

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness, Alaina Urquhart & Ash Kelley

JVN: Hey, curious people. Welcome back to Getting Curious. I'm your host, Jonathan Van Ness. So you guys, obviously, yesterday was Election day. So today we just need to take a break, let our hair down, let it all go. So I hope everyone is doing ok. I hope you got your SPF on. I hope you're nice and hydrated and ready for a good juicy story. Today on the podcast, we have two guests, two of my favorites of all time, Alaina Urquhart and Ash Kelly, the co-host of Morbid, my favorite true crime podcast of all time. What's morbid you ask? Ok. Well, it's only one of the most popular podcasts of all time. On Morbid Alaina is a licensed autopsy technician and author. She brings her unique perspective on death and the afterlife while Ash has her enthusiasm for true crime and storytelling. And as you'll also find out she is a hairdresser, we have that in common. I think that's part of why I fell in love with them so hard core, but I've been listening to their podcast for years. I love them so much. I got to do their podcast last year. Now I get to have them on our podcast for the first time. This duo covers a wide range of topics including infamous murders, unsolved mysteries, historical crimes, uh, ongoing crimes, listener tales. They have so much good stuff. Just get over there and listen if you haven't already. And on today, Getting Curious is meeting Morbid, we're uncovering one of the grimmest and spookiest true crimes out there. Popes murders, magic and corpses. This is the Cadaver Synod. This episode is gonna be a little bit different. You guys, the first segment is gonna be just us, Ash, Alaina, and I gabbing having fun doing the thing. Then segment two and three, we're getting, getting into the actual story which is giving us like the crossover vibes because we're doing like an episode of Getting Curious kind of how they do their episodes of Morbid where I'm going to be telling you the story of the Cadaver Synod just so you get the formation around here. Ok. Let's get to our chat, Ash and Alaina, welcome to Getting Curious. How are you?

ASH KELLEY: I'm good. How are you?

ALAINA URQUHART: Thank you!

JVN: You guys? I'm so excited to like virtually see you and have you on the pod. It's I got to do your pod once, but this is the first time that I get to have you guys on Getting Curious pod and we are just like next level excited.

ALAINA URQUHART: I'm stoked. We're both stoked. We are firing in a real way. Like when you asked us to do this. We're like, what?

JVN: Shut your mouth. I can't stand it. You guys. But wait, I have to tell you this. So one thing about the pod is, is that we work, like sometimes we record the week before something and in this case, our episode is literally the episode that's coming out the day after the election. So this is what's happening. But, you know, we are not fortune tellers over here. We don't know what's gonna happen. I don't know. Ok, so I could have done like a live something or something, but I didn't know. So I'm trying to just get, you know, it's, it reminds me of um what is that man's name from Twister who is so handsome who passed away? Rest his – Bill Paxton.

ASH KELLEY: Yes.

JVN: It's like, I just want to be Bill Paxton and Twister when he goes and gets the dirt and just like, really, you know, dribbles it into the wind to see which way that the wind is blowing, you know, to know, like how to get the Dorothy up to the next Twister, but I don't know where the wind's gonna blow. So I just thought it'd be really fun to have the queens from Morbid over. We're gonna talk about true crime pods. We're gonna talk about this gorgeous papal cadaver, Synod, Cy, Synod and we're just going to do like kind of like a crossover pod to soothe us from our post election woes. So that's what we're doing today.

ALAINA URQUHART: I love that.

ASH KELLEY: Let's go. We're here for that. We're very ready for that.

JVN: Where and why? And how did Morbid get born?

ASH KELLEY: Morbid was born on Alaina's living room couch one day –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yes.

ASH KELLEY: We are just always hanging out. So we said, why don't we get paid to hang out together and make this a job?

JVN: Age old question.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, you know, we both listen to podcasts. Alaina's always been into True Crime. So by proxy, I have been too –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, I was always a horror girly, always a true crime girly. I was very interested in like the pat, like the forensic pathology of it all that –

JVN: Well, because especially as a, as a, as an autopsy –

ALAINA URQUHART: Exactly.

JVN: Fucking uh practitioner.

ALAINA URQUHART: And that's why I chose that job. I was so fascinated by it and yeah, we just, I made sure that Ash because she's 10 years younger than I am, she's –

ASH KELLEY: Just a baby.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah. So I, as soon as she came into the world, I was like, oh, this is going to be my best friend and we're going to like the same things I've decided.

ASH KELLEY: And here we are.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

JVN: But what year did I get born morbid?

ASH KELLEY: 2018?

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

ASH KELLEY: Right at the time.

JVN: That's what I thought. Yes. And you guys have just had like, you guys are just like been fucking just on that successful track just doing the damn thing. Sidebar though Alaina, do

you, are you still doing, do you still have to do the autopsies or did, like, morbid, make it so that, like, we don't have to do autopsy so much anymore?

ALAINA URQUHART: Well, I wouldn't even say I don't have to because it's like I did, this is my full time job now. This and writing books, luckily which I –

JVN: Which is really busy. So, we're clear.

ALAINA URQUHART: It's a lot, it's a lot,

JVN: Like, it's a lot.

ALAINA URQUHART: But I actually, and I don't do autopsies anymore or not currently, I would do it again in a second though because I really enjoyed that job. It was so fascinating. It was always something different. I learned something new every single time I went in there and I think it was like a really good lesson in like empathy and like it brought a little more. I feel like I was always like a little like brash and like, you know, like, I, you know, I can come off that way sometimes –

ASH KELLEY: It happens sometimes,

ALAINA URQUHART: And I feel like working in autopsies kind of brought me back into like the humanity of people a little bit –

ASH KELLEY: And made you care more about people I feel.

JVN: As an, as a, as a former autopsy, like queen. Is there anything that you just like, don't fucking do because of your time as an autopsy person? Like, you don't put your feet like up on the like on the dashboard because like if the airbag comes out, like you're gonna get like double back broken legs and like internally bleed out or something like is there and like, I mean, obviously it goes without saying, like, you know, don't go around guns and stuff, but like, you're driving but like, is there just like, is there any, like, low key little tips and tricks? I'm like, yeah, don't do that because it's fucking really shitty way to die. And like, another thing you could have done and it wouldn't have happened?

ALAINA URQUHART: It's definitely you nailed it on the head with the legs on the dashboard. That's like the number one thing I won't do.

ASH KELLEY: **Gasps** I do that every day.

ALAINA URQUHART: And if I it's all I can think of. Also trampolines –

JVN: But what about as far as dying, like, definitely not the like feet up on there because you've seen like some people with like double back, broken legs from a car accident that didn't make it and their like legs were just mangled?

ALAINA URQUHART: It's not a good thing to see. They don't resemble a person anymore essentially –

JVN: NO!

ALAINA URQUHART: So also a claw clip in your hair. Um, don't do that in the car.

ASH KELLEY: You got to take them out in the car.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, I have a pile on the floor in my car –

ALAINA URQUHART: Take them out in the car because they will embed into the back of your head in a car accident.

ASH KELLEY: When she told me that my life was ruined because I'm a claw clip girly.

ALAINA URQUHART: You wouldn't believe the things in your car or on your person that will become a projectile and like a weapon of mass destruction in your car in the event –

JVN: What else?

ASH KELLEY: do you think my nails would be a weapon of mass destruction in the car?

JVN: Probably in your hand. Like you could probably cut your own palm or something or you like face?

ASH KELLEY: Oh I hate that.

JVN: Ok, so now that you guys have been around for like you guys are literally giving us six, you guys are literally giving us like first grader age of podcasting. Like we are, our podcasts are in grade school together. They are so cute. They're like just the cutest pods. Um, you know, for me leaf killer, leaf murderer guy is I think for me the most like that's the one for me that I just, I think about my reference all the time. Like it's just that one. I don't know if it was the mood I was in that day. But what do your followers, what are your listeners? What are they craving for? Do they like, like current stuff? Do they like really old stuff? Do they like? Are they like, what, like what also listener tales? I, you know what other listener tale I think about a lot is that fucking family who was in that cabin and that like red haired man, like all of a sudden it was like in the door like he's like in the doorway and then remember that?

ALAINA URQUHART: Oh I think I do remember that!

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JVN: It was 2023.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yes.

JVN: I do, it was like a year ago. It was 2023, I do know that.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, I totally forgot about that one.

ALAINA URQUHART: I forgot about that one too, that's a good one.

ASH KELLEY: That one hit different –

JVN: Scary.

ALAINA URQUHART: We get listener tales that definitely hit different and make me rethink my choices as a human.

ASH KELLEY: Our listeners write their listener tales so fucking well, we end up –

JVN: They really do –

ASH KELLEY: So hard and they'll be like, I'm not a writer but blah. I'm like –

ALAINA URQUHART: And then they just proceed to be a writer. You have to write something because you're hilarious.

JVN: Jack The Ripper series was really fucking strong too. By the way, love Jack, the Ripper series.

ASH KELLEY: She became a Ripper Ologist in that moment.

ALAINA URQUHART: I felt like that was my magnum opus. Like, I felt I didn't even want to end that one –

JVN: My TikTok has not recovered from that.

ASH KELLEY: Neither has Alaina's.

ALAINA URQUHART: No.

JVN: Because you sent me in deep.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah.

ALAINA URQUHART: I'm in a state of Jack The Ripper at all times on my TikTok.

JVN: Also, that Australian man and then they figured out who it was. Remember the Australian and they did figure out who that guy was –

ALAINA URQUHART: And that was crazy timing.

ASH KELLEY: That weirdly happens to us a lot.

ALAINA URQUHART: Like it's been at least 3 to 4 times that we've covered an unsolved case and there's like some break in it like, right, not saying we're responsive for it –

JVN: I'm not saying, but we're not saying that you guys are like responsible for, but also like, you know, Elizabeth Gilbert, uh her third book, After uh, Eat Pray Love and a skeptic makes peace with marriage. And her third book was about like these like ideas. I forget the title but it was like ideas like travel around and stuff. So I actually think that you guys did just so, you know, I think you guys did have some sort of like energetic fucking break. Not to be not to out ADHD or ADHD Ash. But tell us about your under eye powder illuminator. I know this is Getting Curious, not Pretty Curious, but this color is so bright and gorgeous. Like is this like Kosis or something like what is this gorgeous like illuminator coming from your like inner corner like under your under your under eye is like so bright and beautiful and like like like so like the opposite just like smooth youth. Perfect. No eye bags is this K says press P. Why is this so perfect? Why is this so seamless and perfect?

ASH KELLEY: The craziest thing is I was literally doing my makeup in my facetime app before we came on here because I had no makeup on –

ALAINA URQUHART: This is true.

ASH KELLEY: And I was like, oh fuck this is, can I swear on here?

JVN: Yeah, of course.

ASH KELLEY: I said oh fuck, this is a video thing. Ok. So it's the Tart crease creamy,

JVN: Everyone's talking about it. Are you loving it?

ASH KELLEY: I love it so much because let me tell you something and Alaina gets this because we're family, the women in our family have very, very dark under eye circles and I'm –

ALAINA URQUHART: Cause we're so pale.

ASH KELLEY: We're so pale. You can see our circulatory system and I'm about to turn, well, in like two years I'll be 30 it's really coming at me fast and my purple under eye circles have gotten a lot worse. But this stuff, she saves you.

JVN: When I think about me being 28 I just think about like Anne Hathaway in Les Miserable –

ASH KELLEY: Oh god.

JVN: Like I think like, I just, like **sings* there was a simple time. It was*, you know, that's how I think about 28. Like I just was youthful –

ASH KELLEY: Yeah.

JVN: And it's before I got road hard and put away soaking wet by this fucking entertainment industry. Um, anyway, ok, let's ok.

ASH KELLEY: So true.

JVN: So um, ok, so, so basically your, your, your listener like to listen to a little bit of everything all over the place. Like they just want to just as long as it's giving true crime, they're happy kids,

ASH KELLEY: people, even the spooky stuff too, like haunted locations –

ALAINA URQUHART: You got people for everything.

JVN: Question.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yes?

JVN: Have you guys covered the rainy street killer?

ALAINA URQUHART: No.

ASH KELLEY: No.

JVN: So let me tell you something in Austin, Texas, these men's bodies keep winding up in the river in downtown Austin and it's right off the street called Moody Street. And there are usually like men in their thirties and forties like brown hair, brown eyes kind of similar description. But the police keep saying like, oh, these are all totally like coincidental and like, don't have anything to do with each other, but there's only like 14 men's bodies over the last like like multiple men's bodies. Like maybe I made up 14 Chris. Can you Google it if you put in Austin, Texas serial killer in tiktok, it'll pull it right up with like the, the creepy tiktok music and you know, like that creepy, scary tiktok true crime music.

ASH KELLEY: Yes.

JVN: There's also one, there's another one, you guys, I freaked out. Anastasia.

ALAINA URQUHART: OH!

ASH KELLEY: Alaina has been in a tiktok deep dive about the, what is their last name?

ALAINA URQUHART: The Romanov –

JVN: The Romanov. We're dying for Anastasia.

ASH KELLEY: Yes

ALAINA URQUHART: Yes, I would. Absolutely. I've been driving John crazy for like weeks talking about the Romanovs because I just got like completely hyperfixated –

JVN: Did you fuck with Anastasia or was that like before your time when you were little?

ALAINA URQUHART: No, I fucked with Anastasia. I had a really amazing grandpa who bought me like literally every single VCR like of the Disney Princesses –

ASH KELLEY: VHS.

ALAINA URQUHART: What did I say? VCR?

ASH KELLEY: VCR.

ALAINA URQUHART: VHS's to put in the, you know, I'm showing my age –

JVN: Ash, I hate myself for this. This is so annoying.

ASH KELLEY: No, tell me.

JVN: I hate when I do this. I'm going to blow your mind right now.

ASH KELLEY: Oh no, I'm scared.

JVN: So Anastasia is not a Disney film.

ASH KELLEY: Wait, it's not? I really thought she was a Disney princess.

JVN: No, it's my favorite trivia thing just to be like, and, and whenever someone refers to Anastasia as a Disney film, like, I'm like, don't do it, don't do it, don't fucking do it, don't bring it up. Um And then it was actually like, I, I don't think I've ever told this story on the podcast, but I'm gonna tell you guys the most embarrassing story. And then we got to get into this Synod. When I met Kate Hudson. I was like, I will not tell her how important first wife's club is to me because I was literally her mom. And like, why does she want to talk about her mom? There's plenty movies that she's done. You're not going to bring this up to her. I was wearing a sweater, two piece set. I started sweating really bad. I think the reason I started sweating is because my ADHD was like, you're going to fucking talk about First Wives Club, whether you like it or not –

ASH KELLEY: You have to.

JVN: So I walked up to her and I was like, I just need to know that like First Wives Club is like such a formative movie for me. And like, I love, I love your mom. I love you and I love First Wives Club so much and I love you so much. And then she was like, yeah, Elise Elliott, like that character was major. And then I was like, hm, Elise Myers, you mean –

ASH KELLEY: He said wrong.

JVN: And then, and then I was like, and then she was like, no, I think it was Elise Elliot. And then I was like, oh my God, I just confused TikTok star Elise Myers. I just been thinking about her like so much has been happening. And so I literally like brought up Elise Myers instead of fucking Elise Elliott.

ASH KELLEY: Honestly two queens though.

JVN: I know two queens like I have to live with that for the rest of my life. Like it's really hard for me to give myself embarrassment like I am, you know, I've done a lot of cringey or you know, cheugy things as the kids would say

ALAINA URQUHART: Same.

JVN: That one really sticks with me.

ALAINA URQUHART: I love the layers to that one because it's like not what –

JVN: Do you think it can't get worse?

ALAINA URQUHART: You just wake up at 3 a.m. and think about that?

JVN: I do.

ALAINA URQUHART: That's amazing.

JVN: Welcome back everyone. Are we settled in popcorn ready? We're going to get to a little, this is like, really like the Getting Curious, like meets Morbid crossover format which I'm really excited for. We're all cozied up on the couch. It's time for a story, a spooky story, a Morbid tale from nearly 1100 years ago. But don't worry, we'll be stopping here and there for vocabulary updates and little tidbits of historical information. This is a true story of the Cadaver Synod. Sy-nod.

ASH KELLEY: Syd-nod.

ALAINA URQUHART: I am so excited for this.

JVN: You are?

ALAINA URQUHART: I am. You said 1100 years ago and I was like, I'm locked in.

ASH KELLEY: Alaina said it's my time, honey,

ALAINA URQUHART: You said a dead pope and 1100 years ago. I was like, ok –

ASH KELLEY: She got locked in.

JVN: Vocabulary update. Synod, a gathering of clergy. Alt a place I don't wanna be. Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic church. Comma Fisher of Men. Our tale takes place nearly 1100 years ago in the ninth century when Rome was a city grappling with significant political and religious transformations. Amid the backdrop of a fragmented Europe interest. This period saw the emergence of the Pope as a pivotal spiritual and political figure, particularly with the crowning of Charlemagne – what? That's where his name comes from? Obsessed –

ASH KELLEY: I always wondered.

JVN: With the crowning of Charlemagne as holy Rome emperor in 800 which linked the city to broader European dynamics. Rome's population was dwindling with war and widespread

migration which led to a decline in its infrastructure and a struggle for power among local aristocrats. Ooo, so basically American 2024, ah!

ALAINA URQUHART: I was going to say, so familiar.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, it sounds like this.

JVN: The warring factions, political struggles and lots and lots of opinions. Who was the Margie Taylor Green of that time.

ASH KELLEY: I wonder.

JVN: Oh, also Charlemagne, that was a medieval king of the Franks and Lombards, Germany and France. Oh, like, I guess that's like Germany and oh Charlemagne is known for crusading and uniting most of what we now call modern Europe under a Catholic rule with the help of Rome in the tumultuous villas of the ninth century, Romans, wealthy power struggles and political intrigue were a way of life, especially within the walls of the Vatican. It's now that we turn to our main character, Pope Formosus –

BOTH: Formosus.

JVN: Pope Formosus had once been a respected figure, a pope who had ruled from 891 to 896. It's giving one term. His tenure was marked by political alliances and disputes that mirrored the fierce rivalries of the time. However, after his death in 896 the situation in Rome took a dramatic turn. Formosus says, legacy became a pawn in the ruthless game of power as faction sought to claim dominance over the Papacy. Upon his ascension successor, Pope Stephen the sixth, a staunch rival of Formosus during his life, took an extreme step to solidify his authority and discredit his prede his predecessor. Prior to his death, Formosus had actively worked to move forward with progress and openness for the people a cause his successor disagreed with entirely with help from his fiercely conservative aristocratic allies and deeply consumed by ambition and perhaps a thirst for vengeance. Oh my God, I'm so scared. Steven ordered the exhumation of Formosus's body to be placed on trial for his previous crimes.

ALAINA URQUHART: I'm obsessed with this.

ASH KELLEY: That's wild. Also, can we just talk about Steven

ALAINA URQUHART: Thank you, I was just going to bring that up.

ASH KELLEY: Steven going up against Formosus? Like I feel like Formosus just wins in that scenario.

JVN: Yeah, because the name discrepancy, right?

ASH KELLEY: All I think is Kristin Cavallari, Stephen. That's all I think of.

JVN: Wow, that was not what I was thinking of.

ASH KELLEY: That's all I think of whenever I hear the name, Steven Steven.

JVN: Yes, that makes sense. Pope Steven.

ALAINA URQUHART: What is it? Formosus –

ASH KELLEY: Formosus.

JVN: Well, like us. The decision shocked many. But in the political arena of Rome shock was just another tool of the trade.

ASH KELLEY: Dun dun dun!

JVN: As the corpse of Formosus was unearthed. It was treated with an eerie formality. The decayed body was dressed in the ceremonial garments of a Pope and placed on a makeshift throne and a court packed with bishops and curious onlookers. Honey. The very site was Macabre. Macabre. Do I say Macabre or Macabre? Is that a silent R?

ALAINA URQUHART: It's a silent R.

JVN: Who wrote that word? Like who like who, who got off with like literally like who decided grammatically that we were going to put in a silent r?

ASH KELLEY: The silent letters really overtake the English language.

ALAINA URQUHART: The English language, like having kids that are now learning to read and I'm having to like, explain these things to them and they're like, but why does this word say this and that word says this and it's spelled the exact same. And I'm like, I don't know, it's just like, I don't know, I don't have an answer.

ASH KELLEY: My name has a silent G. That makes absolutely no sense.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

ASH KELLEY: But we named Morbid Macabre.

ALAINA URQUHART: That's true. We did.

JVN: and then I did the Silent R that was like, this is too hard to search.

ALAINA URQUHART: We were like, people might be like maca-bre like, what does this mean? I've never heard it.

JVN: Thank God because I didn't fucking know you guys probably literally like you put the wheels of success in motion at the very top.

ALAINA URQUHART: And it was Ash who came up with because I said she was like, what does macabre even mean? I was like, I don't know, like Morbid, like, and she was like, why don't we just name it Morbid? And I was like, that is better and that was it.

ASH KELLEY: Then boom, here we are almost seven years later.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

JVN: Oh God, I love that story. Um, um. Oh, oh, ok. Ok. So I got that. Ok, oh,oh. The very site was macabre, a lifeless figure. Once a man of power now reduced to a mere object for ridicule and scorn. It's getting a more formal weekend at Bernie's.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah it is.

ASH KELLEY: That is like a ritualistic

JVN: Scary, stinky. Yucky.

ASH KELLEY: Definitely stinky. That's all I can think of –

ALAINA URQUHART: It's giving. Um, like this is where the lore for the band Ghost came from.

ASH KELLEY: It is reminding me very much of Alina's favorite band, Ghost.

ALAINA URQUHART: I feel like this is where all the papas came from.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah.

ALAINA URQUHART: This idea –

JVN: What happened with them?

ALAINA URQUHART: So they do you know the band Ghost?

JVN: No.

ALAINA URQUHART: I can put you on. I was gonna say I can't explain all the lore because I'll take like 85 years.

ASH KELLEY: Alaina. Wait, you're like a Jehovah's witness. When it comes Ghost.

ALAINA URQUHART: I spread the word.

ASH KELLEY: You do.

JVN: Did one of their lead singers die and then they like exhume their dead body?

ASH KELLEY: Well sort of.

ALAINA URQUHART: The lead singer is Tobias Forge like a Swedish man. He's the lead singer, but he has characters for every album and it's a different pope, like demonic pope, like a papa Emeritus and each time they, like, kill him off or something and it becomes another one in the line and it's like this whole lore behind it. It's very –

JVN: Ok art!

ASH KELLEY: You would love it actually,

ALAINA URQUHART: I think you would like it.

like very theatrical, very involved and it's very like dark, you know, Pope kind of stuff going on.

ASH KELLEY: Someone that we met over the weekend said it was like a more theatrical Kiss.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, and all the Popes are like all his characters super hot.

JVN: Yeah, alternate universe, Taylor Swift Swedish man.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, actually

JVN: is he blonde? Not to assume –

ALAINA URQUHART: Well yeah, in real life.

ASH KELLEY: But as Papa, you've got like black, dark hair.

JVN: I only like lady singers. Let's dive back into our story. The trial commenced in January 897 with Pope Stephen the sixth presiding over the proceedings, Steven's back again you guys –

ALAINA URQUHART: It just doesn't hit it.

JVN: He launched into a tirade accusing the dead Pope of various crimes. The most disturbing being that Formosus had illegally assumed the Papacy and the chilling display of political theater, the lifeless Formosus was propped up and subjected to a series of bizarre accusations. The assembled bishops listened in stunned silence as the pope proclaimed his verdict delivering a relentless assault on a figure who could no longer defend himself.

ALAINA URQUHART: I just say this is, it's crazy that he was allowed to go through with this –

ASH KELLEY: It really is.

ALAINA URQUHART: When the other person can't say anything.

JVN: Yeah, I guess like 900 stuff was just more like,

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

JVN: Yeah, the afterlife and, like, witchy and that was just like, ok,

ALAINA URQUHART: Like, this guy's just gonna yell at a dead guy in front of everybody and everybody's just, like, legitimate realistically though.

ASH KELLEY: Like, what else is there to do in 897? So, I think that's why this happened.

ALAINA URQUHART: That's true.

JVN: Well, like, I mean, talk about from modern perspectives, like, playing God. Like, they're like, uh, come back here to this world. Like, don't get to, I mean, wouldn't you think that Satan was like, punishing him in hell if he had been such a bad Pope?

ASH KELLEY: Yeah.

JVN: And I don't know if this was before or after Dante's Inferno. But wouldn't he have been in one of the circles of hell or whatever?

ALAINA URQUHART: I would think so. So just leave him there if you're really that –

JVN: Just let him rot. Steven.

ALAINA URQUHART: Come on Steven.

JVN: So bisect as the trial progressed, the atmosphere became increasingly surreal. I don't know how it could have gotten worse. Steven six pointedly condemned Formosus for perjuring himself after he didn't talk, suggesting that the late Pope's actions had led to confusion and discord within the church. Each accusation seemed to amplify the absurdity of the proceedings, leaving the audience grappling with the grotesque reality of what was unfolding. The corpse remained silent. A tragic reminder of how far the struggle for power could descend.

ASH KELLEY: The corpse remained silent is my favorite sentence.

ALAINA URQUHART: Here's the question though. Would you be in this audience because I would.

ASH KELLEY: Yes.

JVN: I would like to think that I would have been like, sucking dick somewhere else you could find –

ALAINA URQUHART: Like you'd be booked and busy right now.

JVN: Yeah, I just, I just would like, rather, I just was thinking like when you said, like, what else was there to do in 18, 897? Like my, like internal voice said, like, have sex?

ASH KELLEY: Yeah.

ALAINA URQUHART: That's true.

JVN: Like I would want to be with my husband like on a lake and we would just be like doing husband stuff. Like even if the Vatican didn't say we could get married or whatever –

ASH KELLEY: Hell yeah.

ALAINA URQUHART: And not watching this foolishness.

JVN: Yeah, because that dick's too good to go see some corpse stand trial. Like especially before we even knew about like HIV AIDs I would have been just like cum in me in Rome like, yes girl, I guess they did have syphilis –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, she's no joke.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, they did.

JVN: He literally died of like neurosyphilis. Like he went crazy from neurosyphilis. This like poor like Pope's second kid. Yeah, it was like really sad –

ALAINA URQUHART: Damn.

JVN: In a swift and shocking verdict, Formosus was declared guilty. His Papacy was annulled and the court decreed that all of his actions as Pope were invalid –

ALAINA URQUHART: Wow.

JVN: The body was then stripped of its papal vestments. Oh and the fingers that had once blessed, the faithful were severed from his hand –

ALAINA URQUHART: Damn.

ASH KELLEY: Too far, too far.

JVN: Formosus says remains were thrown into the Tiber River. An ignoble end for a man who had once held the highest office in the church. I've never heard Ignoble.

ASH KELLEY: Nor have I.

JVN: No, I thought I was like, I would have guessed a noble, but Ignoble is hotter and probably right.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, way fancier.

ASH KELLEY: Yeah, way better.

JVN: I don't think I've ever said that word in my fucking life.

ALAINA URQUHART: I didn't recognize it –

ASH KELLEY: Were his fingers thrown in the river too?

ALAINA URQUHART: It sounds like it.

JVN: You guys, I have to just give it up for Chris. Did you write this, Chris? Which one of the husbands said ignoble was that you or Nate? I'm sorry. We had to give it up for our sound engineer right here right now. Nate. Literally like thesaurus'd, the fuck out of that word. Ignoble.

ALAINA URQUHART: Nate! **Everyone claps**

JVN: I think I eight years of podcasting like to ever utter a word for the first time on the podcast. Like it kind of major.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, huge moment.

JVN: I think that the, the Madison Square Garden rally was very ignoble.

ASH KELLY: Spot on.

ALAINA URQUHART: Nailed it.

JVN: The cadaver Synod sent shockwaves through Rome and beyond. The spectacle was seen as a grotesque farce, an affront to the very tenets of the church. Many Romans were outraged and the event only deepened the existing rifts within the church. The bizarre trial served as a catalyst igniting further conflicts among rival factions. Those who had supported Formosus rallied against Stan viewing him as a tyrant, willing to desecrate the dead to elevate his own status in the wake of the trial. Pope Steven and his Ryan rapidly unraveled his heavy handed approach and had alienated many and just months later in July 897 he was imprisoned by his opponents. The very chaos he had sought to wield for his own gain, turned against him. Steven was ultimately strangled in his cell. A grim end that reflected the brutal nature of the political landscape of the time.

ALAINA URQUHART: Damn, was it worth it, Stephen?

JVN: Was it fucking worth it?

ALAINA URQUHART: Was worth it?

ASH KELLEY: I think not, Stephen.

JVN: Which is why I think President Ford pardoned Nixon,

ALAINA URQUHART: Cause it wasn't worth it.

JVN: Is it this papal trial that makes people think like turn the page?

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, like move on –

JVN: But Nixon wasn't even dead. So it's really not apples to apples.

ALAINA URQUHART: No it's really not.

JVN: But I just wanted to go into an American historical reference, whether it made sense or not, it made sense. I went for it.

ASH KELLEY: It still made sense.

ALAINA URQUHART: It sounded very smart in my opinion.

JVN: The courts of Formosus, however, had a different ending. The body of Pope Formosus washed up downstream on the banks of the Tiber. And legend says that miracles were occurring from the water, logged corpse. Please God don't tell me they did anything fucking nasty. Like drink this corpse water. It's like great girl. That's just e coli, ok, like that's not demons coming out of you. That is the e coli from drinking dead corpse water —

ASH KELLEY: Just picturing that is so heinous.

JVN: The cadaver Synod stands as a bizarre chapter in the history of the Papacy emblematic of the depths to which political ambition can sink. The legacy of Pope Formosus once marred by scandal was transformed into a cautionary tale of hubris and retribution. The event also serves as a stark reminder of the intertwining of faith and politics where the dead could be dragged into the machinations of the living

ASH KELLEY: Ooo another good one.

JVN: Wow, Nate. Shit.

ALAINA URQUHART: 10 points, Nate.

JVN: Or was that Chris? That was also Nate? Damn. Nate said not today. Predictable vocabulary. You better fucking exercise your thesaurus and where power struggles could lead to unspeakable acts.

ASH KELLEY: Damn.

JVN: That's I mean mic drop honey in the years that followed the tale of the Canver Synod could be recounted on, could be recounted as an extraordinary. Why am I talking like Patriot from tiktok? Why am I talking like her little fucking asymmetrical mouth stabbing ass, democrats.

ASH KELLEY: Alaina literally started in the morning talking about her girl. And she did the face.

JVN: Girl, I have been tracking that TikTok since like I think May, June, she got on my radar. Here's the part about her that I hate about myself the most and I'll admit it. I never wanted to until I showed her to my friend Denise. But then my friend Denise was like, oh she's like kind of pretty like with her like dead tooth, like her like gum line with that front tooth. It's like, you know, there's something about like that dead tooth gum line that works. I'm not even kidding. I'm not being like a cunt I'm not being a bitch. Like, I mean, like, no, she genuinely is. There's like something about her face that is like —

ASH KELLEY: I'm looking her up —

JVN: Not, not pretty. And I, that's the part, that's the worst part. I mean, she's full of shit. Like she's like, she's full brainwashed. Like she's a nightmare. Like, I don't, I mean, she is a night brainwashed nightmare, but she's kind of pretty and I hate that.

ALAINA URQUHART: I know it makes you mad.

ASH KELLEY: I'm nervous.

JVN: So back to the Cadaver Synod, in the years that followed the tale of the Cadaver Synod would be recounted as an extraordinary episode of both the absurdity and the tragedy of papal history. A testament to the lengths to which men would go in the pursuit of power. It remains a chilling reminder of a time when even the dead were not spared from the grasp of political ambition –

ASH KELLEY: Mic drop.

JVN: I am curious now about because we do this whole thing in the wrap up which we're going to do together about like what we're curious about. Now, I want to know about these like supposed papal uh miracles that were coming from the cadaver water.

ASH KELLEY: I have a lot of questions when it comes to that.

ALAINA URQUHART: I need to know more about that.

JVN: Did you guys watch Mother God?

ASH KELLEY: Disturbed me so deeply. I had to cleanse my house after I watched that.

JVN: It reminds me of when they were doing like the, the electronic, like readings of her dead body. Like, whoa, look at this magnet off her ankle. Like it's like girl, like, I don't know if these are miracles like they like they are –

ASH KELLEY: I don't think they are.

JVN: That was like, and then you know what the craziest part to me about that was. So I watched it thrice but each time I watched it until the last time I stopped, like, after the part when the police came, like, I didn't watch like the last 20 minutes or maybe like the last time when like, basically everybody's life just goes back to normal.

ALAINA URQUHART: Right.

JVN: Like everyone basically just like cheered her on to kill herself. And then everyone just got to like go back and like spin off into mini cults. And it was like, oh yeah, mom, you know, we think about mom but she did the damn thing and it was like –

ASH KELLEY: But she didn't –

JVN: That felt so poignant to me. It was just like the end that like everyone just got to like move on and this woman literally poisoned herself to death. And you guys played flippity floppyity with her dead body because you were in a fucking cult.

ASH KELLEY: That was one of the most disturbing cult documentaries that I've ever watched.

ALAINA URQUHART: And so jarring.

ASH KELLEY: It was so it was so much more –

JVN: The opening –

ASH KELLEY: The opening, it just boom –

ALAINA URQUHART: The visuals are like whoa.

JVN: It comes when you realize what you're seeing because it took me like a hot minute to realize what I was even looking at –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yes. That's like Paradise lost. The beginning of Paradise Lost is one of the most jarring.

JVN: Which one's that?

ALAINA URQUHART: That's the West Memphis three documentary.

ASH KELLEY: I've actually never seen the opening.

ALAINA URQUHART: One of the most of I think that documentary is brilliant. It's a really good one. It'll just astound you. But the opening is horrified because it's three –

JVN: Ok.

ALAINA URQUHART: It's, it's, it's quick and it's, but it's like, w it'll hit you. But the rest of the documentary is, there's three of them. Paradise lost. And then there's two more. I don't remember the names but –

JVN: Oh my God. But I love a good rec.

ALAINA URQUHART: I'm telling you will have you just like shocked, jaw on the floor.

ASH KELLEY: You're gonna be angry.

JVN: Ok, but wait, so what's next for you guys? What's next for Morbid?

ASH KELLEY: My God. We have so many plans for Morbid.

ALAINA URQUHART: I know. So we're gonna, I think we're just looking to cover our, our main goal going into like 2025 is we want to hit some things that people have never heard of before. Like we want, we want to give the unexpected.

ASH KELLEY: Really dig in and like find some things that people are like shit. I've never heard of this before in my life –

ALAINA URQUHART: Like obscure, weird shit.

JVN: Ok? I have two more unsolicited ones for you.

ALAINA URQUHART: Tell us everything.

ASH KELLEY: Let's go.

JVN: The United States uh figure skating team 1961 or 63 gets on a plane to go to Worlds, plane crashes.

ASH KELLEY: Oh my god.

JVN: They all die like the reigning national champion, the reigning Paris champions, the reigning ice dance champions, the reigning men's champion. Like all the coaches, like the whole fucking team dies.

ASH KELLEY: That is horrifying.

ASH KELLEY: And we'll survive the tale, right?

JVN: Maybe. I mean, I don't know what the point is but like you would have to do some research, like I only know about like the, the main thing, you know, but you know, run away with it. Maybe you don't, maybe, I don't know.

ASH KELLEY: I'm interested.

JVN: Then also, what about that, I think it like William Taft like that three week president who got the pneumonia and died after three weeks. Have you guys done him?

ALAINA URQUHART: But that one's a really interesting, that's what –

JVN: Yeah, what the fuck happened with that –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, because what the fuck happened?

ASH KELLEY: I feel like my husband Drew could give us a lot of information about that. My husband is like very into like historical presidencies, yeah.

JVN: I think that one would be really good and I think that's all the, I mean, ii, I really, I gave you guys, I like, really gave a lot of unsolicited advice for future episodes.

ASH KELLEY: It was, it was good advice. It was not unsolicited. Don't worry. We loved it.

JVN: And, and then are you guys where can, I mean, if people like, well, maybe they don't know because, well, wait, Alaina, what about, because you had, it was Butcher and Wren Butcher and the ren, right? Butcher the Rye Thank you. Choose Christ.

ALAINA URQUHART: I released The Butcher Game –

JVN: And that's your new book?

ALAINA URQUHART: That's my new book –

ASH KELLEY: Number one times, best selling author.

JVN: I mean, it's giving me like, again, not surprised, like not to be anti climactic. I just like, not surprised.

ASH KELLEY: That's true.

JVN: Like, sorry about it. Fucking number one New York Times. Best selling fucking author. Wait. So is there gonna be like a third then? Obviously? Right? I mean, don't just not write another book when you get number one –

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, I'm in the process right now of writing the third and I want to write like a million more books. Just I have a million stories in my head that I, I love writing books. So I would –

JVN: I love writing too.

ALAINA URQUHART: Isn't it amazing?

JVN: It really is. And it's like, I, it really is and I love that you get to do it and I love reading your work and I'm so glad that you get to keep writing more stuff. Um, Ash, what WBU

ASH KELLEY: I think someday like when I have the time and when I can, I really want to do a makeup line, it's like, I think that's like way down the road, but I'm really, really interested in doing that.

JVN: Yes queen. Come on, entrepreneur, let's go. Entrepreneur. Where are you guys the most active on social tt IG? Where should people be following you for like most of your BTS lives?

ASH KELLEY: I would say definitely, and that's just at a podcast.

ALAINA URQUHART: We're trying to get more um active on tiktok because we both love tiktok.

JVN: Get on TT you guys, I think it would just kill over there. No pun intended.

ALAINA URQUHART: And we're going to be doing videos finally –

JVN: We are too. We're switching to video. It's gonna take us a minute to transition. But I realized, and I'm sure you guys have had this happen too because you like, we, our podcasts are like similar ages but it's like everyone and their mom is on video now. So we got to get on video or you're just like, not on youtube and you're leaving all this metadata on the table.

BOTH: Yeah.

JVN: And it's like so many people just like you have to be on video now.

ASH KELLEY: You cannot, you cannot podcast in your pjs anymore.

JVN: You just can't.

ALAINA URQUHART: So I think we're gonna do listener tales and we're gonna do a video for listener tales and we're going to make them very fun. We're gonna, we're gonna do it, spin it our way because we're not going to be on video all the time.

ASH KELLEY: No, we have to be in disguise if you will.

JVN: Yeah, we're like in a little transition. It's like, I don't know where we want to do it at, but it's like, I don't, I don't know where I'm going. I don't know where I am. So we got to figure out like where we want to be. But we, that's like on our goal list, like a video.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah, it's a big change. It is, it takes a lot of planning.

JVN: It really fucking does. But if anyone can do it, it's us you guys –

ASH KELLEY: We can do anything.

JVN: We can fucking do this you guys.

ASH KELLEY: That's right. And we're in it together. We are.

JVN: Yes, **sings* we're all in this together, oh no no, oh woah woah* Ash, Alaina. Thank you for coming on Getting Curious. I love you guys so much.

ALAINA URQUHART: Thank you!

ASH KELLEY: We love you. Thank you for having us. Seriously, the love is real. This was so much fun.

JVN: I think it was our funnest and what a good anecdote to what we just had been going through.

ASH KELLEY: Truly, that was was relevant. It really was.

JVN: Come learning about Dead Popes after the election.

ALAINA URQUHART: Yeah.

ASH KELLEY: A lot of Dead Popes.

JVN: I love us. Thanks for coming on you guys.

ASH KELLEY: Thank you so much!

ALAINA URQUHART: Thank you!

JVN: You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description and follow us on Instagram @CuriouswithJVN. You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our podcast on all things beauty, get into it! Still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us? You can subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple Podcasts for commercial free listening. And our subscription only show, Ask JVN where we're talking sex, relationships, or really just whatever is on my mind that week. Our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.