Harry Potter and the Sacred Text: 4.32 – *Flesh, Blood, and Bone*: Waste

Casper: **Chapter 32: Flesh, Blood, and Bone.**

“Harry felt his feet slam into the ground. His injured leg gave way and he fell forwards. His hand let go of the TriWizard cup at last. He raised his head. “Where are we?” he said. Cedric shook his head.”

Casper: I’m Casper Ter Kuile

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan

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

Vanessa: So Casper, my Grandmother Ruth, she had a very hard childhood and teenagehood and early twenty’s. She went straight from the concentration camps to she got married in January of 1946. (She) had 3 kids and 5 pregnancies in 4 years. And then, they moved from Brussels to Paris. From Paris to Tel Aviv, back to Paris to the United States and then she got a job at a factory. I mean, it was just like this crazy, crazy life. And then, in 1956 she and my Grandfather and their 3 children including my Mom lived in Glendale, CA. And my Grandfather got promoted from dishwasher to waiter at a very fancy restaurant. The kind of restaurant where you like coddle an egg for the fresh Caesar salad dressing by the side of the table. And this meant that he would make enough money that Mumma could quit her job at a factory and you know focus on raising the children. And, very shortly after she was able to quit her job she got terrible, debilitating vertigo. And she ended up having to spend 11 months in bed. And, I often think about that year in bed. As someone with depression who sometimes spends more time in bed than I would like to. And I have justified that year for her as just her body processing everything that it had been through in the past 30 years. Her body was able to stop, and so, it stopped. And was like “Stay down. Heal. You have a lot to go through.” And me, with somebody who has depression, I spend a lot of time in bed. And, because I don’t have the traumas and sort of “good reasons” that Mumma had, I think of those days as wasted time. That’s time where I watched Grey’s Anatomy reruns and sleep. When I could be reading the great works and doing all of the things that I want to do in the world. And I’m in the middle of trying to figure out how I can rewrite the story for myself about those days in bed without overindulging so I spend more time in bed. But, it was just making me think about what we consider to be a waste. And, when it is productive to call something a waste and when it is unproductive and unhelpful to do that. But I think it is very important for us to see this death of Cedric as a waste of a good life. And for us to meditate on that so that we can focus our energies on making sure that we waste as few wonderful lives as we can. But I also think that I need to find a way to not see those days in bed as a waste. So I’m interested in this idea of waste and when it is important for us to name something as that, and when it is important for us to resist naming something that.

Casper: Well, Vanessa I am so astonished by Mumma’s story and just to think about that amount of time in bed. Especially with 3 young children and the experiences she’d had. And, yeah, just this bigger question of waste and what do we categorize as waste. Even just thinking about that definition of: “Dirt is matter out of place.” Like, what is waste? Is it just time that we have spent differently than we planned? I’m really interested in digging into this together. I think that’ll be juicy. Before we do that, let’s not waste another second before we do the 30 Second Recap.

Vanessa: Segway King!
Casper: And I believe it’s my turn to go first. Will you time me?

Vanessa: Yes, of course.

Casper: Thank you. And listeners, for those of you reading along. And, I have to say, I am in love with each and every one of you who’s reading along with us as we go. It is so cool. You will know that this was a very short chapter just six or seven pages. And so, you can expect a richness of details in our 30 second recaps which are unparalleled in the rest of the series.

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go!

Casper: So, Harry and Cedric get magically pulled to this other place. They’re at a graveyard—Very frightening. And, they suddenly a hear rustling. And then, like, something carrying a little bundle of something in his arms. And then, a little high voice that says: “Kill the spare!” And then: “Avada Kedavra!” And (explosion sound) –end of Cedric. And then Harry’s being tied to the tombstone of Tom Riddle. And then, um “Blood of the Father—Bone of the Father, Blood of the Enemy” and then into the diamond pool goes Voldemort and then he comes out reembodied stronger than ever. (*buzzer sounds*)

Casper: Alright Vanessa, it’s your turn. 30 seconds to recap Chapter 32. Here we go. 3, 2, 1… Go!

Vanessa: Cedric and Harry know that something’s amiss, they’re like: “Wands out? Yes.” And they’re like clearly scared. And, Harry is being like dragged by something that is missing a finger and he’s like “Oh, obviously that’s Wormtail.” And Wormtails like, really ancious about the fact that he has to cut off his own arm and he’s like “Uh I don’t want to.” But he does it anyway. And um, and there’s like the biggest cauldron that Harry has ever seen which makes me wonder about whether or not Percy would try to help regulate it. And, um, Voldemort gets-ya know-back up. (*buzzer sounds*)

Vanessa: By: “Get back up again” I mean: “Evil, reemerges in the world.”

Casper: *Laughs*

Casper: Vanessa, here we are at a chapter we’ve been referencing for the past two years. Because, this chapter contains the line: “Kill the spare.” And, what’s more chilling than a command to execute that is so… It’s not even heartless it’s just… perfunctory. And, we’re looking at this chapter through the theme of waste. And, waste is so much about what do we value and what do we not value. Of what is worthy and what is worthless. And the fact that Cedric’s life, a character that we have gotten to know as an honorable, gentle, kind young man full of potential. Is, dismissed and seen as extraneous and so disposable reveals just the intense, terrifying nature of Voldemort. And so I-I wanna roam around that moment. Those three words for a good little while. How do you reflect on that through this theme of waste?

Vanessa: Well it’s not a waste for Voldemort. To your point about waste is about what we value and what we don’t, from Harry’s point of view this is a waste of a life. And from Voldemort’s point of view it’s just waste. Right? This is just trash to be dealt with. And what it reminds me of, or, you know, whenever there’s a tragedy abroad what often gets communicated here is: “Thirty people died and there was one American.” And all of the sort of news coverage here is about the one American. And, that is us saying as a culture like “And the stories of the lives of the other twenty-nine people don’t matter. What makes somebody matter to us is their nationality, and that’s it.” And everybody else is just a waste to us. I mean,
It's impossible to like completely care about the whole world and so I understand why we do that. But, when you see it so starkly in the text like that you see the truth of how brutal—and to your word, chilling it is. And even the language that he uses to give that instruction, the word “spare.” He doesn’t say, “Kill that boy,” it's not even a human being that Voldemort is engaging with. Like it's a spare part, it's something I don’t need. It's not that we don't know that these decisions get made all the time like, “That cut in federal funding doesn’t matter because it's not for people like us.” You know? Whatever it is we only see the results of those decisions. But here, we see the exact moment where someone verbalizes that decision. I don’t even know what to do with it its that terrifying.

Vanessa: I mean, it reminds me of the Hannah Arendt theory of the Banality of Evil. That, you know, hate to some extent isn’t the same as evil. Evil is seeing something as waste when it’s not waste. And that is what real evil is. It’s just not caring about a whole thing. I often think about that. There was a moment when I had locked myself out of my office in New York and had left my wallet inside. And, I lived six miles away from my office and it was like too late that I like felt safe to start walking home and so, I just needed two dollars to get on the subway to pay for a one way ticket and then I had money at home that I would, you know, be able to get back into the office the next day. And, I was like dressed nicely for work, and it was so easy for me to get those two dollars. The next person I saw, I said: “I’m so sorry, I locked my wallet in the office and I need to get home. Do you have two dollars I can borrow?” And how different that exchange would have been if I had looked different, if I was dressed differently. There are people who you’re like: “Oh, I would do that. I have left my wallet inside of places before and needed two bucks.” And there are other people who you see yourself as different from. They're sort of “spares” and you wouldn't have that same interaction. And to me, it’s about whether or not we could see that happening to us. And we lie to ourselves. If somebody gets cancer, we immediately wanna be like: “Well, were they a smoker? Did they drink a lot?” We want to see that they had it in some extent in their own control so that we can say that will never happen to us. And with Cedric, it’s just so clear that it could happen to us. All Cedric did was show up.

Casper: That’s so interesting Vanessa. Yes, we were talking on the one hand structural oppression, a reason why we categorize people whether its by race or gender or whatever it is, get “othered” get much more vulnerable. And then, on the other hand, there are situations where it’s a randomness that makes it terrifying. When you think about, the shooting in Las Vegas last year for example, people walking to and fro on a street at a concert. There’s a randomness in the suffering that happens in the world which therefore makes it uncontrollable which for some people makes it all the more frightening then. Particularly when you’re in a dominant class. Or, if you have multiple privileges in your identity. Cedric has all of them, right? He’s a student who does well, he’s popular, he’s a man—he’s a white man. He’s champion in this competition and here that means nothing. It means absolutely nothing. And the thing that I’m really compelled by is that we are-like you said with cancer diagnosis for example, we’re able to tell ourselves stories that make us feel safe. When in reality we live in a world where we should be doing everything we can to give everyone the levels of safety that Cedric has. And, at the same time, know that even that still leaves us vulnerable.

Vanessa: Yeah, I think that is why the death of Cedric which is, as we’ve talked about, it’s not the first death in the series.

Casper: Absolutely and Bertha is still unfound.

Vanessa: Yeah, Bertha’s still missing. Frank has died. We have seen horrendous things and so many other people are going to die. But, it’s this feeling of: “If it could happen to him, it could happen to any of us”.

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And there is no story we can tell ourselves about “Well, if he had only done this thing differently…” It’s just a total random act. Whereas like Bertha went missing in Albania and Frank went into the house, we can tell ourselves these things we would have done differently. But Cedric, there’s like nothing he could have done differently. He made the right choice at every turn and this awful thing still happened to him. I don’t know, is it helpful to contemplate that?

Casper: I don’t know… What I am compelled by, and I have to say this is my favorite chapter and my favorite book of the whole series. Which sounds very strange. What I love so much about it is this shadow of evil this kind of omnipotent presence of discomfort and terror is no longer hidden. It is in full display. We know what it looks like, we know who it is, we know who’s responsible. And there is something, ironically, comfortable about knowing where evil is. We don’t get that luxury most of the time in our lives. We don’t get that luxury of pointing to one thing or one person from whom all terror emanates. And so, I do think it’s important to contemplate this question, even if it make us uncomfortable and frightened.

Vanessa: Because it’ll help us hone in on where the evil is. If we look in the direction of who is treating the most people as waste-

Casper: Mmmm

Vanessa: It can point us to where that root of evil is.

Casper: And not just in others but also in ourselves. I think that’s what I appreciate is that this chapter is unflinching in its insistence that we must interrogate where Voldemort is rising in our own hearts. Like, there is something certainly in me, and I hope not just me, but like it is easier to walk through the world putting people in categories of like: “Not worth my time, worth my time, not worth my time, worth my time.” And that’s what Voldemort is doing here he’s like: “Not worth my time, worth my time.”

Vanessa: Casper, where else do you see this theme of waste in this chapter?

Casper: Vanessa, there’s three compelling moments in the text when Wormtail is kind pf preparing the ingredients for Voldemort’s return. Where he says: “Bone of the father, willingly given, you will renew your son. Flesh of the servant, willingly given, you will revive your master. Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken, you will resurrect your foe.” And I saw, reading this chapter through the theme of waste, a pattern that I’d never noticed before. Which is, that he’s essentially saying: “Renew, revive, resurrect” as a sort of new version of: “Reduce reuse recycle.” Which I just thought was really really funny. But, does that strike you in any way? That he is introducing these kind of ritual words: “Renew, revive, resurrect?”

Vanessa: I mean, he’s definitely like using all parts. I’m a vegetarian and I’m like a pretty strict vegetarian except I buy my dog meaty bones and I justify that they are parts of the animals that wouldn’t otherwise be used. And he is using the bone of his father and that would otherwise not be used.

Casper: I mean, what is interesting is how we think about the category of waste and how its created. We have this idea of the economy as this linear thing and there’s this competing idea which is growing now, the idea of the renewable economy. Or, the holistic economy were nothing is ever waste. The whole point is to see every resource that it has, another way in which it could be useful. And that’s exactly right, thinking about the bone of an animal has this secondary purpose. But, where Voldemort doesn’t live by the rules of renewable economy is, he creates waste. He doesn’t find a purpose for Cedric. And of course, we’re stretching a little bit in terms of the conversation here. But, I think it is interesting to think about that
category of what paradigm we live in of when there is waste and when there isn’t waste. Because if we can truly live in a world where everything is interconnected then there never can be waste. It just doesn’t even make sense as an idea.

Vanessa: And I think another way to think about it is in terms of what we ask from one another. If you are asking a friend to support you in a way that genuinely helps you, then, you’re asking for energy that’s sort of renewed. Like, they are giving energy but it helps you get through a difficult time. But then, you know, there’s like using your friends when you don’t actually need something from them. It’s like asking Wormtail to chop his own hand off. There are things that you can ask from the people around you that are completely unfair and wasteful to ask of them.

Casper: Absolutely, and that is give take. That’s how energy works that it is in motion. And we never see that kind of reciprocity between Voldemort and anyone else who is in his service for example. Like, Voldemort would never chop off his own hand to help Peter Pettigrew in some way. I mean, he wouldn’t even spend a Sunday afternoon with him if it wasn’t somehow in his purpose. Voldemort is a symbol of the extractive nature of how our economy works. When, what we’ve seen with Cedric and Harry is much more reciprocal relationship of equality. And of trying to create a new reality by changing the rules of the established system. They’ve refused to let one person be the winner in the TriWizard Tournament and both of them have taken the victory. And now they’re kind of coming face to face with the old reality where, you know, there’s only one person who’s worthy and the other one is just excess. And just left to rot.

*Piano music interlude plays*

Casper: Vanessa, we’re continuing with our sacred practice of Havruta. Where one of us asks a question and the other returns with another question. We try and find the truth in the middle of the conversation between our two respective arguments. And I want to draw attention to the physical body of Voldemort. The text tells us: “The thing seemed almost helpless. It raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail’s neck. And Wormtail lifted it.” It has this kind of freakishly, child-like quality which is so unsettling. But, mostly I’m interested in Voldemort’s face. The fact that, as he has created the horcruxes and has killed so many people, his physical body is deformed and he becomes more and more snake like. His nostrils are flared, his eyes are red... And I’ve always been challenged by this idea that somehow his physical body is shaped by his evil deeds. And it seems different from, someone like Mad-Eye Moody where there’s battle scars. This is more than that, and so I wondered why does he look less and less human and more and more sort of like this snake, baby demon? And, my best attempt to try to answer that is that... somehow his humanity is lost and therefore he looks less and less like a human. But, why would then look more like a snake? I’m-I’m just really confused by it.

Vanessa: You know how like, old married couples start looking like each other?

Casper: Ohh...

Vanessa: I mean he and Nagini spend a lot of time together.

Casper: *Laughs*

Vanessa: To some extent it makes sense, right? If a couple’s been married for 60 years they probably like eat the same and like have similar exercise habits and have traveled the same and...
Casper: And go to the same store to buy their anaracts.

Vanessa: *Laughs* And so like, if you live lives in parallel you sort of, your bodies have the same stimuli. But what’s problematic about your question. What I’m wrestling with is the fact that the implication of Voldemort being so ugly and looking like an embodiment of evil, is that we think that we can see the true character of people based on how they like.

Casper: Right!

Vanessa: And we know that that’s not true.

Casper: And its such a 19th century Victorian idea of what an evil person would look like.

Vanessa: Right, they would have a certain sized head.

Casper: Exactly, exactly its like a eugenics laden idea of how to understand good and evil.

Vanessa: I mean, snakes are an interesting thing in the text. A snake is sort of the first time we see Harry have a connection in Book 1, Chapter 2.

Casper: In the zoo.

Vanessa: In the zoo its with the snake. And so, with the text certainly like, snakes are not just evil. Harry is a Parstlemouth and Harry’s not evil and as we heard in the previous chapter there’s a prejudice against Parstelmouths that they must be evil when we know that’s absolutely untrue. And so, I think that it’s easy to say that because Voldemort looks snake like that has something to do with his evil and I guess I just want to reject that idea. I want to separate the two. He looks like a snake, and he’s evil. But, Denis Creevy if he looked like a snake he’d still be Denis Creevy. We know that people do evil things and are still handsome in a conventional sense and we know that people have to rip their bodies apart because they get breast cancer. You can have scars from head to toe for things that have nothing to do with your inner character.

Casper: But it’s more complicated than that because its about what he’s done that has transfigured his body. At least, we don’t hear anywhere in the text that as a young man, the man who becomes Voldemort looked evil or frightening or snake-like. It’s because he’s killed rampantly and it’s because he’s intentionally split his soul that his body has changed.

Vanessa: I just have such a strong resistance to it because we know it doesn’t bear out in the real world outside of Harry Potter. I mean, I do that its really interesting, the different ways that our life and our choices and the world around us change our bodies. Right, we know that giving birth changes your body in a major way. There are stories about people’s hair going white overnight out of stress. And, I like the idea that your body is in conversation with your life.

Casper: Mmm...

Vanessa: But, the end results can be for any number of reasons. And so, the symbol is true and we have to interrogate the “why?” So, somebody might be missing a hand because they cut it off to help facilitate
evil regrowing in the world and someone else might have their hand cut off because they were trying to save a life. And so all of thislike physical representation of life should be an invitation for curiosity rather than an invitation for judgement.

Casper: There’s one other moment in the text I want to draw our attention to as we think about this question of bodies and what it means. Cedric is killed and his body is lying not far away from Harry, and we are told that his eyes are blank and expressionless like windows in a deserted house. And I, I actually think in some way that description would work just as well for Voldemort. Because, as his soul has been broken down and broken down at this point, there is nothing left of his humanity. Like, that sense of what brings people to life, that animating force has been so corrupted. Like it’s a deserted house, like there’s no one to find even if you like went in with a lamp of kindness I think at this point when he is resurrected into his new body there’s nothing left of who he was. Or, who he could’ve been.

Vanessa: And I think that that’s true in other physical changes too, right? Like, when you come out of any surgery its not just that there have been physical changes to your body but you’ve gone through like a psychic, profound change.

Casper: This week’s voicemail is from Allison Bolt.

*Voicemail tone*

Allison: Hey Casper, Vanessa, Arianna I just listened to your episode about the first task and wanted to share a couple thoughts. Casper, you mentioned that maybe if it weren’t Cedric, Harry might not have told another Hogwarts champion about the dragons. And, I wanted to weigh in and say I think Harry totally would have warned anybody about the dragons. And not just because he always plays the hero, but, I don’t think he’d want one of his classmates to die. Partly because he already understands about what death means. And, he’s already got a relationship with death that, is of course, is going to change in the end of this book. But, here he’s seen the dragons and he really feels like they could kill him. I might be thinking about this because I just reread Book 7 where Harry even saves Draco Malfoy and Malfoy’s someone where Harry thinks to himself, I think here and definitely in other parts of the books, like: “Oh, I wouldn’t wish this thing on anyone. Mhmm… well except maybe Malfoy.” But, at the end of the day, he doesn’t want Draco to die, and he even kind of feels bad for him.”

Vanessa: Allison, I wonder though, If Harry at this point practices on Cedric, practices his like goodness and generosity on Cedirc so that by the time we get to Book 7 he has sort of practiced this skill enough that he even extends it to Draco.

Casper: Mmm...

Vanessa: So, I think maybe Casper was right and you’re right.

Casper: The thing that it also makes me thinks of Vanessa is how Harry’s previous experiences with death shape his experience of this one. What does Cedric’s death mean for how he thinks the deaths of his parents and the deaths he’s going to encounter going forward. This is the first time he’s had a longstanding relationship with someone and I think the fact that he is not gonna be believed about the circumstances of this death are gonna make him much more internalized. Like, we’ve seen him reach out to professors in the last two books. First with Lupin and now with Moody, right? He is building relationships with authority figures and what’s gonna happen in Book 5 is I think he’s gonna separate
himself more. I think he’s gonna internalize it more. So I think this experience of death isolates him again just like it did in the very beginning of the series. There’s some sort of turning point here I think in what death means in his life.

Vanessa: I mean I think he also—because of his experience with death knows that death is permanent right? And that’s always a real part of someone dying for me is like: “Oh, I’m never going to see them again.” And there’s always this point in grieving for me where I have a moment where I’m like: “Okay, I’m like tired of that person being dead time for them to come back.” And then realizing again and again its like: “Nope, this is just forever now.” And I wonder if Harry has a very firm understanding of of that because of his experience with death where he is able to internalize that more quickly about Cedric. Although we hear in this chapter that like even before he can process that Cedric’s dead he’s dragged into this other moment...

Vanessa: So Capser it is now time for us to offer our blessings. And there are no women in this chapter and so I would like to offer a blessing for people who feel underrepresented in places which they want to be. There are no women in this chapter and I just want to say that. There are no women in this chapter. What about you, Casper? Who would you like to bless this week?

Casper: I’d like to bless Harry. He’s kind of a passenger at this point he has very little agency. He’s injured, he’s on the floor, he’s tied up, he’s having to experience incredible pain, he’s used as a living sacrifice as Wormtail collects his blood. And I think, what’s most painful for me to imagine is that Harry, like literally his own blood is used in Voldemort’s recreation and to feel like you are so essential to violence and that you are being used against your will to enact pain and suffering in the world. So for anyone who feels like they are being used in destruction and violence and they have no agency to counter it, this is a blessing for you.

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, or leave us a review on iTunes, and send us a voicemail. Next week we’ll be reading Chapter 33 “The Death Eaters” through the theme of necessity. It’s getting really dark guys. It’s pretty scary.

*Vanessa laughs*: There’s no way out.

Casper: This episode is produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and, Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. And we are part of the Panoply Network where you can find ours and other great shows on panoply.fm.

Vanessa: Thanks to Allison Bolt for this week’s voicemail, Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, Julia Argy, and Stephanie Paulsel. And we will see you in London!

Casper: *Imitates British accent* Got, Blimey Govenor!

Vanessa: Casper, I’m gonna dress like the Queen.

Casper: You don’t already? Why are you wearing that crown?

*Music fades*
Casper: I was listening to Semisonic's "Closing time" today and it kind of professed that every new beginning is some other beginnings end...

Vanessa: You can't quote Semisonic.

Casper: No?

Vanessa: No. They were lame in...

Casper: *Singing* I know who I want to take me home.

Vanessa: You don't have to go home but you can't stay here.

Casper: That's what Voldemort should have said to Cedric! Like, “I don't want to kill you, but you can't stay here.”

Vanessa: “You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here, Ced.”

Casper: And then Cedric could have been like: “I know who I want to take me home, Cho Chang!”

*Laughter fades*

Outro Music.