

## Shmanners 284: Victorian Funerals

Published October 29, 2021

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[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 [spooky voice] *Shmanners!*

**Teresa:** [laughs] It's extraordinary etiquette.

**Travis:** [spooky voice] For ordinary occasions! Hellooo... how are you? My dear.

**Teresa:** Good. How are you?

**Travis:** I'm good. I feel like you're not playing... into—

**Teresa:** I don't know what the game is.

**Travis:** Like we're gho— like we're ghosts.

**Teresa:** Oh.

**Travis:** 'Cause it's spooky. 'Cause it's, like, Halloween?

**Teresa:** Oh, okay. That was—

**Travis:** You knew that— that was—

**Teresa:** —that was a ghost. Got it.

**Travis:** Don't act like that wasn't—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —a spot-on ghost!

**Teresa:** I just thought that we would keep, like, the little taglines clean.

**Travis:** Yeah, but then I forgot.

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

**Travis:** What I normally said. You know it doesn't take much to throw me off of... I don't know. [unintelligible] Hello, my dear? [unintelligible]

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** No, no. You say, "Hello, my dove." And I say, "Hello, dear."

**Travis:** Yeah, see? I don't know. I'm—[spooky voice] The memory's dead!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay, that was actually a good one.

**Travis:** Thank you! So, it's Halloween.

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** We've talked about... what have we talked about? We talked about, uh... bonfires.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** That's not so— I mean, it can be spooky. What did we talk about last week? Oh my God!

**Teresa:** Ghost hunting.

**Travis:** Ghost hunting, of course, paranormal investigations. But this week, we're talking about the Victorian death process?

**Teresa:** The Victorian funeral. So, from—

**Travis:** The Victorian funeral.

**Teresa:** From the moment of death 'til the moment of burial, and then the people behind, what they're supposed to do.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** There— I mean, the thing is, there's so many rules [laughs] that we're not even gonna cover all of the rules, but some of the best rules.

**Travis:** Okay. So, wait. Is this one of those times— because the Victorian era seems to be a turning point in, like, not only a lot of cultural things, but a lot of, like, industrial and economic things as well.

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

**Travis:** And so I'm just gonna go out on a limb, because we've done 6000 episodes of *Shmanners* at this point, that—

**Teresa:** [laughs] Yes. 6000.

**Travis:** That this— the reason there are so many rules is suddenly people were able to afford funerals, to, like, make a funeral a thing.

**Teresa:** Yes. And the business of funerals dates back to the Victorian period.

**Travis:** Big Funeral.

**Teresa:** Well, not just big, but— so—

**Travis:** I meant, like, capital B, capital F— the industry—

**Teresa:** Ah, yes, yes.

**Travis:** Yes, okay.

**Teresa:** Like Big Pharma. I got it now. I got it. Yes, because funeral homes/parlors, depending upon what region you're from, didn't exist!

**Travis:** And—

**Teresa:** Until then.

**Travis:** —you know what? I'm gonna go out on a limb. Shouldn't.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Just chuck 'em in the ground! Or burn 'em up real good, turn 'em into trees. Something like that. Way better.

**Teresa:** Okay. But not for the Victorians.

**Travis:** No. And I'll never die, so I don't have to worry about it for me.

**Teresa:** Don't have to worry about it.

**Travis:** I'm just saying.

**Teresa:** Um, we would like to give a special shoutout to, uh, the YouTube channel Ask a Mortician.

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** Caitlin Doughty is an incredible and entertaining source for all things macabre.

**Travis:** Listen, I'm not saying there aren't reasons for a funeral. But... ack. Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay. S—

**Travis:** No, you know what? I'm just gonna go ahead. I'm gonna put the tiger on the table and yell at it, express my feelings.

**Teresa:** What? The—

**Travis:** Put the tiger on the table and yell at it?

**Teresa:** The tag on the table?

**Travis:** The tiger on the table.

**Teresa:** The— the tiger, okay.

**Travis:** This— this is one of those things where it's reached a point now where I don't know if it's a real thing or a thing we made up on *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* to make fun of real things, but here we are.

**Teresa:** I think it is.

**Travis:** So, the thing is, is before we even get into it, I do think that there are certain aspects of the modern-day funeral process or whatever that are fine or whatever. But I also think there are aspects of it where it is capitalizing on people's grief.

**Teresa:** Oh, of course.

**Travis:** To make money off of—

**Teresa:** Like price gouging and things, for sure.

**Travis:** Like buying fancy coffins so that you can bury 'em in the ground, and the person turns to dust inside of it. No thank you.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um—

**Travis:** I'm just saying that out loud—

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** —'cause I have strong feelings.

**Teresa:** You are allowed.

**Travis:** Thank you!

**Teresa:** So, one of the things that the Victorians lusted after—

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** —was a, quote, "good Christian death." TM, TM, TM, TM.

**Travis:** So, like, saving a child from, like, a bus fire or something?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** Although that— something heroic like that would definitely be cool.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Aw, yeah. Obviously.

**Teresa:** Um, but there are a few requirements for your death in order to be a, quote, "good Christian" one. Uh, you should die with your eyes open.

**Travis:** Huh!

**Teresa:** Bravely ready to face God and judgment.

**Travis:** [thoughtfully] Okay.

**Teresa:** You should have parting words of wisdom perched upon your lips for your family, who are surrounding you to witness your passing.

**Travis:** This is something that always strikes me, because it— I'm not surprised, actually, 'cause Victorian era seems to be, if anyone was barely of note, they, like, took note of their, like, final words.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And do you think that was weird, when someone's, like, hanging out by your bed, like, "Say your final words."  
And you're like, "Uh, it is better to love and live in a good, clean way."

And like, "Great."

And then you go like, "Aw, man! This sucks!" And then you die. And they're like—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Should we write that one down? 'Cause technically his last words were 'Aw, man! This sucks!' But... hoo."

**Teresa:** Well... [laughs] like— like a lot of things, this is highly exaggerated, because this is what the Victorians wanted, so that's what they told everyone that everyone had, right?

**Travis:** Right. But probably most of time it was, like, written down beforehand, or a complete lie, right?

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and also... [sighs] this idea, this good Christian death, TM, TM, uh, was simply just not available. Death was everywhere in the Victorian era. You could die from your crinoline catching on fire, or from cholera contamination, or the arsenic in your wallpaper, or—

**Travis:** Get hit by a horse-drawn carriage!

**Teresa:** Yeah. Uh, like the earliest refrigerators exploding, or like—

**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** Totally. Uh—

**Travis:** But Punky Brewster told me the only danger was a child getting trapped inside a refrigerator 'cause they didn't take the door off when they threw it away!

**Teresa:** Yes, today.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** Because refrigerators are a completely closed system, but they actually had leaky refri— you know what? YouTube it.

**Travis:** It's not important, yeah. That was a special episode, by the way. It's not important.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Do you know what I want? I want you to tell people my last words were, "Is that a bus?" No matter how I die.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay.

**Travis:** No matter how I go out. Do you wanna hear another joke?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Do you know how I wanna die?

**Teresa:** How?

**Travis:** I wanna die at a nice old age, like 98 or 99, peacefully, while skydiving.

**Teresa:** Aww.

**Travis:** Thank you!

**Teresa:** Love it. So... what normally happened. If you were not killed in some sort of accident, um, then it was disease, right? Uh, there certainly were people that died of old age, just kind of, like, went to sleep and never woke up. But, um, you know, mostly it was long and painful, like pneumonia, or kidney disease, or heart disease, or, you know—

**Travis:** Or Boogie Fever.

**Teresa:** [fake laughter] Or any other—

**Travis:** I thought that deserved better than that!

**Teresa:** No, it didn't.

**Travis:** Aw, okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Or any other innumerable diseases that nowadays people just get an antibiotic for. Right?

**Travis:** Yeah. Oh, medicine, huh?

**Teresa:** [singing] Medicine!

**Travis:** It's great.

**Teresa:** And the reason that the Victorian wanted this good death, uh, actually stems from the 15th century. Um, *The Art of Dying* was recognized as the model for the ideal death. Um, but, you know, at the time... it was recognized— I mean, there was a bunch of skepticism about it, for sure. Um, but the idea really came to prominence in the 18th century during the Enlightenment.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um, because of the popularity of Evangelicalism in Victorian Britain. The Protestant Reformation has gotten rid of the Catholic idea of purgatory, right? So there's no waiting room anymore. When you die, you either go up to heaven at the pearly gates, paradise, or you are plunged to the fire and brimstone of hell.

**Travis:** Or you go sideways to Cleveland.

**Both:** Ahh!

**Travis:** Sorry, a lot of jokes. Death makes me uncomfortable! Okay, keep going.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, okay. So, then the idea was—

**Travis:** I'm sorry, Cleveland. Listen, I'm— I live here in Cincinnati.

**Teresa:** We love the Cleve.

**Travis:** I don't know why that was my go— I am so sorry.

**Teresa:** Um, the idea was you could make this choice to save yourself the last second before death, um, and your divine judgment, right? Um, and so that's why the Victorians idealized this good death, right? It would be slow enough to give you the chance to say goodbye, um, but fast enough to make sure that you could say your one last prayer.

**Travis:** So let's call it what it is: a loophole.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Yeah. They believed this was a loophole. Okay. Got it, got it, got it. Okay.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And so all of the— you know, the media at the time, uh, sort of, like... it glorified this idea of people at the bedside, the one last breath, that's what we see in movies and TV.



**Travis:** Still to this day, right? Like, that's a very common scene of the, like, sitting by the— especially if you're doing a period drama. But, I mean, even then the, like, sitting by the bedside and, like, everyone knows it's coming, and they're like, "There's only moments left."

How do you know that?! Nosferatu? Get outta here!

**Teresa:** Exactly, exactly. Um, and so, they lied.

**Travis:** Now, is that— Nostradamus is what I mean.

**Teresa:** You meant Nosfer— Nostradamus.

**Travis:** I don't know if the vampire Nosferatu can sense the time of death.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Maybe he does!

**Travis:** "Hey, I'm not here on official business."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Just wanted to let you know, that guy's about to die. Also, can I suck your blood? No? Ope, that's fine. Welp, okay!"

**Teresa:** Nope. Mmm. Mm-mm-mm-mm. So, like a good, upstanding, middle class Victorian family, you would make up the details for the obituary. You would broadcast to everyone that there were— it was a beautiful death scene, and that all of their family was there to pay their last respects.

**Travis:** And they died with a smile on their face, no, yeah.

**Teresa:** They died with a smile, and all that kind of stuff. Right? Um, and—

**Travis:** Suddenly he totally got the ending of *Lost*. He understood it completely.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Uh, and by the end of the Victorian period, people really started to come around on this. Be like, "That's— that's fake. You guys are making that up. That's not how death actually happens." Um, but after a person takes their last breath is when the real... dirty work happens, in the Victorian era.

**Travis:** And I can't wait to talk about it, but first... how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

**Teresa:** Alright.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** *Shmanners* is sponsored in part this week by DoorDash. Thank you so much, DoorDash, for everything you do. Not just delivery food, which, don't get me wrong, is amazing, but also, when I need toothpaste, when I need bread, when I need milk, all of those basics. Because yes, listen, in these current days, food delivery has become more important than ever. But not just that, it's also grocery essentials with DoorDash, too. You can get drinks, snacks, other household items, delivered in about under an hour.

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Go to [zola.com/shmanners](https://zola.com/shmanners) today, and use promo code "save50," that's S-A-V-E-5-0, for 50% off your save-the-dates. Zola is the one place to start for your wedding day. That's [zola.com/shmanners](https://zola.com/shmanners), code "save50."

And speaking of weddings, we have a special personal message here. This message is from Jasper and Sam and it's for Lindsey and Cole.

"Happy wedding day! Oh my goodness, I'm so excited for y'all. I hope that everything goes smoothly, and I hope that it's the best day of your life, except for every day after that together."

[music plays]

**Renee:** Well, hello. I'm Renee Colvert.

**Alexis:** Hi, I'm Alexis Preston. And we are the hosts of *Can I Pet Your Dog?*

**Renee:** And we got breaking news, we got an expose, and all the beans have been spilled via an Apple Podcast review that said, "This show isn't well researched."

**Alexis:** [gasps]

**Renee:** Well, yeah, no, duh. Of course it's not. Not since the day we started has it been well-researched. Guessing and anthropomorphizing dogs is what we do.

**Alexis:** The *Can I Pet Your Dog?* promise is that we will never do more than 10 seconds of research before telling you excitedly about any dog we see.

**Renee:** I'm gonna come at ya with top 10 enthusiasm, minimal facts.

**Alexis:** We're here for a good time, not an educated time.

**Renee:** So if you love dogs, and you don't love research...

**Alexis:** [laughs]

**Renee:** ... you know what, come on in to *Can I Pet Your Dog?* podcast. Every Tuesday on Maximum Fun Network.

**Alexis:** [giggles]

[music and advertisement end]

**Teresa:** Alright. So, first—

**Travis:** So they've beefed it.

**Teresa:** They've beefed it. First things first, you have to immediately stop all the clocks in the house.

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** And because you are a good Victorian middle class— uh, middle to upper class family, you have a bunch of 'em, because all the little knick-knacks you love.

**Travis:** Do you have to, like, stop them and, like, the last thing you do— like, reset them back a little bit so they're almost—

**Teresa:** Nope. Mm-mm. They have to all— I mean, you are keeping them perfectly in time anyway. Right?

**Travis:** Yeah, but if I stop one I gotta go to the next one and sto— I can't flip the clock switch!

**Teresa:** Yeah, you gotta run! You gotta stop 'em all.

**Travis:** Okay, but even then, I'm not The Flash, baby! Like, I'm gonna have to do—

**Teresa:** Do your best!

**Travis:** But then do I set it back—

**Teresa:** No!

**Travis:** —so it matches the others?

**Teresa:** It doesn't matter that it— that from room to room it doesn't match exactly. What it matters is that you ran at the moment of death to go stop them, *because...* stopping— there are a couple superstitions about this. The first one is that stopping the clock is a way to allow the soul of the newly deceased to move on in the next life without being bound by the human concept of time.

**Travis:** Sure. Sure, that's— that's— yeah. Mm-mm.

**Teresa:** This notion was accepted and done to prevent bad luck and hauntings.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and also it started where—

**Travis:** Also a good excuse to be late for work, huh?

**Teresa:** [laughs] That's another one I'll get to in just a second.

**Travis:** Oh!

**Teresa:** Uh, to let a clock keep ticking after a person had passed away would invite the spirit of the deceased to remain in the home and haunt it. And it allowed the spirit to begin a new period of existence outside time, and to pass into the afterlife where they belonged. Now, those are the spiritual things. The other part is, uh, stopping your clocks allows the grieving to mourn the passing for as long as they liked without worrying about the time.

**Travis:** Ohh, okay. I get it. Was this the time period where you had to, like, mourn for, like, a year?

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Oh boy.

**Teresa:** Um, so...

**Travis:** And I say "Oh boy." Everyone can mourn in their own time. There was, like, an official, structured, capital M, Mourning.

**Teresa:** Yes, yes.

**Travis:** That you had to do for a year, yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, and so next after that, someone else in the house would have to cover all the mirrors.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Uh, because—

**Travis:** So that your alternate selves didn't get out.

**Teresa:** —you didn't want the pers— what? The alternate selves?

**Travis:** The alternate selves that live in the mirror? You know, the other person. You know! The person who's in there and does what I do? You know. You know what I'm talking about.

**Teresa:** So, you wanted to make sure that the person's spirit didn't accidentally get caught in the looking glass, and it was because it was believed that your reflection in the mirror was a reflection of your soul.

**Travis:** Yeah— well...

**Teresa:** Maybe that's why vampires... don't have... reflections.

**Travis:** No, it's because they don't reflect light, and that's why they have such a hard time in the sun. You ever think about that?

**Teresa:** Oh! That's a good one.

**Travis:** 'Cause the light passes straight through them, so that the burn, because it doesn't bounce off their skin, 'cause they don't reflect light.

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** I'm just making this up, but doesn't that make a lot of sense?

**Teresa:** [disappointed] Oh, you're just making it up?

**Travis:** Well, I mean— hey, babe? Spoiler alert.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Everything about vampires is just made up.

**Teresa:** I guess that's true.

**Travis:** Like, you looked at me like—[wheeze-laugh]

**Teresa:** [laughs] But it's not canon. It's just your brain.

**Travis:** There's no canon!

**Teresa:** Yes there is canon!

**Travis:** Based on what?! They sparkle in *Twilight*!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. Well, then *Twilight* vampires do reflect light, because you wouldn't be able to sparkle.

**Travis:** Well, they also don't burst into flame— I haven't seen them or read it, but I don't think—

**Teresa:** No, they live in Portland, so they don't have—

**Travis:** It's not— it's not a concern. [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** It's not a concern. There's no direct sunlight. [laughs]

**Travis:** Got it, got it, got it. This is a good episode so far. Very focused.

**Teresa:** [laughs] I've never actually seen or read *Twilight*.

**Travis:** No, me neither! The closest I've come—

**Teresa:** Okay. [laughs]

**Travis:** The closest I've come is, uh, on a long plane trip. There was a woman two rows in front of me watching it. All— like, all of them, if I remember correctly. At least two of them.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And I, like, kept, like, looking over the seat, 'cause I'm always more interested in whatever anyone else is watching than me. And I would just keep catching scenes and like, "Is that a baseball game? What's happening? What is this movie?"

**Teresa:** I hope they really do live in Portland, but I don't know.

**Travis:** I think they do!

**Teresa:** Or Seattle? One of those places.

**Travis:** Well, it would make a lot more sense for Portland. But I don't know.

**Teresa:** Anyway. You also would want to cover the mirror because... it was said that the first person who saw their reflection in the mirror would be the next person to die.

**Travis:** Then who— who draws the short straw to cover it?

**Teresa:** I don't know.

**Travis:** Are they covering with their eyes closed?

**Teresa:** Maybe.

**Travis:** A lot of broken mirrors at that point, I bet.

**Teresa:** Uh, but you didn't have a lot of time to worry about the mirrors because you also had to put a black wreath at the front of the house, like, on the door where you would put your little wreath.

**Travis:** So you had to have that ready? Can you imagine if you caught pneumonia and then you looked over and saw, like, your brother coming in with a black wreath, and he's like, "Uhh... I'm sure you'll... be fine. But just in case. I want to be ready."

**Teresa:** Well, you would always be ready.

**Travis:** I guess that's true. Death lurks around every corner. Oh no.

**Teresa:** Yeah. You would just have one. Um, and visitors would take that as a sign to knock gently instead of making a terrible racket by ringing the bell.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Okay. [clears throat]

**Travis:** Do you think they ever put the black wreath out just 'cause, like, somebody in the house was really hungover or something?

**Teresa:** [laughs] Oh, that— does that go with the— the legend about the wake?

**Travis:** Hmm, maybe.

**Teresa:** Maybe. Um, so... the next person who you would call would be the undertaker.

**Travis:** Hmm, I love him. He's a great wrestler.

**Teresa:** Um, and it's... [beat] oh, yeah! Okay.

**Travis:** Yeah, okay. Ohh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:** There's gonna be a lot of those in this episode.

**Travis:** Yeah! It's like I said. Death makes me uncomfortable. Jokes and jokes and jokes.

**Teresa:** Um, and at the beginning of the Victorian period, the undertaker was just the guy— and it was a guy— uh, who would come in with the casket and the other funeral accessories. Um, but later in the Victorian period, the funeral director...

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** Uh, this whole industry that sprang up around all of these customs, uh, would start to take on more of a traditional mortician role. Um, because embalming started to take off during this period of time.

**Travis:** Do you think... which do you think came first? The job title "undertaker" or, like, the— like, verb "to undertake" something.

**Teresa:** Hmm.



**Travis:** Do you think it's like, oh yeah, like, you undertake that like the undertaker does. Or is it like, well, you're undertaking this procedure so you're the undertaker. Now I've said it too many times, and it's lost all meaning to me.

**Teresa:** We should move on. Um, at this time, there wasn't really, like, a funeral home. There wasn't really, like, morgues or anything like that.

**Travis:** It was like a shed. It was like a cool shed.

**Teresa:** Nope, mm-mm. It was done at home.

**Travis:** Oh!

**Teresa:** The full service. They come to you. House calls. Um, and, you know, it was just starting to take off as far as, like, embalming goes. Um, and, you know... that's more stuff to sell to you. [laughs]

**Travis:** That's true.

**Teresa:** Uh, and, um—

**Travis:** Always the upsell.

**Teresa:** They would usually do it right in the bed they died in, or if that wasn't— if that was untenable, you'd move 'em to the kitchen table.

**Travis:** Hmm.

**Teresa:** Gross.

**Travis:** And then a lot of Clorox.

**Teresa:** They didn't have that.

**Travis:** Aw, man!

**Teresa:** I mean, they did have ammonia.

**Travis:** I would probably just burn the table, if it was me.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Okay, okay. Um, and it wasn't standardized. Everybody was kind of just, like, making up the idea of embalming. They kind of, like, had the gist of, like, we're gonna do something to keep this person...

**Travis:** Fresher.

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] In this physical state.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, so sometimes it was just a ton of arsenic.

**Travis:** Yeah. Well, at that point, it's not gonna hurt 'em.

**Teresa:** That's true. Uh, but it might hurt the people around.

**Travis:** Oh, sure, sure, sure, if you're doing it on the dining room table, I could see that having long term effects, yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah. Um, so. We've talked about the other people and what they do, but there is always... usually a woman in the household, uh, tasked with... preparing the body to be prepared... to be buried.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, cotton wool, wet cotton wool was placed over the eyelids to keep them from shrinking.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? And, uh, this is where we get the handkerchief tied around the jaw, um, to keep their jaw in place until rigor mortis froze it, because you didn't want a slack jawed corpse. You wanted them to look... asleep.

**Travis:** You didn't want it to look like they were going, "Ahhh!"

**Teresa:** [laughs] Exactly, exactly. Um, and the person then would straighten their limbs, uh, and wash their body with soap and water, all while keeping them, like, completely under the sheet, right? Because it would be indecent.

**Travis:** Yeah, even in death.

**Teresa:** Even in death. Um, then, after they were dressed, and all of the... [hesitantly] orifices were plugged?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** You said that very well, but you felt unsure the whole time.

**Teresa:** I did.

**Travis:** I could tell, yeah.

**Teresa:** I did. Uh, then they would be, you know, placed into a clean nightgown, or whatever clothes they were going to be buried in.

**Travis:** And then you would tie them to ropes so you could still move 'em around, so you could stay at their beach house for the weekend.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** I know. I've seen the movie, Teresa.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Uh, and then they'd do their hair, their makeup, whatever.

**Travis:** Isn't it wild that that was, like, a real movie that was released in theaters and did pretty well that basically was a two hour long just, like, desecration of a corpse?

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Now, granted, Bernie was not a good guy.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Right? In the movie it was well established that I think he had invited Jonathan Silverman and Andrew McCarthy— wow, I know both their names! To come stay at his house, and they were gonna be killed in his place, I think? And he got killed first. But still, they spent, then a second movie too, just further desecration of a corpse.

**Teresa:** Have I actually seen these movies?

**Travis:** Oh, really? Haven't you? I wonder how you would react to seeing *Weekend at Bernie's 1* and *Weekend at Bernie's 2* now. Like, in the year 2021, Anno Domini 2021.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** 'Cause I think I saw 'em, like, you know, in, like, maybe 1991. Now, like, 30 years later would you be like, "What the—"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** There is— there is some messed up stuff in there.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. Uhh... [laughs]

**Travis:** We can't even talk about it on air, that's how messed up it is.

**Teresa:** I don't— I don't think I wanna watch it, then.

**Travis:** No, you don't!

**Teresa:** Okay. Okay. Alright.

**Travis:** Why did anyone want to? Okay.

**Teresa:** Now. And everything that the body touched, the bed linens, the sheets, whatever it was, would be burned.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I— I mean... that makes sense to me.

**Travis:** Especially with most people dying of disease.

**Teresa:** Indeed. Then... [sighs] uh, as the— the woman in charge of taking care of the person was dismissed, and the now funeral director or mortician took over, you would immediately send for the dressmaker.

**Travis:** Hmm.

**Teresa:** Uh, the tailor, because everyone needed to wear mourning clothes now.

**Travis:** Yes. Dark colors. Solid, dark colors.

**Teresa:** Uh, black crepe.

**Travis:** Black crepes.

**Teresa:** No. Crepe— crepe...

**Travis:** Black crepe.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, you could be— if you were of a certain social status, you would have them made specifically, and actually this is about the time

where the whole, like, mourning clothes meets department stores, and when you would go into a store you would see a whole section just for it.

**Travis:** Just for mourning clothes.

**Teresa:** Um, and... [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** [laughs quietly] Just— I— Burlington Big and Sad... is what I just thought.

**Teresa:** [laughs loudly] Yep.

**Travis:** In my mind's... okay.

**Teresa:** Yep, yep, yep. Um, you would be putting these on, and you would remain in these clothes for— I'll talk about specific amounts of time. Um, and then you would plan the funeral, handing out very sad cards to everyone invited. Um, and if you received these cards throughout your life, you were expected to keep a very sad scrapbook...

**Travis:** Oh, yeah.

**Teresa:** ... of all these cards.

**Travis:** "Hey, when did Doug die?"

"Wait, let me look. [page flipping noise] Ah, it was June!" [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** Indeed. And then you would start to accept the flower arrangements people would give you so that when they came to the funeral in your home it didn't smell like death.

**Travis:** Hmm, that makes sense.

**Teresa:** It smelled like flowers.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** [sighs] Okay. So... let's talk about these mourning clothes that you had to wear.

**Travis:** Okay. I'm guessing long pants. I bet shorts were out.

**Teresa:** I mean, shorts were worn—

**Travis:** No cargo shorts.

**Teresa:** —worn by, um, young boys of a certain age. But— okay, okay.

**Travis:** With the extra pockets to hold all the grief.

**Teresa:** These mourning clothes were basically marketed towards women, um, because a lot of the times, you know, especially widows, right? Had to do all of the specific etiquette so they could be seen as fine, upstanding citizens, and then remarry, because women don't have jobs, so you have to get money somewhere.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, so these outfits were dark and heavy, made of wool or discarded silk. So, like, the silk offcuts you couldn't use for other dresses. Um, because they were treated with chemicals to make the fabric very matte, and stiff, and crinkly.

**Travis:** Ugh!

**Teresa:** Um, they were expensive, and heavy, and uncomfortable, and *smelly*, right? Because they were bathed in arsenic and other harmful chemicals. Um, crepe mourning veils were known to cause acne, purple face stains from the dye, headaches, and in some cases blindness! Because—

**Travis:** At some point... somebody must've said, "We should stop doing it this way, right?"

**Teresa:** I know, right? Uh, because you wanted the clothing to not reflect any sunlight. Um, so, you know—

**Travis:** Okay. Like a vampire.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Like— like a vampire.

**Travis:** You know, I bet that's what it was.

**Teresa:** You think it is?

**Travis:** I— I mean, yeah? Maybe. That would make sense, right? To compare this idea of, like, wanting to keep all the sunlight away when someone has died, and it being a part of, like, death, and then it being like, "Uh, yeah, vampires, uh, can't go out in the sun." That's gotta be it, right?

**Teresa:** So, Queen Victoria, when Prince Albert died, wore her mourning clothes for about 40 years.

**Travis:** Long time.

**Teresa:** She had access to, you know, endless supply, right? But most people—

**Travis:** At a certain point do you think it was just a prolonged goth phase?

**Teresa:** Maybe!

**Travis:** Yeah. Maybe the first year was mourning and then she was like, "I actually just think black's my color."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "I mean, don't get me— I miss—"

**Teresa:** [continues laughing]

**Travis:** "I miss Albert, but I look great, right?"

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Um, so a widow would be expected to mourn for two years, and this was broken up into two sections.

**Travis:** 'Cause there was full mourning and half mourning, right?

**Teresa:** Exactly! Exactly.

**Travis:** I listen to a lot of detective novels set in the Victorian era—

**Teresa:** Ooh.

**Travis:** —so there's a lot about death in there, yeah.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Listen, I don't mean to brag, but I listen to books. [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** Um, and then— so, the most dedicated mourners would wear them for decades, of course, like I said, with Queen Victoria.

Uh, but the first year was full mourning. Um, that was if it was— if you were a widow, right? If it was your husband died, except if they were killed in battle, right?

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Um, you were given a little more leeway that way. Um, if you were mourning a parent, you had to wear for six months to a year. Uh, your sibling, six to eight months. Other relatives, three to six months of mourning.

**Travis:** Can you imagine if it was like your stepbrother and you're like, "Ooh, what is that. Is that five? Four months? Where am I at?"

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** "Is it March?!"

**Teresa:** You gotta do the math. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** "Where am I at on— it was my— okay, so it was my wife's cousin... what is that to me? Oh no!"

**Teresa:** Um, I don't know if it's good news. But if a child, um, under three years old died, you only had to mourn for a few weeks, because it happened a lot.

**Travis:** Ooh, yeah.

**Teresa:** Child mortality rates were bananas at this point in time, and you had to get on with making more kids.

**Travis:** Oof. Yeah.

**Teresa:** [sighs] Let's take a breath for a minute.

**Travis:** [takes a heavy breath] Okay.

**Teresa:** During this period of full mourning, uh, you were expected to wear this awful getup, and really only be visible to the people who lived in your home. You were supposed to isolate yourself from society. Um, and, you know, if you could afford that and not be seen in public, it wasn't just like, "Oh, that poor widow."

It was like, "That poor woman! I didn't know they were doing so well!"

**Travis:** Ohh!

**Teresa:** Because it was about—

**Travis:** It was kind of a show-off-y thing.



**Teresa:** It was kind of a show-off-y thing if you could be of— if you were afforded a year to stay away from society, that meant that you had a lot of money.

**Travis:** I see.

**Teresa:** Then, half mourning, the next year. You could now attend— widows could attend social events and start to wear shades of gray and lavender as well. Um, like I said, if your husband was a military man, uh, this mourning period was usually cut about in half. Uh, 'cause you had to get back out on the social scene and grab yourself another man.

**Travis:** Yeah. Get a new beau.

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** Maybe— is that just because, like, it was more honorable, and it wasn't as— I mean, if you're the wife of a military man, you just kind of have to accept that as a possibility, and it's not as... tragic? I'm trying to make sense of why... I don't know. [laughs] To encourage people to join the army? I don't know.

**Teresa:** I don't know. Um, but I think that it's pretty clear that a lot of the etiquette surrounding Victorian funerals is about showing your grief rather than feeling it.

**Travis:** Well, I mean, yeah, that's the thing. The idea that you could dictate the amount of time, one way or the other, right? That, like, for a year you are inconsolable, and then for the next year you're okay, right? It's like, maybe it's someone who feels it forever. Maybe it's someone who wears it forever 'cause they don't feel like remarrying. You know, maybe it's— they didn't like their partner at all, you know? Maybe— who knows, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I think it's worth noting here, even though we're talking about Victorian era, what, 600, 700 years ago?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Is that this idea of— I do think it's important to note, like, everybody grieves in a different way, right?

**Teresa:** Absolutely. And I— I mean, it's good to talk to somebody. It's good to, like, you know, seek therapy or counsel if you can. But the idea of trying to, uh, like, structure, trying to, like, mandate what grief should

look like is, I mean, there was probably a lot of, like, detriment to that. Of someone going, "Should I feel worse than I do?"

**Teresa:** Definitely, definitely. Um, a rather cool handicraft came out of this time period, though. Hair jewelry was very popular.

**Travis:** Oh, I've seen these in moo-seums.

**Teresa:** Indeed. Uh, well, because hair doesn't really decay, right? Um, if it— everything but the root is pretty much how it's gonna be, like, unless you burn it.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, so the wig makers, who previously were very busy making powdered wigs, those were no longer in style. So, these wig makers.

**Travis:** Now they liked unpowdered wigs.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Or cream-filled wigs!

**Teresa:** Indeed. [imitates buzzer noise?]

**Travis:** Because it's like donuts!

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Do you get it? Okay.

**Teresa:** I did get it. I did get it. Um, they would start to make very elaborate things with these pieces of hair that you could keep forever as a memento.

**Travis:** Sometimes, like, little dolls. That had, you know—

**Teresa:** Dolls, or—

**Travis:** Arms and heads and—

**Teresa:** —little brooches with scenes on them. Or, you know, you could make rings, or necklaces, like the pendants and things like that. Um, it was— it's a very interesting little craft. Um, and it is incredibly detailed.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, it's amazing. So those were very popular at the time, and, I mean, you can find 'em at antique stores and museums and things like that. Very cool!

**Travis:** Speaking of very cool, this was a great episode. Thank you.

**Teresa:** Ooh, very spooky.

**Travis:** Very spooooky! We wanna say a big thank you to Alex, our researcher, without whom we would not be able to make this show. Oh, and Rachel, our editor, without whom we would not be able to make this show.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** And I'm very excited to tell you about a new project that I am executive producing, which should be debuting Friday. Uh, what day is that? The 29th? This Friday, today, when you're hearing this.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, it's a show called *Chasing Immortality*, and I think if you liked particularly this episode, you'll be interested in it. Uh, *Chasing Immortality* is a narrative, single voice, episodic show. It doesn't matter. What it is, is it's—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Histor—

**Teresa:** How descriptive of you.

**Travis:** Yes. It's true historical stories about people who tried to find ways to cheat death. Uh, it is narrated by Tybee Diskin. It is written by Alex Rouse, our researcher. It is produced by Alex Flanders, and music by Doug Borntrager. Um, and it is spooky, and funny, and at times chilling, and—

**Teresa:** And informative!

**Travis:** And informative. Uh, it's really, really cool, uh, and I hope you enjoy it. We're releasing it independently, um, and, uh, yeah. We're really, really proud of it. You can follow the show on Twitter and Instagram @immortalitypod. Uh, and I am building the website right now, chasingimmortalitypod.com. Check it out!

Uh, speaking of, you should also check out Maximumfun.org, home to a lot of really great shows, including *Shmanners*!

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** That's the show you're listening to right now! Check it out!

**Teresa:** Also check out mcelroy.family. There's awesome stuff coming up there. Go look at it!

**Travis:** Go do it!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You know what? I'm also gonna say, just 'cause, uh, I don't know, we don't have any cool adult parties to go to 'cause we have two kids—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —if you dress up in a Halloween costume, you should tweet it @shmatterscast. Let us see your Halloween costumes. Let us pretend like we get to hang out with adults. [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** What else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art, @shmatterscast. Uh, when we do topics that we ask for questions from our listeners, that's where we get them from. Um, also thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmatters* Fanners. Join that group if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

**Travis:** And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

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

**Teresa:** [exaggerated southern accent] Manners, *Shmatters*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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