Vanessa: Chapter 26, "Seen and Unforeseen"

"Luna said vaguely that she did not know how soon Rita’s interview with Harry would appear in The Quibbler, that her father was expecting a lovely long article on recent sightings of Crumple-Horned Snorkacks..."

I'm Vanessa Zoltan—

Casper: And I'm Casper ter Kuile—

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

Casper: One of the joys of being in a gay relationship is that you don't have any of the gender assumptions that come with thousands of years of history around some very basic things like who does the cooking and who earns the money, and, you know, all sorts of questions that have been so gendered in how we think about partnerships.

And one of my favorite experiences with my husband Sean, aside from the actual wedding, was planning the wedding. Like, we went all-in. Like we really took like eighteen months to plan the whole thing. And part of what was so fun was that because we were in a gay couple, there weren't any set standards that we felt like we had to do, right? Like, I didn't have to wear a white dress. He didn't have to walk down the aisle with his mother or his father or whatever. And there was such a sense of creativity that if you want to wear top hats together, great! If you want to get the whole congregation standing around you in a circle, great! Lots of ways in which we really felt liberated from some of the maybe heavy expectations that people fall into unthinkingly with a wedding, right? Who really wants wedding cake in their face on their most favorite day? Not me. I want it in my mouth. So in that sense, not having obligations around gender roles was really liberating. But, it can also end up in ways where you just have to navigate a lot more and you have to talk it out a lot more which can (*laughing*) sometimes be tiring.

And so, in thinking through this theme of obligation for the chapter this week, I'm really interested in thinking about—so often when I think about obligation, it is a negative thing, right? Like I feel imprisoned by this obligation or this tradition or this expectation of me that I might not really want. But sometimes, an obligation can actually be relaxing, nearly. Because I know what's expected of me, and so I know how to fulfill it and I don't have to spend a lot of emotional energy trying to figure out what the right thing is.
And so, nearly always, I am grateful to be in a gay relationship, but sometimes having obligations and kind of set expectations and how to meet them can feel really safe and comforting and like, sometimes you just want someone to say, 'Here's the white dress that you wear on the wedding. Here's the top hat that you wear. Here's the thing on top of the cake, and put cake in each other's faces. Let's go.'

So, I'm really curious to think about in this chapter where do we see this theme of obligation and when is it a burden, and when is it actually something that feels really good?

Vanessa: I love that distinction and I feel the same way, that sometimes I'm like, just tell me what to do and I'll do it.

Casper: My first boss said that her favorite thing when she went out on dates was when men ordered for her.

Vanessa: Oh. No.

Casper: And I thought that was horrible, and then I realized, no, you're at the mercy of a company and you're making decisions all day—

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: And so it's a relief when someone says, 'Why not have the salmon?'

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: But I'm a picky eater so that would never work.

Vanessa: Yeah, I—that's not where I want to stop. So Casper, do you find it a relief that you're obligated to go first in today's thirty second recap?

Casper: You know, this feels like a happy pattern that I'm glad to be settling into.

Vanessa: Are you ready?

Casper: Yes!

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go! (*clock ticking begins*)

Casper: So The Quibbler article comes out and everyone's like, oh my goodness, whoa, what's going on, and it's a best-selling issue ever, umm, and what's really interesting is that a lot of the
students believe Harry. People are coming up to him, Seamus says, 'I believe you, I've sent it to my mam.' All's very exciting.

Then, Occlumency lessons continue because Harry is seeing more and more of the scary tunnel and things are happening, and he sees—all sorts of things. And then, Trelawney is fired and it's a horrific scene and McGonagall protects her but then, umm, so she gets to stay, and then Firenze gets hired. (*buzzer sounds*)

Vanessa: So good!

Casper: (*sigh*) Is it Fi-ren-zay? Fi-ren-zuh?

Vanessa: (*in fancy accent*) Fi-ren-zeh

Casper: Firenze. I feel like he's—

Vanessa: Which is how the Italians say Florence—

Casper: Italian, right? (*in Italian accent*) He's an Italian centaur, si. This is Bane and this is Firenze. Welcome to Casper's Italian class, Vanessa, thirty second recap. Eh!!

Vanessa: (*In Italian accent*) Are you Mario and I am Luigi?

Casper: 3– 2– 1– (*In Mario voice*) Here we go! (*laughing*)

(*clock ticking begins*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*) So, Draco and all of the other Slytherins are mad at Harry because he named all of their fathers as Death Eaters, which was like, awkward. And, Umbridge is putting up more and more rules, and umm, and Harry sees into Snape's head for a minute and sees, like, a lot of really traumatic things as a child and then he is continuously—he isn't just seeing umm, the hallway. He's also Voldemort and is seeing Voldemort and is really feeling things that Voldemort is feeling. (*buzzer sounds*)

Casper: Yeah. I mean, the most traumatic thing he sees in Snape's brain is like a really bad hair day.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Yes, so Casper, the moment in this chapter that reminded me most of your story is how Neville says to Harry, 'I'm so glad you did it. You had to tell your story.

Casper: Mmmmm...
Vanessa: I would imagine that that is just so calming for Harry to hear because he's going to get in more trouble with Umbridge, it's like shaking things up even more. He's named names. Like there's all sorts of complicated things, and he was put in a position where he didn't have the opportunity to think about the ramifications and so, for Neville, who is sort of a moral compass in every way, to say, 'You absolutely had to do this: this was a moral obligation,' I imagine is very freeing for Harry.

Casper: Yeah, and what's so interesting is that of course at this point, it's not just about Harry and Voldemort. There's these ten escapees from Azkaban including Bellatrix who tortured Neville's parents, and so he's very specific that people should know about Voldemort but also about what his Death Eaters have done, and also that fact that Harry's naming Death Eaters really makes this connection between what is right for Neville even more clear.

And this—yeah there's something lovely in this moment as well between those two boys, which you know, Harry has carried this secret about Neville's parents and knowing about the impact that the Death Eaters on Neville's family, which now it can be open. It feels like allowing that conversation to expand and become public means that their relationship can actually become more deep. He's not obligated to hide anything from Neville anymore, right? Like, they can be real friends.

Vanessa: Oh, that's interesting, that it was this awkward thing of like, I know and you know but you don't know I know.

Casper: Right!

Vanessa: And Neville sort of being forced to be open about it has created more clearance. I also think that the truly terrible news about the Azkaban breakout I also think has made things very clear for Neville—

Casper: Mmmm...

Vanessa: Right? It's like, okay, this isn't just about Voldemort anymore. This is officially a question to the way that things were, you know, thirteen, fourteen years ago. And so I think he now sees his own moral obligation more clearly. He feels seemingly obliged to be as good of a warrior as his father was, and to like, be fiercely training and to be on the right side of history.

Casper: So what's interesting to me is we think about this theme of obligation because we've been pretty harsh on Neville's grandmother in the last few weeks, and I think rightfully so. But, do we hear perhaps some of the fruit of maybe the impossibly high standards to which she's been holding Neville because there's something in him which knows it's possible to become like his parents, right? That warriorthship that you just mentioned. Should we redeem his grandmother a little bit that she's held up this higher vision of—of who he could become in some way?
Vanessa: No.

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: Because of the way that she did it, right? I do think it's really important to hold people to high standards and to believe that people are capable of things. But she was holding a high standard and saying that is something that you cannot live up to. So regardless of whether or not he ends up surprising her, even if it is because she touted this high standard of high father, she does it so poorly and so—

Casper: Mmmm...

Vanessa: Abusively, that like, no. If she had done it differently I would—I would be more forgiving of her. If she had said, 'You know sweetie, you are not the best student right now, but I think you have it in you,' and like—

Casper: Keep going.

Vanessa: Keep going. And like, love herbology. And you're only fifteen, it's not too late to figure out that you're good at things that you thought you were bad at.

Casper: I mean it is interesting to think how Harry leads and Hermione of course, leads the Dumbledore's Army group, because in many ways, none of the students are obligated to be there. We learn in this chapter that more students are joining, right? Seamus has shown up because now that he believes Harry, he's like, okay I want to join the DA. And so there's something around child-centered learning or curiosity-centered learning where it's about 'what does the child want to learn' rather than being obligated to sit in a classroom from nine to five so that industrialization can happen as parents work in factories, right? That's where this comes from. So I'm just seeing the approach, the different ways in which Neville's grandmother and Harry approach Neville's magical development, essentially, as being very, very different strategies.

Vanessa: Yeah. Another moment where I see these like different ways that obligation could be perceived is that Hermione really puts Harry in a bind in the previous chapter—

Casper: (*laughing*) Yeah!

Vanessa: Where, like, he is all but obligated to tell this story to Rita, right? He's put on the spot. He's not given the opportunity to think about it. Earlier in that same chapter, he's said to Cho like, 'I don't want to talk about this anymore,' and then Hermione puts him into a corner and he has to. And I feel like starting in this chapter we could really see him really starting to resent Hermione for it, right?
Vanessa: And be like, 'You made me do this, and I did not want to.' But instead, it feels like an obligation that he's grateful for.

Vanessa: He never would have sought out Rita to do this himself. He never would have publicly gone after telling his story. But, Hermione obligated him and he's so relieved.

Casper: And what's so lovely in this scene is that we start to see mail coming in, right? From around the country. And some of it is labelling Harry as crazy and, 'I don't believe you,' and what's nice is Hermione and Ron both do this, they kind of filter out those messages. So like, Hermione is taking responsibility for the way that she obligated Harry to tell his story. She's going to do everything she can to kind of protect him from the negative push back, but they will read out loud some of the supportive messages which are incredibly healing for Harry. Like, we know that one of the ways in which he heal is for our stories to be heard and to be affirmed. And that's what's happening at the breakfast table for Harry and so I love that, repositioning of that moment which felt very manipulative when we ended the last chapter, now looks like an obligation that's actually born a lot of fruit.

Vanessa: Yeah, and something that I find so strikingly sweet in this chapter is that it means a lot to him that Cho forgives him and kisses him on the cheek, but it means even more that Seamus believes him.

Casper: Yeah, and he's this beautiful ally, right? Because he doesn't just say, you know, in this moment, 'I believe you,' but 'I've sent it to my mam,' like, 'I'm going to advocate for you with the people who in my circle don't believe you.'

Vanessa: And then I'm going to show up at the DA meeting!

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: Like, I love Seamus. I feel like he completely redeems himself, right? He's not just at the DA meeting, he's like, 'Oh my God, Patronuses are fun,' and like, he shows up and he's all-in once he comes to his conclusion. I hope that if I change my mind about something, I have half this much grace as Seamus does. Like, you haven't just changed my mind, but now I will be
a like vocal proponent of what you've said and he walks right up to Harry and apologizes, and owns his mistake and then like, shows up to be an activist for this new-to-him cause.

Casper: Yeah, and in some ways, he kind of illustrates what it looks like to enter an obligation, right? Because the DA is not a one time only show up if you're into it kind of club, right? We know and we are going to see very concretely what happens when you betray the confidence of the DA in the next chapter.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) God, that poor child.

Casper: Hashtag justice for Marietta. But there's something about that moment where you enter into an obligation, obviously, the most intense form of that might be getting married or becoming a monastic, right? But there's a small moment of that here where really your subserving yourself to a larger relationship or a larger community, right? You are saying, 'I am willing to give up some individuality in order to belong or in order to commit or to do this thing that is really important to me,' and I think that Seamus does that here.

Vanessa: Absolutely. And take risks, right?

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: Which we also see coming up.

Casper: Yeah, the risks are enormous, more than they even understand.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: So one of the key scenes in this chapter is the continuing Occlumency lessons between Snape and Harry. And what really struck me thinking through this theme of obligation is that if Harry didn't have to do these lessons, he would be so into it! He loves Defense Against the Dark Arts. Like, he wants to take on Voldemort. But because he's obligated to do it and because he's obligated to do it with Snape in particular, he's not even trying. Like, Snape literally says, 'We've been doing this for months and you've not improved at all.'

Vanessa: Right, and Snape also I think in theory would love this. This is a really subversive way for him to fight Voldemort. He's specifically protecting his one true love's child. He should be loving this but again because it's an obligation, this is the flipside of it being an obligation and therefore feeling like a chore rather than it being an obligation and therefore feeling freeing.

Casper: Yeah, and what's so striking is in one of the moments, because Harry's been having this dream when Snape goes into Harry's brain, he sees the dream. Snape says something like, 'It's not up to you to figure out what the Dark Lord is doing,' and Harry comes back with this jibe, 'Yeah, that's your job, isn't it?' And then there's this silence and Snape says, 'Yes. That is my
job.' It speaks to his obligation, right? This is his role. And so when we know what we are supposed to do, like we know how to fill our obligations, for someone else to do it feels like a challenge to our very existence and status.

Vanessa: Oh, that's so interesting, I hadn't thought of that, that he's like, 'That's my job. Why are you doing that?'

Casper: 'You're supposed to be like the One Who Lived. You go do the front page stuff. I'm supposed to know what the Death Eaters are doing.'

Vanessa: Yeah! Oh that's so funny. I didn't think of it as annoying to him because Harry's like stepping on his toes. I thought that moment was about 'I sort of wish I was one of the Death Eaters but instead it is my job to tattle on them.' But I really like your reading.

Casper: Oh I like that reading too though. I mean, either way it sets up this situation for the lessons to fail because both feel obligated to be there and neither of them really wants to learn or teach one another. And yet, so help me make sense of this moment: so literally, right after that, is when Harry has this breakthrough and resists Snape's kind of invasion into his mind, and we get the first kind of sneak peak of Snape's internal memories.

Vanessa: Yeah, so I took that as sort of this traumatizing cycle of Snape has just seen all of these traumas that Dudley imposed upon Harry.

Casper: Oh, that's interesting.

Vanessa: And so it's reminded Snape of his own childhood traumas—

Casper: Whooooaaa!!

Vanessa: And so that's sort of what's on the top of his mind. So when Harry resists, and sees into Snape's memory, it's the same kind of memories that are in there.

Casper: I never thought about that. I just thought that Snape walks around thinking about his childhood all of the time, but that makes so much more sense! Like he's literally witnessed, in a very physical way, all of the ways in which Dudley was cruel to Harry in ways that Harry had even forgotten.

Vanessa: Right, and I think that that's another reason why the obligatory nature of this is so annoying, right? Because they are both being forced to remember things that they don't want to remember. So I was just thinking about in divinity school, I was required to take a language class, and I thought it was such a lovely opportunity. I had lost most of my Spanish and I was really excited to like have a year and a half where I was going have to force to practice Spanish
and for me it felt like this wonderful opportunity but I know for a lot of other students it felt like a complete—like for you!

Casper: Like me!

Vanessa: Yeah! It felt like a horrible obligation that had nothing to do with the rest of their work, but as somebody who like, was going into prison hospital chaplaincy and cares a lot about being able to speak to Spanish native speakers, like this was—oh somebody has set aside time for me to do this? And I have to? So I think it has to be sparking an underlying desire—

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: For an obligation to feel like freedom, right? Neville has wanted to be this big warrior.

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: Harry wants to tell his story.

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: And like, Snape and Harry do not want to be relieving their traumas together.

Casper: A hundred percent. I think that's really the crucial thing is like, is an obligation put on us that we never even had that spark for? Or is an obligation a way in which that spark can turn into a fire? Right? Is there a desire for us that the obligation helps to live into, or is the obligation something that crushes our creativity and our life-fulness? Yeah. I love that.

Vanessa where else did you see this theme of obligation?

Vanessa: So the other thing that's interesting to me is how things that used to be choices and fun can become obligations.

Casper: Ugh, yes.

Vanessa: Like, Ginny used to love quidditch so much that she would go and steal all of her brother's brooms—("Casper laughs")—and like rotate them I'm guessing so that they like wouldn't see that one was getting more wear than another, and would like practice under the dark of night in order to become a great quidditch player, and now she hates it so much, she hates the position she's playing. She's like, not good at it. It has gone from being this like great joy to being so painful. And then with Ron—

Casper: It's even worse!
Vanessa: It's even worse! He used to want to be on the team so badly and now Angelina won't let him quit!

Casper: I mean I love just as an illustration of obligation, right? Once you're in, you're in. And actually it's not even up to Ron at this point. He's given the power to Angelina to decide whether he gets to resign or not and she says, 'No, I know that you can do better. I know that you have it in you.' So it's kind of like that grandma and Neville situation but at least she's making him practice all of the time to help him get better.

Vanessa: And if it's just an example of what a good teacher says compared to Neville's grandma and to Snape. It's holding Ron to a high standard and saying, 'I believe in you. I know you can do it.'

Casper: Right, and the twins say they've seen him do it but only if no one is looking.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) If Ron thinks no one is looking. The other thing that is interesting about that though is that Ron has handed this power over to Angelina. He can quit. Just stop going to practice.

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: Right? We tell ourselves these stories about things that we're obligated to do, but we're not! Angelina doesn't actually have this power over Ron. The other thing that just breaks my heart about obligations is Fred and George being obligated to sit on the sidelines, and Harry obviously, but just watch this humiliation.

Casper: This was interesting to me because they said a specific line which, reading it this time, I was like, 'Aha!' They said, 'Quidditch was the only thing worth staying for.' And there comes a point where exactly as you said, something that you have loved has become an obligation and I think in every relationship there's times when things are, you know, less thrilling, whether it's a friendship or a romantic partnership or a workplace, right? There are dips that you have to go through, but at some point, if that tip has just continued, and it's continued, and it's continued, and for the twins at this point, their experience of Hogwarts, like the last thing that they enjoyed was quidditch, and if that's not even worth it, I know for me, I am quite quick to move to the point of like, 'I'm done, I've learnt what I can. This isn't interesting anymore, or like, it's just not working. Like, let's move on.' And that' definitely the case with romantic relationships.

Vanessa: Oh yeah, I'm not only a quitter, I'm like a cheerleader of quitting.

Casper: And I think generally quitting can be a great thing—

Vanessa: I do too! I'm like, it means you tried something and learned about yourself.
Casper: Right, and it creates new space in which other things can happen, and so often we stay in things way longer than we should and it just prolongs something that isn't working anyway. But, how do you know if it's that versus how do you know if something actually's still possible? Because there are times—and I think marriage is one of the them—where it's a way of kind of locking you into something at least to the extent that Ron is locked into the quidditch team, and yes, it might be hard for a year or two years, right? Or three or five or ten, but you don't know what's possible at the end of it, and in fact, the gifts you experience after it are enriched by the experience of a really difficult time and that's proven true for me certainly in my marriage. There's these layers of richness and complexity and ultimately love and forgiveness and companionship which not only makes it worth it, but nearly makes me grateful for the hard times because you know that the depth of love is there to help us make it through those even when, as they inevitably will come again.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: It feels safe. I think that's what it creates, is—is safety. I think that's what obligation is—is the beauty of obligation is that it gives us safety and it gives us confidence in one another, right? I know you are going to show up to the studio, I'm going to show up to the studio, Ariana is going to show up as well, but nobody wanted that but—

Vanessa: Who?

Casper: I don't know. (*laughing*) Maybe she's a figment of my imagination.

Vanessa: Yeah I guess.

Casper: But I think that's the beauty of obligation is that it has this—this deeper gift of basically saying everything's going to be okay.

Vanessa: So Casper the big moment that we have to be sure to talk about is Umbridge kicking Trelawney out. Firing Trelawney.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: Where do you see the obligation in this like, horrible situation that we watch unfold so publicly in this chapter?

Casper: It's interesting because in some ways you can point to the fact that Umbridge might be obligated to fire a teacher who's obviously maybe not quite up to scratch. But the interesting obligation to me is why McGonagall and Dumbledore want her to stay and say, 'Yes, you can fire her, but you can't get rid of her out of Hogwarts, like there is a bedroom for her essentially (*laughing*) and she's allowed to stay.
You know in my reading, it is because Dumbledore kind of instrumentalizes this. You know, he knows that she has had the gift of sight at least once or twice before. We're going to learn much more about that. And so he sees her as an asset in the fight against Voldemort in the same way, frankly, that he looks at Harry to some extent.

Do you think that is what it is or do you think there is something else that mobilizes them to support her?

Vanessa: It seems that McGonagall doesn't know about that in that McGonagall is just offended morally right? Like, you can't just arbitrarily kick somebody out of their home. I think that often, we do things like that not explicitly but it's like, well if you do that to her, you could do it to me—

Casper: Mmmhmmm...

Vanessa: Right? And, I think that there is something lovely about standing up when something is happening to your neighbor right? Rather than waiting. I also would imagine that it offends McGonagall as a teacher. We're not teaching our students to treat one another as trash that we just dispose of on a whim. And so, yeah, I think that there are a lot of obligations at play here. I agree with you. I trust Dumbledore zero. I think he instrumentalizes. But I also think this could have been an opportunity for him to say, 'Umbridge has power,' and like pick his battles with Umbridge. And he—he picks this battle, which I think I agree with him: it's a battle worth picking. And I loooove the move of hiring Firenze, right?

Casper: Ugh!

Vanessa: Like, here is a loophole in your perfect system and I'm going to exploit it.

Casper: You know, it reminds me of is during the height of the foreclosure crisis in the run up to the financial crisis in 2008, you had a lot of kind of neighborhood groups supporting people whose homes had been foreclosed and who were being evicted, and literally people were able to stay in their homes because their homes would be surrounded by neighbors for a number of hours while the bank representatives were kind of their to force people out of their home. You know, it just gas to show like that we can resist that and it actually can change things in the way that exactly like McGonagall does and Dumbledore does too.

(*piano interlude plays*)

Vanessa: So Casper, it is our last Florilegia for a little while. And so, I am wondering as we dive in what sparklet you have picked this week?

Casper: I chose,

‘Harry, you're worse than Ron... well, no, you're not.’
Vanessa: (*laughing*)

Casper: (*laughing*) How about you?

Vanessa: I picked,

"Unfortunately, the back of his mind was no longer the secure place it had once been."

Casper: Ohhhhhhh...

Vanessa: So do you mind reminding me us where this is in the text?

Casper: So, Harry and Hermione are debriefing the disastrous date that Harry and Cho had had, and Harry's just like completely confused like, 'Women, why, I don't understand,' and Hermione is like, 'Listen, what you should have said...’ (*laughing*) and so she's kind of frustrated with Harry because he's just a little bit clueless and then halfway through the sentence of saying that like, how rubbish he is, she's reminded, oh, there's Ron, as he walks in, and she's like, 'Oh no, he's much worse.‘

Vanessa: (*laughing*)

Casper: In part because at this point, we already like have that little sense of potential romantic spark brewing between Hermione and Ron and he is not getting it! (*laughing*)

Vanessa: Such a dummy. (*Casper laughing*)

Casper: So yeah, I just—I love that little moment.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Where is the sparklet that you choose in the text?

Vanessa: So mine is in Occlumency. Harry's like really wanting to write to Sirius but can't and he like, wants to push the thought of Sirius to the back of his head, and he's realizing that the back of his head is a place where he can't push vulnerable thoughts right now, and this is in that moment of that class, and just like how invasive being in this class with Snape is.

I'm wondering why you picked your sentence. What was it about— Harry, 'Harry, you’re worse than Ron... well, no, you’re not'? —why that spoke to you?

Casper: I guess I like it because it illustrates how well they know each other. And within that knowing, also loving one another, that on the face of it, it's kind of an insult, right? (*Vanessa
laughing*) Like, 'You're awful. Well, not as bad as he is. But like, you're both really bad.' But it's also a very loving comment, right? Like when you can joke with someone openly about their faults, it's actually a sign of trust and companionship. And so, I—I just found it a very touching moment, especially within a kind of a three-way context of three friends. If two of them are talking about the other one behind their back, it can very quickly take a turn and become this kind of gossipy nastiness, and here it has none of that tenor. It is very sweet. That's why I like it. Because it is sweet. (*Casper laughing*) Why did you choose yours,

"Unfortunately, the back of his mind was no longer the secure place it had once been."

Vanessa: I think I picked it 'cuz I, until that line this time, have been annoyed with Harry for being so stubbornly bad at Occlumency, and I was like, God, this poor kid. There's nowhere safe. He can't even think vulnerable thoughts! And, this school is terrible. Ginny has learned that diary-keeping is wrong. There are extendable ears so anyone could be listening to you in portraits and whatever. Now, you can't even have thoughts!

I think it just spoke to me because (*Vanessa laughing*) I don't know, sometimes I feel that way about the internet or texts, right? Like, everything we're doing is being surveilled and can be turned against you, and—but obviously I feel as though I can still have private thoughts and so I just really feel for Harry.

Casper: Mmmm...

Vanessa:

"Harry, you're worse than Ron... well, no, you're not."
"Unfortunately, the back of his mind was no longer the secure place it had once been."

Casper: It's making me think of like, kind of being forgetful. I mean, literally what's happening in the sentence that I chose is Hermione is making one statement and then changing it. She's amending her thought. And just that idea of like, as we grow older and certainly as our brains kind of degenerate, there are many ways in which the things that we relied on in terms of our memory and our capacity to think things through don't become trustworthy in the same way. I'm certainly seeing this connection between these sentences of feeling very sure of one thing and then being like, oh, but wait. Can I trust myself? Which is such an important theme in this book, especially latter chapters. You know, Harry's going to be seeing things. To what extent can he really trust that?

Vanessa: Yeah. Oh that's so said if you think of that sentence in terms of like, dementia, right? Oh, I should do that later. And then, knowing that you're not necessarily going to remember that. That's a feeling—obviously I do not have dementia, but lately I have found myself promising things and then completely—
Casper: Mmmhmmm....

Vanessa: Forgetting the conversation. Being so overwhelmed, yeah, if I don't write it down it just doesn't happen.

Okay what happens if we put these sentences in the opposite order?

'Unfortunately, the back of his mind was no longer the secure place it had once been.'
'Harry, you’re worse than Ron... well, no, you’re not.'

Vanessa: So now it seems like really bad sitcom dialogue (*Casper laughing*) of like, (*in mocking voice*) 'You can't remember anything, you're worse than my husband... Well, no you're not.'

Casper: That is so true! It really feels like 90’s sitcom dialogue! (*Vanessa laughing*)

Vanessa: I guess these two sentences make me realize how set apart Ron and Hermione are from Harry.

Casper: Mmmhmmm...

Vanessa: Like, they have so much safety and security in their own lives and own relationships that they can openly mock each other to each other. They don't mock Harry. And Harry doesn't mock them. Like, he's in such a precarious place in his entire life that he cannot even be teased.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: Right, like she starts to a little bit tease Harry but then she doesn't quite do it.

Casper: She kind of backs off by making sure Ron is worse.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: He's in such a tender place, right? And especially at this point in the story where Cho has not quite come back to him and said, you know, 'I believe you.' So he really feels like that relationship is gone and that hope is gone and—

Vanessa: The article is out but hasn't been published and like—

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Luna, who I love, is like, 'and your story isn't as important as—whatever, honking snorkacks' or whatever, right?
Casper: Basically, Poor Harry.

Vanessa: Poor Harry. (*Casper laughing*) I really do think we should retitle this book.

Casper: Poor Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (*Vanessa laughing*)

This week's voicemail is from Iris Gonzalez.

(*Voicemail beep*)

Hi Vanessa, Casper, Ariana, and the whole HPST fam. My name is Iris and I'm from Los Angeles. I'm a huge fan of the podcast. My sister and I are obsessed with your episodes and we even listen to them together, though we live six hundred miles apart.

Anyhoo, I just listened to your episode on distance, Chapter 22, and there's something I wanted to highlight. One thing that haunts me throughout Book Five is Dumbledore's withdrawal from Harry in arguably Harry's hardest year.

Harry struggling mightily with this emotional processing and stress and without any explanation, his mentor and guide abandons him. This has always rubbed me the wrong way because it touches on one of my personal ongoing struggles. I have struggled with anxiety and depression since my adolescence and have found that my support network of close friends, mentors, and family to make it through is essential to my sometimes precarious balance.

When those relationships feel insecure due to my interior struggles or projections or outside forces, I find that it exacerbates some of my worst symptoms. When the distance or gaps that go unnoticed or specifically unacknowledged I find myself making up stories about the person or the situation that end up justifying really deep-rooted insecurities and feelings of self-hatred.

This reminds me of Harry and his seemingly erroneous and irrational theories as to why Dumbledore is ignoring him. With that in mind, I look forward to analyzing this ongoing pattern through the rest of the book, both from Harry's mindset and perhaps his unhealthy coping mechanisms and from Dumbledore's perspective, something I've never been able to wrap my head or my heart around.

With this, I'd offer a blessing to Harry, and to anyone who feels alone and abandoned and not sure why and the difficulties that come with navigating that space. You are not alone. Well, thank you for listening. I hope to see you guys in LA for your show. Much love.

Vanessa: Iris, we'll see you tonight in LA! I just find that everyone from Los Angeles is the best. I mean, this is something that is still weighing on me, someone who has chronic illness and has bad days, which is just like, I disappear on people and don't communicate why. And I find that
it's because I don't totally—there isn't clarity around it. I don't know when I'm going to feel better. I don't know exactly how much I should be pushing myself.

Casper: Mmmm...

Vanessa: I feel like we often pull away from one another. And we ourselves don't know why we're pulling away, or we don't know how to have a conversation about it.

Casper: Mmmhmmm... Yeah, I mean I cancelled on a friend this morning and I did know why which was like overwhelmed with work. At the same time, I knew that I could ask and she was like, don't even worry about it. You know? (*laughing*) So I think, yeah, the bounds of what obligations we have to one another is something we have to keep navigating. And there's something in when a friendship feels good, sometimes it's you that cancels, sometimes it's me that cancels. When it gets to be one-sided, that's when that anxiety comes in that Iris is talking about of like, I don't know what's going on, like, did I do something, right? And we kind of go into these mental doom spirals where we think it's about us when nearly always, it's really about them.

Vanessa: Yeah, I think the thing that as I get older that I'm getting better at is assuming good intentions in other people. I cancel on people all of the time because right before I'm supposed to go somewhere, I realize I just feel too sick and I was too excited about making the plans to understand how much energy it was going to take. I've had to ask for a lot of forgiveness and usually it's about other people.

Thank you so much Iris and we're really excited to see you tonight.

Casper: So it's time for us to bless someone in the pages of this chapter. Vanessa, who are you going to bless today?

Vanessa: I would like to bless Sybill Trelawney—

Casper: Mmmm...

Vanessa: Not only is she being fired, but she's being mocked as she's being fired. When Umbridge is like, we should have been able to see this coming since you're a Seer, and it's just like, the most awful thing. I used to be in an improv group in college and this one guy used to come up to me at parties and say, 'Say something funny!' As if that's how like predicting the future works, or that's how comedy works. It's just bullying. The feeling of being like, publicly kicked while you're down, I just like feel so terrible for Trelawney. And Umbridge is a complete monster. And so, I want to offer a blessing to Trelawney for maintaining dignity in this moment and for not taking the bait that's being offered and yeah, and just offer empathy for her in this like really awful moment.
What about you Casper?

Casper: So from one divination professor to another, my blessing is for Firenze. We know that he's left his fellow centaurs. We are going to learn much more about him in the next chapter. We've really only meet him as he enters the door, right? This moonlit sky, stars twinkling behind him, like he's leaving one world to enter another in a pure act of devotion at great cost to himself as we are going to learn, right? Students might already see that hoof print on his chest as he's standing there in the doorway, just one sign of the way in which he's been physically ejected from his community and it's no longer safe to return.

So, my blessing for him and for anyone who is just making this incredible sacrifice to serve a larger goal. So for anyone in a situation like that, I just have such deep admiration for your courage and your—your sense of right and wrong and your conviction. And perhaps the obligation that you feel to step into this action. I think it's so powerful. So a blessing to you.

(*Theme music begins*)

Vanessa: You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and you can join our Facebook group to chat with other listeners about this episode or every episode.

Come and join the hundreds of people who are supporting us on Patreon. You get fantastic exclusive content including Casper doing a Mario and Luigi impression. Leave us a review on iTunes, send us a voicemail, and we hope to see you tonight in LA and Sunday in San Francisco.

Next month, Vanessa and Ariana will be in Minneapolis with Laura McInerny and we will all be in Indianapolis with (*spoken songlike*) John Greeeeeeeen.

Casper: Next week, we'll be reading Chapter 27, "The Centaur and the Sneak" through the theme of hate. This episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text is produced by Not Sorry Productions, executive produced by Ariana Nedelman with editing support from Ariana Martinez. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl and we're part of the Nightvale Presents family. Thanks to Iris Gonzalez for this week's voicemail, Julia Argy, Dani Agin, Maggie Needham, and of course, Stephanie Paulsell.

We'll see you all next week!

(*Music ends*)

Vanessa: Anyway, it has made me appreciate that every time you mock me, that's because you're so secure in your love for me.
Casper: That's right. (*laughing*)

Vanessa: Wow, this is a really passive aggressive way to teach me that lesson. (*Casper laughing*) I picked this quote for this week's Florilegia, 'Casper, back off!'

Casper: (*laughing*) I don't know what it's saying, why did I choose it?

Vanessa: It just sparkled up at me! (*Casper laughing*)

(*I Only Listen to the Mountain Goats podcast ad plays*)