

Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.20 – *The Dementors' Kiss: Justice*

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Vanessa: In the 9th grade, we had this big English project and we each presented on our project and this girl in my class — her presentation was the day before mine, and she called me the night before her presentation for help on her project. And I remember very clearly she called at like 11:00, and we were not allowed to talk on the phone after 9. And so she called and asked for my help, and I said, I'm really not allowed to talk very much, but this is what I'm gonna be presenting on, and I don't know if that helps to sort of like help you jog your memory, but this girl was clearly very behind, because this was a huge, weeks-long project, and she hadn't even started the night before. So the following morning, I go to class, and it's her day to present, and she presents on my project. I mean, start to finish, my project. So I'm of course livid, but my teacher holds me back after class and was like, "Vanessa, I just want you to know, I know that this is something that you have been working on, and I happen to know that this isn't something that this young lady has been working on, so I just want you to know tomorrow when you make your presentation, don't worry about it." I was like, "Okay, great, thank you so much." So I come in the following morning, I make my presentation. This young woman raises her hand and says, "Vanessa, this sounds a lot like my presentation."

Casper: (*gasps*)

Vanessa: Accuses me of cheating in front of the entire class and goes to the principal in order to tell on me. So we go to this, like, ethics committee meeting at my school, and Ms Wong, one of my favorite teachers ever, is like, very clear as to what happened. She tells the school principal, Mr Ballik, he believes me. I have like all of this evidence of just weeks and weeks of research, and there's just nothing at risk for me, but I remember sitting in this ethics committee meeting, and this woman looking at me while we're being questioned, and she says, "But Vanessa, you remember being on the phone with me the night before my presentation and me telling you what I was gonna present on. And I just, I couldn't contain myself. My fourteen-year-old self was like, "Hey, you know you're lying. You know that I know you're lying. How can you sit there and lie to me when you know that I know that you're lying?" And she just sort of sat there like completely stone-faced, and because there was no proof that she cheated, she got a C on the project, but I'm telling you, I wanted her to like fail and be punished for the rest of her life. And I tracked her throughout high school. She got into a good college. She is a lawyer now, in the irony of all ironies.

Casper: What!?

Vanessa: Yes. And I am sure that she's matured and like isn't a cheater cheater, pumpkin-eater anymore, and it's not like I want her to be suffering, but I remember sitting in that ethics committee room knowing that there was just no justice.

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Casper: ... I do think there's an interesting piece that we're learning about justice here, which is, you know, it wasn't that you had been unfairly treated by the school system, right? Both your

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teacher and your headmaster knew that you were innocent, but what you were looking for was something that made the culprit suffer. And I think that's really interesting because how do we find the line between justice and revenge? Or justice and our own nastiness because we've been hurt in some way? ...

Vanessa: Right, I'm not proud of the fact that I like wanted her to suffer.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: Right?

Casper: But it is something you felt.

Vanessa: But it's something that I really felt. And I especially, I just remember the incredulity of someone lying, knowing that I knew that she was lying.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: It blew my mind. But now...

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