Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.4 - Hospitality: The Leaky Cauldron (Book 3, Chapter 4)

Casper: Chapter 4, The Leaky Cauldron

“It took Harry several days to get used to his strange new freedom. Never before had he been able to get up whenever he wanted, or eat whatever he fancied. He could even go wherever he liked, as long as it was in Diagon Alley, and as long…”

Casper: I’m Casper ter Kuile.

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan.

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

(Intro music fades)

Casper: Friends, it’s been so exciting to see people on social media say they’re coming to our live shows, people are buying tickets for San Fransisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland and we are so excited to see you there. So, the dates are Thursday, June 8th, in Seattle, Sunday, June 11th in Portland, Wednesday, June 14th in LA, and Thursday, June 15th in San Fransisco, so we’d love to see you. Come to harrypottersacredtext.com and buy your tickets there.

Vanessa: If you come to the LA show, you can also meet my whole family, who you’ve heard stories about, and Arianna’s whole family will be there, cause we’re from LA. So LA people, I mean everybody really come out, we’re so excited, these are some of my favorite cities in the world, but LA people, I mean, you’ll get to meet my mom.

Casper: Vanessa, will you tell me a story?

Vanessa: I would love to. Every summer, from when I was born, ’til I was eight years old, my cousin Ronnie would come from Tel Aviv and spend the summer with us. He was ten years older than I was, but he would come and stay in order to practice his English. Ronnie was like a superstar to my brothers and I. The three of us had, just, crushes on him. He was tall and knew how to do all these things, like my parents would speak in Hebrew to each other so we wouldn’t understand, and he would crack the code and whisper to us what my parents were actually saying, it was just like, the best thing ever. In fact, one of my strongest early memories is - Ronnie got my older brother David’s bedroom when he came to visit, and so David, Jonathan, and I would all share a room, and I remember waking up in the mornings, and my mom set some time of like, we weren’t allowed to wake Ronnie until some reasonable hour, I don’t know, like 8 or 9, and so I remember sitting outside of his room with my brothers, watching the clock, waiting for the minute when we could go in and wake him. And really like sit, like little ducks in a row, and be like, “Shhh! Don’t wake him!” but just pray that he would wake up. Cause he was
just like, this six-foot-tall toy for us, we loved him so much. I mean it was just like, it was like having a movie star in the house. And I was thinking about that as we read this chapter through the theme of hospitality, because talking to Ronnie now, we’re still close, and he looks back on that time as my parents being, like, so hospitable and generous to him, and my family giving up a bedroom, and feeding him for the summer, and taking him in, and I look back on it as this amazing time where the coolest guy ever was in our midst. And so I, I think that that is sort of hospitality at it’s best, where everybody feels like they’re winning, and everybody feels enriched by it. And I think we see some of that in this chapter.

Casper: That story resonates so much. I remember all the cousins, or you know, friends of the family coming, and it was like, the most exciting time. And now that I’m sometimes that older cousin, it can be exciting for me as well, and so I love that idea of hospitality being something where everyone is enriched by that relationship. And I think as you say, we’ll find some of that in this chapter, but I think we’ll also find other kinds of hospitality in it, so I’m excited to dig into this theme together.

Vanessa: Likewise.

Casper: So as we examine the chapter let’s remind ourselves what happens, Vanessa. Are you ready for a 30-second recap?

Vanessa: Yup.

Casper: Here we go. 3, 2, 1, go.

Vanessa: Harry now is living at the Leaky Cauldron, and he’s just like walking around Diagon Alley and eating a lot of ice cream, and he buys his books, and he’s really coveting, um, the new, Quidditch…broom, God, I couldn’t think of that word. And, um, he’s sort of waiting for Hermione and Ron to show up, they show up, they go book shopping, Hermione gets Crookshanks, and they all go back they’re all staying at the Leaky Cauldron, and Harry overhears Molly and Arthur talking about how Sirius Black is actually gonna go after Harry and Harry should - is upset about not being able to go into into Hogsmeade.

(Buzzing noise—110 words in 30 seconds)

Casper: It’s called a broom.

Vanessa: (Laughs) Broom! That’s how you say it.

Casper: Firebolt, yeah.

Vanessa: (Laughs) What if they call it a robe? Are you ready?
Casper: Bring it on.

Vanessa: The word is broom.

Casper: Broom.

Vanessa: Tip from me to you.

Casper: Thank you.

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go.

Casper: We see Harry building himself a little life, he talks to the mirror in the Leaky Cauldron, he’s really feeling at home, um, he buys all his things, the monster book from Hagrid turns out to be a blessing cause there’s a ton of these monster books that are very aggressive in Flourish and Blotts. Scabbers is missing a toe or like a little claw or something, (spoiler alert, spoiler alert), and um, he’s happy to see the Weasleys. Percy is being bigheaded because he’s head boy and everyone is teasing him, and Mr. And Mrs. Weasley are worried about Harry and should they tell him or not. And um yeah they just all happy.

(Buzzing noise—115 words in 30 seconds)

Vanessa: Okay, so we’re gonna do a little literary term class right now.

Casper: Uh-huh

Vanessa: There’s a difference between a spoiler and foreshadowing. You didn’t spoil anything by saying that Scabbers is missing a toe, you foreshadowed.

Casper: Okay, well so you don’t know the word for broom and I don’t know the word for foreshadow. (Laughs)

Vanessa: We should definitely have a podcast about books, you and me together, kid. So, Casper, you said that you think we will see different kinds of hospitality in this chapter. Where would you like to start?

Casper: I mean, I feel like there’s some obvious hospitality happening, right? Harry is staying at the Leaky Cauldron, it’s an inn, he comes back after a day of shopping, and the text tells us that someone had been in to tidy. So someone else is kind of making his home, is welcoming him into the Leaky Cauldron. He’s paying to stay, we assume, but nonetheless, right, like someone is making him feel welcome. And ah -

Vanessa: Ummm
Casper: You don't think so?

Vanessa: No, I do. Do we count that as hospitality? I know we call it the hospitality sector, right? Someone works in hospitality if they work in the hotel business, for example. But, Cornelius Fudge has been there, and like, told Tom to take care of Harry, so there’s political pressure to take good care of Harry, and then someone is paying. So would you count that as hospitality?

Casper: Absolutely, I think so. My family runs a bed and breakfast, and I think a big part of that is making people feel at home, even though they’re paying for their room and their breakfast, there’s a way of doing that which is very like, functional and cold, and there’s another way of doing it which is, saying, “How was your day?” inviting them in to have a cup of tea. I think that those two things are not diametrically opposed; paying for service and doing it in a way that feels welcoming and homey.

Vanessa: But isn’t there a qualitative difference from when you were being hospitable to a guest who is a personal guest, and you are being hospitable to a guest who is paying for a service?

Casper: Well it if it was my choice no one would come to visit, and I would finally have some peace and quiet.

Vanessa: (Laughs)

Casper: But, yes, no, I do think there’s a difference. I don’t think that money is the key differentiator; I think it’s about whether you know the person or not. Because we’ve had plenty of friends and family to stay with us, and of course, that’s a friendship or a family relationship. But there’s also strangers who come to stay, who are friends of friends or something, and that feels very similar to the kind of bed and breakfast guest who pays. So I think it’s more about the existing relationship or not.

Vanessa: Yeah, and the inverse is, that Ronnie, we stayed with his family in Tel Aviv and didn’t pay, and he stayed with us, and nobody ever exchanged money. But even though there was so much love there, and so much affection, there’s still a desire to pay back, right? Like Ronnie would babysit for my parents as a way to thank them, and, so I think you’ve convinced me.

Casper: Well and I think this relates to what we’ve talked about in the recent episode on family, that so much of what makes family is relationships of care, and I think hospitality is another kind of way that we build those relationships of trust and intimacy and that kind of give and take, that’s the foundation for these high trust relationships that we all want.

Vanessa: So I wonder if the difference is with the Leaky Cauldron there’s like an explicit contract of sorts -
Casper: Yeah

Vanessa: - sort of like the Bed and Breakfast guests, whereas with hospitality I feel like the contract is not explicit. It’s not like my parents said to Ronnie, “Look you can stay with us but you have to babysit for us six times over the course of the summer, and you have to be sure to always clear your plates.” So I guess with hospitality, if it’s done in its, sort of, fullest, there’s a lot of trust. You’re saying, “I’m welcoming you into my house, and I trust that you’re gonna be an addition to this house and not a burden.”

Casper: Well, this is really interesting because I think the gift of hospitality is doing so without the expectation that it’ll be returned. I don’t know, that feels like real hospitality in some way.

Vanessa: I agree. But, I do think that when you offer hospitality to someone, even if you’re not expecting gratitude, if they are completely ungrateful and rude, and keep taking as you give, it could quickly become a cancer in a relationship, so there’s risk involved in hospitality. Even when you expect nothing, somebody can give you less than nothing.

Casper: And they’re not gonna be invited back.

Vanessa: (Walks) Right.

Casper: For us, with the bed and breakfast, like, sometimes the hospitality was really inverted. And so we had one night where one of our guests who was relatively regular came downstairs with a notepad of paper, which he’d written on. And um, my mom was like, “Oh, well like, how did you sleep,” And he said, “Well, not very well. There was a burglary at 3 AM next door, and I took down detailed notes of who it was and when it happened and called the police,” and he didn’t wake us because he didn’t need to, but he had really become the host and offered this great neighborly favor, and then my mum was like, “So, that’s uh, 60 pounds for the night, please.” (Walks)

Vanessa: (laughs)

Casper: And the kind of tables have turned, and was still the right thing to do, to charge him, but it suddenly felt like, you know, those kinds of questions come up when you’re in this relationship where you start giving, and I think that’s exactly like your experience with your cousin, where like who got the better deal? I don’t know. So I think we that kind of like, big generosity in the text when Hermione insists on doing Muggle Studies. She’s grown up in the Muggle world, and everyone’s like, "Why do you need to study Muggle Studies? Like you know this world." And she’s like, "No, I’m interested in studying it from the wizarding point of view." Which as a generous act of being hospitable to the wizarding world, I just think that’s amazing. To have that kind of openness and kind of welcoming spirit, I think that’s exactly what hospitality looks like. She’s basically hospitable to a different way of seeing the world by studying it through a wizarding lens. I think that’s awesome.
Vanessa: I think it's awesome too.

Casper: Okay

Vanessa: And I agree with Hermione that it sounds really interesting. Which made me feel like such a dork. I was like, "That would be really interesting," So I'm with Hermione. I'm having a hard time following you as to why it's hospitable. Do you mind just walking me through?

Casper: Yeah, I mean the way I think about it is, if tidying up the bed for Harry by the staff at the Leaky Cauldron is a way of showing hospitality to Harry’s physical presence, I feel like Hermione is showing hospitality to the ideas of the wizarding world about her own background. It's a stance to the world which says, "Welcome," There's a curiosity there, like, she already knows the content, she wants to learn how they're looking at the content. Does that makes sense?

Vanessa: Yeah, it does. She almost wants to be like a diplomat between the two, she's like a UN ambassador.

Casper: Diplomacy is the perfect metaphor. And if you think about who goes into the diplomatic core, it's people who are skilled in being hosts and guests. Because you're literally living in another country as the guest of that government, representing your own perspective, but always doing it in this delicate conversation. I love that idea of Hermione as a diplomat.

Vanessa: I think the real hospitable moment with Hermione is that she walks into the Magical Menagerie, and says, "I want an owl," she wants like, this utility animal. And instead, she walks out with Crookshanks, a bow-legged, ugly cat, simply because nobody else was willing to buy this cat. And not only does she buy that cat, she doesn't say, "Look, I bought it because I felt bad for it, isn't it ugly," She immediately starts complimenting it, and gets herself excited about hosting him.

Casper: Even though he's a small tiger.

Vanessa: (laughs) Yeah, exactly. And Hermione’s like, "Isn't he perfect," And that to me is also hospitality. She was planning on welcoming a bird into her house, and instead she welcomes the thing that eats birds.

Casper: That is, I think, really crucial to hospitality, is that we can't control who comes in the door. She has the plan for a bird, and, you know, Hermione, smart woman, is thinking about owls, just like I am, but instead, she’s like, "This is who arrived, and I welcome you with the same warmth and excitement,"
Vanessa: And Crookshanks is immediately a burden on Hermione. Ron and she are really, I mean clearly at this point they’re already like best, best of friends, with how concerned they are for one another. Ron is immediately like, worried about how many subjects she’s taking, they are close. And Crookshanks immediately puts a rift between the two of them because Crookshanks and Scabbers aren’t getting along. And she doesn’t care, she’s like, "I have chosen to be hospitable to this animal. I have committed to this animal in purchasing it." She could turn around and go back to the Magical Menagerie and be like, "Look I’m so sorry, I wanted an owl." She doesn’t. Like, she chooses to be loyal to Crookshanks and sticks with it, and it pays off.

Casper: That’s making me think about, as a country, like, how do we welcome the stranger. And, sometimes the stranger disrupts the status quo, and that doesn’t mean that we should say goodbye to the stranger, it means that there’s something wrong with the status quo. I think that’s a fascinating idea.

Vanessa: It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, which I always misquote, but from Jane Eyre, which is, “Commitments are not for times in which they are difficult to keep, they are for times like these when our entire body rises up against them that we have to keep the commitments we made when we were sane,” and then she says, “Not when we were mad.” And so, it’s - you have to trust that you committed to a hospitality to Crookshanks when you were sane, and you made a reasonable decision, and just because you’re upset now that it’s disrupting your relationship with Ron, doesn’t mean it was a bad decision, it means that now you have to deal with the problem right in front of you.

Casper: That reminds me of our very first episode. Remember we read through the theme of commitment, and we talked about that little town in France, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, you know, that town who had said, "We will welcome the stranger," and then, when it came to the second World War and Jews were fleeing, they said, “We welcome the stranger, even it risks our own lives,” and they saved hundred of lives. And I’m always so inspired by that. And it starts with little moments like this, and it ends up about saving lives. I think that’s really important. Because again, thinking back to our bed and breakfast experience, sometimes you’d have guests who were like, not that pleasant, who would complain about small things that don’t really matter, or would, you know, arrive drunk, or you know, all sorts of issues, and it’s not always fun.

Vanessa: My mom once said, you know, we often had Israeli kids staying with us, and we had one guy stay with us who I really didn’t like, and I was like, why do we do this, right, like I was exhausted, I was constantly giving up my bed to these people. And she was like, "We don’t do it for them, we do it because it’s the right thing to do,"

Casper: Well, this is making me question whether money is changing hands between Tom and Harry, or Fudge. Maybe Tom is saying, "Listen, Harry needs a place to stay, I have beds, he can stay," There’s no evidence that he’s paying. I’m gonna choose to read that Tom is saying
exactly what your mum said, and said, "You know, the right thing to do is to give this boy a place to stay for the next week,"

Vanessa: So Casper, we were talking about whether or not Tom is taking money for hosting Harry in the Leaky Cauldron -

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: But, there's a place where we know that Harry is getting goods without giving any money, and that's at the ice cream shop, where Harry is just like, sitting on the stoop, and Florean Fortescue is not only giving him constant ice cream sundaes, but he's also, like, helping him write his history papers. I can't imagine any motivation other than hospitality. Like, why would Fortescue be giving away his ice cream if not for hospitable reasons, "This kid like, has nowhere else to be, I'll give him ice cream sundaes so he feels comfortable hanging out here,"

Casper: I had exactly the same reaction when I read it the first time, and then I started thinking about it, and I was like, he's sitting outside. This is kind of like, product placement in Diagon Alley. This is like, celebrity endorsement of ice creams. You think Florean is your friend? No. He's using Harry. He's filling this child up with sugar and fat and using him as like, free advertising to the unsuspecting children of Diagon Alley. This is like, the horrible new Pepsi add. This is bad. Bad Florean.

Vanessa: Casper, let's unpack this a little bit. Tom, who most likely is getting paid, you think is maybe not getting paid. But Florean, who we explicitly know is giving Harry free ice cream, you think has capitalistic intentions.

Casper: I do, because he's putting Harry on display. And I think the whole, like, feeding him with help for his homework is just a strategy to keep Harry like, just outside the front door advertising this delicious pistachio ice cream. And, I mean, it's like social media, right? Like Facebook or Twitter, where we think something's free, and if the product is free, we're the product. Our attention, our engagement with these websites, and as much as I love them, like, we've gotta realize, we're the data that they sell. So, I feel like it's the same with this ice cream, like, Florean has got Harry hooked.

Vanessa: I think that's right, I also just think it's possible that he like, knows that this kid has nothing to do, is stuck in Diagon Alley, like he's seen him go in and out of that Quidditch shop and stare at something that he can't afford for days, he knows he's an orphan, I just think that its possible that this is hospitality. And so, I guess my question is like, I think that your point is right, whenever you can't figure out who's paying for something, you're the one being sold, and I think that that's an important thing for us to uh, remember in terms of like the machine, but I - I do think it's genuinely possible that this guy just is like, "Here kid, you have a purpose to sit here. I actually like telling old history stories, I'm a history buff,"
Casper: And I think, you know, I'm probably pushing my point a little hard because I think you're right, like, another piece of feeling like you're being welcomed somewhere is feeling like you have a place. And this is really a place where Harry can sit and feel like he's not in the way, where he's comfortable and welcomed and just that familiarity with the space around you if you're in a new place somewhere, that- that's really important, and I think that that's what Florian is offering him. You know, it's a home base from where he can go on little excursions to get you know, his new robes because he's a third year. It's like little home base where he can always return to. I think that's true.

Vanessa: I have another sunny view of a shopkeeper that you can ruin for me, Caspar.

Casper: Hahaha, bring it on, who are you thinking of?

Vanessa: So the shopkeeper at Flourish and Blotts is, I think, very hospitable to Harry, 'cause Harry comes to buy his books, and he starts looking, he's in like the Divination part of the book shop, and he starts looking at a book called Death Omens, you know and Harry gets sort of drawn in by this picture of a big dog because he just saw this big dog and he's worried that maybe he saw a death omen. And the shopkeeper says to him, "You don't wanna buy that book. If you buy that book, you're gonna start looking for death omens everywhere. Some people start looking for them so much that they get scared to death," Now it's in the shopkeeper's interest for Harry to buy as many books as he can, but the shopkeeper is just, care-taking this kid and being like, "You're welcome in this space, you can browse, and you don't have to buy in order to be in this space," Okay, you ruin it. Go.

Casper: I'm not gonna ruin it, I'm gonna affirm you, because I think that the manager does another thing, which is all these third years are coming in to buy this monster book, and he's got a cage of these monster books, and they're literally eating each other, which just terrifies me, and the first thing he does when Harry says, "Oh I need books, for my third year," he's like ok, puts on his gloves, get ready to like, reach in, and probably get bitten, he's been bitten five times that morning already, and Harry says, "No, no, no, no, no, I've already got that one," and then, the manager says, "Have you," A look of enormous relief spread over the manager's face. 'Thank heavens for that. I've been bitten five times already this morning,'" And that's information he doesn't share until Harry tells him he doesn't need it. Right? He could have said, "Ugh, another third year at Hogwarts. Ugh, my life is horrible." But he's like, "Let me just keep that to myself, I don't need to ruin your day with that." So I feel like there's some maturity and just wisdom being exhibited here by the Flourish and Blotts team that you can have a difficult time, but you don't have to project it onto everyone else all of the time. No doubt you need someone to talk about it, I'm sure they've got great therapists.

Vanessa: Or, I'm in the staff room is just full of like, whining hipsters.

Casper: That staff room is full of those invisible books that they can't find.
Vanessa: (Laughs) That breaks my heart. And the fact that he says, “We still can’t find them,” (laughs) like he thinks they were real. That’s heartbreaking

Casper: I thought they were real. (laughs)

Vanessa: (laughs) it’s a scam!

Casper: The wizarding world is so cruel.

Vanessa: (laughs) Somebody’s scammed them!

Casper: (laughs)

(Sacred Practice intro music)

Casper: Vanessa, we are entering an exciting moment, ’cause we’re gonna do PaRDeS together for the first time without Rabbi Scott, so are you ready for this?

Vanessa: Eeek! I’m not nervous at all.

Casper: So just to remind us all, PaRDeS is an approach to Biblical exegesis, which basically means a way of reading and engaging and gleaning meaning from a text that comes from rabbinic Judaism. So, similar to Lectio Divina, it’s really a kind of structured way that we can engage with a snippet of text. And there are four stages. The first one is P’shat, which is really the surface level, the literal meaning, perhaps. The second is Remez, so there we’re kind of looking for hints or hidden or symbolic meaning of the text. The third is D’rash, which is to seek into the deeper meanings, so maybe thinking about the kind of non-contextual or the moral or the philosophical explanations. And the fourth one I’m still a little nervous about, because we have to look for the Sud. And the Sud is the secret or the mystery. And so it’s something that really doesn’t even come from the text, necessarily. It’s something that is esoteric, it’s mystical, and it’s given to you as a reader. It doesn’t fly off from the page, and so we’re gonna have to really take a little moment to be quiet and find out what the Sud is. So the snippet I wanted to work with is towards the end of this chapter, when in answer to Fred’s question of how’s everyone getting to King’s Cross, Mr. Weasley says, “The Ministry’s providing a couple of cars.” Pauses. The ministry’s providing a couple of cars. So Vanessa, can you tell us about the P’shat of this?

Vanessa: Yeah. The P’shat is that there’s a lot of kids and a lot of luggage to get from the Leaky Cauldron to King’s Cross station, and so there’s sort of a logistical nightmare afoot, and the Ministry of Magic has given Mr. Weasley cars to transport all of the kids, which sets off a few
alarm bells, because Mr. Weasley is low level at the Ministry, so it’s curious why the Ministry would be doing this. This seems like a nice perk for sort of middle management.

Casper: And the other thing that strikes me is, we know at this point that this is really a safety measure. So we’ve seen Harry being put up in the Leaky Cauldron, this is like another protective way to get him to King’s Cross without the potential attack of Sirius. So it - it’s already suggesting some danger, or as you say, there’s a mysterious element to it. So, that’s the P’shat. It-it’s pretty simple, right? The literal meaning. So let’s step into Remez. What happens here?

Vanessa: So, one of the things that Rabbi Perlo said is that a Jewish tradition to do in one of these stages is to think about all of the times a certain root of a word or certain word comes up throughout the entire series, or throughout the entire book, and so I thought that that might be interesting to do here with the word car.

Casper: Ooooh

Vanessa: So the car moments that come to mind are all from book two, and it’s that old Ford Anglia comes to save Harry, then Harry and Ron use it in that very weird way that really annoys me, but then it comes back from the forest and saves them. So, cars in book two have this like, saving, relational thing going for them.

Casper: And it’s the Weasley’s car, and here are the Weasleys with a kid that cars loaned the ministry this time, but again that protective element, that relational piece is there. Cars seem to embody in that sense, protection. And even love.

Vanessa: Right. Are there any other car moments that occur to you?

Casper: The other one I’m thinking of is the beginning of this book when we see the Dursleys kind of showing off. They go outside and talk loudly about their new car. And the image I have of Ministry cars are kind of shiny black new expensive cars and there’s that cliche that dictators the world over will buy expensive Range Rovers before feeding the poor in their country, just as government departments in our countries buy expensive cars. But there’s some sort of symbol of power, some sort of symbol of wealth, that’s associated with these cars, and I think in some way that institutional power is claiming Harry here, right? Like Fudge doesn’t punish Harry, he brings him in and his excuse for something that other people would have been punished for, it seems like Harry is beginning to be compromised by the power status in the magical world through this car symbol. And there’s something there for me.

Vanessa: Oh, I agree. When somebody sends a car for you, that is a status sign, you know? If I’m speaking somewhere and they’re like, “Oh, we’ll send a car,” it’s like, “Whoa, you really want me.”
Casper: And it’s not just one car, it’s a couple of cars.

Vanessa: Right

Casper: And what we know of the magical world is, if they wanted a car that could fit all these people, on care would be fine, right, there’s just a magical charm, and there’s space enough for everyone.

Vanessa: Don’t you think that the reason that they would do that is so that it didn’t look conspicuous when they pulled off at King’s Cross? That like, just, endless number of - like a clown car number of people and bags kept coming out of a car, I feel like they just don’t want to be conspicuous.

Casper: That’s very smart. I like that.

Vanessa: But yeah, I think that these cars are showing us that Harry’s like super not a normal kid. So much effort is being put into Harry, and so much effort is being put into making it look like nothing special is being done on Harry’s behalf.

Casper: Yeah, so I think that kind of hint that we’re finding in this Remez stage, is that these cars are saying something about Harry, and his relationship to the institutions of the wizarding world.

Vanessa: Okay, so now it’s time for D’rash. Do you mind reminding me?

Casper: Yeah, so for D’rash we really wanna think about - we’ve been kind of contextual, right? In the story of the Potter books, with some expeditions beyond - now we really wanna be thinking about the non-contextual ways in which we can examine this phase, “The Ministry’s providing a couple of cars.” So this is where we get to ask moral questions and philosophical questions and really start to think about the deeper inquiry that we could go to with that phrase.

Vanessa: So what this is making me wonder about is, what like, evil or big things am I complicit in? By taking something that seems free to me. You know, Harry is complicit in government activity and Dementors coming to Hogwarts, and all sorts of things, by really doing nothing, and the Weasley’s are sort of making an arrangement, by taking these free cars. So, when I turn on my water tap, what evils am I complicit in all the time, without even being capable of being aware of it. And the moral question to me is, what is my responsibility in that. I try to be a conscious consumer, and - but like, you can drive yourself crazy paying too much attention to those things. And then there’s some things that you just can’t get around. Harry has to get to King’s Cross. How are they supposed to get there. So that’s what this is making me wonder about.
Casper: That’s super interesting, Vanessa, and I think a great point.

So I just wanna take a second of quiet before the Sud arrives. I’m hoping it arrives, but I feel like we need a second. So I think I’m gonna read it now more time. "The Ministry’s providing a couple of cars." What’s the secret that you’re hearing here, Vanessa?

Vanessa: So, something that just occurred to me is that the time that you like, send cars for someone, tends to be for funerals. You get a procession of cars. Even for a wedding, there’s usually like, one limo for the bride and groom, but like the only time a procession of cars gets sent that I'm aware of, is for a funeral. And, I wonder if on some level if this is the beginning of Harry’s march towards his own death. The first two books was about him becoming a wizard, and now Sirius is back, things are about to get set into motion in a real way to bring Voldemort back, and these two cars being sent are a sign to us that the funeral procession is starting.

Casper: Oh my god. Vanessa. The funeral procession isn’t for Harry. It’s for Fred. Fred is the one who asks, “How are we getting to King’s Cross tomorrow, dad,” and Mr. Weasley says, “The ministry’s providing two cars. It’s two cars for the twins. It’s this symbol of impending doom and like, this is foreshadowing. And the irony is, that in the whole of this scene, everyone’s making fun of Percy for being serious and solemn, and maybe he’s the only one who has an intuition of what this actually means. They just think he’s being pompous, and I don't know, maybe Percy is more insightful than we have previously thought.

Vanessa: It’s always the person who takes things seriously who’s gonna be right in the end. We live in a serious world, so.

Casper: Oh, this is just heartbreaking. And it matches what we talked about with these ministry cars being black, as well, right? There’s that - there’s that physicality that color of mourning and the color of seriousness and the color of power in both of these cars. The Sud makes me sad.

Casper: This voicemail comes from Abigail Smith.

Beep

Abigail: Hi Vanessa and Casper, my name is Abigail, and I’m calling from Florida. First off, I love the show and everything that you’re doing. I took a Harry Potter and religion class when I was at FSU, and listening to your podcast to get one step further and always be so positive makes my morning commute one of the best parts of my day. I was re-listening to book two in preparation for season three, and I was struck with a thought from chapter three, The Burrow through the lens of curiosity. When I was younger, I was a very curious person, and my mom, who, by the way, I love, used to tell me to stop being nosy. And I would reply, "I'm not being nosy, I'm being curious." Because even as a kid, I knew that one was good, and one was bad, and I wanted to keep asking my questions. So I guess my question for you guys would be, when do we stop
being curious and start being nosy. Is there a line that we cross when the information we are looking for isn’t to help anything, but just because we wanna know. Even in book one, Mrs. Weasley tells the boys not to ask Harry about this scar, because it’s rude, and it’s gonna dredge up bad memories for him. But then we see Mr. Weasley in book two, asking Harry a bunch of questions about what’s it like growing up with Muggles, and what’s the purpose of a rubber duck. So, my question for you is when does curiosity and nosiness meet?

Vanessa: Abigail, I think that’s a great question, and one that I think that everybody struggles with. There’s a very Jewish answer to that, which is, there’s a theory called lashon hara, in Judaism, which technically means the evil tongue, but there’s a lot of theology around gossiping. And, the answer from the Jewish perspective around lashon hara is that something goes to curiosity to gossip when it’s solely for the purpose of entertainment or when the sole purpose you have even if the information is useful, the only reason you are asking for the information is for entertainment value. And so it’s really about intentions and then how you plan on using the information. So if you’re genuinely curious about something, the way that Mr. Weasley is curious about the purpose of a rubber duck, he really wants to know, and I think it’ll impact his work and his general knowledge and he’s not being entertained at the expense at anybody else. But at the point in the book in which Mrs. Weasley tells the boys not to ask Harry about his fame, they would simply be doing that for their own amusement. That would in no way be for any sort of greater purpose. So I think that Mrs. Weasley is right. I think that these things can become really gray, and if something can be the right question to ask even if you’re sort of doing it for entertainment purposes, and certainly you can be interested and, quote/unquote, "entertained" by information that you’re extracting for other reasons, but I think that that is a good rule of thumb. It’s one that I’ve tried to use.

Casper, we now get to bless a character each from this weeks” chapter. Who would you like to bless?

Casper: I want to bless the talking mirror. Because this is comedy gold. The mirror is kind of a little sassy, but like also very sweet. So for example, at very end of the chapter, Harry is freaking out because Sirius Black is on the hunt to murder him, and he says to himself, “I’m not going to be murdered, Harry said out loud,” and then the mirror says, “‘That’s the spirit, dear,’” And I just feel like this mirror is like a loving grandmotherly or grandfatherly figure, who’s just chilling out on that wall and sending love to whoever walks by. So like if you’re just sitting at your desk and people are running around or if you’re at home doing the dishes, and people are getting crazy, you just say, “That’s the spirit dear,” and carry right on. I love this mirror.

Vanessa: (Laughs) I do too, she’s like, “Your hair is great. Leave it. You’re never gonna make it better.”

Casper: (Laughs)

Vanessa: She’s great.
Casper: How about you Vanessa? Who receives your blessing this week.

Vanessa: Well, not surprisingly, my blessing this week is going to be for Molly Weasley. Molly is the defender of Harry’s right to have a childhood in this scene. Arthur and Molly are fighting in this scene. Arthur wants to tell Harry to be on the lookout for Sirius and Molly thinks there’s no need to tell him. The adults know, Dumbledore knows, the Dementors are going to be there, why does Harry need to know? And I, obviously think that both Arthur and Molly are well intended, but I think Molly is right. There are just certain things that you just don’t need to tell, especially children. There’s nothing Harry can productively do about this, except be worried. And I just think that Molly has her eye on the right thing, which is Harry’s overall health and wellbeing. And so, I want to offer a blessing to anybody who is willing to hold back information in order to protect someone else, and has really done the hard work of thinking through whether or not that is the right thing to do, and then makes the decision to keep that for themselves. That’s a burden that Molly is willing to take on, and I think that deserves a blessing.

(Outro Music Begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. We’d love to see you at one of our live shows on the West Coast this summer, tickets are on sale now at harrypottersacredtext.com. Next week, we’ll be reading chapter five, “The Dementor” through the theme of foresight. This episode is produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and Vanessa Zoltan. And we want to say a big thank you and goodbye to Jen Stark, who has been our Ravenclaw head-of-house for the last eight months and our social media coordinator extraordinaire. She introduced wizarding wednesdays, and we are so grateful to have had her on the team.

Vanessa: Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. We are part of the Panoply Network. You can find ours and other great shows on panoply.fm. This week we have a lot of thanks. For donating to our crowdfunder, Maralyn Poukila. For helping us do our amazing transcripts, Alicia Vermeer, Oscar Cadeau, Rebecca Dehovitz, Brittani Howell, Laura Espinoza, Meredith Cooney, Lexi Giordullo, Tara Deonauth, Bonnie Chi, and Dave Jones. This week’s voicemail was from Abigail Smith a big thanks as always to Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, and Stephanie Paulsel.

Casper: We’ll see you next week.

Vanessa: Bye, guys

Vanessa: But, there’s a place where we know that Harry is getting goods without giving any money, and that’s at the ice cream shop with Flo-er-a (mumbles) Florey and Flortescue - ?Floorean Flortescues (laughs) is that not right?

Casper: Fortescue’s. Fortescue’s

Vanessa: (laughs) I can’t say it
Final Music: Panoply