

Still Buffering 485: Whistle (2025)

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[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Hello, and welcome to Still Buffering: the cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, there was more TikTok drama!

Taylor: Oh, I love TikTok drama. What—I probably know what it is, 'cause I keep abreast on it, but what have you witnessed?

Sydnee: Well, as you may know, BookTok shows up on my TikTok algorithm a lot.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: And so I started seeing these reaction videos to a creator without knowing what the—like, I had to back in. You know how sometimes, like, you start seeing reactions to something and you're like, "What are—what are these people talking—what are you reacting to?"

And eventually the algorithm's like, "Oh. Did you want to know what this was about? Here it is."

Taylor: [laughs] What's the comment? "I started at season seven and I don't know what's happening."

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs] That's exactly—yes. Uh, so season seven was, "You can't trademark 'Hot girls read.'" [laughs]

Taylor: Oh, yeah. That—I have never—I mean, no. Like, I guess it happens a lot where someone does something stupid in front of the entire world on

TikTok and they're swiftly dealt their social media karma. But that was fast! That was a very fast... like...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Done and done.

Sydnee: Yes. Uh, yes. Apparently, in case you weren't following this...

Taylor: Give the background. Sorry. [laughs]

Sydnee: A creator on TikTok who sells... products... stickers, bookmarks, t-shirts.

Taylor: Bookmarks mainly, yeah.

Sydnee: Yes. Uh, recently came out with a post that said, "I have trademarked the phrase 'Hot girls read' and so that's very exciting, I guess, but also... uh, please don't sell anything. If you are selling things with the phrase 'Hot girls read,' like, it's mine now."

So it was kind of like a blanket cease and desist. Like, a very friendly, like, "Ha ha ha! Cease and desist! Hehehe!"

Like, that was the tone of it. Like, "I'm not being mean, I'm not angry. Just, like, don't! Don't!" [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And all these people were like, "Whoa, whoa, what?"

Because I guess the phrase "Hot girls read," one, has been a common thing on BookTok for a long time.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And, two, lots of creators sell things that say "Hot girls read." And, three, her date of first use is well after some of these creators were already selling things that say "Hot girls read."

Taylor: It also—I mean, I think there's also, like, the layer of, like, she's only been, like, reading? Not reading. But, like, she's been... [laughs] she, like, has said in previous videos, like, that she only started reading, like, for—like, to create content in the last three years.

And so there's use of—like, BookTok has been around for a while. Like, you're kind of a newbie on the BookTok field, and you're coming in and you're trademarking something. And also, I think it's important to note that the whole hot girl, like, TM, TM, TM, that's, like, a—it's, like, a Meg Thee Stallion thing, right? Like, that's...

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Like, Hot Girl Summer. Like, she's got a whole lot of—but, like, that's—it's also like that little whiff of, like, you're also kind of taking from a culture that's not yours. And, like, a... it's all bad. It's all bad.

Sydnee: I mean, it would be like—'cause, like, I was late to BookTok. I was late to romantasy. It would be like me trying to, now, like... [laughs quietly] like if I were trying to, you know, trademark some sort of BookTok trope. Like, I couldn't, because I was late to the party.

Taylor: And I don't—like, I can't imagine who advised her to do this that didn't, like, want to see her fall on her face. 'Cause it feels like really bad advice!

Sydnee: It does feel like bad advice. Because even if it was a legitimate trademark, even if she was the first person on Earth to say the words "Hot girls read," and then turn it into a bookmark—as I say this, it's so ridiculous. Even if she was, and she could prove it—if there was, like, documented evidence of it—it's still a bad idea to trademark it and try to undercut all these other makers.

Like, it's just a—it's a bad move from a marketing standpoint in that sense, you know? 'Cause then you've gotta defend your trademark, and you've gotta spend all your time and energy writing cease and desist letters to people, and then I guess suing them if they don't follow. Like, why do you want—who wants that noise?

Taylor: It seems like trademarks are intended for very—like, very distinct things that are also backed by very large companies that can go after, like, trademark infringements. Like, it's not a copyright, which I guess is a little bit... I don't—there's been a lot. I don't know why my feed's been educating me on, like, trademark and copyright law, 'cause there's, like, also a drag queen versus Patagonia thing that's going on.

Sydnee: Yes, Pattie Gonia and Patagonia, yeah.

Taylor: We won't even get into that. But, like, I don't—I never wanted to learn about it. I never... I don't intend to ever trademark or copyright anything in my life. I realize that, like, I feel very insulted by the idea of—of trademarking an element of, like, something that came from a creative, like, shared space like BookTok. 'Cause I think art is meant to be collaborative.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: We're supposed to kind of feed off of each other and go, "Oh, that's cool. I want to do this with it."

"Oh, well, I wanna—I saw what you did and I'm gonna do this with it."

Like, that's... that's kind of how things should develop.

Sydnee: I agree, I agree. I think it's a bad look to—I mean, if everybody's selling stuff that says "Hot girls read," and you make the cutest thing that says "Hot girls read," then I guess you win, and more people will buy that. But also, I don't—yeah. I don't know why you even bother. I have learned a lot about trademark law, too. My algorithm was like, do you wanna know the ins and outs of this?

And I was like, "Yes, please."

It sounds like it was a bad idea for all the reasons we've talked about. But it's also probably not something that she can defend very well.

Taylor: No. I think it's already been—I think she has officially retracted it.

Sydnee: Did she retract it? Well, it's been challenged, I will say. I know that. So maybe she retracted it, too. Because it was—I mean, you know, she's gonna lose business because of this whole ordeal. But it also—it was interesting. Like, she can't prove first use, so that kind of falls apart. It's also—somebody made the argument that even if she could, the corollary was—okay. You know there's Coach, the bags?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Okay. One time, Coach, the purse company, tried to sue Old Navy because Old Navy had a line of, like, t-shirts or sweatshirts or something that just said "Coach" on the front in, like, white letters. That's a cla—like, that's so Old Navy, right? Like, blue shirt, white letters, "Coach." [laughs] That's a very Old Navy shirt.

Taylor: "Team."

Sydnee: "Team." Right? "Coach."

Taylor: "School."

Sydnee: [laughs] That's so Old Navy. "Shirt."

Taylor: Yeah. "Shirt!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Old Navy sells a line of primary color t-shirts that say "Shirt."

Taylor: I would buy that, actually.

Sydnee: Primary color sweatpants that say "Pants."

Taylor: Just right across the butt. "Pants."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Pants." [laughs] Actually I want that! Can I have a hat that says "Hat?"

Taylor: [laughs] Old Navy will provide!

Sydnee: Old Navy. [laughs] I'm trademarking this idea!

Taylor: Hmm. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] That is so Old Navy. It's like, we are getting to the basics here. This is clothes for body. Human body clothes. Did you need—

Taylor: Human body clothes. [laughs]

Sydnee: Welcome to Old Navy. We have human body clothes.

Taylor: I want that on the back of one of those, like—what are the—like, the Dickies. Like, the jumpsuits, you know? Like, the full—like, the coveralls. Human body clothing.

Sydnee: [laughs] Human body clothing. Yeah. Top human body, bottom human body. Foot human body. Head human body. Um, but Coach tried to sue Old Navy over this 'cause they were like, "You can't put Coach on something 'cause that's our name. Like, we're Coach. You can't just have a shirt that says Coach."

And it didn't go anywhere, because what they said was like, no. This is a word. Coach is a word and a thing. Like, the coach of a team, right? Like, this is a concept that somebody—and nobody would ever look at that shirt and think, "They must mean the purse, right?" Nothing about that would you connect to Coach bags.

You would look at that and think of a coach of a team. And that's a concept already existing in society. So, like, you can't trademark an entirely separate concept. If you use a word for your trademark that happens to have other, you know, connotations, you can't trademark all those other connotations, too.

So I think the idea here is like, "Hot girls read" is just an idea. It's like a... it's a vibe. [laughs quietly] You can't trademark a vibe. And so somebody might just casually make the comment, like, "Oh, well, you know, hot girls read."

And you can't go sue them because they had that thought that you might just have, and then decide to put on a t-shirt or something. You know? So it's probably not defensible either way.

Taylor: Well, and it's... it is such a sad sign of this, like, late stage capitalist heck-scape. That's Still Buffering approved, right? [laughs] Heck-scape.

Sydnee: Yeah. Heck-scape.

Taylor: That we live in. Where it's like, you know, like you said, like, if you made the cutest merchandise, that's the merchandise that should sell. Now, we already know that giant corporations—it's very hard to compete against every—

Sydnee: Yes, yes.

Taylor: The companies can get better prices on all of the means of productions that we as individual creators can ever make. So the goal is to not make the best product. It's to drive out all the competition, and then we just have to buy whatever product there is. They don't care. Like, Walmart doesn't care about giving you quality. They care about driving all the small businesses out, so your only option is Walmart quality.

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: And that's—it's, like—it's really broken when small creators start to get that mindset. Of, like, "Well, it's not about me making the very best 'Hot girl reads' stuff. It's that I'll just, like, destroy all the competition, and then it's just me, and then everybody—any hot girl that wants to read has to go through me!" [laughs]

Sydnee: It's really—and I think it, too, it undermines the natural progression that I hope we're seeing, which is while these big companies like a Walmart are trying to just "We make the cheapest, we make the most, so we win."

There are younger consumers who are savvier, and who don't want the thing that looks like mass produced, you know, like—like human body clothes. They don't want those.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: They want something that is unique and different. And, I mean, I think are you willing to pay for it is a tricky question, because right now the economy is what it is, and everything's so expensive that, like, am I willing to pay extra for a bespoke shirt right now? Probably not, 'cause I gotta buy food. You know?

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So it's tough. Um, but when given enough economic freedom and, you know, ability to buy stuff, younger consumers are gonna gravitate away from the stuff that looks like it's mass produced.

Taylor: Well, that's—I mean, that probably goes with—I don't spend a lot of time on BookTok. You're more of that world. But, like, I think when you make those decisions, which at core I'm against, but you have to know the zeitgeist of who you're appealing to. And I would not assume a bunch of BookTok consumers would be about, like—like, it seems like a very—

Sydnee: Gatekeeping.

Taylor: —whimsical space. Yeah! Like, it seems against what these kind of—what your consumer would be into.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: There's a weird parallel from the cocktail world where, you know, most—cocktails have names, and they have specific ingredients. Anybody

can make them and put them on a menu all around the world. You can rip off them. You can change them slightly. You can use the same names and use different ingredients.

Very few people have messed with this, because it's a collaborative art form. Somebody makes something, somebody goes, "Hmm, what if I did this instead?" And that's how it goes, and it's cool. Like, that's what makes it cool. And anybody that exists in that world knows that.

One of the few exceptions is the Painkiller. The bartender—the bar that made it, like, not only trademarked it but, like, goes after people that call drinks—like, there was a bar in New York that opened called Painkillers, and they had to change their name because, you know, it was this whole court case. And the argument was, "Well, this is our intellectual property."

And all that ever meant was that people just—everybody that's involved in that world hates the people the trademarked and enforce the trademark around the Painkiller cocktail.

Sydnee: Okay. Help me know about the—okay. This is fascinating to me, because I've been watching so much Below Deck. And they are always, always making and ordering Painkillers on that show. Like, and they—in the last—in this past season that we were watching, they even made a reference to, like, because of where they were, like, in the Caribbean, you have to order a Painkiller.

Like, it was like—and it was this connection that I have never heard in my life. I have no connection between I'm on—wherever they were, Tortola or whatever, so obviously I gotta get a Painkiller. Is that where this bar is where they make these? Is that why? Because they talk about—I don't know what's in a Painkiller, but I have heard about that drink more from Below Deck than I ever have in my cumulative human experience.

Taylor: I've been watching a lot of Below Deck because you shared your—your subscription me to—what is that? Peacock?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I haven't gotten to that point. I know—I researched this forever ago and I can't remember where the bar is. But, I mean, I know it's ubiquitous enough that, like, the last bar that I ran the program at, we had a Painkiller, but we called it "What the doctor ordered."

It's not anything wildly unique. It is, like, a—

Sydnee: What's in it?

Taylor: Coconut milk, rum, pineapple, orange... no, I don't think—there's not even pineapple in it, right? It's just coconut, rum, and orange.

Sydnee: So it's almost a piña colada?

Taylor: Yeah. It's like a piña colada with a lot of orange juice.

Sydnee: What's the big deal? I don't know. I just see people—and, like, on Below Deck, Kate will, like—they'll come back from, like, an excursion to the beach or whatever, and she'll look at everybody and be like, "Painkillers? Does everybody want a Painkiller?"

And they're all like, "Of course! Of course that's what we want!"

And I'm like, why is this such a big... I have never once in my entire life ordered a Painkiller, and I have been to a lot of bars and ordered a lot of adult drinks, and I have never ordered one.

Taylor: Uh—alright, I just double checked myself. It does have—I was correct the first time. It does have pineapple juice in it. And it's from the Virgin Islands, so that's where...

Sydnee: So is it a... okay. Well, that must be—

Taylor: No, it is—it's very close to a piña colada. It's a piña colada with orange juice, and they grate nutmeg on top.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But it's, like—they've made it—it's like the one—I was gonna say the nerd that ruined the party, but I don't think that's... that's not the right word for it.

Sydnee: Mm-mm. But I get the—

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I understand. Yeah.

Taylor: Like, everybody else is like, hey, bartending's a collaborative art form. We all riff off of each other's stuff. We all steal each other's ideas. We remake them. We rename them. That's all fine.

And somebody was like, "Um, excuse me, no. I want exclusive rights to the Painkiller."

You added orange juice to a piña colada! Like, what do—that's not special!

Sydnee: Can you imagine? I'm trying to think, like, the corollary in the medical world. Can you imagine—I mean, like, as a doctor, obviously drug companies and whatnot. But if I was like, "Listen. The method I use to bandage wounds is the Sydnee method, and I'm trademarking it. And if you want to use this combination of wound dressings, um, you're gonna have to pay me for it." [laughs]

"You can't just stick Xeroform on that. You gotta ask me!"

Taylor: I mean, I fear that's our future, right? Like, I think social media has taught us all to monetize our existence in every way possible. Like, that's the inevitable endpoint is like, "I had a thought. Trademark, trademark, trademark."

Like, no, just...

Sydnee: No, just do it.

Taylor: We're meant to live in community with each other, and share our recipes. And all hot girls should read together in unison.

Sydnee: Or not read. I mean... I mean, I like reading and I think reading is fundamental. But I don't... I mean, you can be hot and not read. That's fine.

Taylor: And you can be not hot and read.

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, hot is subjective, right? Like, I don't know.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I also—

Taylor: I don't think that'll go on a sweatshirt, though.

Sydnee: "Hot is subjective."

Taylor: I don't think you can sell that for 50 dollars on a crew neck. "Hot is subjective, but I do like to read." [laughs]

Sydnee: Actually, no, that probably would sell. [laughs] "Hot is subjective, but I do like to read."

And on the back it says "Human body clothes."

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I mean, I don't know, too, that—the whole thing, I was reading it. And it's one of those things where you don't wanna think about it too much 'cause as soon as you start thinking about it too much you're, like, deconstructing the whole idea. I was like, why are we... why are we so concerned with, like, physical appearance and beauty when it comes to reading? Like, why are we even talking about—and then I'm like, god, you're thinking about this too much. Who cares? "Hot girls read" is fine. If you want a sticker or a bookmark or a t-shirt that says "Hot girls read," go for it. Go for it! And if you want one that just says...

Taylor: "Read."

Sydnee: "Read." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Shirt." That's fine too. I don't care.

Taylor: "Book." [laughs] "Read book good."

Sydnee: Sometimes the internet makes you think you have an opinion about something. [laughs] Then you realize, like, seven hours of content later, I didn't. I didn't actually care about that.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, it is, like—I do—I feel like—there's one creator that specifies in, like, "Here's some niche drama that I'm gonna cover for you so you don't have to go through, like, 20 videos."

And I appreciate—that's a service to mankind. Because I do like, "Ooh! What's somebody mad about?"

And that is, after I have pored over everything, come to my decision. There's that moment of, "I don't care. I don't care."

Sydnee: I don't care. I don't actually care about this.

Taylor: And I do kind of care, in that I think it's a dangerous precedent to set that we start, like, carving off pieces of, like, I don't know. Just thought? Trademarking thoughts? Let's not do that!

Sydnee: No! No. I mean, there's a difference. There's, like—you know. I have written a book. If somebody, like, took my book and then put their name on it as author and started trying to sell it, that would bother me. And I feel like that's not fair.

And that's an extreme example. But there is somewhere between that and then, like, "I'm saying a word that everyone says all the time, and I'd like to trademark it now." [laughs]

Like, there's a middle ground here, right?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I mean, the intent I guess should be protecting your intellectual property.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And is the concept of hot girls reading... is that intellectual? I don't...

Sydnee: Is it property?

Taylor: I don't... I don't wanna live in a world where it is.

Sydnee: No, I don't think so. I think everyone can read. No matter your gender or your hotness.

Taylor: Everybody can—not everybody can. Everybody...

Sydnee: Well, I mean, everybody should be able to.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Everyone is allowed. [laughs]

Taylor: Everyone is allowed to read. Hey, that's good on a shirt.

Sydnee: Everyone is allowed to read.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I want to make a series—

Taylor: Just, like, a little—like, a little thumbs up underneath it. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] I want to make a series of t-shirts that say things that people are like, "Yes? And?"

Like the response to would be like, "And the... "

It sounds like it was, like, badly translated from another language.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. That's...

Sydnee: [laughs] Yeah. We got one of those donated to Harmony House the other day. It said something to the effect of, like, "The best food is a delicious bowl of macaroni and cheese, and you can't ever convince me that anything would be better."

It was something like that, all written in this big block of white text on a black t-shirt.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I don't know. It also—here's the problem, though. What I just said could easily be "This is a funny shirt I want to make," or AI-generated. And I'm not sure. Because that's like those terrible AI-generated t-shirts that Facebook tries to sell you where it's like, "I'm a girl dad with 50 guns, and don't mess with me! Or I know a place to bury you. But also—"

Taylor: "I'm a Scorpio." [laughs]

Sydnee: "I'm a Scorpio., so I sting. And I like to work on my cars, but not too much. And country music and America, and... "

It's like, what is this? I don't know what to think about you now. [laughs]

Taylor: The robots are trying so hard to understand us. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] They do combine, like, something really, like, right wing patriotic with, like, a zodiac sign. And then it's like, what's happening?

Taylor: It's just like, where—what are the most, like, out—like, outlying traits on either side? Like, this is the stuff that's getting the most pings.

Yeah, it's a subtle art now. Like, separating good nonsense from AI nonsense. 'Cause I like, like, nonsensical humor. I still think I can pick it apart. Like... but I don't know. Maybe they're gonna optimize that. I always think back to—you might remember this.

It was an Evangelion pencil case I had that was clearly translated from Japanese, but it's Evangelion, which is a kind of dark anime. And on the inside it had a picture of the main characters, and it said, "Let's go fishing with cute puppy! Go, go, beautiful lake!"

Sydnee: I remember that!

Taylor: [laughs] There was not a lake in the image. Or a puppy. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] I remember that! Oh, that's great.

Taylor: AI could never.

Sydnee: AI could never! no. No, I saw somebody talking about how I don't know why we keep asking AI to do things that humans are good at and AI is bad at. If we're gonna, like, live in harmony with AI, why don't you let AI do the things that AI is good at and let humans do the things that humans are good at?

And that was, like, a—I mean, the best—if we're gonna have to—I don't want to live with AI. But I'm gonna have to live with AI, it feels like the best argument. Like, they were talking about, like, robots are bad at buttoning shirts. [laughs] So let's stop trying to make a robot who buttons a shirt. Just saying, like, why do we need a robot who can toss food in a wok? We don't need a robot to do that. Like, humans can do that well. What can robots and what can AI do?

Let them fill their void. And spelling strawberry apparently is a challenge for AI, so let's let humans do that one.

Taylor: Well, I hope—and I don't know. Maybe this is a tentative hope. But that, like, once we get past the excitement of it, we realize how—like, I've worked in a lot of minimum wage service industry positions, right? And I

know what it's like to hire somebody and go like, "They can't—like, there's just too much to do. This person can't do this."

And that's a human with, like, complex reasoning skills. I cannot imagine, like, a robot approximating that. 'Cause that's what a lot of times you see. Like, well, they're kind of getting it, but the ways that they're not getting it are so crucial to the getting it that they should not do this job.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, that is every robot I see trying to do a job. It's like, well, yeah, but the thing that you're really bad at is the thing that matters the most. [laughs] Keeping the food in the wok. Not shattering into a million pieces... on the line. [laughs]

Sydnee: Sometimes they just fall over from exhaustion. I guess that's what they're falling over from. They look exhausted when they fall over.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, I like it when they dance. I don't know. I mean, I still want to go see, like, ballerinas and stuff, but like—

Sydnee: [laughs] "I like it when they dance." Well, but no, that's a great example, though. A ballerina. Like, when you are watching a professional ballet performance, you are not just seeing something that's nice to look at, because it is. Like, just from, like, a very superficial, like, "That's pretty." It is.

But it is also—like, you understand, like, oh my gosh, the training, the strength, the technique, the dedication. Like, all that went into that moment is part of it. That's part of why as humans we watch it and go, "Wow. That's incredible."

It's not just 'cause it's cool to look at. It's that.

And none of that exists if it's a robot!

Taylor: No. I mean, it kind of—

Sydnee: You've taken it all out!

Taylor: I don't know. Like, in an abstract way, it makes us think of why we—why do we perform? Why do we make art? Why do we sing? I think there's an element of our enjoyment in it that we see ourselves—we only get the one life. But connecting with people doing amazing things in their life, with their time, allows to sort of experience that. Because we're connected as a race. Like, we're connected as humanity.

Like, when I watch somebody dance or sing, perform something that I—you know, I'm 40. There are certain things that I just will never do. I can still feel what that would feel like. And that's a really important experience.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That's why—I don't know. I like that the robots dance and make bad art, but it's not gonna replace why we connect with humans doing the same things.

Sydnee: Nope. No, except for parkour. I'll never connect with people doing parkour.

Taylor: I mean, I like watching them do it! I don't know how—I was gonna say, I don't know how you get to the point of, like, learning how to be good at it. 'Cause every step of being bad at it seems like death.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But that's how I feel about people that can skateboard.

Sydnee: Well, that's true.

Taylor: I don't know how you got good at that without dying, but good for you.

Sydnee: Anything with wheels, really. Other than, like, a bicycle. I can ride a bicycle.

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah. That's a little bit of a different skill set.

Sydnee: I can ride a bike. But I can't—I mean, if you're talking about roller skating, skateboarding, any of the trick—now, BMX? Nope. No. Any of that, no thank you.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And it's terrifying. I went skiing once and had nightmares about it. There are just some things that we can't—[laughs] that are beyond me. And everyone. [laughs] If a robot wants to ski, a robot can ski. But I don't need a robot to ski.

Taylor: And, you know, the thing is, I wish we—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] If, like—you know, 'cause the thing with, like, the robots—they're taking jobs that people need. 'Cause people can't afford to live.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: If we didn't live in that kind of a situation economically, sure. Let the robot—I'll work on a line with a robot and be like, "Man, this guy... this guy blows!" [laughs] "Send him to the dish pit! He doesn't know what he's doing!"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That's fine. I'll entertain robots in a world where we have universal basic income.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You can have robots do jobs.

Sydnee: That's fine. Then you can have a robot operate the wok.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I just don't—but also, like, you're gonna have to make it better! Like, until it's at least as good as a human at it. And I mean like a human who knows what they're doing. Like, I guess they're as good as me. But, like, I don't...

Taylor: No, no.

Sydney: I can't do this stuff without tossing food everywhere.

Taylor: We need to have, like, a term for—you know, we understand, like, the uncanny valley in terms of, like, mimicking human visage. We need to have that term for, like, human reasoning. 'Cause I think it exists, where you get AI that's smart enough that it thinks it can think, and it goes into this big dip where it just comes up with resolutions. And it's like, I don't—and I do not interact with AI, except for when I'm forced to. But, like, a lot of, you know—like, Amazon has gone 100% AI. When you're like, "Hey, this package was stolen."

They're like, "We're sorry about that. We have to wait a day for, like, you know." Like, the answer chain. It's like, this is not... you are going through human gestures, but none of the answers you're giving are anything that a human mind would conclude. Even an ill-trained human mind would not make this conclusion.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. I know. It's just like when DoorDash is like, "We're sorry we didn't bring all the food, and now your kids didn't get their food that they ordered. But do you want a refund?"

And it's like, no. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: I want food! I don't have food! Refund? I mean, I guess, yes, no, I would prefer not to pay for food I didn't get. But also... my kids are hungry!

They always ask at the end, like, did this resolve your problem? No! No!

Taylor: And I really—I wish they would just remove the, like, fake empathy of like, "We understand this is a frustrating situation." It's like, no you don't. You don't.

Sydnee: Just, like—just say, like, "We're sorry we screwed you over. Here's your money back. We know you're hungry. There's nothing we can do about that."

Like, at least be honest. There's the honesty. You can't fix it. I know I can order it again.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes, I understand. I understand. I did it the first time. They're always like, "You could order it again."

And it's like, yeah, no, I knew. I know!

Taylor: "We're sorry. Your food didn't make it to you because it was made by a robot with a wok. And he dropped it on the ground and then he fell. And he shattered. [laughs]"

Sydnee: [laughs] And he fell over in exhaustion.

Taylor: [laughs] That was it! That's all we got!

Sydnee: And we only have one other robot, and we programmed him to dance, so. He's just dancing.

Taylor: Also, this entire conversation has been trademarked, so you owe me 2000 dollars.

Sydnee: This is the future. This is the future that we wanted. Thank you, Elon Musk.

Taylor: Can you imagine, like, you're just in communication with somebody on the phone and you get a notification like, "You said a trademarked phrase. That'll be five dollars."

Sydnee: Oh my god. Yes. Taylor, we gotta talk about this movie.

Taylor: We have gone on way too long. Wow! This is maybe the longest—

Sydnee: I know, and it's a good movie!

Taylor: It is. So, I'd watched it before. I told you to watch it. What did you think?

Sydnee: I really liked it! I really enjoyed it. I was a little worried at first because I felt like, one, it is—you said it's kind of—the movie we're talking about is Whistle, by the way. It's a, um, kind of like horror movie that came out in 2025. Um, and you said it was like Final Destination-y. And at first I was like, oh, this does feel—I was almost like, is it derivative?

But it's its own thing. Like, it's a fun—it's a clever conceit. We are gonna spoil the movie.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: But, like, the idea—instead of just—Final Destination is like death is this faceless force that continues to compel you towards it, you know, no matter what happens, you can't evade it. In this case, death is literally, like, your death coming for you. And it's always coming for you. Usually at the allotted time. But they blow a magic whistle that makes it come for them immediately.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And it's clever. Because, I mean, like, in the first one you're like, ooh, why is—'cause I didn't think—the first death they show is, like, the guy who's all been burned. And I was like, well, that's not a particularly scary evil thing. Like, that was my first instinct was like, well, are we just gonna

watch this, like, volcano man come for people? 'Cause I don't think that's very scary.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But then when you realize that, like, oh no, it's just because he dies in a fire. That's why—yeah. And so, like, then you're trying to figure out, like, what are all their deaths gonna look like? I think that's a clever idea.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I guess the, uh—the inspiration is like a real object. Like, the Aztec death whistle. It's just a... it doesn't—I mean, as far as I know, it doesn't summon your death to you. It's just a very scary, like, sound that you could use to intimidate your enemy, 'cause it sounds like a horrible death cry. So, that does exist.

Sydnee: Interesting.

Taylor: But yeah. To me, it felt almost like—I get the Final Destination comparison. I mean, like, the—it reminds me of a lot of the energy of, like, late 90s, early 2000s horror movies. Like, they just felt—like, they had this kind of pacing, this kind of, like, quippy writing that felt kind of fresh, even if it was, like, going over familiar territory. I don't know. I just—I love that it's not from a franchise. It's its own thing.

Sydnee: And it does—I will say that, like, aging it that way, it does feel that way. The conversations—some of the angstiness feels like from our generation. It does not feel modern. It feels a little throwback.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I feel like that's not how—like, that sort of, like... oh, what does—she says at one point something about, like, "This might be our last time hanging out before we go off into our serious adult lives," or something like that. And I was like, god. That is such a 90s... like, that feels so old, the way you're talk—you know.

Taylor: Well, and I didn't look to see who—the age of the person who wrote it. But I would assume they were closer to our age than actual teenagers today. 'Cause that's probably—even, like, the—like, the t-shirts. Like, some of the band shirts and, like, the music. I'm like, this is what would've felt like dad music to us.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Not to a current teenager.

Sydnee: That's true, that's true. 'Cause the main character is listening to her dad's old record collection, 'cause her dad died in a car wreck when he was taking her to the hospital after she overdosed, so she blames herself. So she's listening to his records throughout the movie. And it definitely is not the music of, like, somebody who would be 17 now—it would not be their dad's music.

Taylor: Like, I... one of the, like, background sounds is, like, Concrete Blonde, which I think is, like, an early 90s band. I love Concrete Blonde but, like, that's—yeah. That's not... that would've been us, as a dad. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Us as the dad. Yeah. No, I thought that was interesting, too. The music is really good. Like, the background tracks are good. The acting is really good. I think it's fun to—I mean, I always think things like that are—the human brain likes that. Like, once you figure out like, "Oh, we're gonna see each of their deaths," to start puzzling out, like, what happens to them. I think our brains like that kind of thing.

Taylor: I think they had a good, like—because with the initial conceit that this is what's gonna happen, the first death I was like, "Oh, it's just old age." Like, that's—I think they did it in a really interesting way. But then it's like every death upped the ante. Which was...

Sydnee: They built to it in a good way, which is like, if you're... you're not just—when death gets you, you don't just die. You die in the way you would've died. And it won't make sense, because you're not in the circumstance you should've been in. So the guy who dies in a car wreck is, like, lifted into the air and then basically mutilated in the way that he would

have been, had he been in the car, and whatnot. And the guy in the steel mill, that's awful. That was sad.

Taylor: Well, and I... the sort of—I don't think there's a term for, like, the trope. But this is a common trope enough, where you're introduced to the one character that you don't have to have any empathy for. It's just a character that is evil and will be evil, and you can be happy when they die. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, we're introduced to the—the, what, minister drug dealer that sells drugs to kids and is awful.

Sydnee: That one...

Taylor: Every other character is, like, well rounded. You know, you've got, like, the high school jock who seems like a bully, but he's actually kind of a nice guy. You've got, like, the cheerleader girlfriend who has a heart. Like, every other character has—is multifaceted. He's just like, don't worry. This guy's gonna die, but you're gonna want him to. [laughs]

Sydnee: You're gonna be fine with it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: No, it really—it is—that was the only part that I thought was a little bit cheesy was, like, I don't know if I can buy this guy. Like, this...

Taylor: He was—

Sydnee: I'm not saying that this guy doesn't exist, but also, he doesn't run a really successful youth ministry. Like, everybody—all the parents in the neighborhood aren't gonna be fooled. [laughs] They're like, all the parents are so fooled. They all send their kids to this—I guess it's kid church? I guess it's just, like, only kids go to this church. [laughs] That's not a thing!

Taylor: I feel like that kind of feeds into, too, the idea that this movie feels—even though it's not a retro pastiche, it feels a bit of like one. 'Cause yeah, like, in the 90s, that character would be, oh, the evil minister drug dealer. Now we're like, I don't know about this. Like, this—[laughs]

Sydnee: Well... and it really, like—I had this moment where I was watching all the children walk out of the church and I thought, "There's nothing—" I mean, like, I understand that there are youth ministry programs within churches. But it's not like, "This is kid church. Kids only at this church!"

Like, that's not a thing! [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Wednesday mornings we did kid church.

Sydnee: You go to kids church on Wednesday morning?

Taylor: In Catholic school, yeah!

Sydnee: Oh. Well, okay. Children's Mass. But now, hold on.

Taylor: [laughs] That was kid church!

Sydnee: No. There were adults present.

Taylor: There are adults, like, conducting the Mass.

Sydnee: I don't understand—

Taylor: There are teachers.

Sydnee: With all the issues—and I know it's mainly the Catholic Church. But just, like, I mean, the Baptist Church has had the issues too. Lots of churches. With all the issues with creepy pastors, ministers, priests, whatever, why, if there was a church in town that was, like, teens only, why would you be like, "I wanna send my kid there!" [laughs] What part of you as a parent would be like, "I bet that's a healthy environment for my child!" Teens only. "I'm an adult male. Only teens here!"

Taylor: Right? And even, like, the—the whole, like—the two—like, the final girl, and then her girlfriend—which I do want to talk about, 'cause that's the whole reason I brought it up. But when they're like, to the—what's his name? The boy that dies in the steel mill accident. They're like, "No, we can't—we can't murder this drug dealing minister that actively kills children. We can't do that! That'd be wrong!"

It's like, why? [laughs]

Sydney: Why? I was really rooting for him to just kill him.

Taylor: That seemed like the best solution for everybody.

Sydney: Well, and I do think, like—so, okay. They're blameless. The lesbians are blameless.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydney: Because at the end of the movie, they do not sacrifice this dude so that they may live. Because that's the thing is, like, if you give death a sacrifice by killing somebody else, basically, you mark them with your blood, they die. Um, or, or, much like Final Destination—'cause I think they figure this out in Final Destination, too, don't they? Or they try to evade death the same way? If you die and then come back.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Then you've... death won't get you.

Taylor: The girl that drowns in the ambulance. I actually think that happens in two different Final Destination movies, yeah.

Sydney: Yeah. But I do like the idea that the—so, he does it to himself. In an act of religious hypocrisy, he marks himself with the blood of... I don't know which girl is bleeding. One of the girls are bleeding.

Taylor: The girl that has—what is—oh, you would know. What's her medical condition?

Sydnee: Diabetes.

Taylor: Okay, yeah.

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: She's the one that's bleeding out.

Sydnee: She keeps giving herself insulin.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, although she's giving herself—I couldn't tell what she was doing with that. It looked like she was injecting herself with an EpiPen. But I guess it was supposed to be an insulin pen. But it looked like she was doing, like, an intramuscular situation from the—but I guess it was a subcu. 'Cause usually insulin is subcu. It doesn't matter. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I was also kind of trying to figure out how she was, like, a future doctor, but she was still in high school. Like, how...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That's an early pre-med. [laughs]

Sydnee: It was. Like, she has been—well, she said she's been working in the ER. But I don't know what she's been doing there. But she knew a lot of science.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Anyway. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, good for her! Go-getter. But I like that he—he ended up leading to his own death, so that the lesbians could live.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: The false, hypocritical preacher died so the lesbians could live. That's a good message.

Taylor: Well, and we just talked—you know, we talked about Euphoria before, about the tale of the addict that's kind of, like, over-told. Like, I thought—I didn't intend it when we picked this. But, like, I thought it was actually a good representation of someone that's, you know. Like, when she sees her death and she thinks it's that she's going to overdose, and she says, "I don't wanna hurt anybody else. I don't wanna poison myself anymore."

Like, she is—she has recovered. Like, she...

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: I thought that was a good—I like when—even though we had the, like, evil drug dealer, we did have a, like, well-rounded recovering victim of addiction.

Sydney: I agree. I thought it was—it made me think that someone informed this production who had, like, firsthand experience with addiction, or knew someone well, or something. It felt informed to me, the way they handled it. Even at the end when, like, we assume death is no longer following her, but she still sees, like, a hazy image of her—of her death down the hallway from her, who disappears, but she's still there. But it's, like, fuzzy.

I think what—the way I interpreted that is, what they're alluding to is, substance use disorder is something you always have. That doesn't mean you always use drugs. But you always have that. And so, knowing that that is a possible path for you is what helps you do the work and, you know, take the medicine you need, or go to the therapies you need, or whatever your path to treatment or staying in recovery is. It helps you do that, knowing that that hazy image of what could happen is out there. I thought that was a really nice visual representation of that.

Yeah, I thought that was—it was a nice love story. It's nice that they both got to be final girls. I thought that was all really beautiful. I almost think the way they handled addiction was even better, you know? Like, I thought it was all well done, but, like, the addiction piece of it was really smart. It was really well done.

Taylor: I'm glad you feel that way. 'Cause that's like, I—the thing that struck me about the film was the casualness, where they just let the lead be—she was a lesbian. She fell in love with a woman. That was—you know, we're so used to that being the, like, there's the final girl. And then there's the boy that maybe will live, or he'll sacrifice himself in the final act so she can live. We're used to that, like, setup. And having it be two women, and not really—like, the commentary on it was very, like, lowkey. She was like, "Hey. Do you know if that girl's gay?"

And the boy was like, "Oh! We'll figure it out, won't we?"

And that was it. There was no...

Sydnee: Yeah. No weirdness.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, no, I thought that was well done, and I thought, um—I mean, she does try to sacrifice herself in that final girl kind of way. Like, that typically the guy would. But she doesn't let her. She saves her. Well... I guess sort of the evil preacher saves her by... being a jerk.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: By being a total jerk, but... [laughs]

Taylor: By anointing himself. [laughs]

Sydnee: By anointing himself. Ugh. Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I know. That was a satisfying end. Right as I was finishing the movie, the girls came walking in, and I was like, "You cannot watch this movie, girls." There's too many scary images. You know, like, it's a horror movie.

And they were like, "Well, what is it about?"

And I was like, "I will tell you—let me finish it, and then I'll tell you." But I said, "Generally speaking, I think that this evil preacher, who's a hypocrite and not really a good guy, is about to die so that the two lesbians can win."

And they were like, "We wanna watch this movie! This sounds like a great movie!"

And I was like, "No, you definitely cannot watch it. But it is a great movie!"
[laughs]

Taylor: Someday you can watch this movie.

Sydnee: Someday you will watch this. I love the messages. But there are a lot of—it's just scary imagery, you know?

Taylor: Did you see the after credits scene?

Sydnee: No!

Taylor: Oh. Well, it kind of—I would say it ruins it, but it doesn't. I liked it 'cause it felt like a... like a corny kind of a sting. It's—'cause you see the girl that gets the locker, and she finds the whistle.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: So the after credits scene is her—there's, like, a school assembly, and she's brought up on stage to play music, and she pulls out the whistle and blows it in front of the whole auditorium. And our two final girls are like, "No!" And try to cover their ears, and that's...

Sydnee: Oh my gosh!

Taylor: That's also—but that also feels very like that *Scream* kind of, like, edginess. Like, "Oh no, what's gonna happen now?"

Sydnee: They could do a whole series of this. I mean, like, if they want to make sequels to this movie, I feel like they could. 'Cause it really, like... that specific thing, and *Final Destination* does it so well. And there are a lot of other movies that do this. Where once you figure out what the gimmick is, your brain is immediately gonna start trying to solve the puzzle for every character. And figure out, like, how gory or how crazy or whatever is this gonna get. Our brains love that kind of thing. So they could easily do that.

Taylor: Yeah. I would happily see another one. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. I really enjoyed it. And I thought the two final girls were really well done. They were good actors, they were sympathetic characters. I was rooting for them, I cared about them. They were well written. I was sad when her cousin died. That was sad. That one hit me.

Um, but, like, overall, I thought it was a really good, really well done movie. I would happily watch sequels.

Taylor: Yeah. I feel like that's the... [laughs] I know things feel like they're moving backwards, as far as *Pride* goes. But I feel like this is what we were going for, where it's just like, that's just a normal—like, just as much as this is a standard setup for a horror movie, it operates in a very familiar way.

Sydnee: Yep.

Taylor: It just happens to be two women that are in love at the end instead of a girl and a guy. And I love that.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. That was really beautiful. No, it was good. I would highly recommend it if you like scary movies. Obviously it's, like—it's a horror movie, so it's got, like, some gruesome stuff. Blood and guts and stuff. But, um, but it's really good. Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, Tey, I have a movie for us to watch next.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: That is, um—so, I have not seen it.

Taylor: Great.

Sydnee: And, uh, it could be bad.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: I will say that the reviews don't look great. It looks... [laughs quietly] looks like they got 5 out of 10 or something. Anyway, the point is... the point is, it's called Queens of the Dead.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: And the—it's from 2025, and it's a zombie comedy, and it's about drag queens and zombies in Brooklyn. So it feels like something that you should see.

Taylor: I either know the drag queens or the zombies.

Sydnee: Or both.

Taylor: Maybe.

Sydnee: So I feel like we should watch this. I am not—I'm not putting this out there 'cause I think, like, this is gonna be a high quality film. Maybe it is! Maybe it's great. Uh, maybe it's not. In fact, sometimes when they're not, I love them more.

Taylor: There is, like, a space there where, like, you're bad, so you're good again.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So we'll see. Will this make the room turn?

Taylor: Hm. I'm excited.

Sydnee: Yeah, I'm excited. So we'll do that next. For Pride, and for horror.
[laughs]

Taylor: It's halfway to Halloween.

Sydnee: [laughs] For Pride and for horror! That describes 2026. For Pride and for horror!

Taylor: Honestly. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's every day!

Taylor: I can't—I can't watch movies about queer joy. I need to watch queer people battling unspeakable evil. 'Cause that's where we're at. That's where we're at!

Sydnee: That is where we're at. But we're gonna be okay. The lesbians lived. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: So far.

Sydnee: So far. Um, but thank you.

Taylor: Happy Pride! [laughs]

Sydnee: Happy Pride. No, I'm glad—I really—I'm glad you recommended it. It was very good. I'm gonna make—Justin didn't watch it with me, but I'm gonna watch it again and make him watch it with me, 'cause I know he'd love it too. He loves scary movies, he was just busy, so he couldn't watch it with me. But I'm gonna watch it again so he can.

Taylor: Well, that's what I—I watched it a second time to prepare for this. And it was just as good.

Sydnee: It really is. I would recommend it. And the sound—gosh. I don't know if there's a soundtrack, 'cause it feels like the kind of movie where they wouldn't necessarily release, like, a soundtrack. But I would happily download it if it existed, because it was good.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yep. Alright. Well, check that out. We'll watch Queens of the Dead for next week. And, happy Pride, everybody.

Taylor: Keep on being proud.

Sydnee: Yep. And wearing your human body clothes.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] TM.

Taylor: Oh no.

Sydnee: Too late! Got it. Nobody can say human body clothes now. It's mine. I'm coming for you!

Taylor: Oh no. You know what? I actually think that's a little bit more defensible than "Hot girls read."

Sydnee: It probably is.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I don't think I will—I'm gonna ask Rileigh. I'll ask her lawyer advice.

Taylor: Yeah. We're not gonna pursue it anyway.

Sydnee: Do you think I can defend this? I don't think she'll help me. I don't think she'll help me defend this trademark.

Taylor: That's fine.

Sydnee: Um, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org. There are a lot of great podcasts there that you would enjoy. 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]

Sydnee: Yeah. I do feel like, though, we could probably just make some merch that we can fund that said that.

Taylor: I mean, yeah. [unintelligible] some Still Buffering merch that says "Human body clothes."

Sydnee: Or just "Shirt. Pant." That already exists. I'm sure that's out there somewhere.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That feels like a—you remember when things were random for a while?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I bet that was out there in the random culture.

Taylor: I feel like, though, you could kind of, like, take AI's game and, like, make a shirt where it's like, uh, "Insert prompt of an inspirational quote here," or something like that. I don't know.

Sydnee: "Cute... cute animal pic here."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Sounds good.

Taylor: "Prompt: anime lady. Very pretty. Big boobs."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Boobs."

[chord]

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