**JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST:** Hey Habit listeners, Jonathan here. I wanna be sure you know about another podcast where you can find more great conversations with really thoughtful people.

(SOFT ACOUSTIC GUITAR MUSIC FADES UP)

**JR:** The Tokens podcast is hosted by my friend Lee Camp. You may have heard Lee when he was a guest on The Habit Podcast. He’s a great conversationalist, and he has great guests, because apparently, he knows everybody. I especially loved Episode 3 with poets Tracy K. Smith and Marie Howe.

**MARIE HOWE:** Well, I think it just speaks to the capacity of art to allow us a vocabulary and even a sense of courage for facing the real in all of its troubling dimensions, and also it urges us to draw upon the kinds of resources that we have to confront that. To, you know, live with it in a way that’s productive.

**JR:** You can find the Tokens Podcast at [tokensshow.com](http://tokensshow.com), or wherever you get your podcasts.

(MUSIC FADES OUT)

**JR:** Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I’m Jonathan Rogers, your host.

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

**JR:** Vesper Stamper is an illustrator and an author of young adult historical fiction. Her first novel, *What the Night Sings*, was nominated for the National Book Award in Young People’s Literature, it was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and the William C. Morris Debut Award, it was a Golden Kite Honor book, and it was named a best Young Adult Book of 2018-19 by the Young Adult Library Association, the Wall Street Journal, and Kirkus.

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

**JR:** Vesper Stamper’s gorgeous new novel is called *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue*. It tells the story of a young woman finding her way during the Great Plague of 1348. Historical novels don’t get much timelier.

Vesper Stamper, thanks so much for being on The Habit Podcast.

**VESPER STAMPER:** Thanks for having me! It’s good to be here!

**JR:** So you are an illustrator as well as an author, and have been an illustrator longer than you’ve been an author.

**VS:** Far longer, yeah. Never thought I’d be an author.

**JR:** So *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue* is your second novel…

**VS:** Yeah, my second published novel.

**JR:** Your second published novel. Which you also illustrated.

**VS:** Yes.

**JR:** Tell me about going from being an illustrator to being an author… or I guess I should say adding authoring to illustration. How does that change your writing process? How is your writing process different from somebody else?

**VS:** Well, I’m not trained as a writer. I’m trained as an illustrator. I went to high school for visual art, I have two degrees in illustration, and I just assumed that I would be doing picture books. That was what I’ve wanted to do since I was a kid, and I did illustrate picture books. I did album covers. I’ve done a lot over the 22-odd years that I’ve been an illustrator, but I never imagined in a million years that I would be writing novels or doing anything long format.

So the picture book was really my format that I was going for, but I have never sold one of my own manuscripts for a picture book. I just… there is an instinct for that, and there is a form that I was never able to really nail, no matter how much I tried. So I would illustrate for other people, but I could never sell y own writing, so I never considered myself a writer at all, even though the whole time I was writing a lot of poetry, I was a songwriter.

Then in 2010, on New Year’s Eve, I drew a little character in my sketchbook, and I looked at her and thought, “There’s a story there. I need to know who this little girl is.” So it turned into a novel very, very quickly. And I went to one of these writing conferences and showed the first chapter to an editor, and he was the first person to say to me, “You have to write. You have something to say.” And I thought, really? I don’t know how to do this! And he said, no, you just do whatever you were doing to get to this point and keep going.

So I did. I submitted that for a grant, and I got the grant and wrote that novel. Now, that’s not published, but that was the first long format thing I ever wrote, and I thought, wow, this format enables me to tell the stories that were in me all along, but I was trying to cram them into a picture book format and it was never hitting. But once I found the novel format, I could take my time to really explore the things… not just the themes, but the length of time that I needed to develop the stories.

And so it was in grad school — I went to grad school for illustration — and there was a project we had to do, a book project on any subject of our choice. And I had to, long story short, become interested in what happened to survivors of the Holocaust in the immediate days after the war. And so that was my book project, and it got picked up by Knopf and was published right after I graduated from grad school. And then, apparently, I became a writer, despite myself.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** So that’s my path.

**JR:** Well, the writing process itself… can you talk to me about how when you sit down to write prose, the fact that you’re an illustrator, how does that change the way you approach putting sentences on the page?

**VS:** yeah, whether it’s poetry or songwriting or novels, I think in images. I see the world around me in constantly unfolding images. So as a writer, it’s up to me to put those images down in a different medium, which is words. That’s partly why my novels are illustrated as well. First of all, my publisher lets me do it, which is nice. It’s kind of unusual. But I don’t see the images as embellishment to the words on the page. They’re two ways of exploring the scene. So sometimes it makes a lot of sense to me to put the action, the emotion down as an image, and sometimes it makes more sense to put it down in word imagery.

And this was true before I was writing novels, when I was writing songs for example. I had to have this constant push pull of creating images and then creating songs. They really danced with each other, and I could never have one without the other.

**JR:** You’re saying you’re creating visual images to go with songs?

**VS:** Sometimes. Yeah. So for example, if I had a job to illustrate an album cover, I always had the musicians send me as much of the album as they had finished, even if it was just demos, because the songs would create images in my mind that I would then use to create the album cover.

**JR:** That sounds… the way you phrase it, and this may just be because I’ve been looking at *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue*, which involves synesthesia…

**VS:** Yeah.

**JR:** What you just said sounds like a form of synesthesia, that the music creates images.

**VS:** I mean, I should be so lucky. I don’t consider myself to have synesthesia. My daughter does.

**JR:** Really.

**VS:** Yeah, what surprised me was learning how many of my illustrator friends have synesthesia and never talked about it.

**JR:** Maybe we should define synesthesia because not everybody knows what it is.

**VS:** Right. So synesthesia is a neurological condition where the parts of the brain that control the senses and the parts that control… well, they overlap. For example, somebody could see sound as color or as shapes in front of them.

**JR:** Or *Ratatouille*, who saw flavors as shapes and colors.

**VS:** Oh, yeah yeah! Exactly. Like some people will feel emotions on their body, on their skin, or they um… they’ll have certain smells that appear with different feelings. So the theory is we all have this as children, or as babies at least, but then those parts of the brain separate and distinguish themselves from each other, so that’s why you’ll have separate senses. But for some people that connection doesn’t ever separate. So my daughter for example, she sees numbers and letters as color.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**VS:** It’s all very fascinating to me. You could be right that I have some sort of… form of that, although synesthesia still has a lot of study to be done about it.

**JR:** Yeah. I think surely everybody has some form of that, or else things like metaphor… you couldn’t even begin to write visual imagery, for instance, if there weren’t something resembling synesthesia in all of us.

**VS:** Right. I mean, maybe artists and writers are a little more attuned to that. I’m not sure. But I always think of Marcus Zusak in *The Book Thief* describes “a chocolate sky.”

**JR:** Mmhm.

**VS:** That’s a little bit unusual because the sky’s not brown, right? Um, but it meant more than, oh, it was a brown or almost black sky. You’re talking about multiple factors in that description. The feel fo the atmosphere, the humidity in the air… it could have been any number of things. So I think you’re right.

**JR:** Yeah. I have a friend who has synesthesia, and she’ll write — she’s a writer — and sometimes she’ll write some bit of figurative language that to me makes no sense. This is not even… this makes no sense. And she’s like, “This obviously makes sense.” But that would be one of the limitations of being synesthetic, is that you sometimes don’t know what doesn’t connect with other people, I should think.

**VS:** Yeah, that’s interesting that you’d say that, because I — this character in *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue*, Edith, has synesthesia, and I had to put myself in the shoes of somebody with a condition that I don’t have, right? I interviewed a lot of people with synesthesia. I would send them pieces of music. I would ask them to describe certain words… what do these words feel like to you? And I would either use their descriptions or I would interpret it on my own and say, okay, I think I have this. And the advantage is that every synesthete sees things differently. A sound that could be purple for one person could be green for another. So there’s a certain amount of flexibility in there.

But the biggest thing for me — like a value that I had in writing this way — is I never make apologies for it. I just describe it as it is. But he point is that Edith doesn’t see things the way other people see them. That’s the whole point.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** And I think that was important for… I used synesthesia as a gateway to understanding the medieval mind, because the pre-modern mindset and worldview was fairly magical.

**JR:** Right.

**VS:** It took for granted the supernatural, it took for granted the unseen as part of the fabric of everyday life. And we don’t do that anymore because we’re post-Enlightenment, we’re modern, we’re scientific, we’re all of those things. And even with people of faith… gosh, there’s all sorts of theological arguments against the supernatural and all of those things, but we don’t understand that that way of seeing things is about five minutes old.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** You know? So I wanted to use synesthesia to show the reader that the subject of perception is… at one time in history was much more loaded than it is now. So that one person with a different way of perceiving would be considered a saint in one time and a heretic in another. You know? And all of that could just have come down to somebody having synesthesia. Could it be so simple? Either things are over-spiritualized or they’re under-spiritualized, so synesthesia was a gateway to exploring that.

**JR:** Yeah. Neat. So you’ve alluded to the fact that this is a book set in the medieval area, the 14th century during the Plague.

**VS:** Yes, mmhm.

**JR:** Which seems very appropriate…

**VS:** Strangely relevant. (laughs) I didn’t plan it.

**JR:** Yes… um, can… I don’t know how to ask this question. What are some things that — since you’ve been thinking about plagues longer than the rest of us…

**VS:** Sure.

**JR:** What are some things you’ve learned, some insights you’ve… tell me something I don’t know about plagues and pandemics.

**VS:** Ohhh… oh, there’s so much to say about plagues. Well… first of all, any plague, any pandemic, is far more about what it does to people and societies than just the disease. And I mean that in a positive way and a negative. Way.

So, clearly it was fascinating in studying the plague to see how medicine was handled before germ theory and the thoughts about how disease is spread and how you can protect yourself from it and everything. And you know, I think we look at the Middle Ages as some sort of dark time period where nobody knew anything, and all they did was put leeches on things, and you know… (laughs)

**JR:** (laughs)

**VS:** But it’s so not true! There was a lot of experimentation going on, and a lot of pre-scientific method… really brilliant thought. And I think that from the Great Plague of 1348 — or 1347-51, if you want to be really specific about it — that really was the birth of modern medicine.

**JR:** Hmm.

**VS:** For example, there was this guy Guy de Chauliac, who was the Pope’s physician, and he was experimenting on himself. He actually contracted the plague, so he experimented on himself, and he survived. And he wrote all of his observations in a book called The Surgery of Guy de Chauliac. And that tome is a pre-modern scientific… you know, it’s a medical book that has to do with applying a pre-scientific method to curing the plague.

But beyond that… there’s positives with that. Obviously, we wouldn’t have had the Renaissance if it hadn’t been for the plague. There are reasons for that. I could go... we could talk for half an hour on that. (laughs) But at the same time, there was an immense amount of superstition and fear and castigation and heresy and um… you know, a lot of teardown in the religious fabric of the time.

You know, the church lost a lot of authority, either overpromising or heresy hunting, things like that. And these movements would arise of… for example people — and this is in my book as well — people who would take on extreme penitence. And so they would go walking through the streets of the town beating themselves with whips in order to please the angry God who was bringing the plague on them.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**VS:** So I think there are a lot of parallels to our time, what’s going on with the social upheaval we’re experiencing. I think the fear people have of contracting it, but also the fear they have for our livelihoods… we see all these things being played out as binary choices, but in times of fear, a number of things on a number of levels happen to peoples own minds and souls, but also within their social fabric. And that’s definitely… we see that playing out in real time.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** So none of this — *none* of this — surprises me. I mean, to me, I’m just… my whole mindset is, “what’s next?” This could go one of two ways. We could have another Renaissance, or it could be the end of our civilization.

**JR:** (chuckles) Those are serious choices…

**VS:** Well umm, well, maybe not the end of our civilization, but maybe our country. It could be the end of our country. (pause) It could lead to… if it’s not handled properly, and if people don’t… take responsibility on themselves for the healing of it, we could very well see… you know, a civil war. That’s my opinion about it. And I say that dispassionately and completely apolitically. I’m looking at it entirely as a writer of historical fiction who sees how these cycles play out.

**JR:** Mmhm. Alright.

**VS:** Yeah. Sorry to scare anybody! (laughs)

**JR:** (laughs) Well…

**VS:** Maybe we could lean a little bit more on the Renaissance possibility then. (laughs)

**JR:** Yeah, let’s do that! I vote for the Renaissance!

**VS:** Yes, me too.

**JR:** Where do we vote?

**VS:** (laughs)

**JR:** By mail, I guess.

**VS:** We can vote in the courts of heaven. That’s where we vote.

**JR:** Yeah, there you go. Okay, I’ve been listening to your podcast, Vesperisms. Is this kind of a… do you picture this as a limited run — you do a certain number of episodes and be done — or are you doing this indefinitely now?

**VS:** I’m gonna keep going as long as long as I have things to say about thinking like an artist, which is a lot. So it’s not a podcast about creativity or how to get into the industry or anything like that. It’s really about how being an artist intersects with every part of life. So right now, I’ve just been laying out my basic philosophy of what are the ways that we think like artists? And the past few episodes I’ve been doing more topical stuff having to do with current events. But in the future, I mean, I’m gonna tackle everything from being a working parent or whether to have kids as an artist — you know, that whole powder keg — to how should artists think about politics? How should artists think about social media or about self-promotion? You know, just in terms of let’s not let the world dictate to us how we should be, but recognize our gifts as artists and how we do have a different way of perceiving the world and bringing that to bear on the world around us. It’s a vital part.

**JR:** Your motto for the podcast, and maybe for more than the podcast is the life… let’s see… “the work is”… I wrote it down… “the work isn’t everything, but everything is the work.”

**VS:** Yeah.

**JR:** What do you mean by that?

**VS:** I mean that artists can easily get obsessed with their art in a number of different ways, and that when you’re in… (pause) when you’re in the flow of creating work, it can be all-consuming. You can also beat yourself up a lot for not being where you expect to be at a certain point, and so the work becomes everything. You see everything through that lens, and it can take your life over.

But it’s important for the artist to understand that first of all, being an artist in the world is not the highest calling. It’s one of many callings. So the work isn’t everything, but everything is the work, meaning everything you do take in will find it’s way into the work. Whether that’s you cook a particularly great meal for your family, or that you have a… an especially horrible fight with your in-laws, or… all of that will find its way into your work. Your childhood, your hopes for old age… all of it. It’s not about just putting your pen to the paper or your brush to the canvas. It’s about a whole… it’s about understanding your life as an artist as a whole person calling.

**JR:** Mmhm. Okay. You talk about the idea of reclaiming an artistic worldview.

**VS:** Yeah.

**JR:** So… A) How did it get unclaimed? And B) What is an artistic worldview?

**VS:** Let’s see… well…

**JR:** And you can answer the B part first.

**VS:** Let’s answer part B first. Okay. So, I have four tenants of the artistic worldview, or “vesperisms” let’s say. And I’m certainly not the first person or the last to talk about artistic process. This is just how I see it.

The first is that artists see. So the very nature of being an artist is seeing below the surface and beyond what’s presented to you as your initial perception. So artists are made and called to go beyond the surface.

The second one is an artistic worldview is open and expansive. What that means is that where many others would close down possibility, artists, by their very nature, we push that door open. We stick our foot in the door when it’s closing and say, “What if there is more?” What more can I explore about this?

The third is… let’s see if I can remember all of them off the top of my head. Maybe you wrote them down. (laughs)

**JR:** I wrote ‘em down! But I’m gonna see how you do here.

**VS:** Okay, so… (pause)

**JR:** It starts with an H!

**VS:** (pause) Human-centered! Art is human-centered!

**JR:** (laughs)

**VS:** Okay, so I mean two things by that. One is that artists — and by artists I mean writers, dancers, visual artists, musicians, any medium, any creative medium — we take in things through our bodies, so our five senses are how we take things in. And that’s literally how everybody takes things in, but I think artists can… when it becomes all about the work, we can forget we are people in bodies who use our bodies for the work.

So a common thing among artists is that we wanna separate ourselves from the limitations of our bodies in order to make more work. It’s like this common yearning that we have. But to remind ourselves that we are in our bodies to create the world, but also that we create work for other people. So we… there’s the work we create for ourselves, but then there’s the work that we create to be seen and heard by other people, and we have a responsibility to our audience, and we have a responsibility for what we put into the world. Which again, because I’m connected to medieval history, the whole concept of an individual artist putting their work up in a gallery is, again, something that’s five minutes old.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** The concept of a superstar artist or something like that creating their genius in a studio and putting it up in a museum is again, very new. And we don’t know what that does to people.

And then the last tenant is that artists allow for growth and change. It’s part of being open and expansive, but it’s the component that has to do with how our work affects other people and how we allow the world to go on without… I wanna say without judgment. There’s a lot of ways this could play out.

So, Vesperisms really came into being as an alternative to the political worldview which I saw closing people’s minds down. Especially artists, because we are so open and expansive, we are particularly vulnerable to messaging that can cause us to draw binary distinctions.

So if we’re told that, for example, subjects of justice only exist in this one part of the political spectrum, then that’s gonna cause a conflict within the artist. It’s gonna cause a conflict with the open and expansive part that wants justice for everybody and wants equality for everybody, but with the tendency to close down that comes from certain political movements.

**JR:** Right.

**VS:** And those can be on the right or the left, by the way.

**JR:** Sure. I think one function of political rhetoric is to simplify the world in such a way that… you know, things like if you’re not with us you’re against us, if you’re not, you know… just oversimplification.

**VS:** Yes.

**JR:** Which, frankly, does make it much easier to communicate political messages and to motivate people to vote, and a tendency to motivate by fear, and a tendency to… a political worldview, as you put it, is in so many ways the opposite of this opening you’re talking about.

**VS:** Right. And there’s a word for what happens when artists become susceptible to that. It starts with a P… it’s called propaganda. And artists are definitely susceptible to this, and we have to guard ourselves against it. The bravest artists in history and the bravest writers are the ones who refuse to be co-opted for political messaging especially. For social and political messaging. Yeah.

**JR:** And so… I don’t know if you’ve done an episode about this yet, but how does the writer/artist resist that pressure?

**VS:** Well, I mean there’s a lot of ways. One is by understanding history, and right now… (pause) You know, like I said, the concept of the superstar artist or writer who’s gonna make a name for themselves is very modern and recent. Artists before the modern era, they were part of a collective whole. For instance, in the guild system, or most of the works being created were for public consumption, things like that.

So there’s such a drive post-Plague — and I can draw many connections to this — to segment ourselves to hyper-individualism. Now, I believe in the individual. I very much do. But that can cross the line into hyper-individualism and egotism, narcissism. So by guarding against that, by looking at history and seeing, um… by studying megalomaniacs and tyrants and totalitarian leaders and understanding that everybody has that propensity, the artist can take a humble approach toward their own work and responsibility in the world.

But understanding the history of propaganda and how artists have been used in that way, its inoculating yourself against those tendencies in yourself and making the decision before that comes knocking at your door, that I will not sign on. The strength of the artist really is resistance. Saying “I will not denounce what you ask me to denounce, and I will not ascribe to what you tell me to ascribe to do.”

**JR:** Yeah. Ummm… so… let’s take the next step here. Your’e saying in effect… surely your’e not saying an artist can’t have political convictions or personal convictions…

**VS:** Of course not.

**JR:** So how do I balance these things?

**VS:** Yeah, I mean…

**JR:** Are you saying my convictions need to come not from the outside me, but rather… they’re my convictions rather than… I think part of what we’re talking about perhaps is a disconnect between the rewards… the proper rewards for art making are not political rewards, monetary rewards. I mean, I can imagine there being monetary rewards — I have not experienced many monetary rewards for art-making, but when that is the chief goal of art-making, you’re doing something besides art-making.

**VS:** Correct.

**JR:** And so an alignment of stated goals and actual goals is… may be a helpful thing, but an alignment of I am making what I make, and expecting to gain… what am I saying here? In effect, the goal of art is not my own aggrandizement and my own political positioning, but rather loving my audience, trying to tell them the truth. And I guess insofar as my political position is a desire to tell people the truth, rather than a desire to consolidate political power.

**VS:** Right. Right, that’s a good point. Art-making is about truth-telling at its core. And that’s why propaganda is so particularly… that is why propaganda feels so disgusting. Because the mechanism of the artist has been co-opted to tell a lie rather than the truth.

So… now, I have to pull the camera back a little bit, because I am a Christian. So I believe that truth has a capital T, and Truth is a person, Truth is a being. A decidedly non-human Being, other than the incarnated Jesus. But as the eternal, transcendent Being who is Truth, who is Love… any sort of political positioning is so down here on the ground. It’s so base. It’s so human-centered. All it is is human power plays. Now, sometimes those can be to good ends. I’m not saying they’re not. But we have to realize politics is not a religion. Politics does not, should not, will not ever fulfill the place in the human soul that God fills… I won’t even say religion. God is so high above us and must be our aspiration as artists.

And I think after the plague, what happened was after the structure of the church began to crumble, the authority of the church began to crumble, and we entered the modern era with our hyper-individualism and everything, we lost that sense that the artist is creating *unto* something.

**JR:** Hmm.

**VS:** Obviously, there have been artists who have and who have retained that, but we’ve put the human being and politics and anything human, we’ve put that — even science, our scientific understanding which is like… I believe in science, but I’m still, we’re never gonna figure it out. Our scientific understanding is so puny compared to the reality that is out there. I think that has been a great loss, and that artist’s relationship to the truth and to love of neighbor, love of the audience has been so fractured, that I’m really passionate to help us understand that the political worldview or anything else that’s human is so base, and that our aspirations must be higher, and that’s what’s gonna be able to pull us out of our susceptibility to manipulation.

**JR:** Yeah, you speak of Truth as a capital T… another helpful category for me is just reality, right? And also distinguishing between reality and the status quo. And so the political worldview is about managing the status quo, changing the status quo so it’s more like the way I think the world ought to look… and when you talk about how the artist’s job is to *see*, it seems to me that we’re talking about seeing reality.

**VS:** Yes.

**JR:** Seeing through the status quo, seeing through lies, seeing through everything that’s not real to reality and giving an account of that. As an artist, as a writer, as a filmmaker, whatever.

**VS:** Right.

**JR:** Um, and it… I mean, even the language of Truth gets so… everybody says they’re telling the truth, right? (chuckles)

**VS:** But the truth according to whom? The truth according to CNN? The truth according to Fox News? The truth according to Vox? In other words, there’s so many filters now on our concept of truth that we think we’re telling the truth, but really… and I think this is really the privilege of the historical researcher, is to understand the trail of what came before us so that we understand, okay, when this institution came into play, it put this filter on our perception.

**JR:** Yeah, that’s good.

**VS:** So the artist… if we accept that the artist is a seer, if it’s a prophetic calling, if we’re meant to see beyond the surface, we have to be able to trust our own reality. We have to be able to say, no, I really do believe what my eyes see and my ears hear and my fingers touch. I believe in the world as it’s laying itself out to me, and not how it’s filtered through this screen or this commentator or this outlet.

**JR:** Uh huh. Yeah. Okay.

**VS:** Yeah.

**JR:** Well, good. We’re running low on time, so I’m gonna end with the question I always end with…

**VS:** Sure.

**JR:** Who are the writers who make you want to write, Vesper? I know you do a lot of things besides writing, but we’re talking about writing today, so who are the writers who make you want to write your ownself?

**VS:** Hmmm… Dostoevsky.

**JR:** Huh. Okay.

**VS:** Uhhhh…

**JR:** Do you read Dostoevsky and go, “Yeah, I think I could do that”?

**VS:** Oh, I know I could never do that. (Laughs)

**JR:** (laughs)

**VS:** But he makes me want to write because he is the ultimate student of human nature.

**JR:** Mmhm. Yeah.

**VS:** *Nobody* writes human nature like Dostoevsky. And when I say I read Dostoevsky, I mean sloooows… I’ve never finished one of his books. I mean, I’ve been reading *The Brothers Karamazov* for about five years.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**VS:** Because I can only handle about a page at a time, and then it’s enough for me to chew on for like weeks.

**JR:** Yeah.

**VS:** Same with *Jane Eyre*. Like, *Jane Eyre* is one I’ll come back to and read every couple of years just for like, a shot in the arm. For that kind of language and that kind of human understanding.

**JR:** It’s a great book.

**VS:** Anthony Dorr is another one, who wrote *All the Light We Cannot See*. I mean, it’s really hard to find language that’s that beautiful. Yeah. Good books are hard to find these days. I do love the classics, but I think those would be my top three, at least in terms of fiction.

**JR:** Yeah. Great. Well, I hope *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue* does great. I hope a lot of people read it.

**VS:** Thanks.

**JR:** I’m certainly… I’ve not finished it, but I’ve certainly enjoyed what I’ve read of it. You’re doing a great job, and I love the pictures. We haven’t gotten around to talking about the illustrations. But I think you did great

**VS:** Well, your listeners can pre-order it and look at the pictures there!

**JR:** Well, I think by the time this airs, it’ll be released. Right? You’re releasing mid-August, is that right?

**VS:** The 25th, yeah.

**JR:** 25th, okay. I think people won’t even have to pre-order it by the time this airs.

**VS:** Great!

**JR:** And real quickly, before we started recording, you were telling me that you were approaching this as sort of inspired by the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages?

**VS:** Right, right. So even though you can get *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue* on audiobook, which is going to be — the narrator for it is just phenomenal. I’m excited. I’m gonna be interviewing her on my podcast actually, ‘cause she’s just incredible. So you can get it on audio, you can get it on ebook, and you would get the illustrations that way too. But in terms of the object itself, I wanted to create the book as an object that felt like an illuminated manuscript for the modern reader. So it’s fully illustrated in color, and it’s beautifully done, it’s on beautiful paper. It’s an heirloom book, I would say. It’s a gift book. It’s one your’e gonna wanna keep around and return to again and again, and my publishers have always done such a beautiful job with my books. So… yeah!

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JR:** Well, I’ve only seen the pdf, but I’m excited to see the actual book. Alright, Vesper! Thank you so much for being here, Vesper Stamper. And thanks for the work you’re doing.

**VS:** Thanks so much for having me.

**DREW MILLER:** The Rabbit Room is partnered with Lipscomb University to make this podcast possible. Lipscomb has graciously given us access to their recording studio in the Center for Entertainment and Arts Building. We’re so grateful for their sponsorship, their encouragement, and the good work they do in Nashville.

Special shout-out as well to Jess Ray for letting us use her song “Too Good” as part of this podcast. Visit [jessraymusic.com](http://jessraymusic.com) to hear more of her beautiful songs.

**JR:** The Habit Membership is a library of resources for writers by me, Jonathan Rogers. More importantly, The Habit is a hub of community where like-minded writers gather to discuss their work and give each other a little more courage. Find out more at [TheHabit.co](http://TheHabit.co).

**DM:** This podcast was produced by The Rabbit Room, where art nourishes community and community nourishes art. All our podcasts are made possible by the generous support of our members. To learn more about us, visit [rabbitroom.com](http://rabbitroom.com), and to become a member, [rabbitroom.com/donate](http://rabbitroom.com/donate).

(THEME MUSIC OUT)

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