

aStill Buffering 480: Lost in Translation [2003]

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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: Tey, I was at a Ren Faire all weekend.

Taylor: Very jealous. Very jealous of that.

Sydnee: Yeah. It was such a fun event, it really was. What a wonderful group of people you find at Renaissance Faires, you know?

Taylor: I love a Ren Faire.

Sydnee: I love that— Here's what I love about Ren Faires. The first time I went to one, I was googling, "Period-appropriate—" When we say Renaissance, what kind of skirt am I supposed to wear?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know? Like, I don't know. [laughs] I'm not a fashion historian.

Taylor: Fair.

Sydnee: And so I was trying to be real, "Well, I don't want people to give me a side-eye." You know? "I better fit in." And then you go to a Renaissance Faire, and nobody cares.

Taylor: No. There will always be— Well, because there's always a time-traveler-type vibe, right? Because you've got steampunk booths usually set up.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I know at the one I go to, there's always a time travelers weekend. So specifically, that invites *anybody*. Any human.

Sydnee: There's always some Doctor Whos there.

Taylor: Always Doctor Whos. There's always some Links and Zeldas.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Johnny Depp— Well, not Johnny Depp. Captain Jack Sparrow.

Sydnee: Lots of pirates. Pirates are big at Ren Faires, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. You can be a pirate at the Ren Faire.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, obviously there's lots of knights, and lords, and ladies, queens and princesses, and all that sort of jazz. There are a lot of little kids in just straight-up Halloween costumes.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: And that's great.

Taylor: Yeah, you can be Spider-Man. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Oh, yeah. A lot of handcrafted knight helmets out of football helmets. Love that. Love that.

Taylor: Oh, that's great. That's great.

Sydnee: Yeah. I saw a good bit of that this weekend. And then I had previously gone as a plague doctor.

Taylor: Amazing. Love that.

Sydnee: Just 'cause it felt right. It felt right.

Taylor: Yeah. Perfect.

Sydnee: And this year, I decided, "You know, I've been getting more into witchy stuff."

Taylor: Oh! Were you a witch?

Sydnee: Yeah. So I just went a witch direction.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: And that was fine too. The great thing about that is, I don't have to buy anything. It's all just in my closet.

Taylor: Of course.

Sydnee: I had two different dresses to wear that I just wear for nice events. They're just my dresses. But somehow read... [laughs] Renaissance witch.

Taylor: Love that. Just had a hat.

Sydnee: Yeah. The only thing I did buy, and this was— I bought it because the girls both wanted what they were calling "fairy ears." But I would have thought— I think elf ears? But I guess the high fey in all of my romantasy books have pointed ears. Pointy ears.

Taylor: The little hook-on ones?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. Those are nice.

Sydnee: The girls wanted those. And you can buy those in bulk. [laughs] So it's— We were having all of their cousins in. I was like, "Man. If my girls have pointy ears, and the other kids want them, I want to have them available." So I bought bulk fairy ears. [laughs]

Taylor: Just had a basket of fairy ears?

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Taylor: That's adorable. I love that.

Sydnee: For the house. These are for the house. Whoever would like some fairy ears, please take `em. And there were so many, I was like, "Well, maybe I'll wear some fairy ears." So I wore some fairy ears.

Taylor: So you were a fairy witch.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: So there we go.

Taylor: That sounds like something that you would say you were on a kindergarten playground. I love that.

Sydnee: "I'm a fairy witch!" [chuckles]

Taylor: I haven't been to the Renaissance Faire in a few years, but I saw one costume the last time I was there that you would've loved. Because it was a Westley as Dread Pirate Roberts and Buttercup.

Sydnee: Aw.

Taylor: And the Buttercup was wearing the red dress, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: They looked great, and they were waiting in line for the bathroom. And I just had to say, I was like, "I'm sorry, I love this so much. You both look amazing."

And the Westley was standing closer to me, and said, "Oh, thank you so much." And it was a feminine voice, and I realized, it was just some hot lesbians dressed as Westley and Buttercup. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: It's like, that's even better. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's great. Now, I— So I have the red dress costume.

Taylor: Oh, yeah?

Sydnee: I put that together for a murder mystery I attended years and years ago. And Justin was Westley, of course. But we didn't— No, no, no. Actually, he didn't. He went as Fezzik. I forgot about that. But anyway, I didn't want to do it though, because to open the Ren Faire, they did a *Princess Bride* shadowcast event.

Taylor: Oh, wow!

Sydnee: Which, I didn't know that was a thing. But it was really— I wasn't able to attend, just 'cause I had the kids and everything, and it was late in the evening. It was too late for the kids to be out. It was more aimed at adults. But it was they showed the movie, and then, just like you would do with *Rocky Horror*, had everybody in costume, performing in front of the screen. And all the reviews were that it was a blast. People really enjoyed it. But because that was part of the Ren Faire, I didn't want to dress as Buttercup the next day. Because that felt like...

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Yeah. So anyway.

Taylor: That's really cool, though.

Sydnee: Yeah! What a cool idea, huh? But we did do— The other thing I felt very witchy about was I finally had dried all my nettle to make nettle tea. Did I tell you I was doing this?

Taylor: I knew you were growing nettle.

Sydnee: Well, I foraged it.

Taylor: Or had nettle, at least.

Sydnee: Yeah. There's a lot. Actually, I foraged most of what I turned into tea from just my yard. Just in my backyard. And I dried it all out, and then I finally—I got some cheesecloth, and I sewed little tea bags with it.

Taylor: Wow!

Sydnee: You can just boil it, but I like the aesthetics of the little homemade tea bags.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: So I made it for Charlie and Cooper. And I fully expected— 'Cause I took a sip first. And it's an herbal tea. It's a very strong... I don't know how else to explain it. Herbal-y, grassy... It's got a bitter edge to it. It's an herbal tea.

Taylor: It's nice, though.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: It's got— There's a warmth to it.

Sydnee: It is. It is. And I liked it. It wasn't— I mean, I'm a coffee person, so it's never going to replace coffee for me, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the nettle tea. But it is not the kind of thing that I would ever think my children would like.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: And with Charlie, she just kept putting more sugar cubes in, and then finally went, "No, this isn't for me."

Taylor: [laughs] That's fair.

Sydnee: Cooper *loved* it.

Taylor: Oh, what a little weirdo. I love that.

Sydnee: She took it with one sugar cube, no milk. Just nettle tea, one sugar cube. And adored it, and continued to ask for it all weekend.

Taylor: [laughs] [as a posh child] "Give me my nettle tea, mother!"

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: "Mother, I need some nettle tea!"

Sydnee: And the thing is, I had just made a couple little tea bags for them to try it. So when she asks me for nettle tea, what she's saying is, "Can you go to where you have your dried herbs collected, get some of the nettle, sprinkle it out into a little square of cheesecloth that you have cut, and sew it together into a teabag?" And then— [laughs]

Taylor: Well, now, Syd, honey, you can buy some teabags. Or a tea ball.

Sydnee: I know, but...

Taylor: Or an infuser.

Sydnee: I could get a tea ball.

Taylor: Yeah, get a tea ball. If you don't want the paper ones, or waste, just get a nice tea ball.

Sydnee: I could do that. I just— She really loved the aesthetics of it all. But I finally— We used up pretty much all of my dried nettle, and I was like, "We're gonna have to collect some more, but I don't see any in the yard." So I went foraging in the woods, and I found this giant patch of nettles.

Taylor: Oh, nice.

Sydnee: Just purple dead nettle, as far as the eye could see. And so I went in and told— 'Cause all the kids were here. I told 'em, I was like, "I found a big patch of nettle. So later on, when I get a chance, I'm gonna go out there and forage a bunch of this. And then I can dry it, and it'll take a while, but we'll have nettle for days. Don't worry. We'll have nettle tea as long as you want it." And immediately, all these children ran outside and foraged nettle for me. [laughs]

Taylor: Sounds like something from a, I don't know, Laura Ingalls Wilder book or something. [laughs] "Late in the evenings, as the fireflies turned on their lights."

Sydnee: "We were foraging nettle for mother."

Taylor: That's really cute.

Sydnee: It did also feel like I had to apologize to all the other adults, like, "I know this feels like I have somehow cast a spell on your children, and forced them to go do my bidding."

Taylor: "And I have."

Sydnee: [singing] "Come, little children, and make me some tea."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [singing] "Go get me weeds from the forest."

Taylor: That's amazing. I love that. Do you— I have to ask. I feel like this is something you would know. I got a TikTok. I've seen two now on the same topic. One was from Alexis Nicole Nelson, the BlackForager.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: She's talked about Japanese knotweed before. And then I saw another— Like, a chef using it in place of rhubarb.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Taylor: And is that something you have access to? Are you familiar with that?

Sydnee: Not only do I think I do, hold on.

Taylor: 'Cause it's apparently very invasive, and it's great to get rid of it.

Sydnee: Yes. I literally— I was cleaning out my herb beds again. I've done this

multiple times, as a way to keep myself from planting. `Cause I keep wanting to plant, but it's not time yet. But I keep wanting to. [unintelligible]

Taylor: I've used rhubarb before in cocktails, and it's great, but it's so hard to work with. And I was so curious, because I love the flavor of something that is *similar to* it, but apparently just grows everywhere for free. And it's better for everything if you eat it. [laughs]

Sydney: Well, I am telling you that I think I have some. Because I think I took a picture of something. I was trying to figure out, in my weed beds, what were weeds— Or— "In my weed beds." [laughs] In my *herb* beds. What were weeds, and what were herbs coming back from last year. `Cause my mint, my cilantro, my oregano, my thyme, it's all back. It's all there. And when it's little, sometimes it's a green sprout with two leaves, and I'm like, "I don't know what the heck this is." So I don't want to pull it out if it's coming back.

But I'm telling you, I found knotweed among it. I am almost certain that one of the things I looked at was knotweed.

Taylor: Well, since you've enchanted an army of children to do your bidding, [laughs] and you can direct them towards some knotweed, you could just send that my way.

Sydney: Yeah. I mean, I will do that.

Taylor: Just ship that up to me.

Sydney: Is it— I'm assuming it's not illegal to mail plants to people?

Taylor: I mean, certain plants, for sure. There's a ton of laws around certain plants. But I don't think around...

Sydney: Around Japanese knotweed?

Taylor: I don't know. I don't think so.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Well, I know there's some of this around here.

Taylor: One of our listeners, mail me plants. Well, it even looked familiar to me. It's like, I feel like I know this weed well, but obviously not from Brooklyn. Probably from West Virginia.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, it says it's invasive, so...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I'll look around. I'll forage for some of this. I swear, there's one plant out in my yard that, I'm looking at these flowers. They're [unintelligible] Anyway, I will look for this. I also have a bunch of Japanese stiltgrass, as long as we're on the— I don't know if that's anything.

Taylor: Oh, I don't know what that is.

Sydnee: I don't know. I picked it 'cause the leaf looked vaguely like a ramp, and I was like, "Woah!" And it wasn't a ramp. So then I had to seek it, like, "What is this?" It's Japanese stiltgrass, which apparently is also invasive and will take over, so you gotta be careful.

Taylor: Well.

Sydnee: But I'll go out and look for some Japanese knotwood for you, and mail it to you.

Taylor: Just, you know— Or play around with it yourself. Apparently, you can make it into a nice syrup, and you can bake it into a pie.

Sydnee: I almost pulled over on the side of the road the other day because somebody, at the edge of their yard— It was right against the street. So I know it was their yard, but it was a weed. They had not planted this. It was clearly just the grass was high, and there were some weeds growing. And it was tons of red clover.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: You know, with the big poofy...?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know what I'm talking about? And you can make a really great jelly out of that.

Taylor: Oh, really? I have some in my house that I dried, that I got in an assortment of dried various herbs and flowers and things.

Sydnee: Really?

Taylor: I don't know what to do with it. Just put it in a little jar. [laughs]

Sydnee: You can make it— Yeah. You could probably do like a syrup, too.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If you wanted to do it that way. But I almost pulled over to grab all this, because I thought, "These people are not gonna care. 'Cause when they mow their lawn, they're probably just gonna mow right over it, 'cause it's a weed." But then I thought, "Well, or maybe they're like me, and maybe they're really excited about this patch of red clover, and they're planning on going out and collecting it." And so I didn't do it, 'cause I wouldn't want to do that to— If somebody did that to me with my dandelions that I've collected, or my wild violets, or my nettle, I would be heartbroken. So...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: So.

Taylor: [with witchy voice] And you don't want to break the heart of a witch!

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: What would happen if you break the heart of a witch? Don't steal it— [spoken normally] Isn't that— What's the— There's a whole musical about stealing something from a witch's garden, right?

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor: That's *Into the Woods*.

Sydnee: That's *Rapunzel*.

Taylor: Oh. Well, yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. That's the original story of *Rapunzel*.

Taylor: Yeah, that's why you don't do that.

Sydnee: Well, and you know what they stole.

Taylor: No. I can't remember.

Sydnee: Ramps!

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: No, it wasn't ramps. [laughs] But it was ramp—

Taylor: Rampion?

Sydnee: It was something like ramp. Rampion.

Taylor: Yeah. Wow.

Sydnee: I like a West Virginia *Rapunzel*, where they stole ramps from somebody's secret ramp spot.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: That needs to be a whole rewrite.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: 'Cause you'll get shot for that. [laughs]

Taylor: That's a very short retelling of *Rapunzel*. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. If you start digging in somebody's secret ramp spot, or if you find where they go sencing, if you find their ginseng spot.

Taylor: Oh, really?

Sydnee: Yeah. 'Cause you can dig ginseng up, and it's worth a lot, because people like to take it as a supplement.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So you can sell it and make a lot of money, and it grows wild in the Appalachian mountains. But you have to know where to dig, and what you're looking for. I have never— I have gone and looked before in places where I thought it would be, and I've never been able to find it. But I mean, it's an art. You develop you know where to look, and what the leaves look like at various stages. There are people who are quite skilled at it.

Taylor: It sounds very mystical.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Level five senger.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah, you have to [laughs] earn your sencing badge.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: No, but I've never found anything like that. I don't know that— A lot of West Virginia, I've learned to— The trees were originally leveled for various reasons. And so we're on our— Even though the mountains are old, sometimes the plant life on 'em is actually like, we're on our second or third run here, after various industries destroyed them. So it makes me wonder. I don't know. You gotta go deeper to find the native stuff.

Taylor: Yeah. Makes sense. You gotta get on the Appalachian trail.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs] Just the, I don't know, everything that's there? I've always wanted to hike the Appalachian trail. It sounds like something that— I like a physical challenge. I like outdoorsy stuff. But you don't find useful guides on the internet; you just find ghost stories. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. And I mean, I think there are a lot of people who have tried, who maybe— I would not try to hike the Appalachian trail unless I decided, "I'm gonna spend the next year of my life training, getting in physical shape to do it, studying the trail, knowing all the different—" And then studying how to do long hiking trips like that. I've never done that. And there's established methods to do it safely and have a good time, and not die.

Taylor: I guess I should specify. I would like to hike *part* of it, not all of it.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I understand that that's a much bigger undertaking. [laughs]

Sydnee: It is. It is. And it can be very dangerous, if you don't know what you're doing. I don't know. It's the kind of thing where I would have to decide, "I'm going to do that in two years, and so for the next two years, I'll be preparing for this."

Taylor: It's a lot of commitment.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I would never climb Everest.

Taylor: No, no. Absolutely not.

Sydnee: Yeah. I have no interest in that. No, thank you.

Taylor: No. There's the amount of physical exertion and challenge that I think is like, "This is a good goal to set for myself, to prove what I can do as a person." And then there's just, "I have exhausted all sources of excitement and joy in my life. I've raised my levels too high. My base level of what brings me a thrill is too high, and now I have to do *incredibly stupid* things to feel."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I don't wanna ever get there.

Sydnee: No. No, and I also think that sometimes, if you think that adrenaline, like that kind of rush, or whatever that is, is the only— Sometimes, I think people think that's feeling good, and you just have to keep pursuing that one way of feeling happiness, satisfaction, joy, whatever, contentment. And there are lots of other things you can explore aside from that excitement kind of happiness. You know? There's different kinds of happiness.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I don't know. The idea of climbing— I mean, climbing a mountain where there's so much pollution, there's so much tragedy, there's so much exploitation, I don't know if that's— I don't know, I mean, it's gonna lead us to the topic we're discussing today, but I climbed Mount Fuji from the base, from level one, which most people start at level five. I started at level one, and so levels one through five are very— You're pretty much alone.

They're just untamed nature, just hiking up this mountainside to these really winding paths that are littered with all these old shrines, and these really beautiful— It's just absolutely gorgeous. It's breathtaking. It's very contemplative, and I don't know. It was an exertion, but it was an exertion that I felt like my physical standard could take. And also, it was beautiful the whole way. It wasn't really about the top of the mountain. The entire trip was an experience of beauty, and connection with nature, and contemplating my own limits.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And being really in touch with how I was feeling in a moment, especially as you're ascending. And you're trying to say, "Can I keep going? Do I need to hold still?" That is very different than— You can have that experience on lots of mountains. You don't need to go to the one with all the dead people on it.

Sydnee: I think what you're talking about, too, is I think as humans, we have this inclination to rank experiences, and then come up with a cumulative list of the objectively best possible experiences a human can have.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: And I think that's a really flawed way of looking at things. Because then it does lead everybody to think, "Well, if I want to have that euphoria of "I've accomplished something physically really challenging, and I'm standing on top of the world, it must be Everest. I *have* to climb Everest. It *has* to be—" You know. "This is what it must be." And I think the problem with that, like you said, you had a solitary, contemplative experience. That is not what it looks like people are doing on Everest.

Taylor: No. You're like, in a line.

Sydnee: Yeah. So if everybody's trying to have the same [laughs] grandiose experience, I think that you lose something. It's kind of like I always think, I have seen the Sistine Chapel. And obviously, it is incredible, and miraculous, and all the things that I am supposed to feel and think. But it also, the experience I had and I think probably a lot of tourists have, is you are standing shoulder-to-shoulder, packed in a room. You cannot— You can't see the walls, you can't see the floor, there are so many human bodies. With my neck tilted back, staring straight up at the ceiling until I am like, "Okay. I am actually getting claustrophobic, I think I must leave this space."

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: And while it was still beautiful, and I can recognize that, and I am grateful I had the experience, would I say that I had some deep moment of human understanding and reflection and— You know what I mean? No, I don't think I could have achieved that, 'cause I was so aware of how close everyone's body was to me. [laughs] You know what I mean?

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: My brain and my body— I couldn't separate myself out to just be like, "Now, I am elevated to the next level of human experience. I've done it."

Taylor: Well, and I think there are those— There are great works of art, and great pieces of theater or music that it's a timeless thing to get to experience, but it often does come with that trapping.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Everyone's trying to see this once in their life. But I feel like, with the indoctrination of social media and the idea that— I mean, how many times do you get lists of— I live in New York, so it's always like, "The top five bakeries you have to try in New York, ranked! The best pieces of pizza," whatever. So much feedback that's constantly telling you what you're supposed to like, and so much validation that comes with, "Oh, I got the thing that I'm supposed to like."

And I feel like we're becoming farther and farther away from having individual experiences, and individual paths through life. Which is— That's *where* you find the most joy. When I went abroad pre having a map on my phone, or being able to look up hotspots in a city, I don't know. I remember the first time I went to Tokyo, I was 21? And I think I'd printed off a couple MapQuest maps just around, to show how to get from my hostel to the train station.

Sydnee: Oh, MapQuest.

Taylor: Yeah. And they were not accurate. And beyond that, I just kind of wandered around. And I didn't see a lot of the big things you're supposed to see. I saw a few of the obvious ones, but I didn't have a list of the best restaurants to go to, or the coolest bars, or the best views. I just organically found things. And that was a really memorable trip, but I don't know, if I applied the same outline of, what did I do that's "Top ten must-see"? Oh, I did nothing. Shoot. But it was a wonderful trip.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: 'Cause it was mine! 'Cause I found my way organically.

Sydnee: I like to think that, coming from a place like West Virginia, where we rarely make any sort of top ten lists of anything unless it's like, I don't know, smokers per capita or something, unfortunately. Like, [laughs] you know what I mean?

Taylor: [laughs] Top ten cryptids! You got at least one.

Sydnee: There's that. But you know what I mean? Most of what people think and feel about us outside this area is negative. So nobody's saying, "If you want to have the best this, or see the best this." Most of the time, you're not gonna say a place like this. I think it does— I appreciate that it's given me the perspective that, no, I know where you can get a really stellar "this" to eat, or see something beautiful that you'd never seen before, or experience a place that is very— I know those places exist here, even though they won't be on a list. And that allows me to understand the possibility that those places exist everywhere.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And there is no objective list. I mean, people can write 'em all day long, but that doesn't make them any more valid than the random list of top ten places I've been in my life would be. You know?

Taylor: Oh, and so much of what makes a place good has so much less to do with just the structure of it, you know? If you're somewhere, like a restaurant or an attraction, are you there with your family? Are you there with someone you love? Is the weather beautiful? Are you celebrating something? Are you trying to move past something? What is everything else that plays into that, that it creates that unique soup in your brain that goes, "Ah. Good soup. I'm gonna hold onto this." [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yup. Now, Taylor, you've mentioned Tokyo a few times.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, because today, we're talking about *Lost in Translation*.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: 2003.

Sydnee: I had a really scary moment when I went to my Apple TV, and I just went to the little magnifying glass, the little search thing, and searched it. And it didn't come up.

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: And I thought that searched across all your apps, so I was very confused. I was like, "Oh, my God. Do I have to watch this on a DVD?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "I don't think I even have it on D— How am I gonna— Do I have to try to find a stolen copy on YouTube?" And so I googled, "Where can I lost *Lost in Translation*?" And my phone told me that it was on Amazon Prime, Prime Video.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Where it was. And now, I've learned something new about how Apple TVs function, so there's that.

Taylor: I was trying to dissuade you from getting money to Amazon Prime.

Sydnee: I understand that impulse, and I did just rent it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So I was giving *less* money, you know? So I did not give them as much money as I could have, but I did indeed pay I believe \$3.99.

Taylor: I did as well. I think I might even have it on DVD somewhere, but that is finding my DVD little connection thing that goes on my laptop, and then finding the DVD, that seems like a lot of steps.

Sydnee: Yeah. Statistically, I bet you're right. I bet I have it somewhere in this house. But I was not— I was like, "Okay. You got me, Jeff. Here's \$3.99."

Taylor: I know. I know. I'll never do the buy, though. 'Cause I just think, "Physically, am I gonna watch this— What are the likelihood that I'm gonna want to watch this movie, and have to be in the position to pay to rent it four more times? Probably not! So that's fine."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: That was my thought. I had fears, as I went into it – and I would love to know what you think – that there were gonna be moments where I was like, “Oh! Err! Urgh!” And I feel like, maybe, there were.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: I think it’s fair, and I think it’s important, to just say it upfront: I feel like things can be many things at once, you know? Media can be really good at expressing and beautifully portraying one sentiment, and then also have massive blindspots. And I feel like that is how— ‘Cause I do love this movie. It has been— It’s probably been maybe a decade since I’ve watched it. It’s been a while.

Sydnee: Yeah, at least.

Taylor: There’s a lot that I’d forgotten. And there were a lot of moments that I’m like, “Man, that’s... Are we really making a joke about the R and L pronunciation switch *again?*”

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: The first time, I rolled my eyes. Now, we’re still doing it. It’s a whole part. I don’t like that.

Sydnee: Yeah. There are multiple— So okay. If you haven’t seen this movie, the plot— And it’s a Sofia Coppola movie, and I generally like her stuff. And I think that’s also important to remember, because the opening shot of the movie, which I feel like was embedded in all of our brains back when it came out, is Scarlett Johansson’s translucent-underwared butt.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And it is a woman directing. [laughs] But I don’t know. I will just say that.

Taylor: And I will say that sometimes, it’s a woman director, but that doesn’t mean that it can’t be free of the male gaze.

Sydnee: Yes. That is very true. And it's— Yes. So there's that. But [laughs] the plot of this movie is— I mean, basically, you've got two people who have arrived in Tokyo for a short period of time, for very different reasons. One's an actor filming a commercial, kind of like a washed-up Bill Murray, a washed-up actor. Not washed up. He's at the end of his career.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so he's doing commercials to pay the bills, to make money. And Scarlett Johansson, who's there with her husband, who's on a photography thing, he's doing photography for a rock band. But she's just kind of there, drifting. And they spend some time together. There's some flirtation, and maybe some "will they, won't they" energy for a while. And then they don't, and he has to leave and go back home. And he iconically whispers something to her at the end of the movie that the audience is not privy to. And then they both smile and part ways. So in terms of plot, not a lot happens.

Taylor: No. It's very much a character study, I would say, of both the two main characters, and then also Tokyo itself.

Sydnee: Yes. Which is what— I mean, it's interesting, because I remember it being described that way when it came out. Like, "This is my love letter to Tokyo." And if you view it through that lens, I don't know, maybe you can be more forgiving about some of the moments where I do think— I feel like sometimes, the joke is that they're in Japan.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I don't... We really don't do that joke now. [laughs] Nor should we have ever, but you know.

Taylor: I think it's far— I would say, as a character study of Tokyo, I think it fails in that sense. And I mean, it's a gorgeously shot movie. I think the two main characters— It's okay to have not necessarily likable people be— You can like them in the context of the story. But the way that Tokyo is treated, it's almost like a backdrop to these two Americans, these great revelations. It's— What do we call when women have no real role? A sexy lamp?

Sydnee: Sexy lamp.

Taylor: Yeah! Tokyo kind of gets pushed back to being a very interesting, quirky, strange lamp. And it gets to the cusp of, are they learning from this culture? Are they understanding things? And you see both characters kind of— There's a scene where Bill Murray's on the phone with his wife like, "I want to start eating Japanese food. I want to get healthy. I want to meditate," or whatever. It's like, are they trying to engage with the culture, or are they just sort of letting the isolation and the loneliness that it provides to them give them their own, private little space where the two of them exist alone? Which is kind of more what it feels like. Like they're completely isolated on purpose.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: They're refusing everything around them, and just interacting with each other.

Sydney: It does feel that— And I understand the conceit of, you take somebody who's sort of lost in life at that moment, and you put them into a culture that's very different from their own, where they don't speak the language, where they don't really understand all of the structural, cultural interactions that are built in there. And so they feel much more alone than they already are, because now they're— You know. They don't fit. They don't know what to do, they don't know how to act, they don't know what to do.

And that makes sense. It's just, I think it's really important that if you're going to do that, that you treat the culture that they are entering with respect, and not as a— I mean, the trope of the Far East being a place of mystery that's different, and magical, and we can't understand it, is not a great thing to continue to perpetuate. Right? We just don't speak the same language, guys. None of us— We Americans don't speak enough other languages. So if they spoke Japanese, that whole experience probably wouldn't have been so isolating to them.
[chuckles]

Taylor: Well, and it's interesting too, because for a movie that I think is about loneliness and how you work through it, there are so many moments where it's like you're almost there. Because there is— A lot of Japanese media engages with the loneliness in Japan, specifically in major metropolitan areas like Tokyo. And how many industries have popped up to try to answer to that loneliness, but in sort of a capitalist way. You do have a lot of companionship work. And that's sort of featured as, again, it's like a prop.

And it's almost like I just wish you'd push through that. You're in a place that suffers, that understands loneliness, that *is*— Tokyo is grappling with loneliness. It's not a unique thought that I'm having; this is [laughs] an understood fact. So you're in the right place, but you're just not engaging with the fact that it's all around you, and that's why you're experiencing things the way you are.

Sydnee: It also— I mean, I think some of it just reflects— That was 2003. And the access that we had to the rest of the world on a regular basis in 2003 was so much more limited. Our understanding of what people do in Japan, what they live like, was so much less here in most of the US than it is now. I think that's part of it, because when he is shocked that there are Japanese surfers, that really struck me as like, "Why? It's... There's beaches everywhere. There's coasts. [laughs] There's all this coast, it's an island. Of course there are Japanese surfers, obviously. I've seen *Terrace House*. I know that there are lots of [through laughter] Japanese surfers."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: You know? Like, why would there not be Japanese surfers? And what he's commenting on is, "Oh, it's so novel. Can you believe that there are Japanese surfers?" And it's like, no. I mean, that's not no— Yes, of course. So to put that movie in 2026, it feels— There are just moments like that where it's like, yeah, we have so many streaming shows in the internet and TikTok. Yes, we all know that now.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I think it's a very— I think it's something that, I don't know, the America-centered mindset is something that we all have to break out of. Where it's like, when you see your culture reflected in other cultures, you're seeing what you're familiar with, but that doesn't mean that they— It's not necessarily your culture. It's, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: There's lots of influences that have spread internationally, and have become ingrained. I mean, the Japanese rockabilly scene is way more intense and cooler than ours has been in a long time. [through laughter] It's theirs now.

Sydnee: And it's funny, I wonder if you remade that movie today, same plot, just treated the culture with a little more... I don't know, a little more understanding, a little more informed point of view, if it would be a more impactful movie, if it

would hold up better. You wouldn't do a joke about her toes falling off, "You'd probably have people here who like black toe."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, what are you— No, that's not a... People wouldn't make jokes like that today.

Taylor: Well, in that sense, I think it's interesting to watch it as a piece of its time, and think, "Do I still care about these people?" And that's kind of how I watched it. Like, again, he makes— He's incredibly rude to the people that are paying him two million dollars to rep a wonderful whiskey, Suntory. But he's very rude, he cheats on his wife. He's not— I don't think he's supposed to, even just in the context of the time it was made, I don't think we're necessarily supposed to think this is a great guy.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: I think he's a not-great guy who is at a conflicting point at his life. And she calls herself mean. She seems like, here she is in the middle of an amazing city, and she just flops around in the hotel room all day. And it's like, "Oh, my God. Who gets that opportunity? And you're just laying around."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: So I don't necessarily think we're supposed to admire them, or hold them up as examples. I still do think that they are reflections of— They're still good characters in that I want to see these people work through whatever they're working through. And honestly, they're honest characters.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I think they are. And again, I think if you make that movie again today, you have a more nuanced view of like, Scarlett Johansson's character is very much the mean smart girl who, you know, "I'm looking for meaning in life. I'm a philosophy major, I'm looking for meaning. I'm journaling, I'm smoking. I'm making fun of this vapid Hollywood girl who does action movies because she's a bad karaoke-er at the bar." You know what I mean? That sort of... Hopefully, you wouldn't see that kind of depiction of women now. It would be more nuanced. It would be a little more like, "Well..."

Taylor: I mean, given the choice, what was her name, Kelly?

Sydnee: Is that her name?

Taylor: Anna Faris' character?

Sydnee: The blonde one? Anna Faris'?

Taylor: Yeah. Between the three of 'em, *that's* who I'd rather spend my time with in Tokyo. [through laughter] She was at least having fun.

Sydnee: Well, she did say, "I have a cleanse for you all to try."

Taylor: That's true.

Sydnee: "And removes all the toxins from your body."

That was the only moment where I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I'm on your team, ScarJo. Yeah, I'm out with that one."

Taylor: That's fair. That's— Yeah. I don't know.

Sydnee: I do appreciate when her husband tells her, "You gotta quit smoking." And she's like, "I'll quit later."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] Like, that's a great response to, "I don't appreciate you telling me what to do, and I have no intention of doing it, but I don't want to fight with you. I'll quit later." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] Well, there's so much. I mean, the two, just Billy Murray and Scarlett Johansson are very talented. And they have excellent chemistry.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I would argue— 'Cause that's what I see, another one of the things that's held against it as far as "Does it hold up?" is it's a creepy romance setup. This is a very old Bill Murray, and a very, very young Scarlett Johansson. I don't

necessarily— And maybe this is just because I'm older, and you know, you view things differently. I don't see it as romantic tension. I feel it more like, just people desperate for connection, and they both are very disconnected.

She's very disconnected from her husband; he's very disconnected from his wife. They're in this place where they can't communicate with anybody around them, this is all they have, and so they're gonna cling to each other. And it felt like less of a falling in love, and more of a falling in friendship.

Sydnee: I do think that's what happens by the end. I think that the tension is that they both are assuming, "Well, I guess what's happening here, I'm trying to fall into the pattern I understand. You're a movie star, alone in Japan, and I'm a young woman whose husband is kind of, I don't know, being distant or whatever. This should end with an affair. That's what, probably, should happen." And obviously, he's had affairs. And I think what they're both doing is trying to understand, what is this if it's not that? I don't know— I don't have a pathway, a society, and my upbringing didn't give me an algorithm for what this is. And so I don't know what this is.

And I think he is trying to resist doing that. I think his character is very much like, "This is usually what I would do next. I would try to sleep with this girl. And that's because I'm a jerk, and I'm a piece of crap, so I should do that. But there's a part of me that keeps thinking, just because I have gotten to this point in my life where I can't appreciate the things I have, and where I'm kind of miserable and whatever, she's still just starting out. Things could get— She can grow in ways that I can't, and so maybe I shouldn't try to—" You know? I almost feel like he's resisting that urge.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Well, there are some moments where the body language, I think— Especially in the bed scene where she finally turns towards him, and then he lays flat and just grabs her foot. [laughs] Just lays there, awkwardly holding her broken little foot. I think it's almost— I read it more on the rewatch as he sees something of his younger self *in* her. Which I think, especially when it's cross sexes, that's harder to recognize.

It's so normal, in narratives and in real life, that we see people that look like younger versions of ourself, or feel like younger versions of ourself, we want to take care of them. We want to try to help them not make the mistakes we made. That's just kind of a natural community that happens. And I think it's harder when they aren't people that *physically* look like you. But I think there's more of that. *That's* what it felt like more to me. She's smart, she's sharp, she's

philosophical, but she's kind of— She's letting the sadness weigh on her too much, and maybe that's what he's done in his life.

Sydnee: Well, and I think they both say some things that kind of illustrate what has gotten in their way. He makes the comment like, "I'm here shooting this commercial for two million dollars instead of doing a play somewhere," which is a very obnoxious thing to say. You know. [laughs] [with snobby inflection] "I should be doing a play." And I think it's supposed to sound kind of obnoxious, like oh, okay. 'Cause you're an artist, so how dare you make money. You know. And I think when she's making fun of the girl for not knowing who Evelyn Waugh is...

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, it is funny, but at the same time, you know what you're doing. And so I do think that sort of, "I'm supposed to be this thing," is getting in their way. Which is a very classic human condition. "I am this, but aren't I supposed to be something else? And how do I get to the thing I'm supposed to be?" Until you finally realize, "Oh, maybe whatever I am is what I'm supposed to be."

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "Maybe those two things aren't different. Maybe whatever gave me the idea that I was supposed to be something else is not helpful, or gonna lead to me to happiness."

Taylor: Well, what makes me wonder— And I did look up the final whisper. 'Cause what could that have possibly been that made her smile, and everything kind of okay? And people have enhanced the audio to try— 'Cause Bill Murray does say *something*.

Sydnee: He does say something.

Taylor: But Sofia Coppola has famously said that that's not— There was not a— That's not a thing that anyone can know. It's not a scripted thing.

Sydnee: Yes. That was my understanding too, is it was not scrip— I think he was instructed to whisper something to her.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. It is interesting that what— And I don't know if it's— I listened

to the cleaned-up audio of what he's supposedly saying, which is something like, "I have to leave now, but I won't let that come between us."

Sydnee: Hmm.

Taylor: Which is interesting. Because it still doesn't *have* to mean something romantic, but it definitely takes more of a "I have intentions to see you again."

Sydnee: Yeah, it does.

Taylor: Which kind of bums me out, if that's— It's best that that's left unknown. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. I never assumed that it was a romantic thing.

Taylor: Well, and it could have just been, "Whisper something. No one will ever know what it is."

And they weren't anticipating YouTubers with enhancing audio equipment [laughs] to go in and be like, "Ah. This is what Bill Murray said."

Sydnee: Well, we didn't have that at the time. Fax machines are prominently featured in this movie.

Taylor: Right? I think—

Sydnee: Is that a thing? Do you think— Maybe that was— I don't know. In the year 2003, I was not staying in fancy hotel rooms *anywhere*. Certainly not Tokyo, but not anywhere in the US either. Do you think that was a fancy thing in a hotel room at the time? Like, you would have an in-room fax machine, and that was an amenity?

Taylor: I feel—

Sydnee: I wonder if that was just standard.

Taylor: I feel like, and I don't know why I would have ever seen this, but I feel like I have memories of fax machines in hotel rooms. Maybe not any that I was actively staying in, but one's that I've—

Sydnee: Maybe it was just a thing, like if you were staying at a *nice* hotel.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Not— You know. But I don't think, in the year 2003, I would have been staying in any hotels nice enough to have fax machines, if that was a nice amenity.

Taylor: No. No.

Sydnee: Yeah, I appreciate the inclusion of fax machines and [holding back laughter] drawing maps to places.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] Well, that's just the way that they found each other. I was honestly impressed, because I don't— It's hard to find your way around to some little bar in Tokyo with *all* of the technology at your hand. A hand-drawn map or "Oh, meet me here!" That's not gonna work. [laughs]

Sydnee: No. Well, and I do think part of that is supposed to feel a little magical.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's not magic, but it's supposed to have that sense, like she's giving him maps. And these maps are not just literal maps. She is helping him navigate something deeper.

Taylor: Well, and that one— In my mind, it was their last night together. And I was like, "Oh, no. They spend so much more time together." But the night where they karaoke, that scene where she's wearing the wig.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That night just seems so magical, and warm, and perfect. And it makes me think of that idea of, "Will they ever see each other again?"

There are those moments when you're traveling, especially when you're traveling alone, or you're by yourself for whatever reason, where you just sort of get, "Okay. I'm just gonna go along with it. I'm just gonna see where this takes me."

And you end up with a bunch of people that, in that moment, you love them more than anybody else, and it is the best time you will ever have. And it is— But you can't hold onto it. Because you can never recreate it.

Once you get to know those people actually, you'll get to know them as humans, and not as just magical creations that popped up as their perfect night. And that's really— That kind of felt like the bigger idea in the movie, is you do have those experiences when you're traveling. Where you meet people, they become your number-one confidante. You do a bunch of crazy stuff together, and you can't cling to it. You go back to your life, and that's it.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I feel like it's kind of a Vonnegut idea of sometimes, you find people in your karass. And that doesn't necessarily mean that you're supposed to spend the rest of your life with this person; it just means that you both recognize you share something. There is something in your souls that make them good matches, maybe for just that moment, and you will share that moment. And that doesn't necessarily mean you'll ever see them again. But when you identify those people, you should spend time with them, and feel lucky that you got to.

Taylor: I've always loved that concept. I feel like sometimes, I don't know, you can never figure out you, just sitting alone in a room. There are, say, 100 people out there in the world that have a little piece of you that you've got to go get. And it might be very small, but you gotta— If you really wanna figure out who you are, you've got to go find all those pieces. And that's the point of it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And in turn, you're carrying around 100 pieces of other people that you also have to exchange.

Sydnee: That you need to find. I mean, for the criticisms that I think we level at a lot of older movies, you know, before we all said out loud it is not acceptable for the butt of the joke to just be, "These people look different, or sound different, or talk different." Or, you know, the time where we all stood up and said, "Can we please stop?" Aside from those issues, there's a lot of beautiful moments in the movie. I love the way it's filmed. I still think you can care about the characters while recognizing that they're not perfect people.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I still enjoyed it. I enjoyed watching it, despite some of those things. I love Sofia Coppola's stuff; I love *The Virgin Suicides*. I think her eye is really beautiful, so I think it's definitely worth a watch, knowing that there are gonna be some moments where you're like, "Err." [chuckles]

Taylor: Yeah. Well, again, it's just the same joke— It's funny, too, because— And I guess this is 2003. I was there in 2008 or '09? So a little bit later. But there's a lot of, especially in the entertainment industry, it's hard to believe that people didn't speak English. Not that they would have to, but it's just a bit of a farce that you're in central Tokyo in these international businesses, and nobody at the Shinjuku Park Hyatt speaks English is a little silly. [laughs]

Sydnee: I thought that was probably silly, or the idea that you would go to a hospital and nobody would speak English.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I feel like— I mean, everybody but us is so much better at learning other languages [laughs] and making that a standard thing.

Taylor: It's really— [laughs]

Sydnee: You know, if you went to a hospital in Japan, they would want to make sure that they had somebody who spoke your language or translation services readily available. It just feels like that would happen. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But oh, well. Tey, I thought it was a great idea to watch it, 'cause I really did— I enjoyed watching it again.

Taylor: I'm glad.

Sydnee: It had been— I mean, it's at least a decade, if not longer. So I would recommend it, even if you unfortunately had to pay \$3.99 like I did.

Taylor: Yeah. Same.

Sydnee: What should we do next?

Taylor: Well, we don't have our "kid," quote-unquote – she's a whole adult now, but – on anymore to tell us about the new kid music. So I've just gotta keep up with the stuff that Rileigh recommended to us. She had listen to the first Noah Kahan album a couple years ago, and he just dropped another one called *The Great Divide*. And I've been listening to a bit of it so far, I really like it. So I thought maybe we could give it a listen.

Sydnee: That sounds good. I've had multiple people recommend it to me, so...

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: So we'll see what we think.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Excellent. Well, we'll do that for next week. In the meantime, I just want to say thank you one more time to everybody who became a member during the MaxFunDrive the last two weeks. We appreciated you so much for supporting us, and just for liking the stuff we do. I know the Drive's over, I just want to say thank you one last time.

Taylor: Yes. Thank you so much.

Sydnee: And if you liked this show, you should go to MaximumFun.org and check out a lot of other great shows that you would like. And you can email us at StillBuffering@MaximumFun.org, and thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

Taylor: My girlfriend had a karaoke birthday party a couple weeks ago.

Sydney: Uh-huh.

Taylor: I'd been trying to find songs that I can sing, now that my voice has changed since [unintelligible] And I had heard that Elvis Costello song, "[What's So Funny 'Bout] Peace, Love, and Understanding" recently. I was like, "Oh, I can sing that song!" I *totally* forgot that Bill Murray sang that in this movie. It was such an uncanny moment. I was like, "Oh. Oh! [laughs] I did that too, Bill Murray!"

Sydney: You know, that's funny. My karaoke— One of my choices now is the pretender song.

Taylor: Oh, really? Oh, that is funny.

Sydney: Yeah. There you go.

Taylor: Yeah, they're great choices.

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