

Transcript

Episode 1.12

Book 1, Chapter 12: The Mirror of Erised

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read podcast, wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults revisit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*, and JC, an educator and long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book One, Chapter 12: The Mirror of Erised.

Lorrie: Hey, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: It's time to get really deep. We are now on Chapter 12: The Mirror of Erised. Harry gets to have the best Christmas of his life. He gets a present: it's his paternal inheritance that's been restored to him. And under the invisibility cloak, he finds the Mirror of Erised. Are you ready to talk about this intense chapter?

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Where do you want to start?

JC: I think, in the very beginning, the description of the castle in wintertime as being very cold and very drafty. As I was reading, honestly, my first thought was, "Aren't there spells for that? Or is the castle just magic-proof in a way?" It's its own magic, and you can't control it, so I thought maybe there's something like that there.

Lorrie: I think it's just that big. You know how sometimes spells -- you can cast a spell, but you have to keep casting it; it wears off. Time and space matter in magic. Maybe it's just big.

JC: Maybe that would have been something that would fall to someone like Filch, who we know can't do it. Very interesting, though. Yeah. But if you're in a big castle, you're going to expect it to be drafty and cold and things like that. I think another thing that strikes me in the beginning of this is that -- before the action of this chapter gets going -- is going back to Draco. Draco is desperately looking for the button he can push to make Harry go off, and he can't find it.

Lorrie: Yes, I know.

JC: He's trying so hard, and Harry's like, "You going to have to do better than that. I grew up with the Dursleys."

Lorrie: Amateur.

JC: Exactly, but he knows how to push Ron's buttons. Because Ron has not grown up like Harry, Ron's buttons are still easy to push. That whole scene is very interesting, but Harry's like, "Yeah, whatever," and Ron's like, "I'm going to kill him!" Also very interesting, too: even though Hagrid was there when this incident happens -- where Draco insults Ron in a way that gets Ron really angry, and Ron goes after him -- even though Hagrid saw that happen and said, "No, he was provoked," Snape is still, "Five points from Gryffindor." That pettiness there from Snape really takes me back to the comment that you made a few episodes back about how Snape's job is to take care of the Slytherins, because Snape knows that they're not going to be treated fairly in this school and he balances out the unfairness. Slytherin is throwing this unfairness out at everyone else; obviously, it's very unfair. Draco started it, Ron reacted; only Ron loses the points. If it had been McGonagall, they both would have lost the points, but no. Snape is playing favorites for a reason.

Lorrie: And I like this scene, too, because this is one of the first examples of Snape finding a way to punish only Harry or his friends and not Draco, even though everybody knows exactly what happened. Because this sets a precedent; there are a few times in this series when Snape deviates from this pattern, and those times then become notable because this is his default, including that little kick of smugness.

JC: Yeah, that's a really good point. Okay, that'll be something to look for as we read forward.

Lorrie: To me, this chapter is the purest, deepest magic. This is Harry coming into his own enough for him to be able to see his desires. He comes into his own power with his cloak; that invisibility is one of Harry's signature powers as a magician. He gets a Weasley sweater. So he's now part of a family, but, wonderfully, Molly makes it different from the others. She makes it more formal -- better quality -- because she's not trying to pretend that it's the same as having a mother. It's recognizing that no, of course you don't have a mother, and I love you. And he gets to have a snowball fight like a kid. This is not life at the Dursleys. His identity at Hogwarts has now become strong enough and established enough so that he can see his own reflection, because when he first looks into the mirror, he expects to see nothing because he's wearing his cloak; he sees something way more confusing than nothing. He sees so much of his desires reflected that he's never seen before, and it shows him that in this world, his desires are real; he has a self. When he brings Ron in to show Ron -- I love this -- they squabble over the mirror like children. "No, you got a turn." "No, I want a turn!" That shows that, in this sense, they are now equals. In their friendship, they're equals. They both want this. It's not Ron coming from a good family, and Harry being so deprived; there's some equality here. At the end of the chapter, he connects with Dumbledore on the deepest of levels. No other student is connecting with Dumbledore on this level; Dumbledore is not connecting with pretty much anyone on this level. One of them is really old and really powerful, and the other is just this little kid, and there's some truth that they both share. The magic of this chapter is so sweeping to me.

JC: Okay, I want to go back to one of the first comments that you made about this as the most magical wonderful Christmas of Harry's life. I think that was a thing that really stood out to me in reading this. You said so many wonderful things that we're going to come back and talk about more, but going back to that one: that idea that he's happy, he's getting to hang out with his

friend, they're playing wizard chess, he learns this fun new game. Of course, wizard chess comes up again later, and that's a whole other little wonderful magical tidbit. This idea that there's this game, but the little player pieces are sentient in the sense that they will tell you what to do and criticize you when you make the wrong decision. And you have to gain their trust, which is another thing.

Lorrie: Right. You play better if they know you and trust you.

JC: And that's one of the things that I think is an interesting point about Ron's pieces being his grandfather's, or they've come down in his family somehow; they're not new and shiny, but those pieces know him and they trust him.

Lorrie: Yeah. In this case, that's an advantage.

JC: Right. It's an advantage. Having something that's old and worn, but there's trust there and there's a connection there, shows the depth of Ron's family ties, too. It really shows that Ron has this family that Harry hasn't been able to experience. When he opens the presents on Christmas morning: first of all, the idea that he was surprised at getting presents, which we know very well enough by now to know that; Ron's response is, "Well, what did you think you were going to get? Turnips?" And Harry was like, "Worse than, maybe. Sure!"

Lorrie: Turnips would be a step up.

JC: Turnips would be fine. And even though Ron grew up poor, he still had all these things that Harry has never had, so that contrast then really pays off -- as you say -- by the end, when we start to recognize that they're really equals. I love that the Dursleys gave him a 50 pence for so many reasons. What is that? It's really petty, but it's money. It's not a rude gift; in the past, they would give him these sarcastic presents -- and 50p is kind of sarcastic -- but also, they knew someone might look and would see, so they weren't going to be that awful to send him a dirty sock or something. But it's also very interesting -- I hadn't noticed this before -- that Ron looks at the 50p piece and he says, "What an interesting shape!" I had forgotten that the 50p -- because I hadn't seen them in ages -- the 50p coins are septagons. That's really fun.

Lorrie: They are an interesting shape. They're beautiful.

JC: So the seven sides, which I thought, "Oh, that's -- seven, that's a cool little thing."

Lorrie: It's odd and unusual.

JC: It's fun, yeah. But I think the Weasley jumper is probably the most memorable piece of that, too, and for all the reasons that you said before, this handmade gift... I love the fact that even though Ron's like, "Oh, she always makes me one in maroon." As someone who has knitted sweaters for people before -- and anyone who's a knitter knows -- making a sweater for someone is a big deal. Now granted, Molly is using magic, but there's a whole idea of the sweater curse, that if you make a sweater for something like you're dating, it's not a great idea. You put a lot of time and energy and money into knitting a sweater for someone, and then you give them this thing. If they never wear it...

Lorrie: If they don't appreciate it...

JC: They don't appreciate the work you put into it. I love the fact that all the kids put them on. "We're wearing the sweaters. It's Christmas. Let's go, Harry, put yours on, too." There's so much love wrapped up in that idea of the Weasley jumper.

Lorrie: And I like that we know that Ron's colors are maroon and orange. Anytime Ron has something that has a color, it's going to be one of those, and I bet he looks good in maroon. I bet Molly picked it for him on purpose. He might be tired of it, but I bet it looks good on him.

JC: If you've got seven children, you might have them associated with colors in your head. It's a pattern.

Lorrie: You have to code them.

JC: You have to code them. All of Ron's things are maroon, gotcha. Yeah. I also love that the Weasley jumper became such an important thing in the fandom.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: People knitted them, people cosplayed with them. I knitted one -- not for myself, but for my son when he was an infant because I did a cosplay once: me as Ginny and him as baby Harry, so I made him a little tiny Weasley sweater.

Lorrie: Okay. No, you said that before, and this is a Freudian slip. You don't mean Ginny. Who were you cosplaying?

JC: I had red hair. Oh, Lily. Oh, my God. I did it. You're right.

Lorrie: Is this not the most Freudian of Freudian slips?

JC: That's weird. Okay, that's really weird. Yeah. I had the red hair. Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Dear fandom, we have noted that Harry marries his mother. We have noted that Lily and Ginny are the exact same character.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: Because you said that in our first episode, and I thought about saying something.

JC: I did? I said it then, too?

Lorrie: Yes! You said that you cosplayed Ginny wearing baby Harry.

JC: Wow. Alright.

Lorrie: And I thought about saying something, and I didn't.

JC: I did it again.

Lorrie: And then I saw this coming up just now and I waited to see if it was going to happen, and it happened.

JC: That's so funny. Okay, that's wild. That's really interesting.

Lorrie: It's hilarious.

JC: That is hilarious. That's a whole other, later...

Lorrie: That is a whole other Freudian box of... Oy. Yeah.

JC: But yeah, I love that the Weasley jumper is a thing. I love it.

Lorrie: Yeah, that's not where we expected that to go. I'm laughing so much.

JC: The other gifts, too. The other gift, before we get to the invisibility cloak, is that Hermione sent them candy.

Lorrie: Yum.

JC: And I'm thinking Hermione figured out the magic of sending people Christmas gifts and having them appear at their bed on Christmas morning from home, where she's with her Muggle parents. Hermione, she's amazing.

Lorrie: She's wonderful. The 50 pence piece is also kind of a Jane Austen thing. It's definitely a reference to a certain kind of British culture: there are all these stories in Jane Austen about very stingy relatives -- stingy wealthy relatives who don't want to give much money. They're supposed to be taking care of their poor relations, and they don't. But also, it's one of those things that explores just how little connection the Dursleys can have to Harry and still be considered, magically speaking, his family. This is the tiniest gift; it's not an insulting gift, but it's small. I remember talking to my friend -- who I've mentioned here before -- that had a background in childhood that did not have security or family. Talking about the kinds of gifts that the Dursleys give Harry, we were wondering, "What does it require for somebody to feel like they have a family, no matter how terrible?" Harry technically has a family; they are bad, and this is a reference to that. This is a reference to how very, very little you can do as a family, but still be considered family. We thought, "What do you need for a birthday? What's the bare minimum?" Because the Dursleys might give him a present, but they don't celebrate his birthday. Suppose you have no resources. What's the least you can do to make somebody feel like it was your birthday? We thought, You need a cake. You don't need a present. Not everyone can afford a present. You don't need a whole cake or a fancy cake; maybe it's ice cream instead, because that's what you have or whatever. You have to have the ceremony that somebody says, "You were born; I'm glad. Here's a cake. We don't have much, but here's a cake. I'm glad." Here, we have from the Dursleys -- there's nothing about, "It's Christmas, we're happy you exist." It's not that, but it is, "We're legally your family." The grudgingness of it, and the humor of that grudgingness, feels very Jane Austen to me.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: And yeah, the chess. Yeah, the wizard chess will be important. Oh, other things before this chapter gets super heavy: there's Harry trying to figure out who Nicolas Flamel is, and then this is a purely children's-level clue that the author puts in. The clues -- in this book in particular -- come at several different levels: that are clues that only adults will get; then there are clues that anyone can get; and then there are clues that are only clues for children. In this one, she lists all of these titles of reference books that don't have Flamel in them, and they're all 20th century, modern, recent. That's not a clue for adults. Harry is missing something, and the children who are reading this are also going to miss it and adults won't miss it. I love that there are different levels of clues. And I love the foreshadowing: when Harry goes into the library and he delves into the darkness that is Hogwarts by going to the Restricted Section, it's described as "the books containing powerful dark magic never taught at Hogwarts" -- which we find out

more about later -- "and only read by older students studying advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts," such as Harry is going to be someday. And Madame Pince, we get another one of those characters who's more of a guardian spirit than a full-fledged person. All she does is defend the books in a very predictable and funny way.

JC: And they end up shooing the kids out of the library. "Get out of here!"

Lorrie: With a feather duster!

JC: That's really funny?

Lorrie: What is the library for? Is it for people to learn from? No, it's about the books.

JC: It was really interesting, the whole concept of the Restricted Section of the library. Granted, I have not been in a lot of public libraries in the last 20 years, but I've been in libraries in schools and stuff and I know that there are sections where things are delicate, and that's different. There's this idea that there's a place where you have to have permission to go in and there's protocols for handling things, but that's not what this is. This is the dangerous information. That read a little differently to me this time: this idea of having this school where there's information in these books that is so powerful and dangerous that you are not allowed to touch it or to go near it, and thinking about the world that we live in right now. It's not taking the books and putting them another place; it's taking them out and burning a pile of them. If there's that knowledge that books can be that dangerous, we have to make sure we restrict who has access to it. Now, in a magical world, that makes sense in a way that it doesn't in the real world. It's also interesting to me, too, that this is not the only place I've seen that in fiction. There are other places, too; in particular, a television show called *The Untamed* that I've watched and gotten really into. It's a magical world as well, but there is also a library; there is a restricted section that one of the main characters spends lots of time trying to get permission to go into, and finally has to sneak in because no one will give him permission to find the information he needs. And later, there's information that's the key to one of the mysteries that is found in that library, so that idea that there's magic that's so dark and powerful that we have to make sure we restrict who has access to it is very interesting.

Lorrie: Well, I don't think it's the same as book banning, though. Definitely, there's book banning happening right now in a way that we haven't seen in decades in this country. But the Restricted Section -- even if you're not allowed in there, you're aware that it exists. The Restricted Section ideally -- and it does work this way -- is about telling people that you have to be properly prepared in order to withstand how potent this information is. You have to have other things to anchor it onto. You have to have developed in judgment, because part of this is about your brain developing enough so that you don't get given dangerous information before you know how to handle it. The fact that you need a pass, if you're not a seventh year, is about individual judgment of teachers. The judgment required for the Restricted Section is: This is truth; these truths exist, and not knowing anything about them will be more dangerous, but are you ready? You have to pass some sort of test, even if it's just in your own head asking yourself or in the judgment of a teacher who's writing you a pass. Have you earned -- Do you have enough substance in you so that you can withstand the power of this information? That's going to turn out to be pretty much exactly what Dumbledore tells Harry about the power of the mirror when they find it. Skipping way ahead to the central conflict or quest of *Deathly Hallows*, it's Dumbledore trying to build in obstacles to slow down Harry's access to the Hallows, in case Harry loses his head and goes after the Hallows instead of the Horcruxes. Well, yes, the

Hallows are real and they're extraordinarily powerful. But you can't go after them until you've acquired enough knowledge so that you can withstand it and know how to handle it, because we know Voldemort's going after things that he can't handle. Harry mustn't; Harry will lose if he does the same thing. It's about telling people things exist that are more powerful than they are, and teaching people what to do about that.

JC: And it's such a stark contrast with this reality, and perhaps it's different in our reality just because of the internet. People have access to things that there's not precautions in place. Little kids can stumble across pornography pretty easily, so maybe that's part of the reason why we have this reactionary -- take out anything that might be objectionable rather than setting these safeguards in place and saying, "Okay, here are the middle school-level books," and if you're in the fourth and fifth grade, then whatever. It is interesting. It made me think about the contrast between having this place where we're going to put this information and restrict who has access versus nobody gets to have it.

Lorrie: Well, it's not so much about restricting who has access. It's about controlling the rate at which people can earn access. There's nothing that says you can't have access to these books when you are the right age or maturity level. Assuming that you stay in the school and you get older and you graduate, everyone will have access to them. We're being adults and setting limits based on judgment. This is why eight-year-olds aren't allowed to drive. This is why 14-year-olds aren't allowed to drive. When you're 17, are you necessarily that much safer? A bit, yeah, and it's necessary. But what's terrible is if you're never allowed to drive, then you're being disempowered and you're forbidden from defending yourself. If somebody is never allowed access to something, that is a power move on the part of people who can make those decisions to keep somebody disempowered, possibly so that they can't stop themselves from being exploited.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The whole idea of adults deciding the rate at which you can have access to this powerful and dangerous truth: that's a fantasy world. Sometimes, when things work out well, we get that in reality: a fantasy world in which grown-ups do what they're supposed to be doing.

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Basically, my read on the Restricted Section of the Hogwarts library is that it more or less functions in that positive way. Everybody knows it exists. It's not a strict rule; you can get access to it if they deem you to need it.

JC: And it's just a rope.

Lorrie: Well, that and the guardian spirit.

JC: And there's probably charms on it, too, but in theory, it's just over that rope. Yeah.

Lorrie: But also the way that Harry opens a book and it scares the bejesus out of him; it screams and there's blood on it. When things work well -- when children have reason to trust the judgment of caring adults -- the few times that you test out what the adults are doing to restrict you, you find out, "You know what? They were right. They were right. I don't want this book screaming at me. This is scary. Someday, I'll have the power to know how to defend myself against it so that I can go find what's in there, but not today. I'm happy to shove it back on the

shelf." That's a level of trust and function to me, and I think this chapter is really about that. This chapter is about structure being restored to Harry's life in a way that's so healing that gives him more of a self.

JC: This is maybe a good point for me to ask you a question and I would love to hear your take on, then. Why does Dumbledore give Harry the cloak back now, at this point?

Lorrie: As opposed to what point?

JC: As opposed to earlier or later, in three years. My first thought on it was, "Okay, Dumbledore knows that Harry is sneaking around, and he wants not to restrict Harry but give him this cloak so he can do what he needs to do more effectively, more safely." But I would love to know your take on that. Why now? Why this Christmas?

Lorrie: I would guess that they had a lot to talk about after the troll and the dungeons, and after somebody tried to kill Harry during the Quidditch match. As you noted in the last episode, somebody's trying to kill Harry by flinging him off of a broom. Where are the teachers? Are they not noticing? Why are the only people Fred and George Weasley that are trying to do something about this? It's not that the teachers aren't noticing; it's that this is a level where the kids reading this book might not see it, but the adults reading this book can see, "Okay, there's longer-term movement to respond to this very serious threat." Part of it I think is, "Okay, we've been in school for a few months. We've had opportunity to observe Harry James Potter, and the things we were afraid would happen around him have started to happen. This is his." Dumbledore pretty much has to get rid of it as soon as he can, because he doesn't have the right to own it. The fact that it's in his possession is his own flaw. He doesn't deserve it. "Is this kid the real thing? Is it safe to give it to him?" "Yeah." It's not going to be any worse off in Harry's possession than in Dumbledore's; it belongs to Harry, and he's been at Hogwarts long enough, so he has enough of a sense of self. Really, he deserves it. He's starting to get back his paternal inheritance through things like McGonagall saying, "Oh, yeah, your dad was also an excellent flier." This is why they've brought him to Hogwarts: they're starting to restore to him the things that they have postponed by putting him at the Dursleys. To me, the note that Dumbledore leaves with it is so moving. It's powerful, evocative. He says, "Your father left this in my possession before he died," which is a very euphemistic way of saying, "I took it; I made him give it to me." "It is time it was returned to you, use it well. A very Merry Christmas to you." And he doesn't sign it, which is a slightly cowardly move, but it's obvious that there's really only one place this could have come from. And he's not hiding; he uses the first person -- "He left it in my possession" -- so it's not like he doesn't expect Harry to know where it came from. "It's not me giving it to you; it's something finding its way back to you." Dumbledore is acknowledging and taking on the responsibility of being a person to restore Harry's family to him. He's saying, "Yes, of course, you had a family. I know something about the family; this is something official that I'm doing to give you back something that was kept from you." I always come back to this letter from Dumbledore, especially because it's the parallel to a letter that isn't written, that is my headcanon: It's a parallel to Snape dying and giving memories of Lily's love to Harry right before he goes to fight Voldemort. "Your mother left this in my possession before she died," which is Lily's love. It was never Snape's. He wanted it -- he tried to take it -- just like the cloak was never Dumbledore's, even though he coveted it. He should not have taken it; it should have been with Harry all along. "It's time it was returned to you, use it well." The powerful magical objects that are our own work best when they're with the people who really own them, so Dumbledore is doing a magically right thing. As for why Christmas: that's a personal author thing. Part of the

legend -- part of the packaging we've been given as readers of this series -- is that her mother died around Christmas, so she associates that dark time of year with incredible grief, the time between Christmas and New Year's. She's getting Harry ready to grieve. I think we see a reference to the author's personal loss in this chapter; she has no name and no voice at this point, but the author confirmed in an interview that in this chapter, we get our first glimpse of the fourth house ghost: the Gray Lady, Helena Ravenclaw. When Harry first takes Ron to look in the mirror, they pass the ghost of a tall witch gliding in the opposite direction. It's my reading that the ghost of Ravenclaw is one of the author's tales from earlier in her life: the one who thought herself cleverer than her mother, married a violently abusive man, and then -- when she's feeling grief after her mother's death -- decided that bravery and chivalry were more important to her than cleverness and switched her house identity to Gryffindor. But her old self is still faintly visible in this story, gliding in the opposite direction from Harry and Ron as though she were coming from doing her own grieving for her dead mother.

JC: Do you think -- Does anyone else know about the cloak, or is it just Dumbledore knows?

Lorrie: Let's see. Pretty much just James and his friends, because Dumbledore says to Harry later that when he realizes that James had the cloak, he says, "Oh, that explains so much of how they were able to get away with stuff at Hogwarts." That's when he says, "Wow, James, I really could use this. Can I examine it? Can you lend it to me?" Really, what he meant was, "That's a Hallow. I want the Hallows. You don't know it's a Hallow, but I know it's a Hallow." No, James didn't want people knowing because he was getting away with stuff with it.

JC: I guess the reason I ask is because it wouldn't make sense if any of the other teachers knew that he had this, but I'm just curious. I loved your comment about how you think that the teachers probably talked about what was happening and what we need to do to protect Harry. There were some conversations going on, so I'm wondering if anyone else knew that Dumbledore had this in his possession. I guess what I'm wondering about is when Filch comes after Harry: Harry opens the book, it screams and alerts Filch; Filch comes, and then Harry overhears Filch and Snape talking. Snape knows that it's probably Harry sneaking around; who else would it be? I had a moment of wondering: does Snape know about the Invisibility Cloak?

Lorrie: My reading is that Snape definitely remembers James and the Marauders using it, and he puts it together when he sees Harry in book three sneaking around. Then he says, "Oh, it's that thing." I don't think at this point he knows, because nobody has seen or heard of or thought about the cloak since James died. I don't think anybody knows where it was or who had it, so they certainly wouldn't know that Dumbledore has just given it back to the kid.

JC: Okay, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, no, I don't think Snape knows to look for it yet, but when he does see the evidence of it eventually, he'll know exactly what he's dealing with again.

JC: One of the reasons that I'm thinking about it is because -- I don't know. The film versions are different, but the lore around the filming of the series was that Alan Rickman had access to a lot of information about Snape that no one else had. When Alan Rickman as Snape does stuff in the films that does not appear in the books, it always makes me think: is it an acting choice? Is this in the script? Or is this the author sending us some extratextual information through his performance? There's a moment in the scene -- where the scene we're talking about was filmed

-- where Alan Rickman as Snape reaches out as if he knows that maybe there's something there. It made me think of it.

Lorrie: Well, that's partly Snape's nature, too: the creepy person who always knows more than you wish they would, and who, sadly for you, knows how your mind works. Something else about this cloak that thrills me so much: it's about the author again, because part of the mythology around this series is that we know she wrote the first book while she had the baby. She was in cafes in Edinburgh, and she would rock the baby in the baby's little infant sleeper and have the baby fall asleep while she would try to get some writing done. Having been a mother with a baby who writes, there is nothing so exciting as the moment when the baby falls asleep for the night, but you're not asleep yet. For the first time, all day long, you can write.

JC: Oh, God. I know that feeling.

Lorrie: And all you want is for the baby not to wake up. "Please, please, baby, don't wake up." Then your whole self and your imagination just come rushing back to you. You've been waiting all day for this. You can't write when you're interrupted every five seconds. There's this passage: Ron has seen the package, but Harry hasn't opened it again in front of Ron. He's going to share it with Ron later, but this first time he wanted to be just him. So Ron has finally fallen asleep, and Harry pulls out the cloak. "Suddenly, Harry felt wide awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him in this cloak. Excitement flooded through him as he stood there in the dark and silence. He could go anywhere in this. Anywhere." And I thought, "That's it. That's a mother with a baby who has fallen asleep, who can finally write all the exciting things. Everything exciting at Hogwarts happens at night when everyone else is asleep.

JC: Ah, interesting.

Lorrie: A.K.A. when the baby has gone to bed. So there's that, and then it's darling. He's got this powerful cloak; where does he go? To the library, of course. Love it.

JC: I guess that takes us to Harry finding the mirror. Oh, yeah, there's a lot there. He goes to the mirror; he expects to see nothing because he's got the Invisibility Cloak on, but instead he sees the Invisibility Cloak doesn't matter in this case. He's looking at the mirror and he sees himself surrounded by all these people that he soon figures out are his family. That's where those grandparents that I asked about before are. The interesting thing about this is that I'm wondering, does he imagine them all, or do they look as they actually did? That's one question that I was left with was, "How much of it is in your head, and how much of it is the reality of what these people look like? Because has he even seen a photo of his parents at this point?

Lorrie: I don't know.

JC: He's looking at his mother and trying to figure out, "Who is that? She's got my eyes. Oh, is that my mother?" He doesn't even know what they look like.

Lorrie: Well, one thing about the mirror: this is something that we now take for granted, because Harry Potter the phenomenon has existed in our world for some time now. But the Mirror of Erised -- that has desire backwards in mirror writing -- is one of the most brilliant genius inventions of this first book. This incredibly powerful artifact that's about human longing and projection and selfhood: it's a very sweepingly romantic, resonant invention. Harry looks into it; he thinks he's invisible like he has been. He thinks he has no reflection, no identity; it's quite different from that. His desires have been made real, and I think what he's seeing is not a

reflection of the actual historical relatives that he has, although it would be like this story to tell us that, no, that's actually what they look like. But if you take the position of an orphan or adoptee, imagine -- every person on Earth has a family as old as every other person. It's a matter of access. Ron having an old Wizarding set that responds to him? That's generational wealth that has been cut off in Harry's case. Ron's family has the Weasley sweaters; that's his wealth, and this is the wealth that Harry fantasizes. It's there; it's just being denied to him. I have a college classmate who found her birth relatives at the age of 50. I remember the day she said that it was the first time in her life that she looked into another person's face and saw her own face looking back at her, which she had dreamed of but had never had that experience. That's what I think Harry's doing: there are people out there who look like him; this is separate from people who have raised him, who love him. This is a whole separate thing because it does exist and it is part of your story. I have something that's a very distant relative to this: my paternal grandfather escaped from North Korea to South Korea around the time of the Korean War, but he came alone. My parents always told me we don't have family. He has cousins and aunts and uncles and whatever; it was just him, so I know there are people in North Korea that look like me that are my cousins. They probably look exactly like me. I don't know them. That's something that Korea or India and Pakistan, or the Civil War in the U.S, North and South. This kind of division in a family through generations: that's a human longing that's separate from the actual people in your life who love you. It's the projection of your longing for your own story. The line here that describes it is "a powerful kind of ache inside him; half joy, half terrible sadness." I think this longing exists anyway in people, but when it's coupled with so much loss -- so much lovelessness as Harry has experienced -- then it's too intense to survive, so that's when he starts to sit in front of the mirror and lose time. He can't control his desire, he can't control his hunger; it's the opposite of nourishing. He can't eat. It's like the myth of Narcissus who starves to death looking at his own reflection. When it's not anchored because you're not nourished enough -- when you don't have enough scaffolding in your sense of self -- this longing is so uncontrollable that it can become obsession. You're not strong enough for it, which is when Dumbledore says, "I ask you not to go looking for it again. But if you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared."

JC: I found that line very powerful. We've talked a lot a couple of episodes back -- and then even earlier -- about this idea of what kids are learning and how important it is to teach kids things, and to expose them to things that could be dangerous for them and to learn how to handle it. That felt very much like one of those moments here, where Dumbledore knew that Harry had been visiting the mirror. He knew that Ron had seen the mirror; he watched Harry lose himself in the mirror, and then came in and intervened at the point when Harry really needed intervention. Now, you've learned. You know what this is and what it can do, and now you can protect yourself against it should you need to in the future. I just thought, "Oh, wow. That's such a powerful teaching moment."

Lorrie: Yeah, this is the deep magic. This is what Harry and Voldemort both encounter; they both don't have the scaffolding inside them to resist this incredible, overwhelming craving. Dumbledore wants to make Harry stronger than Voldemort by trying to keep him away from this obsessive longing until he has built more of a self, because Dumbledore says, "This mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth; men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen or been driven mad not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible." All of Dumbledore's emphasis on humble things that Harry knows -- that Voldemort can't understand - - is an attempt to build up Harry so that he can be strong enough to contain this longing that

nobody asks for but we're all born with. If we have painful losses in life as Harry and Voldemort have had, then we become almost nothing but this hunger; we're not as strong as the hunger. Dumbledore is trying to make Harry strong enough to hold this hunger, because Voldemort isn't. Voldemort is so much weaker than his hunger that bits of him fragment. He loses parts of himself and has to bury that; he can't contain his hunger. We're trying to make Harry big enough, this tiny little boy, to be as big as this hunger that could kill him. When Dumbledore says to him, "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live," what that means for Voldemort is Voldemort is dwelling on dreams and he's forgetting to die. If he's trying to get an explanation for his starvation, he's not accepting, "No, there's a limit. You're human, you have limits, things happen to you eventually. You'll die." No, he's not ready to face that. If Harry's not ready to face that, no matter how lacking the hand he's been dealt -- that he's also just as human, he has just as many limitations -- he has to surrender to that. To be strong, you have to be human, and if you let yourself get ruled by the enormity of this obsessive hunger, it will weaken you. The intense part of this conversation is when Harry says, "What do you see?" and with Dumbledore's answer, he basically says, "I have this problem, too." One of them is so old and wise; one of them is so tiny. This has nothing to do with the general teachings and lessons and snowball fights and Christmas feasts of most of the students. This is an ageless connection, a kind of truth. They're having a real meeting of the souls. This chapter. Oh, this chapter.

JC: It's so interesting that Dumbledore lies to him very clearly, but even as readers we go, "Okay, that's not..." He's just being like, "This is a personal question, kid; not going to tell you." As a teacher, I've absolutely been in that place plenty of times, but it's so interesting that later in the series we learn exactly what he would see in the mirror.

Lorrie: It's not a lie in that Harry doesn't believe for a moment that Dumbledore is trying to fool him. Dumbledore is saying, "Yeah, that's something deep for me, too," and Harry receives it that way. There's never a point at which either of them really thinks it's socks, and we see more than one thing that Dumbledore sees in the mirror. In this series, we see that he wishes he could go back and undo the terrible betrayals of his young adulthood. In the movie, *Fantastic Beasts: Crimes of Grindelwald* -- when he has not resolved his issues yet -- we know that, to the year before his death, Dumbledore -- like all of us -- did not fully resolve his issues. But in *Crimes of Grindelwald*, when he's in middle age, we see what he sees in the mirror: he's longing once again to just forget values, forget self-restraint, and just have ecstasy of blending his magic with Grindelwald's. This completely ecstatic, destructive -- nothing matters except being with your equal and your soulmate, even if they are what they are. And no, Dumbledore will try. He will live and die his whole life trying to be good and do the right thing, and deny himself what he craves. But it hurts, and nothing else satisfies that craving ever.

JC: Dumbledore's quote about...

Lorrie: "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live. Remember that."

JC: Right. There have been times in my life when that hit me really hard because -- and I talked about this way at the beginning of the podcast -- there was a time when I absolutely was using my involvement in the fandom around this series to escape things that I couldn't deal with in my real life, and I hated that quote. I hated it.

Lorrie: Oh, ouch.

JC: Because this is the only thing that is keeping me afloat, and you're an author telling me that I shouldn't be doing it, and it wasn't untrue. I probably should have been in therapy, honestly. I definitely should have been in therapy, and I didn't really understand the depths of mental health issues I was having at the time. But that quote still stands out to me every time I read it. I'm like, God.

Lorrie: But there's a counter to that, and I wish I could go back in time to 20-years-ago you and give this to you. The other thing that this series does is tell you it's not always safe. It's not always time. For you to rip all those illusions away and be right in your cravings and your misery, could you handle that? No. That's why you have a cupboard under the stairs.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: You hold the baby there. It's not fun; the baby will be abused. The baby will be malnourished by the time you bring him to Hogwarts, but you hold him there until it's time for you to be able to do something for him. That's why Voldemort is in Harry's scar: he wants to heal. He doesn't know he wants to heal; he's taking refuge. "I crave; I'm going to go hide in you. I don't belong here. I don't like it in here; you don't like having me here. I crave. I'm not ready. I'm not ready to hear. Somebody tell me what to do now." Well, there will come a time when people will put the choice in front of you and you can do something about it. Until then... This is also why Dumbledore holds people in house arrest. Why is Dumbledore always giving people house arrest or putting them in Azkaban? Why is his solution always, "Go hide in a cave, go hide in Grimmauld Place, go into hiding, we can change your identity." "Until when?" "I don't know. Not now; can't do it now." "Well, that's punitive." "Yes, it's either that or you're not going to make it." Yeah, dwelling on the dreams in order to make it: that hurts every second, and forgetting to live is a natural risk. We wouldn't be running this risk if the danger weren't real. Sometimes the danger is real; sometimes you're like Charity Burbage and you think, "I'm not going to wait for a better time. I'm going to say it now," and then you get killed and eaten by a snake. We don't always have all the choices we want, but it's worth it to take care of yourself in as questionable a way as you might have to. It might be that someday, you can take care of it. And here we are: Harry's eleven, we've given back his cloak. And because of all this stuff that Harry never asked for, he's now staring in front of a mirror looking at people that he imagines look like him even though he's never seen them. I do think that the mirror reflects what he's fantasizing, just like anybody else I know who doesn't know their extended family and wonders what they look like. So yeah, this is the hunger that we are left with when we have this 11-year-old orphan. Can he be strengthened enough to survive this hunger? Well, Dumbledore has come to talk to him about that, and he's not underestimating how painful this is. But he's also saying, "You're going to keep coming up against this hunger again and again." It's not that he's banning it; he's not preventing Harry from knowing that such things exist as a mirror where you can see the shape of your cravings. He's saying, "Since this is something that is a danger but does come up, now you know what it is; you know what it looks like, you're going to have to learn how to handle it. You're going to have to be ready for it," and, of course, we find out that he's going to need this sooner than you might expect. We don't know yet what this mirror is doing at Hogwarts to begin with. What is this? Why is it here now?

JC: Yeah. At that point, it does seem to be the castle is full of all these bizarre, new-to-the-reader magical artifacts. At this point in the story and this book, you're like, "Oh, it's just another weird thing."

Lorrie: It's just another three-headed dog.

JC: Exactly. What's up with that? It's not until... yeah, looking back on it, it's like, "Oh, wow, that's quite a magical object. How did Dumbledore acquire it? Who was it on loan from?"

Lorrie: "Why is it in storage in this unused classroom? Where is it headed?" Because he says the mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow.

JC: Oh, the other line that he says in there, which is very interesting, is the line about not needing a cloak to be invisible, which is very interesting.

Lorrie: This is unfair to the writer of a very long series, but every once in a while, I'm like, "Couldn't Snape have just cast *Homenum Revelio*?" This spell that we know from future volumes instead of him and Filch grasping at the air, trying to catch a little boy. But yeah, I am impressed at the wealth in this fictional universe that we've been given to play with.

JC: I think, also, the idea of -- this is something that became popular in the fandom, too -- this idea of this mirror that would show you... The idea of 'what would you see when you look in the mirror' became another 'what house would you get sorted into' kind of a thing, which is really funny. Funny's not the right word; it's one of those things where it reveals something about your personality and what you would see. I do remember going on the tour at the studios outside of London and they had the mirror from the movie there, so people would go up and take pictures of themselves in the mirror. There was always that idea of walking up to it and then you really are faced with the question of, "What would I see if I look in this mirror?"

Lorrie: And inevitably, this is the point in the episode when I am aflame with rage about the author's transphobia.

JC: Oh, oh, oh, oh.

Lorrie: Because who is she to say what people see when they look in the mirror to see their own reflections and who they really are? That's the power. You were saying, this is yet another one of those magical selfhood tests that make this series so successful and resonant, is people recognize the truth. You might be nobody, but no one but you knows what you see in the mirror. No one can tell you what to see in there. Not even the author. Ay yi yi. So, let's see. What do we have after this most intense of chapters?

JC: Well, the next chapter is called "Nicolas Flamel."

Lorrie: So, then, we're going to find out what people do with eternity.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Ways to be bigger than your own mortal longings.

JC: Nice.

Lorrie: Are you ready for that? Do you feel ready for it?

JC: Yeah, yeah, I guess I am. Yeah, let's go. I'm looking at the space between my bookmark and the end of the book and it's getting smaller and smaller, so we're barreling toward the end of this one.

Lorrie: The cauldron's starting to heat up! Alright. Well, I'll talk to you then.

JC: All right. Great.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts, and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.