*[Gender Reveal theme music plays]*

**Tuck:** Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host, and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

*[Gender Reveal theme music ends]*

**Tuck:** Hey everyone, hope you’ve all been hanging in there. I’d love to have something eloquent or encouraging to say, but it’s just been a really heavy, shitty week, huh?

Well, a little backstory about today’s short episode: Ozzy and I had originally prepared a normal, full-length episode for this week that included a full guest interview alongside an extended This Week in Gender segment about Cecilia. But on Saturday night, Ozzy and I received some news that ultimately meant we were going to have to remake a bunch of the interview portion of the podcast, and we both decided that ultimately we were too too sad and tired to tackle that at the last minute on a Sunday, so we are holding that interview for now, hopefully we’ll air it later this season. But we still do want to share our tribute that we put together for Cecilia Gentili.

Had I known this segment was going to be the entire episode, maybe I would have tried to build it out a little more, but it is what it is, and I am really really trying to remember that the solution to grief is not to do more work and little projects about it. Which is really hard, by the way, because what’s the alternative? Be sad? Feel my feelings? (sigh) I *guess.*

Anyway, thank you for being here to slow down and feel some feelings with me. It means a lot. Please take care of yourself, take care of each other. Maybe text someone that you love them. Right now. Are you doing it? You did it? OK. Well, it’s time for this week in gender.

*[transition music plays]*

**Tuck:** As you know, we end every episode of Gender Reveal with the same question: “In your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?”

I never got to ask Cecilia Gentili what her ideal trans future was, and I want to say it’s because I thought there would be more time. And I did think that. Even though I am always thinking about death, even though my last *several* therapy sessions have been about everyone just keeps dying, I still thought there would be more time, because I have never in my life seen anyone more alive than Cecilia Gentili.

As Peppermint wrote on Instagram, “Cecilia was one of those women that I foolishly assumed and perhaps optimistically hoped that she’d sort of always be around.”

So, I did think there would be more time. But honestly, I also felt like I didn’t deserve to ask for her time.

She had accomplished so much, and I’ll talk about that more in a few minutes, but it was more than that. It was that she loved so many of my friends and community members so so so much; she was *a* mother or *the* mother of half the trans girls of New York; she was by all accounts one of the most generous and supportive people that any of us had ever met.

Chiquitita, who you know from this show, was one of Cecilia’s cherished daughters, and after she passed, Chiqui wrote, quote, “Cecilia Gentili is the first woman in my life to embrace every inch of me unconditionally. I need to say this. I have never in my life felt this way. People keep telling me how much she loves me and how highly she spoke of me. I still can’t believe it’s true, even alive I couldn’t believe it.”

And Fran Tirado, who you also know from this show, wrote, quote, “There isn’t much I can really write to help you understand what this world will mean now without Cecilia Gentili. The times I’ve tried to describe my relationship to Cecilia — beyond that of a co-organizer, creative collaborator, colleague at a few non profits, a sister in mutual aid, a mentor, a trusted advisor, a muse for a short film we were producing, a figurehead for a doll party we now do every year — I would say, “that’s my mother. That’s mom. Saying that now feels wrong somehow, like I’m not worthy enough to claim it, but it was true. Still is true. More than anything, she saw me and loved me and made sure I felt that love. For countless girls, not just me, she was my mother. We were all her kids.”

I’m not going to speculate where this seemingly common feeling of unworthiness or disbelief is coming from in others; I’m not going to unpack why I felt unworthy of even asking her for an hour of her time, but unfortunately, regrettably, I did, and honestly I still feel like someone more worthy should really be writing this, which is why you’re hearing me quote other people so much. But I have to remember that this is just one of thousands of tributes to Cecilia that do exist and will exist. So, this is mine, for now.

As I was saying, I never asked Cecilia her ideal future of gender. But luckily, Raquel Willis did, for her podcast *Afterlives: The Layleen Polanco Story.*

**Raquel:** And what is the trans future you dream of?

**Cecilia Gentili:** I dream of a future of trans people being safe. I dream of future where trans people may not be fully understood. And that is fine. I want people to say I don't understand your transness, but I respect it and I encourage you to live it to the fullest and to live happily. I cannot lose faith – in humanity because otherwise it'll be nothing for me to live for.

**Raquel:** mm-hmm.

**Cecilia Gentili:** I live in one of the most conservative parts of Brooklyn.  I'm two blocks from the water. It's just beautiful. but it's very conservative, right? So I know that it's people who are transphobic in my block And I always think of like…

**Cecilia Gentili:** I go to a supermarket and I, I touch my fruits and I smell my fruits and things like that, and I'm like, I'm gonna leave this avocado here. And I just wish that someone who is transphobic comes and pick it and make a nice guacamole. So they could see that we share an avocado experience and then nothing happened to them. And then me touching the avocado didn't make it worse or better. It kept it a fucking avocado. Right? So with that, what I'm trying to symbolize always is like my existence really doesn't affect anybody.

**Raquel:** I love it. And now I want an avocado.

**Cecilia Gentili:** Oh God, yes.

**Tuck:** I realize that at this point, we’re several minutes in and I have yet to explain who Cecilia Gentili is. And that’s because I assume you already know, and also because I don’t know how to do it; I don’t know how to adequately sum her up.

She was an asylum seeker from Argentina who spent her life advocating for sex workers, undocumented immigrants, and queer and trans people. She was instrumental in getting the Walking While Trans ban repealed in New York.

She co-created a free healthcare program for sex workers at Callen-Lorde aka the gay hospital. The program is named after her. And for many New York trans people, she was the first and most significant support person for their medical transition.

Cecilia wrote a memoir called *Faltas*, published by our friends Cat and Casey at LittlePuss Press. She played Ms. Orlando on *Pose*, that’s fun.

She consistently, passionately spoke up for Palestine in her last few months, and was brave enough to be arrested at a JVP action in October despite all of her previous fucked-up experiences with the police. I remember watching the videos of her arrest, and she managed to be so joyful and triumphant, even while being arrested, and it was so incredible and inspiring.

She had a one-woman off-Broadway show called Red Ink. I had bought a truly unhinged amount of tickets to see it in April, because no matter who my friends were or what their interests are, the one thing everyone had in common is that they all wanted to see Cecilia perform.

There’s so much more, but I don’t feel like listing her accomplishments fully captures it, so instead I wanted to read this description shared on Instagram by one of her closest friends and children, Cyd Nova.

Cyd writes, quote, “Funny as hell, generous to a fault, loyal, principled, interesting, ferociously loving, gorgeous, committed, experienced, crazily smart, just a little bit crazy, brilliantly creative, sexy and horny as hell, an amazing cook, a good time out and about, a home maker and sharer, a community creator, a princess, a tidy ass bitch, a visionary, a gangster, a forest nymph, a worldly woman. And I forgot the biggest whore in the entire world.”

That was originally a text that Cyd sent to Cecilia on her 52nd birthday last month, although Cecilia would definitely tell you that it was her 25th birthday actually. Cecilia responded to Cyd’s text with, “Who that?? Please introduce me with them, they sound amazing.”

And if *you* are listening to this and thinking, “Who that, they sound amazing,” I encourage you to read *Faltas*, if you haven’t. I encourage you to listen to the *Latino USA* episode “Cecilia Gentili’s Revolutionary Ask,” and also to Raquel’s podcast *Afterlives*, which includes a bonus episode filled with Cecilia’s stories.

You can also listen to M.E. O’Brien’s almost three-hour-long oral history with Cecilia, which was recorded in 2017 for the NYC Trans Oral History Project. There’s also a full transcript online. I will link to all of these in the show notes, by the way.

I’ve also been collecting tributes, photos, and videos of Cecilia in an Instagram stories collection, which is such a silly place to grieve but that’s where we’re at, and I really do encourage you to watch as many videos as possible. Each one is such a gift. She is just so fucking funny, and so strong and smart and brave and kind and good and hot, and nobody knows what to do without her.

The last time I saw Cecilia was four days before she died. She was at the front row of Chiqui’s Olympics of Drag show, and there are videos online of the part at the beginning of the show where Chiqui pulled Cecilia up onstage to celebrate her and do some silly little bits together. But I was late to the show, and I didn’t see that part, and I also didn’t see the part of the show where people in the front row apparently had to throw bologna in the queens’ bras. But my friend Conner was there, and after Cecilia died, he texted me, “Cannot remember if she threw the bologna in the bras or was just near the people who did. But would like to think that she did.”

And ever since then I keep making this little joke to myself, which is, “just as we must imagine Sisyphus happy, we must imagine Cecilia throwing the bologna into the bras at the Olympics of Drag.” But you know what? I do. I do imagine that, and I believe that it happened. And it brings me a lot of peace, for some reason.

And speaking of, nothing has brought me more peace than a snippet of conversation I heard between Raquel and Cecilia; it was also recorded as part of the *Afterlives* podcast, and reshared after Cecilia’s death, and hearing it was the first moment that made me feel like, “Ok, somehow, all together, we’re going to make it through this.”

So, I would like to leave you with this clip for now:

**Raquel:** And how do young trans people inspire you?

**Cecilia Gentili:** Oh, I live for them. I live for them. I'm an elder but I'm in a consistent, consistent, intentional effort to look and feel young and relevant. So yeah, I am an elder, but you may see me dressing like BTS, right, in an effort to kind of like feel relevant and, and cool, right?

**Raquel:** I gotcha.

**Cecilia Gentili:** But it, it is because like, you know, trans kids are so amazing. Like, you know, my children are beautiful. Like, you know, Gogo Graham, Gia Love, Rio. You know, those are my kids and they're doing amazing things and they're always teaching me. They keep me young because they're always pushing the envelope and that's so inspiring, right? It's also, I've been getting lately a sense a peaceful sense of like, I can retire, you know. They're great. They got this! They should be able to do it. They don't need me. So~~,~~ I'm inspired by youth. I'm inspired by all of them.

**Raquel:** I love it. I love it.

**Tuck:** This has been, this week in gender.

*[transition music plays]*

*[Gender Reveal theme begins]*

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. We will be back next week another full episode. In the meantime, we are on Instagram at @gendereveal, where we have a story collection going of different clips and photos and tributes to Cecilia. If you aren’t familiar with Cecilia and her work, I really encourage you to watch those videos and any others that you can find, and to check out the many many other interviews and stories and books and videos linked in the show notes.

This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock.

Special thanks to Raquel Willis and Dylan Heuer at *Afterlives Podcast* for being so so so helpful in letting us use that tape of Cecilia. Thank you also to Chiqui and Cyd and Fran and Peppermint and everyone else for sharing those beautiful tributes to Cecilia publicly.

Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. And there’s additional music this week by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. Free Palestine.

*[Gender Reveal theme ends]*