Harry Potter and the Sacred Text, Recklessness: Birthday Surprises  
(Book 6 chapter 18)

Vanessa: Chapter 18, Birthday Surprises. “The next day Harry confided in both Ron and Hermione the task that Dumbledore had set him, though separately, for Hermione still refused to remain in Ron’s presence longer than it took to give him a contemptuous look.” ["Vanessa’s voice fades away”]

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile.

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

Vanessa: Casper, before we get started with today’s episode, we just want to remind everybody that our RAICES fundraiser ends in 3 weeks, and we would just love to keep growing the gift that we are giving as a part of our holiday spirit to this amazing organization. So go to harrypottersacredtext and click on the orange button that says “Don’t be a Dursley”.

Casper: And a big shout out to our local group in Providence, Rhode Island, which is run by Erin Mule. We love celebrating our local groups and we’re so glad that we have one in the great city of Providence!

Vanessa: So Casper, it is your turn to tell a story through the theme of recklessness.

Casper: Yeees.

Vanessa: And I’m really excited to hear what you’ve got for me.

Casper: Well, way back in 2010, when I started to think about coming to America for graduate school, I started to strategize about how I might get in and so I applied for a Fulbright once, and I didn’t get it. And I applied for a Fulbright twice the next year again, still didn’t get it. So in the end I just applied directly to the university, and was very lucky enough to get a place to study public policy. And… within the public policy program there’s a
number of classes that you have to take. They’re part of the core curriculum especially in your first year. Things like statistics, economics, management, ethics. And so within a few weeks of arriving, it was already time to sit exams for these classes because you have midterms in your first semester.

And of course all the students were a little worried about it, you know, this is the first chance that you really get grades and feedback, and the class kind of, you know, susses out who’s on top and who’s not. And... I went to tell my professor that I had chosen... not to participate in the midterms for the economics exam, because I had chosen to go on a research learning journey to Detroit to learn about all sorts of alternative to traditional economic systems. And the face of my professor was... [*Casper laughs*] quite stunned. He just thought this was the most reckless thing that he had heard anyone doing. It wasn’t like I was missing the exam because I had a funeral or I was really sick – no, I was premeditatively choosing not to go to this exam, even though it would contribute to my grade.

And I tried to explain to him: “Look, really I came here to learn about things that I’m really interested in, and frankly your economics class is not one of them. And so for me it’s not reckless, this is very sensible. It’s only 10% of the grade, I’ll still pass the class if I do okay in the later exam, sorry but not sorry. Goodbye.” And it just revealed to me what perspective we have, what we think is important or not important, shapes so much what we think of as reckless.

So I wanna think about as we read this chapter, who gets to define what is reckless? You know, because there’s some behaviors that have very dangerous implications and we will see that with Ron especially, that you know, on the face of it wouldn’t seem reckless at all. So I’m excited to explore that with you in this chapter.

Vanessa: Casper, have I ever told you I love you? [*Casper laughs*] I think you did exactly the right thing. Did you still pass the class?


Vanessa: I think that that is exactly right about grad school, or any time you’re in school and your grades don’t matter. It’s also so freeing to realize that someone else’s recklessness is not your recklessness.

Casper: Right! And this is my favorite thing, and people often say to you because you taught me this as well, like at live shows people will come up and say “Vanessa, thank you for
celebrating the art of quitting." Because I feel like this is in the same vein. It’s like… the world puts so much pressure on us to do this thing or that thing, and it may be right for some people but if it’s not for you – great! Say goodbye! You know, don’t take that exam. I mean, I did the same thing the next year in my econometrics class, which is more like statistics, and I did fail that one so you know, ["Vanessa laughs"] I had to retake it, but you know what the benefit was? The second time I took it, I actually understood what was going on. So… sometimes you just need a little more time.

Vanessa: Here’s the thing. I also just think that that’s a risk, right? And it’s a risk that you’re willing to take, and then you dealt with the repercussions.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: But just because you took a risk, doesn’t mean it was reckless. I love you so much. Ugh, what a great story!

Casper: And I love you too. ["Casper laughs"] More on that anon Vanessa, but first, let’s do our 30 second recap. Are you ready to roll?

Vanessa: I am ready.

Casper: Okay. Tell me what happens in chapter 18. Starting 3, 2, 1, go!

Timer starts buzzing

Vanessa: So Harry has to get this information about horcruxes from Slughorn, Hermione can’t figure out any additional information from the library, there’s this big test on anecdotes- antidotes, ["Vanessa giggles"], not on anecdotes, ["Casper chuckles"] and Hermione works really hard and Harry just pulls out a bezoar and Slughorn still loves him. And he asks Slughorn about the horcruxes and Slughorn denies knowing anything of them. And then it’s Ron’s birthday, there’s also an apparition class but Ron’s birthday, he gets umm poisoned not once but twice from mead that was supposed to go Dumbledore!

Buzzer goes off
Casper: [*loud, dramatic gasp*] So intense!

Vanessa: Oh my god, yes. I maybe missed a thing or two Casper, can you fill in the holes, please?

Casper: Yeah! Okay, count me in.

Vanessa: Okay, on your mark, get set, go!

Buzzer starts ticking

Casper: Okay, so it’s Ron’s birthday and he’s coming of age so he gets lots of presents and, um, Ron is very excited about that. But, uhhh, bad things happen. So they have a class, they learn how to apparate and we meet Twycross who teaches people about the 3 D’s, which is amusing if you’re looking for it, um, and then, um, uh... Harry’s still trying to think how am I gonna get this information, he reconnects with Hermione, the password has changed for the common room – I mean actually it’s a pretty chill chapter. I would say they use the Marauder’s Map and –

Buzzer goes off.

Casper: – Draco has disappeared.

Vanessa: …you think this is a chill?

Casper: I mean, not if you’re Ron. But for everyone else.

Casper: So Vanessa, I wanna start our theme conversation by really going into the center of what Harry’s mission is at this point in the book, which is to try and understand from Slughorn, what did he tell Riddle as a young man. He’s seen it in the pensive in the previous chapter, and he thinks, you know, maybe this is the perfect opportunity in this potion’s class to just hang behind and ask Slughorn outright. And Slughorn takes maybe half a second before realizing that Dumbledore is behind this and is very frosty with Harry. And... we celebrate Harry so much throughout these books for his ability to think on the spot and to be creative and courageous, and sometimes that demands recklessness. You know, in that
recklessness can be creativity. But in this case, where he’s not actually under any immediate urgency, I just think that Harry’s planning is poor, and he chose the recklessness of... not just thinking through a better way to open this conversation, right? Like he could be so much more subtle, but he’s not.

Vanessa: I also think it is incredibly reckless because he damages the relationship in order for someone to share something that you need trust.

Casper: Yes!

Vanessa: And there are a million better ways into this, right? There is “Dumbledore has asked me to take up a mantle that my mother, who you loved, died for.”

Casper: Yeees.

Vanessa: There’s so many obvious ways to go about this, if he was just willing to put in a little bit of time brainstorming. And I love your point that it is, at least in part, because there’s no great punishment if he doesn’t get the information the first time. He’s just being lazy.

Casper: That’s the word that I was thinking of! I was like, this isn’t even reckless, it’s lazy! Like... and I think in fact that it’s influenced in what just happened in the chapter, right? He has learnt that in potion’s class he can just show up, he can read the commentary from the Half-Blood Prince, and he will be the best potion’s maker in the class. And even this time, when it fails him, it still gives him that out of saying “just stick a bezoar down their throat”. And even then it still works. So I think he’s showing up in the potion’s class without needing to prepare anymore, and he does exactly the same thing. He’s like [“Casper starts talking in a lazy tone”] “Hey uh professor, what about horcruxes?”, and I love your point about Lily. Like, even when he does the bezoar, Slughorn act lyrical about, you know, “you get your creativity with potions from Lily, this is the sign of a true potion master”, like, why couldn’t he say you know “I want to avenge my mother and I need to understand everything I can.” He can still be upfront about wanting it, but he could at least be more creative and bring Lily into it somehow.
Vanessa: Well, I do think this is the downside of privilege. Right? Harry has all the privilege in this classroom. Slughorn loves him for being famous, he has this extra tool, which I think the metaphor for that would be like an expensive tutor.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: He’s just the golden boy in this classroom. And… the easier the path in life is, the more you assume it’s gonna keep being that – which is a fair assumption. We all operate under the assumption that our life is gonna continue the way that it has always gone. And so, Slughorn has always been really amenable to Harry, so why would things suddenly change? And yeah, assuming that your privilege is a right and not luck, I think is the deep recklessness here.

Casper: I mean, there was… there was something about Slughorn bringing up Lily in this chapter that suddenly made me think differently about the whole previous story, which is that we know that Lily is talented at charms and now apparently she’s also talented at potions, but of course Snape was always very talented at potions as well, and so I wonder… like, was that a bond for Snape and Lily? Especially when they were younger. I suddenly saw this echo of a connection that Harry never really investigates and therefore we don’t get to understand better in the books, but… do you know what I mean?

Vanessa: Oh, yeah, and I think that it’s entirely possible because Lily was in Gryffindor and Snape was in Slytherin, and now Gryffindor and Slytherin –

Casper: [*gasps*] Yes!

Vanessa: – takes potion’s together. I mean, nothing at Hogwarts ever changes, [*Casper laughs*] so I don’t think this is an updated system. And I love that, that possibility that Lily and Snape, you know, worked at the same table all those years ago, and that maybe even that’s part of why both of them were good at it. If you have a fellow friend who’s good at something with you, you push each other and it’s more fun to study together, and…

Casper: Oh my gosh. I’m just thinking of how maybe even in the Half-Blood Prince’s book, maybe there’s elements of Lily’s wisdom in there as well.
Vanessa: Oh! That’s such an incredible thought. I mean, the line that really is striking to me in this incident is: “Didn’t Snape say something about a bezoar all those years ago?”

Casper: Yes, yes!

Vanessa: You know, and the ways that Snape is there to help Harry, that Harry doesn’t know about, and the way that Snape is always helping Harry in ways that he doesn’t know about from the very first book.

Casper: Mmm. Yeah, that’s beautiful. Where else did you see recklessness show up in this chapter?

Vanessa: The other place in this Slughorn-incident where I saw recklessness was in Slughorn not telling Harry the truth. I think that they are both reckless here.

Casper: Yes!

Vanessa: I think Slughorn made a mistake 50 years ago, or whenever –

Casper: Well, he was reckless then. Right, like I think that that’s an ultimate moment of recklessly sharing information that he shouldn’t have.

Vanessa: Absolutely. So he did this reckless thing 50 years ago, and it is obviously something that haunts him, that he feels a tremendous amount of shame and guilt over, so much so that he has tried to obliterate his own memory on this. And I just think that Dumbledore, and now Harry, are both giving him the opportunity to fix it. Right?

Casper: Yeah. Yeah.

Vanessa: Or to not fix it entirely, but to make a little bit of amends. And I… you know, when recklessly hurt someone’s feelings without noticing, and I just wonder how many times I’m given the opportunity to fix it, when I don’t fix it. Slughorn recklessly missing not only one opportunity with Dumbledore, but now this second chance with Harry, to go back and make good on a horrible thing that he did all those years ago. It’s just making me think about all
the second, third and 9 millionth chances I’m given with people, that I don’t take advantage of.

Casper: I’m believing more and more as I grow older that like… living a good life is not even about not hurting people or not doing things wrong, because that’s just inevitable. Right, like we’re human, we’re gonna screw up, we’re gonna upset people just whatever you do, and we’re gonna have negative impacts on people. And so I think so much of my attention now is on “so then what?” You know, what do you do? And I think your point is beautiful because he’s invited twice explicitly, I mean… we’re in the middle of a war now, right, like he has access to information that could really help, and I think we have to… we have to be fierce on Slughorn here, that it’s not just reckless for himself, I get the sense that maybe he doesn’t have a great esteem of himself, but he’s being reckless with other people’s lives now. You know what I mean?

Vanessa: Yeah, absolutely. And to some extent, this crime is worse. Because he didn’t know what Tom Riddle wanted the information for then, and he didn’t know how much harm he was going to do. And he’s not gonna… he didn’t do anything illegal; he didn’t even do anything that deeply immoral, right? He… he was a teacher and a student had a really precocious question, and he answered it. And it was a very bright student and a student who was always good to him and seemed charming and well-adjusted. But now he has all the information about how wrong it was, and so now is his opportunity to go fix it, and that is what the real crime is to me.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: We’re in the middle of these thing, I mean, as you said, we’re all gonna make mistakes but it’s what we do with our legacies after.

Casper: And the thing that’s interesting on this theme of recklessness to me is that I always thought of reckless as being an action that you take, but here we see not taking an action as being reckless. That’s an interesting reframe for me.

Vanessa: You know, something that I’ve been made to think of recently is the role of Pope Francis in the dirty war in the 1970’s in Argentina. And he, at the beginning of that conflict, was really on the wrong side of history. But he then dedicated the rest of his life to making
up for that. And I do think that sometimes our mistakes are those opportunities. It’s impossible to make the right decision every single time, the world is chaos. But what we do with hindsight, when things are clear, is what matters and Slughorn just... I feel like grace is being offered to him again –

Casper: That’s right.

Vanessa: – and again and he’s being reckless with the offerings of grace.

Casper: Yeah, that’s powerful.

Casper: Where else in the chapter do you see this theme of recklessness?

Vanessa: So... I’m curious if we see Ron as being reckless here. So, poor Ron. Poor Ron. [*Casper laughs*] Gets poisoned twice in this chapter, on his birthday.

Casper: Guy can’t get a break. [*Casper laughs*]

Vanessa: I mean it’s BRUTAL. And, you know, he eats the chocolate cauldrons off the floor, assuming that it was a present to him that fell off his bed. Is that reckless?

Casper: I don’t think so. I mean, I feel like it’s so understandable, and even we as readers don’t notice that that’s happening, I feel like it’s so subtle. And to some extent... maybe this is why the boundary of recklessness ends... you know, he’s in his own domestic space, eating an everyday object that’s normally fine. I don’t think we should be testing every food item for poison like we’re Henry VIII or something. You know what I mean?

Vanessa: Oh, I completely agree.

Casper: It’s just, to some extent I don’t wanna call this reckless because it should be safe, and the fact that it isn’t has nothing to do with his judgment, and it has all to do with someone else’s intent.

Vanessa: Completely. And then there’s this additional moment of poisoning when he’s brought to Slughorn’s office, and Slughorn feeds him wine that was meant for Dumbledore.
Casper: Well, this is where I do think we see recklessness. Because Slughorn literally says “oh I do have this oak soaked mead meant for Dumbledore”, and you know he’s saying “I was planning on sharing it with Dumbledore later”, but then he makes this on the spot decision – even though he got plenty other drinks, and frankly, these are young people in an educational environment, like, wouldn’t it be better to just go with butterbeer? But he says “oh, you know, let’s just open this bottle.” There was this element of recklessness which feels different from the chocolate.

Vanessa: I guess to some extent we can just blame Draco and Romilda Vane, that they have sort of committed these crimes of trying to poison people and there are victims. And certainly, Katie Bell wasn’t reckless at all when she got injured. I don’t think we should be victim-blaming. And I think with Draco and Romilda Vane, we see the recklessness of crime in that just because you intend to hurt one person doesn’t mean that you’re not gonna have unintended victims. But also, I guess, maybe the moment of recklessness I would point to with all of these caveats aside, is that… Harry should’ve taken him to the hospital wing. Harry is like “I didn’t wanna take him because we’re not supposed to have candy in the dorms”. Madam Pomphrey wouldn’t be like “what, illegal candy?”

Casper: [*giggles*] She’s seen worse before breakfast. I think this is Harry… I guess he knows that obviously Slughorn is a very good potion’s maker and that Ron will be fine, and is this a moment where he is being super strategic of using Ron’s desperate bodily needs to like rebuild this relationship with Slughorn? Because we’ve seen that Slughorn is not hosting the Slugclub, Harry is not getting any more access. So, this might be more a moment of recklessness that does pay off for him.

Vanessa: That is so interesting. I had not thought of that, and that reminds me of your opening story, that what looks reckless to me is actually strategic in him prioritizing something else. Where I am on the outside being like “no no, go to Madam Pomphrey”, he’s like “I don’t care about Madam Pomphrey, Ron just has a love potion, he will get over it in an hour no matter what, I just need to keep him in a padded room, this is a great excuse to go to Slughorn.”

Casper: [*chuckles*] Mm. But the interesting thing is, of course, it’s not like Harry had it planned for this for days, so even though this plan works, it’s still reckless. I guess we need
to figure out is recklessness bad per se? Right, like there’s something about instantaneous judgment activating as soon as you’ve had the idea, you know, without full information, without long term planning. Sometimes it totally makes sense, like it’s not a bad thing to do.

Vanessa: Yeah. I mean, recklessness I think, like many things, is just in the eye of the beholder. And I think where the problem with Harry is, is that he can’t opt in and opt out of it. It is his modus operandi.

Casper: Mm. Yeah.

Vanessa: And I think that is the different between Harry and Hermione. Hermione is capable of saying “now is the moment where we need to be reckless and just make a decision, because it is a game time decision and we need to not care about the rules, and this is an emergency.” You know, Rita Skeeter in a jar, slapping Draco Malfoy etc. We know she’s capable of making these reckless decisions. But when she has the ability to be planful and meticulous, we know that she’s also capable of that. And it doesn’t seem as though Harry has that planful and meticulous mode.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: That is where it becomes frustrating.

Vanessa: So Casper, what is one last place where you see this theme of recklessness?

Casper: Well, let’s go to the Apparition class, because we meet Twycross who, you know, is this old wizard who sets up this kind of temporary space in which people can apparate, as those of age train to learn this new skill, which is a big moment of becoming an adult in the wizarding world. And there was something that really struck me, because he uses – overuses – these 3 D’s, that you have to focus on your destination, you have to focus on your determination and deliberation, as they’re kind of key tools to being a good apparator. And so, to me, I thought that gosh, those are the ultimate antidote for recklessness, right? Destination, I care about where I’m going, I care about the consequence. Determination, you know, this is not a one-off moment that I’m responding to, right, like there’s a longer-term focus and intention. And deliberation is like, I’m not just thinking about where I’m going but I’m also thinking about all the other contextual elements around me. Who am I with? What
time of day is it? You know, all of those kind of questions that any good plan should involve. And so I really like that balance as we’re thinking of recklessness, to think of Twycross as the ultimate kind of anti-recklessness antidote.

Vanessa: That is a brilliant metaphor, Casper, that I had not thought of at all. I mean, because apparition seems like something born out of recklessness.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: Because it’s something where you can spontaneously go from here to there. But the methodology of it is anti-recklessness. And so I think that there’s just such a beautiful metaphor for the ways in which we should be reckless. Though we should be reckless with a little bit of thought, of knowing ourselves, knowing that we’re somebody who values x, y and z. Moments that are obvious that we should be reckless is you have a bleeding child in the backseat of your car, –

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: – it’s a safe stop sign to run, you run the stop sign, right? Like, you’ve predetermined that your child is someone that you care about so much that you’re willing to run a stop sign over. And so there’s that deliberation, determination. Oh, I love that, that apparating seems like a reckless thing, but it’s actually not at all reckless. And if done poorly, the stakes are really high!


Vanessa: Do you think that the way they’re teaching this is reckless? ["Casper chuckles"] It seems as though it’s the best way that they can come up with, because there’s no other way.

Casper: ["still laughing"] Is it? Is it? I just felt like this was a whole other chapter of –

Vanessa: Of pedagogy –
Casper: – failed pedagogy at Hogwarts. Yeah, just in the sense that… I mean, I don’t want to be hard on Twycross, but he definitely doesn’t seem like the person who is, you know, keeping up with latest pedagogical frameworks in, you know, peer review journals.

Vanessa: I mean, at minimum they should warn the kids that there’s a risk of splinching and that it’s not a big deal if it happens.

Casper: Right! And this is what you should do and we have these safety folks here. I mean, he just seems to have very little attention to what’s going on. We hear that Draco is arguing with Crabbe and Goyle, you know, there’s a conflict in the room and he is just… he shows up, he gives the 3 D’s and he leaves again. Like he’s very… it has to be new for you too in order for it to be effective to the students, right?

Vanessa: Yeah, which is also a funny thing about recklessness; you would think that having the most experienced teacher would be the right thing to do, but eventually even the most experienced teacher is a reckless decision.

Casper: Mm.

Vanessa: So I really do think recklessness depends so much…. I also think recklessness is just about what is it you hold dear.

Casper: Mmm.

Vanessa: And it might be that Hogwarts holds this relationship with this professor more dear than it holds its students having the best teacher available.

Casper: Yeah. That's very true.

Spiritual practice tune starts playing

Vanessa: So Casper, we are doing Sacred Imagination this week. The amazing practice first invented by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, in which we are going to invite all of our listeners to close their eyes if safe, and to imagine themselves into this scene. And so this is the scene between Harry and Ron, and Ron has just been poisoned but Harry does not know that yet.
And so we invite you to either be Harry or Ron, or a fly on the wall, and even though it’s my week to do sacred imagination I have asked Casper to read for me, which he gracefully accepted because I have bronchitis, so we’re gonna try to save my voice a little bit. And so… put your feet on the floor, take a deep breath in, and… Casper.

Casper reads:
“This is really funny and everything,” said Harry impatiently, “but joke’s over, all right? Drop it.”
He turned to leave; he had got two steps towards the door when a crashing blow hit him on the right ear. Staggering, he looked around. Ron’s fist was drawn right back, his face was contorted with rage; he was about to strike again.
Harry reacted instinctively; his wand was out of his pocket and the incantation sprang to mind without conscious thought: Levicorpus!
Ron yelled as his heel was wrenched upwards once more; he dangled helplessly, upside-down, his robes hanging off him.
“What was that for?” Harry bellowed.
“You insulted her, Harry! You said it was a joke!” shouted Ron, who was slowly turning purple in the face as all the blood rushed to his head.
“This is insane!” said Harry. “What’s got into –?”
And then he saw the box lying open on Ron’s bed and the truth hit him with the force of a stampeding troll.
“Where did you get those Chocolate Cauldrons?”
“They were a birthday present!” shouted Ron, revolving slowly in midair as he struggled to get free. “I offered you one, didn’t I?”
“You just picked them up off the floor, didn’t you?”
“They’d fallen off my bed, all right? Let me go!”
“They didn’t fall off your bed, you prat, don’t you understand? They were mine.”

Vanessa: Oooh, so Casper, who were you in this scene?

Casper: I was Ron. [*Casper laughs*]

Vanessa: [*chuckles*] Oh, what did it feel like? Because I was Harry. So what did it feel like to… be in Ron’s body?
Casper: It’s so funny, because just reading it, I just felt like how wronged I was. Even though I was the one to hit Harry, right, Ron hits Harry round the face, that’s a pretty aggressive move. But I – I didn’t even register that as something that was bad, I was just… so confused. Like why won’t he let me be with the person I love? You know? [Vanessa laughs] Just like, I’m just like outraged, and just like nooo I wanna be with Romilda! So I guess as there was this single-mindedness. Like, I wasn’t even aware of consequences of my actions, if that makes sense.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: I mean, I know this is like chemically induced, or magically induced, but there’s something wonderful about that feeling, when you’re just like [Casper starts speaking in a mildly crazed voice] “ahh I’d just die for you I love you”, right, like that intensity of… I have to say teenage love. Of course there’s many other types of wonderful love where we would sacrifice ourselves, but this particular expression just feels so recognizable. “The world’s gonna end if I’m not with you!” [Casper laughs again] I don’t know, I found it kind of sweet. [Casper keeps laughing, Vanessa joins in]

Vanessa: Even though he literally doesn’t know who Romilda Vane is.

Casper: [laughs] Isn’t that the most perfect expression of like, teenage angsty love sometimes?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: How about you, Vanessa? What did you feel as Harry?

Vanessa: So, what I felt as Harry was confused and frustrated, like in those moments you’re out with a friend, or you arrive at a party and you don’t really know how drunk they are, so like “why are they behaving like this?” and then you’re like ohhh. But then this moment of panic, of those were not yours, and how angry Harry gets. I don’t think I’d picked up on that before, how mad Harry gets that Ron has picked up the Chocolate Cauldrons off the floor. He’s saying “you prat”, right, he is –

Casper: Yeah!
Vanessa: – furious at Ron, and that is something that really resonates with me. When somebody I know has hurt themselves, it is my first instinct to be mad at them. I’m like how dare you be sick or injured?! [“Casper chuckles”] You know, Romilda again is the bad person here, it’s not Ron. Ron has done nothing wrong. But this instinct to get mad at Ron really… stuck out to me.

Casper: Yeah. And we’re gonna see Ron’s world, you know, just become more and more dangerous, even his own home in the Deathly Hollows. This is a war and there’s no place for safety.

Vanessa: Thank you, Casper.

Casper: Thank you, what a good passage.

Casper: Well, this week’s voicemail is from Brady Cole.

Voicemail beep

Brady: Hey Vanessa and Casper, I'm Brady Cole and I live Virginia and I'm a really big fan of your podcast. Um... so I'd like to take the time to record this blessing to Neville Longbottom. I've recently been bullied for being a little bit more on the chubby-ish side, and I just... feel Neville because... he also gets kind of bullied, you know? He gets... Malfoy uses the leg lock curse on him, like everyone just kinda is mean to Neville and I kinda just feel him and... I'd just like to bless him and... I'm glad that he's like... I'm... I don't know. Just. Yeah. I love your podcast and I hope to see this on there soon. Bye!

Vanessa: Well, Brady, thank you so much for your voicemail, and I think Neville is such a wonderful, wonderful character to see yourself in. Neville I think demonstrates how people who are bullied can and almost always do grow up to just be strong, wonderful people. And I just – the only thing I would say is, it’s not because as you say, you are chubby-ish. Bullies does not bully for anything that is wrong with you. They bully because things that are going on with them, so... do not see this as being your doing at all. There is absolutely nothing that you were doing that is causing this bullying, including just existing in your own beautiful body. That is not what is happening here.
Casper: Yeah. I completely agree. And in some ways, I mean, just looking at Draco in this chapter even we see how he is at his wits end, you know, the ways in which there is such discord between him and Crabbe and Goyle in the Apparition lesson. It’s just another sign, exactly as you’re saying, Vanessa, that… you know. People who bully are unhappy in themselves, and it’s a way to take it out on someone else, to make them feel better that… ultimately doesn’t serve anyone. So. I’m really glad you enjoy the podcast, Brady, thanks for listening.

Casper: Well Vanessa, it’s time for us to offer a blessing to someone in this chapter, and who are you going to bless this week?

Vanessa: I’m gonna bless our darling Hermione. [*Casper chuckles*] There… is a moment in this chapter where she has worked so hard, inside and outside of the classroom, to really be on top in her Potion’s lessons. She is using the fact that Harry is soaring as motivation not to tear him down, but motivation to study harder than ever. She knows the theory and the practical elements of it. Slughorn gives them what seems to be an impossible assignment, which is a problem with the teacher and not the students, if not a single student in the classroom can do something.

Casper: [*chuckles*] Indeed.

Vanessa: And Hermione tries so hard, and… Harry gets applauded for, quote unquote, cheek. And we’ve all been in situations like that, when someone else is getting credit when they haven’t done the work, or some idiot in your English class clearly hasn’t read the book but is praddling on and on as if they read the book, [*Casper laughs*] just how frustrating it is when other people don’t do any of the work and get credit.

Casper: Oh, that is just the worst. [*Casper chuckles*] It’s just the worst. And thank god that she does learn it, because she’s gonna be so vital down the road that she knows all these things, so yes. Blessings to Hermione.

Vanessa: Yes. Casper, who would you like to bless this week?
Casper: Well, your Sacred Imagination really helped me... find someone that I wanted to bless this week, which is Romilda Vane.

Vanessa: Mmm.

Casper: I’m just taken back to that feeling of just – just complete overwhelming force of desire and like, longing for someone who you can’t have. I mean, I feel like I spent most of my teenage years like that, and it makes you do stupid things. I mean, I... when I was 13 or 14, I set up an e-mail account and e-mailed this guy 2 years above me just these anonymous love e-mails. [*Casper laughs*] Oh god. It was all I knew how to do, and so I understand why she’s simply... I was gonna say cursed chocolates, of course they’re not cursed, but I guess this is a blessing for anyone who feels like they are so hopelessly in love, and I... what I have learnt is that just like the chocolates wear out on Ron, as they would on Harry, this kind of desperate yearning and reckless love with also pass in you, as they did in me. So, for anyone who feels caught up in that kind of... overwhelming longing. It will pass.

Outro music starts playing

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and join our Facebook group to chat with other listeners about this and every other episode. Come and join the incredible community of people supporting us on Patreon, and get little bonuses like a monthly Sacred Imagination from me. You can leave us a review on iTunes, you can follow the Common-ground Pilgrimages on Instagram, and always send us a voicemail.

Vanessa: Our Don’t be a Dursley-campaign has 3 weeks left, and we’re so excited to still be collecting money for RAICES up until Christmas Day. And this week we wanna offer a huge thank you to Zach (?) who donated 1,000 dollars to the Don’t be a Dursley-campaign. We hope to see you at one of our upcoming live shows in Toronto December 9th, and St Louis, Missouri on December 19th. And stay tuned for more information about our 2020 tour by signing up for our newsletter at harrypottersacredtext.com.

Casper: Next week we will be reading chapter 19, “Elf Tails”, through the theme of harmony. This episode is produced by Not Sorry Productions, our executive producer is Ariana Nedleman, our associate producer is Chelsea Ursin. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick
Bohl, and we are part of Night Vale Presents. Thanks to Brady Cole for this week’s voicemail, and thanks as always to Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Maggie Needham, Meghan Kelly and, of course, Stephanie Paulsell. We’ll see you all next week!

Blooper time!

Vanessa: You know, you can have a grumpy patron saint. [*Casper chuckles*] Like, he’s sort of… Severus Snape, the patron saint of… idiots.

Casper: Grumpy helpers. [*Casper starts laughing*]

Vanessa: The patron saint of Harry Potter – the grumpy patron saint of Harry Potter. Right? The –

Casper: [*laughs*] Yeah.

Vanessa: – reluctant patron saint of Harry Potter.

Casper: I love that.