

Sawbones Episode 42: Sleepwalking

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Intro (Clint McElroy):

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 song Medicines by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin:

Hello everybody and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost Justin McElroy-

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Welcome home sweetie.

Sydnee:

Thanks Justin.

Justin:

You just came from, came from work.

Sydnee:

I know, a long-

Justin:

Glad to see you.

Sydnee:

... a long day at the office and, um, I ... There was, kind of, somethin' I wanted to talk to you about.

Justin:

Tell me, anything.

Sydnee:

Well I, on my way up I- I noticed in the living room, um, there's a, uh, there seems to be a new, uh, piece of art as it were.

Justin:

Yes- yes, the, uh ... yes. What do you think?

Sydnee:

Well, um, I'd ... Well, uh, when ... We, uh ... Why ... When ... How did that happen?

Justin:

Well-

Sydnee:

Where did it come from?

Justin:

... it's a ... Well it- it is a- a professional portrait, a painted oil, natch.

Sydnee:

Right, I noticed it was, it was ... I ... Uh, that's you, right?

Justin:

That is-

Sydnee:

That's-

Justin:

... me.

Sydnee:

... that's-

Justin:

That is me.

Sydnee:

... mostly you.

Justin:

Yes. I felt like we didn't have enough stately art around the house, so I commissioned a portrait of myself, uh, to, uh, well us was to hang in the home.

Sydnee:

Well, now, when you say us-

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

... um, let me just clarify. Am I that small figure that you can, kind of, see in the doorway in the background of the painting?

Justin:

The one looking at me adoringly, yes-

Sydnee:

Right, the one-

Justin:

... as if to say, with eyes that seem to say, "My hero."

Sydnee:

... the one who appears to, I think, only be wearing an apron and high heels.

Justin:

That's correct, that is ... Yes, that is you. I think it's a wonderful likeness.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I ... Well I will say it's flattering.

Justin:

Thank you. I didn't do the portrait, but I'm- I'm- I'm glad you approve of the art.

Sydnee:

Now, uh- uh, a quick question. Um, I wasn't sure if it was you. I think in the painting you have a- a mustache?

Justin:

I am ... I did give myself a mustache, as part of the commission. I also requested that I be wearing an ascot and a smoking jacket. I did want, sort of, a more grown-up look, I guess, or something a little more stately. And I want something that's gonna last longterm and I do feel like the mustache will be a natural, sort of, evolution as I get older.

Sydnee:

Uh, right. And, uh, am- am I right in that you're holding an autographed photo of Michael Jordan that says, "To my good friend, Hoops?"

Justin:

"To my good friend, Hoops," that's- that's correct. That was also a little bit of artistic embellishment. I'm so glad you, uh, you enjoy it. Uh- uh, I'm- I'm, uh, I'm glad that you think it's a great addition to the house.

Sydnee:

Uh, well, I- I- I mean it ... Yes, it definitely adds something that wasn't there before.

Justin:

A painting.

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative]. Um, how much did this cost?

Justin:

Oh, art- art and finance, the old-

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

... question. What-

Sydnee:

... um, 'cause it's pretty large.

Justin:

... what, uh, can you put a dollar value?

Sydnee:

And, uh, w-, uh, y- yes, no, there's definitely a dollar value that I'm seeking here. What ... I mean, 'cause it, I mean the, even the frame looks really nice.

Justin:

It is ni-

Sydnee:

Um, not that I know anything about frames, but it just-

Justin:

It's Mayflower, uh, wood. It's made from wood that they send-

Sydnee:

From the Mayflower?

Justin:

Wood from the Mayflower is the, what the frame is made out of.

Sydnee:

Like, the- the boat that the Pilgrims came on?

Justin:

I can't tell you how much it cost.

Sydnee:

You can't I- uh, you can't or you won't? What is the-

Justin:

Can't tell you because it is has just occurred to me that I ordered a very specific commissioned painting of us while sleepwalking.

Sydnee:

It ... This just occurred to you?

Justin:

I just remembered that I was sleepwalking when-

Sydnee:

Well, um-

Justin:

... the order went through.

Sydnee:

Hold on. You remembered that you were sleepwalking?

Justin:

I just remembered sleepwalking and ordering this very specific commission portrait of myself wearing an ascot, and a smoking jacket with a mustache, and a signed picture of myself that, uh- uh, autographed to me from Michael Jordan that says, "To my dear friend, Hoops."

Sydnee:

Right, and me in the background in an apron?

Justin:

Correct, that is you.

Sydnee:

Okay, uh, but you, so you do remember that, but you don't remember how much it cost?

Justin:

It's funny isn't it? You know, you never know what's gonna get lost. But, yes, I was sleepwalking-

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

... so that is my excuse.

Sydnee:

W- w- well, um, that's a terrible excuse.

Justin:

Okay, all right-

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

... fair enough.

Sydnee:

... because, uh, one, I don't believe you, [laughs]

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]-

Sydnee:

... and-

Justin:

... as well you should not, that-

Sydnee:

... and-

Justin:

... is good, that's good instinct. Lean into that.

Sydnee:

... two, that's not really how sleepwalking works.

Justin:

Okay. Well how, um, well, um, well how does it work?

Sydnee:

Well-

Justin:

You're so smart?

Sydnee:

... well maybe I should tell [laughs] you somethin' about-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... sleepwalking.

Justin:

Absolutely, hit me, I'm ready.

Sydnee:

I- I will and I'd like to say thank you to Janine who recommended this topic for us.

Justin:

Uh, thank you Janine, you're the tops.

Sydnee:

So, uh, first of all, since it seems that you don't know what sleepwalking is-

Justin:

I ... Why, as a sufferer, uh, I feel like-

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

... I should know, but-

Sydnee:

... as a onetime only sufferer-

Justin:

It's comes and goes, you know?

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative], yeah. So sleepwalking's also called, um, somnambulism.

Justin:

Sonambulism?

Sydnee:

Somnambulism?

Justin:

Somnam- som-

Sydnee:

Somnambulism?

Justin:

... somnambulism?

Sydnee:

And you can probably piece that together, like, som, like, sleep, like somnolence, you know?

Justin:

Ambul-

Sydnee:

Ambul, like walk.

Justin:

... got it.

Sydnee:

Walking in your sleep.

Justin:

I'm with you.

Sydnee:

There's some Latin there for you.

Justin:

I love it.

Sydnee:

Um, so, uh, if you ever hear that, you can use that word and impress your friends. And it is one of the parasomnias, so one of the sleep disorders.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, now it's sim- ... And the simplest explanation is that it's getting up and moving around while you're asleep.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Which you could probably piece together [laughs] if that was a multiple choice answer on a test, hopefully you'd get it right?

Justin:

I bet we are still on, sort of, the base level of awareness of sleepwalking, right?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I don't even feel like the deep dive has truly begun.

Sydnee:

No- no, it's ... So let me give you some- some things about it. So it's not just as simple as you did something in your sleep. It usually happens in the first third of the night and it's in your deepest stage of sleep. This is important, 'cause this is different then, like, REM sleep, when you're dreaming.

Justin:

Uh, that isn't the deepest stage?

Sydnee:

No- no. Uh, REM sleep is a, is actually a much lighter stage of sleep.

Justin:

I did not know that!

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And there is a disorder, REM sleep disorder, where you're not, um, you should be paralyzed while you're asleep, sort of, so to speak. I mean you're not literally paralyzed, but you can't move while you're, um, in REM sleep, while you're dreaming, and that prevents you from acting out your dreams.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And there is a sleep disorder that makes you, you know, your- your body doesn't work right and you act out your dreams. That's not what sleepwalking is.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Sleepwalking happens in the deepest stages of sleep. Um, it usually lasts about five to 15 minutes, although episodes can last up to an hour. And very importantly, uh, y-, the sleepwalker is unresponsive during the episode and has no memory... of it... afterward.

Justin:

You know what? I, in ordering a commission portrait of myself in oil with Mayflower wood frame, I was acting out my dreams to be fair-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... so maybe I was doing the other thing.

Sydnee:

Oh, so you think you have the other thing now-

Justin:

I think maybe-

Sydnee:

... yeah.

Justin:

... the other thing is the-

Sydnee:

Hey-

Justin:

... thing that I have.

Sydnee:

... a lot ... Uh, the, uh ... Whether or not one could perform such a complex action I think is up for debate, um, but, uh, either way, I still don't believe you.

Justin:

That's fair, that's completely fair.

Sydnee:

Now, while sleepwalking can just be a genetic condition, it can also ... It happens to more people than you'd think, 'cause it can be brought on by stress, illness, um, sleep deprivation. so if you go a couple night without sleeping. Um, pregnancy.

Justin:

Ah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, so.

Justin:

I'll have to keep an eye on you.

Sydnee:

Have you noticed? Have I wandered about at all?

Justin:

Only to pee.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's not ... I'm awake. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay, good.

Sydnee:

I am unfortunately awake every one of those times. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, alcohol can bring this on-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... and some drugs, most notably, uh, Ambien.

Justin:

Dad.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's right, your dad, I think, what did he buy some Jolly Pirate Doughnuts and-

Justin:

He bought Jolly Pirate Doughnuts-

Sydnee:

... drove around or somethin'.

Justin:

... and then drove around, and then did not recall doing so.

Sydnee:

Yeah, so. And- and I think a lot of us have heard those horror stories of people on Ambien and drugs like Ambien.

Justin:

It doesn't sound like such a horror story, you get- get home-made free doughnuts.

Sydnee:

Y- yeah. Well I mean that one ended [laughs] happily.

Justin:

It- it could have broken much worse I- I- I admit, but-

Sydnee:

It's much more common in children-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... uh, it usually peaks about age 12, and then a lot, a lot of people grow out of it.

Justin:

Oh yeah?

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, but, up to 30% of kids have at least one event of sleepwalking.

Justin:

That's wild.

Sydnee:

Isn't that, yeah, isn't it crazy? That doesn't-

Justin:

Well, uh, no, okay, uh, science. At least 30% of kids snuck down to the kitchen to get a cookie-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... and tried to pull a fast one.

Sydnee:

I-

Justin:

Like, let's not go crazy here.

Sydnee:

... I think that's a Justin statistic there.

Justin:

Uh, no, I-

Sydnee:

I think Justin snuck down to the kitchen 30% of the time to get a cookie.
[laughs]

Justin:

30% of nights I went downstairs to get a cookie.

Sydnee:

I never snuck downstairs to get a cookie.

Justin:

You went to get, like, broccoli and stuff you're so healthy.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, only one to 5%, somewhere in that range, of children actually have sleepwalking disorder.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And when we go up to adults, um, between one and 7% of adults have episodes, but only .5% of adults have the disorder.

Justin:

What's the difference? I mean, uh, if you're havin' the episodes, what do you ... I mean aren't you, don't you have the disorder?

Sydnee:

Well, if ... No, because it depends on why you're having the episodes-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... and how many you have, and- and the, you know, nature of 'em. So if- if you get super drunk a lot and a couple of times when you've been super drunk you, you know, walked around in your sleep, that's not really a sleepwalking disorder-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... that is another problem.

Justin:

That is another thing we call-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... alcalism.

Sydnee:

Please talk-

Justin:

Alcalism?

Sydnee:

... to your family.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

Alcalism?

Justin:

Alcoholism. Alcalism is [laughs] when you- you have, you are too base.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's when you need to get some lemon juice up in there-

Justin:

Yeah, you need to enter acid into your diet-

Sydnee:

... and some acidity in your ... yeah.

Justin:

... 'cause you're basically all baking soda.

Sydnee:

So let's talk about, kind of, the history of sleepwalking.

Justin:

Take me all the way-

Sydnee:

So now you know what it is.

Justin:

... take me all the way back, Syd-

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

... to the very beginning of sleepwalking treatment.

Sydnee:

This isn't very long ago. [laughs]

Justin:

Oh really?

Sydnee:

So this is the interesting thing. Unlike a lot of disorders, sleepwalking, while we've known about it for a super long time, and we've been writing about people who, you know, were sleepwalkers for a long time, uh, it wasn't really regarded as any, kind of, disorder-

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

... for the most part. Um, so it wasn't anything that was written about in a medical way for most of history. Uh, for instance, Hippocrates, uh, talked about it, like, noted that there were some people who did this, but that was, kind of, the end of it.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, Galen wrote about it, um, Diogenes was known to be a sleepwalker and he wrote about some of his own experiences with it. But it wasn't in any way to, kind of, to try to explore why it happened or what the medical basis was for it, it was just, kind of, "Hey, isn't this crazy? This happened." [laughs]

Justin:

It's weird, right?

Sydnee:

It was in that eye opener section of the newspaper, you know?

Justin:

Well, back in olden times you, there weren't that many ways you could, um, like, bad things couldn't happen to you though. Like, there weren't cars. The ... We didn't have cranes that you could operate-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... like, there was nothing that could happen.

Sydnee:

Is that what you think people who are asleep do, they operate-

Justin:

The worst-case scenario back then is, like-

Sydnee:

... a crane?

Justin:

... you fall on a spear maybe, like, there would be a spear that you get a hold of. Like, that's it, that's all they had to worry about. You'd wander into the place where they keep the bears that they were going to battle in bear-baiting the next day.

Sydnee:

But where is this? What point in history are, is there-

Justin:

You know, you know the-

Sydnee:

... the place where we keep the bears?

Justin:

Well, okay, if you're gonna do bear-baiting, like, you would probably have to keep them somewhere before. You don't just, like, plan a bear-baiting for the next day and then hope that you're gonna find a bear.

Sydnee:

I don't-

Justin:

You'd probably get the-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... bear first.

Sydnee:

I don't know about this history of bear-baiting. You're gonna have to fill me on on this someday.

Justin:

On next week's episode of *Sawbones*-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... bear-baiting. What's up with that? A Justin McElroy special investigation.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

How sweet was bear-baiting? It wasn't, it was very sad.

Sydnee:

It sounds sad.

Justin:

I think that's how we got teddy bears, did you know that?

Sydnee:

No, I don't know-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... any of ... I don't know what you're talking about.

Justin:

'Cause Theodore Roosevelt wouldn't shoot the bear.

Sydnee:

Oh-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... and so-

Justin:

So they- they ... Somebody saw it-

Sydnee:

You know Roosevelt wouldn't shoot bears?

Justin:

Wou- wouldn't shoot a bear because it was, like, chained up.

Sydnee:

Oh, well that makes sense.

Justin:

Yeah, so.

Sydnee:

No, he was too cool for that.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

He would have, he would have hunted the bear and wrestled it.

Justin:

Let it go, put some honey on my belly, let me fist fight this mother grabber for a second, and then we'll see who's reign supreme.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Then we'll see who's on top. What's up? Walk softly-

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... carry a big bear beating stick.

Sydnee:

He was a pretty cool guy-

Justin:

Some cool dude.

Sydnee:

... but that's not really good fodder for our podcast.

Justin:

Neither here nor there. Why are you distracting me-

Sydnee:

I don't know.

Justin:

... with bear-baiting.

Sydnee:

Let me get back to sleepwalking.

Justin:

You know I love talking about bear-baiting.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So-

Justin:

Not that I understand.

Sydnee:

... because-

Justin:

I think I've confused two things by the way. The bear-baiting, I think, is different from chaining up a bear and letting, take, Theodore Roosevelt shoot it.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I think it's, uh, it sounds very different.

Justin:

It's, uh, very different from bear-baiting.

Sydnee:

I didn't know bear-baiting was a thing until exactly-

Justin:

Bear-baiting is when you-

Sydnee:

... what, a minute ago, when you started talking about it?

Justin:

I think it's when you- you fight a bear, like-

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

... just fight it, like, Hercules.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's, kind of, cool.

Justin:

That ... I mean, yeah, except for they probably-

Sydnee:

Is it-

Justin:

... drug it with honey-

Sydnee:

Oh, well, no that's ... Uh- [laughs]

Justin:

... right? You-

Sydnee:

... is it Pooh Bear?

Justin:

... get it sleepy.

Sydnee:

Is it Winnie the Pooh?

Justin:

Then they fist fight Winnie the Pooh.

Sydnee:

This is horrific.

Justin:

And we're terrible people. Why are you distracting me?

Tell me about, like, who- who you say wrote about it?

Sydnee:

Okay, so, because nobody really understood it, and it wasn't seen as a medical problem, but more of this, kind of, exciting mystery, in- intriguing topic, um, it was fodder for a lot of, um, you know, artwork so- so to speak, that-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... Shakespeare wrote about it.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

M- most people are familiar, Lady Macbeth.

Justin:

Sleepwalker?

Sydnee:

She was sleepwalking.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And- and that revealed a lot of the, um, kind of, understanding of it is that, yeah, on some level, you know, Lady Macbeth during the, during the daylight hours, when she was awake, was not confessing to her horrible crimes, but at night as she slee-, uh, you know, she was sleepwalking, she, the guilt would overcome her and she would have to confess.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Which was connected to, if we understood it at all, it was well we might, in our sleep, reveal things we wouldn't reveal otherwise-

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

... which made it more exciting. Then there's an opera, um, and a ballet, I think, Bellini wrote about-

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

... uh, about sleepwalking.

Justin:

So I'm assuming we are probably blaming it on God, or Satan, or something, right?

Sydnee:

And the, uh, pretty much. I mean in the beginning we really didn't know what caused it, but we weren't that interested. Um, through the medieval times, obviously we have to link it to religion, so it's either the, it's either God working through you or on the flip side it might be the devil.

Justin:

Best to just get out of the way-

Sydnee:

Yeah, uh, he, uh-

Justin:

... ei- either way.

Sydnee:

... either way it's something you probably don't want to, yeah- yeah, you don't want to get too entrenched with.

Um, later on it was seen as a, we did, we did that whole ep- episode on epilepsy-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... it was seen as related to epilepsy, um-

Justin:

Is that accurate?

Sydnee:

... for whatever reason. No-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... but for some reason it- it became connected to that if you were epileptic, um, that you might also sleepwalk. It was, kind of, uncontrolled movements-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... you can't control yourself in some way.

Uh, there were attempts in the 1800s for people to actually start describing it in some, sort of, like, medical way. Um, and they were differentiating between natural sleepwalking, which is somebody who just, for whatever reason, was a sleepwalker, and then the sleepwalking events that are brought on by, maybe, hysteria. So somebody, they have some cases of people who were grieving who would w- walk in their sleep.

Um, hypnosis. As hypnosis became popular in the late 1800s, there were people who would walk around under the influence of hypnosis, and

obviously that was different. Or illness, you know, people with fevers would sometimes walk in their sleep.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, and so they begin to, kind of, divide this out with still- still, without any explanation as to why. Um, and there was this, kind of, sense that maybe it had something to do with your spinal cord, as we begin to understand the nervous system. Your spinal cord's working, but your brain isn't?

Justin:

Yeah, maybe?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

No, but that was the best they had.

Um, there were others who saw this as some, sort of, evidence that maybe there, maybe there's just, maybe it's our soul.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Maybe this is what happens when the brain's asleep at night and the soul can take over. Or maybe some outside force, um, because there was some sleepwalkers who were noted to, even those who would walk around with their eyes open, because sleepwalkers can have their eyes open-

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

... would write music, or- or great text, or one, um, minister wrote sermons. And they actually covered his eyes while he was writing to see if he could

continue to write, and he was still writing even though the, you know, his eyes were open but he clearly wasn't seeing, so.

Justin:

But they always just, uh, his sermon, quote unquote, was really just a big list of "you might be a redneck if" jokes-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... that he had heard. So it's not, like ... I mean it wasn't very moving or profound.

Sydnee:

It's crazy how all old those jokes are.

Justin:

It- it really is-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... they didn't even have rednecks, they transcended time.

Sydnee:

And ironically those made him a lot more money than his sermons ever did.

Justin:

That's weird. He never did it any-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And that is how Jeff Foxworthy was born.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Jefforias Foxworthy, A.D. 1400.

Sydnee:

The end. This is what we've been leading up to on *Sawbones*, so thanks for listening.

Justin:

This is the dramatic series finale.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Jeff Foxworthy.

Uh, some of these cases, in retrospect, were probably other sleep disorders.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, kind of, what we talked about, people acting out their dreams, people who talk in their sleep, not necessarily the same thing. Night terrors, that's a, that's a different class, related, but different. Um, and nobody really knew what to do about it. Uh, for the most part it was considered harmless.

Justin:

So they weren't, like, freaking out to fix it. They had, like, other diseases that they could not even begin to understand that were actually hurting people.

Sydnee:

Exactly. So somebody who just, you know, wakes up laying in their kitchen, that's not particularly concerning.

Justin:

Yeah, "Hi, my brother's arm just turned black and fell off-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... so, like, uh, just stay out of my way while you're walking around asleep," I guess.

Sydnee:

I- I read one, uh, one suggestion, um, that they actually were, they used at a school for boys, uh, which was they would have the sleepwalker sleep in a bed, share a bed with one of the non-sleepwalking students, and they would tie them together- [laughs]

Justin:

Sure-

Sydnee:

... because then-

Justin:

... why not?

Sydnee:

... when the, uh, when the sleepwalker would try to to get up out bed-

Justin:

He would wake up the non-sleepwalker?

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative]. But then ... And then I thought, "Oh, well that's clever, 'cause they would wake up the non-sleepwalker and then the non-sleepwalker could wake them up and prevent them from hurting themselves." I know what they say next is, "Then they could jerk back on the rope and make them fall and wake themselves [laughs] up."

Justin:

[laughs] That's a very lazy approach.

Sydnee:

So one way or another, I'm sure that worked.

Uh, in the 1900s we actually started, um, doing, like, investigation. And one of the first people to really start digging into this was Baron Karl Ludwig von Reichenbach.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, this was a guy of many talents. He had a PhD in philosophy, but he studied chemistry, geology, metallurgy, um, all kinds of stuff. He also wanted to establish a new German state in the South Sea Islands, that was a project for about five years.

Justin:

Huh.

Sydnee:

He failed at that-

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... as we, as we know. Um, he was an admirer of Mesmer.

Justin:

Ah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, followed in his footsteps. He studied magnetism. And a lot of his work on magnetism is actually pretty solid science. But in addition to that, he came up with the idea of something called the Odic force, O-D-I-C, the Odic force.

Justin:

Syd, what is the Odic force?

Sydnee:

Well the Odic force, uh, controls and propels all of human life. It is within us, around us, everything that is living is filled with this force. It's similar to magnetism, and- and heat, and, uh, you know, a lot of other, kind of, elemental forces, electricity, things like that, but it, but it's different-

Justin:

Mojo-

Sydnee:

... and it's essential.

Justin:

... from the *Austin Powers* films?

Sydnee:

It's mojo-

Justin:

Basically mojo.

Sydnee:

... that's where it comes from.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

Or the force if you prefer.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Named for Odin, the Norse god.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, and this is where the sleepwalkers come in. So, he wanted to study this force, um, and it permeates all living things, so you'd think it'd be easy to study 'cause it's everywhere, right? Uh, but the thing is, only sensitives, people who he deemed sensitives could see the force.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And he was, [laughs] unfortunately, not one of them-

Justin:

Sure, right.

Sydnee:

... which is a crazy theory that he came up with when he wasn't one of them.

Justin:

Yeah, uh- uh, it's a terrible curse that he had to deal with, that he couldn't see these incredible forces.

Sydnee:

But he learned a lot about it, um, because he later went on to say it has a negative and a positive, it has a light and a dark side.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

I'm telling you, it's the force, that is comes from the hands, the mouth, and the forehead, but you can't see it. So how did he figure all this out? Well he got sensitives and then the main way he recruited sensitives is he looked for sleepwalkers. Kind of based on the idea that sleepwalkers were attuned to this Odic force at night when they were asleep and allowed it to guide them.

Justin:

Whoa. so-

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

... they were doing, like, useful things, that, uh, the Odic force wanted them to do?

Sydnee:

Exactly, or just following the rhythms of the universe or something.

Justin:

Or whatever.

Sydnee:

Or whatever. [laughs] Um, the only way you could see the Odic force is if we put you in a dark room for a really long period of time.

Justin:

And wait, is that anybody or just sensitives?

Sydnee:

Just sensitives.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So- so basically he recruited sleepwalkers, he wrote about all of their nocturnal, you know, wanderings and then he put 'em in dark rooms and waited for them to see the forces. And I, you know, they must have said they did because we have all these facts that he collected about Odic forces.

Justin:

They probably want, just wanted to get out of the dark room.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Yeah, I see it. Whoa, man, I'm really freaking out, it's, like, crazy or whatever. Can I go please? I'm starving and it's freezing in this stupid room."

Sydnee:

This- this didn't really help us at all with sleepwalking, with understandings sleepwalking.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

But, um, the Odic force, uh, has persisted. Some people still believe this idea of some, sort of, vital force and they'll even call it, the Odic force is true. Um, it's been the subject of popular culture. It's in b- books and video games and stuff-

Justin:

Geez-o-Pete. Well-

Sydnee:

... so.

Justin:

... did we have any, like, actual hard science on this, like, actual people studying this?

Sydnee:

Well, I'd like to answer that question for you Justin, but, um, unfortunately you've fallen behind on your payments again, so-

Justin:

Oh, aw, that-

Sydnee:

... um-

Justin:

... figures, just when I'm about to get to the good part.

Sydnee:

Yup, that's how it always happens. I'm gonna need you to head down to the billing department.

Justin:

All right, let's go.

[ad break]

Justin:

Okay, Syd, I give up, who is studying Odic forces?

Sydnee:

So, uh-

Justin:

Or, uh, no, I'm sorry, sleepwalking, nobody in their right mind is studying Odic forces.

Sydnee:

No, only the Baron was studying Odic force. Oh, well, there were a lot of people since then. But, uh, as far as sleepwalking goes, of course, Freud had to get in on this.

Justin:

Aw, yeah, he's not gonna miss a trick.

Sydnee:

He said, you know, "I know what this is, this is, this is the unconscious is taking control at night when you least expect it- [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... and- [laughs] and it's a physical expression of your unconscious desires." It ... Two ... One of two things, he had two theories. So, this is either an attempt to act out sexual desires at night in your sleep, which is odd considering that most sleepwalkers just, kind of, wander around.

Justin:

I- I sexually want to sneak downstairs and eat Crunchberries.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... sexually.

Sydnee:

That, um ... I think that- that portrait you ordered downstairs was probably a sexual desire on-

Justin:

Well-

Sydnee:

... some level.

Justin:

... it wasn't an unconscious desire-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... I very consciously wanted that, so, uh, that, maybe that rules me out, I don't know.

Sydnee:

The- the other, the other theory was that, uh, when a sleepwalker, you know, gets out of one's own bed and starts wandering away from it, that they are attempting to return to their childhood bed. Very literally, they're trying to get back to the- the bed that they slept in as a child.

Justin:

I think he was just takin' a shot in the dark here, I don't think he knew.

Sydnee:

No, I don't think so at all.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But these fall right in line with everything else Freud thought, so there you go. It's either about sex or your childhood, right-

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... or your dad. Um, which he didn't say, but in the 50s [laughs] some of the, uh, in, we're talkin' the 1950s, some of the biggest researchers into sleepwalking and- and parasomnias, said that this did have somethin' to do with your dad-

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... that they- they agreed, with old Freud, that it had somethin' to do with your unconscious, but they said it was a result of repressed hostility towards your father.

Justin:

Why? What?

Sydnee:

And at night you would get up and try to act out your aggressions towards your dad or whatever authority figure-

Justin:

Okay, so good news parents, whose kids are sleepwalking, if you are worried that they were going to go to a knife, uh, go to the kitchen, get a knife, and try to kill you, that is definitely indeed what they are attempting to do.

Sydnee:

That's the whole point.

Justin:

There are, there [laughs] are sli-, Manchurian candidate style sleeper agents-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... literally sleeper agents that are in your home, in your child's bed. You send them off to sleep, toolaroolaroola, honk shoo, honk shoo.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You go to your bed and "What's that? Is that a Chucky doll?" No, it's your child who's been activated by his rage towards you. Sleep tight parents everywhere.

Sydnee:

Is this what *Little Nemo* was about?

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] Is that how it ended? I never read the- the end of that [crosstalk 00:30:07].

Justin:

No that's the end.

Sydnee:

Was that the last panel-

Justin:

That's how it ended.

Sydnee:

... with him murdering his father?

Justin:

That's how it all wrapped up.

Sydnee:

Now, but don't worry moms, apparently it's just dads.

Justin:

Yeah, just dads.

Sydnee:

Uh, the thing is, uh, with the invention of the EEG later in the 1900s, um, we started to understand sleepwalking a little better, uh, because we could see that you were in this very deep stage of sleep and not actually, as I said, in REM sleep when you're dreaming. So it's not, like, you're just acting out dreams or trying to get- get to do stuff that you don't get to do when you're awake, you're actually in very deep sleep where your brain is- is very, uh, inactive.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

But, as I said, it happens in the first third of the night, so your body has just settled in.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

So that's one of the theories is that maybe it's that your brain's not doin' much, but your body hasn't calmed down completely. Why exactly that hap-, that manifests the sleepwalking, uh, still not completely understood.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

Um, and then- then that goes on to explain why maybe kids are more likely to sleepwalk than adults. Uh, their brains are, you know, they're really busy, there's a lot of development goin' on. You think about the difference between, you know, a newborn and a five year old. Think about how much stuff you learn and are able to do in those five years.

Justin:

Sure, yeah.

Sydnee:

Do you think you're gonna, you're gonna change that much in that, kind of, period of time?

Justin:

Well-

Sydnee:

So, I mean, you- you know, that's ... So that, kind of, explains why kids might have-

Justin:

Hm-

Sydnee:

... might be more likely-

Justin:

... that's interesting.

Sydnee:

... to- to sleepwalk.

Justin:

Can I ask you a question? I've always heard that if you, if someone is sleepwalking you shouldn't wake them up, is that true?

Sydnee:

That is actually not true. It's okay to wake a sleepwalker.

Justin:

Oh, okay, good.

Sydnee:

Yeah, the- the main reason that that grew out of was, um, you don't want to startle them if they're in some, sort of, precarious position to make them fall.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

So, uh, that's why a lot of the time they'll tell you the best thing to do with a sleepwalker is just to gently guide them back to their bed and don't wake 'em up.

Justin:

Or wake them up with a hug, if you're strong.

Sydnee:

Uh, well if you're gonna wake 'em up, just don't startle 'em. Wake them up gently and make sure they're not, like, I don't know, standing at the edge of a cliff or something, or on, uh, one of those steel girders at, like, a construction site. That seems like something that might happen.

Justin:

Like, in a Popeye cartoon?

Sydnee:

Exactly. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay, good. Yes, well I- I agree that seems like an un-, uh, not an ideal place to stop a sleepwalker.

Sydnee:

I- if it's your child, they'll probably grow out of it, um, if they don't, there's- there's therapy, there's behavioral stuff, there's some meds that can help.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

It really depends. The main thing is keep, uh, dangerous stuff away from 'em. Maybe lock their bedroom door so they can't get out.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

I want to know though, I want to know-

Sydnee:

... or-

Justin:

... if they're sleepwalking. Maybe I'll just put up a baby gate.

Sydnee:

Although you can't lock their bedroom door 'cause what if there's a fire, so you can't do that.

Justin:

No you certainly can't.

Sydnee:

No. You just want to keep 'em from ... You want to keep 'em away from stairs, and you want to keep 'em ... You don't want sharp things near the bed.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Keep their windows shut.

Justin:

Seems like that's a pretty good rule overall for-

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... kids. Nothing sharp, by the bed-

Sydnee:

Not locked but shut.

Justin:

... but yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, just try to remove dangerous stuff that they may get into while they're-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, if you develop this as an adult, go see a doctor.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

Yeah, that's- that's unusual and you should check in.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So, what I think is interesting about sleepwalking is, as- as, Justin, as you tried to do early in this episode, it's been used as a great defense, um, because, um- um- um- um- um, many people can just claim they didn't know what they were doing, uh, and they did, you know, some sort of crime while they were sleepwalking.

Justin:

Ah, very clever. I like that.

Sydnee:

As a r-, as a result there, uh, there have been multiple examples of, uh, murder trials throughout the years where the defendant claimed sleepwalking as their defense. And-

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

... sometimes they've been successful and then other times they've been thought to be lying and, uh, you know.

Justin:

Like who?

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

Give me the quick bullet points.

Sydnee:

... so, okay. Most recently, 2008, uh, Brian Thomas was on holiday with his wife in Wales when he claimed that he dreamed she was an intruder and murdered her-

Justin:

Bluh.

Sydnee:

... accidentally, while he was asleep. Uh, he was acquitted-

Justin:

Yikes-

Sydnee:

... which as we-

Justin:

... but that's not how sleepwalking works.

Sydnee:

I know, I know-

Justin:

Wow. They could've used our-

Sydnee:

... interesting enough.

Justin:

... expert podcast testimony-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... in that trial.

Sydnee:

Uh, there was a woman in Australia who was having sex with lots of strangers while she was sleeping.

Justin:

We should say, just to be clear, we don't know all the details of Brian Thomas' trial, but-

Sydnee:

I have no idea.

Justin:

... there could absolutely be a legit reason, it's-

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... just not ... It doesn't seem how sleepwalkin' works, but maybe- maybe that's what happened here.

Sydnee:

Or maybe he had REM sleep, you know, sleep disorder.

Justin:

Very possible.

Sydnee:

Um, there was another man who, uh, w- was under a lot of stress, he had some history of some substance abuse issues. Uh, in the middle of the night, well, uh, sleepwalking, drove to his in-laws' hou-, in-laws' house and murdered them.

Justin:

Ew.

Sydnee:

And he reportedly had a great relationship with them beforehand, so it was a really weird case.

Justin:

That's super strange.

Sydnee:

Um, I think the best though, the- the last case I want to tell you about, is a French detective named Robert Ledru. This has to be the subject of some movie I just haven't seen.

Uh, so he was asked by the local police force to help them investigate a murder that they couldn't crack.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So, uh, he started tryin' to figure out, you know, who murdered this person and he discovered footprints at the scene of the crime. What was unusual about the footprints is that the, uh, the, uh, big toe of the right foot was missing in the footprints. They were bare feet, somebody did a, you know-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... walked there with bare feet, but their big toe was missing.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

What was especially unusual is that Robert himself was missing his big toe on-

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

... on his right foot.

Justin:

Holy crap.

Sydnee:

And he remembered a morning that he had woken up with wet feet-

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

... so he turned himself in.

Justin:

Was it him?

Sydnee:

He believed it was him. He presented his case and said, "I did this." Um, he had contracted syphilis before and he said he had had episodes of sleepwalking, he believed, as a result of the syphilis. So they locked him in a cell until they could prove it. They kept him there and watched him every night and sure enough he eventually walked around in his sleep.

Justin:

Holy crap.

Sydnee:

So he was exiled out to the countryside and kept under watch by guards and nurses-

Justin:

That's rough Robert-

Sydnee:

... for the rest of his life, I don't know.

Justin:

... sorry, that's a bad break.

Sydnee:

Interesting story though.

Justin:

Um, that's gonna do it for us for sleepwalking. Thank you so much, uh, f- for listening to our program. Uh, we hope you've had as much fun listening as we've had, uh, recording it.

Uh, thanks to people Tweeting about this show, like, Reggie Clark, who actually tweeted to Dr. Drew that he should listen to our show, which is pretty cool.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, thanks to Al CJM, uh, Alex, Alec, DJM, excuse me, [inaudible 00:36:49] Zen, John, Williams, Seth, Macy, Burton, Taylor, Sarah, Jamie Green, uh, Michael L. Hoffman uh, Dally, Hayden Peters, Christian White, Billybob, Angela Goff, so many others. You guys are all the tops.

We're @sawbones on Twitter if you'd like to follow us there or Tweet about the show. You can use the link sawbonesshow.com., that goes straight to our home at maximumfun.org.

Speaking of maximumfun.org, we got a lot of great programs for, there for you to check out. Uh-

Sydnee:

That's right, we do.

Justin:

... *Jordan, Jesse, Go, the Goosedown, Judge John Hodgman, Bullseye*, a great show about pop culture you should check out. Uh- uh, gosh, *Song Exploder, Lady to Lady, Oh No, Ross and Carrie*.

Sydnee:

My Brother, My Brother and Me.

Justin:

Oh thank you so much Sydnee. They're all waiting for you at maximumfun.org along with our forums. Go there and discuss this week's episode and every, uh, episode of our program at maximumfun.org. There's a new family waiting to welcome you in. Thank you to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song *Medicines* as the intro now to our- our program. And, most of all, thank you so much to you for listening.

We will be back again with you on the very next-

Justin:

... Tuesday. Until then, I am Justin McElroy-

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Thank you so much for listening and- and as always don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays out]

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