

## The Real Question

### DIAGNOSIS

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**Vanessa** [00:00:00] Casper. There was a moment, probably six or seven years ago now, where I was walking with our beloved friend Stephanie Paulsell, and I was complaining to her about the pain that I was in and how embarrassing what I was going through was. And she looked at me and she said, "Okay Vanessa, what are we going to do about it?" And that moment of just someone being like, "Your pain is serious and we are a team that is going to do something about this," really changed the way that I thought about my illness. And I ended up getting eventually diagnosed with endometriosis, as you know, and as many of our listeners know. And looking back, I really think that that moment was Stephanie saying, "We made a huge difference in that really draining, painful process of trying to get a diagnosis."

**Casper** [00:00:56] I remember that time so well because you were at your wit's end, like you had tried so many places, so many doctors had not taken you seriously. And I'm so grateful that you've talked about it on the podcast that we've done together, because I know we've heard from many listeners who've been in the same situation. And today we're hearing from someone who's joining us on the show who is experiencing pain and doesn't have a diagnosis and is bringing up a question that is all about how to manage that experience.

**Vanessa** [00:01:24] But before we talk to that person, you might start to notice that we have a few ads on the show in order to make the show sustainable. But we want to let you know that The Real Question is still ad-free on Patreon. So if you sign up for our Patreon, even at the lowest tier, you will get ad-free episodes of the show as part of that. And thank you all for listening.

**Casper** [00:01:45] I'm Casper ter Kuile.

**Vanessa** [00:01:47] And I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

**Casper** [00:01:49] And this is The Real Question. Today, we're joined by Maya Gosh. Maya is a sophomore at Occidental College on the golf team and a big fan of Liverpool Football Club. Maya, thank you so much for being with us today.

**Maya** [00:02:17] Of course. Thank you for having me. I'm very, very excited.

**Vanessa** [00:02:22] Maya, of course, calling in from the greatest city in the world, Los Angeles, California.

**Casper** [00:02:26] Where is Occidental College? Is it in L.A.?

**Maya** [00:02:30] It's in Eagle Rock. So closer to Pasadena.

**Casper** [00:02:34] [laughing] Eagle Rock--America has the funniest names, like--

**Maya** [00:02:40] Um! Ipswich, Norwich, Wolverhampton.

**Casper** [00:02:44] [laughing] Oh, I like you.

**Vanessa** [00:02:45] [laughing] And you all don't pronounce your cities. I love Derbyshire. [in British accent] Derbyshire.

**Casper** [00:02:44] Derbyshire.

**Vanessa** [00:02:45] There's no "a" in it!

**Casper** [00:02:53] [laughing] So Maya, will you tell us a little bit about the question that you're bringing onto the show today and why you're asking it?

**Maya** [00:03:02] Yeah, so, to give a little backstory--my sophomore year of high school, I started having really weird knee pain. And I played soccer as a child, I got injured a lot. I kind of just figured it was old injuries cropping back up, no big deal. And it continued and it started happening in my ankles, and then a couple of years ago in my wrists, and my shoulders. So I joke that I have pain in my head, shoulders, knees and toes. But the more that it spread, the more I was like, okay, something is not right here. So I went to my doctor and ended up going to a bunch of different doctors and a bunch of different medical departments. And they all told me some variation of "from what I'm looking at in your charts and in your exam, like, you're perfectly healthy."

**Casper** Mm hmm.

**Maya** And one of the doctors even said that they think it is an anxiety response and that I'm being triggered by something in my environment, and that's what's going on, and that I shouldn't really be that worried 'cause this isn't affecting my daily life, and I'm not like, laid up in the hospital. So that was really demoralizing and disheartening. And that's kind of where I'm at now with just wondering, do I even keep going back? Like, is it worth fighting this fight and going through all these appointments to try and get a diagnosis? Or do I just kind of have to live and accept that my joints are going to hurt for maybe the rest of my life?

**Casper** Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:04:35] Well, first of all, I'm so sorry that you're in pain. That sucks.

**Maya** [00:04:40] Yeah. [laughs a bit]

**Vanessa** [00:04:42] Why wouldn't you keep trying to get a diagnosis?

**Maya** [00:04:46] Just 'cause I remember, like, sitting in that appointment where I was told it was all in my head, and just like, being on the verge of tears on, like, a Zoom call with the doctor and just kind of being like, what is the point of this? Like every time I go back to a different doctor, I like get really hopeful and I'm like, maybe this is the doctor that will understand my body enough to understand that this is a problem. And you hope for a while too, because a lot of doctors are very hard to get into, especially after the pandemic. So it's like you hope for months that like this appointment is going to be the one that like you're going to finally figure it out. And then there's that like crashing realization that then is like, okay, so this is a long-term thing. This is going to be for the rest of your life. It like makes it really easy to kind of spiral a little bit too. So I just kind of feel like maybe enough is enough and maybe there's no point because maybe nobody can help me.

**Casper** [00:05:47] Hmm. You said this has been going on for a couple of years, Maya?

**Maya** [00:05:50] Yeah. So the pain started my sophomore year of high school, so like four years ago. And then the whole doctor process started in like the very beginning of 2020.

**Casper** [00:06:00] Oh, wow. So this has been going on for a while. Like you've seen multiple people, and have had that rollercoaster and let down every time.

**Maya** [00:06:08] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:06:10] Do you feel like you have a sense of what it is?

**Maya** [00:06:14] No, it's hard. I have someone in my family that has rheumatoid arthritis, so we thought maybe it would be that. But I've been to a rheumatologist. Everybody in my life has, like, differing thoughts about what it may be. I just kind of am like, if somebody could tell me what is going on, that would be great. But I haven't made any, like, decisions or conclusions on my own.

**Vanessa** [00:06:37] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:06:39] This is never a fun question to ask, Maya, but when you consider like, what's the worst-case scenario? Where does your mind go?

**Maya** [00:06:47] I mean, my mind just goes to like living with this for the rest of my life because I'm only 19, right? That worries me for the future of like we all hear about you get problems with your joints in your body as you get older. If I'm starting out with this like bad joint pain, obviously I can live with that now. But like, at what point is it going to be like unlivable? Is that something that's going to happen? So.

**Casper** [00:07:12] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:07:14] In your imagination, Casper asked the worst-case scenario. What does getting a diagnosis feel like to you when you imagine it?

**Maya** [00:07:25] To me, honestly, it sounds really weird to say my worst-case scenario is this lasts forever, and my best-case scenario is like this lasts forever and I have a name for it, but that's really what it feels like because this obviously impacts me and my daily life, right? And I like will sit down in the middle of a round and like have to tape my ankles and people are like, what's going on? And then I have to go on this really long-winded explanation about how like I have random joint pain, I don't know what causes it, I don't know why it happens, I have not been diagnosed with anything. So I feel like just the ease of like, yes, I have this disease, or I have this condition and that's what's causing this. Like that feels like such a weight off to me. And also I feel like if you have something and you know, like what's causing it, there's probably more information out there about like remedies and, if not cures, but like things that you can do to treat your pain and stuff. So yeah, that feels really like, important or significant to me to, like, have something to be like, this is what it is.

**Vanessa** [00:08:31] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:08:32] Maya I'm just hearing how much this whole situation sucks. [Maya and Casper laughing a bit] Like, I mean, first of all, like that moment of, like, oh, I have to adjust something, like, I'm taping up my ankles, and someone asked me, what are you doing?

And then I have like, now I have to like, where I feel like I have to tell them like, a five minute thing. There's so much judgment that I can imagine happens in those interactions. Plus, you have to like self-disclose, all of this stuff that like, no one has the right to know, first of all. So like that situation, then you have to navigate all of this medical stuff, which is like anxiety provoking at the best of times. And then the whole question of like, well, maybe it's this, which maybe means that my like, has my own body been like doing, like, dammit, like this is just so annoying. And so I can, I can just feel like how you brought us one question, but there's actually all of these layers of frustration and doubt and sadness and just, management of logistics, that is exhausting. And I just, I'm really sorry, like, this seriously sucks. So we're not going to diagnose you today [laughing] because we are not medical experts. But what I really hope we can get to is like, with the help of your texts, and just some time in conversation, to hopefully find some clarity on at least the next best step of like, do I keep going to these appointments or do I put this aside for now? Does that sound right?

**Maya** [00:09:57] Yeah. And thank you for acknowledging--I don't know, "thank you" doesn't feel like the right word. But like, I appreciate that you acknowledged all of the things that go into this.

**Casper** [00:10:09] Yeah. Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:10:12] Well, should we look at your texts, Maya, and see what it is that you brought us and see where that takes us?

**Maya** [00:10:18] Yes. So my first text is a quote from the show *Mythbusters*, which was on Discovery a long time ago, because I grew up with the show. And their goal was just to, like, make science fun and to make it, like, entertaining and to take all these, like, urban legends that people have heard and like actually test them out through the scientific method. And I am not a hard STEM person now, but they definitely did have like a really big impact on me and like I really thought I was going to like do something in science. Like, it's just a lovely show that I appreciate so much for having existed. And so the quote I brought from that show is "Failure is always an option," which is something that they kind of repeated a lot and was a constant theme, especially with like, doing science. They were like, yeah, failure is always an option.

**Casper** [00:11:14] Mmm.

**Vanessa** [00:11:15] What is failure in your scenario?

**Maya** [00:11:21] I don't know. [laughs] It feels like failure is going to these doctors and not getting a diagnosis, but it also feels like failure is not even going and like stopping this process. Everything. [laughs]

**Vanessa** [00:11:38] But what's not failure is getting a diagnosis.

**Maya** [00:11:41] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:11:42] That is success to you, correct?

**Maya** [00:11:45] Yes.

**Vanessa** [00:11:46] But the two options for failure are deciding to keep going to doctors, *and* deciding to not.

**Maya** [00:11:57] Yeah. [laughing] The more you say it, the more I'm like, well, I'm just saying myself up for failure no matter what route I go down. But it just, I don't know. That's kind of where I'm at.

**Vanessa** [00:12:08] I'm wondering how you feel about the sentence, "failure is always an option." Is it an optimistic one? Like, [lighthearted tone] "Don't worry about it. You can always fail. You'll be fine!" Or is it like, [tone changes to pessimistic sarcasm] "Yep, failure's the option. It's always the option."

**Maya** [00:12:22] No, it definitely feels very optimistic to me, and it feels like, obviously it's a play on like, "Failure's never an option." And so I feel like, yeah, it's always read as really optimistic to me and really like, hopeful.

**Vanessa** [00:12:37] Okay. So I'm going to say two things. I'm, I'm running an experiment. I *am* a mythbuster. [Maya laughs] Okay. *Never going to the doctor again, and just living with this pain, is always an option.* Like, think about how that made you feel. Okay? *Going to the doctor and constantly looking for a solution until you find one is always an option.* Which of those two felt like, "Yeah, yeah. That's always an option. I can just choose that."

**Maya** [00:13:13] I feel like the thing that really struck me when you said that was just like, the gravity of always? But like in a in a good way, like you're both making faces like this is going to be sad, [Casper laughs] but like, for once I'm like, no, that's a good thing because like, always is like my entire life.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Maya** And so, like, I could choose to, like, go back to a doctor in five years, and that's still always. And so I feel like that kind of settled me into the idea that like, as long term as this is, like it can be longer term than what I'm perceiving in my mind.

**Vanessa** [00:13:49] Right.

**Maya** [00:13:50] Because the idea of setting up a doctor's appointment for three years from now doesn't feel as scary, and as like, I'm going to throw myself into this hope spiral. It just feels like, okay, I have an appointment in a very long time.

**Casper** [00:14:01] Okay, weird question. Do you win every golf tournament that you play?

**Maya** Ha! No.

**Casper** So why do you keep playing?

**Maya** [00:14:10] Because I like the sport, and I love my team, and it's fun.

**Casper** [00:14:14] What if going to the doctor's was like a golf tournament?

**Vanessa** [00:14:19] Have you ever been to a doctor? [Maya and Vanessa laugh]

**Casper** [00:14:20] [laughing a little] No, no, bear with me, bear with me. Because, because I enjoy the sport, and I love my team. Like, what can we take from that to the doctor situation? Because I hear you say every time I go to the doctor, it's because I'm hoping I'm going to get a diagnosis. And I'm wondering, can we uncouple those two things, that like, you play the sport because you love it and you love your team. And sometimes you win, bonus. Like, I'm just trying to uncouple that emotional rollercoaster from the fact of speaking to doctors.

**Maya** [00:14:53] I see where you're going, and I understand--

**Casper** [00:14:55] Yeah, I feel like it's still bullshit. [laughs]

**Maya** [00:14:58] Well, because when you said think about it like a tournament, I wasn't necessarily thinking about, like, the love of the sport and like the team aspect, I was thinking about like. Okay, I prepare for a tournament, I go through practice and I like, have this expectation of like, you're just going in to do what you can do, and you know your skill level. So I was like, that maybe is something that I could bring to like a perspective of a doctor's appointment, and being more like, intentional about my emotions. But I wasn't thinking like the way that you went down.

**Casper** [00:15:33] I like the way you went down much better. [laughing] That sounds really smart. [Maya and Casper laugh]

**Vanessa** [00:15:38] I mean right, because that, that's not one of the options we talked about. Right, like, it's not like the Mythbusters were like, "we're going to send a car without really setting it up for success. Well, failure's always an option, right?" They still tried really hard every time to set themselves up for success. How would it feel if you just went into every doctor's appointment with "Failure's always an option, but I'm trying. I'm showing up. I love the team of me and my body. The doctor and I are on the same team, and...eh, we lost today." Is that a possibility for what failure would mean?

**Maya** [00:16:15] I feel like it definitely is. Like I said, I feel like I'd be more intentional with my emotions, and I feel like that would be setting me up for...I was going to say setting myself up for a kind of success?

**Vanessa** Yeah yeah yeah.

**Maya** That way, if I had that process to go through and not like understanding.

**Vanessa** [00:16:34] I mean, can I just say, though, I hate this answer, because essentially what we've come to is "what you need is an attitude adjustment." [Casper laughs] But what I love about what you've said is that there would be deliberate practices. You would gear yourself up psychologically and be like, okay, I feel hope coming in. What does that mean? How do I deal with that, right? It would take practice, right? Like it would take discipline to keep it in a place that I didn't go on this emotional spiral.

**Casper** [00:17:04] Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:17:05] It's like I would need to bring this resilience and determination and—right like, golf is really hard. Like, you get up early for training. Right? Like, that attitude adjustment would be a big mental commitment that, like, is always an option to

you? But also makes sense to me that you might not want to do. Right now you're in college. It's not a simple thing, I guess is what I'm saying.

**Maya** [00:17:30] Yeah, definitely. And it's weird that, like. You were talking about how like, disciplined I'd have to be, and how much of a process this was. And it wasn't like--that wasn't scary to me. Maybe because I've gone through something similar with golf and like having to really be intentional about my attitude and how I'm approaching it. But it wasn't as fear-inducing at all, as like where I came in to this question.

**Casper** [00:17:57] And that's really special. Because like for a lot of people, including me, that sounds really hard. Like I think about people who are auditioning every day. Like when I met my now husband, he was a musician and he kept having to audition. I would *crumple*. [laughing a bit] Like, I need to be involved in everything I do all of the time? So like that kind of like, okay, I'm starting again, I'm starting again, I'm starting again. Like that is real mental skill, which I hope you don't discount the clear expertise you have at this point, in doing that, because that does not come naturally to me or most people. Who, who do you really respect, who has that kind of discipline? Like do you have heroes, sporting or otherwise, that like really exhibit this kind of, yeah, mental ability, that come to mind?

**Maya** [00:18:46] Well, actually, I think my next text will really encapsulate that, and is like my example of a hero.

**Vanessa** [00:18:56] Great. Let's turn to that text.

[transition music plays]

**Maya** [00:19:18] So I have a quote from Jürgen Klopp, who is the manager of Liverpool Football Club, my absolute favorite soccer team to ever exist. And basically this quote comes from a press conference before a game they were playing, and—the like, summary for non-soccer people is they play a team away, and they play a team at home. Whoever won on aggregate score goes on to the final of this really prestigious competition. And so, they played the league away, and they were down three nil. And so it is like almost an insurmountable task in any soccer game to score four goals. And they ended up doing it. They won, they went on to win this competition. Right, so because of all of that, this has become very famous in Liverpool fan circles. And the quote is, “If we can do it, wonderful. If we can't, let's fail in the most beautiful way.”

**Casper** [00:20:19] First of all, I love that you're bringing us some soccer. Obviously I'm a Leeds fan and resent Liverpool a little bit.

**Vanessa** [00:20:27] Obviously. [jokingly]

**Casper** [00:20:28] *Because they're such a special club*. [accented] You know, everyone thinks Liverpool's *such a special club*. That was my best Scouse accent, *ahem*, for those of you familiar. So I'm curious, why did you choose this quote? You know, he's this kind of mythical football manager. He's taken Liverpool to great heights. You know, he's achieved a lot. But why this quote?

**Maya** [00:20:47] I mean, part of it is just like the resonance of it. Like when I think of Jürgen Klopp quotes, when I think of Liverpool things, like, this is one of the things that *really* stands out, right. There's like a ten-minute edited clip of like these two games that's really super dramatic and like, I will play it, and I will cry, because it's just so beautiful. So

it's like, part of it is just the resonance of it with me and like the emotional tie that I have to it. Part of it, I just think is it feels like the most pretty dressed-up version of like every cliché sports quote ever? But I love that it's like very pretty and dressed up. I love that we're not just saying, like, leave it all out on the pitch. We're saying, like, fail in the most beautiful way. Who says that? [laughs a bit]

**Casper** [00:21:34] It's also, I think sometimes people who don't love sports don't understand this. Like, yes, we follow sports because it's exciting. Sure, people are skilled, they play matches. But like, when you follow a team through a season, and the, you know, the English soccer leagues, it's like ten months, nine months in a season. So it's like a full year of traveling, game by game, match by match. It shapes you. And I'm curious, like, I just want to hear you talk about why you love Liverpool. Like, what about that club, what about Jürgen Klopp, resonates with who you are? Like what, what does loving Liverpool tell us about who Maya is?

**Maya** [00:22:10] I mean, I started like in Liverpool by accident, kind of. I played competitive soccer. Everybody was a fan of Manchester United, so I was like, I'm going to be different. And Liverpool is my team and there was no thought that went into that decision. But the more I learned about the club and the more I followed the club, I'm just so happy that that was my decision, because it's a soccer club that's not owned by oil money or by an oligarch. They have the most amazing song in You'll Never Walk Alone. And like that was my first tattoo that I got after my 18th birthday was I have the words "you'll never walk alone" tattooed on my arm. The players are so wonderful, and funny, and there's just this mentality of like being good people and supporting the systems. And I don't know, there's just so much about it that, like, I could never live there because I do not function well in the rain and the cold. But if it was sunny, I would love to like live there and like I feel like I'd fit in and it just, everything about it just is so cool and amazing and beautiful.

**Vanessa** [00:23:14] I mean, so you sold me. I'm now a Liverpool fan. I'm not kidding, please email me that ten-minute clip. I love crying over sports. [Casper laughs] But so like, I'm going to just ask the obvious question: what does it mean to fail in the most beautiful way? [pause] We've defined failure in many different ways, [laughing a bit] in the first part of this episode. Which version of failure looks beautiful to you?

**Maya** [00:23:41] I feel like the obvious or like, the very first gut instinct answer is like, you have to go back. Like that is the spirit of this, you have to do it, you have to try, like. Whether or not I try in a more intentional way now because we've had this discussion, or whether it's just like putting yourself through it and go, go, go, go, go. Like it feels like, unless I do something, it can't be like failing in the most beautiful way because I haven't left it all out there, haven't given blood, sweat and tears. I haven't pushed to my last ounce. Right? But I don't know. I also feel like there's something problematic in that.

**Vanessa** [00:24:20] What? What?

**Maya** [00:24:22] Just the idea that, like, that's the only thing that can be the most beautiful way. And, like, the idea that my brain is saying, like, no, you have to do this for it to be the most beautiful way. Maybe the most beautiful way is like the way that allows me to take care of myself, or the way that allows me the least amount of emotional turmoil or something.

**Vanessa** [00:24:43] The reason I am frustrated about this quote for you is that soccer games are a limited amount of time. Right? What are they, they're 90 minutes? And they're



90 minutes no matter what. Whereas you are talking about potentially going to doctors or not going to doctors for an indeterminate amount of time. And I'm wondering what that distinction does to this quote for you. Like, it's really easy to "leave it all out on the field," because it ends. But like, what does that look like in a life that, God willing, will be, you know, another 80 years?

**Maya** [00:25:25] I don't know. I wonder if it's like, setting myself a time limit? If it's saying, like, I'm going to go back to doctors from the age of 23 to 27. Or if it's recognizing that, and just having that, and just being like, failing in the most beautiful way can change, or it can be like, I've made this decision, and like once that decision plays out, that can be the most beautiful thing, and then it can reset? Maybe it doesn't have to be so like individual to one decision?

**Casper** [00:26:03] Yes. I'm suddenly seeing the resonance with like the seasons approach, right. Because like you play 52 games or however many it is, and then there's a winner for the season and we start again. What would it be like to say, "okay, this next season of Doctors United sees us approaching three doctors, one in this realm, one in that realm and one in that realm. And like, let's see how we play. I'm going to do, you know, what I can do. And then we're going to see what happens. And at the end, we didn't win the trophy, but we played a beautiful game."

**Maya** [00:26:38] Yeah. I feel like. Like I like that idea, or something with the idea of, like, setting myself a time span and setting myself, like, do this for now. Or, you need a break now, and that's fine. That's, you're in your summer break of your season, right?

**Casper** Yes!

**Maya** Like something that gives it more of a limitation. Because I feel like that also is like it was just it was so big, without any of this. And the more that, like, we talk about this the more I'm like, this is more of an approachable problem, if I like frame it as a season or if I frame it as three months, or whatever time span I pick. It feels much more like I can tackle this and I can do this.

**Casper** [00:27:25] I am so touched that you have a tattoo of You'll Never Walk Alone. And it strikes me that in the second quote, the word "we" shows up twice. And you mentioned that your family and friends are super supportive. And I wonder, as you reframe potentially what this choice looks like, how you want to structure it, how you want to think about time. I'm wondering, how can you involve people who love and support you and want the best for you? How can you involve them in creating that structure? Like, what would it look like for you all to have like little red shirts and like, being on Team Maya [laughs], as part of Liverpool?

**Maya** [00:28:04] Yeah, I feel like part of it would just be like talking to them and being like, I think this is what I'm going to do. I think we're going to start a season, or we're going to start a fantasy league. What doctor do you think is going to—[laughs]

**Casper** [00:28:19] Oh my god I love it! I'm obsessed! [Maya and Casper laughing] I want to join this league.

**Vanessa** [00:28:25] You should invent that as an app. You will become a millionaire. [laughing a bit]

**Casper** [00:28:29] But please finish your thought Maya, I'm sorry. [laughing]

**Maya** [00:28:33] [laughing] No, I think it's just talking to them in whatever way and whatever choice I make, and, like, talking through choices with them and stuff. And, like, they're all so supportive. Like, if I proposed this idea, I'm sure they'd be like, great, we're on board, we're going to do this, so.

**Casper** [00:28:49] Do you...do you have a Liverpool, like, soccer shirt?

**Maya** [00:28:54] Yes.

**Casper** [00:28:55] What if you wore that to appointments? [pause] No I'm being for real. It's game day.

**Vanessa** [00:29:02] Leave it all on the field. [jokingly; Maya laughs a bit]

**Casper** [00:29:04] And then you take it off at the end and it's like it's done. It's out of my hands.

**Maya** [00:29:08] Interesting. [Casper laughs] I like that idea. I don't know how well I'm going to remember it to do it practically, [almost laughing] but I really like the idea. I really think it ties into kind of what we talked about earlier with like being, set up, like emotionally and like, this is how I'm going to go through the process. And I feel like the shirt or a specific shirt could be very much part of that.

**Vanessa** [00:29:33] I mean, the word that I kept hearing you use in the first text was intention. It sounds like you are someone who's very good at setting intentions right through golf, through soccer, and I would imagine in the rest of your life. And so it might be that we got to solutions a little too fast. And what, what I'm hearing, right, is like a desire to sit back and reflect and set some intentions. And, you know, we've put forward a bunch of options for intentions, you know. Setting up a pool, putting on a shirt, seeing it as a game, seeing yourself as a player. But what I'm hearing is—okay. Like, I'm allowed to take control of this.

**Casper** Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** Does that sound right?

**Maya** [00:30:18] Yeah, definitely. And I really like the idea of like the solution being to just set an intention, and that it doesn't have to be picking one route and that's what I'm going down forever. It's just like, setting an intention for now and then revisiting it after that plays out and, that that process feels..not necessarily easy, but it feels doable, and it feels right.

**Casper** [00:30:51] Hmm. Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:30:54] I just want to go back to something that Casper said at the beginning. This still sucks. Right. Like, even with a great intention and a great team, this isn't the game you want to be playing, right? You, like, chose golf, you chose soccer, and someone threw you into this game. And you're like, I don't, I don't want to play. Right? And so I think that I'm really excited about this conclusion, and you setting intentions. But I don't want to be like, "And your good attitude is going to make all the difference!" Because it'll help you a lot. But this stuff frickin just sucks. You're 19. You shouldn't be in a tremendous amount of

joint pain. And a doctor in a better world would be like, this is what this is. And, like, this is how we're going to treat it, or we can't treat it. But we're here to support you. And when someone asks you why you're taping your ankle, you can be like, "Oh, because I have scarf disorder," and you know, they'll just leave you alone. ...I saw a scarf. [Casper laughs] I looked into my room and there's a scarf. [Casper laughs] But I just want, I just, it's really important to me to acknowledge that, like, this is not the game you chose and this is not a game that you would ever frickin choose.

**Maya** [00:32:19] Yeah. [laughs a bit]

**Vanessa** [00:32:20] It's Hunger Games.

**Casper** [00:32:24] And so now [laughing] I get to say the other thing, which is that like, I find you incredibly wise to be 19, Maya, I just want to say that, which is like. Your like emotional maturity and like ability to navigate your own experience while you're in it. Like that is not normal. You're extraordinary. And so I really hope that you know that, and I wish you didn't have this shitty situation that you're in, but like you are navigating it in a way that is extremely wise. And I guess I just want to, I want to say that, in a messy way. [laughs]

**Vanessa** [00:33:00] I also think you're extraordinary. I like, truly.

**Maya** Thank you.

**Casper** [00:33:06] Maya, we've had a far-ranging conversation, and you may need a little time before you would know what this is. But does it feel like you have a best next step that you'll, you'll take away from this conversation?

**Vanessa** [00:33:21] [chanting, jokingly] Fantasy league.

**Maya** [00:33:25] [laughs] No, I feel like. Not immediately. But, in a point of time that is yet undetermined, I will start a season. I think that's what I like. I think I want a season. I want a set of expectations. I want to be able to say, this starts now and it ends now, and that is all I have to go through.

**Vanessa** [00:33:55] And that means that you are in off season. That actually does mean that you are somewhere.

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** Right? You're choosing right now to not be going to doctors and instead just to be choosing when the season starts. The off season sounds like it is an intention that you're setting right now, of like, until I can figure out when the season starts, I'm in off season. Does that feel empowering?

**Maya** [00:34:22] It feels like a relief, because it feels like it's not a problem I have to think about. Right now, it feels like I'm giving myself space to be like, you obviously have to live with it and I have to live with the pain, but I don't have to, like, weigh these two decisions. I don't have to think, what is going to happen. I don't have to be like, do I call my doctor? Like, there's a lot of things that are taken off my plate by just saying, like, I'm in my off season.

**Vanessa** [00:34:47] Yeah,

**Casper** It's beautiful.

**Vanessa** [00:34:48] I think that is just, like, such a helpful piece of language for everyone in the world. Right, like, I'm always trying to write another book, but it's okay. I'm, I'm in off season. I'm not writing right now, or whatever it is. I'm always trying to get stronger. And then it's like, do you know what? No, I'm just going to keep walking. Right? Like we're all allowed off seasons from everything except from ourselves. And like, you're so wonderful that I feel like since you are the only thing that you can't get an off season from, you're doing great.

**Casper** [00:35:23] Maya, thank you so much for being on the show. I am so invested in your team. Put me in, coach. I hope the very best for you. And I'm so grateful for you sharing this question with us. I found it incredibly resonant, and I know so many people listening to this will find it useful too. So thank you for, for being so generous with us, and keep in touch.

**Vanessa** [00:35:45] And I wish you a really restful, joyful off season, and then a season where failure is an option and it'll be beautiful. But mostly for now, I wish you just like a really joyful, restful off season.

**Maya** [00:36:04] Thank you. Seriously, like, just having this conversation has been so amazing. And I was talking to somebody about this, and how, like, I hadn't really stepped back and, like, analyzed this. I hadn't had, like, a deep conversation like this, and, like, obviously ranted to my friends about this, but nothing in a way that's like--I mean, ranting is productive, but like, productive for planning for the future. And so this has just been like really, really amazing.

**Casper** [00:36:34] And just before we leave you, I have a little maxim from Fort Worth, Texas, from Abby, who says, "Be humble, for you are made of Earth, but be noble, for you are made of stars."

**Vanessa** [00:36:47] You've been listening to The Real Question. Please check out our Patreon at [patreon.com/realquestionpod](https://patreon.com/realquestionpod). And if you love the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcast. You can also follow us on Instagram and Facebook @realquestionpod and Twitter @therealqpod.

**Casper** [00:37:03] A big shout out to our BFF tier patrons: Amanda Schram, Ethan How, Ashley Male, Louise Faring, Mary Margaret, Stephanie Featherweights, Kristin Hall, Becky Boo, Ari. We are a Not Sorry production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman who was on fine form today. We're mixed by Erica Huang. Our music is by Nick Bohl and we're distributed by Acast. Thank you to Maya for joining us. And if you like spending time with Maya, she has a book podcast that you can check out called My Take. Thanks also to Julia Argy, to Nicki Zoltan, Lara Glass, AJ Aramas, Gaby lori, Stephanie Paulsell, and you Vanessa. Thank you.

**Vanessa** [00:37:41] Thank you, my love. Thank you. [Casper laughs a bit]

[outro music plays]