

Wonderful! 128: The Big Finger

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Gettin' a big stretch goin'.

Rachel: Big ol' stretch.

Griffin: Ooh, I'm gonna attack this one. Ooh! Gonna attack the block! Of this episode! Aw, my arms hurt really bad, and my back and shoulders don't want to move like this.

Rachel: Is this from wrestling with our son yesterday?

Griffin: This is from all the rough-housin' that we get up to. No, I think it's important to stretch. Okay?

Rachel: Oh yeah? [laughs] Is this the first time that you've ever said this out loud?

Griffin: Uh, yeah. Maybe. But I think our friends at home, they look to us for guidance and help, even though we're trying not to goop it. I don't think it's particularly goopy to say, stretch it. That back. Stretch those shoulders. Stretch your solar plexus. Wherever or whatever that is. You need to be limber if you're gonna meet this episode halfway. 'Cause we're gonna be coming at you with a lot of rambunctious energy. Isn't that right, babe?

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, we're regular rambunctious... robots over here.

Griffin: See? We're off the walls with wild shit like what Rachel just said. What with the robots and what have you.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: How's it—how you doin'? Are you doing good? I feel like we should check in with each other, as a little, like, way to ground ourselves before each episode.

Rachel: I think a switch has flipped in my brain, and I am beginning to think about ways, uh, to be enriched.

Griffin: Oh, okay!

Rachel: Instead of just surviving.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: Which is, I feel like, a good switch to have flipped.

Griffin: Yeah. Don't just—don't just 'vive. Thrive.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And I'm the first one to say that.

Rachel: Uh-huh. [laughing]

Griffin: Anyone who says otherwise is stealing it from me, and it's my copyrighted motto.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. How are you doing?

Griffin: I'm doing okay. Thank you for asking. My sleep has been quite bad, as of late.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But I got a good... I got a good eight hours last night, so I'm feelin' fresh.

Rachel: Oh, good.

Griffin: Feelin' pumped up. Feelin' ready to go. Been working with about five each day, which has then sort of, the following day is like a dream. Like some sort of astral projection. Where it's not me in my body. Who's in there? But that's not particularly fun to talk about.

Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: I do. Uh... I mean, there's a lot of good media out there to consume right now.

Griffin: There is.

Rachel: And one podcast I've really been enjoying, uh, is Brené Brown's new podcast. I believe it's called Unlocking Us.

Griffin: Oh!

Rachel: It's not, um, affiliated with us in any way. But I enjoy her work, and I enjoy this podcast. It is, uh, very enriching, I would say.

Griffin: It's okay to talk about things that aren't us from time to time. That is not affiliated with us.

Rachel: [laughs] But a podcast, that's like... that's in our turf, y'know?

Griffin: Yeah, that's fair. Um...

Rachel: I think there's time to listen to multiple podcasts, is what I'm saying.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, I'll tell ya – Nailed It coming back. Season four.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: So fucking good. It is like, only getting better, and it is like, uh... Nailed It season four, and new Terrace House dropped on Netflix this week, so it's like—

Rachel: What a gift, right?

Griffin: It's a fuckin' gift, and it's like, takin' me there. Wow, the new Terrace House. We're in some chunks of episodes with some challenging material, what with not great standup comedy, which is a real, uh... a real trigger for me. It makes me—

Rachel: I have to tie Griffin to the furniture to make him stay in the room.

Griffin: I literally Naruto ran out of the—Rachel, I don't even think you realize that that's what I did. But I just like, I dove off the couch and fully Naruto ran to get away from what was happening on the TV.

Rachel: I rarely let Griffin fast forward. I feel very, um, serious about watching a show in its entirety.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But in some cases, in this arc, I have let him fast forward.

Griffin: Yes. It's been very kind of you. Uh, hey, I start things off this week.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: And I'm gonna kick things off with my first topic, which is armadillos. The 'dillo.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: The little 'dillo. A special friend that we get here in Texas that is not, uh, in most of the contiguous United States yet. They're spreadin'. They're gettin' out there.

Rachel: You may be familiar with Armadylan, from PJ Masks.

Griffin: That may be your main point of contact, like it is for us. Armadylan on the PJ Masks is very strong. Um, no, I want to talk about armadillos. They're little rats that wear armor, and like, what else do I need to... I don't need to justify it past that, I don't think, do I? Like, they're little rats that wear armor. They're one of the few animals that's like, "Oh shit, it's rough out here. It's fine, 'cause I've got this armor that's gonna protect me."

Rachel: But they're faster than the turtle, right? So they're like—y'know, they've one-upped, in a way.

Griffin: They beat turtles in nearly every category.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Something I learned though, while preparing this segment, is that very few armadillos actually use their armor for, uh, protection in the wild. Most of them just run away or jump away, or skitter away very, very quickly.

There is one, the three-banded armadillo, one species that does use its thick hide to protect it from predators. They don't have natural predators so much, which is why, uh, they are, y'know, spreading throughout the United States. They started in South America, moved up through Central America, and really kind of got to Texas, and was like, "This is chill here. I like it right here."

Rachel: They don't look super tasty, right? Like...

Griffin: They don't look tasty.

Rachel: I feel like if I were a predator, I would be like, "Eh, I don't think so. That seems like a lot of work."

Griffin: They are kind of toothsome. Um... one sort of negative thing is that, most commonly, you will see them here on, let's say, the side of the road, in a state of... distress. In a state of not being... that cool. And that is because one of their defense mechanisms is that they can leap three to four feet in the air when startled.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: That is whoa. It's cool, right? You think like, Air Jordan. That's fuckin' cool. Except... if a car is passing... by, or over, at the time that the startling happens... that's a series wrap on that particular armadillo. So that is...

Rachel: So that way, they're not quite as strategic as the turtle, per se.

Griffin: No. The turtle sees that and is like, "[laughs] That's why we—"

Rachel: Brings all those limbs in.

Griffin: "That's why we don't jump." Um, it is... it's just amazing. I like that they—they're—I can't think of many other ani—a lot of other animals are like, "We need defense mechanism. Let's evolve something. I know, we'll make our wings colorful so it'll be scary." And armadillo is like, "Okay. Like, I've got a bulletproof vest." Um, I don't know that that's necessarily... I don't think it is bulletproof.

Uh, genetic research into armadillos traces their earliest lineage back to, uh, a thing called glyptodonts? Glyptodonts, perhaps? 35 million years ago, they were just like, big-ass armadillos. They're basically, uh... I can never say

this—I never feel confident in my pronunciation of, uh, ankylosaurus? Ankylosaurus?

Rachel: Ank-lee-oh is the way I would go.

Griffin: Ankle-saurus. And we'll just say it there, and I'll know that I will be wrong. Uh, mixed with like, a turtle. It was like, huge. Like a big-ass armadillo. That kicks ass for me, but it also had like, the spiky club on its tail.

Um, their armor is made up of what are called scoots, or scutes, perhaps.

Rachel: Can you spell that?

Griffin: S-C-U-T-E-S.

Rachel: Aww.

Griffin: It's basically just like, overlapping scales of like, bone and horn.

Rachel: Ooh!

Griffin: Which is what their armor... but their bellies are always so soft, and that's why they can roll up into a little ball, and I love that. Uh, there are a lot of different species of armadillos. Most of them are endangered, which is a big bummer.

The one that we get here in the states is... how many bands do they got? How many bands do they got? They got nine-banded. Nine-banded armadillos are the ones that we most commonly see here, meaning their armor is made up of nine overlapping scutes.

But there's a lot of different ones. There's a pink fairy armadillo, that is native to South America, that has pink armor. Which is fuckin' great. Like, are you kidding me? It's like, on some anime bullshit at that point.

Rachel: Yeah, I'm picturing like a Peppa Pig.

Griffin: Like a little Peppa Pig, but wearing armor, and that's real cool. And I just think they're real cute. Y'know, I feel like armadillo is not an animal that everybody has a crystallized, like, image in their mind of what it looks like beyond, it has a shell. But you look at it, and it's pretty cute in the face, and the belly, and its feet. And it also looks like it means business. Like... if I saw a three-foot tall one of these, one of these ankle-sauruses, I'd be like, "I'm not fucking with that. Are you kidding me? There's no way I could penetrate that thick hide."

You do have the leprosy thing.

Rachel: Yeah. I was gonna say, like, they're not... huggable, per se.

Griffin: It's not great. They're not huggable, I don't think. But it's not like they're always spreading the stuff. It's not like they're like, walking around like, "Gotta give... this'll be a fun prank to humans!"

Also, like, mice and some rabbits and some monkeys spread leprosy as well. It's just that their body temperature is like, really low. Their body temp—

Rachel: Ohh. You're bringing `em all down.

Griffin: [laughs] Listen, rabbits.

Rachel: You refuse to let the armadillo take the full blame for this.

Griffin: Yeah, I do! Their body temperature is like, 90 degrees, which is fairly cold, which makes them like, a good, uh, transmission vector. There's that fuckin' word again.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Uh, for leprosy. But like, I don't know, man. Aesthetically, they're really good. They turn into little balls. They look like little fantasy armored cinnamon roll knights, and I like that.

Rachel: Ooh, I just got like, a vision of like, an armadillo Pokémon...

Griffin: Hmm.

Rachel: That instead of like, bursting out of the ball, just like, unrolls for the ball and rolls back up.

Griffin: That's—babe, you should design Pokémon.

Rachel: I think so.

Griffin: That's good.

Rachel: What would that one be called?

Griffin: Well, I mean, you have Sandshrew, which is like, I think kind of... well, I guess that's a shrew though, wouldn't it be? But it kind of looks armadillo-y. There's gotta be an armadil—they've done every... they've done every animal at this point.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And now they're like, moving onto like, uh, objects. Like, "Here's an ice cream cone, but it's also a Pokémon." Or, "Hey, here's a ring of keys, but it's also a Pokémon." They have almost certainly done armadillos at some point. I'm ashamed of myself for not being able to pull what the armadillo Pokémon is.

Rachel: And I'm ashamed of you.

Griffin: Thank you! What's your first thing?

Rachel: I am bringing a musical group this week.

Griffin: Oh boy!

Rachel: And it, uh—

Griffin: Mannheim Steamroller again. This is your fifth time bringing Mannheim Steamroller, babe! I know you listen to other music.

Rachel: [laughs] Y'know, I'm a real roller. I don't know what to tell you.

Griffin: You love their Christmas music! You listen to it year round! It's fucked up.

Rachel: [laughing] No, I'm talking about Thao & the Get Down Stay Down.

Griffin: Yeah. Have you talked about them on the show before?

Rachel: I feel like maybe, but not as a formal topic?

Griffin: Okay. You do not sound very confident about that.

Rachel: [laughs] Well, it's not in the... it's not on the site.

Griffin: Then you're good. The site is canon.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Uh, so I actually saw Thao & the Get Down Stay Down in 2009 in South by Southwest. So this was a year after their first album came out.

Griffin: Mm.

Rachel: And at the time, it was kind of a... kind of a more folky group. Thao Nguyen is San Francisco based, and she plays the guitar, and she's a singer-songwriter. The group actually originated in Virginia. In 2006, began recording. And then, as I mentioned, 2008, that first album came out, We Brave Bee Stings and All.

Uh, and I saw this band at a small club in Austin. And I was instantly charmed. And so, I want to play a song off the first album that really hooked me in, that is Bag of Hammers.

[‘Bag of Hammers’ by Thao & the Get Down Stay Down plays]

Rachel: So this is a folky, like, poppy... y'know, fun song.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Really gets in there. The whole album, just constant bangers. She has such a like, great sense for like, what is gonna be a good hook, and what is gonna feel like the song that you wanna listen to over and over again.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And I kind of followed the band into, uh, their next few albums. Particularly, *We the Common*, which came out in 2013. And then, Thao & the Get Down Stay Down took kind of a, um... I don't want to say a turn. They kind of evolved.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And part of that was because Thao started collaborating with Merrill Garbus of Tune-Yards.

Griffin: Oh, I was just about to say that the new song you had me listen to sounded like, really kind of Tune-Yards-y in a way I very much enjoy.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Merrill started producing some of the albums, kind of manipulating the band's music, and kind of amplifying some of their kind of more... I don't know, kind of catchy, interesting musical qualities.

And the review I read on Pitchfork, kind of talking about this collaboration, compared the music to, uh, The Breeders, Luscious Jackson, and Cibo Matto.

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Rachel: Which, I just like—oh, I like all of those groups. That explains a little bit. Huh.

Griffin: Yeah. [laughs]

Rachel: Um... in 2019, Thao hosted Song Exploder.

Griffin: Oh, I didn't hear that one!

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Took over. Apparently—

Griffin: Oh, she took over hosting the show? Wow!

Rachel: Yeah. She met the host, uh, when she did an interview in 2016 for an episode, and the host was kind of a fan of her music, and she took over.

Griffin: Hrishikesh Hirway?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And uh, so yeah. So you may be familiar with her from that incredible podcast.

Griffin: It's so good if you've never listened to it.

Rachel: Uh, so the new album from this band is coming out May 15th. It's called Temple. Uh, and y'know, initially, there was a tour planned for this album, which is on hold. Uh, but... it's uh, it's really incredible. It like, really has evolved from that initial album, the initial song I played for you. And somehow, y'know, a lot of times, a band will evolve, and you're like, "Oh, now they're not really for me." But somehow, I just feel like I've grown with, y'know, the band?

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: So I wanted to play, uh, the new song, uh, Phenom. Or Phenom. I think "fee-nom."

Griffin: I think "fee-nom." Yeah. For sure.

Rachel: Uh, which is just... just super fresh.

[‘Phenom’ by Thao & the Get Down Stay Down plays]

Griffin: The music video... you obviously can't see it. It's fucking amazing for this song.

Rachel: I would encourage you to look at... so, it came out last week. Uh, and the video is kind of based on like, a Zoom call, basically.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And so, it's Thao, and then, a bunch of kind of professional dancers on various, like, Zoom windows in this call. There's eight backup dancers, all doing choreography, and they rehearsed the whole thing, like, isolated, online.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, and so, it's just—it's a very apt and relevant video for the time.

Griffin: Yeah. It's fantastic.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um, hey, can I do—real quick, do you think it would be possible for me to... and I know this is a bit uncouth. But do you think maybe I steal you away now, yes?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Here I go. I'm picking ya up. Put you in my backpack. Dook dook dook dook dook... into my vault. And I—

Rachel: Creeeak! [laughs]

Griffin: I took you out of the museum where you were before, 'cause you're a work of art. [pause] That was weird. That was creepy.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But I stole you from a museum.

Rachel: This is why we usually play music instead of really developing a narrative.

Griffin: Just doing some light roleplay.

[ad-break stinger plays]

[advertisements play]

Griffin: Hey, we got a couple jumbotrons here. Did you know about these?

Rachel: I did! Will you read the first one, please?

Griffin: I will. The first one is for Amanda, and it's from Mica, who says, "Hey Amanda! Know what's wonderful? The fact that you're cancer-free! Thanks science! That fucking cancer is gone. I'm glad I got to flip off the tumor after they removed what was left of it. I love you and our girls, Anastasia and Beatrix." And that is—they wanted that spring, or whenever. Really split the uprights with that one.

Amanda, that is such amazing news. I'm glad that tu—I hope the tumor saw you flippin' that... givin' him a cold one, right between the shoulder blades, and just like, knew, like, "Man, I really was outta line."

Rachel: You know me. I'm not always a fan of, y'know, cursing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Y'know? But I feel like this is a good one.

Griffin: That's a good one!

Rachel: Let's keep this one.

Griffin: Yeah. It really stinks, that cancer, so give it as many birds as you possibly can. I guess you only got the two middle fingers, but if you do it like, repeatedly, it's like you have more.

Rachel: [laughs] Can I read the next message?

Griffin: Yes yes yes.

Rachel: It is for Em. It is from... M.

Griffin: It's for—it's for E-M, Em, and it's from the letter M, M.

Rachel: [laughs] I assume that it is—the M stands for something, and it's not, in fact, from the letter M.

Griffin: They're just havin' fun with homonym—homignomes. Oops! Homino—

Rachel: [laughing] Homonyms.

Griffin: Homonyms? Not homophone? Homophones? Homophones? Homophobes? Where am I going with this?

Rachel: [laughs] I don't know! Uh, can I read the message, though?

Griffin: Yeah... I quit. I'm gonna leave.

Rachel: "The last four years have been made indescribably better with you by my side. It's been an honor to watch you grow and to share so much of myself with you. I'm so proud of you for making it through your first semester of college in one piece, and I know you're gonna continue kicking so much ass. Thanks for being the Gina to my Jake. Love you."

Griffin: Oh, I love Lost.

Rachel: Was that a Lost reference? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Gina was the name of the one woman...

Rachel: Smoke monster? The smoke monster?

Griffin: You remember? She was the smoke monster, and Jake was, um... played by Andy Samberg. On Lost. But he gets sucked up in the plane and explodes, like, pretty early on. So this is a really deep cut reference.

Rachel: [laughs] I'm glad you got it, though.

Griffin: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

[Maximum Fun advertisement]

Griffin: Can I talk about my second thing?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: My second thing is also musical, and it is kind of similar to your thing in a lot of ways. But um, I'm not gonna talk so much about an artist or a song or an album as much as I'm going to talk about one kind of concept,

and that concept is St. Vincent's fuckin' disgusting, nasty, fuzzy fuckin' guitar riffs and solos.

Rachel: Ooh! I like this!

Griffin: They are so good. Uh, I thought for sure I'd talked about St. Vincent before, but according to, again, the site, I had not. Even if I have, I could talk about the guitar solos as like, their own separate things.

Rachel: If this site goes down, by the way...

Griffin: We are fucked.

Rachel: Wonderful.fyi, we have no back up. [laughs]

Griffin: We are dead. Um, she just wails. She just like, really, really, really shreds on guitar. And not just in like a... Yngwie Malmsteen way of just like, "Wow, she plays the guitar really good!" Like, it is a different sound than any sort of guitar-fronted musical act that I have ever heard. And I think that's what like, really makes her special.

If you've never heard of St. Vincent, her name is Annie Clark, and she's just a super talented producer, singer, songwriter. And she has also been in the game since like, the early aughts, much like Thao. She started out playing guitar for Polyphonic Spree, and uh, with Sufjan Stevens' touring band. And then, former her own group, again, in 2006.

How weird. How strange. We did not coordinate this.

Rachel: What happened here?

Griffin: Uh, her style has changed a lot over the like, decade and a half that she has been doing music. It has gotten more, I would say, art rock? Art rockier? Uh, I think particularly after she did a collaboration album with uh, David Byrne from Talking Heads, called, uh, Love This Giant. And I think that it has only gotten sort of more... art rock feels like a slam, but it really isn't. It's just like, getting stranger, I think, than her music was before.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: But the one thing that has kind of remained a constant throughout like, all of her work are these like, crunchy, nasty fucking guitar riffs.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And a good example, if you've never heard her music, is... and it's probably my favorite song of hers. Cruel, off her 2011 album, *Strange Mercy*, which has like, just this short little section in the middle that just fuckin' blows my mind every time I hear it. So here's that.

[`Cruel' by St. Vincent plays]

Griffin: A lot of that sound, she achieves with obviously, like, effects pedals and fuzz boxes, and like, special, like, pitch bending effects that are largely played with pedals at live concerts. Like, she's got a fuckin', like, spaceship flight desk, essentially, that she stomps on.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But a lot of that sound also just comes from like, the way she plays the guitar, uh, very sort of like, percussively, and also just the way that the music itself is arranged.

Her music has sort of an unsettling vibe in general, especially these days. I think *Masseduction*, which I think was her most recent album, uh... there's a lot of music on there that is just kind of like, a little bit eerie, for lack of a better term. Or a little bit, um... just unconventional in a way that is like, makes you really pay attention.

She did an interview... oh god, I didn't write down with whom or what entity. I apologize for that. But she did an interview, uh, pretty early on, I think around 2009, when *Actor* came out. Uh, where she said, "I like when things come out of nowhere and blindsides you a little bit. I think any person who gets panic attacks or has an anxiety disorder can understand how things can

all of a sudden turn very quickly. I think I'm sublimating that into the music." That's a good word, sublimating.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Um, and she's just like... she's a great lyricist and a great performer, but like, that is the—that's the stuff that I think about. Like, the... the fact that her music, and especially the guitars can sound like, kind of transgressive at times. Like, kind of like... uhh, bordering on unpleasant in a way that like, that walking that line is so, like, fascinating. And she has just kind of leaned more and more into that aesthetic, as her, uh, career has gone on.

And like, I don't know how—I think that that is its own kind of challenge, beyond like, "I'm gonna write a catchy song," or, "I'm gonna write a poignant, moving song." Writing a song that has elements to it that are... that are transgressive, that are kind of like, uh...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: An assault, in a way, but making them like, fuckin' cool, and making them like, contribute to the music is like, something really, uh, special. So, I want to play one more song off Actor, which was her, uh, 2009 album. I think maybe her second or third, uh, full length album, called Black Rainbow, that I'm just like, uh...

I'm obsessed with it, because it ends with this like, minute and a half long breakdown of this same riff, moving up scales with this just like... symphony, this cacophony of instruments being added to the back of it, and the like—the backbone of it is just this nasty, like, spooky guitar riff. So, here is Black Rainbow.

[‘Black Rainbow’ by St. Vincent plays]

Griffin: I can only play like, obviously, a few seconds of the song. But it's 90 seconds of just like, this, until it reaches like, such a high register, uh, that it is like... it kind of—I don't know. I am very anxious... I'm pretty

anxious in general. These days, like, that anxiety is obviously like, very high. And I find something kind of cathartic about listening to like, anxious music. And I think there's a lot to it.

Rachel: Yeah. And I think that's a really good point, y'know? It's interesting to talk about both of these artists in the same episode, because it does make you think a lot about how this tendency towards getting more experimental, the longer you're in your career, makes sense, right? Because you kind of master, y'know, and become, potentially, less excited about a certain style.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And you want to do something that is exciting, and stimulating to you as an artist, and so, you just kind of start getting... getting wild, y'know?

Griffin: I think where I bounce off of, like... 'cause I have so many artists, especially ones that like, I found in college, like St. Vincent, that like, did start trying out new styles. That I feel like they went so far and kind of lost their voice. Like, they lost what was special about the music they were making in the first place.

Whereas, I think St. Vincent, her style has changed dramatically, but there is a... there is a—there's a backbone there that you can trace throughout like, her entire career. Even when the music is unrecognizable from what she was first making, like, it still has her voice in it, and I think that that's why it works.

Rachel: Well, that, and it's also still thoughtful of the audience. Y'know, I feel like sometimes, artists, like... you can tell that they're interested in it, but they're not necessarily trying to relate with you as a listener. [laughs]

Griffin: Right, exactly.

Rachel: Which I feel like both of the artists we bring this week are conscious of that. Like, I still want to say something, and I still want to connect with the people listening to it.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, what is your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing... is symmetry.

Griffin: Symmetry! The thing when the thing's the same on both sides!

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: I love this!

Rachel: Yeah, me too!

Griffin: Y'know what's good, also? Asymmetry.

Rachel: Oh!

Griffin: I like it, too. It can be good.

Rachel: Alright.

Griffin: I like that, too. I mean, they're both good.

Rachel: I mean, this week, I'm gonna talk about symmetry. Maybe next week, you can talk about asymmetry. [laughs]

Griffin: And that would be very symmetrical.

Rachel: Mmm.

Griffin: Mmm! A paradox!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: A conundrum!

Rachel: Uh, what I was interested in, particularly, is why it's so pleasing, right?

Griffin: Why your brain enjoys seeing symmetrical things?

Rachel: Yes. Yeah, and why you kind of seek it out, and why, when given the choice, like, for example, in designing a home, let's say, in Animal Crossing... [laughs]

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: You would choose kind of a symmetrical design, right? Uh, and this is something that's been written around a lot, and examined a lot. And so, I figured I'd be able to find something, and I did!

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: A lot of what I read about kind of referenced just the natural symmetry in nature. Y'know, this idea of like, a starfish, or flower petals, or a snowflake. This idea of a lot of the things that we admire in nature have this symmetrical quality.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And then also, people themselves, y'know... have you heard, like, the more symmetrical a person's features are, the more attractive they are?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like, it's this idea of like, there's something comforting about symmetry. There's something familiar about it. And then, often, asymmetry can be a sign of illness or danger. Y'know, like, a lot of times, when, y'know, for example, you're looking at a person to identify whether something, y'know, is wrong, you'll look to see kind of like, "Oh, okay, well, is that hand bigger or more swollen than the other hand?"

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Y'know, if you like, are looking at a finger, and it looks kind of swollen, you'll like, look at the other finger on the other hand to see kind of, is this...

Griffin: Well, if you have to do that, I would argue, you're a bad doctor.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: If I have one huge finger on my left hand, and you have to say like, "Hold up, I gotta check the right hand for reference. Huh, there's no big, huge finger on this one. Yeah, I guess that is quite bad."

Rachel: [laughing] Um...

Griffin: "Hey, Jerry. Dr. Jerry, come look at this! You'd think it's gonna be big on the other hand, too, but it's wicked not! So like, what's goin' on with that fingie?!"

Rachel: "Uh, you're looking at the thumb, Steve. That one's supposed to be a little bit bigger."

Griffin: "Aww, I always do that, don't I? Well, let's get those things off of there."

Rachel: Uh... [laughs] I think there's just—there's something kind of... what I'm saying is, there's something kind of biological in our interest in symmetry, and our kind of desire to seek out that comfort. It's familiar, y'know? And our brains will recognize it.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Uh, there is a physicist that has written about symmetry and order, and says that it's something that we crave in this kind of strange universe. Y'know, when you're in unfamiliar circumstances, you will look for things that are symmetrical, that are similar to what you're familiar with.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: The other thing I found when I was researching this is, the work that your brain does to kind of create symmetry. So, have you heard about this gestalt psychology?

Griffin: No, I haven't heard of that one. That one psychology. I've heard of a lot of other ones though, haven't I?

Rachel: [laughs] So, this is the idea that the whole is other than the sum of its parts. So instead of being the sum of its parts, it's other than. So I want to show you kind of an example of this.

Griffin: Yeah, 'cause I have no fucking idea what that means.

Rachel: Yeah. I knew—I had a feeling it would be really... abstract. Uh, so this is the image that came up a lot when I was researching this.

Griffin: Alright, show it to me, and I'll see... okay. What we're looking at is—I don't even—it's three Pacmans, eating up a triangle.

Rachel: [laughs] There you go.

Griffin: Okay. So what's this supposed to be showing me?

Rachel: So, the idea is that your brain kind of projects this other triangle on top of... the solid triangle, because you're looking at the circles, and you're seeing they form that shape.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Right?

Griffin: This would be impossible for me to describe.

Rachel: You only see the Pacmans?

Griffin: I just see Pacsmans.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And they're trying to eat the... the space, but there's three, like, less-than signs, and they're also trying to eat it. So that's what I see.

Rachel: It's like a triangle that is solid, covered by an upside down triangle.

Griffin: An invisible triangle.

Rachel: Except there's no outlines around the upside down one. And so, you're just kind of filling in the blanks.

Griffin: So what does this have to do with symmetry?

Rachel: So the idea is that your brain is, uh, adds up the details of an image. Is more of like a calculator than just taking in information exactly as it is.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: And symmetry is kind of one of those shortcuts. Y'know, you are looking for it. Like, your brain is doing the work to try and find it. Uh, so it is isn't necessarily always intentionally there, it's just something that your brain is like, alright, where is another thing that is like... this?

Griffin: `Cause my brain is lazy, and if it sees something that's symmetrical, it only has to look at half of it? `Cause it's like, "Well, the other half..."

Rachel: [laughs] Well, it can be why it's so jarring, when you're looking at something that's supposed to be symmetrical and isn't. Your brain like, instantly is like, "Wait, what is this?" Like, kind of seizes up. Um, and symmetry is just one of the major principles that kind of drives the organization of your brain. Uh, which explains, y'know, why we like it so

much, and why we look for it. Like, your brain is doing the work. It is trying to find it. And when you see it, you're like, "Ahh, that's nice. That's comforting."

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Um, and I feel like that's what's really appealing to me. A lot about like, y'know, interior design, and those opportunities of like, y'know, putting an outfit together. Or even like, creating art. Y'know, a lot of times, when I was doing like, pottery or whatever, like, what you're trying to do is, you're trying to create symmetry.

Griffin: Right. Pottery specifically, like, your shit will fall apart.

Rachel: [laughs] And so, it's very, like, appealing and comforting. And like, you feel that sense of accomplishment of like, "Oh, look. Look at this. It's the same on this side as it is on that side! I did it!" [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Uh, yeah. You brought up Animal Crossing. Are you like... is symmetry sort of the benchmark of your design process?

Rachel: Well, so, here's the thing. So I'm getting those bunny things, right?

Griffin: Oh yeah yeah.

Rachel: Like, I'm gettin' all the bunny things.

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Rachel: And you only really have to have one of each little bunny item. At least, this is what we're all assuming, right? We don't know.

Griffin: We don't know what this fucking rabbit wants.

Rachel: The idea was that you were gonna collect all these bunny things, and then, on bunny day, you will present them? Somehow demonstrate that you have accomplished the bunny things.

Griffin: You have to eat them in front of the rabbit.

Rachel: [laughs] But I got like, multiple sets of balloons, just 'cause I felt like, in my bunny room that I've created...

Griffin: Ohh!

Rachel: I wanted—y'know, I wanted it—I was very thoughtful about how I laid out all of my bunny items, so that it... y'know, the clothes, for example, line up. There's a...

Griffin: I appreciate that.

Rachel: There's a symmetry to it.

Griffin: I appreciate that. I was not as thoughtful. I just kind of threw all that, like, gawdy shit in one room in a big pile to get the points. And then like, as soon as that rabbit comes and goes, I am throwing it in the river.

Rachel: Oh yeah. It's gonna be a real going out of business sale.

Griffin: It'll be kindling. Um, hey, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Uh, Calypso, which is a badass name, says simply, "In Australia, we call sweatpants tracky dacks. Thanks."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's it.

Rachel: Tracky dacks!

Griffin: Tracky... T-R-A-C-K-Y. Second word... dacks. D-A-C-K-S. Tracky dacks. These are my tracky dacks.

Rachel: I like that.

Griffin: I love it so much.

Rachel: You think people just say dacks when they're in a hurry?

Griffin: Mm, but then, Dax Shepard is around, and he's like, "What?"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And they're like, "Oh no, we were talking about our sweatpants again." And he goes, "Oh, okay. It happens a lot. Don't worry about it." 'Cause he's really nice.

Rachel: And he's everywhere. [laughs]

Griffin: I wish I could say tracky dacks, but it feels like, uhh...

Rachel: No.

Griffin: It feels like... it's like, I would then be like, the kid at high school who got into Black Adder or whatever, and then started using a British accent, or called things like, y'know, a lorry or whatever.

Rachel: That reminds me of like, y'know when people refer to tennis shoes as tennies?

Griffin: No.

Rachel: Mmm.

Griffin: Not here, at least.

Rachel: That's hard for me.

Griffin: Uh, Kayleigh says, "LEGOs! I love these colorful bricks. With all the free time I've had lately, I've finally broke open a LEGO set I bought months ago, but didn't have the energy to work on. But man, they're so fun to do. It's like putting together IKEA furniture, but instead of making an Nordkisa, you can make a little Star Wars plane. That's so wonderful to me."

Rachel: I am counting down the days until Henry is interested in LEGOs.

Griffin: Yep.

Rachel: I will probably regret it when they are everywhere, and we are constantly cleaning them up.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But right now, it is so satisfying to participate in, and I just want him to like it.

Griffin: Yeah. Now all we have is Magna-Tiles, which like, he doesn't really engage with.

Rachel: And he doesn't like those, either.

Griffin: He likes it when I make incredible, beautiful, symmetrical geometric masterpieces with it, and then he can come and stomp on it like a Reptar. But um...

Rachel: I like to think it's a developmental phase where he instructs us to make things that he can destroy. It seems like this is a natural evolution for him.

Griffin: Yeah, like our, y'know, sleep cycle, and... the Magna-Tiles tower, as discussed earlier.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Hey, 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. And uh, thank you so much to Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

Rachel: Maximum Fun is... uhh, it's a community, I would say.

Griffin: Yep.

Rachel: Of very kind, funny, kind of hip folks.

Griffin: Smart.

Rachel: Well, y'know, I... not always. [laughs]

Griffin: Whoa!

Rachel: I'll let you, the listener, figure out...

Griffin: And you know who we're talking... [laughs] I think they're always smart. I'm not gonna die on that hill.

Rachel: No, they are always smart. I just—I didn't—we are potentially including ourselves.

Griffin: Fast. They're fast. Oh, I was talking about the listeners. They're smart and cool and inclusive, and they're fast.

Rachel: Oh! I thought we were talking about the talent on the Max Fun network.

Griffin: Oh, no.

Rachel: So I wanted to be cautious about how much we...

Griffin: Wicked not smart.

Rachel: ... stroked our own egos. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: Uh, anyway, I would encourage you... I mean, this is a time, I think, when people like having a lot of content. 'Cause y'know, it helps you kind of feel less isolated. And so, Maximum Fun is a great place to find great content from cool people.

Griffin: Yep. We have other stuff at McElroy.family. Been doing a bunch of stuff at the uh, on the old YouTube channel. Having fun with that. And um...

Rachel: Yeah, Dr. Sydnee McElroy put up a video on how to appropriately wear a mask.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Which I haven't watched yet, but I am very grateful she did.

Griffin: Yeah. And I think that's it. I think just like... this week, um... this week, let's clean... let's clean up, just a little bit. And I don't know what that means for you. I don't know what that means for you. But let's just... tidy up. What's that in the corner? You've been putting that off for too long. Tidy it. The floorboards? Get those tidy, please.

Rachel: Oh, don't do the floorboards. Here's what I'm suggesting.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Find a drawer. Just find one drawer that you could tidy.

Griffin: Start there.

Rachel: You'll open that drawer later, and you'll be like, "I'm so glad I tidied that drawer."

Griffin: I can find all my old exotic coins. And here's all my—here's all my cool knives. And here's my slingshots. This is a weird drawer. But I'm gonna go start firing these knives out of these slingshots, 'cause I've just invented the ultimate weapon! Sling... sling knives.

Rachel: [laughs] I love that movie.

Griffin: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

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