

## Still Buffering 425: The Substance

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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 Teylor Smirl.

**Sydnee:** Did you watch the Oscars last night, Teylor?

**Taylor:** You know, I did, actually. I went over to a friend's house, and we watched it together.

**Sydnee:** Had a little Oscar party?

**Taylor:** ... I don't know if it was a party; it was a gathering.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** Did you have a party? I mean, I guess your house is always a party. You've got enough people there that it's a soiree of some sort.

**Sydnee:** That's why you have kids, so you're always having a party.

**Taylor:** [laughs] Instant party.

**Sydnee:** Instant party. No, I mean—

**Taylor:** I don't know what kind of party it is, but always a party.

**Sydnee:** Similar. Just— I mean, not really a party. A quiet family gathering. Uh, we had king cake, because, you know, Mardi Gras...

**Taylor:** Oh, that's right! 'Cause it was Mardi Gras, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And so it was like— Justin dubbed it “Mardi Grascars.”

[pause]

**Taylor:** That’s what that would be. That is...

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** ... a good name.

**Sydnee:** But it wasn’t— but, like, we didn’t party.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** We printed out the little ballots, which I had seen a grand total of two of the films. [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Well, unless you count *Inside Out 2*, from the animated...

**Taylor:** Oh.

**Sydnee:** So...

**Taylor:** Well, it was up for an award, so that counts.

**Sydnee:** There you go. I had seen *three* [laughs] of the films. Um, so I had... Yeah, I had no— I just sort of circled things on the ballot, and I think I got four right, which were total luck. So there you go.

**Taylor:** Did you have the— in your king cake, did you have a little baby? Little baby hidden in the cake?

**Sydnee:** So, nobody found the baby last night.

**Taylor:** Oh.

**Sydnee:** We didn't eat the entire king cake, so the baby is in the remaining, like, fourth of the king cake that was not eaten yet.

**Taylor:** Is that some sort of luck, good or bad, if nobody frees the baby from the cake?

**Sydnee:** Well, I think, uh, surely—

**Taylor:** [laughs] Is that like the groundhog seeing its shadow?

**Sydnee:** [laughs] If the baby never makes it out of the cake.

**Taylor:** It's in that— five more weeks of winter.

**Sydnee:** So, Charlie and Cooper determined today after school— Cooper's home sick, unfortunately, but Charlie's at school, so we're waiting until Charlie gets home. And then they're going to search the king cake for the baby.

**Taylor:** Is she home sick, or does she just want first dibs on the baby?

**Sydnee:** It could be. No, she's just—

**Taylor:** A ploy.

**Sydnee:** Listen, I did the ultimate test - I think this is, uh, the modern parenting test of "How sick is your kid?" - I said, "Okay, you can stay home, but we're not watching iPad today. We're not staying home and just watching our iPad all day."

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And she said, "I honestly don't care," handed me her iPad, 'cause it was laying next to her bed. She picked it up, handed it up to me, and she said, "I don't care. I just can't get out of bed." And I was like, "Okay, well, you're sick. Okay. This is real."

**Taylor:** That's fair.

**Sydnee:** She's gonna be fine. She just had— I had this bad cold, and now I think I've given it to my children, unfortunately. I thought they'd given it to me. I feel like everybody's been sick all... year. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah, everybody's just passing around the same three gross...

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** ... gross, but not incapacitating things.

**Sydnee:** Yes. That was my experience with it. Like, I was able to keep working and stuff, but— I mean, you can tell; I'm still congested. I've been congested for weeks.

**Taylor:** Sorry.

**Sydnee:** Oh, it's okay. It's just— I feel bad. I thought I'd gotten it from them, but I guess maybe I've given it to Coop. I don't know. She will be fine, she is okay. She's... cuddled up in bed with snacks and drinks, and the TV, so...

**Taylor:** Well, [jokingly] glad you can enjoy the Oscars, despite your— [laughs] despite illness.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. [laughs]

But I really, like— there were so many movies that I had *no* familiarity with, and that I also am not going to see, just because— like, they were nominated for Oscars, which I feel like should make me wanna go see them...

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... but I'm not. Like, I'm never gonna watch *The Brutalist*. I will never watch that.

**Taylor:** I don't have any interest in seeing *The Brutalist*. Um, I did— my friends that I watched with were big fans of *Anora*, uh, and I had not seen it before. And then after it swept, uh, I went home last night...

**Sydnee:** It did.

**Taylor:** ... I watched it, and I get it. I'm glad it won. I think it's a unique film... to win.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And that's a good sign for smaller productions, for more indie productions for— you know, sometimes I feel like to win an Oscar, you have to be a total bummer, one.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And you've gotta be, like, a giant budget, two.

**Sydnee:** Sure.

**Taylor:** And it's just the kind of movie that feels like, I don't know, eating chia seeds, you know? There's nothing about this that I wanna do; I guess it's good for me, and everybody tells me to, so I should. I don't want to, though.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Taylor:** Uh, and it's nice when a movie that is, you know... fun? Interesting? Like, something I would truly enjoy gets to also win.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Well, that's good. Yeah, I mean, obviously, it seems like it must be a good film, 'cause it won a lot of awards.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I mean, well, but then— I don't... Not naming any names, but also some pretty not-great films won— at least were nominated heavily last night, so, you know...

**Sydnee:** Oh, yeah?

**Taylor:** Yeah...

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I don't know, it was tough because, like, I had seen *Wicked*... [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs] *Wicked* did not win a lot, but I am sure they're waiting for the second one. I think it'll get heavily awarded...

**Sydnee:** The second one?

**Taylor:** ... on the— yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. It was, um... I felt like it was odd that it didn't really win, but maybe that makes sense. But I also had only seen, like I said, that and *The Substance*, so I had...

I'm pretty sure? I don't even know if there were any nominated for other awards where I had seen— you know what I mean? I really did not see these movies this year.

**Taylor:** I was surprised I hadn't seen any of the documentaries. Usually, that's my jam. But that was nice, because now I just have a list of shorts and feature-length documentaries to check out.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** So that... I don't know.

**Sydnee:** I do enjoy trying to pick who I think's gonna win based on, like, the title.

**Taylor:** [laughs] Yeah. Well, see, that's what I think. If I was gonna name a— if I'm gonna make up a movie that should win a bunch of Oscars, *The Brutalist* sounds... right.

**Sydnee:** Right?

**Taylor:** Yeah. And it's got Adrien Brody, and I'm like, "Yeah, that's definitely— that's gonna win a bunch of things."

**Sydnee:** Right? I mean, that's what I thought. That's what I was— so I picked it for a lot of things. I was like, "Well, probably this Adrien Brody [laughs] is gonna win a lot."

**Taylor:** Well, *he* won. Now, did you watch the moment that he won? 'Cause I have a question for you.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I was watching.

**Taylor:** Did he— as he was getting up on stage, it looked like he threw his gum...

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** ... at— okay, that is what happened.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Okay. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** He threw his gum to his, uh...

**Taylor:** Wife?

**Sydnee:** ... wife, partner...

**Taylor:** Wife? Partner? I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Alright. Moments before that, my friend had said, "Oh, you know, good for him." And he kissed the lady next to him, and they said, "Well, that's better than the last time," 'cause of course last time, infamously, he forcibly kissed... Halle Berry, was it?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I think.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Very uncomfortably.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And it was like, "Good, good. This is redemption. He's kissing somebody that seems to want to kiss him." And then he turned around, and threw his gum at her. And I'm like, "Well, that's not... [jokingly conceding] That's *better*..."

**Sydnee:** I told Justin— I said, "If you ever win an Oscar..."

**Taylor:** [through laughter] "And throw your gum at me."

**Sydnee:** "... and throw your gum at me, I will not pick up the gum, and I *will* walk out of the theater. Do not throw gum at me." I can't believe— what is... [sighs] Adrien Brody... I don't know.

**Taylor:** Very fantastically talented, uh, actor, but...

**Sydnee:** Sure.

**Taylor:** ... that, and just being like, "Orchestra, shut up. I still have more things to say. I do this." [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** It's like, okay! Alright.

**Sydnee:** Okay, Adrien Brody. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I don't— yeah. But the gum thing, the gum thing was wild, and not— you just don't do that. You don't... You don't do that!



**Taylor:** Yeah. You think you would have that second ahead of time that's like, "Hey, I might win. I should probably take this gum out of my mouth." Or did he think, "This is gonna be a cool-guy thing to do, and look all cool and wacky?"

**Sydnee:** Well, and then you contrast that with Kieran Culkin's absolutely adorable speech to his wife.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I'm glad he won.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Yeah, I like him a lot.

I thought maybe this would be Jeremy Strong's turn. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah, well, he had a couple— he had two performances. I guess only one was nominated, but he had a strong year, no matter what.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, I thought maybe they would wanna reward him 'cause, you know, he's in the movie about Trump and... whatever. I thought— I don't know.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Kieran Culkin keeps beating him out.

**Taylor:** Well... It's a great— have you seen that— like, a stunt in the movie with Kieran Culkin?

**Sydnee:** Mm-mm.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I liked it; I think he would like it.

**Sydnee:** It looks pretty good. I've thought about watching it, but I haven't seen that, and I haven't seen - and I don't intend to see - *The Apprentice*, the Donald Trump movie. I just can't.

**Taylor:** I couldn't bring myself to watch it. I just— I can't handle the man I don't want to— I feel the same way about, like, when - I mean, I don't

watch *Saturday Night Live*, but you know - I'll get the clips on TikTok, on my apps. And when it's an imitation of Donald Trump, I'm like, "No. I don't— I can't laugh at it anymore. I can't enjoy it. I don't want to know... I want as little of that man's presence in my life, in all forms as possible."

**Sydnee:** I mean, I'm in the same boat. Like, if we watch *SNL*, we skip— if the cold open is about Trump, we just skip it. Morning sketches. I just don't— I have no interest in engaging. I will find out what's happening, and it's not that I'm not paying attention. I know what he's doing, and I'm paying attention. But I don't need to watch him say it.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I don't need to see him talk about it. I have no interest in that.

I *did* watch the Oval Office meeting with Zelensky. I did watch that.

**Taylor:** The actual one, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yes. I watched the entire thing, 'cause I heard so many people—

**Taylor:** It was hard.

**Sydnee:** Well, I heard so many people talking about it, I wanted to know exactly who said what. Um, and I gotta say, I watched that, and then did you watch President Zelensky on Fox News, with Brit Hume afterwards?

**Taylor:** I did not.

**Sydnee:** I know that sounds like a weird thing, but it showed up on my TikTok. I'm surprised Fox News wanted that interview, because it just reaffirmed how, um, tough and serious and fair and just Zelensky is. I mean, it made him look really good, and so I was surprised that Fox News [laughs] would air it.

**Taylor:** Yeah...

**Sydnee:** I don't know.

**Taylor:** That's when you know you're on the [laughs] darkest timeline.

**Sydnee:** Right? Like, it was a very— I was thinking, like...

**Taylor:** Fox News is, uh—

**Sydnee:** ... "This was a very fair interview, and I mean, if I were Zelensky, I would walk away from it feeling very good about it and what is happening."  
[laughs]

I don't know *what's* happening.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** All I know is that Trump and his little buddy, JD, looked like every cowardly schoolyard bully who will only pick on somebody when they are surrounded by their friends, who are even *bigger* cowards, because they're not gonna say it, but they'll stand by and watch it happen.

And that was exactly what that was. Just sad, pathetic, cowardly little boys trying to pick on somebody.

**Taylor:** Yeah... And you know, I don't know, if I was concerned with PR, I would never sit Vance on a couch. Like, I feel like they're just messing with us now. Having him just sitting there, with that mean-little-boy smile and his short pants, sunk into that couch. It's like, "I don't..."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** "I don't like any of this." [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Does—

**Taylor:** He is *too* happy to be there.

**Sydnee:** Does he know how short his pants are?

**Taylor:** Somebody should— oh, don't tell him. Don't tell him now.

**Sydnee:** I mean, I really—

**Taylor:** Make 'em shorter. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I don't understand, like, how he doesn't have— I mean, is there no one in his life to s— or does he not notice? Like, when he sits down, doesn't he see how high up his pants... come?

**Taylor:** I don't know.

**Sydnee:** They're like halfway up his shin!

**Taylor:** It's like, just a little peek-a-boo ankle there. It excites him.

**Sydnee:** I don't know...

**Taylor:** He's sitting on his couch with his little peek-a-boo ankle. It's his—

**Sydnee:** I can't—

**Taylor:** It makes him feel nice.

**Sydnee:** I can't stand him. Every time he talks, I wanna scream.

**Taylor:** He's awful. They're all awful; I hate them all.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Well, yeah. Yeah.

But the Oscars. Pretty dresses, lots of pretty dresses.

**Sydnee:** I did think it was, um, very— *The Substance* that Demi Moore lost to...

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... to the younger— [laughs] the younger actor.

**Taylor:** It was— and you know, I just hope this is the beginning of the Demi songs. You know, I hope she gets more roles, because there was that moment of sadness. Like, now I think that, you know, Mikey deserved the award...

**Sydnee:** Sure.

**Taylor:** ... but I also think Demi absolutely could've won for that. I just hope that she'll get more roles like that. 'Cause, I mean, it's of course the subject we're talking about today.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** What a role. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Oh, my gosh. Well, not just like, "What a role—" like, the fact that the visual effects in that film are real— like, the makeup and everything is real... is wild.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** That that's not computer.

**Taylor:** No, it— well, was nominated a couple times, but the one award - I think the only award it walked with - was for visual effects.

**Sydnee:** I think you're right, yeah. Which is well-earned. I mean, I didn't know— I didn't even know, uh, at the time that it *was* all practical effects.

**Taylor:** But don't you— I mean, I feel like you can *tell*... Like, I can always tell when it's practical. Especially when it's that kind of the physicality, you know, and like, organic closeup... bodies.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** You can always tell when it's practical.

**Sydnee:** We watched *The Substance* - of course, that's what we're talking about - and I was just so impressed with— I mean, it was just so well done. It obviously got into, like— I mean, it became more kind of exaggerated and outrageous as the film went on, but not in a way that ever lost track of what it was saying, you know what I mean? Like, not to the point of ridiculousness.

Which I know that sounds like a wild thing to say about a movie that ends with, like, gallons of blood being sprayed everywhere, but...

**Taylor:** [laughs] No, I agree, but I think it's because it's trying to say something very important, but very... simple.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** You know, it's got one point to make, and it makes it, and it just keeps hitting it over, and over, and over [laughs] again.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** [laughs] Uh, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Obviously, if you haven't seen *The Substance*, we're spoiling it. We're talking about the whole plot of the movie. The general idea is that, uh, there is a— Demi Moore plays a... what is it, movie... TV star— a celebrity.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Who is no longer in her prime, I suppose, is the basis of the film. And so she used to do workout videos, she's very famous for those for many years, and now she is... they're trying to find a new, young replacement for her, because she's - as it is to be a woman - eventually get too old to be allowed to be on TV, I guess. [laughs]

And instead, she ends up, in finding this stuff called "the Substance," somebody gives her a card for some— and it's like a secret thing where, like,

you call a number, you say you want it, you show up at a dropbox. I don't think it— why don't you have to pay for it? She doesn't pay anything, right?

**Taylor:** Well, I don't think it's ever clarified if she does or doesn't. It's possible that she does, and it just wasn't interesting to include it in the plot.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I just thought it was intere— I don't remember there being any like— it's not like it's a million dollars, or anything. I don't remember that being part of it, you know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like in *Death Becomes Her*. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Right, where they were— [laughs] we still don't know what it cost, but we know it was a lot.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And we know it's different for everybody. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yes, that's true.

**Sydnee:** Uh, but you show up at a dropbox, you get this thing— and, like, even just when she opens the box and it's like, "What is this stuff she's gonna have to take to make her young and beautiful?" That's what you kind of assume; it's gonna be something young and beautiful, and it's like, there's stuff you inject to activate, and then there's stuff you have to inject to stabilize, and then there's food bags. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's all so upsetting. And what you find out is that it splits you in two. And you have yourself, and then this younger, hotter version of yourself that, like, literally crawls out of you, out of your spine. And you get to be that for seven days, and then *you* for seven days, although you don't share a consciousness.

**Taylor:** Well, you *do*... like, the second you has all of your— like, you do, but I think they start to grow as two separate entities in this movie. I think

the idea is that you're promised that you share a consciousness, and that that other you has all of your memories...

**Sydnee:** Oh.

**Taylor:** ... knows you're you, knows what you *did*. It's not, like, a child; it is a duplicate.

**Sydnee:** But you don't— oh, okay. But you don't share a consciousness in the moments, like when they wake up after they've been out for seven days, they don't know what the other one has been doing.

**Taylor:** I will admit, I don't think it's made abundantly clear, but I took it to mean that they do— she *does* have the memories of her younger self. Like, they are one, as the movie says. But...

**Sydnee:** See, I didn't know if— 'cause they always seem shocked when they come to, and then they look at the aftermath of what the other one's been doing for seven days.

**Taylor:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** But I don't know. Basically, the younger self is like, "It sucks to be my older self. I don't want seven days; I want *all* the days." And so she begins to break all the rules and try to take over, and it culminates in eventually Demi Moore in truly amazing makeup and prosthetics to make her look like a much, much older sort of, you know, kind of decrepit version of herself. Because all of her life has been sucked away by this younger version of herself, more or less.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And then kind of a *Carrie* scene, I feel like, there. I don't know.

**Taylor:** It's very— oh, with all the blood? Yeah. Oh, yeah, because the younger version of herself tries to take the Substance again to get yet *another* version of herself...



**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... and that results in... Monstro Elisa-Sue? [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** My favorite character in the movie.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And then eventually, she just sort of, like, splooshes.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Just melts.

**Sydnee:** Just melts.

**Taylor:** Bron and Bergie, Bergie and Puddle.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Uh, ten out of ten. My favorite film of the year.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It was— I mean, it's funny, because like you said, it's a very simple message: "This is what we expect of women."

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** "This is—" you know. "And when they do not meet our expectations, we are done with them, and we toss them out, and find a new one that is young, and beautiful, and desirable. And women are put in a position where we will do *anything* to get that back. Anything, no matter how... painful or disgusting or harmful to ourselves."

And, um, that's pretty clear-cut. The scene where Demi Moore, as her regular self— I hate to say "older self." [laughs] But, you know, as herself...

**Taylor:** Elisabeth.

**Sydnee:** Yes, Elisabeth. The scene where she is deciding, "You know what? Those seven days where I'm me, I shouldn't just throw these days away. Maybe I'm gonna go on a date."

**Taylor:** Oh, yes.

**Sydnee:** And there's a guy who knew her from high school who she ran into, who had asked her out on a date. She wouldn't have considered it before, but now she's like, "Yeah, I'm gonna go out on a date with this guy."

So she makes plans with him, and then she goes to get ready for the date. The scene where she is trying to get herself ready to a point where she feels confident leaving the house, and then eventually can't, was one of the most visceral scenes. [laughs]

I don't know why *that* is what dug into me and, like, I kept thinking about. With all of the grotesque imagery in that movie, that scene stuck with me.

**Taylor:** Oh, I agree. I would argue that's the scene that should've won her the Oscar. [laughs] But yeah.

**Sydnee:** She— it's that she's ready, she's gotten herself ready, and she looks great. She's Demi Moore, she looks great. And then she looks at herself in the mirror, and it's not right. So she, like, redoes her lipstick.

So she looks at herself in the mirror again, and the makeup and the hair, like she starts fiddling and picking and wiping and pulling, and like, it culminates in her scrubbing all the makeup off her face, and just rubbing her face raw. And it is just— I feel like there are a lot of us who know that moment...

**Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... who know that, like— I don't know, I used to say sometimes, when I was trying to get ready to go somewhere, I would get stuck in my closet for a while.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] And what it was is, I hate myself in everything I've put on today...

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... and there is no combination of the clothes in my closet that is gonna make me stop hating myself today, and I don't know what to do, and I'm just *stuck*. I'm just stuck here in my closet, half-dressed, and I don't know how to leave it.

**Taylor:** Absolutely. You keep trying to find a permutation of yourself that is going to make you happy, and you know, "Maybe if I just do this with my hair, or I just put on this one thing." And you think, "I can find it. I can find it." And it becomes very desperate, and very sad, and then you realize you cannot find it.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** That is not there.

**Sydnee:** And it's— you know, it's weird because for most of my, like, experience with that sensation, it's been very much tied to my body, and how I feel about my body at that time, and what size clothes I'm wearing, and those sorts of the fears and hang-ups and problems.

As I mean— I mean, I'm now in my 40s; I have those moments where I get ready, and then I look in the mirror, and I just can't stop thinking, like, "Um, when did that wrinkle show up like that?"

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "When did that gray hair become so noticeable?"

And there is an aspect of that that is so intractable. I mean, I don't know, I think I could rationalize, like, "Man, if I just lost a few pounds..."

Not that this is good, or healthy; I'm just acknowledging it. But when you look in the mirror, and your face looks older, your face can't not look older. Your face can't not look older.

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Except I guess it can. I guess there are things.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And I guess that's the whole point.

**Taylor:** Well, but I mean, let's be real. When women, specifically, pursue those things, it often does not— I mean, whether it yields good results or not, that's in the eye of the beholder. But we harass them just as much.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** "Oh, she looks old."

"Oh, she looks like she has work done." Both disparaging statements.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Yeah, no, there really is no winning, because especially as a celebrity, we all know how old you are.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's on— we can Google it. [laughs] You know? Maybe somebody walking down the street, you don't really know if they look their age or not, 'cause you don't know how old they are.

But like, we can Google "Demi Moore," and find out how old she— I don't know how old she is. But I mean, we could figure it out.

And so then, yeah, you're gonna get criticized if you are in your 60s, and you look like you're in your 40s, "Oh, what'd you have done?"

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** No, it's— well, you know, that scene in front of the mirror, very visceral. Before all the body horror, the other one that really did it for me was when Dennis Quaid is eating shrimp.

**Sydnee:** Ugh!

**Taylor:** That was the most disgusting scene...

**Sydnee:** Ugh.

**Taylor:** ... in a movie full of exploding bodies, and [laughs] blood and gore. *That* was the most disgusting scene.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Everything that he is in that scene paired with that imagery, where he's just consuming violently... Which, again, it's okay for a movie to just keep hitting the same nail on the head. [laughs] He's the male producer of her show...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... and he is letting her know that, "Happy 50th birthday; you're useless to us now, 'cause you're too old." And he is just ripping apart the bodies of these creatures that he's consuming, as the industry does women. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, that shrimp scene was one of the grossest in the movie; I agree. Yeah.

And again, which is impressive, because we do have this sort of humanoid monstrosity that [laughs] our main character becomes by the end.

Um, I also thought that that was very— well, the idea that the younger, beautiful version of herself still feels the need to create an even younger, more beautiful version of herself.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** I mean, I thought that was very— yes. It never ends. It's never enough. You can't be perfect enough; there is no perfect. You will find a flaw.

**Taylor:** I think it's interesting— you know, for all of the prosthetic use, one thing— it's subtle, but I was curious about it, but then when I was reading about what they did, what was *built*, the Sue actress, the younger one, is— it's a prosthetic breastplate that she's wearing when you see her nude.

**Sydnee:** Hmm.

**Taylor:** And there is sort of, I don't know, [holding back light laughter] an uncanny valley with her... naked that I think was really— I mean, maybe it was just for the modesty of the actress, but I think it was to just make her look more endowed.

But it's so symmetrical and creepy in that it's so perfect. And I don't—

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** It felt like a very smart, subtle use of going again with the practical effects. Like, she is so perfect, it's kind of... upsetting.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I thought so, too. And I thought that also, um, it was interesting to me when they show her making her new workout videos, and they're supposed to be, obviously, hypersexual...

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... right? Like, this is supposed to be— are we really— we're not even pretending that this is a workout video.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** This is, like, softcore pornography, basically, that they're filming and calling a workout video. Except I did not find any of those shots of any of these beautiful people working out— I did not find it sexy in the slightest.

It's funny; Justin and I were watching it, and I was like, "Who is this *for*? Like, is this male gaze? Is this female gaze? What am I seeing these people—" and I think that's intentional.

I think there is something about it that is so— like, we've reached past sexy to something that makes me feel bad.

**Taylor:** Well, I think it's a purposeful takedown— it's a mockery *of* the male gaze. Because it is; there's something so violent about it. It's just a piece of the body, and then a piece of the body, and then a piece of the body.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** You know? It's her butt, her breast, her mouth. Like, you don't see the whole person because the idea is this is the violence of the male gaze. It's that a woman is the sum of her parts, and nothing more.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And that is how she is shot, constantly, in the film.

**Sydnee:** I think it was very clever, though, because as you're watching it, you recognize the cues of, like, "This is supposed to be sexy."

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** You know, these are objectively attractive people dressed skimpily, you know? Like, this is supposed to be a sexy scene. It is not. It *definitely* is not.

**Taylor:** It seems very clinical, in a lot of ways. And that goes for— I think that the set dressing of Elisabeth's apartment...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... it's so sterile, *especially* that bathroom. It looks like an examination room.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And I don't know, it feels like this is a woman who has lived her life in accordance with what, you know, a male-driven society demands from her. She is clean, and perfect, and beautiful.

You know, it's not like— obviously, this is sort of— the whole film exists in almost a fairytale kind of reality...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... but I kept thinking, like, where are her friends? Like, where is her family? Where are people that you— when you're feeling bad about yourself, and you're feeling insecure, where are the people that you rely on? She has none of those.

The only thing she had was her beauty and the admiration of her industry. And that's a very hollow and empty life.

**Sydnee:** Well, and I think that that's like— I guess we could guess that that is what it's taken for her to...

**Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... achieve this. Like, she has to give up everything in order to achieve this.

**Taylor:** Well, and that's what I thought was so engaging about how— when Elisabeth has her seven days opposite Sue's, when she starts cooking and eating and kind of being gross, you know...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.



**Taylor:** ... I mean, it's an obvious commentary on, you know, just how women are made to starve themselves to exist. Just in general, but specifically in that industry.

But also that she's just finally allowed to be... gross. Like, there was kind of a manic freedom to her in that cookbook. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, I think that was definitely part of it. 'Cause I think that, by the end— I mean, I think that she is very intentionally a crone archetype.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, she has become a witch, kind of, [laughs] in that sense. And I'm talking archetypal; I don't mean in the religious pagan sense. I don't mean a Wiccan.

I mean, that's the phase of woman that she is in, and in that phase, you are allowed to be gross, and scary, and selfish, and concerned with your own needs, and mean, or angry, or all the things that women aren't supposed to be.

**Taylor:** [laughs] All the things that men are allowed to be their whole lives.

**Sydnee:** Right. Like, when you become the crone...

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... you can be those things, but not *until* then. And you have to look like the crone.

The sacrifice is you will look like this, and you will be shunned by society. But you do get to be all those things.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Through your ugliness, there's a certain freedom.

Well, 'cause there is that sort of perverse, maiden-mother-crone progression in the film...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... that I enjoyed. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, I definitely think that that's there because initially, I do think she is trying to— she gives birth, so to speak, to her younger self. And then she tries to be supportive of, like, "Good. She will have this, and I will continue to sacrifice, so that she can have this."

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause they give her the option. You know, "You can stop this at any time. You can end it." And she doesn't choose to end it.

**Taylor:** Yeah. There is that kind of parallel, I guess, to motherhood where, you know, her life is just sucked out of her by this younger version of herself. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] But, like, motherhood is more rewarding. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well, yeah! It's kind of— it's like a perversion of motherhood. It's...

**Sydnee:** Right, yeah. Definitely, I think that there's the beginning of that, like it hints to that, and then it becomes something else entirely. But yes, like...

**Taylor:** Well, and I do think— that is something that happens in society, where women are only allowed to put value in themselves in their beauty. I mean, I have those friends that have those stories about, like, their mother's jealous of their own daughters...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... for their beauty. Like, that weird competition thing that happens. Because if your only vehicle for having worth in the world is your beauty, and then you give birth to a younger version of yourself... All women are in competition with each other, so that's your direct competition, you know?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** That is something that does happen in family dynamics.

**Sydnee:** No, I mean, that definitely— I think that can exist. And I think the other part of that is that we— someone who is pregnant, I think, has value in society. Like, we have some concessions that we'll make, like we will treat someone who is pregnant - at times, not always - like as something to be handled with care.

But as soon as you are no longer pregnant, but you have a child, so now you've become a mother in that sense; you become a parent. You are a parental figure. As a woman, we have absolutely no use for you.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** All value is lost, because you are not that, um, potential of childbearing— there's something about a woman before she bears children, where that is part of what— like, it's not just the youth and the beauty. Someone *could* impregnate her. [laughs]

I mean, I know how gross that sounds, but I do think that that gives somebody value. Like, "Oh, that is something— she is potentially *that*, too."

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** But once you've done it, "Well, good. We're done with you."

And we really— I mean, that's kind of the magic of the "crone" phase, is we give ourselves value at that point. Society isn't gonna give you any value back; "We're done with you." Where you're used up, you're finished, so I will give myself value.

**Taylor:** Mm. Well, but it's sad, because it's not like— you know, if you did have a second chance at your youth, you would hope that maybe— if you spent your whole life pursuing, you know, male approval, you would hope that maybe you'd do something different. But she does the exact same thing.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And it's not even like— it's kind of goofy, when you pull back. Like, "I'm going to be a cable TV aerobics instructor."

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** And then her big thing is, "I'm going to host a network New Year's show - one of, for sure, many that are going on that night." Like, that is the whole sacrifice of yourself is just...

**Sydnee:** That's it.

**Taylor:** ... to do the same things, until I guess Sue gets— you know, if she'd even made the system work. Like, until Sue gets old, and then... yeah, you make another one...

**Sydnee:** And then that's it? Yeah, you keep just doing it, over and over again?

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** I mean, yes. And that's— I mean, she cannot see, even with all of her life ahead again. Because we reset the clock, so she gets not just youth and beauty; she gets time.

And you know what's interesting, is that she does not see the value of the time she got to make new choices, or better choices, or different choices, or just try something else. Just different.

Just try some— she sees *no* value in the time. The only thing that has value is the youth and beauty.

**Taylor:** Well, I mean—

**Sydnee:** That's it.

**Taylor:** To even go back to the exact same man that quite literally— like, that just threw her away, that tossed her out...

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** ... to go back and seek *his* specific approval is— it's very tragic, but I think it is, you know...

**Sydnee:** Well, it's the only place she's ever had value, so she doesn't even know how to begin... Which is, again, demonstrated by the date scene.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Here is an opportunity— not that, like, a date or a relationship is the end-all, be-all, but it's at least another way to have somebody value you, appreciate you, to experience life.

Another place in which you can find self-actualization is through relationships with other people. Not just romantic, but friendships, right? Through, like, *connecting* with other humans.

As far as we know, she has no experience with that.

**Taylor:** Right.

[alarm goes off]

**Sydnee:** Because there's nobody around her. And she can't even engage with that, because the only thing that has value is the thing that she is losing, which is youth.

**Taylor:** Well, and the fact that she takes responsibility for that, you know? I think that's a big separator as far as men and women, you know? [laughs] Having played for both teams, I think it's a very...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** Like, you know, if a woman is rejected, nine times out of ten, she's gonna blame herself. "I'm not enough; that's why I was rejected."

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** When a man's rejected, it's the woman's fault, right?

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Taylor:** *She* rejected— that's her fault. It's always the woman's fault, you know, to fix herself, to better herself, to become enough to be accepted.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Men can just be. And so for her to constantly, like— she can't get the approval from herself; she's got to go find somebody to give it to her, you know? Like, if she'd gone on the date, I don't think that would've been the answer for her character either. But...

**Sydnee:** No. No, I don't think that that would've been the answer, either. I think it did represent, though, an idea that there is something other than being beautiful that you could have.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And then, I don't mean to say, like, "And it's romance."

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I just mean anything.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, there's literally— and I think the cooking and the eating is a version of that, too, but of course it's taken to, like, almost a perverse [laughs] place. Like, yeah, you could've gotten really into cooking, and enjoy food and eating, but not quite like that. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well, but I feel like— again, it's sort of going with the kind of male gaze. And as much as, like, the way her eating is presented as so *disgusting*, like, eating is beautiful. It's wonderful. It's one of the best things we can do with our time. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Food is amazing. But a lot of people that are socialized as women grow up thinking that eating is the worst thing you can do. It's disgusting. It's a disgusting thing to cook and eat for your own joy.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Taylor:** And I feel like the way that they show those scenes just so *disgusting* is just, you know, I don't— I mean, we've both struggled with eating disorders in the past. We've talked about that. And I felt like there was that moment where, like, "Yeah, that's what eating felt like, for years, to me."

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** A disgusting, putrid act that is destructive.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, I think that's well-represented. But you know, I think they contrast it, then, with like, so she has this younger, beautiful version of herself now who's going out and living this glamorous life, and the aftermath is like the party aftermath, like all the liquor bottles everywhere, and everything...

**Taylor:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** And I think that we, as the audience, are criticizing her, too. "Oh, this is terrible. Look at this. Is this how you want to live?"

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** "What, do you just party and drink? Do drugs? What is this?" Like, *all* of it is critical. "We hate you for eating, we hate you for partying, we hate

you for being beautiful, we hate you for being old. We can't stand you, no matter what—" you know?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You can't win.

**Taylor:** "We'll give you a role to play when you're young and beautiful. We'll still hate you, but we'll give you a space."

**Sydnee:** Yes. Yeah, "Come to this studio. Exist in this *exact* space, and do this *exact* thing, and you will be praised for that."

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** "And nothing else."

Yeah, no, I think that the film is criticizing them constantly, which is what—I mean, that's what the audience will be doing.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And you do. Like, you look at the food aftermath, you look at the party aftermath, and you go, "Ugh."

**Taylor:** I— [sighs] The third act of this movie is one of the most gleeful [laughs] sequences committed to film. Starting with the fight between— 'cause, you know, Elisabeth gets the stuff, she finally decides that she's going to kill Sue.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** And she gets the stuff to do so. She can't go through with it, because she just can't— and that moment, she's looking at her beautiful, perfect skin, and she just can't do it.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.



**Taylor:** And then Sue wakes up. So they're both conscious at the same time, um, and they have that fight. And that fight is what kicks it off for me. That's the thing where I'm like, "Is this movie— are we serious?" And then when Sue gives that, like, kick that sends Elisabeth [laughs] across the room...

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** ... like, it's so comical. It's so ridiculous. It just goes into, like, *Tom and Jerry* violence from that point forward.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And it is absolutely gleeful. As disgusting as it is, that is just... such a fun sequence of events from that point forward.

**Sydnee:** Well, and I don't know, like, within the logic of the film, by killing her older self, she begins to deteriorate at that point.

**Taylor:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** Right? Like, because they are one, one cannot exist without the other.

**Taylor:** She's also out of the spinal fluid. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah. She's out of spinal fluid. [laughs] And she can't, and so now her teeth start falling out...

**Taylor:** Oh, the teeth scene!

**Sydnee:** ... which is awful.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And so that's when she decides, like, "I've gotta make a new one!"

She injects herself with - ugh - the leftover activator, and I mean, just the way the spinal fluid— the whole thing, everything about that is also... ugh.

**Taylor:** But then, when she gives birth to Elisa-Sue, and Elisa-Sue is getting herself in that dress, and she's standing— you know, contrast that to the scene with Demi Moore looking in the mirror...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** ... and not looking perfect enough. And then you've got the *monstrous* version of the two of them, and she's curling her one weird, wet hair, and it just sings [laughs] off.

I related to *that* moment. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] And then she rips off the poster's face, and puts it on her own.

**Taylor:** [coming down from laughter] Oh, my gosh. I love Elisa-Sue! I don't know, there was something so freeing about Elisa-Sue that maybe— I mean, I guess it makes sense.

It's like, in finally becoming the absolute nightmare version of herself, devoid of all beauty by their standards - I think Elisa-Sue was beautiful - there was some, like, weird freedom. When she's just spinning around on the stage, like spitting blood all over everybody... Like, it's just... it's *gorgeous*.

**Sydnee:** Well, they got what they deserved.

**Taylor:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** "This is what you all deserve."

**Taylor:** Well, this is—

**Sydnee:** "This is what you want, this is what you deserve."

**Taylor:** And this is what you *made*.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Like, this is what you made her.

**Sydnee:** The boob in the middle of...

**Taylor:** [giggles]

**Sydnee:** ... her forehead.

**Taylor:** That's so on-the— 'cause what did they say? There's an earlier scene...

**Sydnee:** There's a line that references that, yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah. "If only her chest was in the middle of her face," so that was just perfect. Ah...

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I thought it was— I mean, I don't know. I didn't see the other film, so I don't want to sit here and say Demi Moore should've won an Oscar; I don't know. I'm glad she was recognized. I think it was... such a good movie. So well-done. I think— man, she went through with those prosthetics.

**Taylor:** Oh, my gosh.

**Sydnee:** It must've been hours, and hours.

**Taylor:** I can't believe that— I mean, obviously when Demi Moore's in the prosthetic, you can still tell it's Demi under there.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** The fact that it's the other— I feel bad for forgetting her name. The younger actress is in the Elisa-Sue monster outfit.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Like, it would not have to be her. It could be anybody in that. That could be a fully animatronic thing. But that is *her* under all of that. [laughs] It's insane.

**Sydnee:** That's wild. Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah, I don't...

**Sydnee:** It was very— I'd recommend— now, I will say, like, if you're not— I mean, it is not for those who don't like body horror. I mean, it's very grotesque.

**Taylor:** Gore, gore, gore.

**Sydnee:** It is— yes. And I mean, and with scenes like you talked about, they do repeated spinal taps.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Which is rough, even if— that's not even, like, necessarily a body horror kind of thing. It's just hard to watch. Um... so there is a lot of that. And if that is not your thing, this would be a tough movie.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Uh, and there's quite a bit of nudity; I don't know why. I don't know— [laughs] so I was gonna say, "So don't let kids watch it," but don't let kids watch it anyway. This is not for kids.

**Taylor:** Definitely not for kids. I'm sure Cooper would *love* it...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** ... you know.

**Sydnee:** But, see, they referenced it in that opening bit in the Oscars, where Conan crawled out of the Demi Moore body. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And uh, Cooper was in the room for that, and she went running out of the room.

**Taylor:** Oh. Well...

**Sydnee:** She was like, "I don't know what's happening, but this is not okay." [laughs]

**Taylor:** I mean, that's probably— that's the way a young child should react to that, I think.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** So that's good. That's a good sign.

**Sydnee:** Why— [laughs] "Why is that tall redhead man crawling out of that naked woman on the floor?"

**Taylor:** It's terrifying.

**Sydnee:** It's like, "Well... I'll tell you when you can watch this movie someday."

**Taylor:** Yeah. Give her, like, 12 years? 10 years?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** At least— yeah. 11. Then, she'll be 18.

**Taylor:** Alright.

**Sydnee:** So we consider you— [laughs]

Well, anyway, I was glad I watched it. I thought it was very well done.

**Taylor:** I'm glad you enjoyed it. It was...

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** ... yeah, absolutely *my* Oscar winner of the year.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. I agree, having seen very few of the films. [laughs]

**Taylor:** I don't need to see any movies— I know that in none of the other movies there's Elisa-Sue, Monstro Elisa-Sue. There's no...

**Sydnee:** There you go.

**Taylor:** ... horrifying nightmare monsters with body parts. And that's what I like, so...

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Sorry, *The Brutalist*.

**Sydnee:** Sorry, *Conclave*.

**Taylor:** [laughs] Although I do wanna see *Conclave*. One of the friends last night loved it, and he said, It's like, um— it's just like the girls, fighting in all of their outfits. It's a bunch of, like, cardinals...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** ... being sassy, and mean. Like, oh— he described it as, um, you know in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, there's like the other show where they're— it's just them talking, being catty with each other?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, yeah.

**Taylor:** He's like, "It's that, but with the Catholic church."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** *Untucked*. "It's *Untucked* with the Catholic church."

Like, oh, well, now I do wanna see it. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Maybe we will. Justin really wants to watch it, so...

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

**Sydnee:** [lightheartedly defeated] Alright...

Well, what are we gonna talk about next, Tey?

**Taylor:** Uh...

**Sydnee:** Not *Conclave*.

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** Um, I thought we could go back in time for this one. Uh, go back to the 90s, and then we could talk about Garbage, the band.

**Sydnee:** That'd be great! I would love to talk about Garbage.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Mainly the two— the self-titled, and then *2.0*, the two albums that were sort of iconic that came out in the mid-90s.

**Sydnee:** Perfect.

Yeah. We will talk about Garbage next week, and until then, you should go to [maximumfun.org](http://maximumfun.org), and check out a lot of great podcasts there that you enjoy. You can email us at [stillbuffering@maximumfun.org](mailto:stillbuffering@maximumfun.org). And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

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

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Sydnee:** I am *Still Buffering*...

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

[theme song plays]

[acoustic guitar sting]

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