[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Now, Snap Judgment is not the news. We tell you this every week, and we are so far away from the news as you can get. But we do live in this world. We see the headlines, and we know that at this very moment, millions of people in our country are watching the Supreme Court. And they're struggling with a single question. What does it look like to be in charge of your own body? And oftentimes, I'll give a content advisory, and this time I mean it, because this story is a strong language regarding sex, regarding genitalia, even [unintelligible 00:00:51] molestation. This is for grown folks. And next week, I promise we'll resume our regularly scheduled programming, but this story here, this story is about autonomy. And our storyteller, Ashley Asatu, she may well be the definition of autonomy. We'll see what I mean very shortly. But Ashley has always felt connected to her power or to her womanhood. Ashley spoke to our own Regina Bediako about a story that begins over 20 years ago, when Ashley makes a discovery that changes her relationship to her very own body. Snap Judgment.

[intriguing music]

**Regina:** At her parent's home in Stockton, California, Ashley Asatu stood in front of a dusty armoire.

**Ashley:** I was probably in eighth grade. I was in my parents’ room looking for something going through their drawers. I don't know what the heck.

**Regina:** And now her seemingly straightforward relationship with her mom, Janice, was about to get weird.

**Ashley:** I'm just like, “Oh, my God, it's like magic. Magical. What is this?” And I opened it up and it is filled with erotic novels. It was hundreds of books. And they were all like the ones with the woman and the horse and the guy that looks like Fabio, like weird ass [chuckles] European opinion love stories. [laughs]

**Regina:** Ashley grabbed the books and hurried to her room.

**Ashley:** At that time, I didn't know much about sex, but I knew if my bladder got full enough, and I read those novels? Oh, my God.

**Regina:** And then, a few years later.

**Ashley:** Oh, I stumbled across it.

**Regina:** Ashley made another unlikely discovery.

**Ashley:** I was doing homework and you got to do that shit on the computer. You know how you see it in movies, they click on something, and they'd be like, “Oh, my God. Hella files. What is this?” My mom has a whole secret life in this folder. This is a lot of nasty stories. It was very descriptive. My mother was a pretty good writer.

**Regina:** Her mom, Janice, didn't just own romance novels. She penned them herself.

**Ashley:** Who is this woman? And I'm like, “I don't know her.” There was another side to my mother. [laughs]

**Regina:** Janice was the absolute last person you would expect to read and write steamy romances. She led a household that was as buttoned up as they come.

**Janice:** My parents are from Liberia. I'm the oldest, got to make sure girls do the right thing because if not, they can bring shame on your family. It would be horrible for people to think that you were a hussy. I remember my mom told me that I was like, “What is a hussy?” Hussy sounds like they have fun, they can go to parties and shit. [laughs] Definitely couldn’t spend the night at friends’ houses. Going to church camp all the time.

**Regina:** But unlike her mom, Ashley didn't want to keep things behind closed doors.

**Ashley:** Discovering my mother's erotic tales was just like, “Girl, this is in me. This is in you. You're just like--” She was really good about putting things in boxes, like, “This is this box, and this is this box. And these boxes don't mix.” I'm not doing this shit. I'm going to do things in my own way.

**Regina:** So, she went to parties, hung out with boys, wear the shortest cheerleading skirt she could get her hands on. But after all that, she ended up settling down with a husband and kids, just as Janice wanted.

**Ashley:** I had the kids out of order but ended up getting married, so that was a save.

**Regina:** Also, a save, her mom loved her husband. She thought he was charming, successful and reliable, a great partner for her daughter. Some years later, in a warm fall day, Ashley's husband checks in.

**Ashley:** I'm in the garage, I'm doing laundry. He walks in. I'm standing by the washing machine and he's standing by his work desk. There is at least 15 feet between us. He had medicine for me. He pulls the pills out of his drawer. He says that he has chlamydia. The doctor is like, “By law, you need to tell your wife that you have a sexually transmitted disease.” And he tells me that he has been sleeping with someone, so I need to go get tested. The audacity of this whole situation was what I'm thinking as I'm crying.

Up until that point, I had felt like my husband had always looked at me with [pause] love, hunger, want, this desire. And I remember his eyes, they were so cold, almost like I was an irritation. This marriage is over. I realized I needed to move out. So, I took all of my books, and I took a lot of knickknacks and things from my altar, like my crystal, shit like that. First day coming into the apartment walking in, just felt like failure.

**Regina:** 12 years, two kids, a pitbull named Panda, a beautiful home. Just like that, Ashley's love story ends, replaced with custody arrangements, a persistent STI, and a growing sense that the worst may actually be ahead of her.

**Ashley:** I was scared of the embarrassment of saying, “My marriage is not working.”

**Regina:** And the very last person she wants to say those words to is her mom. So, she doesn't, at first. But Janice calls every week and sees her grandkids every month. So, Ashley's got to come clean, ASAP.

**Ashley:** I waited about a week, because I was depressed, I was sad. I told my mom over the phone, I called her and I told her that I was leaving Matthew. She basically was like I'm overreacting. “I'm going to send you prayers on YouTube. I need to have a war room and be praying to God to change him.” Oh, okay. Well, I fucking knew that that was going to happen, but here we go.

**Regina:** This feeling isn't new to Ashley. Her husband wasn’t in her corner, and neither is Janice.

**Ashley:** And that's how I feel with my mom a lot. I just wish you’d see me and see-- this shit is breaking me. And the two people that I kind of-- I really loved my husband, it's my fucking mom. If anyone should be able to see you, it should be your mom. I didn't know what my credit score was. I didn't have a bank account. Yes, my husband was taking care of our primary bills, the mortgage. I didn't feel I could earn my own money.

**Regina:** No income, no husband. She starts avoiding her mom's calls. And it's beginning to feel like all of her issues are manifesting in one place.

**Ashley:** I was feeling betrayed by my body. Not only that I had to heal myself from the chlamydia and deal with their chronic yeast infections that was going on and the dryness that was coming on because of these infections and taking all this medication, I just didn't like the way my labia looked. I felt one of them is longer than the other. I felt if my pussy was better, I would have been able to keep my man. Obviously, that's why he was cheating on me. So, I had been just reading about holistic pussy wellness, and one of the things that came up was Yoni steaming.

**Regina:** Aka an ancient wellness practice of using herb-infused water to steam your vagina. It's controversial.

**Female Speaker:** From conscious uncoupling to vaginal steaming, Gwyneth Paltrow is setting the record straight. She agrees with goop’s editorial director who added, “It feels good. It's not like we're urging people to go out and buy AK-47s."

**Regina:** When the actress famously endorsed it on her Goop blog in 2015, the internet seemed to respond with a collective nope.

**Ashley:** All the writing pieces, the blogs that was coming out, I was like, “Oh, my God. People are really not into it.” Doctors are like, “You're stupid. You're throwing your pH balance off.” This is extra as fuck. Who’s boiling water to squat over it? But I was like, honestly, right now I need to be doing some extra as fuck shit. Kind of hit rock bottom of my life, so I was like, “ [unintelligible 00:10:37] it can't be that bad.”

**Regina:** So, one day, Ashley grabs a pot and boils some water.

**Ashley:** First, I put the pot on the floor and realized I was burning my floor. I was like, “Okay, we’ve got to find something for that. Okay, well, how am I going to squat over?” I tried a bread crate that I had. I flipped it over and I tried doing that and let me tell you, that shit doesn't feel good on your pussy. All those slats, I was like, “Oh, my God, this is hurting.” Then, I tried to put a towel over the crate so my pussy a little cushion, but I couldn't feel the steam coming through the holes. So, I was just like, “Fuck. Okay, this isn't working.”

So, I had to reheat the water and then try it again. So, I had the towel and then I was trying to squat over the pot and that wasn't working because it was like, I don't have [unintelligible [00:11:27] knees. So then I was like touching my butt on the pot lid, and then I'm feeling, “This pussy is already ugly, don't burn her ass too, shit.” Then, someone told me, "Get on your knees." Okay, so then I was like, “That'll work.” So, I got on my knees, and I put the pan in between and I'm on my knees, and then I had my hands on my hips and I'm like, “Oh, I'm feeling like Wonder Woman. This is great.”

[suspenseful music]

It feels warm. It feels orgasmic. I didn’t fucking know that a pot and water could give me this type of relaxation. It was something so simple that brought so much relief, and I slept for 12 hours. That white woman is on to something.

**Regina:** Steaming only solves one of Ashley's problems though. She needs to make money for herself and her kids now that she's on her own. For the past year, when Ashley wasn't picking up toys or cooking family dinners, she taught a pleasure-themed yoga class on the side. It's pretty popular. So, in hopes of getting back in the black, she starts booking more and more classes.

**Ashley:** That shit was like torture. My worthiness, I feel, is tied to being a wife and a mother, and I’ve failed at that. Women would be asking me all these questions about sex, and I'm like, “I ain’t fucking because I just left my husband. So, I don't know how to answer this question. Okay?”

**Regina:** Then, during her next class, somewhere between Downward Dog and Warrior Two, Ashley gets a question that surprises her.

**Ashley:** I'm an overshare, I was just like, I was married to a single man, which led me to get in chlamydia. And then a couple other women were like, “Ooh, wait, tell me more.” And then I started talking about how I had the BV and yeast. I did mention Yoni steaming and then that's how they were like, “Girl, what the fuck is that? Why are you not teaching about Yoni steaming?”

**Regina:** She gets an idea to create a pussy wellness business, incorporating yoga, vagina steaming, and pussy pampering products. The Yoni Day Spa.

**Ashley:** Don't be half ass, be full ass. So, I was like, “Let me get certified in it, let me do all the things so that I can speak from a place of knowing.”

**Regina:** Ashley finds an online course and spends her last few dollars on books about plant-based medicine. She studies around the clock for the next few weeks, soon adding a Yoni steaming certificate to her bachelor's in criminal justice and master’s in administration.

**Ashley:** I'm still collecting all these degrees and certificates. I wanted to be able to break down pussy education to the random person and have them be like, “Damn, sis, I feel you. I didn't realize that.”

**Regina:** But just ahead lies that all too familiar sense of dread. Her mom is already mad about the breakup. Telling Janice Kennedy you're channeling divine feminine power is likely to lead to a divine feminine smackdown.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Will Ashley fess up to her mom, or can she keep her business on the down low? Find out when Snap Judgment returns. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Divine Feminine episode. As I said earlier, this story does use strong language. It refers to sex, to genitalia, and even to molestation. When last we left, a suddenly single Ashley Asatu had just used the last of her savings to open a Yoni steaming business. But what's going to happen when her mother, Janice, finds out about it because she will find out, best believe. Snap Judgment.

**Ashley:** It was just hard for me to see my parents because it was like every time I was around them, I could feel their disapproval. As my business grew, people were telling my parents what I was doing. "So and so from church follows you on Facebook, and she said you posted something talking about sex.” I didn't want people seeing my mom comment. I didn't want people to be like, “How are you doing this pussy work and your mom is commenting, 'Does your husband know you have shorts on?'” That just seemed like a disconnect in the brand. I'm going to have to deal with you offline. First really sat down and told my mom that I am an entrepreneur. I have a business, the Yoni Day Spa.

**Janice:** And I'm thinking [unintelligible [00:16:35]? You need a job where you can make money. You've got a master's degree. Go get a job, work in an office. All of this is going through my mind. I was scared for her. You shouldn't be putting that on social media.

**Ashley:** It felt like you don't believe in me, and it felt like nobody really does.

**Regina:** Ashley goes back to sending her mom's calls straight to voicemail. In the meantime, her business is flourishing. But something's still off with her own vagina.

**Ashley:** I was actually on the phone with my best friend, and I'm like, “Girl, hold on. Let me see who the fuck this is.” And it's my doctor. And she's basically like, “I don't really like the way your cervix is looking. I want to run some tests. I need you to come in tomorrow.” So, I go in, she came over and she just gave me a big ass hug. Basically, she just told me, very matter of fact, she was like, “You have cervical cancer, Ashley.” She cried with me. She's an amazing doctor. I couldn't say anything, just fucking sobbing, and she was just there.

Cervical cancer is deep inside of you. I felt like that shit was more a manifestation of how unhappy I was, how I felt betrayed by my body.

**Janice:** If I called Ashley and I left a message, she didn't call me back, I didn't think anything of it.

**Regina:** At this point, Janice was finding out all the big things about Ashley's life second hand.

**Janice:** I was kind of mad at myself, in a sense, because as a mother, I should have picked up on things. And when I found out she had already had six weeks of radiation therapy without telling me.

**Ashley:** As soon as my mom knew, it was just like, “I'm coming down. I'm going to come with you to your doctor's appointment.” I was like, “Oh God, no.”

**Regina:** Now more than ever, Janice is going full mama bear. She even sits down with Ashley's ex.

**Janice:** We have the kids over here. He came. He said he was going to pick them up, and I told him. I said, “If my daughter dies, there will be two funerals. Hers and yours.”

**Regina:** Janice starts questioning Ashley's judgment on everything. How could steaming help in this kind of a crisis? But one day when she's with friends, talk inevitably turns to Yonis.

**Janice:** That's really neat. Some of them thought it was pretty cool. It surprised me.

**Regina:** She reaches out to Ashley, relaying her friends' unexpected praise of her daughter's business.

**Janice:** When she did finally said, “Mom, I'm going to unblock you. Okay?” “Oh, I didn't know I was blocked.”

**Regina:** Now unblocked, she reads the comments.

**Janice:** Reading all these comments from women and men, who had fibroids and who had problems with their menstrual cycle and the steaming with the herb.

**Regina:** Janine says curious to see more, maybe by attending one of Ashley's events. But Ashley doesn't know she'll be able to keep her mom in check. If there is a scene, she'll lose the clients that keep her afloat. Even so, she takes a deep breath and invites Janice to a workshop, hoping this time her mom will really see her.

**Janice:** It was somebody's beautiful home. She set a painting on the ground, did the [unintelligible 00:20:50], there's a meet and greet. And I'm just walking around, “Hi, I'm Ashley's mom.” And then, there's tables set up where people were selling product. Ashley called the meeting to order. She called everybody to come and sit down. And then, the women got into a circle, and they talked about their vagina. I was thinking, “Okay, these women are crazy.”

When they started talking, they sat in that circle and my other daughter who makes pillows, she brought all these beautiful pillows and they're sitting in a circle and these women are pouring their heart out over rape, molestation. It was touching to me, somebody who has been a survivor of molestation too.

These women are crying over something that happened to their vagina. And it's as if to say you are talking to your vagina about this problem. It was just very nurturing. I took a pamphlet, the actual drawing of a vagina, [unintelligible [00:16:35] labia, the vulva, everything, clitoris, the whole bit. And it was black and white. And then on the tables were paint, crayons, markers, glitter, anything you want. And it was up to you to draw yours, to color it in based on how you were feeling. So, I colored one.

[thoughtful music]

I did a lot of reds and blues and greens. Actually, it was kind of cute. [chuckles] And then afterwards, you could go and just walk around the tables, and look at all the different drawings. It was absolutely beautiful. I was so amazed at my daughter standing there so professionally. It was like I was seeing another side of my daughter that I had never seen before. I probably should have been more open. There are a lot of ways to help people and that's her way of helping people.

**Regina:** Since the night of that workshop, Janice has been pitching in with Ashley's business.

**Ashley:** I'm very blessed to have her help. But I believe my mom feels really guilty about not supporting me in the beginning, so she's overcompensating, trying to be very supportive now.

**Janice:** And now I go there, I help her package them, I help her mail them up. I'm good.

**Ashley:** I'm still working with my feelings, but people come around as they come around.

**Janice:** It takes this like-- you have to go through a process, but now I'm through the process.

**Ashley:** Apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Okay? You can't keep things buried for long that give birth to-- [laughs] My mom is a fucking Meghan Markel stan.

**Janice:** Meghan Markel, the Duchess of Sussex, I call her my goddaughter. [laughs]

**Ashley:** Like she's in this group called Sussex Squad. She bought--

**Janice:** -a bath soap and a pussy oil-

**Ashley:** -and mailed it to Buckingham Palace. Along with a onesie for Baby Archie. She had included a gift for the baby.

**Janice:** It was awesome. [laughs] I was able to brag.

**Ashley:** I was like, “Mom, they're not giving that girl-- They're going to look at this shit and be like the princess or whatever the fuck she is, is not getting this.” My mom was like, “You think that they would take her pussy oil?” [chuckles]

**Janice:** And I got a thank you card back but they didn't mention that part of it. But it was a generalized “Thank You” card from Buckingham Palace.

[content music]

**Glynn:** Big thanks to Ashley Asatu and Janice Kennedy for sharing your story with the Snap. These days, Ashley's health business and relationship to Janice is on the up and up. But don't just take our word for it. Find out the latest or what the Yoni Queen is up to at *snapjudgment.org*. The original score for this story was by Sandra Lawson-Ndu and Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Regina Bediako.

[upbeat music]

Real stories, real life, and if you need more shout at your phone, “Siri, Alexa, whoever you are, give me more Snap Judgment.” Don't take no for an answer. Teach your machines who's boss before it's too late, download the journey. And if you're looking to meet people in the know, people living their lives with passion and purpose, just look around to see who's wearing a Snap Judgment t-shirt. Guaranteed that person will be awesome. If you want to be awesome too, yours is available right now, *snapjudgment.org.*

Snap is brought to you by the team that knows better than to make rules and regulations concerning someone else's yoni. In fact, both myself and uber producer, Mr. Mark Ristich, have decided that decisions about a women's body are probably best left to the women themselves. There's Nancy López, I see Pat Mesiti-Miller, Regina Bediako, David Exumé, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, John Fecile, Marisa Dodge, Davey Kim, Bo Walsh, and Annie Nguyen.

Now, this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you try to hide, your deepest, darkest secret from the woman who brought you into this world, you can see how that works out for you, and you would still, even then, not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[upbeat music]

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*