

Season 7 Episode 1: Forbidden Feline Fanfiction with Ashley Reese

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Kelsey: Hello and welcome to the season premiere of Normal Gossip! We are so happy to be back. 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. I am so excited to have with me today Ashley Reese. I'm going to read your bio now. Ashley Reese is a Los Angeles-born, New York-based writer who has spent most of her career reporting about politics, entertainment, and her own sex life. You've probably seen people yelling at her on Twitter. Her work can be found in New York Magazine, Jezebel, Essence, Teen Vogue, and more. She recently launched Bad Brain, a newsletter about life, death, pop culture, and the internet. She's writing a memoir documenting her journey from 25-year-old virgin to 33-year-old widow for Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster. Ashley, welcome to the podcast!

Ashley: Hi! Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Kelsey: We're so excited to have you here.

Ashley: I'm ready to gossip.

Kelsey: Oh, great, because that's what we're going to do. We're both you and I, children of the internet. We love to be online. Where does posting turn into gossip?

Ashley: I think that now so much of the gossip is in the subtweet. Some of the best gossip I get is in the group chat. And it's like, seeking something you saw online, putting it in the group chat and being like, yep. And I honestly think that more people should do that. Too many people put things on main.

Kelsey: Yes

Ashley: Like, put the messy—like, I'm just like, what you do: you take a screenshot or a link, drop it in the group chat, and then talk shit.

Kelsey: Yeah. I also think part of, like, the art, if you will, of being a shit talker is knowing where to place it, right? Because, like, if you are shit talking on main in public, where other people can see it, you open yourself up to criticism. Like, if I want to shit talk, I don't want criticism. I want to be in a beautiful echo chamber of my friends who all dislike this person we're texting about. Like, that's the whole point.

Ashley: I agree with you. But I also think that now we're in this time where, like, people don't have much sense, but they really want attention. So I think that's how you get into like, Tik—like I think TikTok gossip is like, a whole other level of how you kind of, it's because it's one thing to

be on Twitter and be like, at least, like, semi anonymous, or just kind of be like, alright, I'm a random kind of bitchy person online. But with TikTok, you have your face, maybe people can very easily find your government name.

Kelsey: Yeah, no. I think about this a lot that there's like, something about gossiping, particularly on TikTok, where it's like you are essentially standing in front of a microphone to share this gossip.

Ashley: Yeah, it's a little more town crier, you know what I mean? It's a little bit more that, instead of just like, you're with your girls with a small group chatting, or even, like, the brevity that is required of a tweet, you know, when you're doing a little drive by talk shit that you're like, and people were like, Whoa. Who's this about?

Kelsey: drive by [laughs]

Ashley: Yeah, you know, and I've done that. I really did that the other day, and had people yumming me be like, girl, who is this about? And I'm like, let me tell you, but like, when you're doing it on TikTok, you have girls going on for like, three minutes, yep. I'm just kind of like, are you doing it for love of the game? Are you doing it to get attention? You know what I mean?

Kelsey: Okay, I think that that is actually, like, we've reached what, what my actual problem with it is, right? Which is that, like, it is about love of the game, right? Like, I'm, like, if you're a gossip for the love of the game, you don't need attention, you don't need views, you just need laugh. You need: your friends laugh. And that is the love of the game.

Ashley: Yeah

Kelsey: I was told that you might have brought a gossip for me. Is that true?

Ashley: Oh I sure do.

Kelsey: Can I have it?

Ashley: Yeah. Okay, so I have a friend. We've been friends for several years now. She generally dates women, generally attracted to women for as long as I've known her. Her. And so it was to my great surprise when she told me that she was dating a man.

Kelsey: Oh!

Ashley: And I was like, oh, okay. Like, you know it's, it's the 2020s like, you know you can do what you want. And I'm like, Okay, interesting. Like, tell me more. So she tells me to this guy, and you know, what do you want to be encouraging to a friend? You don't want to be like, oof, so I try to do that. She mentioned that he's vegan, which is not against the law. That's fine. Many such cases.

Kelsey: Sure. People are vegan.

Ashley: People are vegan, and that's fine. My friend is not vegan, okay? But then she told me that he required that she brush her teeth before kissing him.

Kelsey: What? Excuse me?

Ashley: Yeah, because she eats animals and animal byproducts and he doesn't, and he felt dirty, I guess, having her kiss him without having her teeth brushed first. And I guess this is something that she was willing to compromise on, but she didn't feel great about it. And I'm just like, Okay, girl, do you. Like, it is what it is. Um, one day he invites her over to stay the night. She finds out by going to his apartment, that he lives in a roach infested apartment. And I when, when I say roach infested?

Kelsey: No

Ashley: I mean, they were in bed and there was a roach in the bed.

Kelsey: No. No. Ab—no! Leave.

Ashley: She went to shower. She reaches for the soap. There's a roach on the soap. She looks up at the ceiling. There are roaches on the ceiling.

Kelsey: No, girl, you got to get out. Get out, run.

Ashley: And you want to know why there are roaches in the house?

Kelsey: Nuh uh. I'm scared. Is it, is it because he values life so much? Is that why?

Ashley: [laughs] He refuses to kill the roaches. He believes in the dignity of all creatures, big and small, including disgusting roaches. And this was a pickle for him, because, on the one hand, he was aware that this was, you know, not great

Kelsey: yes

Ashley: but not to the point of actually, like getting an exterminator or getting some fucking raid

Kelsey: Doing anything about it

Ashley: and inviting a girl over to stay the night in your roach infested apartment.

Kelsey: Ughhhhhh

Ashley: So from then on, she didn't go over there, she invited him over to her, which I was right, but I was always just like, what if he brings something to your place? What if he like traces in, like a roach egg or something like on his shoes or on his clothes?

Kelsey: Right! Do—are bed bugs also a form of life that we have to respect in this scenario?

Ashley: Right, well I would love to hear his take on that, but then he invites her over for a party, and she is a little apprehensive about this—

Kelsey: No shit!

Ashley: —because, you know, there was a roach in their bed. But I think he said that he, like, promised to clean, he promised to, like, kind of straighten things up. He's like, I know bugs are an issue. Like, we're gonna clean. It's gonna be fine. And my friend is a trusting person.

Kelsey: oh no, girl

Ashley: And party night she gets there

Kelsey: no no no no no

Ashley: She brings some muffins and like some Prosecco or something.

Kelsey: Well, it's nice of her to bring the roaches some snacks

Ashley: Funny that you say that

Kelsey: no! fuck

Ashley: You know how you're at a party, and you know, a party that's generally the place that isn't roaches infested. You just like, maybe have a bite of something. You like, set it down to the plate, and then, like, maybe walk away for a second, do something else. Chat chat chat.

Kelsey: Yeah.

Ashley: She looks back, like, a minute later, swarming with roaches. The Prosecco bottle she brought swarming with roaches, just covered, like, like, just like, scattered, like, here, here, there. They're just like—but, you know, I'm actually not sure if the prosecco bottle being covered in roaches was before after he—her boyfriend—went into the dishwasher, opened it, tried to get a glass out of it for her. Roaches in the, in the dishwasher, in the like, in the little, like, crevice, you know, crevices of it. Open the fridge, there was a roach.

Kelsey: No! Okay, like I'm trying to wrap my mind around being in a room like this, because, like, I feel like the way that people respond to roaches is, like, visceral and loud often, like people are

shrieking when there are roaches around. So I'm like, how are people just hanging out at this party?

Ashley: I think a lot of people are also high. But my friend wasn't

Kelsey: So they're like, I imagined it

Ashley: I don't know. Maybe they were just like, really chill about I mean, look, every single thing that I know would not think this is an unacceptable way to live. They would like, even, you know, even if they felt some sort of sympathy for it, they would just be like, this is a health hazard, which it is. Um, my friend spent the night sitting outside, like on his porch, to get away from the bugs. It was winter.

Kelsey: The thing is, if a bug is outside with you, that's fine. You're in their house now, that's allowed, but I don't need to be inside with all the roaches.

Ashley: When you go, when you're also going outside in New York City to escape pests—

Kelsey: Yes, that's a bad sign

Ashley: —That's a really, really bad fucking sign, man. So on the plus side, she is no longer with this person.

Kelsey: Okay, great.

Ashley: She dates women again.

Kelsey: Yeah, well.

Ashley: This is something that would probably put someone—

Kelsey: Anyone off

Ashley: —off men. They're like, yeah, I don't know why I did that. But the less good thing about that is that she still stayed with him for another five months after this.

Kelsey: Noooooo. Ugh. Also, like, I'm sorry to—this is, it's so gross, but I'm like, imagine brushing your teeth in this apartment because your boyfriend won't let you kiss him unless you've brushed your teeth, and these toothbrushes are just out on the counter in this home of roaches. Like, I'm like—

Ashley: Roach house

Kelsey: Girl!

Ashley: I really, I really hope he learned. I hope that he is in a better place to—it's not like he died. I hope he's—

Kelsey: I hope he's in a better apartment

Ashley: —in a better mental space to like, to decide that this is actually a priority, and that like you were, that's like, peak scaring the hoes.

Kelsey: Yeah. I also hope that he has found a way to control the roaches that does not make him upset. Like, there has to be a way

Ashley: Right, I'm sure there is.

Kelsey: There's gotta be.

Ashley: I'm sure if you Google it with Reddit on the end, you will find something. You will find lots of stuff, you know.

Kelsey: Thank you for bringing me this terrifying roach boy gossip. It was disgusting, and I did not like it.

Ashley: That's exactly what I wanted to hear.

Kelsey: That's beautiful, um, do you want to hear the gossip that I have special picked for you?

Ashley: Of course, I do.

[ad break/music]

Kelsey: It is the early 2010s and our friend of a friend—we're going to call her Victoria—Victoria has just graduated from high school. She's thrilled. In some ways, though, graduating from high school is bad because, like, two of her best friends have already left her hometown, and so she's like, I'm stuck here at home in my parents' house. I feel like an adult, but I'm not yet, and I'm like, desperate to leave.

Ashley: not a girl, not yet a woman

Kelsey: Exactly. Yeah. And she's like, I'm gonna get to leave, right, in the fall. I'm going to college, but like, for this one summer, I'm stuck here with no friends. She's like, but in some ways, graduating from high school and my friends being gone is actually fine, because as a present for graduating, her parents got her her own laptop.

Ashley: Uh oh

Kelsey: Why are you saying uh oh already? Laptops aren't uh oh.

Ashley: I mean, they're they're not, in general, unless you're a chaos agent in which they can be a big uh oh.

Kelsey: And Victoria is an internet girly, like she spent most of her preteen years glued to the family computer, like, listening to that terrible sound as it connects to the internet so that she could, like, log on to AIM and message her crushes.

Ashley: Hell yeah.

Kelsey: She spent like, all of her weekend hours messaging, setting up away messages with like meanings. But now she's like, a little older, she's a little more mature. She's like, am I a little different now? She's like, I don't want to get onto AIM and just like, message all these dummies I went to high school with. I don't want to get onto Facebook Messenger and message all these dummies I went to high school with. I want to imagine a bigger world. I want to discover aspects of myself. I want to form a community. She's like, I want to be creative. She wants to write—

Ashley: Oh!

Kelsey: —fanfiction,

Ashley: Yes, yes! That's exactly what I wanted to hear. You go, girl, you go, girl, a girl, a girl, girl. With my own heart, I love it.

Kelsey: Can you tell the listeners a little bit about your history with fanfiction before we continue?

Ashley: My history with fanfiction is that I started reading fanfiction when I was, God, probably like me, sixth, seventh grade, like middle school in the early 2000s. I wrote a lot of different fandoms' fanfiction, but my main fandom of choice was Harry Potter. And let me just say, fast forwarding like 20 years after getting involved and—almost 20 years after getting involved in that—some of my best friends, and the most important people who I know in my life, I have met from fanfiction, not in the 2000s but literally in the last like four years. Like I'm literally, like, planning a trip to Crete with one of my girlies who I met through fanfiction. Another one whose fanfiction that I read, who I'm obsessed with, like, we talk, I'm not joking, every single day. She was over here, I went over to hers.

Kelsey: That's beautiful to me

Ashley: Yeah, it's kind of like a part of my life that, like, I say that I don't really, I don't like to talk to civilians about it, because it's just like, the girls who get it get it, and the girls who don't, I don't want to have to, I don't like to explain myself too much about that. But yeah, and I've also written

lots of fanfiction. Do I have a giant Google doc full of like fic stuff that I just haven't published yet? Maybe, who's to say?

Kelsey: Whose business is that?

Ashley: Um, do I want to maybe get that out of the way before my actual book publishes, my actual memoir? Yes. But anyway, streets will know what I published.

Kelsey: Oh my god. Okay, all fanfiction has, like an object of its desire, right?

Ashley: Of course

Kelsey: So, like most major franchises, have a fanfiction community. Famously, like, Fifty Shades of Grey was Twilight fanfiction, right? But there's also fanfiction for tons of other like smaller franchises that aren't Twilight size, right? There's like fanfiction for the Mighty Ducks. You know, the ice is cold, but the hearts are warm.

Ashley: I literally read, like, Ed, Edd n Eddy fanfiction when I was like in sixth grade.

Kelsey: Yeah, exactly. And Victoria is like, I want to have fun, right? I want to be passionate about the thing I'm writing fanfiction about, and I want to have a depth of knowledge.

Ashley: Period.

Kelsey: Which is why she picks the young adult book series Warriors, also known as Warrior Cats.

Ashley: Yes! Wait!

Kelsey: Do you, do you know about Warrior Cats?

Ashley: Literally, someone actually ment—so I didn't read it growing up or anything, but someone actually mentioned this to me recently. I think it may be one of my friends, who's a librarian, mentioned this. Um, but people love those books. People have like, people love books about, you know, animals, warrior animals, cats. People love, definitely love cats, so

Kelsey: Yeah. To continue with this story, you do need to know some things about Warrior Cats. So I'm gonna go through some things that I think are important. Okay. This book series began publishing in 2003. It is about anthropomorphic feral cats. There are like, 50 of these books now, and they are still being published.

Ashley: Oh, my God.

Kelsey: Something I thought was fun when I was researching this is that the creator of this series, her name is Victoria Holmes, and like a publisher came to her. They were like, Victoria, we think a great idea is to write a bunch of books about feral cats. And she said, you know, I don't know that there's enough material about feral cats. I don't know that I'm that interested in them. Here is a quote from an interview quote: but to make the story interesting for me personally, parentheses, because, as most of you know, I'm not the greatest cat fan in the world end parentheses, I put loads of extra stuff into the storyline, like war, politics, revenge, doomed love, and religious conflict.

Ashley: Hell yeah, that's what I'm talking about. You gotta make it juicy. You gotta make the cat life juicy.

Kelsey: Yeah, one of the most common plots in Warrior Cats is forbidden love.

Ashley: I don't know if I want to imagine, like cats, like being intimate.

Kelsey: This is also a problem that I have with this series. But you know what? No judgment, go off, whatever you like. Okay. Some other things you should know about the series is that the Warrior Cats are, like, divided into clans based on the terrain in which they live. So like wind clan, thunder clan, river clan, etc. And all the clans are hierarchical, and that hierarchy extends to naming conventions. So important cats have important names.

Ashley: Okay, like, what is an important cat name?

Kelsey: Thank you for asking. It's like the most important cat name ends in like -star, so it's like a suffix situation

Ashley: I see, okay

Kelsey: And the Warrior Cats universe also has a religion, and the religion is called the star clan, which is where dead Warrior Cat ancestors, um, go, and they can communicate via dream and omen and they live in a paradise forest, which is basically heaven. But Warrior Cats also has a hell called the place of no stars, where the spirits of bad cats go.

Ashley: Oh, my God, that's crazy.

Kelsey: Warrior Cats fanfiction is, like, incredibly popular. On fanfiction.net there are only five bigger communities than Warriors, and they are Harry Potter, Twilight, Percy Jackson, Lord of the Rings, and Hunger Games. And after those five, is Warriors.

Ashley: After that is Warriors?

Kelsey: Yes

Ashley: You're kidding me

Kelsey: No

Ashley: Okay, I have so many questions, but keep it, keep it, keep it going. Keep it going.

Kelsey: Victoria begins reading. She's like, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna read first before I write.

Ashley: Okay, research

Kelsey: So she reads all of these stories that exist already, and she's noticing that, like, people are doing the kind of fanfiction where, like, you create your own character, and then what's happening, and what she's noticing, is that these characters are then showing up in other people's fanfictions, right?

Ashley: Oh! Oh my god

Kelsey: So, like, I write a fanfiction and I include your character in mine, right?

Ashley: It's like, it's, I would call that Fanon. It's like, kind of like, it's like, it's like, a canon that the fans create.

Kelsey: Yes

Ashley: I have a lot of feelings about that. In a fandom that I am in—Harry Potter fandom, it's fine—it's happening a lot more than it used to, and it drives me nuts, but I want to know what Victoria thinks about this.

Kelsey: Okay, Victoria's reading it, and she's like, I love this. She's like, I love that people's characters are showing up. It's like—to give a modern example—it's like, when one of your friend's Animal Crossing characters comes to your island, right? Like, oh my God, this is thrilling. She loves this. She begins writing, like, day and night. She gives her character a beautiful name. She names her cat, Baby Moon.

Ashley: Baby Moon

Kelsey: She's like, I love my cat, Baby Moon. And she writes her first story about Baby Moon, who is not her, who is a cat. Baby Moon is all alone. All of Baby Moon's friends have abandoned her, and she's stuck in a place where she can't thrive.

Ashley: Oh, but it's not a self insert. Got it?

Kelsey: Nuh uh, it's not a self insert. Baby Moon is different. And also, Baby Moon is so beautiful, but she doesn't know it. She has dreams that are so much bigger than this small town.

Ashley: Oh, my God, she's like a pop punk song.

Kelsey: Can fanfiction be a way to process your own life?

Ashley: Yes, it actually so is. I'm so serious. My friend and I talk about this all the time. We're like, we're processing our trauma through these like, dead characters like, so that's why self inserts as much as they're like uhhh and like so cringe, there makes so much sense, because if you're not doing it through a self insert, you're kind of putting your own trauma through another established character.

Kelsey: Yes, so for Victoria, she's like, Baby Moon is my best friend. Baby Moon is me. Baby Moon is helping.

Ashley: Oh, my God, Baby Moon.

Kelsey: She publishes her first story about Baby Moon, and she's like, I'm so proud.

Ashley: Oh no

Kelsey: The next morning, she has a private message on this platform, and the message is from someone named Howling Star. Victoria clicks this person's like, username, right? And Howling Star has more than 100 stories, and her character is in so many stories, like Howling Star is an important Warrior Cat.

Ashley: Oh my god, okay.

Kelsey: And Howling Star is, like, I read your story. It's super good. I really think it's great. You have so much like possibility. I really think you could be really good. But you clearly did not read the rules of this community.

Ashley: What?

Kelsey: Please read them as soon as possible. And she links. Victoria's like, Oh, my God, this is so embarrassing. All I want is to be part of this community, and now I have fucked up immediately. She goes to the rules, and she's like, Okay, let's see. And the rules are like, you know, like, no using other people's characters without permission. She's like, Okay, I didn't do that. The rules are like, no plagiarism. She's like, great. I didn't do that. The rules are like, no members of the Council can date other members of the community. She's like, I don't even know what that means, but like, midway down she sees this, like, rule, and it reads all new characters for the Warrior Cats community must contain a full story arc. It does not matter if you

are a longtime poster or a newbie, all new characters must start with the last part of their name as Paw.

Ashley: What? Oh, my God. So because the hierarchy thing

Kelsey: ding ding ding

Ashley: Oh, gotta be kidding me. What? She like, started off too high up on the rankings!

Kelsey: It's like, until you are granted your warrior name, you must use Paw, and the Council decides on all promotions.

Ashley: Who is the Council? These random girls who decide they're on the Council? I hate this.

Kelsey: Literally

Ashley: I hate this. What is going on in the Warrior community?

Kelsey: Victoria is like, oh my god, this is so bad. Like, I named myself Baby Moon instead of Baby Paw. I have stolen valor. I am canceled. She's like, this is awful. And she's also upset because she's like, I've read all of these books. Like. I should have known better.

Ashley: She's like, how could I have done this?

Kelsey: So she has, like, six hearts on this original story, but you have broken a rule. Do you delete and republish?

Ashley: She shouldn't have to take anything down that's insane,

Kelsey: Like, who died and made you the king of Warrior Cats, right?

Ashley: Right. Who made this Council? I have never heard of such a thing.

Kelsey: She's like, okay, now that I know how the ranking system works, I'm gonna take this down. I'm gonna replace Baby Moon with Baby Paw, and I'm gonna repost.

Ashley: Oh no. Okay

Kelsey: She does this. And a lot of people with their official Warrior Cat names are commenting, and they're like, this is so good. Like, we love it.

Ashley: Okay

Kelsey: Victoria's like, hell yeah. She keeps writing. She's writing every day for like, three weeks. She's so committed. Howling Star keeps, like, sliding into her messages with each of these stories. And soon Victoria learns that this girl's name is Kristen.

Ashley: Okay, so what did Kristen—what is Kristen saying?

Kelsey: Kristen's whole deal is that she's like, a senior in college, and to Victoria, she's like, unbelievably cool. And Kristen is like—generally, like, I'm sorry to bring our trauma as writers into this—but Kristen is like, queen of feedback, right? Like, she's always like, I have a few notes, right? Like—

Ashley: Oh my god, no. I hate—look, anyone who's done fanfiction knows about this kind of reviewer who is just like, maybe they mean well, but every single thing they have to say is like, here's what you could have done better. Here's how I would have liked it more. I hate people like that.

Kelsey: Yes. Kristen's sliding in. Like, great start here. Like, I see what you're trying to do, right?

Ashley: Stop

Kelsey: Like, do you want to hop on the phone? Right?

Ashley: Nooo

Kelsey: Like, this whole thing. And, like, Victoria, because she's 18, is like, oh my God, this girl cares about me so much, like, she wants me to get better.

Ashley: Oh my god.

Kelsey: So she's like, I'm gonna try my absolute best. And she's also, like, being a little politically savvy here, because she's like, you know, Kristen is on the Council.

Ashley: Yeah, she can, like, elevate her

Kelsey: Kristen controls when I get my Warrior Cat name and I want my Warrior Cat name so badly. The best edit that Kristen gives her is that Kristen is like, the thing is, Baby Paw doesn't have a lot of a personality. Like, Baby Paw needs to have a more defining trait. And Victoria is like, that's a great note. She's like, my idea is, Baby Paw is baby, like, Baby Paw is dumb, like, a baby. That's her character trait.

Ashley: oh, no.

Kelsey: And so, like her Warrior Cat, Baby Paw is always up to, like, so many antics. Like, she's so dumb she makes the dumbest errors. Like, that's her whole thing.

Ashley: Oh, my God.

Kelsey: And the other writers love this because they're like, this is a really clear character who I can use to advance plot in my stories.

Ashley: oooooo

Kelsey: So they're like, can we use Baby Paw in our stories? And she's like, yes. And Baby Paw is like, the dumbest Warrior Cat alive.

Ashley: Part of me is like, okay, that is a distinct personality. But part of me is almost like, oh my god, stand up Baby Paw, like have some self respect, Baby Paw, formerly known a Baby Moon. Like, wow.

Kelsey: One day she gets a message from Kristen, and Kristen is like, the Council really likes you, like, we really like your work. She's like, I was wondering if we could add you to the Inner Circle.

Ashley: What? So soon?

Kelsey: And Victoria is like, it's only been like, six weeks. And she's also disappointed, because she really wanted her Warrior Cat to be, like, promoted, right? So she's like, I don't want to be added to the Inner Circle. I want to be Baby Moon again. So she's like, this is fine, sure, whatever, add me to the Inner Circle. And she's like, but like, what is it? Like what's going on in the Inner Circle? And basically what the Inner Circle is is, it's like a group chat, basically

Ashley: Of course.

Kelsey: And Kristen is like, oh, like, the inner circle is, like, the reigning authority on Warrior Cat fanfic. And like, the Inner Circle controls who gets their word cat name and when, and the Inner Circle, like, gives feedback on ongoing plots and like, sometimes we cowrite stories together.

Ashley: Oh my god

Kelsey: Victoria is like, I'm so thrilled to be in the Inner Circle. Thank you so much for having me. She's welcomed by everyone. Everyone's so happy to have her, but immediately she's, like, laser focused on one person, and that's because this person is cute and his name is Jordan.

Ashley: Oh, a guy! Okay.

Kelsey: Is it easy for you to get a crush?

Ashley: Hmm, okay, so I think that fandom spaces have so largely been like women, and women dominated, and I feel like I get surprised whenever I see a man in these spaces. And so for me, I wasn't crushing on nobody because I'm straight.

Kelsey: You've like, hit on something though, that I think is important here, which is that most fanfiction communities are like all women.

Ashley: Yes. Largely women.

Kelsey: Largely women, and this community is largely women and Jordan.

Ashley: Who's straight, not gay?

Kelsey: Who's straight. Yeah, he's straight and like, that means that Jordan is like catnip to this community, right?

Ashley: Oh my god, yeah

Kelsey: Like, yeah, they're like, he writes poetry, he writes fanfiction, he listens to softboy music. Like, he's always asking people who how they really are.

Ashley: oh my god. But now that I'm like, not, like, 18, I'm immediately like, red flag. Like, I'm like, Uh oh, okay, softboy?

Kelsey: His Tumblr is really cool, right?

Ashley: Nooooooo flag, red flag, red flag.

Kelsey: Victoria is like a lonely 18 year old on the cusp of going to college, right? Like she is involved in her childhood fandom. This is like, too easy. Jordan comes to her a couple weeks later, and is like, can I put Baby Paw in one of my stories?

Ashley: Stop. Oh, my God. That's like asking someone out in this situation.

Kelsey: And she's like Oh, my God, this is so romantic. Like, yes, you can. His cat is named Mothnose.

Ashley: Mothnose?

Kelsey: Mothnose.

Ashley: So nose as a suffix is like—

Kelsey: No, he has another suffix, like River or something. The first name is Mothnose. That's one word.

Ashley: Oh, my God, okay. Okay. Mothnose.

Kelsey: Yeah. So for him to put Baby Paw in his story, obviously they have to chat about it. They have to chat about it all the time. They're chatting constantly about how Baby Paw might respond, about like, what Baby Paw might like—

Ashley: Oh my god yes these scenarios, ahh!

Kelsey: Suddenly, they're chatting about everything, right? Like he's telling her the things he dislikes about his university, right? She's like, telling him about her fears, right? Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat.

Ashley: And also, I mean, just pointing out, like, these kind of, like fandom friendships and interactions, they get pretty intimate pretty quickly. Like, kind of in a way that even my like IRL friends, like there are things that, like I will so much sooner tell to a girl who I met three weeks ago through fanfiction, than I would tell, then I would tell to someone who's like one of my nearest dearest friends who I've known for like 10 years, you know?

Kelsey: Your nearest dearest friends are listening to this, getting pitchforks to go to your house, like what the fuck are you telling them?

Ashley: I'm so sorry, guys, there's some shit that you just do not know.

Kelsey: Yes. So the intimacy is high, and Jordan one day is like, Oh my God, should we co-write a story?

Ashley: Oh my God, that's like, asking someone to have sex.

Kelsey: Yeah, like, is this a date? Like, does this count as a date?

Ashley: Yes. Oh my god,

Kelsey: I like how firmly you're like, yes, that's a date, one hundred percent.

Ashley: Yeah. Like, no, that is, like, that's intimate.

Kelsey: Do you try and make your cats kiss in the story that you're co-writing?

Ashley: How do cats even kiss? I'm getting upset because I really hate animal stories. Like, I really, I am not charmed by them at all. I'm just like, I cannot imagine. Like, look, no offense to my own cat. But, like—

Kelsey: I don't want to kiss the cat

Ashley: I don't, yeah, want to think about cats making out. But, yeah, I guess if I was trying to, like, impress this, like, Tumblr softboy who, like, wanted to have our, like, cats in a story together, yeah, they're gonna fucking make out.

Kelsey: So the thing is, Victoria's like, I don't think I can make the make out, because, like, my cat, Baby Paw, is still an apprentice. So that's like an age gap discourse in terms of experience as a cat that like, I don't want to get myself involved in.

Ashley: Oh my god. She didn't want to get canceled.

Kelsey: Yeah. So she asks Jordan. And Jordan's like, Oh yeah, that makes like sense to me. That's like, he's like, we can still make it very cute, like, we can still make them like, kind of falling for each other, and the forbiddenness will, like, make it better.

Ashley: [laughs] Oh my god.

Kelsey: She finishes the draft, and he like, sends her edits back. And he's like, I had an idea, what if they didn't kiss, but they had a signal to show each other that they loved each other that wasn't kissing..

Ashley: Okay, I would have, like, folded if I was her, if, like, a cute guy was like, I want our characters to show that they love each other without showing it. You know, like, I'd be like, Oh, we're getting married now. Okay?

Kelsey: Victoria is like, Oh, my God, Is he proposing? Like

Ashley: Yeah, no, I'd be like, we are married now, just so you know.

Kelsey: She's like, Well, what did you have in mind? And he's like, Well, what if Baby Paw and Mothnose would like, tell each other they loved each other by, like, using their little paws. You know how, like, a cat will knead, like, a blanket?

Ashley: Yeah, yeah

Kelsey: Like that.

Ashley: Like they would knead like each other, or near each other, or...?

Kelsey: Yes. And Victoria's, like, I think you're a genius, and I think that's a great idea. Oh, my God, they publish this story, and people love it. They love that there's no kissing. They love the kneading. The kneading—

Ashley: Because there's sexual tension. That's sexual tension.

Kelsey: Yes.

Ashley: Oh my god

Kelsey: Yes, yes, and the kneading, like, makes its way into other stories, because people are like, genius. Victoria moves into her dorm in August. She's still obsessed with Warrior Cats, but, like, she's also obsessed with Jordan. She's going to parties, she's meeting people, and then late at night, she's like, logging on to, like, do her little Warrior Cats, right?

Ashley: Oh, yeah, I know. I know that balance. I know that song and dance.

Kelsey: It's beautiful to have a second shift.

Ashley: Yes, no, that was literally me in college. It's just like going out and then coming home to talk about a certain fandom.

Kelsey: Yeah. It is the early 2010s. Do you change your Facebook status to It's Complicated if you're in love with a man on Warrior Cats forum who still calls you Baby Paw?

Ashley: Yo, at that point, if we're kneading, if we're in the kneading stage already for a minute, I don't know if it's complicated. There's something there. There's something there, man.

Kelsey: Yeah. Victoria is like, also delusional, so she's like—

Ashley: Many such cases.

Kelsey: —yes, I love him. She sets her Facebook status to It's complicated.

Ashley She really does that?

Kelsey: Over the course of the year, they're like, chatting, chatting, chatting, right? She starts, like, submitting some stories to Kristen because she's like, I just want your feedback, like, before these publish. And Kristen keeps sending these back and being like, ma'am, this is smut. Like, this is not, like, you gotta trim this, girl. Like, this is not what this community is about.

Ashley: Ew, But like, what does that mean? What does warrior—did you find out in your research? Did you find out what that looks like?

Kelsey: I don't want to talk about it.

Ashley: Oh, my God, no.

Kelsey: Kristen is also, like, also you're still an apprentice.

Ashley: Know your place

Kelsey: Like, you're still Baby Paw. Yeah, kind of know your place. And Victoria is like, well, when am I going to be promoted? And Kristen is like, don't worry. Like, I'm going to get you promoted at the six—when you hit your six month mark, which is like, the earliest I can get you promoted. And Victoria is like, okay, in November, Kristen comes back, and is like, we did it. We upgraded you. You are being promoted.

Ashley: Oh, my God, the Council spoke.

Kelsey: The Council has ruled that she can become Baby Moon again.

Ashley: Wow, that's a big promotion.

Kelsey: I know. And Victoria is honored, because she's like, I'm so happy that you remembered that Baby Moon was the name that I wanted.

Ashley: Okay? But wait, but then, like, is, is the guy's cat on her level now?

Kelsey: Yes

Ashley: ooooh

Kelsey: now they're on the same level.

Ashley: Uh oh

Kelsey: Uh oh, indeed. Jordan sends her a mixed CD to celebrate.

Ashley: Stop it.

Kelsey: She's like, now I'm not an apprentice. Now there's no more age gap. She's like, I want to write—I want to co-write a horny story.

Ashley: No, not the horny cats.

Kelsey: So she's talking to Jordan over DM one day, and she's like, I have something to ask you. And he's like, I have something to ask you too.

[music/ad break]

Kelsey: Do you want to go first, or do you want him to go first?

Ashley: Oh, my God. I want him to go first.

Kelsey: Victoria wants Jordan to go first. She's like, Okay, you go first. And he's like, okay, but it's like, a little embarrassing. And Victoria's like, Oh my God, no, it's not, I'm sure it's not embarrassing. Her heart is like, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, right? And Jordan's like, oh, so it's like, kind of personal. And Victoria's like, yes! Okay, what is it?

Ashley: Like let's gooooo

Kelsey: Jordan's like, okay, there's like, some gossip going around. And Victoria is like, what? Her heart is sinking, right? She's like, What gossip? And Jordan's like, there's gossip that someone is leaving the Warrior Cats community and a position is opening on the Council.

Ashley: Wow.

Kelsey: And Victoria is like, Okay, I don't really understand what this has to do with us, like what? She's like, that's not a question. And Jordan's like, Well, I wanted to ask if you would be willing to, like, help me get elected for that seat. And Victoria's like, that is not the question I wanted him to ask me

Ashley: Right? I'd wanna be like, do you want to go to pound town in our Warrior Cat fanfiction?

Kelsey: Do you wanna take our cats into pound town and create smut?

Ashley: Right. You're talking about politics. I'm talking about fucking.

Kelsey: Yeah, yes. Do you see another problem here?

Ashley: Hmm, let me see.

Kelsey: Do you remember the rules?

Ashley: Oh, there's no relationships allowed between—oooooooooooo

Kelsey: Members of the Council cannot date members of the community.

Ashley: Oh, my God, but what about—Is she not in the Council yet? I thought she was in the Council.

Kelsey: She's in the Inner Circle.

Ashley: Oh, but she's not on the Council.

Kelsey: She's not on the Council.

Ashley: Wow. Okay.

Kelsey: So to promote Jordan into the Council is to promote your crush, yet again, into a forbidden place.

Ashley: No! So she can't do it, or she doesn't want to.

Kelsey: You're not gonna do it? What do you think?

Ashley: I mean, do you let the ones you love go? It's like, if you love them, let them go

Kelsey: It is kind of like that

Ashley: But if it was me, I would try to convince him not to do it, just so he could have a relationship. I'd be like, a little bit conniving.

Kelsey: Oh, Victoria is not conniving. Victoria is like, I'm gonna tell him that I'll help him, and then I'll decide later what I'm gonna do. So she's like, Oh, my God, great. Love that for you. Totally no problem, because her feelings are also like, hurt, right? Because she thought that they were talking about something else that they were not talking about, which is being in love.

Ashley: right.

Kelsey: Jordan, at this point, is like, what was your question for me?

Ashley: He's like, he's just down to business.

Kelsey: She's like, when will death come? Right? This is not what I want.

Ashley: Like, can our cats fuck?

Kelsey: She's like, I just wanted to see if you wanted to co-write a new story. And he's like, Oh my god, yeah, I'd love to do that. But she's like, I can't tell him it's about fucking anymore. I feel weird.

Ashley: Oh no.

Kelsey: Couple days pass, Kristen reaches out and is like, I'm just doing this, like, straw poll. Do you know who you're gonna vote for? Do you tell her you're gonna vote for Jordan?

Ashley: Maybe, only if I don't think that Kristen suspects something is going on between us.

Kelsey: Yes. So Victoria is like, I don't think Kristen has any suspicions. She's like, I've been thinking about voting Jordan. And Kristen's like, Oh, that's really interesting. That's like, a really good idea. Like, he'd be great, good instincts. And Victoria's like, thank you so much. She's like, I love Kristen's approval almost as much as I love Jordan.

Ashley: right

Kelsey: So Victoria votes for him, and of course, he wins.

Ashley: Oh my god.

Kelsey: So now their love is, yet again, a beloved plot of Warrior Cats, in that it is forbidden.

Ashley: Oh my god, this is just, she can't win. When will Baby Moon win?

Kelsey: Is it Baby Moon's turn to be happy? Exactly. They're still chatting every single day, telling each other what they eat for dinner, what the weather's like, how their classes are.

Ashley: This is intimate.

Kelsey: Yes. In the spring, the Inner Circle decides that they should all meet up IRL, and they're calling this jokingly, Kitty Con.

Ashley: I mean, look, I can't knock down, meaning fanfiction friends IRL, because I've done it several times, many times. I was literally at a wedding recently of a friend who I know, primarily—people were like, Oh, how'd you guys know each other? I say, Live Journal. We were in a, we were in a fucking role playing game in 2010.

Kelsey: Mhmm, she admit it.

Ashley: Yeah. Like, exactly. So, like, I'm not against it. The name: chop. But, like, everything else, the concept, yeah, sure. Like, I love meeting fandom friends in person,

Kelsey: Yeah, and it's like, for Victoria, she's like, it's a summer between my freshman and sophomore year, like, famously, a bad summer, because you've, like, tasted the freedom of college and then been forced to regress. And she's like, I have some work study money. Like it's totally worth it to buy a ticket for this 10 hour Greyhound to get to where Kristen lives.

Ashley: Okay, see, I think like a long travel that's something that I feel like I'd have to work up to. But hey, like, I still, I guess I look, you have the opportunity. Okay, why not take the 10 hour Greyhound?

Kelsey: Yeah, Victoria is also like, Finally, I'll meet Jordan in person.

Ashley: Oh my god

Kelsey: Like, this is huge for me. The time comes, she boards the bus, she gets they're going to where Kristen lives. And this is because, like, Kristen is a senior in college, and so she has, like, off campus housing. They're going to her city so they can stay at her place.

Ashley: Wow. Okay.

Kelsey: Victoria is, like, so nervous. She's like, what if they don't think I'm cute IRL, what if they don't like me? Like, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They meet at a board game cafe.

Ashley: Okay, chop. But keep on going. Keep going.

Kelsey: Jordan stands up to hug her, to greet her. And she's like, Oh, my God, he's taller than I thought.

Ashley: Oh, because they know what each other looks like at this point, I'm guessing.

Kelsey: Yeah, yeah. But he's taller. You don't, haven't seen him in person, yeah. And she's like, he's so cute. And then he like, he doesn't sit next to her, but he like, looks at her a lot.

Ashley: Oh, no.

Kelsey: What do you think about this?

Ashley: Oh, he has, he definitely has a crush on her, or at least just wants to—eh, let me, let me not. There's something going on.

Kelsey: After the Games, they all go back to Kristen's house. The girls are all staying there, obviously. Jordan is, like, gonna sleep somewhere else because he's like, the only boy.

Ashley: But I was about to say, like, where's he gonna go?

Kelsey: Yeah, he's like, hanging out late. He's like, sitting next to her. He keeps, like, telling her how excited he is to see her, but he's also telling everyone else that he's really excited to see them.

Ashley: Uh oh

Kelsey: And so she's like, hmm. And like, when people are talking, it's like, clear that people know things about him that she doesn't know. So she's like, Excuse me? And then he's like, Do you want a seltzer? I'm gonna go get a seltzer out of the fridge. And Victoria's like, yeah, of course I want a seltzer. And then she watches him walk to the kitchen. She's like, he's so cute.

He's so tall. And then she watches as he's like, passing Kristen, who's getting more snacks, that he like, uses his little hands like they're paws, and he like kneads her shoulder on the way by!

Ashley: No! Not kneading! No! Oh no. He hasn't needed anyone else that day, has he?

Kelsey: Nuh uh, he has not.

Ashley: Yo, no, I'd be heartbroken.

Kelsey: Victoria is watching all night, right? Like now she's on high alert. She's paying close attention, and she notices that, like he's always touching Kristen when he passes, and like he knows where things in Kristen's apartment are.

Ashley: Nooooo. Okay, it's a wrap. It's a wrap.

Kelsey: And she's like, I have never been filled with more envy and more anger in my entire life. She's like, Kristen has everything I want. She has star status. She's an editor. She's dating Jordan. Like, this is terrible.

Ashley: Oh, my God.

Kelsey: You have also—you're Victoria—you have also noticed that he's like, flirty with everyone. Do you tell the others?

Ashley: That he and Kristen are together?

Kelsey: Mhmm

Ashley: Oh, I would definitely ask, like, Hey, do you know if anything—? I would act like I don't care at all. I'd be like, hey, is there something going on between Jordan and Kristen? I'd act like I did not care while I was, like, dying inside, like, wanting to cry because you just drove, like, imagine being in a greyhound for 10 hours thinking that you're gonna have some intimate one-on-one time with, like, the guy that you've been like, fantasizing about doing, like, kitty smut with for like a year.

Kelsey: Months. Yeah.

Ashley: Yeah, noooo.

Kelsey: Victoria is like, here I go, right. I'm young, I'm petty. I'm about to start asking some fucking questions. So she's like, does anybody know, like, if Jordan has a girlfriend? Like, are he and Kristen together? And everyone's like, Girl, we don't know what you're talking about. Like, I don't think so. Doesn't seem like Jordan has a girlfriend. Like, he talks to everyone all the time,

and she's like, I don't know. I like, saw something in the kitchen. I saw him, like, knead her shoulder.

Ashley: And they're both on the High Council in that wait, are they allowed to be together? If they're both on the High Council?

Kelsey: Okay, really. Good question. Theoretically, yes, but he wasn't on the High Council until she elected him there.

Ashley: Ohhhh, ohhhh

Kelsey: There's also a problem here, which is that the other girls in this group have conflated Victoria with Baby Paw, and so they're like, Baby Paw—

Ashley: They think she's dumb!

Kelsey: —you're so dumb.

Ashley: Oh, my God nooo

Kelsey: They're like, we love you so much. But like, it's very clear from your stories that you're like, in love with Jordan. And like, everyone knows that.

Ashley: Oh my god, they clocked her

Kelsey: And they're like, we get it. You're jealous. But like, you don't need to, like, project things onto Kristen.

Ashley: Stop

Kelsey: And she's like, Oh my god, I'm not projecting. Like I'm not, I swear to you, I like, saw these things, and they're all like, okay, like we love you, but you gotta calm down.

Ashley: They're gaslighting her

Kelsey: They're gaslighting her. You're now betrayed by your crush and your idol, both of them. What do you do after this like, weekend is over?

Ashley: I don't know. I feel like the, maybe the stories might change a little bit. I don't know if I want to collab as much. I don't know, unless I know the truth.

Kelsey: Yeah, Victoria is like, you know, she gets home, she's disillusioned by the Warrior Cats community. She's like, people are gaslighting me. I'm being lied to. She's like, stewing. And she decides, you know, if all of these girls think that I'm in love with Jordan because of my stories,

then that means that, like, they also think that they're telling on themselves in their stories. So I'm gonna go back and, like, read all these stories and see what I can figure out. So she's reading everyone's stories, like, back into the past before she got there, and she's realizing that, like at different times, Mothnose has been in everyone's stories,

Ashley: Oh my God. He's like the fandom bicycle. Oh no.

Kelsey: And all of the stories, like, revolve around his character.

Ashley: They are getting played. These girls are getting played by, what, Mothnose?

Kelsey: Mothnose

Ashley: Oh, my God. Oh no. Maybe they were s—maybe they were acting like that because they've been played in the past.

Kelsey: Okay, so this is what Victoria thinks. And she's like, DMing them, and she's like, okay, girlies, are we all acting like this? Because we've all been played like, is this the John Tucker Must Die scenario? Like, what is going on? And all the girls are like, Oh, no, I don't really like, feel like I've been played. It's just like, that's kind of how, like, the stories, like, got edited when he helped us edit them.

Ashley: Come on. No.

Kelsey: And Victoria is like, mmmm okay. But she's also like, huh, if Jordan is dating Kristen, and Kristen is famously an editor, is Kristen not just editing everyone's stories? Like providing notes to make everyone's character be in love with Jordan? She's like, Oh my God. have I been like, edited into this crush via my stories?

Ashley: Oh, my God, is Kristen like, is Kristen, like, the puppet master?

Ashley: She's like, the puppet master? She's like, Oh my God. And she starts trying to, like, remember what it is she liked about Jordan, right? She's like, what is it that I liked? And she's like, oh, you know what I really liked? I really liked his poetry. And so she, like, goes to his Tumblr. She's like, reading his poems. And she's like, these are so bad. Like, I was wearing the, like, rose colored glasses of crush. And these are, like, they do not make any sense.

Ashley: Oh my gosh. She didn't like a softboy poems, after all?

Kelsey: She didn't like his softboy poems after all. And also, she's like, these are just like, not good, like, he's not a good writer. She's like, so how is it that he was like, co-writing stories with me?

Ashley: Right. Oh! Was it Kristen all along?

Kelsey: It was fucking Kristen all along

Ashley: Oh my god! Wait, so they were in cahoots!!

Kelsey: They were in cahoots.

Ashley: Stop.

Kelsey: You have now been betrayed like, emphatically betrayed.

Ashley: On every level

Kelsey: On every level

Ashley: Oh my God!

Kelsey: What do you do?

Ashley: This is when I would probably talk to someone who I befriended in that fandom who was not none of those people, and would start talking some shit and being like, asking them what I should do. Because I don't think the people in the Council are to be trusted. They didn't believe her before. They didn't know when they were being manipulated. They thought that this was just, Oh, Baby Moon's stupid. Like No, Baby Moon is smart. Actually, you guys are stupid.

Kelsey: Yeah!

Ashley: No, I wouldn't trust any of them. She's been betrayed left, right and center. No, I think I would be so disillusioned that I would like dip, unless I just really loved Warrior Cats that much.

Kelsey: Victoria is like, Fuck the Council, fuck Jordan, fuck Kristen, like I'm going out in a blaze of glory.

Ashley: Yessssss, hell yeah girl

Kelsey: She's like I am gonna write a fanfiction to get me through this.

Ashley: That's what I'm talking about.

Kelsey: And she writes a fanfiction where Baby Moon has a crush, and the crush is a new Warrior Cat named, like, you know, something-stupid Paw, yeah, and something-stupid Paw is a poet, and she gives something-stupid Paw, in this in this story, all of Jordan's bad poetry.

Ashley: Like the actual like, verbatim?

Kelsey: The actual, verbatim poems that he has, like, sent her.

Ashley: Oh my God.

Kelsey: And she's like, this is gonna get him right. Like, she's like, written this, like, fuckboy Warrior Cat character.

Ashley: Oh my god.

Kelsey: She publishes this at a time when, like, she knows Kristen is busy and so, like, it can be up for a while without anyone commenting on it.

Ashley: Oh, my God.

Kelsey: Everyone in the Warrior Cats community is like, Baby Moon. This is such a good story for real. Like, the fuck boy character is great. His poems are so bad. Like, you're such a good writer. How did you even write this bad of poems? Like, you're a genius.

Ashley: Oh, my God, wait, I love that for her, but I feel like she's gonna suffer the consequences.

Kelsey: It is, like, the most popular thing she's ever written, and she's getting, like, a ton of credit for putting herself in the head of this terrible poet. And so now she's like, now is the time to appear as God did to Saul, and be like the scales must fall from your eyes, right? Like the bad poet is Jordan. He can't write. These are his poems.

Ashley: And not his stories.

Kelsey: And not his stories. And the scales fall from these from the Warrior Cat girls' eyes. And they're all like, Oh my God. And they're also catching on to something that you caught on to, which is like, were they dating before the Council?

Ashley: Listennnn

Kelsey: At this point, the Warrior Cat girls, not including Kristen, have a quorum, and together, as a quorum, they decide that they're gonna initiate an investigation. And the way they're gonna do this is they're gonna call in a third party person to investigate this, and the person they call in—

Ashley: oh, my god oh, like, a Robert Mueller,

Kelsey: Yeah, literally, they're like, they're like, who is an investigator in the Twilight community? They're, we're gonna bring them over here, and they're gonna figure this out.

Ashley: Stop. Not not getting someone from Twilight community. Stop it. This is crazy

Kelsey: They bring someone from Twilight over. The Twilight girl is, like, interviewing everyone. She's trying to figure shit out. But she's also like, why is your community like for virgins? Like, why can't people date?

Ashley: That's kind of, that is kind of crazy.

Kelsey: Yeah, and all the Warrior Cat girls are like, Oh my God, that's a great point. Like, why can't people date? Like this doesn't make any sense.

Ashley: Not the Twilight girlie like, being like, Y'all are prudes.

Kelsey: Yes. The Twilight girl's like, Come on, man, like this is fine actually. The Twilight girl does eventually find out and reveal that Kristen was dating Jordan before he was on the Council.

Ashley: Oh, my God

Kelsey: So that's strike one. But what the Twilight girl also finds out is that Kristen has been preferential editing everyone's stories to make Jordan look good.

Ashley: Yo. What kind of relationship is this?

Kelsey: I don't know

Ashley: I didn't know the Warrior Cats girlies were doing it like this, the drama, the intrigue.

Kelsey: We are almost at the very end. Whose side are you on? How do you feel? Do you think there's a moral here?

Ashley: Look, I respect our girl, Victoria, for being like, if I'm gonna go out, I'm going out in a blaze of glory, and having everyone end up on her side.

Kelsey: Yes

Ashley: I love that, but I also worry that she's gonna, I'm worried that she's gonna get like, blowback from this. Is she gonna get kicked out? Like, I don't know. I'm worried about our girl.

Kelsey: I do have some final updates for you, which is that Kristen and Jordan co-wrote a story that sent both of their cats to the Land of No Stars.

Ashley: Wait. They sent themselves?

Kelsey: Correct.

Ashley: What kind of self-flagellation is this? So they killed themselves in the story?

Kelsey: Yes, and sent themselves to cat hell.

Ashley: No. Wait, this is so funny.

Kelsey: It's so funny.

Ashley: Oh my God, I want them to, I hope they're married.

Kelsey: I hope so too. I don't know what happened to them. No one gave me an update on that, which is upsetting. After they left, everyone was like, the Council is dumb. The rules are dumb. We're not doing that anymore. We're just gonna go back to writing regular fanfiction, like regular people—

Ashley: Hell yeah, as it should be

Kelsey: —which meant Victoria could promote herself to Star. So she was thrilled about that.

Ashley: Oh my god.

Kelsey: And after she graduated college, she was like, Okay, I don't have time for this anymore. Like, I'm not doing this anymore. But, like, five years after she graduated from college, like, kind of recently, she was at a party, and she was like, talking to someone about the early Internet, and this person was like, oh my god, I used to be in this fanfiction community that had this whole drama because two of the moderators were dating, but then this girl wrote an iconic story about how the head moderator's boyfriend was a terrible poet, and then he got run out of the community, and the Twilight fanfiction people talked about it for years.

Ashley: Oh, my God. So it must have been lore. Wow

Kelsey: Do you admit to this random stranger that it was you?

Ashley: Yes immediately, I immediately say that that was me, but that's, but that's me. Like, that's, that's, and they're not a civilian, because they know some shit. I would be like, that was me.

Kelsey: If you pull off a heist, you should get credit for it. So Victoria is like, yeah, it was me.

Ashley: Oh, my God, that is the perfect, perfect ending.

Kelsey: It's so beautiful.

Ashley: No notes

Kelsey: Wow, great. Do you have any final thoughts or feelings?

Ashley: Well, I mean, go Victoria. This was so true that, like you really do, put a bit of yourself into the stories you write, and this worked to her advantage to get some revenge, and I appreciate that. But you know what? She lucked out. It has a happy ending. It could so easily—there are so many of these girls who try to go on a power trip when they have any amount of power, in these little communities: fanfiction, role playing. This was a great, great—love this ending for her.

Kelsey: Ashley, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. It was a delight to have you.

Ashley: Thank you for having me, and this was the perfect story for me. Thank you.

Kelsey: Oh, my God, of course!

Ginger Hollander: Thank you for listening to Normal Gossip. If you have a gossip story to share with us, email us at normalgossip@defector.com. Or you can leave us a voicemail at 2679-GOSSIP. If you love this podcast and want to support us, become a friend or a friend-of-a-friend at supportnormalgossip.com. You can follow the show on Instagram and TikTok @normalgossip. You can follow Kelsey on all social media at @McKinneyKelsey.

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.

Thanks to the rest of the Defector staff. Defector Media is a collectively-owned subscriber-based media company. Normal Gossip is a proud member of Radiotopia. Normal Gossip is hosted by Kelsey McKinney. I'm Ginger Hollander. And remember, you did not hear this from me.