

Still Buffering 409: Hausu

Published October 13, 2024

[Listen here at themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

[theme music 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: Tey, I don't know if you were following the TikTok drama about the rug buried in the yard. But I feel like because of the way the algorithm works, sometimes TikTok makes me feel like the entire world is paying attention to something... but it's not. You know?

Taylor: I do think it at least—I don't know how similar our algorithms are. But in this case at least, I also got the rug videos.

Sydnee: Okay. And I don't—this was what was weird about it for me. So—and I will go into the drama, if you are not familiar. But I don't listen to true crime podcasts or watch true crime documentaries. I don't—there is nothing about true crime that has ever really appealed to me. And this felt sort of like a true crime kind of vibe. So it was—I don't know how my algorithm knew I would be inter—I was interested. I did follow the drama.

Taylor: You were.

Sydnee: Yeah. I did wonder what was going on. I wonder if it's—okay. The story is that there was a woman on TikTok who thought her house was haunted. This is—I wonder—

Taylor: Oh, see, I didn't—I got the videos I guess later on in the saga, so please start from the beginning. I didn't know that part.

Sydnee: Her name is Katie, I believe. Right? Yes. And so, anyway. So, TikToker starts sharing. She moved into a new house and she's worried that it's haunted. And the reason she's worried that it's haunted, the original

TikToks were about, like, she, um, went into a room and some stuff had been moved around the room, and her laptop screen was, like, cracked or something. Like, her laptop was broken.

And she had, like, talked to her kids, and she had talked to everybody else in the house, nobody knew how this happened. So, like, there's this mystery of like, stuff got moved around. Nobody had been in this room. Nobody knows how it happened. The alarm on the house was set so nobody could have broken in. And it really, like, freaked her out and she started wondering if her house was haunted.

And, like, that was the original vibe. And what added to it is that, like, when she moved into this house she found out that the woman who lived next door had just died the day before she moved in or something. I don't know what that has—is it a ghost? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: The ghost is like, "I—I'm dead, but I don't really like my house, but the neighbor's digs are nice. I'm just gonna... "

Sydnee: Or maybe, like, she's trying to—

Taylor: Bloop, bloop, bloop. Just float over.

Sydnee: Send a message. Trying to get your attention. Something happened. I don't know. Anyway. So then they're digging a hole in the yard to, like, put a fence post in or something like that. And as they're digging this hole in the yard they see, like, the fringe at the edge of a rug. So, deep, pretty deep buried in the yard is a rug. And she starts sharing this. And she's like, "Isn't this weird?"

And a lot of people on TikTok are like, "That's not... good. Why does someone bury a rug?"

And, like, you can just see I guess initially just the very end of the fringes of the rug. So, like, is it possible there's something inside the rug?

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: And so people on TikTok are like, "You should call the police." So she does. So then the police come out. And the police are like, "I don't know. It's pretty weird. [laughs quietly] But I don't really know that there's anything for us to do about this. So, I mean, dig it up if you want."

But, like, they leave. Okay? So that was that, initially. And so she plans a big party with a bunch of friends to come and try to, like, dig up this rug. And there's this whole, like, side story where there's a tree planted over the rug, and the tree is, like, a blood... something tree. Like, it has blood in the name of the tree. And so...

Taylor: Spooky tree.

Sydnee: Spooky tree. Rug's buried. Friends are coming over.

Taylor: Well, you know, uh... hmm. The party is—I'm not—I'm... it's kind of where you lost me, or at least makes me go, wait a second. Are we—what are we doing here? You're planning a party to dig up a rug that might have... I mean, if your suspicion is maybe something awful happened... why would you plan a party? [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, my worry too is that it would be a pet. But I guess she had also done some research. Like, there's a—and there's a lot of—I mean, there's a lot of information on her TikTok if you followed it. But, like, she reached out to the people who used to own the house or, like, a mutual acquaintance.

Taylor: And said "Hey, did you bury a body in the backyard wrapped in a rug?"

Sydnee: Well, like, to ask about pets. Like, could this just be a pet wrapped in a rug and they planted a tree over the pet and I'm about to dig up a dead

pet? And like, that would be upsetting, and we don't wanna do that. We will leave it undisturbed if that's the case.

And they somehow found out that, like, they had had pets but they had been cremated, so this was not pet remains.

And, like, a lot of research was done here. And I think TikTok helped with that. Like, I think this was, like, a back and forth. Like, people on TikTok were saying like, "Do this. Call this. I found this out. I researched this."

Like, people on TikTok were helping her do the detective work.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: So anyway, she plans the party, but before they can actually have the party, uh, the homicide unit from the local police department reaches out to her and is like, "Actually, we want to bring these dogs that smell cadavers."

Taylor: [simultaneously] Cadavers.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so they bring the dogs. And both of the dogs sit over the area—like, over the hole.

Taylor: That was the first video I got about the rug fiasco.

Sydnee: And they only do that if there's... some human remain, or scent of human remains, right?

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: That is the only reason they would do that. And they both did it independently. And so everybody was, like, going wild. "Oh my gosh. This has to be real."

And the police were like, "Okay. Now we've gotta make this a crime scene and we have to dig up this rug."

Taylor: But then there was nothing in the rug?

Sydnee: Then there was nothing in the rug. So this is where we are currently. There's nothing in the rug. Why did the dogs indicate that there were human remains there? I don't know the stats on how often cadaver dogs on wrong. That would be interesting to—what can make them falsely, like, react, and how often does that happen? These are not things I know.

Taylor: I'm... [pause] Hmm. I have a lot of issues with this entire drama. One, I think if you have suspicions that there is a murdered person buried in your backyard, I don't think the first thing you should do is whip out your phone and start recording. Because... if a body is back there, I don't know, man. Have some respect?

Sydnee: Well, I—okay. I think the problem—

Taylor: We started with the true crime thing. I think it's my same problem with, like, the true crime genre. So, like, people died. People suffered. Why is this content?

Sydnee: This is why I don't really like 'em, 'cause that makes me sad. And I can't—I—yes. And that's all I can think about are, like, the people who are personally affected by this, and do they listen to these podcasts? It is not—this is not me saying "No one should listen to true crime." I'm not trying to throw shade on that.

Taylor: Do what you're gonna do. But, like... I don't know.

Sydnee: Right. I just can't... personally, it's just never been my thing. Now, a documentary about a cult? I'll watch that every day. But... [laughs quietly] but I don't know. That's just not my thing. But anyway, I think it was sort of this feedback loop. At least when you watch her talk about it it was like, she shared something weird that happened in her house. 'Cause it started with, like, a haunted house story.

Taylor: Right.

Sydney: And then it evolved into this other thing. And what was happening is people were getting invested and saying, like, "Stop stringing us along. Make another video. Tell us what's happening."

And then people were saying, like, "Oh, you're just doing this for attention because you're, like, dragging it out." You know? And, like, criticizing her for not posting. And so then she's trying to keep up and keep posting so that people are, like, seeing that "No, I'm not trying to string this out. I'm just telling you as it's evolving."

I think she got kind of in a lose-lose situation there, right?

Taylor: I guess so. I just—I don't know. I mean, there's a lot of this, like, self-generating content that we have that's, like—it is in this realm where it's, like, the, "Oh no, did I—" there are other videos kind of along that same line. Like, "Did we just discover a body? Did we see a body?"

I think that's when you just put your phone down.

Sydney: Well, I mean... definitely. And I don't know—I could—I'd have to go back and watch them all in order. I don't know if it occurred to her initially when she was digging up for the fence post and, like, saw the rug that's what it could be.

Taylor: It's a really good sort of experiment about, like, when you're like, "Oh. I've breached the gap of monetization. I guess I should keep... posting about this possible dead body in my yard."

And that's where it's like, what is believability? Like, yes, we saw two dogs sit in a—in a video. And we were told they were cadaver dogs.

Sydney: Oh, do you—ohh, no. 'Cause we saw the police, the police were there! They put up the yellow tape and everything.

Taylor: Well, you can buy yellow tape at the Five Below. I don't know.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I just saw, like—and this is also just people talking, 'cause there were also people talking about, like—I can't remember now. But she was part of some fandom that was—she was very dramatic in some fandom. And so it's like, "Oh no. We know her from this. Like, she's always... making a big deal out of things."

Sydnee: Really?

Taylor: I don't know. I just... when somebody wants to be famous on the internet, I guess they do a lot of things.

Sydnee: Well, I had a thought as I was getting—I was actually recounting it to Justin. And as I was saying it out loud I thought, "Is this—is this, like—" Do you remember before the Blair Witch Project was released, they made a fake documentary about it? And released that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: 'Cause I watched that before the movie came out and I thought it was real. Gosh, this really ages me. So—

Taylor: Well, no, no, no. I watched the same one. It was on, uh—it premiered on Discovery Channel, right?

Sydnee: They had, like, a special where they were like, "These three teens went into the woods to do something. And we've recovered this footage, but they've never returned, and it's weird."

And I remember watching that and thinking, "Oh. That's so scary!" And then they're gonna release the footage in a movie. And then eventually it was like, "Oh, okay. This is fake. None of this is real." But initially I really fell for it.

Taylor: Well, a lot of people even when the Blair Witch came out thought that the Blair Witch [wheezes] was real.

Sydnee: I don't know. Audiences today—

Taylor: We were very young to found footage then.

Sydnee: Right. I was gonna say, found footage things are so common now. And, I mean—

Taylor: Even beyond found footage we have, like, ARGs we have, like, the, like... websites that will lead to TikToks, that will lead to YouTube videos. And it's all fictional. But it's a real—it feels real. You don't—you have to really dig to figure out if it's real or not.

Sydnee: Well, and that's—I think that now people would not—if you watch the Blair Witch Project now you wouldn't be shocked. Like, it would not seem revolutionary to you. At the time it felt so visceral and so new and so terrifying. Um, I also got really sick watching it 'cause of all the shaky cam. I can't watch shaky cam stuff.

Taylor: You and Mom both. You do not handle that well.

Sydnee: No, no. But it scared the crap out of me. And now, by today's standards, I imagine if I saw that movie for the first time today I would be like, "Well, that was pretty good."

Because I'm so used to it. But at the time it was—but anyway. The fake documentary beforehand really tricked me, and I had a thought as I was watching this TikTok drama and then recounting it to Justin, is this fake?

Am I—is a movie coming out about this soon and I have—you know what I mean? And then I thought, like, "Well, that's probably not it either. No, it probably is real."

But man, you never know any—everything feels so, um... I don't know. Like, I can't tell anymore. Man, that's scary. As I'm saying it I'm freaking myself out. I don't know what's real and what isn't. I feel like especially people who've grown up with social media are so used to showing the produced version of themselves and their life, their branded version all the time, that the

line between fiction and reality has gotten really blurred on social media. And so it's so hard for me to tell.

Taylor: I think that's a fair concern. Because even in the mundane form, like, how often do we have these, like, blogger families that look happy and wonderful, and then—I mean, there is—there are true crime stories attached to that where it's like, it was a happy family that showed their, whatever, their kids on social media, all dancing together. And then something awful happens.

Or even if it's just they weren't happy and they get horribly divorced, and it's a big, like, situation. Like, what we see is not what is real. That is every form of social media.

Sydnee: That's—and I mean, I think that that... hmm. Like, on a grander scale—and I don't wanna get real bummary with it—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: —I think... 'cause I think the problem with it—

Taylor: I always wanna get bummary. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know. I don't wanna get bummary with it! But I think it—I have found myself saying to my children many times, like, "Don't forget that the truth is knowable." We can know what is real. There is truth. There are things that are objectively false. And people with enough power and money to lie effectively still don't get to shift reality. They do not get to change what is true. But we are living in a time where it can feel, I think especially to younger people, like it's impossible to ever know what the truth is, so that the truth does not exist. And that is very advantageous to fascists. That is all I'm saying.

Taylor: Whoa! I didn't—when I said "let's get bummary," I didn't know we were going straight to fascism! But you—

Sydnee: I'm just—

Taylor: You out-bummed me! Great job! [laughs]

Sydnee: I'm just saying! Like, it is important that we continue to say, the truth is knowable. It exists. And we can tell it. And we can fight lies with truth. And I don't really care if this is real or not, this whole story on the internet of the TikTok thing. I mean, this is not—like, this is not my concern. I think it just adds to this air of, like, "We can never know what is real anymore."

Taylor: Well, I think it's more that I—I think we can still discern what we believe is real. And I think we have to trust... I don't know. We have to trust experience and instinct on that. Because the algorithm drives—like, if you get a response to a video, and you get money for that, that incentivizes you to keep making that same kind of content.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And so if you get—you want to drag it out because you know every video you post you're gonna get more money on it. So even if it was just "Oh. We found a weird rug. Whatever. It was nothing."

But let's talk about the blood tree! Let's—let's—you know. Like, you've got—you have small children, and there was stuff moved and a broken computer, and everyone went "Oh no, it wasn't me! Must be a ghost!" And you were like, "Oh yeah. It must be a ghost."

Like, I'm sorry. You have two children in your house. Two small children. If stuff was broken and they said "It must be a ghost," or like, would you have not gone like, "Are you sure? Maybe...?" [laughs]

Sydnee: It was de—yeah. It would definitely be one of my kids.

Taylor: Like, I don't know. Like, that's not—like, if people are enjoying it, that's fine. Like, you're making money off something that people enjoy. And I'm actually happier in that way. Then it's just creative medium. Then we're just creating an altered reality ghost story, which is fine. In a new medium.

Sydnee: I think—and I think that kind of stuff is cool. And if it was the lead up to a movie, then that's awesome. I mean, like, then they did a great job.

Taylor: [crosstalk] watch that movie. I've seen a lot of like, "[mocking] Oh, it's a haunted house. Okay."

Sydnee: I don't know. It depends on—like, the Paranormal Activity movies always really got me. So...

Taylor: They were good. They were well done.

Sydnee: Yeah. So if it's that vibe, you know. Like, those would—those freak me out. Anyway. [laughs quietly] This is a good lead-in.

Taylor: It was the Jonas Brothers fandom, by the way. That's what she was a big part of.

Sydnee: Ohh, okay.

Taylor: So.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That means nothing. Yeah, lead-in. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Speaking of haunted houses...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: We're talking about Haus... su. Hausu.

Taylor: Hausu. House, yes.

Sydnee: House.

Taylor: The Japanese horror movie from... what was it? '77?

Sydnee: I believe that's right, '77.

Taylor: Which is much older than I thought it was, because it didn't make its way to America until the early 2000's.

Sydnee: Um, and it is, I would say, like—it's funny. It was listed—we were watching some sort of, um, best horror movies kind of compilation show. I love those shows where they just, like, go over a bunch of different—

Taylor: Oh, were you watching the new one on Shudder? There's a great one on Shudder right now.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah. 'Cause they had a whole episode about Japanese horror.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. That was exactly the—yes. And they were talking about House in it. Um, and I think it has achieved that kind of, like, uh, cult classic kind of status now at this point.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: I think it is beloved because it is so—it is also so unique, kind of bizarre. [laughs quietly] Um, I don't even know how to break down the plot. I mean, if you can.

Taylor: Yeah. I think you—the plot—

Sydnee: Okay. The plot—okay.

Taylor: It's very—I mean, the straightforward plot—and this tells you nothing about the gonzo antics that go on in it, but there's a young girl whose father is recently—he's about to remarry and she doesn't want to stay with him and his weird, new fiancé. So she writes a letter to her aunt and says, "Can I come stay with you?"

Her mysterious aunt that lives in this... house. Uh, and she invites a bunch of her friends to come along. And all of the young girls go and stay with her aunt. And one by one they are consumed by the house, and that is the...
[crosstalk]

Sydnee: And then it turns out that her aunt had been...

Taylor: Dead. For a while.

Sydnee: Dead. Yeah. And it is, like, this—is it the spirit of her aunt? Like, the vengeful spirit of her aunt that lives in the house that is why they are consumed?

Taylor: Because her—her fiancé never came back from the war. And so she still, like, wants to be married. So she devours unmarried women to continue on, and I guess... I don't know.

Sydnee: Does she, like, one day get married?

Taylor: Maybe? I don't know.

Sydnee: [crosstalk] the house?

Taylor: That's what allows her to put back on her wedding dress, I guess, if she eats enough young girls she can be a bride again.

Sydnee: And they girls are all named Gorgeous, and Fantasy, and...

Taylor: Professor. Kung Fu.

Sydnee: Mack. Sweet.

Taylor: Yeah, Mack, Sweet, yeah. So they're all like—their name relates to their most important trait.

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs quietly] Like Kung Fu.

Taylor: Yes. The MVP of the entire movie, Kung Fu.

Sydnee: Although, I mean, not the final girl, I guess.

Taylor: There is no—yeah. There is no final girl in this. The aunt wins.

Sydnee: The aunt. The aunt is the final girl. The house is the final girl.

Taylor: So, my favorite thing maybe about this movie, um—I was talking about this with some friends the other night. Like, it was proposed—the studio was like, "Hey, Jaws was really successful. Let's make a movie like Jaws." And somehow this resulted from that.

Sydnee: How is this like Jaws, would you say?

Taylor: I guess it's like, well, okay. Instead of a shark eating a bunch of people, what if a house ate a bunch of people?

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] That's...

Sydnee: I don't... wha—I would love to know the brain, like, that made that, like, went into the... I would love to have been inside—like, watching those thoughts connect and end in that.

Taylor: I mean, it's... it's a brilliant thought. [laughs] It's definitely—who needs another shark movie? We can have a cannibalistic house. I guess it's not cannibalism if it's a house.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: It's just— [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Well, it is imbued with the spirit of a human, though. So, ehh. It's hard to say.

Taylor: Yeah. Like, the—Obayashi, Nobuhiko Obayashi was the director. And he continued to, like, "We should make this movie" until finally people were like, "Okay. You can just make this movie." Like, this is your answer to Jaws. [laughs]

Sydnee: And it's—I mean, it's got, like—it does have a lot of blood, I guess.

Taylor: It does. And I mean, I guess there is a lot of... you know, like, young people being eaten. So that's...

Sydnee: Like Jaws.

Taylor: Yeah. Jaws wasn't trying to get married in the end. But...

Sydnee: What—I mean, is there—are we supposed to take a deeper message from House? Or is it just what it is?

Taylor: Do you think there's a deeper message in House?

Sydnee: I don't know. I think whenever I see, like, characters with names like Gorgeous and Fantasy and Kung Fu and whatnot, I think, like, are these—is this an allegory of some sort? [laughs quietly] Is this—is this some sort of—like, am I supposed to take something from this?

Taylor: Well, alright. [crosstalk]

Sydnee: To under—

Taylor: A woman who's mourning her fiancé who becomes this monster, and so she eats the youth to... I don't know. Continue on her painful existence. Is there an allegory that we can pull from that?

Sydnee: Maybe not. I don't know. I always think with horror movies they're trying to tell me something about the current state of... society, or culture, or humanity, or... you know? Like, they're about a time and place.

Taylor: I think the house just eats... girls. [laughs] That's it!

Sydnee: [laughs] The allegory is the house... just eats girls.

Taylor: And I'm always the first person to be like, "No, I think there is a deeper—" but I don't know. Maybe?

Sydnee: Well, it—I think what got me thinking about it probably was that, uh, the TV show that we're talking about on Shudder, where they're talking about Japanese horror movies. And then they talk about—well, no. Actually, it was a different episode. It's when they talk about Godzilla.

Taylor: Well, okay. Godzilla absolutely is an allegory.

Sydnee: Yes, it is.

Taylor: And that's what, like, I think that especially with this era of Japanese cinema you're always talking about stuff that is responding to the atomic bomb. Like, you're always talking about stuff that is made in response to that by people that grew up with that trauma.

And I think because this starts off with like, "Oh, she lost her husband to the war," I was kind of looking for that. But I'm like... but what—it... or is it just... is it just—maybe it's just that simple. The kind of anger and trauma that persists, that continues to...

Sydnee: Hmm, is it about generational trauma? Because you have an older woman who is inflicting her pain on a younger—on younger women, and passing along this pain and anger.

Taylor: I think you could say that, for sure.

Sydnee: I don't know. Maybe that's what—I think it's just about a house that eats girls.

Taylor: I mean, I also implied—I love it, like—I love it from an artistic standpoint. And I don't think—you know, horror movies consistently get the shaft in any sort of awards ceremony. I can't think of the last horror movie that was ever given an Academy Award or anything. Like, it's just—it's not a genre that's even recognized.

And it makes me so sad, because I don't think there's any genre that has more freedom than horror. And this movie is a great expression of that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: However you—like, the plot is kind of—I mean, like I said, I think it's actually a pretty concise plot. It's just the way that they execute these girls, and the visuals you get, are insane.

Sydnee: Well, and the—so they... if you haven't seen this movie, they lean fully into, like, there are special effects being used, like, you know. But they're not in any way, like... realistic, or meant to be, you know.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: It is—it looks very cartoonish and silly when they are—when they are killed by the house. Whether it's eaten by a piano or a... squished into blood in a grandfather clock. I don't know. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, and that—I think that is—it's very... I mean, I don't know if I—would I call it scary? I think it's an uncomfortable movie because of that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Because it's so like, we're used to—like, when the effects are really clean and we understand what's happening, there's almost—it's something sort of boring about that.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And I love this movie 'cause it's so weird. [laughs] It's so uncomfortable the way, like, the deaths are dispatched. Like, I don't know. I mean, from the very first one, the first one to die is Mack, and like, her head coming up out of the well and the biting the other girl on the butt. [laughs] Like, it's a weird gra—it's a weird image!

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And it's kind of played for laughs, but it's also incredibly disturbing.

Sydnee: I think—well, and you know, it's interesting you say that like, horror movies always get the shaft. And I think that it is because... I still think we do not, as a culture, I think that we understand it is not always easy to be funny. And so we have, like, respect for like, "Ah. You have done something that has made me laugh." And not everything makes you laugh. And so being funny is something we value.

I don't know that we understand—it is hard to make something that is genuinely scary. I don't think it's easy to scare people. And I think that we undervalue that. Like, "Oh, it's easy to—you just boo. I don't know." [laughs quietly] You know.

Taylor: Well, I think it's easy to have jump scares, which is what a lot of horror movies boil down to these days. Uh, but it's hard to genuinely disturb somebody. But I do think... it's funny you bring up humor, because I think the ability to make somebody laugh and the ability to scare somebody are right up against each other. And maybe my brain's just wired wrong.

But, like—like, I don't—when I go through a haunted house and I'm scared, I laugh.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, it's about... uh, I don't know. Like, we talk about the theory of horror a lot. It's very similar to the theory of comedy, in that it's about doing something unexpected. A good punch line is when it catches you off guard. There's a buildup and you think you know where it's going and then like, "Oh. I don't know where that's going."

It's also the same stuff that makes us afraid. Because it's—it's uncomfortable. It's—it's surprising.

Sydnee: It—it is. And I think the other element to it—this is something that Justin always says, that comedy is like truth told in an unexpected way. And I think horror is the same. It's reflecting a truth. It's reflecting something

that we understand and connect with and feels familiar, in an unfamiliar way. That's a—you're right. I mean, there is a common seed there.

Taylor: My—the other movie that—House makes me think very much of, like, the Evil Dead movies. Which also, I think, strike that chord of it's so gonzo that's sometimes it's just goofy. But you're also so uncomfortable with how otherworldly the violence is that it's like, I'm laughing, but I'm also so [wheezes]—I'm also so freaked out.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And those are also some of my favorite movies. So, that's a preference thing, I guess. But like, for me, those moments where, like, horror and comedy link up in, like, a very specific way are so satisfying.

Sydnee: You know, it was—it's disappointing. I don't—I told you I didn't finish *The Terrifier*. We started *The Terrifier*. And then we got to a scene where I suspected torture was about to occur. And I just—

Taylor: [laughs] So you got five minutes into it? [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, in the beginning he's just a murderous clown. And he's just, like, murdering. And that's it. But then... once you've got somebody tied up it's a whole other thing. Right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If you're just, like, stalking someone and then you jump on 'em and kill 'em—I mean, I'm not saying like, "I wanna watch that!" But, like, that's—for me there's, like, a line between that and, like, "I've captured you. I've strung you up. And I'm gonna do some—" I don't know. There's just... for me personally there's a line where that I'm like, ehh, I don't wanna—I'm good now.

But in the beginning of it, it was really pushing that button for me of making me laugh, but being terrifying. Like, it really—there's something about him that's funny and I don't know what it is at first. But he's also really scary, of course. And the whole thing is kind of funny. And then it's not. But for the

first few minutes I was like, ah. I like this. This is a good mixture of, like, why is he so scary, but also kind of making me laugh? I don't know.

Taylor: Well, and that's—I feel like that—I have mixed feelings about the Terrifier movies, without going on too much of a tangent. Because I do think—I think they're doing something else that's interesting in the long run. Like, they're kind of—they're so extreme that it's like, "Why do you enjoy—" it's asking the viewer the question, "Why is this what you want to see?"

Sydnee: Hmm.

Taylor: And it makes you kind of... 'cause I do think when you flex deep into that kind of shock, gore, horror, there's a point where I tap out. Like, I can view it. I don't want to. And I'm almost bored by it. Like, I... really done practical effects, when it's just "Yeah. Here's a victim. They're being tortured."

I'm not interested in that, you know. One of the first movies that taught me that—and this is so inappropriate that I watched this when I was, like, 13 or 14 years old, but I remember going to an anime convention and finding the Guinea Pig movies.

Sydnee: Oh. Yeah.

Taylor: Which—series of fake snuff films, basically, that were Japanese.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I was like, "Yeah, yeah! Extreme horror!" And I'm like, "Oh." There's a point where I'm just not... I don't wanna... it's not—it's predictable. I know this person's gonna die, and in the worst way possible. There's no surprise. There's no humor to this. It's just torture. And I'm bored? And then when you're bored you're just—now you just feel like a bad person.

Sydnee: And then you're sad. And then—yeah, no. I think—well, there's no—I think that that's not very artful at that point. Like... I don't know. Hostel did that to me. Like, I watched—

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Yeah. I saw that and I was like, "No. This is not—I don't ever—" I watched it one time, I never watched it again, and I didn't watch the sequels. I have no interest in knowing about that. It's just not my thing. And again, this isn't me saying like, "And everybody who watches it is a bad person." No. I mean—

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: We all have different—for me, like... uh, one of the scariest movies I've ever seen in my life for me personally was *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. That movie got in me and messed me up for, I mean, it—to this day, I have nights where I'm laying in bed and, like, a scene from it will flash in my head, and then I'm just awake for an hour staring at the ceiling in terror.

Taylor: Well, I mean, part of that is I think anyone that... Catholics got that exorcism drama. But also... but *Exorcism of Emily Rose* has many surprising moments. Like, you know it's gonna be terrifying, but the way she contorts her body, the eating the bugs, the, like, the—the violent kneeling and rising. There are lots of just imagery that you're like, "Oh. My brain—this is a new idea to my brain."

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And that's what triggers a laugh response in some, and a scream response in others. And that's what—I mean, *House* is like the ultimate just joyful expression of that. Like, what is happening? What is—what is—okay. This girl's been eaten, but her legs can still kick? The evil cat painting, and the cat painting starts flooding the room with blood. [laughs] It's like—

Sydnee: Why?

Taylor: It's so... the mattress attacks this girl. Okay, sure. Like, I don't—the—the—my favorite scene in the whole movie is when Melody is playing the piano. And she's possessed, and it's been made clear she's possessed. And her fingers get eaten off, and she holds up her dismembered fingers. And there's this, like, sort of lightning technicolor effect around her. But in

the background there's a skeleton just like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!" just dancing? [laughs] It's like, what is this? [laughs] [crosstalk]

Sydnee: That is the scene that sticks with me, too. That's always the scene. I'm like, "Have you seen that movie, House? Okay. It's the one—you know, the girl's playing piano and her fingers get eaten?" [laughs]

Taylor: It's like, so—it's... there's a weird joy to it? It's like, so macabre that it's just, you have to laugh. And it's horrifying. If you put that in, like, a hardcore—like, if you made a gritty reboot of House, and this girl just had all of her fingers cut off by a piano, there would be something... awful about it.

But because of the framing it's like, I feel like I'm on a roller coaster ride and I'm just laughing the whole time.

Sydnee: Well, and you know, it's interesting. 'Cause if you think about it framed that way—and, I mean, I don't know if this is true. But you could interpret it this way.

Why would it—it is kinda joyous. The scenes are a little... we—like, elevated in a happy way that you don't associate with, like, a death scene. If you are watching it from the perspective from the House... [laughs quietly] like, if that's who you are, if as the audience member you are seeing it through the lens of the house right now, then I guess it would be. And that's a wild thought. Am I the house?

Taylor: Is that how the whole movie is themed?

Sydnee: Well?

Taylor: Maybe?

Sydnee: Like, are we the house?

Taylor: Well, 'cause you do—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I don't—especially on this rewatch, I was kind of rooting for the weird aunt.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Like, right at the beginning when she's, like, dancing on the rafters and the one [unintelligible]—sneaks into the refrigerator and then is dancing on the rafters, and the one girl is just horrified at whatever's going on? [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Like, I love this kooky aunt!

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: She's creepy, she's weird! She's having a great time. Whatever she's on... I'm way more intrigued by her. I'm rooting way more for her than these kind of one-note characters that we're given. Except for Kung Fu. Kung Fu is my girl.

Sydnee: Even though what she's on is the blood of the innocent. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I guess that's true! Ehh, that's, uh—that's accurate. [laughs]

Sydnee: But yeah! I mean, like, if you interpret it that way, like, the reason—as an audience member I'm watching this and I'm feeling this. Why am I being made to—like, the visual cues and the sound cues and everything about it is invoking this response in my brain. Why would it be? Well, if you're watching from the perspective of the house, then... this is—these—I mean, obviously, like, at that point the lives of these young girls are inconsequential to you. And so it can be funny, and silly, and joyous. Because it doesn't matter.

And that, now—and that sounds like, why would you ever want to feel that way?

Exactly. That's why it's scary. That's why it's disturbing. 'Cause you don't wanna feel that way. You don't feel that way as a human. But then the movie makes you feel like the house, and then that's scary.

Taylor: Well, but that's it. But I think that is a balance that is more pronounced maybe in this. But it's struck in movies that do speak to us. Because I do think you have to have a certain amount of sympathy for the devil to enjoy a horror movie. Like, we—we love Freddy Krueger. We know what a monster Freddy Krueger honestly is in his, like, backstory. But he's also a funny guy with quips.

You have a certain amount of empathy for, like, Jason, because you see his backstory. You know, he was this tortured kid. Like, I think you do—and you get those scenes. Like a lot of—especially like in Night—er, Friday the 13th, like, you get those scenes that are shot from his perspective. I mean, that's kind of—have you seen, it's a recent movie, In a Violent Nature?

Sydnee: Uh-uh.

Taylor: It's a serial killer movie that—he's very much like a Jason allegory. Like, he's a, you know, long dead but never fully dead, like, serial killer that stalks people camping.

But it's entirely from his perspective. And so every killing is kind of just, like, wild and goofy and... like, you're—who else are we supposed to care about when everything is from his perspective?

Sydnee: That's really interesting. And, I mean, I think again, like, that is what makes something... scary, is when you—I don't know. For me, when it can disturb you in that way and start making you question your own... uh... is that—do I have that in me? Am I empathizing with this person, and how am I capable of empathizing with this, and what does that say about me as a human? And it's very uncomfortable.

Taylor: But isn't that part of the joy of horror? It's like, none of us are actually—I mean, hopefully [wheeze-laughs] none of us are actually out here doing this stuff.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: But you—you—you get a view, I don't know, behind the mask.

Sydnee: Which is—

Taylor: There are lots of movies that trigger that weird empathy for the bad guy.

Sydnee: That's true. And, I mean, you know, we have talked about that we're kind of, I think, as a society in that era now generally where we're—

Taylor: We're in our villain era.

Sydnee: Yes. We're in our villain era. we're empathizing with the villains. We're trying to find a way, even if you are a villain, is there redemption for you?

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: And I don't know if horror movies want to ask you that question, because they're... usually the villain in a horror movie is still just a villain. Like...

Taylor: Well, and I don't really—I like when my villain is still at the end of the day a villain. I don't like when a horror movie tries to make me too sympathetic for the bad guy. Like, then it's just a bummer again. Right?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like... 'cause ultimately I think—we've talked about this. Like, doing evil is a choice. I don't think it's a nature. I think it's a choice. And, you know, I'd still like to believe that given the worst circumstances, most of us would do good, and if you choose to do evil, that was your choice.

But... I don't know.

Sydnee: Well, I get a little tired of—everybody needs, um... yeah, a tragic backstory motivation that just—somehow will justify? I think is—not only do I not like that, I think it starts to get a little dangerous, in that—as I'm saying this, the movie that is, like, flashing in my head is *The Joker*.
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Oh no! Like, the new one?

Sydnee: Well, yes. I mean, I'm not going to see the new one. But...

Taylor: I'm not going to—I'll see it when I can stream it. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. But I mean, like, the idea, like, that we need to, like, feel bad for this guy first? And then we can empathize with this incel version of the Joker. And then, like, the whole thing is just, like—I don't think we need that. I don't know who—I guess somebody asked for it. I didn't ask for it. We don't need that.

And it also sucked just 'cause it undermined, like... [sighs] the Joker is chaos. The Joker is, you know, uncontrolled unpredictability of life that is scary for that reason. And... I don't—you know? Like, is it's own—he's his own thing already, that is exactly what it should be. And cannot be explained or understood or controlled or bargained with. And that is what makes it so threatening.

Taylor: That's the writing of the Joker that I enjoy. I like Joker as just truly just chaos incarnate. Because when you have Joker as the man that had one bad day, and so he takes it out on the rest of the world, the immediate foil is Batman, who had one bad day and uses that as his reason to help the world. So that's the—that's the dichotomy right there.

Sydnee: One cannot exist without the other.

Taylor: Yeah. But are you—do you react to your trauma by trying to prevent that trauma in other people? Or do react to your trauma by trying to perpetrate that trauma on other people? That's a choice.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's not a... not a destiny.

Sydnee: No. And it is not something that I think we need to, like—let's give a lot of space for people who were, I don't know, failed at standup comedy and so then decided to murder people. Like, let's make a lot of space for that.

Taylor: No. There's too many of those people out there that we don't need to encourage. [laughs]

Sydnee: Honestly, they all have podcasts too, so. [laughs]

Taylor: That's true. That's true. No, but—and I don't—and that's kind of why, you know, we're talking about like, what does this movie mean?

I don't... like, that's kind of, like—like, I love movies that just, yeah, you can find—you could talk about meaning if you wanted to. But it's just a roller coaster ride. I mean, I mentioned Evil Dead II. That's what I love about those movies.

There's good versus evil, sure. But we are not trying to, like—you can love the aunt character. She's kooky and weird. You can root for her. It doesn't mean anything deep about you. It's just a weird movie with wild graphics, wild—why does the guy turn into bananas? What does that mean? What is that an allegory for? Nothin'. He just turned into bananas! 'Cause, I don't know, ghosts do weird things! [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: And I do think—I do think there is—again, I think there is something inherently disturbing about, like, "I couldn't have seen that coming. I don't understand it. My brain can't put it in a framework." You know? Like, that's... I don't know. I would high recommend if you have not seen House, you should watch it. It's a great, like, watch-it-with-friends kind of film. You know, like, to enjoy together. Um, it's not... like, if you're one who doesn't really like stuff that's super scary, I would not say it's super scary. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No. There is some gore but it's not—I feel like it's purposely not well done. Like, it's...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Nothing's believable. There's a little bit of nudity, just, you know, for kids' sake.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, like, I'm not gonna show this one to my kids yet.

Taylor: No. I think they're a little young for that. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: They're a little young for House, yeah. But I enjoyed watching it. It's good this time of year. I love watching movies that—I love watching scary movies, and this is always a good one to revisit.

Taylor: I—I forgot that the end... 'cause, you know, it's set off by kind of this creepy stepmom character, right? Like, that's what puts the whole—and in my head I was like, surely it wraps back around to her. Like, she was definitely evil or something, right? She wasn't!

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: She was just a weird stepmom. And she comes back, and she's the final victim of the house. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: And that's it.

Taylor: [unintelligible] [laughs]

Sydnee: It doesn't have to make sense.

Taylor: No. Yeah, no. It's a really—it's fun. Again. Just a—just a—feels like riding the—what's the Camden Park haunted house ride?

Sydnee: Um... is it just called The Haunted House? What's it called?

Taylor: Is that it? I feel like the—it is the visual version of that sensation, riding that ride.

Sydnee: That... man. If you're ever at Camden Park... come to Huntington, West Virginia. Go to Camden Park. Ride in the Haunted House.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: There is nothing like it.

Taylor: Same experience.

Sydnee: Especially the gum wall.

Taylor: The gum wall. That's the scariest part!

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: See? That's what I mean. Surprising.

Sydnee: It is surprising.

Taylor: Who would have expected that? [laughs]

Sydnee: I know. There's a wall where everybody puts their gum. Don't touch it!

Taylor: And it's under a black light, so it's glowing.

Sydnee: Don't touch it! [laughs quietly] It's been there for I don't know how many years. Um, well, Tey, thank you for having us watch House. I enjoyed it.

Taylor: Oh, thank you for watching it. It was a lot of fun. For next week, there has been a trend on TikTok that I felt like we should participate in on the show.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: People are making "hear me out" cakes.

Taylor: Alright. But... I want you to—like, we know the rules of a "hear me out" cake.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Like, you've got... it can't be like, I don't know, like...

Sydnee: I don't wanna use—I'm trying not to use an example that I've seen on a TikTok. [laughs]

Taylor: I know. Like, I don't—it can't be like, Sherlock Holmes, you know?

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Like... an obviously attractive character with some quirks. It's gotta be a weird—

Sydnee: It's gotta be weird.

Taylor: —answer.

Sydnee: Yes. 'Cause otherwise, like, we don't need to hear you out.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You're heard.

Taylor: Yeah, everyone... heard.

Sydnee: You've been heard.

Taylor: Cool, yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] Alright. So we will—

Taylor: I'm gonna have so many good answers for this.

Sydnee: I know. Well... can I just say right now, I'm not going to include the fox from Robin Hood, because I feel like it is not—I feel like it's too well known and understand.

Taylor: No. I'm not gonna include Gadget the Mouse.

Sydnee: That's—yeah, universally accepted.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Is it? Have we all accepted that that's a hot mouse?

Sydnee: I—right?

Taylor: Well... alright. So we've established our front line. Cool.

Sydnee: Okay. Alright.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: We'll go from there. Alright. I'm sure there'll be other things to talk about. But definitely we have to... and then there's so much discourse about "hear me out" cakes and what's the rules of "hear me out" cakes. And then there's the one couple that did one and that didn't go well for them, and—anyway. So. We have so much to talk about.

Taylor: Amazing.

Sydnee: Alright. Uh, but thank you, Tey. Thank you, listeners. Please watch House if you haven't. If you like that kind of movie, you know. If it's your thing.

Um, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there that you would enjoy. Um, 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, your cross-generational guide to the... culture that made us. [pause] Is that—

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I am still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: We may have changed it up. I don't know if we switched it.

Taylor: Did I just reinvent that?

Sydnee: Maybe.

Taylor: Maybe. Sorry.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] I remembered that I had lines!

Sydnee: I know. I saw you. You were examining your wrist and I was like, trying to motion.

Taylor: I'm used to just being able to tap out at the end. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know. We're sharing the load.

Taylor: Alright.

[music plays]

Dan: I'm Dan McCoy.

Stuart: I'm Stuart Wellington.

Elliott: I'm Elliott Kalan.

Dan: And together we are The Flop House, a long-running podcast on the Maximum Fun Network where we watch a bad movie and then talk about it.

Stuart: And because we're so long-running, maybe you haven't given us a chance. I get it. But you don't actually have to know anything about previous episodes to enjoy us, and I promise you that if you find our voices irritating, we grow endearing over time.

Elliott: Perhaps you listened to one of our old episodes and decided that we were dumb and immature. Well, we've been doing this a while now. We have become smarter and more mature, and generally nicer to Dan.

Stuart: But we are only human, so no promises.

Dan: Find The Flop House on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

Maximumfun.org.
Comedy and Culture.
Artist Owned.
Audience Supported.