

Shmanners 209: Victorian Dinner Parties

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Travis: Ain't no party like a Victorian dinner party, cause at a Victorian dinner party, no one's allowed to leave until I say so.

Teresa: It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

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.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: I'm well. Uh, we're trying out a new, uh, podcasting setup.

Travis: Yeah. It's very—it's ergonomic.

Teresa: I—it is ergonomic. I'm here, on the floor, with our daughter, Dot.

Travis: And I'm here, hovering above it all! [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] Well, you're actually sitting in a chair.

Travis: Yes, I'm—I am at my desk, and at the command central, at—at Podcast HQ, as I like to call it.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: I've never called it that before in my life.

Welcome everyone to the second episode of this week. Hopefully, you've already listened to our very special episode about, uh, video conferencing.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And you've told all your friends about it, 'cause I was very proud of it.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: And so, what are we talking about today?

Teresa: Um, well, I think that a very natural, uh, follow up...

Travis: Mm-hmm?

Teresa: ... to uh, Zoom etiquette...

Travis: Yes?

Teresa: ... was uh, Victorian dinner party etiquette! [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, obviously. I mean, there are probably people who are like, "Why didn't they cover Victorian party etiquette in the episode?" And—

Teresa: I mean, I know, right?

Travis: Yeah, we had to do it in two parts. Part one, uh, video conferencing etiquette. Part two, Victorian dinner party.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, here's the thing, right? [pause]

Travis: Tell me! What is the thing?

Teresa: The thing is...

Travis: Yeah? What is it?

Teresa: This is the kind of stuff I like to do. [laughs] So we're doing it!

Travis: Yeah, no, I know. Like, Victorian dinner parties.

Teresa: Like Victorian dinner parties!

Travis: You don't need to make an excuse to me, baby!

Teresa: Okay. Well—

Travis: You know I'm here for a Victorian dinner party!

Teresa: Alright, great!

Travis: I would—I... Wait. Is—is A Christmas Carol Victorian?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay. 'Cause in most Christmas Carols you watch, uh, there's like some party games and stuff at the dinner party...

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: And I am *there* for that!

Teresa: Right.

Travis: We don't play enough, like, Minister's Cat these days!

Teresa: Okay, well—okay. Well, so Christmas was a different beast.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: So, Christmas was kind of the one time that the Victorians and you know, the Dickensian-types—

Travis: They cut loose.

Teresa: Got to cut loose, right. There—

Travis: Yeah, that's why a lot of people outlawed it! [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: We've talked about that. We did the War-on-Christmas episode.

Teresa: Yes, we did.

Travis: Okay, right. Right right right.

Teresa: We did. Um, but like... The normal, eve—not every day Victorian dinner party, because it was special; didn't have one every day.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Uh, if you were the nouveau riche, you probably needed to have one a week.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: Well, because—

Travis: Just to establish your—

Teresa: Right, yes.

Travis: Presence, yeah.

Teresa: `Cause if you—if you didn't come from money, didn't come from family, uh, that came from money... you needed to make people, you know, notice you. And this was the one—

Travis: You had to worm your way into society somehow.

Teresa: Exactly. Exactly. Um... So these—these Victorian dinner parties were more like exhibitions, right?

Travis: Oh, okay. Yeah yeah yeah!

Teresa: Uh, so you had to invite people that would, you know, talk about how nice your house was, and your furnishings, and your cook, and your—how meek your servants were, and you know...

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: Like, how—how good you were at being Victorian. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah, I get that.

Teresa: Um, and so...

Travis: I bet you had to choose the guest list pretty carefully, with that in mind, right?

Teresa: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Travis: `Cause you wouldn't want super judgmental people to come, cause then they would badmouth you.

Teresa: Weeell...

Travis: But—

Teresa: But all the best people were the judgmental people.

Travis: Right, you wouldn't want just the people who would compliment anything, 'cause then who's gonna take their opinion to heart? So you had to be like, "Okay, well. They're kind of, you know, a hard-nosed person. But, I think we can impress them, so that's a good gate, if we can get them to come."

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Right.

So, a lot of this information is going to come from Florence Hartley's 19— Sorry. 17... Goodness! Can't read, today. [sighs] Let me try again!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Florence Hartley's 1872...

Travis: Yup! There it is.

Teresa: [laughs] ... book, The Lady's Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: Um... your Victorian dinner party started way, way, way before your dinner party, with the invitations.

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: Here's the whole invitation business.

Travis: You'd get on Facebook, you would say, "Hey, do you wanna come to my party? Yes, no? Maybe?"

Don't click maybe! Man, decide if you're gonna go or not, you know?

Teresa: What are you gonna do with 48 "maybes"?

Travis: What are you gonna do with 48 "maybes"! Huh? Make 48 maybe-sandwiches?

Teresa: No, actually not. But, the instant gratification of the guest list is something that existed, at this point.

Travis: Can I guess why?

Teresa: Why?

Travis: Because you would send a runner with a card, and with the RSVP, and then they would fill it out right there, and the runner would come back with it.

Teresa: Exactly!

Travis: Yeah, I got it! I've been paying attention!

Teresa: I mean, you *could* send it through the mail, but...

Travis: That's not riche enough!

Teresa: All the—all the best people sent a servant.

Travis: Yeah, you'd put it on a platter! A silver platter!

Teresa: [laughs] Um, and then... um, you are—like you said, you're expected to respond *immediately*.

Travis: That's a lot of pressure.

Teresa: Uh, and here—here is what you might say, right? So, the invitation you got would say "Ms.—" Let's say...

Travis: Teresa Wellman.

Teresa: “Ms. Teresa Wellman’s compliments to Ms. Dot McElroy, and requests the pleasure for company, for Wednesday, March 9th at eight o’clock.”

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right? And then immediately—and of course, uh... P-M-R-S-V-P.
[pauses]

Travis: Oh...

Teresa: Meaning, of course, “Responde s’il vous plait.”

Travis: Okay. Now this is a lot of pressure, right?

Teresa: Right!

Travis: Cause nowadays, we get an invite, and we just like look at it for a while. You and I will talk about it, like, “Well, what if—” Check the calendar, ask around to see if anything better’s going on. [laughs]

Teresa: Right, no.

Travis: You couldn’t do any of that!

Teresa: Because immediately, you are locked in, and you respond with, “Mr. and Mrs. Dot McElroy, accept with much pleasure...”

Travis: What? Dot’s married?!

Teresa: Well, you know—

Travis: Oh, for the example. Okay.

Teresa: For the example. "Accept with much pleasure, Mr. and Mrs. Teresa's invitation on dinner, March 9th."

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Now... You really only have a second to decide. Because you have to send this runner back, right? And if you can't go, you have to tell them right then, which... I think... [sighs] It really makes it so much more urgent, because you're like, "Uh, if I say that I can't go, then I really can't go, and I wanna go, and I won't be able to say yes later. But if I say yes, I won't be able to say no later."

Travis: Well—

Teresa: Cause it all reflects on your—on your status in society.

Travis: And I bet that this was also... Beneficial, to the nouveau riche, right? Because like, you didn't have time to research, and say like, "Who is that? I—I know I've heard their name, are they important?"

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Like, you wouldn't have time to figure that out, so you'd just be like—and you wouldn't have time to ask around and say like, "Are you going? Are you gonna go to it?" You would just be like, "Well, a dinner party..."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "And this is a servant, with like, a silver platter, so it's probably important, so yeah?" And then—and like, you're locked in before you have time to like, research and figure out who the person is.

Teresa: So you could send, "Mrs.—"

[Baby Dot yells happily]

Teresa: [laughs] Yeah!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: "Mr. and Mrs. Dot McElroy regret that the previous engagement will prevent their accepting Mr. and Mrs. McElroy's kind of invitation for March 9th."

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Right? So—

Travis: I can't go.

Teresa: Can't, can't go.

Travis: I have other plans.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I do notice that you said in there, like, "A previous engagement." But there's—is there an option to just be like, "I don't wanna!" [laughs]

Teresa: Uh, you wouldn't.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That would be a *major* snub.

Travis: Yeah, 'cause the previous engagement could be like, "I'm gonna nap! I'm going to bed early!"

Teresa: So, the other problem is if you don't accept this invitation, uh, the hostess then begins inviting her second string of potential guests. All who will talk about you behind your back.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because the second string will *know* that they're second string—

[Baby Dot coos]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: She is really enjoying this mirror. Loves it.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Babies, mirrors. They love it.

Travis: To be fair: I love mirrors too.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, the second string will know that they're second string, because the invitation will be sent secondly, and... not as like, beautifully, because their status probably indicates that they're second string?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, the second string will know who the first string was, and they'll talk about you.

Travis: Man! Now I'm thinking about all of the politics in this, right? Because like, then this is also like, if you're not there as a like, top-tier, like, rich person, right? Like, an aristocrat—

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: Then you are ceding a little bit of power to these people that are there so that they are forming connections, and they are talking about you. And so like, you have to go to maintain your status as being so important. But if you go, you're also there to like, bolster up this nouveau riche, like, secondary person, and give some of your status to them. So it's really like,

there's a lot... at stake, here, deciding who you say yes to, and who you say no to.

Teresa: Exactly! And you have to do it, like, pretty much immediately.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Say yes or no. Um, okay. So then, now you've accepted the invitation and you're going, and it says that you... That the, uh, dinner is at eight o'clock, right? But... you cannot be late. In fact, it's expected that you arrive 10 to 15 minutes early.

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: Um, and you could even get there, uh... right after the previous meal, right? So once the previous meal is being cleared from the table, you could arrive, and you'd be—you probably wouldn't be like, entertained the whole time. The hostess would meet you at the door, and show you to the parlor.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Where you could wait, until the other guests arrive.

Travis: And look through their stuff.

Teresa: Mmm... maybe!

Travis: Well, but—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's probably something the host would want, right? It's like, I'm gonna give you—like, if they have spent a lot of time perfecting that parl—see, I'm coming at this from the nouveau riche perspective.

Teresa: Okay! Okay.

Travis: It was probably like, if you were old-veau riche, then it was probably like, "Oh, they're here super early!" But if you were like nouveau riche, you were like, "Yes! They're here super early. I've put a lot of work into the parlor. I'm gonna let them snoop around for a little bit, and see what a good job I've done, so that they will be impressed." And like, let them feel like they're snooping, so they're getting all the dirt, and the dish.

Teresa: Exactly. Exactly.

Travis: That hot goss.

Teresa: Okay. So now, what you're doing is, even if a guest has arrived already, you have met them in your day clothes. You are going to change into your evening attire.

Travis: Oh, boy.

Teresa: Where if you are the hostess, you are expected to dress finely, but not *too* finely. So you better stick to like, dark colors.

Travis: Very Victorian.

Teresa: Right? [pauses] Um, and not—and you could wear one or two understated pieces of jewelry.

Travis: Yeah. I mean, you're in your house. You're not going to a gala, or ball or whatever!

Teresa: Exactly! But for a party that's supposed to show how, you know, awesome you are...

Travis: Mm-hmm?

Teresa: You're supposed to... Forget how awesome you are, and dress not-awesome?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Uh, but if you're a guest, you can dress a little more extravagantly, but I mean, of course, remember, this is Victorian sensibilities, so...

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Not *too* extravagantly. Um, and of course... The—the only makeup look is the no-makeup look.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: Alright, so... Uh, even if a guest arrives extremely early, you are absolute—you have to be there to welcome them. Um, and... you have to like, stay by the door. So this is what I'm talking about, the kind of like, the room-to-room business, so you—the host welcomes them into the home, uh, gives out introductions as they are accompanying them to the sitting room or the parlor, and then you leave them there to talk to each other. And they best know how to behave.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: 'Cause you have to go back to the, to the door to greet the other guests. And you could do this up to like, ten minutes before eight.

Travis: Phew! See, here's another political thing, right? Like—well, the politics, I guess. It's like, if you invite a guest, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: And—and they're like, top-tier, this is like our A-level, "We're really excited that they said yes," and then you invite another guest, who maybe

isn't as well-mannered, and you leave the two of them alone? That reflects on you, as the host, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Hmm...

[Baby Dot coos]

Travis: Yeah! Baby Dot agrees!

Teresa: [laughs] Well I mean, at this point in history, there were also usually two of you. Um, because the only way you would've achieved status is to, uh, to be married.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and so one of you can post up at the door, and the other one can—can delight in conversation in the parlor.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Okay, so—

Travis: "Keep William from telling all his ribbled jokes!"

Teresa: Right! Um, also, the way that you greet your guests, should more than one arrive at the door, is important. Uh, the oldest woman is always greeted first, then the younger women. Men are greeted last, and also in descending order of age. Uh, so, even if you know the man, like you haven't seen your brother in ten years, the old lady from the post office is here first, and you have to greet her first.

Travis: What if their ages are like close—you just know?

Teresa: Yes, of course you know! You invited these people, you know every intimate aspect of their lives.

Travis: Oh, boy!

Teresa: Okay, now everybody's here.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Uh, so you can move your guests from the parlor to the drawing room, and here, uh, is—

Travis: You can draw! [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] No, here is where your guests must first be seated, in order of importance. Even though it's not like a table, right? The different stations in the drawing room determine, like, their status in society.

Travis: What?

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, you can tell what somebody thinks of you, by where they sit you.

Travis: Whoa! Okay.

Teresa: Um, so... Winter—in Winter, chairs should be arranged around the fireplace, with the lowest in social ranks sitting furthest away from the hearth.

Travis: Yeah, coldest. Yeah.

Teresa: So literally, the cold—the lowest person is the coldest. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, uh-huh.

Teresa: [laughing] I love it, I love it. Um, and this is where you should you know, really turn up that dazzling conversation, but of course not *too* much, because we're Victorians. And mostly the husband would do the talking, because wives should be seen and not heard. [blows raspberry in disapproval]

Um, and the—the woman of the household, is expected to stick to topics like literature and art.

Travis: M'kay.

Teresa: [sighs] Yeah, well...

Travis: Alright.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: Meh, okay.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. So now... We've moved from the parlor, to the drawing room, now it's time to go to the dining room. This—

Travis: That is exciting, but... first... How about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

Travis: Shmanners wants to give a thank you note to our sponsors this week! We're sponsored in part by DoorDash!

Continue supporting the restaurants you love in your community, safely. We've started doing it, we've been doing it, where we find local restaurants that are on DoorDash, and we order through there, and then also... This is just a tip from me to you... make sure you're also tipping, just the *heck* out of those delivery drivers.

And listen, everybody's working hard right now to make sure everything is going as smoothly as possible, and that you can still enjoy the meals you love, while keeping the restaurants you love open. DoorDash is the app that brings you food you're craving right now, right to your door.

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Right now, our listeners can get five dollars off their first order of \$15 or more, and zero delivery fees for their first month, when you download the DoorDash app and enter code "Shmanners". That's five dollars off your first order, and zero delivery fees for a month, when you download the DoorDash app in the app store and enter code "Shmanners". Don't forget, that's code "Shmanners" for five dollars off your first order, with DoorDash.

We also want to thank Nextdoor. Staying connected is now more important than ever. Nextdoor is helping, by offering a great way to keep in touch with your neighbors and get local information from your community. There are so many ways our neighbors can help us, we just need an easier way to connect with them. So Nextdoor is a free app that connects you to your local community, so you can talk to your neighbors and tap into trusted, local knowledge, right from your phone!

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We also have a jumbotron from Jack and company, and it's for Nestor. "Happy birthday to my sweet boy, Nestor... [pauses] The best guinea pig I've ever known, who so loved the dulcet tone of Travis and Teresa. May 14th would have been your 10th birthday. I know you'd have perked your ears

and whistled, hearing your favorite podcasters say your name. Thanks for all the joy you brought to our lives, in your nine years.”

That’s absolutely beautiful. Nestor, you’ll be missed. Uh, you sound like you were a good, sweet boy... I’ll miss you.

[music plays]

Jackie: Hi, I’m Jackie Kashian.

Laurie: Hi! I’m Laurie Kilmartin.

Jackie: And we have a podcast called The Jackie and Laurie Show! Who are you, Laurie Kilmartin?

Laurie: Oh my god, so much pressure! Uh, let’s see, stand-up—I’ve been doing stand-up since 1987. Uh, I’m a writer for Conan. I’ve written a couple books, have a couple CDs out, I have a special out. Who are you, Jackie?

Jackie: Well, I too am a stand-up comic, since 1984, and uh, I do the road like a maniac, uh, and don’t have a cool writing job, but I have four albums out. Working on a new album.

We talk about stand-up, we talk about, uh, all the different parts of stand-up comedy. So, that’s the Jackie and Laurie Show, and you should subscribe on Maximum Fun if you want to hear that.

Laurie: And I would encourage you not to! [laughing]

[music ends]

Travis: Okay. [laughing] It’s time for the main event!

Teresa: The main event: the procession.

Travis: [pauses] What?

Teresa: What?

Travis: What?

Teresa: Yeah, the procession, from the drawing room to the dining room.

Travis: Oh boy! Okay?

Teresa: Alright. So... as a hostess, you should decide which gentleman will be escorting which lady into the dining room. And you can't just have people pair themselves up – you have to do it. Um, and you have been agonizing over this, uh, in the weeks prior, because, uh... you have to make sure that you don't offend anyone, as you partner them up.

Travis: Yeah. Of course.

Teresa: Um, and so, for example, the guest of honor must always enter the new room first, followed by the most senior lady. Um, many couples, husbands, wives, things like that, brother, sisters, people like that, are fine to walk in together, but if any of the friends are single or widowed, you have to pair them specifically with someone close to their age, and you can't have them enter last, or that would be really rude.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So here's a good example. If the guest of honor is a woman, the host of the dinner party enters first with the guest of honor, or the most senior lady. Then, he would sit at the foot of the table. Then the hostess would enter next and sit at the head of the table, if there is one, but... We'll get to that. Um, and she would escort the guest of honor to go first, if the guest of honor was a man.

Travis: [laughs] Okay?

Teresa: [sighs and laughs] I know, right? Most people would be scheduled to, uh, enter the room at descending order of age, but you also had to be aware of the pairs, so a person's escort was probably going to be sitting with

them, and getting the procession wrong would make things awkward for everyone. [sighs]

Travis: I'm just thinking about like, all the math that went into this and figuring this out, of like... Can you imagine now, having a party and being like, "Man, I'd love to invite John, but... [clicks tongue] There's just no one of his age to pair him off with, to walk into that room, so... [clicks tongue again] Guess he's out!" [laughs]

Teresa: "I guess not!" Well, and this is kind of like, prime time for setting up your single friends, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But you have to... the way that you could even... fathom getting them next to someone who was also single, I mean, you'd... the triangulations of this whole thing, right?

Travis: This is why this makes a lot more sense to me, in terms of like... When I think about dinner parties, I always think about like, books and movies where it's like, "I'm going to help you be upwardly social-mobile." Socially-upward—whatever!

Teresa: Yeah! [laughs]

Travis: And so, I'm going to pair you, not necessarily with a *romantic* interest, but somebody who's like... going to be able to help your career, or help your social status or help...

Teresa: Yeah, totally!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Okay. So... now that we know who we're walking in with, we best know where we should sit!

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: We've talked about, uh, business cards, calling cards.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Uh, place cards, also, very important. And you might assume where you're sitting is either who you walked in with, or who you arrived with, but that would not be the case.

Travis: No, I do know this, is that it was bad form to like, pair someone with their partner at dinner.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And you were supposed—

Teresa: Sit next to them.

Travis: Sit next to them, right. You were supposed to have like—not random, but like, put people with different people, so that they have stuff to talk about, and so that there's more mingling.

Teresa: Exactly!

Travis: At the table.

Teresa: So if people had too much in common, or it was thought that they might enjoy each other's, uh, company too much...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Then they would be split up, in order to keep the conversation open for everyone.

Travis: Right! 'Cause you don't want just like two people facing each other and talking, right? You want them addressing the mass, the crowd.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Got it!

Teresa: Um... Nextly important is the type of table and furnishings that you're sitting down at, which would also reflect your status and the status of your guests.

Travis: Okay. You give the most important person the biggest plate.

Teresa: [laughs] No, but we have talked about the different serving styles being reflected in uh, the à la russe dining service.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Versus the à la Français.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: A l'anglaise, all of that stuff.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, it should be an oval table, uh, which would be, you know, difficult to produce, difficult to—to make all that kind of stuff look nice.

Travis: Way more difficult than rectangular, yeah.

Teresa: Actually, yes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Uh, because it's too *aggressive*, and does not allow for the flow of conversation.

Travis: Oh, rectangular's too aggressive?

Teresa: Yes. It's very—

Travis: Huh!

Teresa: I'm told it's too aggressive.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: It must be elegantly and artistically—

Travis: You know what? That actually makes sense, cause if you think about placement, right? If it is rectangular, the people at the ends have to like, lean out to see the people down at the other ends.

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: But if it's oval, everyone's kind of naturally facing inward in a way that makes it easier to see the people at the far ends.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Yeah, right? 'Cause if you think of like—

Teresa: Not that you would lean around another person to speak.

Travis: Well, that's what I'm saying. With rectangular, right? You would have to lean around to talk, but if you're at an oval, the people in the center of the table, right? Everyone's kind of like, inwardly focused at the table, so it's easier to see each other without leaning around each other.

Teresa: Okay, I get it. Um, it must be—your table must be elegantly and artistically spread.

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: With a suggestion of maybe, ferns and flowers, and of course, your finest crystal.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: For... here's a quote: "The settings of your table need not require much wealth, but good taste *is* required to set it handsomely."

Travis: Oh, yes!

Teresa: Those Victorians.

Travis: Oh! It's what you *do* with it!

Teresa: I don't think that you could set with your, uh... [laughs] Your finest china on a budget.

Travis: That's fair.

Teresa: Okay. We've talked a little bit about table setting, but here's one of the things, right? You would've instructed your servants to conduct your table setting, according to the newest fads, of course. Um, and so, everything should be measured so that it is exactly four inches from the edge of the table.

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: And you're gonna need a measuring tape, because, between the soup, oysters, entrees, and dessert, each person could have up to twenty serving utensils.

Travis: Get out!

Teresa: And that's not counting if they need spoons for tea or coffee. Now, they wouldn't all be on the table at the same time.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That would be redonkulous. But, they would have to be—

Travis: [in an fancy Victorian accent] “Why, I must say, Lady Marmington! This table layout is redonkulous!”

Teresa: [laughs] They would have to be placed and replaced *exactly*.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: In the right place. Um, and then, you would also have, uh, three glasses: one for water, one for champagne, and one for wine, which was, if we’re talking about the English-Victorians, this would be usually sherry.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and so, the water would be to the right, and you would start on the outside and work your way in with the silverware. We—we’ve talked about that before. And like I said, though, um... each—the silverware would be placed according to what you are having for dinner. But it could be placed and re-placed with every course.

Travis: Okay. Whew! So this is not only a test for the host and hostess, but for their staff as well.

Teresa: Exactly! And, Victorian dinner parties required at least five courses, and could have up to 13!

Travis: Oh boy-zee... Oh boy-zee!

Teresa: So...

Travis: This is exhausting, and to do this once a week?

Teresa: Yeah! And it would cost a lot of money, right?

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Because not only do you have to provide the food, you have to furnish the house and all that stuff.

Courses could include, soup, fish, hors d'oeuvres, meat and vegetables for your entrée, a third course of more meat with puddings and pastries and ices, and then dessert. But dessert didn't really count for a course, because it was usually served in a different room.

Travis: Right. And then of course, there's the jerky course...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: There's the frozen peas course, um... There's a lot to think about here, folks! The candy course, of course.

Teresa: Of course, of course! The horse course, of course.

Travis: The horse course, of course!

Teresa: [laughs] Now some of these things do sound pretty good. Um, things like yummy breads, and beefs, and things like that. But um, as we know, the Victorians, they uh... they had a different palate at the time, than we do now. So, other things might have included boiled calf's head.

Travis: Mm-hmm?

Teresa: Uh, pickled oysters.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Herring pudding.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Or 'brown winter soup,' which is a soup made out of beef gravy, malt vinegar, pepper, and figs.

Travis: Okay! Interesting.

Teresa: Not... not really my idea...

Travis: No!

Teresa: ... of delicious. But, you know... maybe somebody likes it! People—

Travis: Maybe *they* did!

Teresa: Maybe *they* did! People did eat it, and didn't die immediately, so...

Travis: Oh cool, okay!

Teresa: I'm—I'm sure it was fine.

Travis: A ringing endorsement from Teresa McElroy!

Teresa: [laughing] Uh, one personal favorite dish of Queen Victoria was bone marrow toast.

Travis: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

Teresa: That, I do like.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Alright, um... So, let's say that you do like all of the—the food being served.

Travis: You lick your plate clean.

Teresa: The servants are going to—

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Offer you seconds... But this is a trap.

Travis: Really?

Teresa: Never, never, never accept seconds.

Travis: Then why do they offer it?

Teresa: Well, because the hostess has timed the courses, and the course—and when the courses come out, the next course comes out, you better be done, because, uh, you're gonna have a backlog of foods.

Travis: Oh, okay okay okay.

Teresa: Right. [pauses] Okay, you get about 20 minutes for the entrée, you get ten minutes for all of the side ones. It does seem like we're at probably 11 o'clock at night though, right? With all of the talkings, and the processionings, and the sittings, and the coursings, and all of that stuff...

After we're done with the food, you can move to another room where desert has been laid out, but usually, men and women will retire to separate rooms, and a good hostess hangs out for *at least* an hour after the tea and coffee to entertain her guests for *more* sparkling conversation.

But, you can only leave and go to bed if your guests are primarily male. 'Cause then, you would be, you know, expected to excuse yourself so the menfolk can do things such as drink brandy, uh... uh, have cigars, and talk about all um...

[laughs] Alex—I love Alex. She says, "Talk about those orphans at the steel mill, who can never thread the sewing machines right."

Travis: [laughs] Okay.

Teresa: [laughing] She's great. Aright.

But when—when does anyone else get to go home, other than the hostess and ladies?

Travis: When the guest of honor leaves!

Teresa: Yes. Whenever that is.

Travis: Yeah. Whew!

Teresa: Uh, dawn? Maybe? Oh, I don't know. After dawn, breakfast the next day!

Travis: So it really, it's until—until question mark.

Teresa: It is the original “’til question mark”.

Travis: Oh boy-zee. Okay.

Teresa: And heaven forbid, if you fell asleep? Or, if—

Travis: `Cause they would write on you with sharpie!

Teresa: [laughs] No, but you are—your status would be, would be in question.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because your ability to host and maintain—like, this kind of um... What—what do you say? Stamina! Right? Was all part of it. Because even—

Travis: That's probably why they did coffee so late in the evening!

Teresa: Yeah. Even though you're not expected to be a party animal, you got to be able to—to last 'til dawn!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And I think—[sighs] Gosh... So the party starts at eight, and you're supposed to arrive early. So people could arrive as early, let's say, as like five o'clock, after tea. And then... you probably don't serve dinner 'til ten. You're probably not done until 11 or 12. Then you're expected to have more conversation, probably 'til two? Maybe three?

Travis: Oh boy... No thank you!

Teresa: And then, that's when the hostess could retire, if most of the, the guests are female. But if most of the—I'm sorry. If most of the guests are female, you would have to stay up even later, and you can't leave until the—[sighs] I don't know if I could do this!

Travis: Well, then they'd probably, you know, sleep until... what, noon?
[laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] Maybe.

Travis: Okay. So, that is gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for joining us. Uh, if you have ideas for topics, you can email us, shmannerstcast@gmail.com. Uh, it—when we have a little more actionable topics, we will put out the call for questions on Twitter, @ShmannersCast.

Uh, let's see... Uh, what else do we usually say, Teresa?

Teresa: Well, we always say thank you to Brent "Brental Floss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art, as you already mentioned, @sShmannersCast.

Um, thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up Photography, for our cover, uh, photograph, of the fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners, which you should join if you love to give and get excellent advice.

Thank you, also, to our, um, our researcher and writer, Alex. Um, gosh! I really love these things, this—this is so much fun, for us to do together.

Travis: Yes. Thank you Alex, and thank you all for listening. If you enjoyed this episode, please tell a friend. Uh, and I think that's gonna do it for us!

Oh! Go check out all the other amazing shows on MaximumFun.org. They're all great. And that's gonna do it for us. Uh, 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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