

## Shmanners 230: Idioms Pt. 4

Published October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

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**Travis:** The long and the short of the bandwagon is the I—you know what? I'm confused already. 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:** Where did that snarky neck movement come from?

**Travis:** I don't know. Maybe I'm just excited to be talking about idioms again.

**Teresa:** This is a—oh, I leaned against the door and it—

**Travis:** Oh no! My studio!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Oh, I'm destroying the studio. Oh—okay, okay. Sorry. Uh, this is a recurring segment—

**Travis:** A series, if you will.

**Teresa:** A series, yes. A mini—maybe mini-series?

**Travis:** No, it's a series.

**Teresa:** No, it's a series, okay.

**Travis:** I mean, at this point, this is number four.

**Teresa:** Fourth one, yeah. We had more wedding business.

**Travis:** Well... yeah, but that doesn't mean that this is any less of a series. Let that not detract from the worthiness of this. It's not important. So, idioms—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —real quick, to catch you up, idioms are like sayings. It's something where it is usually a clever turn of phrase, or some kind of catchy thing.

**Teresa:** Not only that, but it's illustrative, so use of metaphor is rampant.

**Travis:** Right. And so, it's usually like a kind of fun turn of phrase. For example, one of ones we're gonna talk about today, lily-livered, right? Uh, is pretty common. Of, like, "Oh, that person is a lily-livered coward." And you're like, "Oh, yeah. That person's afraid of everything."

But the reason we started doing this series is, there is all these—well, two reasons. One, it—

**Teresa:** Idioms are fun.

**Travis:** —okay, three. Three reasons.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Idioms are fun. There's all of these, uh, things that we say all the time that we kind of take for granted that we know what they mean, but when you really stop and think about it you're like, "Where did that come

from?" And two, uh, the English language is notoriously difficult for people to learn, because these kinds of turns of phrases... like, we here in the US hear them and we're like, "Yeah, of course, yeah, totally."

And other people trying to learn our language are like, "Wait, what? What does that mean?"

**Teresa:** Exactly, yeah.

**Travis:** And so we took some submissions. Alex, our researcher, has been collecting those, and then going through and trying to find origins and explanations for some of these especially weird ones. And, we also have some idioms that we should no longer use, because they are deeply problematic. So, if you enjoy—

**Teresa:** Or just a bummer.

**Travis:** Or just a bummer. So, if you enjoy this episode, go back, listen to the other three. Oh, also—

**Teresa:** Make a day out of it. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah. Also, if you enjoy this episode and enjoy listening to Teresa and I talk, we started a kind of mini-series. This one *is* a mini-series.

**Teresa:** Mini—yes, definite mini-series.

**Travis:** Uh, podcast about *Great British Bake Off*, the new season. Episode one, *Cake Week*, is out now. Uh, episode two will be out—

**Teresa:** [gasps] And we're gonna—

**Travis:** —yeah, soon.

**Teresa:** Yeah, soon! Tomorrow, it's on here in the US.

**Travis:** Well, we're recording this Thursday—it's not important. Um, but—

**Teresa:** Nothing's important today.

**Travis:** But you can listen to it—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —on, uh—it's up on YouTube, on the McElroy family YouTube, and it's now on Spotify and Apple Podcasts and, uh, it's on Pod, uh... what else? Pocket Casts, so go check it out there.

Okay. Alright. The baby's napping.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** So it's time for us to talk about *idjums*.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** What's our first... idjum?

**Teresa:** Well, you mentioned it first, so let's do it first. The phrase "lily-livered."

**Travis:** Okay. So, lily-livered... here's what I think of when I hear that. Like, um—uh, almost like somebody going pale, right? When you're like—uh, you know what? Shaggy and Scooby. Shaggy and Scooby are lily-livered, right?

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** They're a little bit, uh—well, there's a—even the mention of a ghost...

**Teresa:** G-g-g-ghost!

**Travis:** And they go white, they go pale, they're scared. They're scared, Teresa.

**Teresa:** Okay, yes, indeed. That would be a good illustration of lily-livered. Um, but that's not the—the origin wouldn't be the draining of the blood from the face, right? Going white.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, this was submitted by Cory. Thank you, Cory. So, this is because of, in the Middle Ages, where this phrase originates from, they didn't quite understand, you know, how the body worked.

**Travis:** Ohh, this is a humors thing!

**Teresa:** A little bit! Yeah, it is a humors thing. Um, if you are unfamiliar with humors, please go check out Sawbones. Uh, Justin and Sydnee McElroy go over the humors—

**Travis:** I've heard of them!

**Teresa:** —quite extensively.

**Travis:** Yeah. Now, because the humors have influenced a lot of idioms, right?

**Teresa:** Oh yes. Oh yes.

**Travis:** 'Cause there's—there's, uh, like, just even, "He's in a bad humor," right?

**Teresa:** Right, right.

**Travis:** Like—these kinds of things. Even the word phlegmatic, right? Where you're like, "Oh, they're very phlegmatic."

**Teresa:** Yep. And melancholy.

**Travis:** And melancholy, right? Because you have... uh, phlegm, you have black bile and yellow bile, and you have... ooh...

**Teresa:** Blood.

**Travis:** Blood, right, okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I was trying—'cause all I could think is "sanguine," which is another one we use all the time.

**Teresa:** Right, that's another one.

**Travis:** Um, right? And so these—it was supposed to be like if you felt a certain way, it's 'cause your humors are not in balance. It makes no sense now.

**Teresa:** It was the way—so, it's twofold. It's the way that the body was explained to have worked, and a way of, like, kind of medicating, usually through food, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** So if you found that you were melancholy, right? You had to eat a certain hot or cold, wet or dry food. Anyway, go check that out.

**Travis:** And if you didn't—if you didn't have enough blood, you needed to eat more red meats, like that kind of thing? Yeah, okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah, like that.

**Travis:** Okay. So, how did that lead to lily-livered?

**Teresa:** Well, so the medieval belief that the liver was where all of your courage was held, right?

**Travis:** Okay. Sort of like how the heart holds all the, uh, love?

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Yeah, sort of like that, actually. Um, so—

**Travis:** Yeah. And your colon holds all the poop! We used to believe such weird things.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Such weird things. Uh, so if you had no blood in your liver, you would have no courage, making your organ white, right?

**Travis:** Oh. So it's quite literal.

**Teresa:** It is quite literal.

**Travis:** Okay. Now, what about the next one?

**Teresa:** This next one is "hop on the bandwagon."

**Travis:** Okay. So, this—if I hear this, I usually think about it in terms of, like, sports, where if a team starts winning a bunch, right? Then everybody's like, "Oh yeah, I love that team," right? Because they wanna be part of this cool thing. That's another thing—cool thing—of, like, if a TV show becomes popular, suddenly everyone loves that—it's kind of—you know, the, like, "Oh, I've loved that TV show forever, and only because people are talking about now are you talking about it." It has to do with fandom a lot, right?

**Teresa:** Uh, fandom or just, like, a cause or trend, right?

**Travis:** Right, okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, this was submitted by David, and the origin of this is actually very interesting, because we have P.T. Barnum to thank.

**Travis:** I know that guy. Sucker born every minute, can't please all the people all the time, a lot of good sayings from that fellow.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Inspired the perfect movie, *Greatest Showman*.

**Teresa:** Uh-huh.

**Travis:** Which I watched drunk on an airplane and cried multiple times during. [pauses]

**Teresa:** I haven't seen it. I don't have—

**Travis:** Yeah, that one?

**Teresa:** —any opinion.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Anyway.

**Travis:** I've never watched—I haven't watched it since I watched it drunk on a plane, mind you.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** So who knows? [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** Who knows? All I know is sometimes when, um, Bebe asks for movie musicals from Alexa, it comes up.

**Travis:** Yeah?

**Teresa:** Anyway. Anyway, so you need to know that circuses arrived in towns, usually by train.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay? And PT Barnum started calling the particular vehicle carrying the circus musicians 'a bandwagon.'

**Travis:** Makes sense.



**Teresa:** Right? And so, obviously, when the circus came to town, it was a big deal. And it attracted people's attention, when he decorated the whole, like, train, the music, vehicle, like, all this kind of stuff. Everything was very brightly colored and illustrated. Um, and paraded it out in order to promote the circus.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So this is where it gets interesting, because politicians literally... [laughs] ... hopped on the bandwagon... to, uh—to promote their things, right? So they began decorating their own, quote, "bandwagons," to parade through the streets in the same way.

**Travis:** That makes complete sense!

**Teresa:** Absolutely. Absolutely. So, the hope is that you would hop on their bandwagon and begin to support them.

**Travis:** Okay! Okay. Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Yep, that one's—okay, yeah. You know what? Totally clear.

**Teresa:** Totally clear.

**Travis:** Totally clear. Now, what about "spit-balling"?

**Teresa:** Less clear. [laughs]

**Travis:** Okay. Okay. This—it—ugh. Okay. So, here's the thing. Spit-balling to me is, like, when it's like, "Okay. We don't know exactly what we're doing, so let's throw out some ideas," right? You say something, I say something, we're just spit-balling here. Right? It's kind of like, we're looking for the solution. We're not exactly sure where to start, so any suggestions are welcome.

Now, the thing that's weird to me... is a spitball... is when you wad up a little piece of paper in your mouth, and you get some spit on it, and you shoot it through a tube, like a straw or something. That's a spitball.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** So is it about if it sticks to the wall or not?

**Teresa:** Uhh... not really. So, here's the deal, right? There are a couple of origins of this. The first one being that the process of blackening your boots was called spit-balling, right?

**Travis:** Why?

**Teresa:** I'm not exactly sure, but it has to do—it doesn't have to do with the blackening of the boots so much as, you would really only do that if you had time on your hands. Right?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So it was kind of something where if you had a lot of time, you had the time to just throw wild ideas out.

**Travis:** Sure, okay.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Uh, but as time went on, it began to be associated with the children's prank where school kids would answer questions, or shoot at the back of the teacher's head.

**Travis:** Right, with spitballs. Okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs] With spitballs. Um, and then when it really took off was when it started to be associated with ad jargon, okay?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, that's just like, where... instead of being, like, something that you did if you had a lot of time, it's closer to what you said now.

**Travis:** Right, just throw out ideas, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** 'Cause I've also heard of it as, like, blue sky thinking, right? Of just like, "Whatever." Which—maybe it's 'cause there's no clouds, there's nothing in the way, right? It's completely open.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Maybe. But I do think about it in terms of very, like, boardroom executive, *Mad Men* kind of deal. Just, like, "Throw something out. [snapping] We'll see—we'll see—" I mean, it's—

**Teresa:** Right. That's where the evolution has led to.

**Travis:** Because it's—it's kind of used in the same way as, like, "We'll throw spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks."

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Right? Of just, like, "Whatever, baby. This is jazz, you know? Throw it out!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Throw it out, we'll see what sticks." Okay, what's next?

**Teresa:** Next is "the long and the short of it."

**Travis:** Okay. Now, this—this is usually, I think of in terms of, like, a summing up, right?

**Teresa:** Sure, yeah.

**Travis:** So, listen. I've told you this whole example, and the long and the short of it is, we need to get in there right now. Right? It's basically the "too

long; didn't read" of its day. It's saying, like, "Okay. The long and the short of it is, we're running out of time." Right?

**Teresa:** Yes, okay. So, we have William Shakespeare to thank for this one.

**Travis:** Oh, that dude. That dude did a lot of these.

**Teresa:** I know. This appears to be one of the *hundreds* of phrases that he coined. Uh, it shows up in *Merchant of Venice*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Midsummer*. Um, and it's thought to be started out as kind of a reference to accounting, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** As in, don't tell me how you worked the numbers out, just tell me the beginning and the end result.

**Travis:** Okay. I guess that—

**Teresa:** Like, "Don't worry about showing your work, just tell me what the answer is." The long and the short of it.

**Travis:** I guess I can—yeah, I can kind of see where you would say, like, the long is the long explanation, and the short is the summary. So, like, what's the long and the short of it? What's the big picture and the summary? Don't tell me all the in between stuff.

**Teresa:** Yes, perfect.

**Travis:** Okay. I guess that makes sense. I guess?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Shakespeare? Okay. We're gonna talk more about idioms, but first... how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

**Teresa:** Let's go.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** We wanna say thank you to Varsity Tutors, one of our sponsors this week. It's been challenging for students to transition from being in a classroom for seven hours a day to learning from home. Well, Varsity Tutors delivers free live enrichment classes taught by experts that make learning fun.

Now, Bebe is a little too little for this right now, but oh boy. There's a, like, wildlife learning series on there that includes some dinosaur classes that Bebe is absolutely going to just devour here, not too far from now.

Uh, so Varsity Tutors has hundreds of free online classes to enrich your child's educational experience, whether it's a class taught by an astronaut, musician, or wildlife expert. There are fascinating subjects for everyone. Varsity Tutors also offers one and one tutoring, self-study tools, learning pods, and homeschooling resources. Varsity Tutors has a 4.9 out of five satisfaction rating.

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We also wanna say thank you to HelloFresh! Get fresh, pre-measured ingredients and mouthwatering seasonal recipes delivered right to your door with HelloFresh, America's number one meal kit. There's something for everyone, including low calorie, vegetarian, and kid friendly recipes, which, believe me, is a concern that we appreciate.

The packaging HelloFresh uses to ship your food is almost entirely made from recyclable or already recycled content. Easily change your delivery days or food preferences, and skip a week whenever you need. It's great. Right there, you learn how to do it. And, like I said, man, havin' something that our almost four-year-old will eat too is just incredible. It's—it's really a big load off.

So, go to [hellofresh.com/80shmanners](https://www.hellofresh.com/80shmanners), eight zero Shmanners, and use code "80shmanners," eight zero Shmanners, and you'll get a total of \$80 off your

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[spooky music plays in the background]

**April:** Hello there ghouls and gals, it is I, April Wolfe. I'm here to take you through the twisty, scary, heart-pounding world of genre cinema on the exhilarating program known as *Switchblade Sisters*. The concept is simple. I invite a female filmmaker on each week and we discuss their favorite genre film. Listen in closely to hear past guests like *The Babadook* director, Jennifer Kent, *Winter's Bone* director, Debra Granik, and so many others, every Thursday on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org). Tune in, if you dare! [spooky laughter]

[music cuts out suddenly]

**April:** It's actually a very thought provoking show that deeply explores the craft and philosophy behind the filmmaking process, while also examining film through the lens of the female gaze. So, like, you should listen.

*Switchblade Sisters!*

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**Travis:** I'm feelin' pretty good today, Teresa. You know how I'm feeling?

**Teresa:** Uh, are you fit as a fiddle?

**Travis:** I'm fit as a fiddle! Another fun idiom. I'm fit as a fiddle! Also, I'm finer than frog's hair. That's another one that's very folksy.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Um, because frog's hair is so fine, you can't see it.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Is that one that your mom used to say?

**Travis:** My dad.

**Teresa:** Your dad says it, okay.

**Travis:** Yeah, finer than frog's hair. He's folksy too! He's Ohio, Pennsylvania folksy, and my mom was, like, Kentucky folksy.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Well, I mean, I know that we just have—is fiddly-fartin'—is that your dad or your mom? [laughs]

**Travis:** I think that's just something my dad said one time in anger.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Okay.

**Travis:** Where me and Justin and Griffin were, like, in the back of the van probably, like, smackin' the back of each other's heads, or, like, arguing about GameBoys or something.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And Dad just, like, "Hey—quit—quit fiddly-fartin' around back there!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And we all three stopped and were like, "... 'Scuse me? What did you say?"

**Teresa:** Well, it worked.

**Travis:** "You said fiddly-fartin'?" Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, speaking of fiddly-fartin'... [laughs]

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** You are correct. It does mean that you're in good health, and this goes all the way back to 1600s England, when violins were both incredibly expensive and highly revered instruments. I would say, yes, indeed, this continues to be correct, because violins are also notoriously hard to maintain.

**Travis:** I imagine so. I mean, pardon the use of this word, but... they're a little fiddly.

**Teresa:** Ahh.

**Travis:** Because, you know, they got a lot of moving pieces, they're very small. Wood expands and contracts in moisture and dryness, and—and you're using it a lot. There's a lot of heat and friction. I—yeah, I'm not surprised by that at all.

**Teresa:** Yeah. So, if you're fit as a fiddle, you're doing a lot to maintain your health as well.

**Travis:** Okay, I see. Okay. Now, this is another one that I think is pretty common, right? Giving someone the cold shoulder. Uh, which is, like, above and beyond just, like, ignoring them. Like, if somebody is like, "Hey, hey Travis!" And I, like, purposefully turn my head away from them, and I'm kind of actively, like, "I want you to know that I'm ignoring you."

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Exactly. And the origin of this expression is physically literal, okay? Because in the 1800s, it was good etiquette to welcome visitors to your home with a hot meal. Um, and if you didn't offer them a hot meal, you would instead offer them a cold shoulder of mutton.

**Travis:** Ohh, so you're literally giving them the cold shoulder!



**Teresa:** You are! And you're letting them know that you don't like them.

**Travis:** Whoaaa! I wouldn't have guessed that in a billion years. I would have guessed it had something to do with, like, "Well, I'm looking over this shoulder, so that's the warm one."

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** "And I'm leaving this shoulder along, and so nothing's touching it, so it's cold. This is the cold shoulder."

**Teresa:** Well, I mean, turning your shoulder away from one is, you're right, is kind of like ignoring them on purpose. But isn't it so awesome this this origin is actually, like, literal, a cold shoulder?

**Travis:** Yes! Now I want to know what a chip on their shoulder is. I wonder if that's a—

**Teresa:** Ooh, let's save that one. Yeah, write that down.

**Travis:** So, now this next one... I don't know. I mean, I maybe recognize it, like, passingly. But "happy as a Larry"?

**Teresa:** Yeah. I mean, I've heard "happy as a lark."

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** And—although I didn't—you know, I don't know literally where that comes from, I would assume that because a lark is always singing...

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Yeah?

**Travis:** That makes—yeah. But this is one, much like "Bob's your uncle," right? Where it is because—one of the reasons we might not know it right away is it's a common phrase in the UK and Australia.

**Teresa:** Yes. And it begs the question, who is Larry?

**Travis:** Well, we've been searching for him for years!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** If you—do you have any information about Larry? If so, call this hotline.

**Teresa:** Maybe it came from a person. Maybe it is Australian boxer Larry Foley, who never lost a fight.

**Travis:** Pretty happy.

**Teresa:** That would make me happy, if I was a boxer.

**Travis:** Yeah, he enjoys winning.

**Teresa:** Um, and maybe it's not a person at all. Could be from a Cornish slang term, "larrikin," which means "rough type" or "hooligan."

**Travis:** Sure, okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, maybe it's because you don't have any responsibilities, and you want to seek fun and party instead of having to go to work?

**Teresa:** Sure. But is that a characteristic of a Larry? Is that, like, "Well, everyone knows Larry. He doesn't like to work."

**Teresa:** It's a characteristic of a larrikin.

**Travis:** Oh, okay. That makes more sense.

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah.

**Travis:** Okay. "Oh, Larry? Oh. But you barely know him!"

"Oh, yeah. But you know how *Larrys* are. Always happy and shirking." That's probably not—I'm sorry. If there's any *Larrys* listening, I'm so sorry.

**Teresa:** Sorry, Larry.

**Travis:** Now, this is another one that I think there's a song... oh, who sings it? Nancy Griffith?

**Teresa:** Are you talking about "[singing] Blue moon—"

**Travis:** There's that one.

**Teresa:** "[singing] You saw me standin' alone."

**Travis:** Well, there's a couple. Blue moon—'cause there's also, "[singing] Blue moon of Kentucky, keep on shine—" but the one I was thinking of was, "[singing] Just once... in a very blue moon." That's like—

**Teresa:** Yeah, that one—

**Travis:** "[singing] And I feel one coming on soon."

**Teresa:** [laughs] That one makes the most sense with the actual origin.

**Travis:** Right. Once in a blue moon is like, it happens rarely, right?

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Like, you might say, like, "Oh, you're expecting the boss to give you the day off? Maybe once in a blue moon."

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Because a blue moon is quite rare. Um, it's when there are two full moons in one calendar month instead of just one.

**Travis:** Ohhh!

**Teresa:** And it occurs, like, every two or three years. So, not unheard of.

**Travis:** But not, like—it doesn't actually—it doesn't appear to be blue, like a blood moon or something like that. It's just, like—

**Teresa:** No, no.

**Travis:** —it's rare that the moon's cycle would line up so that it would be like, "Oh yeah, it starts—right at the beginning of the month, there's a full month, and so there's time for another one to come back around."

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** When it is...

**Teresa:** I'm nodding my head in agreement.

**Travis:** [hesitantly] ... waxing gibbous? [bursts into laughter] I don't know what that means.

**Teresa:** Let's not—let's not outstep your boundaries, here. [laughs]

**Travis:** When it's waning, and waxing, and gibbous-ing...

**Teresa:** Those are words associated with moons.

**Travis:** And the lunar—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, another one.

**Travis:** —uh, gibbous is quite—

**Teresa:** You keep saying gibbous.

**Travis:** —it's gib—well, the lunar gibbous is such that it looks like a fingernail.

**Teresa:** What? [laughs]

**Travis:** You know, you get it. When you kind of look up at the sky and it's God's fingernail—it's not important.

**Teresa:** Allllright.

**Travis:** Sometimes I say "It's not important" when I realize I don't have any idea what I'm saying.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** But I've also passed the point of just stop—just stopping. And so I'll say, "It's not important," to indicate, "Don't look at me." [laughs]

**Teresa:** Okay. Let's talk about... something else.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** "A bed of roses."

**Travis:** Okay. Now, here's what I think about this song. Another—well, song. I think about a song.

**Teresa:** Another song!

**Travis:** There is a Jon Bon Jovi song. Mr. B'Jovi.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Um, has a song about this that rocks. It's very—it's—

**Teresa:** It's—it's a banger.

**Travis:** It's a really banger—it's a power ballad—

**Teresa:** Ohh, okay.

**Travis:** —in a way that, uh, we don't—listen. The '80s and early '90s were a just golden age of power ballads in a way that we don't so much see anymore. Uh—

**Teresa:** I like when they call it a hair ballad.

**Travis:** Yeah there's a little bit of that. There's a little bit of that in there. I mean, this Jon B'Jovi. It's hard not to have some hair in there. But the chorus is like, "[singing loudly] I wanna lay you down in a bed of roses! 'Cause tonight, I sleep on a bed of nails!"

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Oh boy.

**Travis:** "[singing loudly] I wanna be just as close as the Holy Ghost is! 'Cause tonight, I sleep on a bed of roses—" it's something like that.

**Teresa:** Wait a second, wait a second. Wait a second.

**Travis:** Yeah?

**Teresa:** Didn't—

**Travis:** It's confu—I don't remember the exact words.

**Teresa:** Didn't he just—oh, okay. Alright. I was gonna—

**Travis:** Okay. I don't know if that's exactly it.

**Teresa:** I was gonna say, didn't he just say he was sleeping on a bed of nails, but now roses?

**Travis:** From what I understand, the song is about, like, touring? And, like, how much he misses being with her, and, like, being far away from her. At least, that's what the music video would lead me to believe. I like this song. [laughs] Um, and so I have watched the music video, which also, frankly, rules.

**Teresa:** It does seem pretty romantic, doesn't it?

**Travis:** Yeah. A bed of roses. It's like, um... you know, habit—this is, like—you know, think about spreading rose petals on a bed, right? It's, like, the most romantic you can think of.

**Teresa:** It's not just romantic, but it's a situation that is comfortable and easy.

**Travis:** Right, right, right, right.

**Teresa:** And it comes from Christopher Marlowe.

**Travis:** I'm sorry I sang, everybody. I feel bad about it now. [laughs] I have no—I think it was really bad?

**Teresa:** It was not bad. It was... loud.

**Travis:** Okay. Well, I pulled away from the microphone.

**Teresa:** You did. You did a great job. Um, so it comes from Christopher Marlowe's 1599 poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." It's a very romantic poem.

**Travis:** Is it literally about, like, a flowerbed of roses?

**Teresa:** Well, he describes that, while he may not be able to be—to lavish riches upon his love, he would make her life as splendid as possible, AKA give her a bed of roses.

**Travis:** Okay. Because listen, folks. I'm not gonna tell you how to live your life, and I don't know what you're into. But if you're looking for extreme comfort, laying down on roses... those things gets thorns. You know what I mean? I don't know that I would—

**Teresa:** Alright...

**Travis:** I'm just saying. I would not want to lay on a bed of ro—I would like to look at a bed of roses. I think they're beautiful. Okay, now this one... "Let your hair down." I'll tell you what I think of. I think of Rapunzel.

**Teresa:** Oh, really?

**Travis:** Let your hair down?

**Teresa:** I think of the trope of the uptight librarian who pulls the pencil out of her bun and shakes her hair free.

**Travis:** I mean, yeah. Okay. Yes, I think of that too. Because "let your hair down" is usually, like, "Hey, you're too uptight. Let your hair down and relax," right? It's not just about, like, relaxing like "I'm gonna put my feet up and sit by a fire and read a book." It's more like, "Let your hair down," like, "Let's go party a little bit, or let's break the rules. Let your hair down and get a little wild."

**Teresa:** Yes. It is. Because... in the 17th century, women were expected to literally pile their hair up on their head, so you weren't really supposed to cut it, but wigs were fading, and so you would keep your own hair, and pile it up and pin it on to your head.

Um, so, obviously, if you wanted to be free and comfortable, you would let your hair down. And so that, you know, you could, like, sleep, right? And then also, it would be kind of a fun experience, because you could brush your hair—

**Travis:** And who knows what you're gonna find in there!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** It's been up for a couple days. You might find a birdcage in there, or—

**Teresa:** Well, then you could wash it, which is another fun thing, right? Um, and so, this is actually the origin of another fun term. Uh, when you would



let your hair down to brush or wash, it was known as disheveling, so if a person looked disheveled, it meant that their hair was messy.

**Travis:** Now, isn't it so nice that women are no longer expected to conform to these beauty standards that make them uncomfortable and, like, that is a lot of hard work for, like, what? And it's so nice that that's not—that that's just not a thing anymore, right?

**Teresa:** You can't see it, but I'm staring daggers, and I wish that I had a little cricket noise, because that's not true. [laughs]

**Travis:** I was being—Teresa. [quietly] Hey. This is just for and me. This isn't for them.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** I was being sarcastic.

**Teresa:** [gasps] Ahhh.

**Travis:** Like, I was expecting you to maybe play along a little bit? And be like, "Oh, yeah, it's great. *Not.*" I don't—maybe not that. Not in—

**Teresa:** No, I have sworn to fight the patriarchy, so not even in sarcasm.

**Travis:** Okay, fair enough. Now, what about... elbow grease?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Travis:** This is something where, once again, this is, like, hard work, right? I think about it literally in terms of, like, fixing things. Right? Like, "Well, yeah. You could call somebody in to fix that pipe, but why not use a little elbow grease and fix it yourself?" You know, that kind of thing.

**Teresa:** Okay, yeah. I mean, it really has come to mean hard physical effort, right? Um, so in the 20th century, this literally meant if you're sweating, you're working hard, you get a little—you get sweat in the crick of your elbow, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** The little crease of your elbow gets greased with sweat.

**Travis:** Okay. Well, that makes sense, uh-huh.

**Teresa:** But... this isn't where the term first showed up. So, the first show—the first showing of this term in print would be, uh, in 1672 by the English poet Andrew Marvell, and he wrote:

"Two or three brawny fellows in a corner with mere ink and elbow grease do more harm than a hundred systematical divines with their sweaty preaching."

So basically it means that the message is more effective if you speak passionately and pass the word around than if you yell it from a pulpit.

**Travis:** Sure. Sure. Now, Teresa, I wanna tell you something.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Um, you are the apple of my eye. [pause] I don't know what that means.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** But... you are! No, so—

**Teresa:** It means that I'm your favorite.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** I'm the treasured person in your life.

**Travis:** You hold a special place in my thoughts, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Okay. Why, though?

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, so even though the phrase actually dates back to 800 CE, Shakespeare is the one who made this popular.

**Travis:** Sure, sure, yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? In *Midsummer*, it was related to the pupil of your eye, right? Which is the black part in the eyeball. That's the pupil.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Um, and that was often referred to as the apple. So, if someone was in the apple of your eye, you were fixated on them. They were the center of your attention.

**Travis:** 'Cause they were right there in the center of your eye. I've never heard your pupil referred to as the apple. Maybe that is because now it was referred to that, but now the apple of your eye—the ph—like, the—the idiom has overtaken its origin?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Okay. Well, you know what? I think for the rest of this episode, we should just play it by ear.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Don't we always play it by ear?

**Travis:** Yeah, more or less. So this—uh, play it by ear, I always think of, like... we're gonna, like, kind of keep moving forward however this happens. Like, we don't really have a plan, but the next thing that happens, we'll kind of decide what to do from there, and so on and so forth.

**Teresa:** Another literal idiom. Um, it comes from—

**Travis:** Can I guess? Piano playing. Or, like, playing music?

**Teresa:** Yes! Exactly. So, if you didn't have sheet music, you were listening, you were improvising, you were playing it by ear.

**Travis:** Okay. That makes complete sense! Okay. Now, this one... oh. That made so much sense, and now I'm confused!

**Teresa:** Ohh.

**Travis:** And I'm feeling a little out of sorts.

**Teresa:** Hmm, I like how you linked it. That's nice.

**Travis:** I'm trying to. So, out of sorts is usually what I think about, like, oh, I haven't organized my thoughts. I'm kind of confused, but not just, like, confused that I don't understand something. More of, like—for example, if you walk into a room and you forget why you walked in there...

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** ... you are out of sorts.

**Teresa:** Because it's irritating, also, right?

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** That you walked into that room and you're like, "Uhh, I can't remember. Why am I at the refrigerator?" That happens to me a lot. [laughs]

**Travis:** Like, okay. And maybe this is the origin of it, but I'm not looking. But, like, if I had a bunch of papers sorted, right? And I walked into a room and accidentally dropped them, and then were all out of sorts, right? They were all not sorted. It's like your thoughts are like that?

**Teresa:** Sort of, very close. Very close. So, the term probably goes back to typesetting, um, when the individual metal pieces of letters would be sorted at the printers, right? So they'd be in all these little boxes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And if they were out of sorts, they were not in the little right containers, so you couldn't find the letters you were looking for in order to typeset it.

**Travis:** Very—okay. I get it. Okay.

**Teresa:** Also, could be from the Latin word "sortum," which means "destiny, condition, or category." Um, so if you're not in—if you're out of any of those things, you're not havin' a good time.

**Travis:** Sure. I choose to go with the typesetting one. I like that.

**Teresa:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense to me.

**Travis:** And you know what? The fact that you agreed with me, Teresa, it just puts me on cloud nine.

**Teresa:** Ohhh! If I could do that, like, snappy thing with my finger..

**Travis:** I can't do it. I can't. Like the "wap wap wap"?

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That one.

**Travis:** I can't do it.

**Teresa:** Good work. [laughs]

**Travis:** So, on cloud nine is usually like, I am so happy. I always picture it like I'm floating on a cloud, right? I'm so happy that I'm floating—it's like my feet aren't even touching the ground, I'm so happy.

**Teresa:** Yes. And again, this is pretty literal. It comes from meteorology.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So they would sometimes classify different types of clouds by using numbers that depended on their altitude.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** So if a cloud was categorized as a number nine, it meant it was really high up in the sky.

**Travis:** Well, that makes complete sense!

**Teresa:** Yeah. Some of these things are so—like, they're—the—their origins and their derivatives are so, like, perfect that you wonder, like, is this an idiom, or is this something that is, like, so simple that we should always—do you understand what I mean?

**Travis:** I do, but I think that it's just like we were talking about with apple of your eye, where it's just, like, the idiom overtakes the origin to a point where you no longer asso—like, I—I wouldn't have thought of cloud nine as being literal, a cloud at its highest level, right? You're like, "Well, that has to refer to, like, some kind of reference or something like that."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And you feel so silly afterwards, and especially if you've argued with someone about it. Like, "This is what cloud nine is."

"This is what cloud nine is."

And then you feel so silly, that it's time to bury the hatchet.

**Teresa:** Ohhh! [laughs] I like it when you do this.

**Travis:** Thank you.

**Teresa:** For our next idiom, uh, episode, I want you to do it for all of them.

**Travis:** You want me to do it for all of 'em? Okay. So, bury the hatchet is—what I think of when I think of bury the hatchet is, like, a long running argument or, like, a feud, something like that. Not just, like, "Oh, we disagreed and the disagreement's done."

But I usually think about it in terms of, like, "You know what? You two have kind of been frustrated with each other for weeks now. It's time that you buried the hatchet." Like, it's time that not only do you end this argument, but you also, like, make up with each other and become friends again or whatever.

**Teresa:** Yes. It does—it does reference an actual Native American practice of putting down weapons as a declaration of peace.

**Travis:** Makes sense.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** So you're putting down the hatchet.

**Teresa:** Yeah. And, I mean, it seems that there is occasion where tribes would literally bury a hatchet, uh, but it does seem to be more figurative.

**Travis:** Okay. [thoughtfully] Okay. [quietly] Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so we've had—we've had a lot of fun today.

**Travis:** Sure. I mean, I hope so, you know? I hope the people listening have had fun.

**Teresa:** There's also a few idioms we'd like to talk about that maybe we should remove from our vernacular.

**Travis:** Yeah. This first one I think is really important for us to talk about, 'cause I think that it seems so innocuous. It seems... almost pleasant? I can remember actually in elementary school—so we're talking about cakewalks. A piece of cake, right? I remember in elementary school, doing a cakewalk.

**Teresa:** I did too!

**Travis:** Right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, we would—so you would put—move all the desks, right? And then you'd tape out on the floor little squares with numbers, and each number was associated with a baked good. You'd dance and kind of walk around, and when the music stops, a number is called out, and if you're standing on that number, you get a baked good.

**Travis:** Okay, but here—and so the—the idiom came to mean, like, something that is easy, right? Like, "Oh, that thing? It's a cakewalk." Right? Like, it's so easy, don't even worry about it. Or piece of cake, you know? Like, "Oh, getting to where you're going? Piece of cake, don't worry about it." Right?

But here's the thing – the origins of it... are not good.

**Teresa:** Exactly. So it originated as a dance performed by enslaved Black people on plantations during the Civil War. Um, the owners – *traffickers* – would hold contests to make slaves – *kidnapped hostages* – do these dances in a competition for cake, with the idea that the dance must be easy for them.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Uh, later, the dance and the idiom was popularized through minstrel shows, so let's just, you know, drop it. Let's not do that anymore.

**Travis:** Um, another one is "chop chop, " which I think is another one that, you know, people probably aren't thinking about. And it means, like, "Hurry up!" You know, "Go faster."

So, it's problematic for a few reasons. First of all—and most of all—it's an American adaptation of the Cantonese word *kap*, which means "make haste." Um, so the very real word was Americanized by railroad workers in the American Southwest to make fun of the Chinese immigrants who were



working on the railroads. And if that wasn't enough, it also became very classist in its use. Of it was usually used, like, "Chop chop," something—a more powerful person would say to someone, like, "Don't make me wait!" That kind of thing, right?

**Teresa:** When I hear it, I think of kind of, like, a, uh—a... a—let's see. An upper class, like, socialite lady kind of, like, clapping at shopkeepers. [claps] "[posh voice] Chop chop! Do—do help me first!" Something like that.

**Travis:** With kind of the underlying tone being, "I could get you fired if I wanted to," right? Like, that kind of thing.

**Teresa:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Travis:** Very much so.

**Teresa:** Here's the last one for today, and it's a little sad. It's not problematic, per se, but, um... so the term "off their rocker."

**Travis:** Let's say it's very insensitive, at the very least.

**Teresa:** It is, yes. It has come to mean—

**Travis:** I think anything that makes fun of somebody's mental condition is insensitive, is not great.

**Teresa:** It's come to mean someone who is mentally unstable, for a number of reasons. Um, so the term originated from the heartland, where maybe a rocking chair was set out on a porch for a farmer to sit in after a long day to relax, right? That's nice enough. But if you were off your rocker, that meant that you had gotten up and kinda just wandered away.

**Travis:** Right. It became associated with, like, older people sitting in their rocking chairs on the porch, you know, like because they didn't have anything else to do, or whatever.

**Teresa:** Right. And possibly also about the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's that these older people who, had once all their faculties, just kind of walked away from their chairs.

**Travis:** Yeah. Insensitive at least, problematic... probably. [laughs] I would say problematic. Let's just not do that one anymore.

Um, so hopefully we can avoid using those, and you've learned some more about some other idioms. And you know what? We love doing these episodes, because we think they're interesting, and we hope you do to. So, if you found this episode interesting, two things you can do.

One, go check out the first three idioms episodes, and two, share this with a friend. I think that these are great episodes to share, because I think that these are things that everybody has, at some point in their life, thought, "What does that mean?"

So, share these idioms episodes with your friends, share them on social media. You can follow us @shmannerscast on Twitter. Uh, that is—

**Teresa:** You can also go to iTunes and rate, review, and subscribe!

**Travis:** That is true! On Twitter, @shmannerscast, is where we take questions when we have an episode topic that requires questions.

**Teresa:** But if you have an idiom, please email it to us at [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com). Alex is so great at sorting through all of those idioms. She loves looking at just the full inbox. Please do send those to us.

**Travis:** And, speaking of, thank you, Alex, again. Thank you for everything.

**Teresa:** Thank you, Alex!

**Travis:** Thank you for everything. Um, we also wanna say, Teresa and I recorded an episode of a podcast, if you haven't checked it out yet, where we talk about *Great British Bake Off*. We already have episode one up. It's on the McElroy family YouTube. It's also currently on Apple Podcasts, and Spotify, and Pocket Casts, and I don't know, maybe other places, too.

**Teresa:** It's after the kids go to bed, so it's slightly looser than this one.  
[laughs]

**Travis:** It's very silly, but it is still PG, so it is okay to check out. So, if you like the *Great British Baking Show*, or *Great British Bake Off* – [quietly] it's the same show – you can listen to that and enjoy. Um, let's see. What else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** We always thank Brent "Brental Floss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, we thank Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. One more time, that is @shmannerscast.

Um, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. Uh, you can go and join that group if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

**Travis:** And of course, thank you Maximum Fun, our podcast home. Uh, thank you for giving us a home, this podcast roof over our podcast heads. And—

**Teresa:** One more plug for a podcast. You wrote a book about podcasting.

**Travis:** Oh, that's true! My brothers and I wrote a book called *Everybody Has a Podcast (Except You)*. It is a how-to-podcast guide that'll teach you, like, beginning to end, from picking a topic, to working with cohosts, to where to publish your episodes. All of that stuff. It's gonna teach you how to make a podcast that you are proud of. And it's funny! 'Cause we wrote it.

**Teresa:** And I know that this is the next question. Are you gonna read the audiobook?

**Travis:** We are!

**Teresa:** Yeah, of course we are. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, you—you can, uh—you can preorder the audiobook. You can preorder the eBook and the hardcover, and there's a chapter in there with Teresa and Rachel and Sydnee, talking about research, 'cause Justin and Griffin and I don't research. [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You can go to [mcelroypodcastbook.com](http://mcelroypodcastbook.com) and preorder it there. Now, that's gonna do it for us.

**Teresa:** Phew.

**Travis:** 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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