

Still Buffering 336: Taylor Swift "Midnights"

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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 Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Um, well... hello, everyone.

Taylor: Hello.

Rileigh: Hello.

Sydnee: I don't have a thing. My— my brain is full of election stuff, and I don't think either of you want to talk about that. That's the only thing that I think about all the time. [laughs quietly] That's not a fun, exciting intro to our podcast.

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: Well, do you wanna know what I've been thinking about nonstop for the last four days?

Sydnee: Um... is it the topic of our show? 'Cause that's usually what you're thinking about.

Rileigh: Yeah. It was j— it was just, "How do I get Taylor Swift tour tickets?"

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. I knew— I knew it was gonna be Taylor Swift. [laughs]

Rileigh: Not the album specifically. It was just how I get tour tickets. This is a big moment, guys. She hasn't gone on tour since I've been an adult with my own... money to do with as I please. I've never seen her in concert. It's a big deal.

Sydnee: That is a big deal. I'm excited that you may have that opportunity.

Raleigh: All because Joe Biden is coming for Ticketmaster. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Is Joe Biden working with Taylor Swift to get this done democratically?

Raleigh: You know, I think he really pushed it because she didn't set a DC date. So I think he thinks, like, "Oh, if I do this for her maybe she'll come here."
[laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, that's what it is. Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: He just really wants to see her live.

Sydnee: I was surprised. I saw that she was going on tour and I thought of you, and I looked to see, "I wonder when she's gonna be in DC?" It never occurred to me she wouldn't be. I guess I kind of assumed, like, DC, New York, LA... Chicago. I don't know. Like, aren't those the places you do shows? And I was surprised to not see DC or New York there.

Raleigh: I guess there's a difference between stadiums and arenas? Because stadiums are what she's doing, because they have, like, between 80 and 100,000 seats, so she can get as many people as possible. And technically we don't have a stadium like that in DC.

Sydnee: Ohh.

Raleigh: We have, like, arenas. Um, and I guess New York City is the same? Like, in New York City there's no big stadium.

Taylor: Well, they— we— I mean, eh. What was that—

Sydnee: You guys have sports there.

Taylor: We do. We do have—

Raleigh: I mean we have like a baseball field—

Taylor: I've seen stadium shows in New York.

Raleigh: But it's not the same size.

Taylor: I mean... what was the— the—

Sydnee: We went to one.

Taylor: I was gonna say, the Green Day show. That was a big— that was a big venue. That was a stadium.

Sydnee: That was in— that was a baseball stadium. [stammers] [through laughter] I don't know! This is— man, we are saying so much much about ourselves right now that we went to a baseball stadium— I know there was a baseball field under us. Um...

Raleigh: I mean, we have a baseball stadium here. They just— I guess it's not as big. I don't know.

Sydnee: Interesting.

Taylor: Well, I've noticed— I mean, this just from, like, living in New York, that a lot of places— a lot of touring acts will not come to the city specifically. You go to New Jersey or somewhere close. And it could just be the cost. It could be, like, the... the logistics. But I don't know if I... I feel that excuses it when it's, like, a little punk band that I want to see. I don't know about Taylor Swift. I'm surprised, too. Who knows? [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Interesting.

Raleigh: I mean, Harry Styles took up residency at Madison Square, so he's got that locked down. She can't— [laughs quietly] can't invade there.

Taylor: Oh, is that— is that what it is? I don't know.

Riley: Yeah. I didn't know that until, like, two days ago. I just keep seeing people eternally at one of his concerts. It's like, well, that's why, I guess. He's just always there.

Sydney: Huh.

Riley: Yeah.

Sydney: I didn't know you could do that. Like, I know you can do that in, like, Vegas, but... [laughs]

Riley: Yeah.

Taylor: Just, like, rose a flag. "This is mine, now. I'm Harry Styles."

Riley: [laughs]

Sydney: It's weird— it's weird how, you know—

Riley: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Sydney: [laughs]

Riley: Sorry, go back.

Taylor: That was it not redoing that.

Riley: What was that—

Sydney: Do you need to go back to that?

Taylor: Nope.

Riley: What was that Harry Styles voice?

Taylor: Yep.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Could you do the— could you do more of a Harry Styles impression?

Taylor: 'Arry. 'Arry Styles. Nope, that's it. That's all you got.

Rileigh: 'Arry.

[all laugh]

Sydnee: Does he drop the H? Is he that— is he that kind of British that you drop the H?

Taylor: I don't know! [laughs]

Sydnee: Cockney? Is that what that is? [laughs]

Rileigh: [exaggerated British accent] 'Arry Styles!

[all laugh]

Sydnee: It was like a little bit of *Waiting For Guffman* in here. "Ow are ou?"

[all laugh]

Taylor: This is just— just making a broad assumption. I'm sorry.

Rileigh: Sorry, Syd. I didn't mean to interrupt you. I just had to hear— I had to hear that voice one more time.

Sydnee: I have not— you know what, Tey? You may be right. I'm gonna be honest. I didn't see that movie he was in, and I haven't heard him sing as much, other than when we listened to his album the one time, and singing is sometimes hard to distinguish all the accents. I don't know that I've heard Harry Styles speak. Like, talk, not sing. Like, I— I'm trying to think of a time where I just heard him talking.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't— I saw that interview where he was talking about how he liked the movie he was in 'cause it was a movie.

Sydnee: Yeah, okay.

Raleigh: It's a movie.

Taylor: But I can't— I feel like I immediately went, "I don't need to— I'm not gonna engage with this. I'm gonna block this from my brain." And then that was where it went. It went away in my head. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I, uh—

Raleigh: I've seen TikToks of him doing, like, the little bits between songs at concerts, like when you talk before the next song. Um, but that's it.

Sydnee: I never— yeah. I— he was on SNL once. Maybe I heard him then? Or did he just sing?

[pause]

Raleigh: I don't remember.

Sydnee: Okay. Taylor, for all I know, that might be what he sounds like.

Taylor: I mean, it might not. I'm not— [stammering]— I didn't rehearse that. It was just a little throwaway comment, and now it's...

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Raleigh: I bet you that's definitely what he sounded like when he first auditioned for Simon Cowell when he was, like, 12.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] I feel like that's a read on my trans voice.

Raleigh: No, I mean the thick accent.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: I mean, like, before he was famous. That's all I meant.

Taylor: I— okay, fine.

Raleigh: Before he was famous and felt a need to make it, like, Americanized and fancy. You know, back when he was, like, working at a bakery.

Sydney: Okay. I think—

Raleigh: He wasn't actually 12. I think he was, like, 16 or 17, but...

Sydney: You are assuming that Americanized would be fancy. That's in interesting question, though. What is— we, in America—

Raleigh: Sorry. I guess—

Sydney: Well, no. But we know what, like, accents we are supposed to, like, suppress. Like, for instance coming from Appalachia, you all have probably done what I've done, which is try to soften my accent a little, not make it as obvious. Especially in certain rooms where I become very aware of how I sound compared to everyone else in the room and I try to hide it. But there are other accents in the US that you don't have to hide. You can be proud of, and it's fine, it's cool, it's whatever. I wonder— I don't know what the British equivalents of that are, is what I'm saying.

Taylor: I— I think there are equivalents, but I think that they only exist to people that, like, grew up with an ear for British accents. Like, I think everybody that is British sounds British to me, and they will have very strong opinions about, "No, their accent is this, their accent is that."

And that's all well and good. That's, you know, part of their culture. But I can't hear the difference. It all sounds fancy to me. It all sounds like you— you probably are smarter than me because of the way you talk. [wheezes]

Sydnee: I can tell, like, Northern.

Raleigh: I should not have put Americanized and fancy in the same sentence. I meant I feel like it's common for a lot of British singers or, like, non-American singers to try to make their voices sound less like they have an accent, because they think it'll sell better. I mean, like, I didn't know Adele was British for, like, her first two albums.

Sydnee: Or more like they have an American accent.

Raleigh: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Hm. Yeah, I don't know. Maybe so. I think it's just— I think generally speaking, no matter if you're singing, um, in, like, one language, whatever your original language or accent or whatever is, you— it's harder to tell when you're singing what those nuances are. I think that's true when you hear somebody who English is not their first language singing English. I still think it all starts to— I couldn't ever tell you what their accent is, or what their, you know, first language is. I don't know. That's just me. So, what I'm saying is I have no idea what Harry Styles sounds like when he speaks.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] The ultimate— okay. [laughs] [crosstalk]

Sydnee: I— maybe I should watch—

Raleigh: [simultaneously] In my head now—

Sydnee: I should watch that movie.

Raleigh: It's Taylor's voice.

Sydnee: [laughs] As far as I know, he speaks with a Cockney accent and calls himself 'Arry Styles.

Taylor: [laughs] I mean, I think that— that sounds cute. That's fine.

Raleigh: Yeah. Well, and I think—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Yeah. I mean, I don't have a problem with that.

Raleigh: I think that movie might be a bad judge, 'cause I'm, like, 90% positive he's supposed to be doing a somewhat American accent in that.

Sydnee: Oh, okay. Well, see, that would make it even more confusing! If I saw it then I'd be like, "Oh my god, he's American and we were all tricked!"

Raleigh: I saw people saying, "Is he supposed to be doing a good American accent? Because if he is, it's not very good."

And then some people were saying, "No, he's supposed to be... an... American— " no, wait. "British doing a bad American accent is the intent."

Taylor: Well, I mean...

Sydnee: [snorts]

Raleigh: And I haven't seen it, so I can't speak to that, but that's what the internet told me. [laughs]

Sydnee: [simultaneously] That's convenient.

Taylor: Yeah, I don't wanna spoil anything, but I think he's supposed to be an American character that is doing a British accent at some point for reasons.

Raleigh: Oh, okay.

Taylor: That's a lot to ask from any actor, I think. Like, "Okay." Like, imagine like, "Okay. You're an American. But I want you to pretend to not be an American, but trying to speak with an American accent." Oh, okay. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Okay? [laughs quietly]

Rleigh: How do you go from British to American, and then make your American into, like, a British accent, but make it obvious you're doing— you're an American with a British accent.

Taylor: That's a challenge.

Rleigh: Yeah. That's a lot. For 'Arry Styles.

Taylor: That's a challenge that 'Arry Styles took on. And he did a great job.

Sydnee: And I guess we're saying he's the best actor in history.

Taylor: [exhales]

Rleigh: 'Cause he's in a movie that's like a movie.

Taylor: It's a—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Like a movie.

Taylor: It's a movie.

All: It's a movie.

[all laugh]

Sydnee: Anyway.

Rleigh: That's what he does in the interview, by the way. I'm not just saying that. Like, in the interview it's like he's trying to think and he's like, "'Cause it's like a movie."

Sydnee: Uh...

Rleigh: I'm not hating on Harry Styles. You all know I like Harry Styles.

Sydnee: I know. No, I don't— I don't have a problem with Harry Styles, and I don't know what he sounds like when he speaks, so...

Raleigh: Harry, 'cause you're listening, we— [laughs] we're not—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Don't worry. We're not coming at you.

Sydnee: We have no problem with you. We've just only heard you sing. Except for Taylor, who has heard you speak but still thinks—

Taylor: No!

Sydnee: Still thinks— [through laughter] still thinks you have a Cockney accent. [laughs]

Taylor: It was a throwaway comment! Why am I— [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh, because it was so good.

Sydnee: I'm just joking. Um...

Raleigh: But we're not talking about Harry Styles today.

Sydnee: No, but Harry Styles is one of the people that Taylor Swift has sung about, right?

Raleigh: Yes. We are talking about one of her... well, wait. His exes. Yes. Taylor Swift.

Sydnee: I don't think you're legally allowed to refer to Taylor Swift as anyone's ex.

Raleigh: Well, we were talking about Harry Styles. That's why I almost said "That's one of her exes," but I was trying to do the lead-in to make Taylor Swift the last thing that came out. And that's just, like, the structure I had to go with.

Sydnee: I understand.

Raleigh: We're talking about Taylor Swift's new album.

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: *Midnights*.

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: Which I have not been able to make you all listen to a Taylor Swift album in a year. *Red (Taylor's Version)* was the last one that came out, last November. Here we are, this November. Brand new one. Let's talk about it.

Sydnee: I had already seen some of the music videos, because of... Charlie and Cooper, and because of you.

Raleigh: Well, because the "Bejeweled" music video is like a Cinderella thing, with all sorts of sparkles and, like, pretty dresses and music that the girls would like, so I told you, like, "Well, they need to watch this."

Sydnee: And they did like it. They liked it very much.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Especially Charlie. Although Charlie— Charlie keeps reverting back to the old Taylor Swift songs that she likes best.

Raleigh: See, that's why I thought she might like this one, 'cause it's poppier than, you know, her last couple of albums. She returned to pop.

Sydnee: She does. I think the, um... I don't know. Does Taylor Swift usually make music videos out of, like, most of her songs, or just singles? Or what's the...

Raleigh: So, in the past she had done the singles for every album, um, would get music video treatment. So, like, obviously usually before the album fully came out, you know, the singles that were released then got a music video. Except for

the two albums she released with, like, less than 24 hours notice. That night when the album came out, the lead single for each album had a music video.

But she said that for this album she had, like, a whole visual concept for the whole thing in her head as she was making it, so she wants to make, like, a visual album. And also this is the first time that she's, like, consistently directed all of them.

Taylor: So is there a music video for every song? Or is there gonna be?

Raleigh: Well, that's kind of what she hinted at, at least the 13 on, like, the original one. She did a whole, like, sneak preview the day before the album came out with a bunch of clips from, like, tons of different videos that were in different settings, different costumes and stuff, and said that she had made, like, a visual... album of sorts.

Sydnee: Okay. So when you say she hinted at, you don't mean like you usually do, which is you and other Taylor Swift fans—

Raleigh: No.

Sydnee: — put together a series of clues, or maybe just random things that people noticed. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: No. No.

Sydnee: Into a puzzle that you have created a narrative from. [laughs]

Raleigh: No. This was a— it was an announcement she made that was vague. So, like, I don't know how many songs have music videos. But she put out, like, a big montage, almost like a trailer for it with clips from a bunch of different ones, and there are some clips in there that are not in the two music videos she's released so far, so.

Sydnee: Gotcha.

Raleigh: There must be others, is the thinking.

Sydnee: Gotcha. Okay.

Raleigh: Um, yeah. No, that was an actual announcement.

Sydnee: No. I just know— I just have to distinguish, like, is it real or is it something that you guys have used your red string and your [holding back laughter] wall of puzzles to put together?

Raleigh: I gotta be honest, I think that she's getting a little bit, like— if you're, like, a game master in an escape room and you're watching people try to put it together and they're missing the most obvious clues 'cause they're thinking that, like, the outlets in the walls have, like, something secret behind them. I can imagine just, like, sitting there screaming at your computer like, "No! Look at the big painting that has hinges on it! That opens!"

Um, that's what I feel like she felt like, watching all of us pick at things that were nothing. So her music videos recently have been full of very obvious, like, more Easter eggs that are actual Easter eggs intentionally dropped to demonstrate something, instead of grabbing at, you know, hints from the past ten years and putting them together into something. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: In this vein, I liked the song "Mastermind." [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Oh, did you?

Sydnee: Yeah. As long as we're— we're kind of hinting— we're kind of running up against that concept, so I thought I would throw that out there.

Taylor: I—

Sydnee: I really liked that one.

Taylor: I liked that song, too. The trend that it inspired of... women revealing the steps they took to capture their man [wheezes] [through laughter] was a little— it was a lot!

Sydnee: I don't know about this. I just listen to the song. There was something— not just lyrically. There was something with the ambiance of the

song, something with the... music that I found very... I don't know. It pulled me in. I liked that song. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: I think—

Sydnee: What is the trend? What is the trend? I need to know the trend.

Raleigh: It's literally just that song with women, like, putting a text on the screen that says, like, "Oh, I masterminded my relationship. You know, I met him here, like, once, and then I looked up his favorite things, and then found him online, and then followed him to where, like, he would be this day, and then, like— " I don't know. All these kind of things. And then it's like, "Now we're dating! We've been together for two years."

Taylor: "I found him talk about his favorite books, and then in conversation when he asked me what my favorite books are I said his favorite books, and then I had to read them, because I hadn't read any of them." [through laughter] Like, that kind of stuff.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: [sighs] I don't know...

Raleigh: The best— the best part about that song is, uh, there is a song on *Folklore*, her album that came out two years ago, called "Invisible String." The point of that song is that her and her current relationship, that's the same one that she was dating then and is dating now, um, that they, like, had all these invisible coincidences where they almost would've run into each other or, like, they had heard about each other, and then it all led up to them finally meeting. So it's like this whole idea of like, they were invisibly tied to each other, and then they just finally found each other. And then this song comes out and it's like, no, that's not true! [laughs quietly] You made it happen! There was no invisible string. It was Taylor Swift all along!

Sydnee: But it— but— but the song isn't that she did. It's like "Imagine if she did," right?

Taylor: Hmm...

Rileigh: I don't think so.

Sydnee: Oh.

Rileigh: I mean, I— okay. I think this is where some people have been getting confused listening to her songs from this album, because *Folklore* and *Evermore* inspired a whole new generation of people to listen to her that did not previously. And before those two albums, her songs were about her life. It was very rare for her to write about something that she had not experienced. But those two albums are just, like, story albums almost. Songs and fake characters that she had created that she made stories about, and then wrote about in song form.

This album goes back to what she would've been doing had there been no pandemic, thus no *Folklore* and *Evermore*, writing songs about her life. So these are all a lot more inspired by actual... her experiences. It's also why she's not doing, like, the indie kind of softer acoustic stuff in this album. That's never what she did before. She just took a pandemic break.

Sydnee: Sure.

Rileigh: And wrote two whole albums. Like we all did. [through laughter] In quarantine.

Sydnee: Yeah. Some of us learned how to garden and bake bread, and other people produced... platinum albums. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Sure. Yeah.

Sydnee: I assume they're platinum. I don't know that. I just kind of...

Rileigh: I mean, probably.

Sydnee: Assumed.

Taylor: Some of us just survived, and that's fine, too.

Rileigh: Yep. I did nothing!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: I listened to the Taylor Swift albums.

Sydnee: Well, there you go. That was your—

Rileigh: And I heard you talk about learning to garden. [laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I'm not very good at it, it turns out.

Taylor: I thought you were really good at it!

Sydnee: I had— I think I had beginner's luck. My first year I had a super successful, like, regular vegetable garden and herb garden, and then the last couple years I've just— I've not been able to reproduce the results. I don't know. I'm blaming the weather. [laughs quietly] Anyway...

Rileigh: I'll blame the weather too, then.

Sydnee: I don't know. I just— I'm gonna study more before next year and I'm gonna do better.

Taylor: It's that global warming. Just— you know. That's a real thing.

Rileigh: [simultaneously] Study more?

Sydnee: I tried to blame climate change for a while, and that felt like an excuse for bad gardening. [laughs quietly] For me personally. I don't mean, like, globally. I just mean like in my little garden box in the backyard, it's probably just that I wasn't— I wasn't tending to it enough. Anyway... [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: That's what a campaign'll do to you. Distract you from your vegetables.

Sydnee: That's what it was. I just wasn't tending to my garden well enough. I wasn't weeding and watering.

Taylor: Those vegetables are not gonna vote for you.

Sydnee: Adjusting the soil. I have compost. I didn't put it on there. Like, I wasn't doing the right things.

Rileigh: Yeah. Tell us more about your gardening. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: No! I don't want— that's what I'm trying to say! Like, I don't wanna... Taylor Swift. Not gardening failure with Sydnee. This is a bad gardening podcast.

Rileigh: Um, I should say, like, just generally, this album is her 10th studio album, but technically 12th because of the two re-recorded albums, if you count the originals and the re-records. Um, and it came out October 21st. It is 13 songs that are supposed to— it's supposed to be a concept album, is what she said, about the things that keep her up at night, past midnight, thinking about. And then she surprise-released the 3 AM edition which came out on 3 AM on October 21st instead of midnight, that had seven extra songs. So that's like a general overview... [quietly] of the thing.

Sydnee: Um... yeah. I, uh— overall, I enjoyed it. I, um... the songs— I get— like, the songs that were singles, obviously I understand why those stuck out to me as ones that I enjoyed a lot. The "Antihero," that's a single, I assume, 'cause that was a music video.

Rileigh: Well, what do you mean by single?

Sydnee: Uh... was released before the rest of the album, played on the radio a lot more. I don't know. I mean, a single used to come out, like...

Rileigh: [simultaneously] See, that's what is— see, this is what, no, no, I'm genuinely—

Sydnee: Released singly. But we don't do that anymore.

Rileigh: That's why I'm genuinely asking what you mean, because I've been very confused by the concept. Like the Billboard 100 whatever, that's supposed to be for singles. Like, Hot 100 Singles.

Sydnee: You used to be able to— okay. You used to be able to purchase a single. Like a cassette with a single on in and then, like, a B-side. But...

Rileigh: She did not release any songs or snippets of anything before midnight the day this album came out, which was very unusual. Usually— except for the two albums she announced the day of that they came out, obviously she didn't release anything early for those, but this one she didn't release anything early. Um, but "Antihero" has been called the lead single because it had the big music video that came out the day the album came out, basically.

Sydnee: I would— okay. Teylor, I feel like you're more in touch with music than me. Do you think the equivalent of our concept of a single, which used to be either something you could physically buy the single of something, or it would be the first song out on the radio.

Teylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, that's how I would think about it. Like, Alanis Morissette when *Jagged Little Pill* was released, the singles were all the songs we heard on the radio first before we bought the CD. Or there were also music videos of the singles. So, like, you know, we saw "You Oughta Know" the music video before we bought the CD. That kind of thing.

Now would the equivalent just be the songs we... if you release it all at the same time, are those the songs that get videos?

Teylor: Well, I think that's fair, because that was still kind of the way it worked for us too. I mean, you would— the singles often were the ones that got videos before the CD was released. You could see them on, like... depending on how mainstream your music was, you'd see them on TRL, and then you'd get the album, and the CD. So, you know, that is... I do think— and with the two that she's made videos— that she's released videos for, aren't those some of the bigger songs?

Rileigh: Yeah.

Teylor: It's still sort of following that format.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: Yeah. Um, it's interesting, because "Antihero" charted highest out of all the songs in the album. She obviously— I mean, she took up the whole top ten on the Billboard Hot 100, which, like, had never happened before. So obviously all of them charted very well. But that one was highest, and the rest kind of fell in order of where they are in the album, which I think just speaks to people that started the album, and that gets the most streams from the beginning, and then dropped off.

Um, but yeah. I mean, it just— I guess the video. For other albums it's been very traditional, like you just said. She would release songs from the album to play on the radio and stuff, to stream before the album came out, with a video sometimes. Um... you can download— I don't know why people do/would. You can download and pay to download single versions of the songs, like those two songs, and the instrumental versions. Like the string versions, I think, of a couple of them. But again, I don't know why people would pay to download digitally an album that you can stream on a streaming service.

Sydnee: Like for karaoke?

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Sorry. Not instrumental like— instrumental was the wrong word.

Taylor: [simultaneously] I don't think you wanna karaoke with a string quartet.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah. Like a more acoustic version. Instrumental is not the right word.

Sydnee: Oh, okay. I thought you meant like karaoke versions. [laughs] I was like, "Well, that's convenient, I guess. If you wanna... [holding back laughter] if you wanna get right in there to karaoke and you gotta learn the words pretty quick if you want to karaoke right away, but it's nice. It's considerate." [laughs]

Rileigh: But people do. I mean, people download the album and pay for it. I just... I pay for my music streaming service, so it's hard for me to also then pay to digitally download something. Especially 'cause I usually buy a physical copy.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, I'm assuming you have to buy— for this one you're going to be buying all the variant covers. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Well—

Taylor: And if you put them together they spell out a message that sends you somewhere, and you end up in the CIA somehow.

Rileigh: Okay. But do you know what happens—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] No, you make a clock.

Rileigh: — when you put the— well, do you— they— it makes a clock when you put them all together. It's like an actual, working clock! No, I didn't buy it. There were so many people that bought 16 versions of an album. I could not do that. I bought, um, the Target CD because it has extra songs on it that you can't even stream anywhere.

Taylor: More than the 20?

Rileigh: Yeah. Well, okay. This is the thing that some people have been very upset about. The CDs and vinyls that everyone ordered only have 13.

Taylor: Oh.

Rileigh: They do not have the seven other songs. So a lot of people are like, "Well, what the heck? Some of my favorite songs are on these other songs, but I just ordered 16 versions of an album [through laughter] that only has 13!"

Sydnee: [shaky] They ordered all 16 versions?

Rileigh: Yeah. Like, she— so she did, like, four for the CDs and four for the vinyls, so there's eight. And then they did, like, four signed CDs. There's 12. And then, like, if you got a Target Cd and a Target vinyl... um, the Target one, it

does— it has an entirely new song. There are three songs on it that you can't stream. Two are just remixes of songs that are on the album. One is entirely new, that I personally think is, like, the best song of all of them.

Taylor: Of course you do. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: But I couldn't— I couldn't share it with you all, and you can't listen to it online, 'cause you can only listen to it right now on the Target vinyl or the Target CD.

Sydnee: Okay. So— so all you can get online are 20 songs?

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah. For right now.

Taylor: All. Just 20.

Sydnee: Okay. Okay.

Raleigh: Yeah. Just 20.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: She's done this before and had Target exclusives that have extra songs, but then three or four weeks after the album comes out, then you can stream those. But with social media obviously with all these people talking about how great this song is so, like, you're gonna go buy the CD so you can listen to it immediately.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Raleigh: I bought it 'cause it's pretty. It's a lavender one. The other one.

Sydnee: 'Cause there's a song on it called "Lavender Haze."

Taylor: But don't get it twisted, kiddos! It doesn't mean it's gay.

Sydnee: No.

Rileigh: Don't— don't get it twisted.

Sydnee: No. That is not what that meant.

Rileigh: There was that debate about that song before it came out because of the title, and I think once you listen to the lyrics and her talking about how, like, everyone is constantly asking her now whether, you know, they're married, because women can pretty much only be what— she says "A one night or a bride." Like, you can't be in between. You can't be woman in, like, a long term relationship without getting married. Um, so... I think that's what she was talking about when she was talking about weird rumors about her relationship before it came out. But that obviously was an issue.

Sydnee: Yeah. It probably just wasn't very good wording. 'Cause it's not a weird rumor to say that she got married and didn't tell anybody. Like, that's not weird.

Rileigh: Well...

Sydnee: It's a rumor. It may be untrue. It may be unfair. It may be chauvinist, misogynist, sexist, but it's not weird to think that two people who are together for a while got married and didn't want to make a big to-do over it because pandemic, they're famous, blah blah blah. You know?

Rileigh: I guess.

Sydnee: That's not weird.

Rileigh: I guess it would be weird if you are that person and people you don't know are constantly asking you, like, details about your private relationship, that she's very publicly said "I don't talk about." Like, they're rarely seen together, they don't, you know, talk about... the details of their relationship or whatever. Um, so I guess more so it's just like, how would you also feel if people were constantly asking you, "Are you married yet? Are you married yet? I know all about your relationship and how long y'all have been together. I don't know you, or you don't know me, but I know all about you. Are you married yet?"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: But I agree. It's not a wild rumor.

Sydnee: No. I had not heard it, I will say, but then you're my source of Taylor Swift rumors. So, if you have heard them and dismissed them, then they don't make it to me. [laughs]

Raleigh: Well, it was a pandemic rumor that, like, they got married during the two years that, you know, no one was seen anywhere. Even some people said, like, they had kids while no one was seen anywhere, which is not true.

Taylor: Even if it was, like, it's... it's none of our business.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I feel like— you know, like what— like Dolly Parton had a partner for, like, what? Has had the same husband for, like, two decades, and she just showed his face, like, I don't know, a year or two ago. It was like, "That's right. That's him. That's my guy."

And nobody— nobody pushed, like, "Ooh, I wanna know." Dolly Parton truthers. Like, just let... let— let celebrities have private lives. It's fine.

Sydnee: I think— I think what's intriguing about that is just the idea that you're able to keep somebody out of the public eye for that long if you're Dolly Parton. That's kind of fa— I would wanna know the logistics behind that, 'cause that would be fascinating to... I just don't know how you do that. When I think about, like, just the realities of a relationship, like, how many places Justin and I go together... not that either of us are famous, so it doesn't matter now. But if one of us became famous, I don't know how I would— the other— I don't know how we would do that. Like, you know? The logistics are fascinating. [laughs]

Taylor: But, like, I don't know. Maybe her partner's just a real homebody, you know? Like, "Oh, you're going to Emmys? Have fun, goodbye!"

Raleigh: "Have fun at the Emmys!"

Taylor: "I'll make you some food. It'll be here for you when you get home."

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: "Have a good time."

Riley: Yeah. I— that's why— and I try to maintain this distinction when I talk about these, like, silly theories about her music and stuff. I don't like to engage with the ones that are about her personal private life, like her past relationships or her identity, or her current relationship, or anything. I feel like that's, like, taking it a little bit too far. 'Cause I feel like it's unlikely she's going to be dropping hints about her past personal experiences. But I do think she's been known to drop hints about what music she might release next, or like, what the name of her next album's gonna be, or something like that. Like, I will theorize about that kind of stuff all day, 'cause I enjoy her music, so I'm gonna speculate on what music is coming next.

Sydney: Sure.

Riley: But I don't know. It does feel very, like, invasive to be like, "Okay, but tell us all the details about your personal life. 'Cause I like your music." [laughs quietly]

Sydney: Yeah. No, I know what you're saying. And I think— I mean, I think it's one of those things that, like, not a lot of people really stop and consider, because it's so long been seen as, like, the consequence of fame. Like, well, sorry. That's what happens. You get famous, and everybody gets to be up in your business. And especially with Taylor Swift I think a lot of it leads back to like, well, if you're gonna sing about guys you used to date, then you started the conversation, not us.

And I think that it— hopefully we are at a point of culture shift where we have enough younger people saying, "Yeah, but I mean, can we stop, though? Can we stop now?"

Like, I understand that for years we just accepted that that's what it meant to be famous is that you had no privacy, but maybe not now.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, and it kind of bums me out. Because it's like, what is present on this album? There are a lot of songs that refer to feeling like... alone, or feeling like the bad guy, or feeling hated, or feeling ostracized. It's clear that the impact that celebrity has had on Taylor Swift— and she's not hateful about it, you know. She doesn't seem angry. But she feels really resigned to this level of sort of, like, baseline discomfort in her life. And it's like, that's not— you don't need, like, a secret code to see that. That's right there in the— why don't you just listen to the lyrics?

Raleigh: She's saying it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I think maybe have, like... have some awareness of that. Like, that seems to be the answer. And that idea that, like, celebrity opens you up to everything, I think she's responding to that in her music very clearly.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: I think that's why people like "Antihero" so much is because she said— before it was released she said "This is, like, the most I've ever shared about my deepest insecurities and the things I hate most about myself. Like, this song is everything I hate about myself."

And then I... it makes me feel a little bit bad. Obviously I don't, like, feel bad for Taylor Swift, but in every interview she kept saying, like, "Don't feel bad for me. Obviously I have a great life and, like, I'm very lucky. Don't feel bad for me. But... I also hate, you know, all these things about myself because of how I am in the public eye, and because of how I've been in the public eye since I was 14," or whatever. Um, so yeah. I don't know. It is a weird... weird, uh, double... I don't know.

Taylor: I think it's kind of a broken capitalist concept that if you give somebody enough money they should be able to be okay with abuse.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: There's not— there's not a— a bankroll high enough that can pay for you to feel better about horrible things that were done to you. I don't know. And that's not— I don't— again, like, I don't feel personally connected to Taylor Swift, but I do think that— I feel bad that she has to say "Don't feel bad for me. I have a great life." Like, yeah. Lots of people have great lives, and they still suffer.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, a great life on paper because you have millions of dollars isn't necessarily a great life.

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: Right. I think that's why also— which we probably won't talk about in here because it's a whole book and I'm not gonna make you all read a whole book— but Jeannette McCurdy who was on *iCarly*—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Oh, I'd read that book!

Raleigh: Yeah. She just released a memoir called *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: And it's about how everyone told her, you know, "You're a Nickelodeon kid. Like, look how popular— " or a Disney kid, I guess. Whatever— whichever channel it was on. "Look how popular you are. You're so famous. These famous people you're meeting, the money you're making. Like, how are you not just having the best life?"

And, I mean, of course it was all because her mother was forcing her into it and emotionally abusing her, and she was being abused on the set. Like, it wasn't something she ever chose to do.

Sydnee: Sure.

Raleigh: So it was very much like, why do we expect people— why do assume that people in this position have chosen everything that comes along with it?

Sydnee: Well, and it's— you know. It's the ultimate, like, that's how you also stall progress. If you're interested in keeping the status quo, if you're interested in keeping the, like, level of especially wealth inequality that we have in our system, it is really important that you keep people who are struggling for one set of reasons that have to do with, like, financial insecurity, like, fighting against people who are struggling for other sets of reasons, but are also very financially secure, you know? Like, let's make sure all these people— let's continue this— like, foment this hatred among them instead of looking at the system that harms all of us. And directing their energy together to fixing the system. You know, that's exactly why you have that. Like, so "You can't suffer 'cause you're not... you know, suffering financially. So no suffering can occur." Yeah.

Raleigh: Well, you know— and I joked about Joe Biden and ticket prices or whatever. But, I mean, it also, like— people are saying "I can't believe Taylor Swift would do this to her fans. We don't have thousands of dollars to spend on tickets. Her tickets are gonna be so expensive. Why would she do this?"

And it's like, well, it's not... her. It's the fact that now Ticketmaster and these stadiums and these companies are taking advantage of the fact that we just had a pandemic, and that this is a concert that people have been waiting for for half a decade now. And will take advantage of things like dynamic pricing, and gouging, and not doing everything they can to prevent bots because, you know, they want money. Like, they are the ones that are profiting off of all of us that aren't necessarily the most financially secure or stable.

Taylor: Well, doesn't— there were two songs on this album at least that mention something along the lines of "I took the money." Like, I feel like she's a— there's an awareness of, like... I don't know. I respect that. I feel like it's honest. Again, you don't have to— you don't need to look for secret symbols in her music videos.

She's being very honest on this album about, like, the cost of fame. And at some point, like, "I'm gonna take the money and do what I have to do to take care of myself. And what— what do I owe people that have constantly given the worst-faith reads of me, or misinterpreted me, or treated me horribly, or dehumanized me?"

And I respect that.

Rileigh: That's on "You're On Your Own, Kid" which is I think one of my favorite songs...

Taylor: Yeah, I liked that one.

Rileigh: ... um, on the album. Yeah. Because it's about how she's felt growing up in fame, and how she's been treated as a young person, and that part of the bridge where she says, I— you know, "The jokes weren't funny and I took the money, and my friends from home don't know what to say." Like, these things people were saying about her and jokes people were making, she didn't think any of it was funny, but it kept boosting her to this other level because people kept knowing, "Oh, Taylor Swift, the one that writes about her exes and her breakups."

Like, she took the money from that, 'cause it did get her fame. But also she feels disconnected from the actual person she was... before. I do love that song, though.

Sydnee: That is a good one. That's one of the ones I liked. Along with "Mastermind." I liked the one— "Snow... "

Rileigh: "Snow on the Beach."

Sydnee: "... on the Beach." I liked that one.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know why.

Rileigh: That one— it's a little disappointing to me. Um, just— I like the song, but just because in the past Taylor Swift has been notorious for— and I can

critique her. I'm not gonna sit here and say she does no wrong. She's been notorious for having females featured on songs and advertising them as, like, "Oh, look. I'm featuring this female group or, you know, artist," and then they don't have a verse. It's just like they do background vocals. Um, like when she did that song with Phoebe Bridgers. That's the first time that a woman had had an actual verse on a song of hers. So she advertised this as, like, the one feature on this album, featuring Lana Del Rey, trying to get all of Lana Del Rey's listeners to come listen to her music, and you wouldn't even know Lana Del Rey was in there.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. That is true. [laughs] It's a good song, but yeah, that is true.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah. I mean, she's done so many duets and features with male artists and groups. Um, so that one was a little disappointing just for that reason. But I do like the actual song aside from that.

Sydnee: Well, and—

Taylor: I like the, uh— oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: I was just gonna say, a lot of the time, too, I think what we fall into the trap, especially with female artists, is to try to ascribe motive to those sorts of things. When, like, she's just making music. She's making the decisions that are best for her music. That, you know, male artists do that all the time and are not subject to that level of critique of like, "But why?" You know.

Raleigh: Yeah. It's not malicious. It's probably just the music she's writing.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Um, I liked the "Karma" song. I thought that was cute.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, very— I don't know. I mean, Taylor Swift has gone through a lot of public stuff. Like, I like that that's maybe her takeaway from it. [laughs] Like, stuff will come around. I don't have to do anything.

Raleigh: You know, I love that song, 'cause it's so just fun and silly. Like, her saying, like, "Karma's a cat, purring in my lap, 'cause it loves me"? Like, that's just so silly. And it took me a while at first. I first listened to it and I was like, "Oh, I don't know if I like this, and this album as a whole." But I think it's just because she released two albums full of folk songs that were very lyrical and poetic and meant to, like, dissect the language, and it was just, like, these, you know, beautifully written things that had string instruments in the back and stuff. So I was used to that. This is Taylor Swift— this is Taylor Swift. I mean, she's the same one that wrote "Me." Like... this is Taylor Swift. It's just so silly and fun, and I love it.

Taylor: Like, I can hear that song and think, like, "That's a fun song." And then imagine, like, a 15-year-old being like, "Yeah! Karma! Karma's gonna come back to those people [through laughter] that smote me!"

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, Raleigh, you didn't mention the most important part of the "Bejeweled" music video.

Raleigh: What's that?

Sydnee: Of the— of who's in the "Bejeweled" music video.

Raleigh: Oh. Well, Laura Dern is in it.

Sydnee: Laura Dern is in it.

Taylor: Isn't Dita Von Teese, too?

Rileigh: Yes. And Haim, and Jack Antonoff, who is her producer on the whole album.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: And that's all—

Rileigh: [simultaneously] I think those were all the cameos.

Sydnee: That's all great. But Laura Dern.

Rileigh: Laura Dern is in it.

Sydnee: To go back to Laura Dern, Laura Dern is there. [laughs quietly] If we could all just take a moment to celebrate that, Laura Dern's presence. I love Laura Dern.

Rileigh: I know you do.

Sydnee: [laughs] That was my favorite part was the presence of Laura Dern. It's a good song, I like it. But Laura Dern is... is the best part. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Well, that's another one that she's saying something deeper than it sounds because of the music. But in an interview about it she said "I was so scared to come back to pop, because this was my next— " this was her next planned album. Like, this was what was supposed to be next after *Lover* in 2019. And then pandemic happened and she ends up writing the other two. Um, but she said she was scared to come back to pop, because she felt like she wouldn't be welcome. People expect a certain thing from her now, so "Bejeweled" is supposed to be like, "Well, look at me. I can still sparkle. I can still shimmer. I can still make fun poppy pop music." [laughs quietly]

[pause]

Sydnee: It is— I mean, it is fun poppy pop music. But I would say it's, um... it's different than before.

Rileigh: Yes.

Sydnee: There's a... I don't know what I'm trying to say. I don't wanna say, like, sadness. It's not sad. It's a...

Raleigh: It's more mature.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a... I keep lowering my hand. It's something, like, down tempo? But it's not even a tempo. It's a d— it's... I don't know. A calmness? I don't know what I'm trying to say. There's something different to it.

Taylor: Well, I do think there's something— I don't know. It kind of goes back to what you said talking about like with "Mastermind." There's something strategic about it where I feel like— and, I mean, I don't dislike it about it. But I think that Taylor Swift has been in the industry long enough to know how to make a hit album, but she's also sort of aware that it's a business, you know? That people have treated her like a product, so she's going to give you a product. And she's gonna make you aware that she's aware you're treating her like a product. And I'd— it's all there, and then it's just like a light, poppy album. Which, I... I don't know. There's a bit of menace to some of it, honestly, that I appreciate.

Raleigh: Yeah. She said that in her documentary that she feels like as a woman in music, you have to keep reinventing yourself every couple of years or else people get bored of you, and they'll just move on to, like, what's new and exciting, and then you're just over and done with, and your moment's over. So she said that's why she has these eras where it's, like, entirely different from what she did before, because she knows what people want, and it's just different from whatever she did before. Whether it's because people didn't like it or people are tired of it or whatever, she just has to do something different. So you're— I mean, that's exactly it. Like, she knows what is going to make her a lot of money and sell, but also does it in a way that still reflects at least some truth.

Taylor: I do think it's— some of the reads I've— and it's— specifically related to that "Antihero" song and the video that goes with it, um, that line... you talked about it last week, right? The "sexy baby."

Raleigh: The "sexy baby."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And that some people have been like, "Oh, no. Taylor Swift is finally, like, millennial cringe. Like, this album was millennial cringe." You know? Like, "Oh, I'm the bad guy. I'm the antihero. I'm the problem."

And it kind of, like... this album's a success. She's still successful. But, like, when Taylor Swift takes that turn, because I feel like that line— like, maybe she didn't realize that it was kind of out of touch, because you would assume everybody's seen *30 Rock* because you're of— you're older than some of your audience. Like, if she ever takes that turn and, like, goes far into like, "Oh, wait. People don't get me anymore. I can just do whatever." I'll be around for that, too. 'Cause I think that's fine, you know? [laughs]

Sydney: That is an important moment when you realize you don't have to— you could— you could set the relevancy. You don't have to be relevant by their standards.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm. I do wanna say, just because you had said this feels like her other stuff, but— and you kept doing the down— the down thing—

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: — there is a song called "Maroon," which obviously she had a whole album called *Red* and there was the titular song on the album called "Red." And I think if you listen to it, it feels like it's talking about a similar person or a similar story, almost. But because maroon is like a darker red, this is like a more... I don't wanna say it's, like, darker, but you know, more mature, more adult. Realistic.

Sydney: Heavier.

Rileigh: Heavier, yeah.

Sydney: I don't know. There was—

Rileigh: Also less idealistic about love and relationships, and more realistic about, like, what those things actually mean. Even, like, "Sweet Nothing" is the one nice little love song on this album, and it's not any more about, like, how exciting and wild and passionate love is, like some of her other songs were. It's just like, "Oh, you don't ask anything extra of me. You don't want anything else. That's all I want." [laughs quietly] "You don't want anything else from me other than just me being me. That's just all I want."

Sydnee: Well, um, before we wrap up I would say the one— I liked "Mastermind" the best. What are each of your favorite songs?

Taylor: Hmm...

Rileigh: Um... you know, I really liked "You're On Your Own, Kid" but I think "Would've, Could've, Should've" is my favorite. It's in the 3 AM edition. It's in the extra little seven.

Taylor: Yeah, I also would say I like "You're On Your Own, Kid." Um, I also liked the last song. I guess this was only on the— 'cause I listened to the 3 AM edition. I liked "Dear Reader." I don't know. It was kind of a weird outro. I liked that.

Sydnee: I listened to that too, yeah.

Rileigh: Well, that one I think is the most obvious up front, "This is me talking to you. Here's all the lessons I've learned and all the things I've been through, but also don't listen to me, because I'm... like, a broken person." [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: Yeah. It's, uh— I love the 3 AM version. I can understand that she wanted it to be, like, a concept thing, and 13's her number, so it's 13 songs. And I think that those 13 are very cohesive together. But I think that the other seven is just some of the best songs.

Sydnee: Well, Rileigh, thank you. I enjoyed it.

Rileigh: Thank you all for letting me talk about Taylor Swift for another hour.

Sydnee: Of course, of course.

Sydnee: [laughs] She's gonna come out with another album in, like, two months. Right?

Raleigh: I know. I was gonna say, when are we gonna talk about this again? Maybe after I go see her on tour. I don't know. [laughs quietly] If I do.

Sydnee: It was good, I enjoyed it. I liked the album.

Raleigh: Good, good. Um... Syd, what's next?

Sydnee: Something completely different. I want to talk about the 1998 Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore movie *The Wedding Singer*.

Raleigh: Alright.

Taylor: That you do.

Sydnee: It's very of the 90's. It's about the 80's, but of the 90's, and I think it works.

Raleigh: Alright. I have not actually seen it, so...

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: Well.

Raleigh: There we go.

Sydnee: I think you'll enjoy it. Alright, well, everybody should check out, uh, *Midnights*, or *Midnights 3 AM Edition*. Or any one of the 16 versions of this CD or album.

Raleigh: Or the lavender Target edition.

Taylor: [simultaneously] The special Target release. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: That you would like to enjoy. It was very good.

Taylor: There's one album buried somewhere in the continental US that if you follow the clues you find it, and it's got another song on it.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Rileigh: Listen to all 200 of her songs backwards [crosstalk].

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I personally like this one better than the last two, this album.

Taylor: Oh, really?

Sydnee: That's just me.

Rileigh: They're just very different, but I agree. It's more fun to listen to. I have to be in a mood to listen to the other two.

Sydnee: Um, thank you all. Thank you for listening. You can go to Maximumfun.org and listen to a lot of great shows there. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, you can tweet at us @stillbuff, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Rileigh: I am still buffering...

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

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: The next time we do this, I can say either Delegate Sydnee McElroy or I can say failed-attempt-at-being-a-delegate [through laughter] Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: Yikes!

Raleigh: That's a fun energy.

Sydnee: [laughs] That's exciting.

Raleigh: Oh, yay.

[music plays]

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Jackie: [laughs]

Laurie: — before we leave this— not only terrible business, but this awful world.

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Laurie: [laughs]

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