

Season 5 Episode 9: Getting Frisky at the Black Rose with Erika Casupanan

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kelsey: Hello, and welcome to Normal Gossip. I'm Kelsey McKinney. 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, Erika Casupanan. Erika, welcome.

erika: Thank you. I am so excited to be here today. I love this podcast.

kelsey: Oh my God, I am a huge fan, so I'm thrilled to have you here. Um, I will tell the people who you are. Erica is the winner of Survivor 41 and the first Canadian winner ever. She's also a keynote speaker, media personality, and the host of the Happy to See Me podcast, where she has inspirational chats with people who have been overlooked and underestimated. She recently returned to reality TV on the Traitors Canada. Erika, welcome.

erika: Thank you so much! Ahh!

kelsey: I want to talk specifically about your season of Survivor just because I think it will give people a little insight into how gossip on the game may or may not function. In your season, right before the official merge, you got sent in what seems like a very traumatic experience—

erika: Yes.

kelsey: —to Exile Island, um, and you were given an important choice. Can you explain the choice? And then also how gossip impacted your decision?

erika: Yes, okay, this choice is just insane. It was the first time they did this on Survivor where I got sent, you know, very humbly sent to live on an island by myself. And you're right, it was a traumatic, but life changing and character building experience. And everyone else who was back at the main camp, there were half of the people who won the competition and they were safe and they were the ones who sent me there. And then there was the other half of the people who did not win the competition and then they were not safe. And then I had the opportunity to symbolically break this hourglass with a hammer and go back in time and change the result of the competition so the people who were safe were now vulnerable and vice versa. But yes, I made the decision to change the results but there was something specifically, that, um, I remember from that experience where the people who won that competition said that they decided how they were going to make the decision based on a game of rock, paper, scissors.

Kelsey: Bullshit!

Erika: And I'm just like, I was standing right there, I never saw the fist go up and down, okay? I never saw any symbol, not a rock, paper, or a scissor, be revealed. And I'm also thinking, this... is a high stakes televised game. No one is making a decision like this based on rock, paper, scissors. So for some reason, it's like their decision to justify their decision to just soften it by saying it was like based on a game versus based on a game, like a game decision. I'm like, no, no, no, this is you trying to like soften—

Kelsey: A blow.

Erika: A blow for me. And I'm just like, then I know that that's not, that's not true. I'm always receiving gossip and always information, so I know that that's not true. So it like, signals to me, I'm like, okay, I can't ride with these people, I have to choose myself first, choose my safety first, and then... Sorry, you guys are unsafe now, but not sorry.

kelsey: Yeah, I love that. And I think like now if those people are to bring you information in the future, you're going to be taking that with like a whole box of coarse sea salt, right? Like I don't believe you for a second. Um, is there anything else you'd like to talk about about how gossip works on Survivor?

Erika: I think any reality show, especially these reality strategy games, it's so built in gossip, right? Because the truth is based on what people say about themselves and each other. So we're actually always gossiping to each other, saying, this person wants to target this person, but then you go to somebody else, and you say this person's targeting this person, and then you hear all these stories, and you have to be able to deduce which one is the real one. And by creating these gossip stories about each other, then we can make someone seem more trustworthy or make somebody seem more threatening. So that is a huge element of playing the game. And then something else that I realized after I finished watching the show is even what you see on TV is the result of gossip because it's like, what do the players say about each other in their confessionals?

kelsey: ohhhhh

erika: And then I learned from making friends with producers is that the producers could be on the same beach and seeing the same conversation. And they could interpret it going differently where they're like, I think this person had the upper hand another producer could say I think this person had the upper hand, but then it goes through their machine where they talk about it and it goes through producers, editors, executive producers and then somehow it's like a game of telephone and then what you see on tv is like the end result of that gossip. So it's all just like hearsay and telephone really.

kelsey: So it's, it's also like a POV battle, right? Where it's like you have one producer saying, I saw it this way and someone else saying it that I saw it this way. And then eight people down the line, they're like, we think both these people hate each other. And it's like, what?

erika: [laughs] Exactly. So it's like, yeah, it's like what you watch on TV is really just like a rumor that has gone so far. And now it's on primetime TV.

kelsey: You know, I love that for us as the American people. That's great television. Um, a birdie told me that you brought a gossip to share with me. Is that true?

erika: Yeah, so this is like a vintage high school gossip I can share.

kelsey: I love history. Great.

erika: Alright, so this was back when I was in high school, so this was something that happened in a high school in my hometown, and you know how in high school, girls tend to form groups where it's like the four of us are best friends and we have a name for our group.

kelsey: Yes.

erika: So there were four girls who were best friends. And then just outside of the group, there was a girl named Caitlin who was not in the foursome.

kelsey: Is this Mean Girls?

erika: Basically, I'm ripping off Tina Fey.

kelsey: Okay, continue. Great. I love it

erika: It's actually very similar. Um, so yes, there's this Caitlin who is the fifth person, she's not in the group, but she hangs out, and it's worth mentioning there's also a Caitlyn who is in the group because at this point in time everyone is named Caitlyn.

kelsey: Well, yeah.

erika: Let's say there's a tall Caitlyn and there's a small Caitlyn, but anyways, just not to get them confused.

kelsey: Okay, thank you.

erika: So then one day, um, and remember this is the time where MSN is a big deal. Geocity sites, big deal. One day someone begins hacking the MSN accounts of these four girls and then someone is hacking their GeoCity sites, revealing secrets, talking shit, conversations with crushes are being sabotaged, new MSN accounts impersonating them are being created. It's just like this online warfare back in the early 2000s. And these four girls are like, what is going on? And then they realize, who would know all of these secrets? And they're like, oh, it's the small Caitlyn. So then, naturally, these girls are like, Okay, Small Caitlyn, we don't want to be friends with you anymore if you're attacking us online.

kelsey: Small Caitlyn, please give us our accounts back. We're trying to DM our crushes.

erika: Exactly. It's like, think of all of the weird, like, high school makeouts that have been prevented because of the Small Caitlyn.

kelsey: Oh no, Small Caitlyn.

erika: So, Small Caitlyn is like, I'm not doing this, goes to the principal's office because she's feeling shut out by this group. The principal calls in parents, the girls are like, we are not bullying Small Caitlyn, Small Caitlyn is bullying us, and then Small Caitlyn is just so mortified she ends up disappearing from school for a few months. I don't know, gets homeschooled or something and then... Shows up next year and is just like kinda to herself and the dynamic is never the same with the Small Caitlyn. But the girls are like, small Caitlyn, you were sabotaging us. Of course this is happening.

kelsey: Small Caitlyn! It's like, sweetie, you hacked four accounts.

Erika: Exactly. You are the only one who knows all of these secrets

kelsey: You're doing crimes

erika: So then years later, years later. One of the girls in the group, as an adult—

kelsey: oh noooo

erika: —catches up with one of the other girls in the group and then somehow it all clicks to her that it was not Small Caitlyn, it was actually Tall Caitlyn—

kelsey: No!

erika: who was framing Small Caitlyn because she was afraid that Small Caitlyn was getting too close to the group and apparently there's only room for one Caitlyn.

Kelsey: It's a Caitlyn war!

Erika: It was the, it was the Caitlyns versus Caitlyns. So now it's like—

kelsey: Holy shit.

erika: —I don't know if there's ever been justice for small Caitlyn. I don't know if tall Caitlyn is living with guilt, but it was just a Caitlyn war.

kelsey: I think Tall Caitlyn should be living with guilt. Justice for Small Caitlyn. That's not fair. She had to leave school. She was being bullied.

erika: I know. And the other girls didn't realize that they were just clearly getting the wrong information, and Tall Caitlyn was actually the puppetmaster the whole time.

kelsey: Do you know if the person who realized that it was Tall Caitlyn told the other members of the group?

erika: Yes, yes, they did. I don't know if they ever, I don't think that anybody ever did anything about it. I think that it still lives as this embarrassing thing that happened.

kelsey: Oh my god!

erika: If a Small Caitlyn is listening today, I hope you're okay. I hope you're justified in knowing that the truth is out there.

kelsey: Yeah, it's time for you to seek vengeance. You were right! Oh man, I feel so bad for Small Caitlyn and I'm also like, Tall Caitlyn. It's not your fault that your parents gave you the same name as everyone else. But that doesn't mean you have to wage wars. Scarcity mindset in friendship: no thank you.

erika: I know. And like, one of them could have gone as a Katie. One could have been a Kate. This all could have been prevented

kelsey: A Lynn. You have so many options. Erika, thank you for bringing me this gossip. I am going to be haunted by it perhaps forever. And that's the best kind of gossip. Do you want to hear the gossip that I have for you?

erika: Yes, I would love to.

kelsey: Oh my god, okay, great.

[music/ad break]

kelsey: You know how when you like see people over and over and over again, like you're in very close proximity to them over a period of time, you get like a kind of blindness that causes you to believe that they're hot?

erika: Yes, definitely.

kelsey: Um, today's story is about when you combine this kind of proximity obsession with a workplace.

erika: Ooh, okay.

kelsey: Do you have any experience with this dynamic?

erika: I've never had a workplace crush

kelsey: Oh, okay, great. I think you're gonna love this.

erika: Okay, can't wait.

kelsey: Here we go. I want you to imagine, like, palm trees. A small main street with like pastel colored homes. Bridges everywhere, the houses have like columns on them, large sprawling oak trees. It's like the kind of city where light is dappled

erika: Yeah, I'm like, okay, I, I'm like, this is like, what, an American South rom com?

kelsey: Yes.

erika: Okay.

kelsey: This is like the kind of city that is like so historically haunted that it has been rebranded as twee. Right? Like, that's what we're working with.

erika: Okay. So there, there could be some spookiness to this too.

kelsey: Always here, it is wedding season. Always it is bachelorette season. Always it is someone's 50th wedding anniversary.

erika: I know exactly where we are. Okay. [laughs]

kelsey: I love that. Here in this city, right on the water, is a sprawling luxury hotel. Big pool. Striped umbrellas. Rooms with ceilings up to the sky. Think like White Lotus: American South. Can you help me name this hotel?

erika: Can we call it the Black Rose?

kelsey: We sure can.

erika: In the spirit of White Lotus.

kelsey: It's beautiful. So we are here at the Black Rose. Have you ever stayed in a fancy hotel? What's your take on them?

erika: I have stayed in a fancy hotel and I'm like, this is a treat. I'm going to use every amenity. I'm going to spend time in the bathtub no matter how busy the schedule is, and if somebody wants to carry stuff to my room wearing a top hat, by all means.

kelsey: That is your luxury and you deserve it. Our story today is about the people wearing the top hats. It's about people who work at this luxury hotel.

erika: Oh my god, okay.

kelsey: Their goal is to make this run so smoothly that, like, no one ever needs anything. They are anonymous and interchangeable to guests, and the guests are always right. No request you can make is too unreasonable.

erika: Wow. Okay, so there's already no boundaries here.

kelsey: Mmhmm. Yes. Have you ever worked customer service?

erika: So many times, yes. Since I was, like, a kid.

kelsey: Yes. So you know that, like, you learn a lot about human nature.

erika: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

kelsey: And you will also understand why all of the requests I'm about to read you are unreasonable. If someone needs a strapless bra in 30 minutes, this staff makes it appear. If someone needs 40 matching shirts in an hour, no problem. Someone needs 12 peacocks, none of whom make noise, by tomorrow evening, like, they've got a guy for it. And these workers are like supremely competent. If you're a billionaire trying to lay low, they like know how to cheat the system by putting an asterisk in front of your name so like no one can find you. But this means that the guests are treated like kings. They behave like kings and they're little demons. For example, the Black Rose used to have nice Pendleton blankets that like sat outside by the ocean so that guests could go out at night and not get too cold, um, but people started getting frisky under them and so they had to remove the Pendleton blankets. How are you feeling at this point in this setting?

erika: It just sounds like there's going to be so much privilege on display. I'm excited to really test the limits of humanity in this story. It's like, okay, people are going for it under these fancy blankets and getting peacocks instantly. And those are just the opening context building just details that we're sharing. I'm like, all right. Some crazy stuff is happening, and I am ready for it.

kelsey: Yeah, it's chaos hour. Every guest at this hotel has main character syndrome, obviously, but our friend of a friend today, we're gonna call her Jade. She's 23 years old, she's just out of hospitality school, and she works on a team that we're gonna call Welcoming. The Welcoming team is like mostly women. The only person on this team who's not a woman is Sky. And Sky is

a person who everyone at this hotel deems an equal opportunity flirt. Like they will flirt with a tree, if given the option. Charismatic. Charming. Sky's whole deal is that they are like drama royalty. If there is gossip, Sky wants it.

erika: From the guests? Or within the top hat people? Or anybody?

kelsey: Anybody. Sky will take any morsel of gossip at any time, and also they're the manager.

erika: Amazing power dynamic. This is a healthy workplace.

kelsey: So, this is a messy group, Welcoming, obviously, but they also like are very competent. They check people in, they coordinate their problems. Every guest has to be like walked to their room because it's this giant hotel. Our friend of a friend, Jade, her shift is from 3:30pm to 11:30pm every day. So there is a culture of like having a little drink at the hotel bar afterward, doing a little smooch, you know, culture of dating and sleeping with your coworkers, which is always a healthy sign for a workplace.

erika: But at least it's like a luxurious place. So if you're gonna do it, do it among the expensive blankets.

kelsey: Yes. There are two problems that like come out of this. The first is that it's a culture of like kind of razzing people if they're like dating or sleeping with each other. And the second is that if you are dating someone on the staff, you can't work the same shift. So, like, one of you will get moved to either the morning shift or the overnight shift, both of which are worse.

erika: Okay. The, it sounds like the picture is clear because then the manager, who presumably is making the shifts, also knows all of the gossip.

kelsey: Mm hmm.

erika: It sounds like a scheduling nightmare, to be honest.

kelsey: Yes, because if you know one piece of gossip, now you have to move someone's shift to earlier, and like, chaos. Today when Jade gets to work, her work rival Tiff is already there. Tiff is like a real, you know, game respects game. Tiff is supremely confident, she never stays out too late. Tiff and Jade started at the hotel at the same time, and like, unlike everyone else who is like, this is a good job that pays me money and gives me a lot of time off, Tiff and Jade are like, this is my career. I want to move up the ranks of this hotel. Have you ever had a work rival?

erika: Mostly people who have authority over me, which is not the best way to feel like a rivalry at work. But for some reason, the people who are my peers, I'm like, great, we ride together. But if it's someone above me, I'm like, oh, get ready. I'm coming.

kelsey: I love that. By the time Jade arrives on time—she is always on time—Tiff has taken all the cool assignments. Like, Tiff is finding a local artist who can paint someone's dog, she's finding someone a specialty whiskey, and so Jade has to do this terrible job of, like, trying to find 200 perfectly round ice cubes.

erika: That seems actually reasonable. If you just give somebody a couple hours, you could just make them.

kelsey: Yeah, yeah, but it is annoying. So Jade is like, this is a boring job. I don't get to have any fun. I don't get to meet a local dog painter. I'm just making 200 round ice cubes. She's doing this when Tiff like hits her arm lightly. There is only one thing that Tiff and Jade have in common, one shared interest, and that interest is the Bellmen.

erika: Mmm. So it's a workplace and a romantic rivalry.

kelsey: Yes. Jade would like to believe that, like, the Bellman of this hotel are the brawn. And Welcoming is the beauty. But the Bellmen are both the beauty and the brawn. They wear little hats. They are all very tall. They are all jacked. They all have, like, unkempt hair that's a little too long. They're always, like, a little but not too sweaty. And their, like, high necked uniforms are always unbuttoned, like, flapping open.

erika: What??

kelsey: Technically, this is against protocol, but the guests love it, and they get lots of tips for it, so they keep doing it. How are you feeling? What are your takes?

erika: It sounds like these are the people who are going to be carrying my, my bags to my room, and I will happily be giving them my American dollars. And it already sounds like it's wild that they are just walking around with hats and open shirts!

kelsey: Yeah, it is wild. I agree. And they're making incredible tips for it, so, you know, more power to them. In the front of this group of guys is a tall, beautiful lad. His name is Wyatt. And he's like, I want you to imagine the beast after he transforms into a man.

erika: Okay. I see the flowing hair. I see the pecs. I see it all.

kelsey: Yes. Wyatt is like charming and charismatic, which as you know is a dangerous combo. Everyone on Welcoming has had a crush on Wyatt at some point. But he is like very mysterious. And very good at boundaries. He's like, I never date within the staff, I never have too many drinks. Which is torture for Tiff because Tiff has had a crush on Wyatt for years. And in the spring she finally like got up the gall and asked him out and he turned her down.

erika: Oh my god, no. Now the rejection is fueling the rivalry even further!

kelsey: Yes. And because of this rejection, they're now always doing this thing where they're like, play fighting, which makes Jade crazy. She cannot tolerate this at all. So like, Wyatt will come to the counter and be like, Tiff, you forgot to restock the water bottles in the valet stand. And like, wink. And Tiff is like, no I didn't. And he's like, yes you did. And Tiff is like, I swear that I didn't. Like, what will you bet me? Da da da da da. And they're like, always doing this like, chirping thing. Jade, watching them do this, like, rolls her eyes. At her like, work wife Miguel, who is on the Bellman team. Miguel is her like lifeline here because she's like, Tiff makes me crazy, the Bellmen are always in this feud with us, and Miguel is the only one who likes to gossip. So the two of them will like huddle up at the bar and gossip about the guests and gossip about the co workers and gossip about Sky and gossip about like the other hotels in the chain. Are you a gossip at work?

erika: A strategic gossip at work, where I'm like, oh, you can come and speak to me because I'm a safe space for you to vent your frustrations. And then I'm just like, okay, and now I know the crazy shit that this person's done. I'm going to keep that in mind for the future.

kelsey: You just hold it all in your little hands.

erika: And then, yeah, have the right moment to deploy it.

kelsey: Yeah, I love that. This night after the shift, Miguel and Jade like settle at the hotel bar to debrief. Eventually, Jade is like, oh, let's check in. Like, what about Wyatt and Tiff? Like, do you think that they're ever going to hook up? And Miguel's eyes get like really wide. And he's like, oh my god, I forgot to tell you. He's like, Wyatt told me that he has a girlfriend. And Jade's like, what? Who? And Miguel is like, I don't know. It's this girl who lives a couple hours away. Like, he showed me a pic. Why are you making that face?

erika: I don't know. I was, I was hoping it was going to be Tiff. I was hoping it was going to be from within the house. I feel a little sad for Jade now. Cause like, not only has she seen this insufferable flirting, but I'm like, oh, he's not even available.

kelsey: I know! Jade is like... Wow, this is very upsetting because I've had to watch all this play flirting and now he's not even available. She's like, do you think that they're going to stop flirt fighting? And Miguel is like, I mean, I doubt it. Like, could they even stop it if they wanted to? This drama goes on for all May. Tiff and Wyatt are, like, still hiding each other's key cards. They're still making up fake things that guests need. They're, like, doing these little pranks on each other that are, like, teasing. You are Jade. You know that Wyatt has a girlfriend. Knowledge famously is power. Um, do you tell Tiff?

erika: No.

kelsey: [laughs] So fast and firm, why?

erika: No, no, she is my workplace rival. So I'm like, it sucks for me to watch it all go down, but at the same time I'm like, okay, whatever history we have where she's my workplace rival, I'm like, I don't think I need to have her best interests in mind. I think I can just like, allow her to go down this journey and figure it out the hard way. So no, I wouldn't say anything.

kelsey: Here are what Jade thinks are the pros and cons. Jade's like, the pro is that maybe if she knew he had a girlfriend, they would stop like, flirt fighting in front of me, which would be great. She's like, but there are two cons. The con is then I lose the entertainment of them flirt fighting, and it could make Tiff grumpy, which would make her worse to work with.

erika: Which, yeah, very important. If you already have a rivalry with her, you don't want her in a bad mood

kelsey: Yes. So Jade's like, I'm not gonna tell her. I'm gonna keep this little knowledge inside my heart. But then, in June, two things happen. Tiff and Wyatt stop play fighting entirely, like abruptly. They are ignoring each other. The second thing that happens is that Sky announces that they are leaving to go to a different hotel, which means there is now a power vacuum, and Tiff and Jade both apply for that position.

erika: Oh my god, okay, I am ready for this, and I'm also like, did Tiff and Wyatt hook up? Like, what has happened here?

kelsey: Why do you say that?

erika: Well, just for them to automatically stop talking, I'm like, did they hook up? And then she finds out he had a girlfriend, and then something goes down. Or tell me, tell me it's even crazier than that. That is too pedestrian of a theory. Okay.

kelsey: Too pedestrian. Way too pedestrian. But we're not going to get there for a second. Do you try, if you and Tiff are both applying for this job, that is management of your team that you work on, do you try and talk to Tiff about this?

erika: No! Nope. I'm like, we're just applying for the job. Let the powers that be make the decision. Just put my best foot forward. Like, I don't, I don't feel like I need to talk to Tiff about this.

kelsey: I love this boundary setting that you have. You're like, firmly, she is not my problem.

erika: Yeah.

kelsey: Jade does not have this, like, self awareness. And so she's like, Tiff, I just want you to know that, like, I know we're both applying for this and, like, I'll totally support you if you're the one that gets it. And Tiff is like, thank you. I'll be happy for you too if you're the one that gets it.

They're like, great. Now you've had like a nice tiny conversation. Do you want to ask her what's happening with her and Wyatt?

erika: Oh yeah, a hundred percent. Yeah, that's actually very big of them in hindsight to share the olive branch or whatever, but it's just like, okay, if you get this little bit of nice behavior, like why not see if you can scratch and get a bit more? So yes, a hundred percent.

kelsey: Yes, she's like, Great. I'm so glad that we're both, um, supportive of each other. Is everything okay between you and Wyatt? And Tiff's like, what? And Jade's like, oh, I just noticed that you're not, like, play fighting anymore. And Tiff's like, what are you talking about? Jade, like, drops it, but she's like, I feel like I'm losing my mind. Like, I have been watching this, these two people play flirt for, like, months. I have watched them do these little fights. And now Tiff is standing in front of me saying, like, I have no idea what you're talking about. We've never done that.

erika: I, I just can't imagine what is going to be on the other side of this because it's like everyone in this hotel has eyes! We have seen the play fighting. We've seen the hidden key cards. There's no way you can convince anyone that this hasn't been happening

kelsey: Yes, Jade's like I'll drop it but like I'm paying attention and I know that something is happening here.

[music/ad break]

kelsey: One day the next month they're at the desk and Wyatt comes running in and he's like a guest has arrived, we've got a code yellow. Code yellow is when a guest wants something that the hotel has not done before. So they like, don't know how to obtain this thing. In this case, it's that this man wants to go pearl diving. And everyone is like, we don't have any guys that do this. We don't even really know what this is. Like, this should be a chaotic moment. But as Wyatt is explaining the code yellow, Tiff is just like a brick wall, like not responding to him at all, clicking around on her computer, like not even paying attention. You're Jade, you're sitting at the desk next to Tiff, listening to Wyatt tell you about this code yellow, what do you do here?

erika: I mean, okay, listen to the code yellow, put your job first, figure out all of that stuff. But I think once that conversation is over, It's like, I have to turn to her and be like, girl, what is going on? How are you not responding to this at all?

kelsey: Yes. Jade is like, Tiff, are you gonna handle this code yellow or do you want me to handle it? And Tiff's like, I'm not handling it. And so Jade's like, okay, Wyatt, come over here. Like, what's this, which guest is this? What does he need? And Wyatt's like, oh my God, finally, thank you. And then he winks at her and leaves. Luckily for Jade, she doesn't have to talk to Tiff about her behavior because Sky is still watching this because they're staying there until the replacement is chosen and trained. So Sky is like, Tiff, you cannot ignore the Bellmen. Like, it is your job. And a code yellow is serious. And Tiff's like, yeah, I know, I'm sorry. And then Sky is

like, just because Wyatt hit on you, doesn't mean you can ignore him. And Tiff is like, okay. And Jade, in her heart, is like, wha, what? Are you asking a follow up here?

erika: I'm just like, what, what, what? It's like the hitting on her. What was it for it to cause this much of a reaction? Are they not play fighting and play flirting for years? Like, I wonder what this was.

kelsey: Yes, Jade's like, Tiff, what? And Tiff's like, it's nothing. He made a pass at me at drinks last week. Sky saw it and like helped me shut it down. And Jade's like, I do not understand what's going on here. Like, what is going on? Jade's like, theoretically, Wyatt has some long distance girlfriend. Or he, I guess, could have lied to Miguel, and it's just like being shady, like, what do you, what do you think here?

erika: I have no idea, because I'm like, wait, wouldn't, wouldn't him hitting on her be something that's welcome? Like, is she not nudging Jade, saying, look, Wyatt is here?

kelsey: Yes!

erika: Yeah, where, where does the girlfriend factor into this? If they spend this much time at this resort, They get together for drinks after work, presumably when they drink they talk about their lives. How is it also not out in the open that he has a girlfriend?

kelsey: Jade gets answers to none of this. Instead, the tension between Wyatt and Tiff continues to escalate. Like, she's not talking to him. She won't help him at work. Wyatt then begins to, like, go on the offense. Like, he starts talking to Tiff in an exaggerated imitation of, like, her phone voice. And they both start, like, throwing each other under the bus with guests. Right? So like when a guest asks Wyatt to help him find a date for a wedding, Wyatt will be like, oh my God, Tiffany would love to help you with that. So Jade keeps having to like intervene in these conversations because she's like, you're going to fuck up the guest experience here. And that is like our whole job. Sky is on her team about this, obviously. So Sky and Jade are like gabbing about this at the counter one day. And Sky to Jade is like, if Tiffany and Wyatt do not stop this, like, elementary school behavior, I'm gonna lose my mind. Like, it's fucking up our job. And Sky is, like, kind of joking, but not really. Wyatt overhears this and is pissed, like, so angry. And he leans over the front desk and is like, I know that you all think that this little, like, drama gossip club is cute, but you are a manager, Sky, and this is inappropriate. Like, you need to stop it.

erika: Wow, where did Wyatt get boundaries from? And also this, this is where he's going to step up and speak up for himself?

kelsey: Mmhmm. Are you skeptical of that? You're making a skeptical face.

erika: Yeah, I'm very—Yes, I'm skeptical of that. I'm just like, wait, there has been this weird tension now for however long, and this is the moment when I think that Sky is actually being

very reasonable and saying that this is fucking up the whole team. Like, why is Wyatt just now saying something?

kelsey: Yes. And I think maybe if Skye were staying longer, they would have like investigated this, but because Sky is on the way out, they're just like, I'm sorry dude, like, my bad.

erika: Yeah. It also sounds like Jade is probably the front runner for this job between her and Tiff because she's not actively fucking up this team as far as we know. So good for Jade.

kelsey: Great transition. Thank you. At the end of June, Skye comes to Jade and is like, congratulations, you got the job. You're going to be the manager starting in July.

erika: Go Jade! Our girl.

kelsey: Jade's like, oh my god, thank you. She's like ecstatic. She's like, this is my career. I'm so happy. I really didn't think I would get it. Like, thank you so much. And then she's like, can I ask, like, why I got it over Tiff? Expecting Sky to be like, well, Tiff has been behaving like a 14 year old with Wyatt, and so I can't give her this job. And Skye is like, oh, Tiff pulled her name from the running.

erika: But Tiff still works there.

kelsey: But Tiff still works there. Jade's like, so I'm, was the only applicant. And Skye's like, yeah, but that doesn't mean you don't deserve it. Would you feel bad here? Like, how would you feel?

erika: I'm just like, Jade, don't go into the tidal waves. Just be happy you got the job. Don't do this weird comparison shit. You're getting, you're gonna get paid more, you're gonna have more responsibility. Like... Don't, don't ruin your self image over that. But then also, now she has some questions for Tiff and as a manager she can ask that.

kelsey: [laughs] I love this. Jade, like, feels a little bad for one second and then she's like, I got what I wanted. Like, I don't really care. This doesn't matter. Before she starts as manager, before Sky's last day, she gets to use one of the few perks they have in this job, which is that for one week every year, you get to stay in a sister hotel. So Jade takes her week vacation in June, she goes away, she gets to be a guest, someone deals with all of her petty, insane requests, and then she comes back and she's feeling refreshed and good. She comes in on her first day as manager and things feel different. Partly because she's the manager and partly because she has like changed her outlook on work, right? She's like, as a manager, I have decided that I will not replicate the mistakes that Sky made. Like, Sky encouraged the culture of this place to be unprofessional and gossipy and deranged. And like, I am going to do better as a manager. She's like, I'm going to become a totally different person who's not interested in gossip now that I have this position of power. Do you think that that's, um, possible?

erika: I mean, after one week of having people cater to all of her crazy requests, maybe that changed something in her. Where she's like, oh, I realize how deranged it is that I can have a peacock on request, so maybe I need to come back down to earth.

kelsey: Yeah, she's like, she's like, I feel great about this revelation and I think it's the right thing to do. Until she walks in the front doors. And she watches Wyatt come up to the counter. And be like, hey, like lean on it and be like, hey, can I get a pen? And Tiff be like, oh yeah, of course. Like, which pen do you want? And like, fan them out in front of him. And she's like, they're getting along? They're flirting again? You've resolved to never gossip again, and you are the manager. Do you ask?

erika: Yes, I ask. Cause now, it is totally within my job to know about the social well being of this team.

kelsey: So yeah, I'm gonna ask. You're just gonna be like, what's going on here? What's your move here? Like, how do you ask?

erika: Um, I think that I would frame it as So, what has happened in my week away? How have the relationships changed?

kelsey: You coming back from exile island, what has happened in my week away? Jade is like, oh, did you and Wyatt like work your little problem out? And Tiff is like, what problem? And Jade's like, I mean, it seemed like you had a problem with Wyatt. And Tiff's like, I've never had a problem with Wyatt.

erika: These people just need to be honest about where they're at. It's okay if there's conflict, Tiff! It's okay.

kelsey: It's fine! Yeah, exactly. And Jade is like, okay, whatever. Like, maybe this is a sign from the universe that I was right to try and stay out of it. Like, I'm gonna keep trying. This goes on for a few months. Everything is calm. Tiff and Wyatt are still flirting all the time. And then one day, in September, Tiff is like, I have to run an errand. Can I take my dinner break now? And Jade is like, yeah, no problem. Like, who cares? But then, when she needs a bellman for something and calls one, Miguel comes. And Miguel is like, oh, Wyatt just took his dinner break. Do you have the number of this car detailer that we need? A guest is asking, and Jade is like, well, well, well, Wyatt is on his dinner break at the same time as Jade. That's very interesting to me.

erika: I'm intrigued. I'm like, we need some answers. Everybody has been exposed to this for too long. We all deserve something. I don't like this hot and cold. Just tell us what's going on, Tiff.

kelsey: Jade is like, it's not really gossiping to speculate with your work wife, right? So she and Miguel are like, could they be together, like, where could they have gone? What are they doing?

Going on and on. When another employee comes up and is like, what are you guys gossiping about? Do you tell your employee what you're gossiping about?

erika: Oh, see, I fully agree that there's this sanctity in the relationship with the work wife where all other social decorum gone. You can say whatever.

kelsey: Yes.

erika: Oh, it's a tough position because you are the manager, so I think you shouldn't be telling this other employee, but I get the feeling that Jade is going to say something.

kelsey: Jade is like, it's nothing, we're just gabbing. And the other employee is like, so you're sure it's not about Tiff getting into Wyatt's car. And Jade is like, don't tell me about that. I don't want to know that. And then the employee leaves and she and Miguel are like, what?! What do you do here? Do you do anything?

erika: It's, I mean, one, continue to gossip with the work wife. But I think when she comes back, I think it's reasonable to say, hey. How did that errand go? It appears that you and Wyatt went on the errand together. Was it productive? I think you can find a way to ask, because at this point it's like, come on guys, it's been years.

kelsey: Yeah. They come to the conclusion that Jade is getting nothing out of Tiff. Like every time she asks a question, Tiff just stonewalls her. So they're like, you try. Miguel, you try with Wyatt. So Miguel goes off and does his job and he comes back the next day and he's like, I talked to Wyatt. And Wyatt said they are absolutely not dating, they are absolutely not involved, like he just took her on an errand because she needed a dress hemmed and his aunt is a tailor.

erika: I also can't believe that they haven't used Miguel and Wyatt's relationship as a resource up until this point. I know. You mean like Miguel has never asked Wyatt at all about this?

kelsey: I know. It's like boy hour over there where he's like, this guy showed me a picture of his long distance girlfriend on his Instagram and I asked no follow up questions.

erika: Yes!

kelsey: Like what? What are you doing?

erika: He's actually, like, probably one of the worst people to have in your gossip arsenal if he is not doing the work to get more information too!

kelsey: Yes. Luckily in this case, Miguel is like, oh, it's nice that you, like, hooked Tiff up with your aunt who's a tailor, but like, why did you need to drive her there?

erika: Yes.

kelsey: And Wyatt's like, oh, oh, oh, I've been driving her places because her car is broken and she can't afford to get it fixed. And Jade in her head is like, this is a little like, the lady doth protest too much to me. Like, lot of excuses happening here, but she's like, I'm not going to ask Tiff because I am reformed. I shan't ask her about Wyatt, but as a manager, it is perhaps my duty to know if her car works. So she's like, Tiff, I heard that you're having car trouble. Is that true? What happened with your car? And Tiff's like, oh, my car is broken. And Jade is like, oh, I'm so sorry about that. Like, let me know if you need anything. And Tiff is like, yeah, actually, I do need to talk to you. Can we talk for a minute?

erika: I'm ready for the reveal. Let's go, Tiff. Or at least tell us why you don't have the Uber app.

kelsey: Yes. Jade is like, it's definitely not gossip if she confides in me. She's like, come to my office, what's up? And Tiff's like, listen, I've been dreading telling you this because I know it's going to create all sorts of problems and like the fallout, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And Jade's like, yeah, yeah, yeah. Get to it. Like, what is it? And Tiff is like, I put in my request for my week at a sister hotel at this big, fancy hotel overseas that no one ever gets approved for and I got it. And I'm going the first week of October. And Jade's stomach plummets into the ground because she's like, first off, this is not the gossip I wanted. This is managerial bullshit. She's like, second, the first week of October is like the biggest week for us this year. We have three weddings, two billionaires on site, and a conference for food and drink people who, when they were here last year, drank the whole bar out of booze. She's like, the staff have been strategizing for this for weeks, like months maybe. She's like, and Tiff is supposed to be the point person for like all of these weddings. So her leaving for this has fucked up everything. What do you do?

erika: Well, one, it seems like Tiff is really skilled at fucking up a lot of shit here. What do you mean you're leaving during that week? What do you mean you have had this weird flirtmance forever? What do you mean you can't call an Uber when your car is in the shop? And also this is a very expensive hotel. So I would think that like you're at least making enough to cover the usual cost of living. So Tiff, not trusted. But this is a moment with privacy. So I don't know if Jade's gonna do it. But as someone who is really invested in the story, I hope she takes this moment to like ask what the fuck is going on.

kelsey: Jade is like... Could you go to this fancy hotel any other week instead of the first week of October? She does not take the wide open door chance to ask a question here. And Tiff is like, no, that's the only week they offered me. But Jade does not believe this. And with the system that she has, she can see whether or not they offered Tiff more than one week. Do you look?

erika: A hundred percent.

kelsey: Why?

erika: It's within your managerial right to look.

kelsey: Jade looks and she sees that Tiff was offered three different weeks and that Tiff chose the one that she would be the busiest on. What do you do?

erika: So is Tiff aware that Jade can see all of this?

kelsey: I would assume so. Yes. Ah.

erika: Okay. I feel like she has to go back and say, Hey, I see that there's actually other weeks available. Can we work something out where maybe you get a bit more than a week, and then you can go at a different time? Like maybe we can figure out a compromise?

kelsey: I love this strategy. Like I love your manipulation of this. I think that would work perfectly. Jade is like... I'm so mad at her that I want her out. Like, I'll do it without her, she can leave for the week, whatever. But then the whole lead-up to that week, she's like panicking, and planning, and rushing. Like, one of the brides wants 5,000 pink roses. So someone has to source those. One of the fancy guests wants two rooms that connect, but this doesn't exist in the hotel, so a contractor has to be brought in to like, connect them.

erika: Jesus Christ. I didn't realize that they're renovating for these guests, too.

kelsey: By the time the week begins, Jade is like, I don't even have time to think about Tiff. Like, I only have time to work. And at the end of the first day of that week, she's like, I'm so exhausted, like, I'm not having a drink at the bar, I'm going home, and I'm going to sleep. For three days, she works so hard that she has like no memory of the day before. On the fourth day, she's stuck late doing some dumb request and she's like looking at things on her computer trying to find something for a guest when Miguel comes in and he's like, hey, do you want to get a drink at the bar? And Jade's like, yeah, I feel like I'm absolutely dead. And Miguel is like, oh, why? And Jade's like, I mean, I told you that Tiff is gone because, like, she got into the swanky hotel and so she's left. And Miguel is like, oh my god, I forgot that that was this week. Miguel's like, isn't it interesting that Wyatt is visiting his brother in Miami this week?

erika: Stop. Of course, I was about to ask, is Wyatt there this week too? But of course, they are both gone at the same time.

kelsey: Mm hmm.

erika: And also, Miguel, you need to be more forthright with this information.

kelsey: Yes, come to the desk and tell me immediately. Jade is like, this girl, screwed me over, is constantly creating problems for me. She's like, do you think that they're together? To Miguel? And Miguel is like, yeah, of course I think they're together. He's like, they're both gone the same week. And he's like, isn't Swanky Hotel like the most romantic of all of our hotel properties? And Jade's like, yeah, I think it's like for couples. And Miguel's like, oh my god, it is. You and Miguel

have the power of management and friendship on your side, and you want proof that they are together. How do you get it?

erika: Is there like an interconnected network of welcome team managers at the different hotels? Like can you reach out to the equivalent of you at the Swanky Hotel and figure out who she's with?

kelsey: Yeah. That is a great idea and they will do it, but not yet.

erika: Okay.

kelsey: The first thing they do is Miguel is like, it's an international hotel. He's like, what I'm gonna do is I'll call Wyatt tomorrow. And this, I did not know this, these people are very smart, apparently the ringing tone, like when you call someone, is different in different countries.

erika: Oh shit. Okay. I learned something.

kelsey: Yeah. So like the US uses like, there's a two second ring followed by a four second pause. In like the UK, for example, you hear a double ring. So, like, two bring brings followed by a two second pause. So, Miguel is like, I'll call Wyatt tomorrow. If the ringer is different, we know he's not in Miami. We know he's abroad. So Miguel calls in the morning. It rings. The ringing tone is different. And Wyatt answers his phone. And Miguel is like, oh, hey buddy, like, what's up? We're just, uh, we're just bored at the front desk and we're wondering if you know where the cards are. And Wyatt's like, what do you mean you're bored at the front desk? Isn't this like one of the busiest weeks that the hotel has all year? And Miguel's like, haha, yeah.

erika: Okay, Miguel needed a real plan for this. I was like, Miguel needs to be coached through, like, this gossip and information sourcing.

kelsey: Yes, Miguel is like, yeah, it's, it's, uh, it's bad, but do you know where the cards are? And so Wyatt's like, yeah, like, the cards are in the valet stand, like, da da da da da. Miguel's like, great, thank you so much. How's your brother? Are you having a good, a good time? And Wyatt laughs and hangs up the phone. Now, they are very mad. And more suspicious than ever, because they're like, did the two of them leave us in this hellscape to go on this secret romantic vacation? This is where your, your idea comes in. Jade is like, I don't have access to that hotel system, so I can't just like, look them up. She's like, but I could call the version of me that's there. And ask a strategic question and probably find out.

erika: Yes. I like what Jade is doing here. This is like the way to play the game. Yes, Jade.

kelsey: What kind of strategic question do you want to ask? You don't want to get caught as like being snoopy on your employees. And you don't want them to find out that it's like you calling, but you want to know for sure that Wyatt is there.

erika: Can you call and say that you're like the sister of somebody and you want to send a bottle of champagne or some type of like anniversary surprise?

kelsey: Oh my god, you're so good at this. I'm gonna start calling you with my problems. Um, she calls and she's like, Hey, so sorry, uh, we're having a bit of an emergency here at the hotel, could you transfer me to Wyatt Lastname's room really quick? And the her on the other end is like, yeah, absolutely, give me one second.

erika: She directly got there!

kelsey: The transfer signal begins to ring. Do you let it ring?

erika: No, because clearly these people are not capable of having the conversation when he picks up. Like, when you call someone, there's the risk they're going to pick up and you need a plan for that. So no.

kelsey: Yes.

erika: Don't let him pick up.

kelsey: First ring, Tiffany picks up the phone. She's like, hello? Jade hangs up. Miguel and Jade are like, dying. They're in hysterics at the front desk. They're like, these two think that they're so sneaky. They're like, acting like they don't go on vacation together. Like, come on. We have like solved the mystery. They're so proud of themselves. They're patting themselves on the back. Wyatt and Tiff return the next week. They have their stories straight. Jade asks Wyatt how was Miami and Wyatt's like, Oh, it was great. I did a walking tour, I ate ceviche, I saw the beach, it was so fun. Jade asks Tiff how her vacation was and Tiff's like, Oh, it, you know, it was so good. I got some alone time. Jade is like, why are they like this? Like, they're so difficult and like, I can't prove it. I don't want to deal with them anymore. Like, this is just annoying me now.

erika: I almost feel like, okay, if they're not play fighting anymore and it's not ruining the guest experience and they're not like passively aggressively handing each other pens, at this point I'm gonna be like, you know what, just go off and secretly date. Like, fuck it. But then I guess they did leave during the busiest time of the year. So actually, I think I would be salty still.

kelsey: A couple of weeks after their trip, Tiff comes to Jade and is like, Hey, I'm putting in my two weeks. She's like, I'm transferring to another hotel in like a new city. And Jade's like, okay, bye.

erika: [laughs] The relief I feel!

kelsey: And then she immediately is like, where's Miguel? And she goes to Miguel and she's like, Miguel, Tiff is leaving. And Miguel's like, oh my god, Wyatt is also leaving. Like, he has transferred to a different hotel in that same city. So the two of them are like, well, well, well. We

have all the proof we've ever wanted. Like, we've solved this mystery. We are almost at the end. Whose side are you on?

erika: Ah. Okay. I think it's Jade. I think that it's always been Jade. I think that perhaps Jade could have been more strategic in how she went about this. Um, but at this point, if I was Jade, I'd be like, girl, you won. You got the job. Your workplace rival is leaving. You don't have to do this weird Sherlock Holmes shit anymore. And then you can have the satisfaction of knowing that, like, they're just out of there and you can have this toxic-free workplace environment.

kelsey: Yes. Tiff and Wyatt leave. Bliss. Jade's job is so easy. No one's doing play fighting. People are just hooking up in a normal way that doesn't cause any problems for her. A few months after this, she's leaving at the end of her shift. And she runs into Sky on the street. They're gabbing. They're happy. She's like, oh my god. You'll never believe what happened with Wyatt and Tiff. And she tells Skye this whole story. And Sky is like, Oh my God, you don't know. And Jade's like, know what? And Sky's like, So I'm friends with Tiff's sister on Facebook. And Jade is like, What? Why? Like, why would you be friends with Tiff's sister on Facebook? And Sky's like, she's hot, like, don't worry about it, that's not important. And Jade's like, okay. So Sky is like, a couple of weeks ago, I'm on Facebook and I see that she posted photos from the fall of last year, right? Like an album titled Fall whatever year. Sky's like, so I'm scrolling through the photos and look what I see. And they turn their phone around and on it is a photo. It is a photo of Tiff and Wyatt and they are kissing. And the sun is behind them and they look so beautiful and her hair is so thick and gorgeous and Jade is like, wait a second, is that a fucking veil?

erika: [gasps, laughs]

kelsey: And Sky nods, flips to the next photo and they are standing at an altar. Like full tux, full white dress, full marriage. The two of them got secret married in the fall while working at this hotel.

erika: Why is this a secret? Why does this have to be a secret? I don't understand why it's a secret. Why are they hot and cold with each other?

kelsey: I don't know! Why!?

erika: If people are dating all the time, you can obviously have these arrangements. Like, why is this a secret?

kelsey: Jade is like, what are the fucking dates on this? She's like, scrolling through the photos. They got married the week before hell week. And their trip to that hotel was their honeymoon. So that's how she got into that hotel, was by being like, it's my honeymoon, please.

erika: I, I think it's very humbling, cause I was like, okay, if everyone is gossiping here, and Jade is supposed to be the manager who knows everything, it's like, I just, these people have been fucking married, and I had no idea.

kelsey: Yes.

erika: But I'm also so confused, like, why is this a secret? I'm sure you could like, go to HR, and say you're married, and it's fine, but

kelsey: Right!

erika: Why is this a secret? What happened to Wyatt's girlfriend from hours away?

kelsey: Yes.

erika: I don't, I don't understand why this is kept from everybody.

kelsey: No one understands. She like goes to Miguel and she's like, what the fuck is this? And Miguel is like, oh, maybe that's why they were fighting because wedding planning is really stressful. And Jade's like, that doesn't make any sense. Like, why did they need to hide this? Jade's like, I feel like I'm losing my whole mind. Do you have any theories of why they might hide this ?

erika: Why they would feel the need to hide this? God. I'm like was, I, I'm really like at a loss. Was she worried? She wasn't gonna get the manager job Like I just I cannot think of a reasonable reason to be hiding this

kelsey: Yes, Jade is like this is gonna send me into like a quick descent into madness. Like I am going to be checked into a mental hospital. I am going to lose my mind. So she's like, you know what? Fuck it. I'm like going to bring this to the whole team and see if we can like sort it out. She's like, did any of you know that they were married? No one knew that they were married. And everyone's like, did any of you know that they were dating? And everyone's like, no, we thought that they were just fighting all the time. It turns out that like, basically they were just like, we want privacy. And so we won't be telling anyone about our relationship. Like we want to work the same shift. We want to be able to carpool. We don't want anyone in our business. So we have secrets now.

erika: Okay. Boundaries, I guess.

kelsey: I guess.

erika: But it's like fighting all the time is such a weird way to throw people off the scent because you're just drawing attention to yourself.

kelsey: Yes. It's like the worst stealth technique of all time to be like, we're enemies, actually.

erika: Yeah. Let's openly show people that we don't get along. I don't understand. I don't get it. I don't understand them. I don't know.

kelsey: We are at the end of our story. Do you have any takes? What are your final thoughts? Lay it on me

erika: I mean, I love how, well, one, Jade did not complete her mission of having a gossip free workplace, when she called in the whole department and is like, okay, let's get to the bottom of this. So I'm, I'm rooting for Jade, but unfortunately, Jade has not hit her goal during this. I still do not understand this Tiff and Wyatt thing at all. Like, truly, I don't. And then I wonder, now that they're in a new city, like, what happens? Is it a clean slate? Where they can live openly as a married couple? Or is this ruse going to continue and—

kelsey: Right.

erika: —they'll never tell their co workers about each other?

kelsey: Right. It's like, is that why you're at different hotels? So that, like, you can continue to do this ruse where, like, you're just a nobody who has no interests and no one knows anything about you? Like, imagine being able to keep that many secrets about yourself. Like, certainly could not be me.

erika: I feel like you would go home and just scream or something. Like, I wonder what they talk about in the car ride home, where they're like, alright baby, another day down, no one knows, they think we're just fighting.

kelsey: I guess that's a question, it's like, do you think it could be some kind of kink? Like some reason to like, keep it a secret?

erika: Yeah, what if their names aren't even Tiff or Wyatt at all? Like what if their whole, what if everything about their identities are fake? And Sky is not actually following her sister on Facebook, like what if nothing is real?

kelsey: Wow, that's... It's a terrifying and beautiful place to end. Erika, thank you so much for coming to the podcast. It was a delight to have you.

erika: Thank you so much. It was an honor to talk about this. I still cannot wrap my head around this story.

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