

LARP Camp with Rebecca Jennings

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Rachelle

Hello and welcome to Normal Gossip! I'm your host, Rachelle Hampton and in each episode of this podcast we're going to bring you an ANONYMOUS morsel of gossip from the real world.

Welcome to episode five of season eight y'all! We're somehow halfway through the season, can you believe it? I know that strikes fear into some of y'all's hearts because it means the end of this season is approaching but I've got some great news for those of you who want even more Normal Gossip which I hope is all of you. This fall Se'era and I are going on tour for the first time! This September we're bringing Normal Gossip to nine different cities, we're stopping in New York, Boston, Seattle, Portland, Oregon, Denver, Dallas, Austin, Chicago and Minneapolis.

Tickets go on sale to the public on Friday May 9 but if you're listening to this episode before then I've got some extra special news: you can buy your tickets right now in an exclusive 48-hour pre-sale if you go normalgossiplive.com and use the promo code GOSSIP25 before 10 a.m. local time on Friday May 9th. I know I just tossed a lot of numbers at you so lemme say it again: if you happen to be listening to this episode before 10 a.m. on Friday May 9th and you want to guarantee you get a ticket, you can buy your tickets early in an exclusive pre-sale if you go to normalgossiplive.com and use the promo code GOSSIP25.

If you're listening after that, have no fear! Tickets are on sale to the public at normalgossiplive.com starting Friday May 9th.

This is my very first live tour, it's a year of firsts for me and I'm so, so excited to take this show on the road and meet some of y'all.

That's all the housekeeping business I've got for today's show, now onto the main event. Today, I'm so, so excited to be joined by Rebecca Jennings. Rebecca is a features writer at New York Magazine and she's got a book coming out on May 27th that's all about one of my favorite topics: Love Island! Rebecca's book is called *Be the Bombshell* and its "a cheeky, laugh-out-loud playbook to navigating singlehood by embracing the absolute ten-out-of-ten, proper fit, total bombshell that you are."

Rebecca, hello. Thank you so much for joining me.

Rebecca

Thank you so much for having me. I love nothing more than to gossip.

Rachelle

Wow. You guessed my first question, which is, what is your relationship to gossip? It's almost like this question has been asked before.

Rebecca

Oh my gosh, recently, gossip has been making me really paranoid. Like every time I hear people gossip, like 95% of me is like, oh my god, yes. Like, this is what human beings do. This is what human communication is. This is what friendship is. And then the other 5% is like, well, if they're saying this about one person, like, what are they saying about me?

Rachelle

I think that's real, and I would say that is you empathizing with the subject of the gossip.

Rebecca

Yeah, this makes me an empath.

Rachelle

Exactly. Let's flip it around. Let's reverse it.

Rebecca

Thank you so much. Yeah, but it's like, I feel like this is a newer thing with me, like it just is making me really anxious and paranoid a lot, so I'm glad that we're talking about this in a safe space where gossip is being condoned and entertainment for all.

Rachelle

Well, it sounds like your relationship with gossip is changing over time. That at first it felt kind of just like, this is fun, and now is it, do you think you're like, at a more public time in your life? Like, do you think there is more in your life to gossip about than maybe previously?

Rebecca

Yeah, and this is because I am about to get married. I know that there are all these group chats that don't involve me about like people, and it's also I'm having a destination wedding. And everyone like on Tiktok all the time, I see people like, if you're if you have a destination wedding, you're a shitty person. And I'm like, Oh, cool. Love that. All my friends probably hate me. But no, it's like, you know, people planning about when they're arriving and what they're doing, which is totally normal and fine, but meanwhile, it's making me like, oh my god, everyone's so mad at me for having a wedding.

And meanwhile, it's like they're doing the kindest thing in the world by, like, showing up for me and celebrating me. And that just makes me like, Oh my God. They all secretly hate me. And so, you know, like, whenever you're at a time in your life where people are constantly saying, like, congratulations to you, you're like, oh, and then there's, there's a side chat, like outside, because they're like, oh my god, she is being obnoxious again. She's being a whatever. And this is completely in my head.

Rachelle

Rebecca, I think we might share some of the same head. I understand exactly where you're coming from in that I find it very hard to be happy, which is something I've talked about with my therapist.

Rebecca

Yep, yep, yep.

Rachelle

But the hardest thing in the world, quite frankly, is to actually just embody being happy and people around you being happy, because my little rat brain is just like, something's going wrong, and if the actual events aren't going wrong, then something's going wrong with the people involved, and it's that they hate me because I have expressed a need and an emotion.

Rebecca

Yes, yeah, yeah, yep. And sometimes even when I haven't, like, I haven't expressed anything, but I'm like, but that I should have, or like, I should have done a different thing. What would that other person have done? And this is also, I was reading *How Should A Person Be* which is an entire novel of this woman just thinking that the whole time, it's like, I should be more like her. No, I should be more like him. No, I should be more like her. And I'm just like, yeah, I relate.

Rachelle

Yeah, wow. I get it. This feels like therapy.

Rebecca

I know, I have a tendency to do that.

Rachelle

You sound like a perfect gossip.

Rebecca

When it can never get back to me, and when it doesn't involve me, and when it's like mostly like fun. Yes, love, love, love, love.

Rachelle

I mean, speaking of being a perfect gossip, a little birdie told me that you have some gossip for me.

Rebecca

Okay, so I asked one of my group chats. I was like, yeah, like, I am going on Normal Gossip. What should I say? I am going to steal one of my friend's bathroom stories. So my friend we'll call her...we'll call her Claire. She was known in college for, like, only ever taking a shit at her own house, like she would never, ever take a shit anywhere else. And so she's about to graduate, and she goes to this, like, graduation party, and it's like, at this, like, crappy college

house, and she's like, okay, like, I'm about to graduate, like, I need to be an adult and actually, like, take a shit somewhere that isn't my personal toilet.

So she goes into this bathroom, and you can probably guess where this is going, shitty pipes. It does not flush. And she's freaking out. There's someone banging on the door outside. And she's like, Oh my god, freaking out, freaking out. She like, does the thing because, like, like, any, like, person who's shy about that, like, that's this is their worst fear, and they will, like, study how to what to do when this happens. But nothing was working. And she leaves, and she's like, someone's banging on the door, and she leaves, and she's like, No, no, don't go in there. Like, someone, I was trying to fix it, but someone, like, took a shit in there. And they were like, ew, who would do that? And then, like, they got the host over, and they're like, oh my god, that's so crazy that someone would do that just like, leave it there. She's like, Yeah, I know. And then I was just like, well, I know it wasn't you, because you never take a shit out of your house! And so she was like, she was like, oh my god, I just got away with this. Like, and to this day, her friends have no idea that it was her. And I think that if she ever, like, gives a toast for someone's like, birthday or wedding or something, she should be like, and by the way, that shit was mine.

Rachelle

That is incredible, both that she got away with it, that she tried something new and that this probably created gossip for that community for a while.

Rebecca

Oh totally.

Rachelle

Where it was like who clogged the toilet at this party?

Rebecca

And I really hope that one of them is listening right now, because that would just be really fun.

Rachelle

We know who it was. Well, that was some phenomenal gossip, and now I have some for you. Are you ready?

Rebecca

Oh, my God, I'm so ready.

(music/ad break)

Rachelle

Today, our friend of a friend is named Ash, and there are three important things to know about Ash. The first is that he has just finished his junior year studying fine arts with a specialization in

ceramics. The second, which is related to the first, is that he's having a hard time finding a summer job. The third, and the most important fact about Ash is that Ash is so hyper aware that this is his last summer, that this is the summer before his senior year of college, before he has to be an adult, before he has to worry about taxes. He's like, This is it. Do you remember this summer?

Rebecca

Yeah, we had a bed bug, and so like, both of, like, me and my roommate had to, like, move in with, like the dudes we were seeing at the time. It was horrible. One bed bug ruined my life for like, several months. Never get bed bugs.

Rachelle

Oh my god that is my worst fear.

Rebecca

Yeah, it was bad. This was, like, back when the bed bugs were, like, the number one issue facing New York City. Now there's others [laughs].

Rachelle

Ugh simpler time?

Rebecca

Yeah, yeah.

Rachelle

Well, Ash is determined to have a capital "A" adventure that hopefully does not include bed bugs. He has spent every summer since he was 15 working at the Dairy Queen in his hometown, which is fun in its own way, but it doesn't give like capital "A" adventure. Which is how Ash finds himself applying to a bunch of overnight summer camp counselor jobs. Our friend or friend told us, quote, it felt like that was the best way for me to get paid like a grown up while being able to live out the feral child summer of my dreams.

Rebecca

Mm hmm. Love that choice.

Rachelle

Okay, what do you think of our friend of a friend's logic here?

Rebecca

I think that's so fun. I've always like wanted to do that, having never gone to like, a sleep away camp or a summer camp like that, I'm like, oh my god, *Parent Trap*. Like, I want that, so I totally get this.

Rachelle

Same, I love *Parent Trap*.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

So Ash applies to at least a dozen camps, but he has no childcare experience, which means he isn't a super qualified candidate. The one camp Ash hears back from is called Camp Gonedoor. And Camp Gonedoor is an eight week long summer LARPing camp for kids from age 10 to 16.

Rebecca

Yeah, for *Lord of the Rings*, I assume.

Rachelle

It's a fantasy camp, but for our listeners who might be unfamiliar: could you tell me what LARPing is?

Rebecca

Oh, I thought you're gonna say, tell us what Gondor is. LARPing is live-action role-playing. It's like when you, you know, are kind of doing improv, but it's a game, sort of like DnD but you're wearing costumes and you're like running around and stuff, and like sword fighting

Rachelle

Exactly, and as you correctly guessed, and is perhaps obvious from the name, which, for legal reasons, is spelled G-O-N-E-D-O-O-R.

Rebecca

Oh, okay. Jesus.

Rachelle

We are not getting sued by Tolkien here. But camp Gonedoor isn't just a LARPing camp, it is specifically a fantasy LARPing camp. So there are courses on archery and sword play. There are afternoons spent learning elvish and how to identify plants with medicinal qualities.

Rebecca

Oh my God, I'm so jealous. I'm jealous of Ash. I want to do this so bad.

Rachelle

This is basically a camp for parents trying to get their video game addicted kids outdoors and doing a physical activity.

Rebecca

Yeah, it's like, how to not raise incels, but still meeting them where they're at.

Rachelle

Exactly. Ash doesn't have any history with fantasy LARPing. His specific form of nerdery comes in the form of Greek mythology, but he feels like there is enough adjacency—you know, like swords, gods, gay type shit—for Ash to get read in fairly quickly. Whoever was reading the applications that summer was like, Yeah, close enough.

Rebecca

Yeah. This is who you want at your fantasy LARPing camp. You want Ash, the Greek mythology guy.

Rachelle

And Ash is offered a position as an assistant prop master for Camp Gonedoor. Do you think LARPing as a camp counselor at LARPing camp is a good idea?

Rebecca

I mean, yeah, that's kind of how you have to approach it. It's like, you're kind of doing immersive performance art. Like, I love that choice.

Rachelle

It's avant-garde, actually.

Rebecca

Yeah. What he's giving like these kids should be paying for it—they are paying for it, I guess.

Rachelle

He's included in the price.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

So some important things to know about Camp Gonedoor. It was founded 50 years ago by a couple that we will be referring to as the King and Queen. And the King and Queen poured their hearts and souls into Camp Gonedoor. They're in their 70s now and slowing down. And a few years back, they turned the day to day operations of Camp Gonedoor over to their son, the Prince.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

The Prince does not give a single fuck about his parents' freaky little role playing hobby.

Rebecca

Oh no.

Rachelle

The Prince also got his MBA from Wharton.

Rebecca

Oh no. He's gonna like private equity the shit out of this camp. Oh, my God, these poor little incels babies.

Rachelle

Yeah, the Prince unironically identifies with Kendall from *Succession*.

Rebecca

Okay, okay.

Rachelle

And Camp Gonedoor makes pretty good money, so he's fine running it.

Rebecca

I would watch an HBO Sunday night show about *Succession* of Camp Gonedoor. I'm just saying.

Rachelle

Same. Someone call me. So this is the situation our friend of a friend is entering, *Succession* at Camp Gonedoor. Do you have any concerns for him?

Rebecca

I have a lot of concerns because I feel like these kids, and including Ash, are too gentle for Gonedoor Kendall.

Rachelle

So to be fair to Ash, he didn't know about the royal family of Gonedoor until he arrived on the campgrounds in early June. He has just finished a self-administered crash course in fantasy novels, like he has reread *Fellowship of the Ring* for the first time since he was 10. He's purchased a set of dice, and he has brushed up on his papier mache skills. So when Ash arrives at the beautiful lakeside campgrounds of Camp Gonedoor, he feels as prepared as he possibly can be.

He's studied and he is ready for his capital "A" adventure, which is great, because almost immediately after arriving at Gonedoor, Ash is introduced to Jeremiah. Jeremiah is 23. He is a counselor for the 13 year old cabin. This is his fourth year as a counselor at Camp Gonedoor so he's extremely knowledgeable, but also super chill about it. Ash told us that Jeremiah was tall and lanky in that adorable, gangly way, and that as soon as Ash saw Jeremiah "galumphing

across the field with his long legs like Shaggy from Scooby Doo I was a goner” and that's a direct quote.

Rebecca

Oh, my God, I ship this so hard, but I know it's not gonna end the way I hope it does.

Rachelle

Did you have any cartoon crushes?

Rebecca

Mufasa and the hot cats in *The Aristocats*.

Rachelle

The tomcat? Yes.

Rebecca

Yeah he was so hot.

Rachelle

He was. These are all phenomenal choices. So Jeremiah is assigned to give Ash a tour. And Jeremiah is not just a pretty face. He is also a phenomenal tour guide. What kind of stuff do you think a camp like this would have?

Rebecca

Oh, my God, this is like my dream camp when I was that age. So I hope that it has, like a little, like a Shire, like a little area where they're, like, it's all you do is, like, run around and, like, dance, and they, obviously, they're kids, so that they can't drink. But like, probably have, like, that's probably where, like, the food is.

Rachelle

Yeah.

Rebecca

And like, cool, like forest stuff, like tree houses and cool rocks that you can pretend are castles. Rivers and like, old statues that look like they were there from like, a previous age, like crumbling around you, from, like, the Numenorians.

Rachelle

I'm getting the vibe that you would be a great counselor at Camp Gonedoor.

Rebecca

Yeah, you're giving me great ideas for the summer.

Rachelle

Jeremiah is giving this tour guide, and he's like, here's the cabin. There is the lake. That's the mess hall, normal camp stuff. Then he's like, this is the computer lab. The kids are only allowed in there for an hour a week.

Rebecca

An hour a week?! Oh, my God, these kids are gonna die.

Rachelle

Jeremiah is like, That field is for practicing archery. That field is for sword play. He shows Ash where the cape closet is and where they store the stockpile of SPF 75 for their very pale campers. Jeremiah's like, here's where the EpiPens are. We have a lot of kids with allergies here. If the younger kids want ponies, here's where the broomsticks are at.

Rebecca

Oh, that's so gentle.

Rachelle

Jeremiah also clues Ash in on all like the rules and lore of Camp Gonedoor. Jeremiah's like the King and Queen were a little overconfident in their ability to repair things, so stuff's a little janky. And he's like, there's something else you should know.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

The showers can suddenly go ice cold without warning.

Rebecca

Oh no.

Rachelle

The beds creak more than you would really like them to. Sometimes they even creak when no one's near them. Ash is like, what? And Jeremiah kind of just rolls his eyes and it's like, yeah, honestly, it's a really good idea for you to keep an eye out for stuff like that. We have a lot of overactive imaginations around here.

Rebecca

Oh, my God, is he—wait? Was he like, LARPing in this moment? Was he like, there's, it's kind of haunted, but I don't know, like, almost like, trying to do improv a little bit? I hope so.

Rachelle

Not at this moment.

Rebecca

Okay, okay.

Rachelle

Because he continues to explain that, like a lot of camps, Camp Gonedoor has just a bunch of camp superstitions. There's a door in the mess hall that no one uses because it's bad luck, and Jeremiah is like, I'm pretty sure the door was just broken and they didn't feel like repairing it. But also, I don't believe in any of that shit. But also, don't use the door. It's not worth the trouble.

Rebecca

Okay.

Rachelle

Would you ask for any more information about these strange happenings?

Rebecca

Um, I would want to know, like, what lore these people have? Like, the bed creaking by themselves. That's what, that's what interests me. Like, what are the King and Queen thinking about that, because they seem like real freaks, like I need to know, like, I need to know everything about these people. And yeah, I bet there's some good lore there.

Rachelle

Yeah, Ash is, unfortunately, too caught up in how cute Jeremiah is to really be paying much attention to anything specific he's saying. What Ash does hear are the rules that Jeremiah said that Prince Wharton instituted for summer staff when he took over. The rules are as follows, no drinking booze on campgrounds, no personalization of the uniforms. And most importantly, staff members are absolutely not allowed to date each other.

Rebecca

Ughhh. Okay, this has all the makings for a forbidden romance. And it sounds like a movie. Like, I love this.

Rachelle

What do you think of these rules?

Rebecca

I mean, I think the no personalization thing is the thing that is the weirdest. Because, like, if this is a camp where people can be little freaks, like, don't you want your counselors to also be little freaks like that doesn't make sense to me. The no booze thing I get, it's like, there's kids, then the no dating I get it on a level where it's like, you know, you could have a situation where a kid walks in on two people fucking, which is not great.

Rachelle

Not great. No.

Rebecca

In theory, like, I do get it, but like, once you tell people, like you're not allowed to date that, then you're just gonna develop crushes on everyone that you work with, I'm sorry. Like, just don't even have the rule.

Rachelle

You might as well encourage them to date each other, because then they won't want to. So Ash isn't a fan of any of these rules, but especially that last one, because Jeremiah only gets cuter as the days go on.

Rebecca

Awww, okay.

Rachelle

Whenever any of the younger campers have nightmares, Jeremiah is the first counselor they go to.

Rebecca

Oh my God, that's so sweet.

Rachelle

Jeremiah's hair is growing floppier by the day.

Rebecca

Ah! Oh my God.

Rachelle

Ash is in so, so deep.

Rebecca

Aww.

Rachelle

There's just one problem with this crush, two problems, if you count Prince Wharton's rule about staff not dating each other. But for that to even be a problem, Ash needs to know whether or not Jeremiah is even queer, which brings us to a third problem: this story takes place in 2007.

Rebecca

Oh my God, okay.

Rachelle

Ash had only recently come out himself and has no idea how to ask someone if they are also queer.

Rebecca

Aw, okay.

Rachelle

So it's 2007. You're Ash. You're pretty sure a cute boy might be interested in you, but you need to be absolutely certain before you make a move.

Rebecca

Yeah, okay.

Rachelle

How would you go about being absolutely certain?

Rebecca

Oh, man. So here's the problem, is that there's no alcohol in this camp. Because one that could be solved real night one, real quick, have like, three drinks, and then being like, so you're gay, right?

Rachelle

Ash is like, 65% sure that Jeremiah is flirting with him. Jeremiah is always the first to volunteer to help Ash carry the heavy wooden shields back to the storage shed at the end of the day. The other day, they were practicing sword play, and when Jeremiah corrected Ash's form, he was just like, a little bit touchier than he needed to be, like, think that pottery scene from *Ghost*, but with a wooden sword.

Rebecca

Oh my God. Oh my God! Okay, love.

Rachelle

Do you think Jeremiah is flirting? Is it possible that this might be in Ash's head?

Rebecca

No, I think he's flirting. Also it seems like, in my head, Jeremiah is the kind of guy that like, flirts with everybody. Like flirts with anyone, no matter what gender they are, how old they are, like, just kind of a flirty, like sweet, kind of golden retriever-esque person.

Rachelle

Yeah.

Rebecca

So I think that makes it actually a little more difficult to figure out whether that's real flirting or, like, the kind of golden retriever flirting that guys like that do with everybody.

Rachelle

That's so real. Luckily, Ash has an incredible opportunity to gather some more evidence.

Rebecca

Okay.

Rachelle

So one week Jeremiah's co counselor is out sick with the stomach bug during their campers assigned one hour a week in the computer lab. So when Jeremiah asked if anyone would be interested in helping him keep track of his campers, Ash jumps up just a little bit too fast. The only reason he hesitates at all before volunteering is because of Cody. Have you ever met, like, a really precocious child?

Rebecca

Yeah, and they've never been named Cody. But continue. Cody is like the class clown.

Rachelle

That's real. How would you describe the vibe of like a super precocious child?

Rebecca

Dakota Fanning in like every movie before she was like 12, like a mini adult who's like, really uptight and loves to be right, and likes to win and likes to be the center of attention, but not in a way that, like they want people to think they're the center of attention.

Rachelle

Yeah, so Cody is one of Jeremiah's campers, and before there was the Master of Spiders in Game of Thrones, there was Cody. Cody is 12, but he is way older than his years. He is an only child, so he has spent a little bit too much time with adults.

Rebecca

Yep, yep, yep, yep.

Rachelle

He's been going to Camp Gonedoor since he was nine years old. He was such a talented DnD player that he was allowed to start a year earlier than was technically allowed.

Rebecca

I love this kid. I hope that I, if I ever have kids, that I have a weird DnD prodigy.

Rachelle

I will say his parents also made a sizable donation to Camp Gonedoor that year.

Rebecca

Okay.

Rachelle

All of this could have made Cody obnoxious, but he's more of a chaotic good on the alignment chart. The counselors have, like, a love hate relationship with him. Mostly love because he's, like, pretty funny, and he's so charismatic that if he's on their side, then he makes it easier to kind of like, corral the other campers. Sometimes hate because it is very clear that Cody loves knowing more about what's going on at camp than the counselors. He loves knowing all the gossip. And Cody also has a tendency to just go a little too far sometimes.

Rebecca

Oh, my God.

Rachelle

What kind of obsession do you think a child like this would have?

Rebecca

The child like that wants to be an adult and like, wants to, like, do whatever the adults are doing. Know about, like, dating and crushes, I'm sure. If you're 12, you already care about that, but especially if it's like, if you're obsessed with adults, you want to know, like, who's fucking and also, like, you know, wanting to, like, tell the other campers what to do and finding ways to get that.

Rachelle

Yeah.

Rebecca

I'm rooting for Cody.

Rachelle

Cody's current obsession is like paranormal shit. Okay, he has started spending his designated hour in the computer lab researching the history of the campgrounds, looking for stories of campers who have gone missing.

Rebecca

This is a journalist, and I hope, wherever he is, he's like an investigative reporter.

Rachelle

He's so deep into this that he has brought the rest of his cabin into this obsession. So that's what they spend their hour at the computer lab doing. Do you think it's wise to let children with overactive imaginations look for dead children?

Rebecca

Normally, no, but for Cody, yeah. Cody is like, doing work. Like Cody is like, contributing to the science of paranormal studies.

Rachelle

Ash is just happy that they are all quietly occupied, because this gives him time to chat up Jeremiah. What kind of questions would you be asking if you're trying to figure out if someone liked you?

Rebecca

I mean, first of all, I would want it like, I would want to know their dating history. I think I'm like, are you dating anybody? Like, is that weird to ask? I wouldn't feel weird about asking that and then kind of slowly move into, like, What's your type and who you're into. Yeah. Like, just go for it.

Rachelle

Ash asks all of these and more. He's asking about celebrity crushes.

Rebecca

That's a good one.

Rachelle

He thinks he might be getting somewhere, because Jeremiah has just admitted to being more of a Legolas guy than an Aragorn guy, which I feel like is a clear sign, if you know.

Rebecca

That means you're gay, yeah, for sure.

Rachelle

But just as Ash feels like he's getting somewhere, Cody finds a Ouija board.

Rebecca

Oh my God, okay

Rachelle

Do you let these children play with the Ouija board?

Rebecca

Hell yeah. Let Cody cook. Well, I was playing with a Ouija board when I was, like, 14. I don't know.

Rachelle

I just don't fuck with ghosts on such a deep level that I'm just like, I will not be involved in the horror movie, because you would not have even gotten me into the house in the woods.

Rebecca

Yeah. Got it. I get that, yeah.

Rachelle

Jeremiah just sort of rolls his eyes because he's chill. He's like, Yeah, sure, whatever. And Ash is ready to do whatever Jeremiah is doing, obviously. So they watch as at first the campers mostly use the Ouija board to spell out butts and fart.

Rebecca

See that's beautiful.

Rachelle

But eventually Cody is like, knock it off. We have to take this seriously. Cody asked Jeremiah to lower the lights.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

And Jeremiah's like, oh my god, yeah, sure. And he turns down the lights. When he rejoins Ash, he stands close enough that their arms are brushing

Rebecca

Oh my God!

Rachelle

And he speaks low enough that Ash has to lean in even closer to hear him.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

And Jeremiah is like, are you afraid of ghosts? And Ash was raised Catholic, so he's like a little bit. And then Jeremiah smiles and is like, Don't worry, I'll protect you.

Rebecca

Oh my God! Okay. Also shout out to Cody for, like, wingmanning this whole thing,

Rachelle

Right?

Rebecca

That's an ally.

Rachelle

Ash almost passes away.

Rebecca

Awww.

Rachelle

He's like, there's gonna be a ghost on this property. It's me. I'm dead right now.

Rebecca

That's so cute.

Rachelle

He's saved from having to respond by Cody calling for silence in the room. And then Cody says, If anyone is here, please tell us your name. It's quiet for a moment. And the little triangle thingy, which I've learned is called a planchette. It starts moving before traveling to the letter "J."

Rebecca

Okay.

Rachelle

And then it drifts to the letter "I" before finally landing on "M."

Rebecca

Jim, okay.

Rachelle

And it's quiet for a second. And then Cody whispers, Jim? There's a ghost here, and his name is Jim. And then, as if confirming that, the little planchette moves to yes.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

There's silence for a moment, and then one of the campers starts to cry.

Rebecca

Aw, okay.

Rachelle

And that's when Jeremiah is like, Okay, I think it's time to go to bed. The crying camper is like, but what about the ghost? And Jeremiah's like, there is no ghost, and then he's like ghosts only haunt places where they've died and no one's died here, right?

(music/ad break)

Rachelle

Luckily, this is not Ash or Jeremiah's immediate problem, because they have the next day off.

Rebecca

Okay, okay, great.

Rachelle

Every week the staff gets a randomly assigned day off, and this is the first time since camp started four weeks ago that Ash and Jeremiah are assigned to the same day. So they squish six people into a sedan and they head off to go camping for a night. They have cases of PBR. They have two handles of Fireball.

Rebecca

Oh my god, 2007. This is beautiful.

Rachelle

Someone brings out a handful of very badly rolled joints. This is their day off without children. This is the only time they're allowed to drink. And these 20-somethings are making it count.

Rebecca

Yes, it's so beautiful.

Rachelle

They're taking shots on the hour every hour. When's the last time you had Fireball?

Rebecca

Probably years, I think that's one of those drinks you can, like, get at the grocery store, right? Because it's, like, barely alcohol.

Rebecca

It's definitely a lot of sugar.

Rebecca

Yes, yeah, yeah.

Rachelle

I have a secret fondness for fireball, because I love a sweet little drink. I'm just like—

Rebecca

I support you.

Rachelle

—shots should be more fun, and what's more fun than fireball?

Rebecca

Yeah, I do love a shooter, like, when it's like they put a little juice in it or something.

Rachelle

Exactly, exactly. So by Ash's third shot of fireball, he has finally worked up enough courage to join Jeremiah on his blanket. The conversation turns to that summer's staff DnD campaign, and this is Ash's first real campaign of this magnitude with some very skilled players. So he's a little bit intimidated, and he doesn't really feel like he's done that well so far. He's having a little trouble understanding his character sheet still. But the thing is, being kind of bad at something can work to your advantage when you're flirting.

Rebecca

100%. And Jeremiah is the type to help.

Rachelle

Jeremiah is patiently explaining the difference between history and investigation.

Rebecca

Okay, love.

Rachelle

The sun is setting and they're sitting by the fire. Jeremiah pulls out a little red velvet bag from his book bag, and inside is his favorite set of dice. They're gold plated, and they're like glinting in the light of the fire. Jeremiah's hands are warm, and he hands Ash a 20 sided die. And when Ash looks up, Jeremiah is staring deeply into his eyes.

So Ash squeezes Jeremiah's die for luck, and Ash goes in for a kiss.

Rebecca

[gasps]

Rachelle

And he's met halfway by Jeremiah, who's also going in for a kiss!

Rebecca

Oh, my God, that's so sweet.

Rachelle

Ash is like floating on a cloud.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

Later that night, Jeremiah picks up his sleeping bag and deliberately brings it over next to Ash's and like squashes himself down next to him, so they're next to each other while they go to sleep, they fall asleep holding hands.

Rebecca

Oh my God! Jesus Christ. Yeah, that's beautiful.

Rachelle

The next morning, Ash and Jeremiah are trying to be as discreet as possible. They're both in their early 20s, though, so I really doubt it's discreet at all.

Rebecca

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rachelle

But no one says anything, and Ash is honestly pretty sure he saw another set of counselors sneaking a kiss before they head back to camp.

Rebecca

Yeah, they're fine.

Rachelle

Ash was like, his secret's pretty safe. Do you agree with him?

Rebecca

If I were there, I would have clocked it, but that's cause I'm nosy, so it depends on the drunkenness and the snoopiness of the other counselors I guess.

Rachelle

The first moment Ash starts to get just like a little bit worried, is when they get back to the campgrounds, and it's because the vibes are decidedly off.

Rebecca

Uh oh.

Rachelle

It's kind of eerily quiet for a camp full of children, even nerdy children. The kids they do see are acting pretty fucking weird, which is saying a lot for this camp.

Rebecca

These are already weird children acting wicked weird. Okay.

Rachelle

Some of them are scurrying between buildings like they're being hunted.

Rebecca

Oh my God. Okay. Are they just LARPing?

Rachelle

Well, a lot of them seem to be staring at Ash and Jeremiah.

Rebecca

Okay?

Rachelle

And just then, Prince Wharton comes out of the administration building, and he makes a beeline for Ash and Jeremiah

Rebecca

Uh oh.

Rachelle

How would you be feeling?

Rebecca

That's homophobia, so I would be feeling righteous anger and concern.

Rachelle

Prince Wharton is like, did you two dummies tell the kids that someone died here?

Rebecca

Oh, uh oh.

Rachelle

Apparently, in the 24 hours they had been gone, rumors of Jim the ghost had spread across the camp like wildfire.

Rebecca

Jim the ghost! That's so good.

Rachelle

None of this had been helped by Cody, who had snuck back into the computer lab after the Ouija board session, and come out with evidence of a child named James Hawkins disappearing from the camp grounds.

Rebecca

Oh my God, Cody!

Rachelle

At first Ash is like, Oh, thank God, that's it. I thought I was about to be fired for canoodling.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

And then to Prince Wharton, Ash is like, Wouldn't your family know if someone had gone missing from the campgrounds? And then Ash is like, Wait, did someone go missing from the campgrounds? And Prince Wharton is like, I don't know. The kid was at the camp that existed before my parents bought this place. So they don't know anything about it.

Rebecca

Oh my God!

Rachelle

And then he's like, You two made this problem. You have to fix it. None of the kids slept last night, and a few want to call their parents to pick them up early. And it doesn't exactly look like the Prince slept either. But Ash is like, this is not the time for me to mention that.

Rebecca

Oh my god.

Rachelle

How would you handle the situation?

Rebecca

Well, that's so cute. Okay, I think there's a really cute way to do it, which is like, you bring everyone to like, a campfire or something, and you're like, we're gonna say this special song and that drives the ghost away or something. And then you're like, you have a stern chat with Cody, being like, I know you don't believe in this shit, but you're gonna go along with it, because all the other campers are really scared and it's kind of your fault. You treat Cody like the adult that he is, and you get him on your side.

Rachelle

Like the tax paying adult that he is.

Rebecca

The tax paying, job having, wrinkle having kid that this Cody is. Yeah.

Rachelle

This is a good plan. Jeremiah goes to track down Cody so he can see this ghost evidence before he really starts to figure anything out. And Ash heads to the prop house to help put together something that might tire the kids out so they'll sleep that night.

Rebecca

That's smart.

Rachelle

He manages to put together an impromptu obstacle course. So by the time Jeremiah comes and finds him, Ash is ,like, sweaty and itchy from being covered in sawdust and grass. He forgets all of that, though, as soon as Jeremiah says hi to him.

Rebecca

Awww.

Rachelle

It's only been, like, four hours since they had last seen each other, but Ash says it felt like an eternity.

Rebecca

Aw, Ash. Ash is so gentle. It's so wholesome.

Rachelle

Jeremiah's like, Okay, we have a problem.

Rebecca

Uh oh.

Rachelle

He's like, low key, the evidence Cody has is kind of convincing.

Rebecca

Of course it is. This man did his job.

Rachelle

Jeremiah's like Cody showed me a website he found about the old camp that mentions this kid, James Hawkins, going missing in 1934.

Rebecca

Also, James Hawkins is a perfect, like, missing kid name in the 1930s like, old James Hawkins, down by the river.

Rachelle

Jimmy Hawkins. Ash is like, I'm sorry, what? And there's just, like, a little bit of fear in his voice. Jeremiah's like, Wait, do you actually believe in ghosts? And Ash is like, I don't know, okay!

Rebecca

I haven't seen enough evidence either way.

Rachelle

Jeremiah kind of smirks, and he's like, remember, I told you I'd protect you.

Rebecca

Oh my God.

Rachelle

And then he holds hands with Ash. Ash is ready to vomit at how cute this is.

Rachelle

When they're interrupted by a [cough noise] behind them.

Rebecca

Uh oh.

Rachelle

We're almost at the end of the story. How are you feeling?

Rebecca

I just want things to work out, and I fear it will not for anyone. Mainly Cody.

Rachelle

Ash and Jeremiah turn to see none other than Cody standing there with a shit eating grin on his face.

Rebecca

Oh! Oh my God, he has blackmail evidence.

Rachelle

Ash feels like he's been electrocuted and not in like a cute, romantic way.

Rebecca

Oh.

Rachelle

His heart is pounding. He doesn't even know what to say, and Cody is the first one to speak. Cody's like, don't worry. And then Cody winks. And then he's like, I won't tell anyone.

And then, as told us, Cody swans out of the room.

Rebecca

He's like, bitch, caught your ass.

Rachelle

Do you believe this child?

Rebecca

Oh, oh, God. I mean, no, I don't believe him. As much as I want to root for him. I don't believe little Cody. He's still 12, even though he's a grown man.

Rachelle

Jeremiah is immediately like, Don't worry, it's going to be okay but he says it in that tone where you're clearly trying to convince yourself.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

Ash is like, mm hmm, and then he's like, let's not get caught again.

Rebecca

Yeah, yeah.

Rachelle

So Ash spends the next few hours before dinner in a state of just, like, rising panic.

Rachelle

The vibes have only gotten worse. The kids are freaking out about Jim the ghost. The counselors are freaking out because the kids are freaking out, and Prince Wharton has spent the afternoon on the phone with exorcists, which has done absolutely nothing to calm anyone down.

Rebecca

That's so funny that he, like, he was like, we need to hire a professional.

Rachelle

He's like, Ghostbusters!

Rebecca

Yeah, yeah. He literally is like, oh, like, what's the number again?

Rachelle

Ash sits down to eat in the mess hall, just as Prince Wharton enters, and he motions for everyone to quiet down. And then Prince Wharton is like, I've received a lot of concerned calls from parents. They're asking me to bring in a trauma therapist.

Rebecca

Oh my God.

Rachelle

Prince Wharton is like, if nights like last night continued where half the camp doesn't sleep, computer time will be revoked for everyone.

Rebecca

Uh oh.

Rachelle

The entire mess hall is just full of horrified gasps.

Rebecca

[laughs]

Rachelle

And then finally, the prince is like, if anyone here has any information about anything, please share it immediately.

Rebecca

Oh no, Cody, don't. Don't do it.

Rachelle

It's quiet for a second, and then Cody stands and is like, I have something to share.

Rebecca

Oh, my God. This little shit. I am no longer on team Cody.

Rachelle

What do you think Cody has to share?

Rebecca

Well, there's two pieces of things he could say to make it way worse than it already is. One is that two of the counselors want to fuck, and the other, the other one is that he knows there's, there's a dead ghost, there's a child dead ghost.

Rachelle

Yeah, Ash immediately starts to panic. He's looking around for Jeremiah, whose eyes are, like, as big as saucers. Cody's like, I know something no one else here knows. And then Cody looks at Jeremiah.

Rebecca

Oh no.

Rachelle

Ash's heart is in his ass.

Rebecca

Yeah.

Rachelle

And then Cody's like, I planted the Ouija board and I lied to Jeremiah. The website I showed him is fake. I made it. There's no ghost. Everyone can stop freaking out.

Rebecca

Oh! Cody, what an angel. And okay, did he actually make it up? Or did he just say that so that like people would calm down.

Rachelle

Well, apparently, Cody had decided to take his dungeon master game to a whole new level.

Rebecca

Oh my God, he's doing LARPing!

Rachelle

He had been planting clues since the previous summer, including the Ouija board. He had spent his free time during the school year making graphic design his passion, and made the very convincing website that mentioned James Hawkins.

Rebecca

Oh my God!

Rachelle

You can maybe see why Cody's parents had wanted him to get outside for the summer.

Rebecca

No, keep him in there! Like he should do this for a living, like send him to all the camps and have him do this, and then the rest of the time he's at work, he's at work on his computer.

Rachelle

You can also maybe see why Camp Gonedoor received a very large donation from Cody's parents a few weeks after what everyone came to refer to as The Cody Incident.

Rebecca

Oh, my God, that's so good. After they'd already given a generous donation to let him in the first time. Oh, that's so good. Oh, my God. I think Cody might be, like, our age. Actually I don't know how old you are, but like, if he was 12 in 2007 like, he's only like, what? Like, a year, a couple years younger than us.

Rachelle

I know. What is he doing right now?

Rebecca

I really need to know what he's doing.

Rachelle

I mean, my fear is that he's working at like DOGE or something, but I'm not going to put that on him.

Rebecca

He's not giving Republican energy. I will say. Because he didn't rat out the gays.

Rachelle

You're right.

Rebecca

We can hope.

Rachelle

Well, that's the end of our story. Do you think Cody did anything wrong?

Rebecca

No, Cody is perfect, and I want to adopt him as my friend. Do you think Cody did anything wrong?

Rachelle

You know...

Rebecca

That's, it's what the camp is for. It's at LARP camp!

Rachelle

You're right. I think that the rules should have been more explicit about how far to take LARPing.

Rebecca

Well, he was yes anding. He was using the principles of improv to A to C it.

Rachelle

There was nothing in the contract that said he couldn't do this.

Rebecca

Exactly.

Rachelle

How would he have known?

Rebecca

How would he have known? Talk about an active imagination like this is, this is genius, and we should be encouraging more of this. The follow through! God, what really, really impressive stuff. And again, I want to meet his parents. I want to meet him now. We, like, I need you to ask this person, like, where's Cody? Like, where is he?

Rachelle

I'll do that, but first I have some post scripts for you. Do you want to hear them?

Rebecca

Oh my god, I would love to.

Rachelle

So Cody was true to his word and never said anything about the hand holding he witnessed. Ash and Jeremiah had a long distance relationship for a year, while Ash finished his senior year of college and eventually got married in a gorgeous, themed wedding.

Rebecca

What?! They're married? Oh my god, this is so cute.

Rachelle

They're about to celebrate their 18th anniversary.

Rebecca

Oh my god. How old are they now? Like, in their 40s? Probably like,

Rachelle

Yes, I can't do math. I can't do math on the spot. That sounds right, though. Yeah. If they were 20ish in 2007.

Rebecca

Yeah, yeah. Oh, my God, that is so sweet.

Rachelle

Cody, after signing a contract promising to never run another Stanford Prison Experiment on his fellow campers, came back summer after summer and eventually became a counselor.

Rebecca

Oh my God, he's perfect.

Rachelle

And Camp Gonedoor got an infusion of new life and money after the Game of Thrones boom in the late aughts. The water in the showers is hot now!

Rebecca

Oh my god, I'm so happy.

Rachelle

That's the end of our story, Rebecca!

Rebecca

Oh my god, that was such a good story. You're such a good storyteller. And I like that that was, like, a fun one.

Rachelle

Yeah, I asked for gossip that was secretly a romance novel, and our listeners definitely delivered on this one.

Rebecca

So sweet. Like no like, it felt so cinematic. And I have like characters in my mind for Ash—who has blue hair, I'm sorry, like

Rachelle

Oh yes.

Rebecca

There's a video game that I play where there's an Ash with blue hair, and that's why. And Cody is like your little sniveling prince who's secretly got a heart of gold.

Rachelle

Exactly, we love Cody.

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