

Season 7 Episode 7: Hell in a Ham Bag with Carson Olshansky

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Kelsey: Hi and welcome to Normal Gossip. I'm Kelsey McKinney, and in each episode of this podcast, we're going to bring you an anonymous morsel of gossip from the real world. As always, if you are desperate for more gossip and you're just like dying inside because this one episode a week isn't enough for you or you're becoming scared of the end of the season, you can always become a subscriber at supportnormalgossip.com where you'll get an extra monthly bonus episode.

I am so excited to have with me today Carson Olshansky. Carson is a Brooklyn-based standup comedian and writer whom you may know from New York City Pride Fest, the New York Comedy Festival, Reductress, or that time Cara Delevingne commented on their Instagram reel. Carson, welcome!

Carson: Thanks for having me. I'm excited.

Kelsey: It's so nice to see you again. We were introduced to each other for the first time at the Williamstown Theater Festival. Do you have anything you'd like to say about our experience at the theater festival before we move on?

Carson: Oh, I loved it. I just got to be like a passenger princess, both in the literal sense of like literally being driven around, and, I mean, you guys had to put, you know, produce a live show. I just got to have fun and steal snacks.

Kelsey: You did miss the most dramatic thing that happened.

Carson: I mean, I think I got sort of a teaser of it.

Kelsey: Yeah, the real thing is that I went dumbass mode. And I don't usually drive places, because I live in a walkable city, so my car keys are just like a thing that doesn't really exist to me. And so I put them on the floor of the rental car, and then they became stuck in the like rib cage of the rental car seat, and then I could not find them, and so we spent like, 45 minutes in a pure terror. Poor Alex was Googling, like, how to get new keys for car, while I was, like, hyperventilating. So you're lucky that you missed that.

Carson: My perspective on this story was, you know, I was the kid who if something spilled, I was the one who spilled it. Okay, so I just, like, left, you know, I was about, like, I forget, like, an hour out, and I get a text being like, hey, any chance you took Kelsey's car keys? And I sort of read that as I absolutely took Kelsey's car keys

Kelsey: Oh no!

Carson: Like, I searched all I had like this, I was like holding three big bags in my lap. I searched all of them, and I was like, and I couldn't even find it in my bag.

Kelsey: I'm so sorry. So thank you for not stealing my car keys. Not thank you to me for losing them.

Carson: I'm so glad I didn't

Kelsey: Um, Carson, would you like to start me off with a classic first question, and tell me what your relationship with gossip is?

Carson: So you know those kids who, like, weren't allowed to have, like sweets as a kid, so that when they're an adult, there's no way they're gonna have a normal relationship with sweets?

Kelsey: Yes

Carson: I feel sort of like that with gossip, not because of any like, household restrictions, but because in like, middle and high school, I had few friends and no social currency, so I just wasn't in the gossip circles. I didn't have the like practice gossiping at those formative ages where you're supposed to be forming a healthy relationship with gossip. So now I just sort of go too long too hard.

Kelsey: Explain, like, what does it mean to go too long and too hard?

Carson: So let's say gossiping starts because someone has something juicy to share.

Kelsey: Okay.

Carson: Three hours later, you're out of juicy stuff. You know, then you're just shit talking people you don't even dislike. I feel like I often end up there.

Kelsey: And you think that that's because you missed out on some kind of, like, training.

Carson: Yeah, I think I just sort of like, am so excited to be included in gossip, and I have such a scarcity mentality of like, if I don't keep adding fuel to this, it's gonna go away.

Kelsey: No! Carson! You you're like, pulling up people's Instagrams from 2014 being like, yeah, look at this.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Wow. That's hard. You are very visible on social media. You are, you're posting. We're both posting all the time. What is this I have heard about Cara Delevingne commenting on your Instagram reel. What is this? Explain.

Carson: So, I posted a joke about how, like, I don't think celebrity women are actually any more likely to be queer than the population overall. I think they're just more likely to have met Cara Delevingne. And Cara Delevingne commented, lol

Kelsey: So she's saying it's true.

Carson: Yeah, exactly. I didn't hear a denial there.

Kelsey: I don't hear a denial. It seems like that's true for sure.

Carson: That's like when you hear, you know, a rumor that a female celebrity has dated a supermodel like you don't have to be that gay to want to date a supermodel. You know what I mean?

Kelsey: Yeah, exactly. I was told that you brought a gossip story for me. Is that true?

Carson: It's true.

Kelsey: Can I have it?

Carson: Yeah. I, okay. So, growing up, I had this childhood friend, Julia

Kelsey: okay

Carson: this is one of those situations where, like, we're friends, our older siblings are friends, our parents are friends.

Kelsey: Oh, okay.

Carson: we became friends when we were, like, three or four. And it was that dynamic where, like, we had a great time one on one we, like, played pretend fairies. We made our Neopets accounts together.

Kelsey: That's, that is huge, really

Carson: yeah, right, it's a commitment. But, yeah, so we went to the same elementary school, the same middle school, the same high school

Kelsey: okay

Carson: all throughout there was this dynamic where, like, she was cooler than I was so there was a real distance in school.

Kelsey: Yes, and I imagine, I mean, I had friendships like this, right? It is kind of like an in-law situation where it's like you have become friends via marriage, and the marriage is your older siblings or your parents are friends, right?

Carson: I would argue that we had real friendship chemistry, independently, okay, I love that for you. I don't know whether she would confirm or deny. You know, who's to say?

Kelsey: Okay, I'm already scared.

Carson: By senior year, we drifted apart a lot. It was early in the year, I heard a couple classmates talking about having gone to Julia's 17th birthday party over the weekend.

Kelsey: Okay

Carson: I wasn't surprised not to have been invited to her birthday party. I was surprised that they said 17th birthday party, because Julia and I are the same age.

Kelsey: Oh no

Carson: Julia's 18.

Kelsey: What?? I—okay. I was very old for my grade, and you knew which kids were younger, right? Like, it is very clear when you're in elementary school and middle school, which kids are a fu—almost a full year younger than you, because, like, you're taller than them, you have more skills than them because that's how childhood works. So the idea that you could hide being a full year younger than people in your grade for the entirety of your childhood is like, okay, so you're not only saying that you're a year younger, you're saying that you're a genius.

Carson: Exactly. I knew you when you were like, either three, just about to be four, or had just turned four. You weren't a full year younger than that, you know? So I asked her about it. I'm like, Hey—

Kelsey: Quick question!

Carson: Yeah! I heard people talking about your 17th birthday party. Why do they not know how old you are? And she's like, actually, you don't know how old I am.

Kelsey: what??

Carson: When I was three, my mom lied and said I was four so that I could get on the same peewee soccer team as my older sister. And the lie has just, you know, at a certain point, there's no good way to walk it back. I'm like, that would almost be plausible if I didn't know you then.

Kelsey: Right

Carson: She's like, No, it's true. I mean, you know, I always looked young. Now you know why. And you have to stop talking about this, because we could get in real trouble now

Kelsey: Wait, what?

Carson: So I say to her, like, look, I don't believe you. That being said, it's clearly important to you that I let this go. So like, I'm not gonna keep talking about it. Honestly, what I feel sadder about is just like how far we've drifted as friends.

Kelsey: Oh no.

Carson: And she says, I just don't know that I can be friends with someone who doesn't trust me.

Kelsey: You lied to me! For 15 years!

Carson: Yeah! Or just started lying to me now.

Kelsey: Yeah, one of the two.

Carson: Yeah. So that's it for our friendship. Like, that's the last time that she and I speak, and she's been like family to me, you know, for all my formative years

Kelsey: right

Carson: So, like, I still miss her, you know, she's still in my dreams. So two weeks ago, I'm going through childhood photos.

Kelsey: Okay

Carson: I find a picture of our pre-K class

Kelsey: Okay

Carson: So the thing is, I'm not about to concede any years old battles, but she did look really young.

Kelsey: Oh! Oh no. Okay, let's say I buy it, right? Like, let's say I buy it, which I'm not sure that I do yet—

Carson: yeah, I'm also not sure that I do. I'm just giving you all the information I have

Kelsey: Thank you, I appreciate that. Let's say I decide to buy this story. How would she get in trouble for it in high school?

Carson: I don't know, but she seemed really intense about it, so I didn't push it,

Kelsey: huh.

Carson: There's one little epilogue.

Kelsey: Oh! Okay, great.

Carson: Which is that in getting ready to tell you this story, I wondered if I could fact check it.

Kelsey: Yeah, that's a great idea. I love that plan.

Carson: I did look up her full name, plus age. There were two Google results. They both showed different numbers.

Kelsey: I've tried to—my brain is like moving 500 miles a minute, because I'm like, one, how can we figure out the correct answer to this? Because I need to know now. But two, it's like, for your age online to show two different numbers. It means that, like, at some point this, like, charade of what age you are seems to have continued, right? Because, like, like, why would the ages still be different?

Carson: Yeah, I have no idea.

Kelsey: Wow, I like this crime because it hurts no one. And also, I have no idea why you would do it. Carson, thank you for bringing me this story of childhood friendship and deceit and lies. I liked it very much.

Carson: I'm so glad.

Kelsey: Do you want to hear the story that I have for you today?

Carson: more than anything in the world

[music/ad break]

Kelsey: Okay, here we go. Our friend of our friend today, we're going to call her Tessa. And Tessa is experiencing a very particular type of misery. Which is that she is boarding a plane home from college to go home for the holidays. She does not want to go home. She wants to stay in college, where she has created a personality for herself.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Is this relatable to you at all?

Carson: Absolutely. I mean, I did go home for the holidays during college, but like that, freedom of finally having gotten away and like, having my first situationship. My situationship isn't at home.

Kelsey: Yeah, exactly what are you supposed to do? Like, talk to people you went to high school with who have lied to you about their age for years? Tessa is like, I never even wanted to be in the place I was from in the first place, right? Like, she's one of those girls that went as far as possible. And for Tessa, that meant across a whole ocean.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: So to go home for the holidays, she has to leave her like prestigious Hogwarts ass college she attends, fly on a giant plane all the way to the other side of the world, to her home country that is also a continent.

Carson: Okay, I have zero guesses.

Kelsey: Yeah, how would you have a guess? And then she has to drive hours from the airport in the big city to the small town that she's from

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: And that's, like, the worst part of this, right? Is that it's like, in the small town, her parents work for the town. She went to school there. Everyone knows her, and that was like, the

old her, right? She's like, I feel different now. I don't want to go back to the land of kangaroos, where everyone assumes they know everything about me.

Carson: Yeah. There are no like parents' friends to tell your parents if you're out past 11:30 at night in college.

Kelsey: Exactly. Truly hate to do this to you, but you did tweet recently, and I quote—

Carson: Oh god

Kelsey: This is a great moral to never tweet.

Carson: Oh, no.

Kelsey: Quote, Sometimes I'll run into an old acquaintance, and they'll try to fall back into our old rhythm, but it's like, sorry, I don't remember which version of me I pretended to be with you. Can you explain this?

Carson: Oh god. Um, can I explain that? [laughs] Yeah, sure, I have some people pleasing tendencies.

Kelsey: Sure.

Carson: I'll maybe change my personality a little bit depending on who I'm talking to, and so it might take me a second to remember who I was

Kelsey: yeah. And I think that's like, especially acute when you're 19, right? Because it's like, you haven't really finished filling out the form of like, which personality you would like to have.

Carson: Yeah. You're still trying stuff on. You're still like, seeing what works from which personality, and sort of gluing together your collage personality from all of them.

Kelsey: exactly. And there's another problem for Tessa, which is a more universal problem, and it is pining.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: What is having a crush like for you?

Carson: excruciating

Kelsey: Say more.

Carson: I mean, like I can't sleep when I have, like, a real crush.

Kelsey: Is it like an obsessive kind of a crush?

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Okay

Carson: Yeah, oh yeah.

Kelsey: So for all of high school, Tessa had an obsessive crush on this girl, Erica.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: They were the smartest girls in their literature class, but Erica, like always had a boyfriend and seemed to be straight.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: Tessa assumed that by going very, very far away for college, she'd like forget all about Erica. And for the most part, she did. She's like, I'm the new Tessa now, right? Like, I have a whole cool group of queer friends. I'm, like, reading classic books. I joined a rec sports league in college, right? Like, I'm totally different.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: She's like, I'm confident and strong, and I am not the type to pine after a straight girl anymore

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Do you believe this?

Carson: No, but, well, no, yes, but I don't believe Erica's a straight girl.

Kelsey: Aha, okay. The minute Tessa gets on the plane to go home, her brain is like, remember Erica?

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: And so she has so much time on the plane to think about this, because the flight is hours and hours and hours, and she's like, pining, having a crush like that is so miserable, I can't do it, right?

Carson: Yeah. Wait. I want to know what was, you know, I know Erica always had boyfriends. But what was Erica and Tessa's relationship?

Kelsey: Good question. The vibe that I got is that Tessa is like, the kind of girl that, like, when she has a crush, she like, withdraws, right? Like, like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, right? And so it's one of those things where, like, the person you have a crush on would be like, they don't even like me, and then as her friend, you would have to be like, no, she does like you, she's just a dumbass.

Carson: Tessa kept every conversation as short as possible, because they were so excruciating.

Kelsey: Exactly.

Carson: So on this airplane, not feeling good about this crush coming back, not feeling good about this crush having magically blossomed again inside her heart, and she's like, you know what I'm gonna do? I'm just gonna stay inside my parents' house, like, I'm gonna go home. I don't need to go anywhere. I don't have to see anyone. I can just go to my house for the holidays and put myself inside house prison, and then I'll be safe.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Do you think this is a good idea?

Carson: No, like, it sounds like her brain is the prison here. And so spending all your time shut up inside, in a place that makes you feel like not the best version of yourself doesn't seem like the antidote to the poison.

Kelsey: Yeah, that seems right, but Tessa is 19, so she's like, this is absolutely gonna work. By the time Tessa arrives, her plane touches down in the land of a thousand Hemsworths, she is exhausted. And also, it is so hot, because, famously, south of the equator, Christmas time is summertime. Her mom picks her up at the airport, drives her the million miles home, and when she arrives, she's like, I'm so tired. Her dad's in his armchair, and he has his like, crutches nearby, because this man had to have his hip replaced because of some like, long ago college sports injury. And so he's, like, barely mobile. So he calls Tessa over, and he's like, I'm so glad you're home. It's so good to see you. And she's like, it's so good to see you. And then he, like, kind of like, menacingly, is like, I gotta talk to you later about something. They eat dinner. Tessa's like, watching him with concern, because she's like, What on earth does this man have to say to me? And after dinner, he pulls her aside, and it's like, Tessa, you know, I've been, like, laid up and injured. And she's like, yes, I'm aware of that. And he's like, Okay, I need your help with like, all the Christmas chores.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: And Tessa's like, Well, yeah, that makes perfect sense, right? Like, classic parent ask.

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: what kind of holiday traditions do you have in your family?

Carson: So we are Jewish

Kelsey: yes

Carson: so we don't do much for Christmas.

Kelsey: Yes

Carson: Hanukkah is kind of a fake holiday

Kelsey: Famously

Carson: like my parents really put on a good show when we were little. But, you know, by the time I was like, still home, but maybe, like, 13, I'd be like, Wait, are we not doing all eight nights? And they were like, Oh, you still want to do all eight nights? Grow up. New Year's Eve is also my late grandfather's birthday. So we, so every year we have, like, a dinner for that, but that's about it.

Kelsey: My only Christmas tradition is that every year I watch every Twilight movie. So I'm not also, I'm also not doing a lot of Christmas traditions. In this family, every Christmas is the same. Okay? Christmas Eve is like a small dinner at home, and then on Christmas morning, they drive two hours to the city where Tessa's plane landed, and that's where her mom's family lives. So they do, like, big Christmas there. Everyone opens their presents, they have a big dinner, etc.

Carson: Do we like this family?

Kelsey: We like the family, yeah. Everyone feels good about that. So Tessa's like, whatever. There's always chores around Christmas. Like, what kind of chores do you want me to do? And for the most part, these are normal, right? The dad's like, I need you to help me put up the Christmas tree. I need Christmas cookies for the neighbors. We got to put the lights up like normal stuff. But there's one more thing. And he's like, I need your help with your mother's Christmas gift.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: There are, like, a couple reasons that this is annoying to Tessa. The first is that she's like, they're only, like, four days until Christmas, right? Like this is stressful timing. You've now given me like, four chores, including a present for my mother. The second reason is that Tessa's parents are so annoying about Christmas. They always demand to open each other's gifts at the big family party, and then they do this, like little sketch that they do every year, where her dad opens her mom's gift, say it's like a George Foreman grill or whiskey stones or a puzzle game or a Yeti cooler, and he's like, I hate it. It's impractical. It takes up counter space. I don't want this. Her mom opens her dad's gift and say it's, you know, an automatic wine opener or a Snuggie or a fancy piece of cookware. And she's like, this is too expensive, and it looks cheap, and it isn't like me at all, and it is so uncomfortable for everyone in this Christmas room.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: How do you feel about this like, tiff?

Carson: I, well, this is a bit of a different—because there's not the interpersonal tension element to it. But every Passover, my dad reads the same humor passage from Daniel Handler, aka Lemony Snicket, and every time we get to the four children part of the Seder, and every time he takes out his little insert, I'm just like, [sigh] okay.

Kelsey: here we go

Carson: So it's not the same like play fighting in a way that you're like, I know this is play fighting, but it's still making the rest of us uncomfortable seeing this

Kelsey: Yes

Carson: But at least there's that same degree of like, I understand the sort of eye rolliness of knowing it's coming and then having to see it through.

Kelsey: Exactly, and so it's like, it's the eye rolling, and it's also the fact that Tessa knows, like, the reality of these people's lives, which is that when they go home, they use the gifts that they have gotten each other every single day.

Carson: So Tessa knows that this is a play fighting joke. Does everyone know that this is a play fighting joke?

Kelsey: not necessarily, like the vibes are not great.

Carson: Do you know the 30 Rock episode where, like, the rich women without jobs, need to do the Fight Club just to, sort of, like, feel alive?

Kelsey: Yes.

Carson: Do you think like, maybe they're just so satisfied in their marriage that they need to perform marital dissatisfaction just to keep the erotic spark alive?

Kelsey: I love this as a theory. I think it's totally possible. Like, I don't know why they do this, like, we did not get an answer, but it's like, there's something about this kind of couple that, like, I like, I know couples like this, where it's like, they pick at each other in front of people, and you're like, I don't really love that your like love language is public fighting. Like, could you just stop? Like, this is not—everyone else is unhappy here.

Carson: It does always feel weird to be brought into a couple's dynamic in ways that feel outside the sort of scripts for how couples are supposed to exist in public, shared spaces.

Kelsey: Yes. So Tess's dad has now asked her to become involved, not only in getting the gift, but like, in this whole situation

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: And he can sense her hesitation, and he's like, Don't worry, I already have the perfect gift. Like, she's definitely gonna love it this year—he says this every year—and Tessa's like, I don't believe you. And he's like, no, no. Like, this year is different. I already called ahead. The gift is in stock. All you have to do is go get it. What do you think about this?

Carson: I mean, I don't feel great about it, but, like, if I were Tessa, it seems like going and getting it would be such the easier option than taking a stand here.

Kelsey: Yeah, exactly. Tessa's like, fine. Like, whatever. Like, what is the present? And he tells her that it is a very beautiful, very fancy ham bag. Do you think that this is a good gift?

Carson: You said it's a handbag?

Kelsey: Oh, see. No, no, no, no, no, I didn't say hand bag. I said ham bag, H-A-M B-A-G

Carson: Ah okay, right right right right. Of course, ham bag.

Kelsey: Do you know what a ham bag is?

Carson: I mean, I know what ham is, and I know what a bag is.

Kelsey: Yes, you're pretty fucking close already. In this land of like down under chaos, they have some sort of fun and exciting Christmas traditions. One of them is like to go to the beach dressed as Santa, I guess. But they also have ham bag. A ham bag is a cotton bag with a drawstring at the top that is made for storing ham.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: Ham is like the traditional meat of this country's Christmas, I guess. And because Christmas time is in the summer, all these like flat white lovers don't like a hot roast. They want cold meat, like sliced ham. And so they have a nice, big luncheon. And because of this, you have so much ham, and the ham needs to be stored. And so you have a ham bag where you put the ham so it doesn't dry out in the fridge.

Carson: Okay. Huh.

Kelsey: Do you think this is a good gift?

Carson: No.

Kelsey: Why?

Carson: Because gifts are supposed to be like fun and not like that sounds like such a practical item like cotton and a string seems pretty, not that exciting.

Kelsey: Yes. Tessa is like, what kind of fucking drugs did they give you when you got out of surgery? Like, you buy a ham bag at the supermarket. You buy a ham bag as like an extra little thing in line. Like, it's like, giving your partner a Scrub Daddy for Christmas.

Carson: Yeah, okay, yeah.

Kelsey: Tess is like, Dad, you cannot give mom a ham bag. And he's like, no, no, it's a special ham bag. It's high quality. First off, it's linen and cotton. Second off, it's hand embroidered by a local artist. You're paying for art. It's really high quality. It's like, bespoke, even

Carson: For an item that you're gonna put a bunch of greasy ham into?

Kelsey: Correct

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: Are you convinced?

Carson: No, but I am convinced that mom's reaction to this is gonna, like, ultimately be dad's problem. I mean, I know we're all gonna have to feel it and be uncomfortable about it

Kelsey: sure

Carson: but it also sounds like dad has proven himself over the years to actually have a pretty great sense of mom's taste, okay, and what she'll actually use and enjoy. And so maybe even though this would not be the right present for 99.99% of people, she might be that .01%

Kelsey: Tessa is like, Dad, no one wants a hand embroidered ham bag. And he's like, your mom complains every year about the quality of the ham bags, like she's gonna love it. Tessa's like, No, she's not. And her dad is like, will you please just help me? Like, I can't drive. You have to go into town to get it. Town is like, you know, the bigger town nearby with cute stuff. It is a 30 minute drive.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: what do you think?

Carson: Does town put me in greater danger of running into high school people?

Kelsey: Yes

Carson: okay, I don't love this, but I probably wouldn't put up a fight.

Kelsey: Okay. Tessa's like, Oh, my God, fine. Like, I'll go. He's like, great. It's in this little, like, shoppy shop in town. Usually, when I say the words shoppy-shop, what I mean is a store that, like, carries Graza olive oil, okay, right? Like, it has like, adorable mugs and great incense and like little plants that you'll kill, right? Like, that's, that's the vibe. And so Tess is, like, the ham bag that you want me to get is from the store that carries like, these weird, strange tchotchkes that, like, I don't think anyone wants. And he's like, Yes. She's like, great. He's like, Do you know where it is? She's like, Oh, yeah, I bought, like, Mom bought your whiskey stones last year there, which you claim to hate and use every day. He's like, great. So you know it. So the next day, three days before Christmas, she drives into town. It takes 45 minutes because there's traffic from people going to buy gifts. It's hard to park. She finally finds a place. She goes, like, strolling up to the store, and she's looking in the window, and there at the counter is Erica. What do you do?

Carson: So, has Tessa—I know Tessa has sort of transformed herself in terms of, she exists in a different social circle. She, in college, carries herself with a new confidence. Has she, like, gotten a cool haircut? Has she gotten ripped? Are there visible changes that could say, like, Erica, I'm not the same test that you knew.

Kelsey: Definitely. Absolutely. There are, like, absolutely physical changes, probably haircut, probably ripped, right like she's looking different, but in her heart she is not feeling different.

Carson: Yes, she's regressing right back. So it's really hard to summon that sort of spirit of like, this is the new me, when you're like, Erica, Erica, Erica, Erica, please smile at me. Please, please smile at me.

Kelsey: Literally.

Carson: I would hide.

Kelsey: Okay, that's correct. Tessa is like, fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. She ducks. She like, runs at a half, stoop back to her car, and she's like, I cannot believe this. Like, I do not want to see this girl. I'm also, like, not dressed cute because I just came into town to get this stupid ham bag.

Carson: Okay? I'm glad that she's not dressed cute, because that means she's not so obsessed that she's like, every time I'm going into town, there's a possibility of seeing Erica, and therefore—like, she could be farther gone than she is.

Kelsey: She will become more farther gone. She's like, I can't go in there, right? Not going in there. I don't look cute. I have been dreading and also hoping with every bone in my body to see this girl. I cannot go in there. And she's also like, is her hair shorter? Like it looked shorter?

Carson: Okay...

Kelsey: Are you brave when faced with a crush?

Carson: No.

Kelsey: What level of bravery do you have?

Carson: Like, close to none.

Kelsey: Would you flee?

Carson: I might, like, wait a little like, I don't know that I would fully run. She was at the counter, so she's paying, right?

Kelsey: No, no, no, no, no no. Oh, sorry. Oh, she's not paying. She's working at the counter.

Carson: Oh, gotcha, okay, then I'd probably swallow my—I'd probably suck it up.

Kelsey: You would?

Carson: yeah

Kelsey: you're going in.

Carson: Yeah, especially, I mean, you've got such a great like, The scary thing is not knowing what you're gonna say. But this is a beautiful moment. You can be like my dad got my mom this ham bag. This is crazy, right?

Kelsey: Yes, that is a great point that, like, the script exists. Like, if you're in a foreign country and you barely speak the language, you can interact with customer service people, because there's only ever, like, eight things that people say to each other, right? Like, the script is easy. Tessa does not think this. Tessa is not brave. She drives back home. She's like, Dad, I didn't get the ham bag. I'm gonna go get it tomorrow. He's like, okay, great. She spends the evening, like, doing chores, right? Her mom has been doing, like, so much lately because her dad is hurt, and Tessa, like, makes the Christmas cookies he needs. She cleans the kitchen. Her mom is like, so happy. And she's like, thank you so much. Like, I feel so underwater. There's like, so much to do. And usually your dad is like, super good at helping, but he just like, can't when he's on crutches. And she's like, and I'm just feeling so tired. Like, thank you for your help. And Tessa is like, You're so welcome. But then in her heart, she's like, we cannot get this woman a ham bag.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Do you think that she should, like, find an alternative gift, like what?

Carson: No, this is her dad's problem. This is, it's, just let it happen. I'm sorry that you have to be there for it, but you just have to let it happen.

Kelsey: Why?

Carson: Because she's already pushed back. Let it, like, this is not you did your part.

Kelsey: Yes. Tessa is like, Dad, we cannot get her a ham bag. And her dad is like, we're getting her a ham bag. And she's like, okay

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: The next day, she wakes up, she becomes dressed, she becomes cute

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: she drives 45 minutes. She looks through the window of the shop, and Erica is there again at the register, and she's like, I can't, no, no, I can't do this. She goes to the coffee shop across the street. She's like, I don't want to interact with Erica. I'll just wait until her shift is over, or she goes on her break or something, and then I'll dart in.

Carson: See, I'm a very cowardly person. And even I'm like, okay, Tessa, just—you no longer have my sympathy for like, having been caught off guard, you know, you've gotten yourself cute

Kelsey: You look cute.

Carson: Yeah, this is, like one of the most straightforward interactions you could possibly have. Like, running into her anywhere in any other context would be so much scarier. Here you know exactly what your role is.

Kelsey: yes

Carson: And it—this is a little uncomfortable, what I'm about to say from a power perspective—

Kelsey: please

Carson: She's the one working there. You're the customer. You can kind of decide when the interaction is over.

Kelsey: Yeah, and it's also like, there's a clear limit on the interaction time because you're buying something

Carson: Yeah, exactly

Kelsey: right. Like, you're not, like, it's not like you ran into her at a bar, and it's like, well, if I could talk to her, I could get stuck there for 45 minutes, that I might reveal all my secrets, right? Like, it's, like—

Carson: I mean, you could, like, on the plus side, you can stay in chit chat, like, if it's not too crowded and she doesn't have other people that, you know

Kelsey: Yeah, you have options. In some ways, I'm like, this is the best way to run into a crush. Tessa does not think this. She's like, I'm gonna be staking this out. Have you ever staked out a crush?

Carson: No...

Kelsey: Yeah. I think that's the normal response. I just figured I'd ask. Tessa waits and waits and waits, and eventually Erica leaves. And Tessa's like, her jeans look so good. She looks incredible. She's like, Now is my time. Erica is gone.

Carson: Are these the same style of jeans she's always worn?

Kelsey: No

Carson: Or are they, like, maybe a little bit baggier than they've been in the past.

Kelsey: Good question. They are a little bit baggier than they've been in the past. Isn't that interesting?

Carson: That's so interesting.

Kelsey: She's like, that's so interesting. And also, I have to go now, right? Like, she's, she's left. I have to go so Tessa, like, darts over

Carson: Wait, just quickly. Did we get a close enough, uh, view to see whether the piercing count is the same as it's always been—

Kelsey: we did not

Carson: —and whether there are any new tattoos?

Kelsey: We did not. We are across a street.

Carson: Okay, go on.

Kelsey: Tessa goes over. She like darts in. She's looking around. There's like, you know, Christmas scented candles, and like weird wooden objects, and like those tiny leather pouches that I don't know what they're for. And finally, she finds the ham bag, and it is embroidered on the outside with, like, native flowers and, like, several little pigs. And there's like a card to the side with, like a bio for the artist, okay? And then she looks at the price, and it is \$60.

Carson: all right

Kelsey: And Tessa is like, I'm a college kid, like, I don't have \$60 to blow—

Carson: Oh, her dad didn't give her money?

Kelsey: Her dad did not give her money. And she's like, I'm not spending \$60 out of my, like, debit account if we have not discussed me getting reimbursed for this, yeah. Do you agree with that?

Carson: Yeah, I'd probably call my dad and be like, hey

Kelsey: Yeah. Tessa's like, I'm gonna call my dad. I'm gonna figure this out. But before she can call her dad, Erica returns from her break.

Carson: I'm so surprised

Kelsey: What a surprise. And Tessa is like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. She ducks behind a row of postcards. She sneaks out the door. She tries to, like, dart out a bit, really fast, but like many shops, it has a bell on the door, so when she goes out, it's like *bing*.

Carson: She hasn't scoped this out?

Kelsey: Not at all.

Carson: Tessa, rookie move.

Kelsey: She runs to the car. She's like, out of breath. What do you do at this point?

Carson: I mean, I call my dad, I confirm that I'm going to be able to get the money back. I go back in there.

Kelsey: You're going back in.

Carson: I say, oh, my god, hi, Erica. We've already established that. I don't think this is a good enough rea—you know, I think this avoidance has passed the point of

Kelsey: reasonable

Carson: I mean, or even, like, because obviously, even the first avoidance is not like, reasonable, but at least to me, it's somewhat sympathetic. My sympathies are kind of running out.

Kelsey: Yes, I also think it's like, there is a version of avoiding someone that is, like, creating an advantage for yourself, right? Like, you're like, I want to see them when I look hot, in a situation where I'm prepared to see them like that is like, creating power for yourself. At this point, every moment that you don't see her is self sabotage. Right, like you're creating bad things for yourself in this avoidance. Tessa's like, I can't do it. She drives home, and she's like, I cannot buy the ham bag, dad. Like, mom will never forgive you for buying a ham bag. She's, at this point, reaching. She's like, it's ridiculous for a ham bag to cost \$60. This is true. She's like, also mom will talk about it constantly for the rest of our lives and ruin everything. And in her heart, she's like, I cannot go back in there. And her dad is like, I'll give you the money. Why didn't you just call me and I would have, like, reimbursed, I would have told you that I would reimburse you. And Tess is like, No, I don't want to do it. I don't want to get the ham bag. And her dad's like, how much? And Tess is like, what? And he's like, if I gave you \$100 in cash and you got to keep \$40 for yourself. Would you do this?

Carson: Would I? Yeah, I mean, I already would have done it. Like, yeah

Kelsey: now you're being paid.

Carson: Yeah.

Kelsey: Tessa's like, fine. Like, \$40 is a lot for me. I want a treat, I'm a college student. She's like, here's the deal, \$40 and you take my involvement in this to the grave. Like, do not tell mom. He's like, deal.

[music/ad break]

Kelsey: Now it is the third day, and she must return to the town.

Carson: Did she get even cuter than the second day?

Kelsey: She sure does

Carson: okay.

Kelsey: She gets even cuter. It's like, hair done, light makeup, like, we're looking great. How do you play this?

Carson: I mean, I'm going in there. I'm looking cute. I'm making fun of my dad to her

Kelsey: yeah, yes, yes.

Carson: We're laughing together. We're exchanging numbers. We're getting coffee to catch up on all that we've missed since, you know, like, how's college?

Kelsey: Ooooooooooh okay game. I love it. Tessa is, like, delusional, 100% right? And she's like, my plan actually worked last time. I was just too slow.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: So again, she goes and sits in the coffee shop. She's like, wearing giant sunglasses. She's wearing a hat, right? She's got, like, a newspaper. No one reads the newspaper. She's waiting for Erica to leave. Finally, Erica leaves. She like, hurries across the street. Tessa finds the ham bag. And her dad was like, get the cream ham bag. But now she's looking and there's also, like, a gorgeous olive color. And she's like, that's my mom's favorite color. So she's like, fuck it. I'm making myself complicit. I'm getting the green.

Carson: Nooo, don't do it.

Kelsey: [laughs] Why?

Carson: Because your hands are so clean, like, don't have any role in this. Let it be your dad's problem.

Kelsey: Tessa picks up the green one. Just as she picks it up—she has learned from her past mistakes—and so she hears the bell on the shop door ding. And Erica has returned from her break. And Erica is like, oh my god, Tessa, you're back? And Tessa's like, oh my god, Erica, hi, just like, for the break. And then Erica hugs her. And Tessa is swooning, right? Like, she's like, my knees feel weak, my tongue is maybe dead, like I can never say anything at all. And Erica's like, can I help you like, find anything? Tessa's holding an olive green, \$60 ham bag in her hands. And she's like, Yeah, I'm looking for a ham bag. Erica like, looks at her, looks at the ham bag, looks back up at her, and is like, I think you've found it. And Tessa's like, hahaha, yeah, I mean, that's, this is what I'm gonna get. And Erica's like, Oh, you're, you're getting the ham bag? And Tessa is like, Yes, I'm getting the ham bag. And Erica is like, everyone is obsessed with the ham bag this year. And Tessa's like, it's a beautiful ham bag. And Erica's like, yeah, it keeps the ham so moist. It's a real dream.

Carson: This is my nightmare.

Kelsey: Why is this your nightmare?

Carson: Just ending up like this far into a conversation that, like—I know this feeling. You're just saying words to not be silent, because you have to say words now. And so you end up this far into a conversation that you know that they're bored by because you're bored by it.

Kelsey: Yes, this is also where I'm like, You need a wing man, right? Like, if you're going into this situation where you have to interact with your crush, like you need a friend, to just like, elbow you as hard as they can in the ribs when you start saying things like, it's a beautiful ham bag. Tessa's like, I want to die, right? Like, she's with you. She's like, this is terrible. This is awful. I'm now having an extended conversation about a ham bag with this girl I have always thought is cute, who has a septum ring?

Carson: Huge.

Kelsey: She's like, that makes this worse somehow. Erica's like, okay, great. I'm so glad you found the ham bag. Like, is there anything else I can get you?

Carson: Just ask Erica a single question about her life. Just one.

Kelsey: Just one. That would be a great idea. Tessa looks frantically around, and she's like, she sees a bunch of teapots. And she's like, Yeah, I need a individual teapot.

Carson: Noooo

Kelsey: She does not need this. But once she said it, Erica leads her over there—

Carson: There go her \$40 and then some

Kelsey: Ding, ding, ding, Erica picks one up and puts it in Tessa's hands. And Tessa's like, are we? Are we touching hands? We're touching hands. And Tessa's like, Oh, my God, it's so cute, because it's like, an individual teapot, it's little. And Erica is like, yeah, very but she's looking at Tessa. Is this flirting?

Carson: Like? Not enough information to say so far, but it's not discouragement.

Kelsey: Mhmm. Tessa's like, Huh? She's like, I'll take it. Because she's like, I want, yes, I'll take this. It is \$40.

Carson: Tessa no, don't keep giving up your power.

Kelsey: What do you mean?

Carson: Just like, you don't need to say yes to, like, be your own person in that space, you know? Don't just try to guess what she would want you to do and then spend all the money you have trying to do that.

Kelsey: This is such good advice, but it's also really good advice that comes from being in your 20s. Like being 19, being still in college, you think that the way to get someone to love you is to become the version of a person that they want?

Carson: Yeah, absolutely. You read every book they even mention in passing

Kelsey: Exactly, and it's like, actually, that's not what people want. Like, just be who you are. But she cannot. She's like, whatever I'm spending the \$40 that I got in my dad's money on this weird little teapot.

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: She goes to the counter, and Erica's like, I'm kind of like, surprised that you're getting a ham bag.

Carson: Yes, make fun of the ham bag! Just make fun of the ham bag!

Kelsey: And Tessa's like, Oh, my dad wants me to get it for my mom. Like, I don't know. He's like, on one like, I'm just here on a mission. And Erica is like, Oh, that, that makes perfect sense to me actually. You're not the first one in here this week doing that. And Erica is like, is the teapot also for your mom? And Tess is like, oh, no, no, the teapot is for me actually. How are you feeling about this interaction?

Carson: Like, moderately, but not severely, negative.

Kelsey: Okay, okay, it could be worse I guess. Tessa pays with her cash. And Erica's like, it was so good to see you. And Tessa's like, it's good to see you too. And Erica's like, Merry Christmas, enjoy your ham bag. Tessa's like, you too.

Carson: God, Tessa, just ask her one question about herself. You'll get an answer. That's the kind of thing of like, okay, I know you—I wanted to hear so much more about that, but I know you have to work. Would love to get coffee before I go back to school. Just—

Kelsey: See, it's great that you have game. Tessa does not have any. Tesla's in the car like, you know, looking at that little mirror that's like, in the flip visor, and being like, What the fuck is wrong with you? Like, why did you say you too when she said, enjoy your ham bag? Why didn't you ask her one question? Like, what is wrong with you? You now have the ham bag and you have the teapot. Are you feeling good?

Carson: No

Kelsey: Okay, cool. Tessa doesn't feel good either. She feels insane. She speeds home. She like, sneaks in the ham bag, in her tote bag, she like, tells her dad where it is, and later her dad is like, it's a little bit smaller than I was expecting. Do you think mom will still like it? And Tessa's like, I never thought she would like it. And her dad's like, I've also said to get the cream one. And Tessa's like, I really think she'll like the olive green one better. But truly, I think she would hate it, even if it was custom designed for her. And her dad's like, okay, don't worry about it. By this point it is Christmas Eve, Tessa is like, sitting in her room replaying the conversation with her crush when her mom comes in.

Carson: Okay

Kelsey: Her mom sees the teapot like on the little table, and is like, Oh, my God, everything in that store is a waste of money. I do not want you spending your money in there on stupid little things. And Tessa's is like, Okay, thank you. And her mom sighs. And you know when your mom, like, starts up with, like, a light conversation, and then her face becomes very serious and it's like, oh, so that was just the lead up to the thing that you actually wanted to talk to me about?

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: The mom is like, my friend owns the coffee shop in town, and she says that you've been in there every day this week, staring longingly out the window, wearing sunglasses, scoping out the shoppy shop. How do you want to respond to this?

Carson: Was Tessa's crush on Erica known to her parents in high school?

Kelsey: Oh yes, it was.

Carson: Then, yeah, I just say, Okay, fine. Erica works there, and I was trying to avoid her.

Kelsey: Tessa is like, what I'm not allowed to go to a coffee shop? And her mom is like, Well, my friend also said that Erica works in the shoppy shop across the street. And Tessa's like, that's crazy. I didn't know that. And her mom's like, Babe, it's like, not healthy for you to drive out there day after day, and, like, spend all your money on stupid things so that you can, like, pine after Erica. Is there anything more mortifying than like this conversation, in your mind?

Carson: Probably, but I'd have to work hard to think of it.

Kelsey: The conversation with your parents about a crush is bad. Conversation with your parents about a crush that you're failing at is worse.

Carson: Yeah, and a crush that reminds you of who you don't want to be anymore.

Kelsey: Right, it's like, you can imagine that they've had a similar kind of conversation before. And Tessa's like, I know that she's not wrong, but this is, like, awful. The next day they drive to her aunt's house, Tessa sits in the back with the wrapped ham bag. They arrive. For the most part everything's great. Tessa's drinking Prosecco. She's like, this is fine. Like, everyone else's gifts go great. Everyone likes them. Her dad opens like a nice new Polo. He hates it. He's like, what an extravagant waste. These are the wrong colors. He puts it on. It looks great. Everyone's rolling their eyes. The very last person to open their present is her mother. Are you worried? What's—

Carson: Yeah, I have like, a knot of dread in my stomach, and like, I want to believe that this is not my problem, but ultimately I'm having trouble letting go of it.

Kelsey: Tessa's mom picks it up. She pulls off the wrapping paper, she pulls out the ham bag, and there is just like, silence. Everyone in this room, right? Extended family is looking at this ham bag, and then Tessa's mother, her shoulders begin to move, and she begins to cry.

Carson: Ohhh

Kelsey: And Tessa is like, Oh, my God, I fucking told him, like, I told him that this was wrong. I told him that this would break her, like she's broken. She's crying. She can't even do the fucking bit that they usually do. This is so bad. And then her mom is like, touching the embroidered pigs and she's like, they're so beautiful.

Carson: This dad knows his wife, goddamn it!

Kelsey: Her eyes are shining. She's looking at her husband, she's like, how did you know? She loves the ham bag. She's like, I've been envying it in the window for weeks. She's like, I'm so excited to tell my friends. Like, they've all, we've all been lusting after the ham bag. Like, the only thing that could be better is if it had been the cream one.

Carson: [laughs]

Kelsey: And Tessa is like, god damn it. Like this whole interaction, and she's like, thrilled. We've broken this terrible ruse. How are you feeling now?

Carson: Relieved, like a weight has been lifted.

Kelsey: Okay, good. I love that for you. On the ride home, her mom's like, giving her shit. She's like, do you want to stop in the town and see Erica? Maybe you could spend some more of your money not asking her out. Could be fun for us. Do you tell her that you were only going for her ham bag, which she loves?

Carson: Yeah

Kelsey: You do?

Carson: I mean, there's no reason not to now. It wouldn't absolve me of the part where I went three days in a row and, like, stared, but at least it would absolve me of the idea that I was going just to see her.

Kelsey: Yeah, Tessa is, like, I did this for you. Like, yeah, this wasn't about Erica. I had to be strategic, because I didn't want you to see. And her mom's like, oh my god, wow. I can't believe it took multiple days and a stakeout to get the ham bag. Thank you so much for doing that. You worked so hard. We are finally almost at the end. Whose side are you on? How do you feel?

Carson: I'm on Erica's side.

Kelsey: Okay! Why?

Carson: All she's done is had a little queer awakening and been a pleasure.

Kelsey: Do you have any hopes or dreams for how this could end?

Carson: I just, I think that even if nothing romantic is going to happen between them, I get the sense this is a small town, that it's not a place where there's a lot of queer community. I want them to have another queer person at home who they can hang out with when they're in town.

Kelsey: I think that is a great hope for them. In the end, Tessa did take the teapot back, and she was like, I'm so sorry. I don't want this teapot, even though it was very cute, I just didn't know how to tell you that. I just, like, I bought it because I wanted to talk to you

Carson: Yeah!!!!

Kelsey: And Erica's like, that's totally fine. I kind of thought that that's what was happening, to be honest. And Tessa's like, okay, great. Can I have my \$40 back? And Erica's like, yes. And then Tessa used her \$40 to take Erica on a date.

Carson: Yeah!!!!!!

Kelsey: And it was awful. They had absolutely no romantic chemistry.

Carson: This is amazing. She's released from this hold that it had on her.

Kelsey: Yes, Tessa is like, oh my god, this is actually better than me falling in love with her because she lives on the other side of the world and I'm free.

Carson: This is the best possible scenario

Kelsey: Yes, and now you have a queer friend in town who you don't have to date, which is the dream. It has now been two years since the ham bag Christmas. The ham bag is beloved. Everyone compliments the ham bag at all times. It gets hand washed very gently with a special brush, gets hung dry only. The next day ham sandwiches are the best ones that this family has ever had, apparently. And last year for Christmas, Tessa had a girl to bring home, right?

Carson: Yeah, someone willing to fly across oceans to come with her

Kelsey: Yes, very serious relationship. And, you know, she got to bring her home. And of course, the girlfriend is like, what's up with this ham bag? And the problem with the ham bag now is that it gives her mom an excuse to tell her new girlfriend all about Erica. And so now everyone calls Erica ham bag girl.

Carson: So my, my pick, is the loser of this story,

Kelsey: In a way. Inside this family, she's the loser of the story, but she is still friends with Tessa, yeah, so it's like, it didn't end up so bad.

Carson: But are they the kind of friends where Tessa can say, like, hey, just so you know, everyone my family calls you ham bag girl

Kelsey: Definitely.

Carson: Okay, awesome.

Kelsey: Like, "my new girlfriend calls you ham bag girl" is always a good sign that your new girlfriend does not see your friend as competition, which is great, yeah. And that is the end of our story. Happy Ham-mas! Carson, thank you so much for coming on. It was a delight to have you.

Carson: Thank you for having me!

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This podcast was produced by Alex Sujong Laughlin, Ozzy Llinas Goodman, and Jae Towle Vieira. Justin Ellis is Defector's Projects Editor. Jasper Wang and Sean Kuhn are Defector's business guys. Alex Sujong Laughlin is Defector's Supervising Producer. Tom Ley is our editor in chief. Abigail Segel is our intern. Dan McQuade runs our merch store, which you can find at normalgossip.store. Tara Jacoby designed our show art. Thank you to Rachelle Hampton, Brandy Jensen, Sabrina Imbler, Dave McKenna, Chris Thompson, Heather Chen, Ray Ratto, David Roth, Kathryn Xu, Jasper Wang, Israel Daramola, and Patrick Redford for your help on this season.

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