

## Sawbones 172: The Man Who Ate Everything

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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 music plays]

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

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee Smirl, formerly Ann, McElroy. You've gotta quit with the middle names. It really throws me off.

**Justin:** I know. I've been trying to introduce it to set myself apart. There is another Justin McElroy, who's a reporter in Canada.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Justin:** And sometimes I get tweets from him about very disturbing murders in Vancouver. So I'm trying to like, differentiate my brand. It was either this or J.T. McElroy.

**Sydnee:** So you think the way to do that is by saying your middle name just in the intro to *Sawbones*.

**Justin:** Yeah, it's like how Michael Fox and Michael J. Fox never get confused.

**Sydnee:** Whose Michael Fox?

**Justin:** Um, that's not actually a real... [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [through laugh] I don't know who that is.

**Justin:** [coughs] Did you know that, um, his middle initial was initially A? And he changed it because he didn't want people to say Michael's a fox.

**Sydnee:** Why wouldn't you? I wish people would say, well, not Michael— I mean, like, my name's Sydnee, but my last name isn't Fox. It wouldn't work.

**Justin:** I read that—

**Sydnee:** It actually doesn't work for me. I'm going to go ahead and take that back 'cause it in no way works for my name. [laughs]

**Justin:** I read that about him in a fan book about how great him.

**Sydnee:** How great him?

**Justin:** How great he is.

**Sydnee:** How great him was.

**Justin:** Yeah, how great him be. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** All right, where were we?

**Sydnee:** Justin's not great at talking today.

**Justin:** Today, no.

**Sydnee:** But Justin, I have a question for you.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Are you hungry for this week's episode?

**Justin:** Um, I mean I— I— I'm looking forward to recording this week's episode, as always.

**Sydnee:** Well, but no, wait. But are you *hungry* for this week's episode?

**Justin:** Sure, I'm looking forward to it and can't— can't wait.

**Sydnee:** But would you say that you're *hungry*?

**Justin:** Fine, fine. Yes, I'm hungry for this week's episode.

**Sydnee:** You know who you're not as hungry as?

**Justin:** Who, Sydnee?

**Sydnee:** Tarrare.

**Justin:** Who's Tarrare?

**Sydnee:** Well, that's who this week's episode's about.

**Justin:** Man.

**Sydnee:** You see what I did there?

**Justin:** That was— I'm looking around for the seams. It's seamless. I'm going to have to order online. Order it online, 'cause that was seamless.

**Sydnee:** You'd think that I wrote that down, but I didn't. Just did it.

**Justin:** Just spur of the moment?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I just did it, right there like that. I know, you're welcome for that intro. I think, Justin, we need something a little bit lighter and a little bit grosser.

**Justin:** It's been a heavy few weeks. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's been a heavy few weeks. We need some— we need some good old fashioned *Sawbones* medical grossness.

**Justin:** We got some choice— we got some choice tweets about the past couple weeks.

**Sydnee:** That's right. That's— we did. That's fine. Bring it on. But also, here's some gross funny stuff for you.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause we all need a little bit of that. Thank you to Jana, Marie, Kathy, Tess, Aaron, Brittany and Shay for recommending this topic.

**Justin:** Hot one.

**Sydnee:** Because whoa, I wasn't familiar, and boy, I am so glad that I am now. Tarrare—

**Justin:** All right. I'm so ready. I'm so reary.

**Sydnee:** —is the name of a human.

**Justin:** I said reary 'cause you said Tarrare, and you confused me with sounds.

**Sydnee:** Tarrare.

**Justin:** Listen, it's not a great day for the J man. I'm not feeling great, so—

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] Well, you just— you let me take the lead here.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So, Tarrare is the name of a human. A human person that used to be alive.

**Justin:** This is off to a good start.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. [laughs] In the 1770's, a child was born in France.

**Justin:** Used to be alive, you say?

**Sydnee:** Well—

**Justin:** You're starting with their death. Usually, you save their death for the end of the episode.

**Sydnee:** Well, sure. He was born in the 1770's, so what— I mean, were you guessing he was still around? [chuckles]

**Justin:** No, that would be amazing.

**Sydnee:** He's the oldest living human that no one has heard of, except me.  
[laughs quietly]

**Justin:** If he is— yeah, if he's still living, I know why we're doing an episode about him.

**Sydnee:** He— now he may have had a different name than Tarrare. I don't know. All we know him as is Tarrare.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Sort of like Madonna, except we do know that she had a different name. So, maybe not a great example. He— there's a— the question of where does this nickname come from may come from an old phrase in French that was popular at the time, bom-bom tarrare. Which was the way you'd say, like, something exploded. I guess instead of saying, like, kaboom.

**Justin:** It's like tick, tick, boom. You say, "bom-bom."

**Sydnee:** Something like that. And why he may have been compared to explosions, well, I'll get into that. Um, so he was a fairly normal-looking kid, other than a few distinguishing characteristics. And this is kind of important to his story. He had a very large mouth. It was noted that he could fit either 12 eggs or 12 apples in his mouth at a time.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I'm guessing like small apples.

**Justin:** Yeah, 'cause those things aren't the same size.

**Sydnee:** No, I'm thinking, like, real-deal, like, organic natural apples.

**Justin:** Sure, sure.

**Sydnee:** Not like the things— you know, the things that we have created. He had pretty thin hair.

**Justin:** Which are great. Which are great.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** And help feed a lot of people.

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** Thank you, genetically modified food. You're the best.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's right. That's right. I have no problem with large, juicy, genetically modified apples.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I'm just saying that was probably *not* what he was sticking in his mouth. And he had a distended belly with a flap of skin so large that he could wrap it around himself. [pause]



**Justin:** That's gross!

**Sydnee:** He also, reportedly, smelled pretty bad. It was noted specifically, even at 20 paces, "quite an odor." They talked about vapors that you could see rising off of him. I'm going to guess that was an exaggeration and that he didn't, cartoonish like, have—

**Justin:** Didn't have visible stink lines?

**Sydnee:** Yes. And that he sweat all the time. He was also recorded to have pretty bad teeth, was very hot to the touch, always had constant, horribly smelly diarrhea, and never really gained weight.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** His stomach would become very distended after a meal, and his cheeks would flush, and he would smell worse, but he was always very slim. And why am I telling you about his appearance and his weight? Because the other thing you should know about Tarrare is that, boy, he loved to eat.

**Justin:** Well, what else is he gonna do? The dates weren't piling up, I assume. Getting a great job is hard, what with the constant, and I believe your term was, "smelly diarrhea"?

**Sydnee:** Yeah. It was particularly foul. Not just any diarrhea. Ver—

**Justin:** Not that regular, good smelling diarrhea that you read so much about, in those fantasy novels.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] Quite odiferous. And the thing is, he liked to eat so much, even as a young child, his parents could not keep him fed. He ate constantly, like, I said to the point where his belly got very distended and his skin hung off of him, but he never—he never really gained weight. He was eating—

**Justin:** But how would he gain— how did his belly get distended if he wouldn't gain weight?

**Sydnee:** It would get really big and bloated and distended after he would eat. And then as he would digest it, it would just hang. Like a big flap of skin.

**Justin:** That's buck-wild.

**Sydnee:** Yep. He was eating, before he was kicked out of his house by his parents, who ran out of food— he was eating about a quarter of a cow a day.

**Justin:** The question, of course, was which quarter do you eat which day? Because if you save the head, and just treat yourself to the butt-quarter and the mid-quarters, that's really unfortunate.

**Sydnee:** My question was, how many cows do they have? Because a quarter of a cow a day, that's a cow every four days. I mean—

**Justin:** Two cows every eight days. I mean, run the math.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I mean, I don't know how many cows this family had, but eventually they were going to run out. So—

**Justin:** Not many cows. I would say they didn't have a lot.

**Sydnee:** So, they ran out of cows, and they kicked him out. [laughs]

**Justin:** The end.

**Sydnee:** So, no, his parents did turn him out. They couldn't keep up with his demand for food. So, at this point, he did what any teen—

**Justin:** This is a great time in human history, when you're like, [high-pitched voice] "No, he eats too much. He must leave!"

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** [normal] Like, "He's, our son. Should we—"

[high-pitched voice] "He eats a cow. He eats a four cow."

**Sydnee:** Is that your French accent, now, that you're doing?

**Justin:** Oui, oui!

**Sydnee:** So, he's turned out by his parents, and he does what any teen on the run does. At least, from all the books that I read as a teenager, about other teens on the run.

**Justin:** He— he eats local cows.

**Sydnee:** No, he takes up with a band of questionable characters. You know, people who steal things, and people who try to run scams on people and whatnot. And just basically wanders the French countryside for a while, doing whatever sketchy people do for cash. You know, illegal kinds of things.

**Justin:** That is an unfortunate life if you're, like, not just regular hobo hungry, but like super hobo hungry.

**Sydnee:** Super hungry. Super hungry.

**Justin:** Like, that's rough.

**Sydnee:** He eventually figured; you know—

**Justin:** Eats a hobo.

**Sydnee:** No. Mm-mm.

**Justin:** Just starts eating his railway companions.

**Sydnee:** No. No.

**Justin:** No?

**Sydnee:** We'll get there.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** He eventually joins up with a medical show, because he figures, you know, "I can eat a lot more than most people. I should use it to make money." Because you know, if you've got a talent, celebrate it.

So, he signs up with this— this, kind of, quack doctor who goes around selling fake patent medicines. And he basically is in charge of drawing the crowd. So, he would stand in front of people and say, "Hey, come watch me. I'm going to swallow a live animal, and then a bunch of rocks. Basically anything. I will eat anything. I'm always hungry."

And then a big crowd is drawn. And then the doctor comes out and gets everybody to buy his tonic, or whatever.

**Justin:** [coughs] I'm assuming the two weren't actually connected. As like, "You could be just like him."

Like, "No, thanks. I'm good. I'll eat regular human food, thank you."

**Sydnee:** No. Not really. Just like a— just a— kind of, as a sideshow kind of thing.

**Justin:** Got it.

**Sydnee:** By 17— he was eating more and more through this time, and by 17 he was said to have been able to eat his weight in beef. Which still wasn't very much, 'cause only weighed, like, 100 pounds.

**Justin:** I bet that's still about a quarter cow.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Probably.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** He began to see that this eating thing could be bigger than just medical shows, but he's got to get out of the countryside. He's got to get to the big city, to the city of lights. He's got to get to Paris.

**Justin:** Gay Paris, where a professional eater can really—

**Sydnee:** What's more romantic than eating your weight in beef? So, he— he goes to Paris looking for bigger crowds and more money to get and—

**Justin:** And baguettes.

**Sydnee:** I'm assuming. I'm assuming. He— so, basically, he would get there, and he would stand in the streets and eat things... for money. He would eat— he would buy a basket of apples and then just stand there and eat the entire basket of apples. He would eat corks, 'cause he could. Flint, anything that he could find or afford or that people were willing to hand him. And I'm guessing it was, like, probably a dare thing. Like, "If you'll eat this, I'll give you two francs." [pause] I don't know.

**Justin:** Yeah. It's a rough superpower. "You eat these two francs and I'll give you two more francs."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] "No, you can just have those."

**Justin:** “And you get these as a bonus, you’ll keep them. You can have them.”

**Sydnee:** Of course, there were hazards in this line of work. At one point, he suffered an obstruction of his intestine from... *any* of these items I mentioned.

**Justin:** Yeah, take your pick.

**Sydnee:** Any of them. And he ended up in a local hospital. They cured him by just giving him lots and lots of laxatives, which eventually worked. Which you could do, I guess.

**Justin:** Cool day.

**Sydnee:** We’re good at laxatives. We’ve always been good at laxatives, humans. Just— that’s just something we have always been good at.

**Justin:** Good for us.

**Sydnee:** Making people poop. He offered, while he was there, to show the doctor his tricks in repayment. By— he said, “You know, if you want me to, I can swallow your watch and the chain. Just watch, I’ll do it right now.”

**Justin:** “Can you not, sir? Can you not?”

**Sydnee:** That's basically what the doctor said. And then said, "You know, if you do, I'm a surgeon, I'll cut you open and get it back out. So please, don't swallow my watch."

**Justin:** And he's like, "Well if you do that, I'm just going to eat it again."

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** 'Cause that's how the... [mumbles]

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] That's how Tarrare works.

**Justin:** "Now, can I be a doctor too?"

"No, that's not how that works."

**Sydnee:** That's not how any of this works. So, with the French Revolution, Tarrare feels his patriotic duty. He must sign up.

**Justin:** [French accent] "I will eat all the guns!"

**Sydnee:** [laughs] He probably could have. But instead, he ran into a problem, because if you're going to join the military, you got to survive on military rations. Now, they— they recognized and were sympathetic to the fact that he was hungrier than your average French revolutionary soldier and they gave him quadruple rations.

**Justin:** Nice.



**Sydnee:** But that still could not sustain him. And after he ate all of the poultices in the apothecary's office – that's right, he ate all the poultices—

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** —they decided, we're going to have to put this guy in the hospital. He's just— there's something wrong with him. And he claimed that he was so completely exhausted and starving and couldn't do anything anyway. So, they put him in the hospital for exhaustion and the surgeons are kind of excited.

**Justin:** Okay. Because?

**Sydnee:** I mean, because he's interesting.

**Justin:** Yeah, what's happening here?

**Sydnee:** Because we don't get this. We don't understand this guy. So, while he's there and they're trying to figure out what's wrong with him, he basically eats everything he can get his hands on. They find him eating scraps off other patient's trays. They find him going through the trash. Digging through the gutter. Just, basically any food that he can find, they— he's eating.

They even at one point start tying him to the bed, because he was eating all the food in the hospital. And, I mean, other people needed to eat. So, the surgeons, of course, rather fascinated with this guy, start doing some experiments. So, for instance, there is a meal that was prepared for 15 laborers. I— history does not know what the 15 laborers ate that night. [laughs lightly] But what I do know is that they didn't eat the meal that was

originally prepared for them, because instead, these surgeons let Tarrare loose and said, "Go. Go eat it." And he did.

He ate two giant meat pies, plates of salt and grease.

**Justin:** [groans]

**Sydnee:** What are you even doing with that? And then drank four gallons of milk, before passing out into a deep, deep sleep.

**Justin:** So, he's like— this cat's basically a human Tasmanian devil. Basically.

**Sydnee:** [laughs lightly] They tried some more frightening, I would say, experiments than just eating plates of grease and salt. They put a live cat in front of him and [speaks softly] he ate it.

**Justin:** O-kay.

**Sydnee:** They tried other animals: snakes, and puppies and lizards. He seemed to prefer snakes, but he'd eat anything. Um, and he once even ate an entire eel whole.

**Justin:** So, I'm supposed to be— that was your climax? After eating cats and puppies, he ate a eel whole? That's what's supposed to get me excited?

**Sydnee:** He swallowed it whole. He didn't swallow the cat whole.

**Justin:** What did he do? Just kind of... ugh. I don't want to know.

**Sydnee:** You don't want to know. Trust me. You don't want to know.

**Justin:** Ugh.

**Sydnee:** So, okay. This guy will eat anything. We've established this, but the surgeons aren't really learning necessarily, I would say, anything. I would say, they were pretty horrified. [laughs lightly]

**Justin:** They're pretending like they are, "Hmm. Hmm. Very good, let's try again."

**Sydnee:** "Let's just keep putting things in front of him."

And the army is not thrilled with this. "Listen, we need all hands on deck. We need all of our soldiers. We need all of our surgeons not occupied with this situation. So could we just get him back out here and let him do soldier stuff again? And please stop feeding him animals."

And the surgeons are like, "Well now, we still want to get some— we could probably squeeze some more science out of this guy. We're really fascinated." So, they come up with a plan: "Why don't we make him sort of into, like, a human carrier pigeon?"

**Justin:** Okay, I like it.

**Sydnee:** Since he'll eat anything. So, they test it out by putting a message into a small wooden box and having him swallow the box. Some number of hours later, out comes the box, with the message inside completely intact and legible.

**Justin:** Message of course, "Where's the beef?"

**Sydnee:** Aww.

**Justin:** Gross. I don't know why they picked that.

**Sydnee:** Gross... gross. So, once the doctors try this out, and go, "Yeah, this could work." They take him to the headquarters of the French army and ask him to perform this trick again for all of, like, the commanders. "Hey, look at what your new superspy can do." And they have him eat a box [laughs lightly] and then wait. Then he poops the box out, and then there's a message in it and it's like, "Surprise, I'm your new spy!" [through laughter] Coming to theaters this fall.

**Justin:** Yeah. So, he eats the box— he eats the box in front of them and then he's, like— they're, like, "If you think that's good, just chill here for, like, 12 hours, 'cause it's about to get great."

**Sydnee:** I mean, that's basically what happened. I found one footnote, from one source, that maybe Napoleon was there, which is just too much for me to handle. No, I can't. I can't handle that situation. No way.

**Justin:** Yeah, that's too good. Okay.

**Sydnee:** In return for this, by the way, because they say, "We're going to use you as a super-secret spy," they give him 30 pounds of raw bull's liver and lungs. Which he, of course, he eats on the spot.

**Justin:** Okay, so what was this dude's deal, Sydnee? I gotta know.

**Sydnee:** Well, Justin, I'm going to tell you more about Tarrare, but first why don't we head to the billing department?

**Justin:** Let's go.

[ad break]

**Justin:** Okay. I have to know more about this cat. I'm obsessed with him.

**Sydnee:** Okay. So—

**Justin:** He's my hero. I want Kevin James to play him in the movie.

**Sydnee:** [chuckles] We're at the point where Tarrare has been co—

**Justin:** I don't think Kevin James is a big fat guy. Because, I mean, he can be. But he can also be— I mean, look at *Here Comes the Boom*, for example. He looked great in that.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** I'm just saying, I think he'd be funny.

**Sydnee:** Okay. I think you know a lot more about Kevin James than I do. So, I don't have much to contribute to the Kevin James conversation.

**Justin:** That's fine. I'll keep it going over here. I'll back-channel.

**Sydnee:** Right. Good. So anyway, I do know about Tarrare. Let me tell you about him. So, he, at this point, we have— he has been— it's been decided by the French army that we're going to send this guy, who can swallow things and poop them out later intact, we're going to send him on a secret spy mission.

**Justin:** [excitedly] Yes.

**Sydnee:** But they're a little nervous. They don't doubt his physical ability. I mean, he has shown them what he is capable of. [laughs]

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** And they are impressed.

**Justin:** Of eating boxes and pooping them out.

**Sydnee:** Exactly. But they are concerned about, um... his temperament, let's say.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** It is noted, actually, in one description of him, historically, one of the physicians wrote that, "He was almost devoid of force and of ideas."

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** So, they're a little worried about his ability to pull this off. Like, the spy part. So, the first— they tell him, "We're going to have you swallow a box with some top-secret documents in it." Okay?

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Super-secret stuff. Really, all they do is put a note in the box to this French colonel whose been imprisoned by the Prussians. And the note, basically says, like, "Hey, did this work?"

**Justin:** You'll never guess where this note came from.

**Sydnee:** [laughs lightly] Also, "BT-dubs, you got any intel you want to let us know about? Just testing, testing. Can you hear me?"

**Justin:** Through this guy's butt.

**Sydnee:** Through this guy's butt.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** I mean, that's basically it. It had no useful information in it. It wasn't a top-secret document. It was just, like, a test run, but they didn't tell him this. Tarrare thinks that what is hidden in his gut is of utmost importance.

**Justin:** Uh-huh.

**Sydnee:** So, he swallows the box. He takes off. He gets behind enemy lines disguised as a German peasant. However, there's a hitch. There's a problem they did not think about.

**Justin:** What's that?

**Sydnee:** Tarrare does not speak a word of German. [laughs]

**Justin:** Okay. Tricky. Yes.

**Sydnee:** Problematic.

**Justin:** Problematic, for sure.

**Sydnee:** As a result, he is almost instantly discovered. [laughs lightly]

**Justin:** [wheeze-laugh, cough]

**Sydnee:** As a spy. So, he's captured. Uh, they figure out that he is on some sort of secret mission. They, obviously, don't— the Prussian army does not know what the nature of said mission, is, but they interrogate him. They beat him and, finally, he reveals his mission. At this point, they basically chain him to the loo and wait.

**Justin:** [simultaneously] And wait.

**Sydnee:** And, eventually, the box comes out, and they discover the not-so-helpful message. Now, there is, by the way, an alternate story that I found in two sources that may— there was some question as to did they ever



actually get the box out or did Tarrare reswallow it? Like, poop it out and then instantly reswallow it.

**Justin:** Ugh.

**Sydnee:** Um, and then— so they never got the information. Either way, even if they got the information, they saw that this guy really didn't have anything. He didn't have any good stuff.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So, at this point, his captors get really mad. Because here they waited for this guy. They've had to go through his poop. There's nothing useful. So they hold, basically... a mock execution?

**Justin:** Okay. Didn't know that was a thing.

**Sydnee:** They actually get to the point of placing the noose around his neck, before they then remove it and just, kind of, send him back— back on his way, back to France.

**Justin:** If they knew what sweet trick he could do, they probably would have kept him.

**Sydnee:** I don't know. Maybe they saw that that plan didn't work out very well for the French army.

**Justin:** But, yeah, just for fun. For, like, base entertainment, I guess.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] So after this escapade, he's pretty freaked out and he's really, kind of, over the whole military experience. So, he gets back to his— to his team— to his camp and he says, "I just want to go back to the hospital. There's something wrong with me, in case you guys didn't know, [laughs lightly] and I just want to be admitted there until you fix me. I can't do the fighting thing or these secret spy missions anymore. Please, please, somebody fix me."

So, at this point, instead of just feeding him random things and seeing if he gets— and seeing what happens, the doctors actually start trying the cures of the time. And as you may imagine—

**Justin:** So, basically, they gave him random things and saw what happened.

**Sydnee:** Exactly. Only instead of just seeing if he'd eat it and going, "Whoa, I can't believe he ate that."

**Justin:** They wrote it down.

**Sydnee:** They wrote it down. And they were, like, "Let's try some laudanum. You know, opium. Nope, I mean, he feels great, but he's still eating everything in sight. Okay, give him some vinegar, we love to give people vinegar. Nope, that didn't work. Tobacco pills? That's great. Let's try it. Nope, doesn't do anything."

And then they tried a treatment that I really—I would like to coin as "The Cool Hand Luke Method." Where they basically just gave him as many soft-boiled eggs as he could eat. I don't know if the idea was just to see if they could fill him up?

**Justin:** Or if they took bets.

**Sydnee:** But, anyway, it didn't work. He just ate tons of soft-boiled eggs, then they ran out of them. And that was it. That was the end of that.

**Justin:** The end. And by then it was getting pretty late, and they all decided to go home.

**Sydnee:** [laughs lightly] And they decided to go home. And they were like, "Man, now we don't have any eggs for the morning."

**Justin:** "Yeah, we'll eat them next time."

**Sydnee:** And they tried a bunch of, like, controlled diets. Like, just limiting how much he was allowed to eat, but changing what— you know, trying to concentrate on caloric content, or protein, or whatever. And anyway, none of it worked. So, he still wanted to eat everything in sight.

And he was sneaking away, at night, while he was in the hospital, because of his growing appetite and all of these treatments that weren't filling him. And eating, again, worse and worse stuff. He began to go to all the local butcher shops and eat any offal that he could find leftover in dumpsters and trash cans. It was noted that he would fight alley cats for carrion that would be left there.

**Justin:** That's fun.

**Sydnee:** Um, he would dig through trash. Just was eating everything. Uh, his surgeons stuck by his side for a while and then things started to get really bad. He was found drinking blood that was being taken out of other patients...

**Justin:** Oh, no.

**Sydnee:** ... who were being bled as treatment. And then they found him trying to eat corpses in the mortuary.

**Justin:** Oh, come on!

**Sydnee:** Still, his surgeons stuck by his side and said, "We must keep this man here. Our job is to heal. I am a healer. I will do what it takes. We will work harder to control him, but we're not giving up on Tarrare."

Right up until a 14-month-old child who was in the hospital went missing...

**Justin:** I mean, I've been hungry before. Don't get me wrong.

**Sydnee:** I have no proof that this is what happened. No one really does, but I guess it was *heavily* suspected. So, as a result, even his surgeons could no longer stand by him. Which, I think, by the way, all they do is kick him out of the hospital.

**Justin:** That's not bad. Not bad, really.

**Sydnee:** Considering that they thought he ate a baby, I think just kicking him out of the hospital is not the worst...

**Justin:** Oh, my God. Is this like a backwards origin story for Fat Bastard from the movie, *Austin Powers 2: The Spy Who Shagged Me*?

**Sydnee:** [laughs lightly] No, absolutely not. I would not be telling that story. So, Tarrare leaves the hospital.

**Justin:** [Fat Bastard voice] "I'm going to eat your baby." Remember?

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I— I remember. [chuckles softly]

**Justin:** [Shrek voice] "Oh, donkey, open window."

**Sydnee:** [deadpan voice] Just as— yeah... just as funny as it was back then. Okay. Anyway—

**Justin:** [bad Shrek voice] "Donkey, open the window." That one's from *Shrek*.

**Sydnee:** [pause] Is it?

**Justin:** That one was *Shrek*.

**Sydnee:** Right. They all just—

**Justin:** [Donkey's voice] "You know Shrek, I love a parfait."

**Sydnee:** So now you're gonna do *Shrek* voices?

**Justin:** That one was Donkey.

**Sydnee:** Right, that one was Donkey. Now you're going to do characters from *Shrek*. Are there any other impressions you'd like to get in real quick before—

**Justin:** Are there any characters that I can't do? Is the question.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Well, French ones. You can't do those.

**Justin:** Okay. Moving on.

**Sydnee:** You're bad at those. [laughs lightly] So, he— we lose track of Tarrare for a while. Because he's turned out of the hospital and no surgeons are writing about him. That's where— that's why we know so much about him, by the way. A lot of this just comes from fascinated doctors who had no clue what was happening or what to do about it, but just could not help but write about this guy.

So, he turns up four years later in a different hospital. He actually sends for one of the surgeons. Uh, who asks someone to try to get him to come see him, because he is very ill and he believes he's dying. And he is in another hospital, and he wants— you know, he remembers the surgeon who worked so hard to try to help him and, you know, didn't give up on him until maybe— maybe he committed cannibalism.

**Justin:** It's odd that we don't have that surgeon's name, huh?

**Sydnee:** I do have his name. I just didn't write it down.

**Justin:** Oh.

**Sydnee:** Sorry.

**Justin:** It's okay. It just got lost to history.

**Sydnee:** No, it's there. I mean, it's very—

**Justin:** History's got it.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. It's there. Just didn't write it down. So, anyway. So, he's very ill. He's dying from what he thought was the result of swallowing a golden fork.

**Justin:** [laughs and coughs]

**Sydnee:** That's what he tells—

**Justin:** Is he Rumpelstiltskin?

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] What— did Rumpelstiltskin swallow a golden fork?

**Justin:** No, it's just, like, an appropriate fairy tale sort of, Grimms Brothers' thing. Like, this character vacillates wildly between, like, "Man, that sounds like a really tough medical affliction." And then, other times, I'm like, "This guy is a human troll or ogre that lives in the swamp."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** And he's Shrek. A person named Shrek. He's like, Shrek the person.

**Sydnee:** Well, I mean— yeah, he does some pretty horrible things. But, either way, he thought that he ate a golden fork. Um—

**Justin:** Oh, no. He did— I mean, he probably *did* eat a golden fork.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's true.

**Justin:** He thought that he was feeling poorly— in a poorly manner, because he had eaten a golden fork.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Justin:** That a witch had cast a spell on.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Justin:** And poisoned him with magic— a magical golden fork.

**Sydnee:** Percy, is the name of the surgeon, by the way.

**Justin:** Percy.

**Sydnee:** Percy.

**Justin:** All right. Got it. He's been immortalized now.



**Sydnee:** [laughs lightly] So, Percy arrives at the bedside. He— he hears the story of the golden fork, but there's nothing he can do. Tarrare is very sick. And actually, after examining him, he— whether or not the golden fork is causing a problem, he is certain that Tarrare has tuberculosis at this point. And that is actually why he is so sick, and why he is dying.

He continues to deteriorate. He developed very severe diarrhea and then he died. Um, at this point, you can imagine, there were a lot of doctors who wanted to know what the heck was going on.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And so, an autopsy was performed. Uh, which at the time, the— what you would have been able to learn from an autopsy would have been pretty limited because our understanding of the human body was so fairly limited.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** So, you know, even if they had performed an appropriately thorough autopsy, who knows if they would have been able to put together exactly what the cause of his— his condition was. But they didn't perform a complete autopsy, because what they found after they first began the procedure was so... gross? That they didn't proceed very far.

He did have— the way they describe it is they were able to open up his mouth and look down directly into his stomach. That his esophagus and his stomach were just huge. And when they opened up his abdomen that it filled, like, the entire abdominal cavity. His stomach— which it's not supposed to be that big. You can probably imagine. That his liver and his

gallbladder were huge. That there were ulcers everywhere. There was a ton of pus everywhere.

And basically, it just got too much for everybody in the room. And they said, "You know what, we don't know anything yet. We're not going to be able to figure this out for hundreds of years."

**Justin:** It's the 1800's, yeah.

**Sydnee:** "We don't know anything. Let's just leave this— this poor guy's been through enough."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** "Let's leave his body in peace." Um, it should be noted they never found the fork.

**Justin:** [laughs lightly] The last mystery of Tarrare.

**Sydnee:** For all of you— for all of you at home who are wondering, "But where's the fork!?" [laughs lightly]

**Justin:** Yeah, sorry.

**Sydnee:** They didn't find the golden fork. Now, you may be wondering— this is where the story of Tarrare, as far as we know, ends. Now, what's interesting if you— if you find this story fascinating, is we are not the only ones to talk about it. There are puppet shows about Tarrare. There are plays. There are short films. There are all kinds of— there's all kinds of artwork out there based on him.

I think he's a really interesting character, um, in literature and art. Just as, kind of, this picture of a glutton, some call him. Of, um, I don't know, but it's a very interesting— he's become a very interesting artistic figure as a result of all this. As—

**Justin:** Well, it's got to be a walking hell, right? To like— to be always hungry.

**Sydnee:** To never be full.

**Justin:** To never be full. To always be hungry.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So, that insatiable character.

**Justin:** What was wrong with him?

**Sydnee:** Well, that's a good question, Justin.

**Justin:** Nice.

**Sydnee:** We're not sure. I— I'm not going to be able to give you a completely satisfactory answer. There have been a lot of theories about what was wrong with him. Um, people have suggested things like hyperthyroidism.

**Justin:** Hmm?

**Sydnee:** When you have too much thyroid hormone. It can make your metabolism fast. And you could have some of the symptoms. Such as, you could have trouble gaining weight or have weight loss. You could have diarrhea. You could have a lot of sweating. You could be hot all the time. That being said— um, your hair could be thin. That being said, I— generally, we don't accept that it also makes you eat live animals.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** And drink human blood. You know?

**Justin:** Steal babies for fuel.

**Sydnee:** That— hyperthyroidism could explain some of the things, but not everything, certainly. Um, some people talked about diabetes. Very uncontrolled diabetes can have symptoms like wanting to eat all the time or losing a lot of weight. But again, obviously, that doesn't explain everything.

**Justin:** You don't see Wilford Brimley pounding babies.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] No, at least not in the commercial. There has also been talk about was there damage to a part of his brain called the amygdala, which is part of what controls your hunger, and people who have damaged amygdalas in history - especially animals, we have noted - have just shown this insatiable hunger.

But again, there was a lot going on here. There was— this is clearly a very complex case. And we've never seen one exactly like it in history. There were other famous people who ate a lot and who ate odd things. And even, like, live animals and things like that. But this case takes the cake. Not to make a joke.

Um, he is clearly the biggest ap— the word, by the way, is polyphagia. Polyphagia. That means you eat a lot. It means you're hungry a lot, I should say. So, someone with polyphagia is just hungry *all* the time. Eating all the time, cannot be full, and that is— that is Tarrare.

**Justin:** I think you mentioned to me, if you're still *hungry* for more Tarrare, I think you mentioned to me, our friends over at, uh, *Stuff You Missed in History Class* covered Tarrare, as well.

**Sydnee:** That's exactly right!

**Justin:** I remember that.

**Sydnee:** They did an episode on it as well. So, from the historical perspective.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's a fascinating story. Poor guy.

**Justin:** Poor guy. Um—

**Sydnee:** Well, he *may* have eaten a baby.

**Justin:** May have eaten a baby. Yeah, it really does cast a pall on him.

**Sydnee:** But let's get you innocent until proven guilty, right?

**Justin:** Yeah, and good luck with that one.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** That's going to do it for us. Thank you all so much for listening. Thanks to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song, "Medicines," as the intro and outro of our program.

Hey, if you got a second, you want a new podcast? I got one for you. It's called *Still Buffering*. Uh, Sydnee hosts it with her sisters Rileigh and Teylor, and they compare teen life then and now. And this week is all about YouTube, so if you fin— and old internet videos. So, if you finally want to understand YouTube and what the kids are doing on YouTube, search for *Still Buffering*.

**Sydnee:** Thank you, honey.

**Justin:** Uh, on iTunes or go to teen— teengoole.com.

**Sydnee:** [quietly laughing]

**Justin:** And you'll also get there. It's another Maximum Fun program. There's a lot more at Maximumfun.org. If you want to see all the shows our family makes, you can find them at McElroyshows.com, but I think that's going to do it for us for this week, Sydster. Um, so, until next week, I'm Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And, as always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[theme music plays]

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