Harry and Dumbledore approached the back door of The Burrow, (*pre-roll music starts*) which was surrounded by the familiar litter of old wellington boots and rusty cauldrons, Harry could hear the soft clucking of sleepy chickens coming...

I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile.

Vanessa: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

(*music fades*)

Casper: Vanessa, do you know that my parents lived in America for three years before I was born?

Vanessa: Yes I do, in Chicago.

Casper: Yes! Do you know what else is in Chicago?

Vanessa: One of our groups.

Casper: That’s right! It’s a local Harry Potter and the Sacred Text reading group run by our very own Maggie Needham and Paige Yungermann,, and they are absolutely fantastic. And if you want to join their reading group, go to harrypottersacredtext.com/groups, and you can find out when and where they meet as well as all the other local groups around the world.

Vanessa: This week we are lucky enough to be joined once again by one of our very few repeat guests, the host of The Anthropocene Review and a couple of other things here and there.

John: (*sniggers*)

Vanessa: The great John Green. John, thank you so much for joining us again.

John: Oh, it’s great to be here; it’s always a pleasure. I love your podcast so much.

Vanessa: So you are on this week to tell us a story through the theme of yearning for the chapter An Excess of Phlegm. Do you have an opening story for us?

John: I do have a story about yearning. When I was in college I yearned to be loved, mostly to be loved romantically, but also just to be loved in any form. I wanted it so badly, and I also yearned to have, like a big life, like some kind of grand adventure. I always felt like my life was small, and I wanted it to be big. And before I was born, my dad worked as a commercial fisherman in Alaska: my dad is a much tougher person than I am. And so when I was in college I got this idea that I too could spend a summer in Alaska, and I did. I drove to Alaska with a girl I was dating and two other friends, but- uh - I did not work on a commercial fishing boat; I scooped ice cream in a town called Moose Pass, Alaska.
John: And I was profoundly and intensely and extremely needily in love. And eventually the relationship blew up and we broke up, and it was a disaster because we were – uh – stuck together in this town of like forty-seven people.

Casper: Oh God.

John: You know, a former couple.

Vanessa: Uh-huh.

John: And, a couple weeks after we broke up, we went on this trip to Denali National Park together. Like we’d planned the trip, and even though we’d broken up, we were like, ah, let’s take the trip. And I was still desperately yearning for some kind of reunification, and we walked up to the tundra and we spent a night looking at Denali in a tent. It was beautiful, it was lovely. The next morning, I made coffee over a fire, and I said to this woman who I loved, “Why do you think we broke up?” and she paused for a while and said, “Well – have you ever fallen out of love with anyone?”

Casper: Ohh.

John: And I said, “I guess so,” even though I actually hadn’t. I said, “I guess so,” and she said, “I think I just kind of fell out of like with you.”

Casper and Vanessa: (*dramatic gasps*)

John: (*chuckles*) And for many years, I have to say, when I told that story, I cast myself as the hero and her as the villain, but now I look back on it, and I think, “Oh my God, she must have been so exhausted with my level of like, constant, endless yearning need…

Casper: (*laughing quietly in background*)

John:…. that she must have just broken, and thought to herself, maybe if I say this it will end.

(*general laughter*)

Vanessa: (8still laughing*) I mean, I give her points for the wordplay.

John. It’s great, I mean it’s great, it’s very clever and quick-witted.

Vanessa: So I will return with an equally humiliating story, which is that I broke up with someone – he broke up with me – in a small town in Italy, and I was like, “Well I am leaving!” I was eighteen years old, and so the following morning I got up to take a train to Rome, and leave this – it was a tiny town called Samona, Italy, there was one hostel in town – and I stood on the wrong side of the tracks, and so the train came and left, and I couldn’t get on it.

Casper and John: (*laughing*)

(*laughter continues while Vanessa is speaking*)
Vanessa: And there was only one train a day, so I had to walk back to town and hung low, being like, “I’m back.” And I had left like, “I never wanna see you again, this town isn’t big enough for the both of us, I’m going to Rome!” And I was back an hour later.

I stormed off successfully the next day, guys, don’t worry.

John: I bet it was – I bet it was just as good the second time round.

Vanessa: Shut up John!

John: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: It was. It totally was.

Well, but that is the thing about yearning, right, the idea is like there’s something embarrassing about wanting, there’s something…

John: Yeah.

Vanessa: … vulnerable about other people knowing that you feel like you need something. So I would re-cast yourself as the hero who’s being vulnerable enough to let someone know your needs or your wants. But I do think that there’s just something really – that can be humiliating about yearning. Or at least very vulnerable. I don’t think it should be humiliating.

Casper: Well and I really like what you said about the beginning of your story, John, where you were saying, like, this experience of feeling small and yearning for this bigness ‘cause one – one of my favourite definitions for like, feeling connected to the divine is when you feel both fully small and fully big at the same time.

John: Right.

Casper: You know, I’m just as insignificant as a grain of sand, but I’m also like, the fulness of all living things like are in me and I am in them. And most of the time, like ninety-nine point nine per cent of the time we’re not feeling both at the same time, and when we’re not in them we we yearn for them right, so like either we yearn to escape and be left alone, frankly, or we yearn for like the full rich experience of what it means to be alive. So I think, kind of, most of the time we’re yearning. So we shouldn’t - we shouldn’t blame ourselves.

Vanessa: Oh, absolutely not. And actually in this chapter I think it’s interesting, right, because I mean, Ginny has a lot of like coming out as cool chapters.

Casper: (*sniggering*)

Vanessa: But this is one of them…

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: … and one of the reasons that she is cool again is because she’s not wearing her yearning for Harry on her sleeve, right?

Casper: Mmm.
Vanessa: And it’s like not obvious any more and so now she’s the cool chick. And I am curious now because I hadn’t thought of it, until your story, John, but I wonder if one of the reasons that the Weasleys hate Fleur is that she shows no yearning.

Casper: Oh-mmm.

Vanessa: She is cool, and like where’s that – so-so I think it’s, we want people to want just enough, but there’s like a very small window of how much you’re allowed to want.

John: Yeah. That’s really true: I’d never thought of that before, but – I often feel embarrassed about dissatisfaction, about not feeling…

Casper: Yeah.

John: … like my life is complete. You know there’s that old…

Casper: Totally.

John: … cliché about you’re never unhappy if you want what you have, rath- what is the line?

Casper: It’s Sheryl Crow singing, er, in Soak up the Sun, “It’s not about getting what you want…” (*sings*) “It’s wanting what you’ve got.”

John: Yeah, which is a lovely sentiment, but I just don’t think it really applies to humans, like I think it – I think it would be great if that were true, but I think most of us aren’t Fleur…

Casper: Yeah.

John:…, and most of us do want things. But it – it is weird how wrapped up in coolness not yearning is, like in some ways the definition of coolness, at least when you’re in middle school, is not yearning.

Vanessa: Well, I wonder, you know, I’m trying to think of like the lessons that I would want to take from yearning, and I – I think that it’s – part of me wants to want less, right?

John: Yeah.

Vanessa: And to revel in what I have more, and to, you know, have more of and appreciation than yearning, but the other part of me wants to also destigmatise yearning.

Casper: Mmm.

Vanessa: That like, to want is human, right, we are like born wanting, and like part of me loves ten-year-old Ginny that like just couldn’t hide how much she likes Harry, right. I mean, I think all three of us work very much in nerd culture, and like, that’s what we love about nerds, right, is like unabashed love and want for more and more. And so I simultaneously wanna celebrate yearning and also wanna say, but it’s okay to take moments to just be like…

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: … satisfied with what you have.
John: Yeah, I think when I – when I feel yearning at least, or like the healthy yearning I feel is not like, “I yearn for a better car.”

Casper: Right.

John: It’s – although like, if I had a really crappy car, I would yearn for a better car because it’s nice to have reliable transportation – but the deep yearning I feel is – is for more connectedness, for more understanding, for a deeper relationship with the world around me, for a better understanding of my place in the world. And I expect that yearning to last, and I have been told by the culture to be embarrassed about it, that like sincerity and earnestness in the pursuit of meaning are cringey and cheesy and lame, and I really don’t wanna give in to that, and it’s hard, and I don’t feel like I always succeed, but I’m really trying not to let that take over in my mind.

Casper: Yeah. Absolutely.

John, thank you so much for being back on the podcast, we love you.

Vanessa: We really – we do.

John: I love y’all too.

Vanessa: I now feel like I’m supposed to be cool and not act like I am.

John: (*in background*) That’s right, that’s right.

Casper: Yeah, it’s great you said that.

John: (*laughs*)

Vanessa: John, you’re fine – whatever.

John: No, we have to fight that urge! We have to love each other without any irony or distance. (*laughs*)

Casper: Yes!

Vanessa: Okay, we love you.

Casper: Yes!

John: Me too.

(*boing sound*)

Casper: Ah Vanessa, do you know what could have really saved you with those trains? An extra thirty seconds.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Indeed. But you only get one set of thirty seconds in today’s recap. And I do believe it’s your turn to go first – I have no reason to think that, but I’ve decided.

Casper: (*false laughter*) Bring it on!

Vanessa: (*giggles*) Okay – on your mark, get set, go!
Casper: So Harry comes back, and he’s like, oh my God, great to be here, and he has a little chat with Molly, who’s of course extremely worried about Arthur, because Arthur has been promoted – yay! – but is very like, stressed, well, lots of dangerous things. Um, and so then – um – he gets, he wakes up and like Ron is there – hooray! – and Hermione’s there – hooray! – and Ginny’s like super not happy that Fleur is there: Molly’s also not happy Fleur’s there, and Fleur’s just like looking fabulous and she got her man and everything is great. Um – and then Tonks is also depressed, you know it’s just like Happy Families, but families are always complicated.

Okay, thirty seconds on the clock, Vanessa, what else happened, here we go, three, two, one, go!

Vanessa: So a couple of other things that happen is that erm – Harry tells Ron and Hermione about the prophecy, Hermione gets hit in the face by one of Fred and George’s – gadgets they left behind, ‘cause they’re now living in Diagon Alley and apparently doing really well, and also, most importantly at all according to Hermione, is that the O.W.L. results come in and Harry has done really well, Ron has done just a little bit not as well, Harry’s been made Quidditch captain, Hermione did really well, but is like, oh I didn’t get all of them, and sad.

Casper: (*chuckles*)

Vanessa: So, Casper, this chapter, we are reading it, as John so beautifully set up through the theme of yearning. I thought that we should start with the title of the chapter the Excess of Phlegm, because to me this is – this is a shame on the Weasleys moment.

Casper: Well, say more. I mean I definitely don’t love the nickname, and when I first saw the title, I was like, wait, what it – what happens in this chapter? I’d forgotten that they call Fleur Phlegm, and I have a sister called Fleur so I really love the name Fleur.

Vanessa: Yeah, so Fleur – the thing she is yearning for is to be closer to her soon-to-be-husband’s family, right? Bill has sort of deposited her here for a few days to get to know his family, and the things that we see her doing are objectively not annoying.

Casper: Super reasonable, she’s like, let me help, I’ll bring the tray up to Harry’s room for breakfast, like, how can I be useful? You know that’s like totally my strategy when I’m with in-laws, I’m like, let me do the washing up, how about I carry this outside, you know.

Vanessa: Yeah, no, I love a task in those situations ‘cause it means you don’t have to talk to people.

Casper: Ha, exactly!
Vanesa: But she is like really just trying, and everybody is being really hateful to her. The whole thing makes me feel icky, because I feel like, are the women mad at Fleur for being pretty?

Casper: It’s unclear, like, I mean, we – we certainly see Ron being like, ooh, Fleur is wonderful, and even Harry kind of defends her later on, and Hermione is also kind of pulled into this anti- Fleur trope, so it seems – it seems to be based on gender lines, and we know of course that Fleur is part Veela, so is there something there about jealousy, or-or is it just about protectiveness about Bill, like I can totally understand, when someone like a sibling, someone that you love brings home someone that you’re not excited about. And I’ve been that person, you know, I remember with a previous boyfriend, who I have only warm feelings towards, he’s a wonderful man. But the moment I introduced him to my parents, I saw him through their eyes, and I was like, oh he is not the person I’m supposed to be with. And Bill is not here, so we can’t see how Bill is interacting, Bill can’t be the bridge between Fleur and the rest of the family; it is kind of like putting an orange in with a bunch of apples, you know like, that- that can happen.

Vanesa: So Molly articulates your point, right. Molly is like, I just wish that they weren’t getting married so quickly, they’ve only known each other a year, and people do reckless things. They are also waiting a second year to get married, so it’s not like they’re rushing into it.

Casper: Very reasonable.

Vanesa: And so yeah, I just really do see Fleur as like being a beacon of yearning in this house, and if we think of yearning as wanting something that you have no control over whether or not you’re gonna get it, I feel like the way that she wants the Weasley family approval, and she’s not getting it, is sort of the embodiment of that kind of yearning.

Casper: Well, and I think we’re also seeing yearning from the Weasleys that impacts Fleur, because another way to think about yearning is that it’s about longing for something that you’ve lost or that you’ve been separated from, and I think we have to talk about Percy in this moment…

Vanesa: Mm.

Casper:…because the family has lost Percy, and perhaps, especially in Mrs Weasley’s eyes, we’re now losing Bill, right like, this is going to be another departure of a kid who’s not gonna come home, who’s not gonna be centred around the family because he’s starting his own new family. So I think there might be a lot of what’s going on here that actually isn’t about Fleur personally, but is about the imagined loss, loss of Bill to some extent.

Vanesa: Casper, just staying on Percy for a moment, I mean, I can’t imagine how much yearning Molly has to make things right for Percy. And I think that Molly’s yearning for her family, is obviously just like embodied in this clock that she is …

Casper: Ohh. My God.

Vanesa: She’s carrying it with her from room to room, like…
Casper: Right.

Vanessa: It is constantly with her – even though it’s not changing status.

Casper: (*laughs*)

Vanessa: it’s just everybody is in mortal peril. So, yeah, I’m wondering what you make of the fact that they aren’t able to reconcile, that they’re not able to go to Percy and be like, can we please move on, like there were miscommunications, or what Percy could possibly be thinking; he’s not yet ready to go back to his family.

Casper: Well that’s the big question, right like, we don’t know what’s happened. Has there – has there been an attempt at reconciliation? Like, has someone reached out and said, Percy, we forgive you, please come home, you know, we love you, we miss you. Should yearning always be accompanied by an action? Like if – if you’re yearning for that reconnection, if you want to feel like everyone is back together again, doesn’t that = doesn’t that put the onus a little bit on the Weasleys? And of course they’re all Weasleys – but on the family in the house?

Vanessa: Yeah. That’s such an interesting question. I think that often yearning isn’t accompanied by action, right, that you’re longing for something that you can’t control the outcome. And so I feel like often we’re yearning to reconnect with someone who’s passed away, right? I don’t think that yearning is necessarily tied to action, do you?

Casper: I think it’s – it’s probably tied to like futile action (*laughs*). Or at least maybe the action changes yearning, like ti turns it into something else. For example, I’ve recently done this really helpful process where I kind of sat down with a friend and wrote down like, basically a list of names of people that I didn’t feel in right relationship with. Like, some of them were, you know, significant challenges, others were like just that little feeling of like, mu-uh, there’s something not quite right between us, and basically we – we kind of strategized, we each brought a list, and we strategized and helped each other think through what might be an action that we could take to – to get back into right relationship. Now for some people that was like, give them a phone call and say I’m sorry about this thing, or write a card and say like, I really like you and I hope we can hang out more, or – and for some people it wasn’t right to actually reconnect, but it was like, to meditate for them or pray for them or just like hold them lovingly in our hearts or with compassion. And I will say that for everyone that I’ve wrote to or reached out to who responded, I feel my yearning has been like, enriched and like made golden and sparkly, because in every single case for the people who have responded, they wrote back saying like, I felt that too. You know, like I – I was yearning for a different relationship with you too, and I feel so much better about this moment. And so that’s what I feel is possible in that yearning, when you add that action, like you no longer need to yearn because now suddenly like, you’re actually connected again, you know. I guess I really wish that for the Weasley family at this point., I – my imagination is that they’re both sitting there yearning for one another, but it hasn’t been accompanied by action.

Vanessa: Right. And I think so many of these moments are lost in miscommunication.
Casper: Right.

Vanessa: I can imagine any number of things, from Mr Weasley running into Percy in the elevator, and being like – hi, ohhh, you’re not talking to me, even though I thought – you know like, I can imagine…

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: …all sorts of little slights that are so easy to misunderstand from one another.

Casper: Yeah. I think there’s something about yearning which is also safe. It means we actually don’t necessarily have to encounter the world, like – like when you’re pining for a crush, right. Well, I mean, you remember the story of like hand delivering the Valentine’s card where I declared my love, right like, that burst the – the yearning bubble, because I knew that it was not reciprocated, and so sometimes it’s – it’s, I dunno, it’s kind of safer or nicer to stay in yearning, rather than risk. Because it’s – yearning is also about a dream, it’s about living in a reality that is actually different from the one that you’re in, and so there can be something really lovely and comforting about it.

Vanessa: Oh, yeah. I mean, you are willing to take an action outside of yearning you are risking rejection.

Casper: yeah, you’re risking the yearning completely, like that whole imagined life.

Okay. So Vanessa, where else do we see yearning show up in this chapter?

Vanessa: Oh Hermione, with her O.W.L.s.

Casper: (*laughs*) This was a mazing.

Vanessa: So, Hermione has just found out that her best friend has a curse put on him, where he’s gonna have to fight to the death…

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: And then, she also finds out that test results are coming, and she’s just like, priorities, priorities! Test results please! What would it take for her to be happy, is my question. So – so she is doing all of this like, I think I ruined Ancient Runes, I’m definitely gonna fail x, y and z; she’s already talked to McGonagall about what is gonna happen in case she fails…

Casper: Ha!

Vanessa: So you would think that there would just be this feeling of relief with the fact that she passes all of her O.W.L.s. And she gets one Exceeds Expectations, and the rest she gets the top mark. What is she actually yearning for? Would she have even ben satisfied with perfect marks?

Casper: Well, this is so interesting, ‘cause I feel like we’re encountering a Serena Williams of like magic in a way, where at some point you’re not competing against other people, you’re competing against yourself, so that even if she got all Outstandings, she might still not be happy because she knew she got a question wrong, or she knew she didn’t answer that
properly and that she had known it when she walked into the room, right. I mean, that’s what I admire about Hermione is her standards are so high: it’s also massively constricting and I think here actually a little unfortunate in that, of the three people who respond to their exam results, Ron who objectively got the worst results, is the happiest. He’s like, sweet! Like, we nailed it! I love his attitude.

Vanessa: His – his attitude isn’t just, oh I nailed it – he finds out that Harry did better than he did…

Casper: And is still happy.

Vanessa: He’s so happy for Harry, he’s like, I knew you would do that well! And like, hits him lovingly. This is a moment where I – I just like love Ron, I’m like this is Ron in like full buddy bro friendship mode. “So you’re gonna get to use our bathroom! Whooo!”

Casper: (*laughs*) I know that that’s like the big win of becoming Quidditch captain.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: And also he’s very sensitive about saying like, oh now that you’re captain, you know, if you’ll still have me on the team, like, he is really giving Harry an out.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: If – if Harry’s like, ah, Ron, we need to have a conversation, sorry.

Vanessa: Or even just be like, we’ll see how try-outs go.

Casper: Right. Right, like he is being so smart about this whole scene.

Vanessa: I know. But – yeah, so you think that Hermione’s yearning for perfection is just like a bottomless pit of want, and that there would be no satisfying it?

Casper: I think she’s gonna need to go on a couple of retreats, and take up meditation, to like come home to herself that she is already perfect and she doesn’t need to achieve anything else. And, at the same time, like, I think Hermione has a vision for the Magical and Muggle worlds, which is so much beyond what we ever get to see in these books, like, she just is such an incredible leader and such an incredible witch in – just in terms of her skillfulness, and I think she feels like, yeah, I need to be the best at everything, so that I can do – I can fulfil that vision in a way. The other option that she might be considering is actually linking it back to that piece of news that she just received about Harry being the Chosen One…

Vanessa: Oh, that’s interesting.

Casper: Right, that she’s like, listen Harry’s not gonna be able to do this all by himself, like he is gonna need me, and like, I – what I can bring is to know every single fact in the History of Magic textbooks, year one to seven. And like, I struggle with Defence Against the Dark Arts, that’s the core thing that we need as we fight Voldemort, like, I need to skill up in everything else to be a valuable asset in this fight. I – I can believe that too.
Vanessa: Why do you think that she does not get an Outstanding in Defence Against the Dark Arts? She has been part of Dumbledore’s Army…

Casper: Mmmmm.

Vanessa: She’s gotten the same training, you know, from Harry as everybody else, and she’s like the top witch of her age. Do you think, is this back to book three. Like Lupin doesn’t let her practise against the Boggart, so she blew that exam, and so she gets like anxious…

Casper: Hm – mm.

Vanessa: …and it’s just this cycle, ‘cause we know she’s excellent at Defence Against the Dark Arts she goes and helps…

Casper: Right

Vanessa:…hunt Horcruxes, and like we know she’s good at this, she’s the one putting up all the spells to protect them while they’re out camping, like, she’s incredible at it.

Casper: I – I definitely resonate with what you’re saying about just that anxiousness, and once you get in a – in a story, as so many of us do, I mean I think especially around math for example, like I know I lived in that story for a long time, and like, I failed my first econometrics class in grad school. And then I really had to sit down with myself and be like, I can do this like, this is not beyond me, I can do it. And I sat – you know, I sat down every week with the professor, and I ended up getting a solid B.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: (*laughs triumphantly*) I’m like, yes, I can pass this, like, it’s not in my natural gifts but it’s – it’s also not like I’m allergic to math or something, you know. But, I can also imagine another story which is that like, Hogwarts teaching has not been very good. (*laughs loudly*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Particularly in defence Against the dark Arts.

Casper: Exactly, and we don’t know what was on the exam compared to the skills that she actually has. So like sometimes there’s just a mismatch between what you know and what you can do and what you’re tested on, um – which is just another reason why these kind of tests are not the best way for us to understand what people can do.

Vanessa: Well – well something that just occurred to me is that part of the reason why Harry gets an Outstanding is because he’s given the opportunity to do a Patronus…

Casper: (*gasps*)

Vanessa: …and the reason he’s given that opportunity is because of this horrible thing that happened to him with the Dementors attacking, and so the examiner is like, I heard from the Ministry that you can do a corporeal Patronus, and he’s like, yes I can and it like does this great victory lap around the exam room (*laughing*).
Vanessa: But we know that Hermione can also do a corporeal Patronus, and has done it in Dumbledore’s Army and she, in that room, in that moment, did not say, “Hey, I can do one too!” Right…

Casper: (*softly*) Wow.

Vanessa: …like, she protected the secrecy of Dumbledore’s Army, she was not supposed to be at the level…

Casper: O-oh.

Vanessa: … where she can do that yet, and so she doesn’t show off that she can do it. Even though she could do the same thing.

Casper: Okay, this is a glow up, because remember Hermione from like book one, where it’s like, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me!

Vanessa: Hm-mm-mm.

Casper: Here’s she’s like, I can do it, but I don’t need everyone to know about it, I’m gonna do it when it really matters, let Harry have his moment, he’s had a helluva year. I love that.

Vanessa: So I wonder if that’s part of why it like a little bit stings looking at this E. She’s like…

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: …I could have made the choice…

Casper: Oh, yeah.

Vanessa: …but I was being a good person. And like, you can know that you made the right choice and still be yearning for a world in which you’ve got to show of that you could do this cool thing…

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: Right like, you’re like, I wish we lived in a world in which I was gonna be able to show everyone my really cute otter.

Casper: (*laughs*)

Vanessa: So cute! And no one got to see it. It could’ve ridden on the back of Harry’s stag.

Casper: Vanessa, there’s one final place in the text that I – I think is worth mentioning, which is as they’re getting their exam results, Harry is very happy, he’s like, this is the best I could’ve hoped for, it’s – he’s very reasonable about it, and just at the end, he has this little twinge, like, oh, I didn’t do well enough in Potions for me to become an Auror. And – and what’s destabilising for him is that this is the only vision of himself post-Hogwarts that he’s really had, like, this – this is what he imagined himself doing once he’s graduated. But what’s so ironic of course is that like, he’s already doing what Aurors do, like he’s fought Voldemort a number of times, his whole like, organising of his life is around, you know, defeating Voldemort, and certainly by the end of this book, once it becomes clear that, you know, he
needs to continue getting all of these Horcruxes. So, it just made me think about the way in which sometimes we yearn for things that we already have, or that we already are, but no one has really turned round to say to him like, hey, I see you as an Auror, and like, yes we’ll skill you up, but you know there’s a different pathway into this profession beyond whatever exams that you need. So, it – it made me think about like, what do I yearn for that I already have, like, I can – I can be a very ambitious person and yeah, it was just a reminder – it was just a reminder, A that we should reflect on that, and B that often you can’t do it alone, you kinda need someone to say like, hey, I really see this in you.

Vanessa: Yeah, I mean the – he sort of does a job description of an Auror, it is the last sentence.

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: And what he says is, that an Auror is a highly-trained wizard whose job it was to find and kill Voldemort.

Casper: Hahahaha.

Vanessa: And I’m like, it’s true that you’re not like getting paid for that yet, Harry…

Casper: Mmm.

Vanessa:… but you’re like the Olympian amateur gold medallist in this event,

Casper: (*laughs*)

Vanessa: like, that’s your best event.

Casper: A really big sponsorship contract awaits with a major clothing brand.

Vanessa: Yeah, absolutely, Madam Malkin’s is waiting in the wings.

Casper: (*still laughing*)

Vanessa: I was like, what do you think you’re doing if you’re not getting trained by the greatest living wizard, Dumbledore, to be a highly-trained wizard whose job it was to find and kill Voldemort? We’ve found out that he is actually the only Auror, ‘cause he’s the only one who can actually kill Voldemort.

Casper: Right. He’s like Auror-Plus.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Gold standard Auror.

Vanessa: He’s actually the only one, in the world. Done! So yeah, I just completely agree. I feel I do this all the time. I look at – I have such a beautiful family, right, like…

Casper: Mmm.
Vanessa: … nuclear family, extended family, friend family, chosen family, every version of my family is beautiful, and then I’ll look, you know on Instagram, and see another version of another kind of family…

Casper: Ah, yes!

Vanessa; …and be like, oh I don’t have that…

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa:…I don’t have, like a house in the suburbs with a big yard, you know, whatever it is…

Casper: Right, right.

Vanessa:… and I can just like yearn myself away from my own happiness.

Casper: Yeah, that’s the danger with yearning, and I think that’s where we need to look out for is like, is it stealing our joy from the moment that we’re in and the things that we already have, because here’s the secret that we all know, is like, once you get the thing that you’ve been yearning for, suddenly it ain’t so pretty. Right like, either you have to deal with the reality of like, oh now I’m with this person I’ve been like crushing on for three years, turns out he has really smelly feet, or like he’s super-selfish, or you know, whatever it is. Or like, you get that house and like suddenly the mortgage is super expensive, or like…

Vanessa: You have to sweep…

Casper: (*laughing*) I know!

Vanessa: …a huge house. Whenever I’m like, I wish I had a big house…

Casper: (*still laughing*)

Vanessa: …I’m like, I would just have more floors to sweep.

So Casper, one – one last thing before we wrap up this conversation about yearning, is this moment where harry tells Ron and Hermione specifically what the prophecy is. And, you know, it says in the text that he just feels so much better as soon as he tells Ron and Hermione. What’s so interesting to me is that sometimes we don’t even know what it was that we were yearning for…

Casper: Right.

Vanessa:…until we get it. And like, the way that I know that is like, I will get – hear my mom’s voice and burst into tears.

Casper: Yess.

Vanessa: And I’m like, oh, I didn’t know I needed a good cry. (*laughing*)

Casper: Yeah.
Vanessa: Um, will have held it together, like the bad thing could have happened to me eight
days ago, and then as soon as I hear my mom’s voice, I’m like, (*crying voice*) last
Tuesday…

(*both laughing*)

Vanessa: I’m like, oh, I did not know that was bothering me. And so I feel that there’s
something so familial about Ron and Hermione…

Casper: Mmm.

Vanessa: ,, and they at this point are just an extension of himself…

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa:… and he can’t deal with it until he says it, and so it’s like, he didn’t know how
much he was yearning for this moment until it happens.

Casper: Big time. And I think he knows there are some things he needs to keep to himself,
he’s been very diligent, like, this is not about him suffering in silence, I really think this about
him being responsible, that he is stopping himself from telling them. But, as you say, like, the
moment he – he does it, he’s surprised, like, his physical reaction, he feels this warmth come
through his body, and I think that’s – that’s the moment when you know you’ve been holding
on to something and then like, suddenly it releases itself. Whenever I have a massage, like,
I’ll – I’ll suddenly realise, like, oh, wait, here’s this thing that’s really been bothering me, or
like, oh, that’s the decision I need to make or, I just – I just find like literally whenever
someone’s like, rubbing my back, good things happen. (*laughs*)

Vanessa: Yeah, I feel like you, Ariana and I, whenever we get into the studio, we check in,
and you will always ask like, how is everything? And I think what’s going to come out of my
mouth is, “Fine!” and instead what comes out of my mouth is like fifteen minutes of whining,
and then I just feel so…

Casper: It’s not whining!

Vanessa: Fifteen minutes of processing feelings.

Casper: Yes!

Vanessa: And I just feel so much better after every time. But, I’m telling you, every single
time, I’m like, just say, “Fine!” and I’m like, well…

Casper: (*laughing*) But I’m your fwend….

Vanessa: I know, it’s just, like, I didn’t know…

Casper: Right, right.

Vanessa: That I was yearning to like, talk to my friend, until I see you and Ariana and I’m
like, safe space!

Casper: (*laughs*) Well and I think that that is really helpful Vanessa, because it reminds us
that like, literally being together, even if we don’t know why we’re gonna be together, helps
us remember who we are and what matters to us. And I think, you know, this is the first time
Harry is seeing Ron and Hermione again – even though the summer away was shorter – like,
it’s just good to be together. And I love that.

(*music plays*)

Vanessa: So Casper, it is time for us to transition spiritual practices, so we are going to be
doing the classic, the original lectio divina.

Casper: Uh, nothing better. And I have just put my finger on the page; it’s towards the end of
the chapter, and it’s this sentence: “This has always worked before: I don’t understand it.”

Vanessa: Oooh.

Casper: It’s a – kind of a hidden line, it doesn’t immediately evoke where we are. So perhaps
I can start us off with the first level of lectio, which is to think narratively, like, what’s
happening at this point in the story. And you’ll remember that Hermione kind of had touched
one of the products that the twins had created, it kind of punched her in the face and she’s got
this panda eye, she’s got this black eye, and Mrs Weasley is trying to put on some kind of
balm from the Healer’s Helpmate and she’s saying to Hermione, “This has always worked
before, I just can’t understand it,” because it’s – it’s not fading, it’s not helping in any way.

Vanessa: Oh, got it, I understand exactly where we are, super interesting and I love that
Molly is criticising Fred and George right, she’s like, oh, they didn’t get these O.W.L. scores
and I was worried about what they were gonna do, but they can so magic that she can’t.

Casper: (*laughing*) That is true, I mean, that’s something that we’re gonna see, certainly
over the next couple of chapters like, Molly’s re-evaluation of the Weasley twins. I mean, she
already attests to their financial success in this chapter, and I mean of course once she’s in
Diagon Alley she’s actually going to see the shop. So this – this might be just another data
point in her realising like, oh wow, these two really are skilled, and I misjudged – you know,
at Hermione’s expense ‘cause she’s still got a black eye – but er, hopefully a valuable lesson
for Molly. (*sniggers*)

Vanessa: I- I mean in the next chapter we’re gonna see how easily the twins are able to fix the
back eye, so yeah, the twins are better at certain kinds of magic than molly. No disrespect to
Molly: she is a goddess.

Casper: Okay, let’s turn to step two. So now we’re gonna think allegorically about this
passage, we’re gonna think about what stories or songs or images, other references, other
texts that this little snippet reminds us of, so – so I’ll read it again: “This has always worked
before: I just can’t understand it.” What does that remind you of, Vanessa?

Vanessa: What I’m imagining is like, the way that white men are being confronted in the
world right now. Right like, but it’s always worked before, I’ve always been able to just like
talk to women like this, and I’ve always been able to flirt with employees, or I’ve always
been allowed to put my hands on women’s shoulders at work or – and there’s just this like
real confusion, it’s like, well it’s always worked before. And I think that often the next step is
like this moral panic, of like, we’re not gonna be able to flirt any more like whenever things change, and it’s like well, your old ways aren’t working and gotta figure some things out.

Casper: Yeah. I’m also thinking of like, I dunno, like scenes from – from great epic tales maybe about castles that have never been breached, or like walls that have – that have never fallen to the enemy. Is there something there?

Vanessa: Yes, I’ve thought of one! So like when Darcy proposes to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*…

Casper: Woo-oo.

Vanessa: …he just goes in and is like, she’s gonna say yes ‘cause this has always worked before, like, a rich man proposing to a not wealthy woman, like that always works, and so he just walks right in…

Casper: (*chuckles*)

Vanessa: …assuming she’s gonna say yes, and is like, wait what? You’re saying no to me? And so, I think that there’s something really invitational about these moments of like, but this has always worked before.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: And seeing like, but that does not make it a law, that makes it something that’s always worked before. I also think we’re seeing that in politics right now, of like things that we thought were laws or norms in the United States where it’s like, well, it’s always worked before that it’s a norm and therefore this is what a President does, and now we’re like, oh, it turns out that that’s not always the way it has to be.

Casper: Well, both with Lizzy Bennett and – and with the President right now like when a – when a person who is different enters in to the arena, like suddenly you realise that all of those norms actually can be different, for – for better and worse. And you know, I’m even thinking about like, I’m thinking of *Game of Thrones*, just in the way that like Tyrion had these like brilliant ideas of how to defend a certain aspect to the city, or you know, how to breach a certain defence. Like when – when someone new enters into a context how things can change, and that’s true about the twins here, like the twins are changing how magic happens. And we’re gonna see that that becomes not just fun and jokey, but actually becomes part of weapons manufacturing or like defence systems against Voldemort. So that is really compelling to me; I – I like that reading.

Vanessa: Yeah, which leads so well to me in the thing – um – that I was thinking about for step three. Do you mind reading the sentence one more time?

Casper: Yeah. “This has always worked before. I just can’t understand it.”

Vanessa: Yeah, which leads so well to me in the thing – um – that I was thinking about for step three. Do you mind reading the sentence one more time?

Casper: Yeah. “This has always worked before. I just can’t understand it.”
Casper: Wo.

Vanessa: And I was able to do it, for like, you know, time and time again, like, I could just reliably do it. And then my mom came to watch and I was just so excited to show her that I could do it, because for like weeks if not months, I was doing an aerial, but at the last second I would freak out and put my hand down.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: And so (*laughing*) I was like, Mom, I can do it! And again, I had probably done like fifty before trying to show my mom, and then my mom was there and I couldn’t do it.

Casper: Ohhhh!

Vanessa: And I was like, but I could do it before! Now nothing’s changed, and my instructor, his name was Farborse, said, “No, something has changed, now your mom is watching.”

Casper: Mm.

Vanessa: You know, and I think Molly’s in exactly that moment, of like, nothing’s changed, and it’s like, no, something has changed, your kids are grown-ups and are really good at magic, and are experimenting in ways that you never thought of before. And so I think often when we hit these moments of frustration when you just like don’t realise these like invisible powers, like I would never have thought that my mom being there would make me so nervous I couldn’t do something.

Casper: Yeah. Yeah, I mean that reminds me just how we’re learning about how in scientific experiments, like having scientists conduct the experiment actually changes what happens in the experiment. Not because of any wilful or – or – or bad action, but just the process of being watched actually changes the – the way things behave. That is super interesting.

Vanessa: What does it remind you of in your life?

Casper: I mean I – I’m also thinking about the way in which (*laughs*) our bodies just age, like, that there are things that I used to be able to do physically that I just can’t do any more. And perhaps with like great skill and attention and you know, fitness, maybe I would.

Vanessa: No, no!

Casper: (*laughs*) It turns out – no! (*laughs again*) Um, certainly I would need to make it a priority in a way that I can’t now, and even then, who knows, right. But like even if I’m standing still, something is changing ‘cause time is passing, so it’s – it’s just thinking about that kind of like fourth dimension. Maybe this particular cream that’s been in Molly’s cupboard is just out of date, you know, it might not actually be about the magic it might just be about the length of time that she’s had it around the house, ‘cause who doesn’t have like cleaning supplies and like medicine that’s certainly beyond its date of use (*laughing*) somewhere in the house. So that’s what it’s reminding me of. Shall we move to step four, Vanessa?

Vanessa: Yes.
Casper: So in step four we ask ourselves what the text might be inviting us to do, so we try and find some sort of action that we might take, it can be small or big, but just something that we – we are really compelled to do because of our close reading of this text. So I’ll read it one more time and ask you what does this text invite you to do. “This has always worked before. I just can’t understand it.”

Vanessa: My – my partner Peter and I actually just had this conversation last night. I was trying to install something, and I could not figure out how to do it, and so I was like, okay, Peter, you like, I need you to do this for me. And he couldn’t do it either (*laughing*) and it turns out the thing – the thing was broken, that it wasn’t me, and we just had this really interesting conversation about gender norms and relationships and where I’m like, do I take these moments of frustration and is it actually just a lovely thing to be in a relationship and turn to the other person and say, “Can you do this?” Or is that like I actually have a lot of these skills and if I can’t do it, it means it can’t be done. But like, thank goodness. Molly isn’t like, well, I can’t so it so I guess it can’t be done! (*laughing*) And I think what I’m called to is like still ask for help, right like, even though it turns out that the thing was broken and Peter couldn’t do it anyway, that validated my choice to trash the thing (*laughing*) which…

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: …otherwise I think I would have felt really guilty about being wasteful, and I felt bad about like wasting his time and him getting frustrated, but I think that that builds relationship and that it’s important for us to have each other for help and so I wonder why Molly didn’t just like send an owl to Fred and George, and be like, one of your dumb things hit Hermione, how do we get rid of this bruise?

Casper: Mm, mm.

Vanessa: What about you?

Casper: I mean it feels like a small thing, but I – I am really stuck on this idea of just our – our bodies changing, and wanting to appreciate the things I can still do, and maybe to just like test what I can still do. I’ve really wanted to go to one of these like trampolining centres…

Vanessa: I’ll go with you any time!

Casper: …for a while.

Vanessa: They’re so fun!

Casper: Ah! They look so awesome. Can we go next time we’re together?

Vanessa: Yes.

Casper: I have wanted to just like – I used to love trampolining, like my parents got us a trampoline instead of a TV and were like, make your own adventures. And so like, I trampolined so much as a kid, I just don’t do it any more and I wanna see if it’s still fun, and like if – (*laughing*) if my body mass can you know, be okay on a trampoline (*laughing*)
Vanessa: It – it can. I recently trampolined…

Casper: Awesome!

Vanessa: …and I was like, oh my God, I can still do really weird things with my body!

Casper: Right, like, you can do cool twists and jumps and sit bounces. Okay, let’s go trampolining, that’s my action. (*laughs*)

Well, thanks for that lectio, Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thank you Casper.

Casper: Always joyful, and always unexpected.

(*both laughing*)

Vanessa: This week’s voicemail’s from Colton from Dayton, Ohio, and he sent this voicemail less than twenty-four hours after the shooting that they experienced there.

(*voicemail beep*)

Colton: Hey Casper and Vanessa, um, my name is Colton, I’m from Dayton, Ohio, where we just had the, um, the mass shooting in the Oregon district last night. I was there, I was up on the balcony of the bar right across the street. The, um, shooter was basically right under my feet. Um – so needless to say, it’s been a really hard, hard day for me, um, you never think it’s gonna happen in your own home, and then it does, um, and it was such a close call, I mean, we almost got in line to go to that bar, and we just decided we didn’t wanna get in line, so we went to the bar across the street. But, um, I just wanted to thank you guys because I’ve used your podcast, um, for a few weeks now to really just calm my head because I already have anxiety and I work by myself basically for ten hours, um, my mind is always racing, and you guys have definitely helped distract me from that and your podcast, for the past twenty-four hours, has helped me calm down, has helped me get to sleep, has helped me go about my day doing things, um, just listening to you guys’ voices discussing, you know, one of my favourite things in the world, which is Harry Potter. Um, you know I can’t think of anything to relate this to with Harry Potter, maybe you guys can, um, I just really wanted to send a voicemail and say thank you.

Vanessa: Colton, first of all just thank you for this beautiful message. Um, I am so sorry for you, and for the – your city, um, and for all of us that we live in this broken world. I love your instinct to try to do meaning-making with something you love, with Harry Potter, and I also love that that is not what you feel called to do in this moment. You know there are stages to grief and to shock and meaning-making is something that happens much later on. The other thing that really resonated with me is that you said, you know, you never think it’s gonna happen to you. I think one of the problems we have in America, if I can diagnose all of us, is that we’ve been sold this idea of you make your own destiny, and so to some extent we believe that if something terrible happens to you, you must have done something wrong – you have heart disease because you eat poorly, you have cancer because you smoked, because we always wanna know why it is that some – that something bad happened to somebody else in order to make ourselves feel safe. And I think that what I feel invited to based on your
voicemail is just to remember how deeply equal we all are, and yes, we are all in danger, but we are also all valuable. I wanna thank you for reminding me of that, that even though anything bad can happen to any of us, all of us – as the Harry Potter books do tell us – are worthy of love.

Casper: That’s beautiful, Vanessa. Thank you, Colton.

Vanessa, it’s time for us to bless someone from the pages of this book, and who are you choosing to bless at this chapter?

Vanessa: I know I’ve already beat this drum, but I am going to bless Fleur.

Casper: Mm.

Vanessa: I just feel so bad for her – her fiancé has like abandoned her in this house full of people who are not trying to like her and are not trying to give her the benefit of the doubt, and then Ron, the only one who’s positively bent towards her, is like leering at her. I mean, Harry shows up, and like, that’s nice and she like has someone who she likes, but urgh, I have been in situations like that where I’m like, I’ve been deposited here, I don’t wanna be here, you don’t want me here, bleuh, and it’s just a terrible feeling. So I wanna offer a blessing to anybody who feels like they’re trapped somewhere where they like don’t quite belong, and, yeah, just say I’m sorry that you’re in that situation. And they pass, and they’re the worst. Poor Fleur.

What about you, Casper, who would you like to bless?

Casper: Well, I was on this train already too, but I wanna celebrate Ron, and I know we really cheered him on and kind of celebrated Ron earlier in this episode but I do really think it’s so easy for us to overlook him sometimes because he is maybe the least easy to – to recognise as special of – of the trio. But this chapter just really reminded me about not just how sweet he can be, but how generous, like this – this was just such a generous moment, and like, I mean, they’re literally in his house again, right like - two people who are better in all sorts of ways that the outside world recognises, keep coming into his life and he wants them there, I think – I think that’s what I love about Ron is that like, he’s a model of hospitality, like, this is their home now as much as it is his; he’s just got this gracious, beautiful thing going on, and so, I guess for anyone who’s welcoming people into their home consistently and with joy, this is a blessing for you and a blessing for Ron.

Vanessa: Yeah, he is the anti-Petunia,; I mean, Molly, also.

Casper: Yeah, and – and I guess that’s what beautiful is it’s passing down generations, you know…

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper:…and I’m sure it was in Molly’s parents too, and I’m sure if and when Ron has kids, like he’ll pass that on as well.

Vanessa: I love that he’s so happy to see Harry he like, hits him
Casper: (*laughing*) Yeah!

Vanessa: (*laughing*) It’s just such a dumb, boy way to be, like, (*shrilly*) I’m so happy! Boom!

Casper: I love you, but I can’t say that out loud.

Vanessa: I can’t give you a big kiss, so – punch!

(*both laughing*)

(*boing noise*)

Casper: Before John left the studio, we asked him if he had a blessing for a character in this chapter.

John: I wanna bless Tonks.

Casper: Mmm.

Vanessa: Oh yeah.

John: How I love Tonks. I just – I find Tonks to be kind of the light in these early chapters, the wit, the cleverness, the kindness that she shows Harry, the clumsiness, I just – I just love her. She’s always been one of my favourite characters, but re-reading – uh – the book with y’all this time around, I’ve just been reminded of how much is dependent upon Tonks even though she isn’t always around in the story.

Casper: Mm.

Vanessa: Absolutely. And, I mean, that – just that moment between her and Molly is so tender and aware, and like not over-imposing…

John: Yeah.

Vanessa: …but vulnerable. I love that; a blessing for Tonks indeed.

Casper: Thanks again, John.

John: Oh, it’s great to talk with you all. Really a pleasure.

(*outro music starts*)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and join our Facebook group to chat with thousands of other listeners about the episode. We have new perks up on our Patreon, so join the twelve hundred people there and get the exclusive Meet me in Mallorca sticker for five dollars and up. You can always write a review on iTunes, send us a voicemail and we hope very much to see you at one of our live shows. We’ll be in New York City on September 9th, Cambridge, Mass. on October 2nd, Washington D.C. on November 7th, Chicago, Illinois on November 21st, and St. Louis, Missouri on December 19th.
Vanessa: Next week, we’ll be reading Chapter 6, *Draco's Detour*, through the theme of stubbornness. This episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text was produced by Not Sorry Productions; our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman and our associate producer is Chelsea Ursin. Our music, as always is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bolh, and we are a proud part of NightVale Presents. A big thanks as always to John Green, who is the embodiment of generosity, to Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Maggie Needham, Meghan Kelly, and as always Stephanie Paulsell. Thanks so much and we’ll talk to you next week.

(*music swells and then stops*)

Vanessa: In college I was capable of thinking about a lot of things, like the boys that I had crushes on…

John: Oh yeah.

Vanessa: …and wanting to go back to sleep.

John: I had…

Vanessa: I think I was doing my best thinking.

John: Right, I had a lot of yearning, but it was in one very narrow direction.

Casper: (*laughing manically*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*)

John: I yearned to be loved romantically, that is it, that was my …

Vanessa: Yeah.

John: That was my central yearning.

Vanessa: But… I had two! I had a second yearning for napping. You didn’t yearn to nap in college? That’s all I wanted to do.

John: No. I really just wanted to be loved. Oh God.

Vanessa and Casper: (*laughing*)

Casper: Romantically.

John: And boy, was it obvious.