



*the goddess
society*

kelly mckain

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by

Kelly McKain

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matti@gramatticus.com

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For Helen and Laura - for then, for now, for ever

Jen

“How can you possibly know what noises she made?!”

We started the Goddess Society on the day Shelley quit school. It gave us a whole lot of trouble - heartache, tears and, in my case, one heel snapping clean off a very expensive (borrowed) Valentino stiletto. Still, we wouldn't change it. Not for a second. Not for anything. Because the Goddess Society made us happier than we ever dreamed possible. And it gave us something else too - see, we started off as best friends, but we ended up more like sisters. And that's for ever.

So imagine this sort of tinkly harp music and the scene going all misty. In case you're not getting the vibe, here's a hint:

YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE PAST
(Enjoy Your Visit)

Lia and I are in the common room already, both with coffee and sticky buns from the cafeteria, when Shelley comes swaying in, drops her Muji bag on the table and starts telling us the gossip even before she's got her disgustingly skinny backside on the chair.

“So, Carrie’s up at the park in her mum’s car losing it with Max, yeah?” she says, starting right at the juicy bit. Shelley’s only interested in life’s juicy bits. “And she’s like ‘uh, uh, oooo, baby!’ and they’re really into it, and she wants to come so she shoves her hips up and pushes her feet against the windscreen and starts going, ‘Ah, ah, ahhhhhhh-hhhhhhh, yes, yes, YESSSSSS!’”

Lia joins in the orgasm re-enactment while I choke on my sticky bun. By the way, in case you hadn’t noticed? I’m not as loud as my friends.

“How can you *know* that?!” I splutter. “How can you possibly *know* what noises she made? Did she *tell* you?”

Shelley looks at me like I’m from another planet. “God, no! And don’t let on we know, either! Lucy heard it from Heather who’s in the swimming club with Georgie who’s Carrie’s mate from home.”

“So Lucy told you?”

Shelley looks exasperated. “No, Lucy’s big sister Jess, when I gave her a lift home from the gym last night,” she says, like it’s completely obvious. “Anyway, I haven’t even got to the good part.”

“Oh, sorry to interrupt the narrative flow,” I say sarkily, “do go on.”

Lia’s eyes are popping out of her head by this time and I can tell she’s thinking, there’s *more*?

I’m pretending to be above this sort of stuff, but really I’m as keen as she is. I’m probably doomed to lifelong virginity, but still, any info on the subject might be useful, just in case.

“So that’s all great and she’s done it and she’s really happy, but then the next day she gets in the car with her mum, to go to Sainsbury’s, and it’s raining...”

“Yeah?” says Lia, jiggling up and down as if she’s about to pee herself.

“And so the windscreen steams up and these two footprints appear, like invisible ink, on the inside of the glass! Her mum went crazy!”

Lia explodes. “No way!” As her coffee slops, I see she hasn’t touched her sticky bun. Huh, the deal was we’d both have one.

They obviously think it’s hilarious, but I’m mortified. It just seems so sordid – and with everyone knowing about it as well. And what a way for your *mum* to find out. Yuck! It’s enough to send me screaming to the nearest nunnery.

“Poor Carrie!” I say, with feeling. “I don’t want my first time to be tacky like that.”

“Me neither,” says Shelley, pulling an apple from her bag and taking a big bite. Because she’s busy demolishing the apple it takes her a minute to realize we’re both staring at her. “*What?*” she cries into the silence, spraying juice everywhere.

“I thought you’d done it ages ago,” Lia explains. “You know, having your own flat and that. Being surrounded by all those yummy male models.”

Shelley looks at me. I look back, *yeah I thought so too*. I thought so because when we were about fourteen there were all these rumours about Shelley and Dan Evans doing it on a pile of coats at Kieran Johnson’s party. Lia doesn’t know about that because she only moved here about two years ago and, me being me, I never asked Shelley about it - I just assumed it was something she wanted to forget as quickly as possible. I know *I* would. I feel guilty for believing it now.

Shelley crunches her apple more slowly, thinking. Then she pulls out this crazily large Evian bottle from her bag, unscrews the lid very slowly and takes a long swig. This is what Shelley does when she’s buying time. “I can see why you’d think I had,” she says eventually. “I’ve got motive, means and opportunity all sorted. But I guess I’ve just been

so focussed on working. If a shoot or casting finishes early, I go and see Stick at the Lily Pad. I meet plenty of blokes, but when would I have time to go out with them?"

"Shelley, you don't have to justify yourself to us," I say gently.

"Yes, you do," says Lia, only half joking. "I mean, all those lush guys going to waste! It should be a criminal offence."

Shelley frowns. "They *are* lush too. On that swimwear shoot with Sam Weston last week I was virtually *drooling*. It's just, I know girls who've got involved with the lads and it's so awkward when it doesn't work out. So I don't even *go* there - plus I'm always busy working my arse off to keep up with this bloody schoolwork - and I'm *still* failing!" She sighs deeply and slumps over her water bottle. "It's official," she groans, "I've got no life."

We didn't mean to bring Shelley down. But it sometimes happens accidentally - like popping a balloon. One minute she's this bright, bouncy thing and then she's just a limp bit of plastic with no va-va-voom. I try to pull her out of it. "You *have* got a life - the sort of life most girls would kill for - getting to wear all that cool stuff and seeing yourself in magazines and all that. And no wonder you're always knackered - you're trying to do almost a full-time job and three ... two A-levels." Shelley dropped Business Studies just after the February London Fashion Week, when she really ran herself into the ground.

"And it's not *totally* your own place," says Lia. "I mean, it's still in your mum's house, and she's the nosiest person since sliced bread."

"Well, it's not like no one's ever interested," Shelley admits, rallying. "I spent last Wednesday draped round two gorgeous blokes and they both asked for my number."

“Exactly,” I say. She smiles and hey presto, we’re back in Happyland. I reckon I should be a counsellor or something.

“It’s time I had some fun,” she says. “I mean, all work and no play makes Shel a virgin for ever. Ben and Paul and Sam, look out!”

I agree that Shelley should have more fun, but I’m not sure about all this male model business. We’ve been to one or two parties with her (literally one or two, she hardly ever has time to go out), and the guys I met seemed pretty shallow to me. “Let’s just promise each other that however it happens, it won’t be tacky,” I say, with feeling.

“What do you mean by tacky?” asks Lia, while Shelley punches buttons on her mobile, checking for messages from her agency.

“Smoking after,” I say. “Or smoking before, or during.” In case you didn’t get that? I hate smoking.

“During?” says Lia, giggling.

Shelley beeps around a bit more, scribbles a few things in her fluffy pink notebook then flips her phone shut. “Let’s make a list,” she says, turning to a clean pink page.

I reckon Business Studies A-level was a big waste of Shelley’s time anyway. I mean, a list? The Business Studies kids should study *her*.

Shelley writes: *To not have tacky sex on your first time, avoid the following:*

1: Doing it in your mother’s car and leaving footprints on the windscreen.

At first that’s all we’ve got down. But pretty soon we come up with a whole load of no-nos:

2: Doing it on a sofa.

3: Chewing gum during.

4: Wearing manky old underwear.

5: Bristly legs (on the girl).

6: Dodgy jewellery (on the guy).

We're just getting grossed-out about "7: In your parents' bed" (I mean, eww!) when Mrs Parsons comes in and has a go at us because the bell went ages ago.

"And you shouldn't be in here at all, *young* lady," she adds, thinking she's being all witty by emphasizing the *young*.

"No one else minds," says Lia, sort of into her sleeve.

It's true - Mrs Parsons is the only teacher who doesn't get that Lia's like a seventeen-year-old trapped in a fifteen-year-old's life. But we don't want to start her off - technically, Lia isn't a sixth-former, and the last thing she needs is Mrs Parsons launching a full-scale campaign to publicize the fact. As we walk out Shelley flicks her the Vs using her subtle method of pretending to scratch her nose. I slap her hand down because it's not that subtle.

"Tacky Sex Number Eight," Lia whispers, glancing back at Mrs Parsons. "Excessive facial hair. On the girl." And we all crack up again.

Lia scoots off to some obscure GCSE subject like Food Technology while Shelley and I slip in at the back of Media Studies. They're watching *American Beauty* with the blinds drawn, taking notes. Mr Jenkins notices us slide in late, and says, "Nice to see you at last, Miss Green."

He's referring to all the time Shelley's had to take off for modelling jobs. It all started about a year ago, when the three of us were walking along the King's Road, linked arms, going to get the train back to Beckenham. This car screeched to a halt right by us and all the traffic was beeping but this woman didn't bat an eyelid. She got out and just *stared* at Shelley. We thought she fancied her or something, especially when she handed over her card and said, "Call me." Then she had to go because she was getting yelled at for blocking the bus lane. But when she pulled away, giving the bus guy the Vs out of the sunroof, we looked at the card. She turned out to be a model scout. Lia and I weren't

surprised. Shelley's six-foot-one, whippet-thin, with long chocolate brown hair and a strong, angular face. It's amazing it didn't happen earlier.

So, anyone would call the number, right? Not Shelley. That's not her style. Instead, she rang the best agency in London and booked herself a go-see. Of course, they went as crazy over her as the first woman and signed her up like a shot. Shelley doesn't mess around with second best. Anyway, at the start of the year, when it looked like she'd be away maybe twice a month, the school were pretty positive about it. But no one had any idea she'd get this much work. Now it's more like twice a week, or maybe even three times (thrice a week?!) - anyway, let's just say the novelty's wearing off.

When Mr Jenkins is looking at the screen, Shelley slips her phone out of her bag and hides it in her lap. She never turns it off - *ever*. I've even seen her taking calls in the *bath*. About ten minutes later, she looks at me with these huge wide eyes and grips the desk. She scribbles something and turns her notepad towards me. It says, "Who needs a man when you've got your phone on vibrate!"

The text is from Lia, who's obviously bored in Metal Engineering or whatever it is. The screen glows in the darkened room: *Tcky sx no 9. Sum1 slaps ur ass and makes tht clickng noise 4 horss!*

Mr Jenkins is cool so normally we don't muck about in Media Studies. But we're already hyped up, so we can't help sniggering like Beavis and Butthead. I feel terrible for being so rude, but I just can't stop myself.

"No one can afford to take phone calls in my class," he says sternly. "Especially not you, Shelley."

Now, if I were in Shelley's Jimmy Choos I'd apologize to Mr Jenkins and get back to looking all studious. But she's a stickler for detail.

“It wasn’t a call, it was a text,” she says, without a hint of cheek.

Mr Jenkins gives her a killer look, but lets it go.

And that should’ve been it, sorted. But then something happens that really isn’t Shelley’s fault. It’s mine. It gets to the bit in the film when Lester and Carolyn nearly do it on the couch. I lean over and whisper, “Tcky sx no. 2,” and we both burst into fits.

Mr Jenkins flips like a pancake.

It’s not that Shelley got thrown out exactly. It’s just that halfway through his speech about how she was crazy for putting a short-term money-spinner above getting an education, something inside her just *went*. I’ve known her a long time, so I could spot it. She doesn’t get angry, like Lia would, or tearful, like me. She just *goes* somehow, and then you can’t touch her. It’s something I really envy - Miss Emotional Jelly that I am. But it was a shame in a way, because the poor guy was just trying to wake her up to what she was throwing away, and he lost her. Shelley was apparently listening to him with this deeply thoughtful look on her face, like she’d seen the light, and I just wanted to say, “Give it up, sir. She’s gone.”

So Shelley smiles and apologizes. She says he’s right and that she’ll make more of an effort and then she picks up her bag and excuses herself for the loo.

Mr Jenkins takes the DVD off pause and probably congratulates himself on saving another young person’s future. My stomach’s churning, but I get my head down over my notes. And when the bell goes I pick up Shelley’s jacket, because I know she’s not coming back.