

## Shmanners 501: Texas Guinan Part 1

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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:** Good morning!

**Teresa:** Good morning.

**Travis:** [sings] It's Shmanners in the morning!

**Teresa:** Oh, I didn't know if you were gonna actually sing that song that you attested—

**Travis:** The one that went, "Shmanners in the morning, Shmanners in the evening, Shmanners has overtime."

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** [sings] When you got Shmanners on a podcast, you can have Shmanners anytime!

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** That one?

**Teresa:** Yeah, delicious.

**Travis:** Isn't it weird in that song—

**Teresa:** [chuckles].

**Travis:** I don't even know if they still use that jingle for pizza bagels, but they separate evening and supper time like it's the 1840s.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** You know, for—

**Teresa:** When we used to take—

**Travis:** For when you sup!

**Teresa:** Supper at 10.

**Travis:** [in a silly voice] "You can have—honey, did you hear about the latest pizza bagel? We can have it for luncheon!"

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** "When we get back from the fox hunt, we can have pizza on a bagel!"

**Teresa:** Uh-huh.

**Travis:** "You know, honey, how before, pizza was limited."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** "To only the evening. But now, we can have pizza for brunch."

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** "With the queen!"

**Teresa:** We went to a birthday party for one of our cousins, and the pizza bagels were there, and Bebe lost her mind.

**Travis:** Have you guys heard about these things?

**Teresa:** She ate like 10 pizza bagels. [chuckles]

**Travis:** "Mom, according to the science, I can now eat pizza anytime."

**Teresa:** And I was like—

**Travis:** They've done studies!

**Teresa:** I was like, "Is that all you've eaten today?" She's like, "Yes."

**Travis:** And it's all you have to eat.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** They should change the song to when you got pizza on a bagel, you can eat pizza every time.

**Teresa:** All the time.

**Travis:** All the time. Hi.

**Teresa:** Hi. [chuckles]

**Travis:** That's not what we're talking about today. We're not talking about the etiquette of pizza bagels. Maybe that'll be a special for our 1000<sup>th</sup> episode, all about—

**Teresa:** Oh, wow.

**Travis:** How you—

**Teresa:** I don't want to make promises about our 1000<sup>th</sup> episode—

**Travis:** The proper etiquette about eating pizza anytime.

**Teresa:** With a knife and fork.

**Travis:** Have we—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** If you ate pizza bagels with a knife and fork... I'd kick you out of the house.

**Teresa:** You would shoot it across the room.

**Travis:** It would be so little, first of all.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] And then when you sliced it go "pew!"

**Travis:** *Pew!*

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** But we're not talking about any of that. What are we talking about today?

**Teresa:** Okay, we are talking—we have a biography today.

**Travis:** Okay. About me?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Never.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** It's never about me.

**Teresa:** About a larger-than-life persona by the name of Texas Guinan.

**Travis:** I saw this name!

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** On the doc.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** And I wasn't certain if it was a person or not. Texas threw me.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** I know nothing about this person.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** It sounds like almost a cool like poker persona. Or like—

**Teresa:** Sure, yeah.

**Travis:** Like you would see in like a Robert Redford, Paul Newman movie, either, like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Or like, oh, now, the—heh, the Sting. I got there.

**Teresa:** Oh, you did.

**Travis:** Took me a while.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I went from The Hustle to the Snitch to The Sting, and I got there.

**Teresa:** You got there.

**Travis:** But it's none of those, right?

**Teresa:** It's none of those.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Texas was a person.

**Travis:** Okay, so far so good. Checkmark!

**Teresa:** But a lot of the things about this person may or may not be true.

**Travis:** I love this. Wait, what time period?

**Teresa:** The '20s. 1920s.

**Travis:** Thank you for clarifying. Because we are—

**Teresa:** I know. We could be, but not this.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Perhaps Texas was born on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1884, to horse ranchers in Waco, Texas.

**Travis:** Okay, what is Texas' pronouns? We haven't established.

**Teresa:** She.

**Travis:** She. Okay, great. I didn't want to have to keep saying Texas over and over again—

**Teresa:** Oh, okay, well, I was saying Texas because I'm not exactly sure how to pronounce the last name.

**Travis:** No, that's fine.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** We can color Texas. But without the use of pronouns, we would just have to keep saying the word Texas over and over again, until it stopped—and already it's lost a lot of meaning to me, not just today, but over the years. [chuckles]

**Teresa:** Okay. [chuckles] Well, all right. I tried to find the pronunciation of the last name, and I heard both, either Gwee-nan or Guinan.

**Travis:** And do you feel that your choice of Guinan is perhaps impacted by your love of Star Trek: Next Generation?

**Teresa:** You know, I hadn't even thought of that.

**Travis:** Because that's Whoopi Goldberg's character—

**Teresa:** That is. That is.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. So, I'm just going to say Texas.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Because that might have been her name.

**Travis:** Wait, what?

**Teresa:** Perhaps her full name was Mary Louise Cecilia Guinan, or Gwee-nan, but everyone who knew her probably called her Mamie.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** She might have been one of four children, and all of them living active lives on the ranch.

**Travis:** She did exist, though, right?

**Teresa:** Learning cowboy skills.

**Travis:** Like in Yellowstone.

**Teresa:** Yeah, kind of.

**Travis:** So this is like a real-life Yellowstone?

**Teresa:** Not quite.

**Travis:** Oh, thank god.

**Teresa:** Also, was talented at marksmanship and singing.

**Travis:** Two great things—that's like Annie Oakley. I don't know if Annie Oakley actually sang in real life or if that's just Annie Get Your Gun.

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

**Travis:** I don't know either.

**Teresa:** But maybe in 1898, when she was probably 14, her parents could have sent her to the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago.

**Travis:** This is fun, because we never get into real life fan fiction, which is what this is.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Now, in my version, she was 12 feet tall with robot arms.

**Teresa:** Well, what we do know is that Texas did get a gig in a touring troupe that specialized in "Wild West entertainment."

**Travis:** Okay, so this is a big thing, for anybody who doesn't know like, during this period of time when the American West was like established as a thing but not "settled."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** You know? Everybody wanted to know like, what's it like being a cowboy, being, you know, a prospector? Being—

**Teresa:** And it was highly romanticized, even then.

**Travis:** Yeah. And so, you had Wild Bill Hickok and these like cowboy shows. Not—I—no, was about to say not unlike. But in the vein of, like we have rodeos now that like tour the country. But it was not that. It was a much more... theatricized? Is that a word?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Anyways, a theater version.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Of that, where it was more of like a pageant—

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Than anything. And racist. There was a lot of Native American, I don't even want to say the word, representation. Some—

**Teresa:** Stereotypes.

**Travis:** Stereotypes and yeah, very much—

**Teresa:** Fabrications. [chuckles]

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Not in a flattering way. So, just to jump back—

**Teresa:** Uh-huh.

**Travis:** Because you mentioned her name.

**Teresa:** Uh-huh.

**Travis:** And they may have called her Mamie.

**Teresa:** Maybe.

**Travis:** But... Mamie maybe.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Maybe Mamie.

**Travis:** So call me Mamie. But at no point did you say Texas. Was that like a nickname that she picked up?

**Teresa:** So—

**Travis:** Because I talked about like a poker player or like a pool player, and it's like being called like the Cincinnati kid, right?

**Teresa:** Right, yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, okay, this woman carefully crafted legends about herself to support her own kind of mythos, right? So, all of that early life stuff... probably made-up.

**Travis:** But I'll say this, anybody who has gone to college with people that they didn't grow up with, and has tried to do this for themselves—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** It's not easy. So, the fact that she was successful at it is really telling.

**Teresa:** I think it helped that it was the turn of the century. And so, people could pretty much go wherever they wanted and not be like traceable.

**Travis:** Yeah, not as many people were using Facebook in the 1920s.

**Teresa:** Not at all. Probably her parents were grocers, who lived in an actual town and not on a ranch. They may have gotten—

**Travis:** Wrangling up produce.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] They may have gotten lightly into ranching, in a stint where they were living in Colorado. But there aren't really any facts about that.

**Travis:** Light ranching is just like raising chinchillas.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Is it?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** What about alpacas? Lamas?

**Travis:** No, that's full ranching.

**Teresa:** That's full ranching.

**Travis:** Because they're big.

**Teresa:** Oh! Okay.

**Travis:** With light ranching, you can have a tiny barn, and a tiny paddock.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And like, tie—everything's tiny. A tiny field of wheat for the chinchillas. But when you get to full-sized animals, you need big stuff. You know what I mean? The best part, the tiny livestock trailers for the chinchillas that you can hook up.

**Teresa:** The tiny bales of hay.

**Travis:** Yeah, you can hook it up to like a power wheel, and just drive the chinchillas down to market. It's great. I'm picturing it, and it makes me really happy.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Why chinchillas? They—

**Travis:** It's fun to say.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay.

**Travis:** It's a fu—I could say gerbils. I could say guinea pigs.

**Teresa:** Guinea pigs, I think, would be more apropos to this, because chinchillas are dust-loving, not actual rodents.

**Travis:** But what's a funner word to say? Guinea pig. Chinchilla.

**Teresa:** I mean—

**Travis:** Chinchilla, you have to smile when you say it. Try it. Try to frown while you say chinchilla.

**Teresa:** Chinchilla.

**Travis:** See? It doesn't really work.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Okay, so—

**Travis:** This is going to be a long one if I keep interrupting.

**Teresa:** Yeah, it sure is.

**Travis:** Oh, did I say that out loud?

**Teresa:** [laughs] So, I—it is universally agreed that the thing that we know about Texas is that she was a sparkling, gorgeous con artist.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** I love this.

**Teresa:** We have the Wild West shows. We know this because listings on playbills and posters and newspaper articles, okay?

**Travis:** Real quick, I want to jump in to say, whenever we talk about like the people in like the 1920s, 1930s, four—you know, this kind of pre... I would say 1980s, right? People reinvented themselves to build out like a celebrity persona.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** That still happens now.

**Teresa:** I mean, yes, but it's more kind of like corporate.

**Travis:** Yeah, and—

**Teresa:** Like you go to a place, and they make it for you, and like—

**Travis:** And it's a lot smaller scale, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Nobody's like, "Yeah, I grew up on the side of a mountain, raised by bears," or whatever, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** But there is a—still a lot more like, you know, "I'm just from humble beginnings." And then you find out like, "Wait, didn't your grandfather like own this big oil company?" And it's like, "Yeah, but we only had three mansions." Right, like that kind of thing?

**Teresa:** It's very reminiscent of that scene in Chicago, the press conference.

**Travis:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:** Where Billy is making up all of her like—she moved here to become a nun and her parents, she had lost them to, what is it, gambling and liquor? Or I don't know what it was. Anyway, so, once she gets to New York City, we start to really be able to keep track of her, okay? But she still is quoted as saying, "Never let facts stand in the way of your narrative."

**Travis:** I feel like that is a paraphrase of like a Mark Twain quote or a like Oscar Wilde of like, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story."

**Teresa:** Yeah, something like that.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. When she arrived in New York, this is where she started going by the name Texas, right? Because she's—

**Travis:** Powerful.

**Teresa:** Crafting this persona as like a Wild West performer, right?

**Travis:** Probably really amped up an accent too—

**Teresa:** Probably.

**Travis:** I was just talking about Justin—with Justin and Griffin about this the other day, because we had somebody here like doing some work on a system in the house. And I said, "Whenever a service person comes into your guys' house to do work on something, do you find yourself sounding more West Virginian than normal?" And they're like, "Oh, absolutely."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Just really— "Yeah, man, I don't know! Yeah—"

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** "I'll tell you what I think it is."

**Teresa:** [titters] She claimed in one interview in 1910 with the San Francisco Call, that her father was "the first white child ever seen in Waco."

**Travis:** I don't believe that.

**Teresa:** I don't believe it either.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** That's probably one of those things that even back then someone would say, and the interviewer was like thinking like, "I don't believe that, but I do want to write that in the story, so I'm not going to question it."

**Teresa:** In New York is when she meets theater critic Julian Johnson, who becomes a lifelong collaborator and enabler.

**Travis:** Okay?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** There were rumors that maybe they were married, maybe they were divorced, whatever. There's no like legal...

**Travis:** Well...

**Teresa:** There's no legal like—

**Travis:** One of those would have to happen for the other one to happen, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah.

**Travis:** That's not like a either/or. Either they were married or divorced.

[both chuckle]

**Teresa:** Either they were married and they stayed married, or they weren't married, or they got married and divorced. I don't know.

**Travis:** I don't know either.

**Teresa:** There's no legal trail.

**Travis:** They might have gotten married six times, gotten divorced seven. Who knows?

**Teresa:** You can't prove it legally.

**Travis:** Then they weren't married!

**Teresa:** I don't know? These things, you know, the 1910s, crazy times.

**Travis:** Yeah, I guess everything was on paper then and you could sneeze and lose the documents.

**Teresa:** [laughs] It's true. All right, so, what she wanted to do is get herself out of the chorus. Okay? So, Texas was trying to give herself something competitive and marketable in vaudeville and New York city theater.

**Travis:** Okay?

**Teresa:** She had the persona of—she had like a down-home American story.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** And she had like this kind of like beautiful talent, like plucked from obscurity kind of thing.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right?

**Travis:** A good narrative.

**Teresa:** She landed the female lead in a stage production of Simple Simon Simple.

**Travis:** Okay. I don't know that at all.

**Teresa:** And it went pretty well, until supposedly she accidentally shot herself on stage.

**Travis:** Oh, bummer!

**Teresa:** Here's the thing about—

**Travis:** And that ends our story.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** Because she continued working, so she couldn't have been very hurt if that indeed did happen.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Because there's no lapse in her resume here.

**Travis:** Okay. Maybe it was just a light shooting.

**Teresa:** Probably—

**Travis:** Just a minor... just a—just a little, just a technical shooting.

**Teresa:** There is a newspaper article that corroborates that she shot herself in the side, but also, it points out that when Texas proceeded to claim that she was not only able to finish her song with the bullet in her side, but also rallied backstage and came back to finish the entire show.

**Travis:** Probably not. Probably not.

**Teresa:** Probably not.

**Travis:** Probably not.

**Teresa:** It's very difficult to separate the fact from the fiction.

**Travis:** I also—listen, obviously, all of—

**Teresa:** She said facetiously. [chuckles]

**Travis:** All of my knowledge on this comes from accidentally watching a lot of CSI.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

**Travis:** In like the 2000, and like 2003, or whatever, when TiVo was still a thing. And I axe—I would come home from work at Best Buy—I guess this would have been 2007. But anyways, it's not important. The side, not a lot to stop a bullet there. So, that would have been a—what we in the CSI business call a through and through.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** So, there wouldn't have been like—that would have been just like a hole through her side.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Even if it was just grazing. It's not like a, "I'm just going to keep going. The bullet's in my gut." Anyways.

**Teresa:** All right.

**Travis:** I'm not a medical expert.

**Teresa:** We're up to 1908. She received praise for her performance in the Gibson Girl Review, and placed an advertisement in the newspaper at this time, offering \$1,000 for anyone who would write her the next big hit song. Now in 1908, \$1,000 had the purchasing power of \$35,000 today.

**Travis:** Oh, wow.

**Teresa:** So, probably not actually going to give somebody \$1,000.

**Travis:** But a good story!

**Teresa:** A good story!

**Travis:** I bet that there was like some like fine print of like paid out from the proceeds of the song.

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** You know what I mean?

**Teresa:** That would be smart.

**Travis:** Where it was like over the—over the course of the song's like time, you will earn \$1,000.

**Teresa:** Yeah, that's a good one.

**Travis:** That's what I would do, because I'm a real sleazy record guy.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Okay. So, at this point, she's a soprano vocalist, and is in several productions, including *The Gay Musician*, *The Hoyden*, and *The Lone Star*. Okay? We're up to 1910. This is the year she achieved national stardom, appearing in a multi-year touring production of a show called *The Kissing Girl*.

**Travis:** Every time I hear about like the name of productions from like the 1900s, it sounds, and I guess it's just because they're so identifiably of a genre, but it always sounds like this is a bit. These are fake names.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Made up for like a comedy sketch, where it was like, "I was in *The Gay Musician* and *The Kissing Girl*!"

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** You know? And like Doug's Ladies. You know, it's like==

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Okay. Did you make all of these up? Are they real?

**Teresa:** I don't think that many of these shows had the staying power they were hoping for.

**Travis:** Well, a lot of them were reviews, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah.

**Travis:** It was just like this dude wrote 12 songs, you know? And then we—it wasn't like there was no story to them. There was no...

**Teresa:** Or very loosely storied.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Usually, the girl plays like an actress, and she's doing these songs or something, right?

**Travis:** Yeah. Imagine this, it's like we're doing a show to perform these songs, and that's the story.

**Teresa:** That's the story.

**Travis:** If you can—if you can suspend your disbelief long enough to pretend like you're watching a show.

**Teresa:** Yes. So, we get up to 1913, where she's working as one of the headliners in a production of The Passing Show. I haven't heard of that one either. But she was doing very well at this point. She was highly recognizable. So, she licensed her name and image to be used by WC Cunningham for a trendy weight loss plan. That turned out to be a scam.

**Travis:** No way!

**Teresa:** No way. [chuckles]

**Travis:** In what, 1913? A weight loss plan that was a scam? No!

**Teresa:** She was the poster girl for these advertisements that said that this program helped her lose like 70 pounds, right? And it's possible that she saw the paycheck and she was like, 'Yeah, sounds good.' [chuckles] Right?

**Travis:** I'm sorry, excuse me, 70 pounds?

**Teresa:** I know, right? That's like half a person at this point.

**Travis:** In 1910?!

**Teresa:** Yeah. So, it's possible that she tied her name to the faulty project on accident.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Right? But investigative journalists—

**Travis:** That's what I would have said too!

**Teresa:** At the time exposed that she knowingly acted as a shill for a scammy diet plan, right? And defrauded the public in this way. So, the Postal Service looked into it—

**Travis:** The Postal Service?!

**Teresa:** I know.

**Travis:** The *Postal Service*?!

**Teresa:** And they were convinced of Texas' swindling. And the Postmaster General—

**Travis:** *What?*!

**Teresa:** Quietly—

**Travis:** Why was he involved?!

**Teresa:** [chuckles] And quickly acted—

**Travis:** Was it through the mail?! Plea—at least, it had to have been through the mail. Or else, was it just that the Postmaster General was like, "You know what? I'm feeling very passionate about this right now. I'm going to investigate."

**Teresa:** He prohibited her from receiving any mail.

**Travis:** That was a punishment you could do?!

**Teresa:** I guess so.

**Travis:** You're not allowed to get mail anymore!

**Teresa:** Yes, well, because a lot of things came through the mail. Like, if we're talking about paper paychecks or correspondence with your lawyers.

**Travis:** I've never thought of that as a punishment before. That's incredible!

**Teresa:** I mean, it would be like today. Somebody saying, "Okay, you did a bad, and now we are taking all of your electronics. You cannot use your phone—"

**Travis:** You're grounded!

**Teresa:** Your computer, nothing to communicate with the outside world except person to person.

**Travis:** I need a moment to recover from this. How about a word from another Max Fun show?

**Teresa:** Okay.

[theme music plays]

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[break]

**John:** Sleep is important, but it's difficult sometimes. I'm John Moe. On *Sleeping with Celebrities*, famous people help conk you out by talking in soothing voices about unimportant things. Maria Bamford on parking.

**Maria:** I parked in a bus stop. That's just not right. I am not a bus.

**John:** Roxane Gay on airports.

**Roxane:** My favorite airport is Indianapolis. It has a really smart layout.

**John:** Alan Tudyk on yardsticks.

**Alan:** You hand somebody a yardstick, yardsticks become part of the family.

**John:** Granted, it's a weird idea, but it's lots of fun and it works. Listen wherever you get podcasts.

[break]

**Travis:** Okay, I've thought about it.

**Teresa:** Yeah?

**Travis:** That's devastating.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** The more you describe this, just by changing—like by modernizing a lot of this, you could be talking about like a TikTok influencer who built out a whole story—

**Teresa:** Yes, absolutely!

**Travis:** Of themselves—

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** And like then like partnered with a brand to like—and then people were like, "Hm, this seems like a scam." And they were like, "I had no idea!" And everyone was like, "They did know."

**Teresa:** They did know. [chuckles]

**Travis:** So they're banned from TikTok, now they're banned from social media, and then them coming back. Like, if you told me she came back and had like converted to religion or something in five years, I'd be like, yes, this absolutely tracks. We're there.

**Teresa:** Well, she moved to California.

**Travis:** That'll work too. Yeah, okay.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Moved across the whole country to the other side, from New York. She still appeared in a few tours and variety shows, and took a few New York roles as kind of like guests, right? But she wasn't living in New York at the time. Her film career was very prosperous, from 1917 to 1933. In that first year, she appeared in four two-reel shorts from the Triangle Film Corporation. And so like, she wasn't anymore just kind of like a doe-eyed soprano, she was like a Western film star.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And—

**Travis:** Did you know Harry Houdini was in a lot of movies?

**Teresa:** No, I didn't know that? As himself?

**Travis:** Sort of. I mean, yes. In the way like Charlie Chaplin was himself, that kind of deal, right?

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

**Travis:** Where it's like, the escape artist kind of deal. I've been thinking about Harry Houdini a lot.

**Teresa:** You sure have.

**Travis:** I have.

**Teresa:** Almost always.

**Travis:** Yeah, that's true!

**Teresa:** Yeah! Mm-hm. Okay, so, with a name like Texas, she couldn't not be a cowgirl. So, they began referring to her as the female Bill Hart.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** I don't know, he was a Western star. And so like, her dressing room doors didn't have her name on it, it had a map of Texas, right?

**Travis:** Seems like it'd be easier to just put her name.

**Teresa:** I don't know. It's a brand. She had a full-page advertisement in 1919 that shows her all like steely eyed and double fisting pistols and a polka dot bandana, right? It says, this advertisement, "She came out of the vast unknown regions of the West with the spirit of the desert and the plains, the power and brawn of those compelled to defend their own by force of might and will. And yet, she possessed all the graces and charms of a woman."

**Travis:** This is so wild... why... period.

**Teresa:** Period. [chuckles]

**Travis:** But also, one, she's in California, about as far west as you could get—

**Teresa:** I know, right?

**Travis:** In America, unless you're like in Hawaii or Alaska. And I'm pretty sure in 1920, California was as far west as you could get. But also, that narrative—I joked about Yellowstone, right? But having just watched season two for the book report, that narrative is still there in a lot of like Western theme stuff.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Of this like we... we're out here just trying to defend what's ours and the land and you know, having the strength. And it's like, hey, man, it's even now, 2026, we kind of know, like even on a surface level, we know how European settlers got the land that is "theirs to defend."

**Teresa:** Right, yeah.

**Travis:** Right? Like this narrative of like, "Yeah, we needed strength and brawn to defend this land." And it's like, okay, "defend" is an interesting—

**Teresa:** Interesting.

**Travis:** Word choice there.

**Teresa:** She was the darling of the Froman Amusement Corporation, which was a motion picture business started by the Froman brothers, who were former Broadway producers.

**Travis:** Mm-hm.

**Teresa:** And so they made—

**Travis:** One of 'em Abe Froman, the sausage king of Chicago. No, that's from Firas Bular's day off.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay. They made more than a dozen films with her.

**Teresa:** You couldn't hear this at home, but Teresa gave me a look like—

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** One, why do you know that? And two, is that true? And that's why, not even as a joke, I couldn't play it off anymore, because of the sincerity of the look on her face that she was like—

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And I was like, no, I don't even want to play this bit anymore. I see how confusing that was. It was from Firas Bular's day off.

**Teresa:** Not one to sit on her laurels, not just starring in the films, she began to expand her horizons by learning skills of production as well.

**Travis:** That's where the money and control is!

**Teresa:** That's right. You can—you control the narrative, you control your destiny. So, she started working as a unit department head. Several of her films at that point included *Outwitted*, *The Lady of the Law*, *The Girl of the Rancho*, and *The Desert Vulture*.

**Travis:** Ooh.

**Teresa:** And at least 5 to 10 others.

**Travis:** Yeah, a bunch.

**Teresa:** They're all in there. That's when she was like, "I don't need anybody else. I can start my own production company," in 1921, producing three of her own films, *Code of the West*, *Spitfire*, and *Texas of the Mounted*.

**Travis:** Texas of the Mounted?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Listen, I understand that combination of words—

**Teresa:** Yeah, I don't know what it means either.

**Travis:** But it doesn't sound like they go together, right? Without context, you're like, I'm sorry, you must have mistyped a lot of things in there.

**Teresa:** Maybe horses? Is that like a mounted cavalry or something?

**Travis:** Yeah, like mounted brigade. But the fact that her name is Texas is like, the state is on a horse?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** What do you mean?

**Teresa:** It doesn't make any sense to me. She had a starring role in the silent film, *My Lady Robin Hood*, and then would appear in two sound pictures.

**Travis:** Ooh, talkies!

**Teresa:** I know, playing fictionalized versions of herself. She was doing really great. And then she moved back to New York.

**Travis:** Why?

**Teresa:** Because of the Volstead Act. Do you remember?

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** Prohibition.

**Travis:** Oh, right. Okay. I was thinking—you said Volstead—okay, let me tell you what my brain did.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** You said Volstead, right?

**Teresa:** Uh-huh, yes.

**Travis:** And my brain went, "Comstock."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Comstock was a different thing that was about profanity and vulgarity and stuff, that then they named the antagonist in *Bioshock Infinite*—

**Teresa:** Right, yes.

**Travis:** After. And I went, I don't think she would move back for that.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** But Volstead Act and prohibition makes a lot more sense.

**Teresa:** Yes, yes. Midnight on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1920, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment goes into effect from the Volstead Act.

**Travis:** I've never thought about it, but it's really kind of them to be like, "We're going to give you New Year's Eve, and a couple of weeks after to really just run through your stock, and then it starts."

**Teresa:** Then it starts. Speakeasies, right? They were also called "beer flats" or "blind pigs" or "blind tigers," were illicit establishments that sold alcoholic beverages, right? And they could be in regular restaurant basements.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** They could be—it could be the back room of a soda shop. It could be somebody's living room, you know, all this kind of stuff. It was very easy to get people to come to a pop-up speakeasy, because people were like, "Booze? I'm there."

**Travis:** Yeah. And it was, you know, kind of dangerous and fun.

**Teresa:** Right. And everything's fancier in New York City, so—

**Travis:** I've heard that.

**Teresa:** So, what she did was, she headed over to the Big Apple and was like, "I'm going to rake in mountains of cash." She's got a bunch of like seed money, she's been a movie star, she's going to start a speakeasies.

**Travis:** Interesting.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** An interesting career transition.

**Teresa:** For \$50,000, in 1923, which is the spending power now of nearly a million dollars—

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Right? She got an offer to go and sing at a speakeasy in Manhattan. Who could say no?

**Travis:** Yeah, she said yes! Right?

**Teresa:** Who could say no?

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** And she sang, but also she had incredible stage presence, and she started being known as more of an MC, right? Because so she was like working through the different acts and she would come on and sing a little bit, and then she would do a little joke, and then she would like do all this kind of stuff. They—

**Travis:** Well, I mean, so far, the through line to her seems to be, knows how to build a narrative and captivating.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. Exactly.

**Travis:** Right?

**Teresa:** She gets together with producer Nils Granlund, and they put together a big floor show. Like—

**Travis:** Look at this floor! Now look at this floor!

**Teresa:** [chuckles] No. Like Ziegfeld Follies kind of thing.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Right? With chorus girls and stuff. And this is where she gets the attention of the rum runner named Larry Fay. Larry Fay is like, "Hey, I'm going to start up these speakeasies, and I want you to be the star. The L'Fay Club in Manhattan. And she was killing it every night! People were coming to the speakeasy, right? Not just for the booze, but for Texas as well. They were like, "Hey, this is the coolest place in town."

**Travis:** And it's amazing that they were able to keep that secret from the po—

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Like, I'm sure all the authorities were *trying* to crack down on it.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. The "queen of nightclubs" she was billed as. And so, they say that her catchphrase, when a new person would come in, she would say, "Hello, sucker. Come in and leave your wallet on the bar."

**Travis:** I do that on accident sometimes just because I have ADHD.

**Teresa:** Yeah, you leave your wallet a lot of places.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** In the house. Not usually other places.

**Travis:** Well, no, because I left it at home.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** You know, and I get there and I'm like, "Ah..." One time I went and I was buying something at a store and I realized I didn't have my wallet, and I

knew I'd left it at home. But I'd alr—they'd already scanned in a bunch of stuff. And I was like, "Oh, I left it in the car," because I live very close. [chuckles] And they were like, "Okay, yeah, you can just run out and get it." And I was like, "Please feel free to like suspend this and check out other people." And they were like, "Oh, no, it's fine." I was like, "No, please." And then I had to run and go get it and come back.

**Teresa:** And they waited for you?

**Travis:** I said I lost my car too—no. [chuckles] Yeah.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Like you said, these things didn't usually last very long. You had to kind of move around and go to different places, because you would get raids and like—

**Travis:** Well, you'd pay off the right people.

**Teresa:** Pay off the right people. So, there wasn't really like a home that they had for a while—

**Travis:** It's got floating!

**Teresa:** They would kind of move around.

**Travis:** You are a floating thing, like as discussed Guys and Dolls with the floating crap game.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. But it was very lucrative, right? They split the profits. And at one point, the pair cashed in \$700,000 in a—in a 10-month span of time, which is roughly equivalent to \$6.4 million today, in less than a year.

**Travis:** That's quite a few dollars.

**Teresa:** It surely is. And so she was like, "I am the brains of this operation. I'm going to do it on my own."

**Travis:** Yeah, that seems to be her thing, isn't it? Of like reaching a point—no judgment, but reaching a point of like, "Now that I've kind of learned how to do it from working with this other person, I'm just going to start my own thing."

**Teresa:** That's right. So, she opened the Texas Guinan Club.

**Travis:** Kind of putting it all out there as far as authorities are concerned, right? Of like—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "I'm guilty."

**Teresa:** Over the next decade, she would be raided countless times.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** She would rub elbows with some of the most iconic stars of the day, and cap it all off by completely fooling the FBI.

**Travis:** How?

**Teresa:** I'll tell you about that in part two next week.

**Travis:** Oh my god! You got me!

**Teresa:** Gotcha.

**Travis:** You got me! Okay. Hey, everybody! Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not do the show. Thank you to our editors, Gino and Rachel, without whom we could not do the show. And thank you to you for listening. We could do the show without you, but that would be like opening a speakeasy without Gin. Can you imagine?

**Teresa:** Absolutely not.

**Travis:** Can you imagine? Hey, everybody, go check out [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com), we got new merch over there, including a new mug that says, "I like all butts and no government."

**Teresa:** Hey.

**Travis:** And My Brother, My Brother and Tea, themed tea over there that you can get either separately or in a bundle with some of the mugs there. [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com), check that out. What else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** Well, we always thank Brent 'Brental Floss' Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. We also thank Bruja Betty Pin-up 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—if you want to submit someone for a biography.

**Travis:** I might have to do a Houdini biography, because I was just sitting here thinking about the fact I remember he's the first person to fly in Australia.

**Teresa:** Ooh?

**Travis:** He wanted to be the first person to fly somewhere, so had an airplane ship to Australia, then flew it, to be like, "That was me."

**Teresa:** "That was me." If you would send those to [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com), and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

**Travis:** And that's going to do it for us! So join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

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

**Teresa:** Manners-Shmanners, get it?!

[theme music plays]

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