**Gender Reveal Transcript: Episode 156 – Casey Plett**

TUCK: Queer Candle Co. is a queer- and trans-owned business that makes small batch, soy wax candles, hand-poured with love. The other day I was at Clementine Bakery in Brooklyn which sells Queer Candle Co. candles, and the employees there were just opening up and smelling them and talking about how good they smelled. And if that’s not an endorsement, I don’t know what is. Plus, they’ve got DIY refill kits available online, and 10% of profits are donated to the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. You can use code GENDER10 at checkout to get 10% off your first order at queercandleco.com, that’s queer candle co dot com.

[Show theme music begins]

TUCK: Welcome to Gender Reveal, the 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.

[Show theme music ends]

TUCK: Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there, thank you so much to everyone who came out for our live show last week at the Bell House, it was such a treat to meet so many of you. All of you listeners will hear part of our live show next week, but this week on the show I am thrilled to share my conversation with author Casey Plett.

Now you might ask, Hey Tuck, wasn’t Casey also in the live show? So, will I be hearing from her two weeks in a row? And the answer is yes, this is true, we are all extremely lucky. Anyway, in this episode, Casey and Ozzy and I chat about why Casey is finally talking about the Topside Press of it all, whether queer community is actually bad for us, and why Casey made the brave, polarizing choice to write a book about community.

CASEY: A lot of my Mennonite community people were like, Awesome, I’m so curious to see what you’re gonna say, I can’t wait to read that, and every single homosexual was like, What the fuck [laughs]. Like, why?

TUCK: And you’ll definitely want to stick around to find out what made Casey say this:

CASEY: I will walk out of the room if anybody presses me on that.

TUCK: Here’s two things I learned about Casey in this episode. Sometimes she likes to do a little tap-tap for emphasis [gently taps on mic to demonstrate], and also, like many of us, she has a really creaky chair. So, throughout this episode you might hear some taps and creaks just like in the clips you just heard. Not a big deal at all, just didn’t want you to think you were imagining things.

But before we get to all that, it’s time for This Week In Gender.

[Segment theme plays]

TUCK: This week in gender we've got a very special segment from friend of the show, former Gender Reveal guest Niko Stratis. Niko's here to explain the latest development in Autostraddle’s ongoing implosion. Here's Niko.

NIKO: Quick disclosure at the top of this. My name is Niko Stratis. I'm a writer; you might have seen my work in places like Bitch or Xtra. Or, in the case of this week's segment, I'm a former writer at Autostraddle. This is This Week in Autostraddle’s Gender Journey.

[Music begins]

NIKO: We are witnessing a masterclass in taking all of your remaining good will, all the graces that could be afforded you in this life, all the second chances and well wishes, throwing them into a big pit in the backyard, and setting it ablaze. On Monday, August 21st, Defector published the second of their inside looks at what the fuck was going on with Autostraddle. This time they leaked that a VC-funded company named For Them had acquired Autostraddle. Or maybe they merged? They used both words interchangeably. But don't worry. These aren't the only terms no one seems to fully understand. More on that in a second. What is For Them, you ask? Great question. It's a confusingly named wellness company that uses the worst combination of copy and font you have ever tried to read in order to sell … binders. Although they're primarily a binder company, For Them also offers a gender tracking app for members. One Instagram post advertised that users can, quote, “track real-time gender evolution using biometric data.”

[Music pauses]

NIKO: Unsurprisingly, Autostraddle readers and community members reacted poorly to this news. Among the many red flags, a gender tracking app using biometric data implies that private health data would be inputted by the user and stored in a nebulous location by a company that hasn't yet earned the trust to keep it.

[Music resumes]

NIKO: It's reminiscent of other similar moves by companies seeded by VC firms. Remember Euphoria.lgbt, the company funded by Chelsea Clinton and other VC firms? Nina Medvedeva did a whole This Week In Gender segment on them back in Episode 88. They had services like Clarity, which helped you track your transition; Bliss, which helped you track your finances; and Solace, which gave you information on transness in the world around you. They received the same critical backlash that Autostraddle/For Them is facing now. In a post-Roe America, period tracking apps, which also take and store biometric data, have been on the front lines of serious conversations around life-threatening privacy concerns in regards to the personal health data apps like these gather and store.

On Tuesday, the merger or acquisition was announced formally, and this is where the wheels fully fly off. Autostraddle announced the move via a baffling Q&A with an incoming CEO of For Them that was fun, like a mandatory office party, in stark contrast to the shitshow of affairs that had left in their wake. At one point, Riese Bernard, now outgoing Autostraddle CEO, jokingly asked their new VC-funded owners, “What part of Autostraddle are you going to torch first?”, like she had forgotten that a few months ago, she fired three people over Slack and didn't know how to tell anyone about it.

After the Q&A was published, a lot of trans people were understandably alarmed at the idea that the new owner of Autostraddle also owned an app that tracked people's genders with biometric data. The sort of data a country obsessed with banning and outlawing transness would simply love to subpoena. However, after a full day of critical backlash, For Them revised their statement to say that they didn't mean biometric at all. They just meant the app was like a journal. Users would fill out daily mood and identity check-ins and the app would track, I guess, how far into gender you've gone, or something? One is left to wonder how many times the word biometric was used in copy for a wellness company seeded by venture capitalists with no one asking, “Hey, so what does biometric mean?”

Biometrics or no biometrics, there are a lot of people left unhappy with this news. We have all seen what the world of venture capital and wellness brands does to small empires and we will have to wait and see how many of the buzzwords on For Them’s website hold water over time. Capital doesn't care about community, only commodity. And it's troubling that a formerly independent outlet is now the editorial arm of a wellness brand that sells binders, gender tech—I don't know what that means either—and an app that doesn't mean biometric “that way.” For now, Autostraddle continues on as Autostraddle For Them, until they write an op ed to say they didn't mean Autostraddle For Them and change it to something else, which I assume will happen once they remember there is already an outlet called them. owned by a different set of rich people.

TUCK: Before we go, I just wanted to note that another friend of the show, professional software girlie MB, did a little investigation of their own into the For Them app and learned a lot of really wild stuff about how the app works, what the privacy situation is, and more. They wrote a really great thread about it. I really recommend reading it. I will put a link in the show notes to make it easy for you to check out. Anyway, you can find Niko and her excellent newsletter at anxietyshark.ca.

This has been This Week In Gender.

[Music ends. Segment theme plays.]

TUCK: We've got two Theymail messages for you this week. Theymails, of course, are tiny messages from listeners that we read on the show.

This first message is from Han and it says: Wig Dog Press is a team of queer and trans friends creating screen prints on thrifted clothing, carved linoleum block prints, hand-sewn patchwork wall art, and high-quality stickers. Wig Dog is based in the south and is passionate about celebrating the southern queer community. Check us out on Instagram @wigdogpress and shop tees and art at wigdogpress.com.

Our second message this week is from Axe and it says: Axe Thembro is a nonbinary personal trainer and online fitness coach who helps queer and trans folks achieve strength, power and confidence. They're fully inclusive of all people and all bodies. Whatever your goals, they can help. Sign up for a free consultation at www.thembro.fit or get in touch on Instagram @axe\_thembro. That’s A-X-E underscore T-H-E-M-B-R-O.

[Show theme music plays]

TUCK: Casey Plett is the author of *On Community*, *A Dream of a Woman*, *Little Fish*, and *A Safe Girl to Love*. She is also the publisher at LittlePuss Press, a feminist press run by trans women.

[Show theme ends]

TUCK: Well, the way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

CASEY: I am a trans woman and I prefer transsexual, but I'll use transgender, it's no big deal. And that's the end of that.

TUCK: Yeah, we've asked this enough, let's ask it again. Why do you prefer transsexual?

CASEY: Honestly it is truly an aesthetic thing for me. When I taught intro to LGBTQ studies—I used to teach that as a class, which is kind of hilarious—I would use a sentence example of how language shifts a lot and how a lot of it is aesthetic or emotional and it doesn't really have to be these kind of calcified political things. So, I transed in like 2010. And at that time, transsexual to me connoted these old school, “true trans” medicalized sort of things, you know, things that I thought were silly, or I didn't connect with, or I wanted to get away from. And then very quickly, around like, 2012, 2013, I was around this crowd which, you know, uses it in these jokey terms, and find it very silly and kind of fun. And were these like, young girls drinking whiskey and calling themselves transsexuals, so I was like, Oh, that's hilarious! Like, I can vibe with that. That's cool. That's fine. And then transgender—as gay politics absorbed more trans people, and transgender started to become this part of the alphabet soup, I became less attached to it. But I don't feel strongly politically about it. I don't feel strongly that there's anything more to it than that. It's more just like, I used to not vibe with this word. And now I do.

TUCK: No, all of that makes so much sense to me. And I do feel what you're saying about like, Oh, the more that it's being used in this weird, almost corporatized way, the more I'm like, well, what are the other options?

CASEY: Right, exactly. Exactly.

TUCK: Totally. While you use the name Casey Plett publicly, you also have a different name used in your personal life, and I was wondering, is this simply a matter of wanting a pen name? Or is there something more going on here?

CASEY: Uh, there's a few things to that. Thanks for asking. So, when I started publishing, under Casey, which was in 2010, a lot of it was just that I was nervous, particularly about attaching trans things to my legal name. I was like, I'm not sure if I want that to—maybe I'll be fine if that follows me around for the rest of my life, and maybe not. So I still wasn't sure how it was all going to shake out, you know? And then also, I had some close family that had some public teacher education positions in some really small conservative towns. And I was also just like, You know what, if something I write blows back on them, that sucks and I don't want to do that, so. And then also, Plett was my grandmother's maiden name. And she was a really wonderful, very troubled, very smart woman who lived in this old Mennonite, conservative area; also wanted to be a writer, and that just isn't something that could happen. She died when I was 13 in some pretty sad circumstances. So taking that name, Plett, is also a way to honor her.

And yeah, like you said, I have a different name that I go by, often in my personal life, which is Athena, I don't mind saying it here. And it's funny, you know, for many years, Casey was a pen name, and no one called me that in real life, because, you know, nobody knew who I was. So around five or six years ago, people started calling me Casey in real life. And that was very strange. I was like, what?! Okay, I guess that's easier. And now it's sort of evolved to the point where I guess I just kind of have two names. Sometimes people are like, “Well, what do I call you?” And I'm like, I don't know, like, is your name Joe, but do you ever have parts of your life where everyone calls you Shorty Steve, even though you're seven feet tall? And somehow you're just Shorty Steve around that crowd of people? And it's like, it's no big deal? So that's kind of how I feel about the pen name thing. Does that make sense?

TUCK: It totally makes sense. I also was thinking yesterday about how I only know how to make friends with people in a work context. And so I'm like, see, this is my nightmare, where you have your work name, and it would be very obvious if I'm like, “I've decided we're friends now. I'm switching.” [Both laugh]

CASEY: Right, it's true!

TUCK: Oh, well.

CASEY: Yeah. What are you gonna do?

TUCK: What are you going to do. Well, you were talking about the first writing you did; in like 2010, 2011, you did this column for McSweeney's, when you were very first transitioning.

CASEY: [In a sing-song voice] Yes I did!

TUCK: Your baby trans thoughts and feelings and spirals are still out there on the internet to this day. What is your relationship like to that work now and having it, you know, floating around?

CASEY: Yeah, I mean, obviously there's lots of stuff in that old column that I wouldn't write now, that I wouldn't even necessarily believe in now, but also that's fine. I have never once regretted that still being up there, you know. For one, sometimes every now and then I'll still get an email where somebody tells me that they have discovered that work and it means something to them. So, awesome. Number two, I mean, I don't fucking know, man! Like, that was 13 years ago, and how often is it that we're sold that being trans is like, new? I think I just said this in a BlueSky reply to someone this morning, where I said, being trans is always like three years old. Like, it was always invented like three years ago. So I don't mind having my messy, weird, early 20s thoughts out there, even if I wouldn't say a lot of the same things now.

And then finally, I think there is something, just as a writer, to tracking how someone has changed over time. And that's kind of cool, you know. So I do have lots of feelings about them. And sometimes I go back and read them, and I'm like, [with emphasis] Oh my goodness! [Tuck laughs] Although sometimes also I go back and read them and I was like, Hey, that was smart! Man, I'm stupider now. I should read some more old things from when I was 23. I've lost a step! You know, both those things sometimes happen at once? Yeah, no, that's fine. It mostly, it often makes me feel grateful that I've been able to, you know, publish work for like, 13 years now.

TUCK: Yeah. So, when you were talking about watching that evolution over the last 13 years, I was thinking about how we also get to do that with a bunch of characters in your work when they show up in different stories in different books over time. And I was also thinking about how you have a lot of, you know, friends, or meaningful authors in your life that show up in your work, and also so many real places that you've spent time in that show up in your work. And we were texting yesterday about how I was enjoying incredibly specific Portland references as I was reading. And so, I'm trying to mold this into one question, which I think is: I really love this, because it creates this idea that these girls are just out there living over time. And you know, maybe if I go to CBar, I'll see one of the characters from the book, because she's just inhabiting the same space with the same people and places that we know. But I was wondering like, your decision to put them all in the real world interacting with real works and concepts and websites that we know, as well as your decision to kind of weave them in and out, and whether you planned that out in advance or whether you've just been feeling it out?

CASEY: Never really planned it out in advance. I always thought it was cool when that kind of stuff happens as a reader or a consumer of art. So it always felt really energizing when I was like, Oh shit, like, what if this person came back? That makes sense! And then thinking about it a little more bird's eye view, I also thought, We're such a small group of people. Like, obviously, these girls are occupying a very sort of like, niche part of things, in terms of geography and age and, largely, race. So it's not like they're, you know, I always get queasy when people talk about my work as like representative of trans things. But, we're such a small group of people, like, of course, they would run into each other! And, of course, they would probably like—Okay, this person was in this city at this time, they would have probably encountered this weirdo thing. Like that, it’s just not unlikely. So why not then also put that in there? Yeah, I've just never seen a reason not to do it.

TUCK: Yeah. Did you ever have to map it out? Just because I feel like all of your stories start at slightly different times. And so I'm trying to track like, Oh, this person would be this age, and would be at this—she wouldn't have gone back to her mom yet. You know, like, is that just something that you like, have in your head because you know the characters so well?

CASEY: Yeah, I do actually. I have, whenever I've done that, I've always been like, Okay, wait, and I've gone back and done the dates and done the geography and done like, Does this actually make sense, would this actually have happened this way? Thanks for catching that! I've always thought like, Man, no one else is gonna be paying attention to this, what are you doing.

TUCK: It helps if you read them all, very quickly in succession. [Both laugh]

CASEY: Right before you have to interview the author, I bet, I’m sure. Yeah, totally.

TUCK: I was thinking about little artifacts you sprinkled in. There’s also a whole chapter in *Little Fish* about the COGIATI. [Casey laughs.] And when I saw it, I texted Mckenzee and was like, I can't believe this chapter about the COGIATI. And she was like, Oh, you better believe that I took it immediately afterwards. And I was like, Mckenzee, is this how you learned about the COGIATI? And she was like, Yes. And I was like, Oh, no. So my question to you, Casey, is how does it feel to know that you are to this day leading girlies to take the COGIATI? [Both laugh]

CASEY: [Dramatically] Heavy lies the head that wears the crown. [Normal voice] Probably I feel the same way about it as, a lot of the girls in my books do a lot of self-destructive things.

TUCK: Totally. [Laughs]

CASEY: Yeah. My goodness. Apologies to Mckenzee.

TUCK: It’s okay, she was hyped about it. She was like, Yeah, it was kind of inconclusive. And I was like, Were you too good at math? And she was like, Yeah, I was too good at math. [Both laughing]

CASEY: She knows too much about shapes.

TUCK: Yeah, exactly.

CASEY: Yeah. Sorry, sweetheart.

TUCK: Well, thinking about craft, a couple of stories in *Dream of a Woman* specifically, start in third person and then move to a first person, and even a sort of like “I'm talking to *you*” format. I was just wondering this idea of kind of introducing people to a character and then like, putting them straight into that person's head after we've kind of seen them moving around for a while.

CASEY: I take a lot of inspiration from how TV and movies will do this sometimes. So I guess a good example would be like the mockumentary style where you're watching just like a regular movie, or a regular show, and people are running around doing things and all of a sudden they turn to the camera, and they tell you some really deep intimate things that you would never tell an actual human being in your fucking life. And everyone’s just like, Yeah, sure. Okay. That willful suspension of disbelief. I mean, it works on the screen. So I've always thought like, there's no reason it can't work in books, either. But yeah, I mean, I love the intimacy that kind of thing can communicate. Like *Little Fish* is like straight third person is straight, close third the entire time. And in the last few sentences, it switches to second person, and it's like, Oh, now I'm addressing you, the reader. I always expected someone like my editor to like, call me on that. I always expected someone to be like, You can't do that. You got to take that out. And no one did. And I feel like really good about that. And I feel really strongly about it. So.

TUCK: If people aren't saying anything, it means that it worked and we all had no problems with it, which is huge. So.

CASEY: Here’s hoping. Yeah, here’s hoping.

TUCK: Well, I was reading all of your books, again/for the first time, depending. And I was also listening to and reading a bunch of interviews and essays with you at the same time. And, revisiting all this stuff at once, it was also really clear, many moments that you had shared in interviews as something that happened to you, and then we see it show up in a book and happening to one of the characters? I was wondering if there was any particular moments that you think would be a new fun reveal to hear were taken from your life. And I think I say fun intentionally. And then I'm not like, Which of these assaults happened to you? But you know, like something fun. [Both laugh]

TUCK: Or normal, neutral.

CASEY: That's the nicest way to ask that question that I have ever heard. Thank you. Um, you know what's hilarious? Is that I’ve forgotten so much of what I've written about.

TUCK: That’s really fair.

CASEY: Yeah. Is there anything specific you want to ask me about? And if I tell you that I don't want to answer it …

TUCK: No, truly no. Ozzy, do you have any?

OZZY: I don't know. I guess I was kind of curious, like how much the character of Ben from *Little Fish* is, like, drawn from real ex-Mennonites in your life who might have like that sort of relationship to gender, but also to religion? That character is very interesting to me. So I was just curious about that.

CASEY: What I can tell you is that everyone who has known my dad is like, Holy shit—

OZZY: That's your dad.

CASEY: —the character of Ben, what the fuck? And my dad says, No, that’s not me.

OZZY: Classic.

CASEY: Oh, I can tell you one other thing too. I can tell you one other thing too. I have a latent answer to that question.

TUCK: Oh great.

CASEY: So in *Little Fish* the plot of the novel revolves around Wendy thinking that her dead grandfather might have been trans? I'm pretty sure neither of my grandfathers were trans. I am like pretty sure about that. So that's a negatory. That is not drawn from real life. Uh-uh. [Laughter] When *Little Fish* was about to come out, too, I was like, Oh, man, there is nothing in this book that I want to talk about with my family with. This is, that’s— I really hope none of them ever read it. But I did say like, Hey, this book is about to come out. I just want you to know like, I don't think Grandpa was a secret transsexual, like I just want you all to know.

[Tuck and Ozzy laughing]

TUCK: Fic-tion. It is fiction.

CASEY: Right. Right. Like, not even a little bit drawn… So there's that for you. Although as opposed to Mennonites—it’s funny because actually, all the ways in which Ben, if you know my dad and you've read that book, that you can sort of like mix and match, his specifically Mennonite aspects of that I would say are not sort of the strongest correlations. But if we want to talk about Mennonite masculinity—I was talking about this with Jonathan Dyck, who's this other Mennonite author about my age, from Manitoba. He wrote this great graphic novel called *Shelterbelts*. And we were talking about like, [mumbles]—oh, it was in *Dream of a Woman*, he was reading this story called “Enough Trouble,” which takes place in this kind of small, unnamed Mennonite town. And the character is talking about her grandfather who was just very sort of stoic and kind of quiet and really reserved, but sweet guy. And we had this long conversation about like, Mennonite masculinity that can be very, like, harsh and troubled, and often violent. And also can be really, like, sweet and sort of boundless and kind of like, literally unlimited. So yeah, the funny thing is that Ben isn't really related to anyone in terms of, again, the specifically Mennonite aspects of things. But Mennonite masculinity is something that I think about a lot. A lot, a lot a lot.

TUCK: Well, I was about to ask that actually, I was gonna ask how growing up around Mennonite and formerly Mennonite people informed the ways that you first had concepts of gender and gender roles and stuff?

CASEY: Oh, shit, what a great question! Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, so like, on my mother's side, specifically, my mother's side is more rural, more conservative, and a little more old school—my father's family belonged to a Mennonite denomination that was kind of a little more assimilated, a little more, kind of had more things in common with, like, U.S.-style evangelicism. And they were more urban. So I'm specifically talking about my mother's side of things here. They’re EMC, used to be the Kleine Gemeinde. Maybe like three people will know what that means, but that's for you! My mom's family was EMC, my dad's family was Mennonite Bretheren. There you go. Anyway, that was a branch of religion that practiced, you know, it was like very specific about traditional gender roles where things were very gender segregated. You know, my mom, for example, grew up where like, there were men who sat on one side of the church and women who sat on the other side. Like that kind of thing. I think it stopped when she was like, maybe a teenager or in her early 20s. It was before I was born, but it was like just before I was born.

But also, Mennonites practice unconditional pacifism, and there is this extremely… um, an underpinning of the religion is non-violence. And I mean, like, there's plenty of violence that happens in Mennonite communities, but there is still sort of a different attitude towards it, and a lot of the religion is centered around this idea of peace, in every kind of sense of the term, which obviously intersects a lot with questions of gender. So I would say that when I was growing up, I mean, like, Mennoniteism influenced a lot about like, gave me sort of this weird role models of peaceful masculinity. Like, that that was possible. Like, there's also plenty of role models that were not peaceful masculinity, but like they were there and they existed. Traditional Mennoniteism kind of like doesn't really fit in terms of like, our modern political parlance in all sorts of ways, because it comes with things like pacifism, because it has—some parts of it have this really like socialist ethoses. Like, there's this group of people called Hutterites that are an offshoot of Mennonites that literally believe that private property is a sin. Like it's an actual literal hell-worthy sin to have private property. You know, they're also an extraordinarily like, deathly homophobic society. And you can find lots of stuff from their expats that will talk to you about that. And also, it's like, I mean, I've been on Hutterite colonies, and they're like, literal, functional communes that are like, kind of amazing and beautiful. And also, the last time I was on one was when I was nine years old, because for obvious reasons.

TUCK: I feel like this is a great place to start talking about this new book you have coming out—

CASEY: Oh, geez.

TUCK: —on community, called *On Community*. [Casey laughs] And I think I wanted to start with something that you said, near the top of that book, which is, “It's probably indicative that so many queer people to whom I mentioned this essay’s concept reacted with some combo of apprehension, shock, sympathy, and sometimes a deadpan, Why are you doing that to yourself?” And I guess I kind of wanted to ask why you're doing it to yourself, because like, obviously, you've been thinking about it for a while, because in *Dream of a Woman*, some of the characters kind of have a very abbreviated version of this conversation. But yeah, why do it to yourself? You could have left it there.

CASEY: Yeah, I really could have. For a bunch of years, I wasn't really interested in the idea of writing like longform essays, or longform nonfiction. I really liked writing fiction, I thought it was the way that I kind of wanted to express a lot of artistic things, so, you know, I would write the odd review or odd essay here and there, but that wasn't really my focus. It wasn't really what I wanted to do. And I also found myself not excited about sharing my opinions about things. I was like, I don't really want to share what I think about this stuff; I don't want to get into the discourse; I'm just not really interested in that. And in the summer of 2021, I had just finished *Dream of a Woman*, it was just off to the printers. And Dan Wells at Biblioasis, is who is the publisher of *On Community*—and is also my old boss, which is really hilarious—and he's like, I'm doing this essay series, do you want to write something? And I was like, Oh, maybe, I don't know. My first thought was like, Oh, I don't want to do that. Like I said, I was like, I'm not interested in, yeah, in getting into the discourse, but I also mean that in like a non-snarky way, I just mean that purely, I think other people are, are better at this. I think other people are doing more work there. I just want to keep my head down and I want to write my fiction. I want to work on publishing. I'm interested in that. But around the time that Dan pitched me on this, part of me started to think, Well, maybe that's a cop-out, like, I do have opinions about things. And I do have stories to share. And I do have things that I believe in. Maybe it's time I talk about that. Maybe my desire not to talk about it is becoming one of those defense mechanisms—if I can quote *Nevada*, One of those defense mechanisms that at a certain point, it stops helping you and it starts hurting you.

So, Dan's original question was, do you want to write something on faith? And I was like, no, absolutely not. Absolutely fucking not. [Laughs] No! But again, it got me thinking about, Well, what—do I have anything to say about things? And I kept pulling back to, Well, I think I have this stuff to say about community, even though that also sounds terrifying and scary. And that sounds like, again, why would I do that to myself? I was like, Well, maybe that's an indication that I should. And again, like I said in the book, I had done this interview in *Quill & Quire* for *A* *Dream of a Woman*. And the interviewer had asked me some things about community. And when I reread the interview, I sounded a lot more negative than I think I really felt. I quoted the line from one of the characters in the book, who says, you know, Trans community can mean whatever I want it to mean in that moment. And there's a degree to which that's true, right? You can use the term “trans community” as like a plug and play for whatever point you want to serve that day. That's totally a thing. It's true. And even the interview tagline I think, was like, Casey Plett on something something and “the illusion of community.” [Tuck laughs] I was like, An “illusion”? Well, I don't know if I'm that nihilistic! And then I read the interview and was like, Oh, gosh, I do really sound this way. But I don't think I feel this way.

TUCK: Yeah.

CASEY: And then there was a lot of stuff that I was thinking about with the book, like, was that the vaccine had come out, and so people were just kind of like, starting to do stuff again, after a year and a half of COVID, which is, of course, still fraught. So all these things were still like, in my mind at the time, and I thought, well, maybe I'll do this. And then I said this to Cat—Cat Fitzpatrick, who you have had on your podcast and did a wonderful Gender Reveal. That was a great episode. And who, of course, is my business partner at LittlePuss Press. And I was telling her, you know, I think I want to do this and she goes, and she says, Oh, that sounds like you’ll have to tell people what you think about things. [Laughs] I was like, That fills me with so much dread! Oh, no!

TUCK: I mean I had this conversation yesterday with my therapist, where I was like, I don’t want to tell anyone what I think, and she was like, What if you did? And I was like, No. [Both laugh]

CASEY: Except maybe never. Except how about no! [Tuck laughs] That sounds gr—that sounds way better. Tell me why never. Why not never.

TUCK: It’s like my show is letting other people talk, and I go, Hmm, interesting! And then they have to say what they think.

CASEY: [Laughing] Right, exactly! Isn’t that great?

TUCK: I love that.

CASEY: I mean like, you know it’s like, I feel that way about being a fiction writer. It’s like, Well, isn’t this character interesting? She says this things. She did this. Can you believe that? How fascinating!

TUCK: [Laughs] Totally! Yeah.

CASEY: [Laughs] Um, oh and then the one other thing was, around that time in 2021, you know Cat and I had just started LittlePuss, Torrey Peters’s novel *Detransition, Baby* had just come out and got a lot of explosion, and I was talking about, and hearing questions about, a certain publishing house that may or may not have existed in the 2010s, which may or may not rhyme with “Bopside Press.” [Tuck laughs] Anyway, Topside Press, which published books between 2012 and 2017, released *Nevada*, released my first book, and went down the toilet in catastrophic fashion. And, for years, I didn’t want to talk about it; I think most of us involved really didn’t want to talk about it, for lots of good reasons, and it was when I did an interview about Torrey, actually—Torrey got profiled in *New York Magazine*. And she was like, Hey, this journalist is gonna talk to you, you know, and I was like, Yeah that’s cool, that’s great, no problem. And she was like, Hey look, if she asks about Topside, like, maybe it’s time to start talking about this stuff. And so that was also on my mind too, you know. I was like, Well, I was there for all that stuff. I was there for that scene. I know everything that happened, and it’s clearly of interest to a lot of people, and I don’t want to talk about it, but maybe at a certain point I should. Maybe there’s value to that.

So, a lot of the *On Community* book came from examining stuff that I didn’t want to share my opinions about, that I didn’t want to share my experience about, and being like, Well maybe there’s value if I did. Maybe it’s time to start doing that. So all those things led to me going like, Okay, let’s give this a try. If it doesn’t work, I can always back out of it, I can always cry uncle, I can always say, Sorry Dan, this didn’t work, just kidding; can I write a book on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* instead? How about I do that for you. That’s probably gonna sell a lot better anyway. And I kind of just made myself do it. But yeah, it’s funny, you know, that footnote I wrote about, it’s queers specifically who said that. Everyone else in my life I would talk to was like, Oh, you’re writing a book on community! That sounds really cool, like, I wonder what about that! You know, like, a lot of the more mainstream literary people in my life were like, Whoa, cool, I want to read that! A lot of my Mennonite community people were like, Whaaat, that’s—oh, awesome, I’m so curious to see what you’re going to say, I can’t wait to read that! And every single homosexual was like, What the fuck. Like, why? [Tuck laughs]

TUCK: I want to point out there's this part in your book that says there's some rather disquieting research suggesting that the more queers are involved with our communities, the more we feel worse? Do you think that is why we're like, Don't write about community? Because apparently it's causing us strife? [Both laugh]

CASEY: Yeah, I mean, I think there's something really real to that. I'm not completely 100% sold on that, um—the term that researchers like to use is “intracommunity stressors,”—like, I'm not completely sold on that idea. I mean, like, we're doing some of that right now. And this—I've been looking forward to talking to you all day! But I do think there is something to the idea that queer community can be a real, literal drag on our mental and physical wellbeings, in certain circumstances, and if we're not careful. But I also think it's sort of to the degree of like, I do think sometimes we have a tendency then to go like, Well, fuck community, I hate that! [In a silly voice] I hate the queer community, man, I hate the trans community, man, I never want to be around it again! Bah! [Normal voice] And it's almost a little bit to me, like, sometimes I hate my friends; I don't want to say, Fuck friendship…

TUCK: Totally.

CASEY: No more friends! [Tuck laughs] And it's easy to do, right? I mean, like, I've certainly parroted those lines, I've certainly felt that way about community. So like, Yes, is the answer to your question. I do think that sometimes I've seen these discussions stuck there in a way that I don't think is entirely productive.

TUCK: Yeah.

CASEY: Like I sort of say in the book, there's all this research about gay intracommunity stress that makes total sense to me, you know, like, the more we're involved with our communities, like, the more we can feel worse, like, yeah, that that makes sense. I’ve heard that from other—I couldn't track it down. There was old Trans PULSE research in Ontario that suggested that as well, that were like, the trans people who reported being more involved with the trans people, like, scored worse on mental health diagnosis, and like, well, that sucks. That's not great. Again, I will buy that a lot of that's true. But I don't necessarily buy that's the whole puzzle right there. That seems like just like maybe a few very important pieces of it. You know what I mean?

TUCK: Yeah, I mean there's so much going on, it's like, the more that you spend time with trans people, the more you're going to be exposed to many, many people who are like really deeply struggling, in all these different ways—

CASEY: Exactly!

TUCK: —that you like, don't have to deal with if you just like, talk to your coworkers at like, a middle class job, you know? So like, that's a huge one. That's like, All my friends are suffering all the time. That is challenging.

CASEY: Right? Exactly. Like when that happens, don't you feel depressed? Of course you do.

TUCK: The other thing I was thinking about when you’re—in your book, you're talking about, like, defining community, and then you just said, like, friendship as an example. And I was like, I guess when I'm talking about like, trans people who I agree with and vibe with and feel really connected to I just say, My friends. So I guess when I say the trans community, writ large, I actually just mean everyone who's trans and doesn't agree with me. [Both laugh] Otherwise, I would just be like, My friends and I.

CASEY: Right, exactly.

TUCK: So…

CASEY: As if your friends weren't also trans.

TUCK: Right.

CASEY: —and if you, your friends were not also somehow removed from like, [silly voice] the community.

TUCK: Exactly, exactly. Yeah. So…

CASEY: [Normal voice] Oh, my god, that's funny.

TUCK: Yeah, learning a lot here [laughs]. So I had, I do want to say that in my notes, I did write like, “Little recap of what went down at Topside is so rare and brave.” So, thank you for doing that and putting it on the record, because I think—

CASEY: Oh, I’ve been wanting to be called brave for years!

TUCK: [Laughs] Yeah! I finally found a way where it's not transmisogynistic to call you brave. And it’s [Casey laughs] when you write about Topside Press.

CASEY: Oh my god! What a fuckin’ life. Who knew. Thanks Tuck.

TUCK: Anyway, I was thinking about when *Nevada* first came out, how you, among many, many, many other people, have talked about how it was this huge moment for you to see this book that was written by/for/about trans women. And I know that your books have had that impact on other people as well, where your books have been the first thing they've read by/for/about trans women. And that has been huge for them. And I just like, I obviously was not involved in Topside, but just hearing bits and pieces about the experience, it seems like so much of it was like, let's just get stuff by/for/about trans people out there because we're not seeing it anywhere. And I was trying to think like, Is that still the goal? Do we have a new goal? And then I was like, Do we need goals in order to publish books? Maybe we're just publishing books now. But I was just wondering, like, kind of your thoughts on like, Is there another sort of goal we are chasing, as far as that goes.

CASEY: Yeah totally. I don’t know if I would say that’s the goal for us at Little Puss and I don’t know if I completely agree that that was the case with Topside. That was certainly a lot of the bluster associated with Topside. But practically that’s not always how it shook out in terms of people who submitted to them and the sort of books who got published and also the functionality of the place, which was often very not functional. That’s the one moderating thing that I’d say, with the bluster of it, you’re not wrong. I do think that there is — when Cat and I started Little Puss, we were sort of like “Okay, well some of the landscape is different now right?” Like, Janet Mock has happened. Torrey has happened. So we specifically were interested in, well, what is the trans stuff that is not getting published that can’t get out there? I feel strongly that I want to work in kind of like a duo track thing here where one is — I don’t want to do the thing that you said. I don’t want to just get stuff out the door for its own sake, for a lot of reasons. One, publishing takes so much work that if you work on something that you don’t just like fucking love with all your heart, that sucks and it’s shitty and you’re just going to burn out. And it’s also kind of condescending, I think, to the artist in question.

TUCK: Right. I feel like I was feeling that as I was asking this question. Like I’m not trying to imply that we’ll take any and all trans shit.

CASEY: Yeah, yeah.

TUCK: But I’m thinking about like, again I think this is the bluster, because that’s the part that I can see. But so much of like — oh we made this book and it’s called The Anthology — because there hasn’t been one, you know what I mean? Like that energy of just like —

CASEY: [Laughs] Yeah

TUCK: We’re doing everything for like the first time and it’s like, maybe we don’t have to think about that anymore [Laughing] and we can think about something else.

CASEY: Yeah totally. That’s totally true and that’s something that Cat and I were not interested in doing, I would say, with Little Puss for sure. And I think what we would hope is that there would be a lot more trans people making stuff. You know? I think that’s also like — trans people are clearly getting published in a way that was not even happening like 10 years ago. Wouldn’t it be cool if there was more trans people behind the wheel making shit? I would love it if I could just reel off a list for you of tons of trans publishers who are doing other stuff you know? And that’s not the case. Cat and I can only do, you know at the moment we can only do about like — we’re going to try to move up to two books a year next year from one. Which is like peanuts in the publishing world, you know? So Cat and I would love to talk to a bunch of people about starting their own small presses and putting stuff out there. We would love to do that ya know? That’s what I would really love to see. I don’t know if I want to see tons more shit getting out the door. I would love to see tons more trans people making shit and be the people who are like, the ones shoving things out the door, to carry your metaphor. Does that make any sense?

TUCK: Yeah. Seizing the means of production is what I’m hearing.

CASEY: [Louder and enthusiastically] Yeahhhh. There you go. There you go!

TUCK: [Laughs] Perfect. I have a couple more thoughts but Ozzy, I’ve been talking so much. Do you have anything that you have been dying to ask?

OZZY: Yeah. I guess I’ve been curious about something you talk a lot about, in terms of like, isolation of communities and sort of how like, not being welcoming to outsiders can be a self protective mechanism but can also lead to some sort of limited world view. I guess I was just curious if you feel like you’ve seen any solutions to that form of isolationism or any things in your own life that you feel like have helped work against that?

CASEY: Yeah, thank you for asking that question because that has been a thing that has been on my mind for years and years and years because what’s that membrane between intimacy and — oh you have a group of people and you kind of vibe together and you do things together, and you’re also like, suspicious of people who are outside your little circle. Like that membrane is really really thin and sometimes it’s like very squooshy, you know? And I think I come back again to this idea of openness and to this idea of strangers and to this idea of trying to carry some sort of bedrock of welcoming as opposed to suspicion. I don’t know, that just seems like deeply possible to me. And I don’t know if I have any like, strategies or one neat trick or such things, but I do think it is something that like, lots of us in our bones know how to do, even and including those of us that have survived really hard things.

I mean, I can tell you something, this is also sort of in the book, where like one day I was walking home very late and I was sexually assaulted by a stranger and that was obviously terrible and it was unpleasant and traumatizing and the next morning I had to get up and go to work. I had to get on the subway and I had to go to work and I didn’t have a choice about that. And you still end up trying not to be a dick to the person who you buy your coffee from right? Because that person is probably okay. I think in our bones, lots of us have experiences like this and we know how to deal with them. Intellectually, maybe it doesn’t occur to us that way but we do act those things out. We do end up doing them. And so I think tapping into that part of ourselves where we are welcoming and are open and are not isolating ourselves and are letting ourselves be welcoming to the rest of humanity who we do not know. It’s actually deeply possible. It’s very very possible in our life. And most of us, in the meat of ourselves, probably understand how that works, even if intellectually sometimes we have a hard time wrapping our brains around it. Does that make sense?

OZZY: Yeah. I guess it just seems so hard. I don’t know. I’m just curious if it ever feels hard to maintain that openness when strangers have done such terrible things to you, in certain cases.

CASEY: I mean, I think I also go back to that like, as trans people, most of us know what it is like when strangers treat us like shit for no reason. Right?

OZZY: Right.

CASEY: And that sucks. So I also try not to let that be very far from my mind because I certainly don’t want to treat the world that way.

OZZY: That’s a really good point. Yeah.

TUCK: Are you ready for the most incredible tonal shift of all time?

CASEY: Oh my god. Don’t write a check your body can’t cash.

TUCK: The question that I’ve been waiting to ask you this entire time is — who do you main in Super Smash Bros?

CASEY: Oh my god. Link.

TUCK: Great. And do you think that Link is trans?

CASEY: Oh man. Okay, that’s a discourse I refuse to be a part of.

TUCK: Great. Okay.

CASEY: Absolutely not.

TUCK: I respect your boundaries. [All laugh] Completely, totally normal and fine.

CASEY: Yeah. Absolutely not. I will walk out of the room if anyone presses me on that.

TUCK: [Laughs] All right. I have told you, Casey, this story before that when I was in my last apartment, they were showing my apartment while I was in it and the first people that came in were these trans people who looked at my bookshelf and out of all of the incredibly trans and gay books on my shelf were like “I love your Casey Plett books.” [Casey laughs] And I was like, incredible, incredible flagging you’re doing here. If you were going to walk into a stranger’s house and instantly decide they were cool and could hang, what books would indicate to you that they were cool and could hang?

CASEY: Oooh. Sure thing. Sure thing. Swing Low by Miriam Toews, The Pervert by Michelle Perez, I’ve Got a Time Bomb by Sybil Lamb, and of course, the Mennonite Low German Dictionary by Jack Thiessen.

TUCK: [Laughing] Amazing. Are you a big Taylor Swift fan or are you just a big Red fan?

CASEY: Yeah. Red is when I got into Taylor Swift and it does still feel, to me, like her peak, to me. I think sometimes if an artist is like, I feel like something was supposed to reach an apex and everything afterwards was kind of like a long downhill. Like I feel that way about Lana Del Ray. Like to me, Paradise is where, okay, we hit Paradise and everything is, a lot of stuff is still pretty good, but its all kind of like this long downhill. She got to the top of the mountain with Ride and we’re just coasting after that. I did really love — what is that first one she released right in the first two months of the pandemic? Folklore? I liked that a bunch. Yeah, you know what, I’ll call myself a casual Taylor Swift fan. And a very enormous Red fan.

TUCK: Beautiful. The way we always end this show is by asking — In your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

CASEY: The future of gender would look like getting to play a piano. [Tuck laughs] That’s the future of gender, man.

TUCK: [Laughing] Yeah

CASEY: There’s so many keys. You can do like an unlimited amount of things with them. They’re probably intelligible. There’s probably like an order to it, like if a cat walks across it, you’re like, that just sounds like, gibberish. I can’t understand that at all. But there’s like a little, like literally an infinite amount of permutations on it. And also, I mean like, nobody is going to be like, you can’t teach kids how to play piano. Can you believe they just let pianos in anywhere now! [Tuck laughs] Like, okay if you’re going to play piano, you’ve got to wait a year and train to do it. Nope. Nope, nope, nope. Pianos for everybody.

[Show outro music begins]

Tuck: That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with the Casey Plett fans and future Casey Plett fans in your life. You can find Casey at CaseyPlett.com and LittlePuss.net. Casey’s upcoming book, On Community, comes out in November and is now available for pre-order. Her other books are of course, available wherever fine books are sold. As always, you can find us at genderpodcast.com where we have transcripts available of every episode. And if you want more Gender Reveal in your life, you’ll want to go to Patreon.com/gender and sign up for our weekly newsletter and monthly bonus podcast. Today’s episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week, for real this time, with more feelings about gender.

[Show outro music ends]

TUCK: I have a twitter handle that sometimes people think is my name and that is how I know they have no idea who I am when they send me a message. But that is —

CASEY: That’s normal.

TUCK: That happens to a lot of people. [Both laugh]

CASEY: True. Yeah.

TUCK: Including people whose handle is Ida Bae Wells and they’re like “Hello Ida.” It’s like — absolutely, what are you talking about?

CASEY: Every now and then, I’ll get a professional email that opens “Hello Mr. Plett.” And that’s always a really...

TUCK: Wow.

CASEY: That’s always really hilarious.

TUCK: Sick. [Laughs]

CASEY: Yeah. I mean that one does take some really special obliviousness, but...

TUCK: Yeah exactly. It’s like you have to just have never engaged with anything you’ve ever done on like any level.