

Still Buffering 433: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes

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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: Uh, did the Easter Bunny visit you, Tey?

Taylor: Uh, no.

Sydnee: Aw...

Taylor: Well, I was my own Easter Bunny, I guess.

Sydnee: Mm!

Taylor: Because I did make myself a treat. So that's what happens, kids: when you get older, you have to be your own Easter Bunny. [laughs]

Sydnee: You made yourself a treat?

Taylor: I did! Um, I uh... Gosh, this is such an old person thing to be excited about, but I got my first, like, nice cast iron skillet, um, specifically so I could make cornbread in it. And I worked a long shift yesterday, and it was very busy because all of the people celebrating the weed holiday...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: ... wanted food, as you can imagine.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And so, uh, I came home, and I made a *beautiful* loaf of skillet cornbread.

Sydnee: Yum!

Taylor: It was really good.

Sydnee: That sounds delicious.

Taylor: It's... It's really good.

Sydnee: Well...

Taylor: It's the highlight of my week. Month, maybe. Who knows?

Sydnee: I think— I mean, first of all, a good cast iron skillet is very important. I'm certain you've done your research on the care and keeping of your cast iron?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, that's the thing that held me off from getting one for so long, was in my head, it was like an incredibly detailed process. It's like, you know, some Water Temple level...

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: ... situation, trying to keep it intact. But then, I don't know, I read a couple articles. It was like, "Oh, okay. No, you just... you gotta... Like, don't use harsh soaps."

Sydnee: Don't use soaps, yeah.

Taylor: And, you know, dry it— or heat dry it...

Sydnee: Heat dry it.

Taylor: ... on the stove, and keep it with a little sheen of oil on it.

Sydnee: Yeah. Put some oil in it, occasionally, and yep. So...

Taylor: Yeah, I think it's not that bad.

Sydnee: We have one. We've had one for a while. It was actually one of the first things that Justin and I bought together.

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Like, before we were married and we each had, obviously, our own finances. But we went to the store, and picked one out, and split the cost 50/50. It was like our first joint purchase. Well, also, there was like a doormat. We purchased a doormat... [chuckles] and a cast iron skillet.

Taylor: [laughs] Those are very adult things.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. And we called it Love Rug and Love Pan.

Taylor: Ugh. Okay.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Uh, [crosstalk] like this.

Sydnee: You know... [laughs]

Taylor: Blech.

Sydnee: But Love Pan, I was very— We bought it so we could make pineapple upside down cake.

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Yeah. But I was very, like, "I don't want things that I have to take that much care of."

Taylor: You have children.

Sydnee: Okay. That— Other...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: The only thing I really need to do that for...

Taylor: [laughing] I think children take a little bit more work than a cast iron skillet! I don't know, I only have the skillet. I don't have a child.

Sydnee: But they're living things that, you know, I love. So I am willing to put in the time and effort for my children. I do it for my cats!

Taylor: And you can put soap on your kids.

Sydnee: That's true. I can wash my kids. I could watch my cats, but they would not like that.

Taylor: No, they'd do that themselves. They— [crosstalk]

Sydnee: No. They would get really mad. Although Olive has taken to showering with me.

Taylor: Oh, that's...

Sydnee: She just sort of huddles in the corner.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know why she wants to be in there.

Taylor: Supervising.

Sydnee: She doesn't seem to enjoy it, but she does want to be present.

Taylor: Someone's gotta make sure you don't drown.

Sydnee: She's very worried - I think I've said this - she's still doing the nursing home cat thing, where she's like, always on me. Like right now,

she's right here at my feet. Like, wherever I am, she— Yeah, I'm talking about you. She needs to be pretty close, so...

Taylor: Well...

Sydnee: I hope I'm not secretly dying.

Taylor: I think that just means she loves you.

Sydnee: I hope that's it.

But I was very resistant to the cast iron. But Justin was all in, he was willing — So he does all the things to it. He seasons it. Whenever we use it, I leave it for him to clean. I'll do the rest. I feel like that's a fair distribution: I'll do the rest of the dishes, but I'm leaving this one pan for you. So I don't mess it up, and so I don't have to remember what not to do.

Taylor: That's fair. Well, as I was, like... I was looking around. There are *lots* of people trying to sell you lots of expensive things to take care of it with.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: So it does seem like you can really go down a rabbit hole [laughs] of, like, maintenance products for a cast iron skillet.

But I don't know, I can't remember the name. I found some article by a chef who was like, "Here's the easiest, cheapest way to do it that will 100% work," and that's what I've been doing. And it's been fine.

Sydnee: Well, as long as we're talking about old people stuff, you should check out *America's Test Kitchen*. [laughs]

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Because the thing about *America's Test Kitchen* is that it's recipes, and cooking implements, and pan, and tool, and whatever, kitchen stuff

advice. But it's all like, just straight up, "We tested everything, and this is the scientific best answer to this."

And this is *not* to sell you extra stuff. It's not frilly. It's not necessarily the fanciest. It's "We can tell you *exactly*—"

"Here's an article that tells you exactly, scientifically, how you take care of [laughs] your cast iron skillet, and this is *the* right way. And we know, „cause we tested hundreds of skillets, under hundreds of conditions, with bunches of people in this big kitchen. And we said, here, this is what you do with a cast iron. And also, this is the best one!"

Taylor: That sounds— Is Alton Brown involved in that? That sounds very Alton Brown adjacent.

Sydnee: He's not, but yes. Like, so *America's Test Kitchen* [crosstalk]...

Taylor: Spiritually. [laughs]

Sydnee: Huh?

Taylor: Spiritually, he's involved. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yes. *ATK* goes back pretty far.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Predates Alton. But I guarantee you—

Taylor: Okay!

Sydnee: Yeah, I guarantee you Alton drew inspiration from *ATK*. „Cause, like, it really is about, like, there are right and wrong ways to do things, if you're trying— Like, are you trying to achieve this result? Well, cooking is science, so like, we can find ways to achieve this result that we know work.

And, I mean, I know that then you get into, like, "Well, but if you put a twist, or a spin..." And also, like, *ATK* occasionally will take on recipes—

Here's the thing you have to know about *America's Test Kitchen*, if you've never watched it. It feels very New England. Everything about it feels like, I don't know, like we're in Connecticut. [laughs]

Taylor: Saying "very New England" could mean many things. [laughs] I really...

Sydney: It feels very...

Taylor: Are we talking about, like, flannel, are we talking like outback of a Dunkin's with a cigarette? These are both [laughs] very New England.

Sydney: No, we're talking about, like, white, upper middle class...

Taylor: Okay, okay.

Sydney: ... farmhouse, like... can skew a little bougie at times, you know what I mean?

Taylor: Mm. Yeah.

Sydney: Like, and so when they take on recipes that originated in other cultures, sometimes...

Taylor: Oh, no, no.

Sydney: ... I'm like, "Well, we actually don't have to scientifically tell, you know, Vietnamese people the best way to make phở, or something." You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah, like...

Sydney: Like, maybe don't. Maybe don't do that. [laughs] Maybe just stick with, like, "The way you roasted that lamb looked *incredible*." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] I'll check that out.

Sydnee: But it's a lot of fun. I really love *ATK*. I... I would recommend it! I mean, they have websites and stuff, too, but like, they have a show.

Taylor: I'll have to look into that, „cause I do enjoy that type of... treating cooking like science. I mean, it is, but you know... I was—

Sydnee: And they—

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, I was gonna say, they have a bunch of hosts now, which are a more diverse cast. But the two main hosts, at this point, are both women.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: Which is kind of nice. So, like, they— Julia and Bridget, they're wonderful. Anyway... [chuckles]

Taylor: I was gonna say, I checked in with Alton last night, because I was... The recipe that I *have* been using for my cornbread uses baking powder, but I was trying to figure out how to incorporate an ingredient, and so I was looking at a different recipe that used baking *soda*.

And I was curious. Like, I know vaguely what both the— I always thought of baking soda as baking powder— like, it's an element of baking powder. I understood that much, but I didn't understand beyond that.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And so I found a video where Alton Brown talked about the difference between the two, and how they aren't really the same thing, and then how you use— Like, why you sometimes use both of them at the same time. And that's what I ended up doing.

Sydnee: Mm!

Taylor: So baking powder with a little bit of baking soda. And I will say, I think it did give me the superior result.

Sydnee: Really?

Taylor: But it was cool, because sometimes you throw stuff in a dish, and you just think, "I don't know what happens." And it feels magical. And then you get into it, it's like, "No, it is literally like... very measured science that's happening, where there's available assets that are interacting with available bases. And if these are in balance, I will get this result."

And it's a lot more precise than you wanna think. [laughs]

Sydnee: It is. Especially— I mean, specifically with baking. Because you are— Like, with flour and baking soda and baking powder, a lot of those ingredients, it's just like, "I don't know. I just dumped various white powders into a bowl." [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: [through laughter] Like, it feels like— I don't know what any of this— And, I mean, even as somebody— Like, I studied science. I have a degree in science. I'm still kind of like, "Eh, I'm not really sure what's... I don't know what's gonna happen here." [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: "But this mush is gonna become something fluffy." [laugh]

Taylor: It's really fascinating, just all of the little chemical processes that happen.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And then, you know, one interacts with another, and then that interacts with both, and then you end up with a... you know, a brown butter, or a nice, crisp crust.

Sydnee: Well, we had a strange Easter weekend - we had a long weekend, the kids were out of school extra days. And in one day, we got the— So

there's a local Facebook group that tells you— Like, somebody listens to a police scanner, and is constantly posting it on Facebook. [chuckles]

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: That kinda vibe. And then all other sorts of... I say neighborhood gossip. It's like a city, but we're a small town.

Anyway, the Tudor's on Route 60 caught on fire.

Taylor: Oh, no!

Sydnee: Yeah. And, I mean, listen, Tudor's Biscuit World is very important to Huntington.

Taylor: Yes!

Sydnee: Now, is it the only Tudor's? No, there's other Tudor's, so don't worry. But I mean— People were okay, but we were very worried about, like, the Tudor's.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like, obviously, most important thing, no humans were harmed. But, like, also...

Taylor: I mean... [laughs]

Sydnee: ... Tudor's.

Taylor: To a biscuit, that's the entire world.

Sydnee: Exactly.

But, like, the same day— Tudor's Biscuit World is on fire, and I mean literally, like, people are melting down on Facebook. They're like, [melodramatically] "What am I gonna do now?" [laughs] Literal first comment.

Taylor: Go help put out the fire!

Sydnee: “What am I supposed to do now?”

Taylor and Sydnee: [laugh]

Sydnee: Literal first comment.

Um, but then the same day— We’re outside, it was a nice evening. We’re sitting outside. And we hear a loud explosion.

I’m like, “Did everybody just hear that? I think something blew up.” Don’t see anything.

And so I check the Facebook group, and everybody else is like, “Did anyone just hear a loud boom in *this* area?” Like, all different parts of the city. So *all* over the city, we’re talking about this.

Taylor: Oh, wow.

Sydnee: From East to West, people are discussing, “What was the loud boom?” And then, about 10 minutes later, I’m like... [sniffs] “Does it smell bad out here?”

Taylor: Oh, *no*.

Sydnee: “What is that *smell*? What am I smelling?”

Taylor: It’s something septic?

Sydnee: “There’s like a sulfur smell.” And so I’m like, “Guys, I think something blew up, and now we’re smelling something. Like, this is weird.” And then the next thing on this Facebook page: “Do you smell that?”
[laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: The entire city! Um, everybody's freaking out. Like, what are we smelling? And then people are right across the river, in Ohio and Kentucky. They're saying the same thing. And like, "What happened?"

And we finally find out, a transformer in Ashland, Kentucky - which is really close to here - exploded. Caught the entire hillside on fire, including the KFC.

Taylor: Oh, not the KFC!

Sydnee: Again, people are okay, but the KFC...

Taylor: I can't believe that you can smell the transformer from that far away!

Sydnee: I assume that's what it was. I mean, we heard an explosion. There was a weird smell for a while, in the air. And then there was wild footage of the entire hillside on fire. I mean, it was... I do not think this was a sustained— Like, everything ended up okay.

But a transformer exploded, next to the KFC.

Taylor: Yeah. It's an exciting day.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: See, I like the communal aspect of that that you all have, that you all respond to it and take it seriously. I mean, we have a lot of stuff that goes on in New York, and I don't use it as much anymore, because it was just too much stress, but there's the Citizen app that a lot of people are on.

Sydnee: Yeah?

Taylor: People can report things going on. And there'll be, like, a little map that shows you what's going on with a color coding for how severe it is. Like, if it's a murder, it's a red dot.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Teylor: If it's a car crash, it's a yellow dot. You know.

Sydnee: Okay.

Teylor: Yeah. Like, I don't know. I've been— There was one day I remember I was out in the park, running. And the park was very crowded, it was a beautiful day, and I got a Citizen app alert. And it was "Man with machete," and it was like half a block from me.

And I'm looking around, I'm like, "I really don't wanna stop my run. I really want to... [laughs] get these miles in. There's a lot of people around me."

Sydnee: If anything...

Teylor: I just keep rolling. [laughing]

Sydnee: If anything, you should, like, speed up your run, I think, Tey. [laughs]

Teylor: [laughs] That's true! I was like, "I'm just gonna run in the opposite direction of this..."

Sydnee: [chuckles] "Let's just run faster."

Teylor: Yeah, I guess that's true. He's not gonna go for a *moving* target. There's lots of people just lounging around on blankets; I'm fine.

But there's not the same communal response. It's just like, "Oh, word. Okay." And then you go about your day.

Sydnee: No, in Huntington, it is like if something's going on, everybody wants to know. Everybody's commenting. If people have an inside track, if it's happening next door to me or that's my cousin, they become the main character of the page for, like, a few hours. Where everybody's like, "Oh, my gosh! You know about the event that's happening? Tell us more!"

I mean, people get really intense. It's called Huntington, WV 911. [chuckles]

Taylor: Now, I see why you won't give up Facebook. [laughs]

Sydnee: It's— Local stuff on Facebook is good. There's a lot of crap on there; don't get me wrong. And yes, I would just encourage you, [chuckles] if you're still using Facebook, don't be friends with people who are just gonna make you mad all the time. [laughs] Don't read those posts, and don't comment.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: You don't wanna know what your uncle's putting on Facebook, let's be honest.

But at the same time, for local events... I don't know. It is a hard thing to give up for local stuff, I will say. Especially for a community our size, it's how a lot of people stay connected.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: There was a— We were outside this morning, and we heard... Again, I thought there was a boom. There was some sort of noise in the distance. [chuckles] And then Charlie went, "Not the Arby's!"

Taylor and Sydnee: [laugh]

Taylor: Oh, Jesus.

Sydnee: I thought that was pretty good. I was like, "Ah, yeah..."

Taylor: Making elaborate fake disasters to explode all of your fast food joints.

Sydnee: It did— I mean, like, putting my conspiracy theory hat on there, I did have a moment where, like, "Two fast food restaurants in one day?"

Taylor: "It's gotta be related."

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: "Can't be coincidence."

Sydnee: "Is this what RFK's gonna do?"

Taylor: [laughs] He's just gonna blow up all the fast food.

Sydnee: Is that what he's trying— Like, to make us eat a carnivore diet, or whatever it is? What's his— I don't know. What's his weird, fake thing?
[laughs] Probably.

Taylor: Uh, what... Is he a raw milk guy? He seems like a raw milk guy.

Sydnee: He's a raw milk guy.

Taylor: [goofy tone] That seems like a raw milk...

Sydnee: Yeah, no, he's a raw milk guy. But I think he— I'm pretty sure when he came to West Virginia, and told our governor he was overweight and then made fun of him...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Um, which he did.

Taylor: That's not— I'm not laughing at— That's awful to say, but our governor's also a...

Sydnee: Terrible. Terrible person.

Taylor: It's just bad people saying bad things to other bad people. Alright.
[chuckles]

Sydnee: Right. Like, and granted, I do not— Like, he should say, like, "You're a terrible person who wants to hurt some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and who has done terrible damage to West Virginia." Say *that*. Let's not talk about how he looks; let's just say that.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: But anyway, he said he wants to put them on a carnivore diet. So I think that's his thing: meat and raw milk.

Taylor: Oh, God.

Sydnee: That's, like...

Taylor: [groaning, exhausted] Oh...

Sydnee: ... your nemesis, Tey, as a vegan. Somebody who's just like, "Meat and raw milk."

Taylor: Yeah, well, as a vegan that believes in science, yeah. [laughs] I mean, that...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, those are two things I hate. Stupid people and meat, two of the things I hate the most.

Sydnee: He's terrible. And I did wonder, is this his war on fast food?

Taylor: No, because there are too many corporate shareholders that make money off of fast food. So that...

Sydnee: And Trump *loves* it.

Taylor: Yeah, I was gonna say, the fast food will be safe. They'll find ways around... that.

Sydnee: Uh, I feel like this is a good segue. I feel like we've been discussing *District 12*, in essence, for a while here. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. We're— That's perfect. *Hunger Games*.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Can I just say, like, the titles are getting— The titles are a little much.

Taylor: Well, I think that's the—

Sydnee: I'll never remember.

Taylor: That's the "muchiest" much, because what do we have next? We've got, uh, *Sunrise on the Reaping*?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I can remember that one. But every time I was saying, like, "Oh, I've gotta watch this movie this week," or whatever, "We're doing this episode, what was that... Songbird, Snake... Snakebird?" [laughs]

Sydnee: "Snakebird..."

Taylor: "Bird Snake Movie." [chuckles]

Sydnee: I mean, the one with the good mu— The music is good. Like, it's the one with the good music.

Taylor: [laughs] It does have good music!

Uh, this... In preparation for this episode, this was my third watch through since it's come out. I will say, the first time I watched it - and I don't know if you experienced this, because you partake of a lot of musical theater, so maybe it is different for you, but for *me* - the first time I watched it, I was just like, "This is... just a lot of singing."

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: It feels like the amount of singing that is here would not happen, realistically.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: This is perhaps too much singing.

Sydnee: It is a lot of singing. *I* feel... Well, I wonder, too, like... Rachel Zegler has a good voice.

Taylor: Amazing voice.

Sydnee: Were they just taking advantage of, like, you know... "She's talented, and she has a great voice, so we're gonna put as much singing as possible"? Like, obviously the character sings. Like, that's— I'm assuming, in the book. I didn't read the book, but like, I'm not saying they made that up. But they really wanted to put the singing up there.

Taylor: I could see that being, you know, purposeful. I mean, don't get me wrong, the second or third time I watched it, I was like, "I remembered it being more intrusive. It's actually fine." So it could've just been... [laughs] just needing to do that.

Sydnee: No, it is a lot of things— Well, the numbers go on for a long time. It's not like a little snippet of "And now she's singing." It's like, we're gonna watch her singing.

Taylor: There are times where she'd sing, and I'm like, "No one would let her sing this loud. How is she still singing?"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [through laughter] "No one would let her sing this long!" Someone would've stopped her.

Taylor: I'd— Well, okay. The first time that she sings is when she's being reaped, right? That's the...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah. And there's a fight, and she gets— She's up on stage, after the reaping. And she gets the mic, and she sings. And I mean, they've established that the people in power are this horrible, authoritarian regime, and they all just kind of, like, "Well, let her sing."

Sydnee: "Let her sing."

Taylor: I guess there's the wrap of, like, "Oh, it's good for TV," but like, [laughing] it does seem like she's just allowed to stand up there and sing for a while.

Sydnee: Well, I agree. I think that's weird. I will say that I— Did you read the book?

Taylor: I have not read the book.

Sydnee: Okay. I didn't, either, so this isn't a judgment thing. But it made me wonder. So I had read the other books before I saw the other films, and so to me, watching— I mean, I already knew it was gonna happen, right?

Having not read this book, there was an element to watching this movie where I kept thinking, like, "Did I start it, like, 20 minutes in? Did I miss something?"

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: I felt like... I feel like if you haven't read the book, there are almost moments where you're, like, trying to catch up to, like, "Wait, why did... Oh, she put the snake down her dress. We find out later, it's because of this, and so... she was dating that boy, and that's her dad, and—" You know what I mean?

Like... I wonder if all that was spelled out really clearly in the book, and they're kind of using a shorthand in the movie „cause they assume you've read the book? I don't know.

Taylor: I feel like that is just a shift in movie scripts specifically dealing with already popular properties. „Cause the same thing happens a lot, I'm sure,

to people that are not familiar with comic books watching comic book movies.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: There are so many moments. And I mean, I've read a lot of comic books, but I'm not always versed in whatever the movie's about. And there are lots of movies that have those moments that if you know the source material, it makes total sense.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: But if you don't, there's a little bit of a leap of faith involved. Sometimes big leaps of faith, where you're like, "Wait, why am I supposed to be excited? [laughs] Why is the whole audience excited about this random man that showed his face for two seconds?"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "I don't know. Okay." [laughs]

Sydnee: I think that's true. I mean, I think you could— And I think even going back to the *Twilight* movies, I think there's an element of that.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: „Cause I read those books, and watched those movies. And then the fantasy series that shall not be named... I think you could level that criticism that...

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: ... some of the movies... [sighs]

Taylor: You could level a lot of criticism that direction. We won't do that.

Sydnee: Well, at the individual responsible.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But, man... Ah, it's so hard to, like, just have to... All those things about learning about stuff you love, and then finding out that the person who made it sucks...

I know. We're preaching to the choir with this one; I feel like a lot of our listeners have [amused] probably had that moment.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah...

Sydnee: But anyway...

Taylor: Well, so Suzanne Collins is alright, right?

Sydnee: As far as I know!

Taylor: I don't need my fantasy writers to be leading the revolution. It's great if they want to. I just need you to not be horrible, awful, stank people. Can you just not do that? Like, you could be a little bit of a jerk out there, in the atmosphere. That's fine. Just don't be evil. Don't be abhorrently evil.

This keeps happening, where it's like, somebody pulls the curtain back. And like, [shouts] "Ahh! [laughs] You were *awful!*"

Sydnee: I don't understand— I mean, this is a little off topic, but I feel like people are not... Are people not hiring PR people anymore? Are you not hiring someone to tell you, like, "Oh, don't say that," or "Don't do that," or "Don't say it like that"?

Like, if you're famous, I thought you were supposed to have somebody in your life who told you, like, "Don't do those things." I'm just— I'm thinking about the lady's trip to space, or whatever they called it.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. [laughs] "Have you been to space? You should go to space. Oh, and what..."

Sydnee: I wasn't—

Taylor: [stammering] “What— Te— When you give me the \$10 million dollars, sure. Yeah, I’ll think about it.”

Sydnee: I didn’t go to space; I was *holding* space.

Taylor: [forced laugh]

Sydnee: You’ll never know how much love is inside you, Taylor, until the day you launch.

Taylor: So much wonder. You looked at the Earth, and you finally saw how beautiful it was.

[sighs] I... I—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [sighs] That’s...

Sydnee: Was there nobody standing there, going, “This is not gonna go well, Katie”? “This isn’t good. I understand it’s space, that’s cool, but it’s not gonna play well.”

Taylor: Put the flower down.

Sydnee: It’s not gonna play well.

Taylor: No, no...

I guess the rhetoric— „cause we heard it from some of these *women*, boss lady, space boss, boss woman, go boss, boss girl, go to space. Space boss!

Uh, we heard that the rhetoric of, like, the wonder and awe that you have at the Earth and how truly beautiful it is when you see it from outer space— And this is not the first time you’ve heard this, you know. Billionaires spending lots of money to go to far-flung areas of the world to feel something is a recurrent thing.

And as much as it angers me, it does kind of make me feel good in the sense that, “Hey, you know what I don’t need to do? Go to outer space to feel wonder at the world.”

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, I don’t— I’m sorry that you’re so *supremely* broken inside that you need to have an incredibly— Like, an *insanely* unique experience just to have one little, like, flick of light in your soul. The *rest* of us walk around with it all day, every day.

Sydnee: And this has nothing to do— Everybody was like, “It’s sexist that we’re criticizing these women.”

Taylor: No, no, no. [laughs] No, no.

Sydnee: No, no, no. This has nothing to do with them being women, because two of the richest men in history both decided that, with their untold billions, they needed to build private rockets, and go to space in them.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So that they could say they did *that*. So... you know. [chuckles] This is not a gendered issue.

Taylor: No, no. And there were, like, qualified women in the crew that were definitely overshadowed by the celebrity [laughs] element. But also, they weren’t manning the rocket.

Sydnee: No. They’re not astronauts.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: I— [laughs] Anyway... Back to—

Taylor: Very Capitol activities there. [laughs]

Sydnee: Right? *Very* Capitol activities. Like... [laughs]

Um, it was a— Okay. I had not read the book. I had heard many times that I should, but I really— I knew it was focused on Snow, and his backstory.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: So I guess that's kind of what we're gonna do now, is like— „Cause the next one is about Haymitch. And so we're going back, and kind of getting these backstories of these other characters, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know. Maybe someday, she'll jump to the future. We'll find out what happens next.

Taylor: Oh, I would like that.

Sydnee: That'd be cool. Um, so I really didn't have any interest in knowing anything about Snow, „cause I found him so reprehensible...

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: You know? Like, I don't... And we've talked about this a lot on the show, I'm not always in for, like, a "Oh, let's understand how they got so broken, and why they would be such a—" You know, "Let's give them space to—" Sometimes, you can just let „em be a bad person. Just, like, "Well, it's a bad dude. I don't know. He's evil, he's a villain." But it really wasn't that, I will say.

All that being said, I do not feel like this was a redemption.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: I don't feel like watching the movie— I mean, I don't know how he plays in the book, but in the movie, I don't feel sympathy for him.

Taylor: No—

Sydnee: Like, he was always a jerk. He was a privileged jerk who lost his privilege, and was *desperate* to get it back.

Taylor: That's what I— Well, I would say to your first statement, I found it refreshing that, yeah, I don't think it gave you any great sympathy for him.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I think it showed you that there was a point where he kind of... He chose his path. He was kind of always that guy, there could've been ways he could've stopped being that guy, but he was... always as evil as...

Sydnee: Yeah, he was that guy.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, he... It wasn't just that his family was struggling. I mean, I think that would be a really easy read, is like, "Well, I mean, look. He was struggling to feed his..." whatever Tigris is, his cousin?

Taylor: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: "... his cousin, and his grandma, and times are tough, and life is so hard, and look at that..." No, it wasn't just about struggling to feed them. He wanted them to get back to the level of power and wealth and privilege that his family had had, prior to his father being killed.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like, that's what *he* wanted. He didn't just want to take care of them; he wanted more.

Taylor: Well, and you see, like via his granny and then, obviously, his father's involvement in the Game, that there's a real hatred for the Districts that's baked into it, you know...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And, I mean, there is that shot at the beginning, when him and Tigris are small children, and you know, you see them in the war. Like, they have those scars. But it's not...

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: ... that hatred for the Districts that carries him through this movie, that kind of powers his actions...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's, you know... What the movies are tackling, that sort of legacy of hate, that just continues to compound on itself. And so if that's what he chooses for himself, that's his choice.

Sydnee: Well, and he wants to get back into it. I mean, that's the whole thing: he wants— Like, to him, what else could you want, than to get back to the Capitol, and have money and power, and live a very luxurious life there?

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: The idea that Lucy doesn't want that, that's not something... Like, it's not like she can't have it. Why would she want that?

Taylor: Well, it's...

Sydnee: That's not... You know.

Taylor: Yeah. And that he's her pathway to that, you know. It's not... He never has the moment of, like, "Oh, wait. District people are people, too. Look, I'm capable of loving one, so maybe they're all worth something." It's like...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I don't even know if he *loved* her. I mean, I don't know if there was ever an actual goal *to* be with her.

Sydnee: I don't know that he did, either. I think... I think that the idea of her as a songbird is a pretty good representation. I think he liked to listen to her, and look at her. I think he would've liked to keep her sort of caged with him at the Capitol, as like a pretty adornment to his life.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: But I don't think he had much appreciation for her as a whole human. It was more as an idea. As an *idea*, I think he loved her. But I don't think he saw her as a person.

Taylor: Oh, that's a very good point. Like, quite literally, he meets her in a cage...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: ... and that is when he is enamored with her.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I think he likes her that way. And I think, you know, he likes watching her perform in the District, and you see him enjoying that. But he has no interest in, like, "Now, let me learn all about you, and listen to the words you're singing, and understand the pain behind your songs. And the harm that the people that I come from have visited upon, the people that are around us—" He has no interest in any of that.

She's just... It's *pretty*. It's nice, it's pleasant. It's very surface, I think.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I mean, I'm curious if this is spelled out more in the books, and I'm curious if you saw it the same way I did. Which I don't think—

The first time I watched it, I think I might've... You know, it always takes a minute, a couple rewatches, to really look into something, sometimes. And for their relationship, both ways, rewatching it, I don't think she cares about him, either. I think she's very smart, and using him as much as she...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And being very careful with him, and that kind of leads to the head at the end, where he's used her for his means, she's used him for her means, and then there's this...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: On the surface, they're two lovers escaping together, but really, [laughs] they're these two kind of enemies that come to this battle, at the very end.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, I don't think she cared about him at *all*, really.

Sydnee: No. Well, and I mean, I think it would be very easy— It's about songbirds, and snakes.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: It's about her. She is the songbird, and then obviously there are literal snakes in the book. But I think there is also the question of, what is she? Like, not that she's a bad person, but she's not all... um, weak and lovely, and fragile, and... you know, she's *not* that.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: If she has to, she's capable of doing harm.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If she needs to defend her people. ... *And* herself.

Taylor: She can be the songbird, *or* the snake.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think the easy surface read is like, “She’s the songbird, he’s the snake.”

„Cause he *is* a snake. I mean, he lies, and he betrays people, and he... slithers around, kind of doing whatever he wants, without calling too much attention to himself, until all of his plans are in place.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But, yeah, no, I think obviously she can, represented by the fact that he finds the scarf, and picks it up, and there’s a snake underneath.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Um... I guess it’s— My understanding is, it is also sort of ambiguous in the book what happens to her at the end.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and that’s— I guess, what, did she escape? Did he shoot her, did she die somewhere? I mean, I feel like it’s very pointed that she escapes, you know?

Sydnee: I *assume* she escaped. ... I assume?

I don’t know. I guess— I went, and looked it up after I watched the movie. Like... “Is it ambiguous in the book, or am I just not seeing...” you know?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Was I supposed to know that he got her? Like, we didn’t see her body. But it’s not like she comes back, in the Hunger Games.

Taylor: No, but I think that’s the whole, like... I mean, I’m sure that there are more elements in the new book, but even just all of the ways that you see how personal [laughs] what happens in the Hunger Games is for Snow, like, talk about the queen of haunting a narrative. Like... [laughs]

It would almost ruin it, if she did come back, and was just, you know, a person that is involved in the revolution. Like her as just this horrible force

that haunted Snow his whole life, and came back in so many ways. You know, the way Katniss bows that mimics the way she bows, at first.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: The fact that Katniss is named Katniss. Like...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You know? Like, there's just so many ways that it, like... The song that Katniss sings, that is, you know, the Hanging Tree song, that like...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It felt so personal to him, like, all of those [laughs] spirits aligned to make this revenge... intimate.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, and I do— I think you're right. I do think that is what we're setting up for, is like the seeds of the revolution were planted then.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And he was part of it! He was part of his own destruction.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Because he, even though he eventually turns on her, and rejoins the Capitol there at the end, and turns on his friend, like... The way the Games played out in her favor, the way he helped them play out in her favor, set a tone that— You know what I mean?

Like... the idea that this girl from District 12 won was already destructive to the Capitol.

Taylor: Right. Well, and the idea that there has to be a victor...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... set the precedent for, you know... Like, "I can't just let them all die."

Sydnee: There has to be. Yeah.

Yeah. But then, also, he was the one who made it so brutal, with all the good-for-TV content and all that kind of stuff. That was all him.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: I don't know. I thought— I mean... I did not— [sighs] Maybe it's because I didn't read the book. I read the *Hunger Game* books, and so I found the movies, like, I was just *totally* wrapped up in— I found them so captivating in the story, and sad, and... You know, I really felt drawn in by it.

And I can't say I did, as much, with this.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: But I don't know, that's probably just in nature of not reading the book.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, I don't— I enjoyed— Well, I guess I've never read any of the books, so that's probably why [laughs] they're all on the same level for me.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Um, yeah, the first time I watched it, I watched it literally after a rewatch of the trilogy. So it, kind of... It was nice, because it just gives you so much more, like... that feeds into the future narrative.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But I don't know. I also, like— I mean, I think that Lucy Gray is just such a great character. She's just so... just such a fascinating... Like, she's

not a damsel, but she's not the cliché. Like, it's not like Katniss, who's just, you know, she's tough, and she's gruff. And, like, she's not a girl's girl.

It's like, Lucy Gray is just a very unique representation of, you know, a very specific type of character that you don't get, that often, from female characters.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I think that's true. And I think, you know, it's funny, because if Katniss had had even an ounce of, like, the charisma and showmanship that Lucy Gray does...

Taylor: [chuckling softly]

Sydnee: ... she probably could've started the revolution, like...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... from the jump. Right? „Cause she had the skills, too. Like, the survival skills... She's a fighter, she's a warrior.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And Lucy Gray isn't! She's a singer. She's a coroner.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: If Katniss had had one ounce of that - which she doesn't, right? Like, anything she does, anything that she does that inspires people with visuals or words, she's being coached into doing. None of that comes naturally to her.

Taylor: No, she was lucky she had the... the Peeta. [laughs] Like...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Peeta *was* the charisma [laughs] that Katniss lacked.

Sydnee: [laughing] Which is great, from a guy who's named after bread.
[laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] Well, you know...

Sydnee: [laughing] I love that. He has all the charisma, and his name is Bread. [laughs]

Taylor: No, it's to ease. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I know, but we say Peeta! Like, we can all pretend like, "Oh, but it's spelled different," but it's that— I mean, his name's Peeta. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, well, you know, that's... that's how we used to name people, right? Like, "Oh, you... you..."

Sydnee: [laughing]

Taylor: "... you make..."

Sydnee: Your dad makes bread! Your name... Although I don't know why his name wasn't just... It'd be pretty funny if he was named Bread.

Taylor: Pan? Pan's right there...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... as a name, sometimes.

Sydnee: You can do that.

Taylor: I love Peeta.

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: Uh, both! The bread, and the character.

Sydnee: Yeah. Man. And that really is— I know that expands to talk about *The Hunger Games* in general, but I think that's really well done in this series, the turn that you make as a reader, or a watcher, from like... And this is especially true in the books. Gale seems like a *very* romantic figure, early on.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And you really are like, [adoringly] "Oh, Katniss and Gale!" But by the end, it's like, "Screw that guy."

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: "*Peeta's* the man."

Taylor: [laughs] Well, I do— You know, I remember you were saying early on, "I don't know about a movie that makes Snow look attractive."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And there was that response, obviously, when the actor in this movie was cast. Like, he's a very attractive young man.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: Like, "Oh, it's gonna be... You know, hot... Snow." [laughs] Like, I don't... Despite this being a very attractive actor, I don't think there was a moment in the movie where it was like, "Yeah. What a... What a romantic relationship."

Which I appreciate! I think that that was... That must've been *hard* to communicate, [laughs] because he is... a very attractive actor.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: With a lot of scenes that might make you feel for him, but...

Sydnee: He has an edge. The actor does a really good job of— And I don't know, maybe it was following the cue from Snow in the first few movies. There is, like, an emptiness?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like, a lack of...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... connection that you can feel. I don't know if he's trying to do, like, a sociopath kinda vibe, or something.

Taylor: But I could totally see that!

Sydnee: You know what I mean?

Taylor: Well, that's what—

Sydnee: Like, there's— You can *feel* it. There's something missing.

Taylor: I felt like he had more of that than the old man Snow.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, Elder Snow seemed more warm and charismatic, at moments , than this guy ever did.

Which is, I think, purposeful. He had a highly developed ability to perform and cloak himself, by the time he was, you know, an adult.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: This is still young... [laughs] Still developing the outer shell that, you know, people like that get...

Sydnee: I do. Yeah, I mean, I *do* think there are times where - and it's to the actor's credit, like, you feel like, "Oh... Oh, there's something missing."

Taylor: "Oh, Patrick Bateman." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, which is impressive to do on screen. Like, set off those sort of... You know, we have those defense mechanisms, supposedly, in our brains, where we can recognize that...

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... in other humans, and you feel a little bit of a, like, "Ooh, step back. Red flag." [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like... [laughs] Um, I don't know, he gives that vibe. Like, "Ooh, ahh!"

Taylor: Uncanny valley. [chuckles]

Sydnee: "I don't— There's something missing!"

Taylor: I agree.

Sydnee: Yeah, I definitely get that vibe. And, I mean, he's also styled like, when he gets his hair cut really short, and because he is so, like, blond and pale, and... I don't know. There's, like, this kind of Aryan vibe going with him...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... and then the military. You know what I mean? I feel like that's intentional.

Taylor: No, absolutely.

Sydnee: And he's there, like, judging people in the District who, you know, have a variety of skin tones...

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: I don't know, there's something about him that feels a little like, [uncomfortable] "Eugh, well, it's Snow. It's Snow."

Taylor: I've gotta assume that's all very purposeful, right? [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, the fact that our bad guy is the whitest [laughing] white man that's ever been— that's ever whited?

Sydnee: And we named him Snow.

Taylor: Yeah! [laughs] Come on! Let's...

Sydnee: Yes. I...

Taylor: I feel like that's how purposeful you have to be these days, though, to keep the actual fascists from claiming a fictional narrative as, like, "Oh, yeah, we're the good guys in this."

Which I still think does happen. I still think that there are people out there that think *The Hunger Games* is somehow about the downtrodden good white Christians that are being oppressed by the— Because the people in the Capitol, you know, they have funny hair colors, and dress...

Sydnee: Mm.

Taylor: ... crazy. So that's like all those gay people that are... in power, and forcing us to battle to death? Sure.

Sydnee: That's like *Hollyweird*.

Taylor: Oh, right, right, right. That's who it is. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Those are the people in control.

Sydnee: I wonder if they understand that they're in the Capitol. [laughs]

Taylor: I... I don't— You know, I guess that's the wonderful thing about truth being malleable in your existence. It can be whatever you want! [laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Well, but I do think you could also say, like, it's a good reason why there is a— Whatever your political affiliation is, there is a point where you have too much money. And you can be part of that. Whether or not you believe you're part of that, you are. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: Some of it is just about... money.

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: Rich and poor.

Taylor: Yeah.

Well...

Sydnee: But... Yeah. I don't know, I enjoyed it. I really like the music. I wanted the soundtrack afterwards. Um...

Taylor: Hell yeah.

Sydnee: It felt like music from around here. It felt familiar.

Taylor: Well, now, some of those songs are written for the movie, but I thought one of the songs she sings *is* actually based on an old hymn. Like, it's the same...

Sydnee: There is one.

Taylor: The, uh...

Sydnee: Uh, I forget which one. But I looked this up, too.

Taylor: The one that sings on stage, she sings to her ex? The...

Sydnee: Oh, is *that* the one?

Taylor: The...

Sydnee: „Cause the story of Lucy Gray is also a poem, right?

Taylor: Oh, is it?

Sydnee: Or an old story? I don't know. Now we're just making stuff up.

Taylor: No, I'm pretty sure— „Cause I heard somebody singing the original version of... the “I was the one that you lost in the reaping,” you know?

Sydnee: Oh, yeah. That could be. Now, “Lucy Gray” is a ballad by William Wordsworth.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Yeah. A young girl who disappears in a snowstorm. So there you go.

Taylor: Well, that's cool.

Sydnee: That makes total sense.

But yeah, „cause when she's singing the song about Lucy Gray to him, that is the poem that she's singing. „Cause when he asks, like, “What happened to Lucy Gray?” And they're like, “We don't know.”

Which, you know...

Taylor: There's a lot of, sort of, those... [laughs] set up and delivery that was very... I don't know, it's...

Sydnee: Not subtle.

Taylor: Yeah. And maybe not realistic, but like, literary that I enjoy. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't mind that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's fiction. I don't mind. Well, it was fun to watch. I may read this next book. I really like Haymitch as a character, so...

Taylor: I was surprised that you hadn't read it yet, honestly, „cause I know how much you love Haymitch.

Sydnee: I might dive back in, and read it. I think I might.

Taylor: It might be the first one that I actually read. I think I would like to go back and read the other ones, but...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... I don't think I wanna wait „til the movie. I got, what, like a year? A year and a half?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I think I might read it. So, Tey, what should we do next week?

Taylor: Well, uh, we haven't talked about a cartoon in a minute, and, um... Yeah, I realized we haven't talked about the kind of golden age of Cartoon Network, in the early 2000s.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: One of the most iconic of which, I think, was *Powerpuff Girls*.

Sydnee: Oh, that would be perfect.

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: „Cause Charlie and Cooper would love that.

Taylor: Any time it's a cartoon, I feel like it's gotta be [laughs] something you can watch with the kids.

Sydnee: That makes it easier, for sure.

Taylor: [laughs] It's weird if you're like, "Sorry, kids. Mommy's busy watching cartoons for homework, right now. You can't join me."

Sydnee: [amused] "Go to bed."

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: "I have to watch cartoons."

Well, perfect. Well, we'll talk about *Powerpuff Girls* next week, and in the meantime, you should check out maximumfun.org. There are a lot of great shows there that you would enjoy. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Taylor: This has been *Still Buffering*, your 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 plays, speakers continue quietly in background]

Sydnee: [inaudible over music]

Taylor: [laughs] The rainbow sticks?

Sydnee: Yeah, they're very scary.

Taylor: They're very scary. They're very pretty, though.

Sydnee: [inaudible]

Taylor: We didn't even talk about that, the evil scientist character. She was great.

[music ends]

[acoustic sting]

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