

Transcript

Episode 4.3

Book 5, Chapter 1: Dudley Demented

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 Five, Chapter One: Dudley Demented.

Lorrie: Dudley Demented. Harry is stuck with the Dursleys before his fifth year, having nightmares about Cedric and about mysterious dark corridors, and he feels so abandoned by his friends that he's about to pick a fight with Dudley... until dementors show up in Little Whinging and almost suck out Dudley's soul.

JC: Yikes! We are starting the fifth book. We've talked about this a bit already, that this one is special because for both of us, it was the first book that we were kind of in the fandom when we read it or we were getting into the fandom, I think. We read this one not long after it was released, and that was a very different feeling because I know that I had devoured the first four. Then this one came out and everyone was talking about it, so it was very exciting to be reading it at a time that everyone else was, and then I got to the end and went, 'I have to wait how long?'

Lorrie: That's not fair at all!

JC: 'No!' Yeah. So yes, I'm excited that we're finally reading this one. This is a turning point in the series for me personally, because this is when I became really invested, is when this book came out.

Lorrie: This is your Time Turner re-entry moment.

JC: It is, and also interesting that I don't -- I think I only read this book once. Like I said, I tend to read things once and move on.

Lorrie: Well, I don't know how many times I've read it and I still don't understand it...

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: And people who claim they understand it often find out that no, they don't. Actually, I'm not sure I know that many people who will just flat out claim that they understand everything in this book. It's very subtle. It's incredibly layered on purpose, to some purpose. This is the book where the author decided she was going to take charge of her deadlines and not have the publishing world tell her when her deadlines were going to be. She did meet the deadline for *Goblet of Fire*, but it was so unrealistic that she fantasized about breaking her arm so she could tell her publishers she couldn't do it. This book... I find the tone much more confident. It was actually the last book I read before I joined the stream of real-time... It was *Half-Blood Prince* that was the first one that I had to wait for like everybody.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: The advantage for me is that when I started reading this series, Book Five had already come out, so it didn't strike me as a huge downturn in mood, but I understand that a lot of people who had loved the series up through Book Four got Book Five and wanted to know what fresh hell this was. Where's the joy? Why is this just relentless totalitarianism? Lucky for me, I already got it as part of the set, so I was fine.

JC: Yeah. I'm trying to remember now how I felt about it, because I think it was just the excitement of finally getting to the new one and being able to read it like everybody else. I remember being shocked at how angry Harry was throughout this; some of that I could explain away by just "he's a teenager and that's timely for him" -- because I do know a little bit about how teenagers work -- but I don't think I really understood, interesting enough, until the movie came out and I saw the movie version. The movie condensed down so many of the big themes of this book that it actually helped me understand the book more, and I was shocked. I remember watching the movie and coming out and going, 'Oh, that's why they did that and that and that,' and then one of those brain explosion moments of, 'Oh, now I understand.' I needed the movie to dumb it down for me or something enough, so I appreciate that you said that this one's a hard one to understand. I'm curious to see what we will and won't feel we understand as we go forward.

Lorrie: Even now, every single time I reread this book, there are still things that I'm figuring out for the first time, and I mean on a super basic level on the 'Oh, that's what the author was getting at. I finally figured it out for the first time!' This is not a perfect book, but it's an achievement of so much complexity and the character and the tone that few books I've read can match it, in my opinion. I never understood the criticism that Harry was too angry in this book, because I was in the camp (which was also present

from the beginning) wondering how on earth this child could be so well-adjusted, considering all the trauma he's been through. He was -- for the first four books, in many passages -- saner than I was as a child, and I had not been through any of this stuff. Then with this book, when he was finally starting to show the strain, I felt like that was more realistic. But then, when people were saying, "Why is he so angry? I can't handle it," that was one of those moments when I thought, 'Are we reading the same series?'

JC: I think, for me, there was a big turn in the tone because he'd been a fairy tale character more in the first four books, where all kinds of crap could happen to him.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: He would come up smiling at the end, so there was that feeling of, 'Wow, this kid is fairy tale character resilient,' right? This was the first book where it was like, 'No, this is how a teenager would actually respond to these things,' so it was such a shift for a lot of people, especially for the folks who have been in the fandom and had that three-year wait. I heard a lot of that at the time, and maybe you remember it, too... There were a lot of people who disliked the characterizations and the way things went, and because they had spent three years probably reading fanfic and building up their own ideas of who these characters were and what direction they thought it was going to go, this felt really jarring to a lot of people. I didn't know, really, because I hadn't been in that then.

Lorrie: Well, the end of *Goblet of Fire* is so dark that you think, 'Oh, gosh, please let this be the worst thing that happens to them.' No.

JC: No, no, it's not.

Lorrie: It's just the beginning.

JC: As the last chapter was titled, it is just the beginning.

Lorrie: And boy... *Order of the Phoenix* is such a long, thick book, and it just gets further and further and further into hell.

JC: That's true. Is this the longest book?

Lorrie: It is. It's a door stop.

JC: Yeah. The version that I'm reading now... I switched to a hardcover. I'm holding it up, so listeners can't see it, but I ordered -- Bloomsbury put out a set of these cloth-covered editions (at least the British editions) and there's art in them. I had bought them... I think I bought the initial set and then I kept buying the new versions as they came out, so I have a full set of these. I've never read *these*. Somehow, I had it in my head that when my kiddo was old enough, we would read these together, this version with the beautiful cloth binding and everything. I think we started the first one, and then it just wasn't his thing. He was like, "Uh, can I go back to reading about the talking

wolves again?" Okay. He had different fantasy reading interests, but I'm finally reading one. I'm very excited.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is the book where, when I quote from it in talks, it feels ridiculous to be saying, "Oh, and this quote from page 875..."

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: 'Seriously?' Yes, seriously.

JC: Oh, my God. Okay, now I'm going to look and see, because I know it's different how many pages this edition that I have has. It ends on page 766, this one.

Lorrie: Okay, so that's much shorter than the Scholastic version.

JC: But that's pretty big.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's a weighty thing.

Lorrie: Yep. So yeah, I know that there is criticism that this book is bloated. Honestly, so much of it is so well done that I don't actually feel the need for it to be that much shorter. There's one chapter that's one of my least favorite chapters, and in my fantasies, I would have said, "Can you take this whole chapter out?"

JC: Oh, really? That'll be interesting when we get to that one.

Lorrie: Yeah. But no, generally, I'm really glad for all the wealth of writing we get in this book, how deep it goes, how complicated. In this opening chapter of Book Five, Harry is traumatized and isolated in a way that made me think, 'This might parallel how dazed Voldemort might be feeling at the same time,' because Voldemort thought he was going to have this big triumphant return and then he just had a really disastrous... Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong. Harry is described in this chapter as having the "pinched, slightly unhealthy look of someone who has grown a lot in a short space of time," just like Voldemort must be looking right now with his stretchy new body.

JC: Right. Yeah, it's true for both of them. Yeah, he has grown a lot in a short period of time. I think the words are intended to mean 'physically he has the appearance of...', but his whole world changed in a very short period of time and he had to act like an adult in a situation in which he wasn't really prepared to. He had to save himself; nobody else was going to do it for him. He went through a heck of a lot in that previous book, yeah, so "grew a lot in a short period of time..." absolutely. I also really like the way that the chapter opens with this description of this dry, oppressive heat, that everything is dusty and dull-looking.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's no air conditioning, there's no escape from it... You just have to open the windows and wait out the hottest part of the day. Now, I've lived in hot places all my life (but only with air conditioning), but I do remember being a child in the 70s and 80s at a time when we didn't -- I lived in a house where we didn't have air conditioning. I lived in a place where it got really hot in the summer, so I remember that feeling of, 'Okay.' Everyone's just waiting until the evening comes, and then we'll go sit outside and there'll be a breeze, and we'll cut up a watermelon and hang out in lawn chairs out under the trees. That kind of time is a little bit making me think of, not in a nice 'looking back on it happily' way, but... That sepia filter that they put on some... I'm getting a sepia filter here that makes everything just feel like some old west town where you're just waiting for shit to go down.

Lorrie: Everything's parched.

JC: Yeah, everything's parched is what it feels like.

Lorrie: And it's a big contrast from the beginning of the previous book, where the rain would not let up.

JC: Ooh, yeah.

Lorrie: It was thunderstorming constantly. Well, Barty Crouch Jr. has been taken out, and now what? Now what? We don't know, but while Harry is listless and hot, Dudley and his friends are roaming around, terrorizing their town, and they sound like junior Death Eaters. The way that these are big kids and they're finding smaller kids and then outnumbering them and ganging up on them just for fun... It's pretty brutal, and the way that these teenage boys are described, I can totally see them. The amazing detail that they've broken almost all the swings in the playground... Okay, yeah, I can picture this teenage group of boys.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Harry is listening however he can for news, because with the return of Voldemort plus the news suppression -- the blackout from The Daily Prophet on any news about it -- he's knowing that the boundary between the magical and Muggle worlds might have been breached, that Voldemort coming back was such a big deal that it might have disturbed that really clear boundary, and he's on the lookout for it.

JC: There's so many things that are interesting there in that first part of the chapter where he's feeling all that. It's a little bit like that feeling where something really bad happens, and then you just look outside and the world goes on.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? Life is going on; it's like it didn't happen. It happened to you and to your family or whatever, but it didn't happen to everybody out there, that reminder that this happens to people all the time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You have some kind of a trauma happen to you, and the world goes on around you.

Lorrie: And how can it? Yeah.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Although maybe, in this case, Harry is right and that it was a big enough deal that he...

JC: It should have been.

Lorrie: Yeah. Meanwhile, we get Mrs. Figg, who is the archetypal childless cat lady. She is walking by and frowning and muttering to herself.

JC: And continually inviting Harry over for tea.

Lorrie: "Oh, God, please, no."

JC: It's really sweet, though. She's trying to keep an eye on him, and I love that, yeah. Harry won't find out until the end of this chapter (or until the next chapter, really) what's going on, but I really do like this idea that there are some people who are looking out for him.

Lorrie: Well, she's been so successful at hiding that and in cultivating this persona that he is quite rightly backing away from her quickly. I remember when her name was mentioned at the end of *Goblet of Fire*, I thought, 'Oh, wow, okay.' I guess this is similar to how people say, 'Well, wait a minute. Harry couldn't see the thestrals after seeing Cedric's death at the end of *Goblet of Fire*. He doesn't see them until the beginning of this book. How come, if you can see them once you've seen somebody die?' Often the explanation given is, 'Well, these things take a moment to settle into your consciousness' -- the real answer being that she wanted to set it up for the next book -- but the reader's getting a little lead-in time to remember that Mrs. Figg was name-checked at the end of *Goblet of Fire*, and here she is, walking by, muttering to herself in her slippers.

JC: I know the first time I read this, even though I had just read the last book because I was plowing through, I didn't know. I didn't catch this until the next chapter. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a really good bet if you're the author trying to plant clues. Okay, if you plant something two times, people might catch it; if you plant it three times, they'll start

to figure out something's going on. But if you plant it once -- hundreds, even thousands of pages separated -- then you're pretty safe. People won't catch it.

JC: Yeah, that is true.

Lorrie: But it's there enough to jog something in their brain later.

JC: Okay, there's a bit of humor at the beginning of this chapter before we start getting the dark stuff. The Dursleys are always written with this bit of humor, so the fact that the Dursleys are so disturbed that Harry's watching the news is really funny.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: They're like, "Normal children don't care about what's going on in the world. Dudley doesn't even know who the Prime Minister is. Why? This is weird behavior. We don't like it. Why does this kid want to know what's happening on the news?" But it also reminded me that they lived in a very different time than we live in now, and it's only been thirty years. Okay, only thirty years. A lot clearly happens in a thirty-year time period in the 20th and 21st centuries, but I grew up at a time when my grandparents and my parents would watch the evening news every night, and it was just the routine.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You would turn it on right before dinner or right after dinner or whatever and we would watch it, and I remember my grandparents were always very concerned about the weather report; they grew up farmers, so knowing what was going to happen in the weather was a big deal to them. The mention of them watching the news and then Mrs. Dursley reading celebrity gossip in every magazine she could get her hands on... Does anyone watch evening news anymore? I think it's still on.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Does anyone watch it, and does anyone get their gossip from celebrity magazines anymore? Those two things just felt like an archaic... It felt like something my grandparents did or my parents did. I can't remember the last time I watched the local evening news.

Lorrie: Well, what I see of the evening news on TV is local, that this is a different genre now from the kind of news that is hitting headlines on a twenty-minute cycle online. Yeah, celebrity gossip is its own whole internet sphere, influencer sphere, that is quite irrelevant to the lead time required for print publications, so yeah, this is a very time capsule kind of glimpse.

JC: Yes, it feels very time capsule-y in that way, and also in the ways that the kids are spending their summer.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that could just be the little bubble that I live in, in an upper-middle-class neighborhood where all the kids are maximizing their free time to get into a good college or they're working or something like that, or a combination of those. I remember plenty of summers where I had nothing to do but wander around... ride my bike around, wander, get in trouble, go build things in the woods, or avoid bullies on the playground.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's the kind of summer that these kids are having, and I don't know if kids still have those kinds of summers anymore. I don't know if they go out and wander around and tear up playgrounds and bully smaller children, even. Do they just stay home and bully people online? Do they play their video games? I don't know if kids have this kind of summer anymore, so even that idea that Harry would be out of the house until the time at which, 'Okay, if I get home any later than this, I'm going to get yelled at or get in trouble...' Even that felt like a very old-timey way for kids to spend their summer.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So yeah, this felt very time capsule-y to me. I thought, 'In twenty years, kids are going to read this and they're not going to recognize that... I don't think they're going to recognize that reality.' It's going to seem very old-fashioned.

Lorrie: It'll be a period piece.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, which is good. That's part of what's so lasting and vivid about this series, is how well it captures that era -- the way that people can read Jane Austen and then think that they can make themselves dresses and go to balls and make fancy meals and invite their friends over -- because the writing is so rich that the details are set out there for you. This is one of the purposes of literature: to give us a time and place that we can be part of in our minds. But yeah, the atmospheric writing in this chapter is excellent. Oh, this is something that you pointed out in a recent episode, JC, that really stuck with me. When we were talking about how Harry felt abandoned at the beginning of *Chamber of Secrets* because he wasn't getting any letters, and you pointed out that was paralleling how Voldemort at the same time was without a body and he had no Death Eaters coming to look for him, I thought, 'Oh, wow, that's right.' That's one of those things where they are feeling the same thing at the same time. That really shook me, and how awful it must be if there's only one person in the world who can really understand how you feel, and it's your mortal enemy.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: But that influenced how I read this opening chapter this time.

JC: Me, too. Oh, my gosh, yeah. Every time that Harry -- he does a lot of doom spiraling, I guess, is how I would describe it. It's almost like that anxiety spiral where it goes down into this, 'Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. Guess I'll do this' kind of thing, but it gets worse and worse and worse.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It's the self-talk thing that is not characteristic of Harry...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And I think that was what was jarring for a lot of people maybe, but also for me the first time I read this. I was like, 'Wow.'

Lorrie: 'Wow, he doesn't usually do this.'

JC: He doesn't usually do this, so on this read it just seems really clear to me that it's not all him. It's a metaphor... We could talk about a big metaphor for teenage brains and how they're changing at this time. I actually went back and did a little bit of reading around the cognitive development at this age, just because it does parallel a lot of the things that are happening in teenage brains and how kids start taking risks and start redefining who they're aligning themselves with, as far as friends instead of family and things like that. The way that kids will think that they have something planned out and they think they've taken every precaution, but from an adult perspective, you're like, 'You didn't consider about eighteen thousand things. I can see how your plan made sense to you, but oh, my God! Why didn't you know?' and how clear that is. It's very interesting to me that Harry's in that space -- his brain is that way -- but we've talked before about how [Voldemort] is kind of stunted in his development because of...

Lorrie: Yeah, this is his rebirth.

JC: Yeah, so Voldemort is also stuck in this teenage brain space of getting mad at everybody and doom spiraling. 'Nobody loves me, so I'm going to strike out at people because that's the only way I can make them pay attention to me.' To see Harry paralleling that, and then to put that together with, 'Oh, he's fifteen...' It's like, 'Oh, my God, Voldemort's a teenager!'

Lorrie: Yeah. He's just spent thirteen years in limbo.

JC: The worst teenager you can ever imagine...with power!

Lorrie: Oh, and now he has nobody that he can trust to explain to him what's going on with his body.

JC: Yeah, exactly. 'This is why your body's changing,' yeah.

Lorrie: All of these new changes... Yeah.

JC: Right, and why you're feeling all these big feelings that you can't contain. You have a teenager the same age as mine and you've got an older child... One of the things that teenagers need is someone to help them understand that a lot of these big, uncontrollable feelings are just part of the way your brain's developing. Yeah, this kind of sucks and everybody goes through it, and you'll come out the other side okay. It's more complicated when you've got kids who have psychiatric issues and stuff, but even for kids who are neurotypical, they've got these big feelings and they need someone to tell them, "Yeah, you're having these weird impulses and these big feelings, and that's normal."

Lorrie: Also, they're now big enough and smart enough and powerful enough so that if they strike out because they're having such a rough time, they can really damage something, and that's a problem that you get with, "Well, do we try these people as juveniles or as adults? Yeah, their brains aren't finished developing, but the damage they did was adult-sized."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's a dangerous time. I'm going to go back to something you said, JC. Did you just say that you went and read about cognitive development at this age for this podcast?

JC: Yeah, of course.

Lorrie: Could you just say that again and tell us about that?

JC: Oh, okay, yeah. Well, okay, I'm not a cognitive scientist, but because I do teacher education, one of the things that we do spend a lot of time talking about is that when you're working with adolescents either in middle school or high school, you have to understand how their brains work and that explains a lot of their behavior. As teachers, good middle school teachers and good high school teachers understand that when kids are acting out in certain ways, part of it is just the way that their brains are functioning; if you understand how their brains are working, that helps you figure out how to respond to it in a way that's going to be productive and is not going to sidetrack all of this. For example, one of the first lessons that every teacher learns is that if a kid is acting out, trying to rise up and overpower that kid is a failure. You're never going to... No. You've got to come at it from the side, you've got to be sneaky. You cannot tell that kid to shut up and sit down; that will get you nowhere. You will never, ever make progress with that child ever again, and then every kid who sees it is going to be like, 'Wow, okay.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's things that you have to know about how kids operate.

Lorrie: That's boxing them in so that they think, 'Okay, the teacher has responded to my hostility. The only way out is to escalate.'

JC: Yeah, exactly, and that's the only way out. Exactly. Yeah. I was thinking about how Harry's responding to this trauma; how he's responding to the Dursleys here is very age-appropriate. In the past, he would just keep his head down and keep his mouth shut, and now he's talking back and being sarcastic in a way that feels very different than... We've seen him grow into this as time goes on, but it's being exaggerated now by the connection to Voldemort. But yeah, there's a lot of really interesting teenage brain development stuff that I can see here, and that's going to be interesting to look at going forward because of that connection to Voldemort. I think that's something I'm going to be thinking about. 'Hmm, how much of it is that Voldemort also has a teenage brain? Or does he have a teenage brain because Harry does and they have this connection? What's happening there?' Or maybe that's reading too much into it and maybe it's just intended to be a metaphor. I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, every one of those readings and more, there are people in the fandom who have taken that viewpoint. Partly because we're enjoying trying to analyze this, but partly because everyone's different reading is affected by what's closest to their own needs, because you can read it more than one way. My reading is that no, there is no more of Voldemort in Harry than there ever has been, but what Harry has gone through is so awful that of course he's going to be feeling these same things, just like Voldemort grew up with such awful things that he felt them. But now Harry understands them more, because now he's been through some more stuff that's similar. Voldemort's biggest crisis since he was born was that nobody knows how he feels and he can't communicate how he feels, and when he tries, people fall short so badly; then he heard this prophecy that there was this baby who was going to be more powerful than he was, which sounds almost like there's going to be somebody born who's going to understand how you feel a little, maybe, so Voldemort goes and gets this baby and traumatizes him and scars him. "Great! Now you know how I feel." The two of them are really traumatized; Harry doesn't have any more Voldemort in him than he ever did, but Voldemort now has Harry's blood in him and that might make Voldemort parallel Harry more than before because he has just rebuilt his entire body (which includes the brain) with Harry's blood. Yeah, he is going through an adolescence, but the other thing, too, is that anytime you abandon him [Harry], he's going to be triggered. Yeah, anytime he gets sent back to the Dursleys and he just has that dread -- 'No, no, no, please, no' -- because he knows he's going to be triggered, he's going to feel abandoned like he was for his first eleven years. We've just seen from Voldemort rising back and going to have a word with his Death Eaters how he felt for those eleven and then thirteen years abandoned with nobody coming to look for him. They have some of the same trauma that is being triggered right now. Harry also thinks about Dobby in this chapter, so that's an

intentional callback to the beginning of *Chamber of Secrets*, when he felt like everyone had just forgotten him and left him there. Ugh! Meanwhile, the two of them have just done battle with each other, and they both came out of that so worn out they would be tired and upset anyway. Then he's having these thoughts: "And then, as his feeling of frustration peaked, his certainty leaked away..." and he feels super depressed. What you were saying about him spiraling, JC, that 'nobody loves me' feeling... Well, there were eleven years -- well, nine and three quarters years -- of his life when nobody did love him, and that was only a couple years ago. He's back with the same people, and they still don't love him. Gee, of course it's being triggered, and that made me think, 'How did Voldemort, by this age, feel every summer having to return to his orphanage and to that little gray cot that wasn't comfortable when he was a small child? Now he's a full-grown adult, and he still has to go back into that threadbare room with a little gray cot.'

JC: I never thought about where Voldemort went in the summer. Oh, wow.

Lorrie: This is why he frames Hagrid for the murder of Myrtle, because when Headmaster Dippet says, "If we don't catch the perpetrator who's opening the Chamber of Secrets, we're going to have to shut down the school," Voldemort thinks, "Wait, you're going to send me back to the orphanage? Okay, okay, I'll figure out who the murderer is. If I find the murderer for you, will you keep the school open?" Dippet's like, "Do you know something about the murder?" "No! No, no, no..." Because of the thought of having to go back to the orphanage -- he already had to go back in the summers -- we see Voldemort begging Dippet, "Could you please let me stay here over the summers, too?" Dippet says, "No, I'm sorry, we can't." If you just imagine brilliant, homicidal, fifteen, sixteen-year-old Voldemort having to go back to the same orphanage with the same -- it's not the same crying babies; it's different crying babies -- the same matron who's now only older and more tired...

JC: And hates him.

Lorrie: Yeah. They didn't like him when he was little and they certainly don't like him now, and he's got a whole summer. Then when you think of that, and then you picture Harry kicking the dry grass in Little Whinging, they are both triggered. Summers trigger them both to a time when truly nobody did love them.

JC: That is interesting, because for most kids who have a family -- that they feel secure and they feel loved and they're not food insecure and they feel safe in their environment... For kids like that, summertime is this time of freedom, and a lot of adults look back fondly on, "Oh, I had the whole summer. I didn't have to do anything, and I could blah, blah, blah, whatever I wanted, out until the street lights came on and all that stuff, drinking out of the hose." Of course, there were always kids who never had that kind of summer...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But it is interesting that that's a contrast that we're seeing here. Summertime is not this freedom...

Lorrie: Oh, gosh...

JC: 'Freedom to hang around with your friends and do whatever you want' kind of time for Harry and nor was it for Voldemort. The way a lot of kids dread going back to school in the fall, Harry and Voldemort are the kind of people who look forward to going back to school in the fall because that's where they feel safe and happy...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And yeah, loved.

Lorrie: Or during pandemic, when people weren't getting school lunch and maybe that was the most secure meal they had that day... That was good, during that time, that the government was sending out benefits where they would say, "Here, here's the amount that we would be spending on your kids' school lunch, and you can go to the supermarket with this credit."

JC: Where I live, you could go to the school and eat. The cafeteria people would bring out bagged lunches, so the kids who were in walking distance could go and pick up two meals a day. A lot of schools here do that in the summer, too, which brings me around to current events and Harry lying in the bushes and listening to the news, just hoping that nothing bad -- 'Am I going to hear something bad today?' -- and then the relief of, 'Okay.' We're recording this in the beginning of February 2025, and we're just a few weeks into the Trump administration, into a period of time when on Fridays the Trump administration has been releasing a whole lot of hell just so that people will swim in the chaos over the weekend and freak out and can't really do anything about until Monday. We're living in a time when the news is a damaging place to be, I guess; a lot of us avoid looking at it, or are looking at it through our fingers or being very cautious about how we watch the news. Harry lying in the bushes and listening to the news made me think, 'Yeah... yeah...'

Lorrie: We're also in the news blackout because there's a crackdown on media, so there's definitely the same scrounging for reliable news or trying to read between the lines like Harry is doing here.

JC: Right. That felt really familiar.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ugh...

Lorrie: So yeah, this being the first chapter of book five... This is setting the stage really well for the way that this year, Harry is going to have a lot of moments when he understands how Voldemort must have felt. That's going to be Harry's huge and extraordinarily lonely and terrifying task this year: trying to sort through what he's feeling and whether it's genuinely from himself or whether it's because Voldemort's in his head, whether it's intentional damage from Voldemort -- that Voldemort is trying to make him feel this way -- or whether it's just leaking through unintentionally, or whether it's just that they have some of the same problems. It's at an age when you can feel that angry anyway over things that are genuinely not your fault and yet hurting your life this badly, as kids always do at every phase, wondering, 'Now I've grown in power, does that make me more destructive? Does that make me more dangerous?' If you have a really wonderful, nurturing, safe environment, then if you're lucky, you can be raised to believe that no matter how angry you are, anger is a natural feeling like all other feelings. There are ways to feel angry and let it happen, and then to work through it without harming yourself or other people. Nothing you're feeling is new. It's a human emotion; we can get through this, the world is bigger than you are, and you're safe. That is, of course, the opposite of what Voldemort experienced where, from infancy (when he was really angry), people got hurt and nobody could figure out what was happening, and nobody and nothing was ever more powerful than he was. Not a comforting message. That's his fear, and now Harry is going to be experiencing the same thing quite often, and he's going to have to sort out: in any of this, does he, Harry, have the right to feel angry on his own behalf? Is any of that anger really his? Is it okay for him to be angry? Does he in fact have reason to be angry? The answer is he has lots of justification to be angry. Gee, why does he feel abandoned and unloved when he lives with the Dursleys? Huh...

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: We're going to see later, too, what it's like for Sirius when he goes back to the house that triggers him.

JC: Ooh, yeah, yeah. Now I remember this, and he starts acting out in ways that -- yeah.

Lorrie: He does. He was a child of privilege. It wasn't poverty that was his problem, but it is a hellish punishment for him to go back to either Grimmauld Place, his home -- or for Harry to go back to Little Whinging, or for Voldemort to go back to his orphanage -- where things aren't any better, although you are older... 'But why aren't your friends writing to you?' At this point, this time around, Ron and Hermione *are* writing, but their letters are self-censored and that does not console him at all. The one moment where I lost it with Harry in this chapter was when he threw away their chocolate!

JC: What the heck, Harry?! You know better than that!

Lorrie: HARRY!!! Don't throw...

JC: The chocolate makes you feel better. Come on!

Lorrie: That's the best choc -- Oh, God, that must have been such beautiful, good, delicious chocolate, and he threw them away unopened. Oh... Yeah, because that's something that anyone who's in a time of political struggle has to remember: when you're angry, you have to train yourself not to take it out on your own self or resources or allies.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yes.

Lorrie: It might be tempting because they're there for you to take the feelings out on, and part of what you want is to hurt things or people around you so they know how bad you feel. But honestly, you have to learn to master this, because in ten minutes you're going to need them.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You have to control this urge. So yeah, I think this is the only time. I don't think he ever again throws away unopened Honeydukes birthday present boxes.

JC: And he regrets it immediately.

Lorrie: He does! He does.

JC: This made me think, 'Where'd he throw it away that he can't go back and get it?'

Lorrie: I know!

JC: Yeah. Anyway...

Lorrie: So yeah, he's experiencing what it's like to take out your frustration on your allies or your resources. Sirius' letters to him are only a little better -- he's still bitter when he reads them -- and then we get the first mention of the mystery that is beautifully handled throughout this extremely long book: the "unsettling dreams about long dark corridors, all finishing in dead ends and locked doors, which he supposed had something to do with the trapped feeling he had when he was awake." He keeps having this vision, and he's, of course, trying to find a story to explain it to himself. That's his first red herring -- "Uh, I don't know, I guess" -- and that's a human thing, right? When we keep having these dreams, what does it mean? Why is this plaguing me? And then he notes, "Often the old scar on his forehead prickled uncomfortably." That's something that I think happened so often to Harry in this book that it's easy to dismiss what's going on, but yes, when it's mentioned that Harry's scar prickles, it's because Voldemort is either having a lot of mental and emotional activity that is registering with Harry or it might be that Voldemort is deliberately paying attention to Harry. It's not just

background, it's not meaningless. It's just happening all the time because Harry is living through some hellish times this year.

JC: Yeah, and also because Voldemort now has a body and is back in a much more real way than he was before, so he can just do that more, I guess. He can do more.

Lorrie: Yeah, he's just more potent. Then Harry goes into a self-pitying spiral about how nobody is going to care that his scar is hurting.

JC: Yeah. Ugh... At that point, it's like, 'Oh, come on...'

Lorrie: Poor guy.

JC: Yeah. At this point, I'm reading this and I'm like, 'Okay, all right. All right.'

Lorrie: 'I understand. I would feel that way, too. I have, in fact.' So yeah, when you get upset at people for feeling a certain way that you made up in your own head...

JC: Yeah, exactly. 'Invent a guy who...' kind of a thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So here we get to the real issue. Harry is furious. "How could Dumbledore have forgotten him so easily?" That's the crux of it, because Voldemort must have thought that about his Death Eaters the whole time he had no body. Harry has, in his schooling, gotten so much support from Dumbledore that he can usually balance out how angry he is. He gets so much from Dumbledore, but there's this awfulness at the bottom of it... There is no getting away from knowing that for nine and three-quarter years, Dumbledore let him live a hopeless childhood with the Dursleys, never contacted him until he was eleven, never let him know "somebody knows about you," never gave him any reason to think his life would be anything other than that. When Dumbledore ignores or abandons Harry in this novel, that triggers Harry beyond anything else.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Voldemort, when he killed Harry's parents, made Harry into somebody who could understand how it feels to be an orphan, but Dumbledore reinforced it by going that many years before letting Harry know, "There's a place for you somewhere else, at a school that has known about you all along." That's such a mixed feeling that you get from people, for example, like adoptees who find out that there are people who knew about them all along but didn't tell them. At the same time, you're thrilled and you're moved and you're emotional, but you're also furious.

JC: Yeah. One thing that it's making me think about, too, is the way that adults discount the experiences of small children with this thought of, 'They're not going to remember this anyway.'

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: I'm not sure how old Voldemort is supposed to be. Is he a hundred? He's supposed to be quite old, right?

Lorrie: Well, let's see. Dumbledore had graduated from Hogwarts in 1898, 1899, so he's over a hundred.

JC: Okay. He's over a hundred, so he's been around a long time. My experience is that the older adults get... It's not that they don't take children seriously so much as they remember so little of their own childhoods that they just assume that kids aren't going to remember things, too. Now, we've all been small children and we all can remember, very vividly, things that happened when we were three, four, or five, six years old. Well, most of us, maybe.

Lorrie: A lot of us can't, actually...

JC: And some people can't. Okay, some people can't, but to think things that happen to children at that age, because they can't remember, somehow is not forming them and having a big impact on them... I think that's a mistake that a lot of adults make -- and I'm not sure that that's the mistake that Dumbledore is making here -- but I can't help but read that into the situation. 'Oh, he's going to stay with his mother's family,' and maybe Dumbledore didn't know. Maybe that was a period of time where Dumbledore really didn't know how badly Harry was being treated. I don't actually know the answer to that, but as soon as anyone had a whiff of how badly Harry was being treated, there's this idea of, 'Oh, this could be bad for this kid who has an important role to play. Maybe someone should do something about this,' and no one did, to me, says, 'Well, he's five. Kids are resilient,' or something like that.

Lorrie: That's not how I'm reading it, no.

JC: Okay, yeah, but part of it just makes me think --

Lorrie: No, but a lot of people...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It is definitely written so that that reading is a completely valid one held by a lot of people responding to the story.

JC: So that idea of, 'Well, it didn't matter what happened to him when he was little,' or 'he'll get through it...' That's a harsh perspective, but I can imagine people having that perspective of Harry having to go back and live with the Dursleys.

Lorrie: Yeah, not Dumbledore with Harry. We never see him say that. Whatever happened, he did know that it was damaging. The way I think of it is that it's the same thing as people wondering if there's a God, how can he let such things happen, because not everything can be fixed by somebody more powerful than you knowing about it and coming to fix it. There's a fantasy: well, if Dumbledore knew that this was going on, why didn't he swoop in and make everything better? Well, was it his fault or was it Voldemort's fault for killing Harry's parents in the first place? There's definitely a way out in which the quality of anger... Recently, Trump has announced that he thinks the U.S. should buy Gaza, ethnically cleanse it, and turn it into a resort.

JC: I -- Mmm.

Lorrie: And among my many responses to that was more anger at people I knew who couldn't vote for Kamala Harris because they didn't like her stance on Palestine.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Then this disgusting, obscene thing that I can't even wrap my brain around, which is, of course, the point... yeah. We can be angry at people that we wish had come to save us, but even Voldemort has to calm down and recognize those are still the best chance he has at allies. What's really causing the harm? Well, we don't know, but don't lose focus here. You can lash out at people close to you, but you're also going to need them, and that's the awful subservient trap that Harry is in regarding Dumbledore because he's gotten so much good from Dumbledore and so much care. Dumbledore purports to be extremely fond of him -- from all evidence, actually is extremely fond of him -- but then how did he let that happen? It's hard for somebody in Harry's position to let himself wonder about that and be angry about it, because the anger can be so enormous that it can really damage you. It can feel like, 'I don't know how I can contain this much anger. Is it going to turn monstrous?' If you can imagine Harry being angry that Dumbledore left him for almost ten years with the Dursleys and how angry he might actually feel, you can really see how Harry might think, 'The degree of anger I feel... Is that really me, or is this Voldemort? Am I turning into Voldemort? If I saw Dumbledore and gave him a piece of my mind right now, would I be so angry that I just -- Would he just drop dead? Would I just kill him with how angry I am?' Because yeah, how angry Harry must feel about that is uncontrollable. It is that bad, and, in fact, there are things in life that people have reason to be that angry about. Ugh... With the comic route -- the very sarcastic, bitter comic relief of the Dursleys in this chapter -- every time I read it, I find it amazing that the author says that Vernon calls boxing "the noble sport".

JC: Oh, my gosh. That is really funny, but also can I just say that I'm actually really proud of Dudley?

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: He found a thing he's good at.

Lorrie: I know, and he got good at it!

JC: And he's been successful at it!

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The author is mocking that of course, Dudley would be good at something as horrific as boxing, but I'm like, 'You know what? It's a sport. He got good at it. Good for him!'

Lorrie: And he's stuck with it. On the other hand, every boxing code of honor in the world says that you're not supposed to use your skills to find and beat up small children or people your own size.

JC: True. That is true.

Lorrie: But you definitely, definitely do not get three of your friends to hold a ten-year-old so that you can punch the ten-year-old in the stomach. You definitely, definitely do not do that. Boxing is not about that!

JC: For sure, for sure. It is interesting, though, that there's this moment at the beginning where Harry is sitting on the swing and saying, 'Come on, come over. Come on over here and antagonize me. Please give me a reason.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that made me think, 'What's going on with Dudley?' Once Harry's gone, he's the only child in this house, his parents could spoil him as much as they want. What is Dudley angry about that he's taking it out on children younger than him? Is he just a bully? Is that it, or is there something else going on with Dudley?

Lorrie: Yeah, I don't know.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, I love that Harry's sitting there, thinking "it would be really fun to watch Dudley's dilemma; to taunt him, watch him, with him powerless to respond...." That is so Snape-y.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: This shed so much light on Snape venting his resentments by taunting children. There's a kind of frustration where it's like, 'Oh, I dare you. Oh, I would just love someone to mess with me today.'

JC: 'I beg you.'

Lorrie: Yeah. When I'm in one of those moods, I win arguments on the internet, and then I am full of shame and I log off. 'Oh, no! Oh, no... I'm not doing okay.' But yeah, Harry's trying to talk himself down.

JC: But can I say, too, that it's also not behavior we've seen from Harry before.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's really been pushed. His life is objectively much worse now than it's been before.

JC: Oh, for sure, yeah. This isn't new behavior for Harry. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's just so bad, and he tells himself, "He must not use magic... He would be risking expulsion again..." which of course reminds us again of Tom Riddle afraid of what's going to happen if Hogwarts closes. Then Harry's like, 'There you go, Sirius. Look at me behaving,' but that is a privilege, a difference that Harry has that Voldemort did not have. Having somebody who loves Harry -- who says, "Because I care about you, I want you to keep yourself in line" -- gives Harry more of a limit than Voldemort ever had. It's easier for him to hold back. Somebody cares, and that is the starkness of why Harry has that advantage and Voldemort didn't. It does come down to that kind of math. Harry does have people in his corner, so he's going to try his darndest not to beat anyone up. But yeah, that line, "It gave Harry enormous satisfaction to know how furious he was making Dudley; he felt as though he was siphoning off his own frustration into his cousin, the only outlet he had..." That is the baby-step, tiny version of Voldemort wanting to hurt other people so they can understand how he feels on the inside.

JC: Yeah. Also, I hadn't thought about it until you said it, but that is what Snape has been doing to Harry for years.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: Yeah. Oh, wow.

Lorrie: Although Snape's quality is a little different, because it also has that extra special spice of guilt. That's something that Harry has an advantage with regarding his enmity toward Dudley: he has a clean conscience. He didn't make Dudley this way.

JC: True.

Lorrie: Dudley is about to find out that when you have a heavy conscience because you have harmed people, that's a whole different thing. Snape has a heavy conscience that

way; Voldemort... He's hurt so many people that he can't even let himself go there, but Harry has innocence knowing that he has not really, in his life, hurt people like that. That's something that throughout the series, Dumbledore and Snape both try with Harry and Draco to keep them as innocent as possible, because the more regrets you have about this kind of thing, the worse everything is. You've hurt other people, you've hurt yourself... Ugh. It's better if you just never have to make up that kind of crime.

JC: So okay, I want to talk about... First of all, the nickname 'Big D' is hilarious on a bunch of levels.

Lorrie: Yes, it is!

JC: It's really funny. The whole idea that somehow he's gotten this nickname is just so funny, but it's interesting that Harry puts himself in the position of being their victim, trying to trap them, and they don't see him. They keep on walking, and Harry follows them; the friends peel off and finally it's just Dudley, and then Harry just goes up to him and just starts needling him. He knows what buttons to push -- it's like, 'Come on, come on,' picking a fight with Dudley; Dudley is really reluctant to engage with Harry in that way, but gets back at him by saying, "Oh, I heard you talking in your sleep," which I think Harry at that point didn't know that he was doing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's pretty terrifying for Harry, too. That whole scene, I think, is really interesting, because it shows the relationship between these two cousins, that it's a very brotherly poke, poke, poke. They know how to poke each other. Also, Dudley... I assume that their rooms are close together or something, but it makes me wonder what Dudley thinks is going on. He teases Harry meanly, but what is Dudley thinking when he hears Harry scream this out at night? Does Dudley have any idea, because Dudley would be the one... Vernon and Petunia would not think about it, but I think Dudley would think, 'Wow, what the hell is going on?'

Lorrie: 'What the hell is going on in this kid's life?'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. With 'Big D' -- and actually with any talk about wands -- there's always the experience as a reader of nervously wondering if you're supposed to be thinking of all these penis jokes.

JC: Right, exactly, that little bit of, 'Hehehehe...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's very appropriate for that age, also.

Lorrie: Right. Then the author handles this really cleverly, where most of the time she just puts in enough penis jokes so that you're wondering if it's you and you're the one with the dirty mind or 'Oh, come on,' and then every once in a while she'll crank up the penis jokes a little bit so it's like, 'No, it's not just you.' She knows that this is a kind of tension that people have in life, that sex and sexuality is part of any kind of conflict that you're going to have between two fifteen-year-old boys, and then the confrontation that Dudley provokes is so homophobic. When it starts, as the reader I'm just like, 'Um, this sounds kind of... Is it just me?' And then as it goes on, the homophobia ramps up so much. Dudley says, "Not this brave at night, are you?" and Harry's like, "What?" Little virginal Harry. "In bed!" I don't know about you, but as a reader I'm like, 'Should I be reading about fifteen-year-old boys in bed?' "What do you mean I'm not brave in bed?" At that point, I'm like, 'Ugh, the wording.' "I heard you last night, talking in your sleep. *Moaning*," and then I'm like, 'This is flat out scary.' It's so horrendously suggestive, and then he says with this "high-pitched whimpering voice", "'Don't kill Cedric! Don't kill Cedric!' Who's Cedric -- your boyfriend?" Damn. So Dudley is a person who can hear a nightmare of pure terror and think that it's a gaybashing, and thinks that the thing to do is to taunt somebody about a gaybashing? That's what he thinks? Wow!

JC: Yeah. I kind of read that both ways. On the one hand, it's like, 'Okay, yeah, maybe he really thinks that,' but on the other hand, this is exactly how fifteen-year-old boys of a certain age lash out at each other. Whether he actually thinks that or not, that's the button that he knows he could push. That's the same button that probably all the boys around him would push.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Particularly in the 90s. It's probably still true, but because I was a high school teacher in the 90s, I remember having classes where the homophobic taunts and jokes were just... That's what the boys did.

Lorrie: Right, and it didn't necessarily line up with if they actually thought that the person they were teasing...

JC: It was just how you did. It was just how they did it at the time.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: In some ways, there was so much ignorance about what it would really be like to be talking to somebody who was out as gay that they just thought that it was an all-purpose slur. It was so far from their reality that it was metaphor. Then Dudley goes on to report that Harry has been saying in his sleep "He's killed Cedric! He's going to kill me, dad!" Whether or not there's homophobia here, is that really something you hear

and then decide that you're going to taunt a person? But clearly for Dudley to be bringing this up like this, it disturbed him. He maybe doesn't know what to do with being disturbed, but it's not like he just heard it and shrugged and went back to sleep. He's described as bringing this up, like, "Oh, don't think I haven't heard," and Harry's like, "Heard what?" Then, as Dudley is reporting what he's heard, he can tell from Harry's face he's struck a nerve; Harry didn't know, and this is something. Yeah, Harry's hearing this, loses control, he points his wand at Dudley, and I'm thinking he is so angry at Dudley right now. He could probably cast *Crucio* on Dudley right now. He's justified in feeling that degree of anger, which when a human feels it, it does scare you about yourself. 'Oh God... if I could express, truly, all this anger, would I actually cause damage? Can I trust myself? I'm scaring myself, how angry I am.'" That is the moment that the dementors come, and that's the trap that Harry's going to be in repeatedly in this book: being so justifiably angry and then wondering, 'Wait a minute. Did I make that happen?'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Did I cause unintentional magic? Is it just a coincidence? Because there's a lot of coincidences.'

JC: I was wondering that, too, while I was reading it. Are the dementors drawn to... Is there a relationship there? Were the dementors drawn to all of this anger or this magic or whatever building up, or was the presence of the dementors getting closer feeding into this loop? 'Was there a relationship between the dementors appearing and Harry feeling this way?' was what I was wondering while I was reading it.

Lorrie: Well, the answer we get later is that it was a coincidence. Or not exactly a coincidence, but that the reason somebody saw fit to send dementors after Harry is related to stuff that's causing Harry to feel genuinely this angry has nothing... It didn't call the dementors to him. No, they were going to come anyway.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: But the same bad incidents that resulted in somebody sending dementors after him also resulted in him being upset and angry in life right now. Basically yeah, it's a coincidence. His life sucks; that's why he's angry.

JC: And it's going to suck more.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's so very angry and has so little comfort that if something bad like dementors happens, there is no way in the world he can know, 'Wait, did I do that? Who did that?' Fortunately for Harry, he has just enough experience: "then his reason caught up with his senses." He didn't have the power to turn off the stars because he has encountered dementors before, so he does have the experience to think, 'Oh, right, I

think it wasn't me." But how on earth is a teenager supposed to tell, and how do you learn to keep your anger in check enough to avoid doing harm without harming yourself by forbidding yourself to feel it at all? How do you know you have the right to feel the way you feel, and what do you do with your own fear of the destructive power of your rage? Wow! When you have very little guidance, like Harry has right now, ooh, that's really, really not a good time. Harry has had more experience and support than kid Tom Riddle did when he was experimenting with magic at the orphanage and wondering, 'Did I do that? Did I make that happen?' and he didn't have anyone to ask. If you're fortunate as a kid and you have that degree of anger, then you can receive reassurance that "no, you didn't make it happen. Your anger's okay," or "Yeah, you did make that happen. Here's what you do when that unfortunately happens. Here's how you make it up, and here are some ways to learn how to express it safely." But Harry doesn't have as much as he needs, and kid Tom Riddle had none. Kid Tom Riddle really was making it happen. Meanwhile, Dudley has one default response: just like Ginny has the Bat-Bogey Hex and Harry has *Expelliarmus* and Voldemort has *Avada Kedavra*, Dudley's one response is to punch people in the face.

JC: And he punches Harry, and he doesn't know -- he thinks Harry's causing this. He doesn't know. It's like, 'Oh, God...' Yeah.

Lorrie: Ow!

JC: And then yeah, he doesn't know what's happening.

Lorrie: It's the only thing he knows how to do!

JC: It is. It's the only thing he knows how to do. I can hardly blame him, because it's like, 'Oh, my God, the timing.'

Lorrie: This is why Snape has to get Harry and Draco to keep doing *Expelliarmus* on each other, because once something bad happens, you do the one thing you do ever, whatever that thing is.

JC: Right. Yeah. This dementor attack is really genuinely scary, because even in the moment Harry is shocked that they're there. He's like, 'Why are they here? Why are they attacking my Muggle cousin? Did someone send them after him?' There's all these thoughts going on.

Lorrie: 'Are they just wandering around?' Yeah.

JC: Yeah. 'What's going on?' That made me wonder, 'How many unsolved murders are there that are dementor's kisses,' right?

Lorrie: 'Oh, my God, what is this?'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Hmm... Through the years, all through the centuries, right?

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry is dealing with the cold and terror that comes with a dementor attack. He's starting to have flashbacks; while this dementor is getting into his feelings, he's starting to hear Voldemort's laugh again and he's trying to figure out what to do. He's trying to protect Dudley, and also now he's reeling in pain because Dudley's just punched him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And he says, "You moron, Dudley! KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!" That reminded me of my guy Snape again: this whole situation where you pick on a person because you hate them, and then something happens and you knee-jerk protect them while you're irritated with them the whole time...

JC: Right, for sure. That thing about "Whatever you do, keep your mouth shut," or however he framed it...

Lorrie: It's so terrifying!

JC: Ooooooh... Okay, it's terrifying because we know what it means. Dudley doesn't know what it means.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Also, the whole fact that it's called a 'dementor's kiss' just raises this whole gross --

Lorrie: Yes, it does.

JC: That somehow, if you keep your mouth shut...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Which you can't do -- Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Oh, God.

JC: It brings a sexual violence aspect to the dementors that --

Lorrie: Yes, it does.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, because a kiss is such a beautiful thing, and it's just the most horrifying... Yeah. So yeah, keeping your mouth shut may not help with the dementors, but leaving your mouth open will definitely be bad.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Definitely don't do that!

JC: Yeah, for sure. Also, the dual meaning of "keep your mouth shut."

Lorrie: Yes! Yeah.

JC: That, too, but yeah. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah. See, this is what happens when this author has enough time to write. She can load up all of this nuance, all of these insinuations where the reader's like, 'Wait, am I supposed to be seeing this? Well, they are fifteen. Are fifteen-year-old boys sexual beings?' Yes, but not in any sort of good way. Just in this, 'Oh, no, oh, no... Oh, they're not happy about it. No one's happy about it.' All this threatening stuff happening...

JC: Yeah. What you just said reminded me there's a famous quote from... I can't remember my Shakespeare very well, but there's a quote from some Shakespeare play about how useless teenage boys are, and they're only good for getting in trouble -- "getting wenches with child" is the phrase I remember specifically -- and doing nothing productive until they're twenty-three. There's this quote, and it's just... yeah, so that idea that no, we're in a zone where everyone hates teenage boys or something at this age.

Lorrie: Yeah, and here we have Dudley and Harry hating each other.

JC: And hating each other, yeah. The fact that Harry for the first time in a couple of years is struggling to cast a Patronus is interesting. He's had so many bad feelings lately that he's struggling to draw on something, but then the idea of Ron and Hermione is the thing that helps him cast it, which is like, 'Awww.'

Lorrie: Well, that is actually a new tactic. He was trained by Lupin that to cast a Patronus you have to think of a happy memory, but he doesn't do that here. He just feels a sensation of love and actually of grief, and hey, would you look at that? That's enough to cast a Patronus. It doesn't have to be a happy memory; it can just be love.

JC: Oh, yeah. Well, we're going to see that again.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Love and grief, we'll see that.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this is another resource that Harry has that Voldemort would not have had, but there's reasons why Harry is somewhat more resilient than Tom Riddle was. This author has built up this world so well by this point that, as readers reading what Harry is doing -- ordering his stag Patronus around -- we can recognize that he's casting extraordinarily powerful magic. Adults who can cast Patronuses would not necessarily have done as well as this; Harry's really being very powerful.

JC: He can direct it to go after the dementor that's about to literally kill Dudley or kiss Dudley.

Lorrie: Yeah, and his stag Patronus is so powerful. It just gets rid of them, and we know that Patronuses can also just peter out and die or that you don't cast them at all. This one... he can order it around, he can move it. He meets the moment, and then we get this amazing passage: "Moon, stars, and streetlamps burst back into life. A warm breeze swept the alleyway. Trees rustled in neighboring gardens and the mundane rumble of cars in Magnolia Crescent filled the air again." Oh... I felt that in such a tactile way. There was a breach between the Muggle and magical worlds, just like Harry had been expecting, and I realized that during the whole dementor attack, I'd forgotten. I was so in it; then when Muggle sounds come back, that's when I realized, 'Wow, I just was in an altered reality state brought on by fiction.' That's such a powerful illustration of feelings that people can have in life when you realize that there are parts of your life that seem safe and happy, but somewhere, something dangerous has happened that's changing everything. That piece of writing and the way that I get re-centered by the lights coming back into view in Magnolia Crescent... Wow! Because yeah, no. Until then, I was there with the rattling breaths and the shining stag. Oof.

JC: I felt that way in the previous book, where there was a whole couple of chapters where I forgot about the existence of Ron and Hermione.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And when Harry opened the door and they were standing there, I was like, 'Oh!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Oh, wow!'

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. And then, just as I'm reeling because we can feel the warm breeze -- which is clearly the first breeze they've had all day --

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's when we get Mrs. Figg coming out of nowhere with her clanking string bag and her tartan slippers, calling Harry an "idiot boy" and shrieking about Mundungus Fletcher.

JC: And that's a great way to end the chapter, because you're like, 'What?!'

Lorrie: Whoa! Never mind this barrier between Muggle and magical; we're just in different territory now. What the heck?!

JC: It also makes me think: Mrs. Figg lives in this neighborhood... All through this series, we've had Vernon and Petunia -- Vernon in particular -- talking about "the neighbors are going to say this, the neighbors are going to say that," and it always sounded like, 'Wow, that's super paranoid.' But then at the beginning of the chapter, when there's this loud noise and Vernon's got Harry by the scruff, they look and they can see all the neighbors watching them, and Vernon's like, "Hehe, nothing to look at here."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was like, 'Oh, wait, he actually does have something to worry about there,' and when Mrs. Figg comes running out like this, it made me think she's lived amongst these Muggles like this her entire life and clearly doesn't care what they think. It just made me think again of the magical world -- Mrs. Figg is a Squib -- being a refuge for people who don't fit in and who are fine with that, and that idea that 'This is who I am, take me or leave me...' I just thought, 'Okay, yeah, Mrs. Figg is one of us here,' is what it felt like when she comes running up and she knows who Harry is, knows what a wand is, and knows what just happened. Yeah. I'm just imagining, suddenly, Mrs. Figg's whole life living in this neighborhood and dealing with all these people. Oh...

Lorrie: Yeah. I do like that sleight-of-hand that shows the people who are marginalized - - who have no meaning and no value if you look at them a different way -- are full of life, full of color, are fascinating.

JC: Yeah, and we're going to learn more about Mrs. Figg soon.

Lorrie: Oh, the clanking string bag! Love it so much! Well, how do you feel?

JC: Yeah, I'm excited. Here we go!

Lorrie: We've entered book five, haven't we?

JC: Yes, we have, and it starts dark, and it's going to continue.

Lorrie: But good for Harry. He got rid of two really, really scary dementors all by himself.

JC: And saved his cousin.

Lorrie: Yep, for better and for worse.

JC: Yeah, and Dudley remembers this later, right?

Lorrie: Oh, he does. Yes.

JC: Yeah. Dudley knows at this point, yeah.

Lorrie: There is extracanonical interview material where somebody asked the author, 'What did Dudley see when the dementors got into his head?' -- because it does change him permanently -- and she says he saw himself as he really was.

JC: Ooh... Oof.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that's interesting. It's like a warped Mirror of Erised.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: If it leaves you with only the bad things about yourself, dang.

Lorrie: If they make you remember the worst things ever, yeah.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: Because we know from him saying, "Oh, Cedric! He killed Cedric! He's going to kill me!" We know that these things have been on his mind, and he's been trying to deal with them using his usual coping mechanisms. That was right there for the dementors to take and pull back some curtain for him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Woof!

JC: Interesting. Very interesting. And here we go!

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: Chapter one of how many chapters for this book? Wait... Thirty-eight.

Lorrie: Okay.

JC: So only one chapter more than the previous book, but yet...

Lorrie: They're ever so much denser. The next chapter is called A Peck of Owls.

JC: Is that what a group of owls is called?

Lorrie: I don't think so. Huh...

JC: Well, we'll find out between now and the next chapter.

Lorrie: Well, now I have to find out. Aren't they called a 'wisdom'?

JC: I don't know.

Lorrie: A 'parliament'.

JC: A 'parliament'. Is that not the opposite of a 'wisdom'? I don't know.

Lorrie: Hehehehe... Yeah, no, they're not usually called a peck of owls, unless, of course, pecking is what you're thinking about because they won't leave you alone.

JC: Okay, here we go. Here we go!

Lorrie: All right.

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.

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