

Sawbones 151: The Royal Fistula Fad

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Intro (Clint McElroy):

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[Intro, theme music plays]

Justin:

Hello, everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*. I'm your co-host Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Hey, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Hey, Justin. How you doing today?

Justin:

I'm well. How are you?

Sydnee:

I'm good. Good, thanks. Hey, did you ever see the movie *The Man in the Iron Mask*?

Justin:

Yeah. A while... It seems like you ask me that every day but, as I've told you so many times before, indeed I have.

Sydnee:

Yeah, those are the two questions I ask you every day. Do you miss Crystal Pepsi?

Justin:

And have I seen *Man in the Iron Mask*?

Sydnee:

And the answer to the first now is "no", 'cause it's back. The answer to the second is "yes."

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

I'll ask you again tomorrow and see if it changes.

Justin:

It won't, but that's fine. Yeah, so Leonardo DiCaprio stars as, I think he's like- if I remember correctly, it has been a while- but I think he's like, King Louis XIV's brother? Identical twin brother.

Or maybe it was King Louis XIV himself and they were switched...?

Sydnee:

I think he ... Yeah, I think he was actually the King.

Justin:

It... It...

Sydnee:

I mean, he's Leo. Like, you think they were gonna give him the role, "Hey, let's get Leonardo DiCaprio to play the role of the King's brother?"

Justin:

Well, sweetheart, I don't mean to kibitz, but they are identical twins, so I'm assuming he probably played both parts.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's...

Justin:

That would be an odd choice otherwise.

Sydnee:

[laughing] That's fair. He probably did, didn't he?

Justin:

[laughing] Yes, he probably did.

Sydnee:

I love when they do that in movies or TV, that magic, where they make one person look like two people. Like, in *The Parent Trap*.

Justin:

The Patty Duke Show, yeah for sure.

Sydnee:

Do you know how long I didn't know that was one person? I figured it out when Lindsay Lohan remade *The Parent Trap* and I thought, "Well, I know there's not two Lindsay Lohans," so like I—

Justin:

I would have heard about that in the tabloids.

Sydnee:

... I know that it must've been the same person all along. That's amazing.

Justin:

Man, I bet they were mad they couldn't get the Olson twins for that heat.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Anyway, Sydnee, why are you asking me—

Sydnee:

Why didn't they?

Justin:

Why are you asking me ... Well, by that point they didn't look that similar. Why are you asking me this about *Man in the Iron Mask*, Sydnee?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's been 90 seconds.

Sydnee:

Well, King Louis XIV, I think, is probably best remembered for the film starring Leonardo DiCaprio—

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... *The Man in the Iron Mask*. I think that's probably what most people know about him, for sure, right?

Justin:

Sure, definitely. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, whatever. Yeah.

Justin:

Sure. It's fine.

Sydnee:

But lesser known fact, although still popular, do you know about his butt tunnel?

Justin:

[exhales]

Sydnee:

I'm sorry, let's start over. Do you know about his anal fistula? [laughs]

Justin:

No, I don't know about either one. I know the word fistula, and I have a rough idea of what it means. But I did not know of any connection between that and King Louis.

Sydnee:

I didn't actually know, initially, about King Louis'... King Louis XIV's anal fistula.

But we got an email from Annette, thank you Annette for an- this email that was the best-titled email that our show has ever received. Sorry to... I love all of your emails, but this was the best title.

And it was called "King Louis' Anal Fistula." And I—

Justin:

That's a very good title.

Sydnee:

I was intrigued instantly, had to click on that first to read it. And I—

Justin:

Take note, BuzzFeed.

Sydnee:

Lg This was... Yeah, this totally worked. That was total click bait. It worked. I read it. And I have learned so much.

And now, I would like to share with you the tale of King Louis XIV's anal fistula.

Justin:

Okay, sounds good.

Sydnee:

So, he's also known as the Sun King, which just gets funnier as we talk about his butt more, I guess.

Justin:

[laughs] Sure.

Sydnee:

You know why he was called the Sun King?

Justin:

Uh... I don't actually know why.

Sydnee:

Because of the brilliance of his court.

Justin:

Oh...

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

He had a smart court?

Sydnee:

He had a smart, beautiful, charismatic court.

Justin:

And he was the... he was the celestial orb, the heliotropic body around which they all satellited.

Sydnee:

Uh, yes. And I'm assuming it got better after the anal fistula thing, 'cause like, before that... See King Louis XIV was not what you would consider a healthy guy.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

He had a lot of the things that probably would have been common for the time. He had gout. We've talked about that before. A lot of royalty did because they ate a lot of rich foods, drank a lot of wine. He had gout.

He had a lot of dental abscesses, again there wasn't a lot of dental hygiene. Not surprising. He actually, probably had diabetes.

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

Based on descriptions of his health. I mean, they didn't know that.

He had a lot of headaches. That was reported a lot.

And then the usual host of like, childhood illnesses. Smallpox, and measles and things like that.

But... after he became king, his health became meticulously recorded every single day by his court.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So we know intimate details about all of his illnesses from the day he became king on. Okay?

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So, can you imagine that, by the way? Every morning like, being woken up by guys who are like, "How are you feeling today? And can I look at your toes? And how's your head doing—"

Justin:

There was like another guy writing it down?

Sydnee:

Yeah, and they would just like, write down like, "He woke up this morning and he was a little groggy, and he needed a Tums." Nah, I mean, whatever.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

On January 15th, 1685, this is why we know these dates. On January 15th, 1685, King Louis XIV developed a swelling near his anus.

Justin:

Ugh, you hate to hear that.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

That's rough, especially when your... so much of your day consists of thrones. That's a... that's a tough one.

Sydnee:

Exact- Thrones and horseback riding.

Justin:

Oh, woof, woof, woof.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So this progressed. And we can follow, we can track the progress, of this swelling near his anus every single morning until February 18th, so a little over a month later, when the swelling had become an abscess.

Justin:

I bet one of the most annoying parts of his day was trying to describe to people how... the degree to which the discomfort caused by his anus swelling had changed.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Like, "Is it better? Or worse? Or like, seven, eight? What's your anal fist-like, how bad is this swelling?"

Sydnee:

I ...

Justin:

That'd be very annoying.

Sydnee:

Do you think... See, I haven't read these records myself, but now I really want to because... Do you think they were real artful, and like, it was beautifully described? Or do you think it's pretty straightforward?

Justin:

Um, I mean I think you gotta ...

Sydnee:

I mean, it's the King.

Justin:

Make a safe bet the King's never gonna read it, right? Like...

Sydnee:

[As Royal Medical Recorder] "The King's royal derriere is ..."

Justin:

[As Royal Medical Record] "Has emplumpened."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Emplumpened?

Justin:

[As Royal Medical Record] "Emplumpened with... with an angry... nodule."

Sydnee:

[As Royal Medical Record] "But still lovely."

Justin:

[As Royal Medical Record] "Still lovely and perfect."

Sydnee:

[As Royal Medical Record] "The shade of red becomes—"

Justin:

This is gross.

Sydnee:

[As Royal Medical Record] "...more deep and beautiful every day."

Justin:

What happened next? It became an abscess. Yuckaroo.

Sydnee:

So, it became an abscess on February 18th, 1685.

Justin:

What's that mean? What's abscess mean?

Sydnee:

So an abscess is usually an... Well it's an area of infection that's kind of walled off.

So what you would think of as a boil is probably a good... If you say "boil", you probably mean "abscess."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So like a little walled off, hard, red, actually squishy in the center 'cause there's pus in there, area of infection.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Near his anus.

Now, by May 2nd- Which, that's a long time.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

That he just had that.

Justin:

And had to live with it.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I mean, now let me ... I will get to some of the things they were trying to do to treat this, in a minute.

So there were doctors obviously attending to this. They weren't just like, watching it.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

People were trying to do things for it, but obviously they weren't working because by May 2nd, the abscess has given rise to a fistula.

Justin:

Ugh...

Sydnee:

Now, do you ... You said you know what a fistula is.

Justin:

Well, I remember—

Sydnee:

So ...

Justin:

... a gastric fistula...

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Right? From the—

Sydnee:

Yeah, we've talked about this.

Justin:

That whole romance, the guy who had... uh... Austin-

Sydnee:

Alexis Saint Martin.

Justin:

Alexis Saint Martin. I was gonna say Austin Saint John, who was the Red Power Ranger.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It was not him.

Sydnee:

[laughing] No, it wasn't him.

Justin:

Don't get it twisted, his stomach is like, sealed. No problem.

Sydnee:

No, his stomach's fine. And unlike Alexis Saint Martin, the French-Canadian fur trader.

Justin:

Yes, who had a hole. He had a gastric fistula, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah he had a gastric fistula. So, it's a connection between the inside of something to the outside.

Justin:

So like, it's how people often call your mouth your food fistula.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

No?

Sydnee:

Nope. I mean, no one calls that ...

Justin:

Your mouth is not a fistula?

Sydnee:

No?

Justin:

What about your, uh, nostrils?

Sydnee:

No, because- I mean, usually when we say fistula we mean something that isn't intentionally there.

Justin:

An unintentional hole.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

So you gotta be specific about your words, is key in communication.

Sydnee:

Sure. Yeah. So an anal fistula in this case would be a connection from inside the anal canal to the outside.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So, kind of... Think of like a little bypass road from inside the anus that would open up somewhere around the anus.

Justin:

I'm not gonna think about that, but thank you.

Sydnee:

[laughs] No, just really picture it.

Justin:

I appreciate the in- I appreciate the invitation.

Sydnee:

Everybody google "anal fistula." [laughs]

Justin:

Sadly, I'll have to decline your invitation. I've marked... I did not mark, uh, that I'll have the chicken or fish. I marked, "Regretfully not attending" on this invitation.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Actually, don't google "anal fistula."

Justin:

Yeah, no kidding, Sydster.

Sydnee:

Just... Just imagine it. I mean, you know somebody—

Justin:

[yells] Don't imagine it!

Sydnee:

Some people are doing that, though. Some people are totally—

Justin:

We don't have to theater of the mind this, just get to the education.

Sydnee:

Our listeners, I know are... I know you guys, some of you are doing it.

So, it could develop because of an infection in like, the tissues around the anus, which is probably what happened in this case.

Sometimes fistulas are the results of surgeries, but again, not in this case. This was probably just a really bad infection and it created this tunnel and there you go. Now you got a fistula.

It was thought at the time that it was caused by too much horseback riding. That was the theory for Louis XIV, is because he spent a lot of time on horseback.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So, this is probably where this came from.

Other popular theories at the time were that you could get an anal fistula from eating too much. Having sex, too much.

Justin:

Mm, okay.

Sydnee:

Or the... Certain feathers that you might find in the seats of carriages.

Justin:

Sure. [incredulous] What?

Sydnee:

Yeah. Obviously those don't cause ...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I got—

Sydnee:

Fistula.

Justin:

I was one step ahead of you on that one.

Sydnee:

The treatments that were tried, and this would have been from the initial swelling on January 14th on, mainly consisted of poultices.

So they would take like, a mixture of flour, and barley, and flax seed, and beans, and water, and vinegar, and kind of create this poultice, and—

Justin:

Make chili.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Make some chili and slap it on there and see if they could draw out the infection, is probably what they... what the theory was that they were trying to do.

Enemas were tried. Many, many enemas. And we've talked about this before—

Justin:

That's exactly what you want when you're in that position, I would assume.

Sydnee:

An enema.

Justin:

An enema.

Sydnee:

No, I don't think so.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

I think you've got enough discomfort going on down there as it is.

Justin:

[pained whisper] Yeah.

Sydnee:

But not for Louis XIV, 'cause if you remember, I think we mentioned this in our enema episode, he was a huge fan of enemas anyway.

Justin:

Sure, he was crazy about the things, maybe that's how he got a fistula in the first place.

Sydnee:

Mm, I don't think so. I think I'm gonna be able to tell you why he may have developed it.

Justin:

Right on. Feathers.

Sydnee:

[laughs] No. But he did... he did, it is documented, have over 2000 enemas in his lifetime. Although, some historians are like, [boring historian voice] "That's an exaggeration. There's no way."

Justin:

Boring

Sydnee:

[boring historian voice] "No way."

Justin:

What... what killjoys.

Sydnee:

Either way, he did like enemas, and there are all these anecdotes about him having enemas while holding court.

And people trying to impress him by like, ladies having enemas while they're talking to him, so that... they see that like, "Hey, look I'm into what you're into and..."

Justin:

[hesitantly] Yeah...

Sydnee:

Anyway. None of this stuff was working. And he was basically unable to sit. He couldn't... I mean he was just in exquisite pain. He couldn't sit down. He couldn't lay down. He was.. it was really bad.

Now why did he get this? Remember something about King Louis. This was during the time period when humanity in general, specifically, let's say, European humanity, was unbathed.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

It was the great unwashed.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

We thought at the time that water was dangerous because it could carry disease into your skin and make you sick and weak.

Justin:

I mean, yeah?

Sydnee:

So people did not want to submerge themselves in water as a result.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So bathing was highly unpopular.

It was also thought that it was immoral. So, doctors told you not to, and the Church told you not to because then, you know, you got naked.

Justin:

[sarcastic] Cool church.

Sydnee:

So, and we've talked about this, again, before. There was this time period where it was not okay to be naked, ever really.

Justin:

Ever.

Sydnee:

So you just wouldn't, as much as you could, be naked.

So most didn't bathe. Now, there's this, again this is debated, but King Louis claimed to have only bathed twice in his life.

Justin:

Um, yeah, I think, sir, I think I would diagnose the cause of your anal fistula.

Ugh.

Sydnee:

So this is probably part of the problem. He may have bathed more than twice. Either way, he did not bathe very often.

A lot of royalty would claim this as like, a way to show how much better they were than everybody else. Would say like, "I've only bathed twice" or whatever.

Queen Isabelle I of Spain was noted to say that she only bathed twice in her life. On the day she was born, and on her wedding day. And those were the only two days that she ever bathed.

Justin:

That's so grody. [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's just... I don't have a joke. It's just like, so grody, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Now they probably—

Justin:

How do they not feel like, a... desire to bathe?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

If I make it to like, 11:00 in the morning, I feel like- and I have not showered yet- I am like flipping Pig Pen. Like, please get me into some hot water.

Sydnee:

They... They probably did do something like wipe their bodies down with things like—

Justin:

Hack baths.

Sydnee:

Vinegar.

Justin:

Hack baths.

Sydnee:

Or alcohol. Kind of like the, um, the wet wipe, wet one bath, that you sometimes in the airport bathroom...

Justin:

Yeah, right. Right. Right. Right.

Sydnee:

Like, when you've been on a really long flight. You just kinda go in and like, wipe yourself down with something. Like, "Enh, I feel a little better."

Justin:

Like we do with... Like the washcloth thing we do with Charlie sometimes when we just can't. We just ...

Sydnee:

When we just can't.

Justin:

We just can't.

Sydnee:

[laughs] We bathe our child frequently.

Justin:

Yeah, like—

Sydnee:

Don't think we're bad parents.

Justin:

We're not bad parents.

Sydnee:

We bathe her like, every night.

Justin:

Listen, and don't tell us that that's wrong, 'cause I don't know, we're all just trying to figure this thing out, okay?

Sydnee:

Part of the bedtime routine, okay?

Justin:

Okay? Just back off.

Sydnee:

We're just getting by.

Justin:

It helps to soothe her. We're just trying to make it to 18. All right?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Anyway, so a lot of people did not bathe. The court itself, everybody would have been heavily powdered, and perfumed to try to hide the smell.

And this is well documented. Like, a Russian ambassador once wrote after meeting King Louis XIV that he stunk like a wild animal.

The king would often tell people to open the windows as he entered rooms because he was aware.

Justin:

[laughs hard]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

He should have paid somebody to do that. "Attention subjects. Your King approaches. Please open the windows, or we're just gonna knock this whole room out. All right? It's very... It's rough in there, all right?"

Sydnee:

He was French.

Justin:

I don't do French.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Zut alors. Just pretend I said "zut alors" a lot.

Sydnee:

Okay. We'll throw- we'll edit that back in there later.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So yeah. So he was well aware that he smelled bad. And everybody knew it.

And he would cover it ... Can you imagine that like, all that stench and then you just cover it in as much perfume as you can.

Justin:

Ugh, it's worse. Ugh.

Sydnee:

So everybody smelled that way. But he knew it, and he would tell them, like, "Open the windows. I'm coming in, and I don't want my staff to pass out 'cause we got work to do. Deal with it."

Justin:

That's so randy. Ugh.

Sydnee:

So anyway, the doctors are treating him. They're get- they're using poultices, they're using enemas. They had some ointments they were trying.

Of course bleeding. I didn't really mention that. But of course he would have been bled multiple times to try to treat this.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Up to that point, we kind of already knew that anal fistulas were a thing that happened. And we sorta knew that we probably needed to do surgery for them.

That actually dates back to Hippocrates who said, you know, you really need to go in and cut this thing open to get it to heal.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

In the 1300s, they documented some surgeries that were tried. And they would use something called a seton, where they would actually take like a cord and loop it through the tunnel, and then back out the anus.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And as a way, like, you could do something sharp to like, pull it through, to try to open it up.

Justin:

[pained exhale]

Sydnee:

Or just as a way... You would just leave it in there, too. You could just leave it.

Justin:

[pained] Mm. Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And then it would heal all the way to the seton and then you would pull it out.

Justin:

[pained] Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

That kind of thing.

Justin:

[pained] Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, of course none of this was done with antisepsis in mind, so...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Anyway, so we kinda knew—

Justin:

What's antisepsis?

Sydnee:

As in like, any attempts to stop infection.

Justin:

Okay, got it.

Sydnee:

Nobody... I mean, nobody understood infection so nobody was trying to stop it.

So, we kinda knew that maybe surgery had to happen. King Louis of course, was doing everything he could to avoid that, 'cause there's no anesthesia. There's no ...

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

No way to prevent infection. A lot of people would have died from surgery.

Justin:

You would think that he would just suck it up for like a day and see if it got better. You know what I mean, like—

Sydnee:

For surgery?

Justin:

... just do the surgery once, if he was in such pain.

Sydnee:

Well, but you gotta think about the fact that it's not just the pain of the surgery, it's the risk.

Justin:

It's the risk of... yeah.

Sydnee:

Surgery, at the time, meant death most of the time.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So, you know, because we couldn't stop bleeding, and people died of infection.

Anyway, they finally caved and said, "We gotta get a surgeon in here."

Now, by surgeon of course I mean a barber-surgeon, 'cause this was—

Justin:

Yeah, right.

Sydnee:

... during the time period where doctors would not cut into a human body. It was considered just completely—

Justin:

Profane.

Sydnee:

Yes, profane. The Church forbade it, and a doctor would never do such a thing.

But Charles Francois Felix was a barber-surgeon who would. Barber-surgeons did things like pull teeth and bloodletting, and minor surgical procedures. As well as, I guess, cut your hair?

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Probably that too.

So he was called upon to come save the King. He checked the King out, looked at his fistula and said, "All right, I'll do this."

He didn't want ... Now you have to imagine this guy was like—

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... terrified.

Justin:

This is a lose-lose...

Sydnee:

No, I mean, you kill the King and that's it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

He checked it out and he said, "I'm gonna do this, but I need six months to prepare."

Justin:

Why?

Sydnee:

Well, I'm gonna tell you, but first, why don't you follow me to the billing department?

Justin:

Ugh, let's go.

[Theme song plays, we go to the Billing Department]

[We leave the Billing Department]

Justin:

So, Sydnee, he needed six months.

Sydnee:

That's right. I imagine that if this was a movie—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... that this would be probably the worst montage in movie history. This would be the... The most upsetting, maybe.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

The most disturbing montage. So, barber-surgeon Felix knew he was gonna have to practice, 'cause this was not a surgery he had done.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

He sort of understood what he needed to do, but those are two very different things.

Justin:

So he's gotta find some like, cows or pigs with anal fistulas, so he can practice on them, right?

Sydnee:

Justin this is the King we're talking about.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

This is the Sun King, King Louis XIV.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

You cannot practice on cows and pigs and then operate on the king's rear end.

Justin:

Okay, that's fine. Oh, man. There was—

Sydnee:

You need actual human butts.

Justin:

Aww, man! No!

Sydnee:

That's right. So, he said to the King, "I'm gonna need some people to practice on."

Justin:

[As Charles Francois Felix] "I'm gonna- Hey, King, I'm gonna need some butts!"

Sydnee:

That's pretty much what he said. And he was given butts. Seventy-five of them. Seventy-five men.

Justin:

[As King Louis XIV] "Have 75 of my finest butts."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

[As King Louis XIV] The finest butts in the kingdom.

Sydnee:

Well, I don't think the finest. From prisons, a lot of them came from prisons.

Justin:

They might have had great butts.

Sydnee:

Well... that's...

Justin:

James Dean.

Sydnee:

Sure. Sure. That's true.

Justin:

James Dean got arrested.

Sydnee:

I'm not saying that you don't—

Justin:

He had a great butt.

Sydnee:

... you don't have a great butt if you're in prison. [laughs] But I think it wasn't so much that he was looking for people with high quality—

Justin:

Nick Nolte got arrested. He had a great butt.

Sydnee:

Does he?

Justin:

I don't know. I don't even know if he got arrested. That might have... I might have just slandered Nick Nolte.

Sydnee:

Well, stop doing that.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

All I mean is that it was not... His selection was not based on the quality of their rumps. It was based on that he could tell them that they had to go have a surgery for practice.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

So, he got people from prison. There were a lot of, probably peasants, from the countryside.

I don't know if they were offered, like, money, like "Hey if you survive, we'll pay you something." Or if it was just, "This is in service to the King."

'Cause it could have just been that. "This is in service to the king. This is your duty. You are his subject." Um—

Justin:

[as King's representative] "Now... now spread 'em."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Either way... And none... And to be fair, these people did not have anal fistulas.

Justin:

Yet. [laughs]

Sydnee:

So he was practicing a surgery on something on them that they didn't ha- I don't even know how that works. The point is ...

Justin:

Let's not spin this, Sydnee, this sucked.

Sydnee:

There was ... This sucked. There was no anesthesia. Nobody knew how to prevent infection. He didn't know what he was doing. He was working on developing special tools for it as he was doing it.

So, it was like, "Well, that thing didn't work. Let's try... Let's tweak it a little bit and try it on the next guy. Next! Who's up next?"

Many of these men, unfortunately did not survive this practice surgery.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Some actually did, which I think is almost more surprising, that anybody would have.

He managed to, through his practice, fashion two instruments to use for this surgery. One was a kind of scalpel that really, if you looked at it, it looks like a little scythe.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

It's kind of the long, curved end. A small scythe.

Justin:

Yeah, got it.

Sydnee:

And it was called, "royally curved" is the way they described it. "It is a royally curved scythe."

Justin:

[laughs] For the special curvature of the royal butt.

Sydnee:

Exactly. They also... He also created a retractor. Something to move tissue out of the way.

Justin:

Uh-huh.

Sydnee:

That was... I... You really... you can ... There are pictures of these online, so if you want to look up the retractor that was made specifically by Charles Francois Felix to spread open the King's, you know, anus.

Justin:

Oh, you better thread that Google image search needle so tight.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You better thread that needle. Oh, boy howdy, you are... You are just on a razor's edge with that Google image search.

Sydnee:

Now, let me tell you, if you want to see them in person, these instruments are still on display at the museum of... What? Like, medical technology or something like that in Paris.

Justin:

That would be the only—

Sydnee:

You can still see these instruments. They're out there.

Justin:

That would be the only context in which I would ever see them.

'Cause the Google image search, like, amazing collection of like, Boolean mastery and like... you would need not to see something that would scar you for all your days, is just incomprehensible.

The risk/reward is off the charts.

Sydnee:

I feel like my job as a podcaster is to be able to describe this thing to you. I don't know that I can and do it justice. You really need to see it.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

The point is, he created a—

Justin:

I don't need to do anything, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

He created a special butt retractor so that he was able to spread everything and get to where he needed to get.

And finally, the day arrived.

Justin:

[sarcastic] Hurray.

Sydnee:

November 18th, 1686. So, it's been a while that he's been dealing with this sucker.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, 7:00 AM. It's magic hour. [laughs] Our barber-surgeon Felix arrives with his trusty instruments in hand.

The King is there, of course, along with- Here are the people who he had present for this surgery, which of course in part was... You know, it was very dangerous, it was very risky.

There was every chance he would not survive it, so having loved ones nearby is not a strange thing. But it was also kind of in a private area.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Nevertheless, he had his mistress on hand.

Justin:

Oh you got to, yeah.

Sydnee:

His son was there.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

His confessor was present, that seems smart.

His doctors were all there as well because they wouldn't do this, but they did want to kinda see what was about to happen.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And his minister of state. [laughs]

Justin:

Well, that's maybe... Yeah, to handle the transfer of power, right? In case he died on the table, the minister of state needed to be there to pass it down to his son, right?

Sydnee:

I like to think he was just there to like, "I'm gonna be working while this is happening." Like, he was just that busy.

Justin:

[As Minister of State] "I've got some paperwork. But I do want to hang around for support. If you need anything, if you need an iced tea or whatever, just let me know."

Sydnee:

Maybe they were just super close.

Justin:

Maybe, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Like president Bartlett and Leo, like they were also just best buds?

Justin:

Maybe they were just best butt buds.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Who cared about each other's butts very much. So did it work?

Sydnee:

It worked. It was about a three-hour surgery, three, four-hour surgery.

He was successful, and the King survived and did not die of infection, and within three months he was riding a horse again.

So it was very successful. He healed the fistula.

Justin:

The end. What a crazy story, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Yes, and what followed was in some ways crazier. So—

Justin:

That's not the end?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

That feels like the end. It's not the end?

Sydnee:

I mean, that is the end of King Louis's anal fistula.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

It is healed, it is fixed. It has been laid open and allowed to heal from the inside out, which is... That's the ideal thing with fistulas.

You don't want them to seal off on the ends, 'cause then just infection accumulates in there and you keep getting, you know, sicker and sicker. You want it to heal from the inside out.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And so cutting it open allows it to do that.

Anyway, this made the fistula fashionable. People all over Paris wanted to have their own anal fistula.

Because it was very much in fashion at the time to do whatever royalty... Whatever royalty did was cool.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So it really didn't matter. I mean, they stunk, and they covered themselves in perfume and powder, and that was cool.

So, if an anal fistula is what the King's got, it's cool. So, people started going to their own local barber-surgeon and asking for the operation even if they didn't have an anal fistula. [laughs]

Justin:

[disgusted] Oh, man.

Sydnee:

[As 1600s Parisian] "The King got it, so I want it too."

Now I am not saying that they necessarily performed these surgeries, but people were going and requesting them.

Some people even started claiming they had anal fistulas, just because. Because it was cool. It was in. And wearing bandages over their clothes, like around their butts to display.

Justin:

Not how that works. Good job old-timey people.

Sydnee:

[laughs] To display their anal fistula. Like "look what I have." And they called them "le royale."

Justin:

[French accent] "Le royale."

Sydnee:

[laughs] It was very much in, to have an anal fistula. I don't know, fashion trends...

Justin:

Ugh, that may... That does raise the question, what's a royale with cheese? Ugh!

Sydnee:

[laughs] Ew. That's rough. But I mean, I guess there are a lot of weird fashion trends, you know?

Justin:

Yeah, Sydnee, I mean—

Sydnee: I wore those giant—

Justin:

... I guess there are some weird fashion- What are you saying? Yeah.

Sydnee:

I wore those giant-legged pants, like those giant JNCO jeans for a while. Like, that's prob- that's basically the same thing, right?

Justin:

[sarcastic] Yeah, that's basically the same thing as that.

Sydnee:

Now, barber-surgeon Felix got... He was of course rewarded handsomely for his... for his job well done.

Justin:

Yeah, he crushed it.

Sydnee:

He never again performed that surgery or any other.

Justin:

Went out on top.

Sydnee:

He went out on top. He was given an estate and a title, and lots of money. And lots of fame as a result.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Which I think... And he was probably paid better for that surgery than any surgeon in history. But you know, it was the King's butt, so...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

This would also...

The other important thing that resulted from this is that the doctors present, and the court, and King Louis all began to say, "You know what? Maybe surgery isn't this kind of lowly disrespectful thing that we know is necessary but none of us want to talk about.

"Maybe it's actually a good thing."

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

And maybe we should spend a little more time thinking and talking, and learning about surgery.

So much so that by the time Louis XV came along, he opened the first Royal Academy of Surgery, which now is called the National Academy of Surgery.

And you can still find Felix's portrait hanging there. So, how cool is that?

So this actually helped. This surgery actually helped to lead to all surgeries and the profession of surgery, and surgeons and everything.

Justin:

Wow. Anything else?

Sydnee:

Louis would go on to live many more years. He didn't die until his, just before his—

Justin:

You always gotta kill `em.

Sydnee:

... 77th birthday.

Justin:

You always have to follow them- You always say... We can just leave. You know? You can just close these books without like, flipping to the last page, like, "And then he died. Like a long time later, but he died, too."

Sydnee:

Okay. Well let's go back for a minute.

Justin:

"Don't get it twisted, he lived 400 years ago, so he definitely did die later."

Sydnee:

I'm just saying, he went to live on many, many more years before that.

Justin:

That's excellent. That's excellent.

Sydnee:

One weird fact about this surgery, and something else that came from it.

During the leadup to the surgery, the French people were not supposed to know that this was happening. They were not... I mean, they very much wanted to keep this secret.

Which is not weird, I mean, we've talked about this before in like, politics and leaders don't want their people to know that they're—

Justin:

Of course, you don't want to show weakness.

Sydnee:

They're weak or sick. So, the French people weren't supposed to know that the king had the fistula, that he was going to have surgery, anything.

But of course, rumors spread, people talk. And everybody kinda knew, and everybody was very nervous. They loved their king. They didn't want anything bad to happen.

And even though they weren't supposed to know about these 75 men [laughs] who were being practiced on.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Somebody was disposing of those bodies, word was getting around that maybe this wouldn't go so well. Maybe this was bad.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So, the head mistress of the Royal Girls' School, Madame De Brennan, wrote a prayer for her students to say for the King. It was called "God Save the King," and it was a prayer specifically...

It doesn't mention his butt, or his fistula, but it is about hoping that "God save the king through this anal fistula surgery he's about to have." And they recited it every day.

Well, of course after the King survived the surgery and was better, she had it set to music. And when he came to visit the girls' school, he... they sang it for him.

Well, someone happened to hear this song, someone with the last name Handel. And in, this was in 1714, Handel really liked this song. Went back to England, translated into English.

And, you know the British National Anthem?

Justin:

"God Save the Queen." Sydnee, I love ... This sounds apocryphal to me. I don't... I don't buy it. This sounds—

Sydnee:

So—

Justin:

I need you to throw some asterisks on this bad boy.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So, here's the problem. If you read anybody who's writing about this, from the French perspective, this story is absolutely true. And they, I mean, "Hand to God this is what happened."

If you read any British historian, "This is, this is not true. This is not where this came from." [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So, I don't know.

Justin:

I'm gonna believe it, 'cause it makes me happy.

Sydnee:

I think... I think it's a clever, funny story. And I enjoy it anyway. 'Cause, then it means that it's really a secret song about the French king's butt surgery.

Um, it may not be.

Justin:

It may not be.

Sydnee:

It's a great song either way.

Justin:

Uh ...

Sydnee:

And we stole "My Country 'Tis of Thee" from it, so...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

You know, we all share.

Justin:

Folks, thank you so much for listening. Thank you so much for taking the time. Sorry we're a day late on this one. But you know, life.

If you want more episodes of our show, if you want to hear the whole back catalog, it's all available for you. If you go to sawbonesshow.com, that'll lead you to maximumfun.org where you'll find all the episodes.

Or find us on iTunes and maybe leave us a rating or a review. That really helps us out a lot. We really appreciate it.

Or the best thing you can do is tell somebody to listen. Say, "Hey, I think you'd like this show. I think you'd enjoy it, please listen to it."

Sydnee:

You don't have to start with the one about a butt fistula.

Justin:

No, but I... You could do worse, honestly.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Thank you, as I was mentioning, to the maximumfun.org network. It's actually just called Maximum Fun, it's not called the maximumfun.org network on like, business cards.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

But there's a lot of great shows for you there to listen to like *Adam Ruins Everything*. The new one, *Tights and Fights*, the show about wrestling, is brand new.

And our dear friend, Liz Gilbert, has the second season of her show *Magic Lessons* where she talks about creativity and helping people past their creative problems. It is just wonderful, and well worth listening to.

And you can find those all at maximumfun.org or on iTunes.

Thanks to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. And anything else, Sydster?

Sydnee:

No, just thank you, everybody who listens.

Justin:

Thank you. Thanks.

Sydnee:

Thank you.

Justin:

We really appreciate you. But, until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[Outro, theme music plays]

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