

## Shmanners 189: Mistletoe

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**Travis:** Hey Teresa, why did the guy have explosive foot odor?

**Teresa:** Why?

**Travis:** 'Cause he had missile toes!

**Teresa:** [tiredly] It's *Shmanners*. [sighs]

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello, internet! You're listening to *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** [laughs] [clears throat]

**Travis:** Is that not it?

**Teresa:** What?

**Travis:** Hello, internet! You're listening to *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** I'm your... husband host—

**Travis:** No—what?

**Teresa:** —you say the—

**Travis:** You're right.

**Teresa:** You're lookin' at me like you're waiting for *me* to do it, but you do it!

**Travis:** Listen, it's an early Saturday morning. Let's try it again!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Hello, internet. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:** And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy!

**Travis:** And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear. See, we did it.

**Travis:** Yeah, but it's been, like, two weeks. Soo...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** [stammers] I—I think you understand where I'm coming from. Hi, everybody! It is an *early* Saturday morning recording. Teresa and I are still in our PJs. The Beebs is watchin' *Frozen* on her headphones, so you'll probably hear her in the background. It's a very good chance if we're still recording when it gets to "Let it Go" that you will hear our daughter belting out the high notes.

**Teresa:** Like you do.

**Travis:** Um, so, this is a holiday special. We're here in December. Um, and for this holiday special we're focusing on mistletoe.

**Teresa:** We are!

**Travis:** So, mistletoe... is a magic plant that makes everyone kiss? Am I remembering that correctly?

**Teresa:** Eh...

**Travis:** The spe—it's got spores that when they get in your nose, you just gotta kiss.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Like "Love Potion No. 9", but in mistletoe form.

**Teresa:** Do you have any personal experience with mistletoe?

**Travis:** Uh, yeah! I have this weird memory of, like, somebody at my church when I was growing up, like, selling sprigs of mistletoe for, like, a dollar or something.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** And my mom would buy one or two and hang 'em up in the house, so there was always a piece right at the bottom of the stairs in our house, like, hanging up on the edge of a shelf.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** In our house.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Like, at Christmas. Not all the time, mind you. Just at Christmas.

**Teresa:** Right. My mom had a little fake mistletoe plant, um, so it was like the mistletoe sprigs kind of hung down. And then there was, like, this decorative, embroidered, like, ball thing on a string that she would kind of, like... pushpin to the ceiling?

**Travis:** Uh-huh?

**Teresa:** Uh, but, like, we largely ignored it? [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, that's the thing is I—I—as we were talking about doing this episode, and we have, you know—as you might imagine, we got, like, 25, 30 questions, [holding back laughter] and they all boiled down to the same question.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] The same couple.

**Travis:** "Kissing." And the thing is is, like, I can't ever remember.. that, like—every—I think it's the kind of thing where it's like—at least for me, everybody always acknowledged, like, "Oh, mistletoe! You gotta kiss!" And I don't remember anyone ever doing it.

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] And then nobody ever did it. Yeah.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I think—I think it's easier to follow the tradition when it's *real* mistletoe, but when it's fake mistletoe, like... I just—

**Travis:** I've only ever seen it in my own personal life utilized for people who were already in a relationship with someone, right?

**Teresa:** Oh, okay, yeah.

**Travis:** Like, it being, like, a cute thing of like, "We're under the mistletoe," right?

**Teresa:** "C'mere, give us a kiss."

**Travis:** I don't—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Maybe I just was goin' to the wrong parties when I was *eight*, or whatever—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —but, like, I don't ever remember it being, like, a "Hey stranger, let's kiss."

**Teresa:** Yeah. So—

**Travis:** But I will also say—

**Teresa:** Oh, okay.

**Travis:** —your mom probably went about it the better way of having fake mistletoe, because—maybe this is a spoiler for what we were gonna talk about later—[holding back laughter] it's incredibly poisonous.

**Teresa:** Yes it is!

**Travis:** Uh, and I think about, now that we have two dogs and a three-year-old and a cat in our house, the idea of bringing real mistletoe in our house just seems like I'm sayin', "There's too many small things in here."

**Teresa:** Yeah. Not only is it poisonous, it's a parasitic plant.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So it can't really exist on its own. What it does is it spreads to trees, um, and lives in kind of a ball on a tree branch, and it gets spread around by bird poops.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um—

**Travis:** 'Cause it's got those bright red berries, right?

**Teresa:** Well, we'll talk about that too.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It does have berries, right. Um, but they—

**Travis:** Berries in general are a thing that are—so—[fake laughter] listen, I'm not gonna brag—

**Teresa:** [fake laughter]

**Travis:** —I took botany in college. I paid a little attention. That berries, uh—if you see a berry, like on a tree or a bush or anything, it's usually to attract birds or squirrels or something along those lines to eat it and then poop out the seeds to spread the plant.

**Teresa:** Exactly. Um—

**Travis:** Also, as I understand it, mistletoe is an invasive species.

**Teresa:** Indeed it does! It reproduces and spreads so widely, like, all around the world, this is part of its, like, mythology, right?

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** It's the fertility deal.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It's just *everywhere*, and you can't get rid of it, and it's, like, pervasive, so that is why it's often used to represent fertility and... as an aphrodisiac, but, I mean, like...

**Travis:** Don't eat it!

**Teresa:** Don't eat it. It's not—

**Travis:** Don't eat it!

**Teresa:** —it's more the sight, right?

**Travis:** It is one of the few things I can think of where you're actually better off eating, like, a fake wax version of it than eating the real thing. I don't think people make fake wax arsenic, so I'm sticking with—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —eat—I'd rather eat fake mistletoe than real mistletoe. #2019. [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** Right. And then also, in some cultures it is a symbol of strength, because you really just—you can't get rid of it. It's—it—

**Travis:** Oh, see, I thought it was, like, a thing—'cause—okay. Doesn't it have red berries, and the vikings believed, like, it was 'cause it was, like, dipped in the blood of your enemies or something?

**Teresa:** It *can* have red berries.

**Travis:** Okay. I feel like I heard that somewhere. Please do not quote me on it. *I'm* not the researcher of the couple.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, but—so—and it lasts through the winter, right.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um—

**Travis:** Well, then give me holly any day! Holly lasts through with winter, right? It's way prettier! [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** I think. [singing] The holly and the ivy—[normally] we were just talking the other day—man, this is gonna be a weird, rambly episode for me, I guess.

**Teresa:** I guess!

**Travis:** But we were talking the other day about what's your favorite *weird* Christmas song, or I guess I should say favorite weird holiday song, and for me it's "Holly and the Ivy," or, uh, the—what's the—[mumble-singing] The ivy green, the holly green, the—

**Teresa:** That's the—

**Travis:** "Christmas in Killarney."

**Teresa:** "Christmas in Killarney," from Rankin Bass.

**Travis:** I don't know why I enjoy that song so much.

**Teresa:** It's a great song. It's a good dancin' song.

**Travis:** Yeahhh, it's got a great beat. Okay, back to mistletoe.

**Teresa:** Uh, it is actually a hybrid of two Anglo-Saxon words. Uh, it's kinda...

**Travis:** Yeah?

**Teresa:** ... gross.

**Travis:** Aw.

**Teresa:** Uh... mistleton, or mistel, which means... dung.

**Travis:** Uh-huh?

**Teresa:** And tan, which means... stick!

**Travis:** So it's a dung stick!

**Teresa:** It's poop on a stick.

**Travis:** Why is that? Now why is that? Hey, [through laughter] now why is that?

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, you already touched on it, right? Because when birds eat the berries and they fly over the trees, they release the berries in their poop, and it lands on the trees.

**Travis:** And then it grows.

**Teresa:** And then it grows.

**Travis:** Ohhh, okay! That actually makes a lot of sense. Okay.

**Teresa:** Yep, that's why! Poop on a stick! [clears throat] [holding back laughter] If that's not romantic, I don't know what is.

**Travis:** I know, right? So far I've heard nothing romantic about this plant.

**Teresa:** [pauses] Yeah.

**Travis:** We're not gonna get to anything romantic, are we?

**Teresa:** Oh, just a touch.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Juuust a touch. Okay. Um, we got this in a question about, um, "What can I use for mistletoe?"

**Travis:** "What can I use instea—" yeah, yeah.



**Teresa:** Instead.

**Travis:** Because, like we said, it's an invasive plant, in its real form it's poisonous, um, it's—yes. Yes, yes, yes. It's hard to find anybody who's like, "Mistletoe? I love that stuff!"

**Teresa:** Well, so, who sent that question in?

**Travis:** Uh, that was from @nerpitude.

**Teresa:** Great. Um, the truth is there are over a *thousand* kinds of mistletoe. So... if you find something that has white or red or green berries, and a round-y... kind of oblong leaf?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** You can use that and say it's mistletoe. [holding back laughter] It probably is. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, listen. Hear me now, folks. I'm gonna say nine out of ten people, if you hang up some, like, holly and say it's mistletoe, [clicks tongue] done. Like—

**Teresa:** Well, so—okay. I do want to make a distinguishing characteristic.

**Travis:** I know they're not the same. I'm saying—

**Teresa:** Between the two, visually, okay?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, holly... um, has leaves that are jaggedly edged.

**Travis:** Correct, yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? Kind of, like, scalloped?

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Scalloped, yeah.

**Teresa:** Exactly. And the berries are often quite close to the leaves. Um, when you are looking for mistletoe or a mistletoe substitute, the berries are usually at the end of, like, a stick. And the—

**Travis:** It's more of a sprig, right?

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Yeah. It's, like—

**Teresa:** And then the leaves are rounded and kind of an oblong shape. But—

**Travis:** Yes. And there's always fake. You can always go fake. Go fake.

**Teresa:** [sighs] Yes. Please go fake. But you can—white berries, red berries, green berries, even—

**Travis:** Crunch berries.

[extended pause]

**Teresa:** No. So, you can practically go to whatever your craft store is of choice and find anything that fits your décor that you like.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I mean, really. So if you can't, quote, "Find mistletoe," just expand your mind!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] And redefine what mistletoe is.

**Travis:** Yeah. There you go.

**Teresa:** [clears throat] So... [pauses] here is—here's a fun fact, uh, about why we are advocating, um, fake mistletoe.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, so, the plant has poisonous a means.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** And eating it can cause... vomiting.

**Travis:** Oh boy.

**Teresa:** Stomach pain.

**Travis:** Mmm.

**Teresa:** And it was actually thought originally that mistletoe tea could cure epilepsy and other ailments, but when people drank too much, they straight up died.

**Travis:** So... huh. So... huh. This is, like—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** —a thing they talk a lot about on *Sawbones* of, like, you would think at that point they would go, "You know what? [through laughter] Maybe this doesn't work!"

**Teresa:** "[through laughter] Maybe this isn't it."

**Travis:** "Maybe we should *stop* doing this one!"

**Teresa:** Yeah. So it's *very* poisonous. Um, I do not recommend bringing it into your home. Please go to your craft store.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** If you choose to decorate with mistletoe.

**Travis:** Plus, once again, not to hammer this point home any more, but people should not be growing it on purpose. It is a parasite, and it is invasive. It should not be grown as, like, a harvest crop.

**Teresa:** Agreed. Alright, but birds, bees, butterflies, it's great for them, so.

[theme music begins in the background]

**Travis:** Birds do it. Bees do it.

**Teresa:** Oh no. Don't even.

**Teresa:** Okay, so I guess that's a good segue, because why do we like it? Why?

**Travis:** You know what? I'm dying to find out, but first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

**Teresa:** Alright.

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[pauses]

**Travis:** We would like to write a thank you note in part to our sponsor Quip this week. Listen, in this house, we love Quip. We all use it. They even have kids' brushes that we're gonna start usin' for Bebe here pretty soon. You know, she's still got a little toddler mouth. [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs] It's true.

**Travis:** Got a bad case of lil toddler mouth! But a little bit older and we're gonna switch her to that kids' Quip. We love it because—here's the thing. You're supposed to brush two minutes every time you brush. Do *you* do it? Because here's the thing, you might think, "Yeah, two minutes, that sounds about right."

That's what I thought until I started using Quip. It has a built-in timer to let you know when two minutes is up, and it pulses every 30 seconds to tell you to switch to a different area of your mouth. I was *not* doing enough time.

And so—and not only does it have that built-in timer, it also has gentle, sensitive sonic vibrations, so it doesn't feel like it's beating up your gums. Um, *and...* they now have a Quip floss dispenser that comes with pre-marked string to help you use just enough.

That's right! Now Quip has floss. It's the whole mouth clean you've been looking for. It's Quip—plus, even better, Quip delivers fresh refills to your door every three months with free shipping, so your routine is always right.

Join over three million healthy mouths and get Quip today, starting at just \$25. So, if you go to [getquip.com/shmanners](https://getquip.com/shmanners) right now, you'll get your first refill free. That's your first refill *free* at [getquip.com/shmanners](https://getquip.com/shmanners). That's G-E-T-Q-U-I-P.com/shmanners. Quip: the good habits company.

**Teresa:** *Shmanners* is also sponsored in part this week by Native Deodorant! It's a formula of deodorant that contains really simple ingredients. Things like tapioca starch, coconut oil, shea butter, things like that.

**Travis:** Oh yeah.

**Teresa:** But it is formulated without aluminum, parabens, and talc! So, you can use this, uh, and it—oh, wait! It also comes in a baking soda-free formula, which is important for some people, too. Um, you can use it every day and feel good about using it. It also has some really great scents. Coconut and vanilla, I love that one. That's a good one. The lavender and rose—I'm into cucumber and mint these days.

**Travis:** Mmm!

**Teresa:** I'm enjoying it. Um, and—so, the special offer that they have given our lovely *Shmanners* Fanners is you can get 20% off your first purchase when you visit [natedeodorant.com](https://natedeodorant.com) and use the promo code "shmanners" at checkout!

So, [natedeodorant.com](https://natedeodorant.com) with promo code "shmanners" for 20% off of your first purchase.

**Travis:** We also have a Jumbotron this week. E-he-hem:

"Officer Mugen was proud to take the hero exam and become one of the five cities' caped crusaders, but once he meets his new partner, the weird and wily Junkman, the fateful duo are drawn into a web of intrigue in the cities that never sleep. The Brothers Pimm proudly present *City Limits*: an actual play podcast. Join James, Ryan, and Michael, three good friends and two actual brothers, for a dungeon world adventure in a world of mystery of magic. Look for *City Limits* on your podcatcher or head to @brotherspimm, P-I-M-M, on Twitter and Instagram."

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[dramatic music plays]

**Mark:** We interrupt the podcast you're listening to to tell you about another podcast. That's right: *We Got This with Mark and Hal*.

**Hal:** That's correct, Mark. This is Hal. We do the hard work for you settling all of the meaningless arguments you have with your friends.

**Mark:** So tune in every week on the Maximum Fun Network for *We Got This with Mark and Hal*, and all your questions will be asked... and answered.

**Hal:** You're welcome!

[music stops]

**Hal:** Alright, that's enough of that.

**Music:** [singing] We got this!

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**Travis:** Okay. So, why—why?

**Teresa:** Why?

**Travis:** Why mistletoe? Why?

**Teresa:** Why mistletoe? Okay.

**Travis:** Why ask why? Mistletoe.

**Teresa:** So, um, ancient civilizations all over the world believed that mistletoe had everything from magical healing properties to protection from evil spirits to just, like, general good luck business, right? Some traditions went so far as to dictate that mistletoe needed to be harvested under the moonlight, with a golden sickle, and caught in a white cloth.

**Travis:** Yeah. Oh, see, that's the problem! I was using a *cream* cloth.

**Teresa:** Ahhh.

**Travis:** Oh!

**Teresa:** It must also never touch the ground or its magic is lost, and the vikings... *may* have believed it could bring people back from the dead, but jury's out on that one when it didn't work.

**Travis:** That—okay. That, once again, seems like an easy to test thing.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Like you said, this runs into *Sawbones* a little bit, because, like, the first time it doesn't work, you'll be like, "Welp! Maybe not!"

**Travis:** Well, but then you're like, "Oh, did it touch the ground?"

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** "Did you use the right cloth?"

**Teresa:** "Did you... have the golden sickle?"

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** "Under the moonlight?"

**Travis:** Uh, also in Norse—

**Teresa:** "Was—no clouds?"

**Travis:** —Norse mythology, uh, mistletoe was used to kill Baldur, which I know in part thanks to... *God of War*. [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Thank you. And it basically was, like, an Achilles kinda deal where Freya had him blessed for everything except mistletoe. Uh, I guess mistletoe just didn't seem like a big enough of a threat. Uh, and then that was what was used to... kill him.

**Teresa:** Okay!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Vikings weren't the only ones. The Celtic druids used it in their religious ceremonies.

**Travis:** That tracks.

**Teresa:** They believed that the mistletoe, especially a particularly rare species that grew on oak trees, had sacred powers, including the ability to heal illness, protect against nightmares, and even predict the future.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, during the summer and winter solstices, they would do a mass collection, and then would decorate it in their ho—with their homes—excuse me, decorate their homes with it. During Yuletide, which was part of the original pagan festival to honor Odin—

**Travis:** Which then became Christmas when it was stolen.

**Teresa:** Okay. It—[stammers] I'm gonna get to that.

**Travis:** Okay. You know, I wonder how much I—like, just doing a little bit of deductive reasoning, I wonder how much of, like, the incorporation of mistletoe as a thing to be collected came from the fact that it *was* an invasive, parasitic thing. So it's like, "Well, we need to be out, like, cutting it off anyways. So why not make it a thing, to encourage people to cut it off, and say, like, 'It's magical and great, so you really should get out there and cut it off of trees, huh?'"

I wonder if there was a bit of that, too. Or maybe it was just, like, because it was parasitic and invasive it was like, "This is all over the place. Maybe it's something. Who knows?"

**Teresa:** Maybe, maybe. Um, another Nordic legend—there's a Nordic less—uh, legend where mistletoe was a favorite part of Frigga, often identified with Freya, the goddess of love's sort of mythos.

**Travis:** And Odin's wife!



**Teresa:** Um, the myth was that she went all around to the living things in nature and asked them not to harm her son, but she *forgot*—

**Travis:** Her son Baldur, uh-huh! But she forgot mistletoe! Yes.

**Teresa:** She forgot mistletoe. So Loki, you know, the way he is—

**Travis:** The trickster.

**Teresa:** —shot her son with an arrow carved from mistletoe, and she wept over her son's body underneath a tree that was covered in mistletoe, and her tears created the white berries. Uh, and this somehow translates into her being able to revive her son? Um, and—

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** —out of gratitude for the plant, she decreed that mistletoe would never again be used as a weapon, and that she would place a kiss on anyone who passed under it.

**Travis:** Ohhhh!

**Teresa:** *Maybe* this is why we kiss under mistletoe?

**Travis:** I mean, listen. That seems pretty one for one to me. That seems... pretty connected.

**Teresa:** Okay, but there's also an ancient Roman deal, right?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** During the festival of Saturnalia—which was to honor the god Saturn, we've talked about this before—

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** —people would kiss under the mistletoe because of the plant's association with fertility.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** They, uh—and this is when people would decorate in the wintertime to appease the gods.

**Travis:** Uh-huh. They did everything to appease the gods.

**Teresa:** Oh, uh, certainly. Certainly.

**Travis:** It was their whole deal.

**Teresa:** So, um... now, the reason that we know these things is because they were incorporated [through laughter] during—this is great—what our research assistant Alex has deemed "The Great Christian Re-brand." [laughs]

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Uh, the church decided it would be easier to convert people if they didn't take away all the fun stuff right away.

**Travis:** Yep. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Exactly.

**Travis:** We've talked about this. Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um, so they all happen in—all of these, like, Yuletide, Saturnalia, all this stuff, happen in the last half of December, so they were like, "Hey. Now this is a thing. Merry Christmas!"

Um, they also did this with Easter, and we've talked about that. And all of these cultures had mistletoe integrated already, so they were like, "Why not?" Right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Uh, so in this Great Christian Re-band—Re-brand. tradition, you're supposed to hang mistletoe in your doorway to bring good luck and happiness to your home. And the tradition also says every couple—so, this is why it's supposed to be a, um... a monogamous thing, right? Every *couple*, instead of just random strangers. We were talking about this earlier. Um, every couple who kisses underneath it will have a long, happy life and marriage.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, and if you neglect the ritual you get bad luck.

**Travis:** Oh, bummer.

**Teresa:** Um, and this bad luck then translated into, "If a single lady..."

**Travis:** All the single ladies?

**Teresa:** All the single ladies? Uh, if they stand under the mistletoe and are not kissed, they won't get married that year.

**Travis:** Oh. Okay. That must be awkward if your partner stops under the mistletoe and you're like, "Honey, let's kiss," and he's like, "Ohhh, uhhh, ehhh..."

**Teresa:** "Errr..." yeah.

**Travis:** "Ohhh, what did—oohh..."

**Teresa:** So this—that particular lil nugget, um, was taken advantage of during the Victorian era.

**Travis:** Oh? Okay.

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** This is where all of our Christmas comes from.

**Teresa:** All of our Christmas comes from. Um, and so there was actually proper etiquette for a gentleman with—

**Travis:** Of course there was.

**Teresa:** —of course there was!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** This is the Victorians! Um, was expected to kiss a lady of refinement underneath the mistletoe. So much so that there is a book called *Decking the Halls: the Folklore and Traditions of Christmas Plants* by Linda Allen. Check that out. That's very interesting.

**Travis:** That actually does sound really cool.

**Teresa:** Um, a man was expected to pluck one berry from the plant while kissing a lady on the cheek.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** One kiss was allowed for each berry he plucked, but when the berries were gone, no more kissin'!

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so, like, that's part of the tradition as far as, like, when the berries are gone it loses its, quote, uh, "magic powers."

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** But also this plays into the [through laughter] sexual repression of Victorians.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Right? [laughs]

**Travis:** "Thank *goodness!* An excuse to kiss upon the cheek!"

**Teresa:** Um, it goes both ways though. If, quote, "a girl refused to kiss," um, then not only would they be cut off from marriage proposals for at least a year, many would also snub their noses at her, remarking that she'd probably wind up an old maid.

**Travis:** Oh, bummer. You hate to hear that.

**Teresa:** So isn't this so funny? We talk a lot about the sexual repression of Victorian England, society in general, but then if—then there's this strange—not even strange. Predictable dichotomy of if the lady doesn't partake, then she's—

**Travis:** What a prude.

**Teresa:** —what a pr—yeah. What a prude. She's frigid. Eye-rolling commence.

**Travis:** By the way, every time we talk about the Victorian repression, I'm going to bring this series up on Audible—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —with Stephen Fry narrating called *Victorian Secrets* that's all about, like, the actual underbelly stuff, and the stuff that was going on under the repression. Uh, it's fascinating, and really well produced. Like, they—there's acted out sequences, it's really well sound-designed, highly recommend.

**Teresa:** So, let's get down to the actual—

**Travis:** Brass tacks.

**Teresa:** —the actual etiquette surrounding mistletoe today.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and here is the first one, because it is the most important. You can forget all this etiquette stuff and, uh, really just put this one word in your mind: consent.

**Travis:** Consent.

**Teresa:** Consent! I wish that I could yell it like Oprah.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** But I can't.

**Travis:** No, no, no.

**Teresa:** No. Insert in your own minds, listeners—

**Travis:** Consent.

**Teresa:** —consent, but yelled like Oprah.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, yeah. So, if mistletoe's involved, maybe don't kiss someone who isn't your partner or hasn't openly invited you to kiss them.

**Travis:** Or that you don't want to kiss.

**Teresa:** Don't egg people on if they don't want to kiss.

**Travis:** This isn't middle school.

**Teresa:** Don't pressure people.

**Travis:** And even in middle school, don't pressure people or egg people on.

**Teresa:** Don't make people uncomfortable. Don't be a creepy weirdo.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, and then you can—you can take care of all the etiquette [holding back laughter] surrounding mistletoe.

Um, but... here we go. If you want, both parties who are consenting to take place in the tradition—

**Travis:** Here's an idea. I have an idea. 2019—

**Teresa:** Okay. Okay.

**Travis:** —let's treat mistletoe like every other single holiday tradition. Like, if somebody doesn't wanna take part in a white elephant gift exchange, you wouldn't walk up to them and force a gift into their hands, would you? No! They're not participating in the gift exchange, right? Like, let's do that! If somebody doesn't wanna sing Christmas carols, you wouldn't make fun of them for that, would you? No! They don't wanna go caroling! So let's treat it like every other tradition that exists and let people opt in or opt out based on their own will.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Now, etiquette.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, uh, customarily it's hung in doorways, so if you want to decorate your home, a doorway is the place to put it.

Um, when partaking in the tradition, keep it PG, friends.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** You know? Keep it cute and romantic. And, uh, and I'll leave the don'ts to you.

**Travis:** Yeah, you can fill in

**Teresa:** Uh, so also, it's not a portable kissing booth, okay?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So, like, don't hang it on your hat or your shirt or anything.

**Travis:** Don't be gross.

**Teresa:** Don't be gross. Um, it belongs in the doorway, and we're respectful of that. Um, it does not belong at an office party.

**Travis:** Nooo.

**Teresa:** A professional environment.

**Travis:** [deep voice] Nooo.

**Teresa:** Again, this is something where it—you know, it toes that line between friendly and, uh, and professional. Like, we don't cross that.

**Travis:** [deep voice] Nooo.

**Teresa:** [laughs] So don't bring it to an office party. Also, don't loiter under it.

**Travis:** Yeah. Ugh.

**Teresa:** Um, if you hang out under the mistletoe—

**Travis:** You're a creep.

**Teresa:** —there probably—people will find a way around you. Um, and if anyone else is being weird to you about mistletoe, call 'em out about it!

**Travis:** Yeah. This is a question, by the way, from AJ: "What's a proper, efficient response to someone/people not taking your 'No thanks' when getting caught under the mistletoe?"

Say, "You are making me uncomfortable."

**Teresa:** Certainly. And if you would—if you would care to spout any of these facts that I've given you, those are usually a turnoff, too. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah. "Oh, you mean the dung branch?"

**Teresa:** Yep. The poop stick?

**Travis:** "Oh, Todd. D'you you want me kiss you under the dung branch?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "I'd rather not, for... a lot of reasons, Todd. The fact that you weren't listening to my protestations is making me uncomfortable. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go... anywhere else."

**Teresa:** Perfect. Um, and then—so, also, you feel free with a lot of these made up traditions, right? If you wanna participate but don't wanna touch anybody on the lips or the face, why not give air kisses? Why not high five?

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** You know? Any of that stuff. It could even just be a hug.

**Travis:** Right. Or a dance.

**Teresa:** Any of that stuff.

**Travis:** Or just finger guns, or elbows, or whatever you wanna do.

**Teresa:** And it doesn't even have to be a romantic thing. Kiss your best friend on the cheek. Shower your baby cousin in kisses. Bring your dog under the mistletoe and kiss her until she jumps away from you.



**Travis:** Well—or, if it's Buttercup, until you jump away from *her*.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Until you jump away from her. Um, you know—and so it's—it's so much cuter and more inclusive when you just shower a consenting person with affection. It doesn't have to be kisses. Hugs, butterfly kisses—

**Travis:** You don't force someone to do something they don't wanna do.

**Teresa:** Exactly! Consent. Consent. Oprah yells "Consent."

**Travis:** One last question—

**Teresa:** Do we have a JIF of that? A GIF of that?

**Travis:** Oh yes, definitely.

**Teresa:** GIF, yes.

**Travis:** Um, one last question from Ashton.

"If you decided to decorate with mistletoe for tradition, are you implying you want to open the door for smooching? I want mistletoe, but I don't want to awkwardly decline kisses."

Here would be my advice. You could do—if you're going to decorate, right? And you're, like, having a party, put up a fun that says, like, "Yes, this is mistletoe, but in this house—" and, like, include the, like, "Don't force anyone to do what they don't wanna do."

**Teresa:** Or, "We give high fives."

**Travis:** "We give high fives!" Right? Like, the thing about traditions are this, Ashton, and this is something with touch on, I think, every time we do any kind of, like, traditional episode. Traditions exist because somebody said, "This is how *I* wanna celebrate it." And enough other people said, "Oh, that makes sense to me, and I'm comfortable with that," that they picked up on it, right? That's what it is.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** There was never a time where suddenly everyone woke up, and implanted in everybody's mind was a tradition, right? It starts with one family or whatever and takes over. So if you wanna start a new tradition of how to celebrate with mistletoe in your house, that is your prerogative, and you have the power to do that, so do it.

**Teresa:** Also, another good way. If you wanna decorate with mistletoe, that's great! Maybe you like the way it looks. Just don't hang it where people can stand under it.

**Travis:** Yeah. Don't make a deal out of it.

**Teresa:** Uh, so if you, you know, wanted to make a garland of mistletoe, put it on a bookshelf or a wall or something where no one can get underneath it.

**Travis:** Yes. Alright, folks! That's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much. Um, if you have ideas for episodes, you can email us, [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com).

Oh, also, this is an important announcement. So, Teresa is about 35 weeks pregnant when you hear this.

**Teresa:** Yeahhh.

**Travis:** Uh, so that baby's gonna be coming soon. Uh, when that happens, we're gonna take a little bit of maternity and paternity leave, and so we'll probably be re-airing old episodes to fill in those weeks that we're gone. So if there's any, like, classic favorites that you absolutely love and that you think, like, "Hey, it's been a while and I think people should hear that again," let us know! You can email us or tweet at us @shmannerscast.

Uh, go to Maximum Fun and check out all the other amazing episodes, all the other amazing shows. We mentioned *Sawbones*. They just put up a really fun one this week. Uh... we won't say what it's about, but go look! [holding back laughter] You're gonna—it's good. It's fun and topical.

**Teresa:** It's a little more adult than some of their other things.

**Travis:** Yes. It's topical and fun you will like it. Um, also! Go check out [mcelroy.family](http://mcelroy.family). That's where all the McElroy different productions are.

**Teresa:** And all the McElroy projects for helping people out during the holidays!

**Travis:** Correct.

**Teresa:** Um, it's a McElroy adjacent project to do MBMBaM Angels, and also Candlenights is a very philanthropic idea. Um, there are Candlenights Stars that you can participate in if you cannot attend Candlenights, so just check all that out!

**Travis:** Um, and... let's see. What else?

**Teresa:** Well, always, thank you to Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found.

Also, thank you to Bruja Betta—Betty, excuse me. Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for our cover picture of the fan-run Facebook group. Uh, lots of questions comin' down the pipe these days for holiday stuff, so if you are a fan of our podcast and you would like to meet, give, and get excellent advice from other Fanners, you can join that Facebook group, *Shmanners* Fanners.

**Travis:** Uh, and also, thank you to our research assistant Alex, without whom—well, I don't know how we'd do it! So thank you so much for your help on this episode. Uh, and I think that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

**Travis:** You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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