Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.1- Owl Post: Mercy

Casper: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*--Chapter One: Owl Post.

“Harry Potter was a highly *(intro music begins)* unusual boy in many ways. For one thing, he hated the summer holidays more than any other time of year. For another, he really wanted to do his homework, but was forced…”

Casper: I’m Casper ter Kuile.

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And this is *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*: Season Three.

*(Intro music fades)*

Vanessa: I’m really excited to be here for season three because *Prisoner of Azkaban* is where the series gets just…it goes from amazing to AMAZING.

Casper: I think a lot of people have been looking forward to it, so I hope we do it justice. And we couldn’t have done it without everyone supporting the show, so thank you so much for spreading the word, for donating, and helping us get into season three. And not only season three, my friends, we are going on tour.

Vanessa: So right now, go to http://harrypottersacredtext.com and you will see our tour. We are going to Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles…

Casper: Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington D.C. All the shows are in June or July so go to the website http://harrypottersacredtext.com we have so much fun when we do these live shows. We’ll tell you what chapter to read in advance and we hope to see you there. Vanessa, let’s get on with the show. Do you have a story for us to open season three?

Vanessa: I do. When I was 23 years old, I remember sitting and I felt a depression coming on which was a common thing. And I remember thinking, “I can’t do this again.” When I have this feeling, this is not a life worth living. For some reason that was the time, when I was 23, that after years of dealing with these things that I finally went to the doctor and I got diagnosed pretty quickly and got sent home with medication. And then came the hard part, and the hard part was deciding whether or not to start taking those pills. Medications came with side effects and the biggest side effect that I was really scared of was loss of creativity, was a lot of antidepressants can put at risk. And I remember it felt like an existential threat, and this probably a false dichotomy, but this is what is felt like to me at the time: do I take these pills and give up my creativity or do I keep not taking these pills and live in constant fear of being in just absolute desolation. And I was making this decision while in one of the worst depressions of my life, so it
was already not a great time, and just a week went by and I was talking to everybody I could talk to and basically begging everybody to tell me what to do. And so I called my best friend, Kim, who’s been my best friend since I was 5 years old. And so I called her and asked her what I should do and she said, “oh that’s easy, it’s actually not your decision, it’s my decision, and you have to go on the medication, because I can’t trust you if you don’t go on this medication. There are things I’m going to want to ask you to do, and the stakes are just getting higher. I’m going to get married one day, and I’m going to have kids one day, and I’m going to want you to be my maid of honor, and I want you to be the godmother to my children, and if you are unreliable to yourself how can I count on you to follow through for me? So this isn’t your choice, and you’re to go on meds.” And I just remember the relief of somebody saying to me, “this is the right decision and I’m going to decide it for you.” And the mercy of that. Nobody would do it, nobody would force me to do one thing or another, and she was like, “I’ll take the responsibility. If it’s the wrong meds, I’ll sit with you until you get on the right ones. If this is a mistake, we’ll deal with it together. But I’m telling you this is the thing you absolutely have to do.” And we got off the phone and I opened the pill packet, and took the pill and I’ve been on this medication ever since. And it’s just looking back, it was the greatest act of mercy I’ve ever seen. And I’m so grateful to her for seeing that she needed to do something that wasn’t actually within her power to do, she needed to claim an authority that she didn’t have. And make something that felt like the toughest decision of my life and made it into a non-decision. So I’m really excited to talk about this with you, Casper, where we see mercy in this chapter, and when are people enacting mercy within their rightful authority, and when are they stepping out of it. And when is it mercy without intention, and I think this is an incredibly complicated idea and that we’re not just going to see it in this chapter, but it’s going to be with us throughout this entire book.

Casper: Thank you so much Vanessa for sharing that story. I would argue that mercy is such a defining theme of this book, especially as we think about how Pettigrew’s betrayal of his friends is then shown mercy by Harry at the very end of this book. There’s something very powerful about that theme of mercy to start with in this book, and that it ends with, so I want to come back to that as we come to the end of the book.

Vanessa: Before we get too much into that conversation though, are you ready to do your 30 Second Recap of the chapter?

Casper: Yes, I am ready. Luckily this one is not too long, so I feel I can give it a good go.

Vanessa: I believe in you.

Casper: Thanks.

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go.

(Ticking noise)
Casper: So it's into the summer holidays and Harry is at home, at the Dursleys, and he's very unhappy. And he's doing his homework, and he's reading Bathilda Bagshot's history. And he has to be very quiet because if the Dursleys hear him then it's bad news. And then Hedwig's gone away, but she's allowed to be in the cage, and she comes back and there's post because it's his birthday, yay! And there's post from Ron and Hermione and a book that's a monster from Hagrid. And Percy's Head Boy.

(Buzzing noise—90 words in 30 seconds!)

Vanessa: Well done, Percy would love the way you ended that.

Casper: I mean let's end with the big news, right?

Vanessa: I'm actually surprised by the title of this book and why it's not called…

Casper: Percy Weasley?!

Vanessa: Yeah

Casper: And the Prisoner of Azkaban.

Vanessa: Percy Weasley and the Head Boy.

Casper: Vanessa, you ready for your 30 Second Recap Challenge?

Vanessa: I am.

Casper: 3, 2, 1, go.

(Ticking noise)

Vanessa: We start with all this creepy history about witches and wizards and the way that they used to get tortured. And then of course we're with Harry in the Dursleys and, oh my god, what an amazing comparison. And then it turns out that it's Harry's birthday and he didn't even notice because he's used to not celebrating, but then it turns out that he celebrates and Hedwig comes with a gift from Hermione. And then Ron sends a gift and it turns out that he's in Egypt because the Weasleys won all of this money and that's really exciting. And then Hagrid sends a really creepy book and Harry for the very first time in his entire life is hap that it's his birthday and he, sort of, gets to be a regular kid.

(Buzzing noise—135 words in 30 seconds!)
Casper: Yaaaay.

Vanessa: Yaaaay.

Casper: Let’s all go to Egypt.

Vanessa: Do we have listeners in Cairo?

Casper: Live show!

Vanessa: Okay so Casper, so one of the things that we both noted was that there’s a great act of mercy in this chapter, with Vernon allowing Hedwig to fly and hunt at night.

Casper: Right, which is different from the previous summer where Hedwig was locked up and basically a prisoner.

Vanessa: Right, so I think this is an amazing example for us to start exploring what mercy is. How do you see this as an act of mercy?

Casper: Well, we could read it as mercy because here’s a clear power difference. Vernon and Petunia are in charge of the house, Harry is a child, Hedwig is Harry’s pet; and so in this house, it’s their rules and so they could clearly have just said, “back in the cage, sorry Hedders, you’re stuck.” But this time, they’re letting Hedwig fly free and roam around and so you could see that as a power or authority figure, giving clemency or changing the rules because it’s nicer for the owl who’s living in this situation. But I also feel super complicated about it, because he’s not doing it because he cares about Hedwig in any way.

Vanessa: Right, so the question is: does mercy have to be intended in order for it to be mercy?

Casper: I think so, right? Like there’s go to be some element of forgiveness, or at least compassion.

Vanessa: So the way that I learned the word “mercy” as a child is the way that, I’m guessing, several of our listeners did too, which is playing the game Mercy with my brothers. Where you are basically hurting your sibling and whoever says, “mercy” first, loses.

Casper: Kids can be so lovely, can’t they?

Vanessa: I mean it’s a theological lesson. We weren’t playing for fun; we were playing for the theology. So when you say, “mercy,” what you’re saying is, “I give up,” and you’re asking for the mercy of the other person. So you’re acknowledging that they have more power than you and they have more strength than you, you gave up first—and they then win. But it is an act of mercy because they stop hurting you. So I don’t think that intention has anything to do with mercy.
The more we do this podcast, the more I believe that taking the action is the thing that matters and intention often helps and often makes the quality of the action better but I’m not sure it matters. If you free someone from prison, whether or not you believe they deserve to be freed, does it matter? Vernon, this is still an act of mercy, it is received as an act of mercy.

Casper: Okay well that is super interesting, because I think this is where we get into a complex understanding of what mercy is. Maybe there’s two ways of understanding it: one is the kind of a more tradition understanding where there is compassion or clemency, some act of care, the intention as you say is clear. But we can also experience something as a gift, and say, “what a mercy that it didn’t rain on my wedding day.” Weather didn’t care, right? But I think you’re right, I think we need to make more complex how we think about mercy. But I think there’s a more truer mercy when it’s experienced as a mercy and given as a mercy. When it’s given with intention, I mean I’m thinking of, in this chapter, we see Hedwig, knowing that Harry’s birthday is approaching, knowing that he’s not going to get any Owl Post and Hedwig leaves to go and remind Hermione and Ron to send him something. And even finds Hermione in France, like I don’t know Hedwig’s got some sort of Hermione GPS. But that feels like an even more merciful thing to do.

Vanessa: So two things: one, yes it’s a more genuine mercy because by Hedwig doing this mercy, relives Hermione of this stress of how is she going to get this present to Harry. Harry then gets the gift, which at this pint is a double gift of a gift from Hermione and also the gift of the kindness of Hedwig to go and find Hermione. It is mercy upon mercy. So I think that there you see that the intention can add to the quality, the gooeyness quality of the mercy. However, no because if we wait for pure acts of mercy, we’re going to miss 99% of the mercy around us. If we wait for the moments in which Hedwig, a literal white bird, this sign of purity and goodness, if we wait for things like that there will be so little mercy in our lives. So I think that there’s nothing wrong with looking at Uncle Vernon and saying, “this is an act of mercy and I’m going to take it from you.” There are other ways for Vernon to make it so Hedwig isn’t a ruckus in his house and he doesn’t do that, he doesn’t get violent. And I’m not saying we should give points to someone for not being evil and awful, but that is a mercy and I think it behooves us to notice that.

Casper: Yeah, I think you’re right.

Vanessa: So thinking of owls, another act of mercy to my point of a more complicated mercy, is with poor Errol. So Hedwig and this anonymous Hogwarts Barn Owl carry Errol—like Errol is struggling…

Casper: Somewhere near Egypt, it gets really rough. Errol is aging and he’s tired, and so somewhere near Italy, probably, he’s just like, “I’m done, just give me some olive oil and delicious cheese. I’m just going to sit here and chill.” But this Barn Owl and Hedwig are like; “No, no, let’s bring you home.” And so they carry Hedwig all the way to Privet Drive where he just collapses and one eye opens and he’s just like, “Hey.”
Vanessa: The British and American versions are really different, but fascinating. But the Barn Owl from Hogwarts, Harry offers the Barn Owl some water and the Hogwarts Owl is like, “I don’t need your water,” and just flies off.

Casper: And ruffles his feathers…

Vanessa: And ruffles his feathers, judges Errol, and flies off. So this is an act of mercy that this Hogwarts Owl helped, and I don’t think that that Owl does it with any grace, or any intention for mercy. But without the Owl doing that, Errol wouldn’t have made it right?

Casper: Yeah, he just would have been in his vineyard.

Vanessa: Errol is just like, “I found this place in Capri, I love it hear, please I finally escaped.”

Casper: But this is important because for Harry it is a mercy and so so often this same thing that happens can be experienced so differently. And I guess that’s not news but it’s making me think with more complexity about even the nature of mercy in it’s most formal function. Because usually we think if someone is given clemency, or mercy is shown, it’s a good thing and hurray. But mercy can also mean that justice is not carried out. And so if I was on the side of someone who’d been a victim and now the perpetrator is being shown mercy, like I wonder if I would always be big-hearted enough to see it that way. Maybe it would feel more like injustice.

Vanessa: One of my favorite Lincoln quotes in a letter to Ulysses S. Grant, he said, “now that the war is over, I don’t want there to be a lot of hangings as a celebration to end this war.” And Grant said exactly your point that, “hangings can be what people need in order to move on.” And even that is like Lincoln had lost his appetite for violence. Mercy can be motivated by so many different things.

Casper: It’s so interesting, Vanessa, because those people who were condemned to hang probably many of them for good reason, and I am not advocating for the death penalty, but war crimes right? Some serious business…

Vanessa: They committed war crimes.

Casper: Right. And to give clemency, to show mercy in that situation, in many ways can be seen as being complicit with war crimes. But I think it also reveals that showing mercy is actually a way of remembering our humanity. Yes, there’s an instinct for revenge but there’s also an instinct for forgiveness. And I guess what I’m asking us to do is to think about, for every time we’re following through with the rules and punishing someone, perhaps equally we should be looking to forgive and to show mercy. If we’re just doing one of those things all of the time, we’re doing something wrong.
Vanessa: Yeah, I think about that a lot in terms of raising children, like when do you make exceptions? It’s important for a child to have routine so you make them go to bed at 8:00 every night, and then every once in a while you have to be like, “no, you know, this is more fun than going to bed at 8:00 and we get to stay up.” You have to have a bedtime and you have to have exceptions to the bedtime. And if you don’t have a bedtime that’s probably not great, and if you don’t ever have any exceptions to the bedtime that’s probably not great either.

Casper: And I think that there’s no worse characterization in all of this than Voldemort. Throughout this book, throughout this series, Voldemort never shows compassion, never shows mercy; he is one extreme of that. But here’s the interesting thing, is that I think Harry is the other extreme because Harry refuses to kill. Harry shows mercy to Pettigrew, okay that one works out, okay, but he uses Expelliarmus instead of a more deadly curse. And because of that decision, Moody dies; other people suffer on his behalf because I think he sometimes shows too much mercy.

Vanessa: And I’m not even sure Pettigrew really works out. I mean we’ll talk about this more later, but because Harry shows Peter Pettigrew mercy, Sirius has to go on the run.

Casper: And Voldemort comes back embodied.

Vanessa: Right! So I think that too much mercy, it’s really not always a good thing, if you constantly have mercy for your child’s bedtime, you’re going to raise a tyrant who never gets enough sleep. These things have real consequences, and it’s complicated and the only thing that makes mercy, as a decision clear, as the right or wrong decision, is hindsight. So like, luck is involved in whether or not mercy is successful, it’s not an easy thing.

Casper: Right, absolutely.

(Advertising Music Begins)

Vanessa: Netflix has an amazing sub-category called, “Strong-Lead Female Characters in 19th Century BBC Miniseries.”

Casper: I have the same category! Are you for real?

Vanessa: Yes, but if doesn’t have a great variety of Sci-Fi shows, but there are other apps that do, like Go 90, which now on Go 90 you can watch Babylon Five, which apparently you can’t get in most places.
Casper: It’s super rare to find on the Internet.

Vanessa: But you can also watch Fringe, Terminator, The Sarah Connor Chronicles, and Almost Human.

Casper: And I feel like there’s a big crossover between fantasy, and I don’t know if Harry Potter is really fantasy, but if you like Harry Potter, you’re going to like some of these shows.

Vanessa: If Harry Potter’s not fantasy then what is it?

Casper: It’s real life Vanessa!

Vanessa: So experience every battle, every mystery, every chase, and every moment from the weird to the touching. The entire catalogue is streaming free on Go 90.

Casper: Go to http://go90.show/harrypotter or download the Go 90 App to watch. You’ll find great original series, classics, and live sports on there too. Go 90: Geek Out.

Vanessa: Netflix has an amazing sub-category called, “Strong-Lead Female Characters in 19th Century BBC Miniseries.”

Casper: I have the same category! Are you for real?

Vanessa: Yes, but if doesn’t have a great variety of Sci-Fi shows, but there are other apps that do, like Go 90, which now on Go 90 you can watch Babylon Five, which apparently you can’t get in most places.

Casper: It’s super rare to find on the Internet.

Vanessa: But you can also watch Fringe, Terminator, The Sarah Connor Chronicles, and Almost Human.

Casper: And I feel like there’s a big crossover between fantasy, and I don’t know if Harry Potter is really fantasy, but if you like Harry Potter, you’re going to like some of these shows.

Vanessa: If Harry Potter’s not fantasy then what is it?

Casper: It’s real life Vanessa!

Vanessa: So experience every battle, every mystery, every chase, and every moment from the weird to the touching. The entire catalogue is streaming free on Go 90.
Casper: Go to http://go90.show/harrypotter or download the Go 90 App to watch. You’ll find great original series, classics, and live sports on there too. Go 90: Geek Out.

Vanessa: Okay, Casper, so where else do you see mercy in this chapter?

Casper: Vanessa, I was really struck by the fact that in all three birthday cards—from Ron, Hermione, and Hagrid—they all say something to the effect of, “I hope the muggles are treating you okay.” Which on the one-hand feels like a nice little nicety so say at the end of a birthday card, but to me it also feels like they were abdicating a responsibility. And it really struck me in comparison to your story that you shared in the way that Kim wasn’t your doctor and she didn’t have control over you in any way, she’s not your boss or anything. And yet she kind of imposed herself and took the power in order to then give you mercy. And I think here, we see all three of them—Ron, Hermione, and especially Hagrid perhaps—they in some ways have an opportunity, they could come back, maybe not with a flying car this time, but with one telephone call and then they stop trying to reach out to Harry? Is that really good enough? I feel like sometimes even if we don’t have the authority to do so, we can step into leadership and show mercy, otherwise we’re all just bystanders and there’s Harry feeling dreadful for a whole summer on his own.

Vanessa: I’m definitely going to defend Hagrid. I think you’re right, I think that we all need to try to intervene more than we do, but Hagrid at least knows that the reason that Harry is with the Dursleys is because he has to be with family for long enough for a spell that his mother cast in dying for her son, right? There’s complicated magic here and I feel like Hagrid knows that. And I don’t know how much more we can ask from Ron and Hermione, and I at least want to honor how scary it is to feel like you might just be making something worse. And this is something that we do all the time, I remember when I was pretty young, a colleague of mine came into work after her mother had died, and I asked her how she was doing and said that I was sorry and she said to me, “it is such a relief for someone to ask me how I’m doing. No one will look at me and no one will ask.” And nobody has bad intention in not asking, right? We all cared about this woman, we all knew that her mother passed away; but you don’t want to remind someone at work and like maybe that’s not what they want to hear. And I think that I just got lucky, I could have been the tenth person to ask her and it could have driven her nuts. Or I could have been the first person that asked her and she could have looked at me and been like, “that’s really inappropriate and it’s the last thing I want to be thinking of right now.” So maybe Hermione and Ron are just being honest about their powerlessness. They could say, “Let me know if there is anything that I can do to help. Ron could say, “come to Egypt with us.” There could be all these acts of mercy that Hermione and Ron could be saying in these letters, but I feel like it’s honest by saying, “we’re thinking of you and I hope it’s not getting to you.” So if we forgive Hagrid and maybe Ron and Hermione also, but I think your exact point in that how impersonal McGonagall’s letter to Harry is.

Casper: Ohhh this is in the letter that includes the permission slip to go to Hogsmeade?
Vanessa: Right. So Harry gets his list of books, his traditional list of books, with the permission slip to Hogsmeade; and McGonagall just sends the regular form letter. Now she knows that Harry’s not going to get permission to go to Hogsmeade from the Dursleys, why isn’t there some handwritten note with like, “I know this is complicated for you.” She might also know about Sirius and so he’s definitely not going to get permission to go to Hogsmeade. But it's got to be sensitive sending a permission slip home to a child with abusive guardians.

Casper: Ah this is interesting because she’s probably got some sort of Quick Quill system that’s doing all of these letters all at once, and is just trying to fit it into a busy day and is not writing personal notes to anyone. And I think it tells us that systems can’t give mercy, individuals can. No beauracratic system or computer system is going to make an exception or is going to know when to say, “okay it’s past 8:00pm but you’re allowed to stay up because grandma’s here.” Only an individual can make that choice and that’s why I think mercy is so human.

Vanessa: And exactly to this point, what is annoying about this is it is pretending to be personal. It says, “Dear Mr. Potter” and ends, “Yours Sincerely.” It’s a personalized Quick Quill thing. If it was “Dear Gryffindor Student” then he would know that it happened to arrive on his birthday and this is a form letter. But it is the performance of this being a personal thing, that it makes the lack of mercy in it offensive and hurtful, right?

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: I mean what they just went through, right? McGonagall was just teary-eyed watching Harry emerge from near-death. There is no acknowledgement for the trauma that he’s just gone through, or their personal relationship. I’m sure she’s justifying it as professionalism, but propriety can excuse all sorts of cowardly behavior.

Casper: And I think that there are big mercies and small mercies and just a little, “P.S. Hope you’re doing okay,” would have been a small mercy to give.

Vanessa: If there would have been a stapled note that was like, “I know it might be difficult for you to get this signed by your guardian, let's have a conversation when you get back.” Just say true things, you don’t have to talk about your feelings, but I’m happy to have this conversation with you face-to-face when you get back, right?

Casper: Absolutely.

(Sacred Reading theme music plays)

Casper: Vanessa, one of my highlights of season two was learning about the practice of Floralegia, and we’re going to continue with that in this episode but I want to remind ourselves what this whole idea of Sacred Reading is about.
Vanessa: Sure, so the whole idea is that if we practice treating a text as sacred, we can practice treating our lives and one another as sacred. And by practicing treating something as sacred we mean three things:

- We mean having faith in the text or in one another or in ourselves. And by faith we mean believing that the more time we spend with the text, the more gifts it will give us. That it will only bring good into our lives even when we’re struggling with it that is a good thing.
- The second thing is rigor and ritual. So for us that’s the practices that we do every week, you know: Floralegia, Lectio Divina, Ignatian Spirituality, Pardais, etc. So that is the rigor.
- And then the third part is community, so we try to enact that both by sitting here together, not having this be a podcast where either one of us does it alone. That’s also a big reason why we incorporate listeners’ voices and why we have guests on, because in order for something to be sacred you need a community around to lift you up, to hold you to the highest standard, to make sure that you don’t become a fundamentalist in your point of view. To really engage with you.

So that’s why we do what we do and how we do what we do.

Casper: So let’s dive into Floralegia, and just to remind ourselves this is a wonderful, centuries old practice, that monastic communities would have done where they keep little sparklets—words or phrases—that really stood out from the page. Where they might have noted those down, either in the Psalms or elsewhere in Biblical texts, and then to compare those two and look for what meaning could be gleaned about the relationships between those different sparklets. So this week I chose just a little sparklet from Ron’s letter, and it’s just his P.S. and it says:

**Percy’s Head Boy.**

What did you find?

Vanessa: I picked a longer, flowerier one:

**Silhouetted against the golden moon, and growing larger every moment.**

Casper: Ooooo okay, let me read those two together:

**Percy’s Head Boy.**
**Silhouetted against the golden moon, and growing larger every moment.**

That’s really interesting, what do you see in this relationships?
Vanessa: My first reaction is, that is exactly what Percy would want the news of him being Head Boy to be, is to be silhouetted against the moon and growing larger every moment. Like these two sentences right next to each other are Percy's dream-come-true.

Casper: I mean I do see that golden language, you have a Golden Boy that Percy is growing larger physically and growing larger in responsibility, he's growing in stature. So there is that comparison, but what I also think is interesting is that silhouetted against the golden moon, Percy's Head Boy. So there's something about that the golden moon is there, but the moon is never the source of light, the moon is always reflecting and so maybe here we have something to learn about Percy and his, perhaps, inflated sense of self and his desire for importance but maybe, I don't know maybe he's just the moon. He's reflecting the brilliance of others.

Vanessa: Yeah, oh man, I think that's an amazing way to think of Percy as we go through these books. Like Harry and the trio are a planet and he's just this cold, dead, rock, sort of like floating in their wake.

Casper: And a moon waxes and wanes, right? The moon is not always true, so this kind of sense of betrayal the Weasleys feel about his allegiance to the ministry instead of the family.

Vanessa: I really like that Floralegia, I mean in you're picking Percy, is making us think more about Percy, I wonder he's going to become more a major character later in the series, but I wonder—like a moon—he is showing to us and what he has shown to us so far in the books that we've maybe missed. Let me read it and see where we can go. I'm going to read them backwards:

**Silhouetted against the golden moon, and growing larger every moment. Percy's Head Boy.**

Casper: Oooo the thing that stands out for me this time is “every moment” and the fact that Percy's Head Boy, there's a change in his ontology. Who he is, or the labels that he has, has changed. There's a change in his way of being and to me there's something interested about that combination in “every moment” and “Percy's Head Boy” because, it's an obvious point, but everything is always changing and the stability that we feel is never as stable as we think it is. Even the moon is, as an image, is always changing and the tides are going in and going out and there's this imagery of change that I think is important for Percy to remember. Because this place that he holds of status and reputation and power is not going to last forever.

Vanessa: Yeah, I mean he in the photo in Egypt, they're all there to visit Bill and yet Percy is there wearing his Head Boy Badge in the Daily Prophet. This is supposed to be a story about their family going on a trip, it's not supposed to be about him, but for Percy it's always about him. It's just always about him.
Casper: Let it go Percy. And this is beautiful in this language, “silhouetted against the golden moon,” when you look up at the moon and it’s bright and there’s a silhouette in front of it, you can’t actually see the thing itself, it’s just an outline of this shape. And I think that’s true of Percy too on these pages that although he’s looming large, he doesn’t open up his heart to us in the pages, or whether we don’t learn enough about him, it is this abstract figure that he remains. And it’s just making me think of people in my life who loom large but who I actually don’t know that well.

Vanessa: Yeah there’s a lot about the silhouette and knowing where it comes from in the book it’s, we know that eventually the thing that’s growing larger every moment is going to be revealed. We know that the silhouette sometimes you never figure out what it is, but in this case we do, who Percy is will get closer and closer to us until we do know who he is. But in this point of the book, all we see of Percy is this outline, this Head Boy, Badge-wearing, proud, pratt.

Casper: This week’s voicemail is from Jen Radke who sent us this note in early March.

(Beep)

Jen: Hi Casper and Vanessa! My name is Jen and I’m calling from St. Paul, MN. Thank you so much for creating this podcast, I love it, it’s fantastic, and I’m so happy I’ve gotten my husband and friends into it as well. I find that often when I’m listening, I will find sparklets from things you say. There has been an instance in which I’ve literally pulled over on the side of the highway to write something down in a little journal I keep in my bag, and it was fun to learn about Floralegia because I’ve been doing it with this journal and didn’t know it was a thing, but it’s a thing. So while listening to the final episode of season two, I wrote down some sparklets, and I thought I would read them to you and see what we could make of them. The first one was:

If you’re telling a story, never make yourself the hero.  
You can’t trust people in authority.
I want to live in a world in which I want to follow the rules.  
Nobody does anything alone.  
Gone, but not forgotten.  
With the help of other people, she is able to be freed.

When I put all these together, I couldn’t help but think about International Women’s Day this past week and how so many women have gone before me to fight for our rights and equal rights, and I can’t name these women but they’re gone but not forgotten. And I’m so grateful for these rebellious women who didn’t just trust in authority and they strive to create a world in which we want to gladly follow the rules, and so I’m wondering what you make of these sparklets I pulled together. Thank you so much for the incredible work you’ve been doing. I love it and I can’t wait for my stickers to arrive.
Vanessa: Jen what I particularly love about your voicemail is that it’s not that it’s not that you’re now using the podcast as a sacred text, although that’s very flattering, but I love the idea that you’re writing down things that inspire you from your life and using those as sparklets and creating Floralegia from them. Because I think that’s right, I think we have to take inspiration from all around us and be creating meaningful things from them, so I see that as an invitation to myself to be writing down things that friends say, or you know, just take inspiration where I can get it and love it and harness it. So thank you so much for that really beautiful voicemail and for listening and your stickers will be on their way soon.

Casper: Thanks Jen. Vanessa, its now time for us to bless someone from the pages of this chapter and I thought I might bless Ron because there’s a fairly comedic moment that happens in this chapter where Ron uses a telephone for the first time and is trying to get Harry on the phone but he doesn’t really that he doesn’t have to shout and he shouts and Vernon gets angry. But it just struck me how scary it can be to do something for the first time and that I’m sure that Ron was a little nervous and he didn’t do it quite right, but if he’d had a sympathetic ear on the other end, he would have been just fine. So this blessing is for anyone who tried something for the first time and it didn’t go well, or you felt embarrassed, or you were hurt in some way, and to not give up and to give it another try because Ron will, no doubt, use the telephone again. So just a blessing to anyone who needs some encouraging to keep going, because it’s worth doing.

Vanessa: My blessing is for a beautiful moment between two women in this chapter. And that is for the moment in which Hedwig and Hermione meet in order to come together to give Harry, not just any present, but a perfect birthday present. Harry thinks that Hermione is going to just have gotten him a book, but instead she got him this amazing Broom Serving Kit and she thought of it in France while she was on vacation, and Hedwig thought ahead and made sure to get to Hermione. It’s such a beautiful moment of kindness and gift giving and proper gift giving and honoring of someone, celebrating someone takes a lot of effort and planning and thinking about who they are, not what you want to give them, but what they actually want. And I just think that this is two creatures really thinking outside of themselves and doing a beautiful job at that. So my blessing is for Hedwig and Hermione and for all-generous people who spend time figuring out how to honor the people who they love.

(Outro Music Begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. Please join us at one of our live shows. Tickets are on sale now for our West Coast Tour in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland; and check back soon for tickets for Philadelphia, New York, and Washington D.C. And please join us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook. And next week, we’ll be reading Chapter Two: Aunt Marge’s Big Mistake through the theme of Family.

Vanessa: This week’s episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text is produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zoltan. Our Social Media Coordinator is Jenn Stark, our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. And we are part of the Panoply Network.
You’ll find ours and other great podcasts at panoply.fm. This week, we’d like to thank Jen Radke for sending in our voicemail, Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, and Stephanie Paulsel. Thank you for listening and we’ll talk to you next week.

Casper: Bye.

(Outro Music Ends)

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text: Season Three.

Vanessa: Series Three? (laughter) It is Season Three (laughter) I’m trying to be a jerk, did it work?

Casper: You are a jerk. (laughter)

Final Music: Panoply