

Sawbones 38: Medical Cannibalism

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Clint:

Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

Justin:

Hello, everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I am your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Uh, Sydnee, I have been watching a great new show, uh, that I have been wanting to turn you on to.

Sydnee:

Oh no.

Justin:

No, no, no. You'll like this one. It's—

Sydnee:

No. You're always wanting me to watch TV, and it's almost always depressing.

Justin:

No, no, this isn't depressing. This is a show called Hannibal, and it is about a, uh, FBI scientist specialist, smart fella, who solves serial killings with the help of his trusty psychologist, uh, Hannibal Lecter. Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

Sydnee:

Right. That— I'm sure that's very uplifting.

Justin:

I—

Sydnee:

I'm sure that's not depressing—

Justin:

It's rea—

Sydnee:

... or dark at all.

Justin:

It's not. Okay, it's a little. Uh, I tell you, it's really good. The only thing about it though, the more I watch it, I've watched about a season and a half, I'm starting to get a little suspicious of this Dr. Lecter.

Sydnee:

You— you mean—

Justin:

I think there's something else going on here.

Sydnee:

Well, yeah, I mean, you mean Hannibal Lecter, right?

Justin:

Yeah. That's the character's name. Hannibal— Hannibal Lecter.

Sydnee:

Like, like, I mean, from the movies, right?

Justin:

Oh. There are movies?

Sydnee:

You don't— you don't know about— I mean, you don't know about the movies? Or the—

Justin:

Well, it's a story about— it's about an FBI guy, named Will Graham, and his, like, buddy, who's a psychiatrist, and they just solve crime together.

Sydnee:

Right. His buddy, Hannibal Lecter? Who, like—

Justin:

His buddy Hannibal Lecter. But I'm starting to suspect there's something a little off about him.

Sydnee:

Right. Like, maybe—

Justin:

A little—

Sydnee:

... maybe—

Justin:

Maybe he's, uh, I don't know, like, maybe he's got, like, a secret— a secret past. Maybe he's, like, not as nice of a guy.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Or maybe he has, like, an alcohol problem.

Sydnee:

What? No— no. I mean, it's not that. He doesn't— he doesn't—

Justin:

Shopaholic.

Sydnee:

No. I mean... [laughs]

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

I— I mean, he eats people.

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

Yeah. That's the whole thing. That's— I mean, that's Silence of the Lambs.

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

It's the— Hannibal, the movie.

Justin:

Have you been watching ahead?

Sydnee:

No. Like, the— the movies came first. Like, there were books, and movies, and, I mean, it's about Hannibal the Cannibal.

Justin:

What is... Okay. What is being a doctor have to do with being a cannibal?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, in his case, nothing. He just likes to eat people. [laughs]

Justin:

I don't... This is crazy. Like, is this like one of your crazy spoiler theories?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Is this like your— like your theory about how, uh... I— well, I can't come up with anything right now.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Oh. Your— your theory about Full House, that it was— they were, uh, uh, being forced into stagnation, and any, uh, deviation from that stagnation would result in their deaths.

Sydnee:

All I'm saying is that, in real life, Becky would never agree to have twins and move into the attic and live there with Jesse indefinitely. All— that's all I'm saying. That's ridiculous.

Justin:

You... I wanna back up for a second. You said that it doesn't have anything to do with him, but, uh, has cannibalism had anything to do with medicine over— over the years?

Sydnee:

Well, now that you mention it, yeah. The two actually have— have— unfortunately, I should say, have had a lot to do with each other.

Justin:

Tell me about it.

Sydnee:

Um, so, before I tell you about the history of medical cannibalism. Also, the si— the fairly similar, uh, topic of corpse medicine. Uh, I wanna thank, uh, both Jill and Jenna Marie, who recommended this topic.

Justin:

Thanks, YouTube.

Sydnee:

Independently of each other. So I figured I'd better jump on it. So, we're kinda familiar, I think, with the idea of cannibalism. It's eating people, right?

Justin:

Mm hmm.

Sydnee:

You know— you know what that is?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

And, uh, I'm gonna talk about when it was used in the medical context, but to give you a little bit of history, um, you know, cannibalism has been around for nonmedical purposes for, unfortunately, a very long time. Uh, there were early tribes in, uh, Brazil and Canada that would eat the bodies of warriors that they defeated in order to obtain their courage. Um, the Aztecs were famous for... I think a lot of people remember those, like, pictures from history books, when they were younger, of, like, all the steps. And then, at the top, there was, like, the sacrificial, you know, table.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And the Aztecs would kill somebody and throw the body down the stairs. Don't you— don't you remember that?

Justin:

I— you have a... I think you went to some darker classes than I did in high school.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

But, sure, I'll grant it to you.

Sydnee:

No. That's— that's— I mean, then they would rip their still-beating heart out of their chest, and—

Justin:

Oh. You're talking about Temple of Doom? Okay. [chants]

Sydnee:

[laughs] Sure. Was that your history class?

Justin:

[laughs] Yeah. I did not have good teachers.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, and then there would be people who would eat parts of the—the body, as well. That was all a sacrifice to the Gods.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So it was very much a religious ceremony. Um, the Romans actually practiced a little bit of medical cannibalism. Uh, Gladiators, who were defeated, used to be, um, eaten in some cases.

Justin:

Ew.

Sydnee:

Um, epileptics would eat little bits of their liver, or drink some of their blood because they— they thought it was a cure for epilepsy.

Justin:

How were they getting to their liver?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, they cut them open and took it out.

Justin:

Not their own liver?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Okay. I was confused.

Sydnee:

No. The Gladiators who would get killed while, you know, Gladiating.
[laughs]

Justin:

So Gladiators would... [laughs] Okay. So Gladiators would get killed, and the field would be swarmed by epileptics—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... looking for livers to eat?

Sydnee:

Yep. Yep. The epileptics would run down on the field, much like at the end—

Justin:

"Ah. Get it."

Sydnee:

... of a football game when you wanna tear down the goal posts.

Justin:

No. They—

Sydnee:

Although, instead, they wanted to carry off the dead Gladiators.

Justin:

And eat their livers.

Sydnee:

And eat their liver—

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

... and drink their blood.

Justin:

[laughs] That's totally plausible.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, there— there was also a belief. Uh, I think this is kinda interesting, as we're kinda going through, you know, some of the tribal populations that practiced cannibalism, that, uh... I think this is pretty gory. So they thought that after somebody died, that their soul, like, kinda hung

out with their body on earth, for about four days. And then it could ascend to heaven, or the afterlife or whatever. So, if you ate the body before those four days were up, you would trap the soul forever on earth.

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

So it was, like, the worst thing you could do to somebody. Like—

Justin:

Like, the added insult to injury?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Like, t-bagging them in Halo.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That— that kinda idea. Just the worst— just the worst possible—

Sydnee:

Maybe worse. Maybe worse.

Justin:

Maybe even worse than that.

Sydnee:

I'd say. [laughs]

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

Um, there were also... On the flip side of that, I should mention. Cannibalism was not always a— a bad thing, as crazy as that may sound.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, there was the Brazilian Wari Tribe, and there's also the Fore people of Papua New Guinea. Uh, both of those, uh, tribespeople would eat the bodies of their own, you know, members after they would just die naturally, or— or however they would die. Um, and it was a sign of respect and honor to their spirit. Kind of like soul recycling. Like, keeping them as part of the tribe.

Justin:

That's kinda nice, actually.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So... Well, not really, because, um, in Papua New Guinea, this actually led to, uh, Kuru, which is a disease similar to, like, mad cow disease.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

So, not great.

Justin:

Not a great idea.

Sydnee:

Not great.

Justin:

They should coo— you gotta cook it first. That's the thing.

Sydnee:

No, I—

Justin:

I don't care how good a friend Davey was—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... you gotta cook Davey.

Sydnee:

Yeah. No, 'cause if you just eat Davey, and Davey's got a brain disease, you're gonna get a brain disease. They actually— when I—

Justin:

That's not what Davey—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... Davey would want.

Sydnee:

When I read about this, they said there's some video games, post-apocalyptic video games, where people are all shaky 'cause they ate people.

Justin:

Really?

Sydnee:

I thought you would know about that.

Justin:

Not at all. Um—

Sydnee:

And it's supposed to be sym— symptoms of Kuru.

Justin:

I don't pay that close attention to the stories.

Sydnee:

Oh.

Justin:

I just like the shooting.

Sydnee:

So, uh, some of these practices in Brazil continued until, like, the 1960s. And maybe Papua New Guinea, too which is kinda crazy. But, anyway.

Justin:

Oh. Uh, I bet they're talking about Resident Evil.

Sydnee:

Maybe so.

Justin:

Maybe. Okay.

Sydnee:

I don't know. Something about video games. Not my area. Um, but, uh, you know, a lot of people are probably familiar with some of these ideas, that some of the stuff kinda happened. It doesn't really have a lot of medical connection. Until we get to European history.

Justin:

Uh-oh.

Sydnee:

Now, this is a part of European history that is largely not talked about, probably because it's kind of embarrassing.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, and I— I will say, it makes hypocrites out a lot of, uh... And not just— I don't wanna pick on the Europeans 'cause I'm sure that in— you know, that in the new world, and America, we said the same thing... Who picked on tribal populations for cannibalism. Well, uh, in the 16th and 17th century, it was pretty darn popular everywhere.

Justin:

Wow. Really?

Sydnee:

Um, so the idea was that there were— that human corpses, body parts, bones, blood, whatever, could be used as medicine. This idea became very popular for a while. Why? Why did this take hold? Well, there were several different reasons. Um, some— you know, at the time, we were still dealing with some of the humor theory, you know, that were humors in the body that you have to balance. And part of that was, like, that there was a spirit to help keep all of this in balance. And so, if the spirit exists somewhere in the human body, a lot of people felt like you needed more of it— [laughs] whatever the spirit was. Uh, and you could get it from another human body. So, it was— you know, that was a pretty basic idea, was, well, you know, "I'm sick. That person was healthy when they died. They probably still have a lot of that health spirit left in their body."

Justin:

Hmm. Okay.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Kind of a stretch, but I'll allow it.

Sydnee:

Uh, there was also some influences from homeopathic ideas were popular at their time. Kind of the... We talked about "like cures like".

Justin:

Mm hmm.

Sydnee:

So bits of skull might be helpful for a headache.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

So, that was popular at the time. There was also this, uh, kind of suspicion that every creature had some sort of predetermined life span. Um, like, based on illness, and they're— you know, that, at some point, everything just kinda goes kaput and you die. So, if you were killed, in an accidental way, by some sort of, you know, violence or, you know—

Justin:

You might get— might still be some... Well—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... if you'll pardon the expression, meat on them bones.

Sydnee:

Exactly. You still got some life in you that they could harvest, you know, by eating you.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Um, so how did they... So they had this idea, uh, where did they get the bodies from initially?

Justin:

Uh, graveyards?

Sydnee:

Not yet. First, the Egyptian mummies.

Justin:

Oh, man.

Sydnee:

I know. Uh, and—

Justin:

That's why I've never found a mummy.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's because they were all eaten—

Justin:

Because they ate them all.

Sydnee:

... by the Europeans.

Justin:

All I ever wanna do is find one mummy. Never.

Sydnee:

So— so they were— they started, you know, uncovering these mummies. There were a lot of archeological digs that were finding these mummies and, you know... Um, I guess maybe it was because the flesh was so far removed from human flesh at that point.

Justin:

And aged to perfection.

Sydnee:

[laughs] It was dry aged.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Like a fine steak.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um—

Justin:

Like Prosciutto.

Sydnee:

[laughs] It was— it was prized because it was— they knew that there was a way that the Egyptians used to preserve human flesh, that they didn't really understand. And so they thought that there was some sort of magic or science, or something special about that. And then the... Like I said, I think part of it was just the aesthetic. The flesh no longer looked like flesh. It was dry, and dark, and crumbly. And it was something that you could easily, like, crush up and make a powder out of and sprinkle on something, and it would

have very little, you know, in your mind, contextually to do with, like, a human.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So that's where people started. "We've got these mummies, [laughs] let's— let's grind them up and eat them."

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's certainly what you were hoping for when you paid for mummification.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Can I get a guarantee... This— I— I gotta tell you, Dale, this is a little steep for my taste. Can I get a guarantee from you, that opportunistic future people won't eat me?"

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, it's kind of a shame, because, really, I guess people who couldn't afford to be mummified were probably better off.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

They couldn't be eaten by Europeans...

Justin:

Yeah. Take that. Or people who—

Sydnee:

... 100 years later.

Justin:

Or people who did pay to be mummified, but didn't, uh, spring for the sealant.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Because that's the only thing that's gonna keep those— yeah, the people who will attempt to eat you out.

Sydnee:

You gotta get the sealant.

Justin:

Yep.

Sydnee:

Uh, so let's talk about how— what parts of the human [laughs] you can use for medicine. Or, well, I should say this: You can't use it for medicine, but they thought you could.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, and what they used it for. So, first of all, the flesh of a human.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So, you can crumble it up. And this is how they originally used a lot of— of mummy, you know, because, like I said, it was all dry anyway, so you can make it powdery really easily. So you can crumble it up into, like, a powder and use it in a tincture to stop— they thought you could use it to stop internal bleeding.

Justin:

Oh. Okay. Like... Okay. So, that doesn't... There's a certain logic to that, right? So it's like a powdery blood? So, like, help coagulate, like, a thickener?

Sydnee:

I mean, it wouldn't work, but I can see where they're coming from.

Justin:

Sure. Right. Of course it wouldn't work. It makes sense to me. Of course it wouldn't work.

Sydnee:

[laughs] The— uh, it was used for blood clots. It was used for coughs. It was used for menstrual problems. So, a wide array of uses for human flesh. Um, you— you could, uh, take the whole— a whole big piece of the corpse and make a paste out of it and put on any bruises you have, which seems a little extreme for a bruise. I mean, it's just gonna go away. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I mean, just, you know, don't grind up a human and put it on there. Um, I— there was one particular recipe that I liked, which was, if you could find the— the flesh of a cadaver of, like, a man who was reddish, or had reddish hair, something red [laughs] and if he was around 24—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... and dead from violence, not an illness. And then you cut it into chunks, and then you added some myrrh, and a little bit of aloe, and then soaked it in wine for several days, that that would be really good for just about anything you could come up with.

Justin:

Or nothing.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

Or getting you arrested.

Justin:

Yeah. Nauseating you.

Sydnee:

Or psychiatric evaluation.

Justin:

Right?

Sydnee:

Um, or if you don't like that—

Justin:

Alienating your parents.

Sydnee:

[laughs]... you could just take his— his heart and pulverize it. And then take one dram on an empty stomach if you get dizzy.

Justin:

Wow. That— I mean, I don't know if that would impact my dizziness at all, but now I have some light nausea.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I— what I don't understand, is how dizzy are you?

Justin:

Uh, yeah. I don't know. The point of dizziness where— like, where do you go from, "Whoa. I better sit down," to, "Whoa. I better eat someone."

Sydnee:

[laughs] I've never been—

Justin:

"I better eat a mummy."

Sydnee:

... that dizzy in my entire life.

Justin:

"Whoa." [laughs] "You need me to help you up?"

Justin:

"No, just give— [laughs] give me mummy flesh, please."

Sydnee:

"Could you just give me some mummy real quick?"

Justin:

"Do we have a mummy around the house? I'm emergently dizzy."

Sydnee:

"Go down to the druggist and purchase a mummy."

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] if you think—

Justin:

[laughs] I can't— oh, I can't take it. How are these people finding mummies?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And why were they eating them?

Sydnee:

I don't know. I don't... Because... I mean, I don't know.

Justin:

[laughs] What do they think their grandchildren were gonna do if they ate all the mummies?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

It really shows a lack of fore— of foresight—

Justin:

Mumm—

Sydnee:

... you know?

Justin:

Mummies aren't a renewable resource.

Sydnee:

Like, clearly... Yeah. Clearly mummies— mummies, like oil and coal, are all gonna go away someday. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] You know, for every mummy you eat, you gotta plant three mummies.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's the only way demummystation is gonna— is gonna keep a sustainable mummy supply [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] We're gonna have to look for alternative mummy sources. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] "God dammit. We're out of mummies."

Sydnee:

For when the mummies, [crosstalk] mummies.

Justin:

Oh, Christ.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Everybody tells you that ethanol mummies were the— are gonna be the fix.

Justin:

No, that's—

Sydnee:

But that's... No. No. Don't listen to that.

Justin:

Don't listen to Willy Nelson.

Sydnee:

That's not the solution.

Justin:

Willy Nelson is gonna try to sell you on corn mummies.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's a whole other problem.

Justin:

Holy crap. Okay. All right. So, um, what other mummy parts can we eat?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, okay, I kind of alluded to this already. But the skull was also a great thing for its medicinal value. Um, like I— like I said, it's good for headaches. If you grind up the skull into a powder, it's great for headaches. Again, for epilepsy, because they kind of have a sense that epilepsy started with the head.

Justin:

Mm hmm.

Sydnee:

Which they were— I mean, you know, the brain. They're right. Um, not that grinding up a skull works for that, but...

Justin:

No. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, there was a certain, um, recipe that called for mixing it with chocolate, ground up skull with chocolate, and making a drink out of it.

Justin:

I'll try it.

Sydnee:

That wouldn't be too bad.

Justin:

I'll try it. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um—

Justin:

I don't know. I'll drink Ovaltine.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

What's the difference? It's got calcium.

Sydnee:

And— uh, and this was... Skull was particularly popular among the royals.

Justin:

Well, yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, King Charles II had something invented. Well, he— he purchased a large amount of ground up skull, and had it, uh, dissolved in alcohol. And he would carry it in a— in a tiny little dropper. They were called The King's Drops. And he paid a ton of money for this stuff.

Justin:

Yeah. I'd probably—

Sydnee:

Like, a small fortune. [laughs]

Justin:

... charge the king a ton for that, too. [laughs]

Sydnee:

And he would take these drops pretty much every day. Which wouldn't be too bad, I mean, it's in alcohol, you know?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But, uh, King Francis I, uh, was also, uh, enamored with— with skull powder. And, um, he would carry some— at least some part of the mummy, skull or something, in a pouch at this waist at all times.

Justin:

Just to keep that good mummy energy flowing into him.

Sydnee:

Just in case. It was in case he got into an accident, or got sick.

Justin:

Okay. Yeah. You gotta keep an emergency mummy supply. [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] It was like his EpiPen. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay. [laughs] "So many mummy meat."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I can't reach my mummy."

Sydnee:

"Do you have a First Aid kit?"

Sydnee:

"No, but I've got some mummy."

Justin:

[laughs] "In a bag."

Sydnee:

[laughs] "In a bag, tied around my waist."

Justin:

[laughs] "I found a mummy. I'm gonna eat it."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, similar to the skull, it was also believed that the moss that would grow over the skull, like, while it was decomposing, buried in the ground, um, this moss is called Usnea...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... was— was very good. It had all kinds of medicinal properties. And they thought it was good for epilepsy, again. A lot of stuff was good— everything was good. Nobody understood epilepsy, so what— will just throw anything at it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And then, uh— and then for nose bleeds, which actually... There's a little bit of sense here. [laughs]

Justin:

Really?

Sydnee:

So you would take, like, a wad of the moss, and shove it up your nose when you had a nose bleed.

Justin:

Well, yeah, I mean, that's not that far from what we would do, except with TP.

Sydnee:

Right. So, I mean, that probably worked. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah, right. And then wait.

Sydnee:

And then wait. But that— but the— the Usnea, I will say, um, it was... A lot of people— a lot of people tried to make, like, fake Usnea. Tried to, like, sell you powders and stuff that looked like it was made of the moss, but wasn't. So the people who were smart, or had enough money to do so, would demand that it come attached to the skull.

"I want the skull—"

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

"... with the moss growing on it—"

Justin:

Fresh off the skull.

Sydnee:

"... so that I know for sure that this is the real deal skull moss, and not that imposter [laughs] skull moss that grew on not-a-human body, on a tree or something."

Justin:

What about blood, too? I know we had the— had to be— uh, eat mummy blood.

Sydnee:

Well, uh, I do. I have a lot to tell you about blood, Justin. But, um, unfortunately, I'm not gonna be able to do that quite yet. I don't know if that's something that your insurance would cover, me informing you about blood. So, um, I'm gonna need you to head over to our billing department, and, uh, and find out, okay?

Justin:

Sure.

[theme music]

[ad break]

Justin:

Blood. Tell me about blood, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

So let me tell you about blood, Justin. Thanks for settling up your accounts.

Justin:

[laughs] It's my pleasure.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I'll provide you with some more medical information. Um, so, you know, the idea that blood could be used for something, that blood has a lot of power, that's not a new concept. I mean, all throughout medical history, we find people doing weird things with blood.

Justin:

And that lady on American, uh, Horror Story coven. Remember? Madam LaLaurie.

Sydnee:

Yes. Who liked to, like... And that— and this idea probably comes from this, she liked to, you know, rub blood all over her skin to keep it youthful and drink blood to stay young—

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... and healthy, and... Um, this is fairly similar.

Justin:

There's also a special on the History Channel every Halloween, about people like this.

Sydnee:

About people who were, like, real vampires, but they weren't real vamp—

Justin:

History's real vampires.

Sydnee:

I mean, they weren't real vampires 'cause there aren't real vampires, History Channel.

Justin:

'Cause the... Okay, History Channel?

Sydnee:

[laughs] There aren't real vampires or werewolves. We know this, History Channel.

Justin:

Stop trying to— stop trying to fool us, History Channel. Anyway, sorry.

Sydnee:

So, uh, they thought—

Justin:

We get upset about that near October.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's literally the— quick diversion. It's the— literally the most you can screw up your job, History Channel.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's to be like, "Vampires? Oh, no. Are they..." They aren't.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Stop it.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

You're embarrassing yourself. Anyway, sorry.

Sydnee:

Although, we do watch it, and enjoy it.

Justin:

I mean, we'll watch it.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So, blood was good for vitality. That makes sense. Um, now, the one thing that got tricky about blood, and the reason that, um, and this is—as I'm gonna talk about, we started to move away from mummies as our only source for human flesh medicine, um, was that the thought was, if you're gonna get blood, it's gotta be fresh. [laughs] They're just making this stuff wholesale.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

If it's gonna help you, it probably needs to be fresh blood.

Justin:

Not mummy blood.

Sydnee:

Not mummy blood. 'Cause how do you get mummy blood?

Justin:

Fresh mummy blood is one of the great oxymorons.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So— so the closer you could get to fresh, the better the blood was gonna be. Um, if you didn't like ingesting it just as blood...

Justin:

And I don't.

Sydnee:

Well, 'cause, I mean, that's— I mean, how did people, you know, consume the blood? They just drank it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, but if that freaks you out, which it should, hello, um, there's— there was a recipe that one guy came up with for blood marmalade.

Justin:

Ah. Delicious.

Sydnee:

You could spread that on your toast in the morning.

Justin:

Yeah. Why not?

Sydnee:

Um—

Justin:

Don't let the kids get that.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Wasn't, like, Paddington Bear a big fan of marmalade?

Justin:

Paddington Bear loved blood marmalade.

Sydnee:

[laughs] He loved blood. I don't remember that from the book.

Justin:

Vampire Paddington loved blood marmalade.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, they thought, of course—

Justin:

Don't get me started on Vampire Madeline.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"We love our bread, we love our butter, but most of all, we love blood."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, obviously, blood from young, healthy people was better. Or virgins. Even better.

Justin:

Listen. I— I'm 33 now, and, uh, I obviously know that [laughs] blood from young people is better.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, this got to the point where people would stand at the, uh, hanging scaffold when somebody was going, you know, to be hanged. Hung. Hanged. In that context, it's hanged, right? Hanged. And, uh, would have their cups ready. And after— afterwards, sometimes the— if the hangman was [laughs] in a good— good mood, would slice open a vein for you and let you take a little bit for the road.

Justin:

Yeah. I bet you got to kick in some shillings though.

Sydnee:

We— well, yes, you had to pay him. What was even better is, if you were lucky, it was gonna be a beheading—

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

... a public beheading.

Justin:

Oh yeah. Nice.

Sydnee:

So, then you could either, you know, as soon as the head—

Justin:

[laughs] Get that gal—

Sydnee:

... fell off—

Justin:

Get that splash mat on the front row—

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

... and just collect it.

Sydnee:

And that's exactly it. They would try to get as close as possible to get sprayed by the blood when the head came off.

Justin:

Oh, my God. I thought I was kidding.

Sydnee:

No. Dead serious.

Justin:

That should be the subtitle of Sawbones, "I thought I was kidding."

Sydnee:

[laughs] No. People would either bring their cup to try to drink some, or, at the very least, get sprayed by the blood after the head was chopped off.

Justin:

Yikes.

Sydnee:

Um, fat was also used. That was another popular— uh, popular human substance. Um, human fat, bandages were soaked in. So, again, we're moving into fresher corpses. Um, human fat can be liquidy when it gets warm. Um, anybody who has ever been in an anatomy lab has experienced this. You can soak bandages in it and wrap wounds in it for wound healing. Or, uh, you can just rub it all over your skin. It's good for gout, arthritis, rheumatism, whatever. Just rub fat all over you.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Or, I mean, don't.

Justin:

Don't do that, 'cause it's gross.

Sydnee:

Um, [laughs] there were also minor uses for brains, for, um, the stuff that come out of a gallbladder, for breast milk, for bladder stones. Um, there were other kind of recipes that centered around these products, but the— the main things, like I said, the blood, the fat, the skull, the flesh, that's what people were using. But as we've alluded to, the problem is, [laughs] they— they were running out of mummies.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] You can't— there's a limited supply of mummies, people. You can only eat so many. And, obviously, you know, I— I haven't said this so far, there were people who were— who were against this.

Justin:

Thank God.

Sydnee:

Not everybody was into eating people. And there were plenty of doctors, and clergymen, and politicians, and then just normal, like, everyday people, who were like, "Hey, I don't think we should eat people. That sounds like a bad idea. We probably shouldn't eat all the mummies. Like, this is— may— maybe— maybe we're gonna, like, look at them in a museum someday, or—"

Justin:

"Hi."

Sydnee:

"... terrify children with them." [laughs]

Justin:

"It's me, 1700s Wilford Brimley."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"It seems like there's not as many mummies around as there used to be. Yeah, I've been noticing it, too." [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Mummy eating is a serious problem, and if we want there to be mummies for the next generation, we have gotta stop eating them."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, because of the— the relatively, uh, fewer amount of mummies available for eating, they started to become pricey. The price I saw quoted was five sterling a pound—

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

... which I'm guessing was a lot at the time.

Justin:

Must be organic mummy.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's pricey.

Sydnee:

Uh, they, uh, so— so because it was becoming so pricey, and because there weren't as many mummies available, um, especially people in the lower classes, were trying to find ways to benefit from this good dead people medicine without, you know, having to break the bank. So they started trying to cure— And I use the word cure as in, like, ham or meat.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Cure recently dead, especially strong men, but women would do, too, as long as they were healthy and vital before they died, struck down in the flower of their youth.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um... [laughs]

Justin:

That's essential. The potential is what you're really paying for.

Sydnee:

And the potential, that's what you're wanting. That they would start curing them in, like, honey and herbs.

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

So, like, put them in a box, fill it with honey, throw a bunch of herbs in there, put them in the ground. And then you can take chunks of that and use it for medicine.

Justin:

Now I'm hungry.

Sydnee:

Um, the— there were also, as you mentioned earlier, this is when graverobbing for this purpose became pretty popular. So, uh, you know, I mean, if you were an enterprising young pharmacist, or doctor, or whoever, you know, dig up some bodies and sell— sell stuff as medicine. Um, if nobody was dead, as a last resort, and you don't wanna kill anybody, please don't, you could always drink menstrual blood.

Justin:

Hmm. No. I think I'm just gonna, uh, just keep my dizziness, thank you. I'll just be dizzy.

Sydnee:

Yeah. That— how bad are you feeling?

Justin:

Yeah. How... Yeah. What problem do you have? Oh, man.

Sydnee:

They talked about even, um, after some—

Justin:

I would eat a mummy first.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

There. I said it.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I'd eat a mummy.

Sydnee:

After some royalty died, if they had some sort of illness that caused bleeding before they died, the— the rags or the towels that were used, you know, to wipe up the blood, would be, like, people would rub them on themselves and try to, like, squeeze them and soak them in water to drink that to try to get some of that royal blood.

Um, now, obviously, as you can imagine, it— you know, if graverobbing isn't bad enough, um, some really bad stuff came out of this, because anytime... Well, there's a shortage of dead people, we need— that we can use to make medicine, we need some more dead people, you can imagine that somebody started doing some bad stuff. Uh, one of the worst examples I found was... And I didn't know this... Pope Innocent VIII, on this death bed, uh, to try to keep him from dying, his doctors prescribed him the blood of three young boys.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

And he drank the blood of all three of these young boys, in an attempt to save his life, before he eventually succumbed to his illness, and all three boys died.

Justin:

Now, he's the one people consider infallible, right? That's the Pope Innocent th—

Sydnee:

Let's make it a little...

Justin:

Is that the one?

Sydnee:

Your people—

Justin:

Your people.

Sydnee:

You're gonna just throw this around?

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Listen. Okay, the Catholic church [laughs]—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... has not had a spotless history, all right?

Justin:

When it comes to young boys. Sorry, young boys—

Sydnee:

All right.

Justin:

... throughout history.

Sydnee:

All right. We've screwed up sometimes.

Justin:

Take ownership of your mistakes.

Sydnee:

No, not the... Yes. No, the Pope is not—

Justin:

Innocent. Pope... Just to clarify—

Sydnee:

The Pope is not infallible all the time.

Justin:

Pope Innocent VIII.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

VIII Pope Innocent was the one that drank the blood of young boys.

Sydnee:

The first seven probably didn't. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] Probably.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, of course, this led to people who were poor and desperate, uh, being compelled to sell their blood for money. Not—

Justin:

Hey, not unlike today's college youth.

Sydnee:

Exactly. Exactly. Um, only, at this point, you would, you know, either cut yourself and sell a cup of your blood to somebody who wanted to drink it, or, or if you were willing, you could get more money if you would let an old person suck it directly from your arm.

Justin:

Ugh. Okay.

Sydnee:

[shudders] But that's how you could make the most, because they thought, if they could get it straight from the source, ooh, then you're really, you know—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... gonna... I don't know.

Justin:

Drinking blood.

Sydnee:

Something. Uh, then you're drinking blood. Um, there was also, as we've talked about before, a lot of bleeding going on, bloodletting, at this point. You know from doctors and barbers and whatnot. So, uh, there was an added incentive to, one, bleed your patient maybe a little more than they need to, because then you'd just take all that blood, put it in some jars, advertise them in your shop window, and sell them.

Justin:

I mean, why not?

Sydnee:

So you're bleeding one guy, and having another guy drink it.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And you can bleed him later.

Justin:

Convenience.

Sydnee:

Um, and then, as I— again, as I kinda mentioned, the executioners had a whole side business now. So you could just divvy up your corpses and sell them off to people in chunks, or, you know, sell their blood, or whatever you wanted to do. I mean, a lot of the time, if we're talking about criminals, these people are not gonna get, like, a— a proper burial.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So, nobody was going to object to what the executioners were doing with the bodies.

Justin:

Good for the environment.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh...

Justin:

Ish?

Sydnee:

I don't know. May— but, I mean, bad for, like, human soul. Bad for human, like—

Justin:

Yeah, maybe bad for—

Sydnee:

... our congregate. I don't know.

Justin:

... just the world at large, but of the earth.

Sydnee:

So, you know, and the fear of this was that, um, if we looked back... And a lot of this is supposition... Were people killing, like, beggars or lepers? Were they grabbing plague victims and using them for this?

Justin:

Ew. God.

Sydnee:

Possibly, uh, dead criminals? Was this a motivation for killing off members of society that they thought wouldn't be missed? Maybe. I don't know. This led me to a question, like, "Hey, maybe Sweeney Todd was a doctor." [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Did you consider that?

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

Maybe.

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

Just baking up—

Justin:

Maybe they wouldn't have been—

Sydnee:

... people pies.

Justin:

Maybe they wouldn't have been so upset if they found out what was actually in them. Maybe they would've been excited.

Sydnee:

Hey.

Justin:

They might've been stoked.

Sydnee:

He just took the wrong— it was the wrong, like—

Justin:

Should've advertised. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Does this happen today, Syd?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

I mean, is this a medical practice today?

Sydnee:

No, we don't eat people anymore. I mean— I mean, we shouldn't eat people anymore. The best I could come up with, is, like, um, a correlation to today was, I know that placenta eating is popular among, I don't know, Mathew McConaughey—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... and, uh, somebody else, other people on the internet. We watched it. People blend up their placentas and eat them.

Justin:

Yeah, why not?

Sydnee:

Um, but other than that, and I don't know that that's... I mean, yes, that is a human product. Uh, thank goodness no one is harmed or killed. [laughs] Uh, but otherwise, no, there is no medical benefit to eating people. I can't believe I had to say that. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah, there. Just to clarify.

Sydnee:

There's no medical benefit to eating... Please don't eat people. Thanks.

Justin:

Uh, and thank you to you at home listening, for being so cool. I know it's kind of a different— it's kind of a change having an advertisement on the show. But you're not losing a show, and we get to feed our daughter.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

So that works great for us.

Sydnee:

So there's the really important part.

Justin:

It's a really important part. But, no, seriously, we're not that hard. All right. We appreciate you— you guys, uh, being so cool about it in advance. Uh, remember you can tweet, uh, @Sawbones. It is our, uh, username on Twitter. Uh, thank you to people tweeting, uh, about us. Like, Malinda, Your psycho future ex, Ben lymic, Rob Thomas, Claire, Jarvis, Samo, Bamboo Medea... Or maybe media, maybe.

Sydnee:

I bet media.

Justin:

Media, probably. Nicole, Angela, Hamilton, Tiffany, and Cory Duttson, Mike F, many, many, many, many, many others. Thank you so, so much.

Sydnee:

Yeah, thank you, guys. You can always tweet at us, too. @SydneeMcelroy, or @JustinMcElroy.

Justin:

Uh, and, uh, I think that's gonna do it for us. Thanks to Taxpayers, letting us use their song Medicines, for our intro and outro. You can look for them on Twitter, buy all their music. And, uh, I guess that's gonna be it. MaximumFun.org. Listen to all the shows there, like, uh, Jordan, Jesse, Go! Wham Bam Pow, One Bad Mother, Stop Podcasting Yourself—

Sydnee:

My Brother, My Brother and Me.

Justin:

Uh, thank you so much, Sydnee. And—

Sydnee:

All the other shows that Justin isn't a part of. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah. There's many— there's many... I— I—

Sydnee:

There's many that don't feature Justin McElroy.

Justin:

And many, many more there— I'm— I'm— there are many that do not fea— [laughs] feature me, and there are well worth your time, uh, all at MaximumFun.org, as our forums, and so much else. Anyway, that's gonna do it for us. Thanks for listening to our show. We'll be back next Tuesday with another episode of Sawbones. Until then, I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

As always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays]

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