Chapter 22
St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries

Casper: Before this week’s episode, a couple of announcements about upcoming live shows. Vanessa’s going to be in Iowa on March 18th, we’re doing a live show in Los Angeles on March 21st, and then in San Francisco on March 24th. And then, for everyone in and near Indianapolis, we’re doing a live show with John Green on April 15th. Come and get your tickets at www.harrypottersacredtext.com, and click on the big orange button.

Vanessa: Wait, John Green?

Casper: JOHN GREEN!

Vanessa: THE John Green?

Casper: THE John Green.

Vanessa: I don’t think I can make it.

Casper: (laughs)

Vanessa: (*reading aloud*) “Chapter 22, St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

Harry was so relieved that she was taking him seriously that he did not hesitate, but jumped out of bed at once, pulled on his dressing gown, and pushed his glasses back onto his nose. “Weasley, you ought to come too”, said Professor McGonagall...”

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan,

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile,

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

Casper: For the last six and a half years, I’ve lived in America, and as our listeners know, most of my family are in England and Holland, and so around the holiday season when I’m not travelling home, I’m ready to kind of be a bit sad, so much so that for my birthday this year, I prepped my husband, I was like ‘Shaun, what I really want for my birthday is for you to coordinate with all five of my siblings and parents, for a time that everyone can be on the same video call together, right? That there’s one moment in my day where I’m with, with my family. And it was, like, the highlight of my day, nay, the highlight of my month. It was just so lovely, right? You fall back into those happy patterns of like silly jokes, and all of that kind of thing. Just a few weeks later at Christmas, again you know I spoke with everyone, we were WhatsApping with
each other, sending photos, and yet on that day, I felt really far away from them. And I found that confusing, because here I was using similar tools and technologies to help cross this geographic distance which has remained the same, and yet my experience of distance was sometimes very small, and then sometimes very big. And so, I’m really interested to think about how distance is mediated through technology, especially in this chapter where we see things like the portkey, where the portraits are moving from one place to another, and that relationship between the tools that we have and the distance that we feel seems very very present. So I wanna explore that with you today.

Vanessa: Casper, I think that you are highlighting something that so many of us deal with. Technology gives us this false sense that we can move anywhere in the world, and keep in touch, and while that’s true, just because you’re in touch with someone doesn’t mean that that distance isn’t isolating. And I feel like that experience just beautifully articulates how distance is relative, and experienced, and can feel totally different at different times.

Casper: Yeah, that it changes. That’s the thing which I’m always so surprised by.

The other thing that changes with time is how good we are at 30 second recaps.

Vanessa: It doesn’t change with time, we’re reliably poor.

Casper: (laughs)

Vanessa: We thought it would change with time...

Casper: But it hasn’t.

Vanessa: It hasn’t.

Casper: Alright, well I’ll go first.

Vanessa: In three, two, one, go!

Casper: So Harry’s told everyone about this kind of dream/vision thing that he’s had, and they’re with McGonagall, and McGonagall’s like “We’re going straight to Dumbledore”. And we get into Dumbledore’s office and we hear voices and then all the portraits are pretending to be asleep, and Dumbledore won’t look at Harry, but he’s like “This is serious, tell me what happened, and who were you in the dream?” and Harry’s like “I was the fangs”. And then he’s like okay let me make this teapot - no, kettle - into a portkey, and like get the other Weasley children, and they go to the hospital and Arthur’s feeling much better, but like Molly was very worried and the clock was probably on mortal danger, but everything is okay.

Vanessa: Can you please explain to our listeners the difference between a teapot and a kettle.

Casper: Well it’s very important! And America, you don’t understand this. Like,
Vanessa: So, can I guess? Is, a kettle’s where you boil water, and a teapot is where you steep the tea?

Casper: Correct!

Vanessa: Interesting...

Casper: So many American households - this was a total shock to me - do not have kettles. It’s be...bewildering. Okay Vanessa, here is your 30 seconds on the clock. Three, two, one - go!

Vanessa: So, Fawkes makes it clear that Umbridge is coming, so they immediately go to Sirius’s house, and Sirius is a pretty good host and is like taking care of the kids, and um then Molly comes and is like “Your father is gonna live”, and they’re like “Oh my god, that means he’s really really sick”, but then they go and they visit Arthur, all of the kids, including Harry, and ahh Arthur's fine in good spirits, and then Moody and ahh Tonks come in and with the extendable ears they hear that Harry’s mind is being whatevered by Voldemort.

Casper: Yes, he’s being possessed.

Vanessa: Yeah, that magical word that we don’t have in muggle worlds so I couldn’t think of it.

Casper: So Vanessa I wanna start with the portraits in Dumbledore’s office. First of all can I say, what a joy it is to be back in Dumbledore’s office. Like, I think maybe this is one of my favourite chapters in the book so far, just because I just love that scenery right, these old headmasters and headmistresses from centuries past that feel honor bound to kind of help Dumbledore in this moment of need. But what really struck me was that the portraits still have some agency - we see a former Slytherin head of Hogwarts who’s very, kind of like pretending to be asleep, he doesn’t want to respond, and all the other portraits have to shout at him.

What it made me think about was that if there is distance, and for so many of us loved ones are far away, any technology, especially text-based technologies - email, text messages, but even video potentially - it doesn’t allow the same fullness of expression, the same depth of tone, the same clarity of gesture that you would have if you were together, and so like there is always loss. I think that’s what I want to point to, is that any distance will ingender some loss in the communication, and so in this case it’s a delay before Phineas goes, and he also, you know, probably doesn’t convey the fullness of Dumbledore’s message. His repetition of what Dumbledore asks is like “Weasley’s on their way”, you know? It’s a very, kind of, perfunctory message, right? So distance is always gonna keep us, even if there’s technologies that try to break that gap.

Vanessa: I also think it’s more than just physical distance, right? It’s also time, like different schedules. You can live with somebody, but if you’re on a different schedule than them, never see them. And I think we see that with the technology of the portkey. The portkey is able to get the Weasley’s and Harry to Grimmauld Place, but time has not elapsed enough that they can reasonably go and see Arthur, and so even though there’s a technology to collapse the physical distance, they can’t take it, right? And I often think about that with like, I could go home to visit my family more. There are flights available, and I travel so much that I have free tickets. But that’s time that I’m not spending with my life here, and that’s time that I’m not with my partner and his kids. Time is a restriction that can create distance, right? Distance is always possible. I
mean, silence can create distance with two people in a car together. You can be physically close to somebody, have all the technologies to be able to talk to them as easily as possible, and you can still have distance, and we see that between Harry and Dumbledore.

Casper: That’s what I was gonna say too!! Yes!! Yes exactly, like they’re in the room together, and Harry’s like “Why won’t he look at me?”, because Dumbledore is really intentionally keeping that distance.

Vanessa: Yeah, so if we did Havruta, the question that I would ask you is does Dumbledore look at Harry in that last second on purpose, to show Harry this is why I’m not looking at you. Or is it like he can’t help it, he wants to look at Harry, and he thinks there’s only so much harm I can do, they’re about to escape through the portkey. But I think it’s really interesting to wonder, because there are moments where collapsing distance is risky, right? Even just things like staying up late to talk on the phone with someone, you’re tired the next day, right?

Casper: Think of Orpheus, right? He has to leave the underworld with his love behind him, and he has to trust that she’s there, but he can’t. And he turns around to look and break that distance down, and that separates them for all of time.

Vanessa: Yes, I like that it’s like - think of our friend Orpheus.

Casper: (wheeze-laughs)

Vanessa: But yes, no exactly, right? Collapsing distance is not without risk. You make yourself vulnerable by being close to someone. And like, all the closer for them to really wound you, right?

Casper: And it makes sense why Dumbledore's been keeping his distance from Harry, because I think my answer if it was a Havruta question is that he can’t help but look at Harry, like it’s too painful for him to like face-to-face block him out. Like he can do it structurally, and keep his distance around the school grounds, but if they’re in the same room, to maintain that kind of coldness to someone that you do feel genuine warmth for is painful.

Vanessa: Yeah, and I like that because you know I think a question we’re gonna be asking ourselves again and again when we get to book seven, is how much is Dumbledore instrumentalizing Harry, and how much did he actually care for Harry? And I do agree with you in this moment we are seeing that Dumbledore genuinely cares about Harry, because he can’t be in the same room as him and not look, at least for a second.

Casper: I think this is really profound Vanessa, because I haven’t seen a moment of this intimacy with Dumbledore for so long. I think he’d become this kind of distant figure, you know because we’ve slowed down the way we’re reading it, we’re actually creating more distance between ourselves and the whole plot, right, because we’re going so closely into chapter by chapter. I’d forgotten that there is really like a beating heart in Dumbledore, and he’s not just this strategist master planner, and that he himself is vulnerable because of his love. I actually think this is a very beautiful moment of love for Harry. This is also really reminding me of what’s to come in the rest of this book, when we’re seeing Snape and Harry engage in such
close eye contact, and just that parallel of this loving relationship between Dumbledore and Harry that is now broken, right, they can’t look at each other, and this hatred that exists between Snape and Harry that’s now gonna be forced together. It’s just making me think really interestingly about what technologies are forcing us into closer relationships, less distance, with people where it’s really unproductive, right, it just stimulates aggression. Think of comment threads under, you know, articles in The Guardian or whatever it is, versus the places where distance is increased between people who actually want to be together.

Vanessa: Yeah, I mean you just saying that reminds me of something that I think about a lot with my partner’s daughters. This horrible distance was created between their parents through a divorce, but they’re such a gift to my life, that of course I wish for them that their parents were close enough that they could have a house where they got to live with their dad full-time, cause he’s such a good dad, but I also, it’s like hard for me to totally regret the distance between their parents, because I get a closeness with them that I never would’ve had access to. It’s this distance, but this additional relationship that they get to have, at least, whether or not I’m a positive force in their life, they -

Casper: Which you are!!

Vanessa: Whatever, but they LOVE my dog, so like, they get this closeness with a dog, they are cat people, they never would’ve had a pet dog if they hadn’t met me.

Casper: Well, I think we see something similar with the Weasley’s insisting on Harry coming into the hospital room. Tonks and Moody are staying behind, you know, this is family only, and Harry is all too happy to wait and not intrude on this personal moment -

Vanessa: Which is so sweet and self-aware, a 15 year old Harry -

Casper: Yes, snaps for Harry, he is growing! (snaps) Well done, well done Mr Potter! And yet, Molly’s like, just insists on Harry being with them, and you know, that’s of course not to say that we don’t wish that Lily and James had been there for Harry’s growing up, but we do see these other moments of intimacy in the absence of you know, Harry’s parents, yeah.

Vanessa: And I think when Molly does that, tension breaks between Harry and the rest of the Weasleys, right? Ginny seems to be playing a pacifist role. Ron has just shut down. He’s like, do not know how to compute with the fact that I don’t understand how my best friend knew about my Dad. Right, like he’s silent. And then Fred and George almost seem to be angry at Harry -

Casper: Oh yeah.

Vanessa: - or at least skeptical of him, they aren’t saying anything that they can’t take back, but they are keeping Harry at an arm’s length. And then Molly comes in and is like “No no, Arthur wants to see you, he wants to thank you for saving his life”. And even before that, just the way that Molly thanks Harry and is so nice to him at Grimmauld Place, right, immediately collapses that distance that Fred and George and that just confusion has created. Harry is scared that he hurt Mr Weasley, right? Like he confesses to Sirius, like
“I don’t know”. And so I think that there’s just this silence and certain amounts of accusations that are happening without being discussed, that Molly collapses that distance by being so warm to Harry.

Casper: 100%, and we can see that Harry is uncomfortable with this, because he changes his narrative in telling the rest of the Weasley family to what he said to McGonagall and Dumbledore.

Vanessa: Which I respect.

Casper: Oh, totally understand -

Vanessa: Right, no, I more than understand! I think he is correct, like I think he is morally doing the right thing.

Casper: Say more...

Vanessa: Because he has to tell McGonagall and Dumbledore everything, because Arthur is in acute danger and he does not understand what pieces of information are going to be helpful to removing Arthur from danger. But once Arthur is removed from danger, then he wants to communicate to the Weasleys “I would never hurt your father”, and so the more important thing then becomes the relational thing. So in an emergency mode, relationship doesn’t matter, you do whatever you can to, like, save the person in front of you, but then as soon as you’re out of urgent danger I think he’s doing the right thing, he’s showing like I would never do that.

Casper: That’s really interesting Vanessa, yeah. And he also pulls Sirius aside to tell the truth, right, that’s someone where he needs someone to take care of him, so he’s actually managed boundaries extremely well in this scene.

Vanessa: So well. And that he removes Sirius from the situation in order to have a private conversation, not everybody needs to hear everything, especially not in the moment of acute crisis. If you want to create even power, you can do it afterwards, when there’s like calm time for debriefing. I think Harry is handling this incredibly difficult situation beautifully.

So Casper, another technology that we see here that Dumbledore calls our attention to is Molly’s clock.

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: Which, I also think that distance can be experienced differently between two people in the same relationship. So Molly is never at a very far distance from anyone in her family, she always knows whether they are safe or in mortal danger, or whatever it is that they are doing. Whereas I’m sure that the kids can go sort of days without thinking about Molly, cause they’re teenagers, and like you shouldn’t be thinking about your Mom all the time. And I was just thinking about how we can set up our lives the way that Dumbledore has the portraits, right? To be important reminders of what it is that we don’t wanna be distant from, of what it is we want to keep close. Obama famously put up a bust of Martin Luther King in the Oval Office, and it was something that he didn’t want to be distant from, he wanted a constant reminder as he was making
decisions, of the legacy of Martin Luther King. And Dumbledore, I think, wants a Slytherin portrait up in his office, he could move that portrait, and maybe he wants sort of a team of rivals, you know, amongst him, and wants different ideas around him. And so I’m also just thinking about the technologies of photographs, right? Of which photos we put up, and of who, and where. The way that we set up our space, I think we see very clearly in Molly’s clock and in Dumbledore’s portraits can profoundly change our sense of distance from other people and the way that we behave in the world.

Casper: I love this, Vanessa. I love this for so many reasons. I think it also really relates to this question of where do we charge our phones overnight, right? Like I have charged my phone for the last 6, 7 months in the living room, not in my bedroom, because I don’t want it to be the first thing I look at when I wake up. But here’s the other question, for Molly, she has this clock which says “Mortal Danger”, you know, “In Transit”, “Absolutely Fine”, but that clock doesn’t help her do anything about it. And so part of me is also thinking about the distance of information, right? Sometimes, I don’t want information without the ability to do anything about it, because it’s just gonna cause me anxiety, and I think about like the way in which we’re deluged with information in the news for example, it actually on a neurological level, makes us feel less powerful, if we’re overwhelmed with things that are awful about the world, in a way that is way outsized to our lived experience, right, I’m learning about horrific things happening miles and miles away, which on the one hand it is good, to be an informed citizen, but it actually makes me less likely to be contributing to my local place.

Vanessa: Yeah, I find that so compelling, and I completely agree that there are times where that information is only destructive. I just also note that there are times I am grateful for having had that in-between time, right? The time between test and diagnosis, where you’re like okay, so if these are all the different possible diagnoses, what do I want to do? And you really get the time, and it’s only anxiety provoking and it’s awful, but I think that there’s something beneficial to playing the hypotheticals, of like okay if I get this piece of information, how will I change my life? And have conversations with friends about it.

Casper: You’re kind of practising for the different outcomes.

Vanessa: Yeah, and so I think it’s about when we can’t help it but try to make that in-between time productive in a spiritual way, right?

Casper: Yeah, I think that’s very smart.

Vanessa: The biggest lesson that I took away - I took a Death and Dying class at Divinity School - and the most profound change over that semester was that the class, in its entirety, 30 out of 30 people, when given the option at the beginning of class would you rather die immediately without knowing, or be given 6 months, everyone was like oh I wanna die immediately, and then at the end of the class every single person was like no, I want time. Because saying goodbye can be important, and saying I’m sorry to people, and reminding people that you love them, and getting your things in order, that even though that time is so painful and anxiety-provoking, by the end of spending, you know, 4 months thinking about the process of dying, and what makes for a good death, every single person decided that we would prefer to know.
Casper: Gosh, this is also making me think differently about this chapter in the text, because one of the things that we see is that Sirius is very blunt about the willingness of every member of the Order to sacrifice their life for this battle. And that’s what he says, like “You’re children, you’re not allowed to be in the Order for exactly this reason”.

Vanessa: Which is so interesting because it’s him flipping on what he said earlier with Molly, is that where you’re going?

Casper: No, but I love that point too! But what I’m saying is that, yeah I’m just suddenly seeing the willingness to die, in a very concrete way, that I don’t think I’d really understood about the Order until we got to this moment.

Vanessa: And until we had this conversation I did not realise that Sirius flips in this moment, and is like shoot I actually agree with Molly and what she was saying at the beginning of the school year, when Molly was like “They’re too young, they shouldn't be in the Order, we shouldn’t tell Harry things”. And Sirius sees in this moment. Which is such an exciting moment of potential distance creating between Sirius and Harry -

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: - right? One of the problems with Sirius so far has been that he has this collapsed sense of distance between himself and Harry, when there’s a generational distance, and that means wisdom, and safety, and boundaries, and that matters. And I think that we see Sirius realise that the distance is necessary, and therefore become a better caretaker of Harry. None of this had occurred to me until this conversation, which makes Sirius’s death seem all the more tragic. Cause he’s finally accepted this distance and stepped into, sort of, a true paternal role with Harry.

Casper: The responsibility.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Perhaps the most obvious place that we haven’t even talked about yet where this theme of distance shows up, is the relationship between Voldemort and Harry. We see them become more close than ever before, in that when Harry was dreaming and he was imagining he was the snake, it’s still distant from Harry’s living everyday experience because it’s in a dream. In this moment where he wants to attack Dumbledore, he’s cognizant of the connection while it’s happening, and then at the very end of the chapter we’re gonna have Harry overhear this idea of possession. And so I think Harry now understands in a whole new way, this lack of distance between him and the person he’s already fought multiple times, and who he is like in this epic like global war, clash of civilisations with.

Vanessa: Yeah! I mean, Harry’s gonna learn throughout this book how intricately linked he and Voldemort are, and I think this is the beginning of that realisation, right? He to some extent, has been given the freedom to think that when Voldemort is not near him, he can’t feel him, and now he has a sense of, well when he has very strong emotions, I can still feel him. And now it’s like, oh it’s situational, when I’m asleep, and when I look at Dumbledore, there are all these new ways. I mean Voldemort is really like a cancer, right?
Casper: Yes, like literally in his body -

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: And the pain has been growing, right? His scar has started hurting, he’s no longer commenting on that because it’s just painful all the time. It, really that cancer metaphor is powerful because it’s growing, it’s seeping through his body.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Can I point to one more place where I see this theme of distance? So in Mr Weasley’s hospital ward, he’s like, in the Bite Room.

Vanessa: On the 5th floor.

Casper: (laughs)

Vanessa: And so you know, he’s there with his wound, and then there’s someone there who won’t say what they’ve been bitten by, because it was probably illegal, and then Mr Weasley says, sort of in hushed tones, that somebody’s been bitten by a werewolf. And, sort of famously, a lot of people think of the way that being a werewolf is discussed in these books is a metaphor for AIDS. And I really saw it in the description here in this moment, where Mr Weasley knows somebody with AIDS, right? Knows somebody who’s a werewolf, and therefore knows that like it’s not your fault, you haven’t done this because you’re a bad person, it says nothing about your moral character, it’s just something that you have to medically treat, and the person in the bed next to them doesn’t know that yet, right? They haven’t had intimacy, a lack of distance with somebody who’s been a werewolf before, and so they are more distant from dealing with their own experience than Mr Weasley is, who has spent years loving somebody who is a werewolf, and therefore knowing. And so I was just thinking that there’s a collapsed distance physically between Mr Weasley and this other patient, and that Mr Weasley has a collapsed distance from this experience by being such good friends with Lupin, and this person is still in this self-loathing mode and hasn’t come to terms with their own diagnosis and prognosis.

Casper: Yeah, we even see a third voice in Mrs Weasley who says “Is he safe in a public ward?”, you know, there’s - as much as we love Molly, right in her there’s still some prejudice against, even though she knows Lupin, she knows he’s safe, and Mr Weasley has to remind her, like it’s still two weeks before the new moon, don’t worry about it.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: And so it’s such a powerful metaphor for exactly the reasons you laid out, I love that.
Vanessa: And not defending Molly, cause it’s like a horrible moment, but a little bit, right? Like, she’s in scared mode, and all of her children are there, and she’s like lost track of the moon cycle.

Casper: And her husband’s just been bitten, right?

Vanessa: Yeah, and it’s still terrible, it’s just a terrible moment.

(piano interlude)

Casper: Vanessa, this week our spiritual practise is florilegium. So, just to remind everyone, what we’re gonna do now is to kind of walk through the text as if it was a garden, and pluck just a little sparklet, maybe a quote or a section of words, and having both chosen one, put them together, read them together, and see what we can learn about the other, and then from both quotes, what we can learn about the whole text and what we can learn about the theme.

Vanessa: I’m so excited about mine.

Casper: I am also pretty excited about mine, why don’t you go first, what’s your sparklet for this text?

Vanessa: “Fizzing whizbees, said Professor McGonagall”

Casper: Oooohhhhhhhhh...

Vanessa: What’s yours?


Okay, so we’ve got two little sparklets here: “Fizzing whizbees, said Professor McGonagall”, and “Horrible hot, bubbling guilt”. Why did you choose the one that you chose?

Vanessa: I chose mine because I am somebody who I think would make similar passwords to Dumbledore. I love whimsy, I love setting myself up to laugh later, I love silliness, and then every once in a while, when I’m in a really difficult moment, I’m like why did I put this silly thing, right? Like, it just feels so inappropriate, and I can just imagine Professor McGonagall like, this is intentionally light, like you’re going to see the headmaster, and like you have to say the name of a silly candy in order to get in, and I would imagine that 99% of the time that’s like invitational and warm and welcoming, and in this moment I can imagine it just being off putting.

Casper: (laughs)

Vanessa: Being like ugh, okay. It’s like if you have to go to the hospital and you’re like in a costume because it’s Halloween, you know? You’re like, I’m sorry that I’m in a dog costume, but I had to come straight here. It’s like moments like that, so yeah. What about you, why did you pick yours?
Casper: I love that! So mine is from the really interminable hours that the Weasley children survive with Harry and Sirius as they’re waiting for news. And they’ve all got butterbeers, which, I’m like Sirius, give them tea, do not give butterbeers! But anyway, Harry’s sitting there with his stomach full of horrible hot, bubbling guilt. It’s just so visual, right? Like that sense that your insides are moving all around, that your skin is hot, everything just is uncomfortable, and he has to sit in a stationary way, right? Like they’re all just sitting there for hours on end, waiting, waiting, waiting. And that all of this in Harry’s head still really feels like his fault, and that whatever rationality he can bring to this situation, he still feels like he’s the one who attacked Arthur in some way. Like he doesn’t have the whole story, he doesn’t have the information, and so the best way to explain it is that like somehow he’s made this snake attack Arthur in the same way that he wanted to attack Dumbledore. I just found it very visceral. Which, interestingly, when we’re thinking about connections between “Fizzing whizbees” and the “Horrible hot, bubbling guilt”, I’m seeing a very mouth-related connection (laughs) between our two sparklets, right? This sense of fizzing, right, that’s something that happens on your tongue. Something bubbling, right? Like if you’re having fizzy water for example, right? It’s something that’s happening inside our bodies, that we’re bringing something inside our body, and we can taste and touch it in some way. I don’t know where that’s going yet, help me.

Vanessa: Yes! “Horrible hot, bubbling guilt”, “Fizzing whizbees, said Professor McGonagall”. Together it actually sounds like they’re of a list of like awful things, right? Like fizzing whizbees is like a cleaned-up version of a swear, like “I feel horrible hot, bubbling guilt, fizzing whizbees!! Oh darn!!”. But I also just, they all are things that are, speak of like disjointedness to me, right? Like Harry’s sitting there placidly but feels this hot horrible bubbling guilt in the pit of his stomach. McGonagall's in this serious moment but has to say this ridiculous thing. It’s like when a trauma’s in the midst of happening, like nothing makes sense, right? Like everything is just like flipped.

Casper: Well I’m also seeing a connection between the word guilt and who created the password, right? Because the reason why Dumbledore’s in this mess is partly because of his guilt of what’s happened to his own sister, or at least part of the reason why he’s a headmaster and not working in the Ministry. If he had a different history, he would’ve been at the forefront, he would’ve been the Minister, right? He would’ve been shifting the whole country to fight Voldemort, and he’s much reduced in his capacity to do that, and has to use Harry and McGonagall and these, you know, spies and helpers, rather than kind of really fighting the enemy head-on. So I’m just seeing that connection that like Dumbledore is at the heart of this in so many ways.

Vanessa: I love that. The thing that you made me think of with that is that, like “Fizzing whizbees” is a ridiculous thing to have to say in this moment, guilt is the exact opposite of what Harry should be feeling.

Casper: Ahh, yes.

Vanessa: Harry just saved Mr Weasley’s life. He should be so proud, and that he built up enough trust with McGonagall that he couldn’t convince her so quickly, and that he acted on it so precisely, and bravely, and strongly -

Casper: In front of people like Seamus, who already think he’s nuts!
Vanessa: Right! And like in front of Fred and George, and right? Like he just was brave again and again and again, and instead he’s sitting there with hot bubbling guilt, and McGonagall’s like in the middle of this serious business and she has to say “Fizzing whizbees”. Right? Like these traumas put us into situations in which we are behaving in ways that make no sense and go against everything natural within us.

Casper: Let’s just for fun put them the other way around and see what we find. Will you read them out?

Vanessa: “Fizzing whizbees, said Professor McGonagall”, “Horrible hot, bubbling guilt”. Well I know exactly what that made me think.

Casper: Oooooohhh.

Vanessa: The horrible hot, bubbling guilt you feel in your stomach after you ate too much candy.

Casper: (wheeze laughs).

Vanessa: I’m just, right? Like where you binge on something cause it makes you feel good in the moment, and then 20 minutes later, it’s not even guilt that I feel, I’m just like now I have acid reflux, like literally that didn’t make me feel better.

Casper: Yeah!

Vanessa: That’s what it - it made me think of anxious binging of candy.

Casper: I’ve been there. Frequently!

The other thing I’m thinking of is certainly thinking about McGonagall, and how is she feeling? I mean, she’s going straight to Dumbledore, right? In this situation, she’s like “This is above my paygrade”, like, oh I can’t actually activate in the way that we need to, and I’m sure as you said earlier on, she’s been instructed not to bring Harry to Dumbledore, right? Like she’s been there to kind of keep that boundary, and in this moment she probably feels a little bit guilty about breaking that boundary, she certainly feels guilty on behalf of Harry that he’s has to live this experience, and so she’s just doing the best she can, and like “Fizzing whizbees”, right? Like as fast as she can, whatever it takes, she’s gonna go to Dumbledore. So, I just see her crossing that divide that’s existed in the book so far.

Vanessa: Thank you Casper.

Casper: Thanks Vanessa, I love florilegium. It’s so good!

Vanessa: You’re a cliche of yourself.

Casper: (laughs) But it’s really great!

This week’s voicemail is from Holly Glover:
“Hey Vanessa and Casper, this is Holly calling from San Jose, California. I feel like we’re already friends, because the three of us get together often in my car while I drive places. Thank you for being there for me on my various commutes. I just listened to the episode, um, about gratitude from The Order of the Phoenix, and I was listening to both of your perspectives on Percy Weasley, and I found myself asking the question, “Why is Percy a Gryffindor?” Throughout the trajectory of his character, I feel like he embodies many Slytherin characteristics: his ambition, his resourcefulness, his drive, and I found myself asking why Percy was sorted into Gryffindor. And that really led me to think about his character and bravery, and how sometimes, often it is is harder to forgive people for being right than it is to forgive them for being wrong. I think it can be extremely difficult to apologise, and to come back, and to admit that you’ve made a big mistake, and I wonder if Percy’s bravery shows up after the long absence of him with his family. Him having the bravery to come back. And that also reminded me of his younger brother, who leaves the story and comes back. I saw Percy’s character arc, you know, mirroring Ron’s character arc, when he leaves Harry and Hermione in book seven, and has the bravery to return and admit he’s wrong, instead of making up a story about why he was right, or why the conditions were too difficult for him to go on. He does eventually assume the humility needed to return to his friends who need him most, just as Percy later in the story after a longer absence has the bravery to return to his family when they need him the most. So, just wanted to share that thought with you. Thanks for the podcast. Love you guys, take care”.

Vanessa: Holly, thank you so much for that voicemail. I’m curious where we go in your car, and I hope it’s somewhere glamorous. I am struck by, you know, a theory that our friend Bridget Goggin said in one of our very first voicemails, which is that we get sorted into the houses that we need to grow into the most, and so maybe it was, you know, Percy already has all the positive attributes of a Slytherin, and like the things that he has the capacity to grow into, but that he needs to grow into, are his Gryffindor qualities. Maybe it is all the seven years of Gryffindor training that gets him to eventually come back.

Casper: But I also think, you know I think about my residential dean who always tells students who’ve gotten themselves into a sticky situation, your brain is just not yet fully developed. Even here, Percy is still so young, and god willing, he’ll have a long life where he can do so many Gryffindor-y things, so I think one of the other things to remember is to kind of zoom out the lens of moments where we feel like we failed or fallen short, and to see a bigger picture of all the ways in which I know Percy will contribute.

Vanessa: He comes back!

Casper: He comes back.

Vanessa: In the most important moment.

Casper: But in this moment, where we do see all the Weasley’s together anxiously waiting the news of their father, Percy is not there.

Vanessa: Yeah, and he lives in London, so he would be right nearby. And he works in the Ministry, so he’s definitely heard about it.
Casper: Do you think he knows?

Vanessa: Oh, for sure. By the next day. Poor Percy.

Casper: Poor Percy.

Vanessa: So Casper, we now get to each offer a blessing for a character in this chapter. Who would you like to bless this week?

Casper: In the midst of the kind of tense waiting moment, where we’ve seen Harry and Sirius and the Weasely kids kind of waiting for news from Arthur, and the twins are very kind of standoffish, there’s this amazing moment where Ginny sits down. And she does it wordlessly, but she completely transforms the situation, she takes what could’ve become an aggressive standoff into a moment where everyone can acknowledge their helplessness, and therefore their fear and their worries, and the fact that Harry’s sitting there with guilt rather than shame I think is because of Ginny sitting down, like he’s not being turned on by the people that he loves most. And so my blessing is just for anyone who can transform the mood of a difficult situation by a subtle action, whether it’s sitting down, going out to make a cup of tea, an arm around a shoulder. I just think Ginny is a genius in this moment.

Vanessa: Amen.

Casper: How about you Vanessa?

Vanessa: I would like to bless one of the witches in the portraits. First of all, I just love all former headmistresses of Hogwarts, and second of all like they’ve all pretend to be asleep, and then Dumbledore says “Everard, Dillies, everybody at attention” and they all wake up, and Dumbledore says “You were listening?”, and one wizard nodded, and the witch said “Naturally”. And I just love that she’s like skipping all pretense, right like she has just hopped to, and it’s like what are we doing, and they were just chatting about something totally different, and she’s just still such a headmistresses, she’s like “And now we must do things, naturally I was listening, or course, it’s my job to listen”, and so I just love her still owning her authority even though she’s long dead. Once a headmistress always a headmistress, and so whoever this beautiful witch is, I love her.

Casper: I hope they have these portraits for head of houses as well, cause I would want McGonagall on my wall if I was head of Gryffindor.

Vanessa: Oh, such a good point!

Casper: Fingers crossed.

(Theme music begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, or you can support us on Patreon. You can leave us a review on iTunes or send us
a voicemail to harrypottersacredtext@gmail.com. We hope to see you at one of our live shows in California, or go and see Vanessa and Ariana as they do an amazing live show in Minneapolis in the coming months.

Vanessa: Next week, we will be reading Chapter 23, Christmas on the Closed Ward, through the theme of control. This episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text was brought to you by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl, and we are a proud part of Nightvale Presents. This week’s voicemail is thanks to Holly Glover, we would like to thank as always, Julia Argy, Danny Aigan, Maggie Needham, and Stephanie Paulsell. Thanks so much and we’ll talk to you next week.

Casper: Bye everyone!

(Intro music fades)

Casper: ...is the relationship between Voldemort and Harry -

Vanessa: Who?

Casper: (laughs) You might have heard of him. Umm...

Ariana: We need to start a tally of how many -

Vanessa: How many times I make that joke?

Ariana: oh man...