**The Real Question**

**CLOTHES AND SIZE**

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**Vanessa** [00:01:03] Hi, everybody. I just want to let you know that in today's episode I'm going to be talking about weight. And so if you would find that conversation triggering, we completely understand and recommend that you skip to next week. Take care of yourself.

**Erin** [00:01:17] Hi, Vanessa and Casper. I'm Erin, and I'm calling from Dallas. I went to college in the nineties and there was this funky vintage store run by a guy who was just super interesting and fun. He was one of our local drag performers and just a really great guy. I bought some fantastic dresses from him when I was at school, but the one I still have in my closet is from the late sixties. It's a polyester blue mini dress with a big white collar and a big white belt. If you picture Mary Tyler Moore. You've got it. I wore it with knee high white boots and it was fantastic. I'm not sure why I'm saving it, except maybe for my niece to wear for Halloween or a theme party. But I love it. So it stays. Thanks for letting me share. I love you guys. Bye.

**Vanessa** [00:02:14] I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

**Casper** [00:02:16] And I'm Casper ter Kuile.

**Vanessa** [00:02:17] And this is the real question.

*Intro Music*

**Vanessa** [00:02:33] So Caspar, I like Erin, who left our voicemail, have several sentimental items of clothing. Hmm. But unlike Erin, I know to some extent why I keep them. I keep them because since I was 12, I have vacillated between a size eight and a size 12. Like his just like gone back and forth. And I, several years ago was at a size eight. And like, it wasn't like I was dieting, like I was training for a half marathon. And so I was at my smaller size, and I had four weddings in three months and I was like, okay, I need to find a dress that fits me. Am a little smaller than usual and I am willing to spend a decent amount of money on this dress because it's going to get a lot of use just this summer. And so I bought, just like I think objectively, the cutest dress that you could buy. It's so poke dot. I it's high neck, but like, backless, like super sexy. I like genuinely, to these weddings that I went to, I officiated and I would wear a shawl, you know, to cover the backless thing. And then the groom's like mom on the dance floor later were like, “Oh, that's a sexy minister.” [laughter] And I was like, Yeah, I am sexy minister. And so I like got sick and wasn't exercising as much. And so I'm like not a size eight right now. I'm size 12 and there is so much like great conversations happening around body positivity and you should just embrace your body for the size that it is. And I'm really trying to embrace this body positivity of like this just might be my size forever and that's great. And I love my body the way it is. And I just know myself. I know that like, I go through waves of exercising a ton and waves of not exercising a ton. And I travel sometimes a lot, which means I can't eat as well. Right? Like I know that my weight is going to keep fluctuating, but I haven't worn this polka dot dress in four years now. And in fact, I am staring 40 down the barrel and I like wonder how much I will ever want to wear a short backless dress again. And it's not just the polka dot dress, right? Like there's a lot of clothes. I have a lot of pants that I don't fit into right now. I have a lot of shirts that don't fit me in the way that I would like for them to fit me right now. And so I essentially have three closets, like I have a size eight closet, a size ten closet and a size 12 closet. So like wrapped up in the size eights for me is like, I don't like owning too much stuff. I like really pride myself on owning as little as possible. I don't like spending money on clothes because I try to avoid fast fashion. And so when I do buy clothes, they're expensive. And so I'm like, Well, what if I'm a size eight again, I'm not going to want to spend another $250 on a dress like that is a ridiculous amount of money to spend and I will have once owned a nice size eight dress, right? So it's like I want to get rid of it because I am this bigger size now. I haven't worn it in forever and I'm not even sure I would want to wear it now because I think it might be quote unquote, a “little young for me”, whatever that means. But I want to keep it because I don't want to buy another dress. And it looked great on me. And I know that I like vacillate in weight.

**Casper** [00:06:08] Hmm. This is such a big question, Vanessa.

**Vanessa** [00:06:12] Whether or not I should keep this one polka dot dress? It is a big question!

**Casper** [00:06:17] Well, there's so much wrapped up in it, right? And I really hear that. But I want to identify some things that are not wrapped up in it. Very first of all, because I know that during COVID, I've definitely put on a few pounds. But this is not that conversation. Right. Because you mentioned the timeline is a little longer. You've not worn it for four years. And it's not necessarily a question of like storage space or like being cluttered and having having too much stuff around. And it's really more about these kind of different yous that have been in your rear view window. And are they coming up on the highway again?

**Vanessa** [00:06:54] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:06:54] And are you making a decision about that by keeping or letting go of this particular dress? Does that sound right?

**Vanessa** [00:07:01] Totally. I will say that it is in part about owning stuff like I for years only owned as much as could fit into one car. And again, it's like I'm getting older and I like to bake and I'm tired of baking with like too few things, right? Like, I didn't own an offset spatula, and so I would get, like, teased about how great my cakes tasted, but how bad they looked. And like, I now I'm like, okay, it's okay to own an offset spatula. But it stresses me out how much stuff I own. I really felt better about myself and my relationship to stuff. And, you know, my my grandparents were understandably hoarders. And so I have like this very tense relationship with owning too many things. So it is in part that, of like, I haven't used something in four years, that means you can get rid of it. But I think you're right that there's also this like aging question because really from 12 to like 35. I vacillated in middle school and high school I really went from an eight to a 12 and back and like never consciously trying to lose weight or like stopping trying to gain weight. Like, I don't remember how or why, but I just would vacillate. But I also know like now that I'm almost 39 that like your metabolism slows down and you're mid thirties and so like should I just embrace that? Like this is my middle aged body. Like there's just like this small complicating factor of about four years ago I got really sick, I got diagnosed with endometriosis and my symptoms were really bad. And now I've had two surgeries and I've done physical therapy and I'm feeling better. So I'm exercising again, right? Like, when do I cut this off?

**Casper** [00:08:48] There are so many pieces wrapped up in this and there's also so many unknowns because even making a decision on one of these things doesn't mean that we know what's coming. So I'm wondering if we should, at least for this conversation, really focus in on this polka dot dress, knowing that it touches all these other questions. But let's let's hold that string as we engage the beautiful texts that you've brought to help us figure out this real question for you.

**Vanessa** [00:09:14] As soon as you said that, I went, well, of course I should get rid of the polka dot dress. I'm getting too old for it. And then I was like, No, but it has that really cute gold button. [laughter] Like both thoughts happen simultaneously.

**Casper** [00:09:28] Well, luckily with these questions, we don't have to figure it out on our own. You brought two text to help us think it through. So what is the first text that you're bringing to The Real Question this week?

**Vanessa** [00:09:37] So I am someone who likes poetry a lot, but I only like the most famous poems. I like Wild Geese by Mary Oliver [laughter] and I Like Good Bones by Maggie Smith. Right? Like I only like the stuff that everyone knows. So I am bringing a poem that I love so, so much. And like a lot of you are going to know it. It's called One Art by Elizabeth Bishop. It is a fantastic poem. It was first published in The New Yorker in 1976. It's a villanelle, which is like a very complicated kind of poem to write. “Do not go gentle into that good night” is like the most famous villanelle. And Elizabeth Bishop was I mean she was like, she was just a really incredible woman. She was out as a lesbian in the 1950s. She was like a very vocal feminist. She traveled all over the world. [Hmm.] So I'm going to read the whole poem to you because Villanelle's are relatively short. And then there's a specific part of the text that I want to talk about. But she wrote this poem in the heartbreak of being left by her longtime partner and lover. So here it is

“The art of losing isn’t hard to master;

so many things seem filled with the intent

to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster

of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother’s watch. And look! my last, or

next-to-last, of three loved houses went.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,

some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.

I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture

I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident

the art of losing’s not too hard to master

though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.”

**Casper** [00:12:00] Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:12:01] So what I love about this poem is that it is operating on two levels, right? It is saying we all lose things. Right. You lose a key, you lose valuable things like your mother's watch and like that is part of life and you need to practice just accepting that it's part of life and not spend too much time grieving those losses. Because what's the point, right? Like it isn't a disaster. Losing your mother's watch after your mother has died is sad, but it's not a disaster. But at the same time, right. Like she is saying, it's a disaster because at the end she has to tell herself to write it. She's like, “the art isn't hard to master, even though it looks like”. And then she's like, okay, keep writing. It's a villanelle. So you have to keep writing. Even though you don't mean it, "it feels like a disaster". She is holding this tension of like, it's okay. Like let go of the polka dot dress. Vanessa, you have lost more valuable things. My godmother, Vera, who I worshiped and, like, taught me how to cheat at cards, and it just was the most wonderful woman. She gave me this really beautiful necklace. And then my father gave me his father's wedding ring, which had survived Auschwitz. And so I put him on the same necklace, and the necklace just fell off of me one day. [Oh, God.] Like it's just gone, right? And I grieve it, but, like, there's nothing I could do. Like, I have no idea where it fell off of me. Like these things are and they're not disasters. And so I just feel like she's acknowledging how much I want to hold on to this and is saying like, but let go of it.

**Casper** [00:13:45] First of all, this poem is new to me, so thank you for sharing it with me. And I so hear the connection that you're making, right? This, this self encouragement that the poet is giving herself of, like, you can do this, it's going to be okay. Like, yes, it's painful, but you can let it go. But the difference that I'm seeing for you is that you're not losing something, you're purposely letting it go. And so that that's different to me. But I wonder if that feels different to you.

**Vanessa** [00:14:15] I mean, what I'm potentially losing is this idea of myself that, like, gets small.

**Casper** [00:14:21] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:14:22] Like, at my higher weights, I've always been like, yeah, but I'm someone who gets small again. And I think that's part of why I've always vaguely been okay with getting heavier because I'm like, eh, I'll just start running again and it'll go away. And so the thing that I'm potentially losing is that narrative about myself of like, you always make it back to the size eight. And size eight is where I like to pretend my home base is. [Mm hmm.] And the other sizes are fine because they're temporary. And so, like, I think I'm acknowledging, like, maybe I have to lose that idea of myself.

**Casper** [00:15:00] Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:15:02] Which isn't a disaster, right? Like it feels like a disaster because body image is really hard. And I know that there are people listening to this podcast that is like a size eight would be a disaster for me. Like I'm a size two and I can't imagine it. And I know there are other people as a news podcast, being like a size 12 would be a gold mine, right? Like these things are so relative. It's just like, this is my little zone and it's disgusting, but like a number on a pair of pants can make me feel like a good version of myself. Or a bad version of myself. Yuck.

**Casper** [00:15:43] Yup. It is absurd and it's at the same time so real. I think this is super gendered. Not that this dynamic isn't also real for men, but I think for women especially, that there's just those particular numbers have whole echoes of meaning and worthiness and desirability and value that is honestly probably difficult for me to understand in its fullness. Would you say who? Who is Vanessa if home base is 12? Like, what does that mean to you?

**Vanessa** [00:16:15] I think that my weight is entirely tied, at least it has been in the past by how much I am exercising. Like during the school year I would get really small when I was on the softball team in the spring and I would gain weight when I was, you know, doing drama in the fall. I don't think that much changes, at least in the past, though. I know this changes in middle age, but like I don't think much changes except how much I'm exercising. And I feel better when I exercise not because of weight, but like I feel healthier and stronger and like a lot of good things. So I have that justification of like, “no, but I feel better”. And I know like I used to do races and women who were like size twos and stuff I would beat them in the races. I was faster than they were and stronger than they were. And they would make comments to me like, “Oh, I was really impressed that you could run that fast". And I was like, That is definitely about the fact that you're like, “You seem too chubby to run fast”. I've gotten so many comments like that in my life of people being shocked by the physical activity that I can do because “I'm too fat “to do it in their eyes. So as much as I'm like, yes, I even as a can exercise better since well, Vanessa's in really good shape. Like I can still out walk just about anyone I know.

**Casper** [00:17:39] Vanessa, it's interesting to me you use the word justification when I asked you that question and the story that you just told was also one of like. But it's fine if I'm at 12 and I just I hear the echo of the poem, which is like, it's not a disaster. Like, it's fine. So I guess I want to ask you again, like, who who is Vanessa? You know, if the number is 12.

**Vanessa** [00:18:02] Part of who Vanessa is if the number is 12 at least until I adjust as someone who hates the way she looks in pictures. [Yeah.] I don't like the way that I look as a size 12 and I don't like. The clothes that are quote unquote, “flattering”, whatever flattering means in a 12. Like, I don't like any of it.

**Casper** [00:18:26] Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:18:28] And I know that that is bullshit. Right. I look at my friends who are 12, 14, 20s, and, like, I have never looked at them and thought that they weren't cute and beautiful. Like, not ever. Not once. Right? This is like just me and my shit.

**Casper** [00:18:49] I just want to say I, like, validate your experience and I'm relating to it so much because I can feel fine about myself when I'm bigger. Until I come into a situation like walking past myself in a mirror or like coming home after six months and realizing like, Oh yeah, they're really seeing a big change while I've seen a gradual change. And it's, it's in those moments where they're like, the fine feeling on the inside is suddenly, like, yanked away. And I'm like, pushed into this cold swimming pool of shame and embarrassment or like, awkwardness. And suddenly I'm, like, conscious of how I'm sitting and I'm holding in my tummy and like doing all of these things, which makes zero sense when we're actually like take a breath and being with ourselves and we're like, Actually, I'm fine. So I just want to say I totally empathize with what you're saying because it makes so much sense to me.

**Vanessa** [00:19:39] The Casper like the other thing is, is that I know that there were times in my past where I didn't like looking at myself and like would avoid looking like at a window, afraid I would catch a glimpse of myself. And I look back at those pictures and I'm like, I looked amazing! And so I wonder if. Right, like in a year, am I going to look back at how I look now and been like, I looked great? Why was I being so hard on myself?

**Casper** [00:20:07] Yes, my whole early twenties, I'm like, why didn't I wear half as many clothes as I did? Why didn't I sleep around London? I looked incredible, but I hated how I looked at that.

**Vanessa** [00:20:18] Right. Right. I mean, this is like Nora Ephron. Maybe I should have brought Nora Ephron because she has this great essay where she's like, If you are under 40, you should be in a bikini. If you're under 40, you look amazing. And like that is, of course, an arbitrary thing. And I think older women look amazing and older men. I'm with a man who's over 40. And just this morning, I asked him if it's a burden to be as handsome as he is because he's so handsome. And he said, yes, it was a burden everybody so just so you know. But yeah, Nora Ephron is like, if you feel fat, if you feel skinny, if your boobs look droopy, if your boobs are too small, if they're too big, none of that is true. You look amazing.

**Casper** [00:20:58] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:20:58] And I have lived that to be true. Like, I've hated pictures of myself. And then five years later, I've been like, Oh, my God, I looked so good. I was so cute.

**Casper** [00:21:09] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:21:10] I mean, like we can make this question even more specific, which is I have my first post-COVID wedding that will hopefully happen at the end of July. And so part of me is like, okay, I've just started exercising a lot again. Should I hold on to the polka dot dress until the wedding? Because maybe I'll fit into the dress for the wedding. And the people at this wedding are people who I haven't seen in ten years and like, you know, I want to look great. I want them to see me. And like, I've changed in other ways. I have wrinkles and I have a gray streak in my hair. And like, I don't also want them to be like, Oh, and she got fat.

**Casper** [00:21:44] And you have a book that's coming out this summer, which is going to be absolutely amazing. And you have an incredible family and an amazing podcast. But let me let me point to something which gets right to the dress, because you've just revealed something new about this question, which is it's not just a question of, oh, is the dress there, it’s is the dress a goal? And I think this is where Erin's voice mail is actually really helpful because the kind of costume that she has held onto for her, it wasn't in the way that she told the story. A goal to like get into this costume. It was a curiosity. It was a memento. It was a reminder of this happy time and something beautiful to look at, which in my book is absolutely fair to hold on to something. But if this piece of clothing is hanging in a closet as a constant reminder that you're not good enough and you're not thin enough, and that you that you should be different than you are, then I say burn the witch. Like, you know, like put put that dress on a bonfire and send it up to the gods. Like there's a real difference in those two orientations.

**Vanessa** [00:22:44] Totally! But also, what if I do lose weight now that I'm exercising again, right? Like I only really started exercising again about a month ago, and I have not lost a single pound yet. And like and right like I'm not dieting. Like, I do not diet. So like, I am like I've only change one thing, I guess two things. I'm also drinking more water because I'm thirstier. So I'm like, I might catch up and I might just like drop 10lbs. I still won't fit into that dress if I dropped it 10lbs, I would have to lose 30lbs.

**Casper** [00:23:19] I mean, if you do get rid of the dress in one way or another, right, either as a gift or, as, you know, selling it in some way to subsidize the new dress. And you were to arrive at a size eight, intentionally or unintentionally, and the dress wasn't there. Would you feel, foolish because you hadn't kept it, you know, like I would have fit in and it would have looked great. Or would you be like, Oh, okay, well, I need to find a new dress.

**Vanessa** [00:23:45] I think I would feel sad about it just because I hate shopping. Like I hate online shopping, because then if you don't like it, the returning is such a nightmare. I hate shopping in person because I always like whatever outfit I came into the store and better than whatever I feel like I have to buy when I leave. I hate spending money. I mean, this says something about me. I'd rather spend the money on good food.

**Casper** [00:24:10] Food is always the winner.

**Vanessa** [00:24:11] Yeah, I'm like. I like buying, like, fancy fruit. That's pretty cut up for me. And if I buy a dress, I can't afford that for a few months.

**Casper** [00:24:21] I want to go back to the text. I feel there's more in this poem that we can find that might be helpful. What's the kind of little quote from within the bigger poem that you'd want to read together?

**Speaker 3** [00:24:31] I mean, the part that I feel like Bishop is simultaneously, brilliantly being sincere and cynical. Like the apex of the poem to me, is:

“Then practice losing farther, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of these will bring disaster”

She is saying like. You are going to keep losing things like you are going to lose friends and family and like, you will have had plans for your retirement that won't come through. Right. Like you are going to lose so much. And I believe in practicing things like that. And so she's inviting you, right? She's like, lose things, lose them actively in order to get ready for bigger losses that are going to come down the road for you. But then the other part of me is like, I don't want to practice losing, exercising five days a week because I sleep better and less when I exercise like I feel mentally better when I exercise.

**Casper** [00:25:36] Yeah, she says:

“practice losing farther, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of these will bring disaster.”

I want to pick up on that very last phrase in this piece that you point out as to “none of these will bring disaster.” And I wonder if it's helpful if we look at the difference between frustration of like, oh, I need to buy a new dress or some sadness of like, oh, I don't have this beautiful dress anymore. And disaster of like, everything is wrong. I can't survive. This is life threatening because maybe this choice is really about what kind of discomfort am I willing to endure? Is it one of I have to figure out a new dress because I'm not a size eight again and I let go of this previous dress that I loved. That's the type of discomfort. Yes. It's an annoying set of tasks that you don't enjoy. The other one is a, you know, a constant reminder of the something that you're not anymore and may never be.

**Vanessa** [00:26:36] A, Ahh! It’s folded up under a bed.

**Casper** [00:26:38] But why did you bring this question?

**Vanessa** [00:26:40] Because I know it's under my bed.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:42] Yeah. Right. And so, like, it is constantly there. [Yeah.] So I guess that's what this poem seems to be offering us is like, well, neither of them are disasters, but which discomfort do you want to choose?

**Vanessa** [00:26:57] I mean, I'm an addict to the idea of a smaller size. So I want to choose [laughing] to keep the dress. But I don't think that that's the healthy choice. So, [Ahhh] yeah, of course I want to hold on to the dress. I want to not shop, I want to fit into it. Like I want everything about the dress, but, like, I think it might be psychologically unhealthy.

**Casper** [00:27:19] Yeah. I think you're asking yourself. “I might want this, but is it good for me?”

**Vanessa** [00:27:27] Right. Which ironically, is something that I ask myself about ice cream. [laughter].

**Casper** [00:27:34] Well, I asked myself where the whole tube of a fish food yesterday. And the answer was yes. But that's for a different episode.

*Musical interlude*

**Casper** [-] Yeah. Let's look at your second text, Vanessa, as we come to that junction, of which discomfort do I want to choose? And maybe this is the one I want and this is the one that I think would be better for me. What's the second text that you've brought for us?

**Vanessa** [00:28:18] The second text I brought is Lilo Stitch, the 2002 Disney film. It is amazing. I only just recently watched it for the first time because I was like, Oh, it's not a musical. Like, why would I watch a Disney movie that's not a musical? And then my stepdaughters and Ariana, our producer, were like, No, no, no. You are going to love this movie. And guess what? I super loved this movie.

**Casper** [00:28:45] Doesn't it have some songs? I feel like I know at least one.

**Vanessa** [00:28:48] There is one like song within the movie and there are a ton of Elvis songs in the movie. [I love it] But it's a good soundtrack. It's not a musical. Anyway, I love this movie. It is about an alien, cute creature that gets designed to be evil and destructive [laughter]. And this alien planet is like, We can't have this, so they're going to destroy it. But he escapes and makes it to Hawaii. Meanwhile, on one of the Hawaiian islands, this like precocious, adorable, so bright little six year old girl Lilo is living with her older sister, Nani, because their parents have died. So it's just the two of them. And Nani and Lilo are struggling. They both still hold a lot of grief. They are struggling financially. Right, like Nani is a single mom who also has to work full time. But they love each other soooo much and are thriving in a lot of ways in this, like, beautiful relationship.

***Exert form Loli & Stitch starts***

**Nani** [00:29:58] I'll tell you what, if you promise not to fight anymore, I promise not to yell at you, except on special occasions.

**Lilo** [00:30:07] Tuesdays and bank holidays would be good.

**Nani** [00:30:10] Yeah. Would that be good? [Noni & Lilo giggling]

***Exert form Loli & Stitch ends***

**Venessa** [00:30:14] So one day Noni is like, Lilo, let's go adopt a dog. Like, trying to be like a really good mom, and they go to adopt a dog, and Stitch has been picked up by animal control because, like, what the heck else is Stitch? Besides a very weird looking dog?

***Exert form Loli & Stitch starts***

**Voice of dog adoption worker** [00:30:29] Oh, yeah. So all of our dogs are adoptable. Except that one!

**Nani** [-] [gasps] What is that thing?

**Voice of dog adoption worker** [-] A dog, I think! But it was dead this morning!

**Nani** [-] It was dead this morning?

**Voice of dog adoption worker** [-] We, we thought it was dead, it was hit by a truck!

**Lilo** [-] I, like it. Come here boy.

***Exert form Loli & Stitch ends***

**Vanessa** [00:30:44] So they adopt this alien gremlin [chuckling]. So the rest of the movie is there are two storylines intersecting like Stitch Train to be evil. Lilo can, like, make anyone good just by being herself. And then they are, like, going to bed one night, Lilo and Stitch, and, like, the day went really poorly. Like Stitch was just like in full evil mode [chuckles]. And Stitch grabs this, like, beloved photo from Lilo of her whole family. And she's like, Absolutely not. You cannot destroy this. You destroy everything. But you are not destroying this photo like. And then she says, Did you have a family? And this is the quote I'm going to have a look at. She says. “Do you miss them? I hear you cry at night. I know. It's why you wreck things and push me. Ohana means family. Family means no one gets left behind. But if you want to leave, you can. I’ll remember you, though. I remember everyone who leaves.”

**Casper** [00:31:49] Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:31:50] And so part of me is like, I want to sort of say this to my dress. Of like, it's time for you to go. I'll remember you, though. I remember all my past selves. Maybe I don't want to say this to my dress. I want to say this to, like, size eight. Me, right? Like. If you want to leave, you can. I don't need to worship you.

**Casper** [00:32:13] Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:32:14] And, like, try to be getting back to you. I'll remember you, though. You were hot and felt great. And, like, good for you. But you can leave, right? And, like, implied and this is also like, I'll miss you. It's just like this pain, but also, like, sometimes people have to leave.

**Casper** [00:32:36] This is really beautiful, Vanessa. I'm seeing so many resonant levels in this quote. There's you saying that to the size eight you from four years ago. I'm also seeing that dress like have a desire of its own. Like its purpose is to be worn and to be enjoyed and like it might have a new life somewhere else with someone who would love it and be in it. And also, it feels like you're not just saying goodbye to the kind of family that you were in a size eight, but also like it means fully welcoming in that you are a size 12 as a family and not just a visitor. That's the home base piece that feels really true here. It's like, you know, no one gets left behind. Everyone is part of the you. I just love this framing of all the yous and the dresses. And of course not just this dress, but all clothing like that. It's part of this family unit that changes over time as as Lilo's had to experience. Loved ones have gone on in a way. But she's also found new members of her family in Stitch.

**Vanessa** [00:33:47] And Lilo you know, has this a refrain that, like her family is small, but it's still good, right? Because to a large extent, her family is now just her and Nani. And in that, is this like defensiveness, right? Like, I know our family is small and so doesn't even look like a family. It looks like a pair. But it IS still a family and it IS still good. And so it's this like simultaneous acknowledgment of I wish it was different, but it is what it is, and I love it.

**Casper** [00:34:14] Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:34:16] But also, the family at the end, like Nani meets a guy, and they have Stitch. So it goes back to being four members of the family. And so maybe that means I should go back to being a size eight.

**Casper** [00:34:33] [laughing] But they were new members of the family. I want to bring this text to the way that you articulated the question of like, this is what I want. I want to keep the dress. But I think I know that it's probably wiser to let go of the dress. Like, what does Lilo & Stitch say to that?

**Vanessa** [00:34:52] Well, it's what Lilo says to stitch in this passage. Like I want you to stay. But if you want to leave, you can. Right. And so, it’s, I would prefer you are here, but it's healthier for both of us if I tell you like, it's okay for you to go. I have to get rid of my dress.

**Casper** [00:35:17] Uh.

**Vanessa** [00:35:21] It's so cute. Casper, I'll send you a photo. I looked amazing.

**Casper** [00:35:25] Well, that, I think, is a really big part of it, right? This whole scene happens because Stitch is looking at this photo that's so treasured for Lilo and she's like, no, you do not touch this. This is this is something you will not destroy. And I feel like there's the dress itself, but there's also all of the memories and the memories that are captured in the photographs of you in the dress and that we are not getting rid of. Right. That's not being destroyed. That's not being forgotten. That's part of you and your story, but that's separate from the dress itself. And I'm wondering, is there a way that you could, you could celebrate those photographs and those memories and stories of the you that you were in that dress without the kind of grasping like, I want to get back there or I have to be there to be me.

**Vanessa** [00:36:10] Yeah, it's hard, right? Like, yes, I can keep working on this, but, like, part of my memories of the dress, like one of the weddings was of a college friend. So I was seeing people who I hadn't seen in ten years and they were like, Oh, my God, you look amazing. Right? And I was I weighed like less than I had in years. I was just I was running a lot. And I remember even in those moments, feeling, like, grossed out by it that it was like, oh, my God, you look thin. It's not just good memories of the dress, right? It's a lot of good memories because I was like confident and dancing a lot and, there's a picture of me and one of my best friends in DeeDee, like, both looking fabulous in our dresses. So I wonder if I like, frame that photo, but also, like, it's time to get rid of the dress.

**Casper** [00:37:06] Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:37:09] Oh. Will you go shopping with me when I have to buy a new one?

**Casper** [00:37:14] I would love to go shopping with you to find a good new dress.

**Vanessa** [00:37:17] Yeah. Getting rid of this dress means I have to shop because I don't have a good size 12 dress either.

**Casper** [00:37:23] I love shopping, so sign me up.

**Venessa** [00:37:26] Okay, great. Post-COVID. I'm going to come down to New York, and you and I have to go shopping for a new dress.

**Casper** [00:37:32] There's just one loose end that I want to come back to before we put our text together. Or maybe this is the question to explore as we put the text together, which is, well, where does the dress go now? Because you could sell it to help, you know, bring in some cash to help buy the new one. You could give it to a thrift store. You could give it to someone in particular. Do you already have a good sense of where the dress might live next?

**Vanessa** [00:37:55] Yes. My beloved friend Francesca has gotten a lot of my hand-me-downs. She's ten years younger than I am, and she and I have very similar styles. So she like looks great in my stuff and she always gets stuff for me when I'm like a little too old to wear it anymore. Like a couple of years ago, I decided I was not wearing high heels anymore. I just quit high heels. I was like, I don't care anymore. And so Francesca, got all of my high heels. Like when I retire or a certain identity of myself, I give the things to Francesca because she has great taste, just like I do.

**Casper** [00:38:33] Well, I wonder if the price that she might pay for that gift is to send you a picture of her looking really fun and great in in the dress so that, you know, that dress has a new life as well.

**Vanessa** [00:38:45] Yeah.

Ca**sper** [00:38:46] Well, let's see if there's one final gift in putting these two text together to help us figure out what to do with the beautiful polka dot dress with the gold button. Will you read us the two snippets of text together to create a florilegium?

**Vanessa** [00:39:01] Yes. Okay. So the two texts together are

“then practice losing father, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of those will bring disaster.

I'll remember you, though. I remember everyone who leaves.”

**Vanessa** [00:39:22] Oof! They are in conversation.

**Casper** [00:39:26] Yes, they are. What are they saying to you?

**Vanessa** [00:39:30] I really like that. She uses the word practice like I should Practice losing by getting rid of the dress, giving it to Frannie, and, like, just be okay with the fact that it makes me sad, right? Like, and it's fine that it makes me sad. Like, I'll remember it, though. I remember every past version of myself. Who leaves?

**Casper** [00:39:51] Hmm.

**Vanessa** [00:39:52] Did you know that this was going to be a podcast about grief?

**Casper** [00:39:56] No. But you did!

**Vanessa** [-] I don't think I did. [laughter]

**Casper** [-] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:40:05] Well, I want to thank the woman who left Elizabeth Bishop and inspired this beautiful poem [laughter]. And then, of course, I want to thank Lilo, Stitch and Nani. The movie was mis titled.

**Casper** [00:40:19] Well, Vanessa, thank you so much for bringing that question. And I'm really proud of you. That's a this is a big one.

**Vanessa** [00:40:27] Who knew a question about a polka dot dress would be so big?

*Background outro music*

**Casper** [00:40:33] You've been listening to the real question. We can only make this show thanks to your support. So if you have the means to help us out, please do check out our patron. Patron.com/realquestionpod. You'll get an extra monthly blooper, too. If you love this show, you can leave us a review on iTunes and spread the word among people who you think would enjoy the show. And you can follow us on Instagram and Facebook @realquestionpod and on Twitter @therealqpod.

**Vanessa** [00:40:57] We’re not sorry production. Our executive producers Ariana Nedelman and our music is by Nick Bohl. We are distributed by Acast. We want to thank Erin for her voicemail Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Meghan Kelly, Molly Baxter, Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons. Thanks so much, everyone. And we'll talk to you next week, probably about grief [laughter].

*Background outro music*

*Podcast ends*