

Sawbones 110: Medical History Halloween Costumes

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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'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Happy Halloween, Syd.

Sydnee:

Very spooky, Justin.

Justin:

Don't you mean spooopy?

Sydnee:

Sorry. That's right, spooopy.

Justin:

It's a very spooopy episode of Sawbones. And it's late because we couldn't pick a costume for Charlie and it took us days upon days.

Sydnee:

We bought all the costumes. We put her in every single one.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And it was just... It was a big ordeal. Plus, she got all this candy for trick or treat and we had to eat it.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

That took up a lot of time...

Justin:

In one sitting.

Sydnee:

... 'cause she's a baby and she can't eat candy.

Justin:

And we had to protect her from it because, uh, choking hazard, so we ate all of it.

Sydnee:

So we had to eat it in her defense, which, joke's on you everybody who gave us candy, that baby can't eat it! [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] That baby can't eat candy, you idiot.

Sydnee:

That was for us.

Justin:

Those was dumb dumbs just kept giving us candy! [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] Like they don't even know, like that's— We're the adults, and like, we could even buy candy. Like, we have money, and a car, and people will sell us candy.

Justin:

Um, so...

Sydnee:

They don't know any better.

Justin:

... we wanna prep you, uh, we assume you're going to a Halloween party this weekend. This is the— This is a very special Halloween themed episode of, uh, Sawbones because we wanna get you ready for a Halloween party from the annals of medical history.

Sydnee:

I'm assuming that if you are like us, you have not picked a costume or not prepared.

Justin:

Now that... Now we...

Sydnee:

'Cause generally, we're not. Generally, we are, at the last minute, trying to throw something together.

Justin:

We did a good...

Sydnee:

We did a good. [laughs]

Justin:

We did a good job this year. We actually prepared, we ordered costumes ahead of time. Uh, I'm going as the Man from Another Place from Twin Peaks, and...

Sydnee:

I'm going as Audrey Horne from Twin Peaks.

Justin:

So that's gonna be good, but we already ordered our costumes. So maybe you didn't.

Sydnee:

This was a first though.

Justin:

This was a first for us. But maybe you're not that prepared. So we're gonna talk to you about some costumes from medical history. Some recommendations on how you can maybe achieve those looks. Costumes that everybody will get, and appreciate.

Sydnee:

Now, I know immediately you're thinking, "Well, if Sawbones is gonna recommend a costume. I mean, who else would they recommend?" Pliny the Elder.

Justin:

Pliny the Elder, that's costume number one. What you're gonna wanna do here is— I mean, it's a very cheap costume. You get a sheet.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

You get a cotton-ball beard going.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

And you just walk around the party.

Sydnee:

Maybe one of those, like, laurel wreath.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Wreaths, [laughs].

Justin:

One of those laurel wreaths around your head, and, um, just walk around the party putting honey on people. Just wait till they're not looking. Just give 'em a good glob of honey on there and just say like, you know, "That'll do it."

Sydnee:

Or not just honey, 'cause he had much... He had many more ideas than honey, Justin. He, you know... You could just easily... Anybody who gets injured, or is sick, or complains, like, "I got a splinter the other day." Just grab something at the party and tell them to smear it on there. Tell them about like, maybe using various animal furs, just whatever, like, whatever is available. You can really let your imagination run wild with this costume.

Justin:

Literally anything within reach. Just smear it on there.

Sydnee:

Yes, and that's— Because that's pretty much what Pliny the Elder did. Now if you want a slight variation of this theme, you might wanna dress as Pliny the Elder, the beer. [laughs]

Justin:

Oh, yeah, that's a good option too.

Sydnee:

Which is an excellent beer, um...

Justin:

Uh, yeah, we— Is an excellent beer. It's also why we can't make, uh, Pliny the Elder t-shirts, because they have a trademark on that.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

But that's okay. They got there first. Um, so Pliny the Elder, that is our number one, top... It's not a countdown. But it is our number one top costume recommendation.

Sydnee:

No, because then we did it backwards, because there is a count down.

Justin:

Yeah, right, 'cause that'd be number one. Who also gets in?

Sydnee:

So, our next suggestion for costumes is Max Joseph von Pettenkofer. Do you remember him, Justin?

Justin:

I don't remember him. What was his story?

Sydnee:

So, uh, Max was... Can I call him Max, do you think?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So he was, uh, Bavarian born.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

He was a doctor. He was a chemist. He eventually became a hygienist, um, and he liked to study cholera.

Justin:

Okay, that seems like a noble pursuit.

Sydnee:

Uh, the thing is that, uh, Koch, of postulate fame, had recently already discovered the bacteria that caused cholera. Uh, but Max was a skeptic.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, he wasn't sure that was the case. He thought, uh, that maybe a bacteria spread the disease, but probably it was, like, situational. It only happened among patients who already, you know, didn't clean themselves very well, didn't wash very often, lived in poor conditions. Um, he didn't think that just anybody could get it.

Justin:

Mm-hmm. Was he correct about that?

Sydnee:

Well, no, he was not correct at all. But, uh, he had to prove it first before he figured out how incorrect he was. And in order to prove it, he decided to mix himself up a very special cocktail.

Justin:

Of course, listeners, you remember this by this point? Uh, we're hitting all the greatest hits here. This is a man who mixed up his, uh, patients, uh, his dead patients' diarrhea and drank it.

Sydnee:

That's right.

Justin:

So-

Sydnee:

He drank the cholera cocktail. He did become quite sick.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Proving once and for all that Koch was right. That, you know, you just drink this bacteria and you get pretty sick with cholera.

Justin:

Yeah, so that was proven. So costume, what do you wanna do? Well, I think it's got... One component is, you're gonna wanna go get a Frosty, for... Hit the Wendy's, get, uh, the biggest Frosty they'll legally sell you.

Sydnee:

Uh, wait, are you, are you trying to insinuate that [laughs] Frosties have cholera in them?

Justin:

No, I'm trying to insinuate that if you wanna drink something that looks like a dookie milkshake, and isn't, you might wanna go with a Frosty. Uh, a Frosty will be delicious. It'll be refreshing during the party. And if you put it in, uh, um, a jar labeled perhaps poop experiment.

Sydnee:

Poop experiment? That's the best you've got?

Justin:

Call—

Sydnee:

How about cholera? How about cholera cocktail?

Justin:

Cholera cocktail. But not poop experiment.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

He probably wanted to... I mean, what would you— Like, if you're gonna have that jar in your house, you have to be so clear about how you label it, right?

Sydnee:

The Oregon Trail surprise.

Justin:

[laughs] Now as far as what you wear, it doesn't really matter, right? Because they are gonna be distracted by the fact that you have a big jar of cholera that you're drinking out of.

Sydnee:

I figured you just wear a t-shirt that said Max.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Maybe just the t-shirt that says. "I'm with stupid and it's pointing up at you."

Sydnee:

To you.

Justin:

'Cause you're drinking cholera water.

Sydnee:

I don't know. You're from Bavaria, so like, lederhosen?

Justin:

Lederhosen, that's perfect, [laughs], excellent.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Carry a big beer mug in one hand and a glass of diarrhea in the other.

Justin:

Here's another prop suggestion for you. Remember Wilhelm Reich? He, uh, was the guy who believed in orgone energy, a sexual force that was permeating the entirety of the earth, uh, generated by people's sexual energy.

Sydnee:

Uh, and the only way you could capture this, you may remember, it was by sitting in one of his, uh, sex boxes.

Justin:

Mm-hmm. And...

Sydnee:

Which is just a big, big box.

Justin:

Having, you know, an adult revelation.

Sydnee:

Oh, well, I mean, you didn't have to, you could just sit in there naked.

Justin:

That's another option, too. Uh, this is another one of those prop costumes, [laughs], 'cause what you wear is important, is I think you just carry around a box.

Sydnee:

A big one. Like a human sized box.

Justin:

A human sized box. Maybe a refrigerator box, if you could score one of those from Best Buy or something.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

And it's just labeled sex box.

Sydnee:

Right. And then all you have to do is... And it's a great icebreaker, too, if you think about it.

Justin:

Sure, right.

Sydnee:

Just walk around the party, and invite people to take off all their clothes and sit inside this box. And promise them you won't look, but you will, you're gonna look...

Justin:

Of course you're gonna look. Curiosity killed the cat, right?

Sydnee:

That's what Halloween is all about.

Justin:

If you wanna really complete this look, uh, put a knife in your belt. You may remember that he was drummed out of the International Psychoanalytic Association and he camped out at their next conference and walked around with a big knife in his belt. They did not let him back in.

Sydnee:

But the sex box is the main thing.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

You could just carry that sex box.

Justin:

Syd, I got my costume but what if I wanna tell, like, a spooky story from medical history to kind of creep people out, do we have any of those that we could, uh...

Sydnee: Absolutely, we have some spooky stories.

Justin:

... try to wig people out at my Halloween affair?

Sydnee:

Exactly, for that moment at your Halloween party when everybody sits around the campfire, they tossed the handful of sand...

Justin:

Yeah, whatever the heck that was, like magic— Like, I don't know where these teens from Are You Afraid of the Dark who are getting, like, exploding powder, but yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, you just toss that on the fire and then you can share with your, uh...

Justin:

It might have been non-dairy creamer, 'cause that'll work.

Sydnee:

That does work, doesn't it?

Justin:

Yeah, it might have been non-dairy creamer, just big mittfuls of non-dairy creamer.

Sydnee:

If anyone knows... [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah, if you're in the Midnight Society, what— Okay, first of all, and if you're in the Midnight Society and haven't emailed us already, don't be an idiot. [laughs] Just drop us a line so we could become best friends.

Sydnee:

Can we please be in it?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Please.

Justin:

Just let us in, it's no big deal.

Sydnee:

'Cause we have a great story to share and it's a story of lobotomies.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So, you may remember from our episode, or just from, like, cultural osmosis, what lobotomy is, uh, that it was a procedure where we, uh, removed or damaged a part of a person's brain in order to... uh, the idea was to try to fix some sort of psychiatric illness, um, or things that weren't psychiatric illness at all.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Depending on what was going on and what time of...

Justin:

What year it was, yeah.

Sydnee:

What year it was. Uh, it came to America really in 1936 and it was practiced widely by a doctor Walter Freeman. Uh, now Walter Freeman, uh, really was a big fan of this procedure, and he felt like it was unfair that it was, um, uh, bound to the confines of the operating room and the use of anesthesia, uh, because you couldn't find those things in most state hospitals. So he invented the transorbital lobotomy.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Now, you may remember that this is when you insert an orbitoclast, which is basically an ice pick, which essentially what it was used initially.

Justin:

Right, fancy ice pick.

Sydnee:

Yeah, fancy ice pick, through the inside corner of the eye, along the nasal bone, and you just kind of make some cuts with it, kind of swish it around until you've severed all the nerve fibers in there.

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, Dr. Freeman would travel around the country when he was on vacation with his family so that he could perform these at various hospitals. Um, and he would do them in whatever, you know, kinds of conditions he had, even, uh, doing them in the hallways, if necessary.

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

Uh, and doing both eyes at once to show off that he was ambidextrous.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

Uh, horrifyingly, Dr. Freeman performed 3439 lobotomies in his career. 2500 of these with an ice pick. But for the low, low price of \$25 a pop.

Justin:

Tell that story the next time somebody tries to... Tried out something about, like a ghost that was on the highway and they died 40 years ago this day, aah! They never really freak people out. You really pulled the trump card there.

Sydnee:

Yeah, humans have really come up with much scarier stuff in real life.

Justin:

Uh, I got a costume, Syd. Plague doctor.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's a great one Justin.

Justin:

It's a creepy costume, right?

Sydnee:

So tell me, tell me about how you would dress as a plague doctor.

Justin:

I think the main thing you got to nail are the masks. They have these, uh, masks that basically make you look like, like beaks. Like, things weren't scary enough already with the plague and stuff that you have these grim specters just roaming the countryside like retro Slender Man, just like horrifying beak-like masks.

Uh, if you really wanna get the realism going, uh, put some potpourri inside and breathe through a straw, uh, because that's what they did. Um, they also wore wax coats and carried a cane that they used to examine people,

um, and they had glass eyes in their masks that warded off evil. So, um, that, that is what I would go with if I wanted to go with a plague doctor. That would be a creepy costume. I'd be freaked out if I saw somebody wearing that.

Sydnee:

It is, it's a really creepy costume. It's an excellent costume. I'm kind of regretting that's not what I chose to go as this year.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And if you really wanted to sell this, um, you should try to treat people at the party for the plague, because who doesn't love that, right? You know, the life of the party.

Justin:

That's a great gimmick, what an ice breaker.

Sydnee:

Um, and the best way to treat somebody for the plague is to try to strap a chicken to them. So if you can... I mean and then everybody gets a kick out of that game, right? Strap a chicken to the guests.

Justin:

Mm-hmm, right.

Sydnee:

Right?

Justin:

It's like pin the tail on the donkey, sort of.

Sydnee:

You played that, right?

Justin:

Yeah, we all played that. It's not just doctors, I promise.

Sydnee:

You know, another creepy costume?

Justin:

Tell me.

Sydnee:

Resurrection Men.

Justin:

Ooh, yeah. I love the Resurrection Men. Where's that movie? Where's that movie gone brothers?

Sydnee:

For real, right? So Resurrection Men, you may remember, were people who, uh, worked as basically grave robbers, um, because doctors and medical students didn't have enough cadavers to train, you know, students in anatomy. So the only way that they could get more cadavers was to hire people to go steal them late at night. Uh, Resurrection Men, which was a cool name...

Justin:

Cool, the coolest.

Sydnee:

... for an awful practice, uh, could exhume a body in under an hour, and they had a very particular way of going about it. It was very much like, uh, like an Ocean's 11 kind of heist...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

...description of how they would scoop out the dirt and get in the coffin and get the body out and there would be secret tunnels to get into med school. And...

Justin:

So what's this costume gonna look like though?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, I guess the main thing is that you look like you've been out all night digging up bodies.

Justin:

Mm-hmm. You know what might be fun is if you have like, uh, like a straw man kind of thing.

Sydnee:

Oh yeah, mm-hmm.

Justin:

Like a shirt and pants filled with, like, paper towels or something that you could just, like, wrap its arms around you, like you're, you're giving a piggyback ride or something.

Sydnee:

Exactly, yeah. And then, but people might confuse you for like a Weekend at Bernie's costume. So you got to be careful.

Justin:

There are worse things to happen than for people to think that you're celebrating the cinematic achievement...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... that is Weekend at Bernie's.

Sydnee:

Also, look really cool because you're a Resurrection Man.

Justin:

And it's like the coolest name.

Sydnee:

You just tell people that all the time.

Justin:

Could you go with, like, a superhero theme? Like kind of a Superman suit with like an...

Sydnee:

Oh, with the cape?

Justin:

... R on the front. "I'm Resurrection Man!"

Sydnee:

"I'm here to dig up..."

Justin:

"... dig up dead people." Yeah, doesn't really— Kind of falls apart.

Sydnee:

Ah, no, no, that is something... You know what? I don't think Superman would have approved of that.

Justin:

How about this? Let me hit you with this, Alexis St. Martin.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's a great costume.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

If you wanna go the gory route, you really want to dress up as early 1800s fur trader and voyager, Alexis St. Martin, who was accidentally shot in the stomach...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And had a chronic gastric fistula which is basically just a hole in his stomach that opened up to the outside world.

Justin:

Right. You might remember this episode, The Gut Hole Romance. Um, I... This could be achieved... What I was thinking was, you get two mirrors, two round mirrors...

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

... that you attach to your front and back. So basically just achieving the look of a hole clean through you.

Sydnee:

But why... If you were looking in a hole in someone's stomach, why would you see your face reflecting that.

Justin:

It's, like, not a great effect. But like, it's the best I could come up with.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I think that was really bad. That was a really bad suggestion.

Justin:

Yeah, I guess it was...

Sydnee:

That's not a hole works.

Justin:

It's not how holes work Syd.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

'Cause I did my best.

Sydnee:

[laughs] This isn't even a medical thing. That's just not how holes work.

Justin:

Does that count for anything? I just did my best, what would you do, smart aleck?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, I guess, you would just want a really nasty wound in your stomach. I mean, it... because it doesn't go all the way through his body, like it doesn't go through the back. It just goes into his stomach.

Justin:

Yeah, but visually, I think through his whole body is gonna be, like, the best.

Sydnee:

I think you would just want something that looked like a window and you could see, like, food through it, like a little like chicken wings or French fries.

Justin:

[laughs], what would be nice is, if you could get a false stomach with like a hole that people could, like, put their hands into.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

And maybe you have some spaghetti in there.

Sydnee:

No, whatever the treats are at the party. Just get some real quick and put them in there...

Justin:

Yeah!

Sydnee:

... so that people know, like, that this is what you've been eating. This would also be a great couples costume 'cause, you know, your boyfriend or girlfriend could go as Dr. William Beaumont.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

The doctor who experimented on Alexis St. Martin and they could just periodically stick things in the hole in your stomach all evening.

Justin:

"Hmm, very interesting." Yeah, just make sure you stick together because otherwise nobody's gonna know who they are. Uh, Syd, uh, I wanna hear another story, uh, about, uh, medical history that I can scare people with at my Halloween party.

Sydnee:

Well, I'm going to tell you a spooey story right after we visit the billing department.

Justin:

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Sydnee:

All right. So first of all, let's say that, unfortunately, uh, you've died.

Justin:

Okay, oops, [laughs], had a good run.

Sydnee:

[laughs] And you, and you wanna know how to come back.

Justin:

Yes, absolutely.

Sydnee:

Yes, well, you were not the first one to seek the secret of reanimation, life after death.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, back in the 1700s, Lazzaro Spallanzani was a priest that used to cut the heads off of snails in an attempt to try to make them grow back.

Justin:

How'd that work out?

Sydnee:

I mean, it didn't work.

Justin:

Didn't work.

Sydnee:

But it didn't stop him from trying. He wasn't the only one in history...

Justin:

You would've heard about that if that worked, [laughs].

Sydnee:

[laughs] Yeah. We'd probably have learned to, like, be doing it...

Justin:

Correct, constantly.

Sydnee:

[crosstalk] right, and everybody that had ever been alive would be alive always.

Justin:

Fair, yeah, right, right, so you would know.

Sydnee:

So it would be really crowded. Um, there was also Johann Dippel, who used to rob graves and make elixirs out of the corpses that he would find in an attempt to keep himself alive forever. And, uh, Luigi Galvani, uh, an Italian doctor and physicist who used to stick electrodes in frog muscles in order to stimulate them and make the legs twitch. Um, but perhaps the most disturbing story of reanimation was Giovanni Aldini. Who, um... Or, I'm sorry, is George Forster.

Justin:

George Forster, right?

Sydnee:

Yes, who was a murder who was put to death. And the place that Giovanni Aldini comes in, is that, uh, he had paid off one of the executioner's to get a hold of poor George Forster's body immediately after death...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... so that he could attempt to bring him back to life. Now why, why you want to bring a murderer back to life of all your choices?

Justin:

Doesn't seem fair. But I mean, like, you go where you get it, right?

Sydnee:

I'm not sure.

Justin:

You get the bodies where you can.

Sydnee:

Right, right. So, Aldini, uh, stuck electrodes in the head of George Forster in an attempt to reanimate him. Um, he also stuck them in his arms and legs. And he managed to make his face contort and his, uh, like. arm raise, and his fist clinch. But, um, couldn't bring it back to life.

Justin:

So if you see anybody at the party dressed like Frankenstein, just corner them and tell them all of this, and just see how long it takes him to go to the bathroom and just wipe the makeup off like, "I, I give up. I'm just a regular Joe. I'm not Frankenstein anymore. I'm very upset."

Sydnee:

I need some more costumes, Justin.

Justin:

Uh, how about this Syd, Phineas Gage.

Sydnee:

Ah, that's a great one and easily recognizable, right?

Justin:

Hey, that's awesome, right? Yes, everybody knows Phineas Gage at this point. I was the last person who didn't, and then I did the Sawbones about it and now, I do. So that's everybody. It's all covered. If you don't remember that episode, uh, he, uh, was a dude who was working on a railroad, right? And, uh...

Sydnee:

Yep, he was a railroad worker, and the costume is gonna be really easy at first. You're average height and build, you're wearing some, like, workman's kind of clothing. You know, maybe some overalls, or like a, like a...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

.... a rough workman's denim shirt or something.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

You know, some jeans, nothing too complicated to put together. Uh, look like you're from the mid 1800s. So a little older. Maybe a little dirty like rough hands, rough, dirty hands.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And then, key to this costume, I think...

Justin:

[laughs], yes, this is the key.

Sydnee:

... is that, what you're gonna want to do is get a three foot, seven inch long, 1.25 inch in diameter iron rod that weighs approximately 13.25 pounds, and just have it kind of, like, sticking out of, like, the front of your head.

Justin:

So that sounds unpleasant, I know. Here's what I'd suggest, you know, that hilarious arrow through the head that people wear sometimes just take that, spray paint it silver, and just turn it front ways instead of sideways, boom, Phineas Gaged, right there.

Sydnee:

That is a great costume idea.

Justin:

Yeah, that's a really good one. You can, you... These other ones have been dumb, but this one, that's pretty good.

Sydnee:

This is the one.

Justin:

This is the one.

Sydnee:

That's the one.

Justin:

This is the one I feel, I feel really good about it. Now...

Sydnee:

Send us pics or it didn't happen, [laughs].

Justin:

Let's say, uh, you're a woman, uh, for example, and...

Sydnee:

[laughs], I am a woman. For example, Justin, tell me.

Justin:

The bad news is, um, men have kind of, um, kept women from a lot of medical history because they were oppressed. So-

Sydnee:

Or maybe it's just that women haven't done as dumb things as men have done in medical history, how about that, Justin?

Justin:

That is a— That is absolutely a good— Well, like, mine was not mean, like, I was like— [laughs] You shouldn't get angry at me. I was just saying women were oppressed.

Sydnee:

I'm just saying, Justin [laughs].

Justin:

Okay, all right. Pump your break there, Smirl, Okay. Uh, Speaking of Typhoid Mary, that's one.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, she was an early 1900s Irish cook, who had typhoid and just loved to pass it around. Uh, she... So, you wanna have dirty hands, I would say, and do everything you can to make people at the party sick. So you wanna sneeze on their tortilla chips, for example.

Sydnee:

I mean, this is great 'cause it's a costume and it's an activity.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

So like, your goal is that, by the end of the party, everybody you came in contact with should be puking or pooping.

Justin:

Commit to it, get typhoid before the party.

Sydnee:

Ah, that's even better.

Justin:

That's worse, Syd, remember we talked about the difference between better and worse. That's worse.

Sydnee:

Oh.

Justin:

That's, like, way worse. You don't wanna do that.

Sydnee:

Also, you know, you could try... If anybody, like, notices that you're making everybody sick...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... um, and that your hands are dirty, and the... And when we say dirty, we mean, like, we mean poopy.

Justin:

[whispers] Poopy.

Sydnee:

You get that right? That we mean poopy hands.

Justin:

[whispers] We mean poopy.

Sydnee:

Um, if anyone...

Justin:

Not spooey.

Sydnee:

[laughs] No, no, no, no. Poopy.

Justin:

But also spooky.

Sydnee:

If anybody catches you doing this and, like, accuses you of making people sick, uh, you can have a carving fork and you can chase them around the party with it.

Justin:

'Cause she totally did that, right?

Sydnee:

Yes, she did, and then try hiding in a closet.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Because otherwise the people at the party might try to isolate you on an island for the rest of your life.

Justin:

Because they are jerks who don't appreciate your whimsical behavior.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, speaking of whimsical behavior, Syd, do we have time for, uh, one more story?

Sydnee:

I think we do. I think one last story for you to share for that moment 'cause, if by now you've already shared the other two stories around the campfire and they're still letting you tell stories, [laughs], no one has drummed you out of the party, uh, why not go for spontaneous human combustion? I think of one of the very scariest stories because it could happen to anyone.

Justin:

It can.

Sydnee:

There have been around 200 reported cases of people just kind of catching on fire and burning with no external known source. Um, it's similar to the idea, you know how like dead whales can fill with methane and explode?

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Only with people.

Justin:

But not documented, right? Like this is for...

Sydnee:

Exactly, now this is a—

Justin:

What you have is 200 people who fell asleep smoking and didn't wanna admit it.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Because they'll get in trouble.

Sydnee:

Maybe, or maybe something scarier is at work.

Justin:

Or maybe... [laughs].

Sydnee:

In the 1700s, Countess Cornelia di Bandy was one of the victims of spontaneous human combustion, when she was found, uh, lying on the floor between her bed and her window. It looked as if she had, had tried to get out of bed and go to the window in the middle of the night, uh, presumably because she was on fire.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Right from the, you know, from the exploding.

Justin:

Sure, [laughs].

Sydnee:

Um, and, [laughs], everything but three fingers and her lower legs were completely burned. There were candles present, but the wicks were still intact. And there soot everywhere, but, uh, nothing was damaged by the soot. Um, they did find a piece of bread on her nightstand. This is my favorite part of the story, which was offered to a dog who refused to eat it.

Justin:

Whoa.

Sydnee:

Now this story is scary. But when you talk about the theory behind spontaneous human combustion, I think it gets even scarier. So we think what this is the wick effect. So like these people who are supposedly combusting are actually just accidentally catching on fire. Um, and the way that this works is that, so there is probably a candle or something.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

The clothes catch on fire, and they burn the skin, and this creates like an opening in the skin through which we can like catch the fat on fire, and it

can start melting, and it continues to, like, the fat continues to wick along the clothing...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... and just kind of spread along the clothing just as wax does with a candle wick. And the person burns as long as there's more fat to fuel it. Um, this is why the feet and the hands might not burn, you know, because there's less fat there. Um, but there's plenty of fat in the human body to basically just burn it all up. Even in, like, really skinny people, like we got a lot of fat. So there's plenty of fat if you want, like, you know, to burn somebody.

Justin:

Great.

Sydnee:

There's enough— Anyway, um, so if that, you know, if that doesn't drive everyone away from the campfire, I don't know what else will.

Justin:

Yeah, that...

Sydnee:

Is that— Was that the goal? We were trying to get everybody to leave?

Justin:

We were trying to run people away? I got one more costume for you, Syd, Robert Liston.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's a great one.

Justin:

I know, fastest knife in the West. He was a Scottish surgeon in the, uh, in the early 1800s. He was the first in Europe to use anesthesia. Well, after it's been used in the USA. He amputated a leg in two and a half minutes. He,

uh, in one case accidentally amputated the patient's testicles, and, uh, the... Can you talk about the, uh, the worst, his worst case, [laughs], or best case...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... depending on how you look at it.

Sydnee:

Uh, the best work of Robert Liston in his illustrious career was when he, um, was doing an amputation and he accidentally amputated his surgical assistants fingers while he was slicing and dicing. Um, in addition, there was an observer, this was not uncommon at the time for people to, like, pay to come watch surgeries because they... Well, I mean, there wasn't a lot of entertainment, I guess.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

And, so he, uh, while he was swishing his knife about, he sliced through the coattails of the observer, uh, who dropped dead from fright. So the patient who was getting the amputation unfortunately died, which was common at the time from gangrene. Uh, the assistant whose fingers were sliced off also died later from gangrene. And then the, uh, the person who was watching also died from fright after his, uh, coat was sliced.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, which means that this was probably the only surgery in history that had a 300% mortality.

Justin:

Unlike a lot of the people on this list, we know just what you're going for image wise. Uh, this is a quote, "He was six foot two, and operated in bottle green coat with Wellington boat boots. He sprung across the bloodstained boards upon swooning, sweating stripped down patient like a duelist calling, 'Time me, gentlemen, time me,' to students craning with pocket watches from the iron railing galleries. Everyone swore the first flash of his knife was followed so swiftly by the rasp of saw on bone. That sight and sound seems simultaneous to free both hands, he who would clasp the bloody knife between his teeth."

Sydnee:

These were really the good old days of medicine.

Justin:

Okay, yeah.

Sydnee:

Right? Like, we never see heroes...

Justin:

No lawsuits— Heroes?

Sydnee:

...like Dr. Liston in the OR today. As a medical student, I never got to see anyone with that much panache.

Justin:

Panache, that's one, that's certainty one word for it.

Sydnee:

You know, they are all scrubbed in, and sterile, and using proper surgical technique.

Justin:

What a snooze.

Sydnee:

Nobody puts a knife between their teeth anymore, nobody.

Justin:

That has no place in Halloween and at this point, neither do we, because we're all done. But before we go, we wanna say first off, have a happy and safe Halloween. It's one of our favorite holidays, and we hope it's one of yours. Uh, make sure you have a lot of fun. If you do have any kind of like fun medical costumes, or just a fun costume, whatever, send it... send us a...

Sydnee:

Yeah, it doesn't have to be medical.

Justin:

Send us a picture, either tweet at us, @sawbones or sawbones@maximumfun.org, so we can check that out. And let us know if we can, like, put it on our Facebook or whatever. So because we wouldn't wanna do that if it's not copacetic with you.

Thanks to Maximum Fun Network for having us on. There's a ton of great shows for you to listen to at MaximumFun.org. Thanks for The Taxpayers for letting us use their song, Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you, our beloved listener for being so patient with us and giving us a half hour of your time. We hope you have a very, uh, uh, spooky, spooopy, and, uh, enjoyable Halloween. Uh, but until next time, we, uh, have an opportunity to talk. My name is 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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