

Ear Hustle
"Dream On"
March 01, 2023

Nigel: Earlonne, I can't believe it. We're back with Season 11.

Earlonne: Yes, we are. And we've been working.

Nigel: No kidding. [chuckles]

Earlonne: We've got a whole gang of stories coming up this season. I think we can give listeners a little peek into what we've got planning on.

Nigel: Let's definitely do that but can we save it for the end of the episode?

Earlonne: Of course.

Nigel: Before we dive into this one, I want to say something quick about my voice because it is definitely different than it used to be. I think there's a chance this is going to be my new voice from here on out.

Earlonne: It sounds great.

Nigel: [laughs] I'm glad you think so.

Earlonne: It hasn't changed.

Nigel: Okay, thank you for the support.

Earlonne: I'm used to it now already.

Nigel: All right. Thanks, my friend.

Earlonne: You still sound like Nigel to me, and I think our listeners ain't trippin.

Nigel: All right.

Earlonne: And now let's jump on in.

Mike: *I have a lot of dreams of me drowning. Sometimes, I feel like I can't breathe. I'm struggling [makes choking sounds] and I somehow make myself wake up. I don't like those dreams. I wonder what they mean. I think about it, like, "What the heck is this?" And I haven't found the answer to that yet.*

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor. And this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

Earlonne: On today's episode, we're talking about.

Earlonne and Nigel: Dreams.

[Ear Hustle theme playing]

New York: *Where would you say your dreams take place?*

Aaron Gilmer: *They can take place anywhere, anywhere besides behind these walls. I may rest here, I may sleep here, but this is not what I dream of.*

New York: *Okay. What's up?*

Earlonne: That is our colleague, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, doing his last yard talk as an incarcerated person at San Quentin State Prison.

Nigel: New York has since been released from prison after, what, like 20 plus years?

Earlonne: Right.

Nigel: It's great to have him on the outside here with us.

Earlonne: Indeed it is.

New York: *Can you tell me about the last dream you remember?*

James Carr: *Last night I dreamed I was eating a fat ass double cheeseburger for me In-N-Out. I'm a fat boy, yeah, I dreamed-- I smelled it double cheese. I've seen the cheese and the sauce dripping off of it. I tasted it and woke up and found out I was in my bunk. And my cellie was cooking a soup.*

[laughter]

New York: *What do your dreams mean to you?*

Aaron Gilmer: *What do my dreams mean to me? I just feel like my dreams are a reminder, you know that this ain't it.*

Nigel: Earlonne, did you have any recurring dreams when you were in prison? Something you dreamt over and over again?

Earlonne: I don't know about a reoccurring dream in prison. I had a reoccurring dream as a youngster where King Kong chased me and was trying to get at me.

[laughter]

Nigel: Did you hide under the bed or something?

Earlonne: Well, I came around the corner, he was just trying to mush me into the sand.

Nigel: Did you wake up before he got you?

Earlonne: I don't know, but I know I was trying to figure out why I keep having this dream.

Nigel: Yeah. I can't answer that one. Well, how about in prison? Do you think being in prison changed the kinds of dreams you had?

Earlonne: Uh, yeah. A lot of them, I think I was kind of powerless in a lot of the dreams, you know what I'm saying?

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: But I think the one dream that I had that probably was the deepest dream was, I was in solitary confinement serving my SHU term. One of them dreams about 3:00 in the morning was my ex-girlfriend when I was younger, was like, "Get a life."

Nigel: Damn.

Earlonne: I don't know where it came from.

Nigel: Oh, wow. Wait, was this the first time you were in prison?

Earlonne: Yes, this was when I was a kid. Yeah.

Nigel: So, if you had listened to her, you wouldn't have come back a second time.

Earlonne: Ah.

Nigel: Oh, man. She was trying to give you some really important information.

Earlonne: Nah, she could have been saying, "Get life."

Nigel: "Get a life," I think is what she was saying.

Earlonne: She should have said, "Get life," because, I got life.

[laughter]

Mike: *Unfortunately, I lived a very violent life. I was a gang member for 30 years, active. So, I was involved in a lot, a lot of violence. When I first got arrested, the dreams were me committing violence on people, hurting people. But now that I changed my life and I don't hurt people, the dreams are now me being injured. The physical violence being done to me.*

Earlonne: This is Mike. He heard we were doing an episode on dreams, and agreed to come down to the media lab to talk to us.

Mike: *I was a Southerner, Sureño, from Los Angeles County. I had like a shot-caller position, so I was kind of at the top of the food chain. When I dropped out, all the friends that I once had, now they consider me their enemy and they want to hurt me.*

March 27th, 2017, the Mexican mafia sent an order. Next thing I know, I didn't even know it was coming. 20 something Southerners attacked me from behind. And they stomped me out and stabbed me.

[ominous music]

I've had dreams where they're chasing me. I've had dreams where they caught me and they're on top of me. Beating me up, stabbing me, shooting at me. These dreams that I have, they feel so real. I wake up during the night to use the restroom a lot. I'll be in the middle of a dream and there are 30 Southerners attacking me and thank God, I wake up to go have to go to the bathroom and I get out of that dream. Sometimes, that saves the day right there, [chuckles] it really does.

But one thing I want to say is, they're not all bad dreams. When I'm having a dream, I'm out in the world, I really believe I'm free in that dream.

I lived in numerous houses, but the house that I grew up in from the ages of 5 till 14, that's the only house I dream of. That house means a lot to me. It's where I mostly grew up. For some reason, I want to say to you guys, I feel safe in that house. But actually, because so much bad stuff happened in that house, I don't know how I could say it. Maybe that's not the word. Maybe safe's not the word, but that house, it's a happy house to me.

[somber music]

I had a father, a mother, and a brother. It's four of us. That first house was where we were actually a family, the four of us. Even though fucked up shit was going on in there, we still had good times as a family, the four of us. I had good times, but a lot of bad times too. In that house is where I was physically beat by my father from ages 6 to 11. And that's where my dad started

shooting me up with heroin at 11, 12. My father was a Vietnam vet, and he brought this heroin addiction home with him from Vietnam. He OD'ed December 1st, 2007. We didn't really have a good relationship because of what he did to me.

There's dreams that I have with him where we actually are having a good time together and enjoying each other's presence. In those dreams, our relationship is definitely better. Is my father trying to come back to make things right with me? I've thought about that after some of these dreams. Obviously, I don't have the answer because I'm not psychic, but I have wondered about it. I miss him. Those dreams, we have a good time together. Too bad it couldn't have been like that in real life.

I wish I could even go back one day and buy that house, and go back and live in it. And my daughter will have a room and I'll have a room. So, I look forward to the dreams because I know they're going to come of me dreaming about that house.

[scintillating music]

Zac: *I'm Zac Morris from San Quentin.*

Nigel: *What'd you bring down here with you?*

Zac: *A book I found in the library.*

Nigel: *What kind of books do you like best?*

Zac: *Fantasy.*

Nigel: *Fantasy?*

Zac: *Science fiction, horror. I love horror.*

Nigel: *You don't get scared.*

Zac: *I do, but that's the point though, I think.*

Nigel: *What about dreams? Do you have horror dreams?*

Zac: *Yes. And that's what I kind of look forward to.*

New York: *Why?*

Zac: *I don't know, they're vivid. Sometimes, I'm terrified, but sometimes like zombies, living dead type stuff, or an alien will run through the high school. I'll wake up, I'm like, "Wow, that was really cool."*

Nigel: So, they're fun for you.

Zac: Yeah.

Nigel: Okay, Zac is kind of a nerdy, bookish dude.

Earlonne: Yeah, he definitely strikes me as one of those D&D fantasy cats.

Nigel: [chuckles] Absolutely. I think Zac maybe more than anyone else we talked to has made kind of a hobby out of dreaming.

Earlonne: Yeah. I mean a lot of his dreams are almost like videogames. Like something he does for entertainment.

Nigel: Do you see yourself in the dreams? Are you part of the terror?

Zac: There's different perspectives from mine. Sometimes it's first person, sometimes it's third person. Sometimes, I die and the dream will move on.

Nigel: I've always heard you can't die-- This is like probably a myth, like you can't die in your dream because it would be so shocking that you would actually die in real life. [chuckles]

New York: Yeah, if you die in a dream, you die in real life.

Zac: There was one when I was climbing a Ferris wheel. It was on fire. I got to the top of it. And it tilted and fell, and I died, but the perspective moved to a different person. I don't remember who it was, but they're like, "Oh, no, Zac died." It just kept going like that but I wasn't in the picture anymore.

Nigel: What were your dreams like while you were waiting to come to prison?

Zac: I think that whole period was just really numbing. I do remember the first couple weeks in reception, I found an egg, the egg hatched. It was a dragon, and it threw a fireball at the wall, and it crumbled, and we flew out. [laughs]

Nigel: Escaping for sure. Do you look forward to dreaming more that you're in prison?

Zac: Yes. For sure.

Nigel: Can you talk about that a little bit? Like, why do you look forward to dreaming now?

Zac: *I mean, I go to work, I go to school, and I come back to the cell. I watch TV, do my homework, and I read. I'll get nervous or stressed and not talk. My thoughts might not come across.*

Nigel: *But in your dreams, is that different?*

Zac: *Yeah, I'm free.*

Nigel: Earlonne, did I ever tell you about the lucid dream study I did, like 20 years ago?

Earlonne: Nigel, you know you never told me this story.

[laughter]

Nigel: Well, I'm going to lay it on you now.

Earlonne: Lay it on me.

Nigel: Okay. This was a long time ago when I was in graduate school and I used to suffer from nightmares and I felt everybody did. And so, I found out about this research thing that was being done and they were looking for people who had nightmares in order to teach them how to lucid dream. So, I used to have to sleep at this sleep lab on the top floor of this hospital.

Earlonne: Mm.

Nigel: And they put all these electrodes on me. I got hypnotized every time before I fell asleep as a way of getting trained to become a lucid dreamer. In a lucid dream, when something's happening and you become aware that you're dreaming, and you can change the outcome of your dream.

Earlonne: Mm.

Nigel: So, that's what I was trying to learn to do. And the weird thing was the lab was right above a medical facility for prison. So, at night, I'd hear all these people wailing and yelling. And you think that didn't give me nightmares on its own?

[laughter]

Earlonne: I bet it did.

Nigel: It was crazy. During that study, I did learn how to lucid dream, but it's been so long, I'm not really sure I can do it anymore.

Earlonne: Well, I think Zac is someone who's figured out how to do that. Like, get in there into the dream and take the wheel. Maybe you'll get to that point, Nyge.

Nigel: I'd like to get back to it.

Earlonne: So how do you recognize that you're in those dreams?

Zac: My hands. If I see my hands, I'm like, "Oh, this is not a dream," or I know I'm in this dream. That's how I got to control it, I guess. The next thing I'm leaping a couple feet and then the next thing I'm leaping taller than buildings and stuff. And the next thing you know, I can fly and all this stuff.

Nigel: Oh, wow.

Earlonne: So, once you see your hands, automatically, you tell yourself, "I can add some shit"?

Zac: Mm-hmm.

Nigel: So, they are the symbol of, "I've got control now"?

Zac: Yeah.

Earlonne: Have a dream ever hurt your heart?

Zac: Oh. Okay. So, [pause] maybe I'll say this, and it'll make sense. There's the scary dreams that I like that I'll wake up like, "Wow, that was scary." And then, there's the nightmares where I wake up and I'm like, "Nah." I've never met my daughter. The worst nightmare is I'm chained to the chair, and somebody's trying to steal her or hurt her, and I can't do anything. That's a scary dream because that's what I'm fearful of. I can't protect.

Earlonne: Do you dream about ex-relationships?

Zac: Yeah, for sure. Jen, the girl I was with for five years. I keep having dreams about her. We're on a mountain. I'm in a fat suit, she's in a fat suit. It's a game. She has the purple paint, I have the yellow paint. I'm going down one side and I have to paint the most. She has to do the same on the other side of the mountain. I go first. And then, we connect back up, like, "Oh, we had fun," yada, yada. And then, we meet back up again without our fat suits, but with the paint. And I say, "I miss you," blah, blah, blah.

We ended on bad terms in real life, I guess. But she's like, "Yeah, I miss you too." And then, she leaves. But there's this map that you can see the mountain where we painted. I painted the mountain yellow. Instead of her painting it pink, she painted it yellow. I like to take dreams in part when I wake up. I'm like, "Is that yellow paint her wanting--?" I don't know. "Oh, does she miss me in real life?"

New York: *Can I interrupt you guys for an interview for Ear Hustle about the holidays?*

Person: *Yeah, sure. What's up?*

Person: *All right.*

Nigel: Okay. This recording is from months ago. New York and I were in housing units at San Quentin gathering tape for an upcoming episode.

Earlone: Yeah. About the holidays, right?

Nigel: Exactly. People are going to have to wait quite a while to hear that one. But the place was pretty crowded underneath the tier. There are all these guys milling around waiting to make phone calls or play chess or iron their clothes. I walked up to this one guy I'd never met before. His name was Lee. Earlone, I don't think you know this guy.

Earlone: I don't know who I know no more.

Nigel: [chuckles] So, Lee, I feel like he has a man bun, but I know he also has part of the back of his head shaved because he has this wild MC Escher tattoo there. Do you know that artist?

Earlone: I don't.

Nigel: He does these very surreal architectural images. For example, there'll be all these stairs coming together, but they don't quite come together. So, there's something very dream like about them. Perfect tattoo for this guy.

Earlone: Got you.

New York: *How long you've been incarcerated?*

Lee: *About six and a half.*

New York: *And how do you feel when the holidays come around?*

Lee: *Well, it's almost like I'm living like a double life. I have a lot of my dreams when I'm sleeping of family and friends who are not part of my life now. It's almost like when in my dreams, I have another life with them because they're not here in my waking life. So, it's like I have a double life.*

Earlone: That's what's up.

Nigel: Yeah, we were really intrigued by this. We'd already been thinking about doing a dream episode. But when I met Lee, I was like, "Oof, we definitely have to do this episode cos there's a lot here to explore. A few weeks later, Lee came down to the media lab to sit down with me and NY so we could talk to him more about his dream life.

Earlonne: And you asked him about those dreams he mentioned that day in North Block, the ones about having visits with his family.

Nigel: Exactly.

Lee: *Well, I've had these recurring dreams since county, and the recurring dream is me saying farewell to my family. It's usually at a location that I'm familiar with. So, I'm actually on the outside, even though I'm behind walls, like a relative's home or at a restaurant. I'd be saying goodbye to them, but I'm actually just saying, "Goodbye, and I'll see you guys next weekend."*

New York: *Who do you see in these dreams?*

Lee: *Siblings, mom and dad. And my mom actually passed away, so she's there a lot. For some reason, my brain makes it think it's possible, and I enjoy that about my brain. It's almost like it's taking care of me, like, "Oh, you need to see your family, you need to see your friends," and this is one way to do it. That's what I find amazing about it, is that even though it's not very believable, but in the dream, my sense is that it is actually happening.*

New York: *How long has your mom been gone?*

Lee: *Wow. Like 17 years now.*

New York: *17 years? And she's typically in these dreams?*

Lee: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *When you get to visit with your family, you wake up, it's a good feeling that you got to spend time with them.*

Lee: *Right. Exactly. Yeah. It's almost like a visit.*

Nigel: *In the dream, can you make things happen? Can you extend the visit or do specific things with your family?*

Lee: *No, actually, I trust my subconscious at this point because, I mean, there's this thing called lucid dreaming. That's where you have a more conscious level control of content and what happens in the dream. There's a lot of practice involved. It's not like it just happens and all of a sudden, you're playing really great basketball. You have to work at it.*

Nigel: *If you had that ability, wouldn't you think it'd be perfect in prison to be able to be a lucid dreamer? When you're sleeping, you could completely control your experience.*

New York: *I think it would drive you crazy though, Nyge.*

Nigel: *Why?*

New York: *Because you'll be having these dreams that you're free and that you'd be able to do these things that you can't do in prison. Then you wake up and realize it was a dream, "I can't really do none of this stuff. I'm torturing myself." A lot of people break from the outside world in prison because it's too much to be thinking about freedom and freedom's not coming.*

Nigel: *But I could also see how it'd be a partial relief because at least half-- I mean, you spend half of your life sleeping. Well, let's ask you, if you have the ability to lucid dream, why don't you do it anymore?*

Lee: *Well, like I said, I prefer just regular dreaming at this point and letting my subconscious take me where it wants to go. I'll have dreams of having a girlfriend, and I have a job and everything, and just having a normal life. It's almost like the missing nutrients in my life. I'm actually happy to have those things for that time. I don't want to know that I'm dreaming.*

Nigel: *Well, if you could have lucid dreams, and at night have all those things be there, why not do it?*

Lee: *Because consciously, I know I don't have those things. So, I'm making it appear.*

Nigel: *When you're having your dream that's not lucid, you feel it's real.*

Lee: *Oh, yeah.*

Nigel: *And if you had a lucid dream, you'd be in my lucid dream being like, "This isn't real, I only have it--"*

Lee: *Yeah. At that point, I'm the mastermind and I don't want to be the person who is creating, as opposed to the audience enjoying the movie. I don't want to know in the back of my mind that this is all fake and actually, it's much worse than this. This is just a pill that I took. I don't want to know that it's fake at all. I just want to be able to adapt and get through this, whatever, 10 years I've left or whatever, 15, I don't know. Yeah.*

Nigel: *What's a dream you've had recently that you could recount for us?*

Lee: *Wow. Okay. So, it's almost this other side of my mind that I have to recall because it's another state. As soon as I close my eyes for five seconds, I'm sure I'll remember, but let me see.*

Nigel: Yeah, close your eyes.

Lee: Yeah.

[silence]

Lee: You can cut this part out.

Nigel: Take your time.

Lee: Okay. Yeah, easily. This is going to sound really psychic and sixth sense. The morning we had pancakes for breakfast over here in the chow hall, I had a dream of being in a Google-type company, like a large cafeteria of sorts. And they were serving food, and this is the weird thing. The guy that was serving me, he's like, "What would you like to have?" He was actually almost like a waiter, but he's at the window. He's like, "What did you want to order?" I'm like, "What do I want to order? You just give me the food, right?" Like, "Oh, I'm not in prison." So, I actually had a chance to order between four different things. I'm like, "Yeah, let me have this, the omelet," whatever. He's like, "Well, it comes with pancakes." I'm like, "Okay, good. I'll take the pancakes too." And that was just a strange experience because in prison, you don't get to order food.

I actually saw people in high school in that dream too, working in the same company and they were really proud of me. Like, "Oh, wow, you got to our company. You're an employee like us." They were impressed that they saw me there. All these things are really missing in prison. You kind of feed yourself in a way, your brain does that. Like I said, I'm happy the way my brain is now. It's taking care of me because prison's not going to do that for you.

This is a rough environment. For some reason, it's easy for me. I think this is one of the factors, is that I am able to take a step away from here, like every day when I sleep.

Nigel: So, you're saying your dreams and your sleep is what helps you do okay in prison?

Lee: Yeah.

Nigel: Wow. Can you talk about that?

Lee: There's a lot of options that you just can't take in prison. Like, "Oh, I want to finish a degree, "or something or, "I want to go outside." You just don't have these options. They're just not available to you. So, you end up getting to a state of like, "How do I fill my time?" You start to create things that are not there for you. I guess maybe that's what's happening in my dreams as well. I start to create things that are not there.

It seems people discount dreams as, "Oh, it's because it's a dream, it's worthless," or whatnot. I want to try to change that narrative and say that they are valuable. It's not something you can

control. It's just something that your brain offers to you. I wouldn't take it lightly. This is something that your brain created. You should be hold it with some reverence.

Nigel: After the break, more dreams from out on the yard at San Quentin.

Earlonne: You mean the field of dreams.

Nigel: Yes.

[serene music]

Person: *I done dreamed of people running in my cell stabbing. I done dreamed of COs beating the brakes off me. I have a dream, man, I see my mother in a coffin because I wasn't there to see my mother pass away. When the holidays come around or when her birthday come around, that's when usually that dream will pick up.*

Person: *I remember having a dream where I was afraid of spending the rest of my life in prison.*

New York: *What was the dream like? What was the imagery?*

Person: *It was being trapped. It was being trapped in prison and not being able to get out. It actually woke me up. Just that feeling of being trapped.*

Greg: *I believe my dreams are revelation from God. Sometimes it's not the revelation that I want, you know what I'm saying? But I have to deal with that as truth and I move on.*

New York: *What's your last dream? What'd you dream last night? Let's talk about it real quick. Quick.*

Person: *Last night? I can't tell you about her name.*

New York: *Ooh.*

Person: *Watch out.*

New York: *That's what's up.*

Person: *Yeah. Not being real.*

Earlonne: We right here on telegraph. It's next to this other interesting spot. Plating Works.

Nigel: You notice up there it says "crack owl"? You know I love owls. I am not sure I love a crack owl though.

Earlonne: Well, it's probably daytime, so the crack owl is gone. Probably just roaming at night.

[background chatter]

Nigel: This was the office of A.B.O. Comix.

Earlonne: These are some very cool folks in Oakland who do a bunch of stuff with people in prison, including publishing comic books by incarcerated LGBTQ artists.

Nigel: Yes. One of their recent issues was about dreams. So, the other day, we went over to their offices, where they'd arranged for a couple of those incarcerated artists to call us from prison.

Kit: *Hi, is this Arlene?*

Earlonne: *Oh, damn, Arlene. No, this is Earlonne.*

Nigel: *[laughs] And Nigel.*

Kit: *My name is Kit Brixton. I'm with A.B.O.*

Earlonne: *Your name is what?*

Kit: *Kit Brixton.*

Earlonne: *Spell it.*

Kit: *K-I-T B-R-I-X-T-O-N.*

Earlonne: *Oh, Kit. K-I-T. Oh.*

Nigel: *Like kitten. Where are you right now? Can you tell us where you are?*

Kit: *I'm in the most famous prison in the United States, the US Narcotics Farm in Lexington, Kentucky.*

Earlonne: *I would disagree. I would say the most famous prison [Kit bursts into laugh] would be San Quentin.*

Nigel: *I know. I would say San Quentin.*

Kit: *I think that's true.*

Earlonne: No, maybe Alcatraz.

Nigel: Or Alcatraz or Attica.

Kit: All kinds.

Nigel: We want to talk to you about dreams. You might know that.

Kit: Sure. Yes.

Nigel: Well, how long have you been in prison?

Kit: Almost 17 years now. So now, I kind of just--

Automated: This call is from a federal prison.

Nigel: What's a dream that stands out to you that you've had?

Kit: Oh, I have repeating dreams of walking around or exploring areas. Sometimes, I'm kayaking through the Everglades or some kind of place like that. Or I'm at the mall just shopping and trying on all kinds of different clothes. Of course, a lot of people dream about the food and all you-can-eat buffets and things like that. Dreams are just the same kind of ideas of shopping and all the choices that could be there or adventures I could be on, or surfing or being in nature, that kind of thing. Things I don't get to do on a regular basis anymore.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: You ever had a wet dream?

Kit: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Earlonne: How long were you in prison before that happened?

Kit: Oh, God. Probably about three years.

Earlonne: Because this is the dream everybody wants to just run into just-- yeah.

Kit: Yeah, and then I started taking meds and then your body does weird things with the psych meds and stuff. And it's like, "What is going on? I'm 40 years old?" [chuckles]

Earlonne: What you mean your body does weird things on psych meds?

Kit: So, I was taking one and it was like you can't have an orgasm or anything within the allotted of time in the shower or whatever to get away. You just go for a while and then your body just takes care of itself somehow. And then, you have a wet dream or whatever.

Earlonne: Damn.

Nigel: Are wet dreams really prevalent in men's prisons, do you think?

Kit: I, I would say no. Depending on what your level of privacy is, what's acceptable in your area, those sorts of things. Usually, people can find a way to take care of their own self without having to get to nocturnal emissions or something--

Nigel: I mean, I'm not a man, but you can't really control it, can you?

Kit: I know if I go two weeks or whatever, it's probably going to happen. But between then and there, if I take care of things myself, then no problem.

Earlonne: Sounds like no willpower over there, Kit.

Kit: Oh, man. I don't know. That might be true.

Earlonne: He said, "If I can make it to two weeks, I'm good."

[laughter]

Kit: I'm just saying it might be two weeks before my body decides to make choices for me.

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlonne: That was hardest thing to do, is have a wet dream in prison. That's hard. That's almost like trying to get a release date.

Kit: It's all right now because I got my own cell. It's weird when you have to share a cell with other people or whatever.

Nigel: Mm.

Earlonne: All right. I know Nigel's like, "Come on, let's go to the next subject."

Nigel: No, I'm okay with this topic. We haven't talked about this with anybody. He seems willing.

Earlonne: I wonder, do women have wet dreams too in prison? That's what I wonder.

Nigel: *[chuckles] I'm guessing they do.*

Kit: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *But it's a little easier for women, I think.*

Kit: *I'm sure it's probably just a natural part of life. Think of all the options that you don't have, and that's certainly one of them for a lot of us, you know?*

Nigel: *I'm a little bit confused because Earlonne said it's hard to have them. I would think that your subconscious would just take over and you could have them all the time.*

Kit: *I don't know about that because in the same way that you're just trying to survive sometimes, like sexuality and those sorts of things really fall to the wayside. If I'm worried about being snuck up on in the middle of the night, the last thing I'm going to be is relaxed enough for my body to do anything, you know what I mean?*

Nigel: *Right.*

Earlonne: *Are you able to control your dreams?*

Kit: *No, very rarely. I remember a while back, I had a frequent dream about going to the beach. The beach is like a spiritual place for me. It's one of those things I really miss. Surfing, those sorts of things, being around the ocean, and I remember being there.*

Automated: *This call is from a federal prison.*

Kit: *The show I watched as a kid called--*

Earlonne: *Hold on. Can you start over because that thing said, "This is a federal prison"? That you were at the beach.*

Kit: *Sure. I remember being at the beach. And these people are playing some kind of game, throwing a ping pong into a cup. I was like, "Well, this is a dream, so I can automatically win." But otherwise, I mean, it's not like a serious thing. It's just something I do. I just want to see where it's going to take me more than I want to be the active director of it.*

Nigel: *That's really interesting. A couple other people that we talked to that were incarcerated said the same thing, that they don't want to control their dreams, they want their creativity to just take over. I guess I would've assumed that you'd want to, because then you could create a life for yourself. But it's interesting that you're at least the third person to say that. Why do you think that is?*

Kit: *I think for me it's more that I have to control as much as I can around me, and there's just so much that I can't control. So, in a dream state, that's one place where I can let go and not have to try to control what's going on around me or if there's any kind of threat that may come or anything like that. When I'm dreaming, it's like I just want to trust myself to see where it's going to take me. It's like putting your music on shuffle and saying, "Well, what kind of song's going to come up next?"*

My subconscious gives me a lot of insights and personal thoughts to think about. Gives me the opportunity to explore those within myself and even a mirror to get a break.

Nigel: *Thank you so much for calling us.*

Earlonne: *And being articulate.*

Kit: *Thank you for the opportunity.*

Earlonne: *And can you introduce yourself one more time--?*

[beep]

Nigel: *Nope.*

Earlonne: *Nope. That was it. Boop-boop-boop.*

[dialing]

Automated: *Hello, this is a prepaid collect call from Taylor HERNs.*

Earlonne: *Taylor HERNs.*

Automated: *An inmate at Hughes Unit. This call is being recorded and is subject to monitoring. To accept charges, press one. To refuse charges, press two. Thank you for using Securus. You may start the conversation now.*

Nigel: *Hello.*

Taylor: *Hello.*

Nigel: *Hi, this is Nigel and Earlonne from Ear Hustle.*

Taylor: *It's nice to talk to you.*

Earlonne: *You have won a prize. Thanks for calling in.*

[chuckles]

Nigel: Taylor is another artist whose work was featured by A.B.O. Comix. She's a transwoman incarcerated at a men's prison in Texas.

Taylor: *I grew up in redneck Texas. My dad had a saying that the only thing one man should put in another is a bullet. The only person I ever saw transgender was on Jerry Springer. I came to prison for murder when I was 17. I had 80 years. I hit one of the most violent units in Texas, and the transgenders I saw were the lowest of the low. Those years were terrifying because even though I was making it, I was seeing the people who weren't. I was seeing the people who were getting raped and beaten and stabbed. They were property, they were getting pimped out, extorted. Every time in my mind I'm thinking, "That could be me. That could be me."*

I knew I was a girl. And on that unit, girls are the lowest, at the bottom. They were considered punks. They were property. They were turnouts. When I saw those girls for the first time, I knew that's what I was, and it terrified me. So, I ran so far from it.

[ominous music]

I used to hide in my dreams. When I was dreaming, I wasn't in prison and there was always a thing I told my cellies. "If I'm asleep, please don't wake me up because while I'm asleep, I'm not in here. It's my only escape from prison." I would oversleep. I would make sure to sleep in, get woke up, just so I could go back to sleep and dream, because that was my escape.

In the very early days, I was still dreaming of the world. As time passed, things became a mix. It was the world mixed with prison. Eventually it became everything is prison. Any dream I have now, the majority of them, I'm in, because this is my world.

Nigel: *You said when you had those dreams and you were outside and you would wake up and you'd be in prison, was it distressing to you?*

Taylor: *Absolutely. I don't think of the world anymore. It's almost as if like I'll see a commercial or I see a movie and it's just these fake places, that's almost what the world has become to me. It's something I can't touch. It's out the windows, but it's not a part of my life and it's not going to be a part of my life. And I've accepted that because if I don't, it hurts.*

Nigel: *But what about in your dreams when they take place outside? Is that hard because then you're not in the institution, your mind is free in some way?*

Taylor: *Dreams where I'm sleeping, I'm getting away, I've had dreams where a tornado tore down a fence and everyone runs out and I'm in the world. And I don't know what to do, but I'm free. I remember in those dreams, I have a sense of panic because I don't know what to do out there. Almost like if someone landed in a foreign country and they don't speak the language and it's an alien place, they don't know how to live. I don't know what to do.*

I let go of everything on the outside. Things work different, people act different, the rules are different. I feel that I don't need to know those things right now. If I ever had the chance to get out, I can learn them again. But I just focused on in here, that way I can do the best I can and thrive in here to the best of my ability. This is all I have, and it's up to me to make the best of it.

Nigel: So, what do you hope you dream about tonight?

Taylor: *I've been having some stressful days. I got a lot of haters in here, and I've been having a rough period. I would love to have a dream where I'm just carefree and having fun. It wouldn't matter exactly what I was doing but just in the moment, enjoying myself. That sounds awesome. I would like to have a dream where my mind is carefree, and I can smile and be happy.*

Automated: *You have one minute left.*

Nigel: *I don't want to get cut off without saying goodbye, but thank you so much for talking with us. We really appreciate it.*

Taylor: *Thank you for the opportunity.*

Earlonne: *And in the meantime, dream on.*

Taylor: *[chuckles] Thank you.*

Earlonne: *Okay. All right, take care. Thanks again for talking to us.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Taylor: *Bye.*

[beep]

Nigel: Congratulations, E. Ching, ching. Yes, we just finished our first episode of Season 11. And we said at the top we were going to give a little preview of what's ahead this season. So, let's do that now.

Earlonne: For starters, we've got a return of our Catch a Kite episode. Only this time, we're switching it up a bit.

Nigel: Yeah. We've got people at the California Institution for Women answering listener questions about life inside a women's prison. And we're also going to be talking with some transwomen who recently moved from a men's prisons to California Institution for Women.

Earlonne: Yeah, that new law is causing a lot of conversation. Back at San Quentin, we've got another episode about some old heads who are dealing with all the young cats popping up. San Quentin is changing, and that's hard for some of the old-timers.

Nigel: And speaking of old, we're also going to look at how things age with our Trash episode. You know I am very excited about this one. You're not getting out of participating.

Earlonne: Huh, hey. You're going to keep roping me into these crazy schemes of yours, Nigel. I think you're merging art with what we're doing.

Nigel: [chuckles] I've always said this is an art project. So, just hang with me, okay, partner, please? I am not going to let you get off the hook.

Earlonne: You know I'm not happy about this, Nyge.

Nigel: I know you're not. I know I'm sorry.

Earlonne: I feel like I'm going to be in a museum after this.

Nigel: [laughs]

Earlonne: All that and more, coming up in Season 11.

[upbeat music]

Nigel: Special thanks to Casper and Ollie at A.B.O. Comix. It was definitely fun to hang out with them at their space.

Earlonne: Also, James Carr, Aaron Gilmer, Greg St. Mary, Michael Williams, Vernon Evans, and Lamar C aka Shorty for talking to us out on the yard at San Quentin.

Nigel: This episode was produced by me, Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Amy Standen, and Bruce Wallace.

Earlonne: Along with Neroli Price, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, and Tony Tafoya, with help from Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Nigel: It was sound designed and engineered by Earlonne Woods.

Earlonne: It features music by Antwan Williams, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, and David Jassy.

Nigel: Amy Standen edits our show. Shabnam Sigman is our managing producer, and Bruce Wallace is our Executive Producer.

Earlone: Thanks to Acting Warden Oak Smith. And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this woman here.

Guim'Mara Berry: I am Lt. Guim'Mara Berry, the Public Information Officer here at San Quentin State Prison, and I approve this episode.

Nigel: This episode of Ear Hustle was made possible by The Just Trust, working to amplify the voices, vision, and power of communities that are transforming the justice system.

Earlone: Don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown, where you can learn more about each episode and find out what the Ear Hustle Team is up to. Subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

Nigel: That's also where you can find our merch. Mugs, sweatshirts, t-shirts and a lot more cool stuff.

Earlone: This season, our episode illustrations are coming from guys who are part of the San Quentin Arts Program. Any merch you buy on our website, 25 percent of the proceeds go to support that program.

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

Earlone: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at Radiotopia.fm.

Nigel: And when we're not in San Quentin, we record at KQED Studios in San Francisco.

Earlone: I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone and Nigel: Thanks for listening.

END

[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]