

## 7. The Conundrum

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hi, Vanessa, it's Matt. I'm in Iceland and you still are making me do your emotional labor. I have 3 kids. I think you should be a mom, honestly. I know there are complications and I know there are sound reasons not to bring a child into the world. But I believe ordinary acts of love are what this whole sweet sad fleeting lovely life are all about. And you can have them with anybody, of course. But with your own child - the days would be just packed. And that 'your' is specific. You'd pack them. You'd be a great mom. Your kids would bring joy and justice to the world, and those are the kids this world needs. Okay, I'm going back to my vacation. See you later this month. Bye.*

**Vanessa:** Sheila Heti, in her memoir *Motherhood*, wrote: "Whether I want kids is a secret I keep from myself-- it is the greatest secret I keep from myself." There are few sentences that I have read that I have resonated with more. I'm Vanessa Zoltan and this is *Hot and Bothered*.

[THEME MUSIC]

**Vanessa:** I asked my friend, Olivia Hamilton, if she wanted to be part of *Hot & Bothered*. I suspected she would say no because she was particularly busy in this moment of her life; in the middle of a move, a job search, utter chaos. So I was honored when she said yes. I asked what trope she wanted to do and she said, "Secret Baby" without hesitating.

The "secret baby" trope is usually a story of a couple who gets pregnant accidentally and out of wedlock. Often the man doesn't know about the baby for a while. There is confusion about paternity. Hurt feelings and misunderstandings abound. But at the end, there is a happy family unit: Man, woman, baby. That is the typical "secret baby trope". Often the book ends with an epilogue when the woman is pregnant with their second, "on purpose" kid. So, it's man, woman, 2.2 children, white picket fence. *Secret Baby* Romance novels are the beacon of heteronormativity.

I got a follow up email from Olivia a few days after she picked the *Secret Baby* trope, asking if her wife Molly could co-write her secret baby romance novel with her. I replied, "of course!" I am really good friends with Molly. Like, Molly and I talk almost as much as Olivia and I do. I was thrilled to have her.

A few weeks after I gave the OK for Molly to be involved in the podcast, I emailed both Olivia and Molly to set up their first interview. That was how Molly found out she had been signed up to co-write a Romance novel on the trope of *Secret Baby*. Molly talks first.

**Molly:** So, Olivia and I, almost two years ago, started trying to get pregnant. I was trying to get pregnant with a friend of ours who, um, was, you know, our donor. Um, and, he's one of my best friends' husbands, and they lived down the street from us in Cambridge. And we would go over to inseminate at their house and then we would just like hang out and drink beer. And it was really fun and we always talked about how we were in a reality TV show called "Insemi-NATION."

**Vanessa:** No.

**Olivia:** Yeah.

**Molly:** Yes, and I was always like this is, like, what republicans think gay people are doing right now, is like, inseminating each other and drinking Miller Lite and like being too liberal to even stand.

**Olivia:** It involved a drum circle at one point.

**Vanessa:** Of course it did.

**Vanessa:** It also involved a heartbreaking miscarriage.

What is Romantic about an accidental pregnancy? Even intentional pregnancies are far from perfect; they involve sickness, anxiety, at the bare minimum, swollen ankles. Like, what's dreamy-romantic about having a parasite living inside of you who is one day going to blame you for all of their problems? Most pregnancies are far from ideal.

But with the secret baby trope, the "not ideal" part is a given, and the pay off is a Happily Ever After. You get to imagine all of the complications with a "not-picture-perfect" pregnancy but it ends up... happy. The insemination sticks and a beautiful, healthy child is born to a loving pair of amazing moms.

Molly and Olivia are trying how to figure out how to make a family in a complicated situation. I get that.

Shortly after the miscarriage, Olivia and Molly moved across the country, changed jobs, and their insemi-NATION parties became a logistical impossibility.

**Molly:** So that chapter is closed for now. And we are on the verge of becoming foster parents.

Foster parenting: applications, home visits, inspections, letters of reference. There's nothing accidental or secret about it. There also aren't any drum-circles.

**Olivia:** And that was, I think, one of the reasons why The Secret Baby thing appealed to me because we've had such a rough go at trying to build a family

that like the idea of having a secret baby just sounds like awesome but like so ridiculous. Because there's so much, I don't know, there's so much planning and logistics and emotional upheaval that goes into -

**Molly:** And that whole thing that straight people say and even that straight people have said to us: "just relax and it will happen." And it's like "um, that will have to be some very interesting relaxation." I've never relaxed in that way —

**Olivia:** Relax your body so much that sperm —

**Molly:** That sperm drips into your vagina.

**Olivia:** From the surrounding —

**Molly:** From the universe.

[laughs]

**Vanessa:** This is obviously a very personal trope for Molly and Olivia. And so they really early on in the process, knew that the characters were going to basically be versions of themselves. And they thought that their fictional version of Molly was going to be a woman who is in relationship with another woman, but still gets pregnant in a really easy, maybe magical way.

**Molly:** Like when we think about how hard it is for us to like try to get pregnant because of the lack of sperm, I think about all of the like gross couches I sat on in really gross gay bars in New York City and how much sperm was probably on those couches. And I'm like, "I just want to reach back through the time space continuum and get some of that sperm." So maybe I could accidentally get secret baby pregnant by like sitting on a couch.

[laughs]

**Vanessa:** Okay so the characters are going to be based on the two of you.

**Molly:** But roughly.

**Olivia:** Different.

**Vanessa:** Ish.

**Olivia:** We know it's going to be somewhat autobiographical because we're playing with these themes that have been important to us in our relationship and because this could be a romantic thing for us to do together to write this romance novel, so it's going to be like the nesting dolls where there's just layers and layers and layers.

**Vanessa:** So you have two to three months to write 10,000 words. A romance novella about a secret baby in which there is going to be some magical realism. It's going to be based a little bit on your lives. What is that process going to be like for you two to collaborate — write something?

**Olivia:** my vision all along when I realized that oh we could do this together and make it autobiographical in a way, my vision was like one of those things you do in like fourth grade where you write a sentence and then the other person writes a sentence and then you write a sentence. But like, but more like, I'm going to flesh out the first thousand words —

**Molly:** That's actually what I was thinking too.

**Olivia:** And then Molly's going to kind of pick up and we're each going to be —

**Molly:** Like the Poisonwood Bible!

**Olivia:** I love that.

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Vanessa:** I mean to me the point of a romance novel is that because, because you don't have to worry about the central thing, because you know you're definitely going to spend time with two characters you care about and they are definitely going to end up OK and in love, you get to learn all this other stuff. It is like being on a roller coaster that has been proven by the Queen of England to be safe.

**Olivia:** Okay.

**Molly:** Oh my god, that sounds so appealing.

**Vanessa:** Right?

**Olivia:** So essentially this is our, that the bread and butter of our life right now is that we have like we have this deep desire to be parents like that is really, it occupies so much of our like, mental emotional energy of like this longing that we have, you know, and all the complications that come with that but also like the hopes and the joys and the dream etcetera etcetera, and our process primarily, even though we don't always succeed at it, is to try to like keep the bigger picture in mind of like, no matter what happens and no matter how we like have a baby or grow our family, that we are going to be ok at the end of the day, like we're gonna quote unquote —

**Molly:** Right, we'll be parents —

**Olivia:** Live happily ever after because we have friends that will laugh at us about the suffering of life and we can do that with each other and ok. That was really helpful for me in terms of my framing of of romance novels.

**Molly:** I know I just kept thinking about like, bodice ripping and like I don't, that's just not a part of my life.

**Olivia:** It can be if you want, baby.

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:**

**Rebecca:** Okay.

**Teddy:** Hi Vanessa! It's Teddy! It's kinda nice to have a kid.

**Rebecca:** Why?

**Teddy:** Cause, it's just kinda nice. Goodbyyyyyyye.

**Vanessa:** The secret Molly and Olivia have around babies is how they will get one. The secret I have around babies is not knowing whether I want one.

And here's the thing: there's no expert to turn to on this one. I can ask my friends, and I do. All the time. It's charming, not annoying. But there's no right answer, and everyone has a different opinion. I like that though: lots of different opinions, lots of data points. No matter what I decide, someone I love will agree with me.

My best friend refuses to tell me what she thinks. We texted about it, and she said, "I love you more than anything but can not weigh in on your baby dilemma..." I say, "I think I'd be good at it. And I think I'd love it. I just think it might kill me a little bit." And she wrote, "Yes, that's the conundrum."

Whether I want kids is a secret I keep from myself — it is the greatest secret I keep from myself. -

Olivia, Molly and I tried scheduling and rescheduling for our second recording time. But their lives got busy. Eventually, we got on the phone. And it turns out there was a really good reason that they had been difficult to nail down.

**Olivia:** Well, I guess the newest, well it's not that new anymore, it's a few months old news, but we became foster parents. It happened, we have a baby.

**Molly:** Well he was ten months old when he was dropped off, and started walking two weeks later.

**Olivia:** Yup, so we went from zero baby to baby who is a toddler, and ready to take on the world and we had to very quickly make sure our outlets were covered and all of that.

**Molly:** We thought that we had baby-proofed our house and he helped us realize that we had not.

**Olivia:** But what I think is interesting to me, or what I've realized through this is like, I never thought that getting a foster child was going to solve the problem once and for all of how are we going to build our family. It's like, he's here, we're happy to have him, we're happy to have whatever kind of relationship we can and hope that will evolve in a really good way, and we still have, the family building question is still very open —

**Molly:** Yeah, there's not a lot of permanence —

Olivia: Yeah, there's not a lot of permanence right now in our situation with him so it doesn't, I don't know it, I still feel like a lot of our conversations as a couple are still geared at like, okay, so right now this is what we're doing, and we're so delighted with it and it's very meaningful, and we're still kind of thinking globally, like do we want to try to get pregnant again, do we want to adopt a baby through a private adoption? Do we want to take another foster kid — it's possible that we could get called at any time.

**Molly:** Like literally they could call us right now —

**Olivia:** to take another kid, so it's always this, just...

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hello Vanessa, this is Rachel, and I have one child. A three year old. And I'm calling to tell you that I don't think that I can tell you if you should or shouldn't have a kid because I don't think really anyone can tell any other person that. Because having a kid is such a complicated and personal decision, and there's so many wonderful things about it, about how joyous it is, and how much love you can feel for a little person, but there are also so many extremely complicated things about it, and it is hard to work and have a kid, and it is hard to have mental health issues and have a kid, and I know both of those things from experience. So, there's my completely useless opinion on whether you should or shouldn't have a kid. My answer is: yes, you either should or shouldn't. Okay, love you! Bye!*

**Olivia:** Okay, the first question is, how does having bumpers, how does having this baby in our life impact how we're feeling about the fact that we're writing a secret baby trope? Do you wanna —

**Molly:** I think that the first time that we talked, I definitely was yearning to be pregnant, and I think that having a secret baby trope, I was going to be able to live out my dream through the secret baby trope. But now I feel really a lot less of a yearning to want to be pregnant, which I guess it remains to be seen in how that, if that changes the way the story unfolds for me. I think it may actually give me a little more freedom within the trope, because I'm not trying to fulfill a desperate need through a novella.

**Olivia:** Living vicariously through your character in the novella.

**Vanessa:** Or, as I am doing... living vicariously through my friends, who now have a baby. It wasn't as easy as sitting on a couch. It involved zero relaxing. They don't know if it will be a happily ever after, because they do not know if they will be allowed to keep the baby. And they are actually really good people who are rooting for the baby's mom to get well enough to take her baby back; away from them. But they are still working their way toward a family and writing their way to a happily ever after.

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hi Vanessa. I have two kids, they are almost 3 and almost 1 and a half, and they keep me very busy. I, okay, so here's the thing. I think it's hard to answer whether I think you should have kids, but my gut feeling is that, [sigh], you have a very busy career, and you make a big impact on a lot of people. Having kids, and I take this from experience, even for a job that you don't care that much about, which in your case is not the case, um, is a huge distraction. And full time care for your kids is expensive, and at the end of the day you're gonna feel like you're missing out on spending time with them. So it's a constant push and pull. And I feel like, um, with your current situation, you kind of get the best of both worlds, where you have a lot of interaction with kids and you also get to balance that with your work without feeling guilty on either end. So um that's my two cents I guess. I mean I have more thoughts about it but I think the biggest issue is that the work life balance is just challenging. For example, I spent an hour researching laxatives for my very sick toddler today, instead of doing work. So it is constantly eating away at my workday, and I work full time. So, anyway. I love you, and I'll see you on Sunday! Bye.*

**Vanessa:** Olivia and Molly decided that their two characters would write letters to each other. One of them, Olivia's character, would be a gender-non-conforming fire-fighter, who was off west dealing with a raging fire. Molly's character, was going to be a scientist. Homesteading. Planting seeds while Olivia is off fighting fires. When Molly's character has a miscarriage it, well, doesn't quite break them apart. But it has caused such great grief in their relationship, that they aren't quite together either. What we get to read, as their Romance novel, is the letters that they are sending back and forth to each other from across the country, as the fire burns.

In our second interview, Olivia had done some writing, but Molly hadn't heard it yet. Molly read us some of it.

**Molly:** Alright, now I feel a little flustered. "Midge girl do you remember the time you were driving me from Maine to Wyoming, the first summer I came out here to work and we stayed the night at the Red Roof Inn, even though it seemed sketchy, and even though they made us sign our name in that leather bound book at the front desk like we were at a wedding or a funeral instead of a divey..."

Olivia had written about the pain of watching other people get pregnant on their first try; about the resentment of even fictional character's ability to get pregnant, when she and Molly spent so much time and money and anguish trying to get pregnant and then losing the baby.

**Molly:** [reading] How much money do you think we've spent on fertility stuff? How much time and stress and fights and love lost and timelines redacted and ditched all together? I'm getting worked up thinking about it. Why am I taking this so seriously? It's not that serious. I love you and you are gorgeous and maybe that little girl in the movie is right, and faith's not what the eye can see or whatever but something deeper or wider or less contingent. By the way, do you think fire is alive?

**Molly:** I can't with her. She just wrote this. She's like a freaking genius.

**Olivia:** Thank you.

**Molly:** I'm just going to tell you, we got in a fight this morning because Olivia was being a butthead, she'll agree with me, and then I'm like, ugh Olivia's so annoying, and then I read this and I'm like, oh my god, I get to be married to Olivia. I'm winning.

**Olivia:** That's cute.

One of the things that Molly and Olivia's story is grappling with in a very live way is climate change. Olivia chose to make her character a fire fighter inspired by all the fires that were burning up California in 2018, and in order to deal with the fact that that any baby they brought into the world would come out onto scorched earth.

Do you know that there are grief-support groups for people who are deciding not to have kids because of global warming? And anxiety support groups for people who have kids, and read the climate reports? Do you know that the seas are rising and the malaria rates are rising and parts of the world are currently facing plagues and that those plagues are coming for us? Do you know that California, where I am from, and Massachusetts, where I live, are both at risk for floating away?

Yes. You do. You absolutely know all of those things. Know who knows them better than I do? My friend Rosy who has a doctorate in Biology and a smart British accent:

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hi Vanessa, it's Rosy. I have a three year old, and three week old. I'm gonna say to you, do it. The reason I say that is because I have all the same concerns as you about whether to have a baby or not. And honestly, I think if the Brexit vote and Trump's presidency had happened before I'd conceived my first daughter, I might have checked out altogether and not done it, because I feel so bleak about the future of the entire planet, frankly. But, because I have my two children now, I can't check out. I have to stay engaged, I have to stay invested in the future. I kind of don't want to be, some of the time, but they give me a reason to fight. So for that reason, I think you should give it a try. It will be very very hard, but hard things make great art, and you make great art. So, that's my advice. Love you, bye!*

Olivia and Molly got a second foster child. I got zero inches closer to knowing if I wanted a first child. And we got on the phone again.

**Molly:** Okay this is what I was thinking about preparing for us to talk to you, it's like this funny thing where this writing project that we embarked on, that is so deeply invested in questions of infertility, family, how are we going to do this, you know, uncertainty, and a little magical realism.

**Olivia:** And over population and global warming.

**Molly:** Yes, well I wouldn't say those questions in our lives have resolved themselves. But I would say the questions we are asking now, whatever nine months into being foster parents. The questions that we have a really different so it's kind of interesting, I think that's part of the inertia around finishing is that we seems like we were in such a different place emotionally and like creatively and spiritually when we started writing our novella, and now its kind of like do we want it to end in the emotional space of where we were when we started it, or do we want it to end in the emotional space that is where we are now?

**Olivia:** Can I say what I want to do?

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Olivia:** I still want to end it how we initially felt like we were going to end it, and initially it felt like I was dealing with my grief through writing this, and I still feel like I have grief, but I also don't have regrets about how our journey to parenthood has unfolded, so now I feel like writing the ending feels kind of like a fun exploration of a parallel universe, and not what I wish had happened. Where initially I think it was more of wishing that you know we had had a biological baby, but you know now if I hadn't of had a miscarriage I wouldn't have met these two wonderful beings that we are cohabitating with, and even if they go back to their moms I still will not have regretted it because I love them so much that I want

what's best for them, and if what's best for them is to be with their moms then I want that. And that feels like a really new and fresh way of loving someone.

**Vanessa:** I love that they want to end it the way that they had previously planned. The first version of this book, a year ago, was conceived in the grief of miscarriage, and no longer having access to the father that they wanted for their child. So originally, they wanted to end it with Molly's character pregnant and having gotten pregnant easily, like by relaxing on a dirty couch. A sort of wish fulfillment. They still want to honor that grief, because the grief has shifted, but it hasn't gone away. But also, new factors have been introduced to their lives; they're writing a romance novel together, and taking care of two foster children together. They have become more hopeful about all the different ways they might be able to make a family.

**Molly:** And I felt hopeful also about global warming. Even writing about the fire and the destruction, thinking about — and I did research on how seeds work that are in fire prone areas. And I don't know why, that made me think about succession planning. I feel like the seeds are like succession planning, there's a built in system for things to intentionally survive the destruction and nature did that. And in my spiritual belief God is Nature and Nature is God and God did that. And that makes me feel hopeful for all of us here on this fragile planet that we appear to be fucking up. Not just appear to be fucking up, that we are fucking up. Yeah, I mean I'm obsessed with composting and I throw away food scraps now sometimes because I'm overwhelmed by the composting because our lives are so chaotic. And how much energy and resources go into raising kids.

**Vanessa:** But you're recycling these kids.

**Molly:** Yes.

**Olivia:** We are. We're composting a lot of difficult human experience and growing some sprouts out of it.

**Molly:** And speaking of compost, maybe we've talked about this in previous interviews but Olivia's dad unfortunately died very tragically a few years ago of a heart attack. And her parents were living in Miami in the time and we flew down there, it was March in Boston and we flew down to Miami which was sunny and beautiful and it was a very surreal experience. And our priest called us from Cambridge and prayed with us while we were there in the days after he died and she said something to the extent that the grief we were feeling is compost for love and god wastes nothing and I think that more than anything else is my theology. That everything can be compost for love, and that God wastes nothing, and we can live by that tenet too. And that had a very profound effect on me, for sure.

**Vanessa:** Gross. What if having a kid turned me into an optimist?

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hi Vanessa, it's Stephanie calling. I'm just calling to say that I know that you have many children in your life whom you love, and who give you a lot of joy, but I hope that you'll have a child, because any child that you would parent and raise is a person I'd want to see in the world. Talk to you soon, bye.*

**Vanessa:** Molly and Olivia finished writing their story. In the end, it was Olivia's character who got pregnant, not Molly's. Their characters find their way back to each other and begin building a family in a way that they never expected to. It honors their grief, their wish fulfillment and their love of the family that they now have. It's happy.

But I had something I wanted to talk to them about that, you may have noticed, has been on my mind. So I called them from my bedroom one night and got them on the phone one more time.

**Vanessa:** I just read Sheila Heti's book *Motherhood* and one of the lines is "whether or not I want to have children is the biggest secret I keep from myself." And that is how I feel — it's like I must know on some level. But it is the definition of ambivalence for me. Part of me wants it with my whole body, like in my vagina. And another part of me is like "oh my god it will destroy me, like it will kill me." Not the pregnancy, but the tedium and the finances and the "what if I don't like it" and what if it's an asshole and won't it be boring?

**Molly:** It's all those things and it will destroy you. I feel like it has destroyed and remade me a hundred times over, like almost on a daily basis because there are moments when it felt so hard and impossible like when we had both of our foster sons when they were a 1.5 and 6 months old. There were some Saturdays and it was 2 o'clock and I could not imagine making it through the rest of the day. I didn't think I was going to die, but I just couldn't imagine 6 hours in the future, still being intact.

**Olivia:** I think for me, despite for the past five years being on this journey so to speak trying to build our family and have kids, I still have deep ambivalence. I still have cold feet in a way. And there are a lot of days where even though I love our foster son enormously there are days when it's like super tiring — not just tiring.

**Molly:** Taking you to wit's end

**Olivia:** Yeah wit's end, and where I feel like "man I've lost some parts of myself and I miss those parts of myself." And that's part of where I am right now in my anxiety, I'm like "who am I now?" So I don't think the ambivalence ends with having the kid or not having the kid, I think it's always ambivalent.

**Vanessa:** In the 12th grade we had to go to a local elementary school for an assembly and we 12th graders each got paired with a kindergartener. Eve Peters, a girl in my

class, remarked how good I was with the 5 year old and that I'd be a great mom one day. I said, "oh. I do not want to have kids."

She said, "that's so cool. It never occurred to me that I could not have kids."  
It had never occurred to me that I should have kids.

Now, when I hold a baby, I have no idea how I feel. That's not true. I know exactly how I feel. I know all 15 of my deeply ambivalent feelings.

[BEEP]

**Voicemail:** *Hi Vanessa, this is your friend and producer Ariana. I have no children, and I'm not planning on having any children. But I can so vividly imagine you being a mom, and having a little daughter running around, and the amount of love you could give to that child. I see you give so much love to your dog, and your stepdaughters, and your many godchildren, and your little nephew, and I know that you have that much love to give to a child and I think having a child would enrich your life. That being said, I think you're putting a lot of pressure on yourself to make this decision now. I know that you're feeling like this is like close to the last time that you could maybe make the choice to have a biological child, but the more I think about it the more I think that the love you have to give to a child doesn't necessarily need to be to a biological child, that you could adopt a child down the line, and that you would love him or her as much as you would love any child that came out of your body. And I think having a kid is not a decision that you can undo, but not having a kid right now is a decision that you could undo down the line, when you feel more sure, more settled. And I love you, and I think whatever you choose will be right. Bye.*

**Vanessa:** I am tabling this issue for now. No more opinions are being solicited. Data has been collected. The earth is getting warmer. One of Olivia and Molly's kid's made his way back to his mom and because of their love and support, was able to do that safely. And I met Olivia and Molly's foster son and we snuggled and Olivia took a picture and he and I made quite a cute pair. Lucky kid, getting to live in that house.

[MUSIC]

**Vanessa:** Now, for this week's assignment from Julia Quinn

**Vanessa:** Hi Julia!

**Julia:** Hey!

**Vanessa:** So it is now time for our next assignment. What do you have in store to torture your writers this week?

**Julia:** Dialogue.

**Vanessa:** Ooooh, okay!

**Julia:** Your people have to talk to each other. I suppose you could write a romance with nothing but smoldering hot gazes, but I think people need to talk.

**Vanessa:** I agree.

**Julia:** I'm a pretty chatty person and for me it's the easiest part of writing and I think it's probably because I talk too much. I know from talking to other writers that that's not always the case, that people do find dialogue difficult. My biggest tip when writing dialogue is, read it out loud.

**Vanessa:** So, people have just written their meet cute, should they be practicing writing dialogue by having each of their characters go and talk to a friend about the meeting?

**Julia:** That's a good idea! Or you could be going back and working within the dialogue in your meet cute and maybe expanding the meet cute. But, this is the assignment where I really want people to think about dialogue and how people actually talk and I do have some tips on this. The first tip is to remember that your characters are talking to each other and not the reader. I think we've all seen this sort of thing in a book, and my favorite kind of mock example is, you have two sisters and they're talking and one of them says, "Oh my gosh, remember when mom and dad died in that plane crash? We had to go live with great aunt Sally." And the other one goes "Yes, it was so horrible and then she died and they put us in foster care!" And the next one goes "Oh, and yes, and then we were separated and it was so" — they wouldn't say this to each other, because they already know all this. You want to make sure you don't do an info dump. So first, remember that.

Another thing I often say to people is think a lot about catch phrases and speech rhythms and patterns. Say you have a character that has a certain phrase they use a lot. I wrote a character a while back who happened to begin a lot of sentences by saying, "I say," comma, blah blah blah. I didn't even realize I was doing this with this character until an editor looked at a different book of mine, saw a character doing that, circled it, and said "This is what Henry says." And so what had occurred to me is that, if I'm going to give either of my characters, or any of my characters, because it can be secondary characters too, a very distinctive way of talking, whether it's speech patterns or sayings or curse words or something, I'm probably not going to have anybody else in the book do that. Which isn't entirely realistic, because certainly she wouldn't be the only person to ever begin a sentence with "I say," but it just sort of reinforces the characterization without it being knocked over the reader's head. Nobody's going to finish that book and say, "You know, I really knew who Henry was because she began every sentence with 'I say.'" Hopefully they won't notice that. But, maybe, when they finish the book, she will just seem like a somewhat more fully realized character.

**Vanessa:** So this week's assignment is to go back and look at your meet cute, and try to really create some strong dialogue between your two main characters. Good luck, and Julia I'll talk to you in just a couple weeks!

**Julia:** Great! See you then.

**Vanessa:** One last opinion, from my mom:

*[BEEP]*

**Voicemail:** *Hi honey, it's mom. I'm answering your question of to whether or not I think you should have a child. You know my answer is yes, not strictly for selfish reasons that I would like to have another grandchild, but also, there is nothing like a mother's love for a child, and I think you deserve to experience this. Never in history was there a time when people said, how can you not do this at this time, historically, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, there's always something to say no to. But I want you to know that whatever you decide, I will be there to support you every way I can. I love you. Bye.*

**Vanessa:** If you want to read Olivia and Molly's story, *Wildfire*, or if you want to share your writing assignments, go to our website, [hotandbotheredrompod.com](http://hotandbotheredrompod.com)

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @therompod, and leave us a review on iTunes. It helps other people find us. Our Romance Teacher is Julia Quinn. We are a co-production of Not Sorry Productions and Spoke Media. We are executive produced and co-written by me, Vanessa Zoltan and Ariana Nedelman. Our Production Team is: Chelsea Ursin, Julia Argy, Brigid Goggin, Janielle Kastner, Caroline Hamilton, Jenna Hannum, Will Short, Alexander Mark, and Evan Arnett. Our music is from Firstcom and by Nick Bohl. Special thanks this week to my dear dear friends, Matt, Rachel, Molly, Rosy, Joanne, Kim, Stephanie, David, Ariana, and my mom. Thanks mom.