Casper: Chapter two, “A Peck of Owls”:

“What?” said Harry blankly. “He left,” said Mrs. Figg, wringing her hands, “left to see someone about a batch of cauldrons that fell off the back of a broom. I told him I’d flay him alive if he went, and now look! Dementors!”

(Casper reading fades out, intro music fades in)

Casper: I’m Casper ter Kuile—

Vanessa: And I’m Vanessa Zoltan—

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

(intro music finishes and fades)

Casper: Before we get going, a couple of quick announcements! We mentioned our live shows last week, but we also have amazing listener meet-up groups that are all across the country. In Arizona, Colorado, Texas, North Carolina, Washington state, California, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Louisiana, Illinois, Florida, and even in Scotland and Australia! So if you want to join an existing group where people talk about the podcast and maybe do some of the spiritual practices, or if you want to set up one where you live, go to harrypottersacredtext.com and click on the “Get Involved” link at the top of the page…and uh, there’s some great people who listen to the show. You might like to meet them!

Vanessa: And Casper, people should sign up for our newsletter to be aware of all of our live shows—but also, you have a newsletter!

Casper: I did start one this summer, and it’s kind of fun! I write about, kind of, the intersection of community, spirituality, and culture change. So if you’re interested in those kinds of questions, just go to my little website, which is caspertk.com, and you’ll find a place to sign up for the newsletter there. But enough of meet up groups and newsletters. Vanessa, it’s time for a story.

Vanessa: So as you all know, I used to be a high school English teacher. And I will say that I made a lot of rookie mistakes in my first year of teaching. For example: it took me a really long time to notice that my C period class did much better on the daily reading quizzes than my B period class. But once I figured it out, (laughing), I was like, “well that’s an easy fix! I’ll just write two separate quizzes.” I did not make a formal announcement to the C period class – that now the C period test would be different than the B period one – but the very first day that C period got a different quiz than the B period, I was grading and this young woman Claire – I was grading her quiz – and she clearly got 100% on the B period quiz, even though she was in the C
period class. For example, I asked the question in the B period class – for those of you who know Catcher in the Rye – I asked who Holden takes up to his hotel room, and the correct answer was a prostitute. And in the C period quiz I asked who he went on a date with, and that’s Sally—

(Casper laughs)

Vanessa: (laughing, too) —and she answered the prostitute instead of Sally... anyway, there are some, like, pretty funny answers. So, I pulled her in and, you know, I was just like, “look, you cheated, you messed up. You’re not only gonna get a zero on the quiz, but you’ll get a zero on this whole unit because we have a zero-tolerance policy for cheating.” And this young woman looks right at me and said, “I didn’t cheat!” And I immediately just felt complete frustration rise within me. I was like, “yes you did! There are 5 questions on this quiz, and you answered all the right answers...to another quiz!” —

(Casper chuckles in the background)

Vanessa: —that would be statistically fabulous if it was possibly true for that to happen, but it’s not. So we both know that you cheated. Please just admit it, so that we can at least relationally begin to repair some trust between the two of us. And I really, like I thought I made a compelling argument, and she was gonna be like, “you’re right.” And instead she looked at me and was like, “I didn’t cheat.” And started, like, brilliantly justifying her nonsense answers to me. And the longer she talked, the more I was just like, “oh my God!” I was like pulling out my hair, as I’m sitting there trying to quietly like wait her out for her to admit this to me. And she absolutely would not admit to it. There are, like, very few times in my life that I can remember being so frustrated by something, and looking back, I think that that frustration was misplaced. I think what I was doing wrong in that moment – the reason I got so frustrated – is because I was taking her actions personally. I was thinking to myself, like, “you obviously have no respect for me; you don’t respect for this class; you don’t think what I do matters!” Looking back, it wasn’t about me! She was a sixteen-year-old girl who had no interest in reading Catcher in the Rye and was embarrassed to be caught cheating. And I think we see that a lot in this chapter where Harry or Vernon is taking things personally that aren’t about them, and when you feel as though they are about you, they are so much more frustrating.

Casper: Vanessa, I love that image of you sitting there with the sixteen-year-old girl. I think it’s the definition of frustration when you know, and she knows, and she knows that you know and you know that she knows that you know, that’s when you’re like, “oh, come on! Like let’s just get these two things together!” I think that’s exactly when frustration happens is when you can see the logical solution, and like there’s some silly reason that’s getting in the way of that happening, so, yes. Let us turn to the 30-second recap!

Vanessa: Yep! On your marks...get set...go!

(recap clock starts ticking)
Casper: So in this chapter we meet one of my favorite characters, Mafalda Hopkirk, the Departmental Administrator at the Magical...Mystery... uh, it’s Government department. Uh, because Harry basically gets a ton of messages being like, “you used magic illegally; you’re expelled!” and all the owls are coming and you know that I love owls and Vernon doesn’t. So the first owl comes and Harry is like, “oh my God, I’m expelled! Well now I can do whatever I want; I’m just gonna leave!” and then he gets a message from Dumbledore and all the people being like, “don’t leave, whatever you do” and then a second thing comes being like “no you’re gonna have a trial!” and then Sirius writes and he’s upset—(timer buzzes) But mostly really it’s Mafalda. Her paperwork and her, just, little kind note at the end: “best regards, have a great day!”

Vanessa: You’re still talking?

Casper: I-I know, but, Mafalda’s worth it (laughs). Alright...go!

Vanessa: So, Mrs. Figg sends Dudley and Harry home. They’re explaining to Petunia and Vernon why Dudley is, like, so befuddled, and Dudley is like pretty traumatized by what’s just happened to him. And Harry starts getting these letters that he’s accep—expelled, and then from Arthur telling him what to do, and then told he’s not expelled, but that he’s gonna have a trial. And it turns out that Petunia and Vernon are ready to kick Harry out, but then Petunia gets a howler, saying, “you’ve made an agreement, and you can’t get out of it!” and it turns out that Petunia knows about Dementors. (timer buzzes)

Casper: That was, like, what a reveal—

Vanessa: Right?!

Casper: Yes! Vanessa, I want to start our conversation on frustration with Mrs. Figg—

Vanessa: And Mundungus Fletcher?

Casper: Yes! ‘Cause this is the ultimate, like, bad boyfriend situation—

Vanessa: Yep.

Casper: —where he lets you down, he breaks his promise, he chooses himself over the relationship, and all other priorities—

Vanessa: Yeah!

Casper: —it’s so frustrating!

Vanessa: It’s like they’ve signed a lease together—

Casper: (laughing) yes!
Vanessa: —or had a baby together, and he’s like, “I’ll change the diaper next time!” And never does—

Casper: —right!

Vanessa: So what Mundungus actually does, he apparates – or he disapparates – in the previous chapter, and him being gone is what allows the Dementors to come and attack Harry. He is supposed to be on watch all of the time. And Mrs. Figg is also on watch, but she is a Squib, so actually can’t do anything to help protect Harry. And so I just feel like the other structural piece to this, like, that I think might be gendered, is the fact that it seems as though Mundungus doesn’t understand what the stakes are. He doesn’t understand that Harry can literally be attacked – and I do think that people who are structurally in lower positions of power have a firmer understanding of the fact that actual bad things happen. Women have a keener understanding of that, because you walk down the street and you get street harassed and you’re scared! There have just been moments in your life, statistically, where you have more often have been afraid than if you’re a man, and I just feel like Mrs. Figg in this moment must be going out of her mind with like, “you idiot, you didn’t get it! You put a child’s life at stake because some cauldrons fell of the back of a truck or whatever.”

Casper: I want to add something to that, which, you know, Mundungus is clearly on some sort of rotational hourly time zone. Like, this is when you’re responsible for looking after Harry. But it looks like Mrs. Figg is, like, always on, like because she lives there. Like, this kind of invisible labor that women do—

Vanessa: I had a male friend once say to me, “oh, I’m babysitting my daughter tonight.” Talk about frustrated! I was like, “you’re babysitting your daughter?”—

Casper: (laughing) It’s called parenting.

Vanessa: —it’s called “being a Dad”! (laughs)

Casper: Yeah, I think that’s why Mrs. Figg comes out of this whole situation so well, you know, Harry says like, “well why didn’t you tell me?” and she has to say, “I had to make it not fun for you to be with me, otherwise the Dursleys would have never let you come over to my place.” You think about Mrs. Figg who’s already probably living a life somewhat isolated from the rest of wizarding world, in part because she’s a Squib and in part of where she lives, and she can’t even form this relationship in a way that she would want to, no doubt, to care for Harry and make him feel at home. I mean, she would have probably taken him in to live with her if that would have helped, but she has to keep this distance, so...

Vanessa: Which I think is also frustrating, right, when you have to put your responsibility over your sort of instincts.

Casper: Yes.
Vanessa: Like my dog super judges me every time I take her to the vet, and I wish I could explain to her, like, “this is for your own good.” And it’s incredibly frustrating it feels though, that I can’t explain to her that, like, I don’t like going to vet either! I think she thinks I have some weird going-the-the-vet fetish—

(Casper laughs)

Vanessa: —And she’s like, “I don’t know why you like it here so much. They torture me!” and I’m like, “I’m into it.”—

(Casper laughs breathlessly)

Vanessa: —when really, I wish I could just explain it to her.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: Yeah...

Casper: Let’s talk a little bit about Vernon, because I do feel for him in this chapter. I really do.

Vanessa: I do, too! His son comes home completely out of it, and clearly having been attacked in some way. This is like a parent’s worst nightmare!

Casper: (laughing) I love that you talked about Dudley, ’cause I was gonna talk about owls. (both laughing joyously) It’s probably a combination of the two.

Vanessa: Yeah, sorry, you go about owls and I’ll talk about the less important thing with his human son.

Casper: (laughing) Well, I think it’s, it’s one on top of the other. Dudley comes home first and Vernon’s world is-is shocked, right, is broken. Here’s his son who’s the boxing champion, who’s strong, and coming home completely traumatized and unable verbalize his experience—

Vanessa: And Vernon has made every decision in his life to protect his son, right—

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: —like, they live in this like ‘safe neighborhood’ where nothing bad can happen, and they live in these square houses, and he sends him to a school where he’s given a stick, to like, beat other people away. He is counting on the fact that his son is safe.

Casper: —Absolutely. And so the first thing is Dudley coming home, but then secondly his home, his castle, you know that square home you were just saying is literally invaded, right? His private space is inundated with these different missives from the owl land. And it’s really a
symbolic invasion of the magical realm entering the, kind of, normalcy of his home. And it’s not just one owl or two owls, it’s like five or six by the end of the chapter. And I think it’s helping me see two different types of frustration. You know, one is when you’re just dealing with, let’s say a bureaucracy, where your individual case is not being given the attention it needs. You know, I look at Mafalda Hopkirk’s paperwork as a good example, because there’s the blanket expulsion. Straight away—you’ve broken this rule, you’re out! And if Harry didn’t have a super powerful player like Dumbledore to advocate for him, he would have just been expelled. Like, no one is interested in the story behind the action. But then there’s another kind of frustration, which is really more...when you’re at the edge of your learning capacity. So I’m interested to see, can we find that second type of frustration – that learning frustration – in this chapter?

Vanessa: I think that we see it in the moment where it says, “and all of the sudden, for the very first time in his life, Harry fully appreciated that Aunt Petunia was his Mother’s sister.” And that is coming because they’re in this incredibly frustrating moment; they are outside of crisis time; they’re away from the Dementors; they’re back home. But they’re not back, like, in comfort zone. They’re not in their normal dynamic, they’re not, you know, eating around the table. They’re in this in-between place. And I think that is what it takes for Harry to understand, that Petunia and Lily were sisters. And that there is, like, a deep relationship there.

Casper: And it’s important that that moment comes after the owls that say, “you’re not expelled,” and after Sirius and Arthur write, right? Like Harry has some more information, there’s some more security, so he’s moved from crisis to discomfort again, and that’s when the openness happens to that kind of learning. I love that. I also think that this whole chapter could be read as actually dissolving some frustration. Because Harry’s had to live in these two very, very different worlds, and in this chapter we really see them merging together, and he’s talking about Voldemort at the kitchen table with Vernon and Petunia Dursley. You know, Dudley understands what it means to be attacked by a Dementor, so, in some ways there’s this interesting step towards integration, which I think we can see as the opposite of frustration in some way. Like he doesn’t have to pretend, one world to another in some way.

Vanessa: Is that the opposite of frustration or is it what comes out of frustration?

Casper: (thoughtfully) Mmm.

Vanessa: Like, we all know that, like, if you’re moving in with somebody, right, does the difficult process of where the stuff goes, and which routines to follow, right? It’s this beautiful thing but also it’s a very frustrating thing.

Casper: Maybe it’s on the other side of frustration—

Vanessa: Right.

Casper: —if it goes well.

Vanessa: Right. If the frustration goes well, then you can get to the point of integration.
Casper: Vanessa, we’ve talked a lot about Vernon and Petunia in this chapter, but a lot happens for Harry. Like, he gets a letter expelling him from Hogwarts, which, at this point, that is his most important home. That’s where his friends are; that’s where his mentors are; it’s where he feels safest. And he is ready to leave—like he’s starting to plan, he’s like okay I’ve got to grab my stuff and we’re leaving the Dursley’s.

Vanessa: Well he’s even told that they’re gonna take his wand—

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: —I mean if you think about the experience that he has in this, like, hour: he gets yelled at and abused by his Aunt and Uncle; then he goes and he tries to pick a fight with Dudley; he gets attacked by Dementors; then he finds out that Mrs. Figg — who he has known his entire life — is a spy in his neighborhood; he has to carry Dudley home; he realizes that Petunia actually knows what Dementors are; he’s yelling with his Aunt and Uncle; he gets expelled, told that he can’t be a wizard anymore, and then is slowly sort of allowed back, maybe, into the wizarding world. This is like…information overload!

Casper: (sympathetic) Plus he hits is head really hard.

Vanessa: Yeah. (laughing) He also gets punched by Dudley!

(Casper laughs)

Vanessa: Like, he has had a day! Which is another thing I think about frustration, right? ‘Cause sometimes I think our wherewithal just gets low. And I know, like for me, right, like I’m much more likely to be frustrated if I’m tired or hungry, or if I’m just emotionally exhausted. I know you love Mafalda, but like…when I have to send six emails in a row, ‘cause it’s like, “oh my God, I forgot to attach it!” or “oh I called it Tuesday the second and it’s actually Tuesday the first!” —

(Casper laughs)

Vanessa: —Right? Eventually I’m like, “I’m so sorry for all the emails.” and she’s just…keeps sending these letters, with totally different life-sentences attached to them!

Casper: Yeah I just had such empathy for Harry. And, as you said, things are changing so quickly. You know it’s all happening at a distance, right? The decisions are being made in a different room far, far away, and he’s stuck here at this kitchen table having to navigate all of the complexity, you know, of his family.

Vanessa: That’s the way we talk about frustration with small children, right, with like with toddlers. How frustrating it is not be able to communicate what it is that you want; how
frustrating it is to not being able to do what you want; to have all your decisions being made by adults.

Casper: Did you tell me about this thing that the best thing to do with a kid when you-you know have to leave and they’re having a good time is to affirm their experience, and say like, “Johnny, I know you’re sad. You’re having a good time and we have to leave; that’s really hard.”

Vanessa: No, I’m not the person who told you that!

Casper: Someone told me that, and I was like, “that is so true,” and I try and use it in all sorts of situations now where it’s like—

Vanessa: Not with children? (giggling)

Casper: (also laughing) —the child inside all of us.

Vanessa: (laughs) Sometimes I wonder how much you manipulate me….

(Casper laughs mischievously)

Vanessa: A lot, right?

Casper: Muah hahahaha…

Vanessa: (as Casper) Vanessa, I know how much you enjoy recording….

Casper: But it’s midnight and it’s time for us to go home…

Vanessa: (laughing) It’s time for us to wrap up.

Casper: Vanessa, the final thing I want to mention is that, you know, book five is known as Harry’s, like, ALL CAPSLOCK book. That he’s shouting all the time, and he’s angry and he’s frustrated. An-and in this chapter it’s really Vernon who is shouting, and it just made me think, like, “oh, this is interesting,” like when you look on the page, the person with the all capslock on is nearly always Vernon. And so just to make that connection of like, oh Harry has learnt some of this behavior. He’s been with the Dursleys for eleven years and then the previous few summers, so it just doesn’t come from nowhere. Like, he comes by it honestly.

Vanessa: Also he witnessed his friend die, whereas Vernon’s just yelling.

Casper: He had a busy day in the drilling office.

Vanessa: Yeah!

(Casper and Vanessa both laugh)
Vanessa: So he’s come by it honestly, in at least two ways.

(Theme music plays, episode transitions)

Casper: Vanessa, it’s time for our spiritual practice, and I love that one person on Facebook was like, “are you going to say that it’s your favorite practice?” And I will say...it’s growing on me.

(Vanessa laughs)

Casper: We’ve just done it once, and we’re gonna try it again. And I thought I’d mention the way we’re doing this is we’re swapping texts. And what we’re gonna try and do is look at what the other person has noted, or underlined, and for the reader, the first thing to do is try and make some meaning of it. Like, what connections is it making in our brain? What do we think the Marginelia is about for the person who wrote it down? And then we’ll engage in conversation. So, Vanessa, do you want to look at my text, and see what stands out to you from the various scribblings in the margins?

Vanessa: Yeah. The very first thing I noticed is that you circled the name Mundungus, and then you wrote in the margins, “why is he in the Order?” And we find out in a couple of chapters, right? Like, Dumbledore wants him in the Order is because he like, knows the right bad people. But the question for me is, why does Mundungus want to be in the Order? I mean I guess you can be a bad guy and still be anti-Voldemort.

Casper: Yeah, that was exactly what I was trying to get after. Like we know he is skills are useful, but Mundungus has chosen to do this, even if he breaks his word. There’s something that’s motivating him, like, is it self-interest? I don’t think so. I think there is a bigger mission there, it’s just not one that he’s very open about maybe.

Vanessa: The other thing that’s making me think about is the times when you don’t have to like everybody on your team. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter if you like them, we have the same responsibility to each of them. And I feel like Mundungus is an example of somebody who, like, you don’t like...but, what, like you still have to be grateful for the fact that he is on your team? He is such a bad team member!

Casper: Well this also speaks to the fact that, like, there’s few and far numbers in the Order right now. They’re really struggling to call up people who are willing to enter the fray again. You know a lot of people are still in denial—it’s just the word of a fourteen-year-old boy. And maybe because Mundungus is a bit more of a lone player, and doesn’t seem have a kind of a settled life, he’s more willing to...to be mobilized for Dumbledore. We’ll see a lot more conflict around him, especially Molly Weasley is gonna be really frustrated with Mundungus. So it’ll be interesting to see if we learn anything more about his own motivations and convictions. Why is he willing to at least put himself in some harm’s way for this mission?

Vanessa: Yeah, it’s also interesting, like, why people agree to do things that have no intention
of following through on. Like, he knows that when he says “yes” to guarding Harry, that he would let it fall away if any other opportunity came his way. It just like comes down to a sense of self-worth, right?—

Casper: Hmm.

Vanessa: —because he doesn’t think he’s providing enough of a service for it to matter.

Casper: Yeah, maybe he doesn’t know how important he is.

Vanessa: Right. ‘Cause, like, that’s when I feel most comfortable like making loose plans. Five people are going to a movie and I’m like, “yeah, I’ll go!” but then I’m like, “nobody cares if I’m going to the movie or not, and like, if turns out I have to do laundry that night…whatever”. But if it’s one-on-one plans, that’s a totally different thing.

Casper: I love that analogy. I think that’s exactly what’s going on. Okay, Vanessa, so I’m looking at your text, and in the scene where Dudley’s trying to explain what’s happened to Vernon, there’s a short phrase: “‘yes’, Dudley whispered, still trembling”. And you’ve underlined “whispered”, and kind of asked a questions mark, like why “whispered”? What’s the connection with whispering? It’s…it’s an interesting one because Dudley is such a forceful character, and is usually full-mouthed (laughing) and full-bodied, and here is, you know, hardly audible. Feels like his foundation is really shaken, and it’s such a contrast, again, to the all caps talk that Vernon has. I mean, literally within the next sentence Vernon shouts, “OUT! OUT! I SHOULD HAVE DONE IT YEARS AGO,” right? This is the final straw for Vernon and he’s like, “get out, Harry.”

I dunno, I think here we see a really important break in that father-son relationship, which we mentioned it in the last chapter on the podcast, and we’re gonna right see through to the end of book seven, that Dudley is changed here. Like, his sense of safety in the everyday world has been shifted. And, this is a bit of a grandiose comparison, but I do think of America post-9/11. Like that sense of “we are vulnerable as a country; that this story of supremacy is not really complete.” So the fact that he’s trembling, the fact that his voice is whispering, and the fact that he affirms Harry’s description of his own experience. You know, Harry supplies the phrase – to describe what it feels like to be attacked by a Dementor – “as if you’d never be happy again.” And when would Dudley say, like “yes, Harry is right”? Like that has never happened before. So I feel like there’s some really important shifts that you’ve picked up on there, which is cool. What else did you mean?

Vanessa: Well I just think that whispering is almost always a sign of intimacy. Right?

Casper: (intrigued) Hmm.

Vanessa: It’s like you whisper when you are, like, in a boring class, it’s often when something illicit is happening. Or you whisper just, like, ‘cause it’s late and you’re in bed cuddled with somebody and you sort of, like, whisper to them. But you don’t whisper to strangers, you don’t whisper to people who you don’t have some sort of intimacy with. I mean, he’s whispering to
Harry in front of Vernon and Petunia, and so like his alliance is shifting to Harry over them. It just seems so intimate to me. And, so based on our conversation about it last week, it like really struck me that Dudley whispered, in this moment, to Harry. That it was...he doesn’t care if his parents can hear him or not, he’s like only trying to bond with Harry. And there is potentially some shame involved, maybe?

Casper: For sure. It’s time for our voicemail, and this week we’re hearing from Rabbi Max Chaikan.

(voicemail beeps and begins)

Hi Vanessa, Casper, Ariana, and the entire team. This is Max Chaikan. I’m a Rabbi in Southern California, and I was a little late to your podcast, but I did just catch up in time for Season 5. My question for you is about authorship: I know that as a rule, you tend not to discuss authorial intent. And as a learner of sacred texts, especially Biblical texts or Ancient Jewish texts, I find that quite powerful. It’s something that guides me as well in my practice as a reformed Rabbi, that we are the ones that have to interpret and make meaning from our texts, if we are going help them become real and powerful ways to structure and think about our lives. But with your project, with Harry Potter, it does seem to me a little more reasonable, once in a while, to talk about J.K. Rowling and her authorial discretion and intention.

It came up most specifically in my mind in an earlier season when, I believe it was Vanessa, was discussing a particularly unflattering description of a character - maybe Dudley or Millicent Bulstrode, I can’t quite remember – but it was a very unflattering description of their body. And I, if I recall correctly, Vanessa attributed that narrator’s voice to Harry. And that was a specific moment where I thought to myself, “I am learning a lot from this reading that it’s Harry who is having this feeling or this negative description of this other character, but I’m wondering about Rowling’s intention and use of such a language to begin with.” So I’m wondering if you can talk more about your feelings about authorship, especially when it comes to narrator’s voice in these texts. And I wish you all the best in this project. Thanks! Bye, bye.

Vanessa: Hi, Max, what a great nerdy series of questions that I absolutely love. I do think it’s sometimes really exciting to wonder at authorial intent. I think the Harry Potter books are, in part, so exciting and interesting because they came of age right along with the Internet. So J.K. Rowling is one of the few authors, certainly of something so popular, who in the history of the world has been able to engage with her fans so explicitly. And I am very grateful that we made the decision, out of sort of, you know, an innocent point of view, to not engage with any of that, because then we would have to engage with some of the very disappointing things she has done and said over these past couple of years. And I am grateful for the opportunity to treat these texts as sacred, and not let her imperfections sully our experience with these books.
Casper: The other thing I’d wanna say is that we had John Green on the show last season, and he says this lovely thing that – as an author – he’s the author of the book until its publishing date, and then the book is no longer his. Then the story is the reader’s, because whatever the reader brings to the text is gonna shape the text, right? Like, writers will tell stories of people coming up to them saying, “oh my God I loved what you did with this character!” and the author’s like, “I didn’t do that with the character, that’s literally not on the page,” but as a reader we create these stories from the text, and I think we actually limit what the text can be when we make it about the author’s intent. And it’s so much more interesting to think about what it means to me, and what it means to you, and then to have a conversation about it—like it’s just much more creative. ‘Cause there’s only one right answer if we’re sticking to authorial intent.

Vanessa: Besides, J.K. Rowling has never like a single tweet that’s been tagged with her and us, so she’s obviously a monster.

Casper: (laughing) I invited her out to tea when I was in Edinburgh, she never responded.

Vanessa: She didn’t even say “no”? She just didn’t respond?

Casper: Or maybe her people just got back to my people and we couldn’t fit it in because of my busy schedule. (both laughing) Vanessa, it’s time for us to offer a blessing, and we both want to bless the same person this week.

Vanessa: Because there’s like a right and wrong answer—

(Casper laughs breathlessly)

Vanessa: —the right answer is that you want to bless Mrs. Figg and the wrong answer is that you want to bless anybody else!

Casper: So why don’t you give us your blessing...

Vanessa: So we talked about this a little bit but I want to bless her for not making it fun to hang out at her place. I just think this is like a beautiful, selfless move. Nobody wants to be the not-fun person to a child. Nobody wants to like, not be themselves in their own home. But Mrs. Figg knows that if Harry enjoyed himself at all, he wouldn’t be allowed to come over, and so she makes this, like, very tactical, responsible, grown-up decision. I just think that this is the essence of maturity—is knowing what the right thing to do is, and like, checking all of your desires in order to do what truly the right thing to do is. And I just want to bless Mrs. Figg for giving me a perfect example of what it means to truly be a mature adult. And whenever I’m wondering what the mature decision is, I am going to think about Mrs. Figg. Seriously, like, What Would Mrs. Figg Do? What about you, Casper?

Casper: I’m so impressed that she’s agreed to do a job that it’s actually impossible to do. You know, if Harry is attacked – as he is by the Dementors here – she can’t do anything. So not only
is she gonna be unable to protect him with any sort of spells, she’s basically signed up to witness a horrible tragedy, if it were to happen. Like, she’s the sort of canary-in-the-coal-mine, or the balloon up in the sky. I dunno, I feel like it’s a very sacrificial act, that she’s willing to live in a place where no one’s gonna really know her story; she’s not going to have any relationships of meaning around her, as you say not even with Harry. So, there’s something beautifully unselfish and it makes me want to know her story, as well. Just like Mundungus, like, why—why does he care? What is it about Mrs. Figg? What has she endured, or what does she know, who does she love, that makes this act worth it? And it just makes me wanna learn more about why people sign up to do things that I would think are impossible, because we’re all probably capable of more than we think.

(Ending theme music begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, or sign up to our newsletter at harrypotterscredtext.com. Please leave us a review on iTunes, we love to read them so much! And you can send us a short voicemail to harrypotterssacredtext@gmail.com.

Vanessa: Next week we’ll be reading Chapter 3: The Advance Guard, through the theme of Compassion. This week’s episode of *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* was produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl, and we are part of the Panoply network. You can find ours, and other great shows, on panoply.fm.

Casper: Thanks for this week’s voicemail to Rabbi Max Chaiken, to the fabulous Julia Argi, and the wonderful Amanda Maddigan, and of course to the incomparable Stephanie Paulsell. We’ll see you all next week.

Vanessa: You know so many adjectives.

(Casper laughs)

*(theme music fades out)*

Vanessa: And if you meet them and have a baby with them, tell us about it.

Casper: Yeah, we’re still waiting for the first *Harry Potter* baby. It’s been two years, everyone—come on!

Vanessa: Name it “Vanessa”.

Casper: (breathless laughter) Even as a middle name. Thomas Vanessa Kershplonki. (both laughing) That’s a great name.

Vanessa: The Kershplonki family is my favorite of our listeners, (both laughing) I love them.