

Shmanners 483: Embroidery

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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 Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: Saturday morning.

Teresa: [laughs] Don't even talk about this.

Travis: Why?! Listen.

Teresa: Because—

Travis: Holidays! More like Holi-daze, D-A-Z-E.

Teresa: I don't need the internet to know my shame.

Travis: It's *my* shame. It's *my* shame.

Teresa: Is it?

Travis: Uh...

Teresa: I mean, both—our shared shame.

Travis: No, I'm willing, because I love you—

Teresa: Of lateness.

Travis: —I'll take 100% of the shame. Where I was like, "[strained] Uh, I'm cooking too much." And I was. Uh... [laughs]

Teresa: Even though our kids have been off school all week.

Travis: What the heck! How much time—

Teresa: This is the longest Thanksgiving break ever.

Travis: How much time do kids need to really get into the Thanksgiving spirit? You know what I mean?

Teresa: [laughs] Do you think that at some point it was like, "Okay. Thanksgiving is on Thursday, so that means we can't really have them back on Friday, but that also means that makes it a super long weekend, so people will probably not come to school on Wednesday as well."

Travis: So might as well just not do Monday and Tuesday.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: 'Cause that's the thing. I understand the thinking of, like—

Teresa: Like, what are we gonna get done if we only have a two-day week?

Travis: A lot of people travel to, like, see family on Thanksgiving. I get that. What... do you need that Monday and Tuesday for? Wednesday is the travel day. Ugh.

Teresa: I don't know, honey.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Just show movies on Monday and Tuesday like we used to!

Teresa: Our children are a joy. So.

Travis: I'm just saying that if schools are allowed to do that, we should be allowed to do that with our kids.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Where it's just like, "Yeah, man. I don't know. We needed student preparation day. And just didn't bring our kids in today." No. Hey, teachers. You work so hard. This isn't about you.

Teresa: No, it's about—

Travis: This isn't about you. And that isn't what the episode's about.

Teresa: Also, you're right.

Travis: Everybody—listen. Teachers? You should get more days off, too. There should be days where the school board has to go in and teach.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: And teachers just get, like, the whole week off.

Teresa: Yeah. We wanna call that administration teach day.

Travis: Administration teach day, yeah!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: I don't care if they just show movies, but those teachers need time off, but I also need...

Travis: As long as they have to answer questions.

Teresa: [simultaneously] My kids at school.

Travis: I don't care what they do. They just have to answer questions. I've had to answer two children's questions for a week, and I'm losing it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's mostly what I need teachers for. They're there to answer the questions. Um, along those lines, hey. This is once again a deeper, deeper side track. But Dot is way into space stuff, and has been for months. This isn't, like, a temporary fixation. She's deep into learning about planets, and exoplanets, and dwarf planets, and any celestial body that exists. And then she will ask us about them. One, it's hard to tell if it's because she doesn't know the answer, or because it's a quiz.

Teresa: [laughs] It might be a quiz.

Travis: It might be a quiz. And two, she will ask about things that I have zero concept of it. Like, she's like, "What does it mean when something—like, what makes something a potential, like, dwarf planet versus an existing dw—" and I'm like, "I don't know."

Teresa: I don't know the criteria.

Travis: And then she'll, like, list off the reasons. And I'm like, "Cool, man. You're five. And you know so much more about this than I do."

Teresa: And she keeps trying to call me Kepler.

Travis: That also happens. And talk about comets that she wants to see. She's like, "Hey. In 2028... " [laughs] "... can we stay up late in January to see a comet?"

And I'm like, "You got it, babe. And I'll put a reminder in my phone."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Like, January, 2028. Let Dot stay up late to see a comet. You got it, bud."

So, we're talking about embroidery. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: Yes. Totally different.

Travis: All of that brings us back to embroidery.

Teresa: So, maybe you, when you think about embroidery, you think about maybe your grandmother, right? Maybe something kind of old-timey. Or some kind of, like, very niche handicraft.

Travis: Ask me.

Teresa: Oh, what do you think?

Travis: I think about the patches in Dungeon Crawler Carl that he puts on his vest.

Teresa: Ooh, yeah.

Travis: To get special abilities and increases in scores. And I think about scutelliphily, which I believe is the term for making embroidered patches that I also learned from Dungeon Crawler Carl.

Teresa: I remember as a Girl Scout receiving embroidered patches. Now, those were all machine-embroidered.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Uh, because they needed to be mass produced for Girl Scouts.

Travis: I recently, in making Dungeon Crawler Carl—uh, Dungeon Crawler Carl cosplay.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: Hand-embroidered some of the patches for the cosplay. And it... is a beast.

Teresa: Yeah, it is not for the faint at heart. Um, which is another reason why—okay. We all know. You, me, the listeners. We know that I have been reading a lot of, like, Regency/Victorian romance novels.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And in this, as in real life in England at that point, to be an accomplished lady, right? One must embroider, one must play a musical instrument, perhaps sing.

Travis: [simultaneously] Yeah, dance.

Teresa: Yes, dance. Be—

Travis: Like, handwriting, right? Is that...

Teresa: Sure, correspondence.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Read extensively. Also ride, also be an accomplished hostess, right? Putting people at ease.

Travis: Hand to hand combat.

Teresa: Nope. No hand-to-hand combat.

Travis: You gotta be able to at least do basic evocation magic.

Teresa: No.

Travis: No?

Teresa: That's not what I'm talking about.

Travis: Oh, sorry. I started thinking about, like, EverQuest and World of Warcraft. Sorry.

Teresa: But embroidery—

Travis: Leathercraft.

Teresa: —and needlepoint—

Travis: Herbalism.

Teresa: —are one of the things that comes up a lot, right? 'Cause the idea is like, you have to keep your hands busy.

Travis: Yeah. So, that's what's interesting about it, right? Because when I think about these things that you've just discussed as, like... correspondence. That has a very practical—right? Because, like, yeah, man. We didn't have cell phones and internet or whatever, so correspondence was a thing that you did. Both in, like, thank you notes, invitations, just keeping in touch with people. Dancing, right?

That was a thing where it's like, everybody—if you're in, like, the upper levels of society, you're going to those things. You need to be able to do that stuff. A lot of societal, uh, observation and, like, upward mobility and stuff happened at those things.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Riding, getting to places—all these things, right? Embroidery isn't like making clothes for your kids.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Isn't like patching up—you know, isn't darning socks. It seems to be a very, like, decorative—almost like, not to say that it's bad, but like art, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Or, like, also, you know, musical instruments in there. Just, like—

Teresa: Musical instruments and watercolors or something like that.

Travis: Right. This is a thing of just like, hey, here's a performative, literally, like "Look what I made" kind of skill. Not necessarily a real—like, a practical application to it.

Teresa: Well, and so that is the very surface level of it, right? But there's also the kind of qualities that a person needs to have in order to be accomplished at embroider.

Travis: Mmm.

Teresa: Things like patience, right? Tenacity, in order to finish these kind of things.

Travis: Detail oriented.

Teresa: Detail orientation. Also, it shows that the lady has enough time to be able to sit and do the thing. They don't have other responsibilities, right?

Travis: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's a certain amount of, like, leisure demonstration that we see throughout any era you look at where it's like, "I have time to tan," right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: "I have time to, I don't know, macrame."

Teresa: That's another crafty art. Um, but—

Travis: And I want to just jump back real quick.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: When I talk about being, like, performative, and show off what you could do, in no way should anyone take that as me being, uh, judgmental of it or putting it down. I like doing crafty, "Look at this stuff, look what I can make" stuff.

Teresa: Are we not all performers, my dear?

Travis: I mean, me, yeah, 1000%.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Look at my life. Look at this stuff. Isn't it neat? Wouldn't you think my collection's complete?

Teresa: We want to be shown to have a small sort of accomplishment, right?

Travis: Yeah. Well, and I also think that there's something... and I'm sure that this at the time wasn't what 99.999% of dudes looking for a match were looking for. But I—there's something about the enthusiasm of someone who's very interested and very good at something. Like, watching them do it, and then having them show it to you, and describe to you. It's one of my favorite things. I like hearing people tell me about the things that they're very interested in.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Whether I'm interested in them or not, you know, I like the passion that comes from someone describing, like, "Ah, but this, you do this with it, and this happens."

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. As you like to explain things that you're passionate about.

Travis: Uh, over and over and over again.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. So, this is what we've got on kind of, like, the outside of society. But embroidery specifically has been, throughout history, a tool of not only recording history, but sometimes subversion...

Travis: [gasps] What?

Teresa: ... of recordings. Okay. So, let me explain.

Travis: Should we first clarify, like, in case somebody's listening, what embroidery is, versus other things?

Teresa: Um, okay. I mean... embroidery is a decorative needle art, right? It doesn't really hold together pieces of fabric. It more makes uses of different size stitches and threads and knots in order to make a picture, or a word, or a pattern.

Travis: Yes. And it differs from cross-stitch, in that—

Teresa: Which is a collection of tiny Xs.

Travis: Right. Where that follows a much more structured pattern on a grid.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And embroidery is much more... I don't wanna say freehand. But, like, uh, you know, do the lines as you need them to to make the picture.

Teresa: So, let's think about embroidery, then, as sketching, and cross-stitch as, like, pointillism.

Travis: Sure. Yes. Yeah. Nailed it.

Teresa: Yeah. So, let's do a little bit of history. The oldest surviving embroidered object was found when King Tut's tomb was extracted in 1923.

Travis: King Tut was embroidering?

Teresa: Uh, somebody for him was. The piece itself is a needlepointed cloth that dates back to 13,000 BCE.

Travis: 13,000?!

Teresa: Yep. And having—

Travis: That's a tough cloth! I got handkerchiefs that I need to throw out after, like, five or ten years of use!

Teresa: Nobody used it, I think.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: It was just—it was there, right?

Travis: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. He might've gotten the sniffles. I'm sure King Tut got the sniffles.

Teresa: He didn't use this one, though.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: He was buried with it. Um, so it was a very lavish piece, and it would've been valuable in ancient Egyptian society because of the social status was prominently displayed by how ornately you adorned yourself and your home, right? Because you were showing everyone, you know, how either you could do this thing, or you could afford to have somebody else do this thing for you.

Travis: Having embroidery was like having the impractical sports car of the ancient times.

Teresa: Sure. And Egyptians weren't the only culture who did this. Ornate needlework was uncovered in an ancient cemetery along the Peruvian coast that dated back to 300 BCE. And it's worth noting that these two examples are simply the ones that people have verified, right? There's evidence that could support embroidery being even twice as old as that, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And one of the biggest things to happen to the history of this artwork was the creation of the Silk Road, which is a 4,000-mile-long network of trading stops that connected Europe and China.

Travis: Well, suddenly you get access to much more decorative, like, higher end fabric, and thread. And, you know, there are certain cultures that focused more on, like, textiles, sewing, that as an art form versus, like, carving, or metalwork, or leatherwork, and all these things.

Teresa: And thanks to the Silk Road, right? The trading points, you were exposed to that culture, right? And so you were able to trade, and see what people were doing in other places, and maybe change your sensibilities according to what you liked or whatever.

Travis: Well, and also historically we have so many countless examples of as soon as a new culture's decorative thing, leisure thing was found, the hoity-toity, the hoi polloi, the rich and famous were like, "I want that, and I wanna make it so it's hard for other people to get it."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: "So I'm gonna send people to raise the price on it, and it's gonna cost so much to have it here, because I want to be the only one with it."

Teresa: So, this caused Chinese patterns to mix with Persian and Arabic artwork, making up things that were, like, stunning floral motifs is what we most commonly see and, like, geometric patterns. Um, and so the artwork belongs to every culture, but the name embroidery comes from French. The term originates from the word broderie, which means embellishment, or decorate.

Travis: Sure. It's almost like border.

Teresa: I mean, sure, yeah. It is a little bit like border. Um, okay. So, we have this needlecraft, right? That not only made clothing and textiles more

personalized, they also are a historical record, okay? And the oldest surviving work of embroidery isn't a little sampler, right? Or a decorative border on a jacket. It's an actual historical record.

Travis: Now, I want to say, I'm gonna correct you real quick, just a little bit.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Samplers can be historical records.

Teresa: Oh, of course.

Travis: Because growing up, my mom cross-stitched so much. Constantly. And taught me how to do it when I was, like, five, and I've been doing it ever since. And I remember very clearly, I think it's actually still up in Justin and Sydnee's house, there's a sampler that she made that, like, has the dates of, like, when her and Dad got married and stuff. And it's, like, meant to commemorate that, with lots of little apples and sheep and stuff around.

Teresa: Absolutely. I'm not saying that samplers are not historical record.

Travis: I know. I just wanted to take a second to flex what I knew.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Because it happens so rarely.

Teresa: What I'm saying is there is a very grand historical record known as the Bayou Tapestry. Or Bayo. Bayeux.

Travis: How spelled?

Teresa: There it is. B-A-Y-E-U-X.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: From 1077.

Travis: Did I just say "How spelled?" Just cut out some words and—"How spelled? How spelled?"

Teresa: [laughs] I don't know.

Travis: I've been spending too much time online.

Teresa: Um, it is a narrative embroidery that spans nine panels of linen that have been joined together to make a complete record of the Battle of Hastings. Okay. So—

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: Let's get some technical terms out of the way, okay?

Travis: Okay, do it.

Teresa: Tapestry is technically a misnomer for this piece of art, because tapestries are woven, okay?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: The—

Travis: Tapestry's a rug on a wall.

Teresa: [laughs] This tapestry is hand-stitched, okay? And they refer to it as a tapestry because it is enormous. It is 20 inches wide, and 224 feet long.

Travis: Sorry. 224 feet long?

Teresa: 224 feet long.

Travis: So it hangs... longways, right? To commemorate the battle. So it would be, like, a foot and eight inches, and then...

Teresa: Down the hall and to the right, and—

Travis: ... almost—

Teresa: [laughs] Through the next bedroom.

Travis: —almost, like, two thirds of a football field.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Also, side note, it's one of my favorite things, if you talk to anybody who uses the metric system, and they're like "Yeah, we can compare it to, like, this and this and this."

And all Americans have is like, "How many football fields is it?"

Teresa: [laughs] Anyway, so it normally hangs in a museum in Normandy, France, although I believe it is on loan to the British Museum at the moment.

Travis: Sure, what isn't? "On loan," quote, unquote.

Teresa: Well—

Travis: At least that's from Britain.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, these Anglo-Saxon artisans kicked things up a notch by creating a blend of gold and silver thread, made to be specifically stitched into velvet.

Travis: Ooh-la-la! Would mind wiping my nose with that!

Teresa: So, now these specific—this specific form of embroidery with these threads was only to be used for the most sacred objects, and was referred to as Opus Anglicanum.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: To properly describe their luxuriousness.

Travis: I love that. Um, Mr. Holland's Opus Anglicanum.

Teresa: [laughs] And these pieces were so coveted in the 1300s that the Pope owned 113 of them.

Travis: What didn't the Pope own back then?

Teresa: What didn't the Pope own? And so they often included precious metals or stones in the embroidery, making it obviously more luxurious and more pricey, and more powerful. Right?

Travis: Bigger, stronger, faster, Pope-er.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. So, that's the first form.

Travis: And now, a thank you note for one of our sponsors.

[theme music plays]

Travis: It's... the holidays. This simply cannot be denied. You're looking for that perfect gift for anyone in your life. Maybe a grandparent, maybe a parent, maybe a loved one, maybe an enemy that you're trying to patch things up with. You know?

Teresa: Or, like we were talking about for embroidery, preserving something for future generations.

Travis: Indeed. Why not check out Storyworth? Huh? Because Storyworth memoirs can help you give gifts to just about anyone, even yourself. Maybe you want to make a present for yourself. You're worth it.

Teresa: I would love to have a record of some of my grandparents' escapades. I think that this would've been a really fun thing to have had before they passed.

Travis: I'd love to have a record of my dad's ice-capades.

Teresa: Hm!

Travis: When he used to compete on the circuit? Oh.

Teresa: Get him a Storyworth!

Travis: Okay. Each week, Storyworth emails a loved one a question prompt, and they can either write a story over email, or record it over the phone for Storyworth to transcribe, which is so good, because there are lots of people that's like, "Sit down and write something." It's like, "Ehh, I don't want to."

It's like, "Talk."

"Yeah, you got it."

Teresa: Mm-hmm!

Travis: And after a year, Storyworth compiles your loved one's stories and photos into a beautiful keepsake hardcover book. And this year, they added a bunch of new features to make storytelling even easier. They've got new book designs, vibrant color printing, and they've printed over a million books and preserved 35 million family stories since their founding 13 years ago. And, they have 48,000 five-star reviews on Trustpilot. That's incredible.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And, you know, I think about this a lot now as we get older and, like, our kids get older, and then by extension, like, their grandparents and our grandparents and family members and stuff, that there are all of these stories that just kind of get lost to time.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: About, like, what happened to us when we were younger, to our parents when they were younger, all this stuff that now I especially am like, I wish I knew more about, like, my great-grandparents. I wish I knew, like—had stories to, like, pass those things on. And that's what Storyworth is for. It's perfect.

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Okay.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: We're back.

Teresa: We're back. We are introducing one of those newfangled embroideries that you were talking about, the new craze. Here we have Catherine of Aragon, who rolls up to marry Henry VIII, right?

Travis: Yeah. She's one of those.

Teresa: One of those.

Travis: One of those people. One of those... seven? How many were there? Eight?

Teresa: Something like that.

Travis: How many wives did that guy have? He had a bunch.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. Anyway. Alright. She comes from Spain, and there was a particular style of embroidery that was very a la mode in Spain. I don't know, how do you say "of the time" in Spanish? I don't know.

Travis: Avant-garde? No.

Teresa: Nope. [laughs] Whatever is Spanish for a la mode. [laughs]

Travis: A la mode is with ice cream, isn't it?

Teresa: Of the time is what that means.

Travis: So I'm having ice cream of the time?

Teresa: [laughs] It just means this is popular right now.

Travis: That's all pie a la mode means? Popular pie?

Teresa: [laughs] Yeah.

Travis: No!

Teresa: This popular style of pie with ice cream.

Travis: So it's like—it's like soup du jour.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But it came to mean with ice cream?

Teresa: In the time. Like, in this popular fashion, a la mode. But now—

Travis: That's ridiculous!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Are you—are you joshing me right now?

Teresa: No!

Travis: You pulling my leg?

Teresa: No!

Travis: So it's literally like if someone said, "Mmm! I'll have the soup du jour." And it was just, like, soup with whipped cream on it?

Teresa: [laughs] Soup du jour is of the day. A la mode is—

Travis: Yeah, and a la mode is of the time.

Teresa: —of the time.

Travis: It's the same thing! But means two—

Teresa: Okay, not—not just—okay. I'm trying to think of something more literal. In—in this fashion. A la mode. In this fashion.

Travis: I'm just disappointed, I guess.

Teresa: Don't be. It's not my fault. Anyway. The time was... [laughs] I can't even get back. Okay.

Travis: I'm just—I'm so upset right now.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I've been lied to.

Teresa: No one has been lying to you! You just didn't know.

Travis: A la moda, or de moda, is the Spanish version of a la mode.

Teresa: Okay. Monochromatic black embroidery, okay? So it would be embellished on cuffs, and collars, and bodices, right? So these things were normally white. They were embroidered with black thread. So the blackwork embroidery became all the rage, right? Because it would showcase extremely complex and elegant patterns.

Travis: They talk about this in Dungeon Crawler Carl!

Teresa: Oh yeah?

Travis: Yeah! Donut gets so excited when she sees Spanish blackwork.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. So, it really showed how skillful the artisan was, right? And how expensive the fabric was, meant you were willing to pay and had this means, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so, this was not the only trend to take over in embroidered art. Mesoamerican huipil is a traditional indigenous garment worn by women in Mexico and Central America. It's a loose-fitting tunic made from two or three rectangular pieces of fabric joined together with ribbons or embroidery. And everyone wore them, and the embroidery that was stitched on your specific one was a marker of your identity. And you can see how these patterns shift and change over time, especially after the colonialization of these areas.

Travis: What was this one called?

Teresa: Huipil.

Travis: Can you spell it?

Teresa: H-U-I-P-I-L.

Travis: Oh, that's gorgeous.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, cool! So, keep in mind that all of these examples were completely stitched by hand, right? That 200-foot tapestry? Done by hand.

Travis: Probably not just one set of hands, though, right?

Teresa: Probably not. Not that one. But most often, each single garment was a product of one person's time.

Travis: Sure. I mean, like—I mean, maybe it was. The Sistine—well, I think the Sistine Chapel he might've had help.

Teresa: Coloring in his lines and stuff, maybe.

Travis: "Hey, go back over this for me. Just kinda clean it up a little bit."

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. And then we have, um, the industrial revolution, right? With machine embroidery. We have in 1804 the Jacquard loom wowed the world with its ability to create complex patterns through a punch card system. Which, by the way, would go on to inspire data systems like telegraphs and computers.

Travis: Sure, I've heard of those. Now, it's always so interesting, right? Because this is a thing we talk about a lot when we talk about, like, these very exclusive, like, handmade, very expensive, very ornate things.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Where the trade-off of kind of losing the artisan approach to it is it does become more available to more people.

Teresa: Yes. Okay. So, now that we've done a pretty comprehensive history, let's talk about the subversion.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Of embroidery and stitching.

Travis: Use—use the fabric... to stitch through the thread!

Teresa: No, not that kind of subversion.

Travis: [simultaneously] No, okay, okay.

Teresa: So, because this is often written off by the patriarchal society as, quote, "not a real art," because it is often—

Travis: We live in a patriarchal society?!

Teresa: Is often—

Travis: This is the first I'm hearing about this! What?!

Teresa: Let me finish!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Considered a woman's work. Right? Um, that meant that many men, especially men in power, couldn't even conceive of the sewing as a communication tool.

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: Maybe you needed to share sentiments that couldn't be carved in stone or published in a newspaper, or even written in a letter, right? For example, Mary, Queen of Scots, when she was imprisoned, all of her written correspondence was very closely monitored. And, you know, things were redacted, or, you know, they were, um—what do I want to say?

Travis: Censored?

Teresa: Censored, yes. And so, a lot of her frustration that we know of now, right? Was communicated through her embroidery.

Travis: So it, because it was considered so unimportant, right? So, just, frippery...

Teresa: Right.

Travis: ... it could become very important to the communication of it, because who's checking it, right? Who cares?

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: You're just sewing some stuff. [blows raspberry]

Teresa: Exactly. And so even though she was rightly frustrated and—

Travis: Yeah, I would say so!

Teresa: —and angered.

Travis: I'd say she's allowed to be angry.

Teresa: Indeed. She had a particular fondness for embroidering animals, and recurring characters include an orange cat with a crown of flowers, thought to be Queen Elizabeth.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And a grey mouse, thought to be Mary, Queen of Scots.

Travis: Oh! And not only, I think Queen Elizabeth had, like, orangy hair.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? But also, like, a cat and mouse thing, right? Of like, "I'm just trying to survive, and she's playing with me."

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Um, in another example, a woman named Annie Parker who lived in Victorian England, she was arrested over 400 times—

Travis: What?!

Teresa: —and spent a good chunk of her life in horrific workhouse conditions, or behind bars.

Travis: She was arrested 400 times?!

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: 400?

Teresa: For things like public drunkenness.

Travis: Which men did all the time.

Teresa: Exactly. And for... we know now that she was suffering from addiction. Um, and so a lot of her, like, quote, "public nuisance" arrests were a result of her struggle with addiction.

Travis: But almost certainly heightened because she was a woman, right?

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: Where there were dudes out there just getting rowdy 24-sev.

Teresa: Yeah. But in her time, served either in the workhouses or in jail, she would crochet and do her needlework. And she began to be known for these pieces that she would give to staff and prisoners, and many of them contained Bible verses, and many of them were stitched out of her own hair.

Travis: Okay! Huh.

Teresa: The Victorians loved hair art.

Travis: They did. They made hair jewelry, too.

Teresa: They definitely did. This was not—it was—I wouldn't say it was commonplace. But—

Travis: But it wasn't seen as, like, freaky.

Teresa: It wasn't weird, no. It wasn't weird at all. It happened a lot. Hair art is something that they did. Not only as a Victorian woman were you expected to grow and take care of your crowning glory, right? Um, using it to make art and stitching like this was something that people did in order to share pieces of themselves with other people.

Travis: I think that this is—we've joked about it on *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* multiple times. But I think it's important to know that, to then understand the O. Henry story, uh, of the Gift of the Magi.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because it's like, he sells his watch, and she sells her hair. And it's like, yeah, she can regrow that hair. He can't regrow his watch. But at this time, like, a woman's hair was almost—I don't want to say sacred. But, like, her responsibility to keep.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: To upkeep.

Teresa: Dr. Isabella Rosner, author of *Stitching Freedom: Embroidery and Incarceration*, writes that while some of this hair work could've been practical, she also believes it's about a personal sort of craft. Um, as though she were offering a piece of herself to maybe her higher power, or showcasing each moment behind bars that maybe took a piece of something from her, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: There's a lot of stuff like that. Um, here's another example. There is something called Ashley's sack. It is a rare and priceless piece of history, um, of an embroidered narrative about enslavement. It's a small bag, about maybe the size of a—like, a half pillowcase, maybe a little bigger than that.

And on it is written, "My great grandmother Rose, mother of Ashley, gave her this sack when she was sold at age nine in South Carolina. It held a tattered dress, three handfuls of pecans, and a braid of Rose's hair. It was told her to be filled with my love always, and she never saw her again. Ashley is my grandmother. Signed Ruth Middleton, 1921."

Travis: Wow. Before we wrap up...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I want to clarify something. Or I guess elucidate? Illuminate. Tell. I want to tell people something. So, I, like I said early on in the episode, I did a little bit of, like, making handmade patches for this thing. I've done cross-stitching. I've done knitting. Um, I haven't done crochet, but if you ask Bebe, I have? I don't know. I've tried to explain to her multiple times which

ones I've done and which ones I haven't, and she's like, "You've done crochet."

And I'm like, "I haven't."

Teresa: I've done—I've done crochet. [laughs quietly]

Travis: And I'm like, "No, I haven't. I haven't."

She's like, "You have."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I don't know what's happening. But the thing is with most of these—a lot with a lot of crafts, but I think specifically a lot of, like, um... maybe needle... I don't know if I can say needlecraft 'cause, like, knitting and crochet.

Teresa: You can say handicraft.

Travis: Yeah. They're deceptively complicated.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? Because you look at these... knitting's a great example, where you would look at it and be like, "Knit and purl. Got it." Right? I knit and purl. It's two things. Done.

And it's like, that would be to me the same as someone going, "Painting? Easy. Brush, paint, put it on there." Right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Or like when someone says of acting, like, "You just memorize the lines." And it's like, no. Right? Dancing, just move your feet. Right? These things of like, it's not the mechanical action that is inherently complicated. It is the technique. It's the...

Teresa: Artistry.

Travis: It's the artistry of it, right? That is what makes those things amazing. So when you see embroidery that is like, "Wow," right? Like, this is taking my breath away. Especially, you know, talking about that 220-some-foot thing, right? It's not like somebody just sat down and said, "I can do this." Right?

Part of the thing that makes art like that so impressive is the layer of knowledge you have of the technique and skill that went into it. Right? So it's like, yeah, the finished picture, the finished thing is gorgeous. But it also tells a deeper story of someone committed to making that thing.

Teresa: Exactly. And I think that we've seen that with, like, these kind of historical records through embroidery. We see different, like, hidden messages used to communicate things. People, like we said, who were incarcerated, communicating with the outside world. Um, people who were enslaved keeping records of their own personal lives.

Um, again, like, there's other stories of Japanese internment camps making quilts and passing messages back and forth. All of these things, like, I talked about kind of the subversion of embroidery being a means of communicating people's stories to the outside world, where maybe other ways of communication were stifled.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: And I think that that communication not only is, like, secret messages, right? But also of their work, their commitment, their dedication to the craft, and their artistry and technique.

Travis: Especially during a time, multiple time, a long period of history where writing and especially publishing was not something you could just do.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? And so the idea of making sure that history wasn't exclusively being told by the people who had control of writing and publishing, and finding different means to do that, and to pass on information. Be it that or, like, a family tree, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm, absolutely.

Travis: That someone would work on and sew into, or write into, whatever. I think that it's a deeply underappreciated art form, that hopefully is a little more appreciated by the time you finish this episode, which is right now. Hey, everybody!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Thank you so much for listening. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we couldn't have done this episode. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not have done this episode. And thank you to you, for listening. Uh, each one of you is a stitch in the beautiful tapestry of Shmanners.

Teresa: Aww.

Travis: Thank you. If you're listening to this before the 6th, on December 6th we're doing Candlenights in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia, 7 PM at the Keith Albee Theater. You can get tickets at bit.ly/candlenights2025, and all the proceeds from those tickets will go to Harmony House in our hometown.

But if you're listening to this after the 6th, or if you're not able to make it to Huntington, good news! We are filming that Candlenights show, and we will be streaming it starting December 19th through January 4th. Um, and you can also get streaming tickets, or your in-person live show tickets will include a streaming ticket. Once again, bit.ly/candlenights2025.

Um, Champions Grove packages are still on sale at www.championsgrove.com. It's a weekend-long gaming event that I host at Ravenwood Castle in Hocking Hills, Ohio. Bring out a bunch of fun people,

play games in a castle, you'll love it. Go check that out.
www.championsgrove.com.

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. We also thank Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

And as always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms, your romance novel suggestions. Please send those to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every one.

Travis: I'm gonna throw in there too, cozy, like, murder-mystery. If you have something, uh...

Teresa: 'Cause those are your favorite.

Travis: Those are my favorite. Agatha Christie-esque. Uh, what's the one that we listened to? Death Comes to Marlow? Something like that. I love the idea of just like, some folks being like, "There's a mystery here!" And going around and, like, "This is—we're gonna get everybody in a parlor and be like, was it you?"

Love that. Love that. Give me more of that. Um, and that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

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

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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