[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

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

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck**: Hey, everyone. I hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show I am thrilled to share my conversation with Torrey Peters, the author of *Detransition, Baby*. I keep wanting to say it: *Detransition, Baybeee*, but I don’t think that’s how you’re supposed to say it. Anyway, this conversation is neck and neck with Kai Cheng Thom for the longest episode we’ve ever had and, I don’t want to spoil it for you, but I will let Torrey give you one little spoiler.

**Torrey**: I actually think I’ve talked about a lot of stuff that I wasn’t expecting to talk about, what with venture capitalism, and supervillains, and t4t orgies.

**Tuck**: Speaking of spoilers, as you’ll hear, I do not really explain anything about *Detransition, Baby* in the interview. There are plenty of plot summaries online if you’re into that sort of thing. What I’ll tell you is that this book is about Reese, a trans woman, Ames, a detransitioned trans woman, and Katrina, a cis woman. They’re all in their thirties in New York. We also mention *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* which is a novella and all you need to know about that is that it’s about trans people in a pandemic. Torrey’s novellas are actually free on her website if you would like to read them. Torrey was *very* generous with her time so our interview went really long and you might hear some crosstalk in the background in the last ten minutes, or so of the interview. It’s fine, just wanted to tell you that is a real thing. You’re not imagining it. Anyway, before we get to all that, just a couple quick reminders and housekeeping notes.

The first is that you have two weeks left to shop our March merch collection. We’ve got sweatshirts, t-shirts, tank tops, stickers, all designed by rad trans folks with the proceeds going to rad trans organizations. So far, our most popular item this month is a sticker that says, “No gender, too tired.” That’s all available at bit.ly/gendermerch. Secondly, if you want to support our work as we wrap up this season of the show, and move into season seven, and beyond, you can join us at patreon.com/gender where just one dollar, or more gets you our weekly newsletter so that you can stay in touch even between seasons. The other way you can really help us out is by telling your community about the show, sharing the show on social media, or leaving us a review in your podcast app. But first, it’s time for “This Week in Gender.”

[*This Week in Gender* theme music plays]

**Tuck**: This week’s segment is brief because this episode is already too long, and also I don’t like talking about transmisogyny. Last Thursday, Mississippi became the first state in 2021 to successfully ban trans women and girls from competing on women’s athletic teams. They did this despite the fact that when asked, Mississippi legislators could not name *any* specific trans athletes in their state. That’s right. There is a global pandemic, but legislators are busy passing laws in case a single trans girl wants to play shortstop, or something.

So, content warning again for bioessentialism, but I actually pulled up this law, and it says that if a student wants to dispute which team they should be able to play on, they can establish their sex by presenting a signed physician’s statement which will indicate the student’s sex based solely upon A) the student’s internal and external reproductive anatomy, B) the student’s normal endogenously produced levels of testosterone. Pardon? And 3) an analysis of the student’s genetic makeup. This is fucked for a hundred reasons, but also what do the presence of ovaries and a chromosome have to do with your ability to be a high school point guard? I just truly don’t understand it. Keep in mind, of course, that Idaho passed a similar law last year that was then blocked by a judge for being transphobic, and also remember that Joe Biden signed an executive order earlier this year expanding federal anti-discrimination protections to include gender-based discrimination in schools specifically. This is why republican legislators in 21 states and counting are currently attempting legislation like the one in Mississippi because they’re retaliating against Joe Biden, and the victim are girls that want to play lacrosse.

Anyway, since 21 states are attempting this legislation that is illegal per Biden’s executive order, we can expect a flurry of legal appeals on our hands. Mississippi’s law is set to take effect July first if it is not appealed or blocked by then, which, you know, hopefully it is. I will also point out while I’m here that many of these states trying to block access to women’s sports are also trying to block access to puberty blockers and HRT, presumably because if the state simply allowed trans girls to take puberty blockers, and later HRT, they wouldn’t be able to use testosterone levels, or a testosterone dominate puberty as their talking point for why trans girls can’t play field hockey, or whatever. As always, I suggest calling your legislator, looking around for other ways to get involved in this issue, following Chase Strangio on twitter and Instagram, and maybe grabbing a “Trans Kids are Wonderful” shirt from our shop which are in kids and adult sizes so that, you know, you can wear it around, see how people react to it, find out who your enemies are.

This has been “This Week in Gender.”

[*This Week in Gender* theme music plays]

[Background music starts]

**Tuck**: Torrey Peters is the author of the novel *Detransition, Baby*, as well as the novellas, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, and *The Masker*. She also holds an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa and a masters in comparative literature from Dartmouth. Torrey rides a pink motorcycle and splits her time between Brooklyn, and an off-grid cabin in Vermont.

[Background music ends]

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

**Torrey**: I describe myself as a trans woman. I do often use the word transsexual, actually, and then recently people were like, “Why do you always use transexual?” But I think I’m going to stick with it, so I guess I am a trans woman who often, in casual conversation, calls herself a transsexual.

[Tuck laughs]

**Tuck**: Yeah. Well, in *Detransition, Baby*, you tend to use transexual or trans as opposed to transgender. So, at one point, a character spits the word transgender derisively with a hard G, and at another point, you know, you connect the word transgender to the AIDS crisis so, do you have negative feelings about transgender because it’s-

**Torrey**: Am I anti-transgender? Is that what you’re asking me?

[Both laugh]

**Tuck**: Yeah! Yeah, I’m like, “Hey, Torrey, I’m trying to cancel you immediately with the first question. Could you please tell me how you hate transgender people?”

[Tuck laughs]

**Torrey**: I’m going to selectively edit how you don’t like transgender. We’re going to cut out the word and it’s just going to be, “Torrey, not into transgender.” That hard G was a funny joke. I don’t know. You just say transgender with a hard g and people understand what you’re- Do you know- I forgot her name. She’s a drag queen from Seattle, but she’s always mixing up the Js and the Gs so she’ll- like at Christmas time she’ll say she wants to give you a jift, and somehow it’s the funniest thing, and so it just seemed funny for transgender with a hard g too, but wait, what was the question?

**Tuck**: Oh, I’m just curious cause you didn’t use transgender that often, except for in jokes, so I was just curious if it had that kind of association for you.

**Torrey**: I think it does. I think also for me, the word transgender was the one that was there that the world wanted me to use, especially since I went through a period of life before I was officially transitioning, or whatever, where, you know, I didn’t know exactly how to identify. I identified as a sort of, you know, occasionally cross dresser. Sometimes, I’d be transgender, but not really define it, and then I started hanging out with all these other trans girls, and they were using the word transsexual and there was a day when I was like, “Oh, I can use that word too.” Like, “I can use the word transsexual,” and I felt sort of next level, like Morgan Page. I think she said like, “I earned every single one of those syllables” and I too was like, “I want to have the right to all four syllables of transsexual.” So, it wasn’t really a political move so much as just a kind of vestige of a, maybe, in-group time and that, I just think transsexual sounds pulpier. To me, it just kind of has a more glamorous connotation. It sounds like some sort of 70s exploitation movie and, you know, when you’re a novelist, and you can do clinical, medicalized language, or you can do pulpy, exploitation language, or exploitation film language, I should clarify, use the word that’s got so much more zazz, or whatever. It’s got the word sex in it so-

[Tuck laughs]

**Torrey**: How could you not use it?

**Tuck**: Absolutely. Well, before we dive too much into *Detransition, Baby*, I actually want to ask one silly question about *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, which is simply: Do you think about that story differently now that we’re living through a pandemic, albeit a very different pandemic?

**Torrey**. Yeah, totally. I mean, I’ve had thought about expanding that, like, I had- In my mind there were sort of four installments that were each about novella length in the story, and I had started writing the second installment, just kind of for fun after *Detransition, Baby*, right when the pandemic hit, and for the first three weeks I was like, “Wow, this is great research,” and then after that I was like, “I don’t want to write this. I’m not interested at all,” and what had seemed like fun wasn’t that fun. It was like- I remember I lived in Iowa during a time when there was a flood, and there was a kind of- Maybe this is a real phrase, but it’s a phrase- I don’t know if I invented it or not, but disaster euphoria where the city was flooded, and you sort of knew it was terrible, like what you were seeing was terrible, but all around you, it was actually really beautiful. You know the ripples on water when the sunlight hits the ripples and then the ripples reflect on the underside of a bridge or something like that? It was like the city was covered in that beautiful effect. Every sidewalk was rippling with light, and there was glassy mirror-like surfaces instead of the roads.

It was like, “I know this is terrible, but it looks holier or gorgeous.” It moved me in this strange way and then, of course, two days later, it was like, “I haven’t had power in two days. All my food is spoiled. This is terrible,” and what had looked gorgeous and holy to me looked finally, like an actual disaster, and I feel like the pandemic had a similar effect where for the first three weeks, it felt magical. You know, that was the period of time when people were talking about the pink dolphins returning to the oceans, and I’d wake up every morning to silence and mourning doves in the middle of Brooklyn, and during that time, it seemed cool, but after about three weeks it was like, “Nope. Hate it. I don’t think this is actually the right subject for art that’s kind of fun.” You know, it wasn’t like- There’s a kind of fun in certain types of apocalypse that I think is a kind of disaster euphoria, and I didn’t think that people would extend that same euphoria to *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* in this moment. In three years, maybe I’ll release the next installments and will like it. It will be nostalgic. They’ll be like,“Remember when we almost lived through something like this?” And then- but right now, they’re like, “Shut up, Torrey.”

[Tuck laughs]

**Tuck**: Well, speaking of phrases you don’t know whether you invented or not, you actually came up in a conversation recently with Zachary Drucker about the popularization of the term t4t because when I first started t4t in 2016/2017, I thought it was because I was just hearing it for the first time, and not because it had been recently pulled off of Craigslist and popularized by a 2016 novella about a plague. So, I would love if you could talk about your experience sort of popularizing that term outside of Craigslist, and yeah, what it was like from your perspective.

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean, I think that is fair to say that that novel popularized it, but it was a thing that was kind of happening that summer. It was when people would start doing the tattoo, and so, I’ll say my version of where I think it came from, which was Clutch Fleischmann, who writes as T Fleischmann, the book, *Time is the Thing That a Body Moves Through*. The way I learned it was that Clutch had been talking about doing it with their partner, Ambrose, and then Clutch was hanging out with these other girls, Vivi Veronica, I think Serena Hara, and Gogo Graham, the fashion designer. It was late night, one night, and there was a tattoo gun in the corner, and they- those girls- just all tattooed t4t on each other, you know, pretty messy late night tattoos, and then, Vivi directly after that, came to Seattle, within a week. She was in New York, and then she came to Seattle, and she was like, “I had this amazing experience with these other girls. We talked about t4t that night,” kind of by way of Clutch and Ambrose’s conversations, and then was like, “Do you want to get t4t’d?” And I, being who I am, I was like, “I don’t want a homemade tattoo, but I will go to a tattoo parlor with you, and if you hold my hand while they do it, maybe we can count this as part of that process,” and Vivi was like, “Okay, well, since we’re just making up the rules now, I think that that counts.” Cause her version was that you had to have one of the girls do it for you, and I was just like, “Well, you’re going to get a lot of prissy girls like me not willing to do it then.”

So, she broke the rules, and then, that was during the time, you know, first writing the novella, and, also when I was sort of, you know, learning about the ways that these relationships both could be so intense and great, and also, you know, there’s a real possibility to let each other down, or that these relationships could run to the end of the sort of resources, emotional, financial, etcetera, that we could offer each other, and could turn really bad, and so the novella was a way of working through my feelings at that particular time. But, I think there was the night the t4t tattoos, and then there was *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, and there’s sort of twin tracks of t4t, and the t4t homemade tattoos are san serif tattoos because they were just done lines, and the Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones is Times New Roman, and so usually if I see a t4t tattoo I can see whether or not it’s serif or san serif, and know what kind of genealogy that t4t has. I think mine was the first serif because I, again, was prissy and went to a tattoo parlor.

And, of course, it’s all meaningless because there’s been so many other things, and in a lot of ways the whole point of t4t is that I don’t own it. You know, that is something I think that’s important is that, sure, I had my little place in its history, but I feel no ownership over it, or no- It doesn’t belong to me, and people can do whatever they want with it, so I just want to definitely make that clear. Yeah, I mean, there’s so many- so much turnover of generations that things that happened five years ago become the distant mists of time. You know, legends, but it was- I was on my couch a couple years ago, or something, you know.

**Tuck**: Yeah. Well, I wanted to ask you about that because you started writing *Detransition, Baby* in 2016 which is 50 years ago in trans time, so I’m curious how you approached writing a book about contemporary transness in a moment when the cultural conversation around transness was evolving so rapidly and whether it felt hard to even keep it grounded in the present.

**Torrey**: Yeah. I definitely think it is. I mean, I think the biggest example of that is maybe the juvenile elephants metaphor that people talk about, you know. I think I wrote that when I was a little bit more angry, and it was during a time when sort of t4t relationships were falling apart, and people were attacking each other online and in person, and you know, subsequently I’ve met so many more different types of trans women from so many different places, and, you know, one of the things that happened where Katrina sort of corrects Ames after he does the juvenile elephants metaphor, which- Should I explain that metaphor?

**Tuck**: I don’t know- I’m kind of- you know how you’re always like, “I’m just going to write for trans women, and everyone’s going to keep up.” I’m kind of like, “I’m going to make this podcast for people who have read the book [laughs] and everyone can keep up.” But you can explain it a little bit. I probably shouldn’t-

**Torrey**: No, I love that. I love that. That just makes people have to go read it, and be like, “What are they talking about? Isn’t this a trans book? Juvenile elephants?” Well, you’re going to have to read the book to find out, audience. But basically, I wrote that, and then I was hanging out with Cecilia Gentili, and, you know, the metaphor saying that trans women are like juvenile elephants, Cecilia was like, “That’s not really the case for me, and for the women that I know in this Latina community where girls are coming, and they’re, often times, immigrants, and they need help, and they need care. There are strong family structures by necessity and that there is consequences if somebody is just hurting other girls. We will tell them to knock it off.” And it was like, “Oh, actually my version of what I thought trans was is actually pretty narrow,” you know, and learning- I think especially over the course of writing it- learning how narrow, not just temporarily fixed in sort of time my version was but also culturally narrow, really kind of white girls in Brooklyn, and that actually helped me. It taught me to be really specific about what I was making fun of and what I was talking about, and I think in the ways that the more specific you are, you can kind of burrow in so far that it comes out the wormhole, and becomes a little bit universal. That happened by necessity where I was like, you know, “I’m talking about a specific moment, I’m talking about a specific place, and so if I want to make jokes about that stuff, I have to really hit my targets,” you know. So that I think is one of the ways I dealt with the fact that it took five years to write.

**Tuck**: Yeah. I want to go back to juvenile elephants in a second but in that bit, the thing you’re referring to, Ames says, “I have a bad habit of saying trans women when I mean white trans women,” and when I read that I was curious if that was a stand-in for you at some point. So, can you talk a little bit more about the way that you chose to handle race in the book? I feel like there are some sort of clear moments where we’re pulled back and we’re like, “To be clear, this is specifically about white women. Let us now talk about Katrina’s existence as a non-white woman.” Was that in the original draft, or was that something you put in later?

**Torrey**: It was- There was a version of it there, but I think it was something that I realized in editing that I wanted to lean into more. I think a lot of people think like, “Oh, what’s the political ramifications of doing this?” And, for me, it’s less political ramifications than the artistic ramifications. That juvenile elephants metaphor is not particularly flattering, and so if I’m going to deploy it, I really have to deploy it sharply, and same with things that are like jokes, and if I’m going to make fun trans women all wanting, you know, secretly all lusting after a consumer appliance, I have to make sure that that’s not all trans women. That’s a specific type of trans woman who maybe has a job in tech, or something like that. So, being really clear about who my targets are actually makes the jokes a lot funnier, and to be specific and be clear wasn’t just like, “Oh, I have to not speak for other people,” which is important, but also I have to create good art and good art is setting your targets right, and so a lot of it was like, “This joke isn’t quite landing. This metaphor is being too broad so that there isn’t that kind of emotional heft to it that I wanted.” And so, the editing process was about sharpening that to make it a better book, both politically and artistically.

**Tuck**: Yeah. I really feel compelled cause you’re talking about jokes to just say that this book is so funny. [laughs] I laughed out loud so many times. Two of my favorite parts are the funeral and the very end with the Wim Hof method, and I’m not going to spoil that part. The funeral part has this bit where these two trans women are at a funeral for a trans woman, and one of them tells a joke that is a bit of a macabre joke, and another young trans woman from twitter.com walks by and is like, “You shouldn’t be joking about that right now,” and I was thinking about that because immediately after I read that, Patti Harrison went on twitter, and was pretending to be the brand, Nilla Wafers, and started tweeting out random transphobic shit as the brand, Nilla Wafers, as a bit, and I- my roommates and I were like, “This is the funniest thing I’ve seen in months. This is so delightful,” and then we had other trans people replying being like, “Who is this person? Why does she think it’s acceptable to say this? It doesn’t matter who’s saying it. Nobody should say these things. It’s so hurtful,” and I had this weird moment that was just like, “Oh, am I bad?” And I just thought of that scene, and I was like, “No. Okay, okay. We’re okay.”

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean- I mean, it is possible though- I mean, it’s possible that the twitter girl is right, and that Reese and Thalia are jerks.

**Tuck**: For sure. I think they’re both true.

**Torrey**: Yeah, and I think that that’s sort of the fun of fiction is that you can sort of have the characters do the thing that we all do, and to some degree, you know, if it was an essay in a magazine, I’d have to, I don’t know, referee it and say the twitter girl is wrong or something, but as a fiction author, you can sort of just, you know, let that land as it lands for people, and that’s kind of like the pleasure of is to get to show everybody in sometimes their worst light, and then let people take whatever judgement that they want from it. I think that my personal sympathies are probably with Reese and Thalia in that moment, not the twitter girl, but also, I mean, I think there’s a moment afterwards where, you know, Reese is like, “Making fun of baby transes is never a good look.” You know, and as you say, both, all of it’s true at the same time.

**Tuck**: Yeah. I think you do that really well, and that’s something that other people have talked to- talk about, about the book is how all of the characters are so relatable and so messy, and you know, flawed but in this way where you’re rooting for all of them at the same time, or I was rooting for all of them. But I’ve heard you say that different people identify different characters as the protagonist. What do you think it says about someone if it was a personality quiz- What do you think it says about someone to identify Reese or Ames or Amy, which I would say is actually distinct, or Katrina as the main character?

**Torrey**: I mean, I would say that that’s the goal for any writer, right. That’s the dream is that when somebody is like, “I’m a Carrie or I’m a Samantha,” or like, you know, I know we shouldn’t say it anymore, but a Hufflepuff [Tuck laughs] or whatever, a slither-snake person. There’s a way as an author where you’re like, “Oh my gosh. I’ve created archetypes, and I didn’t mean to,” but then it does become really fun because once they’re archetypes then you can read into it, so I don’t necessarily want to define these archetypes just like, probably, the creators of *Sex and the City* don’t want to say exactly what it means to be a Carrie or a Samantha.” They’re like, “My work is more nuanced than that.” I’m waiting for the Cosmo quiz where they’re like, “Are you an Ames, a Katrina, a- you know,” and I will say that sometimes when someone’s like, “This is the story of Ames,” I’m like, “Really? Is it? You know, wow. What’s going on with you?” But I also understand it cause I think that each character as I was writing it, I sort of was closest to that character in my own life when I wrote that character.

So, I don’t know, when I was feeling bitchy or dating men, you know, I was writing the Reese scenes, and when I was, kind of, had, you know, some feelings of regret post-transition about people who I lost, or you know, I lost my partner and I, which I didn’t lose her, but we broke up. I felt a lot of sadness and regret in that loss, and in a lot of those moments that I was feeling that sadness and regret, I wrote the Ames scenes, and so the idea that where you are in your life, rather than exactly what kind of person you are, but where you are in your life, you relate to a different person. I actually do relate a lot to Katrina now because I’m a little older than these characters, and Katrina’s a little older, and a little bit more tired and just doesn’t care that much about terms, is just looking for the way to move forward, and so there’s times where now, I’m like, “Oh, actually, I almost relate to Katrina more now that I finished the book than when I was writing it.”

**Tuck**: So you were talking about how a great thing about fiction in general, the scene we were talking about at the funeral, all having all these different characters, it’s great because you have the characters say different things that you as an author don’t necessarily agree with, and see what happens when you do that, and you don’t have to always adjudicate it. That does leave room for misunderstanding, and bad faith interpretations where people conflate your beliefs with a character’s statements. I am someone who can’t even do a joke tweet without doing a reply that clarifies my intent, or deleting it because I get so stressed when people start misinterpreting me, and that is something I am working on, but do you have thoughts on how to be okay with the fact that not everyone is going to understand your tone and intent all of the time because I couldn’t write *Detransition, Baby* for a million reasons, but one of them is that the jokes are too good, and I’d be too scared to make them.

[Tuck laughs]

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean, I think that that there’s a way in which better jokes are in my fiction because, I mean, to do it on twitter, is like- you do it, and then you get this immediate response that shuts you down, whereas in fiction, I made these jokes three years ago, right. So, if someone is like, “That joke you told three years ago, not that good,” I’m like, “I can barely remember that joke. It doesn’t hurt me that you didn’t like a joke that I told three years ago,” and I know that for them, they just heard that joke, but for me, it’s like time actually creates such a distance between the stuff that I was feeling, and even if I did feel something deeply three years ago, or five years ago, I no longer exactly do, and so I can start to see the novel as separate from me. So, if people are like, “It’s no good,” or if they don’t like the way I did something or another, it doesn’t feel like an attack on me anymore, whereas I still, I mean, I'm with you on the tweets. You make a joke on twitter, that’s you who made that joke. You can’t be like, “That was a past me who made that joke.” I mean, I guess technically it’s a past you, you know. Eighteen seconds ago me did that but I would never.

[Both laugh]

But, I get that benefit in fiction, and I also have the fig leaf of fiction where I do- I have occasionally got annoyed where people have quoted the characters where it’s a character saying something, and then they’ll say like, “Peters writes this,” and it’s like, “No, Peters doesn’t write anything. Reese says this in Peters’ book,” but also, I can’t get too bent out of shape out of that- about that either because I’m just happy people are reading it.

**Tuck**: Well, while we’re still talking about twitter, I want to go back. I was thinking about the juvenile elephants this week because Kai Cheng Thom tweeted a poem of hers about trans womanhood, and was immediately inundated with trans people saying like, “Absolutely not. How dare you say these things about trans women,” and I was thinking about how Kai Cheng is not even thirty. She’s about to turn thirty, and she has spent so much of her life being a mother and a mentor to younger trans women, and she’s still constantly having to go private on twitter because they’re yelling at her, so the question I was asking myself, and I did not have an answer was, are there no adult elephants in this metaphor, or are the baby elephants just trampling the adult elephants out of the space, you know?

**Torrey**: Well, let’s take that metaphor to that exact example, right? So, you have Kai Cheng, and then what she’s basically saying is she’s like, “I think as a trans woman you can embrace monstrosity as armor and beauty, and that that itself has a long sort of genealogy with Elena’s essay. She’s Little Light on twitter, and she wrote this whole thing about being monstrous. I remember that was in the 2000s, and then before that you have Susan Stryker with the *Words to Frankenstein*, and so what’s interesting is that Kai Cheng was in fact signaling her elders as she spoke, right, so there was actually four generations of trans women buried in that little twitter beef, but that the young ones who are piling on Kai Cheng Thom don’t understand that they’re actually being given four generations of history in this tweet, and the fact that there are so many of them, and so few elders, and that the elders aren’t actually there to speak to them, right. Susan Stryker, if she had to deal with everything like this, she’d get nothing done. Elena also is- She does her own work, and so I think that the question of these young elephants trampling their elders *is* actually the juvenile elephants metaphor, right.

When you have so many young people, and so few elders, that is a disappearance. It’s a relative disappearance of elders, and it, in some ways, speaks to the problem that there’s no one to teach these young people that like, I say- Oh god, look how old I sound even saying it, these young people- teach them that this isn’t one tweet that is outrageous. This is an entire line of thought that’s being handed to you, and that maybe it’s worth looking up, you know, the context for this, or thinking about the context, or knowing, learning, learning your history so that you don’t get mad at Kai Cheng and, you understand that you can reject that line of thought, but that’s really different than rejecting a single person who says something in that line of thought.

**Tuck**: Yeah. I think it’s also tricky because on one hand, I do hope that trans folks can read about trans history and folks that have come before us, but also, a lot of trans people are just trying to live, you know, and I think that reading Susan Stryker, or whatever, is a privilege that not everyone has, and also something that no everyone wants to do, so I think it’s tricky for me even just trying to decide how to put this show together, and who is the audience that I’m speaking to.

**Torrey**: Yeah. The thing is that there’s a lot of pressure where there’s sort of an either/or thing, right, but that in fact maybe it’s not an either and or situation. A lot of times what I’m doing is just trying to live my life. You know, I’m a writer. I write about this stuff, but most of the days, I’m thinking about like, “What am I going to cook for dinner?” I’ve got an 11-year-old stepson now, and he’s definitely not in a queer world type of thing, and I have to worry about him, and my partner, and stuff, and so it’s like- a lot of life is like, “Yeah, just trying to do those things,” but actually, if you look again at cis people, if there’s just some mom, right, it’s not like that mom doesn’t be like, “Well, I’m being a mom as a cis woman, so therefore I don’t need to know my history, or my family, or the context of the city, and country, and state in which I live,” and the idea that to just live your life, you have to not know anything about yourself, it’s a foreign idea to me. I would argue to those people who are like, “I’m just trying to live,” is actually if you’re just trying to live, then you definitely should know the history before because otherwise you’re going to repeat all of these other mistakes. You can know your history, not just to be like, “I want to talk about it,” but to basically be like, “Here’s these things other trans women were doing in the 90s, and it didn’t work for them, so maybe I should go trying to reinvent that wheel.” That kind of learning isn’t a political thing, it’s for just living with ease, so if you want to live with ease, still learn your history, just even for self-serving reasons would be my argument.

**Tuck**: I love that, and I also love how you were like, “Hmm, Tuck, have you considered it’s not a binary?” And I’m like, “Hmm, foiled again by binaries.”

[Both laugh]

**Torrey**: Sorry to do it to you.

**Tuck**: No, no! You were right. I mean, I still do frame things very black and white. I’m very fascinated by the way that cis people, and particularly cis women read this book. I have a suspicion that there are cis people who are picking up this book thinking it will teach them about trans people, and transgenders, and are actually going to end up learning about their own gender as a cis, or potentially cis person. Do you want to talk about that?

**Torrey**: I think it’s what I’m trying to do, and I think that it’s true for trans people and cis people, is that I’m trying to basically take what’s worthwhile in a bunch of different conversations and put them together. So, for cis people, hey, here’s a bunch of tools for thinking about gender, and not transgender people’s gender, but your own gender that I’m going to sneak into this book, and I hope y’all pick up those tools, but trans people already have those tools. We are constantly talking about gender as the way it’s performed, and the multiplicity of genders, that there’s not, you know, two ways of doing it so, since when I speak to cis audiences, I’m like, “Hey, here’s these tools,” what I think I would say to trans people is I went through a period where I was connected with sort of a t4t thing, which has a connotation of trans separatism, and when I was in my thirties, and I was really looking for, for how to live, not sort of the politics about it, but the everyday kind of, “How am I going to make a life? I did this transition. You know, I’m a woman, and what’s next? How do I actually now be a woman for the rest of my life?”

And obviously, there’s a lot of trans women who had things to teach me, but there were also a lot of cis women who I could look to, and who were willing to share things with me, and were willing to model for me ways of being, and ways of moving forward, and ways of basically feeling chill about my life, and what I hope for with the book has never been like, “Oh, this is for trans people, or this is for cis people,” but that I think the book itself, I don’t think it poses any solutions. The trajectory of the book is getting to this moment. Trans people of different types, and a cis woman are sitting in a room together and they say, “How are we going to live? How are we going to do this? How are we going to have families? How are we going to be okay? How are we going to break the cycles of coping mechanisms, and lies that we’ve told ourselves for our entire lives? How are we going to move forward?”

And the truth is that I don’t want to prescribe an answer there, and so I ended the book there at this moment where it’s actually like, “What does womanhood look like when there’s cis women in the room and when there are trans women in the room, and when we realize that a lot of things we’ve done in the past have failed us, and we’re going to have to build something new,” and if we’re going to build something new, I hope it’s not actually a separatist thing. I hope that there’s ways in which cis women and trans women can share that we have different things that the others need, and that we can create a kind of collective with it, and give each other things, instead of basically being- creating a division there. That’s sort of my ultimate purpose with this book, so I have sort of two tracks. I have the track in which I’m trying to gather the cis women to me to hear what I have to say, to be part of the conversation, and then equally, I have the track where I’m like, “Hey, trans people, you’ve transitioned. You, maybe, are in this place where you don’t know how to live. Maybe you have some anger, which is totally justified and fair, but what if we came to this place where we could actually have an exchange, and maybe go forward,” not in a particular way that I know of, but at least committing to the project of going forward together.

**Tuck**: Yeah. A question that I kept asking myself was like, “Okay, I know Torrey’s novellas are very explicitly t4t, in a broader definition of t4t. You know, ‘I am a trans woman writing work for trans people, and trans women,’” and kept being like, “Is Detransition, Baby t4t?” Because so much of it is for trans people and so much of it is also for cis women, and I’m thinking about- we were just talking about binaries and I was like, “Oh, there’s probably not an answer to that. It probably is and is not t4t at the same time,” but do you have an answer to that in your head? Do you think about that?

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean- so I think that, you know, if you listen to other interviews you probably heard me talk about this and forgive me if I repeat it, but I think there’s different stages of marginalized literature, that the first stage is sort of like, “We’re just like you. Like us, accept us.” The second stage is, “We’re nothing like you. We reject you,” and then the third stage is sort of like, “We’re neither like you nor reject you. We have our own thing,” and that stage to me is that third stage which is the third stage identified by Joanna Russ, who wrote a book about women’s writing in the 70s. That, to me, when transposed to the trans context is the t4t context, the, “We’re doing our own thing. We’re not defined by the sort of dominant culture.”

But the thing is that I actually think there’s a fourth stage that wasn’t identified by Joanna Russ, and that we’re in now, which is when the marginalized thought bleeds into the dominant culture or infects, if you will, dominant culture, and the dominant culture begins to see themselves through the terms set by the marginalized culture, so that straight people understand their sexuality through terms created by queer scholars. White people understand their race through terms set by black thinkers, and thinks of color, and now we’re in the stage where cis people are understanding their genders through terms set by trans people, and if we’re in that stage, and if cis people are beginning to understand themselves through the terms that were set by us trans people, I actually think it’s a huge opportunity that the reason to not be a separatist t4t thing is that in the past, I think the rest of the world has demanded that we come to them, but what’s happening now is that they’re coming to us, and that actually is a significant opportunity the way I see it.

There’s a moment here where if they come to us and if they begin to see themselves through the terms that were set by us, maybe, you know, who knows, but maybe there’s an opportunity to have a lot of this sort of material consequences of historical prejudices begin to dissolve, or at least opportunities to rectify it. I want to be optimistic. I don’t want to let this opportunity go. I want to try to write into the moment and accept that times change, people change, moments change, and to respond to the moment that we’re in, so I think that t4t was definitely an essential stage for me to move through, and it may still be an essential stage going forward for a long time for certain people in certain moments, but for me, where I am now, in the way that I want to deal with the world, I think that we’re in this fourth stage where I don’t have to give us the gains of t4t in talking to cis people because cis people are coming to me.

**Tuck**: Yeah. What do you feel like they are coming to you for? What is the wisdom that they are looking for that they feel like trans people can provide? Because I know you’ve talked about hetero-pessimism, and straight cis women trying to figure out how to exist in a way that’s tolerable.

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean, so there’s definitely that, where it’s, you know, you do see these cis women that are like these roles that are in- that are actually gender roles, you know, and that these gender roles are flexible and like, hey, if you understand that gender is flexible in this way, you could play around with it, you know, to separate, for instance, desire for gender roles as a way of living. So, if you’re attracted to a stoic, tough dude, you don’t actually have to marry a guy who treats you bad and is cold. You can just play with that with different people who put that on, and take it off. You want a lumberjack? You want a sailor? Play around with it. You don’t actually have to be stuck living as a sailor for your entire life.

[Tuck laughs]

And I think that’s actually- I mean, I’ve talked about it a lot for cis women, but the more and more, I think that that understanding of gender is essential to men, that men are very unhappy. Cis men especially are very unhappy with the ways that they are forced to live, with the expectations that are on them, and those are gender roles that are put on them, where it’s like, “Oh, I feel like I always have to be stern with my son. I can’t express love for him. I have to fight all the time.” Through the vagaries of my life, I’ve ended up spending time with older men and a lot of them are so damaged, so damaged because they thought they had to be this thing that is in fact a gender role, you know, that they had to fight, that they couldn’t dance, you know, that they had to be stern and tough, and they had to live that way all that time rather than put it on for a little while, try it out, realize that it’s a role, realize that it’s actually not intrinsically tied to who you are as a person.

You can play with these roles, you can move through these roles the same way that I think trans people move through these different roles, and that it’s not the same as being trans, of course, but it’s a kind of way of thinking that I think trans people have developed for ourselves in order to be happy, you know, to be like, “Okay, sure, I have this kind of body, but it doesn’t mean I have to be this kind of person,” and I don’t even mean that in terms of transition. If I’m a trans woman, and I have a particular type of body that’s not normally associated with, I don’t know, ballet or something like that, it doesn’t mean I can’t feel the way that a ballerina would feel. If I have a smaller body, it doesn’t mean I can’t feel like a superhero. You can just put these things on, and I think that there are a lot of cis people who would be really thrilled if they could sort of do that. People have talked about Kardashians as female to female transsexuals, you know.

**Tuck**: [laughs] I miss that. Yeah, okay.

**Torrey**: Yeah, so something like that, right? You can be a female to female transsexual. You thought you were this kind of woman, but actually, you can just be this kind of woman, or you thought- You can be a male to male transsexual. You thought you were, I don’t know, one kind of stereotypical man, or one kind of role, and no, it actually turns out you’re, I don’t know, a sensitive hippie, or whatever it is it turns out you really are. You can do that, and I think that is something that cis people are wildly hungry for, and have no idea how to articulate, and are coming to use to figure it out.

**Tuck**: Speaking of cis guys, *The Masker*, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, *Detransition, Baby*, all of those stories have the main character having some kind of affair with a wealthy cis guy. Can you talk about what draws you into returning into that dynamic over and over again?

**Torrey**: I mean, it’s just from my life. You know, it was like I saw a wealthy man, in sort, you know, of terms that one could see as sort of sugar baby. It was usually that boldly named, but I had a wealthier boyfriend for much of the time that I was writing this novel, or not much of it, but part of it, and, you know, that’s also how I happened to know, sort of, older men, and there are ways in which I found a lot of validation from the approval of men with power, and I don’t much anymore. I think I had to, sort of, go through that to see why it was not important to me or meaningless to me, or- not just in a political way, of saying like, “Oh, these guys are bad so I shouldn’t be with them,” but to really, in the way that therapy does where you would sort of like, “Actually, this has no charge for me, one way or another. They’re just people.” I had to move to get to a point where it was sort of like, “Why do I go through these relationships with these guys? What kind of- what am I getting out of it,” to get to a place where I’m like, “Yeah, I just, I don’t know, I’m bored with them now.”

I’m actually quite, quite bored with it in a way that I’m not mad at them, and I also feel pretty responsible for my own part in it. I don’t think that they did anything wrong to me. I think it was two people who needed things from each other, and in my case it was, you know, happened multiple times with multiple men, but where, you know, you needed something from somebody, and you repeated cycles, and then, now I think I’m in a place where that’s not so much the case, so I don’t know if it’ll be in my future work, but at the time that I was writing, and I definitely want to clarify that those aren’t straight autobiographical things, you know, but the dynamics are certainly the dynamics familiar from my own life, and so, since that was sort of what occupied a lot of my thoughts was these relationships with these guys, I wrote about them because they were extremely gendered relationships in the way that I was just talking about previously with these strong gender roles, it happening in the relationships, and it was a place to make those gender roles feel real, right. If I wanted to feel powerless, you know, and feminine, then I guess I’ll find a guy with true power over me, you know, and realizing the ways in which that’s not actually necessary was part of the process and way out, I think for me, which now, I think actually this is what cis women do a lot of the time, and so I’m really like, “Hey girls, I had to figure this out as a trans girl, and because I had this trans thought to help me, you too can do this. You don’t need this in the same way.”

I would argue, you know, girls can do what they like, so that is why a lot of that is in my books. I think they’re always something- I’ll always sort of think it’s fun because it’s been a huge part of my adulthood, but I think the nature of those relationships will change, and I’m very, very interested now in trans women with a lot of power. That’s actually something that’s fascinating to me, and what I’ve been writing recently is not sort of abject trans women, but what does it mean when a trans woman has a tremendous amount of power, and what does she become? What does a powerful trans woman become? What is she capable of? And I don’t mean that in only good ways. I mean, what is she capable of in really bad ways if a trans woman has a lot of power in ways that we haven’t seen before?

**Tuck**: Yeah. You know, it’s so funny. It made me think of when that suite of euphoria apps was announced, and Berry Grass tweeted, “Ames logging into his detransition app, phoria.”

[Torrey laughs]

**Torrey**: Yeah. That’s good.

**Tuck**: I don’t know. I don’t know that I have a question. I think It just made me think of, sort of, that trend that we’re already seeing of trans women, and other trans people gaining more power, and then sort of losing class consciousness among other things, I think.

**Torrey**: Yeah. I mean, the saving grace for those apps is that they were tremendously stupid, and so it was hard to sort of take them at their face value as sort of trans supervillain, you know, kind of things, cause they were just so incompetent, and so you could sort of laugh at them, and they weren’t dangerous. But, what is going to happen, what is coming is going to be trans women who are actually really smart about this, and who are going to be able to exploit the trans community from within, and they’re going to be smart enough that when they have power they could be coercive with it, so I’ve actually thought a lot about hormones, and the ways that they interface with bigger systems. Those people, and I don’t want to give away the supervillain secret, but those people, they didn’t create anything new. They just created this stupid app like everybody did, but what happens when a trans woman gets a patent on the next round of estrogen, right, from the FDA, and suddenly, she has a monopoly on the ways that we all make our bodies cause now, the estrogen we use was patented in 1951. There hasn’t been an upgrade to estrogen in seventy years, and the technology to upgrade it that was nice is all available, in the 80s or 90s. Anybody can do this, and I’m not trying to get that idea out there, but I’m just saying, somebody could, and then a trans woman could own the recipe to all of our bodies, or at least a more efficient recipe to all of our bodies. Nobody’s thinking about this. Nobody’s stopping it. Nobody’s even making art about it that I can see, and so it’s very, very interesting to me what it looks like when that class of trans women, who is coming, arrives.

**Tuck**: That’s so interesting. Wow. Well, I’m excited to read your dystopian science fiction as it happens in real life simultaneously.

**Torrey**: Luckily, it doesn’t even have to be science fiction. It’s just going to happen. I could write a realist novel about it, and I mean, I know you’re making a joke, but I’m making a warning that the sad thing is that it’s not going to be science fiction. It’s going to be realism. The problem in the past is that everybody’s been incompetent at it. I remember when I was a kid, there were all these cis women who had these sidelines in doing makeup for crossdressers at exorbitant fees. They didn’t exactly understand trans women. They didn’t understand the urges, so they weren’t able to, sort of, capitalize on it, but even still, they were sort of using the, sort of, desires and sadness of trans women to make money, and now, the next generation, it’s going to be trans women doing that who actually have the knowledge that those cis women lacked to really capitalize on it.

**Tuck**: Yeah. What do you think is the way to dodge that? Is it possible? Can we somehow prevent the more crafty trans exploitation from happening?

**Torrey**: Yeah, I think that, and this is just my personal opinion, but I actually think that we can’t just say capitalism is bad, and say we reject it, and we’re just waiting for the revolution, and I don’t mean that in a demeaning way, but I think while we wait for that, we’re going to be just really used badly, and so I think that we have to think about the ways that other people would exploit us, and we have to use that ourselves. Right, so there’s things that could happen where someone could patent the next round of estrogen, and make it wildly difficult for trans women to get, so we need to do it first. We need to organize. We need to figure out, how are people getting this VC money? How do we get it in a way that’s ethical? How do we get it in a way that we can use it, and we can fight, and have our own systems up, and running before the supervillains arrive? And, that requires having conversations that I think that people aren’t willing to have which is like, “Is it okay for trans women to take venture capital money? Is it okay to use these weapons that other people use against us,” the kind of things that I think other marginalized groups have talked about for a long time, sort of the master’s tools. Should you use the master’s tools? Well, I think that we’ve had the good luck to not actually have to have that conversation in sort of real terms, but the moment is coming, and it will make the ways that we’ve been having this conversation, in sort of hard line abstractions, no longer possible. So, I’m not someone who’s going to probably have that conversation in a, sort of, activist way, but I am trying to pave the way for a conversation with art.

**Tuck**: Pivoting from venture capitalist evil, etcetera, a couple years ago, you said in a conversation with Harron Walker- you said, “We’re trained as trans people to cheer for everything we read about us. Part of me doesn’t want to be cheered for. I want to be argued with and say, ‘fuck you, I’m right,’” and in another interview you did, shortly before this book came out, you said something like, “I hope that trans people forgive me for writing the secrets,” so I am curious overall how you feel the book has been received specifically by trans audiences, whether you feel like you’re being satisfactorily argued with, whether you’re being forgiven for writing the secrets, just how that’s been overall so far.

**Torrey**: Well, I will say I think I’ve mellowed a little bit since I said that to Harron, you know, [Tuck laughs] and that people have definitely argued with me, and you know, I’m less into confrontation.

**Tuck**: You’re like, “Never mind, no more arguing.”

**Torrey**: Never mind. Let’s all get along, but no, I do think I’m more- I’m less confrontational than I probably once was. What I’m more weary of now, and what I’m trying to be more respectful of now, is the ways in which what I write about can really be bracing to people, and it’s bracing either because they do really see themselves in it, or because they see what looks like a whole lot of shame and emotion that doesn’t really describe them. A lot of people who have been really upset by the book are upset because they’re like, “Well, this is a trans experience that’s very powerful and full of shame, and stuff, but it’s not my trans experience, and people are going to think that I’m like this.” And the problem there is that we’re in a place where there needs to be more trans writers. There needs to be more people with me. I didn’t come here to sort of be the token trans writer. I think if you’re like, “This doesn’t describe me,” then you should write a book, and you should talk about your experience with lots of emotion, and stuff, because right now, what ends up happening is that people are upset because the book isn’t exactly them, and then they’re like, “Well, this misrepresents me,” and I want to basically be like, “I was never trying to represent you in the first place.”

This isn’t *the* trans novel. This is a trans novel, and a very specific one, but I also understand when people are having those kind of reactions, often times, they’re having them in, you know, I don’t want to go so far as to say they’re triggered, but they’re having- I can see when people read stuff that sometimes the response that they have is feeling alarmed or threatened, whereas the person who gave that quote to Harron, that version of me might have been, “Well, let’s argue about it if you’re feeling alarmed and threatened.” I think I now have kind of a more, more of an understanding that the way to deal with that alarm and the feeling of threat isn’t to intellectually argue your way out of it, but to acknowledge it and be like, “Yeah, you’re having that experience, and I’m sorry that you’ve gone through things to make the stuff that I’ve written so kind of potent that way, but I hope that maybe you’ll think about it, realize that I’m- If it isn’t talking about you then I’m simply not talking about you, and if it is talking about you, I’m trying to name, with love, some things that you’ve gone through that are hard, and that the way to get passed shame, or get passed certain kinds of pain is to really name it, and to put it into words,” and so I’m trying to do that work, so that I can point to it in my own case, and that other people can point to it in their case, and that it can sort of take some of the emotional charge out of it.

When I wrote *The Masker*, about sissy stuff, first of all, I was really lucky with The Masker cause nobody wanted to identify with that character. [Tuck laughs] They were like, “That’s definitely not the kind of trans I am.” Nobody was like, “This is a representative novel,” and that was real joy that I get to tell a story, and nobody was like, “This represents me,” and that was sort of a little bit been my method going forward is to try, and actually make these characters so strong in their ways that the idea that they represent you, outside of sort of the archetype way that we’re talking about, it doesn’t have as much power, and it doesn’t feel like I’m trying to tell somebody else’s story beyond those characters, and to some degree my own.

**Tuck**: We’re in this cycle now where cis people want to talk more about trans people, and they’re sort of getting the idea that they should have trans people on their journalism teams, but they’re not actually doing it, so what’s the ratio of people you’ve gotten to talk to about this book professionally that are actually trans people?

**Torrey**: I mean, it’s been interesting, and it’s not necessarily been what I think is always good. Most of- a lot of the people I’ve talked to in the U.K. are trans, and that is, I think, a reflection actually of transphobia that the kind of outlets that are willing to talk about the book, and who’s working at those outlets. I talk to many more trans people in the U.K. than I did in the United States, but those people were working at smaller outlets. They were much more on a freelance basis, and they were writing, you know, more out of the love of it than because they could make any money at it. Whereas in the United States, I talked to much bigger outlets, but those outlets were much more likely to have cis people asking me the questions. There were occasional trans people at those bigger outlets, but I would say that it ended up being if you were at a little outlet it was more likely that you were a trans person, and I don’t say little in any sort of demeaning way.

The one exception though, I will say, was New Yorker. New Yorker’s, you know, obviously a huge place, and that was [Crispin Long](https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-insider-insights-of-detransition-baby). It was probably the best trans coverage that the New Yorker’s ever had because the New Yorker’s done, despite them being quite nice to me, I don’t think they have the most brilliant record with their trans coverage, and it’s mostly been cis people fumbling it for them, so it’s great to see, and Crispin is on staff, I believe. You know, started out as a fact checker, but this is what happens when you have a trans person on staff, not just like a- who’s invested in the magazine as opposed to just a freelancer who’s like, “Oh, this is a trans subject. We’ll hire a trans freelance person,” which is the other thing I’ve run into in the United States is when they have a trans subject, they’re afraid to have cis people tackle it, but they know it’s important, so then they hire a trans freelancer.

**Tuck**: The way we alway send the show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Torrey**: I think gender would still exist in various roles, but that we would understand that these roles which have so much power, and which have so much appeal, don’t necessarily have to have a one-to-one relationship with bodies, that you can have gender, and you can have gender roles that people love, but they don’t need to be biologically determined.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Tuck**: That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, or you learned something, or you want to warn everyone about impending supervillainy, please share this episode with folks in your community. You can purchase *Detransition, Baby* at your favorite local bookstore, or at bookshop.org, and you can find Torrey’s other work for free at torreypeters.com, or your local library. We are at genderpodcast.com where you can find our FAQ page, transcripts of every episode, starter packs for new listeners, and more. We are also on twitter and Instagram @gendereveal. If you like what we do here, please subscribe obviously, and consider joining us at patreon.com/gender. Our merch shop is at bit.ly/gendermerch, and our online community is at bit.ly/genderslack2, all links in the show notes.

Today’s episode was produced and edited by me, Tuck Woodstock.

Special thanks this week to Reese, Yash, Arlie, Cass, and everyone else who shared their *Detransition, Baby* thoughts with me.

Our logo is by the talented Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder.

We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]