

Transcript

Episode 4.34

Book 4, Chapter 34: Priori Incantatem

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread 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 Four, Chapter Thirty-Four: Priori Incantatem.

Lorrie: Priori Incantatem. Voldemort attempts to kill Harry in front of his Death Eaters, but finds that their wands connect and create gold. This connection brings forth memories of the last several spells cast by Voldemort's wand; the memories protect Harry and help him escape. It's a moment of high tension, JC.

JC: Yes, and I think, as we mentioned in the last episode, this is the point where the chapter breaks are meaningless. It's just... You just keep going.

Lorrie: Yeah. Voldemort wants to duel. He has Wormtail thrust Harry's wand into Harry's hand and Wormtail does this without looking at him, which makes me think about what it does to people when they're the ones who have to contribute toward executions. It takes a toll.

JC: Right. If you look at that person, you have to acknowledge their humanity.

Lorrie: Yeah, and know what you're setting them up for.

JC: Right. It's also interesting that Wormtail's new hand apparently can just cut through the ropes.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's just really strong.

JC: Yeah. He's got this super hand now.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Magical hand. It's also interesting to me that at the beginning of this chapter, Wormtail hands Harry his wand and Harry realizes that he is so injured that he really couldn't just run away. He's really trapped here, so this moment of realization for him where he's like, "The only spell I really know is the one for disarming. I am not prepared for a duel like this against any adult, let alone this one..."

Lorrie: Plus his thirty goons.

JC: And it's just that moment of looking around and realizing, 'I'm probably going to die here, and how am I going to face it?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Who am I, and how would I like my life to end?'

JC: Yeah, and he's fourteen.

Lorrie: Yeah. Voldemort, when he very formally asks Harry to enter into this duel with him -- "You've learned to duel, right?" Without mentioning Snape, that's where the Snape storyline of disarming re-enters. This is the first time (but not the last) in this series that the Snape disarmament spell is going to pay off. This is what he taught the children that even a child can do. You can't outduel adults based on skill, but this is something you can do. Anyone can do this.

JC: And it's a great -- we talked about it back when it was first introduced, but the idea that "I'm not going to fight you" is kind of the message there, right? It's like, "Who knows which of us would come out on top, but I'm not going to do damage to my soul by hurting you."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I'm just going to take your ability to fight me away." Wow, that's powerful.

Lorrie: "And I would rather do that than hurt you, even though..."

JC: "I know you would hurt me easily." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Voldemort then mocks Harry by forcing him to bow and humiliating him, and the Death Eaters laugh. As you mentioned in the previous episode, you have to read this thinking, 'Doesn't this make any of these Death Eaters feel sick?' Well, either they're hiding it or no, this is their idea of a good time. Then Voldemort says this very curious thing: he tells Harry, "And now you face me, like a man... straight-backed and proud, the way your father died..." and that confused me. Why would he say this? Because this actually encourages Harry, and we see later in the chapter that he remembers these words and thinking, 'Oh, yeah, I'm going to be like my dad and proud.'

I guess it's part of Voldemort's fantasy that he wants to build up Harry to be a worthy adversary, that he feels like he deserves this. He deserves a real fight, some real answers or some real struggles from somebody, somewhere.

JC: Yeah. That really stood out to me, too, because it's hard to know what the truth is, because later he says something very different.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I don't know if it was in this book or if it's another book in the future... He implies that Harry's dad begged for his life or whatever, so it's hard to know what the truth is, but it is interesting that he made the choice to say something to bolster Harry in the moment. Yeah, why would he make that choice? That is so interesting.

Lorrie: And just... yeah, how it emphasizes that these are two people who didn't really know their fathers. The story... You want the story, whether you have any information or not. He starts off, as usual, with *Crucio* and he gives Harry some pain, and then we get this nasty moment of sadism when we see that after *Crucio*, Voldemort's "slit-like nostrils dilate with excitement." Yuck! Having cast that Unforgivable, he then follows up with *Imperio*, and I continue to be so impressed at how brilliant it is that this series casts *Imperio* as a blissful sensation.

JC: Interesting, yeah. The pain goes away...

Lorrie: Aaaahhh... Your mind "has been wiped of all thought... not to think, it was as though you were floating and dreaming..." Imagine a life where you never had to adult. It's just the temptation to be taken care of and do as you're told and not question. Is this actually endangering you? Oh, don't think about that.

JC: Yeah. It's like a really good high or something, but something that's going to come back and haunt you, right? I feel like this is evoking a sense of being on a really powerful drug, too. You've got heroin or some kind of opioid that I don't have any personal experience with, but that idea of, 'Yeah, I don't care about anything except what I'm feeling at this moment, and I'm feeling great. Whatever happens, the consequences of this... Hmm,' all of that. It's really interesting that it feels like it's calling on that, and the fact that, first of all, Harry is able to throw it off; then that Barty Crouch Jr. is the one that taught him to throw it off... That's really interesting, too, right? Barty Crouch Jr.'s personal vendetta about being kept under the Imperius Curse and learning how to throw it off... It was really important to him that the kids learn how to do it, and that it's because of him that Harry can throw it off here, but also this idea of throwing away the comfort of that moment. Harry, wherever it comes from inside him -- whether it's just knowing this isn't real or whatever -- Harry just decides in this moment, 'No, this is not what I want. I would rather face the pain and the torture...'

Lorrie: It's dangerous, yeah.

JC: 'Than lose control or hand over control like this.' He's been taught to throw it off, so he has a choice. That's so interesting to me.

Lorrie: Yeah, he does, and he's strong. What it reminds me of -- I've seen this happen. Kids who are abused by their parents or caregivers, even when they are adults... It's really tempting to stop fighting against the enormous lie that the abusers have constructed and to just say, "Okay, I believe in your version of things." I've seen people say, "Let's ask my mother or father. They'll know what to do," and then what the person says to do is completely horrifying, but it's comforting. It's comforting to think, 'Yes, okay, that's the world I believe in, not the real truth,' which is, 'No, actually, you've been horribly abused your whole life and it's going to be a struggle.' But this is people believing politicians' lies. 'No, if we vote for this person, then the price of eggs will come down.' Well, first of all, avian flu, and second of all, no, they're not.

JC: Right. The comforting lie, yeah. I think what you're getting at is really connecting to the reality of the world we live in.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That a comforting lie...

Lorrie: That's what people want.

JC: Yeah, people want that. It's like, "Yeah, lie to me."

Lorrie: Somebody to take care of you. Yeah.

JC: "Tell me that you're going to fix it, especially if you have a patriarchal worldview, right?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And you think that it's possible for someone powerful to just take over and make it work.

Lorrie: Make it okay.

JC: And if that's your worldview, then of course you would go for that. You'd be like, "Yeah, great. We just have to find the right person to take over, and then, yeah, they might abuse their power, but they'll be taking care of things." That idea of a patriarchal leader who becomes this abusive father, but yet things are happening, right? You're being taken care of, even if you're being abused.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That idea that people are in the position of having to make that choice, or "I won't be abused. I'll be one of the Death Eaters laughing on the side."

Lorrie: Oh, gosh, yeah.

JC: "I'm not going to be the person who's getting the Cruciatus Curse aimed at them."

Lorrie: Free will is a burden. The thing about coming from such a crappy background as Harry is that more than you're supposed to, children his age are supposed to still think that maybe there's a way for somebody to take care of everything, and he has been artificially, brutally stripped of that. He knows, 'No, you're not going to be saved,' and the unhappy advantage that gives him is that he cannot be seduced by this promise. No, it is not ever good to cede control because no, you cannot trust people to have your best interests at heart.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Constant vigilance.

JC: Constant vigilance. Yes.

Lorrie: And then what really got me was as soon as he throws off *Imperio*, "back rushed the aches that the Cruciatus Curse had left all over his body..." Oh, that really resonated with me. One of my children has chronic pain -- has a pretty severe chronic illness -- and when people say, "Why don't you try meditating, be mindful," she has to explain to them that's not a cure-all. It is helpful for some people, but when she is mindful and is aware of the moment, then all of the work she constantly does to endure her never-ending physical pain so she can go on with her life -- that protective labor that she does in her mind -- is disengaged, so her physical pain comes back and it's not okay because the pain is not going to go away. It never grows any less, and if she's aware of it, then she's going to have to start all over again, motivating herself to just live. Anyone recommending mindfulness...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Don't think that just because it worked for you that it would work for everybody, but that's something that Harry is going to be learning in the next couple volumes: times that you have to protect yourself and turn it off and times that you have to be alert and keep your mind open. Right now, even though the aches are all rushing back, no, he has to be alert, so he chooses.

JC: It's not quite the same as your child's experience, but it's reminding me of when my child was born and I had a C-section, like many do. Because my child was a preemie -- micro-preemie, even in the NICU -- normally the drugs that they would give you for pain after a C-section are just fine to be passed through breast milk, but because he was a

micro-preemie, I was told, "He can't have your milk until you stop taking those drugs," so I said, "Okay, then I'll start taking them." So I stopped taking painkillers, and turns out that ibuprofen works pretty dang well and ibuprofen was fine.

Lorrie: Good.

JC: But that idea of, 'I'm feeling this pain, but for a reason...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'And the reason it is more important for me to be able to feed my baby than it is for me to be pain-free.' It was not even a question in my mind.

Lorrie: No.

JC: It was like, "Oh, then I'll stop taking them."

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And I feel that here with Harry, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'In order to be in control of myself, I'll take the pain. Yeah, the pain is back. Okay, that means I'm back.'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: 'That means that I'm in control of what's happening to me, and then I can protect the people around me' or whatever he's going to do, right?

Lorrie: Right, or survive, or at least not let this asshole have one more win in his column.

JC: Yeah, yeah. The pain is a reminder that you're alive and that you're here, you're in control.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Or in control for certain values of it, but yeah. Yeah, I feel that, too, that when the pain comes back, it's like, "Okay..."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: A little bit of, 'All right, let's go.'

Lorrie: Yeah. And then Harry starts fighting back. "With the reflexes born of his Quidditch training," he starts to dodge, and this reminds me again of Barbara Lamond Purdom, my friend who talks about how the Quidditch themes that run through this book are all about how games work as metaphors for the way Harry learns how to fight for his

life and his survival, and the Quidditch games parallel events that he has to go through. Yeah, he has been trained -- he can actually dodge! -- and to continue the game theme, Voldemort continues talking in this way that reveals that he is a child who wants a friend. He says, "We are not playing hide-and-seek, Harry... come out and play, then..." This is an intentional eerie, grotesquely wrong immaturity in their dialogue; we're talking about death and murder, and they're talking about children's games. Voldemort is so lonely.

JC: It's also so creepy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's a reminder that the person he's trying to kill is a child.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We're all watching him torture and kill a child right now, and he's taunting this child with, "Come out and play..." Yeah, it makes it extra creepy, and all these Death Eaters are just standing around and watching.

Lorrie: And that'll happen again in *Order of the Phoenix* -- that Bellatrix will taunt Harry using childish language -- and that points to what's at the root of all of these insecurities for the Death Eaters, their own terror of powerlessness, and that's what they're taunting each other about. Then there's this intense thing that Voldemort says, where he says death "will be quick... it might even be painless... I would not know... I have never died..." I thought, 'Wow, that is superior and yet incredibly pained all at once. That's intense.' Meanwhile, Harry -- having just seen the disgusting, stomach-crawling example of Wormtail and Lucius Malfoy -- knows that the one thing he won't do is kneel to this guy. No! We know what cringing in front of him looks like. No, it's not worth it. "He was going to die upright like his father..." Okay, Voldemort. Well, you'll get that satisfaction anyway. That leads up to the first time (but not the last) that Harry meets Voldemort's Killing Curse within *Expelliarmus*.

JC: And I love that it's automatic now. We talked, way back when Snape first introduced this one, that he really wanted it to be the first thing that the kids would go for, and it is. It's the only spell that he can think of. It just comes out; he doesn't think.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's beautiful.

Lorrie: So what did you think would happen when Harry crosses the Killing Curse with an *Expelliarmus*, and what did you think when you saw what happened?

JC: I don't remember what I thought would happen because I was reading so fast the first time through. I was just gulping it down, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But it was really interesting to come back and read this scene again because I think I've watched the movie version multiple times. I don't think the movie version does gold here; it just has their spells back and forth and push against each other, so it doesn't make gold. I had forgotten about that fact: that when their curses meet in the middle, the whole stream of magic becomes gold, and the idea of connection. The fact that when they're lifted to their feet and moved to another place where it's free from all the tombstones, and then this golden cage forms around them and the phoenix song is playing because both of their wand cores come from the same phoenix... That is really fascinating. I'm really curious about the wand lore behind all of that, and I'm sure that much meta has been written about exactly what happened in that scene, but it is really interesting that Harry hears the phoenix song and understands how important it is to not break this connection, and that connecting with Voldemort is the thing that's going to save his life here.

Lorrie: Yeah. I had wondered, 'What is it when their wands connect and then they get moved up in the air away from the tombstones and to a clear patch?' And then I thought, 'Oh, well, one thing it means is that Harry is now closer kin to Voldemort than anyone else has ever been.' Certainly, Voldemort feels closer to Harry than he ever did to the dad that he killed. This connection is the first time Voldemort has ever connected with another human being ever. This is the first time he has felt that who he is at the core is similar to who another person is at the core, and his soul has been hungry for this his entire life. This is the contemptible commonplace magic that anyone who's been loved has experienced, and that was denied to him through no fault of his own. The "bright, deep gold"... He's never felt this, and part of what caused it is what happens to his mind when he attacks somebody with the intent to kill and then he's met with only self-defense, like you were saying. With disarmament only, not with hostility. That can have an effect on people's emotions in a way that somebody fighting back with aggression might not. It emphasizes that the other person who was your intended victim... it's not a dehumanized thing. It's not an Other; it's another person, which, taken to a more logical conclusion, is to think to kill this other person would be like killing a part of yourself. That's something that people who have known love would be able to sense. Voldemort has never had any reason to be able to sense that before. Yeah, this moment, he has gone from somebody who's never connected with a single human being to somebody who has. Nothing's prepared him for this.

JC: Other things that are coming up for me in this whole idea of connection is that it seems to be that the author is saying this is how you defeat... 'Defeat an enemy' sounds a little too dramatic, but I'm thinking about -- Okay, I'm thinking about the author and her own stance on trans folks, and there's a sense in which in this scene she's telling us how to combat her own stance, and I think people tried and it didn't work.

Lorrie: She has been refusing meetings with queer rights groups since TERFpocalypse started back in December of 2019, when she sent out the first tweet and different organizations said in the best faith, "We're not asking you for anything except meet with us. We will come to you, we'll meet you wherever you want. Just talk to us," and she has consistently refused, which reminds me of Wormtail not making eye contact with Harry.

JC: Yeah. I think it also explains -- we've talked about this before at some point -- the desire of so many people in Harry Potter fandom... This idea that if we could just connect with her, then it would fix things, and I think it comes back to this idea here, right?

Lorrie: It's a fantasy. Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And she knows enough to avoid it. The vulnerability that Voldemort has just built into himself unintentionally... He wasn't so sensitive before, but now he's just rebuilt his entire body with Harry's blood that has protective love in it. That is what it takes to feel human connection and empathy and grief and remorse; those are the qualities in a person that help you heal. All of the effort that Voldemort has always put into compartmentalizing his soul -- walling off his feelings -- now, those efforts are being countered and undermined by the love in his blood that's a solvent. It's really going against all of those efforts, and now he has internal conflict.

JC: I like the descriptions of the surprise on Voldemort's face at every moment through here, and I hadn't thought until just this moment that it's not just surprise at what's physically happening in front of him, but it's surprise at what's happening inside him, too, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You're right. If this is the first time he's experiencing this...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He is in for a bunch of surprises.

Lorrie: This is why contact with Harry is always going to hurt him, because Harry has the part of him that wants to keep healing and that's antithetical to the way he thinks he has to be to be immortal. Like mindfulness, this is going to work against the desensitization he's trained himself to live with in self-defense, and it is self-defense because the degree of emotional pain that Voldemort was born into... He cannot live with that degree of pain. His circumstances were intolerable, so he was in this dilemma: either he feels it and then he's a bodiless less-than-spirit who would be dead of pain if

he were human enough to die, or he can live but he has to find a way to block the pain. It's tempting to eliminate all possibility of pain by just killing Harry Potter, because he has an easier time avoiding feelings of pain if he doesn't run across this annoying brat. But if you kill Harry Potter, that also closes off the one tiny possibility of connecting with Harry enough so that the love Harry has known can help to heal Voldemort the way Harry can heal. There is a part of Voldemort that cannot, will not let him give up that dream. That is a painful internal conflict. There's a part of his soul that broke off that's being sheltered and nurtured by Harry that never wanted to give up that dream, and then there's the soul in Voldemort that, when Harry's nearby, connects with that. When he's near Harry, he feels his pain more urgently and intensely than ever. Now that he's got Harry's blood working on him from the inside, he's never going to be free of this pain in non-metaphorical terms. Now, he's let himself believe that there is something special about Harry Potter, about a person who he hurt, who might be similar to him in some way. Now, he's started to have the notion or hope of empathy. That's something he knows now that he can't unknow.

JC: And I also love that while all this is happening, the Death Eaters are standing outside of this cage watching.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, I'm just thinking about what's happening from their point of view. They've been summoned -- whatever. They were at dinner, I don't know what they were doing, or at work. They get summoned, they have to make their robes and their masks appear out of whatever, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They have to come, they have to face Voldemort. It's like, "Oh, my God, what's happening?" Some of them get tortured, and now they're standing outside of this golden cage, and this freaking 14-year-old kid is doing what none of them could do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What the fuck, right? I'm just trying to imagine what's going on in Lucius Malfoy's head right now.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I want to read that fic from his point of view.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: What is he thinking? What are all of them thinking?

Lorrie: Right. This contemptible little kid who's nothing... Oh, my God. What he can do to this guy that has them all so terrified that they're kissing his robes and letting him *Crucio* them...

JC: Yeah. 'Maybe there is something about this kid.'

Lorrie: Yeah, and nobody has ever seen or even heard of anything like this happening. They do not understand it in the least. Nobody here understands what's happening.

JC: Right. 'What is this kid doing to defeat...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Look what's happening! This kid is standing up to Lord Voldemort?!'

Lorrie: He's gotten him lifted up off the ground, yes.

JC: 'What the hell? He's created this cage?!' As far as they know, Harry's done all of this, right?

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yeah.

JC: 'What kind of power does this kid have?'

Lorrie: And I love the writing. I think it's so beautiful. "The golden thread connecting Harry and Voldemort splintered; though the wands remained connected, a thousand more beams arced high over Harry and Voldemort, crisscrossing all around them, until they were enclosed in a golden, dome-shaped web, a cage of light..." This is how I picture baby brains developing when they are very small and they're being held and nurtured, because we know that their brains just grow so rapidly when they're that tiny. This expansion, this gold, is the thing that wasn't happening for Voldemort all throughout the past year when he was stuck in the rudimentary body and he could not grow any larger. It's just happened for him now in the potion that contained Harry's blood with protective love in it; Voldemort is being changed. Connection with Harry has created alchemy for him and turned his base material of his soul. This is a soul that was originally like anyone else's soul, silver, and then he damaged it through committing crimes and tearing it permanently into pieces, and this connection has turned his soul into gold. He can feel again, and it really hurts. And yeah, his eyes are "wide with astonishment." Well, it's not boring anyway, what's happening. It's something new! Quite rightly, he yells, "Do nothing unless I command you!"

JC: Okay, yeah. What are they going to do?

Lorrie: Oh, God... Can you imagine if he's having this brand new fascinating experience that is answering all his dreams of, 'Does this Harry Potter kid have something new to show me?' and then one of the Death Eaters kills Harry or something

and makes the golden web go away? He would have worse than killed them. 'Oh, don't interrupt this.' "And then an unearthly and beautiful sound filled the air... from the light-spun web..." so we get the phoenix song. Do you remember our Sorting Hat episode from the first book when Dumbledore says, "Ah, music... a magic beyond all we do here," and you asked me --

JC: And I was like, "Is it?"

Lorrie: Yeah, and you asked me, "Does this ever come up again?"

JC: Yes. Indeed it does.

Lorrie: It does. It does come up again.

JC: Yeah. Okay, and when we learned about phoenixes, I was trying to remember, 'what is it about a phoenix's song?' We know that their tears can heal wounds, even mortal ones, but what does the song do?

Lorrie: Well, it's a song of connection between people, and it's knowing that you don't have to give up on everything just because of death. There's still reason to hope. Things can happen even after catastrophe. It's second chances, or the Christ metaphor of phoenixes being a Christ symbol of something happening beyond death. This is addressing the fear that Voldemort has always had of death -- that it's so final -- and Dumbledore (and now Harry) saying there are other things, too, that are powerful and worth it other than avoiding death. It's connecting to the part of Voldemort that can't help but feel hopeful that maybe this kid Harry can help him. Not that Voldemort understands that's what he's feeling, but there's just something that's unlike anything he's felt before, and it's overpowering and frightening in how little he understands it. Harry thinks of it as the sound of hope, "the most beautiful and welcome thing he had ever heard in his life... He felt as though the song were inside him instead of just around him..." Now Voldemort can feel this, too, but his version is the cursed version (the half-life version) because he's stolen it the same way that he killed and stole blood from unicorns. Yes, he has it now, but at what price?

JC: Okay, so Voldemort is not hearing the same song that Harry is. Is that what you're thinking?

Lorrie: I think he is hearing it, but it means something different for him because there's so much damage he's done. Harry, having a whole soul, can be uplifted by it; Voldemort has done so much work to maintain all of the divisions that he's put into his own soul that to have this song of wholeness enter him... It's just a lot of conflict, and it's fighting against his defenses of staying fragmented so that he can endure life. Oh, what did you think of the large beads of light doing battle?

JC: I had to read that a couple of times because I had forgotten what that was, or that I think the beads... Okay, so first of all, *Priori Incantatem* has been activated or whatever the word is here, and I guess I had to sit and think for a little bit about 'by what?' because that's a spell you can cast on a wand, right? You can pick up someone's wand and you can cast *Priori Incantatem*. No one said those words -- no one cast that -- but there's something about the connection between their two ones and these two people that cast that spell, even though no one said it. That's the first thing that I... I don't have an answer for that, and I'm curious if you do. How did that happen?

Lorrie: Well, doing the metaphorical read, I thought it's because when you attack somebody and you dehumanize them in your head, then you don't feel what you're doing to them. It doesn't matter. But when you're aware of the humanity of the person you're attacking -- then you know what they feel, you know what it is that you're doing to them -- the feelings come back to you. The fact that they have similar cores of their wand just means that this is somebody where Voldemort can't convince himself that they have nothing in common. Voldemort has to admit, 'No, whatever I am, this child is, too. Whatever he feels, I have to feel, too,' and that's what most people have the privilege of being able to do and Voldemort hasn't until now.

JC: It's also making me think about... I know you've said a long time ago -- I can't remember what season we were even in -- that what could potentially heal Voldemort is that the splits of a soul is dealing with the remorse, facing what you did and working in the remorse of it. Because they're connected in this way, the spell just... the opportunity is being presented to Voldemort by their connection. 'Here is your chance...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'To feel remorse for what you did, and all the people' -- the last few spells he's done, going back to Harry's mother and father. 'Here's your chance to face this.' It's not that anyone called that spell into being; it's the fact that they're... I don't know, maybe the phoenix feather did it. There's something about the magic of that connection that is providing Voldemort an opportunity to face what he's done. Not that he can handle it at that moment, but I don't know. That's all I got.

Lorrie: It's easier to face what you've done if you have done not quite as many bad things. It does matter. Killing several people really is worse than killing one. He really has made things a lot, lot harder for himself. The beads of light... I was thinking this is a battle of wills where if Voldemort succeeded in pushing the beads of light toward Harry through their connection, that's kind of what he's doing to Harry or what he wants of Harry. "You, child, can you take responsibility for my pain and do something with it? Can I be rid of my pain by killing you and proving my superiority or something? Or will you suffer so that I can enjoy your suffering?" And Harry is saying, "No! No, you deal with your own pain. You are not me. I did not invite you in. I never asked for this. I don't

actually care about you. Deal with it yourself." This is something where a child can be just as powerful as a really important politician, because Harry's certainty... He doesn't have doubt in himself. He has an intact soul. He knows, no matter what, he did not invite Voldemort, and he is not responsible for whatever crimes this person has committed. No, he is himself. "Get out of me. Get out of here!" Meanwhile, Voldemort does have self-doubt because he has spent his whole adult life self-harming, dividing his soul out of self-hatred because there's parts of himself that he hates so much or that have been so powerless that he can't claim them, he can't admit them. So yeah, if you think about the two of them and their conviction as they face off with each other, no, Harry does have an advantage because of having an intact soul. Harry... His differentiating himself is also an act of maturity, of responsibility for himself. He's pushing Voldemort to own his own feelings.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And just the gorgeousness of the writing -- "his eyes furious, fixed..." -- just the determination and the rage in him as he's looking at Voldemort, saying, "Oh, no, you do not do this to me." Even a baby can give you that, and of course Voldemort is scared and surprised. What on earth is he supposed to do with feelings?

JC: Yeah. Yeah, that look of fear when the beads are coming back to him is interesting. So do you think -- Did Voldemort start it, or did the beads just come out of Voldemort's wand and he's just rolling with it?

Lorrie: I'm thinking... Because the beads came from both of them. No, did it? Now, I have to see.

JC: Okay, it says, "His wand began to vibrate more powerfully than ever... and now the beam between him and Voldemort changed too... it was as though large beads of light were sliding up and down the thread connecting the wands -- Harry felt his wand give a shutter under his hand as the light beads began to slide slowly and steadily his way... The direction of the beams' movement was now towards him, from Voldemort..." and then he forced them back.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So both of their wands... they're producing...

Lorrie: It's from the connection. The golden power connecting their wands has developed these beads of light that are moving.

JC: And the beads of light are the prior spells? What are the beads of light, then? I assumed it was the prior spells that had been cast, the ones that then come out of Voldemort's wand, but maybe not.

Lorrie: I don't know. I was reading it as just a way to track which of them has more power in the connection. If a very, very powerful Dark Lord and a teenager are connected in a battle of wills, well, you would assume that the Dark Lord would be the one who could enforce his will, but no. That's what I thought, and then as soon as Harry pushes the beads of light into Voldemort's wand, screams of pain start erupting. That's what I figured. 'Okay, Harry is just getting him to feel his feelings.'

JC: And I'm also wondering what -- again, going back to the Death Eaters, who are in this circle, the Greek chorus surrounding this... When they see that happening, that must have been incredible and terrifying and exciting. This idea that, 'Oh, this kid could defeat him.'

Lorrie: Wow! Yeah.

JC: 'What's going to happen here tonight?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'This kid is doing something that no one else has ever been able to do to Voldemort. That's amazing.'

Lorrie: I'm thinking that when he's with Harry and they connect this way, and Harry can make him feel what he's done to others, that's what rebounding spells means. Until Harry, he didn't see his victims as beings; he just dehumanized them. Whatever he did to them... It doesn't matter whether he kills one or a hundred; they're just meaningless. Harry, he was thinking of as a person, and feeling what he does to people is agonizing. He doesn't know how to handle it. That's what the rebounding spell does. It makes you feel it, and since he can't stop it... No wonder he either has to kill Harry or somehow get Harry to stop doing this. But yeah, the peanut gallery here, the Death Eaters, they are getting a show. They are getting to see Voldemort's fears and guilts displayed before them; they're coming out of his wand. They're seeing, 'What is this person really like on the inside?' He's being known, and yeah, they're witnessing the power of Harry Potter.

JC: What a story these guys are going to...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I just think to myself, 'They're going to have a lot to think about when they go home at the end of that night.' I'm imagining Lucius Malfoy lying awake in bed -- Narcissa's asleep -- just staring at the ceiling, like, 'What the fuck,' processing everything that's going on and everything that's coming. Oh, my God. 'How do I protect Draco?'

Lorrie: 'This is unacceptable,' yes. 'I refuse to accept this.'

JC: 'What does this mean?'

Lorrie: 'I have to do something about this! I'm too rich to have to watch this.'

JC: Yeah. That's so funny. Oh, okay, we're going to talk about the ghost now, or the shades or the images or whatever. Okay. This is when I knew it was coming...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I still forgot how emotional it was. I think...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It was a surprise to me to sit there and just cry reading this for the first time in however many years because I knew it was coming, but I think that's how this is so powerful, and it's partly the kind of thing that I think has become more powerful. For me, at least, the older I get, the more things like that, I think, hit me emotionally. I was not a child when I read this -- I was a full-grown adult -- but I'm wondering how this part comes across to children, with the shades of these people appearing and talking to Harry and ready to help him, and the connections that he has made to all the people. Even Frank Bryce, who comes out and he's like, "Yeah, I know who you are, kid, but..."

Lorrie: Yeah. "Oh, so he was a wizard. Huh!"

JC: Yeah, and Harry is able to connect to all of these spirits or whatever they are that come out of the wand immediately, which says a lot about Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: All of this just means so much more to me somehow now than it did the first time I read it, and maybe it's because I know Harry's story. I have this really strong memory. We, as a family, decided we were just going to watch all the Harry Potter movies in a row. It's probably been seven or eight years ago now, but we said, "Okay, let's just watch them all. We'll take a long weekend, and we'll just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! We'll binge watch all of them."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And we did, and I remember in the middle of the first movie I just started crying, and it was the weirdest feeling. I was like, 'Why am I crying?' But I was looking at these little tiny children -- the actors portraying these little children -- thinking, 'Oh, my God, I know what they're going to go through,' and I was shocked by how emotional it was all the way through for me. I remember watching these movies in the theater not being emotional, but somehow returning to it years later as a parent and looking at these little tiny children, it was totally different because I was still not a parent when I read this book for the first time.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And I don't know... Something about being a parent and living a lot longer changed my perspective on a lot of what I see in this scene, too. I was crying my eyes out yesterday reading this.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I do know people who, as children reading this, had lost their parents, and it's no wonder that this series was important to them. I was so overwhelmed by this one sentence fragment, because... Okay, we see Cedric and Frank Bryce and Bertha Jorkins. Then Harry knows who's coming "because the woman appearing was the one he thought of more than any other tonight," and that really struck me because I didn't know Harry had been thinking of his mom all night. The story never mentions it, and that is a real thing that happens where there are people who, when you think, "Oh, yeah, you were thinking of that person?" they just kind of quietly tell you, "I think about that person every day. I think of them all the time." You'll hear that from people who've lost somebody close, and they don't talk about it because there's nothing new to say, but are they ever out of their mind? No, and when you learn that about a person, it's humbling, right? Wow... Yeah. Every day. Every day.

JC: Always...

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, these people that Voldemort killed, this history... This is how Voldemort and Harry are connected. This is the story that Voldemort took from Harry. These are the parents that he took from Harry and the story of being an orphan that he gave Harry. The sight of the love from James and Lily gives Harry the strength to get away. Then he gets a bigger surge of greater strength because he realizes he has the power to bring Cedric's body back to Cedric's parents, and that's an act of love he can bring into the world that's going to need so much repair.

JC: So, a question I have at this point. I was asking myself, 'Are these ghosts?' They're coming out of Voldemort's wand, but are they really coming from Harry? They know what's happening, they know exactly what Harry needs to do. Does that mean that this is coming from Harry's subconscious -- from his inner strength -- or were they really there? is my question. I'm so curious about what's supposed to be happening there, and I know that you don't tend to read on that level, but I'm like, 'Were they actually ghosts? Were they somehow summoned there by this spell, or is this Harry's subconscious generating the help that he knows he needs?'

Lorrie: Well, we are told in the text a number of times that they're not ghosts -- that they're very like ghosts but they're more solid -- and we do see them acting in ways that the humans never did. Bertha Jorkins the human never came out of a wand and looked around. My read is that they're coming from Voldemort, and that Voldemort and Harry both see them because this is their history together, and when he's in front of Harry, Voldemort can't deny that these are things on his conscience. These are things he's done. These are people whose stories he ended, and he can usually deny them

because he's such a master of compartmentalizing and denying, but not in front of Harry, he can't. When the shades tell Harry, "You have a moment, you can run because we're going to be on his conscience," Voldemort is being taken up by his inability to deny his responsibility here. He's having feelings and they're distracting him.

JC: So do the Death Eaters outside the circle see these shades, too, or is it only Harry and Voldemort that see them, do you think?

Lorrie: I think the Death Eaters also see them, because they're seeing the relationship between Voldemort and this little kid that he's trying to kill. 'Well, we know that our master just kills anyone he wants, he's so powerful. Then there's this one kid that he didn't kill, although he did kill the kid's parents.' What happens when they come face to face? I think they're seeing that this is a big issue for their guy. Whatever they do or don't see, in terms of shades of physical bodies, they see that he's feeling the effects when he's faced with this teenager and that he's losing.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The charge from Cedric's shade to bring his body back to his parents... That's an Iliad reference, which Rowling said outright in an interview that she got the idea from one of the most disgraceful passages in the Iliad: when Achilles from the Greeks kills Hector, who's the greatest warrior and the son of the King of Troy, and to be horrible, then hitches the corpse of Hector to his chariot and drives his corpse around in the dust, around the outskirts of Troy, for days so that everybody in Troy watches this horrible desecration being done. Even his own people are like, "Wow, this is a lot. You should stop it. That's not very nice," and Achilles won't until King Priam of Troy humbles himself and physically walks into the Greek camp and says, "Please give me back my son's body." Of course, the king walking in like this, this old man, could've just been killed, but Achilles then relents and says, "Okay," and he stops and gives back the body. That's the inspiration here for Cedric asking, and that's the extra power. Just having to survive on his own with the love from his parents... That's a certain level of power for Harry, but knowing that he has to do this for Cedric's family, I think it gives him more. That's when I'm realizing, 'Oh, God, the Triwizard Tournament tasks... he actually learned from them.' The part where if the hostages were past an hour, would you still save them? Yeah, because they mean something to someone.

JC: His escape after this is just riveting and terrifying with the way it's written.

Lorrie: Oh, God. Yes.

JC: It is almost read-through-your-fingers kind of... Yeah. It's hard to write that kind of action, and it's really impressive that it's so well done here.

Lorrie: Yes. And yeah, there's this one super overbearing moment of Christian imagery when Harry dodges a Killing Curse from Voldemort by going behind a marble angel -- a stone angel in the graveyard -- and then the curse takes off the tip of the angel, but the angel protects Harry. At that point, after this tour de force of a couple chapters from this author, my feeling is okay, given everything she's just achieved, I will spot her a Christian symbol or two. She's earned it, because yeah, what she has achieved is monumental to me. Yeah. He's pelting away, and poor Voldemort is shrieking, "Stand aside! I will kill him! He is mine!"

JC: Yeah, and in doing that, he's setting up this thing that goes on for the next few books, where it's like only Voldemort can kill him.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And that protects Harry?

Lorrie: Yes, it does.

JC: In so many ways going forward, it starts right there.

Lorrie: And he's right to be worried that these buffoons might just go ahead and do it, because that happens several times where people are like, "Well, I'll just kill him. What's the difference? He'll love me for it." No, no, no, you don't understand. He actually loves Harry Potter. He doesn't want Harry dead. Oy... I'm very glad that none of those buffoons messed up and killed the one thing that might give Voldemort an answer or two about life.

JC: It's also interesting, to me, the desperation with which Harry gets to Cedric's body and then he's able to use the Summoning spell...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The one that he struggled with so much earlier in the book, and it's just like a non... Don't even think about it.

Lorrie: He's never going to have trouble with that spell ever, ever, ever again.

JC: And I think that this whole escape, to me, does show how much he learned during the Triwizard Tournament, all the things that he learned in order to be able to get through it and survive it, let alone win it.

Lorrie: Yeah. "Oooh, there's a gold thing. I have to get the gold thing," and then I realized, oh, even the tombstones are like a maze.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You have to get through the maze to get to the Cup.

JC: Yeah. He's dodging the attacks from all the Death Eaters like he was dodging this dragon, right? All of this is like the whole Triwizard Tournament right here at this moment.

Lorrie: Oh, God, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. And then...

JC: And the Cup takes them back.

Lorrie: And "Voldemort's scream of fury." Not again!

JC: Okay, so here's my question. In the next chapter, I think we appear back at Hogwarts, so what happens after Harry disappears?

Lorrie: I know. I know.

JC: What happens?

Lorrie: I know.

JC: I want to know! I want to know how bad of a night Lucius Malfoy had after that.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Well, this is going ahead a couple chapters, but I will say that there is one man who saves the night for the Death Eaters and Voldemort, and he's my guy. This night, when nobody has any answers and the defeat has been so humiliating, there's going to be one guy who's going to come with information and a plan and words of comfort. They're not true words, but hey, at this point Voldemort will take anything because the defeat that he just suffered in front of his so-called friends has just been so complete and terrifying.

JC: Yeah. He's been utterly humiliated.

Lorrie: In ways, yeah.

JC: His feelings put on display.

Lorrie: Oh, my God! Yes.

JC: Yeah. A 14-year-old kid forced him to feel things...

Lorrie: And he'd been having such a good night!

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: He got back his body and everything. He could touch Harry --

JC: And had his groveling minions.

Lorrie: MWAHAHA! Yeah.

JC: He got to monologue at people...

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: What a great night for Voldemort, and then...

Lorrie: And then it just went wrong. Ugh!

JC: It all went wrong.

Lorrie: Yes. Harry Potter... Ugh...

JC: Amazing. Okay, so what I love about this, too, though, is that this chapter -- what's fascinating about it is that at the beginning of it, it's like Harry's going to die, right? You think to yourself, 'He's not going to die, because there's three more books after or however many more books after this,' but it's like, 'How could he possibly get out of this?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This 14-year-old kid, who is not as qualified as the other people in the freaking Triwizard Tournament...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: How is he going to get out of this? The fact that he relies on his instincts, he relies on his training, and he relies on the wisdom of people he's made connections with... That's how you get out of a life or death situation. The fact that he's able to do this at all is so hopeful. We've just had this incredible, awful, "Oh, my God, Voldemort's back. It's going to change everything..." It's a turning point in the series, but then Harry gets away and changes Voldemort a little bit in the process. Thinking of the moment in time where we are at the time that we're recording this, that is uplifting in a way, because it's like, 'How did Harry do this?' Okay, the power of connection, the power of relying on his community, relying on his training, on trusting his instincts... that's a little bit of a message about, 'Okay, how are we going to get through what's coming?'

Lorrie: Disarmament.

JC: Yeah, disarmament. Yeah.

Lorrie: Not attack.

JC: Know when to get the hell out.

Lorrie: Yeah, and thinking that there are people that have loved you that can make you feel strong, and thinking that you can help other people with the love that they have for

their families. Really, thinking about, 'Oh, I had to get Cedric's body back to his parents...' That was the push that got him that final step.

JC: Yeah. So yeah, Voldemort's back.

Lorrie: Yeah, and now he has feelings and now everybody knows.

JC: And we are three chapters from the end of this book, which is fascinating to me. I think we both talked about the fact that this is the point at which you and I caught up with the fandom in the sense that I read this one and then the fifth book had just come out, so I read that. Then I had to wait. What do you mean I can't just have more?!

Lorrie: But I'm dying to know! What happens? What happens?!

JC: What happens next?! And then I had to wait and imagine, just like everybody else. So yeah...

Lorrie: Well, the next chapter is called Veritaserum.

JC: Ooh, which we heard about a while back. Now we get to see it in action. It's like Chekhov's Gun...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But not on Harry.

Lorrie: No.

JC: Who'd only have to confess his crush. I don't know... He might have a lot more... I don't know. Anyway, I'm sure fanfic has dealt with the issue of 'What would Harry say?'

Lorrie: Veritaserum is such a gift to fanfic writers.

JC: For sure, for sure.

Lorrie: All right, I'll talk to you then.

JC: All right. Next time!

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.