Chapter 13
The Secret Riddle

"Katie was removed to St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries the following day, by which time the news that she had been cursed had spread all over the school, though the details were confused and nobody other than Harry, Ron, Hermione and Leanne seemed to know that Katie herself..."

I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And I'm Casper ter Kuile.

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

Casper: The Houston Grand is one of the great opera houses of the United States, and also, the city hosts The Pensieve, our Harry Potter and the Sacred Text group. It's run by Carrianna Mance and if you would like to join Carrianna and the fabulous people who gather there, you can go to harrypottersacredtext.com/groups.

Vanessa: So we're lucky enough to be joined today by Mike Schubert of the amazing Potterless podcast which I'm sure you all already listen to. Mike, we've invited you on today to tell a story through the theme of superstition. Do you have a story for us?

Mike: Yes! I'm glad you did! I'm like Stevie Wonder, I believe that superstition is the way 'cuz growing up, it was a very big part of my—my sports career because I started playing baseball and then that's a very superstitious sport that kind of seeped into everything, but the particular story that I have is the most ridiculous superstition that I do. So the—one of the biggest superstitions that's out there is 'knock on wood' when someone says something that could jinx something good that's about to take place. For most people they don't do it all of the time and they do it for real life things.

For me, I do it when I'm playing a pretend basketball video game called NBA2K. I get very superstitious when the announcers—who are just pre-recorded computer programs at this point—when they say something positive about my team, I will pause the game and knock on wood because I don't want them to jinx it. So, if I've scored ten points (*Vanessa laughing*) in a row, and they say, 'Oh!' you know, 'The Vancouver Groove are on a ten-o run!' I will pause the game and knock on wood three times, and this is altered depended on where I've lived because I've moved around.
So in Houston I would swing open the cabinet door of the entertainment system where my television rested so that it was close enough so I could easily knock on wood with my hand, uh, when this would happen during the game, which they did in an alarming number of times. Every time something was going right for me they had to tell me that something was going right for me. It’s like, I’m well aware Doris Burke that I’m playing well. Please don’t tell me, ‘cuz now it’s going to get messed up! (*Casper laughing*)

So I leaned the cabinet door so it was close enough for me to reach over and knock. When I was in Seattle, I would make sure that my coffee table was close enough to my knee so I could easily lean forward and knock on wood and now in New York City, uhh, the only thing I can resort to is knocking on the floor which I know is real wood because I can’t trust that my Ikea furniture is made out of wood, so (*Casper laughing*) I don’t know that it’ll count to fend off the bad juju of the pretend announcers. So that’s like the biggest one that stuck with me is the knock on wood thing. Anytime someone says something that will jinx it, I will try to knock on wood or the most wood-like substance around me.

And the final thing I want to say about the way that I do this is it’s not just a particular knock. It’s not that I just knock on it like I knock on a door. It’s a very specific knock that I have to do where I take my right pinkie, the biggest knuckle, and I knock in a 1-2-3 pattern, and it has to have the right cadence and the right sound, otherwise it doesn’t count, and I’ll have to redo it. So I’ll do it until it sounds just right.

So here, I am going to hold up the back of my phone close to the microphone and do a little uh a little ASMR here so you can tell what the cadence is and if it doesn’t sound right, I’ll keep doing it until it does, but it’s a little along the lines of (*knocking sounds*) 1...2 3. And it’s gotta be that. And I still do that all the time and it’s silly and makes no sense, but here we are.

Casper: Oh, but I totally get it Mike ‘cuz I remember watching Wimbledon as a kid and I would create these very elaborate rituals before every time that Tim Henman had to serve and it involved throwing a ball in a particular way against that wall and it had to bounce off that wall and I’d have to stand on the chair and then at some point, my younger sisters would watch with me and I would make them like walk in the door at the exact moment that he hit serve because the first time they walked in he served an ace, and I think in a way all of this is a way of increasing our participation in what’s happening, right?

Mike: Oh yes.

Casper: I can’t influence what Tim Henman is doing on the Wimbledon tennis courts, and you—

Vanessa: What?!
Casper: (*laughing*) I know, shocker! Ummm (*Mike laughs*) and like you don't really have any power over the algorithm of what they are going to say and what piece of pre-recorded commentary is going sharper your game, but we can react to it and there's a way in which it involves us in some sort of cosmic drama that we otherwise wouldn't have any connection to.

Mike: Definitely! And especially with watching sports, it makes you feel like you are contributing, that you are part of the team. Casper, you should watch baseball with my dad, (*Casper laughing*) because he is ridiculous with watching sports. People have to sit in particular chairs. If you are sitting in a certain way and the Yankees start doing well, you can't move. So if you are sitting in a chair and the Yankees are on a run and you've gotta go to the bathroom, tough luck because you aren't going to the bathroom until the inning is over.

Casper: Let's get those priorities right.

Vanessa: So I'm curious, Mike, as to what your theory on superstition is. I sometimes think that like locking my backdoor is a superstition. If someone wants to break into my house, one deadbolt on the backdoor is not going to be the thing that prevents them, so I think that that is, you know, a symbol and superstition of like, look, I am making an effort here in keeping myself safe. So I'm wondering if you think that superstitions are, to Casper's point, I can't participate in this so I am going to try, or are they about trying to control things that are out of our control? Are they wishful rituals? What—what is your theory on superstition?

Mike: I think that it's something that a) gives you peace of mind and b) gives you some sort of agency, like I am taking the active decision even if I recognize that this is silly and this is something that is out of my hands, I am going to do this tiny little ritual of sorts to make it feel like I am in control. And I think for some things, it makes a little more sense—locking your back door—that is still nice to do because it's an extra level of safety.

My fiance Kelly religiously checks to make sure that all of the burners on the stove are off before we go to sleep, and she'll smell each burner and look in the oven and all sort of stuff like that. So those sort of things I think are a little more logical than me thinking that Doris Burke and Clark Kellogg are going to mess up my pretend basketball team's game. But also, it allows you to not have to look back and say, 'ah, I should have done this,' because I don't know, with jinxing of anything, the only time you remember it is if it comes true. If you're watching a sports game and they say something like, 'the Yankees have never lost a game when they're winning by three runs after the ninth inning,' and then they find a way to lose it, it's like, well thanks Michael Kay, you didn't have to say that and now you've jinxed it!

Vanessa: Yeah, it's so interesting that you said it like that because the place that I saw that in this chapter is: first of all the pensieve is the great opportunity for hindsight, right? Like, you literally get to go back and relive something and be like, 'oh, that's where the mistake was.' In watching Dumbledore interact with the young Tom Riddle, I was like, what are you doing?!
asks you to prove your magic and you do, he asks if he can go to London alone and you say yes—

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: Like, you are just jinxing this child! You are reaffirming every individualistic instinct that he has, you are showing him that magic is power, like, Dumbledore should already be separating these things out and problematizing them for Tom, but I am only projecting superstition onto what I know is a cursed relationship and a life that we know Voldemort is going to live. But Dumbledore would not necessarily have any reason to be going into this thinking, oh I have to be defensive in x, y, and z way.

Mike: Yeah I always though a wild aspect of this was Dumbledore actually giving into his demands to prove that he can do magic. I was so confused by why Dumbledore would actually do that. Not that he's asking him to do anything bad or that he's stooping down to his level, but it just seems weird to give this petulant like give into his demands, I don't know, I feel like Dumbledore doesn't have anything to prove so I never understood why he went that far to do it.

Vanessa: Before we dive more into this, because yeah, there is so much weirdness in this interaction between the young Tom Riddle and Dumbledore, I'm wondering if the three of us should all remind our listeners what it is that happens in this chapter in an epic thirty second recap challenge. Make sure that you knock on your phone. (*Mike laughing*)

Casper: (*laughing*) I can go first.

Vanessa: Okay! So Casper will go first, and then Mike, which is better for your superstition, if you go second or last?

Mike: Umm, I am going to go to the old wives tale of first is the worst, second is the best and I will go second.

Casper: Ughhhh. (*laughing*)

Vanessa: As the middle child who's the second, I love that adage. (*Casper and Mike laugh*) Okay Casper, I will count you in. On your mark, get set, go!

(*clock begins ticking*)

Casper: Okay, so Harry comes up to Dumbledore and it's back into the pensieve they go. Dumbledore's hand is looking worse than ever, FYI. They arrive into a memory of meeting Mrs. Cole who runs an orphanage and Mrs. Cole is like very warm and competent but likes a little tip of the old gin, and once she starts talking, we learn lots of stories about the young Tom Riddle,
and, oh my God, twenty seconds, oh my God, umm and he hurts children. (*Buzzer sounds*) (*laughing*) (*Vanessa laughing*)

Wow. That was—

Vanessa: That's okay, you—we have Mike and I—

Casper: Let me turn to Mike. There's a good thing there's three of us to cover this chapter. Mike, you've got thirty seconds on the clock. Give us a thirty second recap.

Mike: Do I start from where you left off?

Casper: No.

Vanessa: No, you try to do better.

Casper: Yeah, whole thing. Just forget that I even tried, because it was such a paltry effort.

Vanessa: Honestly, but you can do whatever you want. It depends on how competitive you want to be with Casper.

Mike: Got it, got it.

Casper: Thirty seconds on the clock. Here you go Mike: 3, 2, 1, go! (*clock begins ticking*)

Mike: So it's another time for Harry and Dumbledore to do pensieve stuff. Uh, they gotta go back and figure out the stories of Tom Riddle when he was an orphan and stuff. They are going and talking to Mrs. Cole who gets drunnnnk off of gin and just starts spilling all of the beans about Tom, and—

Vanessa: Fifteen seconds.

Mike: he's a bit odd, and he's a bully, and the thing in the cave, what he did to the little kids, and then Dumbledore comes in, starts to talk to Tom, Tom is like, 'are you a wizard?' He's like yeah I am, he's like prove it—

Vanessa: Five seconds.

Mike: Dumbledore lights a cabinet on fire but nothing's on fire because Tom is a magpie and then they go back and Harry's confused.

All together: Ohhh!
Casper: You've got skills! Alright Vanessa, 3, 2, 1, go! (*clock begins ticking*)

Vanessa: So, yeah, they arrive and they're getting all of this information from the orphanage about Tom Riddle, and the umm Mrs. Whatever is really excited to get rid of Tom and Dumbledore is like, awkward, you know that you are going to have to have him for the summers, right? And she's like, I guess it's better than having to have him all year round. And Tom has a collection of all of the things that he's stolen because he likes tokens of things that remind him of the horrible things that he's done which is interesting because it is foreshadowing for the horcruxes.

Casper: (*To a murder mystery tune*) Dum dum Dum! (*Buzzer sounds*)

Vanessa: Never has a chapter been better recapped, apparently we always need three of us.

Mike: Yeah, feel free to call me in friends. For the recap. I'm happy to do it. Anything I can do to get back at my business professors in college that told me that I talked too fast in my presentations. I'm happy to use that skill and put them in their place.

Vanessa: So Mike, I'm wondering if there's anywhere else in this chapter that you saw this theme of superstition. Because we are at the beginning of a war, and I think chaos and fear are moments when superstition can flourish.

Mike: Right, I don't know if it was exactly in this chapter but it was more about seeing how Voldemort's decision to do the horcruxes with the items that he used in the places that they were at and the significance that they had, I think that was the biggest thing that made me think of superstition is like I talked about with my superstition, I realize that it is not anything super important and I realize that it is probably a waste of my time to have to keep pausing the game and knocking on wood while I'm playing it, but for Voldemort, it is important for him to have it tied to parts of his past, people of his past, things that were influential in his upbringing, and I'm not sure if Voldemort recognizes why it's silly because then people can go on the hunt to figure out where they are and do detective work but then again I think it's that peace of mind thing. He feels good about putting the horcruxes in places that he feels that either no one will go or no one will be able to find, whether it's the Chamber of Secrets because he's too powerful or whether it's the cave because no one will be strong enough. I think it's him making a decision that ultimately isn't that smart but gives him the control and to me that was the biggest thing that I saw in this chapter, alluding to future superstitions of Voldemort.

Vanessa: Voldemort is obviously obsessed. We even hear it in this chapter. Because he has this line about his mother that she obviously wasn't magical because she died, and if she was magical she wouldn't have died, and so we see that his obsession with wanting to avoid death, you know, has already incubated and he's ten or eleven years old here.
And so I think it's so interesting that he's a collector of items as a form of superstition, as a way of warding off oblivion. Right? Like, one of the ways to have a legacy is to leave behind a collection of sorts, and it makes sense to me. He doesn't have a home. He doesn't have a lot of things or relationships or people who are his.

The depraved part of it is obviously that he is collecting things from moments in which he has been awful to somebody else—

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: But I do think there is something superstitious about wanting to allude death even just in the items he is collecting.

Casper: Okay, I think this is helping me understand Voldemort on a whole new level, because, Vanessa you just pointed to a massively important moment in this chapter where he equates magic with life, and non-magic with death.

Mike: Yep.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: And so his obsession with avoiding death is in fact, I think, a sort of twisted—trying to prove himself as magical. He wants to prove himself to be special because if he dies, it means he hasn't lived into the fullness of his magic, and of course he is a half-blood, we know that from the beginning. And so there is this fear that he is not special enough, that he is not magical enough. I think that's this sort of core drive that we're seeing in him, and so each of these totems, as you are saying, is actually an affirmation of being alive. It's not even a memory of like, I want to be reminded of this moment when I tortured two other children in a cave, it's like, this was a moment when I had power and I was special and when I was magical. Like, the moments when I knew magic worked are the moments, sadly, when it was oppressive and horrific for other people, but it was the moment that I felt alive. And oh my God I feel like I understand Tom Riddle so much more because of that reading!

Vanessa: Well, I also think that is why bullying happens. Right? It's like, I feel good when I make somebody else feel small. And then it's an addiction to that feeling.

Mike: I think also what this all boils down to is when he is talking with Dumbledore, he talks about how he can manipulate the things around him, whether it's people or talking to snakes or stuff like that, and again that goes back to giving him control which I also think goes back to precision. Like I said earlier, for me, it gives me that peace of mind, putting me in the driver's seat. I am making the driver's seat. I am making the decision. I have taken away the jinx and I've taken away the agency from pretend Doris Burke and pretend ("laughing") Nba announcers and now I am driving the ship here. So I think that's a similar thing that you can look to with
superstition and giving you that power, that's what Voldemort wants. He wants to be in control. He wants to be in the say. He doesn't want death to happen to him. He wants to be able to decide what happens to him and all that and that goes with the prophecy too. The prophecy inherently—he is uncomfortable with something else determining his face and he wants to take fate into his own hands because he is scared of death and non-magic.

Casper: He comes by it honestly. The moment Dumbledore walks in, the first reactions the child Tom Riddle has are, 'are you a doctor?' right, 'are you going to take me away?' And then, 'if it's not a doctor, are you taking me to the asylum?' Right? 'don't call me mad'. Anytime that he is not in control, he is in danger. And so that, that obsession with control, I can see where it comes from. He's literally born into this establishment. We see from Dumbledore's visit at least one perspective on one day that this is a place that is relatively safe. But the first thing that I realized is that when Mrs. Cole brings Dumbledore up to the room, she lets Dumbledore into the room alone with this child and closes the door. I just saw how dangerous this place was and how many things might have happened in this orphanage that we don't know about and frankly, there's enough evidence of what happens in these places when it isn't properly safe-guarded, and how vulnerable children do get abused, I—I suddenly just understood why Voldemort is so obsessed with control.

Vanessa: Which leads to another moment which I think we see real superstition which is when, umm, Harry is starting to sympathize with Voldemort at the end of this chapter and Dumbledore says, like you are right now Casper, 'oh no, are you starting to sympathize with Voldemort?' And Harry—and I think it is only superstition—Harry is like, 'no!' 'NO!' Like, 'I will never sympathize with Voldemort.' That is like him knocking on, you know, on a board, and being like, 'no no no, I am not somebody who sympathizes with Voldemort. I will lose control over my hatred of him. I will lose control and agency over him being bad and my mom and dad being good.' He like superstitiously is like, 'absolutely not, I feel no sympathy for him,' as a way of regaining control of this narrative.

Mike: Yeah, and in classic Harry fashion, he's got no poker face on it at all (*Vanessa laughing*) (*Casper laughing*) He sounds like uhh a sophomore in high school trying to deny to his coach: 'what? I don't have a crush on Jessica! I don't think Jessica's cute!' (*Casper laughing*) 'Cuz Harry has said this before. I recently had been watching the movies for my podcast and even in the second book, Harry after his run-in with Tom Riddle in the diary, he talks to Dumbledore afterwards and he is concerned about the similarities he notices between him and Tom, so definitely Harry feels about this, Vanessa I agree that I think it is kind of like a superstition for him. It is something that he is aware of that he does feel this way so he's got to will it into existence that he doesn't by trying to proclaim that he does not sympathize with him and he doesn't have you know any sort of compassion for him even though he kind of does.

Casper: Yeah, it is so interesting. I think that is the whole point of what Dumbledore is doing with these pensieve trips is to open Harry's—not necessarily compassion but at least insight into understanding Voldemort's psychology. Because that's what's going to help him find horcruxes
and ultimately defeat him, right? So for Harry it's still confusing, why am I still seeing these memories when we're supposed to be dealing with the prophecy and preparing me to fight Voldemort but it's all a part of how Dumbledore sees this strategy working so it does make sense.

Vanessa: I did find it remarkable upon this reading though that Dumbledore doesn't do any meaning-making of like, I should have gone to Diagon Alley with him.

Casper: Yes, yes yeah.

Vanessa: Like, Dumbledore just makes such obvious pedagogical mistakes, with the help of hindsight I can imagine justifying in the moment, this is a child whose every moment is scrutinized in an orphanage. He wants a moment of freedom. I am going to give him a moment of freedom. Like, I can imagine justifying making the decisions that Dumbledore makes, umm, this is a kid who's drunk on power. I want to show him that at the end of the day, I have more power than he does. I can light everything he has on fire in an instant.

But all of these strategies so clearly backfired. So I just think it's so interesting and I'm wondering why Dumbledore doesn't say, like, I should have taken more care. What this kid needed, actually, was love and I instead fell for every trick.

Mike: I'm not sure why Dumbledore isn't more reflective here. We've seen other instances, especially in the last three books in the series, where he is okay with admitting fault and admitting mistakes so it's not something that is out of character for him.

Vanessa: Right.

Mike: At the end of Book Five, he talks to Harry about how he regrets how he handled everything that went down, and in six and seven—

Vanessa: Yeah, but those are all humble brags right? (*Casper laughing*) Like, ‘sorry that I loved you too much.’ (*spoken dramatically*)

Casper: Well to some extent I think what he's doing is the point of the session is to give Harry the information he has. This is not the moment for Dumbledore to work out his regrets. That's for a different conversation with a different person. I think Harry's still, you know, a sixteen nearly seventeen year old. I am not sure what Harry would gain with that re-assessment at this point.

Vanessa: I do, he would learn that love is always the right strategy.

Casper: But surely that's what he's known from the beginning.
Mike: I don't know, Harry can't get it through his thick skull, Dumbledore has to tell him every single book. (*Casper laughing*)

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: But only at the end.

Mike: 'It's love Harry!'

Vanessa: Fair enough, fair enough. Maybe it's superstition, Dumbledore will only tell Harry at the end of the school year about how important love is. In the beginning of the school year he can't tell him yet, it's too soon—

Casper: He won't survive if I tell him now, I have to tell him afterwards. (*Mike laughing*)

Vanessa: And that's how I codify another year of survival at Hogwarts, Mazel Tov Harry. Got it, fair enough guys.

(*ads play*)

I will say that there's something in me—this is going to sound bad—a way that I see myself in Voldemort is like, since my doing was like nine weeks old, I've talked about her dying. I mean like, we all know the greatest tragedy about dogs is how short their lives is. They come into our lives, they are better than any human we'll ever know, and then they die way too soon.

So I constantly talk about her death as a way to demonstrate to the world like, I know she's going to die so give me as much time as possible. And it's also a form of self-manipulation that I'm trying to prove to myself that I will be okay with it. And train everybody else that I won't be.

Mike: (*laughing*) I think it's kind of a way to coach yourself to be able to move on. It's something that I have gotten into with my podcast since the whole thing is me going through the Harry Potter series for the first time, eventually the show has to end so I have to keep telling myself and other people that yeah, you know, Potter's going to go on for awhile but eventually it's going to run its course. I totally agree with you Vanessa, part of it is looking nice and mature and not be devastated when i have to stop making it. I also think as a superstitious slash make me feel good thing, by running out of material and not like, the show becoming unpopular or podcasting getting usurped by some other form of media makes me rest easier at night to say, ah! This is why it will end! Because I will run out of things. Not because it has lost popularity or relevance in this world.

Vanessa: It's not because blogs are going to come back.
Mike: Who knows man! Telegrams are going to make a huge comeback. People are going to love—

Vanessa: Morse code.

Mike: The Pony Express coming through.

Vanessa: Yep.

Mike: It's going to be great.

Vanessa: I think this is all in the spirit of Voldemort of trying to avoid our own deaths, our own oblivion right? Dumbledore says this in the chapter. He says, 'We've been made a fool by time again,' umm

Casper: Mmmmm, uh huh.

Vanessa: Death and time makes us all fools. We all age and die. And not just your podcast Mike but every podcast is going to come to an end, right? And so by winking at these things we're trying to show that we're in on it and Voldemort takes it too far and rather than trying to wink that he's in on it, he's trying to beat it, which I think is what makes Voldemort a monster.

Mike: Yeah, I think it's especially with Voldemort he's trying to control something that he can't inherently control. There is no wizard that's going to be immortal, even people like Flamel eventually something will happen where they die, and I don't know this actually bringing it back to sports and stuff a lot of athletes try to retire on their own terms rather than have it be brought upon by them. So you'll see athletes that probably could play for another three more years until it gets to the point where they may be in a minor bench role or not playing as much, you'll see them retire two years early so that they can announce that they are going to retire, they have their farewell tour, that last year they are playing they are not completely hobbled, and then when it goes out, it's like, wow, look at Dirk Nowitzki's career, he played for twenty one years and even in that last year, he was okay. It's similar where they want to go out on their own terms. They want to be the people that decide how and when things end, so I don't think Voldemort wants death to come upon him, ("Casper laughing") not to say that he wouldn't be like, I've done it, I've run my course now, but I think that's his flaw. When you look at the Tale of the Three Brothers, the brother that has the cloak who ends up in the good situation, he could have kept avoiding death but he got to a point that he willingly embraced death with open arms or whatever—

Casper: Right.

Mike: —the exact quote is.
Vanessa: As old friends.

Mike: Yes, there it is, welcomes death like an old friend. I think that is something that—like you can see Voldemort's reason but he still missed the mark in that ultimately the thing that he is trying to control is something that he has no control over at all and happens to everyone and leads to his sooner demise than if he'd lived a regular wizard life. He'd 'a been way older.

Vanessa: I think it's a moment I love in Dumbledore and it's the greatest difference between Dumbledore and Voldemort. When Dumbledore is given his death sentence, he's like, great, how do we take advantage of it? How can it be the most meaningful death that it can be? Whereas Voldemort is just going out of his way to try to control things. And nobody could accuse Dumbledore of not being a controlling person, but (*Casper laughing*) there's something beautiful to me about letting go.

Casper: I mean all of this is making me think of how actually the whole of Voldemort's mission targeting Harry from the beginning of these books in itself is superstition. I mean this prophecy—I don't know how real it is, and for sure, I don't know how real it would be if Voldemort hadn't acted on it.

There's something in which this whole series of events is kind of the outcome of taking something too seriously and therefore by taking it seriously, making it real. Which, that is just a whole other question which was also echoed for me in this chapter whereby Dumbledore after promising to take young Tom Riddle away then comes back and says, 'but of course, he'll be back every summer,' like you said Vanessa. I don't know why. Is there no place for him to go elsewhere? Surely he's not the only child in this situation. It seems like superstition is changing how people imagine their physical reality and therefore influencing what happens to them.

Mike: I think you've identified the biggest problem with Hogwarts is that there is no summer camp at the school.

Casper: Yes those kids need summer camp.

Mike: It is a travesty.

Vanessa: That is obviously the biggest problem (*Casper laughing*) at Hogwarts.

Mike: Come on, canoe races in the lake with the squid there, come on! It's right there!

Vanessa: It's definitely a missed revenue opportunity for Hogwarts. And then maybe they could afford like a guidance counsellor. (*Casper laughing*) I guess I'm thinking—I guess this is more of a fan fiction moment, but I'm just thinking what a good omen Voldemort leaving this orphanage is for all of the other kids.
Casper: Mmmmm.

Vanessa: Like, this is great news for Tom, but this is also great news for the kid whose bunny he killed.

Casper: I mean, yes, yes. For nine months of the year, these kids are not going to have to deal with this quite frightening child. But, he’s going to come back every summer.

Vanessa: And the kids at Hogwarts are going to have to deal with him.

Casper: I mean, that's a whole new bunch of kids who are going to have to deal with him. But it's also fascinating to see Voldemort put on his like, 'yes sir, I am a good child and I will—' like put on a character that's allowing me to navigate this relationship in a successful way. I wonder whether that's what most of the time people see at Hogwarts because he's kind of practiced it by the time he comes in, but we know plenty of stories of him, you know, manipulating Hagrid to get him thrown out, et cetera, et cetera.

Vanessa: I'm wondering if you guys see any symbolism in the fact that bunny rabbits are often a symbol for magic. Like, you pull a rabbit out of your hat.

Casper: Ohhhh.

Vanessa: And he kills one. Am I just in a Halloween frame of mind?

Mike: I think if you asked J.K. Rowling this she'd be like, 'yes! That is precisely what I was going for!' It's uhh bigger picture of magic bla bla bla. I think that could be it. Also, bunnies are just really cute and seem harmless so if you go out of your way to kill one, what has a bunny ever done wrong? Whereas if you kill a cat, there are a fair number of people out there who are like, well, all cats are evil, so not the worst thing in the world.

Casper: Well, the other thing with bunnies is there's many of them at one time, right? They replicate quickly. It connects to me of what he says about, 'there's so many Toms. I don't want to be Tom. I want to be special. And a bunny rabbit is something way too common and it's beneath me.' And so that might be in there as well.

Vanessa: He's just trying to dominate everything.

Mike: Yeah. He's trying to make Professor Dumbledore do magic—

Casper: That's right.

Mike: —like he's a puppet. Dance for me! Do magic! Prove it!
Vanessa: Hot take guys: I think this Tom Riddle guy is going to be bad news. (*Casper laughing*) I do not see good things in his future.

Mike: Seems like a little bit of a problem.

Vanessa: I know.

Mike: He brought kids into a cave and now even the narrator won't even tell us what went wrong. (*Casper laughing*)

Casper: Well on that note, Mike, thank you so much for being with us today. We love Potterless and we're so grateful you're on the show now and part of podcasts forever.

Mike: No, thank you so much for having me. It feels great to finally be on your very thoughtful, through, and accomplished podcast (*Vanessa laughing*) as opposed to my goofy, make em up poke fun at the series thing. Now that I have read all of the books, I am glad that I can bring something more thoughtful and thought provoking to the table to show my range: look! I can also say smart things too. (*Casper laughing*)

Vanessa: Excuse me, you and I had a very thoughtful conversation about the Yule Ball.

Mike: We did, that was so fun, I listened back to that the other day, oh it was so great.

Vanessa: I had so much fun talking to you about the Yule Ball, so for our three listeners who haven't listened to Potterless already, if you want to start with me, you can start with the Yule Ball episode, but really, just go back and do a listen through. It is just a read through of the Harry Potter books, Mike reading them for the first time, and being quite incredulous about a lot of the things. It is almost the opposite of our podcast. Instead of treating the books as sacred—

Mike: Honestly, I—it's—I'm glad you said it because I do say, I do say that to people sometimes. Like, have you heard of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text? It's the opposite. They treat the book like it's high praise and until I get to the end of Book Three, I didn't think the books were good. And then thankfully I came around on it which is nice. I think that's part of the fun of the podcast, is to see me go from, 'oh, these books are overrated,' to 'just kidding, I love these and I'm obsessed with everyone and if anything happens to Ginny Weasley, I am going to be in shambles.'

Casper: (*laughing*) Thank you so much, we're really glad to have you with us, have a great rest of your week.

Mike: You too, thanks so much for having me.

(*piano interlude plays*)
Vanessa: So Casper, we are going to do havruta again, and my question for you is, what is Dumbledore's motivation in getting Mrs. Cole drunk?

It seems to me that Dumbledore is going to be able to get the information that he wants without Tom anyway, that Mrs. Cole is eager to get rid of Tom, and that there is a level of professionalism that is like, I am going to be his future educator, you are his past educator, can you please tell me everything you know about him?

This seems to be a conversation that two reasonable adults could have without this very strange power move that is made of manipulating Mrs. Cole and really taking advantage of an apparent weakness that she has. The only answer that I have is actually that Dumbledore doesn't have a tremendous amount of respect for her or for muggles and is like, this is a weakness that you have that I can exploit to expedite this. But I cannot come with a positive potential reading as to why he pulls out this gin and starts getting her drunk in this moment, and I'm wondering what you make of it.

Casper: (*intrigued tone*) Huh, okay. I was like, well this is such an obvious answer but now I'm seeing that maybe it's not. This is a good havruta!

Vanessa: What was your obvious answer?

Casper: Well, that he's trying to get information. Right? He's trying to get information. But what I'm now realizing is like he uses magic very expressly here, right? He makes her look at a piece of paper that's blank and is communicating to her somehow that everything is fine. But perhaps he doubts the capacity of magic to extract stories that might not be obvious to find, right? There's something about his magical abilities that limits the information he might draw out to the questions he might know to ask, and what he really needs is for Mrs. Cole to speak freely about anything that's associated for her with a young Tom Riddle. And so, kind of plying her with alcohol is a way of letting her kind of (*chuckling*) freely associate and tell stories rather than kind of him going in with his magical abilities to surgically remove specific answers to specific questions.

Vanessa: Yeah, I guess I also just think it would be really gross if he used magic to that end too—

Casper: Oh, it's definitely gross.

Vanessa: So I understand why he uses magic in order to prove to her that it's legit. I don't understand why he didn't show up with some sort of official letter, like this just all seems to be so easily done aboveboard.

Casper: Mmmm...
Vanessa: And I guess my bigger question is why didn't he just do it with integrity? Why doesn't he just spend a minute building a little bit of trust with this woman saying, 'you have cared for this child for the last ten years. It is now my turn to take care of this child.' Why not do this the right way?? It seems so easily achievable the right way. And then, if it doesn't go well, resort to magic or resort to gin. He doesn't even try! He just goes in and starts manipulating.

Casper: What he's not doing is zooming in on a broomstick or in a magical car abducting Tom and kind of saying, 'see you later!' and then obliterating everyone. So let's put this into context of what could have happened in kind of a magical context. What is interesting to me—and we see this in the conversation with Mrs. Cole, is that she is very careful not to say anything that would jeopardize Tom's place in this school, so I think if he had come in and kept it all very aboveboard, I don't think he would have received the quality of storytelling that he does from Mrs. Cole, and he is already aware that that kind of extra information is important. So I'm not judging him too harshly.

The other thing is that he might himself want, you know, just a little tipple. (*Vanessa laughing*) (*Casper laughing*) This is his best way of getting that to happen.

Vanessa: I don't know why it really grossed me out. I mean obviously in a very different context now of men drugging women in order to get them to do things and I know that this isn't nearly a similar context and you know, she partakes in the gin knowingly. And I don't think it's magical gin. He's not plying her with drinks. She's pouring them herself. I guess I just believe in the muggle like tricks of building trust and like, what makes him different from Voldemort?

Casper: Well, I think this is an important which is we see a ton of mistakes being made by Dumbledore with Voldemort. And to some extent, I mean he's a much younger man at this point, so we're not seeing wise, experienced Dumbledore. We're seeing beginner Dumbledore. And just as he makes mistakes with the young Tom Riddle, I think perhaps he's making mistakes with Mrs. Cole. This might reveal in his own lack of confidence in his ability to engage with muggles for example.

Vanessa: I think it's his belief in wizard supremacy.

Casper: Oh that's interesting. Perhaps it's more than wizard supremacy, it's just like, Dumbledore supremacy, right? Like, he actually behaves this way with everyone he meets. And we know, by his later admission, q that it's that fault why he never wants to be Minister of Magic, because if he's in situations where he has power, he knows he will act with it in ways that end up being dangerous to the people he loves. And I don't think he knows that in this flashback. He is still happy in his internal story that he's the best, smartest, most powerful ever and actually, the normal rules don't apply to him and he knows best in every situation.
Vanessa: Yeah, this chapter just really made me sad for all of the missed opportunities that I think Dumbledore just lets pass by.

Casper: Ughh, and this is why when Slughorn says about Harry being so humble, that that's the reason Dumbledore likes him. I think that's the main trait that Dumbledore knows that he doesn't have and that's why he admires it so much in Harry, and maybe why he's so invested in this whole fight to begin with, because he sees his own complicity in it being created.

Vanessa: Which does actually make me get a little bit of respect for Dumbledore back. He certainly doesn't do any meaning making of his mistakes with Harry, but nor does he hide his mistakes from Harry.

Casper: Right, right. He doesn't alter his memory to show something nicer for the viewer.

Gosh, I thought that was a simple havruta question—there's actually a lot in there. That's really beautiful.

Vanessa: There always is.

Casper: Thanks Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thank you Casper.

This week's voicemail is from Kimberly who's giving us her thoughts on the chapter "Silver and Opals"

("Voicemail beep")

Kimberly: Hey Casper, Vanessa, and Ariana, this is Kimberly calling in from London in the UK. I'm sending in this voicemail to respond to a statement Harry makes in this chapter. He says, "The Half-Blood Prince had proven a much more effective teacher than Snape so far. As most of us know, Snape is the Half-Blood Prince and we can see the irony in this statement as we re-read this book together.

As I've been re-engaging with the books, I realized that Snape's teaching plays an uncredited but fundamental role in Harry's journey to bring down Voldemort. As we know, Harry's go-to spell against Voldemort is Expelliarmus. In addition to using it to save his life in The Goblet of Fire, it is the first spell Harry teaches Dumbledore's Army in Order of the Phoenix. The Death Eaters know it is Harry's go-to defensive spell, and even though Lupin advises Harry not to continue using it, Harry relies on it in the final duel against Voldemort. It is Snape who teaches Harry Expelliarmus. In The Chamber of Secrets, Snape uses it to disarm Lockhart in the dueling club, which Harry later uses to protect himself against Lockhart in the same book. He even says, 'You shouldn't have let Snape teach us that spell.'
I've always been wary of Snape as a character. I appreciate the critical role he plays as a double agent, but I cannot forgive him for how he treats Harry in the seven books, even if they are ultimately on the same side. I do love the idea that Snape accidentally gives Harry one of his most effective weapons against Voldemort.

Finally, I wanted to send in a blessing to the three of you. One of the things I love about the podcast is the love that you three share as friends, and I'm constantly reminded of the love I have for my own friends, many of whom live in different countries but still give me so much joy and love every day. Thank you.

Vanessa: Kimberly, thank you so much for that beautiful blessing. I am delaying responding to your Snape comments because he and I are in a fight right now and I think that you make a very good point, but I am not in an emotional place to give him much credit for anything. I'm still mad at him for you know, Neville doing better when he's not around. He's a horrible teacher.

Casper: But I do think it's interesting that Harry learns this crucial, you know, signature move from one of the most difficult relationships in his life, and I think—I don't know, I can't say it in the moment or even a year later, but the happy relationships in my life that I really struggled with and through from which I've learnt some of the most important lessons about how I want to live and maybe even who I want to be in relationship with next time, so I think there is something in what Kimberly is saying that does strike me. I mean, it's really important what he teaches Harry and not just in the land of spells, but I think in how to be in the world.

Vanessa: Oh, I absolutely agree. I think Kimberly's point is brilliant. And I think your point is exactly right. I've also had relationships that, looking back, I'm like oh! I didn't like your style but actually your substance was great. Or, you actually taught me a great deal. But, I'm just seeing the ways that he has stunted these children right now.

But yes, Kimberly, I thank you so much for your brilliant point and your beautiful blessing.

So Casper, it is now time for us to each bless somebody. Who would you like to bless this week?

Casper: Well, (*laughing*) having just talked too much about Dumbledore, I actually still want to bless him. (*laughing*) I think in his older age, he has found the right middle-ground between that kind of dangerous supremacist idea and a full confidence in his own abilities. And the way he describes his memory as different from the other narrators whose memories we've entered before just made me smile so much. He says, "I think you'll find it rich in detail and satisfyingly accurate." And so my blessing is for anyone who just has had a moment of competence where it's like, uh! You've asked that question. Here's the briefing that I've prepared knowing that it might be important to you. Or like, yes! I did think of the gluten free cake because I knew you were bringing your new girlfriend and that she's gluten free. Or whatever it is to have that
moment where you're like, yeah, I really did this thing and it worked. That's a very happy feeling. (*laughing*) So blessing for Dumbledore. How about you Vanessa?

Vanessa: I would like to bless either Merope (*Muh-rope*) or Merope (*Muh-ro-pay*). I don't know how we pronounce it. We've probably mispronounced it.

Casper: Depends on if you from the north or the south of England. Should we say that?

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Great. So, I would like to offer her a blessing for this just like horrible way that we now know that she gave birth, and after the conversation we had about her two weeks ago, it just struck me as so sad that she names Tom after these two men, neither of whom made her happy in any way that she names her son after Tom Riddle who obviously they are no longer together, and then after her very abusive father. It broke my heart.

Casper: Mmmm.

(*End music begins*)

You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Instagram and Facebook and join our Facebook group to chat with other listeners about this episode. You can leave us a review on iTunes in order to keep Casper company late at night when he doesn't know what else to do. You can always send us a voicemail: please do!

Support our fundraiser for RAICES and thank you so much everybody who already has. You can continue to do so by going to harrypottersacredtext.com and click on the orange button that says, Don't Be a Dursley.

And remember that it's election season, so if you have a local election going on near you, make sure that you get out and vote! And we hope that you also get out and come to one of our live shows either in Washington DC on November 7th, in Chicago, Illinois on November 21st, and then in St. Louis, Missouri on December 19th.

Casper: Next week, we'll read Chapter 14, "Felix Felicis" through the theme of resistance.

This episode was produced by Not Sorry Productions, executive produced by Ariana Nedelman, associate produced by Chelsea Ursin, our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bolh and we're a proud part of Nightvale Presents. Thanks to Mike Schubert from Potterless for joining us and telling us this week's story. Thanks to Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Maggie Needham, Meghan Kelly, and Stephanie Paulsell.

Vanessa: Bye!

(*Music Ends*)
Mike: Oh, please! You go camping in the Forbidden Forest, build a treehouse up there, make a whole ropes course, there's so much opportunity.

Casper: Aragog makes the ropes.

Vanessa: (*laughing*) Aragog is the one belaying everyone on the ropes course. (*laughing*)

Mike: Ooh, a zipline through the Forbidden Forest, that would be so great!

Vanessa: Obviously guys.