

'Chapter 15 The Forbidden Forest: Things couldn't have been worse. Filch took them down to Professor McGonnagall's study on the first floor, where they sat and waited without saying a word to each other. Hermione was trembling...'

(Quote continues, fades into intro music)

Vanessa: I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Casper: And I'm Casper ter Kuile.

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

Vanessa: As I'm sure is true for many of us, I had a very complicated relationship with my grandmother, who by literally all accounts, was not an easy woman to love. And, towards the end of her life, my father was going back and forth a lot from Los Angeles to Holon, Israel, where she lived, to be with her for, you know, weeks and weeks at a time. And she had never really spoken about the Holocaust. She was very tight-lipped about it. But towards the end of her life, she told my dad this story about the day that she arrived at Auschwitz. And she and her family were deported very late with the Hungarian deportations, and so she was there with her father, and during selection, when they were separating out people for work and people to go to the gas chambers, the Jews who were being lined up obviously didn't know that that was what was happening. It was chaos. And my grandmother was put into one line, and her father, my great-grandfather, was put into another line. And he was disoriented and starving, and quite old at this point. So he wandered out of the line when he saw my grandmother and wandered toward her, and she said, "No no dad, get back into your line." She was worried that he was going to get into trouble for wandering out of his line. And so he went back into his line. And what she didn't realize was that was the last thing that she would ever say to him, because his line was going to the gas chambers, and hers was going to get numbers in order to enter into whatever labor assignments they were getting. And she spent her whole life with that regret. And feeling guilty for this moment in which, as far as I can tell, she did absolutely nothing wrong. There's no guilt to be had. And the fact that she carried with her so silently for so long, I think speaks to the depth of her regret. And I was reminded of it in this week's chapter as Harry and Hermione walk through Hogwarts for these weeks with so much regret for having cost Gryffindor all these points, and all these different things, when really they had done nothing wrong. Their intention was just to help Hagrid. And so I'm going to be interested in exploring how complicated regret is, and the role that it plays in our lives in this week's episode.

Casper: Before we dive into that theme, Vanessa, let's remind ourselves of what happens in this chapter with our 30-second recap. And, I believe it is your turn to go first. So are you ready?

Vanessa: I am, but what doesn't happen in this chapter?

Casper: There was a lot, readers and listeners. Uh, so, prepare yourselves. Maybe we need to like, strategically you take the first half I take the second half.

Vanessa: No! Game's on, ter Kuile.

Casper: Ok, fine. 3...2...1

(ticking sound)

Vanessa: Hermione and Harry get into big trouble with McGonagall, so does, uh, Neville. And they get 150 points deducted from Gryffindor, and everybody in Gryffindor hates them. And then they get called to detention, which, it turns out, is also with Malfoy. And they get marched down by Filch to Hagrid's for their detention, and the detention somehow is really risky to their entire lives, and they have to go into the Forbidden Forest to hunt because this unicorn is die-has, has blood everywhere! And so they see something mysterious and there...is...centaurs! And the centaur takes Harry to the...bhd.back to safety...

(Timer BUZZES)

....after the trouble! Ooooo that was...

Casper: Sstrong start!

(Vanessa laughs)

Casper:....Didn't finish!

Vanessa: The ending is really confusing! Ok, you go! Go ahead!

Casper: Listeners, I'm just gonna fill in the ending. 'Cause it is really important that we cover it.

(Vanessa laughs)

Casper: You know what Vanessa said, now let me go *(laughing)* with the other 30 seconds.

Vanessa: Ok. On your mark, get set, go!

(Ticking sound)

Casper: So after getting into all this trouble and going down to Hagrid's hut, they leave with Fang, the dog. And they go into the forest, and they're very scared. And they get broken up into two groups and they get told, "Green sparks if you find something, red sparks if you get into danger." And suddenly there's red sparks. And so they all run to where Neville and Draco are, but it's a false alarm because Draco is being mean. And then Harry is with Draco. They find the dying unicorn. It's actually already dead. Then there's centaurs: Bane, and some other guy, and

um, Firenze who rescues them, but they're all angry at Firenze for doing that, and then they go back to the hut and, the, uhh...

(Timer BUZZES)

...Snape! Voldemort!

Vanessa: Really just yelling names.

(Casper sighs)

Vanessa: I actually really like it when you get Dada about it. It's like you're writing a little a little 30 second recap haiku.

(Casper laughs)

Casper: I just like the fact that if I'm losing it's because I'm Dada-esque.

(Vanessa laughs)

Vanessa: So, Casper, I'm hoping that you, as my lovely, optimistic, bright friend, can help me make sense of this: why are Harry and Hermione so remorseful over this? They feel so guilty they are walking around, feeling this shame and guilt and so much regret. Is it over being caught? Is it just over the stupidity of leaving the invisibility cloak in the astronomy tower? What is their obsessive regret over?

Casper: One thing that I think is worth mentioning, and we talked about this in Chapter 9, I think he's still struggling with the idea that he's allowed to fail somehow. And that the reason there's such a depth of regret for him is that he's just so worried about the outcome. You know, he doesn't yet really feel safe in this place where he hasn't quite figured out where the boundaries are of the rules he has to follow. And for good reason. I mean, at the end of the chapter, suddenly and magically, his invisibility cloak comes back with a little note saying, *Just in case*. So he's really being given two messages of, you know, "Go and break the rules," and, "You really mustn't break the rules, I've never been so ashamed of Gryffindor in my life." So I think we can see Harry navigating the kind of authority structure of Hogwarts in this moment as well.

Vanessa: I understand that, but there's no, like pride underneath it of, "But we were doing it for a really good cause." There's no conversation about, "We're doing it to protect Hagrid."

Casper: Do you think that's because they're doubting that they're own ch—I mean Harry says he doesn't want to meddle in things any more. So do you think they're really doubting their own impulse of helping people?

Vanessa: Maybe, right? I think that that's a great point. That, when you get caught doing something, you're like, "Shoot. I was doing that for the wrong reasons." I can justify gossiping pretty well. I can be like, "I'm sharing information." There was that New York Times or something article about how gossiping is actually how communities share essential information.

Casper: I'm building community!
(*Vanessa laughs*)

Vanessa: I'm building community! But then I get caught, and I'm like, "Ohhhh" You know, like, "I didn't actually have the best intentions." So I wonder if that could be part of it. I just, I just think it's so interesting how bummed they are about this. And you would think that they would explode at Hagrid in anger or blame, saying, "You did this stupid thing, and look at the fallout." And there's none of that here.

Casper: The other moment where I think we really have that sense of regretting something, for something you haven't done, is when Harry sees the dead unicorn for the first time, in the clearing in the forest. You know we read, 'Harry had never seen anything so beautiful and sad.' And it reminded me of that feeling when you hear about something in the news, or something happens in someone's life that you care about. You know it's not about me, it doesn't affect me directly, but I feel regret about it, and I don't know how quite to make sense of that. But it feels related to this, this sense of things that are out of our control but that we do regret. And that image of looking at something so beautiful and so sad- like this magical creature that's so rare- there's such an element of regret in that scene that struck me also.

Vanessa: Yeah, I wonder if that regret for Harry is a regret of exactly what you said. Of not having enough control; a regret of not being able to intervene in pain in the world. Some of my biggest regrets are when I've witnessed cruelty out in the world and haven't intervened. You know, a parent being mean to a child on the subway. And I don't know that I could've done anything differently. It's none of my business, and what could I honestly have done, but I feel deep regret over that, that I didn't try to somehow intervene.

Casper: And this is the frustrating thing of life, because, you know, in this chapter we see them really intervening, right? They're helping Hagrid get rid of Norbert in this safe and sensible way. Well, maybe not totally sensible, but they're doing their best.

Vanessa: In the best way that they can come up with.

Casper: As 11-year old children orchestrating an international escape, I am very impressed. But again they feel regret for getting caught there, and they would've felt regret if they hadn't done anything. So sometimes maybe regret is something we have to live with, whatever we choose.

Vanessa: I was thinking about offering a blessing to Hermione for this, but the way that she shows her suffering is so sweet. It says, 'Hermione and Neville were suffering, too. They didn't

have as bad a time as Harry because they weren't as well known, but nobody would speak to them either. Hermione had stopped drawing attention to herself in class, keeping her head down and working in silence." So her version of penance, like her manifestation of regret, is not taking joy in learning. She's punishing herself. It's like, "I don't even deserve to learn!"

Casper: I think it's important to notice that both Hermione and Harry are taking away the thing that they're most good at, and the thing that they can most contribute with. And it makes me think, you know, who else in our own lives is feeling, or is restricting themselves or feeling restricted from the gifts that they have to give because of this sense of regret or guilt that they carry for something that wasn't necessarily their fault. Or they were trying something good and it just didn't work. And I mean, that's really a sad thought. And I'm glad that there are people like Oliver Wood that say, "Don't you dare resign," and I wish there'd been a teacher that said to Hermione, "Hermione, you know the answer to this, will you tell us?" Because, you know, she's just sitting there not helping herself or anyone else in this situation.

Vanessa: I wonder if McGonagall is disappointing us here by not being more curious about what the kids were actually up to. She offers them an excuse, and is like, "I know what you were up to. You were trying to embarrass Draco." She doesn't ask. She doesn't check in, like, "Is everything ok? Are you acting out for any reason?" She just, you know, she's this expert educator who thinks she knows, and just jumps to all these conclusions. And I think an unfair punishment is doled out because of it.

Casper: Yes. I was thinking about that, Vanessa, because in the text we read, I think McGonagall says, "I think I've got a good idea of what's been going on. It doesn't take a genius to work it out. You fed Draco Malfoy some cock and bull story about a dragon trying to get him out of bed and in to trouble." And I wonder, is she feeding them a different story to tell that they can spread around the school so that, you know...

Vanessa: ..she doesn't have to expel them?

Casper: ...So she he doesn't have to expel them, because...

Vanessa: ..and get Hagrid in trouble.

Casper: Exactly. Is she actually protecting them here? Does she know? And yet, when she says, "Don't tell me what I can and can't do, Potter. I've never been more ashamed of Gryffindor students." I wonder if she is saying there, you know, I am ashamed of you because you should have come to me or Dumbledore with this issue. So they are layers of meaning that I wonder about just in this passage.

Vanessa: Yeah, and the, "I've never been more ashamed of Gryffindor students" really gets to me, right? I mean, it's almost a cliché of it's harder to hear your parents say, "I'm disappointed in you," than it is to hear your parents say, "I'm mad at you." And I wonder if the reason that she feels so much shame is that she says, "Nothing gives you the right to walk around school at

night. Especially these days. It's very dangerous." And that is when she says, "I'm going to deduct 50 points from each of you." And I'm wondering if the reason she's so ashamed of them and so ashamed of herself for failing them in this way, is because she feels as though Hogwarts has never been such a dangerous place. So again, it's possible that she's feeling some shame here about the fact that she can't keep them safe and is lashing out. So I just feel like regrets and shame just pile on each other, and we just keep it so private.

Casper: Of course it's difficult to know if any of this is true, but I do think it helps us to expand our imagination of just thinking through what might be going on. You know, what are the different perspectives on the story, what are the different layers?

Vanessa: I think it's so easy whenever someone is rude to us, whenever someone is short to us, you know to just assume bad intentions. And so I think practicing wondering at McGonagall and, you know, what could be behind different motivations for different people could be good practice for our lives.

Casper: Does that extend to Filch and his newly oiled chains for children?

Vanessa: No. Can we talk about that for like, two seconds?

Casper: Sure.

Vanessa: Filch's "regret" in this chapter is that we have moved on as a society from abusing children. And this is a private rant of Vanessa's, that I think it is the responsibility of people as they age to young people, and to keep loving young people, even though it's hard. And Filch is the worst! Don't you think that Filch really regrets the fact that Dumbledore doesn't let him hang kids up by their wrists anymore?

Casper: I wonder if to some extent Filch plays up this angle of his character a little bit. Especially as a squib, someone who doesn't have magical powers, he has to enforce his authority by other means. And I think kind of playing the scary, weird, old guy with chains in his office is probably his way of cementing his authority with the children.

Vanessa: I a little bit buy that. 'Cause kids don't tend to respect sort of custodial staff, and if they were to find out that he was a squib they wouldn't respect that either, so he's putting, you know, the fear of God in them. I still don't think it's the best way to go around earning the respect of children. Is to say, "I wish I could still hang you by your wrists for 3 days." But maybe it's some Zen-like practice that he keeps those chains oiled, even though, you know....

Casper: It's like those old monks. It's an aesthetic practice.

(Vanessa laughs)

Vanessa: Exactly.

(Music)

Casper: The passage I chose for this week's Havruta study is the moment where Hagrid and Hermione and the other children, have met one of the centaurs, Ronan. And Ronan says, 'Good evening. Students are you? And do you learn much up at the school?' 'Erm, a bit,' said Hermione timidly. 'A bit? Well that's something.' Ronan sighed. He flung back his head and stared at the sky. 'Mars is bright tonight.'

And, Vanessa, I wanted to ask you about, "Mars is bright tonight." Why is he answering with that? And we don't just read it once, we get it three times. And, I know that part of this practice is that I have to suggest something, so I've come up with this. Which is that we know that centaurs have a gift for divination. They have the ability to see in the future. Mars is traditionally associated with the god of war. You know, the Roman god of war. So it says something about war, it says something about violence. But there's also something about the enormity of space and time that I think these centaurs are living on, you know, they look at the long view, they look at the big picture. And a planet is about as far away as you can get from what's happening in this Forbidden Forest. So those are the things that struck me, but I'm curious to learn from you.

Vanessa: I really like what you said about it's an offer of perspective, right? Yes it's tragic that unicorns have died, and Mars is bright tonight. Especially in the face of violence to your point about Mars conjuring a vision of war, and it's the red planet. There's sort of darkness and a bloodiness to allusions about Mars, so just reminding us, you know, that tragedies come in context, and that life is long and the world is longer. I really, I come from California, so looking at sequoia trees always make me realize how short my life is. They have been around longer than I have, and they will be around hundreds of years after me. So I think that when you conjure the stars in the face of a human issue, it's an offering of perspective.

Casper: And maybe that's why it happens 3 times as well. It's kind of reinforcing that perspective taking.

Vanessa: It's like a church bell, right? "Mars is bright tonight?" It pulls you out of your routine. And you have to pay attention to something if you hear it three times.

Casper: I do wonder where the real resistance to helping Harry in this situation and helping him in his time of need comes from. Why are Ronan and Bane so hesitant? And we do know that the centaurs have this power of divination and that they know about prophecies and foretellings, and I wonder if the resistance from Bane and Ronan comes from protecting a prophecy that they have. And we can speculate about what it might be, whether it's about Harry dying at the hands of Voldemort in this very place, in the Forbidden Forest, or if it's something more general. But there is a secretive-ness about this. And Firenze is the one who's breaking this social norm, which really shows the difference between Bane and Ronan, who are keeping that big

perspective, staying at that planetary level, and Firenze who has chosen to involve himself in this, you know, here and now challenge, and gives Harry a ride on his back - a great shame for a centaur, to, act like a mule, as Bane tells him. So there's something in that language which is really about upholding dignity and identity, I think, which I hadn't read in that way, so thanks for helping me understand that.

Vanessa: My question for you, Casper, is who do we respect more: the centaurs who are keeping the big perspective, or the centaur or who is, literally, like, "Get on my back?" And I wonder if the argument is that we need all kinds?

Casper: I think you're exactly right, Vanessa. I think if we just have one of them we'll always lose the perspective of the other, and we need that dialectical relationship to find a very contested middle ground that's full of grayness and complications and regrets. But we know that that's better than either extreme.

Vanessa: Yeah, it gets back to what we were saying at the beginning. I bet that both Firenze and Ronan regret that they had to make this black and white choice of either helping Harry or keeping this mars perspective just like Harry and Hermione would've regretted not helping Hagrid and they have regrets about helping Hagrid. Thank you for this wonderful Havruta moment, Casper. I loved it.

Vanessa: This week's voicemail is from Kevin Bianchi. Kevin, thank you so much for sending in this voice message.

(Beep)

Kevin: Hey Vanessa, Hey Casper. I have a couple thoughts and then a question about Ron and Hermione bringing their wands with them to the quidditch match. You guys talked a lot about a wand as an object of utility and going out without a cell phone or unplugging for the Sabbath. Um, and I totally agree with all of that, but, for these characters, a wand is also a weapon. Um, and living in the world that we live in, I couldn't help but make a connection between, you know, a wand at a quidditch match and a gun at a night club, or any other safe space. In the wake of the Orlando shootings, I feel like a lot of people were saying, "Well if somebody in the night club had had a gun, then X, Y, or Z could have gone differently." And the idea of bringing a weapon to a safe space in case you need it feels very backwards to me. And so I was trying to pinpoint why that felt backwards to me. So I started with the idea of hope, because that's what your episode was focused on, and I think it's less, "I don't bring a weapon to a safe space because I hope I won't be attacked," I think it's more that, because I trust I won't be attacked. So, my question for you I guess is two parts. Number one is for you, is there a connection or a difference between hope and trust? And then the second part is how do you think those two ideas relate to the idea of a safe space and how we operate within them, whether it's a quidditch match or a night club or a place of worship? I can't wait to hear your thoughts, and I love this podcast so much!

Vanessa: Kevin your two questions are very intertwined to me. And the root of it, as I see it, is when is hope possible and when is trust possible? In that trust is actually something even higher than hope. If you completely trust somebody, you don't even need hope. Hope is for the moments in which we're scared. Hope is for the moments in which we are in those foxholes that we talked about in the Nicholas Flamel episode. So I think that we go for hope when trust is broken, and I would like to think that once trust is broken, it doesn't get broken in a way that it can't be reformed. And so, I hope that we can reform trust enough in one another that we can walk into more spaces without our wands drawn.

Casper: To close us out, Vanessa, let's bless the characters who we want to give a special word to this week. My blessing this week is for Neville. You know, at the beginning of the chapter, he's already doing something very brave to try and warn Harry and Hermione about Draco's plot. And then at the end, when he goes into the forest, he's paired with Draco and with Fang, the dog. And Hagrid tells us that Fang is a coward and, of course, we learn that Draco, too, is a coward. And so when Draco scares him on purpose, Neville does exactly what he's supposed to do, he sends red sparks into the sky to warn the others that there's danger. And, ultimately, we find out, it's just Draco playing a trick. But I want to bless Neville for following the proper safety precautions, and for really learning constantly during this first book first of all to have the courage to act, and now secondly doing the right thing when he needs to act. So, my blessing is for Neville for being the brave man we know he will become already in this chapter.

Vanessa: Hear, hear. Amen.

Casper: How about you, Vanessa?

Vanessa: My blessing this week is for Professor McGonagall. It cannot be easy for her to take away 150 house points from Gryffindor. As we know, she's pulled Oliver Wood out of a classroom and snuck Harry a broom because she's so excited about the idea that Gryffindor can beat Slytherin. And so the fact that she is so invested in character-building for these kids, and in their safety, I think that she's really upset that they're out of bed because she's really worried about Hogwarts being dangerous at night right now that she really punishes them in a way that is also punishing herself. So I would like to bless all the parents out there who have to sometimes do things that they don't really want to do in order to do what is right for their children.

Vanessa: You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. Next week we are going to read Chapter 16, Through the Trap Door, through the theme of Destiny. This week's episode was produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile and Vanessa Zoltan. Please remember to subscribe and review, and follow us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook. You can find our handle at HPSacredtext.com. This week we would like to thank Jenn Stark, our social media coordinator, Briton Revick, Emma Walsmith, Chelsea Keenan, Jordan Pederson, Kelly Low, Alexander Hoover, Heather Rivard, Peter Kimberling, Anna Kansnam, Adam Friedman, and Dalton Farr. We'd also like to thank Kevin Bianchi for sending in his great voicemail. Our music is by Ivan Paisaou and Nick Bolle. We'd like to thank Charlie and Rebecca Ludley, Lauren

Taylor, Shane Bannon, and Rufus, the Harvard Communications Office, the Humanist Hub, and our Harry Potter and the Sacred Text reading group. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next week.

Casper: Bye!

Casper (*imitating McGonnagall?*): A dragon's egg, Potter, that's a likely story.

(*Vanessa laughs*)

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