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Ian:

Quick note before we start the show, today's episode does acknowledge the existence of sex, just barely, but it's there. All right, on with the show.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

It was a couple years ago and I was given to a little kid by the tooth fairy. Cute story, right, so far. So there I am, Upper West Side, kid loses a lateral incisor, he's about seven. Kid goes to sleep, wakes up in the morning and I am just waiting for this moment. This kid, I'm thinking, this is a ten, he's going to get ten for a tooth, he's going to go bananas. He opens the box, unfolds me, and he literally looks at me and says, "Is that it? Is that it?" My name's Colin, and I'm a Ten Dollar Bill.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

As much as I want to believe that I can do anything a twenty can do, or do anything a hundred could do, the truth is, could do half what a twenty can do, and a 10th of what a hundred could do.

Ian:

Exactly.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

I mean, yeah, math wise, that's what it is.

Ian:

Well, Colin, I imagine you've moved around a lot. Can you tell me about where you're spending your time these days?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

These days in a wallet.

Ian:

Okay.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

It's a lot. I mean, it's a lot of wallets, a lot of purses, pocketbooks, ATMs.

Ian:

Yeah.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

That's pretty much where I am.

Ian:

And the wallet where I guess you call home?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah.

Ian:

Are you alone in there?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

No. No, it's rare that I'm alone. There's, you know, usually other bills. There's in this wallet there's not only that, but receipts, so many receipts, which I don't love, you know? I don't know. It's like, get it together, you know, like.

Ian:

Yeah.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Imagine being sandwiched by like eight of them or 40 of them. You know what I mean?

Ian:

That really is a lot of receipts.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

It's a lot. This guy's an animal. I don't know what to say.

Ian:

So how many people have you been in possession, the right word, in possession of?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

That's a good word, possession is good. It's tough because some, I guess, how do you define it? Sometimes it's a handoff. Is that possession? I don't know. But I would say if I had to ballpark it 180, 180-ish.

Ian:

That's a lot.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Is it? Yeah. I don't know. It feels normal. It feels normal. I mean, I just, as you're saying that I'm remembering one wallet that was honestly, like, humiliating. It was a humiliating place to be because I was pressed up against a condom for, I don't know, like way too long for this, weeks, just kind of jammed up against a rubber. It's not great. It wasn't a great feeling, you know? And I'm just kind of in my head, I'm like either spend me or something needs to change in here. Because it's like, I don't know, it just felt gross.

Ian:

You said you were there for weeks.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah. I don't know what he was doing. I don't know what kind of life he was leading, because nothing seemed to be working for him.

Ian:

Who left first?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Well, ironically, I left first, which is fine. I was like, whatever. But the funny thing was I went first and he bought more condoms with me, which I was like, "What? Easy Casanova." Like, I don't know, weird.

Ian:

I want to talk a little bit about the way you look, if that's okay.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah, that's okay.

Ian:

You have so many images on you. There's Hamilton, the number 10, the torch. This might be a weird question, but what is your favorite part of you?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

I would have to say the favorite part of me and the least favorite part of me are all words. Because words, you know, it's tricky. It's like getting a tattoo and then you have to live with it.

Ian:

Yeah.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

We the People, I love. In God We Trust, there was a time when I was like fairly religious. Like I would feel, you know, like I would, there were things I believed in. You know, as time passes I would honestly say I'm more of an atheist now. So an atheist with an In God We Trust tattooed on you, it's not a great, it's confusing.

Ian:

Yeah.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

I mean, I don't really go in ... all this patriotic stuff. I don't really ... I love the country, but it's a little much, it's a little overdone. I feel like flags, seals, Peter, you know, all that stuff, it's just not my favorite.

Ian:

Peter?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Peter the Eagle, you know, Peter the Eagle? If you've ever seen currency with an eagle on it, that's Peter, that's Peter the Eagle.

Ian:

You're saying that the Eagle that I see on currency, that's a specific eagle?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Peter.

Ian:

The eagle's named Peter?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

His name's Peter, yeah. He lived at the mint in Philadelphia and he would perch on the coin presses. He would just kind of sit up there and watch over things. And then sadly one day one of the presses went on, Peter had his wing in the wrong place, and that was the end of Peter.

Ian:

It just seems like a strange name for an eagle.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

What do you mean? What would be better?

Ian:

I don't know. I just imagined something like more majestic.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Bruce?

Ian:

Bruce doesn't seem right either.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Sandy?

Ian:

No.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Sir John Eaglebud? Eagle Bird Humperdink? Flapped in America?

Ian:

Maybe.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Don Henley, from the Eagles?

Ian:

Makes sense.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Beako Suave? Egg Louganis? Whoopie Goldbird? Talon Iverson? Pete Buttigegg? Feather John Misty? Mitch McCawnell?

Ian:

I guess that's probably one for a crow.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Chris? Judy Plume? Chandler Wing?

Ian:

I guess Peter is okay.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Okay. Yeah. Fine.

Ian:

Colin, can I ask you about your first memory?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Sure. I mean, there's not much to it. I mean, I just remember it was a lot of, it was just loud, super loud, and just a lot of old white guys, just flashes of old white men.

Ian:

Right.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

And it's not a great feeling. You know, am I in an old age home? Where am I? You know, I just didn't know. I didn't know what it was.

Ian:

How much do you know about the man emblazoned on you?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
Alexander Hamilton.

Ian:
Yeah.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
Yeah. Oh, I know. Yeah. I've seen the show. I've been to it. I mean, I shouldn't say I've seen, I've been to it.

Ian:
The musical.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
Yeah. The original cast.

Ian:
How did that happen?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
Well, I mean, the person who was in possession of me got tickets and we were there, you know, we were there, I was there for that. I was there for Lin-Manuel, the whole thing.

Ian:
How was it?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
You know, I don't know. It's one of those things where maybe it's my seats. Maybe it's, you know, obviously wherever I am, it's obstructed, I'm in his wallet. So I wish I could jump on the bandwagon and be like, "Oh", you know, but for me, when as soon as they start singing, I just tune out. I'm like, "Oh, they're singing." It's just like, all I can think about is they're singing it, they're singing it, they're still singing. I don't know. I'm just not a musical bill, I guess.

Ian:
Is there a musical you do like?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:
I did actually, I did go to Avenue Q, and that was just a hoot.

Ian:
Well, Colin, you are, of course U.S. currency. Have you ever met bills from other parts of the world?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

I did, actually, meet a Canadian dollar once. Yeah, he was in the wallet for a little while.

Ian:

Okay.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

It was really awkward. I thought it was, I was excited because I was like, I've been always just around American currency and I was like, "Oh my gosh", it just felt so exotic to have a Canadian in there. But it was not a great thing and I do have to say, I do kind of blame myself, but I wasn't trying to ... We're both ten dollars, but I was just trying to, I think I got a little too deep into like global economics with him, and I was trying to explain that even though he's ten dollars, he's not worth as much as me. But even saying that out loud, that's just jerky.

Ian:

I think it would be hard to hear.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah, it's not nice. And I tried to buy it back by saying, "You know, but things could change, you know, imports, exports, you know, and maybe one day you'll be worth more than me." But at that point he was totally shut down.

Ian:

Can I ask, did he have the smell?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

I don't really want to talk about that.

Speaker 3:

The Beeby residence, [inaudible 00:10:56] speaking.

Ian:

Hi, is Dean in?

Dean:

Yeah, Dean's talking right now.

Speaker 3:

Okay, cool. Bye.

Ian:

Hi Dean.

Dean:

Hi there.

Ian:

Do you have a few minutes right now?

Dean:

I sure do.

Ian:

So I see you wrote an article for the Canadian Press in 2013. The headline is Do Canada's New Plastic Bills Smell Like Maple Syrup?

Dean:

Right.

Ian:

Can you just tell me basically what was going on there?

Dean:

Well, Canada introduced a new series of plastic bills in 2011, and the first bill to come on the scene was the hundred dollar bill, which was released in 2011. And I noticed as a reporter, I noticed on social media, a lot of chatter about these bills had a peculiar smell. Some people had this idea that they had somehow been impregnated with the smell of maple syrup. So I just found that kind of odd. I did get a hold of one and I, for everything I did, I could not get it to smell like maple syrup or anything else for that matter.

Dean:

But this belief was so strong on social media that I wondered whether the issuer of the currency, which is in Canada, is the Bank of Canada, that's responsible, whether they had gotten any kind of correspondence from ordinary Canadians about it. And it turned out I use our Access to Information Act to get that correspondence. It turns out there was a lot, a lot of correspondence saying, "You know, I'm having a dispute with my wife, she doesn't think they smell like maple syrup and I do. Can you resolve it for us?" Or, "Where do I scratch it to get the smell?" But I should say the Bank of Canada absolutely denies that there was anything put in that bill, no impregnation of any smell of any kind.

Ian:

So you filed an Access to Information request. We, in the United States, we have the Freedom of Information Act, I guess it's the same thing.

Dean:

Yeah.

Ian:

In the process of doing that, are you like writing a letter that says, "I want to know everything, all correspondence relating to the possible smell of maple syrup on our currency?"

Dean:

Yeah. It's pretty much exactly that. It was a guess on my part, but sure enough, that bank had tons of correspondence that they refused to release to me initially, by the way, I had to fight to get them to do it.

Ian:

Wow. They're trying to keep the lid on this maple syrup conspiracy.

Dean:

Yeah.

Ian:

So, okay. So the Bank of Canada firmly denies it. You've never experienced it yourself, but you've read correspondence from hundreds of people who insist was the case. Your best guess of an explanation for what's happening.

Dean:

Power of suggestion. You know, somebody posts something on social media and you know, these things just move at the speed of light and it just catches on, you know, it's a kind of a strange phenomenon.

Ian:

Yeah. I mean, we read so much about conspiracy theories that the idea that the Canadian currency is scented like maple syrup is I think the most harmless kind of kindest conspiracy theory I've ever heard.

Dean:

I think you're right. It's a benign conspiracy theory that's not hurting anybody, right? It's not disparaging anybody. It's just kind of fun, that's it, you know, just kind of fun.

Ian:

Colin, I'm thinking about how your exchange for things, and I was looking around to see some various things a person could get for ten dollars. I just want to get your reaction to them. Can I just fly through a few?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah, sure.

Ian:

There's a place that offers 12 tacos for ten dollars.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

E. coli.

Ian:

You can get a poster of Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh painting.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Framed?

Ian:

No.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Not great.

Ian:

For ten dollars you can get a gerbil from PetSmart, size, gender and color vary by store, cage not included.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

That's nice. That sounds like a nice ... I like gerbils.

Ian:

I think there's just something so weird about money, that you know, you are exchanged for that. But how strange it would be if you and the gerbil then traded lives for the day. If the gerbil came to live in the wallet and you went to live, I guess, in a gerbil habitat among gerbils.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Whoa. That's a mind blower. I don't think he would do so well on the wallet.

Ian:

No?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

No, I don't think so. You need a certain kind of mental toughness, you know. Also, I mean, have you ever tried to fold a gerbil?

Ian:

No, no.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

No. Because they would die from that.

Ian:

It's also weird because I think as a human, I can credibly walk around other humans and believe that we all have the same worth. Like, no matter where we're from or what we've become, we're all in some way worth the same. With bills, by definition, you don't have that.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

No, you're right. No, it says it right there. We're branded with our worth.

Ian:

I was curious how much I was worth, just like if you were to sell me for parts? And it turns out the human body, all human bodies pretty much, are worth about \$160.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Oh, that's pretty good. How'd you feel about that?

Ian:

You know, I'd like to be more.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Did you have a guess what you might have been worth?

Ian:

I think I would have thought it was like a thousand dollars.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Wow, that's a lot. Maybe if you're like a celebrity.

Ian:

Well, that's the thing is, yeah, all humans from, you know, celebrities to me. I guess babies are worth less because you're really about the elements that you're selling, so there's just less of them to sell.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

What about Pharrell Williams?

Ian:

Also probably \$160.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Oh.

Ian:

Colin, the kid you mentioned at the beginning, that tooth fairy kid?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah.

Ian:

What did he end up spending you on?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Oh, he didn't spend me on anything.

Ian:

What happened?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

What happened? He walked over to his window in his giant, giant room, and tossed me out of the window onto the street. Like, he would have rather tossed me out of the window than spend me, because I was so disappointing.

Ian:

So you were just out there on the street?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah, I was lying there. It was an awful, awful, like, I would say five to six minutes, just lying there. There's a lot of transitions, obviously for me, you know, like register at ATM to wallet, to purse, to pocket, you know? But this was, usually that's the transition is fast. This was, I was cast away, thrown outside, and I'm like, wow, I don't even know what's next, is anything next?

Ian:

So what was next?

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Somebody picked me up and I immediately felt better. They picked me up, they un-balled me, which took a while, because he really did a number on me. And yeah, they went and they bought some chips and a turkey sandwich, which is great to go from that to a turkey sandwich and chips, that's good. That's a good outcome.

Ian:

If you were more, if you were a bigger bill-

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah.

Ian:

... You would have been stuck with that kid for maybe a lot longer.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah. Maybe that's my leg up on hundred dollar bills, you know, or even twenties. People don't necessarily want to hold onto me.

Ian:

Yeah, you got nothing to lose.

Colin, Ten Dollar Bill:

Yeah. I am nothing to lose.

Ian:

This is, Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag, with Eva Wolchover. Special thanks to Emily Spivak. Our editor is Hillary Frank.

Ian:

Colin, The Ten Dollar Bill, was played by Colin Nissan. Colin is a frequent New Yorker and McSweeney's contributor. His stuff is hilarious. You should track it down right now.

Ian:

Thanks to Dean Beeby for talking to us about the mysterious, delicious smell of Canadian money. Dean is an independent journalist based in Ottawa.

Ian:

Thanks also to [inaudible 00:21:10] Manuck Shareet for her help.

Ian:

Everything is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Without Julie Shapiro, executive producer, we would be but a gerbil in a wallet. You can get in touch with us any number of ways via EverythingisAlive.com.

Ian:

We'll see you soon.

Voiceover:

Radiotopia.