Casper: Before we get started, we have a favor to ask of you. “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text” is conducting our annual audience survey so that we can learn a little more about you, and we would really value your feedback. Could you take a few minutes and tell us about yourself and share your thoughts about the show? Please visit surveynerds.com/harrypotter to take the survey today. That’s surveynerds.com/harrypotter.

Casper: Chapter Thirty-Four, “The Department of Mysteries”

“Harry wound his hand tightly into the mane of the nearest thestral, placed a foot on the stump nearby, and stumbled clumsily onto the horse’s back. It did not object, but twisted its head around, fangs bared and attempted to its eager licking...”

Casper: I’m Casper ter Kuile.

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And this is “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text”.

Vanessa: Just a few announcements about my travel plans, everybody, before we get started. I will be in London on June 18 and Paris on June 22, and I would love to see you. You can find information about both of those events at harrypottersacredtext.com.

Casper: And if you can’t go to Europe, or you don’t live there, join my newsletter! (*laughing*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*) It’s like the same as going to Paris.

Casper: I mean, I sometimes post pretty pictures of cathedrals.

Vanessa: You do. And it’s a journey into a world that I never would’ve gotten to go to.

Casper: I love to explore questions of spirituality, community, and social change, so if you’re interested in getting a nice little email on a Friday morning from me, go to caspertk.com, and click on the “Sign up for the newsletter” button.

Vanessa: It is the only newsletter I am signed up for. It is also my favorite newsletter.

Casper: The other newsletter I love is the Harry Potter Sacred Text newsletter, which everyone should also be signed up to.
Vanessa: But I’m not signed up for that one, though. I write it.

Casper: (*laughing*) That’s the difference.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Yeah.

So as many of our listeners know, I spent much of 2018 ill and undiagnosed and unclear as to what I was sick with. And because I didn’t know what I had, I was telling myself all sorts of stories. I was like, “Oh, I have a virus,” or, “Oh, I’m tired,” or, “Oh, I’m sure getting sick a lot.” And at a certain point, I started getting embarrassed by how frequently I thought I was getting weird viruses and started, not lying about it, but not telling people. I was like, “Oh, I just want to stay in tonight.” It just felt ridiculous that I was “sick” all the time because it did not occur to me that it was a bigger illness. Anyway, I shouldn’t have, but something I started to do was conceal some of my symptoms from my partner Peter. He was very supportive of me, but–I don’t know how else to say it–I was ashamed of how sick I was. I felt like, “I think of myself as a strong and healthy person and I don’t want to be weak”. One day, I was driving to his house and I was like a mile from his house and I had to pull over to the side of the road because I got lightheaded and started sweating and I had to open my car door very suddenly and very dangerously into oncoming traffic to throw up. And I closed the door, and I sat and I was sweating and really not feeling well and he had people over for a little party, and I did not want to show up sick. I was closer to his house than my house. It would have been more convenient for me to go there to lie down. I was just so embarrassed to be sick again in front of these friends who I had cancelled on once before because I was sick. And so I texted him a lie. I was just like, “Oh, so sorry. Suddenly can’t come.” And he was like, “Why? What happened?” And I was like, “Just can’t. So sorry,” and turned around the car and drove home. And what’s so funny about concealment in certain circumstances is that you don’t always have an exit strategy. Like, I concealed to get myself out of the immediate awkwardness, but obviously we had to have a conversation later where he was like, “What happened? What was that about?” and actually discuss what happened. And I think we see that in this chapter where Neville asks Harry “How are we going to get out of here?” and Harry’s like, “Who cares? We came here to find Sirius. It doesn’t matter how we get out. We just have to stay quiet and do what we’ve got to do, and we’ll figure out the rest of it later.” And I do think that there are things we are entitled to conceal; there are secrets we are entitled to have but then also there are times when concealment becomes a trap of our own making where we’ve concealed so much that we can’t break out of it. So, I’m interested in talking to you about that today, Casper. I think a lot of the concealment in this chapter is strategic and wise, and then a lot of it is really dangerous.

Casper: First of all, I’m so sorry that you had that feeling where you’re like, “I don’t want to disappoint someone, and this truth is so unpleasant.” That is such a sucky feeling, so I’m sorry you had that.

Vanessa: I feel like we all have versions of that.

Casper: Oh, totally!
Vanessa: You don't need a weird disease.

Casper: Absolutely! And I think that sense of one concealment leading to another and then suddenly it’s out of control is something, hopefully at a small scale but even at a big scale, I think we’re familiar with. So, I’m interested to see where we can actually find that—maybe it’s consequences concealment—in this episode.

Vanessa: But, Casper, would you like to instead of conceal, reveal, through the 30 second recap?

Casper: I’m ready! Do you have 30 seconds on the clock?

Vanessa: Oh, I sure do! On your mark, get set, reveal!

Casper: (*clock begins ticking*) Okay, so the six of them get on the thestrals. Obviously for Ron, it’s totally freaky because he can’t see what he’s flying on. It’s long. They’re flying into the distance. I have questions about who can see them or not, but we’ll return to that later. They arrive. They go into the ministry. No one seems to be around, which is a little spooky. They make it into the first door. Oh my gosh, everything starts spinning. Hermione comes up with the great idea of like, “Let’s mark it with a cross.” There’s a room with brains and green liquid. Then there’s a room with the stone with the um, um, I always imagine it to be a velvet curtain. Then they come to the hall of things and they (*clock stops ticking and buzzer sounds*) turn around and see—we don’t know who it is yet, but it’s not going to be good.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) And it’s Obama!

Casper: Okay, Vanessa. That was a light speed edition. Let’s see what you have to add. 3, 2, 1, go!

Vanessa: (*clock starts ticking*) So Luna is like, “Riding a thestral, done it a million times.” Graceful, graceful. They all get there and Harry keeps trying to ditch everyone, and Neville is like, “Dude, stop trying to ditch us. We’re super-coming with you.” The thing you didn’t really get to is they get to this place with all these orbs, and there’s one with Harry’s name on it—question mark! And Harry’s like, “I’m gonna touch it,” and Ron is like, “I don’t have one with my name on it.” And they’re all like, “Harry, you shouldn’t touch it,” and he’s like “It’s mine. I should touch it.” And as soon as he touches it, it’s warm and that is when someone says, “I see you, Potter. Give that to me.” (*clock stops ticking and buzzer sounds*)

What the hell is with Ron being like, “There isn’t one with my name,”?

Casper: (*imitating Ron*) I want one! I’m Ron!

Vanessa: Is it that Ron feels like he’s constantly so concealed by Harry that he’s constantly looking for himself?
Casper: The thing that I really resonate with is that here–they don’t know that this is a prophecy just yet–but I think all of us are looking for ways to help us find the right path in our life, so if there is something with our name on that has something to say about who we are or why we’re here or why things are happening to us then I would want one. I’m just thinking about the massive rise in horoscopes and the way in which we’re all engaging with, “I’m a Taurus, so this,” or, “I’m an Enneagram Seven, so that.” It’s helpful to have someone to explain to you that you’re angry at the time because of this.

Vanessa: Yes, I just, I think that Ron is actually a great example in this moment of people who are looking in the wrong place. It’s that he feels not-seen in his life so he is looking anywhere Harry sees himself, Ron is therefore trying to find himself. And that is just a recipe for disaster and for saying really dumb things like, “Where’s mine?”

Casper: And I think that the dial is amped up for now, right? The twins have left. Ginny is still younger than him, but he is now the eldest at Hogwarts and having to think about what future career he might have. And he’s looked at his older siblings who have managed to find a path. Whether we agree with Percy or not, everyone has found a real kind of vocational call, and Ron doesn’t. You know, he’s 15, 16, so I think that Ron is having this feeling of “What is my life path? It’s concealed from me, and I am looking for signs to help me know what my path is.”

Vanessa: Yeah, but it’s not as though there’s a prewritten path that’s concealed from us; life happens and unfolds and we make choices within the doors that open for us. Ron is looking for a fallacy, right? Like even the prophecy for Harry says “Harry Potter?” This is literally a prophecy with a question mark on it.

Casper: That’s what I love about the question mark is it’s not questioning the whole idea of prophecy but it is saying that even this prophecy is too broad to know who it applies to and we know two of these six who it could apply to, let alone if there’s more. I think that to think of fate as something that is already set but is concealed from is probably not the best way to imagine our future.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Talking of doors that open or don’t open for you–one of the most interesting just geographical things or architectural things that happens in the Harry Potter books happens in this chapter. The gang walks into this (in my head it’s this octagonal room, but I don’t know if it’s true) and once they’ve close the door, it starts to spin, and so it’s completely unclear what they walked in through and which door they would want to go into next, as Harry has always imagined in his dream. So there’s this very physical concealment, like being in a maze, and that is fun if it’s set up in a game situation, but here, the stakes are so much higher, and so concealment is really—it’s dangerous. I thought that was interesting in the architectural space that the gang is in.

Vanessa: Yes, absolutely, the doors are trying to conceal from them and then Hermione says “flagrate” or whatever her thing is, and she has figured out a way to stop the doors from being
able to conceal themselves by marking them and marking the doors they have opened. And what was so interesting to me about that is that they are whispering, right. They don’t want to be seen; they are very much trying to be concealed even though they are on this search and yet, again to this question that we were talking about at the beginning of the episode, what’s the exit strategy here? They are leaving evidence behind. Right, they are simultaneously trying to be concealed and not caring if they are concealed, and I think that is the balance of emergency mode. They show up at the Department of Mysteries, and Harry is like, “We’re here on a rescue mission,” and is looking for the person to have them weigh his wand. They don’t want to be seen, but they also can’t care about whether or not they are seen. And I think that was something I experienced again when I was sick; there were certain moments where I could prevent the full weight of my sickness from being seen, but then I would be walking the dog in the morning and have to throw up on my walk and be like, “Well, people probably think I’m still drunk or hung over.” Right, I can’t conceal it, so I’m not even going to try.

Casper: That struck me with the thestrals as well. I was like, “Yeah, okay there are going to be plenty of people that are looking in the sky and being like, ‘Yup, that’s definitely some thestrals landing in the middle of London.’” Definitely in that emergency mode, the stakes of what you conceal change.

Vanessa: So, I would like to talk about this line which is Ron is saying how it’s hard with the thestrals since they’re invisible and Harry says to him, “You better hope it stays invisible.” And I was just thinking that the ability to choose when to conceal and when not to conceal is a privilege. Like, being white means that you can choose to be invisible; you can choose to conceal yourself whereas being an African American, that is not a choice that’s available to you. Right? And we see that with the thestrals. It is a privilege if you can’t see the thestrals. If the thestrals are invisible to you, that means that you haven’t been traumatized. So, I was just interested in the idea that sometimes the ability to be concealed, the option to conceal, is in and of itself a privilege: a privilege that’s not available to everyone.

Casper: This is interesting, Vanessa, because I saw a real connection between the people who can see the thestrals and the people who can hear the voices when they come to the room with the veil. And Harry is more than interested, he is captivated by this. It feels like siren songs in The Odyssey where Odysseus has his sailors and rowers put wax in their ears and he is tied to the mast but can’t do anything about it. And Harry is really drawn closer and closer and hears these voices. And to some extent, here is the image of someone who has not chosen to be exposed to this experience but is able to see or hear what the rest of the crew is able to hear or see because of the experience he has had which connects me to the broader privilege point.

Vanessa: Yeah, it’s also further complicated by the fact that Hermione is like, “There are no voices.” And she says, “Whatever the veil was, it was dangerous,” is what Hermione said. And we know that veil was death. And so Hermione is saying death is dangerous. And Harry, because he can hear the voices behind the veil, is like “Death is mysterious. Death is not dangerous. Death is interesting.” I just think it’s so interesting the way that different people think about death. Death is a mystery that’s completely concealed from all of us; none of us know how we are going to die, under what circumstances, at what age, what it actually means to die, what
happens after we die. It is a completely concealed thing. And it is just so interesting to me that Harry, because he’s witnessed death, has a little bit of insight into it and therefore finds it interesting and something to be in conversation with, and Hermione, having not witnessed death at all, is like, “Nope, it is just something to be afraid of.” When something is completely concealed, it can be horrifying, right?

Casper: I mean, the broader point that strikes me is that when you don’t about something, it’s so much easier to think in extremes. Either, “It’s totally wrong,” or, “It’s totally right,” or, “They absolutely should have done that,” or, “I would have done something totally different.” And often, the more you learn about any subject, the more complex and hopefully interesting it becomes. I remember thinking this about my high school physics teacher who obviously knew a lot about physics but was also super religious and talked about her faith in this very mysterious way and that her faith was strengthened by her understanding of science. That was the first time that I was like, “Oh, maybe the more you learn about something the more you realize that you don’t know and that there are still things concealed from us. We are more open to mystery, for example.” And so I think, in this moment, Hermione is more open to absolute binaries because she hasn’t been given that first morsel or taste of something. And when we do learn more, it’s harder and harder both to judge someone or to think in absolutes, how to think about the law, how to think about relationships. That, just the more that you know about all of the different pieces of the puzzle, the more complex it gets.

Vanessa: I mean, we see Harry–there is one thing that seems very obvious to Harry, which is that he is allowed to touch this orb because it has his name on it.

Casper: With a question mark!

Vanessa: With a question mark, which he just seems to be ignoring entirely. But he’s like, “No. It’s mine. I’m entitled to it.” Right, like anything that’s about me shouldn’t be concealed from me.

Casper: Mhmm.

Vanessa: I have such mixed feelings about that idea. Like, to some extent I think it’s true; I think we are entitled to all of our medical information and to seeing all of our academic records and I hate that there are secret FBI files on all of us, or whatever. But this sense of “Nothing about me has the right to be concealed,” seems to be somehow misguided, and it gets Harry into trouble here, but I can’t quite articulate why it’s misguided.

Casper: The thing that seems interesting to me is that Harry is now 15, nearly 16. And if you think about sex-ed, this is about the age where, even if their parents don’t want them to learn something, at least in the UK I think, children are allowed to opt in against their parents’ will to learn about sexual education. And, so there’s something–I mean that’s a slightly different context because it’s all of us learning about our bodies and reproductive processes and sexually transmitted infections and diseases, and here, there’s something very specific to Harry in particular, but nonetheless, I feel like we’ve always talked about these characters as children, and
for me, we’re now starting to get into a little bit of a grey zone. Soon, these characters will be able to serve in the military and will be older than the age of consent. That boundary is starting to become more grey as well, and so who has the right to know what about whom has to be informed more and more about their age as well.

Vanessa: I completely agree. And it says this prophecy is 16 years old. It struck me as, “Ugh, our Harry is growing up.” And I think that’s right. I don’t think children are entitled to all of the information about themselves, and I absolutely also think you’re right that there’s this in-between period that’s so difficult with young adults where you’re like, “I don’t want to burden you with information that’s going to inhibit your development in an unhealthy way, but you also have rights, and I want to honor your rights.”

Casper: And here, we have to question Dumbledore’s decision making again because there’s also the question of HOW does Harry receive this information. Right, the way that he’s about to find out towards the end of this book is a really unfortunate (*laughing*) way. You know, I’m thinking about how children learn that they might be adopted, for example. I mean, it’s always going to be a destabilizing experience, but it can be one that is done with love and honesty and trust in ways that really build up the child’s sense of an expanded family rather than it being something of a betrayal. And, is there a chance that Harry could have learned this information before with the question mark attached to the story, saying that we don’t know if this is true but this is information that you have a right to know?

Vanessa: And, don’t touch it. Which I also think is a metaphor within our lives. If somebody tries to tell you who you are, don’t necessarily believe them. If somebody says to you, “Oh, you remind me of me; you should also be a doctor,” and you’re like, “But I never wanted to be a doctor. Should I be a doctor?” We should resist when other people try to tell us who we are, and not necessarily touch it, right, or always see it with a question mark.

Casper: Yeah. I mean, if we think about concealment as an intentionality to keeping something hidden, and that means that we have to interrogate what is the motivation for keeping something secret. I think, that’s the thing about concealment that I am really sticking with. There is a good reason the Ministry of Magic is keeping these prophecies under lock and key; the most mysterious, the most hidden part of the Ministry is this room, for good reason because otherwise everyone is going to be obsessing about, “What’s my destiny? I need access to this information.” It’s kind of like, you know, the state secrets of the magical world. I think if you’re trying to keep a society together, that’s a strategically sound decision. But what’s the bigger purpose that the Ministry is concealing all of these prophecies? Because there are at least 97 probably 100 of these rows and rows and rows of these glass orbs that all contain prophecies.

Vanessa: Yeah, I wonder if some of them are ancient and have already come to pass.

Casper: Would you want to walk into that room and see “Vanessa Zoltan?” What would you do if you had access to that?

Vanessa: Right, like, would you want to know when you are going to die.
Casper: Yeah!

Vanessa: I would love to know when I was going to die if that was predetermined.

Casper: Really?!

Vanessa: Yeah, I think— I love to backwards map. I was trained for that as a teacher; you’re given goals for the end of the year and then you map backwards month by month what it is the kids need to learn. And yeah, I think it would be really helpful to know when I’m going to die and how. But I think I’m less interested in my own life than the Earth’s future. I would take that information. Would you not? Do you not want to know when you’re going to die?

Casper: It’s tricky. It’s tricky. I think I would prefer to not know.

Vanessa: Mhmm. Why?

Casper: In part because it leaves an openness to life and what it would do or what I could do. Would I start taking really stupid risks if I knew I was going to die when I’m 77? I just watched this video of a man jumping from 25,000 feet out of an airplane without a parachute and landing in a net. I mean, just the most absurd things. Why, humans, do we do this? This makes zero sense.

Vanessa: Was he okay?

Casper: He was fine because he landed at the edge of the net—it was close. So, I think maybe I would abuse the information, and I think maybe in some ways there’s an illusion of freedom in living without knowing that kind of information—in keeping it concealed from us. But it’s an interesting thought experiment: what would the world look like if we all knew the day we were going to die?

Vanessa: I guess I’m just sort of changing my opinion. I thought that there was something maybe entitled about Harry grabbing this orb, but I think I would do the same thing. I would think, “This is about me. I have a right to know.” I guess the only thing that I don’t think I have the right to know is if you had a diary and I saw my name on it, I don’t think I have a right to know your feelings about me. And I guess to some extent that’s because it’s actually about you. Right, like, that’s not a fact about me, those are your feelings about me. And so, even if in your diary, it had things that could be helpful to me like, “Boy would I love Vanessa more if she started pronouncing my name right,” I still don’t think I would be entitled to that.

Casper: I love that difference. There’s a kind of statistical, “You have blood type X,” or “You have diagnosis Y,” versus “When you say that, I feel this.” Those are very different things, and frankly that second category could be more relationally destructive as well, so I think that’s a great difference. Yeah.
Vanessa: Right, and I also think this with Peter. I think I should have been more honest earlier with him about my health. I was just confused; it wasn’t poorly intended. But, you know, I had the right to conceal. It was embarrassing. You don’t want to be talking about vomiting all the time, but if I had something contagious, I absolutely would not have had the right to conceal that information from him. I think we have to be thinking about, “I have the right to keep this private. This is mine, and I don’t have to share it.” And then there are other things that I do think we are morally obligated to share, and there are things we are legally obligated to share.

Casper: All of this is kind of reminding me of the current conversations around elite university admissions processes. I mean, we’ve seen these numerous scandals around people paying to get in, but even the standard application process and the ingredients that admissions officers look for (you know, trying to create the best college experience for their students) is still somewhat mysterious. And there’s plenty of students who, like Ron, would say whether they get in or don’t get in, “Why? I want to fully understand why you made the choice that you made,” and to that extent, I do feel that they’re entitled to know.

Vanessa: Yeah, and as somebody who has for many years now hired people and gone through hundreds of resumes in order to pick somebody to hire, you don’t necessarily always know exactly why you picked the person you picked.

Casper: That’s right.

Vanessa: Or you write a job description, and somebody has a certain skill set and you’re like, “Oh, that would actually be wonderful for this job.” And I remember when I was working at New Leaders, at that education non-profit I worked at for years, and we all came into a meeting thinking there was a clear person we were going to hire, and we ended up hiring someone else. I think we made the right decision in the end. So, I think these things can be a mystery and concealed from us and complicated. And I am not defending corrupt systems.

Casper: Oh, absolutely, but even to know like, “Listen, I’m sorry, I picked the other one because it just felt better.” Even that honesty I think would feel better than clouding it in some mysterious process which is deemed scientific in some way because I think in those cases, it feels better to know the truth.

(*theme music plays*)
Vanessa: I love spring. I think it should be spring 100% of the time. It is time for spring cleaning, and Quip has an easy way to start: with your teeth brushing habits. There is a new kids’ version of the Quip brush, which is the same as the original version just tweaked for sized-down mouths. Kids are inspired to brush better and more often with oral care that looks and feels like the products that the adults in their lives use. Help them develop a grown-up routine without childish gimmicks. The other thing about Quip that’s amazing is the built-in two minute timer which pulses every 30 seconds to remind you when to switch sides and to help you clean your whole mouth, and it makes me feel my like my best self with 2 minute standards, which is why I love Quip and why over one million happy, healthy mouths do too. Quip starts at just $25, and if you
go to getquip.com/harrypotter right now, you can get your first refill pack for free. Again, that’s your first refill pack for free if you go to getquip.com/harrypotter.

(*theme music ends*)

(*theme music restarts*)

Vanessa: Support for “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text” comes from Luminary, the only place where you can listen to the new podcast “Anthem” from John Cameron Mitchell and Bryan Weller. “Anthem” is a one-of-a-kind podcast musical with 31 original songs delivered by 40 actors including Tony Award Winners Glenn Close, Patti LuPone, and Cynthia Arrivo. Listen to “Anthem” and other original podcasts only on Luminary. Visit luminary.link/harrypotter for your first two months of Luminary’s premium content free. After that, it’s $7.99 per month. Cancel anytime. Terms apply.

(*theme music ends*)

Casper: Vanessa, one of the things that isn’t really in the chapter but it’s absence struck me was just as the six of them are walking from room to room and having these strange experiences with the veil and with this kind of sea of brains is that Voldemort and the Death Eaters are probably concealed and probably watching them in some way. I mean, I don’t think they’re just sitting there and waiting in the Hall of Prophecies, and so that made the whole thing even more eerie, you know, when you know as a re-reader that there are concealed eyes following the whole story.

Vanessa: Yeah, it’s something that weirds me out about London, although the United States has certainly come a long way toward meeting London there, but I remember reading articles 15-20 years ago about the CCTV, the closed circuit TV, video cameras that are up all over London and that there’s basically nowhere in London you can go without being recorded. I was horrified when I first learned about that—and to our familiarity theme a few weeks ago, you get used to these things. But the idea that I can’t be concealed, and lord knows that I’m not committing any crimes other than going out without brushing my hair, but like it was a very oppressive feeling to me to think that there are places in the world where I could go where I couldn’t be concealed.

Casper: One of the few upsides of that is that it solves many plot points in my current favorite TV show, “Line of Duty”.

Vanessa: I feel like that’s why so many great crime shows are set in London.

Casper: Maybe! Oh, my goodness! That’s fascinating!

Vanessa: Because it’s like, “We can always just go into the CCTV.”

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: The other thing I’m just interested in, Casper, is the things that we conceal from ourselves. You know, Harry keeps going back and forth as to whether or not he thinks Sirius is dead, and there’s a line in the chapter that says, “An unbidden voice inside his head was bringing
up maybe Sirius is dead.” And to some extent, Harry knows Sirius is not dead because he thinks he would feel it in his scar, but I wonder the things that I conceal from myself—all the difficult truths that we just hide from ourselves in order to function and tell ourselves prettier stories.

Casper: And even on a kind of less intense level, I find myself wanting one thing on a Tuesday, and another thing on a Wednesday, and a whole other thing on a Thursday. And I feel not even in that case that I’m actively concealing them from myself, but that they are just concealed from me and I’m like, “Why can’t I just know all of these things at the same time and then make a decision?”

Vanessa: Yeah, I think I’ve said this before, but one of the fears that plague me is, “What is the thing that everybody knows I’m bad at that I just am walking through the world like ‘I don’t even know that’s a thing let alone that I’m bad at it?’”.

Casper: #thirtysecondrecap

Vanessa: (*laughing*) That’s not it.

Casper: (*laughing*) No, it’s this other thing.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) I know exactly how I am at the thirty second recap. So, yeah, I guess I think that that’s the point of friendship or of community is to, even if they don’t tell you the things you’re bad at, they sort of secretly have your back at the things you’re bad at because they know.

Casper: Or just to say, (*whispering*) “You’ve got spinach in your teeth.”

Vanessa: Yeah! Please don’t conceal that from me, everyone!

Casper: (*laughing*)

(*theme music plays*)
(*theme music ends*)

Casper: Vanessa, this week we are continuing with our spiritual practice of Sacred Imagination, and I’ve chosen a passage which doesn’t have a lot of character driven plot. It’s more descriptive. So I really want to invite you, and everyone listening, to focus on the physical surroundings. What can you see? Are there echoes? Is there a smell of the place? What’s the touch on your skin or under your feet? To see if we can understand more about this very mysterious place within the Ministry that we’re really seeing for the first time.

“In his dream, Harry had always walked purposefully across this room to the door immediately opposite the entrance and walked on, but there were around a dozen doors here. Just as he was gazing ahead at the doors opposite him, trying to decide which was the right one, there was a great rumbling noise and the candles began to move sideways. The circular wall was rotating. Hermione grabbed Harry’s arm as though frightened the
feels faster so much is that it’s a very human way to move. It’s literally orienting.

Isn’t that fascinating? I had never noticed the candles before.

Vanessa: Yeah, that they turn into a line.

Casper: Yes, and the fact that there’s blue candlelight. Can we talk about that? Like, I had never thought about the room in that way. What did you notice?

Vanessa: I mean, it reminded me of my experiences with earthquakes and how the last earthquake I felt—the first thing I noticed before I felt myself moving was that the lighting fixtures suddenly started swinging and I was like, “How did that start happening?”’ and then I was like, “Oh, the whole room is shaking.” That feeling of not being able to figure out what’s moving and why, and it’s often on trains where you’re like, “Is my train moving? Is that train moving?”

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: And then you try to feel if the seat is vibrating. No? Then it’s the other train is moving. How disorienting is that? The other thing that I hate is why do people keep the window shades on planes down while you’re landing? I want to know when you’re going to hit the ground. So, not having the visual cues to understand your visual whereabouts can be so disorienting. That’s what I felt. Right, so I was Hermione reaching out for Harry. Literally what is happening in this room right now.

Casper: The thing that really struck me was because of this blue light, I think of hospitals. That kind of very cold lighting. Maybe it’s very dark everywhere else. This is the only light that we see, and so the whole area—especially we’re going to see this room with brains—I’m suddenly seeing this more as a medical complex rather than (to me it had that Hogwartsian kind of medieval castle vibes in my head until reading it this time) and now I’m seeing it as a clinical space. Right like, maybe a terrifying ward where all sorts of scary medical things are happening and there’s nobody there, and it just became a horror film rather than kind of a historical romance adventure.

Vanessa: I mean, it also reminds me of Gringotts in the way that Gringotts intentionally tries to confuse you. I mean, Hogwarts does this to a large extent too with the moving staircases. It seems as though the magical world is trying to constantly disorient you with where you are in physical space and the way they travel with Floo Powder. One of the reasons that I love to walk so much is that it’s a very human way to move. It’s literally orienting.

Casper: I find that always such an interesting idea. If you’re flying or travelling a long distance faster than the speed of human power, that your soul takes a few days to catch up to you, and that feels true to me in the sense that you’re not quite all there until your body has kind of
acclimatized again or your body at a speed that seems biologically reasonable, unlike flying which I’m unable to explain physically.

Vanessa: (*laughing*)

Casper: I’m like, “This thing seems heavy.”

Vanessa: And the wings aren’t flapping!

Casper: Exactly!

Vanessa: So why are we staying up?!

Casper: (*laughing*) I know there’s something called “lift”, but I don’t know how that works.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Yeah.

Casper: Were there any other senses, maybe sound or smell, that you experienced this time?

Vanessa: Well, the other thing could be because I’m–you’re welcome everybody that we’re talking so much about vomiting in this episode–I’m someone who gets motion sick, so the idea of the world spinning and I just can’t the imagine the walls starting to spin, how sick I would feel. I feel like Hermione is possibly holding onto Harry because she’s just like, “I’m going to throw up.”

Casper: The other thing that’s so startling is that the rumbling stopped. This is loud. This is not a silent process. So again, in the sense that they’re trying to conceal some things, but other things they’re being flagrant about as they move through the Ministry: this noise is clearly going to draw attention from other staff or people nearby.

Vanessa: The other thing that just struck me is that it must be the floor that’s moving because if the whole building is shifting, things would fall. I know magic is weird, but like, I wonder if because of the relativity of how movement feels, it looks like the walls are moving and it feels like the floor isn’t because they’re standing on the floor, but what would make the most sense in a physical way is if it was the floor that was rotating and not the walls.

Casper: I’m going to suggest not asking too many questions. (*laughing*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*)

Casper: Thanks, Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thank you.
Our voicemail this week is from Lorraine Haymen.
LORRAINE: Hi, Ariana, Casper, and Vanessa. I just want to echo what everyone else has said in the past: thank you so much for the amazing work that you do on “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text”. In The Order of the Phoenix, we are often talking about Harry dealing with quite a lot of trauma that he has faced in his life, and that kind of accumulates at the end of the last book with the death of Cedric, and it seems like in this book, Harry is therefore dealing with the death of his parents all over again, and maybe even future loss around Sirius. And so, this is something that I wanted to bring attention to because throughout my life, I have suffered various traumas, and I have a tendency to connect the traumas that I don’t do with the joyous things that have happened in my life. I often sit down and I think, “So this happened in my childhood, and this happened to my family members, and I have lost this person and that person, and I’ve lost this sense of myself here and there,” and actually, it really doesn’t help to connect them in this way. I’m wondering about what you feel about that with Harry because we do see his traumas are connected and they also do lead to Voldemort, but if we break up the trauma and we disconnect them and we think about them in isolated incidents, does that help? I don’t know, but perhaps when I’m dealing with my own traumas, I have found that it really helps to not think that this trauma led to this trauma which led to this trauma because as I said, I don’t do that with the joyous things that have happened in my life so why build up trauma? Because in that way, it does accumulate. So I just wondered what your all’s thoughts were about that. Thank you.

Casper: Lorraine, first of all, thank you for your message. I want to stress that I am not a trauma specialist, so this is just one random Slytherin’s thoughts from far away. But the things that strike me:

1. To link together a daisy-chain of the joys as much as we do with the sorrows in our life is, to me, a very precious and powerful practice. And I sometimes do this, you know people might have a gratitude journal or think of one or two things they’re grateful for before they go to bed. Or what I like to do is think of something I’m grateful for and find something in that gratitude that leads me to another gratitude and maybe it’s like, “I had a really nice time getting ice cream with my friend today. Oh, that reminds me that I can walk to that ice cream place from where I live. I’m so grateful for that. That reminds me that I get to live in a house where it’s safe and warm and dry.” And to string together those joys is a practice that reminds all of us of the things that we are lucky and grateful for or that we have worked for.

2. On the side of the traumas, one thing that I do think I have learned is that to be able to tell a coherent story of our lives in which those traumas find some space, not to negate them and not to inflate them, but to situate them within a story of who we’ve become, can be an incredibly healing process. I don’t know more than that, so if it’s helpful for you to separate them, all power to you, Lorraine. But I think there is some value in finding a coherence within the tragedies that we’ve experienced because they’ve contributed to the wonderful people that everyone has become.

Vanessa, it’s time for us to bless someone within the pages of the chapter. Who are you going to offer a blessing to this week?

Vanessa: So, I want to bless Lily. Harry can hear voices at the other side of the veil, and this is just me imagining, but what I was imagining is that it’s Lily on the other side of the veil, and that
she can see Harry, and that mixed feeling of wanting to be a siren to get to him and call him to her and that simultaneous feeling of don’t come to me. And so I was just reminded of Lily and want to bless her for missing so many years of her child’s life and how terrible that is, so yeah. Who would you like to bless, Casper?

Casper: I would like to bless Hermione. She has this great line which we’ve kind of talked about already where she says, “This isn’t right, Harry.” And I loved her clarity in that moment. We all need to be, I think, pulled back from the things that are most interesting but could drown us. The image I have in my head is like when I go into a YouTube hole or friends who might go deep into a Fortnite gaming hole. Right, it’s so easy to get drawn in and someone sometimes needs to grab you by the shoulder and say, “This isn’t right,” and pull you back out into the bigger picture. And Harry suddenly then remembers the mission of why he’s in the Ministry in the first place. So, for her strategic analysis and her willingness to interrupt potentially destructive behaviors, I have a blessing for Hermione.

Vanessa: She also has the best line in the chapter. Luna’s like, “I know what’s in that,” and she’s like, “Something gribbly, I bet.”

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Even Neville who doesn’t have a mean bone in his body is like (*chuckling*)

Casper: (*laughing*)

Vanessa: (*laughing*)

(*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 join our Facebook group to chat with other listeners about the episode. Come and join the over one thousand people supporting us on Patreon or you can leave us a voicemail or a review on iTunes. We hope to see you at one of our liveshows soon.

Vanessa: Next week, we will be reading Chapter Thirty-Five “Beyond the Veil” through the theme of Home. This episode of “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text” was produced by Not-Sorry Productions, executive produced by Ariana Nedelman, and our associate producer, we are proud to announce, is Chelsea Ursin. Welcome, Chelsea, to the Not-Sorry Productions family. Our music, as always, is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bolh, and we are a part of Nightvale Presents.

Casper: Thanks to Lorraine Haymen for this week’s voicemail, and as ever to Julia Argy, Maggie Needham, and Stephanie Paulsell. See you all next week!

(*theme music ends*)

Vanessa: Would you like to, instead of conceal, reveal through the thirty second recap?
Casper: Before I do that, can I just say that the only thing I think of with the word “conceal” is (*tune of “Let it Go”*) conceal don’t feel don’t let them know!

Vanessa: Me too!

Casper: The whole time!

Vanessa: I kept wanting to sing “Let it Go”!

Casper and Vanessa: But now they know!

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(*PRX theme*)