

[Classic] B064 - The mushroom mystery

Episode description

Andrew talks about a fascinating and sad news story involving three deaths from eating poisonous mushrooms. Accident or crime? Listen to and decide for yourself! In the vocabulary lesson, you'll learn about the phrasal verb **to feel for (someone)**.

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Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hey everyone, it's Andrew here. Welcome back to another edition of the Culips English Podcast. How's it going? I hope you're doing well. Thank you for clicking play and joining me for an English study session today. It's a long weekend here in Korea. Monday is Children's Day and Tuesday is Buddha's Birthday. So I'm taking a little time off to relax, recharge and spend it with friends and family. But I've still got something great for you. Today, I'm bringing back a classic bonus episode and a fan favorite bonus episode number 64 "The mushroom mystery." This one is a gripping story that will keep you hooked from beginning to end, so I think you will enjoy it.

And of course, it's also a great way to build your English fluency. Listening to stories like this helps you improve your comprehension, pick up natural expressions, and strengthen your listening skills. The interactive transcript for this episode is available for free on our website, culips.com so be sure to check it out and use it to study as you listen.

And if you enjoy these kinds of episodes, these real-life news stories from around the world and you want to hear more, then just let me know on our Discord server, I always appreciate your feedback. OK, let's listen to this story now. Here we go!

For today, I wanted to do something a little bit different. And that is, I wanted to read a news story to you, and share my opinion with you about that news story. And also, at the same time, walk you through some of the interesting vocabulary that will come up in that news story.

And I chose this story out of, you know, the thousands and thousands and thousands of news stories that are available for us to choose from, just because it seemed a little bit unique. And, well, we'll get into the nitty-gritty of it when we get into the story. But, as of now, the story is breaking, which means all of the details are not out yet. The situation is

still under investigation. So, when a story is breaking, it means it's unfolding. It's happening in the moment, but we don't know all of the details yet.

So, I came across this story on Thursday, yesterday for me, Thursday of this past week. And by the time you're listening to this episode, on Monday or Tuesday, whenever you're listening, well, then maybe some of the details will have changed by that time. But as of now, here on Friday when I'm recording this story, it's still breaking, and we don't know all of the details yet. So, we'll go through the story together.

And the reason that I chose this story is one, it is very unique. I haven't really ever heard of a news story like this before. And two, it's also related, potentially, because we don't know all the details yet. Like I said, it's still breaking. So, we don't know all of the details yet. But potentially, this news story is related to true crime. And I know that true crime is an extremely popular genre around the world, I believe, these days. I know that there are several members of the Culips team who are massive true crime fans.

And indeed, if you look at some of the top podcasts in the podcast stores like Apple Podcasts or Spotify, if you look at the top podcasts on these charts for these apps, you'll notice that many of the top podcasts in the world are about true crime stories. So that means there's a huge audience for it, and many people enjoy this kind of content. Now, like I said, I'm not exactly sure if this is a crime yet or not, and we'll have to wait for the investigation to be finished before we can say, "Oh, this is a crime" or "This is not a crime." But we'll read about it and we'll break it down. We'll go through the story together, and I'll share my opinion with you.

And after, of course, I would like you to share your opinion as well. And how can you do that? Well, you can join our Discord server. We have our very own Culips Discord server, and it's a great place where our community of fantastic people and English learners, who are very passionate about learning English, can join together and communicate with each other. You can leave a text message on there, you know write something and post it. You

could record an audio message or a video message and post it. And you can even communicate in real-time in our discussion rooms, which is a great way to improve your English conversation skills.

And so many people, I know, around the world want to become better speakers. And of course, if you want to become a better speaker, you need to practice, right? This is something that you need to do. And so, they want to practice, but they can't, it's difficult. Why? There are no people around them to practice speaking English with. Well, if this describes you, then don't worry, we've got you covered. You can simply join our Discord server and communicate in one of the speaking rooms and practice English speaking that way. And what a better topic to talk about than the news, right? There's always something interesting going on around the world, and this is just one potential news story that you could talk about.

So that's the plan for today. And without any further ado, why don't I pull up the news story, and we can get started by reading it together? Here we go. So, this news article is titled "Victoria Suspected Mushroom Poisoning: Lunchtime Dish Believed to Have Been a Beef Wellington Pie." And the writer of this news article is Donna Lu, and this was published on theguardian.com, a very famous newspaper from the UK. And I'll post the link to this story in the description for this episode. So, if you'd like to pull up that news article and read it, well, that would be fantastic. So, let's get into it. I'm going to read this story right now, and you can listen along. As we go through it, I'll break down some of the key vocabulary.

And my main question for you that I would like you to think about and maybe answer on our Discord server after we go through this article is: do you think foul play is suspected in this story or not? And "Foul play" is a great term to know when you're talking about crime, OK? Foul play. "Foul" is spelled F-O-U-L, by the way. Foul play, this occurs when a crime happens, OK? So, if somebody does something intentionally to hurt or injure somebody else, then that is foul play. But sometimes bad things happen, and people get hurt or

injured, and it's just an accident, right? If it's an accident, then it is not foul play. But if there is criminal intention to do some damage or harm to somebody, then it is foul play. So, I want you to try and help me think about this. Do you think it is foul play or not foul play?

So, here's the story. Here we go. "A beef wellington pie was the lunchtime dish that is believed to have left three people dead and one fighting for his life from a suspected mushroom poisoning, according to a source familiar with the situation." OK, so remember when we read the article title, the article title was "Victoria Suspected Mushroom Poisoning." Now this is not talking about a person named Victoria, but a place, OK? Victoria is a place in Australia. And this story happened in Australia, the Land Down Under, OK? that is — that is Australia's nickname. And I've never been to Australia before, but I do know a little bit about that place. I had an Australian roommate for a while when I lived in Montreal. And I know that a really popular food in Australia is pie. And in North America, pie is also really popular, but always as a dessert. We eat apple pie, or cherry pie, or at Thanksgiving, one of my favorites, pumpkin pie—very delicious. But in Australia, I think also it is really, really common to eat savory pies as dinner. So, this is a beef pie. It would be like a pie with some meat inside. OK, so this beef wellington pie, people ate it, and after they ate the pie, three of them died, and one is still fighting for his life. A great expression to know, "fighting for your life" means to be almost dead, right? You're in a very, very critical condition. And you know, the — you're giving it your all just to stay alive. You're trying as hard as you can to not die, you're "fighting for your life." So unfortunately, after eating this pie, three people died, and one other person is fighting for his life.

So, let's get into the details. The next paragraph says, "Erin Patterson, 45." So, that means she's 45 years old, "Erin Patterson, 45, prepared the meal at her home in Leongatha on 29 July for her former parents-in-law, Don and Gail Patterson, and Gail's sister, Heather Wilkinson, and her husband, Ian." OK, let's break this paragraph down. And right off the bat, it seems a little bit strange to me, this situation. We don't know all of the details. But I'm trying to imagine myself in this situation, and it seems a little bit strange. Erin

Patterson, the cook of the beef wellington pie, she's 45. So, she's only six years older than me. So, I can sort of put myself into her shoes a little bit and imagine the situation.

So, she's having dinner, she prepared a dinner at the end of July, July 29th. And who are her dinner guests? Well, it is her former parents-in-law. OK, so we don't know what happened to her husband. Let's assume it's a husband. OK. Are they divorced? Did the husband pass away? We don't know. We just know that she's not married to that person anymore. Because it says her former parents-in-law, OK? So, for whatever reason, that marriage is not a thing anymore. But I guess she still has some sort of relationship with her parents-in-law, her ex-parents-in-law, because they came over to her home for dinner. So, there are the two parents-in-law, right? The mother-in-law, Gail Patterson, and the father-in-law, Don Patterson. Those are two of the guests. And the other two guests were Gail's sister—her name is Heather Wilkinson—and her husband, Ian. So, yes, there's this woman, Erin Patterson, and she has four people over to dinner, and in my opinion, a little bit strange.

OK, we don't know all of the details, but I'm just imagining myself in the situation and inviting my parents-in-law over as well as my mother-in-law's sister and her husband. That would be strange, but every family is different, and if it works for their family, whatever. OK, so, we have this situation. Let's continue with the story. The Pattersons, both 70 years old, have since died. Ok, so very unfortunately, the Patterson — the two parents-in-law have passed away. As has Heather, the sister, 66. Now Heather's husband, 68-year-old Baptist church pastor Ian Wilkinson, remains in a critical condition in hospital. So, out of the five people who were at this dinner party, the host and the chef is fine. But out of the four guests at the dinner party, three have passed away, and only one is still fighting for his life, and that is the 68-year-old who is the husband of the sister, OK? And his name, like I said, is Ian Wilkinson, and he remains in critical condition in the hospital.

Going on, the article continues to say, "Police said their symptoms were consistent with having eaten death cap mushrooms." Death cap mushrooms. So, I don't know about you,

where you grew up, in Canada, in our front yard, our backyard, in the forest, and in the school playground, mushrooms grow naturally. And I remember when I was a little kid, my parents always warned me, "Never eat the mushrooms! Don't eat the mushrooms They are poisonous, and you should never ever eat the mushrooms." Even though they look like the mushrooms that you can buy in a grocery store, they could make you sick. Now, I don't know if the mushrooms that grew in Canada, where I grew up, if those are actually poisonous mushrooms or not. I never tried them to find out, and thankfully, as a kid, I guess I never would anyways, because I always hated mushrooms when I was younger. I thought they were slimy and gross. And I actually thought they were slimy and gross until quite recently. I'm a new convert to mushrooms, and I do actually really enjoy mushrooms now.

And it's kind of funny that we're talking about mushrooms because I talked with Kassy, my cohost, recently. And she said, "Andrew, we have to record a Simplified Speech episode about mushrooms." Because apparently, when she was away in Europe, she had a great fantastic mushroom foraging experience, and she wants to talk about that in an upcoming Culips episode. So, what I'm trying to say here is that it's true that there are poisonous mushrooms that grow in the wild. And at least in my case, my parents always warned me, "Don't eat the wild mushrooms because you never know if they are healthy and good for you to eat, or if they could be very poisonous and make you sick."

I'm wondering, in your neck of the woods, in your area of the world from where you're listening to this show, if that is the same for you, if your parents gave you a similar warning when you were growing up. So, these mushrooms that were potentially in this beef wellington pie are called "Death cap mushrooms." And a mushroom cap is like the top part of a mushroom. You know how a mushroom has a thin narrow stem at the bottom, and then the top almost looks like an umbrella that's been popped out and unfolded, right? Well, that round, big part at the top of the mushroom is called the cap, OK? So the mushroom cap, and then the long skinny part that is similar to the leg, we call that the

stem. So, think about that name of that type of mushroom, "Death cap mushroom." Just from hearing the name of it, it sounds like something you don't want to eat, right?

So, the people at the dinner party who potentially ate those mushrooms, they had symptoms that were consistent with the poisoning that happens from death cap mushrooms. So, I don't know exactly what symptoms those are. But when you eat a death cap mushroom, then you probably, you know, have some unique symptoms that you can say, oh, of course, you ate these mushrooms. Maybe you have a fever or a very strong stomachache, or who knows what happens, but you have some symptoms that make it really easy to identify that you've been poisoned by that specific kind of mushroom.

OK, let's continue on with the article. Police said Aaron Patterson remained a suspect in the investigation because she had cooked the meal at her home but did not become ill. So, this is where I'm wondering, is foul play involved, OK? The host of the dinner party, the cook of the beef wellington pie, she's totally fine. But everybody else who attended the dinner party has either died because of mushroom poisoning or is in very critical condition. So, you have to wonder, is foul play involved, right? Did she design this dinner party in order to kill her dinner guests? Like, that's the first question that popped into my mind. And well, I imagine that police are also asking that question because it does seem a little bit odd, right? You have to wonder, why is she OK, but all of the guests are sick?

Let's continue with the article and find out some more details. However, they, the police, they warned people not to speculate about the case because it could turn out to be very innocent. Well, I guess I messed up, right? Because here I am speculating about the case on the podcast, even though the police warned people don't do this. So, I apologize to the police in Australia. Here I am speculating about the case. But it could turn out to be very innocent, they say. So, it might have been a mistake. It might have been a really huge, huge major mistake. We don't know the details, right? We don't know if foul play is involved or not. But police are warning people: Don't speculate. You know, "innocent until proven guilty" is what we say in this kind of situation. Without any proof, we can't go

around pointing fingers and saying, "Oh, you did it. You are a murderer." Of course, of course not. We have to wait for all the details to come in. Let's continue with the article. "The death cap" and here is the Latin name of this mushroom, and I will probably incorrectly pronounce this, "Amanita phalloides is the world's most toxic mushroom and is responsible for about 90% of mushroom-related deaths globally. Its main toxin is α -Amanitin, which cannot be destroyed by cooking or drying and can result in liver and kidney failure." So, this is pretty intense. The death cap mushroom is the most poisonous, most toxic, most deadly mushroom in the whole world. And it's got a toxin, poison inside of it that you cannot remove. You can't get it out of the mushroom by cooking the mushroom or by drying the mushroom. It's always going to be poisonous. And here we learn some information about how it affects you when you consume or eat this mushroom. It results in liver and kidney failure. Doesn't sound very pleasant, does it?

"In its earlier growth stages, death caps have a white creamy color that can resemble edible straw mushrooms. They typically grow under oak trees and are found in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, but rarely in other states." So, this mushroom looks similar to another type of mushroom and only grows in one specific area of Australia around Victoria and some other regions.

"Police are conducting forensic tests on items seized at the house and also visited a nearby tip. The incident has left the rural Victorian town of Korumburra, where Ian Wilkinson is a pastor, in mourning." "In mourning" means that people are grieving and very, very sad over the loss of their pastor's wife. And also, their pastor is in critical condition, fighting for his life. So, they're very, very sad that this incident has affected their community, OK? A pastor is a leader of a church. So, we could imagine that there were probably many people who felt a connection to this guy. So, all of the people who are probably members of that church and part of that community feel very sad to hear this terrible news that has happened to that town.

The article continues by saying, "Mushroom foraging is popular in the area, according to the local mayor." Which means many people like to go out into the wild and search and hunt for wild mushrooms to eat. That is foraging, and you gotta wonder, why is it such a popular activity in an area where the world's most toxic mushroom grows? And it looks like a mushroom that I assume is harmless - the straw mushroom. So, you kind of wonder, you must have to be very, very careful if potentially you could eat that mushroom by accident. But anyways, I guess mushroom foraging is a popular activity in that town, according to the mayor.

And the article continues, and we're almost at the end here. It says, "Guardian Australia understands that the lunch behind the suspected poisoning included a beef wellington pie as its main course. Common recipes for beef wellington pie call for the addition of mushrooms, with some suggesting chestnut or wild varieties. In 2012, two people died in Canberra after eating death cap mushrooms at a New Year's Eve dinner party."

And that brings us to the end of the article. So, I'm curious, what do you think? It's quite the amazing story, right? In many regards, it's very tragic. Obviously, having three people pass away and one person in critical condition is tragic. And I feel for the families of those people who passed away. And on the other hand, it's a very intriguing story. We don't know yet, like I've mentioned a few times, we don't know yet if this is true crime or if this is something totally unrelated. If there's no foul play involved, it could be the case. But you can't help but speculate. You can't help but wonder if it was the host of this dinner party who was trying to get rid of the in-laws.

And I think we're just going to have to wait until the police do their investigation and release more information. And maybe even some journalists can look into the story more and find out some of the background information about the people involved. Because there are just too many unknowns for me to make a decision. But I'm really curious about why those in-laws are ex-in-laws, former in-laws. What happens to the partner of the host of the dinner party? Maybe that will give us some insights. Anyways, I want to hear your

thoughts. I want to know what your guess is about what happened, about what your hypothesis is about what happened.

And hopefully, in the upcoming weeks and months, we'll know the real details of the story. And then we can have some closure about the story and find out what the real information is and what really went down. Anyways, I did spend a lot of time this week thinking about this story and just wondering, you know, if it is possibly a murder case, then what could the motivation be? What could the motive be for the ex-daughter-in-law to try and kill her former in-laws? I have no idea. We'll have to wait until the investigation reveals more details. But I thought I'd share that story with you so that we could learn some interesting vocabulary and talk about this interesting yet tragic incident that happened down under in Australia.

And now it's time for this week's vocabulary lesson.

Today, we're going to learn about a phrasal verb expression that is really useful and very, very common. And English speakers use it when we want to convey our sympathy or empathy to other people. Now, the expression is "to feel for someone," to feel for someone. And I just mentioned two words: sympathy and empathy and perhaps you might not know the difference between those two words because they do have a very similar meaning. But there is a slight nuance to the meaning. So let me break these two words down. And then we'll talk about "to feel for someone."

But, essentially, empathy is when you feel the same way that someone else feels, and you know how they feel because you've been through a similar situation in your past. For example, maybe your friend lost their job recently, and perhaps in your past, you also lost your job. Well, in that situation, you would be able to empathize with your friend because you know exactly how that feels to lose your job, right? So, that is empathy, because you can understand what somebody else feels because you've gone through that yourself.

You've been in their shoes before, and you can deeply understand that emotion that your friend or whoever is feeling.

Now, on the other hand, sympathy is about caring about someone's feelings and showing your support, your emotional support, even if you haven't felt the same way yourself. So, for example, I have an example from my real life that I can share with you.

Recently, I have a friend who has a new baby, and that baby was a little bit sick recently, just a little fever, a little cold, nothing major, the baby is fine now. However, in that situation, my friend was a little bit stressed out because this was one of the first times that his baby was sick. So, when I saw that my friend was stressed out, of course, I wanted to show that I support that friend and I'm thinking of that friend and I'm caring for that friend. But since I don't have any children myself, I can't really understand what it feels like to be the parent of a sick child. So, in that situation, I was able to show sympathy because I was caring for my friend's feelings, but I wasn't able to show empathy because I don't understand that situation. It's one that I've never been in myself. So, that's the difference between empathy and sympathy.

And let's bring it back to the key expression for this lesson, which is "to feel for someone." So, we use this expression when we want to show sympathy or empathy towards somebody else's situation, or their emotions, or their experiences. Now, I used this expression in this episode when I was talking about the families of the people who passed away by eating the poisoned death cap mushrooms. I said, I feel for them because I can imagine that this is a terrible way to lose somebody that you loved, right? If this was your brother, or sister, or something like that, it would be a very terrible way to have one of your loved ones pass away. So, in this kind of situation, I was using "to feel for" to show my sympathy or empathy. Quiz time: sympathy or empathy? Of course, this would be sympathy because I have never had a family member pass away by eating a death cap mushroom. So, I don't know exactly what that is like. So, this would be sympathy, OK?

Now I'm going to share some example sentences with you with this expression, and we'll talk about exactly when you can use this expression and in what kinds of situations and how you would use it. But before we do that, I do just want to rewind and go back to the point in the episode where this expression just naturally flowed out of my mouth. And I want you all to listen to it a couple more times just so we can get the context. And then we'll move on to some example sentences. So, let's do that now. Let's rewind, go back, and we'll take a listen a couple more times. Here we go.

I feel for the families of those people who passed away.

OK, so we just heard myself saying that "I feel for the families of the people who passed away." K? And this is a really nice expression that you can use whenever you hear something negative on the news about people who are in an accident or who had some really difficult situation. You know, you can say, "Oh, I feel for their families" or "I feel for those people." And it just shows that you are expressing that you care, and you realize that that is a pretty terrible situation to have to go through. And you just want to recognize and say, like, it must be really difficult, it must be really terrible. I feel for them, I care for them. And I hope in the future, that things will improve in their lives. This kind of situation is when we want to use this expression. It's just a really polite and kind way of showing compassion and support for someone who might be going through a challenging or difficult time. OK, now that we know the meaning of this expression, let's take a listen to those example sentences so we can learn how to use it in a natural way. So, I've got three examples prepared for you. And yeah, let's check out the first one right now. Here we go!

Example sentence number one.

I recently watched a documentary about refugees, and it made me feel for those who are forced to leave their homes in search of safety.

So, in the sentence, the speaker said that he recently watched a documentary movie about refugees. And refugees are people who have to leave their homes to go to a different city or a different country because there is some problem that is preventing them from living safely in their hometown. It could be a war, it could be a natural disaster, anything like that, that would force people to move from one place to a different place, OK. It's different than immigration. Immigration is when you move from one city to another city or one country to a different country because you want to.

On the other hand, if you're a refugee, it's usually because you don't want to, but you must because there is a war or a natural disaster has forced you to leave. So often we can feel sympathy for refugees if we think about what that must be like, it's gotta suck to leave your home and your friends and your family and your culture and your language and have to go to a new foreign place and start life all over from the beginning. It's a very, very difficult situation, right? So, in that example sentence, the speaker says, "I feel for refugees," and that just communicates that he understands that this is a very challenging thing to have to do. And he wants to show that he is thinking about them and caring for them and hoping things improve in the future.

Example sentence number two.

My cousin's been through so much in her life over the last few years. First, she was in a bad car accident, and then she lost her job. I can't help but feel for her.

In this example sentence, we hear about a cousin who has had some bad luck over the last few years. First, she was in a car accident, and then she lost her job as well. So, it's a very difficult, challenging situation. These are two terrible events that have happened to her. So, in the example sentence, the speaker said, "I can't help but feel for her." And in fact, if you keep your ears open for this expression in the future, you'll notice that native speakers use this construction often. I can't help but feel for him. I can't help but feel for her. I can't help but feel for them. OK? We use it with "I can't help but feel for someone."

And this is just a great sentence or phrase to memorize so that you can use it when you want to show your sympathy or empathy for someone in the future. "I can't help but feel for somebody."

Example sentence number three.

Final exams are coming up really soon, and I can't help but feel for students who are feeling the pressure to perform well.

Let's break this final example sentence down. In this sentence, the speaker said that he can't help but feel for students who are feeling pressure to perform well on exams. And of course, often high school students and university students can get quite stressed out around final exams. Often, they're pulling all-nighters, and praying and hoping and studying so that they can do well on the exams. And the speaker just wanted to show that he is caring for them, and he hopes that they're doing all right. Maybe the speaker has been in that situation himself. So, he can empathize with what they're going through.

And I think this sentence does a nice job at showing how we can use this expression "to feel for someone," even in a situation that's not really, really, really serious, right? Like, being a refugee is a very serious situation, when somebody passes away or gets in a car accident, these are really serious situations. An exam at school is not as serious, I think, as these other issues. But it's still stressful and can still be very difficult. And it's still a situation where we want to show our sympathy and empathy. So yeah, you can use "to feel for someone" in a variety of different situations, anytime you want to show that you care or are thinking about somebody because they're going through a difficult or stressful time.

So that's gonna bring us to the end of this week's bonus episode. Thanks for joining me, and if you made it all the way to the end, congratulations on completing an English study session with me today. Great job!

We did something a little bit different in this episode. And of course, whenever I do something new, I would like your feedback. So, if you have any comments or feedback for me, please let me know on our Discord server.

Finally, I have one announcement for all Culips members, which I probably should have made at the top of the episode, but I forgot, it slipped my mind. But I just remembered, so I'll let you know now before I let you go. And it is that we are going to be having our live stream for Culips members coming up very, very soon. It will be happening this week on Thursday, August 17th, at 9:30 pm Korean Standard Time. And of course, you'll have to adjust and calculate what time that happens in the area of the world where you live. But since I live in Korea, it's happening at 9:30 pm in Korea, and we'll be hosting the live stream on our Discord server. We'll put the link in the description for you so you can find it easily.

And during the stream, I'll be joined by Alina. Alina is one of our study guide writers and also is the moderator of our server. And we're going to be doing something a little bit different from our regular live streams as well. So, lots of experimentation these days at Culips. But we are going to be playing Culips trivia during the live stream. And so, what is that? Well, trivia is a game where you have to answer questions. It's like a quiz game. And the topic is going to be Culips. So, it'll be fun, I think, and you'll be able to put your knowledge of Culips and Culips content to the test. So, I'm curious, like, how much do you know about Culips? And how much do you remember about what we've been talking about over the last few months? You'll be able to find out during the live stream when we play Culips trivia. So, I hope to see you there. Again, it's happening at 9:30 pm Korean Standard Time on Thursday, August 17th.

I'm going to take off now but have a great week ahead. Take care and, as always, happy English studies! Bye!

Episode credits

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