

Still Buffering 449: Clown in a Cornfield (2025)

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[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, it was a wild weekend. TikTok giveth, and TikTok taketh away.

Taylor: What did TikTok doeth?

Sydnee: The conspiracy theories, the hope that TikTok gave us...

Taylor: Oh. [laughs] Yeah.

Sydnee: We spent one glorious weekend wondering... as somebody—not me, I was not clever enough to come up with this. But as somebody said, we spent a weekend with Schrodinger's President.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Ah...

Taylor: I guess I'm just too much of a cynic that I just wouldn't let myself get my hopes up. I was like, "No. That would—that's just... no." And not like that would even necessarily be... good. 'Cause then we've got...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Little baby man. That's not better.

Sydnee: I know. I mean, I understand what you're saying. But, like... also... [laughs] but still.

Taylor: On a deep, spiritual level, I need to outlive that presence on Earth. Like, in any moment of darkness, that's one of those little guiding lights that comes up. Like, "Well, you can't go yet, buddy. 'Cause you can't let that... [wheeze-laughs] you can't go before that guy does."

Sydnee: I, uh... at first when I saw those sorts of theories floating I thought, "No. Come on, guys. Come on." And then... because I interacted with them, my algorithm kept growing. And it was like, "Well, I mean, it is kind of weird that that picture would be from so far away. Like, it is weird that they wouldn't address it by just having him, like, stand up and say, like, 'Hey, I'm still alive.' It is weird... that they—that the roads to Walter Reed are all shut down. It is—" [laughs] Like... "It is kinda—that picture does look weir—why is he smiling like that? That is weird!" I don't know. I let them trick me.

Taylor: I think it's pretty obvious that he's very ill. But I do think that they will—they will as close to a Weekend at Bernie's situation as possible, until the bitter end.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You know.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I think you're right. And, I mean, I do think—I do think that they are hiding whatever his medical conditions are. I do think that's true. But I don't know—I wouldn't theorize as to—there are a lot of people in healthcare who decided, after seeing the picture of the edema in his legs, that they were going to, like, go on TikTok and diagnose him.

Taylor: I've seen a lot of people do that.

Sydnee: Yeah, and it's just—that's a dangerous game to play, period, with anybody, ever. It's just not—you can't diagnose people from a picture, or from—I mean, you just can't. If you're not their healthcare provider and you don't know their whole history and all of their, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't like to dabble in that. I could sit here and tell you all the reasons

someone could have swelling in their legs, but I'm not going to sit here and say, "And I know definitively."

You just can't know. You can't know from looking at that picture. You can't know.

Taylor: It would be... what a—what a kick for ol'—ol' Joey B, ol' Joe Biden out there with his ice cream, if he outlives that man. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I know, right? We did not expect that. I hope he's doing okay.

Taylor: Wherever he is. I think he's fine. He's just... got his feet kicked up. Got a big ol' bowl of... of rocky road.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Just... chilling.

Sydnee: Yeah, but it was a—it was a magical weekend. It really distracted me from—I was trying to chase down the story of the woman who fell in love with her psychiatrist.

Taylor: Oh, you don't—you know what? I—I—I got the first video fed to me. I don't know what that says about my algorithm. 'Cause, like, I got the first one, when very—it was, like, no one was really commenting on it. And I'm like, "Huh. Well, that's not... that's not good." And then all the sudden it exploded. And then I went back and caught up with it all, and I just decided, you know what? This is one of those things that should not be on the internet.

Sydnee: No. That's... that phenomenon is, I mean...

Taylor: People falling in love with chatbots?

Sydnee: ... transference. Well, with their psychiatrist.

Taylor: Oh, well, yeah.

Sydnee: That's a—a, well, I mean... yeah.

Taylor: Not—there's a lot—there's levels. There's the in love the psychiatrist, but listening to the chatbots as if they were also... spiritual guides.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. But the—that—that phenomenon is so common there's a name for it. And there—and, like, it is well understood that that can happen, especially if you have someone who is in a—if you're in a therapeutic relationship with a patient, and they have never really been able to open up about some things, or talk to—or had someone who listened to them, you know? If they have not had that, like, that is a thing that can happen.

And, like, you are trained in how to try to manage that while keeping boundaries that are appropriate and, like, knowing when, "Okay, this can no longer be a therapeutic relationship. Like, we have... this will not be helpful to you anymore, because you are... "

I mean, there... that happens. But that's not... [laughs quietly] I don't know. I guess now we have TikTok and people want to share that.

Taylor: Well, and yeah, people that are in a state of—they're unwell, mentally.

Sydnee: Yes, yeah.

Taylor: And make a video of something that probably shouldn't be on the internet. That is obviously—that's gonna happen. I kinda—it bothers me, all of the people that, like—like, really whip it up and enjoy it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, people figured out who the doctor was and, like, released his name. Like, "Ooh, is he gonna have a statement?"

It's like, no, 'cause he's a professional, so of course he is going to say nothing and not engage with it, 'cause that's probably the worst thing to do.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Absolutely. Right.

Taylor: But also, like, this woman's in, like, some sort of, I don't know... I don't—I don't know. But clearly not well.

Sydnee: Right. Right.

Taylor: And—

Sydnee: This is a problem.

Taylor: Recognize your own role in bringing this to such a high level of—of awareness that she's going live 22 hours a day thinking that she's an oracle, speaking to these two AI chatbots. Like, we did that. She didn't do that. She was just someone who was in a bad state who made a video that shouldn't have wound up on the internet, and then we whipped it up. And I can't find joy in those situations. There's been a couple examples of that recently where someone is clearly not well, and they become, like, an of-the-minute lolcow. And I just—I can't.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't think—and, you know, I wonder if—I mean, certainly there are people out there who are mean spirited and will laugh at things that, you know, are inappropriate to laugh at, and that kind of thing. But then there are also a lot of people who I think the—the anonymity and the distance of the internet and of social media gives them that sort of, like—it's like you forget, like, that's really messed up.

That person is clearly ill right now, and you wouldn't do that if they were standing in front of you, right? If somebody came walking up to you on the street and was clearly mentally ill and began to say things that, you know, didn't align with reality, you wouldn't be like, "Hahaha, oh my gosh! Everybody come listen to this person!"

Most of us wouldn't do that, right? That's wild. That'd be a wild reaction. But for some reason on the internet, it's like people just forget.

Taylor: Well, not for some reason. I mean, obviously the anonymity makes it easier, but also it's—it's incentivized. Like, at the very least, just for the

likes, engagement, the dopamine hit of if you have the next best hot take on the hot subject, people will watch. But then also a lot of people get paid for, you know—you get money for those likes and engagements. It's kind of evil.

It's like everybody wants to talk about whatever everybody else is talking about, and sometimes it's something harmless. You know, like a—a cute kid that likes to eat corn. Then okay, great. But then sometimes it's somebody having an obvious mental breakdown on the internet, and instead of it just being one video that goes to their handful of followers, a few of which text that person to go, "Yo, you good? 'Cause I don't think you good."

It gets, you know, national coverage.

Sydnee: Yeah. And it really, like—I'm glad I didn't chase it all down, 'cause I didn't know. People were talking about it and I was like, "I don't know what this is." And there were so many videos. I was like, "Oh, I can't do all this." And I was too distracted at that point by the Weekend at Bernie's memes. Which, some of 'em were quite funny, about—

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: —yeah, about the President. And then, um, I'm still getting a lot of Burning Man. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: See, that's the—if you want—if you want to—if you want to, you know, like, capitalize on somebody's misfortune, a bunch of rich people—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Need some schadenfreude in your life.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] That's different. A bunch of mega rich people playing Mad Max in the desert. There you go. Just have some standards!

Sydnee: Ever since I learned about the material that that desert is made out of and, like—like, how bad it is if you just, like, leave it caked on your skin... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I've—I have never—I can't—I see those—I saw the videos. At first, like, the absolutely massive dust storm. And then the torrential rain that turned everything into mud. And I was watching people, like, sort of roll around in the mud. And that is so—you should not do that. You should not do that. That's not a good idea.

And I know that, like, they can't have easy access to showers. I know there's showers. There's lots of videos of people defending Burning Man who are like, "There's bathrooms, there's showers." But it's still a festival. It's not like that you have a shower—unless you're one of the really rich people who, like, drive out in their fully decked out RVs with, you know.

Taylor: They don't even drive. There was a ton of planes landing out there. Landing their planes out there, rolling up to the, you know, whatever setup they paid to have installed for themselves.

Sydnee: The... the—the—[laughs quietly] the image of the orgy dome.
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah... I kept—every—every—there was one guy who was giving updates on the orgy dome and every time I got a video I was like, "Nope. Nope. not—don't wanna know."

Sydnee: Well, it just got destroyed.

Taylor: I mean, that's great. Not, like, in a biblical sense. I just don't... don't know. That... just the people that are there, no orgies for you.

Sydnee: That is, uh... yeah. I don't—that is not an experience that I personally desire. I had thought about it. I watched a documentary about Burning Man back in college. [laughs quietly] Back in the year 2001. And I thought, "Maybe I'll go to that someday."

Taylor: No, I knew—I knew some people that did that, like, a decade ago. But I think it's like a lot of festivals, these days. Like, there's a—I think there's, like, I don't know, like, what, like Bonnaroo, Coachella? There's lots of festivals that started off really cool and really, like, you know, just, like, good places to go and, you know, I mean, Burning Man isn't so much music.

It's art. It's, you know, it's a momentary civilization. But lots of really cool things that just became so... I don't know. What happened? It's just... it's commercialization. It's capitalism. It's influencers invading everything and needing to make everything "[mockingly] An aesthetic experience," and it just—now they all—they all suck together. In different ways, but also in the same. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, yes. It's all that stuff, and then I think specifically, like, anything that starts to get infested with that, like... millionaire, tech bro, incel, crypto... culture... place?

Taylor: So many words, but yeah.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Like, that's—whatever that is. That Venn diagram, that intersection point of people. When those people start coming to these events, like, that's not—I mean, you know. I'm sure there are a lot of people there who have been going for a long time and don't really enjoy the private plane... you know... rich people who show up to, like... I don't know. Hook up with twenty-somethings? I mean, I'm not—you know what I mean? Like... I don't know.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, that's what—like, for a lot of those—you know, I think historically those have been like, "Hey, this is your one big thing you're gonna do." But, like, if you have enough money that you can just... like, you don't—you shouldn't need that. You could have that every weekend in your mansion. You could have people bring in some weird dirt and do a bunch of drugs. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: If that's what you want.

Sydnee: That's all they're missing is the weird dirt!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, they're already doing a bunch of weird drugs and, you know, dressing however they want, and dancing around. And they probably are burning things, whatever they want.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: You could build your own man and burn it. Like... you could do that. It's just the weird dirt. That's what they're missing. They're missing the weird dirt.

Taylor: And that seems like the worst part!

Sydnee: The weird dirt seems like the worst part.

Taylor: Every time people describe the weird way that it sucks moisture from your body and cracks your skin, I was like, it sounds like an organism that hates you. Like, I don't know if—especially if you're, like, spiritual in, like, the Earth sense, like, "Oh, we're going out there to experience—" like, it sounds like the nature is actively saying, "Get off! Go away!"

Sydnee: Yes! There were a lot of commenters who, like, that's their take on it, is that it seems like the desert's rejecting you. It seems like the desert is saying, "No. no. We don't—you are—no! Please leave." It's very inhospitable. Which, maybe that's the point? I don't know. Like, maybe if you ask people who've been doing it for decades, maybe they would say, like, that's the whole idea is to come live in an inhospitable environment, and still... thrive, and create, and love, and live. Maybe that's the whole point. I don't know.

Taylor: If you want to be in an inhospitable environment and create art and try to thrive and live, you could just come to New York.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: We do that every day. [laughs] You wanna live out your Mad Max fantasy? Just, I don't know, live off certain trains, and every day you get to experience that.

Sydnee: That's true. And, I mean, yeah, if—I mean, I guess maybe that's the different perspective is, like, I... we come from a place where, like, for a number of reasons, it is hard to survive and thrive and create and do all the things you want to do for a lot of people who live here.

Taylor: And I moved to another one that's the same. Interesting choices, Taylor. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, but it's like—and so, I don't know. Like... maybe that's the—it's a different perspective. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, that—yeah. I mean, and that's—again, like, I know that there's two camps of... what do they call themselves? Burners? Like, I think there are those old school people that this is just—they're there for the art. They're there to make cool stuff.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I am sure that there is some cool people, some really interesting people that have taken part in it for a long time. But then I also think there are the people that don't have any struggle, or difficulty, so it's like—like some sort of difficulty tourism. But then they also have the kind of money to not make it difficult.

Sydnee: I've seen people call it things like poverty cosplay. And I don't—I mean, I agree with you. I don't think that's everybody who participates, by any stretch. A lot of people have reached out, 'cause we've talked about the specific stuff that the mud does to—the playa does to you on Sawbones. And a lot of people reached out who attended and were like, you know, "You should come sometime, it's really awesome, and I've been going for a really long time. And it's not what—you know, it's not as bad as people talk about it," and that kind of thing. So I do think there are a lot of people who attend for that reason.

And like I said, I remember watching that documentary about it [laughs quietly] back in college and thinking, like, "[gasps] I could—it's almost like a commune!" Like, I could set up a tent where, like, I will provide you with free medical care. That's what I'm bartering to you. I am offering this as my—you know? I can't create art, I don't have something physical to give you. But my free thing is I will provide free medical service for anybody who needs help, and then in return, I don't know, somebody would... give me... shrooms? I don't know. I don't want shrooms. But you get the idea. Like... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Sure you don't. What a quick answer if you don't want 'em!

Sydney: Well, I don't know! Like, whatever. I guess like a Snicker bar, you know? Something. um... [laughs quietly] But the point is, like, I love that idea. I love the idea of communes. I always have been drawn to that. And I think, like, that sort of aspect of it is really lovely. And I think people wanting to build a little community temporarily and share their art and whatever they create and... you know, spend time together, I think that's a lovely thing. But then obviously there is the more sinister aspect. Um... I mean, that's true for so many things. It's just—I mean, it's like—it's sort of like the evolution of Woodstock. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah, exactly.

Sydney: Right? Except that they were two separate festivals in time. If you mashed it all together into one continuous, ongoing thing that happens every year, it's the same idea, right?

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know. Rich people gotta ruin everything.

Sydney: That's the way of it.

Taylor: They take everything we got.

Sydney: Except, I don't know. Do you think Fred Durst goes to Burning Man? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Um...

Sydnee: Speaking of Woodstock '99.

Taylor: No. No. But I think maybe Fred Durst would be the—that's the only thing that could defeat Burning Man, I think. He is the Burning Man.
[wheeze-laughs] They've been waiting—they've been trying to summon him for years.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: It ends when Fred Durst appears from the pyre.

Sydnee: The burn the man, and Fred Durst and his khaki shorts, with his backwards red ball cap, arises. [laughs]

Taylor: He starts singing Break Stuff, and then that's it. They break all the stuff. Burning Man no more.

Sydnee: And they have finished the, uh—the ritual, and Burning Man can stop.

Taylor: And then the playa opens wide and reveals its teeth and eats the whole thing.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] This is not meant—if you are somebody listening who attends Burning Man, I'm not—I don't mean to offend you. I am sure, like I said, I am aware there are many wonderful, lovely people who attend it.

Taylor: The people that I knew personally that went for a couple years—I don't know if they're still going but, like, they were some of my favorite people in the world, and they were very cool, artistic, creative, like... just real—like, my favorite people. So yeah, I know that there are good people there. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. And I mean, a lot of my resistance to, like, why I would not want to go, I mean, has very little to do with, like, the rich people ruining it as much as I don't even go camping.

Taylor: Yeah. You're not—you're an inside cat.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, I mean, I'm not saying I couldn't survive, if needed. Right? Like, I feel like I have it in me that if I had to live in a desert, I would find ways. Like, I have a—I would have a will to continue on. But I don't want to. I don't want to be muddy and dirty. I don't want to be in a windstorm. I don't want to—you know? I don't want to pee outside. Like, I just don't want to do that stuff. It's the same thing. I don't go camping. I don't go engage with that willingly. It's just not my thing.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Yeah. And that's fine. I have a lot of friends who camp. That's... good for them.

Taylor: Yeah. I have enough just hardship in my daily life that I—it's enough, like, spread out on a regular basis that the idea of seeking more seems... seems silly to me.

Sydnee: That's—I mean, that's always been my thing. Like, I can imagine what it's like. I mean, I have slept in a tent, like, twice in my life. Like, camping. Like, I have tried it. And I didn't enjoy it. And so I understand what that experience is.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I get it. No, thank you. I like s'mores, but I can make those inside if I want to.

Taylor: Yeah, I don't know if they're all going to Burning Man to make s'mores. I don't know if that's a—you think s'mores are a big part of it?

Sydnee: I mean...

Taylor: I mean, they got the fire. We know that.

Sydnee: That's true. Like, what are you—why are you setting all this stuff on fire if you're not gonna make s'mores?

Taylor: Symbolism. The... our art. Some—something. I think they might have other reasons. I'm just...

Sydnee: There is. It's about, like, getting rea—like, saying goodbye to your... old self? Or rebirth, or some—I don't know. You know what? I'm not gonna sit here and guess. Again, I watched the documentary in 2001, and then, you know, a lot of other stuff happened that year. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. uh... never—never forget those things.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Uh... well, I mean, I—

Sydnee: I saw somebody say, this weekend when everybody was wondering if it happened, somebody said, um, "What if it happened on September 11th? And then that would be really hard for everybody, because now... you know, it would become the day it happened, and no longer the day that Ted Cruz liked a porn tweet." [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Aww.

Sydnee: Yeah. Which is a pretty—that was a pretty solid joke.

Taylor: Yikes.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: What a time. What a time.

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: You know what's great in times like these? You know what—you know what my favorite genre of comfort is?

Sydnee: What's that?

Taylor: Horror movies.

Sydnee: Yeah! It reminds you that it could be worse.

Taylor: Is that what it—yeah, yeah, maybe that's it. Like, I don't know why horror movies are comforting, and they're not comforting to everybody, but they're definitely comforting to me.

Sydnee: I—I a—no, I agree. We're talking about Clown in a Cornfield.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: And just, like, on a very surface level, if you—whatever is happening right now, if instead—or if you add to it that you were being chased through a cornfield by a murderous clown...

Taylor: Or many... clowns.

Sydnee: Or many.

Taylor: We might reveal. Spoilers, obviously.

Sydnee: Yeah. That's worse!

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Objectively. Right? [pause] Objectively worse.

Taylor: I think... that is true. And I think it also operates on a deeper level, where when you witness bad things happen, but there's resolution to them, when you've got those alarm bells going off in your head from real life, it somehow quiets them a bit. 'cause it's like, okay, yeah, you might be chased

through a cornfield by a clown. But there will be resolution. You'll hit the clown with your car.

Sydnee: Yeah. There you go. See? [laughs quietly] You can always hit the clown with your car!

Taylor: Yeah. It's, like, encouraging, somehow.

Sydnee: Why didn't I tell you you had a car when I began this? I don't know.

Taylor: It's just—it's—look, it's a metaphor. I mean, it's not, in the case of this movie. It's very much just the plot. uh... 'cause that—I mean, the plot is, like, what? A dad and his—his kid, uh, his teenage daughter move to a small town.

Sydnee: Kettle Springs.

Taylor: Where, uh, there is—there is murderous clowns in the cornfield.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Friendo.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: There's initially Friendo, but then you—as the movie progresses, there are Friendos. Multiple Friendos.

Taylor: It's a mascot for the corn syrup company that's there in town. But, uh... but—

Sydnee: That had closed—it had closed down, right? Their factory had closed down?

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Because of a fire that supposedly a bunch of teenagers, uh, set. But it's—I—I thought it was interesting, 'cause we talk so much about, you know, cross-generational things. And I think this movie, while it was on the surface just very much that—a bunch of teens are stalked through a cornfield by murderous clowns—that was kind of where it

was all leading to. Uh, it's also very much a comment on this sort of millennial versus Gen Z versus Boomer—like, there's levels going on of cultural commentary, which I thought were kind of fun.

Sydnee: I think they did a good job of that, because I really—like, initially I thought it was gonna be set up kind of like your traditional... like, kind of like *Scream*. Like, teen slasher. Like, you're wondering who the—who is really Friendo? Who is really the killer clown? And, like, you're suspecting the boyfriend for a bit. You know? Like, you're—it seems kind of set up like that. And then as it unravels, it clearly isn't about—like, it's more than that. They're doing something different. I will say, if you're somebody who doesn't traditionally like scary movies, I did not think that this was scary. Um, it's gory.

Taylor: Yeah. There's some good gore. But...

Sydnee: Yeah. It's very gory, so if you don't like gore, that's a—I mean, it's very gory. But it wasn't like—like, I'm not gonna have nightmares about this movie. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah. No, it's very silly. It kind of becomes a carnival ride at some point.

Sydnee: Yeah. I would say—I would say even the gore is elevated to that. You know. That sort of thing. Where it's almost like this is too ridiculous to be upsetting.

Taylor: But it was—I mean... it was a very refreshing movie. I like when movies engage—I mean, that's when horror movies are at their best is when they're kind of aware of the struggles of the time, and they engage with those. Sometimes in realistic, sometimes in metaphoric ways. And I think this kind of combined that. Because you have the older generation that is the... collective Friendos. That has basically decided to cull the younger generation because they're a quote-unquote "bad crop."

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And, you know, you have to get the kids back in line. So you have to make them afraid. And if you can't make them afraid enough of you, then you've just gotta destroy them.

Sydnee: Which is interesting, because it also destroys the town's future, in that way.

Taylor: Well, they'll just—

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: There's a next generation down that might be a better crop, I guess is the thought.

Sydnee: Yeah, but like, if you keep killing the young people—you know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know. [laughs quietly] Well, I think, like, metaphorically, it works, too. Because, like, I don't know, old... old people... I guess I'm included in this... have done so much damage to the Earth. That... [laughs quietly] metaphorically.

Taylor: That is true. And... yeah. But the specific group of teens that are targeted are very much represented as the, you know, the Gen Z. They're, like... they're very—they're very much... on their phones, and they're making YouTube videos and they're, you know, they're all... they're woke. [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Yeah. And I think they're supposed to be, like—you kind of see them through the older people's eyes as, like, irreverent. Like, they do not respect authority, tradition, the history of, you know, anything. Like, they would mock Friendo. They would pretend—do, like, a jump scare video pretending to be Friendo, not understanding the gravity of that threat. You know. I mean, like, I think they're—I think that we are supposed to believe that about them. Like, well, they don't respect these things, and that's what really upsets the old people.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which, you know, is—it's funny, because what that uncovers is like, no, they don't respect those things. And then look at its core. What have you given them to respect? You murder kids. [laughs quietly] So...

Taylor: Well, and even, like—

Sydnee: So, like, yeah, they don't respect you, for good reason.

Taylor: The mysterious fire that shut the plant down that was blamed on the kids was actually started by the, you know, rich owner to collect on the insurance money. So...

Sydnee: Yeah. Exactly.

Taylor: Just rich people trying to get richer. [laughs] Pointing the finger at the unruly youth.

Sydnee: Well, and I mean, it really, like—the... that sort of narrative, like, "The problem is the kids, the problem is the kids, the kids are bad, the kids are bad." How long has that been going? Like, it is definitely relevant today, in terms of Gen Z. But it reminds me of, like, back in the 90s, blaming, you know, "It's the video games. All these violent video games are why kids are like this now. We gotta get these kids—they can't listen to this Marilyn Manson music and play these violent video games."

And it's like, I don't think that's the problem. I don't... I don't think that's the... you know? The problem isn't coming from the bottom up. It's always been coming from the top down.

Taylor: Absolutely. And it's hard, because whatever is going on in the world right now is very strange, because somehow we've... I don't really—like... the... the Boomers hated Millennials. We—I don't know. What did we destroy? We destroyed Sears? JC Penneys? Uh, barbecue... stuff? I don't know.

Sydnee: You like avocados, and that really bothers them.

Taylor: They really don't like that we eat avocados. Um... drink coffee that is, like, coffee. Like, that's... you know. If we didn't drink coffee we could all have houses, apparently. Um, there's a lot of hate from the top down towards Millennials. But I think in reaction, like, Millennials are the generation that said "We're gonna be different. Like, we're not gonna hate on the younger generation." [laughs quietly]

And then the younger generation hates on us. And it's an odd moment. But, like, even to that, like—I'm like, I don't think the correct response is to then be like, "Well, back at you, kids." I think it's just that this is... this is how culture works. Like, you know. Yeah, the kids are always gonna look at you as kind of less cool than them. You gotta take it if you want the cycle to stop.

Sydnee: Well, yes. The kids are always gonna do that. Like, you're always going to look back at the—look at the older generation and roll your eyes. Like, that's always gonna—that's everybody does that. And I think that it is a very normal thing that older generations look to the younger people and go, "Oh, they just don't get it." 'Cause in part it's just an age thing. Yeah, no. There's a lot of stuff about life that my seven-year-old doesn't understand yet. [laughs quietly]

It's not 'cause she isn't capable. It's 'cause she's only been alive seven years. Like, you know? And I think that that gets amplified into this, like, "Kids today" kind of narrative. Which is so, you know, reductive and banal. But that's not—no. It's just like, they're young. And you know, if you want to put the effort into showing them what you know, and teaching them, and helping them learn all the things, you could do that instead of just... you know, mocking them for not understanding the world yet.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Well, that's like a lot of the—a lot of what I see. The, like, Millennial, you know, cringe. It all kind of centers around, like, a... a refusal to, like, fall in line with what an adult's supposed to be. Like, there's a lot of whimsy involved that gets mocked. And it makes me sad. I'm like, the kids shouldn't be mocking this. Like...

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: This seems like a good thing that we did, where we said, "Yeah, grow up, you have to do your adult things. You have to be—you have to have responsibility. But you don't have to, like, kill yourself inside to be a grownup." Because that's what's been—that's what leads to the world that we're in, where we just have, you know, shriveled up shells of humans running everything that have no connection to joy, or—or, you know, impermanent things or, like, I don't know. Like, that's a—it's better that you stay a little soft inside.

Sydnee: And, like, there's a balance. And I think that is sort of—unfortunately because we are so hyper aware of what everyone else is doing, around us and not around us, all the time, because of social media and the internet, we know—like, we get codified into these ideas of, like, what the generations are, and what they look like and sound like and think like and feel like. And all of that is sort of, like, made up. Right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, yes, there are things you can say. Generalizations. But then, like, the meme that they have become is a creation. And it's unfortunate, because then you get young people reacting against the meme. And so if you see Millennials as just soft—like, they—life was too hard for them and they gave up and couldn't do it, and all they do is whine about it. Which I think is the—and I'm not saying that's true.

But I think that's, like, the very reductive version that, like, Boomers laid on Millennials. And Gen Z has, like, absorbed. Then they react against that by being hard. And that's not—that's not good, either. Like, there's a middle ground where we say, well, no. What we're trying to say is, life should not... we should not have a society where every second is a struggle. Why did we create that? Why does that make sense? We should be able to relax and enjoy life and be soft. We should also sometimes work at something that matters to us. Both of those things are true.

But instead we get these, like, really harsh dichotomies that are presented to us. You can either be soft, or you can be hard. And hard means capitalism

again. Hard is just taking us back to claw your way to the top and eat your young and, you know, get as much as you can at anyone else's expense. I mean, that's the reaction. And that's not productive.

Taylor: Well, and it's also—I mean, it—the idea that... I don't know. I know people that have achieved those wonderful white collar jobs where it's like, you know, the joke is "Ha ha, I do as little work as possible! And that's what I do, and I get paid for it."

And a lot of those jobs, you know, they're still held by the generation above us. Like, you call Millennials soft, but we're the ones that are working those 50, 60 hour work weeks for minimum wage for the rest of our lives. And I think that the softness is a direct reaction to that. Like, I need to find joy in my life, 'cause joy will never find me.

Sydnee: And I think, like, a really—a really positive direction would have been for... our next evolution to be revolution. I mean...

Taylor: Well, yeah.

Sydnee: This isn't the way it should be. But I think that's also why... yes, again, there is a generalization you can make about growing up in certain eras and influences and things, especially when it comes to, like, pop culture, right?

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: The way people tend to dress. The things they tend to like to listen to and watch and read. You can make some generalizations. But in terms of how people are, events—like, things that happen shape us so much more. And I think, like as we look at young people now, I think the age you were during the height of the pandemic is gonna have a lot to do with who you are and how you interact with things.

I think that, uh, like, our current—our current dive into fascism, and what age you are, is—you know? I mean, I think those things are gonna shape people more than necessarily what year they were born. It's gonna have more to do with, like, where you sit in relation to these events that are

happening around us. I mean, you know, we've talked about 9/11. I mean, I'm sure that that is something that you could mark as a, "Where were you, and how did people in different places and times and of different ages—how did that impact them and change their—" I mean, events like that are really gonna change people.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: And I think that's... I don't know. I wonder if as we look at Gen Z, and then into Gen Alpha, what we're gonna see is a pre- and post-COVID effect. And when I say post-COVID, I should note, COVID isn't over. We're actually in a spike right now. We just... uh, collectively, as a society—I don't mean you as an individual or me as an individual, but collectively, stopped caring about it at some point, I think.

Taylor: Um... I mean, I don't know. In the—in the—in the States, I don't think we ever, like, super cared on a—on an official level. [simultaneously]

Sydnee: We stayed home for two weeks and flattened the curve, Tey.
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: And then when it didn't work, everybody said, "[mockingly] Well, then never mind. I'm not gonna do anything."

Taylor: It's like, you know in the Looney Tunes where they, like, have a bump on their heads, so they shove it down, and then it pops up somewhere else? That's—we did the one bump and like, "Well... that's it." Uh...

Sydnee: We did Operation Warp Speed, and now we're gonna investigate Operation Warp Speed to see if it was any good at all. The same people who did it are gonna investigate it.

Taylor: And now it's—now it's double plus bad, even though it used to be doubleplusgood. Um, doubleplusunbad. I don't know how that language works.

Sydnee: We've always been at war with Oceania.

Taylor: Yeah. But I do—I think all of this—'cause the thing is, I agree with what you're saying about how the meme is not the people. You're right. But it does become that, and it does influence—'cause we do live in a—we live in a world where everybody gets their information through their—through their phones, through their pop culture. Pop culture kind of dictates how we view the world now, unfortunately.

Especially in this country, as our education department is chipped away it. So sometimes it's... so I think it good, at least, when pop culture can reflect good thoughts. It doesn't have to preach. Just reflects good thoughts. And I think there was a smart element in this film that made me go, "Okay. I think they know what they're doing and they're doing it on purpose, but they're doing it in a cool way that doesn't feel preachy."

'Cause the dad? That was a Millennial father. He was singing 90s rap in the car. He was super uncool. He was trying to be, like, a hip, cool dad, and it just wasn't playing off. And by the end of the movie, like, you know, I think that there's a bit more of an appreciation for that character. Like, now he's trying to do good. Now he's working local politics. He's trying to, like, reform the town. [laughs]

Sydnee: Man, I wonder if that's the, uh, insidious message that we're trying to—and insidious, I don't mean, like, it's bad. But, like, maybe the—we're trying to activate Millennials with this movie. Maybe that was the goal. Like, "Come on, millennials. Activate. Run for local office." [laughs]

Taylor: Well, I think it—

Sydnee: "Start making change!" [laughs]

Taylor: Or at the very least, like, "Hey. Like... Gen Z and millennials. If you two work together, instead of letting the people in power turn you against each other, you could kill all the clowns in the cornfield."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: All the old Boomers that don't care if we die and actually want us to, actively... [laughs] we can do it! [laughs]

Sydnee: That is a powerful message. Like, and, I mean, a very, like—we send the—we send Gen Z off to college and let them learn and grow, and figure out how to solve the problem in a big way. And in the meantime, millennials right the ship and try to stop things from getting worse. That's not a bad action plan.

Taylor: Well, and you know, and then the two—the two token young gays stay there as well. Which, that was maybe my favorite plot twist.

Sydnee: Yeah?

Taylor: Was the boyfriend who you thought was—you thought he was the killer because he was... "weird," quote-unquote. He would never hook up with girls. And it was just that he was in love with, like, the rugged farm boy, that you also thought was the killer, because he was a cliché, like, rugged farm boy that grew up huntin'. And... [laughs] nope! They just are in love with each other. And they're just, like, a happy gay couple at the end of it.

Sydnee: When they said "He never hooks up with anybody," I literally—I looked at Justin and went, "Oh, he's gay." Like, "Oh, okay." Like... I felt like that—I knew what was happening there. Now, I did not see the farm boy coming, but I did know what was happening there.

Taylor: See, I felt that there was some sort of tension between them, and then I was like, "Oh, maybe it's gay tension." So I was—but you never get the delivery of that in a movie.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: And then the delivery happened. I was like, "Oh. Okay!"

Sydnee: Nice!

Taylor: Yeah, this is—this is a movie for a different generation.

Sydnee: It is, too. Because you notice, we both referred to him as the boyfriend, because that the, like, archetype that he filled, right? Like, that's the—that is the role for the boyfriend. But he wasn't the boyfriend. And we have seen the whole movie, so we knew that, but it's funny, because he is the boyfriend, and he's not her boyfriend. He's... gay, and he's with this other guy. But they still love each other. They're still friends. They're friends.

Taylor: Yeah, no, they're great friends.

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: No, that was... such a great—that neither of them were involved in the killings, and then they were in love with each other. I was like, okay. This is a generation that grew up with, you know, with *Scream* movies with, what, uh, Stu and, uh—what's the—the boyfriend? Billy Loomis.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Oh, I, um—Billy. Billy.

Taylor: Stu and Billy. And being like, "I mean, really they were the couple. They were the power couple in this movie." [laughs]

Sydnee: [through laughter] This is—if you ship them... this is the movie for you.

Taylor: [simultaneously] [through laughter] This is for you!

Sydnee: What if they didn't kill anybody and they were just in love?

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: Although—although honestly, though, if you—if they don't kill anybody, I don't know what *Scream*'s about. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I don't know. Well, what if they—if they kill people and they were in love? There's a movie there, too. I don't know. I still would've watched it.

Sydnee: [laughs] That's a movie, sure. Yeah. No, I really—I enjoyed that. I thought that was a nice—and I thought that was very nice that they played with that idea. We've talked about this a lot on the show. That it is very common that gay characters in movies and TV will, like, have a villain element. Like, that they are a villain, and then they are gay-coded, or they are gay. You know?

Like, those two have been represented together so often. To sort of play with your perspective as the viewer, like, "Did you suspect them? Hmm. Why do you think you did? Hmm. Why do you think so? Look inside yourself. Maybe do a little reflection there." Like, I don't know. I thought that was kind of a powerful thing to do. To be like, "I suspected them to be murderers and they were just trying to hide the fact that they were gay 'cause they're in homophobic community. Like, oops!" [laughs] "Oops!"

Taylor: They really hit, like, both, like, the gay cliches. Like, you're either evil, or you die. And they played with both of them. You thought the one died at one point, but then nope, they made sure he survived. Didn't make sense. I didn't need to know how he survived. [laughs]

Sydnee: No. I didn't either, but they—yeah. They didn't have to die, and they were not—and they were heroes. They weren't bad guys. That was nice.

Taylor: Really [crosstalk].

Sydnee: No, I thought it was really surprisingly well done. When we turned it on, it was like, on a whim, this'll be so goofy. This will be silly. This is, you know. It had just started. We had, like a week here where it got cooler. And I will say, it's still cooler in the evenings, here. Like, it's getting down to the 50s. But it's—the days are still pretty frickin' hot. But it felt like it was time. And this was better than I was ready for, right? Like, it wasn't just, like, goofy killer clowns. It is that. But it's more.

Taylor: Yeah. It led me down a—I did a rewatch of all... all of the clown horror movies? [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I was, like, working on a big project. So I watched this and was like, "I just want to watch all of the horror movies that have clowns in them." So I watched Clown, which is a good movie. I watched Killer Klowns. I watched IT, part one and part two. The new one. I didn't go back and watch the old one. Um, a lot of good—I watched Terrifier, all the Terrifier movies.

Sydnee: Oh no... I was gonna say, I can't—

Taylor: Yeah, don't—don't watch—you don't like that. You don't wanna watch that.

Sydnee: I don't. No. We started it, and that got to a point where I went, "Oh, I see what—never mind. No. No."

Taylor: Yeah. We'll never do Terrifier on this show. There's reasons that I like them. I think that they are... I think that there's a critique of horror on a bigger... like, viewpoint. But also, it's a lot of just gore that you slog through. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Anything that starts to get into torture is hard for me. Like, that's just not—it's not the genre that—it's funny, because so long ago, we watched the movie Hostel. I could not watch that movie now. I could not. Like... I just... I wouldn't want to engage with it, 'cause I know it would not leave me feeling—I wouldn't feel scared or, like, that adrenaline rush of when you watch a horror movie and you're like, "Ahh!" And, you know, whatever. It wouldn't be that. I would just be, like, upset. Which is not really something I want to feel.

Taylor: I get that. And I think that—I much prefer—and this movie had it—when the gore is, like, that carnival ride experience. It's kind of ridiculous. Like, I will always want it to be practical. I hate when it's CGI. But I want it to be a little bit, like, "This is not what the human body would do if you did that to it."

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, you don't explode into, like, just a, like... I don't know. 100 feet of intestines. Like, that's—and a blood fountain. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: We are not—that is—I love—I love when horror movies present human bodies as just, like, gooshy bags of intestine and blood, and that's all that ever comes out. We just explode into blood and intestine and, like, that's it. And that's not how it works. But it also removes it so much from reality that then it's not as—you know? Then I can't be upset about it 'cause, like, well, obviously that wasn't a person. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. It's like a Looney Tune in that way.

Sydnee: I know what people look like.

Taylor: Exactly. Yeah.

Sydnee: And you know, this is a weird comparison, but it's why—I don't typically like action movies, or movies where there's a lot of, like, shooting. Like, guns and stuff. That's not really my vibe. I've never enjoyed that. But I love John Wick.

Taylor: I knew you were gonna say that. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Because it—it—it gets—it's almost like a carnival ride. Like, it gets to a point where this is—this is—there's no way he could do that. Like, there's so many guys. That's so many guys! How is it even—how is any of this possible? It gets to this hyperbole that I can't be disturbed or upset by it. I'm just sort of fascinated.

Taylor: Well, it's—it's, in a weird way, looping back to what we were talking about with Burning Man where it's like, I'm not seeking realism. I get enough realism in my life.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I want fantasy. I want ridiculousness. I want absurdity. That's what I want. For me, for my palate, for my taste. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: If we—I mean, that's—well, you know what? If, like—if there was an indoor Burning Man where we could just, like—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: —dance around in a big hotel conference room, in costumes... like...

Taylor: Syd, you're talking about Dragon Con.

Sydnee: Okay. Well, there you go. See, just do that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That seems fun.

Taylor: Yeah, I guess the—that is—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: It's weird that the—there are—there are some, like, niche ani—like, anime and nerd influencers that have kind of made con spaces unfortunate. But not enough of them that they've—like, the millionaires haven't descended on Comic Con yet. [laughs]

Sydnee: Right? I think it still belongs to the people.

Taylor: It is still of the people.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think that's true.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know what the corollary is? There are all those, um, fake cons that people keep not—I mean, I guess they're sort of cons. The events people keep making online where they're trying to draw especially, like, romantasy readers somewhere.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: Have you seen those?

Taylor: I—

Sydnee: And, like, they show up, and it's always just a huge bummer. It's like the Fyre Fest of romantasy con, or there was one for, um, like, a Regency era thing, and they showed up and it was just a total bummer, because it was a rip-off. Like, you paid a bunch of money, you went to this thing, and, you know, you get half a cheese sandwich. It was like the Willy Wonka Experience in Glasgow.

Taylor: I have seen so many of those, and nothing makes me sadder than just seeing some, like, absolute ethereal goddess who's just put her all into making this gorgeous dress, costume, elf ears, the whole thing, and she's just walking around an empty hall. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: This is the thing.

Sydnee: That's what capitalism is doing to cons. That's where the bad stuff is.

Taylor: Yeah, that's true. No, there is definitely bad stuff, but there at least isn't the weird—the weird hyper-influencer element where everything has to be aesthetically pleasing. [laughs quietly] Cons are not.

Sydnee: No. No. And they're very crowded.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Um, continuing with our, uh—it's still chilly enough I think we can do another scary thing.

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: Sort of scary thing.

Taylor: Yeah, I was gonna say, I don't—you've seen it, I haven't. I don't—is it scary? 'Cause I heard it wasn't.

Sydnee: It's not scary. It's not scary.

Taylor: It takes it in a whole... whole new direction. M3GAN 2.

Sydnee: I want you—yes, M3GAN 2.0. I would like you to watch it. I think it—I think it takes it in a good direction. I like where it's going. I hope they continue making them. Um, and I think it's funny, and clever. I think that—I don't know what they were thinking—well, we'll talk about it more. I don't know what they were thinking when they made M3GAN 1, but I feel like they know what they're making now, and I enjoyed it.

Taylor: Alright, I look forward to it.

Sydnee: Yeah. Alright. Well, we will be back with you next week. We'll talk about M3GAN 2.0. In the meantime, again, like, it is a gory movie, and it is a scary movie. I mean, it's not scary-scary, but you know what I mean.

Taylor: It's not for kids.

Sydnee: There's killer clowns.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's not for kids. Clowns in a Cornfield is not for kids.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: No. Uh, but if you don't like gore and stuff, you might not like it. But if you don't mind that stuff, it was—I thought it was very well done. It was a clever little movie. And, um, you should check it out.

You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out a lot of other great shows you would enjoy, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Taylor: What's your favorite scary clown?

Sydnee: Uh... favorite scary clown. I mean, it's hard—my—I have always pointed to Killer Klowns from Outer Space as, like, the best scary clown movie.

Taylor: Yeah, that is...

Sydnee: Because of all their, like, accoutrement.

Taylor: They have good accoutrement. [laughs quietly]

[chord]

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