

INTRO: HUBRIS: Round 10, Group Hubris. This piece is titled: Like and Subscribe.

A corporate coffee shop at the holidays. Generic, metallic, instrumental carols are piped in over the speakers. Conversations echo in the cavernous, hospital lobby-like seating area.

BREE sits at a table, scrolling on their phone. Snatches of ads, Tiktok-style but legally distinct of COURSE, can be heard as they try to find some actual content to watch while they wait.

VIDEO 1: *(On phone.)* I can't believe I'm in my fitness influencer era, but here we are.

VIDEO 2: *(On phone.)* Not only is this the softest rug I've ever owned, it's completely waterproof.

VIDEO 3: *(On phone.)* If you've been waiting to buy the viral cat tree, now is the time to do it.

VIDEO 4: *(On phone.)* I asked my husband to try out this heated blanket and are y'all seeing this right now?

Finally, they find a video that's only half an ad.

FIRST INFLUENCER: *(On phone.)* Come with me to check out the cutest restaurant I have ever been to. Right when you walk in, the vibes are immaculate. The server recommended that we try the peanut butter bacon toast as an appetizer, and I'm so glad we did. The hot honey drizzled on top took it over the edge - just look at my boyfriend's face when he takes a bite.

(On phone.) The sound of very crisp toast being bitten into.

FIRST INFLUENCER: *(On phone.)* So good. We did not leave a single crumb.

BREE scrolls to another video.

SECOND INFLUENCER: *(On phone.)* What I eat in a day as a student in a big city. I started with my usual matcha. A lot of you have been asking where I got this mug, so there's a link in the description for anyone who's interested. Today is Tuesday, so I have my 8:00 economics class, and I wasn't very hungry but I knew I needed something to hold me over, so I grabbed my favorite Trailhead protein bar. These are great because they have 16 grams of protein, 12 grams of fiber, and-

BREE scrolls again. Not so much an influencer this time as a content creator, which is such an important distinction, of course.

MEDIUM CONTENT CREATOR: *(On phone.)* Has anyone noticed that every coffee shop you go to these days looks exactly the same? Like, where's the color? Where's the warmth? I feel cold. I literally feel *cold*. I just left a coffee shop - see, here's my gigantic to go cup - and I was like...why do I feel like I need to bundle up more in here than I do outside? It's cold here. But I

was freezing in that coffee shop. It's like they turn the air on to get you out faster or something. Or to get you to order a bigger coffee so you'll warm up. And you know what? It worked. So.

BREE laughs to herself. The video starts to loop and they pause it as STRYDER walks in.

BREE: Hey!

STRYDER: Hey, sorry I'm late. Parking was impossible.

BREE: Oh, I know. I ended up giving up and just paying to park in the deck.

STRYDER: I thought I would too, but it was full. Besides, I saw the price and I was like...maybe that's for the best.

BREE: Yeah, I'll have to sell a kidney to pay for three hours, but whatever.

STRYDER: Why are we doing all this in person instead of online again?

BREE: Because I am committed to this "doing the holidays the old fashioned way" thing this year, and I am sticking to it!

STRYDER: You sure are.

BREE: Admit it, you like it. It's just like when we were kids.

STRYDER: Yeah, it's nostalgia bathed in LED lights.

They laugh.

STRYDER: I haven't been here before. I can't believe we're braving a chain coffee shop at the holidays.

BREE: It's pretty good. I got the gingerbread Americano.

STRYDER: Ooh. Do you just go to the kiosk to order, or...?

BREE: Yeah, it's all touchscreen.

STRYDER: Does theirs at least work? Because the one I had to use for street parking kept starting over. How are we paying \$20 for street parking when the screens don't even work half the time?

BREE: Right? I had to use the touchscreen at the drive-through earlier, and with the rain, I kept hitting the wrong buttons. The guy behind me started blaring the horn and I was like, I know you see me having to try and wipe this screen off every three seconds, dude.

STRYDER: What a jackass. Okay, I'm gonna go put my order in. Hang on.

BREE: Yeah, sure.

STRYDER strides. BREE goes back to their phone. A brief clip of the last video plays before they scroll.

SMALL CONTENT CREATOR: Please don't scroll right away. I just need fifteen seconds to pay for my-

BREE scrolls.

POLITICAL CONTENT CREATOR: We have breaking news regarding the President's latest meeting with the nine members of Congress that have spoken out in opposition to-

BREE scrolls.

JANGLY CORPORATE AD: We know what you crave, and we know how you want it. Three layers of cheese, three layers of garlic bread, no questions asked. \$19.99 from now until January 1. Only at-

BREE scrolls.

THIRD INFLUENCER: I've been asked so many times how I went from this...to *this*! So today I'm finally going to share my secrets. Thanks so much to Goose Egg for sponsoring this video.

STRYDER returns and BREE sets their phone down.

BREE: Find something good?

STRYDER: Peppermint macchiato.

BREE: Ooh. How festive.

STRYDER: 'Tis the season and whatnot. So. How's the shopping been so far?

BREE: I only got to the kitchen supply place and the wine store so far. The lines were almost out the door at both.

STRYDER: Yeesh. I guess that's what we get for shopping on a Saturday.

BREE: Yeah, I think we need to strategize if we're going to get everything done in one day.

STRYDER: Okay, what did you already get?

BREE: I got the wine club subscription for Sam, and at the kitchen place I got both our dads subscriptions for that thing that scans your fridge and makes your grocery lists.

STRYDER: Oh, my mom will *love* that. Dad always forgets milk.

BREE: So now we still need to get stuff for our moms, your brother, my sisters, and all the kids.

STRYDER: Well, for the little ones, what about a playground subscription?

BREE: They already have one for the place near them. But I think they just have a basic account, so maybe we could upgrade it for the year?

STRYDER: What does that get you?

BREE: I think the next tier up has afternoon playtimes, so they could go after school.

STRYDER: Oh, that would be nice for them.

BREE: Yeah, right now they can really only go on weekends or when they're off for holidays.

STRYDER: Okay, one down. So that leaves three kids. What are middle schoolers even into these days?

BREE: Hell if I know. Misty likes video games, but I don't know which ones.

STRYDER is summoned over the speaker.

ELECTRONIC BARISTA: Peppermint macchiato for Stryder.

STRYDER: Hold that thought.

STRYDER walks off. BREE scrolls.

FOURTH INFLUENCER: How I quit my 9 to 5 and started making a living as a content creator, part four. Like and follow to see the whole six-part series, and don't forget to leave a comment for a chance to win my holiday giveaway!

STRYDER returns. BREE sets down the phone.

BREE: How's the coffee?

STRYDER: Not bad. Okay, so, video games. What if we see if the electronics store has one of those...what are they called...those little portable consoles. The new ones. The ones that connect to the smart glasses, I forget the name.

BREE: Those are supposed to be pretty pricey.

STRYDER: I have a store card, though. I might have some rewards points. And they're probably running some kind of special. Hang on, let me check.

STRYDER takes out their phone and speaks into it.

STRYDER: Hey, Elros, what is the name of that portable video game console that connects to smart glasses?

A beat, a notification sound, and STRYDER reads the response.

STRYDER: "That's called a Swerve. Swerve is a very popular portable gaming system, supporting most games on the market. Would you like to see shopping results for Swerve?"

BREE: Swerve, that's right. I knew it was something like that.

STRYDER: Hey, Elros, can you tell me if there are any holiday discounts for Swerve?

A beat, a notification sound, and STRYDER reads the response.

STRYDER: "Swerve is on sale right now at all major retailers near you. Because of its popularity, I recommend placing one on hold for pickup or delivery. Would you like me to do this for you?"

BREE: Oh, that's a great idea.

STRYDER: Agreed. Hey, Elros, yes.

A beat, a notification sound, and STRYDER reads the response.

STRYDER: Okay, we got one! It's on hold for the next three hours.

BREE: That should probably be our first stop, then. The automated check-in takes forever. Okay, so, what about the boys?

STRYDER: Don't they both subscribe to that VR concert thing?

BREE: Oh, true. We could upgrade that, too. Add the pre-show experience stuff. Do they buy enough tickets for that to be worth it?

STRYDER: I think Iz went to six concerts last year alone.

BREE: Jeez, what's his allowance?

STRYDER: More than I make, probably.

BREE laughs.

BREE: Well, perfect. Oh, actually, while we're at the electronics place, I can get your mom another year of those dimmable lights she likes. They've added options for changing the colors.

STRYDER: Ooh. I know she was so bummed when she couldn't get the pink lights a couple years back.

BREE: I know! I hate that they put it behind a paywall. But whatever, that would be a nice thing for her this year.

STRYDER: Does your mom use Yeartunes or Savesong?

BREE: Ugh. Yeartunes. And then she gets the same things every year. I keep telling her Savesong is the way to go, but she hates having to look up all the individual songs on each album.

STRYDER: Fair enough, I guess.

BREE: I guess.

STRYDER: Anyway, I ask because I just got a notification that Savesong is running a special. But Yeartunes probably has *something*.

BREE: Unless...

STRYDER: Oh? Something sneaky on your mind?

BREE: Maybe we get her a Savesong subscription by accident, whoopsie, forgot which one you used, Mom?

STRYDER laughs.

STRYDER: You know what? It's worth a shot.

BREE: I hate messing with her subscriptions, but if it gets her to finally listen to anything new...

STRYDER: Already bought it.

BREE: We're so devious.

STRYDER: I love it.

BREE: So. What about your brother?

STRYDER sighs.

STRYDER: He texted me earlier when I asked what he wanted this year. Would you believe he let his grocery subscription run out *again*?

BREE: I get that he's a student, but at this point he might as well just get a subscription outside of the college. That way he can just overdraft instead of getting cut off, so at least he'd be eating.

STRYDER: Right? I tell him that all the time. Worst case, grab a loan.

BREE: Exactly. Hey, it's getting really busy in here.

STRYDER: Yeah, we should go. Hang on, I'll grab us a couple pastries for later, in case we're in long lines.

BREE: Oh, good thinking.

STRYDER gets up and goes to the counter. BREE scrolls.

AD: Your house is too cold and your friends are afraid to tell you.

NEXT AD: Here's how to get your jaw looking clamp-ready this holiday season!

FOOD INFLUENCER: I spent three weeks eating every kind of pancake mix on the market so you don't have to, and here is my honest opinion. Not sponsored, just someone who loves pancakes.

TEACHING INFLUENCER: My students do not know how to format a paragraph, and I took a 20% pay cut as a result. Please stay to hear the whole story, because it will help me pay for-

STRAIGHT UP JUST CARO: Chris Pine dresses like a nonbinary lesbian-

ANOTHER AD: If the space between your chin and cheeks look like this, then you need this product. I used to look like this too, and now? It's only been three months. This stuff *works*. Follow the link in my-

MUSICIAN TRYING TO BE SEEN: *sings*

STRYDER RETURNS with a paper bag in hand. BREE sets their phone down.

STRYDER: Hey. Ready to go?

BREE: Ready!

They make their way out, chatting as they go, slowly drowned out by the sound of beep booping and depressing corporate vibes.

STRYDER: I got you one of those blueberry croissants I keep seeing on line.

BREE: Oh my God! I've been wanting to try one of those!

STRYDER: Well, here's your chance! You want it now?

BREE: Kinda! Is it shiny like in the video?

STRYDER: It's...glossy?

The sounds fade out to nothing. Because ultimately, that's what this all is.

CREDITS: This episode was written by Caroline Mincks. It was directed by The Hubris of our Hearts, with dialogue editing by Brad Colbroock and sound design by Tal Minear. The transcript was done by Tal Minear. All the influencers were played by Caroline Mincks. Bree was played by Tal Minear. Stryder was played by Anne Baird.