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Kieryn:

I am Kieryn.

Eve:

And I'm Eve. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn:

Where two quiverfull escapees talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.  
Hey, Eve.

Eve:

Hey, Kieryn.

Kieryn:

How are you?

Eve:

Really cranky that it's still snowing here in Virginia, that despite the fact that we're in March and it should be spring.

Kieryn:

Yeah. It's been winter here too and it's ridiculous. I moved away from Maine so I didn't have to deal with winter, and I'm so grumpy that we're having winter in California.

Eve:

Yeah. But, I mean, San Francisco is always kind of chilly.

Kieryn:

Yeah, but Oakland is not usually as chilly.

Eve:

Okay. Yes. Fair. That's fair. It's fair. But the Bay Area in general is not representative of the sunshine everywhere else.

Kieryn:

Yes. This is true.

Eve:

But spring means there's all sorts of social things happening. You're planning a queer prom. Is that what's going on?

Kieryn:

Yeah. Yeah. The Peralta College District is going to have its first ever queer prom. As far as I know, I don't think it's been done before. No one has said it's been done before. So yeah, I'm super excited. And it's also kind of funny because as I am planning this, I'm an organizer, I have planned events before. I started event planning when I was 15, but nobody knows this. And so, when I come in with my event planning hat on like I did yesterday and I had the entire schedule kind of vaguely estimated, and the check-in process all planned out and the way we're going to handle photo permissions and whatnot, all basically planned and mitigated for, everyone was just like, do you do this professionally? And I'm like ...

Eve:

And you're like, not yet.

Kieryn:

I have, yes, I do this. I am an organizer. Yes, this is what I do. And so, it's fun to watch people finally begin to understand that when I say I'm an organizer and then suddenly they know what that means because they've heard me talk at a meeting. And so, that's an exciting thing to happen.

Eve:

Good for you. Good for you. I have never been to prom. I've been to school dances. We had a formal for homecoming and for freshmen, but at Grove I've never been to a prom.

Kieryn:

I've also never been to prom. I wasn't allowed to go to prom because apparently sex happened.

Eve:

Well, because so many of our parents got laid after prom for the first time, right?

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

That's the American high school ritual was like, you have your first at prom or something.

Kieryn:

Yeah. This is what I've learned from movies and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

Eve:

Right, exactly.

Kieryn:

This is how I understand prom.

Eve:

The mainstream media tells us this.

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Kieryn:

Yes.

Eve:

I have no data to back it up.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I have no personal experience to confirm this.

Eve:

But I think the fun part that a lot of our listeners might be wondering about right now is the fact that we even had the option to go to prom when we were homeschooled.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

So guys, homeschool proms, they exist.

Kieryn:

They do exist.

Eve:

They're really scary though.

Kieryn:

Yeah. They try, but they do it in the weirdest way. You actually kind of have a story about this.

Eve:

Right, but let's get to that at the end. Let's start with the spectrum of dance events that can happen in the Fundamentalist Christian community. Let's start big picture so that this is set in context.

Kieryn:

When I was a child, one of the things that our churches did around Valentine's Day was father daughter dances because that's not weird. But it's like you get dressed up and your dad gets dressed up and you go to church and you have the fancy dinner and you dance with your dad.

Eve:

What is the connection to Valentine's Day?

Kieryn:

I don't know. That was just when they had it, I think. I'm not entirely sure. Maybe it was part of they wanted some weird convoluted way to teach girls to value themselves and not chase after boys. I don't

know. So I'm sure it blended into purity culture somehow. In fact, I think that's what it was. But the connection was never really made explicit.

Eve:

Right. Were they called purity balls?

Kieryn:

Not those ones. Purity balls were an entirely different thing I learned about when I was a teenager. And I feel like I learned about it from someone in the revolution or the bloggers of that time.

Eve:

It was big in the vision form circles. It was big in these neo Victorian groups. So it was the ones that really had a fetish about basically antebellum south stuff where it would be the very white version of a quinceanera where it's a coming out ...

Kieryn:

A coming out party.

Eve:

... a coming out party. Right. And so they inverted it to be, actually I'm absolutely not available party. Because usually a coming out party meant that the girl had her period and was eligible to be pursued by gentleman callers. And so, in this culture, it's taking that concept, that basic concept, and flipping it and being, now that she's had her period, she's not going to talk to boys until she's 30.

Kieryn:

Right. And the boys must go through the father first, obviously.

Eve:

Right, right. So the father-daughter dances are this ...

Kieryn:

Slightly more chill precursor.

Eve:

So these father-daughter dances are designed around this idea of it's this very gender binary, heteronormative space where people believe that a girl is going to devalue herself and devalue her sexual worth if she doesn't have a solid relationship with her father to model other relationships with men on afterward.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Which is pretty much, I think, an idea that has been debunked in academic psychological communities where they've done research and it's like, no, you just need to have healthy bonds with your parents and your caregivers and it doesn't have to be a specific gender. It's more about attachment theory as opposed to gender relationships.

Kieryn:

But that's just blasphemous. So the only boys at the purity ball are your fathers and then ...

Eve:

Right. Right.s

Kieryn:

Yeah. And some of them are really big ceremony kind of things.

Eve:

Well, those are the purity balls where they have a kind of a contract. And again, I feel like they're stealing a lot from the quinceanera because there's the whole fancy dress and some sort of ceremony. I mean, it's modeled after all of the things that you think about in terms of confirmation. It's kind of a sexual confirmation where you are pledging yourself to God and not just in a like, this is how I deal with my faith. This is how you deal with your sexuality in relation to your faith. And it's a very narrow focus.

Kieryn:

It's really how you repress it and lock it in a box and never think about it again.

Eve:

These purity balls with these contracts and these ceremonies are usually done before the child in question has hit puberty and is even aware of sexuality as a thing.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Or I feel like I've seen them also when people become teenagers and it's as part of the purity ring getting processed, there's like the ball, and then you get your purity ring.

Eve:

My parents made sure that I had a purity ring and had done all that stuff before I actually hit purity, because it's a lot easier to convince someone of this system when they haven't experienced arousal or anything like that.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

Okay. So what is a purity ring and did you have one?

Kieryn:

I did have one. I got mine I think when I was 12. I got mine after I got my period, so when I was 12, because suddenly I was a woman and therefore I had purity that I needed to guard. Puberty started for me when I was like seven, but I was 12 when I had my period. So that was the culmination of my blooming womanhood. Yeah. And so that's when I got my purity ring and my parents had the purity talk, I guess. I knew we were going to be courting and not dating and all that before when I was nine.

But they were like, all right, you can't have sex with a boy. And I even knew what sex was. Like my experience of sex was the birth that I helped deliver, and I was like, if that's what that leads to, I want none of that.

Eve:

Yeah, definitely not having sex.

Kieryn:

None that, Nope. Fine. Happily, happily not do that thing.

Eve:

Yeah. Would love to not have my vaginal area people bulldozed by a small demon.

Kieryn:

Yes. So it really wasn't that hard of a sell. I was just like, sure. Okay.

Eve:

Got it. Cool.

Kieryn:

Yeah. But I didn't sign a pledge or do much of a ceremony kind of thing. I didn't have a ball or a dance to go to. It was pretty low key. I was like, I got the ring and I think maybe my dad wrote something. Maybe my dad wrote something, but it was not performative outside of my family.

Eve:

Gotcha. Yeah, mine was very kept with me and my parents. I don't think my siblings were even aware of it. And it was a paper contract and they told me to write it. So I had to write the terms of it. And I typed it up on the computer and made a couple copies, and then we all signed it. And this happened, I think, I was just turned 12, so that would be May. So it was still six months out from getting my period. And I didn't have a crush on anyone, didn't understand anything. And, really, going back to last week's conversation, my Mars is in cancer and my Venus is in Taurus. I don't change and I don't fight with people I like.

I know this is going to come as a surprise to people because I'm very opinionated and very passionate, but I actually really very much value loyalty and consistency and stability in my close and intimate relationships. And so, if this is the thing that my parents are going to say is their big issue that they require me to comply with so that they can still love me or whatever, yeah, I'm going to comply with that.

So, my parents had talked with me about the idea of courtship and the idea of purity for as long as I can remember. I remember being five and having a fight with my four year old neighbor where she was, "TJ

at school is my boyfriend," or something. And I was like, "Well, I'm not allowed to have boyfriends because my family believes in courtship." And she was like, "That's stupid. I don't even know what it is or something." And I was just like, "Well, we can't talk," or, so I don't know.

I just remember just having this spat about boyfriends, and I remember very much being like, I don't know what courting is, and I don't know what dating is, but I know this is what we do. And so I had gotten more familiar with the terms and kind of understood the principles. We had to obsessively read over and over the Little House books. And my dad talked about what he thought Almanzo did wrong and right.

We deconstructed all of these relationships and had all these discussions about it. So there was this sense of what was off limits, what wasn't. So I remember we were talking about should kissing me included in the contract, and me being super naive was, absolutely, kissing shouldn't be a thing until marriage because I didn't know anything and I was just trying to be as enthusiastically supportive of my parents' decisions as I could be because I wanted to please them.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

So I wrote up this little contract and signed it, and they gave me this ring, and it was this tiny little ring from Kohl's with a piece of tanzanite stone. And I was told to wear it on my wedding ring finger on my left hand. And so, I would get questions about it all the time. And actually, around that time was when I got mistaken for being my younger sister, Lily's, mom.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

I was 13 and wearing the ring and she was like five, four. So I couldn't have had it, but I was at the Christian bookstore and the woman was, "How old is your daughter?" And I was like.

Kieryn:

That was so infuriating. That happened to me all the time too. They asked me if my brother who's two years younger than me was my child. And I was like.

Eve:

Oh my God.

Kieryn:

No. What is wrong with you?

Eve:

How many child marriages have these people seen to make that assumption? So I remember finding that contract around the time when I got married and finding it really ironic that 50% of the stuff on there I had done and violated the contract for and 50% of it I still hadn't. And just feeling really angry

that that was put on me before I even understood any of that. And it was funny too, because my first semester or first in college, I was wearing that ring. I wore it all the time, got a lot of questions about it, switched it to my right hand just to get fewer questions.

And then that summer I worked at Panera Bread and I was doing dish room stuff. And those cleaners are abrasive. And I had been also working in the dish room at school the semester before. And they didn't supply us with gloves all the time. So that ring kept getting exposed to all these chemicals because you're not supposed to take it off because taking off your purity ring is kind of like this gesture of saying, I don't necessarily believe in this stuff anymore. If I was ...

Kieryn:

You can only replace it with your engagement ring.

Eve:

Right. If I was seen in public not wearing it, if I took it off to play Frisbee and there was a photo on Facebook, my mom might call me up and be like, why'd you take it off? What'd you do? So I always wore it in all these abrasive chemical situations and the ring, the stone, tanzanite is really soft, it fell out. And so, I just had this empty ring and I was like, well, I'm not going to wear this anymore because this is stabby and ugly. And my mom was so upset and she was trying to see if it was a sign from God.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

For a little bit. And then she decided, and I was okay. I hadn't done anything wrong, and my dad just needed to replace it. And he didn't want to go with me to replace it, to go pick out a new one because she had this whole idea that we were going to go on a father-daughter date and replace it.

Kieryn:

Oh, right, those are totally things.

Eve:

And so I got sent with a hundred dollars back to Kohl's to go find myself a new purity ring. And I just was like, I picked out something that was kind of ugly and I didn't really love it, but it was my birthstone, and I felt like that was a little bit of an improvement. But I really just didn't want to wear it and I didn't like what I was doing and I felt the whole thing was just ridiculous and unnecessary.

So I wore that for a little bit, but then when I got to school, I just stopped wearing it at school and would only wear it when I went back home. And I got a lot of questions about it, and I just eventually just stopped wearing it. Now I'm thinking about this and I'm like, I wonder if I stopped wearing it because I started giving hand jobs to my boyfriend. I think that might have been what happened.

But he also gave me a ring around that time, and I think I was wearing that one instead. Oh man, do you remember promise rings?

Kieryn:

Yes. I had one.



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Eve:

That ring that he gave me, he made it very clear that it wasn't a promise ring, but everyone in our community was like, that's a promise ring.

Kieryn:

That's a promise ring. Yeah.

Eve:

Did you have one?

Kieryn:

Yeah, I did. My mom, not my mom, but my parents made my ex get me one as one of their prerequisites for letting us continue to be able to court. Because I didn't come back engaged, they were like, well, you at least have to say you're going to be ...

Eve:

In case our listeners don't know the difference between a purity ring and a promise ring and an engagement ring, do you want to do any of these?

Kieryn:

Yeah. All right. So, a purity ring is something that your father gives you when you are in puberty and you are pledging yourself to God via your father to the ...

Eve:

The accountability to your father. Your father is your head.

Kieryn:

Yes. The top umbrella, second umbrella, whatever.

Eve:

The under God umbrellas.

Kieryn:

Yeah, the under God umbrella in your multi-tiered umbrellas of protection, just Google umbrella of protection.

Eve:

We'll put the graph up. I've got it.

Kieryn:

Yeah. And so, you're pledging not to have sex, not to date anybody who your parents don't approve of. It differs for people. But you are pledging yourself to your father, but God really ...

Eve:

Like your God is stand in for your father. I mean, your father is a stand in for God.

Kieryn:

Yeah. And so you're saying that you're not going to be sexual in any way that your parents don't want you to be until you get married. A promise ring is something that your suitor or beau or whatever Victorian term your parents decide to use for your boyfriend.

Eve:

Oh my god, all of the above.

Kieryn:

Yeah, that is not an engagement ring. So it doesn't allow you to start planning your wedding or say you're engaged, but it is a symbol of you are taken and you are together with somebody.

Eve:

The word that comes to mind is you're spoken for.

Kieryn:

Yes. You're spoken for.

Eve:

That's the phrase. And that's again, with this a very patriarchal property-centric mindset of how women are in relationship to men.

Kieryn:

It signifies that you belong to someone. It's not an equal thing. It's you now subservient to this other man who gave you this ring.

Eve:

Yeah. A man has called dibs on you, and if any man is interested in you, he has to check with that other man first. And you have no say in it. Who cares?

Kieryn:

Yeah. No one. You don't have sex drive or any agency at all.

Eve:

Let's get all socioeconomic analysis on this. Let me bring in the Marxism to this whole situation.

Kieryn:

Yes, go for it.

Eve:

Because virginity is not real. It literally does not exist. I mean, we can go off on this whole tangent of hymens breaking at the wedding night are a symptom of inadequate lubrication and inadequate foreplay. The hymen is designed to stretch. It's not designed to tear. That's bullshit. That is phallogocentric medicine that it's not real. And there's a whole lot of documentation that you can find to back that up. Go research it.

So the whole virginity thing is just an artificial construct and it doesn't exist medically. And the only reason it exists socially is when people in the history of human civilization stopped being nomadic and started owning property and settling down. They wanted a way to pass on property to their next of kin, to their children. And the only way they could ensure that those children belonged to a certain man, again, property language, the only way they could ensure that was to make sure that the childbearing creature they were using to continue their lineage hadn't had sex with someone else.

Because if they could lock up this woman and make sure that her uterus was unpolluted, basically, that no one else would inherit your property, who wasn't part of your family. And I would really encourage anyone who's curious about this to go read Jessica Valenti's *The Purity Myth*. It talks about this in great detail. It's very, very good.

But the idea of virginity became a thing when that started happening. And so, virginity is valuable as a commodity as it relates to property ownership. And so, if we're going to literally decolonize our sexual ethics, we have to reject virginity as a concept.

Kieryn:

Yes. Everything goes back to capitalism.

Eve:

Everything goes back to capitalism. It really does. And this is why these umbrellas of protection and guarding your purity and your sexuality and guarding your heart, and his and hers shared Facebook profiles and shared email addresses and men not allowing their wives to have access to the family finances or putting their names on anything.

It's all because they're so afraid of someone stepping out because they believe that their partner is their property. And it's not that they believe that overtly or understand that that's what they believe, but the entire system of that kind of monogamy is based on owning your partner's sexuality.

Kieryn:

Yup. Yup. And purity culture takes that a step further and goes to owning your partner's feelings and thoughts and heart and mind. Because a huge part of purity culture is not even just not having sex. It's not even having feelings for other people who aren't the person that you're going to be married to.

Eve:

Right. I mean, that's why you're supposed to be ready to confess all of your prior crushes to your future spouse. That's why you're supposed to shut down any crushes and not have them. That's why porn equals cheating.

Kieryn:

Yes.

Eve:

That's why using porn equals an addiction, because you can blame desire on something outside of you and not take ownership for wanting to see other people fucking, wanting to see other bodies. Well, anyone who uses porn is seen as being a sex addict.

Kieryn:

Well, yes, that's true.

Eve:

That's also medically not a thing. Being addicted to porn is medically not a thing.

Kieryn:

Masturbating is a normal thing that your body needs to do. It's not ...

Eve:

And some people need porn for it. Cool.

Kieryn:

That blew my mind and healed so many things and changed so many things when I came to that conclusion, when I realized that masturbating is a physical need and it's not something sinful and bad. It is ...

Eve:

What changed your mind about that?

Kieryn:

I mean, it was just learning about how the body works. It was literally, I was on Scarlett Teen and they were talking about masturbating and how it's just a biological thing that your body needs to do. And I was like, oh my god. I had no idea that I just thought I was just terribly sinful and bad for this thing that is perfectly a normal part of human development.

Eve:

Well, this gets me back to one of my favorite soapboxes, which is the Cartesian divide that is in a lot of evangelical theology where the body is this thing that is subpar compared to the life of the mind. You have everything spiritual is so elevated to the detriment of connecting with your body and being aware of your body as part of yourself. A lot of people who abide by that theology will talk about physical suffering as like, well, that's okay. It's not a big deal. I can't wait to get to heaven when I can have a new body.

And so they're dismissing caring for or being in tune with their current body because they're just like, well, it's already broken because ... Hey, puppy, come on. Get down, Blanche. Thank you. Our neighbors are allowed to walk past. It's okay. Good girl.

They're so out of touch with their active body, because they're so focused on desiring heaven. I mean, the Catholics have a pretty thorough theology of the body and if you except their basic premises, the entire system works. But evangelicals don't have a theology of the body.

Kieryn:

No. The body is flesh and flesh is to be destroyed and is bad and sinful.

Eve:

Right. And one of the places that comes out the most clearly is the ethics of masturbation a lot. There's even in the most fundamentalist circles, there's people who will say it's fine because there's nothing in the Bible that's explicitly addresses it. And so it's just a gray area where it's like, well, you can do it as long as you're not thinking about anybody lustfully.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Yeah. There was also that line.

Eve:

You can do it as long as you're not using porn. You can do it as long as you are not depriving your spouse of sex. There is that school of thought and there's just no grounding for either side of it.

Kieryn:

Yeah. My parents were definitely not explicitly but implicitly on the physical world is not great and we just need to be in heaven. So forget everything about what your physical body is doing. I mean, given that my mom was pregnant for a decade straight, I get being that dissociated.

Eve:

Right. And that's another interesting thing is how do you reconcile that with the female body is seen as fundamentally good when it's reproducing, but fundamentally bad outside of that. There's really no deep analysis of the philosophy that underpins that. And it's really toxic.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I feel like it just is so insidious and impacts so many things. It destroys you in ways that you don't necessarily know. There's so many layers to it.

Eve:

Well, I mean, for a completely out of the sphere example, I didn't realize I wasn't breathing deeply until I started choir sophomore year of college. And I'd realized I didn't have enough air in my lungs to sustain some of those notes. And I was like, why is this? And I realized my abdomen was permanently clenched up and I wasn't able to take a deep breath from my belly. I was taking shallow breaths for 20 years.

It took me a couple weeks of really focusing on trying to relax those muscles. But when I finally took that deep breath, it changed all sorts of stuff. And then later on when I did yoga, I realized I had been just ignoring my body for forever. And I didn't have any relationship with why my hamstrings were super locked up or why my ankle kept turning. And there are all these old injuries or tension points that I had been ignoring, and I'd been making myself suffer for it.

I've been giving myself migraines because I've been ignoring my body's requests for stuff.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Ballet has been really helpful in that respect for me as well, because we do mostly technique. So, the entire class for 75% of it is just stretching and legwork and ab work and breathing work and being in alignment and being grounded. And then, we learn the choreography and run through the steps. But that's after we've spent the first hour being in our body and I'm like, oh, I feel so many more muscles and I feel all of this tension, and I feel where all of my points are because I'm actually there now.

Eve:

I mean, that's Pilates, it does a lot of the same stuff that yoga does. It grounds you in your body. And Pilates was designed as a ballet warm up to get you in sync with your breath and to get you aware of small muscle groups in your core so that you could dance without injuring yourself. Because if you start dancing without being actually in your body, you're going to hurt yourself ...

Kieryn:

It's terrible.

Eve:

It's going to be violent.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Your body is like, we're not supposed to do that.

Eve:

Right. Exactly.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Oh yeah. We were talking about rings. That's what ...

Eve:

That's where we all got with all this whole body thing. It's important. It's really important.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Well, I feel like this now provides the context for the gravity of what a purity ring means and meant. All of the weight that is behind that ...

Eve:

A purity ring is functionally a weight of just severing your spirituality from your body and just saying, I'm going to devote my life to Christ and getting to know the Lord and serving my community and my church and being a very useful engine basically in just being a cog in this church community and ignoring my sexuality and ignoring my body until my body belongs to someone else and they get to use it however they want.

And this goes into, there's a lot of these fundamentals Christian pastors will talk about like denying sex from your partner is almost as bad as cheating. And so, they'll pressure wives into having sex when it's not healthy or completely inappropriate, or nonconsensual. There was this whole story, trigger warning for sexual assault stuff.

Where CJ Mahaney, the founder of the co-founder of Sovereign Grace Ministries, would brag about his wife, he'd been married to her for 30 years, and he kept saying, she has never turned me down for sex even right after she had hip replacement surgery. And that was held up as a positive example.

Kieryn:

Yeah. People were like, wow, that's awesome.

Eve:

That's awesome. She's so selfless. What a saint. Yeah. So much rape.

Kieryn:

That's what being a good wife looks like.

Eve:

Yeah. So what purity rings are kind of priming you for that.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

It's basically grooming so that you'll be a passive victim of sexual assault for forever.

Kieryn:

Right. My mom fancied herself a marriage counselor and that was what she counseled all the women who were coming to her for help was like, well, you just need to have sex with your husband more.

Eve:

Make yourself sexually available.

Kieryn:

Make yourself available and then he won't cheat on you or be mean to you or hit you or whatever. You just have to be more submissive.

Eve:

Yeah. I mean, the pastors at our church gave women that advice all the time.

Kieryn:

Yep. Yeah. No, that was the standard.

Eve:

Speaking of women enforcing the patriarchy and these weird gender roles, because I feel like it is the women who really enforce it, the men, these ideas are designed to benefit men. And then it's the women who are gaslit into becoming the enforcers.

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Kieryn:

Yeah, exactly.

Eve:

And they really, really hold it up. Let's talk about Claire's prom.

Kieryn:

Yeah, which was not a purity ball.

Eve:

No, it was a homeschool prom.

Kieryn:

It's a different thing.

Eve:

But the homeschool moms were the ones organizing it and they were the ones who enforced it and caused all the hullabaloo. And the dads were the ones who were being pervy but the moms were the ones who were enabling them.

Kieryn:

Yep. So what happened?

Eve:

What do you remember happening? I would love to fill this in up from the other side of the ...

Kieryn:

Yeah. I remember the site going down because it went viral.

Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

I remember that. She went to this prom and she wore this dress and it wasn't a slutty dress. It was just a normal prom dress that is very run of the mill prom dress. And because it was all these fundamentalist homeschool moms, the fact that it had spaghetti straps or was strapless or it was something, it was not as modest as they wanted it to be. And the allegation was that the dads were looking at Claire, and that wasn't the dad's problem. That was Claire's problem.

Eve:

Right. Yup. I mean, that's the gist of it. God, I'm starting to get spacey and dissociated because it was so intense. That whole day was so fucking intense.



Kieryn:

It was so much.

Eve:

And it was three weeks of non-stop stuff. This what made me stop blogging is because it was so ...

Kieryn:

It was a lot. It was so many.

Eve:

Okay. So Karen's been my webmaster for years, and they were kind enough to take my website on when I got divorced and was homeless and broke. And so, they were keeping the domain alive, so that's why they were involved with the site crashing. And I had been working at Barnes & Noble in California, and it was a 3rd Street Promenade one, and Claire, she'd been to this prom before. This was her second time at it.

It's in Richmond. It's organized by the homeschool moms. It's very G rated pop music, old songs and swing dancing. And I mean, they had some more raunchy stuff, but not much. Nothing that nobody outside of this culture would recognize it as raunchy. Everybody inside this culture might be like, huh, I might not send my child to that. I was not allowed to go to this prom. I was told that it was risqué.

But because my sister and I had both gotten divorced and kind of ostracized by our communities and my mom had started reconsidering stuff, and they allowed my brother to go one year. And then he took his friends and my sister went with them the next year. And then this was her first year going alone without my brother there. So she was going with her boyfriend. And everybody who's seen this story go viral, has assumed that it was because of racism, because her boyfriend at the time was black. It's not.

The people kicked her out before he even showed up on the scene. They didn't even know he was with her. It could be in Richmond, but it wasn't. And actually, that community is fairly racist in their own ways, but they're so defensive about not being racist that they would not have said anything about an interracial couple. They would've used other microaggressions instead.

So Claire sent me this photo of this dress and it's this sparkly silver dress. And the rule was fingertip length was your acceptable shortness. And she's tall. This girl is like 5'10" and curvy, and the dress was fingertip length, but because she's so tall, it just showed a lot of leg. And she was wearing it with heels. And we did this ...

Kieryn:

Scandalous.

Eve:

We did this video chat where she was showing it to me in her room with heels, without heels. She sent me some selfies and was like, do you think this is okay? And I was like, yeah, you've got half an inch below your fingers. You're good. It was longer than fingertip length. But this woman who was the chaperone who met her at the door and immediately told her it was inappropriate, this woman was like 4 foot 10.

And so, all she saw was leg. All she saw was just these legs in her face. And she just was like, this is not appropriate. And Claire was like, no, look at this. I'll take my heels off. I'll show you with and without it's

here. Look at it. And she kind of was like, okay, I guess you're fine. And let her in. And the boyfriend was out trying to find parking. Everybody got dropped off. So this happened while the boyfriend's trying to find parking.

And it's at a church and there's like this balcony area, and some of the dads are up there as chaperones, and they're manning, I guess they had a strobe light or something they were using. It was in a church that often did theater productions for the homeschool community, Richmond community. And so she goes in there and she's like dancing with some of her friends. This is of course a very dry event, very, very casual.

But if Claire moves at all, she's curvy. And so that's obviously sensual dancing, and she ...

Kieryn:

She has a body and people can see it so clearly.

Eve:

One of the things that my mother gave me and all my sisters is we got some ass. It's just going to happen. So whatever. It's fine. And then, it was not fine because all the dads in the balcony were watching. And I don't know which one. She has an opinion, I'm going to refrain from engaging in that. We still don't know who did it, but one of the dads apparently told another of the dads that he thought it was distracting, her ass in that dress, and ...

Kieryn:

You can't see the side eye that's happening but ...

Eve:

Yeah. So, under the guise of protecting the young men, this father went to the woman who was the first gatekeeper. The mom comes and finds Claire and then pulls her in and was like, you have to leave. And she's like, I can't. I carpooled with all these people. So it's like six people who are going to have to leave. You can kick me out and you can have someone come pick me up, but you're going to refund my ticket, or everybody is going to leave with me, and you're going to refund all of our tickets. And they were like, no refunds. You violated the dress code. Go get out.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

And she was like, no, I didn't. And this is when it escalated and she said, "You're slut shaming me." And I think this woman just was so umbrage at the word being bandied around. And this is when the boyfriend walks in and he's like, "What's going on?" And Claire starts bawling and tells him what's going on. And he and all the friends had to rallied around, and it was this cluster of six kids, and they're all just like, cool, we're leaving. And so they just left.

And so, I'm working at this bookstore and I'm closing, and it's in California. She's in Virginia, and it's like 1:00 AM her time and it's 10:00 PM or 11:00 PM my time. And I'm putting away books. The bookstore is closed. I'm doing recovery. And I get this call and it's Claire, and she never calls me. And I was like, I should pick this up. It's also 1:00 AM in Virginia. Something's going on. And she's just sobbing. And she's

like, "I'm in the car with my friends. We just got kicked out of prom because of my dress, and this is what happened."

And she's really, really upset. And I'm just like, okay, clearly this is something you're really, really passionate about, and you're like ... She's tearing into purity culture and making a feminist rant out about this. And I was like, write it up and we'll put it on my blog. It will help you feel better. You can process this through writing. You can have the space to tell your side of the story and the Richmond homeschool community, it's Gossip central.

So I knew everybody was going to be talking about this, and I knew she was really worried about losing friends over this and people being like, you can't hang out with my daughter anymore because she's a slut. So I really wanted to protect her. And so, I felt like if you tell your story first, you get to control the narrative, which is what happened. So she wrote it up, we edited it down, we removed some names for protection of the offending parties.

And then Gawker picked it up.

Kieryn:

It's so ridiculous.

Eve:

And the site shut down. And so I had this story going viral. By the way, dear listeners, if you see photos from that blog post floating around in all these trashy content farm sites, please report it because none of them have rights to use those photos. Those photos belong to me and they're still using them to get clicks. It's very offensive.

But yeah, so Claire was then ...

Kieryn:

Right, because someone's swearing, obviously.

Eve:

... went viral, she started having local news stations wanting to talk to her. And because the term fuck the patriarchy was in the blog post title, fuck was also in the URL. My father got so offended that she was using that and was going to thereby ruin his professional reputation because she was using the word fuck on the internet that he said that she couldn't talk to any news reporters unless she removed the word fuck from the URL.

But I knew that because it was viral, all of these sites would have the old URL and [inaudible 00:47:21].

Kieryn:

He shut the entire family off.

Eve:

And I knew she didn't want that. So she and I talked about it, and we decided to not, and my father had her basically on house arrest for three weeks. He wouldn't let her out. He wouldn't let the boyfriend call. He wouldn't let people come over. He wouldn't let people talk to her. He unplugged the house phone and only ...

Kieryn:

And all because ...

Eve:

Business as usual through his personal cell phone, which my mom didn't have a cellphone at that point, so it was just him.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I don't know what he expected to come from that.

Eve:

And so the boyfriend and I kind of tag team trying to cover the media and answer the request and talk about what happened. And she was just basically locked up because of it. The whole thing was really shitty and that's why my father doesn't talk to, or my sister doesn't talk to my father today.

Kieryn:

Yeah, that makes sense. I don't understand when parents do these things and they're surprised when the relationship with their child that they did that to doesn't work out. What did you expect?

Eve:

It's also baffling to me, the story. My parents had my sister's back with this issue, like with the prom, they let her go to the prom. They were angry at the organizers for how they handled it. It was just the language and her access to the media. And so, I was like, dad, why does this impact your reputation? Why do you care so much? And he is just, it was basically a control thing. He wanted to be the one who was managing how the story was handled. And because he ...

Kieryn:

He just shut everything down.

Eve:

He just shut everything down. Yeah.

Kieryn:

Why are men so fragile?

Eve:

Because they are told from a very young age not to cry, and that having friends that they love is gay, so they can't have feelings and they can't love anyone.

Kieryn:

It's so ridiculous. It really is.

Eve:

It really, really is. So yeah, I talked with Claire this morning and cleared that to make sure she was okay with me telling that story again.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

And she was, but yeah, the whole thing's super shitty. It's so shitty.

Kieryn:

Yeah .Has anything happened since? Does it still continue and nothing has changed or have things changed?

Eve:

The boyfriend got some death threats.

Kieryn:

Holy shit.

Eve:

Because the actual segregationist racists in Richmond, when the story went viral, who were not part of our homeschool community, the people who are not nice about being racist, which is [inaudible 00:50:09]. But the people who are overt in their racism got wind of it and just were very aggressive. And I had to shut down comments on that YouTube post that we did as a little follow up because I would still get like, fuck you, I'm a white guy kind of stuff in the comment section. Years out, years later, years later, people would still find it on it and just be awful.

And I, around that time, that's when I had the stalker who was posting my photos and phone number up on the Los Angeles Craigslist with personal saying that I had a rape fantasy and here's where to find me. And the Culver City Police didn't care about it. It was just like that was because of this, and it was my Richmond phone number, which I didn't give out, so it had to be someone who I knew from growing up there. I still don't know who did it and I'm still very upset about it because nobody listened to me. Nobody took it seriously, and it was just very scary. The whole thing was just really scary.

Kieryn:

People are terrible.

Eve:

People are really, really terrible. And it all comes down to we're trying to protect some pervy men. That's what it comes down to is all of that violence, all of that vitriol is about some of the homeschool dads thought her ass was hot and decided that ...

Kieryn:

It was her problem and not theirs.

Eve:

... it was her problem and not theirs. And the entire community rallied around it.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Well, our entire culture taught us to believe that if anyone looked at us and thought anything and didn't assume we were invisible, that's our fault, and we're liable for their sin and their struggle.

Eve:

If you look back at the archives around that time period, I don't know how much of this is still up there. Blog posts going up from girls who grew up with us who were either at that prom or not at that prom, but people who knew my sister and me and who were just basically around this time, I had just gotten divorced. I had started calling out my church for protecting pedophiles and for ignoring mental health issues and encouraging ... What did you just break? This dog this day.

Encouraging women to make themselves more sexually available to their husbands and basically denying the existence of marital rape. So, I started calling all this stuff out. Then this happens, and my other sister at the time eloped and was posting feminist stuff on Facebook. So it was like the three of us were a little bit agitating around these issues that nobody else was willing to talk about, and suddenly we were all the black sheep. And so all these people we grew up with were posting blog posts, basically calling us all narcissistic bitches.

No narcissistic bitches, those were words that were used. It was like we were trying to make everything all about us all the time. And we are just like, no, we're just trying to talk about what we're seeing. And all of you are so invested in protecting the system that you don't want to talk about it. A lot of people make fun of the father-daughter dances and the purity balls and the purity rings and all of that stuff.

But when you think about the violence that's associated with trying to step out from under the control of the patriarchy, you have to really think twice about that because the women and children who are in those situations don't have the agency and don't have the tools to get themselves out and you protect themselves. And they may not agree with things, and they may just be going along with things to keep the peace so that they don't get abused or they get abused less.

Kieryn:

Yeah. It's so much of a trap and it's so hard to get out of.

Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

And it's so tied to your eternal future. It's not just like, oh, this is just a decision I made. It impacts you at your core.

Eve:

Right. Because everything is tied to how well you are submitting to God and his will and whether or not you'll get into heaven and the state of your eternal soul.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

Hi guys. Sorry, I got really upset.

Kieryn:

No, it's good. I'm glad that we got to talk about purity culture and proms and all of ...

Eve:

Theology of the body.

Kieryn:

... stuff that is behind that.

Eve:

It's so dark.

Kieryn:

Yeah, it really is. It seems so fine because when people think about proms, they're like, oh, it's this cool party thing, but ...

Eve:

It's a cute coming of age moment. Yeah, it is. It injects you into violence and ...

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Oh my god.

Kieryn:

I am really enjoying getting to create that space for queers on my campus who have either never been to prom because they didn't want to go because they were closeted or whatever, or did but it was terrible. And I feel like this is going to be healing for a bunch of people who had prom experiences, but it's also going to be really healing for me having not had a prom experience and having all of my coming of age things being so grounded in commodifying my body.

To have something that is a celebration of autonomy and agency and being ourselves, I think is going to be super awesome.

Eve:

This part of why, I mean, we had Ramey on a couple weeks back. This is part of why Ramey and I both really enjoyed discovering pole dancing. This is why I really enjoy clubbing now. I don't do it a lot, but I love going out and going dancing. And I love being able to express myself and have it be normal and

have it be part of a group where everybody's doing that and not be the target of basically predatory gaze or touch.

And those things happen in clubs. But there's such a, especially in queer clubs, there's such a community of supporting each other and looking out for each other. There's these cues that you can signal to your girlfriends and they'll dance up on you to get that guy out of the way. There's a culture of collective protection and support and it's really freeing and fun.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

I love it.

Kieryn:

It's so good. I'm glad that we have this thing that we can reclaim.

Eve:

Yeah. Bodies are great.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

We got cheated at it a lot.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Thank you for listening.

Eve:

Thank you for joining us on that journey. It was a journey.

Kieryn:

Yes, it was a journey.

Eve:

The music you hear on this episode is by the Heavens, from their album Stenazó.

Kieryn:

Our Patreon is Kitchen Table Cult pod.

Eve:



This transcript was exported on Jan 23, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

And you should really join that because if you do, we are going to be talking about doing a live recording event in Oakland when I come out to visit at the end of the month. So join the Patreon and you'll get info on that, and you'll maybe be able to hang out with us if you're in the Bay Area.

Kieryn:

Yes. And you should also, even if you're not in the Bay Area, email us questions to talk about on the podcast. You can find our contact info and a bunch of other information on our website, which is [kitchentablecult.com](http://kitchentablecult.com).

Eve:

Thanks so much to our producer, Erin, and for all of our patrons and listeners who make this possible.

Kieryn:

See you next time.

Eve:

Bye.

Kieryn:

Bye.