Vanessa: Chapter 25: The Egg and the Eye

“As Harry had no idea how long a bath he would need to work out the secret of the golden egg, he decided to do it at night, when he would be able to take as much time as he wanted. Reluctant though he was to accept any more favors from Cedric, he also decided to use the prefects’ bathroom…”

(quote continues, fades into intro music.)

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan,
Casper: And I’m Casper Ter Kile,
Vanessa: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.”

Casper: One of the things I love about the Harry Potter books is the use of names, especially the names of characters to kind of give you insights into who they are. Voldemort, of course, the name chosen by Tom Riddle means “flight from death.” We think of people like Remus Lupin, with kind of a hint to the word “wolf” or Luna Lovegood being the most steadfast and creative, loving character, perhaps, in the books. And so I started to wonder, what does my name mean? Is there a special meaning in the name “Casper”? Cause I don’t have any family members who are called Casper, the name kind of came out of nowhere; it’s not a common name in England or Holland. And so I talked to my parents about it,

Vanessa: Please say the answer is “The Friendly Ghost”!

(Casper laughs)

Casper: No, it has nothing to do with “The Friendly Ghost”, but the name “Casper” means “treasure-keeper” or “treasurer”, and it comes from Chaldean in north Iran, which the ancient word was “Gizbar”, which becomes “Casper” over the years. And so that linked to the three wise men to came to the baby Jesus, one of them is traditionally called “Casper”. And so there’s this story about the name “Casper” which is all about looking after things that are of high value. And it reminded me that when I was young, growing up as I did in a house with lots of people in it – three sisters, two parents, bed & breakfast guests, family friends, all sorts of people –

Vanessa: Chickens

Casper: Chickens, doves, goldfish. I always yearned for my own space. And I was lucky enough to have my own room for a number of years. And one of the things that I would to do was to kind of life dig underneath my bed where I had hidden a very special box. And this was a wooden box about maybe the size of my outstretched palm, twice over, which my mother had decorated in kind of lovely pink stripes and blue swirls. And I would lift off the lid, but only when no one was watching, and I would put in things that were very precious to me. And I’m so embarrassed to say that at 31 years old, I can’t remember for the life of me what those precious things were. I think it involved at some point like a crystal, certainly some rocks, maybe like a little letter that I had written. I’m also very confident there was a feather in there – very tactile items. And I would
just take them out of the box, and I would line them all up, and I would look at them. And then I
would put them back in the box. I would close the lid, and I put it back under my bed. And it was
this kind of little ritual that I would have as a child because these were things that in some way
shaped who I was. And it just made me think about this chapter because, of course in the Harry
Potter books your name is so informative about who you are. And it made me think about how
has my name has shaped who I am? Was this kind of secret childhood ritual with this box of
little precious items somehow a response to my name and who I am? And just made me think
about how we define what’s precious to us. We’re reading this week’s chapter through this
theme of “preciousness”, and I think so much of what makes something precious is if it’s secret,
if it’s hidden, if other people don’t know it, and if in some way we have to kind of protect it from
the world around us. And so thinking of this box, thinking of the egg that Harry has, I’m excited
to see what this preciousness theme has to teach us this week.

Vanessa: I really like the idea that the things that are precious to us are things that have
absolutely no value to anyone else. Whenever you hear anybody list the things that they would
grab if they needed to evacuate in a hurry,

Casper: Right

Vanessa: It is, you know, sometimes like the most essential things, but it tends to be the things
that are absolutely of no monetary worth: photos, the dog, the heirloom that was brought from
the old country but is plated in nickel or whatever, right? Obviously, there are things of monetary
worth that we value, but “precious” often means something that only I understand the worth of.
And that’s great that your name means that you are someone who honors the worth of things
that other people don’t quite see. That suits you.

Casper: You know what else I really honor?

(Vanessa laughs)

Casper: Thirty-second recaps.

Vanessa: It’s because we know that our listeners’ time is precious that we try to recap the
whole chapter in thirty seconds.

(Casper laughs)

Casper: Okay, that’s a strong transition.

Vanessa: Thank yaa, thank you.

(Casper laughs)

Casper: Okay, so I’m going first because I’m feeling confident.

Vanessa: Okay. On your mark, get set, go!

(clock ticking)

Casper: So this really is a chapter of two halves, as the title would suggest, the egg and the eye.
The first half is all about Harry taking his egg to the prefects’ bathroom, putting it underwater
with all the jewel-toned hot water things. Moaning Myrtle is watching his young, naked body –
we can talk about that later – and he hears the mermaid’s song, or mer-, merpeople’s song. Ummm, and learns about the challenge. Then in the second half, he gets trapped on the staircase, Snape is there, everyone is there, but Moody is like "I see you and I’m gonna protect you", and his eye is a little dodgy, (buzzer sound) and that’s the end, and he gets the egg back. But loses the map.

Vanessa: You can’t just keep talking
Casper: Just one little word
(Casper laughs)
Vanessa: Do you know what one word means?
Casper: Alright, how about you?
Vanessa: You did a sufficiently decent job.
Casper: Okay. 3..2..1..Go!

Vanessa: So Ron helps Harry get out of the common room, and he’s under the Invisibility Cloak and he goes and he opens the egg underwater. And he’s going to have to go to the merpeople and get something back that means something to him. And then on his way back, he sees that Barty Crouch, Jr., is in Snape’s office, and he’s like “What?”, and he goes to investigate and he gets stuck on the stair. And all the things that you mentioned, and Filch wants to get Peeves. And Snape is like “I know Potter is there”, and he does this weird hand waving thing cause he thinks he’s going to find Harry and he doesn’t. But Mad-Eye Moody gets back the Marauder’s Map, and he’s like “Who did you see in Snape’s office?” And he’s like “Can I keep this, thanks.” (buzzer sounds) And Harry goes back to bed.

Casper: I think we both did really well.
Vanessa: I think so, too.
Casper: That’s it, listeners. That’s all you need.
Vanessa: End of episode?
Casper: End of episode.

Vanessa: So, Casper, on this theme of preciousness, where would you like to start this week?
Casper: So the thing that really struck me reading this chapter is that, you know, we, so often we think about what makes something precious is a physical object. But I think, at Hogwarts, there’s also precious knowledge. We see Harry open the door to the prefects’ bathroom, Cedric has given him the password and the location, and I think it’s like “pine fresh” is the password. And it made me reflect on so many doors, obviously the four common rooms, but so many other doors are dependent on knowing a password and knowing where to find the door in the first place. And so, in this ever-changing landscape, where the passwords are constantly changing, as well as the staircases, what makes something precious is kind of being on the inside, being in the know. And it made me wonder, like how does that information get shared? Who’s in charge of setting that information? It just opened up a whole world of questions about
passwords and precious knowledge that I’d never thought about before because the castle has a life of its own. It’s not as if Dumbledore is there pulling levers every day and resetting the IT software. So like, tell me what you think about that?

Vanessa: I love the idea of Dumbledore being in charge of IT.

(Vanessa and Casper laugh)

Vanessa: So what’s interesting to me is that there are several people who know my passwords to things

(Casper gasps)

Casper: Me too

Vanessa: Including you. Like you and I know a lot of each other’s passwords. And that bartering in precious information is a way to signify to someone that your relationship is precious, right? It’s like “I trust you completely. Here’s my password.” And like, you know where the key is to my apartment, and that makes me feel closer to you. And so, I’m wondering, I know that we’ve said before that passwords are set to keep certain people out, but it’s a show of respect for Harry that Cedric trusts Harry with the password.

Casper: Yeah, because he could have said “Meet me at 9, and I’ll open the door for you.” But no, he gives him the power and the trust to use the prefects’ bathroom.

Vanessa: Right, Cedric, if he didn’t trust Harry, could have assumed he would give it to Ron and then to Hermione, and then everyone would be using the prefects’ bathroom. And Harry never uses it again after this one time. Harry treats that precious gift very respectfully.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: I just think that passwords have that added meaning, right? One of the funniest things, actually, that’s now coming to mind is a moment that I felt like really close to my brother is when he handing me his debit card for something and he told me his password. And I was like “No, that’s my password.” (Casper gasps) And he was like “No, that’s mine.” And we have the same 4-digit password for the same reason. It was obviously totally uncoordinated,

Casper: I love that! Imagine what other like synchronicity there exists in the Hogwarts building.

Vanessa: I mean, later in the books, we see Harry can guess Dumbledore’s password. It’s not like these passwords are really stringent, like you’re just saying them loudly in the hallway (Casper laughs) and anybody can overhear. It feels like more of a gesture to safety and intimacy than like an actual way to keep someone out.

Casper: The other thing it reminds me of is like, you know when you travel in an airport, it’s a stressful, unpleasant experience most of the time.

Vanessa: No, I love it.

Casper: But then, you know, you discover things like TSA pre-check, which allow you a faster security process. And then you discover things like the lounges that exist. And then, for the like ultra-elite, they don’t even go through the normal airports, there are all these private-jet places.
And it just feels like, in some way, Hogwarts is the same in that the more information you have, and it maybe isn’t about money so much or status in Hogwarts, but it’s about the precious information that you have access to that allows you to live a completely parallel life.

Vanessa: I think it’s sometimes about just having put in your time, and I think it’s sometimes about having had an older sibling, you know, who’s been there ahead of you who can warn you about the sticky step. But sometimes it is about status, right, cause the people who have the nice bathroom are the prefects.

Casper: That’s true.

Vanessa: Yesterday, my brother was in town, and we went on an 8-mile walk around the city of Boston. But it was Easter, so everything was closed, so when I had to pee there was nowhere to pee. And I was like “Do you know what’s near here? A Harvard club.”

Casper: Ah!

Vanessa: I am not a member at the Harvard club, and we were in running clothes cause we knew we were walking everywhere, and it was Easter – brunch was happening – but I flashed my precious Harvard ID, and they let us in to use the bathroom. And we, like, we looked like such jerks. But we had this like precious piece of plastic that still got us in. And I gotta say, like these two Jewish kids going to the Easter Harvard club to pee; it was one of the funniest and most satisfying things, right? There is something so satisfying about stealing something precious that feels elicit. Like being bumped up to first class, which in all of my flying has literally never happened to me, right? You just enjoy it so much more, but the other thing that happens – and I think we see that in this chapter, too – the other thing that happens to me sometimes when I’ve been handed something precious is what a lot of people call a scarcity mindset.

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: As soon as I’m offered something precious, I’m like “I’m only gonna have this for a short period of time, you know. I have to use as much of it as possible. No, no, stay away.”

Casper: That’s why I don’t want to get bumped up to first class because forever, I will know what is possible when I’m back in economy!

Vanessa: Well, and we see that with Harry when he’s trying all the different kinds of bubbles. And, first of all, I’m like, if you’re using so many different scents, it probably smells terrible.

Casper: Thought the same.

Vanessa: And Mrs. Norris can smell him, probably because he used like way too much of that bubble bath because it was this precious thing. Whereas, if you have access to this nice bathroom all the time, you know like “I prefer the blue one with the..”

Casper: Just a little lavender for me

Vanessa: Exactly. But there’s like this wanting to make sure you take full advantage feeling that I actually find really stressful when I’m given access to something that feels too precious.
Casper: Yeah. Vanessa, I want to ask you a question about this bathroom scene from another angle, which is we re-encounter Moaning Myrtle. And she is a little thirsty. (Vanessa laughs) Like she is excited. First of all, she’s seen Cedric get naked and in the pool.

Vanessa: She hangs out and looks at naked prefects all the time.

(Casper laughs)

Casper: And now she’s excited that Harry is there. And like, he’s lucky enough to actually have a verbal conversation with her. But I wondered what you made of this. How did you think about Myrtle in this scene?

Vanessa: Well, I thought it was striking how much more creeped out I was about Moody being able to see through clothes than Myrtle and the gender dynamics of that. But the thing that was most striking to me – because let’s be honest, Myrtle is being completely creepy. Like this is absolutely inappropriate; she should be reported, and she should be kicked out of the castle for this. She’s a peeping Tom. But the other thing that was interesting to me is how precious your body is to you when you’re young. If my mom was anywhere near the changing room while I was trying on clothes in high school, I would be like “Get back! You can see through the crack of the changing door!” And like somewhere in your thirties, you’re just like “I don’t care”.

Casper: “Here it is!” (Casper laughs)

Vanessa: You know, like, children start pulling on your clothes and you don’t care and somehow you’re less precious about your body?

Casper: Well, and that’s kind of what I love about Myrtle in this scene. Actually, having a physical body is so precious to her, and she doesn’t have it anymore. And I think that’s partly why she’s kind of lusting – you know, in this inappropriate way – over people who still do have their bodies. And she’s so difficult to get along with, frankly, that she’s doing it from a vantage point of just looking and not actually talking to people. The only reason why she talks to Harry is that they have an existing relationship, right? There’s no reports of her bothering other people. Doesn’t mean that it’s appropriate, but there’s something about like it’s not just that she’s lusting after handsome boys, it’s that she’s lusting after having a body.

Vanessa: I mean, she says that, right? When Harry talks about “How am I gonna breathe under water?” She’s like “Oh, talk about breathing!” But I mean, she misses everything about being alive so much that she’s even jealous of breathing.

Casper: Yeah. I would never think about how precious it is to breathe, but it takes that kind of perspective from us to remember what’s really precious, you know? Some things we assume are just always going to be there, but they’re not.

**Ad for Lola**

Casper: Vanessa, where else did you see this theme of preciousness in this chapter?

Vanessa: So I really saw in the Marauder’s Map.

Casper: Mmmm
Vanessa: The Marauder’s Map is sort of like definitionally precious: it’s one of a kind, you need a password in order to be able to use it, it gives you intel that you can’t get anywhere else. But what really is amazing is if you were Barty Crouch, Jr., this map comes into your life at the perfect moment.

Casper: That’s what I was thinking as I was reading it. Like he is so lucky right now.

Vanessa: This was like Harry has just revealed to him that he knows Barty Crouch is in the castle. And right at that moment, Barty is able to get the map from Harry so that Harry isn’t going to be able to trace that that is always true. If Harry was able to hold onto the map, this Barty Crouch, Jr./Moody thing would be outed so much sooner.

So I was just thinking about how one of the things that, as our listeners I’m sure have been able to tell that has stuck with me the most that we have learned through this podcast, is that opportunities have to be right-sized. They also have to be right-moments, right? Barty Crouch, Jr. gets this map at the most precious moment, right when he is about to be found out. And it just makes me think, I can’t think of a moment in my life when that’s true, but I know it’s been true in my life where for some reason, something shows up and I’m like “Oh my God, if that hadn’t shown up, I would’ve been completely out of luck.”

Casper: And what really strikes me is that Harry leaves the dormitory with three precious items: he leaves with the egg, he leaves with the map, and he leaves with the invisibility cloak. And in some ways, each of these 3 precious items could be the pivot point of the story. Of course, he learns more about the egg, but let’s say that Snape caught him and took the invisibility cloak, that would’ve allowed Snape to do all sorts of things in this moment where his Dark mark is starting to burn again, as it does in this scene. Something has been stolen from Snape’s office; he would’ve been able to creep in there and see what’s going on maybe. It just struck me that, yes, it’s about timing and it’s about right fit of the opportunity in terms of our life, but like also like the right tools in a way. In some way, those three precious items all fail him.

Vanessa: Ooooh

Casper: Right? Like the egg falls and makes the huge amount of noise, which summons all the people to the corridor. The map gets found, and Moody takes it and uses it to avoid being caught, and then finally the cloak doesn’t stop Moody’s magical eye seeing him – and, fine, in this context Moody is helping him, but he’s unable to be the master of his own fate, in a way.

Vanessa: Yeah, but that just speaks to me of like when you’re holding something too close to your chest, and it’s too precious to you, often it precludes you from something. It’s actually a gift that Moody can see through the invisibility cloak.

Casper: Yeah, or it makes me wonder “Is Harry falling back into his old trap of always doing everything alone again? They could’ve brought their swimming trunks. He and Ron could’ve gone out together. They both still fit underneath the cloak, just about, right? Like he’s not allowing other people in to this part of his adventure, which I think leaves him vulnerable.

Vanessa: Yeah, and it’s because it’s just him, he’s holding too many things and literally drops it.
Casper: Exactly.

Vanessa: The real fatal flaw that we see Harry going back to, I think that you're right, it's this going it alone thing, but it's also - oh my God, I could just scream in the moment where it's like “Curiosity got the best of him”, and I'm like “Why?! Go to bed!”

Casper: Cause he sees Barty Crouch on the map, and he’s like “What’s Crouch doing in Snape’s office?”

Vanessa: Yeah, what is he gonna do in his night shirt with his wand and egg and the map if he finds Barty Crouch in Snape’s office? Why does he think that this is something he should just like go and figure out? Report it to McGonagall tomorrow, Harry! So I think that it shows, right, that we can have all of the trappings. I can get everything that I want. I want to be able to buy my own house one day, I would like a nicer car, I would love, you know, a weekly massage appointment, and I could get all of those things, but like my essential Vanessa-ness is still gonna be there. And any flaws that I have are still gonna be traveling with me. So even if we covet these precious exterior things, I think that we can see from Harry that you can have all the precious exterior things – you can have the egg, the wand, the map, the invisibility cloak – but if you’re flaws aren’t something that you are actively addressing, you’re still gonna get caught half-naked with your foot in a stair under an invisibility cloak with, you know, a screaming egg down the stairs.

Casper: Totally. And I think all of this points to the fact that, you know, despite having been put into this tournament not from his own volition, Harry is enjoying being a champion. That’s something we haven’t really explored together yet, but I think it takes until Book 7 for Harry to really reject his own hero narrative, in a way. He’s still embracing that, he wants to win, he wants to be the best, he wants to be the star. And that’s pushing him in a way that isn’t quite healthy, I think, here.

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Music interlude

Casper: It’s time for our spiritual practice. And Vanessa, we’re going to do florilegia for the last time in a little while. And so, just a reminder to everyone, this is the practice of choosing two bits of sparkling text that stood out to us when we read it and putting them together. And think of moving through the text as picking flowers from a garden and putting them into a kind of bunch of flowers together and seeing a whole new something being created.

Vanessa: And because we live in Boston, an April snow will fall on the flowers (Casper laughs). They will freeze and die before they’ve ever been given a chance to bloom.

Casper: It’s cruel, cruel truth that you tell us, Vanessa. So tell us, what is the sentence that you picked from the text this week.

Vanessa: I picked, “This might be exactly what I was looking for.” What did you pick?

Casper: “Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.”

Vanessa: So sad.
Casper: I know.
Vanessa: Interesting. You picked a super depressing one, and I picked a sort of upbeat one. Casper: Yes, so tell me, why did you pick “This might be exactly what I was looking for”? Vanessa: Because it is exactly not the attitude I have in the world, and it is the one I wish I had. Why not see things that come into your life as having a little bit of magic and trying to say like “This might be exactly what I was looking for.” I no longer see what the downside is of having something come into your life and not just saying thank you, but actually seeing it as a gift that can change things for the better. If somebody brings a random ingredient to a dinner party, make it the center piece of the meal because it might be the exact thing you’re looking for, and it might just make the world more joyful if things that come into your life, you treat in that way. What about you, Casper, why did you pick “Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.”?
Casper: It just made me really sad. It made me really sad, and it made think about – there’s all these statistics about loneliness, you know, one in four people say they have no one to really talk to, including family members. And I’m someone who’s very social and very lucky to be so connected in so many relationships, but I’m really conscious of a time when that wasn’t the case, and so I’m really passionate about this question of connection and disconnection. And I feel like that age of Myrtle in her awkward bathroom crying reminds me of my own experience.
Vanessa: That really connects the two sentences to me because that feeling of loneliness might be exactly what you’re looking for to motivate you to go find people, right?
Casper: Oooh. Ooh, I love that. Okay, so let’s put them together. So let’s read them this way around.
“Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.”
“This might be exactly what I was looking for.”
I was recently looking at a friend’s wedding pictures, and it was a relatively traditional Jewish wedding. And apparently often, a Jewish bridegroom will wear a kittel, which is kind of like a white coat, which sort of a burial shroud. It’s something that they will ultimately be buried in. So in this moment of ultimate joy and happiness and connection, there’s a reminder of death and physical decay and separation. And it made the whole thing more poignant, more painful and sad, but just that bittersweetness was fully embodied. So I’m just seeing that in these two lines being put together, as well. There’s a sadness and a joy.
Vanessa: We just buried my grandfather, and his kittel, it wasn’t the one he got married in because they got married right after the war. But it was the one that he always wore for Passover, and so I saw it every Passover seder of my childhood. For me, there’s a moment in the Passover seder where you hide a piece of the matzo, and then the kids are supposed to go and find it. And my grandfather would always hide it and always tell me where he hid it (Casper laughs) so that I could always get the prize. And he would often hide it under his kittel. And so I would have to go dig under his like shirt and go and grab it. And so it’s so nice when like right before the funeral, the family gathers to sort of acknowledge that this is his body and see him rocked in that kittel that I had so many wonderful memories of, which I didn’t realize was going
to be meaningful to me, but when I saw him in it, it was like exactly what I was looking for. For a
funeral to be flooded with precious memories of somebody in such a visceral way was so
meaningful.

Casper: Well, precious memories but also a direct connection between you and him that no one
else necessarily even knew about.

Vanessa: Yeah

Casper: That just makes it extra meaningful. Vanessa, what if we turn it the other way around?

“This might be exactly what I was looking for”

“Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.”

Vanessa: Well that puts a whole new like optimistic spin on the “Nobody missed me, even when
I was alive”, right? Like maybe what I was looking for was that nobody missed me when I was
alive.

Casper: Ohh

Vanessa: Maybe I needed to be alone, maybe I needed to be independent. I do not believe that
suffering is always beneficial, I think it sometimes is, but I think it often is not. But as someone
who has fallen in love with a wonderful partner, I look back on previous relationships and now
I’m like, I’m actually really glad that that relationship ended. And I think we need to give
ourselves permission to say that about other things. Maybe it’s for the best that that friendship
ended in that way. Who knows what that would’ve led me down, and look at where I am. I guess
my whole shtick today is that I want us to be thinking more positively about things that are
traditionally conceived of by our own selves and our own lives and our own narrative writing of
our lives as negative. What about you? Do you want me to read them to you?

Casper: Please.

Vanessa:

“This might be exactly what I was looking for”

“Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.”

Casper: It’s making me think, you know, the words “This might be exactly what I was looking for”
comes from Moody when he finds the map, but it’s also – you could read it as Harry saying that
when he hears the merpeople’s song, and I’m suddenly thinking about who else might be
voicing “Nobody missed me, even when I was alive.” And I’m thinking about Percy, as well, like
as, you know, a brother that maybe so many of the Weasleys, at least in Percy’s imagination at
this point and as it grows in the next few books, that he wouldn’t be missed by his family. And of
course, that’s not true. But he’s excluded in so many in-jokes and I don’t know, there’s
something sad that this is not just the voice of Myrtle. I feel like there’s other characters, I mean
even someone like Flitwick, characters that we never really see embedded in relationships but
always – Snape is the other obvious one. I just feel like so many of us might be walking around
with that narrative in our heads, in a way that is really unfortunate.
Vanessa: Yeah, and it gives me a lot more empathy for Percy, right? (Casper laughs) If that’s what he’s thinking. If you’re obnoxious, you at least get to feel like it’s in your control.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: That they won’t miss you. It’s also possible that if nobody missed you, it means that you lived a full life and you gave people enough.

Casper: You fulfilled your obligations.

Vanessa: Yeah. I mean I miss Papa. But there’s also something lovely about knowing that he was 96, I knew he loved me, he knew I loved him, there’s more peace.

Casper: There wasn’t any unfinished business.

Vanessa: There was no unfinished business. Exactly. And you miss someone less, I feel like, if all the business is finished in that way.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: I mean they say, you know, I took a Caring for the Dying class, and the big takeaway is that the way to die well is to live well. The people who struggle the most emotionally and spiritually as they’re dying are people with regrets, and there’s this great doctor named Ira Byock with “a way to die well is to live well” and that if you are in sort of physical or emotional distress, well dying – the 4 things that you should say are “Please forgive me,” “I forgive you,” “Thank you,” and “I love you.” That that can sort of finish up a lot of business, those simple steps. And so I feel like if you do that, then maybe you will be sort of missed less and celebrated more.

Casper: Yeah, that’s beautiful.

This week’s voicemail is from Lyra Hara (sp?)

*Hi, Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana! My name is Lyra, I am 13, and I am messaging from New Jersey. I recently finished listening to your episode on happiness, and I was thinking a lot about your question, which was “How much does our physical appearance have to do with our happiness?” And um I am someone who puts a lot of time and effort into their appearance, and I think I found the answer to your question, which is you need to be doing it for yourself. If you are dressing to impress a crush or your classmates or uh your boss, I don’t know I’m not an adult, then it is going to have more of a negative effect on your happiness. I dress in vintage clothing because it makes me feel comfortable and confident, and I am pretty sure that I am doing it for myself. But that brings me to the question that I have for you guys, which is how can you tell? Because sometimes it’s hard to know who you’re dressing for, and how do you make the distinction between yes, I’m doing this for myself or I’m doing this to make an impression on someone else? Um, anyway, I just wanted to share my thoughts with you. I love your podcast, and I hope you are having a great day. Bye!*
Vanessa: First of all, Lyra, were you named for *The Golden Compass* Lyra?
Casper: I love that book.

Vanessa: Me too! Cause that would just be extra incredible. Your question and your voicemail are incredible anyway, but that would just, you know. I believe in the power of naming strong young women after strong female characters. I think you are asking a truly essential question. And to me, it’s a really fuzzy, difficult line to walk. The questions that I try to ask myself is “Am I doing this to respect myself?” I find myself getting sloppy sometimes and thinking like what do I care what other people think and then it’s like no, I wanna look nice for myself because I feel better when I do look nice and put together. But where is that line between dressing so that I feel good and dressing so that other people think I look good. It’s not something I’ve really come to a conclusion on, other than I think that the way that you dress should be about self-respect and feeling safe and comfortable. I used to wear heels all of our live shows because I think I look silly in flats standing next to Casper; I’m so much shorter than he is. But then my back would hurt for two or three days after one of our shows, and I wear flats at our shows now. It’s hard things. I don’t want to look silly in the photos, but I also don’t want my back to hurt.

Casper: I’m so impressed you’re already engaging with this question so smartly, Lyra, that’s a really good sign.

Vanessa: And please send our love to Pantalaimon.

Casper: It’s time to bless someone from the pages of this chapter, Vanessa. And it’s a good chapter to give blessings for. I’m curious, who are you going to bless today?

Vanessa: I am going to offer a blessing to Moaning Myrtle. And I’m gonna bless her for feeling all of her feelings. I am someone who, when I’m feeling a lot of feelings, shuts them down. I get right into bed, and I either eat my feelings or watch TV away my feelings.

Casper: Both are good strategies.

Vanessa: Thank you! But I actually think that being miserable and like feeling that or feeling angst or whatever it is helps you get to a better place quicker. It might be a slower burn if you’re distracting yourself. I’m not saying we should live like Moaning Myrtle for a long period of time, but I think that there are times when we should indulge our Moaning Myrtle and just feel all of our feelings and feel them out loud in order to get to a good place soon. And I think that she embodies that for us. No pun intended, Myrtle, I know you don’t have a body, okay?

(Casper laughs)

Vanessa: I’m sorry. What about you, Casper? Who would you like to bless?

Casper: I wanna bless Moaning Myrtle, too. Um, because she subverts the male gaze. I feel like she, inappropriately yes, but nonetheless strongly enjoys the male physical form, as I think many of us agree with. And there’s something that my husband and I refer to as “shirtless bro season” where guys will go around without a shirt on or will play games outside.
Vanessa: You named it well. No description necessary.

Casper: I think we’re all on the same page. And I just feel like Moaning Myrtle, in a much more appropriate way, might just look out of the window. And for that, I want to bless her and all of us who can find beauty and pleasure in the everyday. I hope I was able to give that blessing without sounding like a creepy old man. (Casper laughs)

Vanessa: No

Casper: Just on the edge.

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Music starts

Casper: You have been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can donate to our crowdfunder. We are over halfway on our total amount raised. We’ve had donations from $2-$500, and every one matters. So if you’ve been stalling, now’s the time to join us. Go to harrypottersacredtext.com and click on the big orange button.

Vanessa: Please follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Subscribe to our newsletter, and leave us a review on iTunes, and send us a voicemail.

Casper: Next week, we’ll be reading Chapter 26: The Second Task through the theme of loyalty live from our show in Minneapolis. This episode was produced by Ariana Nedelman, me - Casper ter Kuile, and Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl, and we are part of the Panoply network, where you can find ours and other great shows on Panoply.fm.

Vanessa: We’d like to thank Lyra Hara for this week’s voicemail, Rebecca and Charlie Ludley, Julia Argee, Catherine Koburn for the theme for this week, and Stephanie Paulesel.

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Casper: Hello, everyone! It’s Casper

Vanessa: And Vanessa

Casper: And Ariana, but she doesn’t have a voice.

(Both laugh)

Vanessa: She sold it to Ursula.

(Casper laughs)

Casper: (sings) Poor unfortunate souls!

Vanessa: But she got to be with Prince Eric, who is the hottest of all the princes.

Casper: So there you go.

Vanessa: He doesn’t have individual teeth, but that’s a problem that a lot of Disney princes have. I think she made the right decision.

(Casper laughs)