[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

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

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Hey everyone. I hope you’re all hanging in there. To our Black listeners especially, if there’s literally anything we can do to support you, financially, politically, emotionally, now or any time in the future, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. I thought a lot about whether it was appropriate to post a new episode right now. It’s the first day of pride month, but our scheduled guest for this week is not Black, and it seems inappropriate to be talking about things other than Black experiences and police brutality. So, instead, I am going to talk with you a bit, we’re going to do a *This Week in Gender*, and then we’re going to hear Morgan Givens talk about existing as a Black man in America, his many different experiences with cops as a Black trans person, why quote-unquote “objective journalism” is often just white supremacy, and why testosterone maybe made him forget how to spell “pizza”?

But before we get to that, I do have one quick announcement about merch, before we get started, which is that we have a bunch of limited edition pride month merch in the shop, including things like a tank top that says “nonbinary people can look however they want”, a shirt that says “Trans is Beautiful” real huge, a shirt that says “No Gender Only Lizard” real huge, and a mug inspired by last week’s episode that says “HEY!! It’s they!” We also have a, frankly iconic, commemorative pride month design by Niko Stratis, that I will tell you about next week, but I don’t want to spend too much time on merch right now, I just want to mention it *because* we always donate *at least* 50% of proceeds to an org of the designer’s choice, as you know, and folks are supporting really great causes this month, including Black Visions Collective, Trans Lifeline, Black Lives Matter, and Maggie’s, which is The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project. So, check out the store, grab some new queer stuff for pride, and you will also be raising funds for trans artists, and for Black and trans folks and sex workers. So that’s all at <bit.ly/gendermerch>.

And speaking of fundraising, if you follow the podcast on social media, you may have seen that I offered to publicly acknowledge any listener who donated $60 or more to a Black-led social justice organization, so I want to thank Ash for donating to the Marsha P. Johnson Institute, Lee for donating to Minnesota Freedom Fund, which by the way has raised $20 million, holy shit. Someone who goes by Nurse McHurt on Twitter for donating to Black Lives Matter Houston, my friend Em for donating to Black Lives Matter Los Angeles, Jonathon over at the Break the Boy Code podcast for donating to Black Lives Matter Toronto, the Fireside Folktales podcast folks for donating to Black Lives Matter of Greater Burlington, Eli for donating to Reclaim the Block, great organization, and Alex for donating to the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust. I will honor this offer this week as well, so if you screenshot me a photo of your donation by Saturday, June 6th, I will give a shout-out to you and, more importantly, to the organization that you donated to. And that brings us to, *This Week in Gender*.

[*This Week in Gender* theme music, a newsy fanfare, plays]

**Tuck:** This week in gender, we will be talking about police brutality, racism, and Black trans stuff. If you are a Black person listening to this, feel free to skip ahead, you already know this better than I do. But if you are a white or other non-Black person, I do urge you to listen to this. I am choosing to talk about this because I am a person with some kind of platform and it feels irresponsible to not talk about this, and because this is very important to me. And also, you should definitely be prioritizing actual Black trans voices and other Black voices ahead of mine. So, with that caveat:

As we remember George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, I also want to acknowledge and remember the Black trans lives that have been lost to police violence this year and in the past, including Tony McDade. Tony was shot and killed by police last Wednesday, becoming the third Black man to be fatally shot in the last three months, in Tallahassee, Florida alone. Not only was Tony shot and killed by the cops, but he was also subsequently misgendered in much of the initial coverage of the incident. This is, unfortunately, all too common for trans victims of violence. I also want to acknowledge and remember Nina Pop, a 28-year-old Black trans woman who was stabbed to death in Missouri last month, as well as the four other trans women of color who were killed in the United States this Spring alone. And I also want to acknowledge all of the Black trans folks who are still living in this world that is so incredibly stacked against them, facing all kinds of compounding discrimination.

And that’s why it’s so important to listen to Black, queer, and trans folks when they tell us how we can show up for them. And that’s why it’s important to work towards prison abolition, towards reparations, towards medicare for all, towards housing for all, towards free education for all, towards ending environmental racism, towards ending racism generally. We’re doing all of that not because it benefits us, although it likely does; and not because you’re scared that you’re going to get canceled if you don’t virtue signal and perform your allyship. We’re doing this because Black lives matter, and because it is our ethical duty as human beings to fight for each other as best as we possibly can. And I want to note many of the policies I say would benefit all of us, regardless of who you are listening. But something that’s really important to me in allyship is to think, “What am I willing to give up to move towards equity? Am I willing to give up power? Am I willing to give up resources? Am I willing to give up money? Am I willing to give up time?” And often, we only perform allyship until it costs us something, and then we stop. So really think, “what am I willing to give up in order to help us move towards a more equitable world?”

Anyway, I want to acknowledge also that Black and trans folks are not just their pain, and not just their oppression. And that’s why it’s so important to actively support and elevate Black, queer, and trans art; Black, queer, and trans organizations; Black, queer, and trans stories; Black, queer, and trans movements; Black, queer, and trans joy. Because we as trans people know that we are more than just our oppression; we are more than just the worst part of our lives. I saw a tweet the other day, that got deleted [laughing], about how we can’t call all cops racist, because some identify as queer. Which is like saying we can’t call all cops racist, because some cops rollerskate. They aren’t – they aren’t related. So, just a reminder that being queer or trans doesn’t make you magically not racist. White queers enact racist violence on Black and Brown folks every single day. White queers exclude Black and Brown folks from their events and spaces and resources every single day. White and non-Black queers appropriate Black culture *as queer culture* while excluding those same Black folks that made up the culture that they are now appropriating – every single day. You can listen to queers of color, including Caleb Luna on this very podcast, talk about the huge racism problem in the mainstream white queer world. Queerness and transness are forms of oppression, but they are certainly not “Get Out of Examining Your Own Privilege Free” cards. A separate reminder: that the US police system was founded as a slave-catching institution, as Morgan will talk about in a few minutes. It is a[n] inherently racist organization. Cops have *never been* on the side of Black and Brown, queer and trans people, and there are protests happening across the country *because* cops keep killing Black people. And yet, a lot of people seem focused on “winning the cops over”? In Portland yesterday there were a lot of “March with us” chants directed towards the police, there were people who cheered for cops because the cops knelt down – because they thought the cops were kneeling down in solidarity, but the cops were actually kneeling to put gas masks on so they could gas the protesters more easily.

So, as a reminder: cops aren’t your friends. Cops aren’t on your side. The goal isn’t to reform a slave-catching institution. The goal is to abolish the occupation of “cop”. And one more thing to tie this all together, it’s officially Pride Month, and I’m sure you know this, but Pride didn’t start as a parade. Pride wasn’t about gay marriage, or queer representation, or shirts with rainbows at the Target. Pride exists because in 1969, cops raided the Stonewall Inn, which they did regularly, because queer and trans, Black and Brown folks have always been a main target of police brutality. But this time, the folks at the Stonewall fought back – with violence. And those folks were largely Black and Brown folks, and gender non-conforming folks, and sex workers, and people we’d now call trans. Pride didn’t happen because those people were nice and polite; Pride didn’t happen because those people reasoned with cops, or urged them to all march together or take a knee or share a drink. Pride happened because Black and Brown, queer and trans people were fucking tired and decided to fight back. And my hope [is] that this month, in honor of Stormé and Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, in honor of Tony McDade and Nina Pop, and all the others whose names are lost, and all the others who are still here with us, fighting to survive, fighting to thrive, fighting to find joy: I hope you’re fucking tired and I hope you fight back. This has been *This Week in Gender*.

[*This Week in Gender* outro music, a newsy fanfare plays]

**Tuck:** We have a Theymail message this week, and I will read it to you now. Death Rattle Writers Fest, a literary non-profit based out of Nampa, Idaho, and their litmag, Oroboro, introduces the Oroboro: Penrose Poetry Prize, an award for outstanding poetry by LGBTQIA+ writers. The prize, $200, $100, and $50 cash awards to three winners, with publishing. Featuring guest judge, Mateo Lara. Free to submit, deadline June 30th, we love being the first publication of emerging writers and encourage submissions from people of any age and experience. Where do you submit? I don’t know, they didn’t say, [ed. <https://deathrattlewritersfest.org/home/oroboro>] but that is “Death Rattle Writers Fest” again – what a name for June 2020.

[*Gender Reveal* theme song plays]

**Tuck:** Morgan Givens is the creator of the critically-acclaimed Flyest Fables podcast. He is also a producer on the podcast 1A, he is also an incredible speaker and storyteller, and an incredible human, and I feel extremely lucky to call him a friend. This episode is one of my all-time favorites; it originally aired in June 2019 and since then, Morgan has some new projects in the work[s] that as far as I know aren’t public yet, so all I’ll say is that you definitely want to follow his work, which you can do on Twitter @Optimus\_Mo, and you’ll want to do that anyway because he’s sharing some extremely good takes right now.

[*Gender Reveal* theme song ends]

**Tuck:** Ok, so the way we always start the show is by asking, with regards to gender, how do you identify?

**Morgan:** Uhh, genderqueer trans man. That’s what makes sense to me anyway. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Interesting,can you unpack that a little bit?

**Morgan:** I—I’m still trying to unpack it, if that makes sense?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Morgan:** Um, and it’s just a realization that I’ve—you know, cause it’s always kind of evolving, like when I first began taking hormones, I kinda ran, and was like, ‘I’m gonna be as masculine as possible,’ and I was like that’s kinda ridiculous just because, uh, some of the favorite qualities I have about my self, and the qualities that are most beneficial to me are, kinda, the ones we code as feminine, and so I guess my thing is… that, that I’m learning to embrace the feminine aspects of who I am, and the things that I can’t really label within myself, and so before I was like, ‘no, I’m a—I’m a straight trans man,’ I’m like, ‘nah, I think I’m just kind of— I’m kind of in motion’ and that’s like the best way I know how to *really* put it. Um, and I actually I don’t think I’d really really thought about it until you asked me, and I guess it’s a good thing to have people ask you these things and maybe it’s something I need to ask of myself a little more frequently.

**Tuck:** That’s my favorite thing about that question on this show is there’s so many trans people who are like, Public Figure Trans People, who are just like, ‘oh, no one ever asked me that.’

**Morgan:** [laughs] Yeah, I’ve never been asked it, so I’m like, ‘*wait, what am I*?’ So thanks for asking me that. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Of course. I understand this is all, like, really nebulous, but do you have any examples of things that you think of as more feminine that you’re trying to integrate back into your life?

**Morgan:** You know, I think one of the things that, at least internally, I’m working on is being more accepting of my emotions, and not try to box them up as if they’re something that I can not deal with. Uh, you know there’s a stereotype that we see, kind of everywhere, even when we see those who might be more femme presenting, that in order to put off some form of masculine air, whatever that is, you have to divorce yourself from who you are and your emotions …and, you know, I’ve done that for years. And I think being in touch with who you *are* and being comfortable expressing that, and that level of vulnerability, is something we code a feminine, even though I don’t think it should be. I feel like I’m learning that vulnerability and being in touch with who we are and what we feel might be one of our biggest *strengths…*

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Morgan:** You know? And so that’s one of the things, you know, at least internally, I’m working on, and also *outwardly* because I have a tendency, if people ask me, “oh, how are you feeling?” I’m like, "I’m fine,” and inside I might be a wreck, so [laughs] uh, you know, learning to be more open with how I’m feeling about things. And then, just you know, kinda superfluously, learning to be ok with the fact that I talk with my hands, you know, that’s what I do [laughs] you know, that’s me! You know, I’m expressive. And men are supposed to be like, “don’t use your hands, ’cause that’s…” I’m like, "look man, if the way to get my point across is to emphasize it with my hands, then that’s what I’m gonna do” and that’s how I’ve always kinda been, and so I think it’s about learning to bring the things along with me that I had from before I began transitioning hormonally, and learning to incorporate that into this idea of masculinity I’m trying to build for myself because, you know, if I identify as masculine of center, then the things I do by virtue of that identification I think should be whatever *I* call them, but life is complicated. [laughs] So…

**Tuck:** Well, just ’cause you mentioned testosterone, you mentioned to me that there’s so many changes that doctors don’t tell you when you start taking testosterone…

**Morgan:** Oh, yes.

**Tuck:** …and, please tell us.

**Morgan:** Oh! Oh gosh! I don’t know *why* no one thought to tell me this, I don’t know why I didn’t think to *think* of it, but like, menopause happens! You know?

**Tuck:** Oh shit!

**Morgan:** And it happens, you know, in your twenties. I was 25 when I began taking testosterone via muscular injection, and I was having hot flashes, and for a while I was like, “What is wrong with me? Why am I just pouring sweat? Why am I suddenly just really hot?” and I don’t understand it. You know, at the time I was working at Target, and one of my jobs was to help stock the big deep freezer that would be like negative 30 degrees and I was having hot flashes at this point and I was spending *time*. I would run back to that deep freezer, and there would be, like, steam coming off my head. You know, no one tells you that! I was changing my sheets ’cause I had night sweats like *every*—I was like, “Am I *sick*? Am I dying?” And then eventually, I was like, “wait a minute… your menstrual cycle is ceasing.” You know, there are certain organs that are not doing as much as they were before. It was like, “bruh, you’re going through menopause.” And so, I was like, “I can’t believe it!’ You know, and you tell people that and they’re like, “you’ve been through menopause?” and you’re like, “yo dog, yes.” You do what you can to protect yourself ’cause it’s rough out there [chuckles].

I kinda wish I’d been told about that… and I wish, you know, because I started down in North Carolina, and North Carolina isn’t known for being incredibly *friendly* to LGBTQ people, so mine was informed consent, so it was kinda based on me being like, “thisis who I *am*.” And so I really didn’t have any preparation, I was kinda stumbling into this blindly, and so along with the joys of how I was changing physically, and mentally, there were some real pitfalls. Like, you know [sighs] I don’t want to say that testosterone makes people aggressive. I don’t think it *does*. I think your brain is like, rebalancing itself, but I *know* what’s acceptable behavior, and so it was about learning that I was going to have hormonal surges again. Like this is second round puberty. But being adult enough to be like, “Dog. *You’re going through puberty*." Like, there’s no excuse for kind of acting out. Um, and then, for whatever reason, you know, I’ve been a big reader my whole life, my *whole* life, and I suddenly can’t spell words correctly anymore, I don’t understand it!

**Tuck:** [Laughs loudly]

**Morgan:** I [laughs] yo, like you coulda put me in the spelling bee, I woulda came at least in the top ten. You know, but *now* I’m like, “I don’t know, is that how you spell ‘pizza’? Eh?”

**Tuck:** [Laughs]

**Morgan:** So that’s taking some getting used to, and I’m just like, “you know what, my creativity is still there, so maybe my words don’t come out looking right so much anymore, but that’s ok.” And it was really a great benefit for my mental health, as far as depression. I still have depression, but it has never been as bad as was before I transitioned. And there’s not a lot of literature on it, so I don’t know if that’s a direct result of the hormones, or it’s a direct result of feeling more in line with who I am. But that was pretty incredible for me. I was like, “oh, this is what happy is? Ok!” [laughs] So…

**Tuck:** Yeah! [laughs]

**Morgan:** [Laughs] So, yeah, that was kinda nice. [laughs]

**Tuck:** So… when you transitioned, there were obviously some privileges that you *gained*, like being seen as a man.

**Morgan:** Mmmmhm.

**Tuck:** But you also became a Black man in America…

**Morgan:** Yeah…

**Tuck:** And I was wondering if you could speak to what that experience was like for you?

**Morgan:** I don’t think I had really realized how much tension and stress and *fear* I carried around in my body being viewed as a Black woman in the United States until the day I kinda stepped out in the middle of a parking lot leaving work and I realized that I was not *afraid.* Like, it was pitch black, it was *night time*, it was 2am! And normally I’m checking my six. I’m looking around to make sure the parking lot is empty. And I just walked out there, not a *care* in the *world*. And I was like, “Oh damn! Oh! Like I can *move.* I can do whatever I want." I don’t have to have that fear about a man, uh, possibly, attacking me sexually. But outside of that, I started recognizing and noticing that, even though I had transitioned on the job at Target, people were coming to *me*, for answers, as if I didn’t have a boss, who—and she had been my boss, for like, three years—and I’m like, “why are you asking me this?” You know? [laughs] “Ask her. I just got here.” Uh, so there was this subtle shift in people’s perception of me, and how they treated me, and whether or not they believed I was someone worth listening to, which made me try to be more cognizant of when I speak [laughs] because, you know, there’s probably someone in the area who isn’t being heard because they’re a woman, or however they’re being perceived. So that was kind of one thing.

But, I mean, I’m still a Black man, in the United States, and there is still… I try not to let the hatred, and the prejudices, and the systemic racism that we face in the United States as Black people and Brown people keep me from moving about my life, but I am a little more cautious around the police, which is ironic. Because I *was* a cop. I was cautious around the police even when I was a cop. I’m still trying to untangle… what it really means to be viewed in this society as a Black man, when I spent 25 years of my life being viewed as a little Black girl, then a young Black woman, then a Black woman. And trying to figure out how to put that experience out there, and talk about it in a way that does not detract from the things that Black women and Black femme people have to go through, and so, you know, I wanna talk about it, but I’m still working on it internally as well, but I can say it’s *different*. I can say that I feel… more watched. But in a different way… It wasn’t like I wasn’t watched as a Black woman; I felt the eyes on me then too, but it almost feels like an undercurrent of *fear*, underneath the hatred in a way that I didn’t see before, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen, I don’t wanna discount that for others either. But I’m still working on what that means, and what it’s like.

**Tuck:** Yeah, uh… I have a bunch of questions, but before we get to any of them, I think we have to address the fact that you were a cop?

**Morgan:** Yup. [laughs]

**Tuck:** So, uh… why? …were you a cop? [laughs]

**Morgan:** [laughs] Yeah, uh, so, it was a lot of things. So, I had quote/unquote “fully transitioned” by whoever’s standards, by that time, at least hormonally. So when I entered the Washington DC police academy back in April of 2013, I was one of the first openly trans people to go through their academy, and I come from a family of officers. My Grandmother was an officer for 30 years down in North Carolina, and she used that job to get us out of the projects. That’s where my Grandmother grew up. That’s where my Mom grew up. And so I still always kinda trying to disentangle *what’s worth it*, and your drive to escape certain situations, and that’s something I wanna talk to my Grandmother about.

I have always wanted to be of service, and at the time, I had graduated, the recession was whipping my ass, couldn’t find a job, and my Grandmother was this shining pinnacle of, like, “hey, there is a path out there, you can follow it if you want.” And I had no intentions of being a cop, I went to college to be a teacher. And I grew up with my Grandmother and her friends, and they were officers, and I was still also being told to fear the police, and so there was this weird dichotomy happening in my head, like, “wait a minute yo!”

But, at the same time I was becoming more aware of instances of police brutality, the Black Lives Matter movement was really, really starting to take off after what happened with Trayvon Martin. And I didn’t understand what happened to people. How they could profess to want to do one thing and then join an organization and find themselves doing the complete opposite. And the more I read about the history of policing and how it started as slave catching patrols, and how they treat Black and Brown people and queer people. I just needed to know what happened. You know? And I don’t think I ever figured it out. Um… and so I join the police department, one: ’cause I was naive and foolish. I was like, “oh I can take care of this.” No you can’t.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Morgan:** Not one person—you know, that’s ridiculous.

**Tuck:** [laughing still]

**Morgan:** Like, how ridiculous do you have to be, you know? And I remember when I was in the academy, you can tell who they’re grooming for Brass. They’re like, "Oh, we’re gonna run this kid up the flagpole, give him some lapels, it’s gonna be great.” But I ended up leaving. Because at the end of the day, the closest thing I could come to for some understanding is that our institutions just reflect what’s wrong with our society. You know, you can’t go into an insular thing, like a police department, and think you can create the *real* kind of change that needs to happen so that people do not *fear* the police without actually addressing where they learned these things from. And so, even when I would have conversations with officers, like, “yo, did you *think* about why you believed this about that person?” There’s no real introspection for many of them, but I thought I could figure it out.

I was just—I didn’t understand. And I’m one of those people, when I don’t understand, I wanna try to figure it out, even if it means doing something foolish, like [laughs] becoming a cop. And I wasn’t good at it! In the way they want you to be. And I left. You know, I did some work rewriting the training curriculum, but… That’s one of those things in my life, I’m still trying to figure out that too, like what did I think I was doing? You know? I know I learned a lot. I learned so much about myself, and the institution, and people in general. And the more I learned, the more I realized the complexity of the issue. And what really goes on in police departments, and their interaction with marginalized groups of the public. And it wasn’t always… a happy thing to learn. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, of course.

**Morgan:** Most of the time it wasn’t.

**Tuck:** How were you treated as a Black trans person in an institution that, like, doesn’t value Black or trans lives?

**Morgan:** Oh! Oh, see that’s what’s—Ok, so, check this. So… [laughs] right before, you I get into the Academy—and like, it was a whole mess trying to even get my application done, because I was like, "yes, Gender: male.” And they were like, “oh, you didn’t sign up for the draft.” And I was like, “I can’t!” So like… [laughs] I had to do this whole thing, basically, I had to come out before I could even submit my application to these people. And so I go through the whole process. And they call me up, and they’re like, “so what kind of accommodations do you need at the Academy?” And I’m like, “dog, I just need a place to shower.” And you could tell they were incredibly… they were worried that they would do something, and I would turn around and sue them.

So, it was like this eggshell type thing, where they were so concerned, it was almost like a sitcom. It was like, “if y’all just breathe and calm down, and just treat me how you would treat any other recruit who came in this academy, we gon’ be ok.” They thought that, when I got to the Academy, they would be able to look at our class and be like, “oh, there’s the trans kid! Let’s take care of him.” And then we got there and they were shook, they were like, “where is he?” [both laugh]

So I had a positive experience, with how they treated *me*, but that don’t mean that’s how they everybody. I had folks, when they left, they were like, “yo, I appreciate getting to know you, because now I’m gonna treat people better when I meet them on the streets.” And I’m like, “I appreciate that, but you shoulda been treating them better anyways.” So, it was like… It was this weird thing, where I didn’t feel like I wasn’t accepted, but I always had my guard up, ’cause you never really know.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so… You just implied that you are not a person who is immediately clocked as a trans man, but you are someone who feels like it’s really important to be out as a trans person? Like, you’re out on your website. You’re out in the stories that you tell. So why does it feel important to you, to remind people that you’re trans, when you’re someone who doesn’t have to do that, to do that?

**Morgan:**  You know, I grew up in North Carolina. I didn’t know what being trans could look like. And so, because I didn’t know what it could look like, it took me forever to realize, like “that could be me!” [laughs] Like, life could be fine. But I also kind of feel—you know, personally—a sense of obligation to be out and open about who I am because I live somewhere where it’s safer for me to do so. I have a job where people support me. I have a wife who loves me. I have a family who supports me. They’re like, “you trans, you Morgan. Whatever, we love you.” You know? And so, I know there are places where people *can not* own their identity in the same way that I can, and so I just feel like it’s important for people to see us when it’s safe and when we make the choice. You know, this is just my personal choice, but I feel like it’s important for people to hear our voices, so that they can’t ignore us.

And I think it’s important for, you know, the younger generation—for those of us who can, and who *want* to—to see us. Because I remember the first time I saw someone who was trans on TV, and I know, my whole world, I was like, “for real?” You know? [laughs] And so because I have been so fortunate, because my story has run counter to what society tells us our story should be, or will be. That it is a sense of obligation and it is a way for me to kind of give back, because I’ve been given so much in my life. Where I live, where I work, the friends I have. The fact that I can be me, and not worry about it, I don’t know, I just kinda feel a sense of duty to do it, and that’s just me internally. And because it’s safe for me to do it here! Who knows what I would say if I was living in West Virginia. Like, would I be out here stuntin’ like this? I don’t know! I’m gonna say, “probably not!” And so for the folks who can’t, I’m like, “alright, I’ll stunt for you; ’til you can!” [laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah… So, you’re very much a storyteller, and the first story that you told, publicly in, like, a fancy storytelling context [laughs]

**Morgan:** [laughs]

**Tuck:**  …Was about being trans. And not only was about being trans, but included talking about you genitals. And so I’m curious how you walk that line between, like, being a representation of a thriving trans person, and talking about trans stories…

**Morgan:** Mmhmm

**Tuck:** …without, like, sort of feeding into… performing transness for cis consumption, if that makes sense?

**Morgan:** Yep. Oh yeah, makes total sense. Well, the one thing I always try to remember is while my stories might be enjoyed by a broader audience, I’m telling them for a specific audience. And so, when I told that story… that was one of my real fears, was that someone would find out I was trans and become so fixated on this one thing, that they would ignore everything else about me, like the fact that I *do not have a penis.*

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Morgan:** You know, it’s like, it’s just it’s not there.It ain’t hap—you know, and so, when I brought it up in the story, I was like, this is one of my favorites, here it is. Because, one: sharing that fear was a mode of being vulnerable; but, two: I didn’t dwell on it. I’m like, “that’s not the point of the story.” The point of the story is the fact that I can have standards, the point of the story is: y’all ain’t up to a lot of *our* standards. Like… [laughs] The point of the story is that we can choose to walk away from *you*! But also, some of that is also knowing where a lot of the peoples’ heads are gonna go, and I’m like I’m gonna say it for you before you say it, ’cause you’re ridiculous. Let’s talk about what the story is *actually* about. But that was actually one of my real fears, which is why it was included in that story, but I don’t talk about it in other stories, ’cause it has nothing to do with that.

Who I am isn’t based on that, but I was so young into my dating experience—and had taken so much of the hatred about what they tell us people will do, and how they will react to us, that I believed it! I truly believed that this woman would not wanna be with me because of something so superfluous. What I have found after that was that it was never an issue. It was *never* a problem with the women *I* talked to, but then again I was fortunate. So that’s how I try to remember who I’m telling the story for, and whether the story is beneficial for me. And I sit down with all of my stories, and I try to think about who I could possibly be hurting in the way I tell it.

Whose voice I might be silencing in the way I tell it, which is why, you know, the story where I talk about, you know, I actually had a negative encounter with a cop; he racially profiled me outside of my Grandmother’s house. And I’m talking about how I felt before, when the world viewed me as a Black woman, but even in that story I sat down and I was like: “Am I harming Black women, Black femininity, in the way I tell this story?” And so, that’s kinda one of the things I think about, and that’s what I try to do to keep myself from becoming this stereotype that cis—like you said—consumers, want to see, or makes them believe that is the entirety of who we are, and we are such a broad experience of people. But that’s what I try, I try to remember who my audience is for, and will I be ashamed to have told this story, in a decade, when times have changed? So…

**Tuck:** Yeah… So you make a show called Flyest Fabels…

**Morgan:** I do.

**Tuck:** And maybe it’s not this deep, but you play with a lot of different characters, with a lot different genders, and different voices, and I was just wondering what that experience has been like, to bounce around, and play all those different characters?

**Morgan:** It’s been like finding a piece of my childhood again.

**Tuck:** Aww…

**Morgan:** You know? It really has, because I feel like sometimes I can get so lost in constantly striving to do the next thing, that I forget to just pause and have fun. Um, and I really have fun when I’m making it. Like, I’m constantly thinking up new storylines, or trying to see how they can meld with the other lines that I’m thinking up for the future, but… doing the different voices for the characters is like a break from my life, because like for a few minutes, I’m Antoine! You know? Because I gotta know what Antoine is thinking and feeling. And for a few minutes I might be Marcus, or Princess Keisha, and that’s been a lot of fun, but it’s also required me to—here we go with feelings again—

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Morgan:** To have to [laughs] dig into my feelings a little bit, in a way that I’m not usually used to, or comfortable with. Um, but it’s been a healing thing, I think. I’m not like the world’s best actor, but sometimes, if a character’s supposed to be sad, I have to think about something that made me sad. Or if they’re supposed to be really elated, I have to do the kind of the same thing. But, it has been one of the coolest things I think I’ve been fortunate enough to do. Being able to play all those different characters, and to come up with all of them, it’s just a nice break, and it’s a nice reminder that it’s ok to do things that you like to do without trying to make money off of it! Like, everything don’t have to be a hustle I guess. And I think sometimes I forget that.

**Tuck:**  Can you tell us about any of the other projects that you’re working on that you’re able to share, because I know that you always have a ton of stuff cooking at the same time? [laughs]

**Morgan:** I cannot sit *still!* I’m currently writing and working on a companion podcast to Flyest Fables, that will be in the same “universe,” quote/unquote. And so I’m gonna start having the world outside of the book, in Flyest Fables, interact a bit with this companion podcast, that’s going to be about a superhero.

**Tuck:** Oooo!

**Morgan:** Because, you know, whatever! [laughs] And then, I’m working on a limited series called Fatal Fissure, that’s coming out in October, for Halloween. It will only be like, seven/eight episodes. One season only. Really excited about that! Trying to finish up my young adult novel… I’m also trying to keep myself from starting another one, because I just had this really great idea and I’m very excited about it [laughs]

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Morgan:** And I’m going to start a podcast called “Drink This, Not That” because I’ve actually gotten to the point in my life, where I’m like, I don’t need to drink any more and it’s not healthy for me. And one thing my therapist told me is that, like, cravings for alcohol tend to last seven to nine, seven to fifteen minutes. So my thing has been, the last couple of weeks, recording myself when I’m having a craving, and then pulling up a randomized sentence from the internet and writing a story off of that, to write through the craving, so that I don’t drink alcohol, and I’m recording and packaging these to put out as a podcast called, “Drink This, Not That” Like, “just push play. Listen to this. You’re gonna be ok. You know, just keep listening to the stories.” And the thing at the end of the day is, like, if you can listen through the craving, then that’s like a few more minutes where you didn’t drink alcohol, or didn’t do something that could be harmful to you. Whatever a person might be struggling with. So, that’s something I’m working on, because it’s good for me, and I’m like, “well, if it helps me, maybe it will help someone else.” And you can’t do anything but put good things out there and hope they’re beneficial. So, I’m all over the place yo. [laughs] I am all over the place.

**Tuck:** Where can people find you and follow you to get updates on all of these projects as they come to fruition?

**Morgan:** They can follow me on Twitter [@Optimus\_Mo](https://twitter.com/Optimus_Mo), like the Transformer.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Morgan:** You can follow me [@FlyestFables](https://twitter.com/flyestfables) on Twitter. Uh, those are also the handles on Instagram. And you can find out more at [MorganGivens.com](https://www.morgangivens.com/), if the spirit so moves you.

**Tuck:** So, you work on a public media show, and…

**Morgan:** Mhmm.

**Tuck:** Something that I think about all the time, on the podcast, and off the podcast, is the myth of journalistic objectivity…

**Morgan:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** And how public media has all these rules about what you can and can’t say publicly, and I’m just curious how you’ve navigated a job, where you can’t say anything political, in a world where being trans, and being Black, is inherently political?

**Morgan:** Well, so, my thing is, I’m a *producer*. You know? [laughs] Like, I am not the face of anything WAMU and NPR. And at the end of the day, what’s true is true. You know, and I think there *is* a reckoning happening that we’ve needed to have happen, where we actually look at what the word objectivity means, and who has been allowed to define what objectivity is. You know? And so, is it objective for predominantly white newsrooms to ignore what’s going on in Black and Brown communities? To ignore how dire these things are? To ignore what’s happening in the queer communities? That’s not objective! That’s a choice to *ignore* people.

So me saying, “Hey! We need to talk about *this*.” Or other Black and Brown producers saying, “hey, we need to talk about this,” that’s not us not being objective, that’s just us saying, “you have a ‘blind spot’ in your quote/unquote ‘objectivity.’ And here it is. And here’s what we need to talk about.” You know, there is right and there is wrong, and there are things that will hurt people and things that won’t. There are things that target marginalized groups and things that don’t. But me not talking about it, as someone who works in public media, doesn’t make it go away. It’s a disservice to the public. And so, I am like, I’m gonna say what’s right and do what’s right, and if that means I have to suffer consequences for it, then that’s gonna have to be what happens. But even when I’m writing the questions for the host, I am like, what questions have the predominantly white, mainstream media not asked?

**Tuck:** Mhmm

**Morgan:** And so I’ll put ’em in the script. I’m like, “well, how is the specifically affecting Black women? How is this specifically affecting Latinx people?” And so I’m like, “you need to talk about these groups too. You need to break this down. Because when you say ‘people,’ you’re taking majority white people. I need to know what’s also happening in other communities." And I want these experts—if they are actually experts, as the claim to be—to answer these questions. Because they should also be able to answer the questions about what’s happening in marginalized communities; otherwise you’re not *objective*. You’re just servicing other people and dispensing of and dismissing others.

So for me, in public media, I look around, I’m like, I’m in this white space, and I don’t want to be the person that has to do this, but I’m gonna tell you what your blindspots are, and I’m gonna write questions that make you uncomfortable to ask them. And that might make your experts uncomfortable, and the listeners uncomfortable to hear, but the truth isn’t supposed to comfort us, it’s supposed to inform us. So that’s kinda how I view my role, and the rules they have around it. I’m like, you know what? Like you said, my existence is political. When they are putting out ideas that are going to strip what little rights I have from me, and the people like me, away from us, it is not political for me to have a stance on that. That’s my *life*. This idea that, “don’t make political things” I’m like you can say that if you’re a cisgender white man up there just *chillin.’* You know, you ain’t LGBTQ. You ain’t nothin’. You’re just a happy—No, no that’s not how it works. I can not divorce myself from the realities of my existence while doing my job. I think that would make me… I think I wouldn’t be good at my job if I did that.

And so, whenever I’m at work I can’t do it all. And we got a lot of Black and Brown producers, predominantly women, who work on the show, and so everyone tries to—and I know I can speak for myself on this—I’m like, “where are the blindspots, and who are we ignoring?” I try to make sure that I go to Black and Brown experts first, because we always have so many white experts on panels… And it’s like, “well, where are these other voices?” Because you can’t change the tenor of the national conversation until you start incorporating more voices, and you start incorporating different *kinds* of voices, and get out of this idea, that to be a professional, that to have something to say, means you have to say it a certain way, or sound a certain way, or look a certain way when you do it. So, you know, I haven’t had any issues yet, but, knock on wood! [laughs] I don’t have any in the future, but that’s kinda how I view it. If it’s a public service, then that means we have to serve the public. Sometimes, even if it might be quote/unquote “detrimental to our career” or career aspects. But I’m in a position to say that. I am privileged and fortunate enough that I can take that stance. And I understand that not everybody can.

**Tuck:** Wow, that was such an incredible answer. I was, like, doing praise-hand-emoji hands over here.

**Morgan:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** So you just turned thirty three?

**Morgan:** I did.

**Tuck:** Happy belated birthday.

**Morgan:** [laughs] Thank you.

**Tuck:** And you have a tiny existential crisis on Twitter, about it?

**Morgan:** I did! [laughs]

**Tuck:** Can you talk about that with us?

**Morgan:** Yeah, you know I spent a lot of my life, uh—and I guess I’ll just, you know, trigger warning this, because I’m gonna talk about, um, depression, and suicidal ideation a bit—but I spent a lot of my life incredibly depressed prior to transitioning. Suicidal off and on… And really having no belief that I would still be here at thirty three. Even in the moments where I felt happy, or what I understood happiness to be, I didn’t see what the future was. I was like, “oh, like it just—it just disappeared off into—into gray, into black.” It wasn’t like I could be like, “oh, you know, when I’m forty, maybe I’ll be married with a wife, and a house, and a career I like.” It was just like, it was like this a void of nothingness, and I… I guess that’s part of the reason I try to be so visible, because if I had just *seen* anything, I think, at a formative age, I don’t know if I would feel so unsure about my future. I know the future isn’t promised. And you know, nobody knows what’s gonna happen an hour from now, or tomorrow, but there was, like, no… I don’t have a role model, I guess, if that makes sense? You know, I’m like “dang…” you know?

And I know they’re out there. I *know* there are older Black men out there, but I’m like, “where are they?” Why doesn’t the news ever talk about them? Why don’t we see things written about them? Like, who can I look up to, to show me that, “yo, keep goin’. Continue forward. You’re gonna be ok.”

And so, in this weird way I sometimes I feel like I have to kinda have to self-soothe myself. Like, “you got this dog. Like… [laughs] It’s ok.” And so, you know, I think part of what happened is that I’m like, I’m thirty three and I have *no* idea what the future looks like. Not only for me, but for people like me, as the world increasingly hostile to us in this time period. And so, yeah, I think I just had this moment, where I’m like, “alright, you didn’t expect to be here. You thought you were going to be dead.” You know, for a long time I thought that when I did die it would be because I did it. So, to be in a position where I’m like, “actually, I kinda like this thing called life. You know it sucks sometimes, but this is pretty ok…" And then to be like, “oh—oh damn. Like, [laughs] I have *no* *clue* how to lay the foundation of what comes next.”

Because sometimes I feel that I don’t have any footsteps to follow in. And I think it’s possible to follow in footsteps and still claim a space for your own. And so at times I feel like I’m fighting for space for myself, for others, and I’m fighting to make sure no one else has to be like, "damn, ain’t nobody.”—not that I’m sayin’ I’m a role model, but it’s like, just, “I’m here!” [laughs] You know? And so I think that’s what happened, you know? I was just—I was in a bad place and I was like, “well, what happens now?” You know? [laughs] Because I’m thirty three, and I had no clue that I would make it this far, and society had shown me nothing that told me I could. You know, and so over the years I’ve been doing the work to be that for myself, but in certain moments I’m just like, “oh." I’m just kinda struck by it all over again, by just the lack of visibility, and the way our voices are continually drowned out, and the harm that comes to us, and I think, I just had a moment. Yeah! Like you said, a mini existential crisis on Twitter. I’m just yelling into the void. [both laugh] Just screaming into the ether, you know?

**Tuck:** Ok, cool. Well the way we always end the show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Morgan:** Oh man, in my ideal world? I don’t even know if we would have gender no more! You know? [laughs] Like, in my ideal world it don’t even matter. Like, it shouldn’t matter. Like who is the person internally? You know, in my ideal world it would matter who the person was internally, and none of that external stuff, or how we identify, the boxes that people put us in, or we put ourselves in. I don’t want it to matter! Um, yeah, in my ideal future, there would be no gender. There’d be hokey-hokey-dokey people, you know? I went kumbaya, but that would be the ideal for me, yeah…

[*Gender Reveal* theme song plays]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. Please share the episode with friends and family so that they can also hear Morgan’s smart, good, important thoughts. Follow Morgan on social media and subscribe to Flyest Fables wherever you get this podcast. Again, if you are a Black trans person and you need any type of support right now that we can provide, please get in touch, even if you just need rent money or money to treat yourself to a nice snack. We have funds available for you. Everyone else, feel free to donate more than $60 to any Black-led social justice organization by Saturday, June 6th and we will mention it in our next episode. One more reminder that we have a whole slew of new merch available for June only, raising money for Black and/or trans organizations. You can find all of that at <bit.ly/gendermerch>. If you’d like to purchase a Theymail message, like you heard from Death Rattle Writers Festival, you can do that, sliding scale, from the link in the shownotes.

Today’s episode was produced and edited by me, Molly Woodstock, who is currently in their closet recording this at 10pm. Our logo is by the incredible Ira M. Leigh, our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week, and most weeks, by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme song ends]

**Tuck:** And, hey. It’s Pride Month. So you know what we say for Pride Month: Throw a brick at a cop.