it in creative writing class when I was an undergraduate in college. Think I was a junior in college, and it was my intermediate level creative writing short fiction class. And the graduate instructor came in and said, "Do you guys know about Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey?" And maybe some people said yes, but I did not.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And blew my mind. It just like... unpacks, and like, provides a key to so many films and books in history.

Griffin: All of them, more or less.

Rachel: More or less all of them.

Griffin: Mentioning Brian David Gilbert made me think of my small wonder, which is Pat Gill's interview of, uh...

Rachel: Oh, yes. Ben Schwartz.

Griffin: Oh, shit. Ben Schwartz about the Sonic Movie had me busting the fuck up.

Rachel: Oh my gosh. So... good.

Griffin: It is so funny. If you haven't watched it yet, it's a Polygon video where Pat Gill interviews him and gives him ten seconds to answer questions. It's so funny. It's so good. Okay, sorry.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, okay, so, I didn't—I didn't, and still don't, know a lot about Joseph Campbell. A lot of people are familiar with The Power of Myth, which is a book based on a 1988 PBS documentary, all about Joseph Campbell.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Um... Joseph Campbell was a professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence, who worked a lot in mythology and religion. So he's kind of a pivotal figure in a lot of literary, like, examination and criticism.

Um, he put together The Hero with a Thousand Faces in 1949, which talks all about the classic story structure.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: This story structure went on to inform Star Wars. Just, fundamentally, Star Wars. But then, also, The Matrix, Indiana Jones, The Lion King. And it follows this 17 stage structure that you find on almost every, like, hero's journey story.

Griffin: Right. Any film with a hero in it, who does journey in some regard.

Rachel: I was hoping kind of that you could think of a—like a hero's quest kind of movie, and then you—one that you have to know pretty well. And then you could kind of help me identify...

Griffin: Ooh, that's good.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Um...

Rachel: Could be like a Ferris Bueller, could be like a Labyrinth, it could be like, uhh... a Goonies.

Griffin: Right. I'm just trying to think of one that I... maybe Groundhog Day?

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Do you think that would fit the structure?

Rachel: Yeah, sure!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Sure. Okay, first, call to adventure.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, he has to go to Punxsutawney for work.

Rachel: Refusal of the call.

Griffin: He does not want to go to Punxsutawney for work, because it's cold and miserable there.

Rachel: [laughs] Who is his supernatural aide?

Griffin: I mean, you don't really see it, right? You don't really see the entity that grants him his powers. So... it is there, but not explicitly, like, given a face.

Rachel: Uh, this, for example, in Star Wars, would be like a Yoda.

Griffin: Oh yeah, yeah.

Rachel: For example.

Griffin: Or just the force in general. I don't know. We could get really metaphysical about it, if you want.

Rachel: [laughs] You could get deep on that. Uh, and then there's the moment where he – this is the fourth stage – crosses the threshold, which is the point where the hero crosses into the adventure.

Griffin: Yeah, I mean, he enters Punxsutawney and can't leave.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: He can't—there's like a scene where he like, drives through the blockade and goes into town, and he can't get out.

Rachel: Yeah. That's a good point. Uh, and—okay, belly of the whale.

Griffin: I mean, arguably, like, when he's in there, the morning of Groundhog Day, doing the work, begrudgingly... that's belly-y.

Rachel: Okay. So now we have exited the departure act. We are now in initiation.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: For stage six, the road of trials. Now, this is most of the movie.
[laughs]

Griffin: This is a majority of the film, where he uh, enjoys his powers, and then, things get very, very morose.

Rachel: Okay. Then, uh, what is formerly called 'the meeting with the Goddess,' but this is when the—

Griffin: I mean, Andie fucking MacDowell?

Rachel: [laughs] This is when the hero faces temptations, often physical or pleasurable, that may lead him to abandon his quest. Andie MacDowell.

Griffin: Well, no, before Andie Mac—Andie MacDowell is...

Rachel: Oh, but there's like a—

Griffin: But there's like, a bunch of women that he like, messes around with, and like, proposes to one of them, knowing that it's just gonna disappear the next morning. Yeah.

Rachel: This reminds me of Lost in Translation, when he uh, meets the lounge singer.

Griffin: Yeah, there's a lot of, um... y'know, maybe art imitating life.

Rachel: Um, and then, this is followed... similarly by the temptress. So there's the meeting, and then there's—then there's the actual act of temptation.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Now, atonement with the father.

Griffin: Whoa.

Rachel: This is when the hero must confront and be initiated by with whatever holds the ultimate power in his life.

Griffin: Wow. That's tough. I mean... his own ego, I guess, arguably? He has to learn to kind of shed that a little bit before he can make any progress.

Rachel: Mmm... 'cause this—this leads to apotheosis, which is where a greater understanding is achieved.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So this may be the moments—

Griffin: Comes in waves.

Rachel: Yeah, where he becomes kind of fatalistic.

Griffin: Yeah. And it comes in waves, his realization of like, what he needs to be to actually be happy.

Rachel: Uh, then, the ultimate boon, which is the achievement of the goal or the question.

Griffin: Andie MacDowell! They fall in love!

Rachel: [laughs] Okay. Okay, now we are on return, which is the final few stages. We're on stage 12 now.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Refusal of the return. The hero may not want to return to the ordinary world.

Griffin: Mmm... I don't know that we get that, necessarily, in Groundhog Day.

Rachel: This is where it gets tricky. So, the return is kind of where a lot of movies hop out.

Griffin: Right. Because at that point, like, they've given you the climax. They can't spend, like—unless it's Lord of the Rings, they can't spend another hour exploring the aftermath.

Rachel: Yeah. I was thinking in Labyrinth in this case, where Sarah gets back to the bedroom, and like, she suddenly misses all of her friends, y'know? And then she sees them in the mirror.

Griffin: Right. There's probably some of this in Groundhog Day, where like, on his way out, like a cop stops him, and he's like, "Fuck off, cop." And he's like, "Oops, wait. This is permanent now."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "I don't have the time travel anymore."

Rachel: Uh, the magic flight is the next stage. Um, this is where he must escape with the boon, if it is something that the gods were guarding.

Griffin: Well, the cops—the cops are now after him and Andie MacDowell. They're on the run. They're in love.

Rachel: [laughing] Ooh, rewrite!

Griffin: But he punched, uh, Ned Briarly? Ned Briarson? Shit, I can't remember his name.

Rachel: Ryerson.

Griffin: Ryerson? That sounds right.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Um, rescue from without.

Griffin: Ohh. Okay.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, this is when the hero must have guides and rescuers bring him back to everyday life.

Griffin: This is uh, Christopher, uh... oh, shit! What's the dude's name in Groundhog Day? From uh...

Rachel: Chris Elliott?

Griffin: Chris Elliott. Christopher Elliott is sort of his guide.

Rachel: [laughs] Some of us are more familiar, I guess.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, final two—or, final three stages. The crossing of the return threshold.

Griffin: He smashes through the police barricade.

Rachel: [laughs] This is where he must retain the wisdom to integrate it in life, and figure out how to share it with the world.

Griffin: Okay, that is kind of like the last, y'know, act of the movie, when he's going through like, the repeats, and just trying to like, not perform about it, but just kind of be good.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, which then becomes master of two worlds, which is where the hero is comfortable and competent in the inner and outer world.

Griffin: He's a time walker. And that's a whole thing that we can get into later.

Rachel: [laughs] And then, final stage – freedom to live. The mastery leads to freedom from the fear of death, which, in turn, is the freedom to live.

Griffin: Whoa, okay. He probably got there. He died like a thousand times.

Rachel: There you go.

Griffin: There you go.

Rachel: Those are the 17 stages. I think this is like... an incredible outline for anybody who wants to write, like, an epic story.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I remember hearing this in my like, short fiction class, thinking, "Oh, you've—this is—this is it? This is it right here? If I were to write a novel, I would just say, okay, the first, y'know, 20 pages, call to adventure. Next 30 pages, refusal of the call." Y'know, it just like, sets the whole structure for you.

Griffin: Long ass book, hun.

Rachel: Well...

Griffin: That's gonna be like a... what, like a 240 page book at that point.

Rachel: I'm writing the new Lord of the Rings.

Griffin: Oh boy.

Rachel: But it's called... Lady of the Bracelets.

Griffin: Alright, Lady of the Bracelets. Okay. So we got a bunch of bracelets. Some were given to...

Rachel: Keep in mind, I don't know anything about Lord of the Rings. Continue.

Griffin: Well, then, maybe you should tell me what it's about.

Rachel: Okay, so, uh...

Griffin: Basing it on your knowledge of Lord of the Rings.

Rachel: [laughs] Okay, so there are a bunch of really... big people.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I'm just—I'm doing some—

Griffin: So opposite of hobbits is what you're going with.

Rachel: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: What are those called, now?

Rachel: ... Largebits.

Griffin: Largebits is great. Great great great.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Nothing wrong with that.

Rachel: Uh-huh. And they live in the... wire.

Griffin: Oh, so it's like—they live in Baltimore, then?

Rachel: [laughing] Yes.

Griffin: That's fun.

Rachel: And there's one that's like, the most special one.

Griffin: Mm-hmm. Omar. From The Wire.

Rachel: [laughing] He's called to go on a quest to find the bracelet that will save his people... ?

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: And there's...

Griffin: What happens when he puts the bracelet on? Tell me that.

Rachel: Uhh, he is overcome with a power...

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: Um... and... maybe he'll do bad things if he's not strong enough to wear the bracelet.

Griffin: Alright. You know more about the Lord of the Rings than I think you're letting on.

Rachel: And there was like, a little guy that guards the bracelet.

Griffin: And his name is, um...

Rachel: Oh, we do this all the time, I feel like.

Griffin: Oh, you love it.

Rachel: Golem?

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Look at me!

Griffin: But that's not what it's called in Lady of the Bracelets.

Rachel: No. No.

Griffin: In Lady of the Bracelets, he's named...

Rachel: *She...*

Griffin: She is named...

Rachel: ... is named Slalom. Very good skier.

Griffin: Oh! Okay, that's fun! This bit is accessible.

Rachel: [bursts into laughter]

Griffin: It's definitely not like a MAD Magazine from like, 1971. It's fucking great.

Rachel: Thank you!

Griffin: Can I do my first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: It's gonna be really quick, because it's more of a concept.

Rachel: M'kay.

Griffin: It's sort of a broad idea, if you will. Secret doors. Secret doors. Hidden doors. Doors that are hidden in some way, and allow access to secret areas and things.

Rachel: Hmm, like you pull a book off a book case, and then you get—

Griffin: That's sort of the—the ideal, right? Like, that's what you think of when you say, "Hey, I got a secret door in my house." You got a bookshelf where you pull on one of the books, and it opens up a thing.

I think I've only seen that in... themed restaurants. Like, I'm pretty sure they have that shit at like, Magic Castle in LA. Which they might get insulted if I call it a theme restaurant, but let's be fucking honest, guys. Like, you're a bunch of magicians doing—

Rachel: Ooh!

Griffin: Anyway. Uh, and like, the Jekyll and Hyde club in New York City, I remember, had like, one of those you had to do before you could go to the bathroom. Uh, but like, I don't think I've ever actually been to a house where that is a thing. Uh, but I like the idea of it very much.

At the old Polygon offices, actually, there was a bookshelf that had, uh, a book that had to be in a certain place, and it would open up the bookshelf into what was, essentially, our gaming room, where we would capture game footage. And by virtue of the fact that the door was a huge-ass bookshelf, and there was no other entry into the room, it got so hot in there.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It got so, so, so hot in there. But it was worth it, because it had a cool book door. Book key. And I like that a lot. Um, there's a... I think I've talked about Richard Garriott on this show before?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I feel like I've talked about him a lot, 'cause he's an Austinite, and he's like a fascinating dude, 'cause he was a game developer who made this seminal RPG series called Ultima, and basically used it to bankroll his own private sort of space adventure. But he owns a house here in Austin that is full of like, an entire network of secret doors.

Rachel: Yeah, we saw a video that kind of showcased some of the exciting elements of that house.

Griffin: It's wild, yeah. There's like, some skulls on a table that have to be in like, a particular arrangement to open up a spiral staircase in his wine rack that goes down, and then there's a mirror next to a bookshelf where you have to reach up into the ceiling and let go of a latch, and the mirror pushes inward and opens up to a new staircase. Like, it is literally—it is designed—

And then, behind that staircase is a room with a fucking sputnik in it, for some reason, because my man is like, out of—

Rachel: Space enthusiast.

Griffin: He is a space enthusiast. Uh, it is wild. You can find videos of it. Uh, but, there is also – and I learned this today – a pretty wide, like, category of YouTube videos of what I would call, um... home improvement dads with too much time on their hands, building secret doors in book cases and or wardrobes and or whatever the fuck.

Rachel: Ooh, I like this! Y'know, I was one of those kids that got real into Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, and like, spent a good part of my childhood just looking for those secret passages into Narnia.

Griffin: Mm-hmm. And there is no shortage of videos of like, y'know, goobers actually making it happen in a way that makes it seem so accessible. Like, oh, I could do that. We would have to convert one of our rooms into the secret room, and then, that feels like you're diminishing the square footage of your house somewhat.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, maybe just a closet. A small closet.

Rachel: Or we could take some of our larger closets and put another closet in the closet.

Griffin: That's fucking great. That's very good.

Rachel: [laughs] You think you've reached the back of the closet. Oh no, open up...

Griffin: Oh, no, there's more.

Rachel: More closet.

Griffin: We—I don't know that we own anything that I would worry about enough to hide inside of the closet panic room.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, aside from, I guess, ourselves and our child. So, I—that's, again, sort of a broad category. But what I also like are just like, knowing the secret sort of doors and routes in buildings, uh, that not everybody knows all about.

So like, when I think about secret doors, what I think about is, there was, uh, in the journalism school at Marshall, this like, hatch on the floor outside of my advisor's office. And it was just like, an access hatch to this wind tunnel that like, went under the J school, over to the old library. And you could like, exit out onto the street over there.

But it was like, really well hidden, and it took a lot of effort to pry it out. But once you did, it like, created this wild windstorm in the journalism school that would knock the ceiling tiles out of place.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: So it was like this—you were channeling the elements.

Rachel: That's so cool. I always get jealous—I mean, I wouldn't necessarily want to live in a harsh climate. But those areas of the country that have real severe winter, and they have those underground tunnels.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, I mean, Huntington has a lot of like, tunnels that aren't necessarily like, a completely interconnected network. But it's an old town, and there are... I don't know, I feel like an abundance of... you saw some of it in the MBMBaM TV show. We shot in some of them under the Keith Albee that just has like, an endless cavern of storage space that like, sprawls beneath, like, a significant portion of, y'know, the street that it's on. And I think that's really neat.

I think just knowing the secrets of a place, uh, is such a like, rewarding feeling. Even though like, if we had a secret room in this house, like, it would be more of an annoyance. [laughs] Like, if there was a secret door bookshelf into my office, I feel like I would just like... y'know, I'm carrying my coffee and my soup. I can't pull down my magic book that—

Rachel: I think about that. Or if you were like, y'know, it's nighttime, and you like, can't see where the book is that you have to pull down.

Griffin: Mm-hmm. But I—I think I just like the idea of like, secret spaces. I think there's something very seductive about that, and about it being kind of a showpiece, like, in your house. If you did have it, like, it would be the thing that maybe you showed people, maybe you didn't. Maybe that's how you make people feel, like, actually welcome in the house is like, "Hey, I'm letting you in on the big secret. This is where our sex room is."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's probably what they might think at first blush.

Rachel: Would you be prepared to bring a contractor in and have that conversation? That is like, "I know there's a door here. I want you to get rid of the door and make it look like there was never a door here..."

Griffin: Never a door.

Rachel: "... but maintain the integrity of the room behind the door."

Griffin: I would say two things. One, we live in a pretty whimsical city, so I would be surprised if they would be completely blown away by that request.

Rachel: [laughs] "Oh, another one of those secret rooms. Alright, I got it."

Griffin: We could also just get Garriott's guy, and just like...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "What do you got in there? Some fuckin' Tesla coils?" Like, "No, it's my office."

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: "Don't worry about it."

Rachel: It's a shoe closet. It's gonna continue to be a shoe closet. But we're gonna make it *look* like... not a shoe closet. Go for it.

Griffin: Go nuts. Hey, can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: We have a couple of jumbotrons.

Rachel: Can I read the first one?

Griffin: Wow, yes. Oh, I see why you want to read this one.

Rachel: Yes! This message is for Beth. It is from Lex. "Hey Beth! This is just to say, I have bought the jumbotrons on this show with our faves. And which you are probably not expecting to receive. Forgive me – you are

wonderful, so kind, and so loving. Thank you for six years together. Love, Lex.”

Griffin: That is very nice.

Rachel: What a treat for me, the reader.

Griffin: Y’know my favorite part of that poem? Nobody stole any fuckin’ fruit.

Rachel: That’s true. Everybody got out with all their original fruit.

Griffin: And I like that. Everybody celebrates out of their poem, and it’s like, they’re a fucking thief! We’re celebrating fruit crimes!

Uh, here’s a message for Nova, and it’s from Vick, who says, “Just a quick shout out to the love of my life. I’m so incredibly proud of you, and I can’t wait until we get to spend the rest of our lives together in a small, suburban town in Wisconsin. Until then, sinking Netflix and multiple four hour phone calls will have to suffice. I love you so much, me amore.” Or, perhaps, my... armor?

I love that. It’s like, “Hey, babe, you’re my armor. You protect me from the slings and arrows of this world.”

Rachel: Nooo.

Griffin: “You provide me with a thick, steely... exterior. A powerful exo—”

Rachel: That’s not what—no.

Griffin: “Thank you for being my powerful, steel exoskeleton.”

Rachel: Nooo.

Griffin: “My mech that I climb inside to fight off the angels.”

[Maximum Fun advertisement]

Rachel: Can I tell you my next thing?

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: This one not quite as epic as the hero's journey. I'm talking about the humble but effective fingernail clipper.

Griffin: Oh, yeah. I love this guy. Do I have—I got one of these guys. Look at this guy.

Rachel: Yeah, there he is!

Griffin: Here's where the rubber ones went. I know you were lookin' for the rubber ones. They were up here.

Rachel: Griffin always has fingernail clippers in the strangest parts of the house.

Griffin: I... grow... nails... very quickly.

Rachel: [laughs] Now, are they mostly on your fingers and toes, or would I find them in other places on your body?

Griffin: Uh... that's a—you know I'm not gonna let the—you know where my nails are, babe.

Rachel: Ooh, you'll never tell!

Griffin: I'm not gonna tell the audience.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: But you know exactly where I grow my nails. [fake laughs]

Rachel: He's got eye nails.

Griffin: It's true!

Rachel: It's difficult, 'cause he has these long, beautiful lashes, and which I would never want him to trim, but the eye nails... make me uncomfortable.

Griffin: Yeah. Well, you can't have one without the other, babe. The reason those eyelashes grow sooo thick and lustrous? Because there's also—it's also got nails.

[pause]

Rachel: ... Do you want to hear about the nail clipper? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, sure!

Rachel: Around 1875, patents for the modern nail clipper began to appear.

Griffin: We were bitin' 'em before this, huh?

Rachel: Y'know, there are a surprising number of articles on the internet of people positing what clipped nails before the nail clipper.

Griffin: And there's no consensus on this?

Rachel: Some of it—[laughs] Some of it is like... well, y'know how dogs wear 'em down on the concrete? People probably did that.

Griffin: Huh. I guess, at what age... in what era did we start to give a shit about our nails?

Rachel: Yeah, mm-hmm. And also, people suggested, y'know, just ways of filing the nail.

Griffin: Oh yeah, that was probably it.

Rachel: And then, of course, just knives. Scissors.

Griffin: Yeah. Sucks. God, that sucks.

Rachel: I gotta tell you about the person, um, who did the first patent for a nail trimmer, named Valentine Fogerty.

Griffin: Holy shit.

Rachel: Isn't that so great?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, this was a circular nail file. So not exactly like, the clipper we know today. The first patent for the clamp-style fingernail clipper was 1881.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: We are used to the compound lever clipper. There's also a plier clipper.

Griffin: What is that—oh, like, instead of it having the resistance, you just like, literally—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's literally just a pair of scissors then, kind of? A little bit?

Rachel: Well, I mean, it looks like a plier. It's the kind that you would like, clip a dog's nail with.

Griffin: Yeah, that sucks. Wow, that's rough. Jeeze, this one's skeezin' me out a little bit, babe.

Rachel: [laughs] Now, let me tell you a little bit about the thing that changed everything. Didn't happen 'til 1947! There are people alive today that didn't have access to this clipper!

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: It's the one that has the jaw style design, but it has the little nibs near the base to prevent lateral movement.

Griffin: [gasps] Interesting!

Rachel: Uh-huh. You know the little nibs?

Griffin: I love those guys!

Rachel: And then, there's um, a notched rivet, which ads the thumb swerve to the lever.

Griffin: Oh yeah. And I'm just doin' that right now. See, you see me—

Rachel: It's a pleasing thumb swerve.

Griffin: You see me over here messin' with the thumb swerve, and I'm just kind of spinnin' the top of the jaw all the way around. And at this point, it's not just a grooming tool, babe. It's a toy. I'm havin' fun with it.

Rachel: Yeah. It's the original fidget spinner.

Griffin: Hey, hun? Why did you—why did you decide to talk about this?

Rachel: It is such a perfect little tool!

Griffin: It's good at what it does.

Rachel: I mean, a lever is a satisfying tool no matter what.

Griffin: Yes. That's a good point.

Rachel: But I just think about... just like, the general size and shape. Now, some would argue that the size and shape is not exactly the size of a fingernail.

Griffin: Ohh.

Rachel: Um, y'know, you have to go around one side, and then the other, and then the middle, y'know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But I just, like... I find the process of clipping fingernails, like, so precise. Uh, and it's just kind of the perfect tool to do it, y'know?

Griffin: You say perfect, but that is selling, uh, our imaginations short. So I guess...

Rachel: Here's the thing.

Griffin: How can we improve them?

Rachel: Okay, so there have been improvements.

Griffin: Oh my god.

Rachel: There's like, just a general, like, a fatter clamp, y'know? So you get more, like...

Griffin: That's just... that's just...

Rachel: Work on it. There's also a side model. So instead of like, coming this way, you can hold it sideways.

Griffin: I like that, actually.

Rachel: So your right or left hand, it doesn't matter. 'Cause an argument is that your stronger hand is gonna be the more precise hand.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: And so people say, if you use it from the side, with like a side handle, then it doesn't matter as much with your dominant hand.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: I also – this is the fun design, is the one that has like, the real long pole. [laughs] So if you can't reach your toes...

Griffin: I was just about to say.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. That's a real thing.

Griffin: What about just sort of an automated sort of mulcher, that you could kind of very—

Rachel: Oh, you just put your whole hand in?

Griffin: Well, I was thinking feet. I can do my fingernails. Well, I can do my left hand. My left hand nails look professionally done, and my right hand nails always look like a child, uh, has tried to do them, with like a pencil sharpener or something like that. My toes, like, forget about it. I need the mulcher.

Rachel: You would want to put your toes into a machine?

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

Rachel: That doesn't terrify you at all?

Griffin: Well, the machine's gonna be custom made for my feet.

Rachel: Oh, that's nice!

Griffin: And all of a sudden, this does sound like a product that we would sponsor on this show.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: This is something we could put in our secret room, though, ultimately. Which I like.

Griffin: Yeah. But then it's not gonna—like, people are gonna see that and not instantly think it's not a sex dungeon.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Can I talk about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes, please.

Griffin: My second thing is a song, and it's a powerful theme, an anthem that will get you, um, just ready to go. And that song is Tighten Up by Archie Bell and the Drells. Uh, I love, when I sent you this song, just to make sure that you had heard it before, the way that you first found it was through The Simpsons.

Rachel: Yeah! It was interesting, 'cause I—there's like a Simpsons bit, where it's like, Homer, it's a flashback, and he's performing this song as a one man band. And I remember thinking, like, "Huh, that's funny." And then, years later, when I heard the song, I was like, "Oh, that's an actual song!"

Griffin: Right. I heard it for the first time, y'know, when I was a child. Probably when I—no, when I was about like, 20, I heard it on You Look Nice Today. There was an episode where they talked about Tighten Up by Archie

Bell and the Drells. And now, like, today, it pops up constantly on like, the four or five different playlists that I have it on.

And the reason I have it so widespread is because it is a perfect song. It is so straightforward and good and pure, and I just almost always am in the mood to hear it. And that's not true for a lot of songs. Like, it's never come up, and I've been like, "Ugh, I don't have time for you right now, Archie Bell and the Drells' Tighten Up." It's always like, "Oh, hell yeah, here it is! It's time to go!"

Rachel: Now, what is—normally, people would hear the phrase, "tighten up," and they would think that that is not a thing somebody wants to do. Do you have a sense of what tighten up means in this circumstance?

Griffin: Maybe you don't want to to tighten up. But Archie Bell is just so sort of like, enthusiastically telling everyone on earth...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: One person at a time. He actually, if you listen to the whole song, names every single person.

Rachel: Oh, that's fun.

Griffin: Yeah. So he's like, [sings] "Rachel McElroy, tighten up!" And he gives it to everybody, and so, everybody tightens it up. If you've never heard this song, it is just like... it is this early kind of like, foundational funk hit that came out in, I believe, 1968. And it is... it's sort of like—it topped the R&B and pop billboard charts, and was really the first sort of funk song to achieve that level of popularity.

So yeah, if you've never heard it, I'm gonna play... just the beginning of the song is so, so powerful, and so strong. So here's the beginning of Tighten Up.

[‘Tighten Up’ by Archie Bell and the Drells plays]

Griffin: At the beginning there, he says a lot of great shit, including, uh, “We don’t only sing, but we dance just as good as we want.” Uh, and I’m not entirely sure what that means. But I am glad that he feels empowered to dance just as good as he wants.

He also starts out by saying that they’re from, uh—Archie Bell and the Drells, they’re from Houston, Texas. And the reason he said that, apparently, is because uh—and this was in an interview with some magazine. It was after the Kennedy assassinations, and he had heard a comment that nothing good ever comes out of Texas.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: So he wanted to... he has a quote where he said he “wanted people to know that we were from Texas, and we were good.”

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This song is just like... you heard that clip, and there’s obviously a lot more to the song, and it’s all very good. But like, you kind of get the structure if you hear the first 30 seconds of it, where it’s Archie Bell just sort of enthusiastically encouraging all of his band mates to tighten it up, and play incredible fills.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: The bass runs on this song... the licks are so fucking hot. And then, the like, the break beats, like the drum breaks, are like, so, uh, incredible. And I feel like they are inspirational to a lot of the funk music that came after. Honestly, there are lots of different genres where I feel like you could hear those exact sort of beats happening inside of them. Like, it is such a fresh song.

Rachel: I feel like it’s the kind of song that like, if you and I were at a party, and this song came on, we would instantly feel like the party was cooler.

Griffin: Yes, absolutely. I would feel welcome. It is a—it is a comforting song for me. The origins of this song are kind of wild, right? So, Archie Bell and the Drells is the band that put it out, and uh, y'know, popularized it. Archie Bell... the origins are kind of complicated.

Archie Bell, from Houston, Texas. Big family. He had like, six or seven brothers and sisters. Uh, and he got drafted to serve in the army during the Vietnam war. And he was a musician already at this point, and eh was bummed out, and his band mate named Billy Butler taught him this dance, to like, cheer him up. That's like, how the story goes. And the dance was called Tighten Up.

At the same time, in Houston, there was another R&B group that was called The TSU Toronados, and they would like, play shows around town, and this was like, the riff they would play. That two cord... [imitates a bass riff] They would play that, and it was like, that song was like, their theme song. They would play that to like, get people pumped.

Uh, the TSU Toronados and Archie Bell and the Drells have the same manager. So he like, put them in a room together.

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: Archie Bell had like, took this riff, took this dance. The TSU Toronados like, did the background. And then, they just like... and apparently, it sounds kind of loose and improvisational. It took like, 30 or 40 takes. They were in the studio, like, all night, putting this down.

But this, y'know, this manager was sort of the alchemist who brought like, all these different components together. This was originally a B-side to another song that they were trying to make, like, happen, and it just wasn't. And then, DJs were like, "Hey, let's flip this over. Oh shit!" And then it just sort of became a... it became this national hit while Archie Bell was deployed.

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: Archie Bell was deployed. He was stationed in Germany, and he was injured. He like, injured his leg. And so, uh, y'know, even after he came back, he couldn't dance. They had choreography and stuff. Like, he couldn't really do it. So like, while he was recovering, they put out this full-length album. And they went on to have a bit more of a career after that, but like, this is, by far, their biggest hit. And it is... it is just really, really good.

Rachel: Have you looked to see if there's videos on the YouTube?

Griffin: There is. They are like, pretty low quality, but you can see the dance. The dance is not, like—

Rachel: I would be really curious.

Griffin: It is not, like, y'know, like, Jackson Five level choreographed in that. It's a lot more...

Rachel: Does it give you a clue as to what tightening up is?

Griffin: No.

Rachel: [laughs] Okay.

Griffin: But I think it's okay to not know, explicitly, what tightening up is.

Rachel: Y'know, like, but this is not far from the time frame where everybody was like, telling you what the dance was and how to do it. I just wondered if this was like, an actual... like a dance. People would be at the club, and you would be like, "Oh, that man is—"

Griffin: There was a tighten up dance, right? But it was not—it was very low impact, I would say. [laughs] I would argue. But really, I think this was just like, the party starter. Like, this was just the—this was just the song that made you want to just fuckin' groove, because Archie Bell was up there telling you to do it, and then you would hear, like... just all of these different sort of patchwork just funky ass, like, sections of this song.

Uh, it's just great. It's just perfect. I am going to like... it's nice to know that I have this constant in my life of just like, here's a song that I will always be excited to hear. Unless I like, burn out on it, but I think it'd be hard to do. I love Tighten Up.

Do you want to know what our friends at home are talkin' about?

Rachel: Yes, please!

Griffin: Alex says, "My wonder is maritime museums. The Columbia River Maritime Museum has an exhibit called The Light Ship Columbia, and it's an actual place you get to walk around. A floating lighthouse." Neat. "A lot of maritime museums have floating exhibits like that, and you can see what it was like living aboard as a boatswain."

I think I mostly picked this one because it had the word 'boatswain' in it.

Rachel: [laughs] Have you... ever been in a maritime museum?

Griffin: No. But...

Rachel: Yeah, this is something that people that don't live on the coast don't really get access to.

Griffin: I'm sure it's very cool, though.

Rachel: I'm open to it, for sure.

Griffin: I've been to aquariums, which is like a fish museum with water in it, if you think about it.

Rachel: Ohh.

Griffin: Yeah! Fish is like, uh, boat pets. 'Cause they live under 'em.

Rachel: You are such a poet, Griffin.

Griffin: Thank you. Nathan says, "Lizards are wonderful." Take Nathan's word for it. That's it.

Rachel: That's it. Ooh.

Griffin: But it makes you think, doesn't it? It is evocative, in a way.

Rachel: It does!

Griffin: Um, lizards... my relationship with them is, we live in Texas, and so, I almost always step on them all the time, every day.

Rachel: [laughs] Little, little guys.

Griffin: Every day I'm walking, and little, little guys just... brrrip! I guess I like big lizards, too.

Rachel: I like a lizard on a rock. Um... just sunnin'.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I like that.

Griffin: Our friend had a big lizard that would eat bugs and stuff, and that was pretty cool.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I guess they're eatin' bugs, and maybe there's a lot of bugs that I'm not a big fan of that they like to eat. And that's good to me, I guess. And some of 'em have beards, and that's funny. Like sideburns and shit. That's cool. But the problem is... King Koopa's a lizard. Blugh. I hate that guy.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: Such a childish spirit.

Griffin: Thank you... 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. Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. MaxFunDrive is coming up very soon.

Rachel: Yeah, we recorded our bonus episode!

Griffin: It was so good! Rachel...

Rachel: Griffin assures me it was good.

Griffin: It was very good. Rachel has never talked about video games professionally before, but we uh, she played Animal Crossing: New Leaf for like, two weeks. A game that I adore, and I know a lot of our listeners do, and then we talked about this video game for like, 45 minutes. And it was a lot of fun! I liked it a lot. We got to play together a little bit, and that made me very happy.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Um, yeah, I think that's it. We are... so... proud of you! We're so proud of you!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And it's about time that somebody said it. You've been working hard.

Rachel: You have! Y'know, and you're loyal.

Griffin: You're so loyal, to a fault! No. You're not that loyal.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: You're loyal, but not to a fault, y'know? You're a good amount of loyal.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it's because of that that I think it's important, we wrap this one up by saying... proud of you!

Rachel: Proud of youuu!

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org
Comedy and culture.
Artist owned.
Audience supported.

[Maximum Fun advertisement]