

Still Buffering 318: "Whodunnit?" (2013)

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[theme music plays]

Rileigh: Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Rileigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: So, um, you know my kids are in a show. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] They're in an outdoor theater show directed by Rileigh. And it's called *Seussical*. Have I already said this on the show? It's a Dr. Seuss-based musical.

Rileigh: I've come to realize through TikTok that anyone who did community indoor children's theater in a decently-sized small town with a children community theater did *Seussical* at some point.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay.

Rileigh: That is what TikTok has taught me, is that everyone simultaneously loves it and hates it because everyone has done it. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Uh... so— okay. So you know all about *Seussical*. There's a baby kangaroo. That's the role that Charlie's playing. Baby kangaroo has sort of lines? I mean, as much as, like, saying a word on your own is a line.

Taylor: But this is like a weird family legacy thing, right?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: 'Cause Rileigh, you were the baby kangaroo, correct?

Rileigh: I originated the role, yes.

Taylor: [through laughter] Originated the role.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: When Griffin was Horton the Elephant.

Rileigh: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. It's not a big part, but it is a big deal in our family specifically. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yes.

Sydnee: Um, and then of course we have created the role of Cindy Lou Who for [laughs quietly] Cooper.

Rileigh: Which is just— she's just a Who.

Sydnee: She's just— she doesn't, like— it's not named in the program. No one knows that she is Cindy Lou Who except her. [laughs quietly] It is—

Rileigh: It was just important that she had a name.

Sydnee: In her mind, she is Cindy Lou Who, and it's a secret that we're keeping from the audience... and the rest of the cast. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: The Cindy Lou Who origin story.

Rileigh: Well, 'cause you know how little theater kids are. If they knew that she was Cindy Lou Who, there'd be a riot. There'd be a coup.

Sydnee: Cindy Lou Who does not have any—

Taylor: [laughs] A Lou Who coup?!

Sydnee and Rileigh: A Lou Who coup!

Sydnee: Cindy Lou Who does not have any lines or words that she says alone. And so she is constantly practices Charlie's at home. And this upsets Charlie. And...

Rileigh: Especially 'cause Cooper does, like, a pretty good— pretty good job.

Sydnee: She does. She does. Um, but she was practicing Charlie's lines and Charlie was getting upset, and I was saying "Well... she's just practicing to be your understudy. Don't worry. It's— all leads have understudies. [muffled snort] It's normal."

And Charlie left the room, and Cooper looked at me and went, "What's an understudy?"

And I was like, "Well, it's somebody who, like, knows all the lines and whatever that lead character does, so in case they get sick or something or they can't do the show, you would take over."

And she said, "Yeah. Okay. I'm the understudy. So... if Charlie is sick, I do baby kangaroo?"

And I said, "Yep, if she gets sick you can do the baby kangaroo."

Which is not— like, I don't have any authority to grant her this, by the way. I'm totally pulling this out of my butt. I'm like, "Yep, that's— that's what would happen."

And she says, "Okay." And she's quiet for a second. And then she goes— and she's putting on makeup, by the way. If you can picture her leaning over my vanity, putting blush on her cheeks with this big blush brush, leaning close to the mirror looking at herself.

And she goes, "What is Charlie allergic to?"

Taylor: [through laughter] Whoa!

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Oh...

Sydnee: So...

Rileigh: A little Tonya Harding.

Taylor: Ohh. Syd!

Sydnee: I know!

Taylor: Huh.

Sydnee: She later tried to— she put some blush in her hand and tried to blow it in Charlie's face.

Rileigh: 'Cause she thought Charlie was allergic to dust. So she thought, like, that would...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: That would do it.

Sydnee: Yeah. So... anyway.

Taylor: Wow. Um... she— she's gonna write great detective novels someday.
[laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean... like, she's smart? [laughs] That was a smart thing for a four-year-old to ask?

Rileigh: How does she know what allergic means? None of us even have any allergies. Like, none of us have things that we need an EpiPen for.

Sydnee: Charlie thinks she has lots of allergies.

Rileigh: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Charlie— Charlie will say this all the time. Like, "I'm allergic to dust." She's not. That's not... she's not allergic.

Rileigh: She has seasonal allergies, and she kind of conflates the two. [laughs]
[crosstalk]

Sydnee: But she'll talk about all the allergies. And she only sort of understands what the symptoms of allergies are, 'cause sometimes she'll just sort of, like, lay on the couch and go, "Ohh, my allergies."

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: And it's like... "Honey, you're fine." [laughs] I've talked to her about how it's okay to just sometimes say, like, "I emotionally just can't right now." You don't have to make it a physical thing. You can just say, like, "I just can't," and that's okay too.

Rileigh: It probably didn't help her understanding of allergies that at a rehearsal for *Seussical* there was a girl, probably about 12 years old, who came— was sitting there holding her finger. And a little girl came up to me and said, "She got stung by a bee and she's allergic! And she doesn't have an EpiPen!"

And I start freaking out like, "Oh, I'm the responsible adult in charge here. Why does this girl not have an EpiPen? I understood that everyone who has a severe allergy carries an EpiPen with them all the time for situations like this!"

And I go over to her. I'm like, "Hey, are you—" 'cause she doesn't— she's not, you know, like, having a hard time breathing. She doesn't even look like she's really in pain. And she was just holding her finger and she's like, "Oh yeah, I'm not that kind of allergic. Uh, it just gets kinda itchy, and it'll probably get a little swollen where I got stung."

And I said, "But you're gonna, like... go into anaphylactic shock?"

"No, no."

I said, "So you don't need an EpiPen ever?"

"No, I don't even have one."

It's like, alright, okay. [laughs]

Taylor: Ah— hmm. I'm no— no bee specialist. Uh, but isn't that the normal response to a bee sting?

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydney: Yeah... um...

Raleigh: It gets a little swollen?

Sydney: Yeah. That...

Taylor: Yeah, a little itchy. [laughs quietly]

Sydney: Those sorts of localized reactions are very common. And do not necessarily constitute an allergy. Um...

Taylor: That's just a— a bee doin' its bee thing.

Raleigh: You just get beed.

Taylor: Yeah, you got beed! [laughs]

Sydney: And that— well, and that's an important thing to note, this—

Taylor: [crosstalk] intolerance to bees. We all have it.

Sydney: Yeah. Well, I mean [laughs quietly] nobody reacts well to a bee sting.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: Nobody gets stronger and better. [laughs]

Raleigh: Except for that one person who gets stung by that one bee. Then they're a superhero.

Taylor: I mean...

Sydnee: Bee-Man?

Taylor: I— I think I'm a friend to bees. I— I— hear me out. I've saved a lot of bees in my life.

Sydnee: Okay?

Taylor: Like— like, I found some— I found a dehydrated bee twice that needs to just be given some sugar water, and I've saved it. So I don't think I have bee powers, but I think I've got bee sway.

Raleigh: Bee immunity?

Taylor: Well, like, if I needed a favor from the bees... like, they might not, like, take care of a dead body for me. But they might, like, I don't know...

Raleigh: Drive you to the airport?

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: But isn't that how it starts? Aren't there other characters? I feel like it's not usually, like, superheroes. [through laughter] It's usually more like the villains who have sway with creatures, right?

Taylor: Ooh, yeah. That's— you know what? Fine, actually. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Like, that you can, like, just tell the bees, like, "Hey, I need you to take care of somebody for me." And the bees are like, "[high-pitched cheerful voice] No problem!"

Taylor: I'm the— I'm the Bee Buddy.

Raleigh: Bee Buddy.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And they go swarm somebody for you?

Taylor: Yeah! [laughs] They don't kill anybody, they just really... really, uh, inopportune times, they might come at you and, you know...

Raleigh: Make you itchy. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydney: And you'll have a large, localized reaction to the sting. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: Which isn't an allergy, but is annoying.

Raleigh: All in all very confusing definitions to what allergies are.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: That's important to note, though. Cooper got— my kids are always covered in ticks these days. I'm constantly pulling ticks off my children. And Cooper had one on her back and, like, the reaction to was— I mean, it was an intense localized reaction. It was not a bullseye rash. She did not contract Lyme disease. But, like, that stuff gets mistaken, or that it's an infection, a lot. But it's really just a big local reaction. She's fine now.

Raleigh: I think it's funny now that the moms of TikTok talk about sending in their ticks.

Sydney: Yeah.

Raleigh: Just like, "Oh, I'll send it in. I'll just send in that tick." I— I like imagining the channel of travel through which all ticks go, and the person that just sits there collecting them. [laughs]

Sydney: You can do that. You can send 'em in for disease surveillance.

Raleigh: Testing, I guess. Yeah.

Sydney: I've never... not to me. Don't send them to me, please.

Taylor: You just can't mail a tick to your local doctor. But like, "Ehh, I mean, tell me— tell me about this?"

Raleigh: "What's— what's in it?"

Sydney: Do not mail them to your local doctor, please, it's like to the CDC or something. Like, do not just mail ticks to— if you mail ticks to me, I do not know what to do with those things. Please do not mail me ticks.

Taylor: Yeah, an envelope full of ticks just feels like a threat. I don't think that— [laughs] a very weird threat, but...

[all laugh]

Sydney: Yeah, I do not wanna receive ticks. The girls will want to keep them as pets.

[pause]

Raleigh: Speaking of... weird... threats?

Sydney: Sure!

Taylor: Hm!

Raleigh: Who— *Whodunnit*? It wasn't me!

Sydney: Raleigh, this was such a weird pick.

Raleigh: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I mean, enjoyable, a good show. But, like, a weird pick.

Raleigh: I was reminded by someone who posted a TikTok saying, as many of my ideas and thoughts now come from TikTok— someone posted one saying, "No one else that I've talked to remember this show and I swear I've made it up in a weird fever dream," and then went on to describe a show in which it was a reality competition show, but people got murdered... but fake murdered, of course. But

then people watching thought they were really murdered, and they were competing to solve the crimes and win money. Uh, and I also did remember this and then realized it was *Whodunnit?*, which ran on ABC in 2013 for exactly one season. Then it was gone.

Sydnee: I have some— so, I did watch this show back when it originally aired, 'cause it sounds very much up, like, Justin and I's alley. This is very much the kind of thing we'd watch. Like, have you done research on this show now for this episode? I have so many questions about it.

Raleigh: Like what?

Sydnee: Well, why— *why*—[laughs]

Raleigh: So...

Sydnee: Why did they do it the way— like...

Raleigh: So, here's what I understand. Um, there was— they had this thought to do this murder mystery game show where you'd come in and solve crimes, but they couldn't figure out the best way to do it in a way that would, like, be this weird hybrid of fiction-reality where, like, it is a reality show, it's not scripted, they're not actors, but obviously the situation they're in is fictional. But they're also buying in to the fictionality of it. So, like, this was this weird hybrid genre of TV.

So they got the guy who writes and produces CSI to come write it, uh, and he did. And then also consequently wrote two books in this same universe with the same butler called *Whodunnit?* that I did also read a long time ago. Uh, they're just— they're just as good as you think they are. [laughs]

Sydnee: Are the contestants in it, or just the butler?

Raleigh: Uh, okay. So different contestants, but in the book universe it's like this butler is trapped in this house where he has to help this murderer carry out... these crimes. Like, these murders. He can't stop them. He has to facili— it's like a curse.

Sydnee: Oh, okay. I was gonna say, it's a mystical—

Rileigh: He has to facilitate them, mm-hmm.

Sydnee: There's a mystical element to the books.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: 'Cause there is no mystical element to the...

Rileigh: Right.

Sydnee: ... show.

Rileigh: Right. Very not mystical. Uh, but yeah, they got the CSI guy to come and write it, and... then they went. My one— I don't know if you all thought this, but after rewatching it, my one question was, why did they have... one of the contestants be the murderer, if the crimes scenes weren't going to also point to who did, in fact, dunnit. You know what I mean? Like, they weren't ever really answering the question, *who* dunnit? It was like, *how* dunnit? But it also did the person who was the murderer— like, did they go into it knowing they weren't gonna win a quarter of a million dollars? Did they go in, like, signing off, like, "Yeah, I'll just participate in this for fun."

Taylor: Were they—

Sydnee: Surely they got paid, right?

Taylor: I figured that they were an actor, like, in all of this.

Rileigh: I did as much research as possible, and I could not find anything that said that they were an actor. So all— my only guess was they didn't actually pick who did dunnit until, like, the final three. And they picked whoever would've come in, like, second or third place, pretty much, and then just said they had been the killer the whole time. Because then it was someone who was around the whole time, and it was someone who would be there at the end, but also someone who did get to compete for it, but wasn't going to win.

[pause]

That is all I could figure, but I can't find a straight-up answer anywhere on the internet. If anyone out there knows, please let me know. 'Cause I spent so long

looking up, "Did Chris know if—" by the way, spoiler alert, Chris was the killer. "Did Chris know she was the killer? Did she know she wasn't in it for the money? How did they convince her to do this for nine weeks if she knew she wasn't competing for money?"

Sydnee: She had to have been paid!

Taylor: But, like— but, like, what about, like— I don't know. The detail about the shoes being stuffed with tissue, so that the— the feet looked bigger than they were. Like, that seemed like a clear indication of, like, oh, it's somebody with smaller feet.

Raleigh: Small feet. But I guess then, like, if they would've ended up with someone else— 'cause I thought about that as well— they could've said they did that after the fact so that if someone found it it would be a red herring and throw them off. Um, but that's the only clue in any of the murders that I caught on to that indicated who— whodunnit.

Sydnee: This is a weird— just from, like, a production standpoint, this is also weird to me because the benefit of, like, a reality TV show, I would imagine— and I don't make TV, but I would have to imagine— is that it's cheaper on the front end to make a lot of reality shows. You're not paying for a script, for writers. You're not paying for actors. You can just sort of let people do the weird things humans do and film it. So, like, you still have expenses, but it's not nearly as expensive as a scripted... show. So, like, it's weird to me that they would want something where... you still have to pay— I mean, like, you still have to put in a lot of time and effort to come up with all that.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But it's also still reality.

Raleigh: Right. Yeah. So I don't know, maybe they did. 'Cause even the writer said he didn't know who the killer was until several weeks into it, when several people had been killed off. So... [sighs] I don't know, man. I— someone online said that they agreed that it would've been better if they would've just all been working to stop this, like, mythical killer who owned the mansion and lured them all there, if you're gonna go with this fiction reality.

So, like, none of them working together is the killer. But it still has the same premise, of they're all trying to solve it. 'Cause in the end, like, the person who won was still the person who did the best job at solving all the things, not the one who figured out who it was.

Taylor: Well, that was the weird thing about the show. It was sort of a weird— a scary human psychology study. That they weren't given teams. But they very quickly broke themselves into competitive teams and started denying each other information, and organizing plans to get each other murdered! [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. So that's the— that's the—

Sydnee: Yeah, that is really weird.

Raleigh: That's the layout of the show, I guess, if you're unfamiliar. It's pretty much instead of getting eliminated, the person who does the worst the week before at solving the murder gets killed, but in a very odd and very public manner. So then you either can visit the crime scene, the last known whereabouts, or the morgue, uh, with other people. And there are different clues at each location, but the only way you can then by the end of it come up with a full story of how it all happened from start to finish is if you have the clues from all three. So you kind of have to work with people to get the information they got from other places.

Sydnee: And the— okay. The morgue is weird for me.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Because— I want to talk about that aspect of it. Like, I was watching— from the very first episode— it's jarring, by the way. Because it's been so long since I've seen it. It's jarring now to see, like, reality show contestants... examining a human body in a morgue.

And, like, it is the person laying there, right? Like, they're just pretending.

Raleigh: They're pretending to be dead, yeah.

Sydnee: So, like, you know that person's just laying there.

Raleigh: Being poked and their mouth being opened and... yeah.

Sydnee: Like... acting. But they're not an actor. It's just a regular person. And then these people are supposed to be, like, examining a dead body! That's intense! That's, like, an intense, weird— and it's not a TV show. It's not CSI. That's the thing. Like, yeah, of course you do that on CSI but, like, you're filming, and it's a— it's fake. This is supposed to be real, but—

Rileigh: Real people.

Sydnee: So, like, if it's real, then that's a dead body, and I know y'all don't do that for a living!

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: You're just fine with it?! I don't know. It's— the morgue— I was watching the morgue scene thinking, "This is one of the weirdest things I've ever watched." Like, why would that be part of it? Why would examining the dead body be part of it?

Rileigh: I wondered what you thought. I think it's maybe the very first episode. Uh, there's a woman who's a contestant who's a cardiac nurse, is what she says her job is. Um, but the first person to die got hit with a slingshot in the back of the head, or, like, back of the neck, and I guess that's what killed her. Um, but the woman who was this nurse goes to the morgue to investigate, and starts saying "That's in her cervical spine. Yes, that's her cervical spine. [holding back laughter] Yeah, that's a shot right in the cervical spine."

And the whole time she's saying it I'm like, "I don't think that's right!" I'm not a doctor. Maybe it is. I don't know. But they all were listening to her like "Oh, she really knows what she's talking about."

Sydnee: That is the cervical spine area. But, like, it also looks like... I don't know. I don't know what they were trying to do with that musket ball.

Rileigh: Some of the murders do seem kind of far-fetched. Uh, but it's just the fact that one— it's like the Stanford Prison Experiment. It's like you put these people in this situation and they just immediately take on the knowledge and the power of someone who's done this many times.

Taylor: I mean, the... the— you mentioned the murders are kind of outlandish. Like, the— the weird bait and switch of some of the murders— I say that, "bait and switch," like with the... mountain lion? What is it? The... or the—

Raleigh: Yes.

Taylor: Leopard. Something. Like, oh, we just— the killer snuck in a giant, uh— it was a mountain lion, right?

Raleigh: Mountain lion, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. And to look like that was the thing that murdered this person, but actually it was cyanide. What? What is that? What? What?

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs]

Taylor: I wanna know the— the logic of a killer that's like, "[silly voice] So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna build a secret passageway to sneak a mountain lion into the kitchen, but then I'm gonna gas 'em with cyanide. They're never gonna know what hit 'em."

Like, what?! [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydney: This— this felt like— this feels to me like there were too many ideas and, like, too much money. [laughs quietly] Like, somehow—

Raleigh: \$250,000 is a lot of prize money.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: I was thinking about the seasons of *Ru Paul's Drag Race* that were, like, 10,000 or 100,000. I'm like, wow, you get a quarter of a million for this?!

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: You didn't even have to lip sync for your life once!

Sydnee: Does this feel like— like, who made this— was this made by an eccentric billionaire who just wanted to see this come to life? Like they had this fever dream and they were like, "I must make this real."

Raleigh: You know, I would do that.

Sydnee: No— no price is too high. I will pay whatever. There needs to be a mountain lion.

Taylor: It seems absurd because this feels like something that people would pay to take part in.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Right? Like if you said, "You're gonna stay at this beautiful estate for a weekend and you're gonna have to solve all these crimes, and people are gonna be tagged out in your party to be murdered." Like, that sounds like a thing that I would just pay for.

Sydnee: I mean, I've done that.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: So I do— I do have an update, and I need to tell you all. I missed this. It was right on Wikipedia. It says each of the contestants was asked prior to the start of taping if they would like to play the killer, and the guest chosen received a guaranteed stipend.

Taylor: Ohh.

Raleigh: It does not say how much. I assume less than the prize money, but I guess it was the kind of thing where, like, you can either play the whole game and risk not winning anything, or you can be the killer and you definitely won't win a quarter of a million, but you'll get this much.

I want you all to guess— this Wikipedia article has the per-day budget of this show. Per-day. How much do you think the budget was for this show?

[pause]

Rileigh: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Uhhh... oh. I don't know how much anything costs, like, in that world, like production of things.

Taylor: [simultaneously] A million dollars!

Rileigh: \$750,000 a day.

Taylor: Okay, close. [laughs]

Sydnee: A— a day?!

Rileigh: You were close, yeah! A day.

Sydnee: A day?!

Rileigh: A day. It says they had approximately 250 people involved in the show's production every day. That included award-winning makeup artists to make the deaths look more authentic—

Sydnee: They do look good.

Rileigh: —stunt doubles for the dangerous scenes that show the deaths, and a mountain lion, the mountain lion that was present during the death scene.

Taylor: That mountain lion got paid—

Rileigh: Cost \$5,000 per hour to use.

Taylor: Uhh...

Sydnee: Uhh...

Taylor: That actually is upsetting, because look, I think the makeup was great. The, like— this is just the kind of stuff that bothers me. The set dressing, the decor of this place that's supposed to be this luxurious manor...

Raleigh: [holding back laughter] Yeah.

Taylor: It was so, like, McMansion looking. [through laughter] Like, it was just, like...

Raleigh: [laughs] And the outfits they made them wear.

Taylor: I...

Raleigh: Like, for the Luau party, or when they all went horseback riding, and they all had to wear, like, ill-fitting grey navy flannels and jeans, and... [laughs]

Taylor: You know what? I was fully reminded of that other show you had us watch. What was it? *Escape the Night*?

Raleigh: Yeah! [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. 'Cause it was like—

Sydney: Yes!

Taylor: —I think *Escape the Night* is somebody watched *Whodunnit?* and said, "Uh, we got— we got some kinks we could work out here, right? Like, let's get—"

Raleigh: That's exactly what it is.

Taylor: "—people that can act. Let's have it a bit, like, more decadent in costume, but the same premise."

Raleigh: Yeah, with a bunch of YouTubers that people want to watch, and also it is mystical, mythical. There is a— you know. Ghost killer.

Sydney: I was trying to see if there was— I was trying to compare this to other shows.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: I mean, I—

Sydnee: This is— this is getting up there on par— it's not nearly, but it's like, you're getting close to *Survivor* levels of reality TV show.

Raleigh: And this was nine episodes. And it said it took three days to shoot each episode. One for the investigation, one for the riddle challenge and the dinner ceremony, and then one with each of them doing solo interviews.

Sydnee: I mean, can you ima— when you consider that *Are You the One* has gone on for longer than *Whodunnit*? and how much that much cost...

Raleigh: Well, it must cost less than this!

Sydnee: I know, well that's what I'm saying. Like, you just— you—[laughs] that's a show where you just put a bunch of attractive people in a house and buy lots of what I assume is bottom shelf alcohol. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Um... so also, I did read that Chris did not know any of the information the other guests did not, because she could've rigged the outcome and decided who to share information with if she did.

And the only direction she ever received from the producers was they asked her to stop winning riddles after she had won two in a row.

Taylor: Oh!

Raleigh: So. [laughs] She genuinely didn't have, like, the information to win them extra. She just did. Can you imagine being her and doing so well and thinking, like, "Maybe I really could've won a quarter of a million dollars." [laughs]

Taylor: Well, that— it's funny then, because my favorite part of the show is when they're all giving their, like, deductions, you know? Like, this is what I think happened.

Sydnee: Oh my gosh, yes.

Taylor: But it always ends with them addressing the killer by name. And, like, they're usually wrong. Like it's like, "And that's why, Lindsey, I know you've done this!"

It's like, just so— like, they're so sure of it. And then you just cut to some other goober in the cast sitting there like, "What?" [laughs]

Sydnee: This is what I wonder. Like, okay, maybe that's the only direction they gave her as the killer. But what direction were they giving all these people for them to, like, say and act— like, the way that they're behaving feels so strange for a reality show. Like, those speeches really struck me. Like, who is like... "I am— I am going for this. I am standing in this room. I'm pretending to be alone. I'm talking to this camera—"

Raleigh: [simultaneously] Talking to the cameras.

Sydnee: "I'm talking to cameras. And I am just gonna go— I am gonna go so hard and so self-assured and so, like... Sherlock Holmes on this. Like, I don't even care."

Raleigh: Sydnee, no one would have to give me direction to tell me to do that. I would 100% just go for it and do that. That would be— are you kidding? That would be so fun!

Taylor: I was about to say, I think it's just smart casting. I think they cast people that would be the kind of people to give those monologues. Because I don't— like, I don't know. You had attorneys, you had former detectives, you had the kind of people that are gonna like, "Oh, no. I got this."

Raleigh: I will say, I did read, though, that was not how they decided who had the best theory. So they could really go as far in as they wanted to during their, like, speeches. Get as dramatic as they wanted. 'Cause they all had to take written tests about their knowledge of the crimes, and they would score the written tests, and that's how they decided who would get killed. But they said they didn't want to take viewers out of the... like, world of the show by watching them all sit down and take written tests. So that's how they ended up with them, you know, doing their deductions.

Sydnee: [through laughter] This— this was made by nerds!

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: This is the nerdiest— like, who was like, "You know what I wanna do?"

Raleigh: I love it.

Sydnee: "I wanna— I want them to take written tests that I have to grade after every episode!" [laughs] Like, what— who does that?

Raleigh: *Whodunnit?*

Taylor: Who— who— hmm. I just don't think— I don't think we've— we've talked enough about how absurd it is that they formed themselves into teams and then tried to kill each other off, when clearly based on the format, like, you could've just all, like, competed by, "We all get to look at the same clues, we all get to look at the same information. Who's the smartest at coming up with the right formula?"

Like, or even if you're gonna be cutthroat, like, "I'm gonna keep a thing I figured out to myself." But then, like, it wasn't, like, episode 5. It was episode 2! Where they're like, "No, no, no. It's— this is it. It's us vs. you. Let's kill Lindsey." [through laughter] Like...

Sydnee: That is one, um— one disadvantage of a show like this only going one season is that, like, when you compare it to something like survivor, which has run for so long, the game evolved after people watched those early seasons and saw, like, strategies that everybody sort of adopted immediately that were really bad, and don't help you win. And so then they shifted. And, like, the game has changed so much over time, as people watched older seasons and went, "Oh, well maybe that was their natural inclination, but that was actually a bad move."

So, like, you have to imagine future seasons, had this kept going, people probably would've tried these different strategies, 'cause obviously that wasn't... I don't know that that was helping anybody.

Taylor: Well, and I wish there'd been more room for, like... leaps of thought. Like, you know when you get— like, there was always that, like, latter half challenge where one person would get into the room with a schematic or whatever. And it's like, oh, the killer just left a blueprint for how to rig an oven

with cyanide. That's just a thing that you'd make before that. So now I know literally every detail of what happened.

I wish there had been a bit more grey area where people were given clues, but individually had to draw conclusions, instead of one person getting privy to, like, the whole breakdown. I think that would've been more interesting, and that would've made it less this weird, like, you know, information brokerage instead of just, like, smart detective skills.

Rileigh: Yeah. The best one of those for me, I'll say, was when the girl drives off in the golf cart and that gets blown up.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: And the extra clue that you won at the end, if you won the riddle, was a TV screen in a room that just had security footage of the exact scene where that happened, and a remote control next to it that was a regular TV remote, except for one big button at the bottom that had a cartoon drawing of a bomb on it.

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs] Like, "Hmm, I wonder what happened here?"

Sydnee: Were the people... okay. So, obviously if you were the lowest scoring, you're the next to get killed. That's the mechanic. So you're told.

Rileigh: Yes.

Sydnee: I mean, you must be.

Rileigh: From what I understand, you're not told until that dinner ceremony, like, when they open up their card, if they were one of the best or one of the worst. Uh, and then they don't tell you until they go to film your death if you're the one that was the actual worst.

Sydnee: Okay. So you didn't have— I wondered if they warned everybody. Like...

Rileigh: "You're gonna die"? [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well—[laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Yes!

Sydnee: I was just thinking from, like, a... I'm thinking about the mental health of these contestants. Like, from that perspective, like, after that scene is shot, to have everybody stand up and be like, "Okay, now we're gonna reveal to you off camera who we're about to kill off." And then you tell everybody, and everybody gets to react, and hug, and cry, and say goodbye to the person who leaves, or whatever they want to do. And then you film the death scene. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: As opposed to just, like, someone exploding in a golf cart. Like, that's— I mean, it's wild!

Rileigh: Yeah. I guess— I read somewhere an interview, the female contestant who made it right close to the very end— but she was the only one left that wasn't in that team. [laughs quietly] Of, like, Chris and Lindsey and Cam. She was the other girl left. Uh, and I am not remembering her name.

But she cried in, like, every episode, opening up those cards. And I think— and it was an interview with her afterwards, someone asked her, like, were you just acting? Like, were you playing it up for the camera? And said "No, I was genuinely scared that I was going to be the one eliminated every time I didn't know what happened. And when you're in that setting and everyone's playing in to, like, the whole thing of you're not just getting eliminated, you're gonna die, it's genuinely scary and I was genuinely crying, because I didn't want to be the one eliminated."

Taylor: That was the— there was one— she was one of the two in, like, the double murder. And right before she died, she was crying about it. And she said, "I don't wanna see myself die."

And I was so disturbed, because the awareness of, like, I know it's a show, but I don't wanna see that happen. 'Cause I think that could probably be psychologically disturbing to see your own death. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's a good point, 'cause we're thinking about it in context of filming, but you are going to watch this with your family and friends later.

Raleigh: And you're gonna be on a table in a morgue.

Taylor: Well, and some of those— that one in particular was really disturbing, where it's about draining the two women's blood and, like, making one wheel the other woman at gunpoint to, like, the morgue? Like, this is— I mean, you know, it's all for the show. But also, this is just disturbing stuff to take part in.

Actors I guess understand this is their job. I don't know if reality TV show contestants go in like, "[through laughter] Oh, I might have to... "

Raleigh: "Play out my own death."

Taylor: "I have to face my own mortality, a little bit. Okay."

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, you know, it's interesting, because it really, like— I think there have been and could continue to be books and books of essays and thinkpieces about reality TV show, and what it— I mean, we talk a lot about what we as the viewers, what it does to us to watch that. But, like, what it does to the contestants. I mean, I think of a lot of the reality TV shows I watch and, like, how that can't be... good for you. You know? This is— it's like that, but it's just, like, we recognize it's bad for you, but it's pretend! [laughs] On this show, it's all pretend!

Raleigh: I was just gonna add, we're talking about the mental health of the, uh, cast members. But the audience apparently— I don't know if you all noticed— after the credits, starting with the second episode, not the first one, they added little, like, I mean, literally 10-second-long interviews with the contestant that got eliminated in their makeup once they were dead. Uh, this was because they lost 1.8 million viewers between their first episode and their second episode, because there were dozens and articles and news stories online about if this TV show was genuinely killing people.

Like, people were concerned that they were watching people actually die, and these people signed up for this reality show and were getting killed. And they

could— the creator afterwards said, "I did not fathom a world in which this was an issue, so I didn't think I had to make it clear that these were fake."

So then they added in those post mortem interviews with the contestant that died in their fake death makeup to show people, like, "Hey, I'm not dead!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Wow.

Taylor: That's... that's wild.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, they're not... and especially— okay. If you're imagining that not only did we really kill someone, but then also we're really allowing these other people [through laughter] to examine their body and try to solve the murder?!

Taylor: And this got green light for, what? CBS, NBC? Where was this on?

Raleigh: ABC.

Taylor: Yeah, okay, come on.

Raleigh: Exactly.

Taylor: I don't know. I think, like— I'm a fan of *Dragula*, which is a— like, the— I don't know. Like... more... punk-y goth cousin of *Drag Race*. But they have, like, segments where they kill off every, like, drag artist that doesn't, like, win. One gets killed in every episode. I can't imagine where you're like, "Oh, wait. I really need— I need a little outro that shows me that drag performer still alive." [through laughter] Like...

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's wild. It— I mean, it really— I remember when I first watched it, like, Justin and I discussing, like, "What is happening in this show?" Like what— like—[laughs] what is— I mean, I was never confused. I never thought that they were killing people. But it was, like, who's an actor? Who isn't? Do they know what's ha— is there really even a prize? You know? I mean, for a while, like, I wondered that. Like, is this all— is it a pretend reality show? Is it, like, supposed to look like a reality show but it's just really a scripted show about, like, wouldn't it be wild if this was a reality show? What am I supposed to think? I don't know.

It's very convoluted. It is weird— it's just weird. The— the budget for that. I mean, it's just weird.

Rleigh: I cannot believe that was the budget. I genuinely... I— I would not have guessed it was anywhere near that, looking at the way they filmed and created some of those, uh... some of those fake murders. I would not have thought that that was \$750,000 a day. Um, and that's three days—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs]

Rleigh: —that's three days per episode, with nine episodes. So whatever 750,000 is times 27, that's the budget for this show.

Taylor: I just wanna know the budget to launch Ronnie out of the hot tub.

[all laugh]

Rleigh: That one was absolutely ridiculous. That one was just...

Sydney: They all are.

Rleigh: I— they all are. But I remember that one specifically watching when I was 12. Like, what? The other ones freaked me out a little bit when I was a kid, 'cause I was like, "Yeah, I know they're fake, but this is still a little bit weird."

But that one was... always funny to me.

Taylor: Well, like, this is just— the escalating like, oh, we know whatever the— like, the dinner or the morning ceremony— something's gonna lead to somebody's death. And that— 'cause they were like, "Oh, maybe it's gonna be the facial. Like, you know, they're gonna give you a mask and it's gonna eat your face off or something."

But Ronnie in the hot tub... there are lots of ways to die in a hot tub. [laughs]

Rleigh: Yep. And he was like, "Nah, I'm gonna be good in this hot tub." [laughs] Although you can tell, the way they film the scene of the person leading up to them about to die. There's, like, this weird filter they put on it and it's, like, super

high def and, like, extra exposure. That you know, like, "Oh, okay. They're showing her getting her face mask."

But then you see the way they're filming Ronnie in this hot tub, you know something's about to go down. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: I agree. I think there was a lot of ideas, and I do think that especially with how much people like true crime and, like, solving things at home and talking about solving cold cases and stuff, I do think that there would be interest in a show where you could solve crimes, and it was a reality show. I feel like that could be something that would be successful. I don't know if this was the way... to format it, in the most successful way.

Taylor: Well, I think that the weird— like, the team dynamics and the weird, like, whatever got in the way of, like— it would've been cool to just, like— here are the facts. Is anybody gonna put them together in the way that makes sense? And then, yeah, eliminate the person that does the worst job at it. But it's like... I don't know! It was close, just not there.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. It— it definitely feels, like, too convoluted. Like they had the idea and they weren't sure how to execute it, and so they just kind of kept adding layers to try to figure out how to make it all work, and it became, like... I don't know. Like one of those really... those— those board games that, like, Justin likes to play? You know? That have, like, so many rules.

[pause]

Raleigh: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It felt like that. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Just board games in general.

Sydnee: No, the ones that have all the rules and pieces, and you gotta work through all that first and... the rule book's really thick.

Raleigh: Hmm, like Mousetrap.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: No, not Mousetrap!

Taylor: 13 Dead End Drive, perhaps.

Raleigh: Hmm.

Sydnee: [laughs] No. But, I mean—

Raleigh: Yeah, I know what you mean.

Sydnee: It is— it's strange, because it really— like, obviously they had this big budget. I don't know if maybe this was— if you think about this time period, reality shows were pretty big. And there were shows like— I mean, the budget for *The Amazing Race* had to have been huge. Right?

Raleigh: This is the same network that *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* are on. [laughs]

Sydnee: The budget for that cannot be this big.

Taylor: But, you know, this was also—

Raleigh: For *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Some of the dates they go on... I don't know.

Sydnee: \$750,000 a day?!

Taylor: Well, I think this is kind of before the, like, universal fascination with escape rooms. Like—

Sydnee: It was! This would've been before escape rooms, before a lot of the, like— the murder podcasts and murder shows and—

Raleigh: [simultaneously] Before the modern boom of true crime stuff, yeah.

Sydnee: —yeah, and all that.

Taylor: I think you could redo this in a way that would be really inviting, you know? But I think you would just have to lean a little bit more on the detective skills and a little bit less on this weird... 'cause once it started breaking into teams, I mean, that just introduced a dynamic that I didn't like. But also, just, like, the mysteries. The fact that you could find the answer if you were the one person that solved whatever— not even a riddle. It was like a— like a competition thing. That kind of bummed me out.

Like, there should've been information that you weren't given that you just had to deduce, and whoever deduced it best was the— was safe and, like, judge the worst— the worst deduction. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And you could have— I mean, I guess if you wanted to do, like— if you like the teams, because then— I mean, the advantage of teams is that people talk out loud to each other through their ideas naturally. Whereas if you have solo players that aren't teaming up, you're just counting on them to, like, go to the confessional and say all their ideas out loud. So you get more of that natural, if you have teams.

But then I guess you could just do it with teams. Like, instead of having individuals enter, you could have groups of two or three sign up for the competition.

Raleigh: Which then makes more sense for the format of having some people go to this location and some to this one and some to this one. Like, then if you have a team with that many players and you all go and get the different information, and then share it. Like the way they do already, but—[laughs quietly] sometimes they were really mean about it. Like, people would come over, and they'd all be sitting there with their nondescript glasses of white wine outside by the pool, uh, just talking and sharing their information. And someone would come over like, "Hey, can I join you all?"

And they would just stop talking until the person went away. It was, like, uncomfortable.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And especially when somebody would hide a fact that, like, from one of the members that had demonstrated better detective skills. It kind of bummed me out, because I wanted to see what that person would think of that. I wanted to— 'cause I didn't know. I didn't know what the answer was. So I wanted to see what this person that was good at this was gonna make of that. And then it was like, "No, we're gonna hide it from them. I don't know what to do with it, but I'll make sure they don't know what do with it." || Like, that's... I'd rather— I'd rather be part of the discovery!

Sydnee: Yeah, no, I agree with you, giving everybody the information. And then that would also, I think, make it a little more possible for the audience to be solving things. That's the fun of it. If it feels, like, so convoluted that you can't possibly play along at home, it becomes less fun. So if you make it a little more, like, difficult but possible, um, I think that would help.

Taylor: Well, and I mean, if you're still killing off members of the cast, then you have teams getting disproportionately, like... you know... you'd have to have, like, an element of oh, now would have to combine teams, and we have to, like, chose. But that could be a whole other fun element, you know?

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Oh, we've got— we've lost two people off our team, but the one person remaining is really good, so let me on your team.

Sydnee: But I think that the— I think that if you're gonna have, like, people keep getting killed throughout it, I think you should just have actors being the victims. I think you should just have a show where you continue to discover victims or whatever, and they're actors, and they're not [through laughter] people who signed up for a reality TV show and then had to witness their own death onscreen.

Rileigh: Like— like if you just did— I mean, like, CSI and SVU. Like, those shows, there's just a new different murder every single week.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: And it's just entirely new people and circumstances. If you had a re— this is my plea for a reality show like this so I can just be on it. Um, if you just have people, like, on a reality show being pretend at CSIs or whatever, going to these various crime scenes, they're not being hunted by a killer and they're not living in some mansion, but they're the ones going and investigating these fake murders. And then, you know, going based off of all the other clues and stuff. I think that would be more interesting.

Sydnee: And if you have, like, a serial killer who's doing it.

Rileigh: Sure, yes.

Sydnee: And so, like, you're using it to deduce... I don't know.

Rileigh: If there were actual clues about who the person was. 'Cause they even said afterwards, there were no clues in any of the episodes that intentionally pointed to Chris as the killer, even for the people at home. So it's, like, not even at home could you be guessing, like, "Ooh, who's it gonna be?" There's— you have no idea.

Taylor: Well, and I get that, like, the worry is that if somebody figures it out too early then it's not... you know, it's kind of ruined if someone's, like, every episode like, "Oh, it's you. Oh, it's you. But it's you." Right? But, like, yeah. I think just removing it from the cast or having a more, uh, preplanned story line in some way.

Rileigh: Yes, hunting a fake serial killer! Oh my gosh. That reality show. That's exactly what someone's gonna say about me, when you said "Is this some billionaire who just wanted to see what would happen?"

If I ever have that much money, that's just going to be what I do. I'm just going to create that reality show so I can be on it.

Sydnee: Well, I think it was a— it was a fun show to watch. I think it's a really cool idea. I think it was almost there, and I think if they'd been given more seasons...

Rileigh: Obviously not more money. [laughs] They didn't need any more money.

Sydnee: No, they didn't need more— they needed editing.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I mean, but isn't that what we got with *Escape the Night*?

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Well, I guess that's true.

Rileigh: You know, I do think that if you took *Escape the Night* and made it slightly more produced, in the sense that it's not a bunch of YouTubes acting like a bunch of YouTubers, uh, and then took *Whodunnit?* and made it slightly less produced, with a little less convoluted story line happening, like *Escape the Night*, then I think you'd have a good hybrid there.

Taylor: Yeah, there's definitely something. Someone should make the thing that's there somewhere, and then put Rileigh on it.

Rileigh: Yeah. We all love escape rooms so much. People love escape rooms. People love true crime, and solving things at home, and stuff like that. Like, there's gotta be a reality show there somewhere. [laughs quietly] I would just watch people solve escape rooms. I would just watch a reality show that was just, like— being a game master in an escape room where you can just watch people do them all day. I would love to do that.

Taylor: No, I think you're right. I feel like you could— you could make a whole show that— maybe people don't have to die. It's just you've gotta get out of this room and... I don't know. Like...

Sydnee: That's it.

Rileigh: That's why I love *The Floor is Lava*. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's it. You just gotta get out of this room.

Rileigh: You just gotta get out of this room.

Taylor: I mean, I like the horror— there have been a couple horror movies based on escape rooms. They're obviously written horror movies, but they're good. They're fun to watch.

Rileigh: [quietly] I love escape rooms. Anyways... thanks for watching this silly show with me. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, it's fun. It really is a fun show. If you've never watched it, if those are the kinds of things, like murder-mystery type things, I would recommend it.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I'm bummed that there's only one season. I wish there was more.

Rileigh: I know! I went back and watched it thinking like, "Well, this'll just be kind of nice to just numb my mind and have on in the background." But then I genuinely wanted to watch more of it. Apparently there was a British TV show called *Whodunnit?* that aired in the 70's. I don't think it was the same premise. [laughs quietly] But YouTube kept trying to suggest that to me.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: No, I think— I think it was crime solving, but not—

Rileigh: Not reality. Obviously.

Sydnee: You're just hearing crimes, and solving— yeah.

Rileigh: Well, thank you all. Um, what's next? Sydnee?

Sydnee: Well, I guess continuing on this theme... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, next I wanna do *Death Becomes Her*.

Taylor: Alright.

Raleigh: Alright.

Sydnee: Classic movie that I was fascinated with as a youth.

Taylor: One of my favorites.

Raleigh: [laughs] "Youth."

Sydnee: As a youth. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, thank you all. Raleigh, thank you.

Raleigh: Of course, thank you all.

Sydnee: As you said last time, *Whodunnit?* is on YouTube, if anybody wants to check it out. Uh, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org, check out all the great podcasts you would enjoy. Um, you can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Raleigh: This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Raleigh: I am still buffering...

Sydnee and Taylor: And I... am... too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: I still don't think I'd ever be able to give those speeches.

Raleigh: I just think I'd get really into it.

Sydnee: Like, looking at the camera. "I'll be seein' ya, Cam."

Taylor: "Chris." [laughs] "Lindsey."

Raleigh: Poor Lindsey. She knew all along.

[all laugh]

[music plays]

Benjamin: A man was walking along a beach, which represented his life. At his feet were two sets of footprints: his and God's. But looking back down the beach, the man could see that in the hardest parts of his life, there was only one set of footprints. So the man said to God, "Why is there only one set of footprints when times were hard? Where were you?"

And God replied, "My precious child. I was in my car, listening to *The Beef and Dairy Network Podcast*."

[air horns]

Benjamin: *The Beef and Dairy Network Podcast* is a multi award-winning comedy podcast, and you can find it at Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

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