

Season 4 Episode 10: Family Mealworms with Patrick Redford

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kelsey: Hi, and welcome to Normal Gossip. I'm Kelsey McKinney and in each episode of this podcast, we bring you an anonymous morsel of gossip from the real world. Welcome to the season finale! After this week's episode we are going to be on break for a little bit. When we know when that break is ending, we will tell you, I promise.

Before we get into the show let's do a little bit of business. Business is one: between the seasons, we are going on tour! You can find the dates and the tickets at normalgossiplive.com. We are so excited to meet you on the road. There will be glowsticks, there will be secrets, there will be special guests. It's very exciting! We're thrilled!

Second piece of business, we do have merch at normalgossip.store. We have tee shirts. We have a new sexy tee shirt that has like little, um, hidden things from episodes in it which is very cute.

And finally, just a reminder, if you think you are going to die without gossip between the end of this season and the beginning of the next season, we do have monthly episodes for subscribers. You can become a subscriber at supportnormalgossip.com.

kelsey: Okay, no more business. I am all amped up about our guest today. You may know him from the subscriber episodes talking about chess players cheating with anal beads and Wagatha Christie scandal. I know him because he's my coworker at Defector dot com, and my buddy. He writes about soccer and basketball and how to make nocino and 5 million other things. It's Patrick Redford. Patrick, welcome!

patrick: Oh, thanks for having me. It's so good to be back, I guess, slash here for the first time. This is gonna be fun.

kelsey: Yeah. How do you feel about being on your first public episode?

patrick: Um, it's, it's, it feels good. I realized that before we did the first chess drama episode. I typed up like this whole long relationship with gossip thing, and I was so ready. And then you didn't ask me, and then I was like, oh, I should be, I should be a little fucker and ask Kelsey about her relationship with gossip. But that would've been, that would've been way too rude. So, no, it feels good. I'm excited to be here.

kelsey: Good. I'm glad that you're excited to be here. I'm excited to have you.

Do you wanna answer that question now and tell the listeners what your relationship with gossip is?

patrick: Yeah. Um, my relationship with gossip is that for about the first two thirds of my life, I did not have much of like a conscious relationship with gossip.

kelsey: I thought you were gonna say consciousness and I was like, what was happening? Okay. Continue.

patrick: Yeah. I was very, I was very empty headed for the first 20 years.

kelsey: Okay.

patrick: No, but, um, like, you know, I loved rumors, loved gossip, all that kind of thing but didn't really think about it until I started working as a journalist for Deadspin in 2015. Um, and I learned, I learned two things that you know very well, which is that like so much of our job concerns like gossip in a professional sense where like stories you write either involve like gossiping with people or like finding out what people's gossip is and putting that raw material through the blog factory and having like a story pop out the other end. Um, but more importantly, and the thing that really like changed my relationship with gossip is finding out how much journalists love to gossip about each other and finding out like that there's this sort of just like pantheon of media gossip that like you learn more and more about like the longer you work in here.

kelsey: Was there like a moment that made you realize this or was it just like the steady over time trickling of information about people you didn't know?

patrick: I joined Gawker Media as one of like—

kelsey: rest in peace

patrick: —the last people there during its like—I know!

kelsey: twice.

patrick: Well, I think the, my first official day as a staff writer after being on contract for eight months was like, you know, some Monday in April, and then that Friday the Hulk Hogan decision came down.

kelsey: [laughing] Oh. Sick.

patrick: We had a good, we had a good, very short run.

kelsey: a good one day.

patrick: I remember just joining Slack as like this fresh faced little Californian guy, and then just instantly learning like who was scabbing and who was screwing. I think those are the two great genres of like media gossip.

kelsey: Can you tell the people what you mean by scabbing, just in case they aren't sure?

patrick: Yeah. So, I mean, through union efforts, you find that there's like a real world utility to gossip because. So much of unionizing is just like finding out who's, who's making how much money, which bosses are bad, and sort of creating this shared lexicon of grievance that you can then like unite and fight towards. And then in unionization processes you find out like who's against it and you find out where a lot of people stand on a lot of things and people love to gossip about that kind of stuff. Including me.

kelsey: Yeah! You have your little lists of like who's a scab and also who's screwin.

patrick: That sounds ominous, but you do

kelsey: The two genres. You're right. It's like what are you doing at work and what are you doing in love? Okay, I would like to talk about, I would like to do something that we don't usually do, which is something topical. This week in the news—um, in the news, haha—this week on twitter dot com, people have been taking a food disgust quiz that I have demanded you take as part of this experience

patrick: Yes.

kelsey: And now I would like to discuss how it went for you. Um, for people who haven't taken the quiz, the way it works is you're given like 25 questions that vary from things like, would you eat in a restaurant where there were insects in the bathroom to will you eat wilted spinach, and you say agree or disagree. And then it gives you like a little radial chart that shows what kind of food you're disgusted by. So it's not a picky eater chart, it's like a how much of a garbage disposal are you? Um, how did your quiz go? What was your experience like?

patrick: Uh, a little, a little shocking. Um, a lot of scores I saw were hovering around, you know, a disgust score of 50% um, average. Uh, mine was, uh, 14.9 percent. Very low.

kelsey: Okay. Mine was 9%. So we, we are actually the disgusting brothers.

patrick: Give us the gorbage! Yeah! We love bad things.

kelsey: Why were you surprised to see yours at 14%? Like how do you feel?

patrick: No, no, because I, I'm, I'm not, I guess I am a somewhat picky eater in one very specific way, which we can get to, but—

kelsey: Okay.

patrick: Like, I, I'll, I'll kind of eat, you know, anything. I just assume the digestive system, you know, uh, however many years humans have been evolving. It's gotten good. You know, our bodies kind of know what to do if like, you cut the moldy part off of a piece of bread and eat the rest, like

kelsey: It's fine.

patrick: We got, we got ways of dealing with that, you know?

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: It's not my problem. Um, the one I had was insect contaminants, and I think that was because I answered a question where it's like, if the worm is in one part of an apple, would you eat the other part? And I said, no, because like, that's the worm's house and I don't know what he did in there, so

kelsey: So it wasn't that you were afraid of the fact that the worm was in there. It was that you felt that that was the worm's home?

patrick: I guess it was, I was afraid, because it was his home. Um, no, I mean, I don't wanna evict a worm, nor do I wanna bite a worm. And if I did both the same time, I would feel bad, uh, in multiple ways.

kelsey: Wow.

patrick: So, I don't, I don't wanna bring that into my life.

kelsey: Uh, famously, uh, producer Alex Sujong Laughlin once bit into an apple and bit a worm in half. So that's her trauma.

patrick: Mm. Um, I would like to know if she, how many apples she's had, uh, since then.

kelsey: Alex says, would you evict me if I was a worm?

patrick: I would never evict you if you were a worm, Alex.

kelsey: Wow. That's beautiful. What is your opinion on worms generally?

patrick: I'm, I'm for 'em. Um, I love the really weird long ones after the rain. Um, they, I took, I took a class, uh, in soils in college. I was trained as a geologist for some reason. Um.

kelsey: for some reason?! You like it

patrick: Yeah, that's true. I like it. I mean, I don't do it professionally, but I enjoyed it.

kelsey: Yeah. But I think, I want you to finish your story, but I do think that you and I both believe that college is a place where you should just like, learn shit you think is cool and then you can find your job later. It's fine.

patrick: Yeah. Like unless you like, want to become a chemical engineer, like you probably shouldn't go study like English lit or whatever, but like the good thing about the adult world is that it's messy and silly and changes constantly. And if you're a young money hustler, you can kind of find your way in.

kelsey: Okay. Continue. You took a class on soil.

patrick: Yeah. And the main thing you learned about soils is that like the really important thing is like the level of organic matter and worms play such a huge role in that. You know, breaking, uh, leaves and mulch and things of that nature down into usable bits

kelsey: because they're chomping it up as a snack?

patrick: Yeah. They're just, they're going to town. They're burrowing, they're tunneling. It's going in one end out the other—

kelsey: Incredible

patrick: —enhanced. So I, I respect the mighty worm.

kelsey: Wow. Okay. Well that's important cuz we're gonna come back to worms later.

patrick: Lovely. Oh wait, my one, my one specific food disgust thing.

kelsey: Yes, please.

patrick: Is small round bursty objects.

kelsey: Oh, I knew this about you. Like gushers?

patrick: No, gushers are fine because they're not round enough. But like, peas, blueberries, those are like the, those are the main two enemies. Like if there's peas in like a fried rice, I'm not eating that fried rice. It's not happening.

kelsey: Oh. It's dead to you. Is there anything else besides peas and blueberries? I can't even think of anything, like cherry tomatoes?

patrick: Grapes and cherry tomatoes are sort of like one deep on the list.

kelsey: Those are enemies also

patrick: Yeah. Um, if any of these products have been like thoroughly destroyed, like I can have blueberries in a smoothie, um, I will blend that smoothie for 15 minutes if I have to, to get any remnants of blueberry texture out of there

kelsey: Safety first.

patrick: Yeah. I mean, look, I gotta take care of myself.

kelsey: Yeah. It's nice to have one, um, you know, manic pixie dream girl food decision that you keep inside you.

patrick: I, I know of one other person in my life who has this exact thing and I felt so seen in that moment. Cause I thought I was the only one who was like this.

kelsey: Wow

patrick: And I'm sure there are dozens out there.

kelsey: I feel that if this does not get cut, it will be like when Kalyn said that she had 200 people on her close friends, and like suddenly all of these people were DMing us and being like, I do that. She's normal actually. So perhaps you can create a support group.

patrick: I would love to, uh, enter the Kahler zone.

kelsey: We all want to enter the Kahler zone.

patrick: It's a rare place.

kelsey: It's beautiful. Um, are you ready to do some gossip? You want a gossip?

patrick: I would love to hear some gossip. I can't wait.

kelsey: Okay, great.

[music/ad break]

kelsey: Our friend of a friend today, her name is Gladys.

patrick: Gladys.

kelsey: Gladys is one of those people who is like always outside. She's like pressing flowers into a little book. She's learning tree names. She's always been like this, like as a girl, loved to play in streams. As a teen, loved to climb trees. Young adult, she was lying in fields, right? She had two kids. She like spent all of their childhood trying to imbue the same love of nature in them

patrick: pointing to various mushrooms and saying, eat that one, don't eat that one? That sort of thing?

kelsey: Exactly. Exactly. That whole sort of thing. This kind of bark is cool. This kind is not cool. I don't know anything about bark.

patrick: I think, I think we all need, I think we all need a Gladys in our lives because I, I've spent a lot of time outside and the, the one thing I've learned is that there's always more you can learn.

kelsey: Wow.

patrick: And so my advice to you is find the Gladys—I mean, I guess we'll find out more about Gladys—

kelsey: yeah, we'll find out if you wanna find Gladys

patrick: so maybe this is bad advice, but I will say, find the Gladys in your life and seek out their advice in this one specific area that's contingent on learning more about her.

kelsey: Love that.

patrick: Sorry to derail.

kelsey: In Gladys's forties, she joined the local like nature preserve in her city and started volunteering on the weekends. She was like, this is great. Her kids went off to college and she was like, what if I did this full-time? And she became the director of this nature preserve. By the time Gladys retired a few years back, she'd been in that role for 10 years. Now she's 62.

patrick: She's gone Gaia mode for a long time.

kelsey: Yeah, exactly. She's retired. She still feels young. She still has energy. She just is like, I don't wanna work anymore. You know?

patrick: I love it. Stay outside, Gladys!

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: Put that sun hat on! Don't let anyone tell you any different!

kelsey: What do you think she should do?

patrick: I think she should, um, take a perhaps smaller position at that nature reserve. Or, um, go do something like the Pacific Crest Trail?

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: No, that's a bad idea.

kelsey: It could be fun. You never know.

patrick: Yeah. At least do segments of it, you know. Just take a, take a bigger adventure. See a different kind of outside.

kelsey: Yeah. Gladys does go out west because her, her son lives there and she's like my son, I raised him right. He lives in the woods. He loves nature. I will go visit him and see if he can help me, like figure out a future for myself and her son is like, I have an idea to help you figure out how to, to find a future for yourself. What if we did mushrooms? Gladys has never done mushrooms. What do you think?

patrick: I think this is a great idea.

kelsey: You do?

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: Why?

patrick: Yeah. I think I, I, I think there's a real therapeutic value in, um, in psilocybin, like, you know, I think, I think there's sort of this justifiable worry that if you take basically of taking too much and

kelsey: Sure, yeah

patrick: I think the thing about mushrooms is you can, you can creep up to that line very slowly and gradually and find it yourself. And even at low levels, you can get a lot out of it. So I think this is, I think Gladys has done the exact right thing. She's found the Gladys in her life.

kelsey: Gladys is like, I don't have a job. Why not? So Gladys does her little mushrooms and the whole world like opens up before her. She's like, the trees are so green, the moss is so soft. She like, pet a bush and cried. Right? She was like, this is the most magical experience I've ever had.

patrick: Gladys is never going inside again.

kelsey: Yeah. So that's the problem. How do you think Gladys felt when she returned from this trip to her like small beige apartment?

patrick: Oh yeah. She probably thought, this is all there is? I, I, I've, I've had the, my world has been cracked open, like the window of possibility has been thrown wide open and I have, I have to live at like a higher, a higher intensity.

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: Is what I would imagine.

kelsey: So then how do you find a higher intensity?

patrick: Uh, four words. Ay. Ya. Hua. Sca. I don't know. [laughing]

kelsey: [laughing] I like that you're just like, do a different drugs, see if that one works

patrick: No, that's a bad idea. No, Gladys. Hmm. Maybe she should get into like, psychedelic therapies.

kelsey: Ooh!

patrick: Like I know someone who uses like, who you know, is training to be like a psilocybin therapist. That's a very Bay Area sentence, but it's true.

kelsey: Okay, I'm gonna call that person. That sounds great. Um, Gladys is like, she's like, well, one of my children helped me. I'll call my other child because she has this idea. Her oldest daughter Courtney, lives in a co-living community.

patrick: Oh yeah!

kelsey: These are places that used to be called communes, but they've since rebranded.

patrick: [laughing]

kelsey: And Courtney let Gladys come visit her like a few months ago, and it was like a movie. And Gladys is like, what if I lived in the same co-living community as Courtney?

patrick: This, this could not possibly go wrong.

kelsey: You don't think so? Are you being sarcastic?

patrick: No, no. Living in a living in a co-living community, even with people who don't probably have some like deep-seated trauma you need to work through is like, that's never a problem. No one's ever leaving their stuff everywhere or taking the good ax and leaving it embedded in a tree until it gets rusty. Like nothing like that ever happens. And if anything, bringing family will just, uh, lower the dramatic tension. So this is, this is a great idea.

kelsey: Patrick. The ax thing's so specific.

patrick: Uh, I really, I really, that has never happened to me, but I have, I have some experience in light co-living community type things. Um, my partner was working at a non-profit and I had no job there

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: Or job period because we all quit

kelsey: Generally because we quit ours, yeah

patrick: You and I had just quit our jobs. Um, so I, I found in niche, which was I would just take this truck into the woods, wand just find a dead tree and chop it down and break it down every day. And that was my job. Um, and so I have probably been the ax person now that I think about it. We're working through some stuff. This is good.

kelsey: [laughing] Uh-oh. It is good. It's important to work through things. Okay. Gladys calls Courtney and she's like, what up babe? What if I came to live near you? We will have so much fun. And Courtney is like, abso-fucking-lutely not. She's like, no, like, I love you. You cannot live in my co-living community with me. Like that is too much.

patrick: Respect. Respect for being able to like set the boundary.

kelsey: Agree. It's hard to set a boundary with your parent

patrick: if she successfully sets it.

kelsey: She sets it. She's like, no.

patrick: good

kelsey: But Courtney does say, she's like, I would be happy to help you find your own co-living community if that is your goal here.

patrick: That's great daughtering.

kelsey: You think so?

patrick: Yeah. I think that's finding like a, a nice synthesis.

kelsey: Yeah. And Courtney's like, another thing you could consider is a retirement community because you are 62 and those exist.

patrick: Gladys is not gonna like that.

kelsey: Why?

patrick: Because she's just done mushrooms and she wants to experience life.

kelsey: Yeah, there are actually two specific reasons that Gladys doesn't like that. The first is that most retirement communities are air conditioned and Gladys hates air conditioning and thinks it's very bad for the earth.

patrick: Respect

kelsey: The second is that a lot of retirement homes and senior living communities receive federal funding, and if you receive federal funding, you cannot allow people to smoke weed there, and Gladys wants to smoke weed.

patrick: [laughing] Gladys is so cool. I wanna hang out with her

kelsey: So she's like, Courtney, no, no retirement community. But yes, help me find a co-living community. Like that's what I want.

patrick: I'm now just imagining Gladys like on a sort of like very like loony tunes Chase, uh, running around this senior living facility toking up—

kelsey: Yes. [laughing]

patrick: —while someone runs behind her with like a big butterfly net trying to get her back.

kelsey: Exactly. That's what she's trying to avoid. Maybe she doesn't like running.

patrick: Yeah, she wants to chill.

kelsey: Gladys is like, you know, while Courtney's looking, maybe I'll look too. So she does like some Googling, but she's like not very good at Googling and so she really can't find anything and she's like, maybe I'll move to Canada. She's like, there's a lot of nature in Canada. Um, but it turns out that it's kind of hard to move to another country. So she's like, that's not gonna work.

And while she's doing this, she's kind of like, okay. I think what I've figured out is that I would like to be in the southwest. I like the desert. I love turquoise. I think it would be fun.

patrick: All true.

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: The southwest is amazing. So she tells Courtney, she's like, the thing is I've decided I wanna go to the Southwest. And Courtney's like, okay. Couple weeks later, Courtney calls and she's like, guess what? I found a place for you to live. My friend who I live with in this community told me about it and it's still small. It's like 30 people and five of them are children.

patrick: Lovely.

patrick: She's like, the website says, we live light on the land we own together and value mindful connection in our work and decision making process.

patrick: I'm trying, I'm trying to figure out where the drama could come from.

kelsey: Uhhuh, you look stressed.

patrick: Well, just foregrounding decision making process in that. I'm just, I'm putting a pin in that.

kelsey: Uhhuh. Okay. Gladys is like, that sounds great. That's exactly what I want. Perfect. The community is called Komunumo.

patrick: What does that stand for?

kelsey: Thank you for asking. It means community in Esperanto. Do you know what Esperanto is?

patrick: Is that like, that's like someone tried to create like a universal language at some point in the past and that's Esperanto?

kelsey: Yes. Esperanto is a language, I'm doing air quotes here, quote unquote language, created by a Warsaw based ophthalmologist.

patrick: Um, what, what is that, is that eyes?

kelsey: Eyes. It's eyes. Yeah.

patrick: Okay. You, you famously use your eyes to scan written language. I see no problems.

kelsey: That's so true. Wow. Yeah. It's basically the same as being a linguist. And it was made to like blend all the languages. What that means is that if you listen to Esperanto, it kind of sounds like what English speakers think Spanish is.

patrick: Whoa. That. Have you ever watched those, like, those videos of what English sounds like to a non-English speaker? Those, those weird me out so much. It's like, it's like reverse ASMR.

kelsey: Yes. I don't like them either. They make me really stressed. Okay. Komunumo is a co-living community that is closer to a commune. It's a mix of older grownups who just wanna vibe, everybody's there to have a good time. Right.

patrick: Sweet.

kelsey: There are also a lot of young people there who have read a lot of theory and are like trying to build stuff. What do you think?

patrick: I think this is great, and I think she should, she should grab her SPF. She should put those Tevas on. She should go to Komunumo. I think Gladys's next chapter is gonna be a good one.

kelsey: You think so?

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: Great. Okay.

patrick: Well, the fact that this story's coming up on this podcast makes me think it's gonna get complicated. But right now, if I'm just locked in on Gladys, I'm thinking this is gonna be great. 63 is gonna be her year.

kelsey: Hell yeah. Gladys is like, I'm in. She applies. She gets accepted.

patrick: Let's go!

kelsey: Hell yeah. The only day that new people are allowed to arrive at this community is summer solstice.

patrick: Okay. All right. It's that kind—? All right, let's go. I love it.

kelsey: That's when new members are welcomed. So Gladys shows up. She's got all her stuff right? Immediately she's introduced to her buddy. She's like given a buddy to show her everything. Her buddy is a man named Duncan.

patrick: Duncan.

kelsey: Duncan is in his early thirties. He's like very tall, very tan. He's wearing like Birkenstocks. He has long hair, but it's like very luscious for some reason. Um, and he's wearing, what are I have learned are called Baja hoodies.

patrick: Is that like like the poncho kind of thing?

kelsey: Yes, exactly.

patrick: Yeah. Okay.

kelsey: Gladys is like great vibes already. I'm loving this. She's like, what kind of shampoo do you use? Right. Duncan is like, here's your small cabin. Showing her around all the things. Right. He's like, here's the central area where we eat. Here are the chicken coops. Here are like the big freezers. Here's all our stuff.

patrick: Beautiful. Yeah.

kelsey: He also explains to Gladys, he's like, the way this commune runs is on committees. Our company runs on committees.

patrick: Yeah. I was gonna say

kelsey: Can you explain the way that committee places work?

patrick: Yeah. So, um, those, all those ding dongs who make \$800,000 that we talked about in the start, um, we have to do all of their jobs ourselves too—

kelsey: Because we co-own our company

patrick: Yeah. Because Defector is a worker-run, subscriber-funded company. We have two like business people, and then like you and I have to like, help buy our company's health insurance and work on the logistics of throwing events and things of that nature. And it's very fun and rewarding. And uh, you have to treat it as like an essential part of your job. And I'm guessing that if they're living there, that these committees are equally essential.

kelsey: Yes. And it's a way of making sure that everyone is helping. Right? By giving everyone a job. So it's like everyone is assigned a committee and then within the committee you have a role.

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: So Duncan is on the Community Cohesion Committee.

patrick: Oh, the CCC?

kelsey: Yeah, the CCC. Classic. Which is basically like events and also making sure that no one's mad.

patrick: Yeah. This sounds like the Vibes Committee kind of.

kelsey: Yeah. It basically is a committee full of vibes

patrick: which in a place like that where vibes are like kind of the whole thing, very important.

kelsey: Yes. And in this community people can be like on multiple committees.

patrick: Okay.

kelsey: Just that's important to know. Okay. So Duncan is like really busy today because as part of the CCC, he has to like welcome new people to the community. Right? And they have like a little event. So he's like, Gladys, I'm so glad you're here

patrick: on summer solstice?

kelsey: Yeah, it's summer solstice. So Duncan is like, Gladys, I'm so glad you're here. But like, I gotta run. I have things to do. And Gladys is like, that's fine.

patrick: I have to reattune some vibes over, um, in the northwest corner by the sump area and in 45 minutes, that should be fine.

kelsey: Exactly. He has some vibe-smithing to do. He runs away. Gladys is like, this is fine. She puts on her big hat. She's like meeting a few people. Around six, Duncan like comes and herds her, right. He's like, it's time to go to the like center square area. He's like, there's a huge bonfire to welcome everyone.

patrick: Nice. Never ends poorly.

kelsey: Gladys is not happy about the bonfire because apparently they're very bad for the environment.

patrick: Okay.

kelsey: Um, lots of smoke. Apparently one hour of bonfire is like something like the equivalent of a car idling for a year.

patrick: Whoa, that's, is that, wow. So it's like the equivalent of like a third of a Bitcoin. That's wild.

kelsey: [laughing] Yes. And Gladys is like, it explicitly says in the rules of this community that no, like it is forbidden for cars to idle. So how come we can have a bonfire? Hmm?

patrick: Okay. So being in these types of spaces, um, I'm, I'm sort of familiar with the Gladys archetype of like person who comes in and is immediately like, no, that's wrong. This thing that you have all communally decided because of X. And traditionally that does not go over well.

kelsey: Gladys is like, this is hypocrisy. I hate it. And people are making s'mores with like packaged graham crackers and chocolates and Gladys is like, that is so much plastic. She is not happy.

patrick: So Gladys, it's, I mean, it seems like Gladys, what she really is looking for is like a much more intense, like much more intentional hardcore community than this

kelsey: it seems like that

patrick: and is having like, it's almost like reverse culture shock where she went out here expecting it to be one way, but it's like more normal than she thought, which I guess sounds very disappointing from her perspective.

kelsey: What do you think she should do?

patrick: I mean, I'm, I'm, I'm so the opposite way in new social situations like, I would just kind of sit there silently, try to figure out the group dynamics and then find my entry point and work my way in very slowly and very harmoniously. But it sounds like what she's doing is she's gonna find, I I, if I were her, with her sort of stats and load out, I would find Duncan and say, uh, this is bad, douse this bonfire. We're gonna create our own artisanal marshmallows from, you know, from rabbit brush and things of that nature. And then we can have our s'mores.

kelsey: Gladys goes to find Duncan. She's searching, searching, searching. She finally finds him like over by the s'mores, and she's like, Duncan, can I talk to you? I have some concerns. Duncan is like, hold on one sec. Because Duncan is—as many people do when they're making smores—he's holding like in one hand the two graham crackers with the chocolate on it. And in the other hand, he's holding on marshmallow that is on fire, like a torch.

patrick: And he's like trying to rotate it in a perfect circle with only the one hand. And ultimately it's just, the top's gonna catch on fire. I'm sorry, man.

kelsey: Exactly. And oh wait, so are you a like, rotisserie, marshmallow person?

patrick: I am, I am.

kelsey: me too. everyone hates it.

patrick: It's annoying. You gotta find the right spot and you gotta just use your two hands and just like imagine, it's like a tiny little, uh, cylindrical rotisserie chicken. And you're just lovingly singeing it.

kelsey: Yeah. That's exactly what I do. And everyone hates it.

patrick: No

kelsey: They're like, do it faster. And I'm like

patrick: They can cry through their substandard s'mores. Like, that's not your problem.

kelsey: Duncan, his, his marshmallow is on fire, right? Like it's black on the outside, and he's like, this is fine, but like, I can't talk to you right now because I'm trying to navigate my flaming marshmallow into this s'more sandwich. In his struggle, the like plastic wrapper from chocolate falls onto the ground and Gladys is like, this man cannot help me.

patrick: She, she has found, I, I just like, this, I feel so bad for her. Like this type of scenario where you build something up in your mind. And for her, it's probably the result of this like psychedelic enlightenment that like, this feels like the end point and it, they're just burning plastic in the desert like that, that the weight of that disappointment really makes me feel bad.

kelsey: Yeah. So she goes and she like, she feels really disappointed and she's like, I'm gonna go sit on a log by this stupid fire, I guess. It's so hot.

patrick: Aww.

kelsey: And she's like, this isn't what I thought it would be.

patrick: I hope she finds a friend.

kelsey: Well, great news. Here comes her friend.

patrick: Let's go!

kelsey: She's sitting there, she's like not feeling good. She's feeling really down. And a mom is like coming by with her son, and the son is like begging his mom for a smore. He's like, please, I want a smore, please. And the mom looks at her son and is like, sweetie, we can't have s'mores because we don't want to contribute to waste. But I have these carob brownies. Do you know what carob is?

patrick: It's, I know that I don't like it, but I dunno what it's, wait, no, it's like, it's like fake chocolate, right?

kelsey: Yes. It is real. Like, it's like a tree that grows carob in the same way that like, cocoa beans are real.

patrick: Right.

kelsey: Um, I will now quote a Jonathan Kaufman essay in the New Yorker in 2019. He said, in the 1970s, carob infiltrated food co-ops and baking books as if it had been sent on a cointelpro mission to alienate the left's next generation.

patrick: Yeah!!

kelsey: So it is not beloved.

patrick: Wow. That's so, I I, I love imagining like the CIA pitch meeting in 1973 where they're like, okay guys—

kelsey: Carob!

patrick: We got, we got it, we got it. We're gonna make this chocolate that just kind of tastes like you're biting a desk and this, this will sow so much dissension in the ranks no one will ever be able to find out what we're up to.

kelsey: Yeah. It's perfect. Everyone will become a Republican because their mom fed them these brownies. Gladys though is like, she fed her kids' carob brownies, right? She's like, carob trees thrive in the southwest. So this is like local product. Gladys's ears perk up.

patrick: Yeah!

kelsey: She's like, here's a woman for me. This is a friend. She's like, maybe this boy will also grow up to show his mom the wonder of mushrooms. Right? She's like, hello, I'm Gladys.

patrick: Yeah. She's like, hello. I found this nice, uh, this nice root on my way here. I pulled it outta the ground. Would you like to chew on this as a little bit of dessert?

kelsey: Yeah, exactly. This woman's name is Tammy. She's in her early forties and they are like fast friends over the first few weeks. They're like bonding all the time. Tammy's telling Gladys about how she's making eco bricks. Do you know what eco bricks are?

patrick: Is it like natural building material?

kelsey: It's like, I imagine what if you shoved a bunch of, um, plastic wrappers into a plastic water bottle and then you can use that like a brick.

patrick: Oh, so eco is sort of like a kind of recycling in like the recycling sense?

kelsey: Exactly. It is like reuse.

patrick: I've never heard of this. No. Okay.

kelsey: Yeah. Okay, so Tammy is making those. She's very excited about them. Tammy's like showing Gladys that chicken coops, like they're bonding it up.

patrick: Okay. And Gladys is feeling more welcomed because of this.

kelsey: She's feeling way more welcomed.

patrick: Wow.

kelsey: And what she also learns from Tammy is that part of the reason she was feeling this way is that basically there is a divide in the commune.

patrick: There always is.

kelsey: There are people in the commune because they are so serious about the environment and like wanna live in this intentional community. And there are people who are in the commune because they like the vibes and think it's cool. Tammy is like, what you have to do is figure out which group someone is in and then you know how to interact with them.

patrick: Wow, okay. That's good advice. But that's a hard way to live.

kelsey: It really is. Tammy though is like her confidant. They gossip all the time. They're having a great time. They're going on little nature walks. It's with Tammy that she's able to like digest the first of the two issues that she experiences in the group. Would you like to guess what kind of issues these might be?

patrick: Okay, I'm gonna guess that there was a big group dinner and this community eats exclusively vegan. Or there's like some, some very specific dietary thing. And someone uses butter as a special treat to make a dessert. And um, everyone likes it, but once they find out it's butter, the two camps, um, the schism cracks open a little bit.

kelsey: This is a great guess. The first problem is dishes.

patrick: Ooh. Yeah.

kelsey: Dishes are always a problem. Even if you have one roommate, dishes can be a problem, right? Like whose turn it to do them? Who did a bad job? Who put this in the wrong place? Who used the wrong detergent? So this is like the first saga that Gladys experiences. The second is about a big family meal. So you were right on that.

patrick: Let's go! Dishes. And then the thing that creates the dishes.

kelsey: Yes, exactly. So they have this big family Sunday meal every week. Everybody has a role, right? And like some people are on cooking, some people are on acquiring the food, some people are on the dishes, they're having a problem. Duncan is on obtaining food. That's his committee.

patrick: The most important role.

kelsey: Yes. But every single week Duncan brings mushrooms that he foraged.

patrick: [big sigh]

kelsey: And the amount varies from week to week. So some weeks he brings one mushroom and some weeks he brings 60 mushrooms.

patrick: Eh, see, this is, this would not be a problem if it was just to sort of, when the land provides, we shall eat. Not like I was only able to find one oyster and then a bunch of these just cruddy little ones. And so we're having a mushrooms souffle no matter what.

kelsey: Yeah. The other problem is that the people in the commune have learned kind of the hard way not to trust Duncan's judgment.

patrick: Oh, no, no!

kelsey: What?

patrick: I mean, I'm a, I'm a, I'm a mushroom guy.

kelsey: you are

patrick: and you, you ideally do not have to learn these lessons the hard way. A lot of prize delectable, edible mushrooms have poisonous lookalikes, some that can kill you, some that can just like ruin your week. Um, and you basically, like as a rule, you basically never want to eat anything that you are less than 100% certain about ID-ing. And I would apply that even further where you don't eat anything with a poisonous lookalike. And it sounds like Duncan, um, has not learned this despite, uh, poisoning his roommates.

kelsey: Yes, exactly. So no matter how many mushrooms Duncan finds people do not eat them. They just sit on the table like unloved.

patrick: And this seems like the kind of situation where food waste is frowned upon.

kelsey: Yes. It's also the kind of situation where some people, Tammy don't feel like Duncan is helping. They're like, he's gone all day. He comes back—

patrick: he's like indulging his little hobby horse

kelsey: —with his questionable mushrooms. Yes. She's like, this isn't helping with dinner!

patrick: It's like, okay, you have 30 mouths to feed. And he just goes on and he just gallivants around with his little sack, with his little mushroom knife. And he like very slowly, he's like making little TikToks of him like cutting the tops of the skulls. And then he comes back and he is like, I have eight things that may be porcinis, or maybe will make you lose the feeling in your toes for a week. Good luck. Enjoy dinner.

kelsey: Yeah. Yeah. And Tammy's like you were supposed to go to the grocery store right? And like get tomatoes right? Or whatever. How do you think they should handle this?

patrick: I mean this is, this is sort of the problem. And the, the, the problem and the opportunity of decentralized like decision-making structures, is that like, you know, the flaw that a lot of people point to is that when there's something like this where if you had a leader, they could just go like, say, Duncan, stop doing this.

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: But because the decisions need to flow through communal measures, I guess it can be slower. But what they need to do is find whatever group has that decision-making hammer and swing it and bop Duncan on the head.

kelsey: I like, I like that idea. That is not what they do. What they do is, everyone is just annoyed about this. Um, but peace is delicate, right? And so the people in this community are like, this is not a big enough deal for us to fight him on it. The only person who's like truly mad about it is Tammy, and she refuses to confront him. So it's just like a bad, bad situation.

patrick: I, if you're living in this communal type situation, like much like Defector, it only works if you communicate like about these things before little resentments, resentments grow into larger structural things and so someone's gotta grab that. He needs to be bopped.

kelsey: Agree. The problem is no one bops him. And so there's like kind of a base level of annoyance at Duncan that exists across like almost everyone.

patrick: Is it just Duncan specifically?

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: Or is it like his wing of the party?

kelsey: It's Duncan.

patrick: Wow. So maybe this is why Gladys had such a bad time on the first day, cuz this little ne'er-do-well poncho-haver with this beautiful, beautiful hair just kind of soured the vibe first. And he's in charge of vibes.

kelsey: Yes! He's in charge of vibes. Not great.

patrick: All right. We're plotting a coup Duncan. I'm sorry.

kelsey: So this community has like a weekly meeting in addition to their weekly dinner. Right?

patrick: Mm-hmm.

kelsey: About six months after Gladys joins, Duncan stands up at the meeting and is like, I have a proposal to bring to the group.

patrick: It's winter solstice by now.

kelsey: Basically yes.

[music/ad break]

kelsey: The proposal he has is that he wants to grow meal worms so that they can feed the meal worms to the chickens.

patrick: Okay.

kelsey: And he's like, there's also a lot of stuff coming out about how you can use meal worms as like an alternative protein source and like this would be a sustainable way for us to do that. And he's like, I would like to do this. This is his proposal to the people of the community. What do you think?

patrick: I think if I, if I, I would say Duncan, you got yourself a deal with one compromise. You are now off food sourcing because people should be able to opt in to eating meal worms, and I worry that you will just put all this dedication into your worm project, neglect your vibes project, which you're doing a bad job of anyway, and just kind of keep making weird food without anyone to tell you I'm not going to eat worms and poisonous mushrooms for dinner.

kelsey: The people of the co-op are like, ugh, what, what does it cost? How expensive is it? What are the downsides? And Duncan's like, well, the real downside is that I would need fish tanks with lights to store the meal worms in. And because the worms need like consistent warmth and low light, the only place that is big enough to store them would be the dining room. So I would need to—audio medium! You can't just shake your head!

patrick: I, that, there's a red, there's a red flag right there. Um

kelsey: why?

patrick: Just, just imagine, imagine you're having some nice, uh, like a nice, um, you know, like a carob cake. It's the density of like a brick you would build a house out of

kelsey: [laughing] an eco brick maybe

patrick: and you're sitting around and you're ha you're hanging out with your cross-generational family and someone's like, Hey, can you pass me the salt? And, and it's over your left shoulder, but instead you reach over your right shoulder and you tap on the tank and then like 50 worms just kind start wriggling and reacting to your touch. And then all of a sudden that, that, uh, carob cake looks a little less appealing.

kelsey: Gladys doesn't like immediately see a problem with this, but the people of the co-op immediately freak out.

patrick: [laughing]

kelsey: And Gladys is like, why? You know when like everyone clearly knows something that you don't know. She's like, why is everyone freaking out? She's like, it seems fine. If Duncan's gonna do it himself, this will at least get him distracted from the mushrooms and this would be actually useful. And Tammy tells Gladys about some past trauma that the group has had.

patrick: I cannot wait to hear what this is.

kelsey: The past trauma is that in the past, someone lived in the community, brought a proposal, and said they wanted to get frogs. And everyone was like, great idea.

patrick: that's so cute

kelsey: And so they got frogs, but they had to feed the frogs like grubs. And if the frogs didn't eat all the grubs, then they'd grow up into beetles. And so then there were just like a ton of beetles everywhere. And like, you know, the body keeps the score. So the people are like—

patrick: famously so

kelsey: —panicking. The commune keeps the score. They're like panicking. They're like, we cannot, there's still beetles everywhere. Like we cannot have this.

patrick: And the, the thing about the desert is there's not water. And the thing about bugs is they love water. The thing about a commune is you have a, you've established a spatial monopoly on the water. And so the result of this is beetles all up in your business.

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: Also, why did they want frogs?

kelsey: [laughing] I don't, that's, I dunno, that's not, I don't know.

patrick: this is a great detail

kelsey: Everyone's freaking out. And so Gladys is kind of like, well, do I defend Duncan, who is technically my buddy, and who also I think doesn't really have that bad of an idea. People are just projecting their past beetle trauma onto his meal worms.

patrick: Mm-hmm. I think it's worth pro—I think that that's a trauma worth projecting in this specific way. I think, I think the knives are coming out for Duncan. I'm sorry buddy.

kelsey: Gladys is like, I don't think it's a bad idea. And she like kind of stands up for Duncan and she's like, Duncan needs a hobby basically. And she's like, let Duncan have his stupid meal worms. Like this is the first thing I'm taking a stand on, please. And so—

patrick: Eating bugs worked for the citizens on the snowpiercer train. It can work for us.

kelsey: Exactly. And Gladys is like, okay, I, this is like, I'm gonna defend him. She defends him and everyone's like, uh, okay, fine. They like do their vote and nobody completely disagrees to the point. Everyone can live with it. So it's like fine. He may have his meal worms. They're like, how much money do you need for the meal worms? And Duncan's like, oh, great news. I don't need any money for the meal worms because I picked up six fish tanks filled with meal worms off of Facebook marketplace this morning. I had to take all six.

patrick: This is great. Which we've been talking about, group communication, um, and I feel like one of the important things there is to ask, um, permission not forgiveness. It's not like one of those types of scenarios and not, um, I, I don't know. I just feel like I, I'm already wary of the plan and I'd be more wary if he was like, good, because it's already happening. I would not like that.

kelsey: Yeah. It is true that like if you have a boss, you should just do whatever you want without asking. But when you are in a community where everyone operates on the same level, that's disrespectful and rude. So

patrick: I do, I do respect his ingenuity. Um, my partner's a big time Facebook marketplace person. She finds incredible deals. So

kelsey: Yeah. We love Facebook marketplace.

patrick: This is, this is a big, this is a feather in Duncan's cap. I mean the specifics no, but the generals, yes

kelsey: Yes. And nobody is thrilled about the fact that he was basically asking for forgiveness, but everyone is thrilled about the fact that he got them for free. So they're like, that's kind of fine.

patrick: Also, good timing, I will say, just because chickens produce way fewer eggs in the winter.

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: And more reliable food. More reliable food for everyone.

kelsey: Exactly. So everyone's kind of in on it, except that your prediction is correct and they are kind of gross and like when everyone eats family meal now they're just like a bunch of glass containers with like worms in them.

patrick: Family meal worms!

kelsey: family meal worm. Every week there are so many more worms. There's like rapid worm growth and Duncan to his credit, is doing a really good job. Like he's keeping a careful log of like when they're fed

patrick: respect

kelsey: he's taking them all out and cleaning their bedding and putting them all back in.

patrick: For a second, I thought you were gonna say he was taking them on walks

kelsey: [laughing] Tying them all up to floss

patrick: which is a really, really cute image until I Googled mealworm just now and nah, no no.

kelsey: So what did you see?

patrick: Um, I saw a YouTube thumbnail that appeared to be someone holding a fish towards a tank full of mealworms and I command W instantly.

kelsey: Okay. That's gone. We won't think about it anymore. Okay. There are just like infinite meal worms. And Duncan is feeding them to the chickens every day. Right. He's taking them out there. It's winter, as you said. So this is like very good timing. The hens are like, over the course of a couple of weeks of eating the mealworms getting like very glossy and like a little chubby

patrick: Oooh, skincare! Yum yum

kelsey: Yeah. The, their yolks are like orange. Everyone is happy. Everyone is like, wow, Duncan has made the chickens happy. Duncan has not created chaos. We love it.

patrick: Yeah, you dou—You doubted the man who gave you all gastrointestinal distress because he couldn't tell, uh, a russula from whatever the thing you can eat that looks like a russula is. Giri, don't get mad at me!

kelsey: Exactly. They did doubt him and they were wrong. He's doing a really good job and after like two months, Duncan stands up at the group meeting and he's like, I just wanna thank everyone, especially Gladys, for believing in me and like allowing me to have these meal worms. They're going really well. And he's like, I'm more than happy to keep doing them myself. But there are so many of them.

patrick: Okay. Does he have, have they expanded? I'm just imagining the communal area now is like, you know, you have to have your legs up really high because—

kelsey: Yes. Basically

patrick: —under every chair is like a mealworm aquarium, and like, if the conversation stops for a second, you can hear this low just like [worm rumble] sound

kelsey: yes, that's exactly right.

patrick: Kind of smells crazy in there and you're like, this is the best egg I've ever had. But at what cost?

kelsey: Yes. So Duncan is basically like, I would like for the eco team to help me clean the mealworm tanks and feed them to the chickens and like their chores.

patrick: Okay. This, this is a sensible proposal.

kelsey: You think so?

patrick: In theory.

kelsey: Okay.

patrick: There are a lot of ways this could go wrong because—

kelsey: why?

patrick: I mean, as, as this, I mean, this community already knows like you don't want a repeat of Beetlegate, you know?

kelsey: No, you don't. Everyone is like, this seems fine. Like it doesn't seem that hard. We'll figure it out. The only person who's like even hesitant is Tammy, and that's only because Tammy thinks the worms are like—in practice, she's like, they're disgusting. In theory, I like them.

patrick: Fair enough. Honestly, like that's the, that's, you know, that's one of the great parts of communal living is like, you can get in where you fit in, you know? You don't have to handle those worms if you don't want to.

kelsey: And Tammy's like, I can't do it. I won't do it. And everyone's like, that's fine. Like you can just swap your shift with someone else. Right?

patrick: Perfect.

kelsey: She's like, okay, fine. I vote yes, we will help him with the meal worms.

patrick: Perfect.

kelsey: Great. The worms are fine for like three more months. The chickens have never looked better. There are so many worms that Duncan is like making mealworm cookies, which—

patrick: Ooh, okay.

kelsey: —apparently tastes fine enough that the kids like them, so like sure.

patrick: I mean, they think carob is a treat, so, you know

kelsey: It's a great point. Their palettes are primed for meal worms

patrick: and Gladys has been here for like a year at this point?

kelsey: Not quite. Like 10 months.

patrick: Yes. But, but she's like, she's settling in, you know

kelsey: very much.

patrick: Yeah. That's good.

kelsey: She's feeling, she's feeling it. She loves her community now.

patrick: I was, I was very stressed for her making this change and having this bad first impression. So it warms my heart to hear things are going better.

kelsey: Yeah. Yeah. It's nice. But then one day at dinner, um, Tammy is like, don't the worms look weird?

patrick: Uh-oh, uh-oh

kelsey: and Duncan's like, they don't look weird. You just hate the worms. Like you never look at them. You like need to consider your biases against worms. Like, the worms are fine.

patrick: Wow. Okay. Strong words from Duncan.

kelsey: The worms are not fine.

patrick: Ooh. Okay.

kelsey: The next week the worms are like turning black. Some of them are turning black. They're looking very weird.

patrick: Are they haunted? Is this, is this turning a ghost story?

kelsey: No.

patrick: Are they evil?

kelsey: Maybe. It's unclear. They are beginning to smell worse.

patrick: Ooh.

kelsey: They're smelling like moldy fish like they're smelling like... death.

patrick: Okay. Are these the type of worms that turn into animals with wings?

kelsey: I don't think so.

patrick: I wouldn't think so. Okay. So they're just gonna turn into like sludge, basically, is what's happening here. Liquefying. Gross. And Duncan, at this point, is Duncan still just like, it's fine, they do this?

kelsey: No. Duncan is now concerned. Duncan is like, my worms are sick.

patrick: I hate when that happens.

kelsey: A classic problem.

patrick: A classic problem

kelsey: But now there's, so now at our group meeting that week, we have a question which is like, what do you do with the smelly dying worms?

patrick: A smell that I'm assuming everyone is actively being presented with and assaulted by as they're having this meeting? Like, ughh, I mean. Here's, here's, you know, the circle of life. My friend, it's time to get yourself some frogs.

kelsey: You're creating chaos. You're like, bring the frogs back. We'll have a beetle apocalypse. It'll rule.

patrick: But see, here's the thing, you know, life's all about cycles. Occasionally you'll find these moments of equilibrium between the bugs and the frogs, where like things will be perfect. You'll be eating beautiful yolks. Um, your frogs will be performing little circus acts, which I assume is the reason you bought them in the first place. You're, you're training them up well, because they're on a good diet. And then eventually, you know, things equilibrium will get outta whack. The bad times will return. And then, you know, Duncan will find some way to solve the problem. It's fine.

kelsey: I, this is like when they're having those debates about whether wolves should be brought into national parks to kill moose. And it's like, well, how many wolves? Like four? Is that enough? [laughing]

patrick: I was, I was recently in, um, New Zealand where they have like a huge invasive species problem

kelsey: uh-oh.

patrick: And it's basically just because these dipshit colonizers brought like a couple stoats and little mammals with them. And then like—

kelsey: What's a stoat? I don't know what that is.

patrick: It's like a, it's like a, a shiny little like tube shaped mammal that just eats birds and bird eggs.

kelsey: Oh!

patrick: And all the birds there, they were like, no, no, uh, native mammals. And so the birds are all just kind of stupid little goofy guys who walk around. And so if you go on hikes, like every 10 feet, there's these little boxes with like traps for stoats. And—

kelsey: because they're trying to get them

patrick: because they're trying to get them. Yeah. So I'm very familiar with this, uh—

kelsey: this drama of bringing frogs in to eat all your dying mealworms

patrick: the invasive species, uh, out of your control kind of situation. So why, I don't know why I'm recommending it, I guess is my point against myself.

kelsey: Yeah. It doesn't seem like a good recommendation based on all the anecdotes that have been shared. Um, thing you need to know about the community is that they make decisions based on what's called sociocracy.

patrick: Oh yeah. I'm familiar.

kelsey: Please go ahead.

patrick: Well, uh, I only know that it's like an alternative decision making framework. I'm mostly familiar because one of the goats who lived on the farm was named Sociocracy.

kelsey: Nobody knows what goat you're talking about.

patrick: Oh. Um, on, on the, uh, commune slash farm area that I lived in, I was also briefly responsible for herding the goats.

kelsey: Mm-hmm.

patrick: And their names followed an alphabetical system.

kelsey: Okay.

patrick: Um, and the S one was sociocracy and one of the people there was really into it. And I wish I understood more of how it worked, but it's like kind of social demo—like you vote on stuff, I'm guessing with the -ocracy part?

kelsey: Yeah. The, the part you need to understand for this conversation is that everybody doesn't have to agree. But nobody can firmly disagree.

patrick: Mm-hmm.

kelsey: So like, it doesn't have to be your first choice, but you must have unanimous approval. It has to be a choice that everyone can live with.

patrick: Okay.

kelsey: So at the meeting this week, there are two camps

patrick: as always

kelsey: as always. One of them is like, I like the worms. They feed the chicken. They're a cheap source of protein with minimal eco impact. And if everyone simply ate these worms, the whole world would have enough protein.

patrick: Mm-hmm.

kelsey: The second camp is like, the worms are becoming like a weird fermented meal worm juice, and it smells really bad. And I think that that's gross. And so I think we need to get rid of them.

patrick: My sympathies certainly lie with the, the latter camp because um, I think if you, if you're just trying to poke holes in either's arguments, um, it smells crazy in here in our communal spaces, unlivable, is a way stronger thing than like, when I cut into my, uh, side using the side of my fork in my egg yolk this morning, this beautiful golden hue made me feel things like

kelsey: yes

patrick: you gotta make some compromises.

kelsey: Yes. So this fight takes hours

patrick: [giggling]

kelsey: hours and hours. And finally they get to the point where everyone is like, I can live with no more mealworms, right? Like, that's the decision I can live with. And that includes Duncan, right?

patrick: good

kelsey: Duncan is crying. He's like, it's fine. I'm sad that my mealworms are all dying. Um, but I can live with this decision. I just have one question, which is how are you going to get rid of them?

patrick: Well, it's a good thing we've already solved that one. Call up your frog guy, you know, get some frogs in there. Um, I guess you just put the, open the aquarium tanks and put 'em in the chicken pen and then—

kelsey: Hmm. Okay. Interesting. Nobody had thought about this, right? Everyone was so focused on like, are we gonna get rid of the meal worms or not? That no one had considered, now that we've decided to get rid of them, what are we gonna do?

patrick: I guess you can't feed them to the chickens because they're probably gross, right?

kelsey: Yes. Because they are sick.

patrick: Mm-hmm. Ahh.

kelsey: I will give you an option and you tell me why you think it will or will not work.

patrick: Okay

kelsey: Compost the mealworms.

patrick: Um, they might eat all the compost and then you have no more compost, but you do have even more ravenous, more disgusting worms.

kelsey: Correct. That one will not work. Release the mealworms into the wild.

patrick: Uh, remember those beetles? They're back and they're worse.

kelsey: Yes, exactly.

patrick: And they're squishier.

kelsey: This will not work. Flush the mealworms down the toilet.

patrick: No, the, that's their toilet. Now they're gonna come back up at some point. Like the worst creatures you've ever seen

kelsey: Feed the mealworms to the chicken.

patrick: No, your chickens are now haunted.

kelsey: Put the meal worms into big trash bags and throw them away.

patrick: What? No. Come on. They're, they're, they have movement abilities still. They're gonna get outta them.

kelsey: Kill them.

patrick: Yes.

kelsey: Okay. You wanna kill them?

patrick: Yeah. Done. I'm sorry. They gotta go.

kelsey: Um, you're, you think that it's time to kill them?

patrick: They're, they're all dying. And presumably the how of this is not all that difficult because if there's 30 plus people and there's these very serious camps, surely some of them have such a, such a hatred for these meal worms. Even at Komunoka—what's it, what's the name of the community?

kelsey: That's close enough

patrick: Yeah. Even, even this Esperanto community, they're like, I can, I can fix this. Just like, gimme, gimme five minutes and like a boot. And are those problems going away

kelsey: Mm-hmm. Now I have to ask you some questions that were raised at the meeting and they are, do worms have souls?

patrick: [pained laughter]

kelsey: Can worms feel pain? Will this cause them harm? Does this make you a murderer if you kill 5,000 mealworms? What are the ethics here?

patrick: Well, uh, see, this is, this is when you need just, this is where the committee structure works. You need to have your, um, your insect cosmology and spirituality committee meet, decide these answers. And whatever they say goes, because that's how the committee structure works. You trust these people to make these decisions. You trust them. You know, if exorcisms need to be performed before or if that's more harmful to perform them. Because if you're killing devil worms, that's less ethically dubious. I think what you need to do is just, yeah, call up a call up your bug people. Let them handle this.

kelsey: Mm-hmm. Yeah, you're right. So what happens here is because this is a complicated question that people are not capable of answering immediately, it is deferred to a committee. The committee is whichever one is in charge of like ethics.

patrick: Yeah. The insect spirituality, uh, ad hoc subcommittee.

kelsey: Yes. And what the committee does is they find, um, some material to circulate. And I am sending you the link now. Can you click on this for me?

patrick: Reducing-suffering.org/kill-bugs-humanely. I'm so excited. Okay. Should I, should I read this or—

kelsey: Um, can you just read the top section and then the table of contents?

patrick: Oh, wow. I just, I, hmm. This is good. *While I generally avoid killing healthy insects, I often find injured or—I, I, I should just say like, we're laughing about this because, you know, it's, it's silly, but like, I do appreciate that people have taken the time to think through this thoroughly, like*

kelsey: yes.

patrick: You know, I, I, our human-animal relationships are very serious, and I think so much of it is in this one direction of like inflicting pain.

kelsey: Mm-hmm.

patrick: And so I, I do, I do appreciate someone taking the time to think this through. That said, uh, this page describes *the two methods that I used to kill bugs as little pain as possible. One through crushing against rough paper and two, freezing, which is perhaps less advisable if thorough crushing is feasible. I welcome more research and options on euthanasia techniques. It's not completely clear to me if euthanizing dying bugs is more humane than leaving them to die on their own*

kelsey: uhuh fair. All right.

patrick: *For example, I worry that when crushing bugs into little pieces, there's a small chance the animal's tiny brain might remain somewhat intact in one of those pieces? I'd like to find out more about this concern. Contents. Summary. Introduction. Why I worry about incomplete crushing. Method one, immediate thorough crushing. Method two, freezing, parenthesis (probably less advisable). Shredding? question mark. Wanted: a humane bug killing device. Sub bullet: caveats on the calculation. Footnotes. Wow. That is, this is a hell of a document. Um, I'm putting this into a word counter right now*

kelsey: please.

patrick: Because I, I just, I gotta know, this is, um, 5,672 words. That's longer than almost anything I've ever written. I respect this blogger.

kelsey: And that's how you know it's thorough.

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: This is a good blogger right here. Exactly. Okay. So the ethics committee sends this document around. They then have a meeting about the document that is open and they bring options. Each of these options has a pro and a con. The first option is soak the meal worms in alcohol.

patrick: Okay.

kelsey: The pro here is that it might have an anesthetic effect, which could be ethical.

patrick: I buy that, yeah. This is a good argument.

kelsey: The con is that alcohol comes in plastic bottles, which we don't love.

patrick: Oh, yeah. I mean, there's, there's a way to square this, but not a good one, which is you simply, uh, create a moonshine still and in six months, however long it takes to distill enough moonshine to kill all these bugs. But they're, they're just, they're, you have bug soup at that point anyway, so that's not a realistic, uh

kelsey: And they're smelly.

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: The next option brought by the committee is to freeze them

patrick: Mm. Which, you're putting 'em in closer proximity to all your food. And, um, as this blogger has taught us, freezing is less ideal when crushing is readily available. And crushing is always readily available.

kelsey: Yes. The benefit of freezing is that it's like a little more hands off way of killing. So it's not as, um, morally dub dubious in some ways. And two, um, so that's the pro that you could freeze them and it's clean. The con is that, um, mealworms have come back to life after being frozen.

patrick: You told me there were no ghosts in this story! They *are* haunted.

kelsey: They're haunted.

patrick: Imagine feeding the chickens, um, like a bunch of reanimated meal worms. Their, their powers.

kelsey: You can't

patrick: I mean, you'd, you'd have to deal with them eventually because they would grow sentient and unionize, to try to destroy you. But like for a couple weeks there, their abilities and powers would be pretty incredible. I will say.

kelsey: Yeah. The third option is smush them with your hands.

patrick: Yes. Best option.

kelsey: You like that one?

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: It's efficient, but it's also yucky

patrick: Crunch crunch. It is yucky. But you know, the, this is, this is like not that different from literally you gotta break a few eggs to make an omelet. Like you gotta break a few egg-creating creatures to make the thing that you have to break to then make an omelet.

kelsey: Wow. Um, the last option is burn them.

patrick: [laughing] No! I'm, I'm assuming they can survive that too. If they can survive freezing.

kelsey: They cannot, that we know of

patrick: I hope not

kelsey: Um, the benefit of the burning is that the people of the committee have thought that it might be nice as like a kind of ceremonial aspect.

patrick: We already, this is already a community with some real tensions around fires. And surely if you meld that with like insect ethics, that you're just gonna have to form way too many subcommittees to deal with all the entangled problems.

kelsey: What, which of these options do you want?

patrick: You know, if, if the alcohol thing is feasible in an ecologically responsible way, then doing that and then crushing them. But I, I'm, I'm sorry. Like this, this hammer that we refuse to bop Duncan with is being used to smush these worms. Um

kelsey: [laughing] You're smushing 'em

patrick: But the thing is, I haven't read this whole document and maybe if I read this 5,672 word blog, I would like, I would then think that the best solution is to like fund research towards a humane bug killing device and then sitting with my bugs for another seven years till it hits the consumer marketplace. So maybe it's good I haven't read this document.

kelsey: What happens is at the meeting, they vote. This does not work. They anguish.

patrick: and it's just smelling worse with every passing hour

kelsey: I's smelling worse and worse. The next week people come up and give little speeches. It's a whole ordeal—

patrick: the next week?!

kelsey: yes, it has been two weeks and the bugs—really, they, it smells crazy in there.

patrick: Oh, this is nasty.

kelsey: These are, see, at some point you need a maverick, you need someone who in the middle of the night is just gonna smush the bugs in like the 15 minutes it takes. And the next morning when everyone's like, where's the bugs? That person could be like, oh no.

kelsey: Oh no.

patrick: Oh no. Well, at least we don't have this problem anymore. Who wants some carob cake?

kelsey: Would you do that?

patrick: Yeah. I kinda think I'm the type of person who would do that.

kelsey: You would, you would s smush all these bugs with your hands?

patrick: Not with my hands, with my, uh, with my feet probably.

kelsey: Okay. Sufficient. Okay.

patrick: Although, I mean, if there's a lot then. You need to change shoes a few times but I, I think I could, I could get it done.

kelsey: You think you could do it?

patrick: Yeah.

kelsey: Okay. So as we've been over, the way that you make decisions is you have to come to a place that everyone can live with.

patrick: Sociocracy

kelsey: Sociocracy. The decision they come to is they will freeze the worms for two weeks.

patrick: Okay. Long enough to weed out the bad ones and select for those with magical powers.

kelsey: Hopefully! And then they will burn them.

patrick: Okay. This is a logically coherent plan.

kelsey: Tell me why

patrick: You, you are trying to reduce their suffering, which, mm-hmm. I mean, I, I think,

kelsey: Yes

patrick: which I honestly, I mean, they've read the paper presumably, and I commend that and, you know, I, I do, I do, I think everyone will feel better than a decision that like everyone has like, at least consented to.

kelsey: Yes.

patrick: And for as slow as they worked, like this will minimize resentments going after, because if I went, if I went crunch-crunch mode on those bugs, then the next day Duncan would feel horrible and I would have to lie to him. And then it would be—,

kelsey: long-term resentment, that's no good.

patrick: Which this community clearly has none of already.

kelsey: clearly

patrick: So we don't wanna introduce any in there

kelsey: Exactly. Okay, so they vote on this, everyone is like, yes. Freeze all the bugs, put them in a bonfire, whatever. That's, we agree. But as soon as they voted on this, someone from the CCC is like, uh, just wanna give a heads up on this decision that the next bonfire will be the summer solstice.

patrick: No, no! So all the new people, they'll be like, oh, I love nature in the Esperanto language and um, things that are supposed to taste like chocolate and don't, why are there all these little screams coming from that fire over there?

kelsey: [laughing]

patrick: And then these new people who are like excited and vulnerable to try out this community. You're like, okay. So the ethics of bug souls as it relates to freezing. So

kelsey: Yes. So do you do it? you finally reached a consensus

patrick: I guess now I'm, I'm having to consider this sort of, um, the bulk geometry. Like are there enough mealworms that it would be like noticeable within the three—

kelsey: Yes

patrick: Oh, okay.

kelsey: Certainly, yes.

patrick: Can you just not, can you just like have a fire like another day? Is that not possible?

kelsey: No.

patrick: You know what? I think you gotta do it. I think I, I forget it was, it was a previous guest on Normal Gossip said that a way to make friends with people is, is just say the weirdest thing that pops in your head when you meet them. And I think that's a really great way to like, to sort of just find out like, is this gonna work or not? And if you're the type of commune that is gonna burn bugs at the stake and be honest about it and take this decision so thoroughly in the spirit of radical transparency, you're just gonna have to, these normies are gonna have to find out the hard way.

kelsey: We are at the very end of the story, and they choose to do it. They have to put all of the meal worms into those like silicon ice cube trays into the chest freezers.

patrick: Oh. Oh. I'm just imagining like a sad, like, like a movie trailer style, like mournful cover of like a sad pop song, like a breakup song or something like the Johnny Cash version of Hurt or something, playing as, just like Duncan weeping with his beautiful hair flowing somehow despite being in the freezer is just like scooping his tiny little—

kelsey: friends

patrick: black worms

kelsey: stinky. They decide that since, you know, they're like, we don't wanna hide who we are from the new people. They decide to have an end of life ceremony for the worms at the bonfire to thank them for their service. [laughing]

patrick: [laughing] I think I've really come around on these people. I, you know, they're, they're so, they're so dedicated to their principles that I, I just, I respect it.

kelsey: Yeah. And you know, I guess the, like, moral here is that the method did work, right? Like

patrick: okay. I was gonna ask, there are no, this worm problem did not persist?

kelsey: No. Um, we are at the end. How do you feel? Whose side are you on?

patrick: I feel, I feel, I feel like I really, like, I feel emotionally worn out. Um

kelsey: yeah, that's normal

patrick: That was, that was a way more like more involved story than I expected. Just the, the thinking about the ethics of this, like mass worm killing, and

kelsey: Massacre, even

patrick: Even I, I think I just, I, I'm, I'm so foregrounded in like Gladys's feelings and I want her to like really feel like this next step is like this rewarding, lovely journey. I want this like psychedelic, this process, this psychedelic step, you know, off the diving board. I want her to feel like this was like a good choice for her life. And I'm imagining her sitting here one year later looking at this bonfire and I'm wondering what she's thinking. I'm hoping she thinks these are my people and those were my worms, and they're in hell now where they belong.

kelsey: [laughing] That's basically what she's thinking.

patrick: Aww

kelsey: She's like, she's like, you know, This was very weird and stressful. She's like, but the community worked the way it was supposed to, right?

patrick: Yeah!

kelsey: Like it took some time, but everyone is satisfied with the worms going to their fiery death.

patrick: She got what she wanted and was it stinky? Yes. But like one year later, you know, the sun has gone through its solstice cycle and on the longest day of the year, she's sitting at this horrifically destructive bonfire and just thinking, okay, this is what I signed up for.

kelsey: Yeah. And Gladys has now been there for many years and she is very happy at her commune and she has grown very used to all of these like little dramas playing out.

patrick: I love it!

kelsey: Would you like the final update?

patrick: I would though. I, I will, I will pass an aden—just like a little

kelsey: please.

patrick: Another thought I have is like, I really think life, and this is I guess gets back to like gossip as a thing, I think life is just, way more enjoyable and has a much richer texture if there's just sort of a, a baseline of acceptable low stakes drama in your life—

kelsey: Yeah.

patrick: —that you can gossip about, that you can experience, that you can like work through your feelings through. And so I, I think, I think Gladys is in a good place.

kelsey: Yeah. The goal of a healthy community isn't no conflict, it's conflict resolution in which everyone feels like they were heard. Right?

patrick: Yeah. Like don't you just feel sort of spiritually rung out in like a good way after you sort of go through one of these worm killing ethics debates for eight hours in a rapidly petrifying room.

kelsey: Yeah, yeah

patrick: yeah. It's a cleanliness in that

kelsey: a little dizzy?

patrick: lightly fermented. Yeah.

kelsey: There is one thing though.

patrick: Uh-oh

kelsey: and the thing is that there's something that um, happened, which is that a few weeks after the summer solstice, Duncan came to Gladys and was like, Gladys, can I talk to you about something? Why are you making that face?

patrick: No! I have a prediction, but I don't wanna say it.

kelsey: And Gladys is like, what? And Duncan has all of his little logbooks, right, of like all the cleanings and all the feedings and he's like pointing right at the week before everything went awry. And he's like, it was Tammy's shift.

patrick: Oh shit. She poisoned the worms?!

kelsey: Do you think she poisoned the worms?

patrick: that, I mean, that seems to be the conclusion that he's drawing.

kelsey: Duncan thinks she did.

patrick: Oh, Tammy. I mean, that's devious. That's devious. Because if you're gonna do that, like if you're gonna take that step, you have to be prepared to dig that mass grave and get on your worms, squishing boots. And it sounds like Tammy, I mean, maybe she was spoke up in the meetings, but that's, you can't—see, now I'm fully sociocracy-pilled, I'm like, you should not have done that without going through nine committee votes.

kelsey: What, what do you think the for and against Tammy doing mass worm sabotage are?

patrick: I don't, I'm trying to, I'm struggling to make a, a for case. I guess the four case is like, it's weird in there. Um, mm-hmm. And that's, I, I, I, I sympathize with her to, to a certain degree. Um, the against case is that things are good, those eggs, like, it's like an egg commercial. Um, the chickens are great. They're, they're almost as luscious as Duncan's hair. Like things are good. Duncan's happy. He has a purpose. He's no longer poisoning you fungally. Like the, the against case is pretty strong, I gotta say. Did she poison them?

kelsey: We don't know. This is, this is your final, what would you do? Is that you're, Gladys. Duncan has brought you this evidence.

patrick: I defend my friend. I stick with her.

kelsey: You do? Why?

patrick: Yeah. I think what's done is what's done is done. Um, you know, I I presumably, if we're still close throughout all this, like there haven't been other signs that she is like doing more active sabotage cuz it sounds like the worm thing she was like pretty strongly against. And it seems isolated enough. I think I'm riding with my friend. Um, I think I say, you know, there's no way to know what happened, but also like, we gotta, we gotta move on like the, the, the summer solstice just happened. That's presumably a time of renewal. Um, and so in that, in that sort of lunar, uh, solar I guess spirit, we have to [deep breath] cleanse ourselves. And Duncan would be like, what?! Then, you know, that's commune livin', baby.

kelsey: Gladys is like Duncan, if she did it, could you live with the decision that was made afterward? Like did this play out in a way that you still would've been satisfied with if she did do it? And Duncan's like, well, yeah. I mean, that's the way it was always gonna play out and Gladys is like, okay. Then the only part of that that's missing is how you interact with Tammy. So do you want to confront Tammy about this? And Duncan is like, no.

patrick: Gladys is such a good communicator

kelsey: and so we still don't know, which is beautiful.

patrick: That's a satisfying, I I'm, I'm very, I'm satisfied by this ending.

kelsey: Oh, good. I'm glad.

patrick: My, my prediction earlier when I gasped was like when Duncan comes to Gladys, I had assumed he would be like, Gladys, I have a confession to make. Um, and then takes her to his cabin where there's an aquarium set up with mealworms, and he was like, you know how those eggs are still so good? It's my colony. I did that.

kelsey: Wow. I wish. Um, Patrick, thank you so much for coming on Normal Gossip. It was a treat to have you!

patrick: Oh, thank—this is so much fun. Thank you for having me.

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