

Ear Hustle
Episode 104: Hope Lacquer
April 17, 2024

Carrington: You the youngest Sadiq I met.

Sadiq: I'm the number one Sadiq. I'm the only Sadiq.

Carrington: You're not the only.

[laughter]

Nigel: He's my only.

Sadiq: See? Oh, my goodness.

[laughter]

Carrington: Are you the special Sadiq?

[intriguing music]

Nigel: That's inside producer, Sadiq, on the mic, and he was in the studio to tell us about a gentle dispute he has with his neighbor, Carrington.

Earlone Yeah. Sadiq and Carrington live in Donner. It's what's known as the "honor dorm" at San Quentin. Because it's where people live who are living within the rules of prison. They're doing the right thing. They're running a program. That's where they live.

Nigel: Yeah, I mean, that's why we call them Donner Darlings.

Earlone Donner darlings. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Donner isn't a particularly nice building or anything, but if you live there, there are some benefits. And one of them is that you get single-cell status. Your own cell.

Earlone: Indeed.

Nigel: And, Earlone, that's a big deal, right?

Earlone: That's a hell of a deal. So, this dispute had to do with an allegation that Sadiq was making about his neighbor, Carrington, and how Carrington takes care of his cell.

Nigel: Yes. But before we get to that, I had to ask Carrington about the name, Carrington. I mean, it's kind of unusual.

Earlone: Well, it's like he cares.

Nigel: Oh, he's a Care-rington.

Earlone: He's a Care-rington.

Nigel: *So, when I heard your name, I was expecting a way older gentleman with a [laughs] grayish beard and very studious. Do people expect that when they hear your name?*

Carrington: *When I was little, in elementary school, and I would introduce myself, people would say, "What a distinguished name." I had no idea what they were talking about in the third grade. Like, what does that mean about my name?*

Sadiq: *He is like the first Carrington I ever met. I never met a Carrington. And he do have an old person name to me. [laughs] I never met nobody young named Carrington.*

Nigel: *They all have to be young at some point.*

Sadiq: *At some point, yes.*

[laughter]

Sadiq: *You're right about that.*

Nigel: *Is it a family name?*

Carrington: *No. Actually, my maternal grandmother actually went to college with a guy named Carrington. He was really smart, successful, and my mom was going to make me a junior. Was going to name me after my father. But my grandmother suggested it, and she went with it. She named me Carrington and then gave me my middle name after my great grandfather, Lloyd. And then my dad's last name, Russell.*

Nigel: *So, say your whole name.*

Carrington: *Carrington Lloyd Russell.*

Sadiq: *What I really want to talk to you about is your hoarder--*

Carrington: *Here we go. [laughs]*

Sadiq: *You like to hoarder a lot of stuff. And we trying to a hoarder.*

Nigel: *And here is the heart of this gentle dispute.*

[music]

Sadiq: *I'm pretty sure you are though, because you have a lot of stuff in there that's-- kind of like the two hot pots. Like, why you have more than one hot pot?*

Carrington: *I just got a second hot pot.*

Sadiq: *But you could have just gave it to somebody. You'd rather just keep it, you know what I'm saying?*

Carrington: *No, I'm waiting to get fixed. I'm going to pass it on. I am keeping two fans.*

Sadiq: *So, you have more than one fan? You got more than one everything, really. Is it fair to say that you accumulated a lot of extra stuff?*

Carrington: *To a certain extent. See, I got hoarder tendencies. I'm not a complete hoarder. [laughs] I'm like hoarder adjacent. [laughs]*

Sadiq: *Right, right, right.*

Carrington: *But I do keep a lot of stuff. But I do. So, in all honesty, I do have hoarded tendencies. I think I get that from my grandma because we used to make fun of her. When we would try to go clean out the garage and we trying to throw stuff away, you find a newspaper from 1956. It was like, "Grandma, we could throw this." "No, I saved that because there's an article in it." "Well, then go through it, take out the article and throw away the paper." So, I think that rubbed off on me a little bit. But also starting on the higher levels where it's hard to get stuff. Like, you come up on a paperclip, you keeping that paper clip. You don't know when you're going to need it, right?*

[scintillating music]

Earlone: In the last episode, listeners may remember that we talked to Greg Eskridge about all the stuff in this cell and how overtime, it changed.

Nigel: And this got the whole team thinking, what are the things we hang onto, and what does that say about us. And not just what we hang on to, but how much stuff do we need to feel comfortable.

Earlone: So, that's what we're talking about today.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone: And I'm Earlone Woods. And this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

[Ear Hustle theme]

Carrington: *Only thing I have two of that I'm holding on to probably is the fans.*

Sadiq: *Okay. Radio?*

Carrington: *Possible. Like, I'm slowly seeing. I probably can get that wind-up radio away.*

Sadiq: *A wind-up radio.*

Carrington: *Well, I was--*

Sadiq: *That's like so-*

Carrington: *Why did I get that?*

Sadiq: *--dinosaurish*

Carrington: *Why did I get that? I don't remember.*

Sadiq: *Of course, you don't remember because you're a hoarder. [Carrington laughs] So, hoarders just get stuff just to get it. They don't really care how they got it, what they getting it for. They just want to have it and say they got it.*

Carrington: *Oh, no, that's why I got it. I got it to see if I can get the games in with better reception. Because the other little radio I had-- [laughs]*

Sadiq: *The other one. The other one. Right, right. We're getting somewhere. In my mind, a hoarder is someone who likes to keep stuff just to have it. Don't you feel like boxed in when you have all this stuff in there? Like, all these books and stuff, just boxed in?*

Carrington: No, no, I don't feel boxed in. The shoebox I showed you earlier, that's like the junk drawer everybody has in the kitchen. You open it up, you just got a whole bunch of stuff you never know if you going to need or not.

Nigel: What is the difference between being prepared and being a hoarder?

Sadiq: So, prepared is like having one extra, I believe, just in case mine is on the verge of breaking down or something.

Earlonne: Okay.

Sadiq: Not having two or three. Not having two or three headphones just to have them. Plus having one that's already broken.

Nigel: Did you have some negative hoarder experience in your life? Because you're pretty intense about this. [Carrington laughs]

Sadiq: I have. I have. I have cellies that like to keep a lot of stuff. That might have something to do with it a little bit while I'm searching out these hoarders.

Nigel: But you said it makes you feel boxed in and he suggested it makes him feel more comfortable. So, I'm just wondering, like, what about it makes you feel boxed in? And did you feel this way before prison?

Sadiq: Ooh, that was an awesome question. Before prison, no, I don't think I was ever boxed in because I can always leave. But feeling boxed in, meaning that you have all these books and shelves and storage bins and all this stuff is just around you and it's like you don't have no space to move around in the cell. The cell is already small. You can't stretch out both of your arms in the cell. So, yeah, I feel like, why would you want to box yourself in even more in a small cell?

Carrington: So, I don't feel boxed in. I like my shelves. I feel like I have creatively utilized this small space to space my stuff out and organize it how I see fit. Yeah. I don't feel boxed in. I don't feel restricted. I don't feel claustrophobic. See, I think you look at my cell and feel claustrophobic. But when I walk in, I'm fine.

Tony: So, Nigel, what do you expect to find when we get over there?

Nigel: Okay, well, I'm so curious. Siddiq, those stairs, I hate those damn stairs. Okay. The way Sadiq was-

Nigel: Okay. Clearly, we had to settle this. Was Carrington a hoarder?

Earlonne: Or was he just prepared?

Nigel: So, a few of us, this was me, Sadiq and Carrington, outside editor Amy, and inside producer, Tony de Trinidad, headed over to Donner to see for ourselves.

Nigel: I feel like Carrington- I have a feeling I'm more like Carrington and that I'm going to relate more to his space.

Tony: Do you think Carrington's up right there trying to clean up his act before we get there?

Nigel: *I think he's an honest sort. So, I'd like to say no, [laughs] that he's not, because I heard him mention that there was a dusty floor and he wasn't going to clean it up. So, we'll see.*

[background noises]

Nigel: First, we checked in at the station where the COs are, and then we made our way to the row of cells where Sadiq and Carrington live.

Earlonne: We started with Sadiq's cell.

Nigel: *Are we allowed to go over the threshold?*

Sadiq: *Of course. Of course.*

Nigel: *Do you have to invite us in?*

Male Speaker: *Yeah, sure. You're all invited. Go ahead, check it out.*

Nigel: *This is--*

Sadiq: *That's my door. It looks like I got a few things on the door.*

Nigel: *Wow, it's so dark. I'm afraid to go in there.*

Sadiq: *Finna fix some light on.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Sadiq: *Give me a second. They said it looks so dark in. It's unwelcoming.*

Nigel: *When you look into Sadiq's cell, the back wall is painted like a castle, the outside of a castle, so it's so dark.*

Tony: *Big gray bricks.*

Sadiq: *Okay. When you first walk in the cell, I have two shelves. I have a shelf with my pens. I have a shelf with my TV. I have my bunk that has my radar sign on it. I have my Oakland sign hanging up, my medallion. I have my headphones hanging. I have the lights.*

Nigel: *Sadiq's room was very tidy, dark. And he's right. He doesn't have a ton of stuff, but I don't know, it's a little cold. It doesn't say, come on in and relax.*

Earlonne: *Yeah. Sadiq got to work on that room. He's got to homey that place up a little bit.*

Nigel: *Ooh, I like that description. Definitely. So, after we saw Sadiq, it was now time to see Carrington's cell.*

Nigel: *Wow. Okay, now, and Carrington, this is yours?*

Carrington: *I don't see any dust.*

Nigel: *Okay. I'm going to say [laughs] Carrington cell sparkles. It's like, it's got nice bright color. It's white. It looks inviting. Okay. Can you give us a tour?*

Carrington: Okay, so when you first come in, obviously, I got two shelves right there at the front of the gate. Have all the books I use on the regular and then up top, just to keep them out the way and organize, commentaries and Bible that I was telling you about. I got my nice little shelf that holds my TV right here.

Nigel: Whew. Man, he had a lot of books. And I think Tony asked him to count them.

Carrington: So, 1, 2, 3. That's the empty journal. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

Nigel: So, sure, Carrington had a lot stuff, but I'd never call him a hoarder. I mean, everything was so organized.

Carrington: 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40-

Earlone: Some dudes look like hoarders, but really, they're just well prepared. Really good at being in prison, like, ready for anything.

Carrington: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51-

Nigel: I mean, to my eyes, Carrington had what he needed. Everything here was important to him. All of his stuff and the way he set it up, he really transformed that tiny space into something that seemed-- I mean, it actually seemed livable.

Sadiq: Clutter and feeling boxed in. Does it feel boxed in? Like, all my shelves are out the way? I'm not boxed in. I feel great.

Tony: No, I'm super envious of your cell. I totally want just someone to come and copy yourself on my cell.

Sadiq: I like it. I think it's good.

Nigel: I hate to do this to everybody, but okay. Where would you live? Carrington or Sadiq?

Tony: I would live at Carrington's if I had a choice, Sadiq. [Nigel laughs] Amy, if you had to pick?

Amy: I would live in Carrington's.

Tony: Nigel?

Nigel: Carrington's.

Sadiq: I'm out of here. [laughs]

Tony: Carrington's. Sadiq, if you had a choice, what would you pick?

Sadiq: I'm picking my own cell.

Tony: Okay.

Nigel: I'm sorry, Sadiq.

[upbeat music]

Mesro: *Just feeling a little anxiety now.*

Nigel: *You do? Oh, okay.*

Mesro: *I don't know what's happening right now, so I'm a little anxious.*

Nigel: *Yeah. Wait, how long have I known you?*

Amy: *Like, since 2013.*

Mesro: *Let's see. The photography class was, yeah, that was '13.*

Nigel: *So, I've known you 10 years. So, I've known you as a photography enthusiast. I've known you as an artist, and as someone we've interviewed. You've been in a few stories. You're a damn good storyteller.*

Mesro: *I try.*

Nigel: *We've been working on this story about objects, and I think you probably know I have a big affinity for objects.*

Mesro: *Objects*

Nigel: *The meaning of objects. And when you're in prison, what has meaning to you and what you can let go?*

Nigel: Earlonne, any critique on how I sound there?

Earlonne: [laughs] Well, I mean, I think you just tread lightly.

Nigel: Thank you. I was trying to tread lightly because I'm so used to Mesro being-

Earlonne: There, present.

Nigel: Present and excited and super open to talk about stuff, and he was really closed off. I'm going to say, there was a dark cloud in the room.

Nigel: *I was wondering if I [laughs] could talk to you about your space and what it's like.*

Mesro: *In what context?*

Nigel: *Just, like, are you a minimalist? Do you have a lot of things? Is it an artistic space? Is it a quiet space? Is it a chaotic space?*

Mesro: *Um, yes. Yes.*

Nigel: *Yes, to what?*

Mesro: *All of that.*

[upbeat music]

Nigel: So, the reason he came down to do the interview is that the guys inside had been playfully talking and joking around about being hoarders, and who at San Quentin might

have a reputation for being a hoarder. And the name came up. It was Mesro, and I don't think Mesro took to that very well.

Earlone: He didn't like that, huh?

Nigel: Mm-hmm. And he definitely didn't like it when I asked if we could go see his show.

Nigel: *This is what I was hoping to do. That you would describe what it looks like, and then we would go visit it with the recorder.*

Mesro: *Oh, I'm going to go ahead and say no to that.*

Nigel: *Okay. Can I ask why?*

Mesro: *Well, because the things that I keep are precious to me, and I don't want them associated with, hoarder culture and stuff like that. Because that's the way it was explained to me before and I'm pretty firm on that.*

Nigel: *Hoarder-- But yeah, hoarder.*

Mesro: *Well, because it is a known thing that I have a lot of stuff in myself. Like, it was explained to me, this was supposed to be a thing about objects and hoarders, and I don't really like that.*

Nigel: *What does hoarder mean to you?*

Mesro: *It just means someone who can't let go of things.*

Nigel: *What if it means somebody who likes to archive things and keep them because they're important?*

Mesro: *Yeah, see, that's the thing. You and I probably look at it that way, but most people don't, and I won't have my keepsakes disrespected.*

Nigel: *I totally agree.*

Mesro: *It's just what it is.*

Nigel: *It's interesting on the outside to me, people seem obsessed with streamlining their lives and only having exactly what they need. It's like this real movement, and I don't know if it makes people feel better, makes them feel like they have control, but there's a whole industry based on trying to get people to streamline what they own. And how do you react to that?*

Mesro: *I can see living a very minimalist life if you are either in an unpredictable, nomadic lifestyle. Like, if you're moving around a lot, when I was unhoused, my worldly possessions fit in a backpack. But if you're somewhere settled and maybe raising a family and stuff, I don't see the appeal there. Things are important. There's a history. Things have stories.*

Earlone: *Ol' Mesro's thawing out.*

Nigel: *Yeah. The mood had really shifted, and I think it was because Mesro and I were talking about something that we both understand, which is the inner meaning of objects. We really connect on that level. And so-*

Earlonne: So, y'all talked about what y'all both hoard.

Nigel: [laughs] If you want to hold on to that, I'm glad you were not at the interview. Yeah, hoard or see value in.

Earlonne: Okay.

Nigel: *It seems just to wrap up the things that you surround yourself with the objects that are there have more emotional and intellectual resonance for you. They're not about just having.*

Mesro: *Right.*

Nigel: *I think.*

Mesro: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *Where some people have 20 pairs of shoes because they just want to collect. They want to-*

Mesro: *I got two feet. What do I need 20 pairs of shoes for?*

Nigel: *Right. [Mesro laughs] So, for you, it's not about accumulation.*

Mesro: *See, I'm a recovering claustrophobic too. So for me, it's also a mental health thing to make sure that I have something to occupy my brain in case I have to. I've been down for a while. I remember those race-based lockdowns. I remember being locked in the cell for years at a time. So, being able to, "Oh, I can crack a book. Oh, I can sit down and write. I can do some drawing. I can--", you know what I mean? I can read letters. Like, my letters are my kintsugi. When I'm falling apart, like, I read my letters, and, I make hope lacquer with them, you know what I'm saying? To pick my pieces up. So, that stuff is important to me.*

And being able to do that is more important to me than having two five-gallon tubs full of soups.

Nigel: *So, you want to make sure your mind can always be full.*

Mesro: *Yeah.*

Nigel: He always has his stuff to keep his mind full. Clearly, his cell has all of the things that he needs. But, Earlonne, it's not just in his cell. Mesro always has these objects with him. I mean, when he's on the yard or you see him in another building, he always, always has things with him.

Earlonne: [laughs] I mean, that's what I remember, the laundry bag. He always kept a deck of cards with him.

Nigel: Exactly. And when I asked him about that for the interview, I realized there was something else he carries. This little velvet drawstring bag. It's like a magic bag full of treasures.

Nigel: *Right now, you're carrying your dice with you?*

Mesro: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *Can I see them?*

Mesro: *I carry my dice around because never know when somebody needs to feel wrath and might want a game or something. I had a couple of weird little tiles in there.*

Nigel: *Can we count them?*

Mesro: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *You know what my impulse is when I see these?*

[laughter]

I want to catalog them, like put all the like ones together.

Mesro: *[laughs] By all means.*

Nigel: *Can I touch them?*

Mesro: *Yeah, you can.*

Nigel: *So, these are more traditional ones.*

Mesro: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *You have got two, four, six-- Oh.*

Mesro: *Gray and gold.*

Nigel: *These are gold.*

Mesro: *D6.*

Nigel: *Okay. And then we have got tiles.*

Mesro: *I like to put-*

Nigel: *Earlonne, I kind of wish you had been there. We were having so much fun. It was like, all of a sudden, we were two little kids just playing with our trinkets. Little voices. I mean, it was really jolly.*

Mesro: *Marilyn Monroe. I got Bumblebee dropkick. I think scatter stars were somewhere.*

Nigel: *So, we have got 10.*

Mesro: *WALL-E.*

Earlonne: *Pulled into his fantasy world, huh?*

Nigel: *Hmm-mm.*

Mesro: *This guy I found in a Popular Science magazine, I just thought that was pretty cool. He's all colorful and screaming.*

Nigel: They are beautiful. All right, and then we've got. Okay, I'm just going to get them in order, and then we can talk about them. [Mesro laughs] And then, we've got numbers. Oh, that's a space creature.

Mesro: Yeah, that's WALL-E.

Nigel: WALL-E.

Mesro: Little robot.

Nigel: If I ever found this on the ground with all these in it, I'd be like, treasure trove.

Mesro: Yeah.

Nigel: Don't you think?

Mesro: It's a bag of assorted gems.

Nigel: Yeah, they are all like gems. And I like that they make different sounds. Who knew we were going to end up really talking about dice?

Mesro: Yeah.

Nigel: I love it. And I have to say, I want to protect this guy.

Mesro: It's a little R2D2.

Nigel: Yeah. Like, nothing should ever happen to him.

Mesro: That's my guy.

[laughter]

Nigel: Plus, you could play with him too. Like, you could build little houses and stuff.

Mesro: Yeah.

Nigel: As we were talking, what became clear to me is that these objects really make him feel safe.

Earlonne: Hmm, is it his superpower?

Nigel: I think it's more like a security blanket.

Mesro: Sometimes when I'm feeling anxious and got to feel texture stuff, I'll bust out the dice and start rolling them.

Nigel: Which one's best for that?

Mesro: Usually, the ones that have good corners. Satisfying.

Nigel: It's also so different. Like, that one you can tell is light and delicate, as opposed to just the sound when you drop it is so different.

Mesro: Yeah, it's a little bit more substantial. This guy, this is the Bronx Bomber. He's the biggest D20.

Nigel: He could totally knock all those over.

Mesro: Yeah, he's the giant Indiana Jones boulder coming through there. [hums the Indiana Jones movie theme] He's tearing up stuff. I got Stephen Hawking. I like to use him for villains. You know what I'm saying? "You'll never escape my clutches." [Nigel laughs] Yeah.

Nigel: Okay. So, this is how I'd like to think of your mind.

Mesro: Yeah. My imagination is my favorite toy.

Nigel: Yeah.

Mesro: I play with it every day.

Nigel: Okay, if you had to just take one of these to keep with you forever, what would it be?

Mesro: It would probably be this one.

Nigel: That one. Why?

Mesro: This is the Brooklyn Dodger. This is my D20.

Nigel: The D20 is a 20-sided die used by gamers.

Mesro: I totally wrote a poem about this guy. The D20. It's the Brooklyn Dodger. And if I could take one, it'd probably be this guy.

Nigel: Would you be willing to share that poem?

Mesro: Do I have it with me? Let's see if I got it. I might have it. I'm going to check my astrology logs.

I spend most of my days in the dark, parked next to numerous more, see? Some of them have gold and silver parts. Others are cobalt blue, like me.

Earlone: Listeners may remember that Mesro is a cool lyricist.

Nigel: Yeah. And he and our inside sound designer, Rhashiyd, took that poem and-

Earlone: They flipped it to some hip-hop cool shit.

[Song]

Mesro: My numbers are filled with bright paint. Gameboards are the reasons I was made. My roles make nerds cheer their complaints. 20 sides help Game Master decides who advances and who fails with checks. When I and these friends of mine collide, damage ensues until, what happens next? When the pouch opens and I tumble out, I hear jokes about cosplay and virgins. I see others bright and nice and stout, some with pips, some numbered versions. I want to bring people together, having fun roleplaying, solving problems. Unless outside is inclement weather, we'll be in the sun, rolling often. Mesro DuRafa. Brooklyn Dodger.

Mesro: *I'm Mesro Durafa, and I approve this message. Yeah, fancy stuff, right? I just grab him, just cram him in there.*

Earlone: Now, that's the Mesro I remember.

Nigel: Yep. He just needed someone to give his objects a little respect, that's all.

Mesro: *I will be back for more nefarious schemes later. Boop-boop-boop-boop.*

Earlone: With that, we're going to take a short break.

Nigel: All right, goodbye. We'll be right back.

Mesro: *A bag of assorted gems.*

[upbeat music]

[driving noises]

Earlone: They got some serious tire issues.

Nigel: Yeah. And it's raining.

Earlone: And it's raining.

Earlone: A while back, you and I took a field trip to visit a guy named Eric who lives in San Francisco.

[background noises]

Nigel: Eric is a close friend of one of our inside producers, Tony de Trinidad.

Earlone: Eric knows Tony from back before he went to prison.

Nigel: Yeah, Tony calls him his uncle, even though they're not related. He's always looked out for Tony.

Earlone: And when Tony got arrested, it was Eric who went to Tony's apartment and packed up all his stuff for him.

Nigel: Yeah, he was really lucky. Earlone, if you don't have someone to do that for you, that's looking out, what can happen to all your stuff?

Earlone: Oh, man, everything goes everywhere, because people feel that. Oh, shit. You ain't going to be using this.

Nigel: It's just like a free-for-all.

Earlone: It's a free-for-all.

Nigel: But your stuff.

Earlone: Yeah, but you've got bigger fish to fry.

Nigel: Mm-hmm. In Tony's case though, he had Eric. And Eric came over and did this very intimate work of packing up all of Tony's stuff. Not knowing what was important or what was extra, he just grabbed everything.

Earlone: But now, I think they're both feeling like it's time to let some of this stuff go.

Nigel: So, they've been doing these videocalls where Tony calls from prison, and the two of them go through the boxes together to decide what Eric can throw out and what he should hang on to.

Earlone: So, that's what we'd come to see.

Nigel: *Okay, so we're at Eric's house, and we're sitting in front of two boxes. One's pretty big, like maybe 2ft by 3ft maybe?*

Tony: *Yeah, yeah.*

Earlone: *What do one of them say?*

Nigel: *One of them says Tony's mainly shoes. [laughs] Okay. So, we're going to see if it's mainly shoes. I'm really curious what's in them. The box is- Ooh, it's taped up, so it looks like it hasn't been opened. So, we're here with Eric and we're waiting for Tony to call us on videocall.*

Tony: *So, right now we're in alpine and right at the bottom of the stairs there's these kiosks on the wall numbered one through six and I'm picking number three. And they're like these little gray shelves for your tablet.*

[scintillating music]

It stopped saying a connection error, so now it's waiting for the other side to join the call. So, it's a waiting game.

Nigel: This is prison. Always waiting. Always waiting.

Tony: *Some tablets just glitch more than others. There it goes. Hey, it worked. Hey, it's a miracle. [laughs] It kicked me off right away.*

Nigel: *He's all fuzzy. Okay, so we're waiting for him to connect on the phone. We can see Tony, but he's out of focus.*

Earlone: *Okay. But now he got-- he'll be able to come closer. Is he moving?*

Tony: *No, not yet.*

Nigel: It was a great plan.

Earlone: But technology is a motherfucker.

Nigel: It was not cooperating with us at all that day.

Earlone: Not at all.

Tony: *So, what happened is something the same thing that happened on Christmas with my family where it finally gets through the connection and it kicks me off right away as soon as*

the video pops up and my Wi Fi bars will go down to an x and I have to restart my tablet just to get it again. So, we could try it again, but it's just going to do that a few more times. This is like the worst thing that could have happened. It lets me see his face for a second just to know that it was possible, but it's choosing not to let me do it right now.

When it does that glitch, it won't work till the next day. Oh, there it goes. Here they go. And hopefully it connects. I hear them. Hey. And it did it again.

[upbeat music]

Earlonne: So, eventually we gave up on the video and switched to the phone.

Earlonne: *Hey, man, fix your headphones, man.*

]

Tony: *Eric, can you hear me?*

Eric: *Yes. Finally.*

Nigel: *Hey, Tony.*

Tony: *Hey, what's up?*

Nigel: *Tony, there's two boxes here. A big one and a little one. Which one should we open?*

Tony: *Let's do the little one.*

Nigel: *Okay. All right, let's start. Okay, Eric's opening it. It's kind of heavy. Oh, boy. Okay. Oh, wow. Okay, do you want me to describe what's in here?*

Tony: *Yeah, I'm ready.*

Nigel: *You've got some earbuds in here, but they're all sticky because they're old.*

Earlonne: *Like, it went to the old iPhones, where you can plug it in with a jack.*

Nigel: *Let's just say I'm going to have to wash my hands after touching these because they're super sticky. I'm guessing I know what pile that goes in. You've got a little change purse that's probably three by four inches with a black zipper on it. It's kind of like quilted material.*

Tony: *What's on it?*

Nigel: *It's black.*

Tony: *No symbol?*

Nigel: *There is no symbols. It's like a quilt. It's black and paisley. It's a paisley pattern.*

Tony: *Does it smell like weed?*

Nigel: *One second. Negative. It has a neutral scent.*

Tony: *Basically, three things. I'll either keep it, get rid of it or. I don't know. That's an I don't know.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Nigel: Okay, the reason we wanted to do this was because Tony had all of these boxes that represented his life 10 years ago, when he was a different Tony.

Earlonne: It's like the new Tony is deciding which parts of the old Tony he wanted to hang on to.

Nigel: Exactly. Like, what old part of Tony to pull forward with him and what part he could just say goodbye to. So, it was kind of like a time capsule in a way.

Earlonne: I got to say though, when I was looking at it all, I was just like, yeah, he can pretty much get rid of all this shit. [Nigel laughs] It's out of date. It's useless. It's just taking up space.

Nigel: I'm pretty much with you on this. But then, I also feel like, man, all of this stuff has meaning to him that there's no way we are going to see. You know what I mean? So, of course, he's got to make the decisions. But yeah, if it were up to me, I think I'd bin the whole thing.

Nigel: *A wallet.*

Earlonne: *Ooh. Any money?*

Nigel: *Whoa, whoa, whoa.*

Okay, wait a minute. I take it back. There actually were a couple of clearly important and interesting things in those boxes.

Nigel: *Oh, my goodness. Okay.*

Tony: *Wait, wait, wait. Is that my wallet that I've been looking for forever?*

Earlonne: *Does it say-- It says in the inside. It has a sticker that says "clean and sober."*

Nigel: *And sober. Tony, you've got three library cards in here. Library must have been important to you. Oh, my goodness. [Tony laughs] I'm looking at your driver's license. You look just the same. I would say this is a keeper. There is so many interesting things in here. Yeah, like memories.*

Tony: *Yeah. Keep my wallet for sure.*

Nigel: *There's a postcard that says, "Hey, baby."*

Earlonne: *Missing you so freaking much.*

Tony: *Ah, that's an old one. That's from Rachel.*

Nigel: *You probably want to keep that.*

Tony: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *There's a little envelope. It says "Tony's earring."*

Earlonne: *This is part of the property when you got arrested.*

Tony: *Earrings?*

Nigel: *Yes.*

Tony: *Wow, I haven't--*

Earlonne: *She's going in it right now.*

Tony: *Keep it.*

Nigel: *Let's see.*

Earlonne: *Let's see. She's going in it, but they all stuck at the bottom.*

Nigel: *Huh. Okay, so. Oh, I see. It's a diamond stud that's been stuck onto some black rubber.*

Tony: *Rubber.*

Nigel: *-just so it doesn't get lost. So, let's keep that, right?*

Tony: *Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.*

Nigel: *And it's interesting, the envelope has your name and your date of birth. Yeah, definitely looks like a police thing.*

Earlonne: *Oh, no. It says, yeah, arrestee's information.*

Nigel: *Arrestee's information. Wow.*

Earlonne: *So, in there, was this evidence envelope.*

Nigel: *Yeah. Okay. I'd never seen one of those before. Will you describe it? Yeah.*

Earlonne: *It's like when you go to jail and you have certain things on, rings, watches, earrings, they put it in this bag. So, in here, he had like a cubic Zirconian stud.*

Nigel: *Yes.*

Earlonne: *For his ear.*

Nigel: *And I think on that envelope, it says, evidence or something.*

Earlonne: *Yeah, it has. Right across the top. That's like everything. They put your money in there, they'll put your wallet in there, they'll put all the stuff in there. They'll put a knife in there if it was used or something that's different evidence. But-*

Nigel: *Do you think that was a real diamond?*

Earlonne: *No, I don't think it was a real diamond, because that would have been probably sold long ago for a lawyer or money on the books, not just sitting in a suitcase somewhere in the cut.*

Nigel: *There's a bag in here, but let's get to the bottom. Two bags. Okay, there are definitely a lot of shoes in here, as the box said. So, we've got a pair of-- God, his feet are really this big? Come on. This looks like size 14. He's got a pair of high-top black Nikes with red [unintelligible [00:34:47] of shoes on it. Here is another pair of sneakers. Ooh, these are nice.*

Earlonne: *Old school Adidas.*

Nigel: *Adidas. Is that a baseball bat? With black trimming on them. [unintelligible [00:34:55] Made out of this material that makes that kind of noise. The audio, the audio will explain what it's made out of. He's got like a-- and I bet it goes from this.*

Eric: *There is a slingshot.*

Nigel: *Oh, here's a slingshot.*

Nigel: *I mean, there was a lot more stuff in those boxes, but Tony couldn't stick around.*

Earlonne: *We had spent so long trying to connect on the video to where Tony strictly just ran out of time.*

Nigel: *Yes. And he told us it was okay to keep going through his stuff, which maybe some people would have thought was uncomfortable, but I thought it was actually really cool because it felt like we were getting to know him in this new, I don't know, deeper, more personal way.*

Earlonne: *Definitely.*

Nigel: *Okay. He's got *The Ships of Earth* by Orson Scott Card. Oh, he's into Orson Scott card. *The Memory of Earth, Children of the Earth, Call of the Earth and Earthfall*, all by Orson Scott Card. So, he's definitely into fantasy, outer space fiction. But-- aww. Each one has his name.*

Earlonne: *Did he write his name on library books?*

Nigel: *No, these are his books. That's so sweet. Looks like a container.*

Earlonne: *CD container and he got more CDs.*

Nigel: *More CDs. I can't really read what they all say. Automotive technology class.*

Eric: *In a class-- Yeah, he was in class at college.*

Nigel: *My ride. Slap and something. I'm going to let that one go. Something money and twerk booty poppin.*

Eric: *What's that about?*

[laughter]

Nigel: *Is that twerk booty poppin?*

Earlonne: *I just mean it's probably some type of boom, psh, boom, boom, psh, boom, boom pop that, pop that thing. [Nigel laughs]*

Eric: Socks. [laughs]

Nigel: Oh, my God. This is full of socks. Full of socks. Holy Moses. Mother load of weirdness.

Earlone: That's his sock game.

Nigel: [laughs] Earlone, that was a very exciting moment. Weren't you thrilled to see this bizarre collection of socks?

Earlone: I can't say I was as thrilled as you. No, not at all. You was thrilled as if it was like a gang of them. Remember them snakes that you open something, they just all pop out? That's how you were.

Nigel: I felt like an archaeologist finding the hidden secret, like, tomb of information. It was great.

Nigel: How many socks do-- There's like a nest of socks on my lap. [Eric laughs] You know I'm going to count them.

Eric: Of course, you would.

Nigel: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 socks inside of a bag. Oh, no, no, no. 20, 21. 21 socks, not in pairs. I love it. In like a school bag.

Amy: I think it's a laptop.

Nigel: Maybe it's a laptop case.

Nigel: What was so clear looking at that laptop bag full of socks is that Eric's mission was that when he went to his apartment, he just grabbed everything that belonged to Tony because he wasn't going to make any decisions. He was going to take everything in there.

Nigel: Think he wants all these socks?

Eric: No. [laughs].

Earlone: Socks are out of here.

Nigel: Socks, really--

Eric: They're a goner.

Nigel: All right. I got to take a picture of it though.

Earlone: We kept going through the stuff with Eric, and it was clear. Eric wasn't going to throw any of this stuff out without Tony's permission.

Nigel: Oh, definitely. I mean, he was still looking out for him.

Eric: Soon, he'll be out, let's hope. He's doing really good there. Good school. He's doing really good there.

Nigel: Yeah, he's doing well.

Eric: *Doing what he should do.*

Nigel: *Can I take a picture of you holding--?*

Eric: *Okay. Yeah, both?*

Nigel: *Yeah, whatever. Yeah, maybe one of each. All right, good. [laughs] Tony's shoes.*

Earlonne: *So, most of Tony's stuff just got packed back into the boxes where it had been before.*

Nigel: *Those boots are heavy.*

Eric: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Eric: *Good for anything.*

Nigel: *Well, thank you for letting us come over. We appreciate it. Nice to meet you, because Tony's talked about you a lot. Thank you so much, Eric. Good to meet you. Take care.*

Eric: *Bye, bye.*

[music]

Nigel: *A few days later, I met up with Tony inside San Quentin because I wanted to know what that experience had been like for him.*

Tony: *It was multilayered, multilayered. It was cool. It was fun. It was nice that a piece of my life here was connecting with my piece of my life outside and get to show a little bit of more who I was and stuff. But it was also sad to see a part of my life that is not there anymore. All these physical things just kicking up those memories.*

Nigel: *Do you know what touched me the most? What?*

Tony: *My library cards?*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Tony: *Growing up, my mom always picked me up from the library after school. I spent hours there. I lost my virginity in the library bathroom. [laughs]*

Nigel: *Which branch?*

Tony: *The Glen Park Public Library branch.*

[music]

Nigel: *So, when you were talking to us, did you feel-- was it very present to you that you were in prison, or did you feel like it transported somewhere else?*

Tony: *It was cool. I'll say it out loud. Whenever you guys come in, it feels like a little piece of homes coming in. It's weird. It connected stuff for me, so it just felt really special. I felt like I*

was lucky to be getting to be seen by people I care about. It's like, "This is cool." You know what I mean? That's how it felt.

Nigel: What did Eric say about the experience?

Tony: He was happy. He was excited about it. He was glad to meet y'all. What I could get out of him was that it was like seeing into more of what I'm doing now. He felt excited to be part of it. He's a really, really nice guy. He loves the shit out of me. He's angel. So, he's always interested in what I'm doing.

Nigel: Yeah, he's clearly thinks that you're clearly very important to him.

Tony: I wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for him. There was times when it was my feet bleeding, raining, cops after me, nowhere to go, family rejected me. Where do I go?

Nigel: And you just show up at his house.

Tony: There was one time I actually technically broke in and fell asleep in the bedroom. And I woke up to a sandwich and a blanket. So, that's when I knew I was safe.

Nigel: What about all those socks? We opened this computer bag. I think there were 21 socks in there. It was one of my favorite parts, next to the wallet. I opened up this bag, and it was just full of white, unmatched athletic socks.

Tony: Because I don't wear socks too much more than once or twice. I will buy new socks. I don't like- Prison is a different experience for me. I don't like old socks. I love new socks. They're the best thing in the world to me.

Nigel: Do you not like how the socks get stretched out?

Tony: I hate stretched-out socks. And it has to snug my ankle. It has to. It can't--

Nigel: The only reason my mouth is open is I am the exact same way. [Tony laughs] Like, if I had tons of disposable income, I would only wear a pair of socks once.

Tony: Straight up.

Nigel: Yep, mm-hmm.

Tony: Straight up.

Nigel: That's so funny. I've never met anyone else who has that same sock thing. They're a little bit baggy. It's horrible. They have to be really tight.

Tony: Yeah.

Nigel: That's so funny. So, when I saw that bag of unmatched socks, at first it made me laugh, but I was also like, I'm not really into touching socks but it was just so funny to count them all and imagine, like, "Why did he have--"

Tony: Why did he save him?

Nigel: Well, that's the other question. Why did he save them?

Tony: He saves everything.

Nigel: *I'm sure he- My guess is he doesn't want to make decisions for you. He wants you to have the ability to say yes or no to stuff.*

Tony: *That does sound like him.*

Nigel: *Let's say you get out. What do you think your relationship to objects is going to be like then?*

Tony: *I probably won't want any of my old objects. I kind of want to start fresh. I don't want any of the energy that's on that stuff, and I don't feel too much attachment to that shit. I guess I've got to give it some more thought, I guess. I don't know.*

Nigel: *Would you be sad if all of that stuff disappeared?*

Tony: *Yeah. Yeah, I would. Now that you put it very starkly for me right there, you know it, I guess I would, yeah.*

Nigel: *If you get out, do you think you're going to be somebody who wants to have a lot of things? Are you going to be a minimalist?*

Tony: *I'm going to try to be a minimalist. I just want everything to just be kind of empty.*

Nigel: *So, very organized.*

Tony: *Very organized, not cluttered.*

Nigel: *What does that represent to you to not have clutter?*

Tony: *Organization, clear mind. I've always been like that.*

Nigel: *Do you think there's some control that comes with that, having an organized minimal space?*

Tony: *Yeah. Because sometimes my life feels out of control once in a while.*

Nigel: *So, what are some of the things you'd want to acquire when you get out?*

Tony: *I would like a bookshelf with a nice collection of books on it. That'd be really cool. I want a pair of windchimes to hang out my window. I can't wait to put some Niners stuff up.*

Nigel: *Can you describe what the bookshelf would look like?*

Tony: *Yeah, it would be dark wood, black wood, smooth with a matte black finish. No frills or ornates on it. And then, the top shelf would just be like all of these books that fill my head with cool shit. The second shelf would be all the stuff that takes me away. Escape, fantasy, science fiction. Maybe some reference on the bottom. I like to have a cool-- some record collections and then I want-- So, my grandfather had-*

Nigel: *There's something cool listening to Tony design his future self through this imaginary bookshelf that he wants to have. Earlonne, I know no one's going to let me do this, but I could totally do a whole podcast about objects, people listing all the things they own, their relationships with their stuff. I cannot get enough of this.*

Earlonne: *I mean, I see the spin-off.*

Nigel: [laughs] Will you come with me on it?

Earlone: Indubitably.

Nigel: Thank you.

John Yahya Johnson: My name is John “Yahya” Johnson, former producer of the famous Ear Hustle Podcast. And right now, I'm a transformational life coach, youth mentor, and financial literacy advisor for the young men at the Juvenile Justice Center at Alameda County's juvenile hall.

Earlone: Do you think that Tony de Trinidad should hang on to the wallet from before he went to prison?

John: Absolutely. As you fair well know, my mother held onto my wallet for 25 years. And when she brought it to me in a transitional housing, it was a big inspiration to me.

Earlone: Oh, yeah? Why so?

John: Because it contained my driver's license, Social Security card, and other vital statistics that I needed to get myself further once I paroled.

Earlone: Oh, so that put you ahead of the game.

John: It put me ahead of the game. While dudes are struggling on the computer trying to make ends meet, I was already ahead of the curve in going to take my driver's license exam.

Earlone: Oh, and she brought it to you in the evidence bag, huh?

John: In the evidence bag, bro. [laughs] In the evidence bag. Crazy.

Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlone Woods, Amy Standen, Bruce Wallace and Rahsaan “New York” Thomas. Shabnam Sigman is the managing producer. The producing team inside San Quentin includes Derrell Sadiq Davis, Tony de Trinidad, and Tam Nguyen. The inside managing producer is Tony Tafoya and our inside sound designer is Rhashiyd Zinnamon. Thanks to Acting Warden Andes at San Quentin, Acting Warden Parker, Associate Warden Lewis and Lt. Newborg at the California Institution for Women, for their support of the show. Thanks also to this woman here.

Lieutenant Guim'Mara Berry: I am Lieutenant Guim'Mara Berry, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, and I approve this episode.

John: This episode was made possible by the Just Trust, working to amplify the voices, vision, and power of communities that are transforming the justice system. For more information about this episode, check out the show notes on Ear Hustle's website, earhustlesq.com. You can also find out more about the show on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube [@earhustlesq](https://www.youtube.com/@earhustlesq).

Nigel: Earlone Woods sound designs and engineers the show with help from Fernando Arruda, Harry Culhane, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, and Darrell Sadiq Davis.

Earlone: Music for this episode comes from David Jazzy, Antwan Williams, E. Phil Phillips, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Gregory Dixon, Fernando Arruda, and me, Earlone Woods.

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Earlonne: And while you at it, share some love by leaving us a review in Apple Podcast. That's a big help to the show. And plus, I love receipts.

Nigel: Receipts.

Earlonne: That's the talk nowadays, the receipts.

Nigel: What does that mean?

Earlonne: That means that something actually happened.

Nigel: Ah, you get proof that people love us?

Earlonne: Proof that people love us. Those are the receipts.

Nigel: Oh, that's excellent. And one more thing. Don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown. Every issue, we've got extra tidbits. Like, Earlonne, I don't know if you know this, but for this Lowdown, I wrote a little reflection on what it was like for us to visit Eric's house and go through Tony's things.

Earlonne: Did you talk about that yapping dog?

Nigel: [laughs] [whispers] I don't know. I did.

Earlonne: They'll hear about it. Subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

Nigel: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a network of independent, creator-owned, listener-supported podcasts.

Earlonne: Discover audio with vision at Radiotopia.fm.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

In Unison: Thanks for listening.

[outro music]

Nigel: *Oh, yeah, you did have some CDs.*

Tony: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *I can't remember. There was a very funny title of one. It was something about butts.*

Tony: *Oh, no, please. No, that was not a music CD.*

Nigel: *Oh, it wasn't?*

Tony: No.

Nigel: Oh, well, we didn't. It was there with CDs.

Tony: [laughs] Why did he-- That's the one I told him to take out.

Radiotopia from PRX.

-End of Episode-

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