Episode 24: The Big No No
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Lecrae [00:00:00] What’s going on, y’all? This is Lecrae, and right now you are listening to Ear Hustle, one of my favorite podcasts in the world, and this episode of Ear Hustle contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[00:00:15] [Footsteps, door closing]

Allyson West: [00:00:20] If you fall down and get hurt in the prison, it’s not gonna be good, because then the staff has to do what they call a package, which means some paperwork, we’d have to stay late, I might go to the hospital, you know. It’s a lot of paperwork. And they don’t like doing packages. If you fall down and you die, that’s kind of worse because that’s a bigger package, but then again you’re not gonna be any more trouble to them after that, right? But the worst thing you can possibly do in prison is fall in love with a prisoner.

[00:00:51] [Theme music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:00:54] You are now tuned in to San Quentin’s Ear Hustle from PRX’s Radiotopia. I’m Earlonne Woods, I’ve been incarcerated for 21 years, and I’m currently housed here at San Quentin State Prison in California.
Nigel Poor: [00:01:06] I’m Nigel Poor, a visual artist, now podcaster. I’ve been working with the guys here at San Quentin for about seven years.

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:13] And together, we’re gonna take you inside. [Theme music continues] On this episode, a love story. [Theme music fades out, gives way to plunky new music]

Nigel Poor: [00:01:35] We say this a lot, but one of the things that makes San Quentin unusual, not just in California but throughout the country, is that there’s a lot of people coming in and out of the prison every day.

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:45] Visitors on tours…

Nigel Poor: [00:01:46] Oh, so many tours!

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:47] We did a lot of them.

Nigel Poor: [00:01:48] Oh my God.

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:49] We even get sports teams passing through, like the Golden State Warriors.

Nigel Poor: [00:01:51] What about those twin tennis players?

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:55] [Stammering] Yeah, the the the.. Somethin’ Brothers.

Nigel Poor: [00:01:56] The Somethin’ Brothers came in, exactly. [Both laugh]

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:59] There’s also the entertainers, like Lecrae, J. Cole, Common

Nigel Poor: [00:02:04] Yep, yep, yep!

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:05] There’s also 3,000 volunteers that come inside this prison on a regular basis.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:09] It’s amazing. I’ve heard that number many times. And you know, E? I’ve noticed that a vast majority of those volunteers are women.
Earlonne Woods: [00:02:17] ...I’ve noticed that too, and why do you suppose that Nige?

Nigel Poor: [00:02:17] [Overlapping EARLONNE, laughing] Really? Well, I wish I had an answer, and I’ve thought about it a lot. I think it’s partially because women are more sympathetic in general. But really, I don’t know.

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:30] Well, whatever the case, these volunteers are a big part of the life for the men in blue. They get great teachers…

Nigel Poor: [00:02:37] Oh yeah: counselors—

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:38] Mentors, and you know, just regular, everyday interaction with people from the outside world. In most prisons, you just don’t get that.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:46] Mhm. And it’s got to be an advantage that San Quentin is so close to the Bay Area, where really a number of the volunteers come from. But…

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:54] But?

Nigel Poor: [00:02:55] But all of those volunteers in here can make prison official...mmm…a little bit nervous?

Earlonne Woods: [00:03:01] Yes. There’s this thing called “overfamiliarity.”

Nigel Poor: [00:03:05] [Laughing] Right, that’s so hard to say. “Over… fami… iarity?”

Earlonne Woods: [00:03:11] Yes, pretty much, we’ll roll with that. That’s a word we hear a lot in San Quentin. Volunteers are not supposed to get too close to guys inside. We may be lovable, Nige, but it’s absolutely forbidden to fall in love with us.

Allyson West: [00:03:23] And by falling in love, I mean maternal love, sisterly love, romantic love, friendly love, any kind of relationship where you want to start telling that person about your personal life. Getting advice. Hearing about his personal life. That is when you cross a line into overfamiliarity.
**Earlonne Woods:** [00:03:46] Allyson West. She runs the reentry program here at San Quentin. And one of the things she does as part of that is train and supervise volunteers who help guys get ready for the outside world.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:03:57] Yes, Allyson. She’s a very important person here. And she has strong feelings about volunteers getting overfamiliar with guys in blue.

**Allyson West:** [00:04:05] That is when the institution thinks that you’re gonna start smuggling in things that you shouldn’t be bringing in such as letters, drugs, pornography, the list goes on and on.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:04:20] So: overfamiliarity. A big no no. But, E, it still happens.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:04:26] Yes it does. [Sound of a door opening slowly]

**Erin:** [00:04:33] So I was in… I was in another group. And [Laughs] I mean it was weird, so she sat next to me. You know, it was the only open chair in the room, and she sat next to me, and I turned to her and I said “Hey, my name’s Erin, it’s nice to meet you.” You know, “What are you doing here?” [Industrial music]

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:04:52] Erin’s serving 25 years to life for murder. He’d already been in prison about 15 years when he came to San Quentin.

**Erin:** [00:05:00] I mean, before I came to San Quentin, I never saw one volunteer ever. Like I didn’t even know that was such a thing, right?

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:05:07] Erin didn’t want to talk about what kind of group he was attending, but he did want to tell us about meeting Lisa.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:05:13] He sure did.

**Erin:** [00:05:15] She introduced herself, explained why she had started to volunteer here at San Quentin, and that’s how we met… [He fades underneath NIGEL]

**Nigel Poor:** [00:05:20] Lisa’s not her real name. We’re calling her that because Erin wanted to protect her identity.

**Erin:** [00:05:25] [Fading back up] …And I went back to the cell that night and I didn’t really think about it. And then I found myself a couple days later thinking, “Oh, wow, I
wonder if she’s gonna be here next week.” So I went next week and, sure enough, there she was.

**Allyson West:** [00:05:41] Even though I don’t like to generalize about any particular population, I have to generalize that the population in prison is a deprived population, and one of the things that they're deprived of, in a very long list of depravations, is female company. And so they're vulnerable, and you have to be strong for all of you. And you have to rise above it and hold them and yourself to a very high standard. That's part of my training.

**Erin:** [00:06:09] It's nice to talk to a woman, period.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:06:13] And it’s a regular volunteer situation, where she was just doing her thing?

**Erin:** [00:06:18] Yes. At first.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:06:20] [Distant] That was a long…

**Nigel Poor:** [00:06:21] [Overlapping EARLONNE] Interesting! [ERIN laughs]

**Erin:** [00:06:24] Yes, at first it was. I mean, you know, she’s a very attractive woman. One of the problems… [Fades underneath EARLONNE, ambient music starts]

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:06:31] The first blush of overfamiliarity. When we were talking, I could see it on his face.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:06:38] So this is precisely the situation that prison officials are worried about. People start chatting, they get real comfortable, and all of a sudden certain feelings start to develop. And Erin knew that could cause trouble.

**Erin:** [00:06:51] Yeah, I mean she talked to everybody there, right? And then there came a time where it was more me than it was other people. Then it was almost exclusively her and I talking during breaks and after class. And I think that was about the time I thought to myself, “What's not to like?” Right? “I'm good looking, I'm smart,” Right? “I'm outgoing. Of course, why wouldn't she like me?” Then I thought, “Oh shit, that's my ego taking over. I should really slow down and be cool.” [Low music] I've gotten into so many things in my life for the wrong reason, and I didn’t want to get into another thing for the wrong reason. And because I’d been doing so much work on
myself at that time, I realized, “Well, maybe I’m not. Maybe I’m not ready. Let’s just go ahead and slow down and step back for a minute.” And that was the time I decided to leave the group.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:08:00] Lisa noticed. A few weeks later, a guy came over to Aaron and said…

**Erin:** [00:08:05] “Hey, I have a message for you: ‘Where have you been?’” And I was like, “Okay, thanks for the message.”

**Nigel Poor:** [00:08:13] But who was the message from?

**Erin:** [00:08:14] The message was from her. In my head, I was like, “Fuck yeah.” And then at the same time I’m like, “Okay, hold on.”

**Nigel Poor:** [00:08:23] Those are all the feelings anybody has when they’re falling in love with somebody, or they’re interested, right? It’s this elation and like, “Yes,” kind of feeling.

**Erin:** [00:08:30] Right. Which I was sort of questioning, right? Because at that time I’d been in prison for a while. A decade and a half at that time. And this is my first level 2, so all the level 4s and the level 3s, I’ve done time in ad seg and SHU time, and I was really unsure if that was the proper response. [Fades underneath EARLONNE]

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:08:54] So by leaving the group, Erin basically cut off all communications with Lisa.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:08:59] So I just want to clarify: so for two or three months, you didn’t have any contact with her?

**Erin:** [00:09:03] Yes.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:04] You just were percolating, like, “What should I do?”

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:07] Playing hard to get.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:08] Yeah! Were you playing hard to get?
Erin: [0:09:10] No! No, I certainly wasn’t playing hard to get. [NIGEL laughs] Certainly that wasn’t the case. I mean, I would have loved to have just been like, “Yes, I’m never leaving this group ever again.” But, you know.


Erin: [00:09:25] And I decided to go back the following week. She was, like, talking to people over there when I came in. I was… [Laughs] I remember I was biting the inside of my lip. Not really hard, to like bleed, but just biting it enough to keep myself from smiling, right? Because I remember being so happy to see her. Like I was really looking forward to it. And I was biting my lip because I didn’t want to walk in with this really stupid, shitty smile on my face. So we started talking, you know, then the group starts, then we’re talking more on the break and it just… [Dreamy music starts] It’s so weird. I’ve never… that was the first time in my life that I had just regular, real, natural conversation with someone.

Nigel Poor: [00:10:18] Erin was back in the group, but his delight at being near Lisa again was mixed.

Erin: [00:10:26] That was the first time during my life term that I thought, “Fuck.” Like feeling really shitty about not being able to walk out the gate. Like I never wanted to be out of prison more than I did at that moment.

Earlonne Woods: [00:10:46] So it sounds like it woke up the emotional side in you.

Erin: [00:10:50] Yeah, absolutely.

Nigel Poor: [00:10:54] It also seems like maybe you felt really seen as like a human being.

Erin: [00:11:00] Absolutely. You know, I came to prison, I was so scared and I was so angry and so depressed. And I thought to myself, “Okay, a murderer? That’s what they want, that’s what they’re gonna get.” So for all of that to go away was fantastic and horrible all at the same time. [Doors closing, harsh synths]

Allyson West: [00:11:32] The other thing that you have to think about when you’re volunteering, and if somebody asks you to break a rule, “Oh, tell me about your sex life or where you work or whether you’re married,” etc., is that once you cross that line, if you’re caught, the worst thing that could happen to you would be a criminal prosecution,
which rarely happens. They’ll probably just ban you from the prison for life, and you’ll get on with your life. You can go volunteer for the SPCA or, you know, the regional parks. You can do whatever you want. Your life is not severely affected. But that person that you’ve broken those rules with will have their freedom at San Quentin taken away, they’ll be put in solitary confinement where they get no yard, few showers, no visits from family, no contact. They get their good time credit taken back, so they get out of prison later, and they could be transferred out of the institution. So you may think it’s fun or exciting to break those rules, but you’re putting that person at grave risk. [Buzzing, chatter]

Erin: [00:12:44] One of us said, like, “I can’t wait to see you next week.” And that was like the last sort of word before she had to walk out the gate and I had to walk the opposite direction. So I went back next week.

Nigel Poor: [00:13:02] But I mean that’s a dangerous thing to say to somebody in prison.

Erin: [00:13:05] Yeah.

Earlonne Woods: [00:13:06] What?

Nigel Poor: [00:13:06] “I can’t wait to see you next week.”

Erin: [00:13:07] Yeah, because I mean if someone hears it and they take it the wrong way, it’s all bad, right? But I think for her and I, it meant more. I know it did for me. And we were still going to the same group every week, and talking more, and talking more, and talking more.

Nigel Poor: [00:13:28] You couldn’t keep going on like that.

Erin: [00:13:30] No, definitely not. And I told her, I said, “Look, I’m gonna stop coming to this class.” And she did not like that at all. And I explained, I said, “Look, I mean, other people are noticing that you and I are spending much more time together. I don’t know if outside volunteers are noticing, but everybody that’s wearing blue is seeing what’s happening.” And she’s like, “Yeah, I’ve noticed it too, but so what?” And I explained to her, I said, “‘So what?’ is I get in trouble and you don’t ever come back in, and that’s not bad for you, but it’s really really bad for me.” [Music starts] So she wasn’t happy about it, I wasn’t happy about it, and she said, “Well, what else can we do?” [Music extends, sound of metal bars slamming]
Allyson West: [00:14:33] There absolutely is a right way, and this is what I tell the girls. I don’t want to say that there are not homosexual relationships or homosexual attractions, but that has actually never been a problem so far in my program, but it could happen. So I tell the men too, but I focus on the women, and I say, “If you fall in love, whatever kind of love that is—platonic, romantic, whatever, but most commonly romantic love—I said all you have to do once you realize you want to cross that line is quit the program. Take a month off, get on his visiting list, and go have a great relationship. There are so many men in this institution, probably every man, if I were to generalize, because in my 18 years here, I’ve never met one that wasn’t worthy of our love. So if you fall in love, you go fall in love, I will dance at your wedding. I will give you away if you quit the program and protect the program and protect yourself and protect him. You go live happily ever after and I will give you every blessing.” So that’s the right way. Because people are people, and you put people together, there are going to be some attractions that happen sometimes. And if you want to act on it, then you just have to do it appropriately. [Music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:16:02] Erin and Lisa decided to do it appropriately. They said their goodbyes without knowing when or how they would see each other again.

Erin: [00:16:10] I didn’t sleep that entire night. And I don’t [Laughs] I didn’t even know her last name. I mean, she knew my last name.

Nigel Poor: [00:16:23] I know it sounds weird, but volunteers and men inside aren’t allowed to exchange personal information. So it’s not surprising that he never learned her last name.

Earlonne Woods: [00:16:33] Erin went back to the group, Lisa didn’t. Getting back in contact was on her.

Nigel Poor: [00:16:38] Yep. He was just going to have to wait. [Chatter, inaudible voice comes on over loudspeaker]

Erin: [00:16:49] I was sitting in the cell and the guard comes by with some mail, and I don’t know if I was expecting mail from anybody at that point. I grabbed it not thinking anything, and I looked at the name, and I was like, “Who the fuck is this,” right? [Chuckles] And I don’t recognize even the first name. So I open it up, and there’s this really nice handwriting, and immediately I knew that it was a woman’s writing. [Guitar music]
Nigel Poor: [00:17:27] The letter was from Lisa, but for some reason she didn’t use her real name.

Erin: [00:17:33] [Laughing] She put a little heart over the “i” in her name, which is like super junior high, high school stuff that girls do. But, you know, I felt fantastic.

Earlonne Woods: [00:17:49] Erin wrote her right back and they started exchanging letters, and then, he asked her.

Erin: [00:17:57] “Hey, is it possible for me to call you?”

Nigel Poor: [00:18:00] He got a letter back with Lisa’s number. But E, it’s not just as easy as picking up a phone and calling.

Earlonne Woods: [00:18:06] No, so you have to sign up for a phone slot, and the phone slots are only like 15 minutes long. And you’ve got to figure out, like, what time of day you’re going to call.

Nigel Poor: [00:18:16] Right. So those are like the payphones that you see…

Earlonne Woods: [00:18:18] Those are the payphones, and they have a certain service you’ve got to call, and you call collect, and people got to accept it.

Nigel Poor: [00:18:25] Oh God. Right, and I thought the person on the other side has to sign up for some kind of phone service.

Earlonne Woods: [00:18:30] They have to sign up for this GTL membership. [NIGEL sighs] So it’s a trip, it’s a lot.

Nigel Poor: [00:18:33] It’s definitely complicated. But they made it work.

Erin: [00:18:36] I mean, with the exception of having to hang up every 15 minutes and call back, they were phenomenal. It was really natural. Just like before, like talking face to face, right? [Music starts] So then, after a few months, I said, “Hey, what do you think about coming to visit me? Because fuck this,” right, “No. I am not satisfied with this. I need more, I want more.” She was ready. She said, “Absolutely, how do we do this?” I sent her a form, she filled out the form, it got approved, and she started coming to visit me.
Nigel Poor: [00:19:22] So E, they did everything by the books. Lisa quit volunteering, she waited before she started to visit, but the visiting room at San Quentin is probably not the ideal place to develop a romantic relationship.

Earlonne Woods: [00:19:35] Um, I don't know. I mean, for some, maybe it is.

Nigel Poor: [00:19:39] Really? Have you developed a romantic… ?

Earlonne Woods: [00:19:41] No, I'm just saying, you get to go out there, and when you first see your visitor, you can hug her, you can put tongue down her throat, you can…

Nigel Poor: [00:19:49] [Loudly guffaws, laughs] That's so romantic!

Earlonne Woods: [00:19:51] [Laughs] You can feel her up. You can do all that!

Nigel Poor: [00:19:54] [Laughing] What are you saying? Your hands are just free roamin’?

Earlonne Woods: [00:19:56] Free roamin’ like an old-school cell phone. [Both laugh]

Nigel Poor: [00:19:58] Come on!

Earlonne Woods: [00:20:00] I mean, you can do that in the beginning of the visit. But during the visit, it’s just a conversation, and maybe that might not be ideal for people because you can’t do what you want to do.

Nigel Poor: [00:20:07] Right, I mean, there’s not much privacy.

Earlonne Woods: [00:20:10] There’s no privacy at all. I mean, everything is in the open. And then at the end of the visit, you get to hug, kiss, and say goodbye.

Nigel Poor: [00:20:17] So it sounds like what you’re saying is, under the circumstances, it’s the best place you’re going to be able… or it’s the only place you’re going to have some physical contact.

Earlonne Woods: [00:20:28] Legitimately.
Nigel Poor: [00:20:29] Legitimately. Alright. Well, in any case, for Erin, or really for both of them, it was their only option to meet in person.

Erin: [00:20:36] It felt normal and natural to be with her. But at the same time, that visiting room, I don’t give a shit what anybody says. I don’t care if people have been visiting out there for 30 fucking years, that is a completely unrealistic, false, inauthentic environment, period. I loved being with her and hated, hated that visiting room. [Soft guitar music]

Nigel Poor: [00:21:06] And then what happened? How did the relationship progress?

Erin: [00:21:09] I don’t know who said it first. One of us was like, and I can’t even remember the exact context, but, “I would love to take you to this place in the outdoors. It’s so beautiful and majestic and peaceful and I can’t wait to go camping with you. I can’t wait to take you to this restaurant.” And then that sort of inevitably just led to us thinking about a future together. And then we started talking about marriage. And I mean, I told myself a long time ago that, first of all, I would never get married, but when her and I talked about it, I thought, “I can totally do this. I want to do this.” That’s when we decided to take it to the next level. [Upbeat guitar music]

Nigel Poor: [00:22:00] A year after that first visit, Erin and Lisa got married. We asked him what the wedding was like.

Erin: [00:22:07] I mean, fuck, it was a prison wedding. She looked beautiful. She came in in the most amazing dress I’d ever seen. You know, I had visiting clothes at that time. Really the nicest pair of clown pants a man could have with “Prisoner” painted down the front. [Laughs] I didn’t doubt that that was what I wanted and what she wanted. And I never doubted at that time that that’s what we should do.

Nigel Poor: [00:22:50] We’ve talked about this before on Ear Hustle. Some guys, if they’re married, and they stay disciplinary-free, they get to have family visits, and there’s a cottage on-site where they get to be alone with their family for 48 hours.

Earlonne Woods: [00:23:04] But guys like Erin with life sentences, at this time, weren’t allowed family visits. So basically, letters, phone calls, and the visiting room was all they had.

Erin: [00:23:14] And we argued. And we made up. And things were great. And we argued and we made up. But there was still some part of me, while still loving her more
than anything, that was holding back. I kept telling myself, “There’s only so much I can give from here.” And, still understanding that, kept going. I used to tell her, “Guess what happens when you break down on the freeway? Who you don’t call? Me.” Right? “You hear a weird creaking noise downstairs in the middle of the night, guess who doesn’t get the bat to go downstairs to confront the stranger? Me.” Like, “I can’t be there for you.” If she’s feeling vulnerable emotionally, I think as human beings, it’s a natural tendency to pull somebody into your arms and embrace them. And touch them in a non-sexual way, but a way to tell them, “Things are going to be okay.” You can’t do that out there. And from either side, that was definitely the most difficult part, I think, for both of us. [Music continues] It ended slowly. I mean, on some level, I saw it coming. Even when she didn’t. I tried to stop it because I really didn’t want it to end. This is a shitty life for anybody, and this relationship has been amazing and magical and loving and compassionate and tragic and sad and disappointing and hurtful and everything else.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:19] So how did it end?

Erin: [00:25:23] Uh… [Laughs] I don’t even know. I don’t know. You know, it… [Laughs] Fuck. [Ambient music starts] I mean, I’m no longer wearing a ring. Our divorce has been final for almost two years. I go to my board of parole hearing in two months, 60 days from today. And I don’t know what the future holds for that relationship. You know, we still talk on a regular basis, and it’s amicable? [Laughs] With a question mark.

Earlonne Woods: [00:26:12] I mean I’m just shooting in the dark, [ERIN laughs] is anything on your chain?

Erin: [00:26:17] What do you mean?


Nigel Poor: [00:26:30] How did you know? Earlonne!

Earlonne Woods: [00:26:31] [Overlapping] I’m just shooting in the dark! He just hit his chest and I heard something.

Nigel Poor: [00:26:35] Shit.

Erin: [00:26:35] So yes, I have my wedding ring on a chain around my neck. [Guitar music starts]
Nigel Poor: [00:26:53] Earlonne, it takes a while for us to put a story together for the podcast.

Earlonne Woods: [00:26:57] Right.

Nigel Poor: [00:26:58] Sometimes a couple months.

Earlonne Woods: [00:26:59] And we recorded Erin about two months ago. So yeah, things have changed. Erin went to the board and was found suitable for parole, which means he’s probably gonna get out within 150 days.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:10] But there’s more to it. Just as we were finishing this story, we learned something about Erin.

Earlonne Woods: [00:27:15] And we decided we couldn’t run this story unless we talked to him again.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:19] We’ll be back with that conversation after the break. [Percussive music]

[00:27:39] [Chatter, industrial music]

Nigel Poor: [00:27:44] We really appreciate you doing this story, and you speak so beautifully. But there’s something I have to talk to you about…


Nigel Poor: [00:27:52] And it’s going to be a little bit hard.

Erin: [00:27:54] Okay.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:54] So I’m just going to be very blunt with you. Is that okay?


Nigel Poor: [00:27:56] Okay. So we do stories about life inside prison. We don’t really do stories about people’s crimes at all. And so I found out what you’re in prison for… I was hoping I could talk to you a little bit about it. [Sigh]
Erin: [00:28:12] Um. [Laughs]

Nigel Poor: [00:28:20] How do we tell stories and leave out that part?

Erin: [00:28:25] Yeah. Uh… I don’t know. I don’t know. I mean. I try to be, like, open and honest about my past and the things that I’ve done, including what I’ve done to get to prison. I don’t know, I think the scope of the number of people that could possibly listen to this…I’m just really nervous about that.

Nigel Poor: [00:28:57] Yeah.

Erin: [00:28:58] Yeah, I don’t know.

Nigel Poor: [00:29:00] While you’re thinking, can I tell you some of the things that are just going through my mind about it, and it might help you?

Erin: [00:29:03] Absolutely.

Nigel Poor: [00:29:05] So, one of the things is that I really believe that people change. Like, I take you as the man you are in front of me, and I listened very carefully to how you talked about your relationship and how much you thought about it, and how painful and joyous the whole experience was for you. And so when people listen to the story, that’s what I want them to take away. That here’s this person who’s in a difficult situation, they’ve actually met this person, they fell in love just like anyone else would, it didn’t work out unfortunately. You end thinking, like, “Here’s this guy who’s very self-actualized.” And then what worries me is like, so people will leave with this very… “I love this guy.”

Erin: [00:29:46] [Cutting in] Skewed view of things.

Nigel Poor: [00:29:48] [Overlapping] Yeah. Not skewed—not skewed. But then someone will research you and be like, “Did they just feed me a bunch of bullshit?” But if we could just talk about it and just come to some understanding about what’s our responsibility, what’s your responsibility. So, I kind of feel like I’m trying to partner with you here. How do we present this?

Erin: [00:30:10] Ah fuck. [Laughs] You guys are killing me. Here you guys are. Poking and prodding.
**Nigel Poor:** [00:30:22] Then let me ask you this: do you feel like we’re being unfair trying to make you do this?

**Erin:** [00:30:25] [Overlapping] No, I don’t feel you’re being unfair at all. And I don’t ultimately know what my hesitancy is. So, on December 7, 1994, I murdered my ex-girlfriend. The mother of my now-25-year-old daughter. [Long silence]

**Nigel Poor:** [00:30:53] So how… When I see you, and I talk to you, it’s so hard for me to imagine.

**Erin:** [00:31:02] Yeah. Um. Not for me. I’m not that same person, and it’s sort of… like I know what I did, I know what I felt back then, and I know what it’s taken to get to where I am now. Hearing you say that, right? Like, you don’t know what it’s been like, and me sitting here today is a different person, and you didn’t know that person back then. That’s one of the reasons I think why, with the exception of today for some reason, I’ve never… once I started…. once I figured out that I didn’t want to be that person anymore, that was the moment I decided to be honest with myself and other people about all the things I’ve done. Including killing my ex-girlfriend.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:32:02] So, when you met your wife. Did you have to talk with her about why you… like, how does that conversation happen?

**Erin:** [00:32:14] Yeah. So she was… yes. We did talk about it. And she knows everything. She knows all the details, and we talked about it at length, and yeah. She needed to process a lot of stuff around that, right? And she had a lot of questions. And it wasn’t a pleasant conversation. I didn’t expect it to be. So yeah.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:32:45] And do you think she was ever afraid of you?

**Erin:** [00:32:47] No. No.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:32:51] Now, you spoke about your daughter. Where are y’all at today? How is that today? Is it better, do you have a relationship at all?

**Erin:** [00:33:05] Um, yeah. We have a good relationship. She’s amazing. [Crinkling paper, Erin sniffs] Somehow she has found it in her heart to forgive me, and I don’t feel I deserve it, and I don’t feel worthy. And I’m very much looking forward to actually being a
father, if only late. And hopefully repair some of the damage that I’ve done to her life. At least some. Yeah. [Guitar music starts]

Nigel Poor: [00:33:56] This was going to be an episode on dating in prison.

Earlonne Woods: [00:33:59] We got so many stories on that.

Nigel Poor: [00:34:02] Oh, we did. But once we dug into Erin’s story, we realized we should tell it as fully as we could.

Earlonne Woods: [00:34:08] Right. So thanks, Erin, for telling us your story, and especially for coming back there a second time.

Nigel Poor: [00:34:13] Oh yeah, definitely thanks for that. And thanks to Allyson West for talking to us about how she trains volunteers to deal with that tricky issue of falling in love in prison.

Earlonne Woods: [00:34:26] Ear Hustle is produced by myself, Earlonne Woods.

Nigel Poor: [00:34:29] And me, Nigel Poor, with help from outside producer Pat Mesiti-Miller, who also comes in to work with our sound design team.

Earlonne Woods: [00:34:37] This episode includes music from Antwan Williams, David Jassy, E. Phil Phillips, Lee Jasper, and Gregg Sayers. Curtis Fox is our story editor, Erin Wade’s our digital producer, and Julie Shapiro is our executive producer for Radiotopia. We want to thank Warden Ron Davis, and as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:34:59] This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison. And man, you know, when I first heard about this episode and got a chance to listen to it, I anticipated something completely different. I didn’t realize it’d be as weighty and as heavy as it ultimately was. And so, as always team, I approve this episode. [Theme music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:35:19] Next time on Ear Hustle.

Nigel Poor: [00:35:21] Remember when we said we had a very different dating episode planned?
**Earlonne Woods:** [00:35:25] Next episode, the one we thought we were making in the first place.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:35:27] Yep, dating part two.

**Male Voice:** [00:35:30] Well, I thought I knew what romance was at one point. But I don’t know, I’m kinda confused myself. Like, is love and romance the same thing? Or is it two different things? [Theme music continues]

**Nigel Poor:** [00:35:44] *Ear Hustle* is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:35:54] This podcast was made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration. I’m Earlonne Woods.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:36:07] I’m Nigel Poor. Thanks for listening. [Music ends]

**Erin:** [00:36:15] I hate you guys. [Sniffs, crying. Laughs.]

**Nigel Poor:** [00:36:20] I hate myself right now. [ERIN laughs]

**Erin:** [00:36:24] [Sniffs] Not really. I don’t really hate you guys. It just…

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:36:26] But you hate us at the moment the moment. [ERIN laughs] It’s cool, we respect that, we expect that.

**Erin:** [00:36:32] [Sniffs] Um…

**END OF EPISODE**