

Transcript

Episode 2.12

Book 2, Chapter 12: The Polyjuice Potion

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 2, Chapter 12: The Polyjuice Potion.

Lorrie: Harry goes to Dumbledore's office and sees Fawkes the phoenix there, as well as Hagrid. Then, it's Christmas at Hogwarts. And the Polyjuice Potion is ready. Now, it's time to sneak into the Slytherin common room.

JC: Ooh.

Lorrie: Wow, this is an eventful chapter. Are you ready for this, JC?

JC: Yes, yes.

Lorrie: Ah, this chapter. Harry gets a torrent of deep new information and it's too much for him to process, yet he just gets wave after wave of it. It feels, to me, like one of those middle school growth spurts, where kids suddenly shoot up three inches and their pants legs are showing ankle; they have to fill out later. Understanding the people who are trying to hurt you, they do some audacious moves here in this chapter to try to do that. It's a leap; it kind of hurts. This is going to be good practice later for Voldemort, figuring out the limitations and the humanness of the people who are trying to hurt you. Tons of stuff happening here. What about you? What did you notice?

JC: I really like the way this chapter starts with Harry walking to Dumbledore's office, but Dumbledore's not there, and so he gets this moment to look around and so do we, I guess, as the readers. McGonagall just sends him up, like, "Go to your fate. Go!" and he goes up. I didn't realize at the end of the last chapter that he was alone, but yeah, he is. He walks in, he's just in this room; he looks around, and all the portraits of the former headmasters and headmistresses on the walls, they're all asleep. Which kind of made me wonder: how did Harry know? He's never been in there before. How did he know that that's who those people were in the portraits? Or is it just one of those moments where we're just like, "Eh, we needed this information as readers and we're not going to question it"?

Lorrie: I think they have the names and dates on them.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: At least the ones in St. Mungo's do.

JC: Okay, so that could have been a thing... I don't know. I've never been to a school where they had every principal ever's portrait on the wall. I would be like, "Who are these people? Why are there pictures of them up?" But yeah, who knows? Anyway... But then there's a lot of other things that happen. He meets the Sorting Hat and decides to put it back on his head, which is very interesting, and then hears something that he did not want to hear.

Lorrie: Although he doesn't hear all of it.

JC: That's true. I was like, "No, put it back on your head!" But he took it off, like, "No, I can't handle it right now."

Lorrie: Nope. Not ready.

JC: But it is interesting that the Sorting Hat, the first thing that it said, "Got a bee in your bonnet? What are you thinking about? You want to know something." I thought, I wonder how often people in this universe wear the Sorting Hat more than once. Does that ever happen? It seems like it must be a really... I don't know. When would you have an opportunity?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And does Dumbledore use the Hat for other purposes? That was kind of the question. We find out at the end of the book that he does, but yes, he does. But does it have other abilities to read people in ways that were useful to the headmaster of the school? Just raised some questions about what else this Hat might be able to do.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry is questioning his true inner nature, which has been on his mind ever since he's wondered if he's really the heir of Slytherin. The way that he pulls the hat off his head and doesn't listen anymore -- and the way that it makes the hat immediately no longer this prophetic, important artifact, but just this grubby little old hat -- that's such a good representation of what people are like when they're not ready to listen. As if that's not enough, then he gets Fawkes the phoenix looking terrible, falling apart in front of his eyes. Then he thinks all that he needed was for Dumbledore's pet bird to die while he was alone in the office with it. That really emphasizes what a crappy year Harry's been having so far.

JC: And a crappy day, in particular. This day has been terrible.

Lorrie: That would just fit in with how his whole year's been going.

JC: Oh, gosh. This is the same day that he... in the last episode, he's in the library, and the Hufflepuffs all think he's the Heir of Slytherin.

Lorrie: Talking about him and uniting fronts against him.

JC: Right, and then he walks up the stairs and runs into another crime scene, and everyone rushes in just to see him standing there. Yeah. Ugh.

Lorrie: So yeah, he's been having the most rotten luck, and Fawkes... this meeting with this bird reminded me of one of the saddest things in Pottermore for me. I'm really sad about the

Fantastic Beasts film series coming to such a disgraceful end. I loved the first two movies of that series, and I thought that the narrative was going in a specific direction, which the third movie *Secrets of Dumbledore* reversed because that movie had the responsibility of just bringing the franchise to a halt, because obviously they can't make any more with various scandals going on. But I had thought, based on the second movie *Crimes of Grindelwald*, that Fawkes was going to turn out to have been Credence from Fantastic Beasts, because when we hear in the Fantastic Beast movie that the Dumbledores had another brother, then fans wondered, "But we never heard of him. How can you just spring that? We would have surely seen some hint of this other sibling at some point. You can't just spring that!" I thought, 'Unless he's been there all along,' because in *Crimes of Grindelwald* there are these parallel stories of Credence and Nagini both as humans who are part beast and they can't control it. They're both on the margins and try to grapple with what it means to be a human that has this feral destructive nature, and they bond together. I thought: 'I wonder if Credence is going to have this divided loyalty between Dumbledore and Grindelwald, but then sees that Albus is willing to sacrifice himself to protect Credence's humanity.' Therefore, I pictured the Battle of 1945 between Dumbledore and Grindelwald, and I pictured Credence deciding he's going to return the favor and sacrifice himself and get in between a Killing Curse and Dumbledore; instead of him dying, it turns out that he becomes a phoenix and can do that. That's where I thought that narrative was heading, because then I was really looking forward to re-reading the series, picturing Fawkes the Phoenix as a former human and as somebody with that kind of bond with Albus. This is my first re-read of the series of the books since the *Secrets of Dumbledore* movie came out, and it's kind of sad because I see both. I see both the reading that no, Fawkes is just a phoenix like we always thought, and the potential that it had been a lost brother. That's part of the experience of reading Harry Potter in the 2020s.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, because the Fantastic Beasts movies were both by a single author. It was the story being driven by the same person who gave us the written novel series, and also a group project because the film industry tells you where to go. Warner Brothers had been having an increasingly strained relationship with Rowling and her transphobia and the bad PR that that was bringing them, and needing to separate from her. Then, there was a truly astonishing series of scandals around the Fantastic Beasts actors that all of these things contributed to low enough box office that obviously the series had to be ended.

JC: So was the plan for it to go on beyond the *Secrets of Dumbledore*, or...

Lorrie: There was a press conference after the second movie in which Rowling said, to the shock of everybody, including the director, that she was planning five movies; *Secrets of Dumbledore* would be the turning point of this five-movie arc. We know that endgame is the 1945 battle where Dumbledore eventually puts Grindelwald in his own prison; obviously, this was going to be coterminous with World War II so we could see the global fascism allegory playing out, and we could estimate where we were on that timeline. But then they had the extremely difficult task in *Secrets of Dumbledore* of making a movie that could serve as both the middle of a five-movie arc and also the finale of a three-movie arc.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And you could see them cauterizing story lines and saying "this was going to go over here and play out this way, but we're bringing it to a halt." They managed to bring it to an end

where it's not confirmed that Credence is dying by the end of the movie; there's still room to say that he somehow didn't die or transformed into something else, but the implication is heavily that at least Credence in this form is finished. So yeah, everything they did in *Secrets of Dumbledore* had to be an ending, but maybe not.

JC: I never saw that movie, yeah, and I'm not alone in not seeing it.

Lorrie: No, you are not alone; the majority of the world did not see that movie, and yet the film -- the entire crew, everyone involved with making that film -- had just as much of a responsibility to bring an enormous global franchise marquee film to completion as if it were all being done in good faith. It was just as much labor.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Yeah. All of that really came to mind in this, which I think is our first meeting with Fawkes the phoenix ever. We see this really pathetic-looking clump of feathers that's also so adolescent at the beginning of puberty, like Harry is.

JC: Or in the middle of it.

Lorrie: Yeah, when you're just not very impressive, and you're sort of falling apart.

JC: The awkward and gangly and... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and tired. What's happening? Then you find out, "No, no, it's fine. This is just part of what has to happen when you grow, and it's okay." Just the contrast between Harry's shock and alarm and Dumbledore's complete lack of alarm: "No, no, this is fine. This is how it happens. You'll see: usually he's just a glorious creature, but even a phoenix has to go through this once in a while." So, yeah. It's fortunate that of all days Harry met this phoenix, it was on a Burning Day. Those don't come along very often.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I don't know how long their... what's the period of their lifespan, you know what I mean?

Lorrie: Yeah. What's their cycle?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But no, this was timed perfectly for Harry to witness. 'Look, you can be really far gone and that's still normal.'

JC: And there's always a chance to come back.

Lorrie: Yeah. People go through this.

JC: And they come out the other side, yeah. Now when the little baby phoenix pokes its head up from the ashes, he says it's still just as ugly.

Lorrie: I love that line. Yeah, it's a hideous little thing.

JC: As baby birds are, but they're the only babies that aren't cute somehow. They get to a point where they're cute.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, baby birds...

JC: They're horrendous looking when they're first born. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Well, they look just like artist renderings of dinosaurs that have no skin, no feathers, no nothing. Just skeletal.

JC: They're just mouths, like the little... Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Fossils. Yeah. Hungry little moving fossils.

JC: And I also like that Dumbledore immediately tells us the three very important facts about phoenixes in this section, and it's like, oh, wow. It's even framed in such a way that's like, "Pay attention, readers." That they can carry very heavy loads, their tears have healing powers, and that they're very faithful; all of those things are going to be important later in this book, if I recall correctly, but also in the future, which is one of those very lines with lots of importance.

Lorrie: Yeah, this is just Harry's life right now. It's just one info dump after another, and he's reeling.

JC: Right, yeah. Oh, it's also interesting here that the word 'pet' is used a couple times in reference to Fawkes. I'm like, oh, that just doesn't feel appropriate somehow. But then the word 'familiar' isn't used in the series at all, I don't think, is it?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: So there's not that. That's what these animals are. Hedwig is not an ordinary owl; none of their pets are ordinary. They all have some kind of magical connection to their person. They all have a greater degree of sentience than you would expect from an ordinary pet, I suppose. The use of the word 'pet' there almost was a bit jarring to me. Oh, no, they're more than pets. That's not... yeah.

Lorrie: And yet, on the other hand, when you think about your actual relationship with a pet, it can get really bonded and deep.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: As we speak, we see occasional passing of a little cat tail in front of your face on the Zoom.

JC: Yeah. My cat is a Zoom friend, for sure.

Lorrie: I love the pacing in this chapter because after Fawkes -- after the office, after all of that -- then we get Hagrid.

JC: Oh, poor Hagrid.

Lorrie: Hagrid comes bursting in, waving rooster feathers all around, which, of course, will turn out to be significant later, that there are just dead roosters all over the place. Feathers waving, and Hagrid starts hollering about how "it wasn't Harry, it wasn't Harry, it wasn't Harry," and Dumbledore has to try a few times to get through to Hagrid. "Hagrid, Hagrid, it's fine. I don't think it's Harry." And Hagrid's on a sort of delay and he's like, "oh. Oh. Okay, then." I do love that both Hagrid and McGonagall function, in this chapter and the previous chapter, to emphasize what a relief it is that no, people don't always blame Harry, whatever is going on. It's such a

change for Harry, because sure, all of the students are looking at him with fear, but every time in this series that Harry gets believed is such a relief.

JC: Yeah. This is his whole childhood with the Dursleys. He got blamed for stuff all the time that he didn't do or he couldn't help, and yeah, that idea of "here's a person who's just going to believe you unconditionally."

Lorrie: And who knows more. It's such a comfort when grown-ups know more about what's going on when you're thinking, 'what the heck is this?' This is quite literally beyond his comprehension all chapter, but it's not beyond Dumbledore's. From McGonagall bringing him up to the headmaster, it's clear that she recognizes, "Okay, we're bumping you up." And the pacing here is just great, because the Sorting Hat interaction is funny and then Fawkes is funny in an awful way and then Hagrid is just plain funny; it helps temporarily take my mind as the reader off of how serious this is, because after Hagrid leaves, then you suddenly remember, 'Oh, right, really scary things are happening.' And then... Yeah, go ahead. You have a thought.

JC: It's also interesting to me that when Hagrid bursts in, he's just terrified that Harry is going to get blamed for this. Later in the book, obviously, we find out that something really similar happened to Hagrid. That idea of Hagrid seeing, "It's happening again, and this time it's going to be Harry who gets the blame like I did, and I'm going to do anything I can to make sure that doesn't happen to Harry." To have another adult care so much and want to protect him so much is really cool.

Lorrie: Yeah, and we see hints about how the last time this happened, somebody got blamed. Dumbledore is very gentle when he asks Harry if there's anything Harry wants to tell him.

JC: Oh, and the way he asks, too. As a parent, you know your child; you know there's something going on, and all you can do is open that door and keep it open, even if they don't want to walk through or shout anything through it or whatever. But it's that whole, "I'm here if there's anything you want to tell me. Are you sure? You can tell me." You can just see Dumbledore... he knows that there's something, but Harry goes through that whole list in his head and says, "Nothing."

Lorrie: And I can understand that, because all the things that Harry doesn't feel like he can talk about are so complicated. He doesn't know if there's anything he can bring up that won't just get everything into worse trouble, like the way that Ron and Hermione both are so serious about him understanding snakes. "No, this is not normal. This is not okay." And the elaborate plans they have going on, and Dumbledore has not been very present.

JC: That's true. For me as a reader, I have to remember that at this point in the story, Harry doesn't really know that he can trust Dumbledore. Later on, you think, oh, yeah, he'd go right to Dumbledore with something, or maybe he would. But at this point, he doesn't know that he can trust Dumbledore beyond the fact that he's this really great wizard.

Lorrie: Yeah, he doesn't know how important Dumbledore thinks he is. He just knows that you don't just run into the headmaster's office for anything. So, yeah. I know some people have said, "Wow, Dumbledore doesn't really probe very much here," just to say, "Well, 12-year-old, do you have anything to say," and of course the 12-year-old is going to say, "No, Nothing." But I like the way he did it, just to let it settle. I'm also fantasizing that Dumbledore was able to read some of

what was going on in Harry's mind. I don't know. Maybe... I guess it feels respectful, to me, of how unprepared Harry is to process all the stuff that's happening.

JC: Right. Or just, I think, maybe... Yeah, my take on that scene, too, is that Dumbledore knows something's going on, but he was satisfied that Harry wasn't behind any of it, I guess. At this point, Dumbledore doesn't know a heck of a lot. He doesn't know about the diary, he doesn't know that the monster is a basilisk. There's lots of things that they don't know. They just know what the Chamber of Secrets says, they know what happened last time because he was there; but it is interesting, though, that he has this patience. Yes, another person's been Petrified. You think, 'Okay, horrible things are happening here.' It's interesting that he's not shaking Harry, like, "What's happening?! You know something, I know you do!" That's not happening here, so it's like, 'Wow, Dumbledore's playing a long game or something.' It's really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, and putting together a lot of pieces that Harry doesn't see, as well.

JC: Yeah, yeah. That is one of the things that's also interesting about this entire series: we're seeing it from the point of view of a child. As an adult reading this -- as an adult who's a parent, as an adult who is a teacher, as an adult who has been in the position of looking at the larger picture and understanding what's happening on a level that kids don't -- it's fascinating to see that limited perspective, and how that impacts what information we have access to as readers here.

Lorrie: Yeah. Oof. Then there's a passage that gives me a pang because it has repercussions in *Cursed Child*. Harry is thinking: "He was tired of people skirting around him in the corridors as though he were about to sprout fangs or spit poison; tired of all the muttering, pointing, and hissing as he passed." In *Cursed Child*, when something similar happens to his own kid, Albus, the only advice that 40-year-old Harry has for Albus is, "Oh, just ignore it. If you answer the gossip, you feed the gossip. Just find yourself some people like Ron and Hermione and just get through it." That's, of course, terrible advice, and drives Albus away from him; it just really underscores that that's pretty much the only help Harry was given at the same age. Harry doesn't think there's anything better than that. The only people helping Harry through this period are the Weasley twins, who are making terrible jokes (which at least let him let off some steam) and Ron and Hermione, who have cooked up this crackpot scheme to make Polyjuice Potion and they're not telling anybody anything. Nobody else is doing anything for Harry right now.

JC: Again, his experience as a child is that, too. He comes in and he's still just, what, 12 here. He has no reason to believe that it could be any different at this point, I don't think.

Lorrie: I agree. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and that's sad.

Lorrie: But that really illustrates how much I love *Cursed Child*, and what a gift of a play I think that is to show the repercussions when the same person doesn't think about this episode of their life a whole lot, and then goes on to be the parent of somebody going through something similar at that age. Having gotten only this much at this age, it completely means that this is the only tool Harry has; he is not equipped to do any better because this is what he got. Humans, we're not that imaginative when it comes to things like that; that's just imprinting. So much of parenting that you pull out of your pocket when your kid reaches that age is just imprinting and

unimaginatively repeating the same thing that you were taught, in however limited a fashion, at that age. Yeah.

JC: And it's so hard. Yeah. No, you and I both have teenagers. You have an adult, even, but we both have kids who are teenagers right now and we watch them go through all the awkward awfulness of adolescence. Yeah, I don't think that I was able to do more than be present and to listen, but I had no real advice for my kid when people were being awful. The one time that my kid really needed to tell a teacher about something that's happening, he did; and then, thank goodness the teacher took it seriously and escalated to the next level, which it needed to be. There have been a few times when my kid was able to come and say this is happening and I need help -- one time to just me, one time to a teacher -- and both times, the adult stepped up and did what they needed to do. That was really important to me as a parent: that my kid know that when you talk to an adult, that adult should take you seriously, and I was so relieved that it happened both times.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But Harry doesn't have any faith that talking to an adult is going to make any difference, and I think it's so interesting that even by the time he's an adult (as you mentioned) in *Cursed Child*, he still does that anyway. That his own kid telling a grown up what's happening should make a difference; "Nah, just suffer through it." That's all you can do? Oh, my God, Harry.

Lorrie: Because the problems don't actually get solved.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: The comfort comes when you find out that other people have seen this before and they know what it means and they know some ways to deal with it, but the problems don't go away and that's the awfulness. This is a whole 'reading Harry Potter After 2020' kind of feeling. The whole thing about revisiting something as a much older person is that in order to do any better for a younger generation, you can't do that unless you go back to remembering the feelings of the time, and that is very inconvenient and unpleasant.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Extremely unpleasant, and it would be so much nicer if you could just intellectually know what could be done better and then apply it without having to remember your own memories from that time, but that's not how this works. In order to really be of any use to somebody else and help them not suffer the same way that you did, you really do have to go back into the memories of the feelings. That's a nasty, nasty experience; you can really understand why 40-year-old Harry is not that great of a dad, because what he went through here at 12 is pretty awful with people almost dying, with him nearly being blamed for everything, with stuff happening everywhere. Meanwhile, he's got this voice in his head that his best friends tell him is bad news.

JC: The only people he really trusts, right.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it is, to me, quite reassuring that McGonagall takes one look and says "No, no, above my pay grade. Taking you to the headmaster." Okay, at least everybody knows this is serious. So yeah, Harry tells Dumbledore that he has nothing, nothing to say. Then it's Christmas, which is wonderful even when terrible things are happening, and Hermione is

hilarious. She is completely, terrifyingly business-like. She has figured out everything, and she just briskly lays out all the steps that they're going to have to do -- this increasingly outrageous series of rules they're going to have to break to just drug and then kidnap and then impersonate fellow students -- she's just rattling it off confidently, and the boys are struggling to keep up. They can't wrap their brains around what she's telling them to do. She's already on and several steps ahead. And I love this character so much: She says brightly that "Millicent Bulstrode has left this cat hair on my robes when she was trying to strangle me." Okay, that's how she got her mental revenge on that terrible loss she had to Millicent Bulstrode during the Dueling Club, is to think, 'Well, how can I turn this to my advantage?' And for a moment here, we get to think that Hermione actually comes out of this one ahead. Of course, she doesn't, but that's how she's thinking the whole time. Anyway, this character is very funny to me.

JC: This entire plan, it's amazing, but especially when she gets to the part with the cakes and how they're going to subdue Crabbe and Goyle, because at that point I'm like, 'Okay, this is something Bugs Bunny would do to Elmer Fudd at this point, or Daffy Duck. Oh, my God, this is a cartoon at this point.' And even Ron and Harry are like, "What? No, this is not going to work, this is so stupid. This is not going to work," but then it does.

Lorrie: It totally does.

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah.

Lorrie: And we get a little note of world building. She mentions the Hogwarts laundry.

JC: I totally missed that in my reading. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yeah. She sneaks into the Hogwarts laundry and gets larger robes so that Ron and Harry can fit into them once they have grown into these much larger kids.

JC: Now that makes sense, because way back in the first book, they got two sets of robes that was on their list. I guess while one's in the laundry, the other... How often do they change them? Now I have all kinds of questions. Is it typical teenagers, where they'll just be smelly at the end of a week, and it's time to put your other robe in the laundry chute? I don't know.

Lorrie: Yeah, I think it is, because at some point in this series, there's mention of a pair of socks that yell at you when they become too smelly.

JC: That's amazing. I'm also imagining all the teachers of the lower years being able to surreptitiously cast spells to make everyone smell better in their classroom. It's like that thing when you walk into a middle school classroom, it's like, "Oh, God, seventh graders, oh, no." Just to be able to cast a little "smell betterus" or whatever, although that would be such a great superpower to have as a teacher.

Lorrie: And that's exactly the age they are.

JC: That, and also to be able to make them shut up. That would be the other thing. To be able to wave your wand and they can't talk anymore, holy crap. Wouldn't that be amazing? I don't know if there's a spell like that...

Lorrie: There is.

JC: In this universe. Is there?

Lorrie: There's actually -- and this is in *Crimes of Grindelwald*, the movie -- there's a spell where Leta Lestrange as a student casts a spell on this horrible other student to make her mouth sort of disappear.

JC: Oh, I remember that. Yeah.

Lorrie: And then this student goes and tattles to McGonagall, and she's such a pain that McGonagall just replaces the spell and does the same thing to her and erases her mouth.

JC: Oh, gosh.

Lorrie: So yeah, here they are being seventh graders. Then they make the Polyjuice Potion, and the three Slytherins' Polyjuice Potions turn out to be pee, a booger, and poop. Yup, they're seventh graders.

JC: Lovely.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It is interesting, though, the whole description of the Polyjuice scene: when they first walk into the bathroom, there's just black smoke everywhere, and it's a good thing that the school's basically empty, because at this point they would have been caught. But also, the description of when you drop the hair in, it changes and bubbles, and it's so interesting. It makes me wonder on a chemical level: how is this potion working that it breaks down the DNA of whatever is in the... That's really interesting. And then, of course, the description of what it feels like to take the Polyjuice Potion. It's very interesting, very vivid.

Lorrie: It's painful, it's queasy. I just realized right now: Okay, if it makes this kind of a horrendous, uncomfortable change in people's minds to try to understand what it's like to be somebody that you hate -- someone that's not you? I just realized that might have been similar to how Voldemort felt right after he tried to kill 15-month-old Harry, because something happens to Voldemort when that spell rebounds, and he's so physically uncomfortable that he would have died if he'd been mortal. But what's happening to him at that moment is empathy, which he's never experienced before. He has orphaned this baby, and then the baby is crying and looking at him feeling really, really lonely, and Voldemort remembers how that feels to be a baby like that. Just the whole sensation of knowing what it might be like to be somebody else and have their feelings is massively uncomfortable on a cellular level. That's what these kids are going through. It's so uncomfortable, and then Harry comes out of the bathroom stall and he looks at himself; he looks in the cracked mirror and it's significant that this mirror is cracked. This is the difficulty with which you look at your enemy, or you imagine yourself as your enemy looking at how you are. What would it be like to look in the mirror and see this person instead from that different perspective? This is the same cracked mirror that Harry and Draco see each other in in *Sectumsempra*. Same bathroom, same cracked mirror.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. And then they become these people and they do a little bit of practice about how to move, and then they don't know why Hermione's like, "You guys go on without me."

JC: It's a little interesting in that when they speak, they have the voices of the people that they're embodying. But Hermione... it's interesting. There's no hint yet that she's turned into some strange human-cat hybrid. The voice part -- they still recognize her voice or they hear a voice.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: But then, I guess, the next thing that really stands out to me is that they don't know where the dungeons are. They don't know how to get to the Slytherin common room, and I thought, oh, this is the one thing. No one thought of this in Hermione's elaborate plan? Or maybe Hermione knew, but was so freaked out about being a cat at the moment that she couldn't. They were like, "We're just going to go." In all this big plan, the whole point was to go to the Slytherin common room. How did you not know where it is? But anyway, they head in that direction.

Lorrie: Yeah. They eventually make it in.

JC: After running into Percy sneaking around the dungeons, which was like, "Hmm, Percy, whatcha up to?"

Lorrie: And Penelope Clearwater, also.

JC: Oh, hello. Very interesting. And of course, the Slytherin password is 'pureblood'.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And Draco's like, "What's the password again? Oh yeah." "Really? You forgot about that?" This whole thing, the whole scene with Draco, I think is really interesting. And one thing: back before they actually took the Polyjuice Potion, back during the part of the chapter where it's talking about Harry passing through the halls and people treating him badly, there's this line about how Draco gets this sour look on his face every time someone says that Harry must be the heir of Slytherin.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it's so interesting because that connects to the part that we're up to now: is he jealous? Is he actually considering it? It doesn't seem like it, when they're in the common room, that he actually thinks that Harry... he doesn't mention Harry. He doesn't think it could be Harry.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But he doesn't want it to be Harry, either, is the other thing, because he wants this to be someone he could work with. He would love to find this person and befriend them and he doesn't want that to be Harry, so it's very interesting thinking about Draco's perspective on this.

Lorrie: "Draco, you are not the main character."

JC: Yeah, exactly. "You're not the main character here." Oh, he wants to be. Oh, but that makes it even funnier. I got the sense of this: the fact that Harry lives in Draco's head rent-free.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: The entire time, all he can really talk about is... it's 90 percent how awful Harry is, and then 10 percent "oh, and the Weasleys, blah, blah, blah." They live in his head rent-free. They don't spend that much time talking about him. A little bit this time, because they think he's the Heir of Slytherin, but that whole thing where they sit down and he immediately just goes into his spiel. I'm thinking, this is why Crabbe and Goyle are his only friends, because everyone else was like, "Oh, my God, will you shut up?!"

Lorrie: "Shut up about Harry Potter!"

JC: "Who cares about Harry Potter? Just stop!" No one else can stand to be around him. These are his only friends. I was like, "Oh, my God, Draco."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "You've got to stop."

Lorrie: Well, they're not going to stop him.

JC: Oh, true.

Lorrie: Then we hear Draco say, "Father's always said old Dumbledore's the worst thing that's ever happened to this place." Good, that confirms for Harry and Ron: yes, Lucius has an agenda. Then they hear all sorts of interesting tidbits. "'Last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood died. So I bet it's a matter of time before another one's killed this time. I hope it's Granger,' he said with relish." That is actually shocking to me as a reader. You're reading this as like, "Ah, funny, seventh graders." No, he's wishing death on a classmate and just openly, knowing that that really might happen. The whole thing makes me feel like, okay, Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle are just as immature and in the dark as Harry, Ron, and Hermione -- actually more so -- and they're just saying what they think they should be saying. But then Draco says, "Father says to keep my head down and let the Heir of Slytherin get on with it. He says the school needs ridding of all the Mudblood filth, but not to get mixed up in it." Now his own father is telling him, "You're not the main character."

JC: Yeah. And the only way Draco can rebel against that is... yeah. It's so interesting that, again, Lucius thinks Draco is slightly incompetent. We talked about this before, but Draco is not good enough. His father doesn't really trust that Draco can be a good agent at Hogwarts; otherwise, his dad would be giving him more information or sending him on missions, and Draco knows that and he's frustrated by it. I find that really interesting, too. Yes, he's only 12.

Lorrie: He doesn't show faith, but also Lucius is also trying to protect Draco.

JC: Right. That, too.

Lorrie: Because what's going on is so dangerous and serious, and it's too awful for his sweet little son to get mixed up in.

JC: Right, yeah. And Harry doesn't really have anyone who feels that way about him. That's the one thing that you can say about the difference between Harry and Draco: Draco's parents love him.

Lorrie: Yeah. They're trying to protect him.

JC: My God, his mother loves him as much as Harry's mom loved him. I know that's a big theme, the whole "mother's love" thing, but Draco is awful, a little shit as he can be. His parents adore him and want to protect him.

Lorrie: Narcissa cares about his feelings.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: And his growth as a human.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: This comes up in *Cursed Child*, too. Draco has got to be afraid on a deep-down level of what his father is doing. He's trying to live up to it all by being, "yay, gung-ho, Team Malfoy," just like Lucius wants him to be, but he doesn't even know what his father is doing. Only that there's life-and-death stakes he's not being let in on. It's too dangerous for him to know what it is. In *Cursed Child*, what we see is Scorpius later confronting Draco at the same age as a middle-aged man, being afraid of who Draco had been -- the same as Albus is afraid of who Harry had been -- afraid that his father had committed some really horrible crimes. Which he has: both Draco and Harry end up committing Unforgivables. That's just a really uneasy dynamic, to be the son of somebody who is an active genocidal bigot. In *Cursed Child*, both Draco and Scorpius have given up on Lucius. They just know that's who he is. This is an uneasiness that's being brewed into Draco right now. It's really not a secure foundation for a 12-year-old boy, but he's trying to put a brave face on it. But yeah, he's so annoyed when he has to admit, "Again, I told you, I don't know who it is." He doesn't want to admit that. "Stop bringing that up. I'm sensitive about it, okay?" But yeah, the whole expedition does yield the valuable information that there is a secret chamber under the drawing room floor in Malfoy Manor.

JC: I gasped when I read that. I gasped. I was like *gasps* "Oh, my God, we're going to see that room again."

Lorrie: Oi, yai, yai, yai, yai. And yeah, the feud between Lucius and Arthur goes back and forth a few times. Right now, Arthur has just lost, but he's about to win again.

JC: Oh, right, yeah. Yeah, because Ron's going to write his dad and say, "Hey, there's this secret chamber where they're hiding all their shit." Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Oh, my gosh. It was good to read this scene and read how it was written, compared to how it was portrayed in the film because, like I said -- again, as I've said 100 times -- I have not read this book in a long time. In the film, it was annoying how the boys kept losing sight of their mission in the film adaptation; but in this it was good to see that they were getting pissed off at things they were hearing, but they were also really focused on getting what information they could out of Draco as best they could. Oh, what was the cute little line where I guess... Cute. It was funny. There's a funny line where Draco looks at one of them and says, "I knew you were slow, but you're going backwards now," or something like that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Draco, these are the only people who will hang out with you. This could've been like... what was the line? I don't know if it was in the film or in the book. "I didn't know you could read," that line. He knows he's hanging out with idiots.

Lorrie: Yeah, I think that was... Tom Felton ad-libbed that one, apparently.

JC: Oh, okay. That's fun.

Lorrie: Yeah, because canonically in the books, Crabbe and Goyle can read because there's that comic book series that they read about the Mad Muggle.

JC: Oh, right. Yeah.

Lorrie: Canonically, I think the only person who maybe is illiterate is Aberforth Dumbledore.

JC: Oh, that's interesting. It is interesting, though, that... again, thinking about that Crabbe and Goyle friendship, that little triangle of friends. They're sort of the opposite of Harry, Ron, and Hermione; you've got Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle and that they're sort of the classic... you've got your big dumb friends and you're a bully, etc. But also, it's just interesting, again, that these are the only people that will consistently hang around with Draco. Oh, God. It's so fascinating.

Lorrie: Eventually, the Polyjuice wears off. Ron and Harry realize this with horror and pelt out of there; they pass by the closet where they've locked Crabbe and Goyle, and they hear a muffled pounding coming from inside that closet. That is terrifying.

JC: And then just leave the shoes outside and keep going.

Lorrie: Yeah, which is kind of charming and awful of them, yeah. I just wonder if Crabbe and Goyle are going to be able to figure out what happened.

JC: Yeah. I guess on the surface, it seems like a prank. "Oh, we ate these chocolate cakes. Oh, something knocked us out, and then we woke up in a closet with our shoes missing. Haha. Probably some Gryffindors." It feels like a prank, but it does raise the question: when they come back, if they tell, would they tell Draco what happened?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Or would they not, because it's embarrassing that someone pulled one over on them?

Lorrie: Yeah. We don't have evidence of whether they can put it together right away that it was Ron and Harry in disguise and if Draco has just given away all those secrets. I'm guessing at this point that they don't figure that out, because they're too young to really know what Polyjuice is. The fact that Hermione knows what it is, and then has successfully brewed it, is super advanced. We just know that by sixth year, Crabbe and Goyle are doing it to other people. Then I realized that when Ron attributes the funny expression on his face to having a stomach ache... actually, I didn't ever connect it before but that does make sense, because they've been eating so much. Well, yeah, you would have a stomach ache by then, so maybe at this point 12-year-old Draco is just shrugging and thinking that it all has to do with just being stuffed for the holidays and he doesn't understand what just happened. But also, how much are Crabbe and Goyle communicating to him? Just a few minutes back, when you talked about the secret chamber under the drawing room in Malfoy Manor, I didn't connect until just then: 'Oh, that's the torture chamber.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The whole time, I was just thinking it was where they keep their expensive contraband. Oh. Yikes. Okay. Whoo!

JC: That was my read anyway, was that it's the dungeon where Hermione –

Lorrie: No, I think you're absolutely right.

JC: Where they trap Dobby and trap everyone. Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, no, no, I think you're absolutely right.

JC: So that's interesting that it makes an appearance here.

Lorrie: Yikes. Well, yeah, by that time, it's empty because Arthur Weasley got it cleared out.

JC: Yes. Lorrie: Yikes. So the boys end up back in the bathroom, and they find out what Hermione has been crying about. She has done so much: she's been ahead of them in the puberty game, she has dragged them into this next phase of understanding, of mental maturity, but she can't do it without a price. She doesn't know what she's doing, either. I have read people say that her turning into a cat is a reference to Bastet, the Egyptian cat goddess, and this is a mythology that I know nothing about, so I don't know. I don't have the flexibility to understand how that works. But anyone who does, please feel free to come forward and share, because I don't know. But it's very evocative that Hermione has just been on a separate plane from everyone else this whole book with the way she's been thinking and the way she's been working outside of the rules, and just making everybody follow along with what she's doing. Okay, so now she's a cat, and Moaning Myrtle is thrilled. There's that Schadenfreude theme of this volume again. She's like the counterpart to Peeves; this is the best thing that's ever happened to Myrtle.

JC: "Oh, everyone's going to tease you." Yeah. "You have a tail."

Lorrie: I know. She cannot wait. So that is the end of that chapter. Do you have final thoughts?

JC: Oh, I just have one more thought...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which is that I love that Harry makes this comment that, "Oh, we'll just take you to the hospital ward, because Madam Pomfrey never asks too many questions."

Lorrie: I know. Bless her.

JC: And I love that because I just thought, yeah, she's seen everything, kind of like the ER people who sometimes post the wacky things that they have to take out people's asses. It's kind of like that.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JC: Madam Pomfrey never asks questions. A student comes in who's been transformed weirdly into a cat. "Yeah. Okay. Yeah, we see that all the time." That idea of Madam Pomfrey just going, "All right, bring them in," is really, really interesting. I love that.

Lorrie: The confidentiality is so crucial to what she does. They won't come to her if they think that she's going to rat on them.

JC: Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: And this book ends really nicely with Dumbledore saying officially to Harry, "Is there anything you want to tell me?" and Harry says "No." But Harry knows, based on more than one thing by this point, that if you show up to Pomfrey, she'll just do what she needs to do. She's not going to lecture you. She's not going to do any of the things that create barriers between adult caregivers and kids.

JC: Yeah. I just love that moment there.

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, I guess it's not really "good cop/bad cop", but yeah. No, Dumbledore is official on the record: "No, Harry has nothing to say," and Pomfrey is practical. Oh, Harry's bringing her a cat, and nobody knows why. So when I had the fifth grade reading group, we worked on this part of the story. This was an exercise that I did alongside having them try to see things from the Slytherin point of view, like about the house cup standings changing at the end of Sorcerer's Stone; about the school buying a broom for Harry after breaking rules for him; about how Slytherin had to buy their own team brooms to try to even the score, blah blah blah. Slytherin see things different; their experience is different, and if you look hard enough in the narrative, you can see this, but you have to look from their point of view. If you think about the insights that Hermione, Ron, and Harry have just gained by impersonating their enemies, it's really significant. I set up a brewing station, a potion station, for these kids. They were fifth-graders, and I took a lentil soup recipe. So lacewing flies, that's the label I put on these onions browned in olive oil. Then I got diced carrots and I called them leeches. And you know the Harry Potter font that you can download?

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: "Leeches." Yes, but it's actually diced carrots. Fluxweed was a bay leaf; knotgrass was a mixture of ground sage and dried thyme. I had to fudge it to get the right number of ingredients. Boomslang skin, that was the rinsed lentils. Powdered bicorn horn was salt and pepper; and then bits of the person you want to change into is chopped tomatoes, because in the recipe -- the Mollie Katzen Moosewood Restaurant cookbook recipe that I was using from the 1970s and 80s -- chopped tomatoes are the last thing you add, so obviously that's got to be bits of the person you're changing into.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: And then I wrote out the instructions. I said to "put the lacewing flies into a clean dry cauldron." I was using a Korean ttukbaegi. It's a ceramic stew pot that looks like a cauldron. It is a cauldron. I said, "Heat the cauldron over a medium flame for about two minutes, stirring five times clockwise slowly with a non-reactive wooden stirring rod." They pick one out. "Add the leeches, stir five times clockwise. Add a leaf of fluxweed. Add the knotgrass. Add shredded Boomslang skin, plus enough preserving fluid to cover generously. Adjust flame to high. Stir gently counterclockwise three times." You've got to picture these fifth-grade boys reading the scroll. I printed it out on parchment.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: I did the Harry Potter font, rolled it up in a scroll, and tied it with a ribbon, so they had to untie the ribbon and peer at the scroll and look at the font. They'd have the scroll in one hand and they have the wooden spoon in the other, and they're stirring counterclockwise. "When potion begins to bubble, reduce flame to low. Stir gently clockwise three times." So they do that. "The potion should simmer for three quarters of an hour. Cast an hourglass charm to track the time." They took a moment. "Oh, yeah. Okay, set the alarm." "Every quarter hour, stir gently twice. Add water as necessary. Adjust flame to maintain a slow simmer." They're doing that while they're coming back to the discussion, but they have to keep an eye on the potion. "Add powdered horn of bicorn and stir in a figure eight pattern, gently and slowly, four times. At this stage, the potion should be nearing the consistency of thick mud, bubbling sluggishly. So they're checking. "Okay, nothing's burning." "Add bits of the person you want to change into. Simmer ten more minutes. Test potion for doneness. If the Boomslang skin has begun to dissolve, cast

an extinguishing spell on the flame and decant potion." Okay, so they're figuring this out, and the instructions finish: "Think about a person you've seen around but don't know very well. Maybe you don't like them. You don't know much about their life. And now, take the potion that lets you know how it feels to be in someone else's skin." So yeah, they got their bowls of lentil soup. They sat down and ate lunch that they had made themselves, and they thought about somebody from school that they didn't know very well and they didn't like, and they thought about what it might be like to go through life as that person.

JC: I love all of the descriptions of the lessons that you developed for these kids.

Lorrie: Yeah, I wanted to empower the kids to feel like you can make this magic in anything you do, that there's no distance between what these kids are doing at Hogwarts and what you're living through your life. You don't have to sit there thinking, 'Wow I wish I could get my Hogwarts letter.' No, you have it. Everything that these kids are going through is real crap that real seventh graders have to struggle with. It's just as unfun and mundane with just as stupid accidents happening, like Hermione turning into a cat.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Well, why didn't you ask an adult?" Seriously? What's going on? You can't really trust adults. That is true. That's happening to seventh graders all the time. Maybe you should have, like Ron and Harry with the flying car at the beginning. Maybe you should have just asked an adult; maybe the answer was super easy, and only a dumb seventh grader would have made this kind of mistake. Or maybe in this case, no, the answer is not easy. The adults aren't that far ahead of you. It is really scary. Nobody really knows what's happening and the stakes are super high, but the one thing that you can do to try to move forward is: well, if there's somebody trying to hurt you, try to think about who they are and how they're feeling. You don't have to like them any better, but it'll help you understand the situation more because you need to protect yourself.

JC: And did you talk about that with them? Was that part of... You just had them think about it, or was there any discussion around... I'm just curious what they talked about there, and how thinking about turning into someone you don't like would help them think about that person's perspective.

Lorrie: Well, this exercise I did with a group of three, and all three were different races. One of them was mixed race; one of them was mixed religion. There's some gender stuff happening there, too, so yeah, there was a lot of variety just in their lived experience. Plus, middle school being what it is, every single day is another fight about identity just trying to stand in line in a lunchroom, so it was extremely present. Yeah. They knew it was serious, and I think talking about these issues with this book series this way -- with the stakes this high -- helped validate for them that it is really rough being that age. The issues you face are just as serious as the ones adults face; you just don't have nearly as much experience and resources.

JC: Yeah. I think that's one of the classic hallmarks of good children's literature: it takes kids' concerns very seriously -- and the kinds of danger that kids can be in and the kinds of horrors that they face -- and it turns them into monsters that can be fought in a physical way. But that idea of the horrors that the kids of the series are facing are very real, and as difficult as it can be as a parent to read this and to think about, these are children. Look what's happening to them. From a child's perspective, it's very recognizable, the things that these characters are going through, or recognizable in a different way. We as adults can look back on our own childhoods

(and as you said earlier, that can be painful and difficult to do) and think about what we wish had happened. Then we can think about how we try to protect our own kids -- our own children and other people's children, or the people around us -- how we try to protect them from these kinds of things, and then you can question what the adults in the book are and are not doing to protect kids. But yeah, it's so interesting to think about from a kid's perspective, like what you were doing with that exercise, how cathartic things like that can be.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Draco's position in this chapter is so tenuous, having to put on the face of bravado while being just as ignorant as everybody else but with a lot more to worry about. He's waiting to see evidence of what his father has been doing and he's supposed to act like he knew it was coming and to be all confident and to reap the benefits and jump on it when it happens, but he doesn't really know what it is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He is just being asked to trust, but in what? I guess if I were Draco, I also wouldn't want Crabbe and Goyle saying, "Are you sure you don't know?" "Yes, I'm sure. Shut up." 'Saint Potter.'

JC: Yeah, exactly. And it's interesting, too, that this sets up -- I think this is true. I may eat these words, but I feel like this part sets up the fact that Harry doesn't really take Draco seriously as an enemy again for a while. He just becomes an annoyance again, but he doesn't really think Draco is dangerous again for a few books.

Lorrie: Yeah. Draco doesn't actually know what he's talking about.

JC: Yeah. I think at this point, Harry's like, 'Oh, okay.' He's not actually evil. He would like to be evil, but he doesn't have the tool set yet. 'Eh. Okay, yeah, he's annoying, but...'

Lorrie: Yeah. "Out of my way, Draco."

JC: 'Connected to someone who's actually evil, but yeah, I don't have to worry about him.' And it's a few books...

Lorrie: "Draco, I've got real problems, not you."

JC: Right, exactly. Exactly. Yeah, but in a few books, Draco becomes actually dangerous and that's a surprise to Harry. At least, that's my memory of it. We will see when we get there.

Lorrie: Well, it's a surprise to other people. Harry keeps trying to tell people. "No, Draco is a Death Eater," and they're like, "Who, Draco Malfoy? No." "No, no, I'm serious."

JC: That's... yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Lorrie: So yeah, this was quite an adventure, this chapter.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: And it's a good thing that they have learned all these revelations, because the next chapter is called The Very Secret Diary and it gets very real and scary.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: I will talk to you then.

JC: All right, yes. Looking forward to it.

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.