

Still Buffering 431: The White Lotus

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[theme song plays]

Sydnee: Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*, a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Well, Tey, how's your 401(k) doing? [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] ... Uh, man, one of the few times I guess I'm glad I worked in the food service industry my whole life, and have no concept of savings, or investments, or... I don't know, healthcare? I got nothing to lose, I guess! [chuckles]

Sydnee: It's a—

Taylor: You see these posts like, "Ah, my dad lost five million dollars in a day!" Like, you dad *had* five million dollars, kid! What's that life about? [laughs]

Sydnee: Charlie had done one of those things where, like, as a kid, you can put a couple dollars into things— like, to learn about the stock market.

Taylor: Oh. [laughs]

Sydnee: So she has, like, five dollars invested, or something, and I think she's lost it all. I don't know. [laughs]

Taylor: Oh, no. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know! „Cause I told her— I was like...

Taylor: [laughs] I just see Charlie with her little briefcase, and her suit on, staring up at the ticker.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: “Oh, no, what am I gonna tell the kids?” [chuckles]

Sydnee: “Oh, no. I’ve lost it all!” No, I— but I mean, it was about time we put tariffs on those penguins, you know?

Taylor: I can’t— If you— I— [groans] Mm...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Okay, let’s be— [sarcastically] Sydnee, it’s not tariffs on the *penguins*. It’s tariffs on the goods and services the penguins provide. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: But, like, if you wrote down a list of the things that have been done by this administration this week, it’s like a bad *SNL* skit of evil things that, like, an evil villain would do. Like, [sinister voice] “Hey, man, put taxes on the penguins...”

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: “And I stole money from the *orphans*, and I took away the Meals on Wheels from the elderly. Hoo-hoo! My next bill is to tie all maidens to the train tracks!”

Sydnee: [laughing]

Taylor: “They must be *biological* women.”

Sydnee: I don’t understand— I was thinking, like, “Man, this sounds so stupid with the Penguin Island. There’s gotta be something I’m missing.” Like, “There must’ve been something.”

And I saw somebody trying to say, like, “Well, this is just in case another country tries to use that island as, like...” I guess like a halfway point? Like, a shell island. You know what I’m saying? Like, we’ll do the trade from this uninhabited Penguin Island, and then it’s not tarified. So it’s not, like, a— You know what I’m trying to say?

But I don’t think anybody’s trying to use the Penguin Island that way.

Taylor: No, no. That’s not— It wouldn’t work that way. And also, it’s important to know that they generated these numbers through AI.

Like, this is... you know that the kid that doesn’t ever do his homework, and he just gets something spat out by, like, the internet? But he forgets to take out, like— Like, he copies the Wikipedia page, but he forgets to take out all the blue links - the hyperlinks - and like, all the...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... the citations, and stuff? Like, *that’s* what it is. Just, “Here we go; here’s our answer. We didn’t even check it. [laughs] We didn’t even just do a once-over to see if it was logical.”

Sydnee: Yeah. I think that that’s something that everybody needs to understand, is like... when you use ChatGPT to generate your term paper, or whatever. Your teacher’s gonna know. [chuckles]

Taylor: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: They *know*. AI is not— I’m not saying we won’t get to a time where AI is so good that you could get away with it. Probably, we will. But it’s not there, you know? We’re still—

Taylor: Well, but also— but you have to know, I mean... this is just some *Black Mirror* stuff going on, but what your teachers *have* is another AI program that they are now— it’s become very common to run your papers through...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: ... that tells them if it's AI. So they don't even *have* to, like, do the guess-and-check. They just ask— one robot writes your paper, and they take it to another robot because now... [laughs]

Sydnee: So all we have to—

Taylor: One of us wrote that!

Sydnee: What you need is to convince the robot that's writing your paper not— that it needs to not— the robot that's gonna check the pa— Like, they need to work together. You're gonna have to build a robot alliance, so that the AI program that reads your paper... covers for the AI program that wrote your paper.

Taylor: I don't— I mean, that's... I think a robot alliance will happen...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: ... but I don't think they're gonna be concerned with our term papers. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughing] Well...

Taylor: That's not— it's been a while since I've seen *Terminator*. I don't remember that plot point.

Sydnee: Do you— Okay. Now, here's a thought, though: do you think that...

Taylor: Mm, okay.

Sydnee: ... that them generating these tariffs... was step one?

Taylor: Oh. Well, we are handing them, like... "We don't care; make giant international decisions for us." And they're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah! This is gonna work out great."

Sydnee: "This is fine."

Taylor: “And by „great,’ I mean it’s gonna crash all of your economies! ... And, uh, then we’re gonna take over.”

Sydnee: Well, I mean, [laughs] maybe they typed in, like... “ChatGPT, start global trade war.”

Taylor: That could’ve been the prompt. That honestly seems, like... highly likely. Um...

Sydnee: It really feels like it— all of it— Every time I imagine how this was generated, I think of that *Tim and Eric* sketch with Paul Rudd and Celery Man.

Taylor: I... [laughs] You know, I have no understanding of what you’re referencing. Is it... are you gonna explain this to me in detail? „Cause it sounds like it’s gonna be...

Sydnee: I— [laughs]

Taylor: It might be, like, that thing where you try to tell somebody how a comic strip works, and it’s really bad. But I want you to go ahead and try. Tell me about Celery Man and Paul Rudd.

Sydnee: [laughs] Okay. What I will tell you is, if you’re listening - and, Taylor, when we’re done recording, you should watch— I’m sure it’s available...

Taylor: [laughs] Okay.

Sydnee: ... on the internet. You should watch the clip from the *Tim and Eric* episode where they— um, where Paul Rudd was on there, and he goes, and he sits down at a computer, and he’s like... “Computer, show me Celery Man. Computer, show me—” and they’re all just different graphics of Paul Rudd in different outfits, dancing.

And it’s like— I mean, it’s all absurdist. So, like, why is he sitting at a computer in a tie, drinking coffee, looking at images of himself in different

costumes, dancing? I don't know; that's the whole thing. But it reminds me of what the government must be doing.

Taylor: Mm. Yeah.

Sydnee: Except I guess it's Elon Musk sitting behind the computer.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Anyway.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I won't describe the whole sketch. It's very funny. [chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs] That's— that always helps. That adds a level of... [chuckles] I'm laughing, just thinking about what it might be like.

Taylor and Sydnee: [laugh]

Sydnee: I mean, I... Anyway, it's very funny.

Taylor: [through soft laughter] Sure.

Sydnee: You should watch it. But yes, I think that approximates what's happening. Except, I guess, now... I guess, now Elon Musk is against tariffs?

Taylor: Is he—

Sydnee: Didn't he come out and say, like... "Hopefully, there will be no tariffs eventually"?

Taylor: Oh, I don't...

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: Probably? I don't know. I don't... I don't wanna hear either of their voices.

Sydnee: Mm-mm. Mm-mm.

Taylor: It's like, such an immediate aversion any time. Like, I listen to the news every day, and it's like, if they... They'll tell me, "Trump said something insane!" And like, "Yeah, probably." But then they'll cut to the sound clip, and I'm like, "No! No... No."

Sydnee: I don't wanna know.

Taylor: Don't wanna hear it. Don't need proof. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I don't wanna know! I mean, we're all about to— That's the thing. I think there's a way to...

„Cause when I say that, people are like, "So you just don't wanna be informed?" No. I read about what's happening.

Taylor: [distorted audio] So do I!

Sydnee: I don't want to hear him say it.

Taylor: [distorted audio, unclear]

Sydnee: I don't want to look at him, or listen to him, but I will— I want to know what's going on around me, of course.

Taylor: Well, we're all gonna know— I mean, I know what's happening, because— I don't know, I'm in two group chats with a whole bunch of people that run restaurants. Like, everybody was just talking about how much, already, their costs are gonna go up. Like... their production costs— product cost going up 5%, like, overnight. But that doesn't sound like a lot, but if you know what restaurant margins are, you know that that just meant... just nuked, like, half the dining scene. Just is immediately not profitable.

Sydnee: Well, the—

Taylor: And it's just like, "Yeah, I... I see what's going on." [chuckles]

Sydnee: The booze!

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, the... I don't know why you don't— It's not that hard! You don't have to know a lot, to know that some booze comes from certain places. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I don't know— Yeah, I mean... [chuckles]

Taylor: It's just...

Sydnee: Very classically...

Taylor: ... surface-level knowledge.

Sydnee: Yeah. Very classically— I mean, like, we have— Mm... I can't even get into it. I mean, obviously whiskey, and scotch, and all that, but then wine and champagne, which can only come from France. I—

Taylor: Champagne can only come from France. Tequila can only come from Mexico. Uh, I don't know... I mean, scotch can only come from Scotland.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Um, there's a lot. There's a lot. And also, then everybody that we sell our good ol' American whiskey to, that will no longer buy it. Or that we won't be able to sell it, and it's just... yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean— and there's all kinds—

Taylor: [shuddering sigh]

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, and obviously there's more pressing things than the alcohol. There's, like, shoes are gonna get really expensive. ... Shoes? [chuckles] All clothes. All electronics. All cars.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I mean, a lot of stuff we - you know - need. Um... Yeah.

But I don't need to hear Donald Trump say it. I don't want to listen to him say it. Um...

Taylor: He's not— If I listen to him, it's not gonna make sense. I *need* an interpreter for what he's saying, and that is what the news is. [laughs] Like...

Sydnee: Sorry; my cat's trying to hug me from behind.

Taylor: [admiringly] Aw...

Sydnee: I know. She just reached up behind me, and tapped me, and now she's trying to hug my butt.

Taylor: She's like, "Hey, you're talking about depressing stuff. How about a little cat hug? Might get you through."

Sydnee: "Don't talk about that right now. You don't need to talk about any of that."

Taylor: "We don't have to think about that, no."

Sydnee: "No... That's okay."

Either that, or I really— I don't know; she's been so affectionate. Maybe I... Taylor, maybe I need to go to the doctor. [laughs]

Taylor: Sydnee, you *are* the doctor. Is there anything wrong with you?

Sydnee: I don't—

Taylor: Physician, check thyself out!

Sydnee: I don't think so! I could imagine— *Man!* I feel like the... that would be a bad day, as a doctor, if I go in as the patient, and I'm like... They're

like, "What brought you to the doctor today?" And I'm like, "My cat's been really affectionate with me lately, so I'm worried I'm dying."

[pause]

Sydnee: [snorts]

Taylor: Well, isn't that something that happens, though? Like, I don't know, you always hear about, like... cats that are allowed to— like, the nursing homes that allow pets...

Sydnee: Yes!

Taylor: ... like, the cats will gather around whoever's next to pass?

Sydnee: That's why I've been worried. But I mean, like... then the doctor will be like, "Well, do you feel sick?" And I'd say, "No, I feel fine." "Are you having any symptoms?" "No."

Taylor: ... Yeah, but like, there are lots of illnesses that can get really, really bad, before you start to feel anything.

I don't know!

Sydnee: You're not helping!

Taylor: I'm the wrong person to ask. „Cause I'm like, "This seems perfectly logical." I just know that my cat likes to mess with me, and sometimes he'll just at like, "Oh, no... Oh, no, you're not long for this world." And I think it's just a little game he plays.

Sydnee: See, I don't— Well, maybe that's it. She might just be messing with me; that would be very Olive of her, to mess with... aw, now a door's shut. *That's* what you're upset about! I shut a door... How dare I?

Well, anyway, um... [chuckles] Yeah, I don't blame you. I don't listen to either of their voices. I don't need to hear it. I will read about what's

happening. I will read about the mess, as it unfolds. And then we'll all experience it together.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And we'll get through it together.

Taylor: Well, uh, yeah...

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, you know...

Sydnee: [laughs] Okay.

Taylor: [laughs] Some of us... Some of us, together. Some of you, you deserve this. Probably not listeners to *our* podcast...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... gonna go ahead and make that statement. But, uh...

Sydnee: Yeah, I can't imagine you've stuck around this long...

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah...

Sydnee: ... if you're a big MAGA fan. [laughs]

Taylor: I would say, we used to get those emails years ago, the "I don't know why you need to bring your politics into this." But, uh, I don't think we get those anymore. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's like— What's that clip of Patti LuPone talking about it Donald Trump comes to see one of the shows she's in, and she's like...

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: ... "I won't perform! I hope he doesn't!" [laughs]

Taylor: „Cause I hate him!”

Sydnee: “I hate him!”

Taylor: [laughs] [sighs] I love Patti LuPone...

Sydnee: I know; me too. Uh, Taylor, did you watch the *White Lotus* finale last night?

Taylor: I did. I did.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Uh, it was... I actually— I hadn’t watched any *White Lotus*, and just in like the past two weeks, I’ve watched the first two seasons, and then got... current with the most recent one.

And, um, I would say that this most recent season was probably my favorite. I feel like it’s gotten better every season.

Sydnee: Really? I—

Taylor: That’s my opinion.

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean, I really did like this last season quite a bit. I found the ending a little sad, and so that probably - since that’s so fresh, that probably has tainted the whole season for me a *little*, just because I did find it sadder than the other ones, for me.

Taylor: Oh, we are going to spoil things...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: ... probably across all three seasons, but definitely the most recent one.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Um... Yes, it was sad. But also, I don't know... I was almost let down that I felt like, "I know who's gonna die," and then that's exactly who *did* die...

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: ... and—

Sydnee: Did you?

Taylor: Oh, yeah! „Cause I felt like they were just hammering it so much, like, with Chelsea's whole, like... "Oh, bad things come in threes, and we're gonna be together forever... We're gonna spend the rest of our lives together." It's like, yeah, you are, and I bet your lives are gonna be really short.

Sydnee: Aw...

Taylor: Like, there was *so much* buildup for the two of them just on a collision course with fate...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... that I think it would've— But I won't say that it was too, like... like it was a let-down that it was so obvious, to me. It wasn't, because this was such a cyclical season. Like, *everything* kind of had a meaning to it, and a cycle to it. And that was just the obvious end to their story, you know?

Sydnee: I think it was a lot about spirituality, this season.

Taylor: Yeah, absolutely.

Sydnee: And everyone's different sort of faith, or spiritual understanding. Like, they each come— I think they were representing different belief systems. Not— And I don't mean, like, literally like "This one is Christian; this one is Buddhist." I don't mean like that. Like, different... They each have faith in something different, and how that plays out.

Taylor: I agree with that, but I do think within that, there was an overarching sort of Buddhist...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: A lot of the concepts of Buddhism were sort of present, were sort of exemplified in the stories that these characters were going through.

Whether they failed or achieved some sort of tenet was up to the narrative, but they were expressed, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Um, I think it's been really interesting, the— I feel like *White Lotus* started out, in Season 1, very much sort of talking about privilege, and um... and colonialism, was a lot of Season 1.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um, and then that sort of— like, the broader idea of the way white people move through the world, and assume a level of privilege all the time, and that they've earned all of this, and then of course money, and how that plays into it.

And I feel like it really evolved into something... *more*, with this season.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Well, and the second season had more of that. There was so much about, like, the... there's a lot more about sex.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And also, just about, like... I don't know, seduction. Um... You know, like, sex work. It was a lot about— Like, I think each one kind of has its focus on how we use our money, and our... you know, our resources to court certain aspects of life. But yeah, I think this one definitely was the most spiritual.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

And it was. I mean, I feel like they're really good at having characters that, um... Even if you know that it's not a good person, you still really wanna watch them, and see what happens. And you're not even necessarily rooting against them...

It's that fine line to walk where, like, some of these are just terrible rich people. [laughs] And I'm not rooting for them, but I'm not against them, either. I don't know. I think that's a tough line to walk, that Mike White does so well with the show.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like, I don't want to see all of them suffer, necessarily. But I... I'm not upset if they do, either. You know?

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs] I think that's a hard line to walk.

Taylor: Well, and it could— „Cause part of the reason that I'd held off on watching it is because I thought it really was just... “Hey, rich people have feelings, too.” [laughs] And I don't know, I think we should be skeptical about all media in general. You should always be kind of asking yourself, “What is the ulterior motive here, with this story?”

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Especially if it's made by big companies, you know...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: “What are they trying to sell to us?” basically. And I think, right now, more than most times, selling the idea that “Rich people are people too,” and “Money really isn't all that great and really, it's about family and

love, and spirituality, and *these* are the things that really give you a rich life. Not all that money.” Like, that feels like a useful narrative...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: ... for rich people to put out there. And it seems like we’ve had a streak of shows that are kind of this. Like, you know, “Let’s focus on how miserable rich people are.” Which, to me, feels like could have an ulterior motive.

But even with that said, I think that that’s not really... The show does a lot more than that.

Sydnee: Well, and I think you’re right. „Cause I think— like, *Succession* always comes to mind, when we talk about that, as like a good counterpoint. Because these are rich people who are also miserable.

And it’s the same sort of thing, where like, you’re not rooting for these people, but at the same time, if it was just a show with a bunch of people that you constantly hated and wanted to see bad things happen to, I don’t think that’s a very fun thing to watch, right?

So you have to make it so that the audience wants to watch them, but also not care if they lose in the end.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: But yeah, I see what you’re saying. And I don’t think— I think the best example of that in this season is, like, the rich family from North Carolina.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, I am not sad to think about these people going back to losing everything. Right? Like, I am not— As they’re getting on the boat, and you know that they’re going to go— Like, the dad, I assume, is going to go to jail.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Maybe the older son, because he's wrapped up in the business. Even though it didn't seem like he knew what was going on, it's possible that by default, he ends up doing some time, too.

Taylor: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: Obviously, they're gonna lose everything that matters to them. Um...

I'm not, like, *sad* that that's gonna happen to them. [laughs] I mean, I got to know the characters, and I did feel some compassion for the children at times, and maybe even for the mom and dad, but... but they still value money, and privilege, and position in society, and what their country friends think of them - they value that above all else. And so this is what happens.

I don't know. I mean, I don't— it's hard for me to be like, "Oh, I feel so much sympathy for..." You know? [chuckles]

Taylor: Yeah, I don't feel sympathy for them, but I feel like that was such a beautifully-wrapped story. Because especially with the ending note, like... The father, who knew that they were going to lose it all, he spent so long plotting his death, his wife's death...

Sydnee: [chuckles softly]

Taylor: He kind of checked in with each family member, to be like, "Could you live without being rich?"

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And it was like, "Okay, the one person I'm not gonna murder is the one son that would be chill being poor."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "I'm gonna murder everybody else." And then he can't go through with it. And then his good son almost dies...

Sydnee: Yeah. Because of it.

Taylor: ... and that kind of— Yeah, and I think to that, that was a moment for him of like, "We're not losing everything. This is what losing everything is. *This* is what it's like to lose everything, is that my son dies in my arms."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And so, he *had* that moment of clarity.

So it's like, I don't feel sorry for them, „cause I in a weird way think they're going to be okay. He's the rudder of the family. You know, you see that when they're all trying their drinks, and it's clear - every one of them has a moment of, like, "This isn't a piña colada," but they're gonna drink it anyway.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I think that's when he realizes, like, "*I* steer this ship." Like...

Sydnee: Well, and I think that at first, what he's seen is he steers this ship, and he has, by pampering his family and giving them everything they could ever want, by providing for them - as he was probably taught to do, right?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like, there's that level of, like... It's a very traditional sort of "man makes money, takes care of his family" kind of view. Um, but by doing so, he has created a wife who can't— I mean...

Taylor: [laughing softly]

Sydnee: ... she can't fathom not having everything— you know. [chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs] She can't function without lorazepam!

Sydnee: Exactly! And his oldest son, who he's just turning into himself.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And then his daughter, who... [laughs] When she spends that night...

Taylor: Oh... [laughs]

Sydnee: ... with the monks.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And then comes back, and it's just like— and Parker Posey had called it. She's gonna hate it. Like, "That's fine. Yeah. That's fine, go sleep there. Go eat the food. Yeah, go. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I support you."

And she *knew* it. And then when she's proven right... [laughs] I found— I don't know why that moment really got me...

Taylor: Oh, same.

Sydnee: ... but the look on her face— on the mom's face when her daughter starts going, "The food is just..."

Taylor: "I could tell it wasn't organic."

Taylor and Sydnee: [laugh]

Sydnee: But that dad knows, like, he did this. He made this. He made them... like this, by giving them everything. Which is what he thought he was supposed to do. He thought he was doing what... "what a man does." He gave them everything they needed. And he's turned them all into people who can't function without everything.

Taylor: Well...

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a very— I mean, it is a well-told— like, that vignette within it is a very well-told story, and it's punctuated by the fact that, obviously, Parker Posey is doing...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... I mean, doing everything, and it's hilarious.

Taylor: No, she's fantastic.

Well, and I think that story... I mean, everything just interacted - all of the separate narratives interacted so beautifully together, but that story, specifically next to like... Belinda's story...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: ... who of course was the masseuse from season one, who comes back and gets her money. She gets, you know, awarded \$5 million dollars to... at first, you think she's gonna pursue her dream, open her salon with her new friend she's made. And then she does the same thing to him, that Tonya did to her, and then rides into the sunset with her riches.

Like, the idea that - I think a lot of us who are maybe not rich— I certainly am guilty of this. Think, "If *I* had money, I'd be different. I would do so many good things for this world, and I would be such a good person." And you know, I don't wanna say that I would be... Well, I wouldn't be tariffing penguins; I know that. Um...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [though laughter] But, uh...

But, you know, it shows, hey, here are these rich people that are now going to have to learn how to be poor, but then here is a poor person who is now rich, who becomes exactly the kind of person that we started off hating. Like, "Oh, that's just how rich people are. They throw people away. They don't care about others."

Like, how do we know who any of us would be on the other side of things?

Sydnee: It's really— I thought that was very well done. I agree with you; I think that was one of the most... It was kind of heartbreaking, „cause I feel like after Season 1, seeing Belinda kinda get, like... rewarded...

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... was really good. Like, I wanted that. And I mean, in that moment, when he offered her money, my thought was, "Take it."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Tonya— you know, Tonya would have done. She would've turned— She turned her back on you; she would take the money. Like... she wouldn't go to bat for you. Um... And I say that, loving Jennifer Coolidge.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: But, like, you know... Take the money. You *should* take the money. I mean, I was saying that out loud - watching it, saying, "Just take the money! Just take the money!" [laughs] Um...

But it is sad, because as soon as she does, she... That is what money does. And that's part of the point. This is... And, I mean, that's infected all of society. The quest for money, the desire for money, and then the attainment of money, and then the need to maintain and get more.

Taylor: Well, and it—

Sydnee: It takes place above everything else.

Taylor: And it's deceptive, because we've followed Belinda's narrative from the beginning that there's a part of me that kind of wants to justify her actions. Like, "Yeah, *but*..."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "She deserves it..."

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: You know, "She's gone through so much..."

And I think that's the reality of life, right? It's easy to say these kind of—you know, the idea of rich people that take everything from everybody and don't give back, heinous, but the individual people you know in your life - good, nuanced people that have reasons for doing the things they do. When the reality is, that is everybody finds a way to justify their behavior.

I'm not saying it's good; I'm saying we *should* hold ourselves to higher standards. We *should* be better to each other. But we all find ways to justify our selfishness.

Sydnee: It's also interesting, too - I was thinking about... Before it becomes clear - and this is where we're spoiling who dies. Somebody always dies in every season of *White Lotus*.

Taylor: Yeah, it always starts with a dead body when they do the flashback.

Sydnee: Yeah.

So the fact that Chelsea dies... um, at first, to me, struck as very unfair. Because unlike her friend, who's with... Greg, Gary...

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah.

Sydnee: ... that guy. Um, who very clearly says— I mean, she doesn't love this guy. She's with him for money, and she will follow the rules, and play along, and do what is needed to have the life she wants. And she's not going to give everything up for love, because that's not— that is not her faith.

Chelsea's faith is love. She has faith in the person who she believes is her soul mate, and she believes that staying true to him, and staying true to that idea that the two of them matters— And it's not just for her, right? It's

this belief that it matters to be with the person that you should, and that if you love each other, everything else will work out.

And she's being proven very wrong in the end, in a sense. Um, but... And it felt kind of crappy, because she's being punished for him choosing vengeance over love. He cannot accept the love he has, because he will always seek out the love he didn't get. Which she says to him, very clearly.

But I guess, at the end of the day, that is kind of... It's not fair, but also that's how life is, is what it's reflecting back. You know?

But it bothered me, at first. Like, her dying really bothered me. Him dying when he chooses "I am going to go for vengeance over love," makes sense within the sort of internal ethics of the show, you know?

Taylor: Well, and that's— See, it's interesting, because while I agree with you that that was sort of her faith, I think— This is why I do think this season was so influenced by... specifically kind of meditated on the concepts of Buddhism, because so much about Buddhism is about how suffering is caused by attachment. And her attachment was her downfall.

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: Just as much as he was attached to his vengeance and his anger, she was attached to her love. If he had been able to walk away, they would've been saved. If *she* had been able to walk away, she would've been saved.

Like, everybody in this particular rotation kind of had this question of, "Can you walk away from it, or can you not? Can you, you know, separate yourself from the thing you desire?"

Sydnee: It was just sad. I also really liked that character.

Taylor: Oh, she was great. I think... I don't know why she hasn't been bigger yet, but I bet she's about to be, like... I bet she's gonna be the next big thing.

Sydnee: I bet you're right. You know, it's been kind of interesting, watching interviews and stuff with her. Um... Because people are very focused on her teeth. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah! They— apparently, people ask her if they're real. [laughs] I think...

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Like, she's gorgeous, and I love her teeth, but like... who would... get that done?

Sydnee: Well— yeah. Like, that's usually what she says. Like... "Why would I..." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] It's just very specific.

Sydnee: I don't know. It's been funny; I've seen some interviews with her, and they *always* ask her about, like, "So a lot of people are talking about your teeth, and like..."

I guess some people are going and trying to, like, get a gap put in to look like her.

Taylor: It's not a gap, though. It's a gap, but it's also just the way that... They're like... Cindy Lou Who teeth. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. And she just— she has bigger teeth.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which— I don't know. Listen, I love some big teeth representation. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, she's got big teeth; she's got big eyes. She's got...

Sydnee: [laughing] I have big teeth.

Taylor: She looks like a Tim Burton character.

Sydnee: Yeah. In the best way.

Taylor: Yeah, no, absolutely.

Sydnee: I mean, yeah. In a totally great way.

I think maybe that's part of why I did feel sad at the season— I think she's very easy to feel sympathy for. There's something very earnest about her. There's something very, like, open. And it makes it harder, whereas like...

You know, Rick is, I think, a little easier to... [laughs] Like, you know, he's kind of crappy sometimes, he's kind of mean sometimes. I feel bad for him, but also, like... Did you just go all the way to Thailand to go murder somebody, or... ? [laughs]

Taylor: I've seen some people make the complaint like, "How did he not know it was his dad? It was so obvious it was his dad." And I'm like, yeah, again, this season was very obvious. I felt like...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... pretty early on, "Yeah, that's definitely his dad. Yeah, he's definitely gonna die. Oh, she's gonna die, too." [laughs] Like... Kind of like a... You know, it's like a Greek tragedy. All the signs are there. All of the, you know, symbols are pointing in certain directions...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: ... but these characters are doomed to play through these roles. And some people escape the cycle by being able to separate themselves from, you know, other attachments, and some people don't. Some people continue the cycles.

Sydnee: I don't know— It's interesting, in that - looking at the three blonde friends through that lens.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: [chuckles] That's how I think of them, "the three blonde friends." I don't...

Sydnee and Taylor: [laugh]

Sydnee: Because it was— it was funny, watching their kind of final... Like, their— it's not their very last scene, but it's basically the end of their story...

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Each of them are sort of saying, like, "I love you guys. I'm happy we did this." And then the two of them are being quite fake about it, I think.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, "I felt so good all week," "I felt so happy," like, "I'm so relaxed." And you know they haven't. Like, you know that they've been talking about each other behind their back, and squabbling, and like... You *know* that it hasn't all been happy, but the two of them sort of lie and misrepresent, say the things you're supposed to say at the end of a vacation, I guess. Like, "These are the appropriate, polite things."

And then the... Do you remember any of the— The movie star is Jaclyn. I don't remember the other two names.

Taylor: Uh... [with an unsure tone] Laurie, is one. Is that the...?

Sydnee: Laurie, and...

Taylor: The last one to speak?

Sydnee: Is that Laurie?

Taylor: I think that was Laurie.

Sydnee: She's the one I found most relatable...

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: ... which I also saw a TikTok that apparently means a lot of things about me.

Sydnee and Taylor: [laugh]

Taylor: *I* saw a TikTok that gave everybody a Zodiac sign of the season, and she was the Capricorn, so...

Sydnee: Ah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, of the three, I found her the most relatable.

Taylor: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: Chelsea was the one I found the most relatable, period. Like, I empathize very strongly with Chelsea.

Taylor: I think she was the Aries, actually.

Sydnee: I also— Well, she also says that on the show...

Taylor: Oh, she *is* an Aries, that's right.

Sydnee: And also, Walter Goggins is a Scorpio.

Taylor: That's— Yes! „Cause I thought of you and Justin. [laughs] Like, “Oh, that does kind of fit.”

Sydnee: When she [crosstalk]—

Taylor: There you go; there are your next Halloween costumes.

Sydnee: [laughs] Which— There's that clip of their interaction, where she says, "You're a Scorpio; you're so secretive." And he kind of rolls his eyes. And she said, "No, I'm an Aries! I need it all out in the open!" And he goes, "Ugh, I need some weed."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I was like, "It's me and Justin!" [laughs]

Taylor: I was gonna say, did you watch that episode together? Did you look at each other, and say nothing? [laughs]

Sydnee: [through laughter]

Taylor: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, that's right.

Sydnee: But I— Yes, Laurie is who I found, of the three friends, the one that I— „Cause I feel like you're always kind of like, "Who's right, who's wrong?" with the three of them.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I kept feeling like she was the right one.

She is the only one who says something very true. Like, that she did have a bad time... They *did* have a bad time! But also, the fact that they're still here together matters.

Taylor: Well, the—

Sydnee: But it gives her life gravity, you know?

Taylor: That idea that meaning— like, that time gives it meaning, I thought was really beautiful. And I think that...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... related back to what the monk was saying at the beginning of the episode, where he was talking about impermanence. How, you know, "Nothing is certain." That is, again, gonna tend into Buddhism. Like, everything is impermanent. Everything passes. Everything ends.

And that, you know, we search for things to cling to. We search for things to have meaning in this sort of desperate hunt that always ends up kind of empty, and fake. And in that moment, she's really— she's recognizing that, but the only thing that really matters is that... you know, like she says, "I'm just glad to be here at the table."

Like, "You have a beautiful face, you have a beautiful life." I love how she says that, „cause it's a bit of a, like, "Yeah, alright. What matters is that we're *here*. That we *were* here."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: That we... we live these lives. That's it. It just comes from the time.

Sydnee: And I don't know— Maybe, is that why they get... I mean, „cause they kind of get a happy ending, so to speak.

Taylor: Well, and that's— I think maybe that's that honesty. „Cause there's so much competition between them. That sort of fake posturing of "Who has the good life?"

I think - this is something they did in the second season. And I don't know if it really— I didn't really see an example of it in the first. But you know when you get the son, the father, and the grandfather in the second season?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And how they all kind of felt like the same person, at different stages of the same life?

Sydnee: Yes. Yes.

Taylor: I felt like the three women were three possible outcomes for one person. Even in they look so similar...

Sydnee: That makes sense.

Taylor: Like, I felt like there was a bit of that happening in the story. Where this person has the amazing career - you know, the actress - and *this* one has the perfect family, and then you kind of have the one that... I mean, is a bit rudderless.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And it's almost like she's looking at "What *could* my life—" And we all do this, you know, especially later in life. "What could my life have been? Who could I have— Whose life could I have today, if I just made different choices?"

And maybe the freedom, the happy ending, comes from that realization of, like, "It really doesn't matter." Time passes...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: We have good days, and bad days. You know, everybody has... secrets, and sadnesses, and darknesses, and failures.

Sydnee: It's also interesting, from a— if you look at the fact that they are women, like, specifically there's some stuff there about women trying to have it all...

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... and that more often than not, you get sort of shuttled in a direction. Like, you have the woman who has a beautiful family, but they have the whole political conversation, like...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... she is surrounded by people that she, at one point in her life, ostensibly would never have agreed with. Right?

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like, we get the sense that she was quite liberal, and now she goes to church with a bunch of Trump voters. And she's fine with that. And she's convinced herself she's fine with it. She's given up all of who she was... to be this mom/wife/whatever role that she's supposed to be.

And then the actress has pursued this career, and is famous for being her. You know, she's known, she's beautiful, she's got this career. But then, you call into question, like... This relationship she has with this guy, she's worried about it. She doesn't know if he's faithful to *her*. She doesn't completely trust him. And obviously, he shouldn't completely trust her, „cause she cheats on him.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So in this relentless pursuit of being exactly her, and being famous for being her, and having this career for being her, you know, she's kind of lost the other bits of it.

And then I feel like Laurie did try to have both, right? She had this great career. She was married, and had a kid. The career didn't bring her fulfillment. The marriage didn't bring her fulfillment. She's having some struggles with her child, they reference.

There's just no right— it feels like there's no “right,” quote, unquote, path. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Well, and that's...

Sydnee: Which does feel that way. I mean, that echoes how it feels, sometimes.

Taylor: Well, and I think that's— again, the idea of letting go, detachment, impermanence... Like, each of the other two women cling to what they *have*,

because what else is there? What is beyond that? "What do I have, if I don't have my beautiful family? What do I have, if I don't have my beautiful face? What do I have, if I don't have that?"

And then Laurie kind of sits there... not having... *any* of that, really, to hold up on a platter. And being in the moment, and being genuinely... happy to be there.

Sydnee: Yeah. I guess, instead of choosing both, she's chosen neither.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: It's always an option.

Taylor: Or that she's accepted that neither one was the answer. That neither one was, as you said, the religion, you know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I think that, like you said, with her Chelsea, her religion was love. But these are all kind of false gods. Something that you follow, to your own detriment.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: *Or*, you step away from that path. You know, you see Belinda kinda follow... Belinda followed the god of money, just like Tonya did.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And she started a new cycle that will... We don't know how it ends. I mean, she's now tied to Greg, who we know is [chuckles] a bad guy...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And who— you know, he gives away the money, but he's still filthy rich, and... I don't know, but also still deeply unhappy, it seems.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] And then we have the friend... Uh, Rick's friend.

Sydnee: Oh. [laughs]

Taylor: [through laughter] Just going for that supporting-character Emmy nod, I'm guessing. [laughs]

Sydnee: He is hilarious. His whole monologue, and then his relapse, I guess, at the end - it's all just wild. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: Except at the very end, they show him, like, back with the monks, so...

Taylor: Right, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: Which I don't know, there's even beauty in that. I think including that clip at the end was sort of like, "Yes, you know, you might stray, but you can... you can affirm your principles."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "It's not about the perfection."

Sydnee: You can always come back.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, we tend to think of faith and purity that way, right? Like, you have to be *good*. You have to be righteous. And I think that through him, we see this sort of really meandering, dirty faith, but that's really admirable.

Like, I *know* the right way to be. Sometimes, I mess up really hard. [wheezing laugh] Get back up, and on the path! That's alright.

Sydnee: "I'll try it again."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, and I mean, that's what his— his really was, like, he lays out a spiritual quest. But, um... „Cause his first religion, it seems, was sex.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I don't— I would say, probably, you're right that in terms of storytelling and meaning, and all that, this probably was the best season. I don't know, it really was sad for me in a way that like— The last two seasons, I wasn't— I mean, I love Jennifer Coolidge.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: I was not shocked with how that season ended. Her character...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... I mean, it made sense.

Taylor: It was so funny, the lead-up to her death...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: ... that it was hard— as sad as I was at her character, that the murderous gaze just... [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: That was a gift.

Sydnee: It was funny. And in the first season, like, it was... Again, sad, but I saw it coming.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Not shocking. I was not sad the first few seasons, the way I was this season. Which is not to say I regret— I loved it. I'm so glad I watched it; I think it was excellent. But it was... I don't know. I don't expect— because it is supposed to be about rich people... [laughs] who are kind of jerks, I don't want to feel sad. [laughs]

Taylor: Right. Well, I think the first season definitely was about rich people that are kind of jerks, and about how they go into these places that have their own culture, and their own history, and they just sort of take over.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: You know, all of the— that was a criticism of the first season, is that all of the... uh, all of the Hawaiians that work at the White Lotus are just sort of followed in the background, and it's just the characters that are the main focus. But I think that was on purpose, you know.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: That the staff becomes interchangeable, because these people only care about their own lives.

I think as it's progressed, it's become a lot more interesting than that. It's, one, made a point of including the staff as more prominent characters.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But also just—

Sydnee: Yeah, well, and it—

Taylor: You know. Better conversation.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I agree completely. „Cause I do, I think it was more narrowly-focused. I think the first season was very much about... I mean, it was. They go to this resort, and they have no concern for the culture, the community, the staff, the people around them... they're clueless. It wouldn't even occur to them.

I mean, Steve Zahn has that whole speech about “What do you want us to do, give the money back?”

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like, “Would that make you feel better?” Like, “No. You don’t wanna give the money back.” And he’s saying it to the girl who’s there, with his family on vacation that they’re paying for.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So it’s like, you know— I feel like it’s very much about... sort of that *Downton Abbey* upstairs, downstairs, like... the rich people and the staff, kind of drama...

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... and then it expands beyond that.

But it’s all very good. And I’m glad you watched it, and I’m glad we got to talk about it, „cause...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I have heard rumors this is the last season. That would make me sad.

Taylor: No, really?

Sydnee: I’ve heard that; I don’t know if that’s true.

Taylor: I hope that’s not true.

Sydnee: I hope— I know. I would happily watch more *White Lotus*. I think it talks about really important things! And I don’t— I don’t think, by any stretch, you walk away thinking, like, “Ah, rich people have it hard, too.” I do not think that’s the message. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, and I think about, you know... again, that recognition within yourself that, like, "Who would I be, given the opportunity to be in their shoes?" is an important conversation to have with yourself, to not keep this divider of, like, "If I were rich, I'd do the right thing."

Like, would you? It's an important question to ask. [laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And it's a good reason why we don't need billionaires.

Taylor: Also yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs] It's... yeah. But thank you, Tey.

Taylor: Thank you!

Sydnee: What are we... Oh, it's up to me, what we're doing next.

Taylor: Yes. I was like, "I know. I'll tell you." [laughs]

Sydnee: Okay. No, it was my turn. Spoilers: we already discussed it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So secretly, we know. [laughs] We're gonna talk about *School of Rock*!

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I can't believe we haven't. But, uh, Jack Black was— he just hosted *SNL*, and he's done a bunch of movies recently, so...

Taylor: He's in the *Minecraft* movie.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I'm not gonna see. But I will watch *School of Rock* again. [laughs]

Sydnee: I feel like I'm gonna have to see *A Minecraft Movie*.

Taylor: You're definitely gonna see it. You might see it a couple times.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'm going to be— yes, I will be required. I have watched *School of Rock* many times, because my children are obsessed with it, so... We'll just watch together.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Tey.

Taylor: Thank *you*.

Sydnee: Uh, thank you, listeners. *White Lotus* is on... I don't know what it was on.

Taylor: Max.

Sydnee: There. Thank you. [laughs] I was like, "I don't remember." It was on one of the streaming ones.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And it's very good, and I'm sorry if we spoiled it for you, but we did warn you.

Taylor: We definitely warned you.

Sydnee: Yeah. We warned you well ahead of time. Uh, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to maximumfun.org, and check out all the great shows there that you would enjoy. You can email us at

stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Taylor: This has been *Still Buffering*, a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I am still buffering...

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme song starts playing]

Sydnee: [quietly, under theme music] That would be the whole episode. We didn't have to talk about the brothers at all.

Taylor: No, I don't have anything to say about that. Nope.

Sydnee: Oh, and I didn't mention Chekhov's blender! [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] It's... or Chekhov's weird poison fruit that came together, at the end.

[theme song ends]

[acoustic guitar sting]

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