

## Transcript

### Episode 5.28

#### Book 5, Chapter 28: Snape's Worst Memory

**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 Twenty-Eight: Snape's Worst Memory.

**Lorrie:** Snape's Worst Memory. Umbridge takes over as headmistress. Fred and George disrupt the school with fireworks. Snape leaves Harry unattended with the Pensieve and Harry spies on a memory of Snape, the Marauders and Lily when they were fifth years. Snake catches Harry at this, throws a jar of dead cockroaches at him, and ends the Occlumency lessons. Are you buckled in?

**JC:** Yes.

**Lorrie:** I'm buckled in.

**JC:** Oh, yeah!

**Lorrie:** The title informs us that this is Snape's worst memory. That's not from the chapter itself, so the author is being more directorial here. This is not up to interpretation; we are meant to know that this is his worst memory, and then it's our job as the reader to read it wondering why. What aspect... What about it makes it the worst for him, and why didn't he want Harry to see it? With the Snape character, the author's long game is to reveal or conceal bits of information at a time strategically, but each new dynamic raises the stakes so high on the mystery and it's fascinating to watch her ratchet the tension higher and higher, right? Can she maintain this? Can she keep us guessing what on earth is going on with this character to make all these pieces fit? One of the things that makes this one of my favorite characters in literature and someone that I never get tired of thinking about is how she succeeded. She gave us such

complicated things, and they did all arrange themselves into a coherent story at the end, but in order to figure that out (step-by-step as she gives you some information and withholds other information), you have to really stretch what you as a reader know and can believe about human nature and what's possible with people's life choices. Easy answers generally don't apply. Yeah, most of the chapter titles don't have the author's hand quite so firm in them, but there's no room for interpreting whether or not it was his worst memory; it was somehow, for some reason. Umbridge replaced Dumbledore.

**JC:** Actually, I really love how it was the first thing you see in this chapter.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The first thing is the Declaration or the Educational Decree, Number Twenty-Eight (matching the chapter, which I thought that's interesting).

**Lorrie:** Oh... I didn't even notice that. You're right.

**JC:** Kind of wild, but making her the headmistress of Hogwarts and opening with that is like "Trump Wins Election," right? It just felt like a headline. 'Okay, here we go.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Here, it's about to get worse.

**Lorrie:** It's a big solid block in your chest, yeah, or it's a door slamming really heavily. It reminds me: the last couple years, we've seen a lot of government ousters of college presidents where the government has interfered and pushed them out; also, Trump appointing himself the chair of the Kennedy Center, and he's also now appointed himself the chair of the Los Angeles Olympics.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Okay.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, and wanting to rename things after himself and all this stuff. Yeah. Yeah, it feels very much like that. It's also interesting to me that, as Harry is moving around the next day... Two parts of it: one, everybody already seems to know the details of what went down somehow, which is very interesting because there's been so much secrecy and tight security around Harry's interactions with Umbridge and Dumbledore before, and suddenly everybody knows. I thought, 'Wow, what happened to the security that was around?' and all this stuff. Now everybody knows the details somehow, and then everybody wants Harry to tell the story and they want to believe what he has to say.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** And it's very rare in this book series that people want to hear Harry's story and want to believe him. Those two things together are very interesting in the first couple of pages.

**Lorrie:** We get the clue about why this happened.

**JC:** What, the portraits?

**Lorrie:** Yes, because the Head's office has sealed itself against Umbridge and she can't get in. Dumbledore did something.

**JC:** Oh, I never thought about it being Dumbledore. Oh, yeah, okay. I just thought that the headmaster portraits, maybe, talked to the other portraits and that's how the word got out, but maybe it was... Yeah, okay. I had not thought about it being something Dumbledore did on purpose to make sure everyone knew.

**Lorrie:** Well, the portraits are always overhearing what Dumbledore says in his office, but they've never done this before.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** All sorts of meetings have gone on in that office that we never hear about and the students don't know about, but suddenly they do.

**JC:** Yeah. I guess the castle seems to defend those loyal to it, so part of me was thinking, 'Okay, what if the portraits in the office decided that's enough?' My thought was, 'Oh, the portraits were (or Hogwarts itself was) like, "We're going to defend ourselves against this incursion," and that's part of the portraits going out and telling the other portraits what was happening and spreading the word and the office sealing itself. I had not really connected that with the possibility of Dumbledore doing that on purpose. I felt like that was more the castle, but yeah, okay. That's interesting.

**Lorrie:** Well, the portraits are sworn to assist the current headmaster, so he tells them what to do. We have seen him earlier in this book telling the portraits, "Go to the Ministry and go to St. Mungo's and do what I want you to, and then come back and report to me," and then they answer right away. Even Phineas Nigellus (who tries to be a pain in the butt) still obeys, so we know that. There is also later confirmation, in book seven, Hogwarts recognizes Snape as a legitimate headmaster. It doesn't seal itself against Snape; even if you believe that Dumbledore was surprised and ambushed by Snape killing him, then you might think that Hogwarts might see Snape as an interloper, but it doesn't.

**JC:** Oh... That is a really interesting detail I hadn't picked up on before.

**Lorrie:** There's a legitimate transition...

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** And Umbridge taking over is not a legitimate transition. It's just a Decree. Executive Decrees...

**JC:** Yeah, Executive Orders are just... Yeah. Right, right, that's an interesting comparison. Are you saying then that it's the castle's allegiance to whoever it sees as the valid headmaster, or is it that Dumbledore did something to seal off the office and to command the portraits, or kind of a combination of both, maybe?

**Lorrie:** I think Dumbledore is one of a long line of headmasters who has headmaster knowledge about how the school works, and one of the ways is if there is an unfriendly takeover, then these are the security measures that you can put in place.

**JC:** Oh, okay. That makes sense.

**Lorrie:** So I can imagine him saying, "All right, I'm leaving. I'm locking the office to intruders. Portraits, please make sure that the students understand what's happening." The reason I'm thinking this is because in 2017, I read a headline that made me laugh-cry so hard at how much it reminded me of *Harry Potter*. This was in January/February 2017 when the Trump administration first took over the White House, but they were the first administration to flout the long-held tradition of transition where the outgoing administration (no matter how much enmity they have) prepare meticulous documents to hand over to the next people because they serve the country -- they don't serve the party, they don't serve the particular president. For example, George Bush, the younger: no matter how much enmity he had between him and Obama, when Obama came, they were so meticulous about giving every piece of information they could of being helpful. The Bush kids were helpful to the Obama kids, and that was because there are allegiances to the country. The Trump people... You can imagine how meticulously the Obama people prepared their transition documents, knowing that the people coming after them would be not particularly experienced, and the Trump people coming in made theater of trashing those documents and refusing to even look at them; they performatively threw them away without looking at them. The headline article that I read during the beginning of that administration is that they didn't know how to turn on the lights in the White House. It would be Trump and Steve Bannon shouting at each other in the White House, and people couldn't figure out how to work the switches because they had thrown out the transition documents. They were literally in the dark.

**JC:** It is a laugh-cry...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Because of the stupidity of it, and then the idea of 'Oh, this is where we're headed.'

**Lorrie:** And those transition documents had been prepared without ulterior motive. They had only been meant to be helpful.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** "Look, we know you're going to come in and run the country however you want. If you want the lights on while doing that, here's how you turn them on."

**JC:** Right, right.

**Lorrie:** "Well, I don't need your lights." "Okay... Do what you want, I guess. It's yours now." I'm reading this, and of course all I can think about is Umbridge throwing a tantrum because the head office won't open to admit her.

**JC:** It's very satisfying that it won't let her in.

**Lorrie:** It is.

**JC:** There's a little bit of that, 'Okay, this is the White House locking down and saying "NO."'

**Lorrie:** Anyway, that's what gave me the mental image of the transition that Dumbledore would have prepared if it were a legitimate transfer of power, and how since it's not, he's still in charge. So yeah... Anyway, there's that, and then she has set up the Inquisitorial Squad.

**JC:** Oh, that's really chilling. I don't think that hit me as hard on a first read as it did this time because it was, like, 'Oh. OH.' Obviously, it goes back to Nazi youth (kids informing on their parents and everything), but it just felt more chilling this time that people who were loyal to Umbridge -- to the Ministry -- are the ones who immediately get this power that students should not have, and they can lord it over other students without any reins on it. That just felt really contemporary and terrifying in a way that I wasn't expecting it to hit me that hard.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is the difference between reading *Harry Potter* as an American who sees it as children's allegory and as an American who experiences it as a description of totalitarianism. There are readers in other countries who always thought, 'Oh, yeah, this is what we live through, I recognize this,' and now we have crossed over into becoming that because we used to live in a really privileged state of democracy. So yeah, junior ICE over here.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** It is not as much people who are loyal to Umbridge or the Ministry as people who are willing to profess loyalty...

**JC:** Yeah, that's true.

**Lorrie:** But what it's appealing to is weaponizing these kids' enjoyment of favoritism, not having reins on what they do to other students. It's not so much even that they don't have reins on it; it's that they're encouraged to overstep. It's appealing to people who like that. It's weaponizing their enjoyment of bullying and abuse of power, and that's a more powerful appeal than whether or not they're loyal. Draco gives a beautiful little demonstration of what kind of petty, abusive power this is enabling when he's like, "Well, I don't like you, so I'm taking points off of you."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And Ernie... Oh, bless Ernie McMillan, my adored minor character, saying, "But that breaks the rules!" Yes, love. This makes me think about how one of the issues of contention between the administration we're in now and the one that had just come before is the issue of loan forgiveness for student loans, because that is something in the U.S. that has gotten so out of whack. The Biden Administration actually managed to get some student loan forgiveness through before their term ended. Currently, ICE agents are eligible for student loan forgiveness.

**JC:** Oh, I didn't know that. Wow.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, which is something deliberately done to emphasize the difference in privilege, but you're not required to have a college degree to be an ICE agent. However, you are required to carry firearms. That's not just a privilege of it; it's a requirement, so that is similarly appealing to enjoyment of favoritism and bullying and abuse of power. Yeah. Reading about the Inquisitorial Squad, you can see how the incentives given for joining it are designed to encourage some traits in a person and reward them. These are the students that Snape has been trying to take care of as they become vulnerable and their fathers are sent to Azkaban and whatever. That's who this is targeting.

**JC:** It feels very much, too -- actually, this reference feels so old now -- when Trump first came into office in 2017, all of the weird uprisings of young white men in particular.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** People with their tiki torches and all that kind of stuff... It reminds me a little bit of that. 'Okay, now we are the ones with the power.' Or the fact that when Roe vs. Wade was struck down, some of the first things that we saw happening online were men coming into spaces and taunting women...

**Lorrie:** Saying...

**JC:** "Your body, my choice," and stuff like that, yeah. It kind of reminds me of the idea of people who will step up and join such an Inquisitorial Squad (or people like that) who just want to abuse whatever new power they have over people that they think they're superior to.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is one of those things where the wolf who wins is the wolf you feed, because the same people have other, more empathetic impulses, too, but they're not being fed at this moment. Very, very quickly, this chapter starts on complicating this matter beautifully when we find out that Fred and George know all about the Inquisitorial Squad taking away points and say, "'Montague tried to do us during break.... He never managed to get all the words out, due to the fact that we forced him headfirst into that Vanishing Cabinet on the first floor.' Hermione looked very shocked. "But you'll get into terrible trouble!" Which, of course, that's not an issue anymore, but this is going to come up again and again. It's so clear at this point that Montague was the bad guy, sure, but there's that delicious temptation to be satisfied that he was shut down somehow and to not think further about the consequences that might happen if you just shut him down and then walk away. That's tempting to just be, like, "Well, I don't care, he deserved it," but we'll see, later on in this chapter, more and more consequences when you let yourself just enjoy that and you don't think further. It messes up the good guy/bad guy division so badly, and I'm quite relieved that we have Hermione here sounding the early alarm.

**JC:** I was wondering about that "Hermione looked shocked", because her response was not "What's going to happen to Montague." It was "What's going to happen to you for doing this," and I thought that was interesting, too. But this discussion is also making me think about discussions I've had with my own child. A couple of months back, we've been trying (since 2020, honestly) to watch every movie or documentary we could find about Civil Rights leaders and like political change and things like that. Sometime last spring, we watched *Gandhi*, and that sent our kid going off and reading about non-violence and then stumbling upon this Leftist response to non-violence, which is to say that non-violence has failed completely and it's time for violence. We had some really interesting discussions about some of the things that he found and that he was thinking about, and that came up for me when I read this, too, this idea that taking a non-violent approach... At least, the philosophy would be that shoving him in that cabinet was the right thing to do in that moment, no question. That would be the approach of the folks who are like, "We're past non-violence. It's over. Didn't work. Now we need to move on to violence." That kind of thing is where I felt Fred and George [were] sitting in that discourse.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. We know repeatedly that Fred and George have a different philosophy of life than Hermione, and that's why tracking the ways that they do and don't agree with each other is a good way to keep tabs on the morality of this fictional universe. We will see, later, Hermione leading the trio into a way of fighting that maintains some limits because you'll get into terrible trouble; even if it sounds at first like what she means is, "Oh, no, those are deterrents. You're not meant to go past that line," there is still a limit that she's invoking, and that's something that you're going to have to internalize in a

world where obviously nobody is having rules for safety or fairness. "Well, what are your own internalized rules?" Hermione... Yeah, a Vanishing Cabinet will -- Well, we don't know yet as readers just how dangerous that was what they did and why, if you put something into a Vanishing Cabinet, you might not want to say, "Well, then, I don't care what happened after that."

**JC:** Yeah. We also get this hint here that Fred and George are starting to plot their dramatic exit from Hogwarts, and they have clearly thought this through.

**Lorrie:** Oh, yeah.

**JC:** They see what's coming, they know it's not for them, and because they've been working ever since Harry gave them his money at the end of the last book, they've been building this business plan. They've been working really hard on it, probably even harder than they've worked at their schoolwork; they're ready to enact their plan, and there's something really cool about that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That idea of, "I know, I've got everything I need. It's time to go and do the work I know I'm meant to do, even if I have to sacrifice something or cut something short or leave a place earlier than I planned to." They're ready.

**Lorrie:** They've done all the work.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** What I love is that this shows us who is in a position to put themselves on the front lines. Fred and George don't have anything to lose because they have worked out all their details. They know what they're doing. They can put themselves at risk; other people who are resisting Umbridge might not be able to just flat out disrupt her this way, but they know they can. If you're a protester, where are you going to be in the protest if you have a lot of people you're taking care of? You're not going to be on the front lines getting your head bashed in. Who are you and what can you risk?

**JC:** I also really like that they have thought about what's going to be the moment. They had this plan, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They knew it, and they decided 'The best use of our protest is going to be the first day that she is in power. We're going to disrupt so much that it's going to make her look bad and undermine some of her authority, and also show the rest of the students that this is not okay.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They picked a really good moment.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** We see Filch in heaven because he's going to be allowed to whip and torture students. This is not hyperbole.

**JC:** Yes.

**Lorrie:** It may have read a little bit more comically to Americans in other years... It's not hyperbole.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** It's not even... Yeah.

**JC:** No longer. Yeah. Yeah, the darkness of that comment hit me hard, but you're right. Before, I'm imagining even the performance of the movie actor going, "Oh, I missed the days when I could just hang students up by their ankles or whatever in the dungeon," and it was always comical, like haha; now, it's like, 'Actually, actually... Hmm...' Yeah. Then he says that Educational Decree Twenty-Nine is going to make it legal, which sounds like the next chapter.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, corporal punishment is coming back.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That idea of 'We were a better country when we could beat our children in school' or 'when women had to stay home', or 'when people of color knew their place...' All of those comments is what that feels like here. 'Oh, if I could just beat the children, everything would go back to this imagined past where things were somehow better for me.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. His rationale is that if the kids knew that he had the power to do that, then they would never have misbehaved, but we know that's not true. It's just that he has this appetite that he wants to satisfy, and his loyalty can be secured by feeding that appetite.

**JC:** Right, right. Yeah, Umbridge has his number, that's for sure.

**Lorrie:** So we get him summoning Harry to Umbridge's office. What did you think of this?

**JC:** This scene... This whole -- Yeah, I forgot what happened in this scene until we got into the scene. I was like, 'Does he have to write more lines? What has she cooked up?'

What is it going to be?' Clearly, she wants to push Harry, punish Harry for being involved in this or whatever, and she doesn't yet feel like she can just torture it out of him.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** She has to have a reason, which I thought, 'Okay, that's interesting.' That's one of those lines where I'm thinking, 'Yeah, she could. She could just torture it out of him.' But then I'm like, 'Oh, no, that's the future.' That's more of a statement about where I see the world I'm living in now versus the...

**Lorrie:** Step by step.

**JC:** Yeah. When he came in and he sat down and she offered him a drink, then the memory of the scene came back to me. I was like, 'Ooh!' That's still very dark that you would try to spike a kid's drink with the truth serum or Veritaserum. No consent, you didn't need a warrant, nope. Happily, Harry realized what was happening before it was too late, but oh, my gosh... Even if he hadn't, he doesn't know anything about Dumbledore's whereabouts, so he couldn't have answered that question. Also, because Sirius's location is protected by the Secret-Keeper, he couldn't have, so even if he had drunk it, it wasn't going to get Umbridge what she wanted, right?

**Lorrie:** Right. There are a couple of layers of protection. We see here how good it is when you protect people by not giving them the information, because yeah, she could have tried to torture the information out of him, but he doesn't have it, which often does deter torturers. Usually, actually, there's a point at which they realize, 'Oh, there's no point,' but it makes it so much harder on the person if they do know that they have the information that might be tortured out of them. Dumbledore protects people by not telling them things, which in this case helps, although everybody including me complains about him doing it too much.

**JC:** I guess, too, yeah. Dumbledore is multiple steps ahead of everyone else. Dumbledore's lived through many of these things before, so he has a perspective on how it could go. But yeah, there's definitely a relief in knowing that even if Harry were forced to answer the question truthfully, he couldn't.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Harry gives Umbridge the impression that he drank the tea, so now he really is kind of protected. He doesn't know something, right? He doesn't know it, but also she now believes he doesn't know it.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. She bluffs and says, "I know you know where he is," so now he has the upper hand in that she has exposed how she's bluffing instead of being as well-informed as she wants to come across. Then we get the excellent contrast of what happens to

Harry when she asks about Sirius, which even though he can't divulge the information, he does have it and he's immediately upset wanting to protect Sirius. That makes him upset, and then he betrays himself by his hands shaking so much that his teacup is rattling; that gives Umbridge plenty of information, even though it doesn't say the whereabouts, but the thing that I had not seen until this reading was, 'Oh, he's Occluding.' When Harry thinks about this person -- where he knows the truth about them and would die rather than betraying Sirius -- it's very, very upsetting, but no, nothing is more important to him than protecting this person he loves. It's very upsetting, but if she's going to try to torture the information out of him, she may have found her match. This is natural Occlumency, what Snape could have explained to Harry if he hadn't been monitored by Voldemort the whole time.

**JC:** That's interesting.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The same thing that's keeping Harry from even thinking about the mystery-wrapped gift that Sirius gave him is all of that coming. 'Oh, no... Oh, no, you're not going there.'

**JC:** Another moment in this scene that I really like is that Harry almost drinks the tea and then remembers Mad-Eye Moody telling him, "Don't just drink a thing an enemy hands you," which in retrospect is like, DUH!

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** But that saves him, and it made me think about... I was trying to remember, 'Was that really Mad-Eye Moody, or was that Barty Crouch, Jr. as Mad-Eye Moody who taught him that?' I couldn't remember. In a sense, it doesn't matter, but these little moments... We talk about how kids aren't listening, but they do...

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** And it's this little, beautiful moment where a teaching comes through and protects him. Oh, that's great. We also then get some really interesting information about how the school is being monitored.

**Lorrie:** Oh, boy.

**JC:** She says that the only fire not being watched at Hogwarts is her own, which I think becomes important later, but then she says that the Inquisitorial Squad is reading all of the mail.

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** I just went, 'Oh...' I'd forgotten that detail.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** To give kids access to their peers' correspondence in that way... Oh, man.

**Lorrie:** Well, the DOGE employees who have all the Social Security information are only a couple years older than these Hogwarts Inquisitorial Squad students.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Here we are with Palantir having all of our information... What are they going to do with it? I don't know.

**JC:** Right. I'm honestly, genuinely impressed by the way this authoritarian regime... The details... how well they're matching up.

**Lorrie:** Well, on the one hand, this is a good demonstration of why I really respect J.K. Rowling and this series: it's very well written -- it holds up, and no matter how much you analyze it, it really does stand up to any sort of robust analysis -- but the other thing is that that's because authoritarian regimes are completely predictable. There is one playbook, and that's why it's so painful when naively trusting people say, "Oh, they say that, but they're not going to do it," and you think, 'They are going to do it because there's only one way this goes.' If you say, "Well, let's just give them a chance, let's wait and see..." "You do that. I'm going to be preparing over here." I so fall in the Hermione camp about the twins where they make me nervous, but I do admit the absolute genius of inventing fireworks that multiply by ten when you try to vanish them.

**JC:** It's amazing.

**Lorrie:** That's brilliant.

**JC:** It's so good.

**Lorrie:** What we can do with that, even if it's a metaphor, is keep that as a mindset for resistance. 'Just know: you're going to do this and that? Well, every time you try to suppress us, we're going to come back times ten.' That is a really strengthening message.

**JC:** I like, too, that Harry's in her office when it starts happening. Fred and George had said before, "Scatter! We're going to do a thing, and we don't want any of y'all to be implemented in this,' and Harry has a rock solid alibi.

**Lorrie:** "It was not me."

**JC:** Yeah, which is great.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. They protected him. I laugh every single time at the one firework that says 'poo.'

**JC:** Oh, my God. Yeah, the detail that there are sparklers that just write swear words in the air. That's all they do, and I just have this visual... What it makes me think of is that way back in 2017, 2018 -- somewhere in there -- you knitted a scarf...

**Lorrie:** Oh, yes.

**JC:** That, if you looked at it in the right way, said 'Fuck Trump.'

**Lorrie:** Right. If you looked at it another way, you didn't see it. Yeah.

**JC:** Right. That's kind of what it made me think of: all the ways people were starting to, back then, code or do things that felt like these small acts of resistance that bolstered the people around them. I don't know, there's something about these fireworks that I'm imagining that they're spelling out 'Fuck Umbridge' and whatever, and how heartening that would be to see as a student.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** It'd be like seeing graffiti, but even better because you can't get rid of it.

**Lorrie:** What I love about 'poo' is that there's a way in which it's more powerful than a harsher swear word because it's so ridiculous and funny. Okay, that's a good thing to remember -- ridicule is powerful -- and also that the surprise of it makes you laugh is good for you. You feel better.

**JC:** And you can't argue that it's doing any harm. 'Poo, poo, poo!' It's just a silly word. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "Yeah, what's wrong with poo?" Yes.

**JC:** Yeah, right. One of my very favorite details of this entire chapter is the way the teachers respond to these fireworks that are just going on around the school...

**Lorrie:** Yes!

**JC:** And that beautiful little moment of, "Well, I wasn't sure I had the authority to do anything because you told me I could only do things related to teaching my subject." I feel like that's such a powerful resistance lesson, too, but it's one that people have used throughout time, right? It's the stoppage, the idea of "I can't do anything about it because you put so many restrictions on me, so I guess you're going to have to take care of it." Umbridge runs herself ragged the whole day trying to deal with these fireworks that every time she tries to do something, they just get worse. Oh, I love it. I love it so much... All the teachers ignoring them -- "No, it's not a problem" -- and probably all of them in their heads knowing who's responsible (because they know these kids) and being so fucking proud.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** "I taught those kids, and look at them. Look at the way they're resisting. Look at what they're doing." For every moment that they were annoyed by Fred and George, they're also now admiring what they are capable of. 'Aawww...' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "If only they would work up to their potential..." Well, here they are working up to their potential.

**JC:** Oh, I love Hermione's suggestion of "I'm feeling rebellious, so let's not do our homework tonight!"

**Lorrie:** I know. 'Ooh, look at that.'

**JC:** Which is hilarious, and she's really, genuinely impressed with Fred and George's work on the fireworks. She's been skeptical of them this entire time, but she actually is like, "Okay, yeah. You did really well. This is great."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I like that they have a mutual respect. Sometimes when Hermione compliments them, they really thank her. "Wow! Other people compliment us, but from you?"

**JC:** "From you, it actually really means something." Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** This is Umbridge's first day as the declared headmistress of Hogwarts. Poor thing.

**Lorrie:** Well, that bodes well for the rest of her tenure, doesn't it?

**JC:** Oh, yeah. Bless her heart. She's probably sleeping well tonight.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. 'Her approval ratings are historically low...' I'm sorry!

**JC:** She would say they're historically high.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Sorry. I read that this morning. "The president's approval ratings are historically high," coming from a presidential spokesperson, and it just takes a couple of clicks to go, 'Wow... Actually, they're really not.'

**Lorrie:** Actually, yes.

**JC:** Anyway, sorry. We're getting off on a --

**Lorrie:** What's the opposite of a tangent?

**JC:** The opposite of a tangent? It's a normal. We're getting off on a normal line.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Harry falls asleep, and he falls "right into the corridor leading to the Department of Mysteries... speeding toward the plain black door," thinking, "*Let it*

*open... Let it open....'* so Voldemort is speeding things along here. He rushes Harry through that door into the Department of Mysteries, through some doors into this enormous room that Harry has not seen before that's full of glass spheres. "There was something in this room he wanted very, very much.... Something he wanted.... or somebody else wanted.... His scar was hurting...." Harry wakes up as soon as he becomes more present and Voldemort's hold on him weakens, but Voldemort has been exercising this new information he has from Rookwood on what it is that he has to show Harry and what he wants Harry to be feeling about it.

**JC:** Okay, that answers the question I had, because I was like, 'Has Voldemort been in this room? How is he showing it so clearly to Harry?' But you're saying Rookwood is giving him this information and that's where it's coming from. Okay.

**Lorrie:** Before then, he thought that he just had to get someone through the door, and then he learned from Rookwood, 'No, it can't be just anyone. There are only specific people who can get what you want, and they have to go to this specific spot.' Okay, it's not enough to fixate Harry on the door. You have to fixate him on this particular thing, and you have to make him really, really want to go.

**JC:** And the only person who can retrieve it is the person that it's about.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Either Voldemort or Harry.

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** He didn't know that until recently. The obsession he's trying to insert into Harry's mind has gotten a lot more specific and Harry is fighting it, and when he wakes up, he does feel some of the disappointment that Voldemort wants him to feel. 'Oh, drat! I want to know more.' Nope, you're awake.

**JC:** I do like that he wakes up and he's not alone.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The protest is still going on, right? He wakes up and the people are still sitting at the windows, looking out at the fireworks and he goes and joins them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He doesn't wake up to a dark, quiet dormitory to be left to stew in his own thoughts. He has a distraction immediately and companionship, and I thought that was good.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** He doesn't get that very often.

**Lorrie:** Right, and it helps him resist. It's not just only up to him.

**JC:** Right, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. He's back in a school where people believe him.

**JC:** Thank goodness!

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That's a good thing for Dumbledore to have done for him. If Dumbledore's going to leave, okay, but make sure that Harry has support.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** So are you ready to talk about Harry's showdown with Cho?

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. Harry and Cho are this constant example of the miscommunication trope, which normally I hate -- I hate it, hate it, hate it. It turns out that I only hate it when it's my OTP. It's for the ship I'm rooting for and I'm not really rooting for Harry and Cho here, so it's fine if the miscommunication trope is the thing that rips them apart. Okay. That's not where Harry's going to end up anyway.

**Lorrie:** I like that Cho comes and seeks him out, and his first response is to be protective of her. "Are you okay? Umbridge hasn't been asking you about the D.A., has she?" which is, I think, a completely normal thing to be worried about; no, she's got something way more complicated on her mind. Oh, so complicated.... She says: "I never dreamed Marietta would tell." At this point, I still have hope that she has come to apologize, and Harry "did feel Cho might have chosen her friends a bit more carefully." The way this is so realistic is quite sad and painful because yeah, you have all different kinds of friends, and when fortunes change and things become risky, you don't know who's going to come with you and who might turn out to start saying, "Well, both sides." Sometimes you find out the hard way; that's very real life. Then Cho says the irredeemable thing: "She's a lovely person, really. She just made a mistake." Harry cannot believe what he's hearing and says, "She sold us all out, including you!" This reminded me: back in chapter two of this book, Petunia and Vernon have this moment where they have to maintain their relationship, but one of them is willing to let Harry go out there to get killed and the other is drawing the line there. What are they going to prioritize: their relationship between them or that line where no, you can't send somebody out to get killed? The amazing thing we see there is that Petunia chooses the person not getting killed and takes the risk of Vernon deciding that that's too much for the relationship; here, we have Cho facing this decision for the first time and she's holding on to the relationship she has with Marietta, and Harry realizes she has not squared that with the fact that she herself was one of those people being endangered. Hello?! It's hard to have something as subtle and nuanced as a friendship or relationship and then have to review it in this binary "Are they going to let me get killed or not?" criterion. Cho says, "Well... we all got away, didn't we?" Oh, oh, oh... Yeah, it's quite a relief that there was a reprieve. You choose your relationship with a traitor over

the people that they're selling out, you cannot ask for sympathy or consent from the person you sold out. The fact that Cho was one of the people that Marietta was going to sell out... This is the point at which I turn and look at Remus Lupin. 'Sirius was going to have you eat another student? Is that okay with you?' Shut up. "He's a lovely person, really..."

**JC:** Humans are complicated, though, right? If we all thought through our feelings and if we all applied that logic to our lives, I think the world would be a very different place, but that's just not how we work. I think about... Serial killers have parents who I'm sure love them and are mystified or completely horrified by what their kids have done, but at the end of the day, that's still your kid. That's a really extreme example, but that question of unconditional love for someone... Where would you draw the line? What would they have to do to lose your faith and your trust? You're right that sometimes people have to make a choice there.

**Lorrie:** Well, Cho's a newbie.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Cho is only sixteen, and she says, "Her mum works for the Ministry, it's really difficult for her --" This is, sadly, also so, so true to life. It's kind of amazing that Cho thinks that the two options are being in the D.A. or turning people in. There are other options she could have chosen...

**JC:** True, true. There are other kids in the D.A. whose parents work at the Ministry, yeah.

**Lorrie:** There is the option that she could have stopped going to D.A. meetings and not gone out of her way to seek Umbridge.

**JC:** True, true.

**Lorrie:** This prefaces what Draco decides to do or not do at Malfoy Manor in *Deathly Hallows*. Draco's parents are getting pressured, but he doesn't have to go turn in the people he's got right there. Then Cho says, "That was a really horrible trick of Hermione Granger's. She should have told us she jinxed that list --" What would you say to somebody who said that?

**JC:** Well, that's the big argument in the fandom, right? Isn't that a big argument? Yeah, there are people who agree with Cho and say yeah, she should have. Let's say Hermione told them and someone was really determined to find a way to let Umbridge know; they would have found a way that somehow didn't involve tripping the jinx. I feel like that could have happened, and I don't know if Marietta would have been able to do that, but it seems like there would have been a way to not directly tell and get around the jinx. But if you've let people know "this is the consequence for betraying us," then

that opens up a door for people to figure out (if they really want to turn you in bad enough) how to get around the consequence, and Hermione did not give anyone that opportunity.

**Lorrie:** Now, of course, my theory -- which is just my theory; it's not based on anything - is that Hermione based the jinx on people's bad conscience knowing that they were betraying others. That's what makes the spots show up, and that's why the spots eventually go away...

**JC:** Oh, that's interesting.

**Lorrie:** And nothing that they try has been able to make the spots go away because it's how the person feels on the inside. She knows what she did. That was the showdown between Harry and Cho. Oh, dear.

**JC:** That's it for them, right? Their budding romance or whatever is done at this point, right?

**Lorrie:** They don't talk. Cho has chosen Marietta. We do see at the very end that Cho has come back after graduating from Hogwarts; when the alums come back to help fight in the final battle, Cho does come back also into the Room of Requirement and she's looking at Harry with glowing eyes. We see at that point that she has had two more years of this war to understand where things are and to know that the things she admired about Harry in the first place are more true than ever, and that is when Ginny steps in and says, "Oh, Harry, when you go looking for something in the Ravenclaw common room, go with Luna."

**JC:** I never noticed that before.

**Lorrie:** "Don't go with Cho." Yeah, Cho's all ready to like, "Oh, I could take you there." I like that. There are solid reasons why these two would have caught each other's attention, even though there are a number of reasons why, obviously, it was never, ever, ever going to work. Okay. Well, Harry is headed to his doom to a very bad Occlumency lesson. It's going to be terrible because he has had a lot on his mind and he hasn't practiced at all. Draco bursts in and finds Harry in Snape's office, to his surprise, and gets to find out that it's Remedial Potions. The only two people who ever hear the Remedial Potions cover story are Draco Malfoy and Zacharias Smith.

**JC:** I love that little moment where, when Snape's not looking, Draco looks at Harry and mouths "*Remedial Potions?*"

**Lorrie:** Yes! And then we get this really intense moment where Draco reports that they've found Montague: he's jammed inside a toilet on the fourth floor and he's confused. Of course, Snape rushes off to go take care of his Slytherin student and he dismisses Harry, but he leaves his memories unguarded in the Pensieve exactly like

how Lupin rushed off to catch Sirius and Wormtail and left the Marauder's Map unwiped. What is the thing that will get you more than anything if there's somebody you want to protect? If there's "Oh, my God, what's happening? I'm needed, I have to go. Something dangerous might be happening," that's the human flaw. That was the human flaw that kept Lupin from responsibly taking his potion; Snape can be all superior and angry about that, and here is Snape doing the same damn thing because they care and because they're human. Because on the whole, the good things that we save by having this trait outweigh the terrible, terrible mistakes that we sometimes make by having this flaw built into us. But boy, this is not a pleasant mistake for Snape.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. It's also interesting to me that when he showed up to this lesson, he recognized that he was in the worst possible state of mind for it and that it was going to go badly. He understands whatever it is he's learned about Occlumency, he's learned that when he is angry and resentful, that is not the right state of mind. I thought, 'Okay, well, he's learned something.'

**Lorrie:** Yes, he has.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. He knows it's going to be bad, so it's a relief to all of us when Snape rushes off.

**Lorrie:** Oh, thank God. That could not have gone well. Then Harry's left alone with "things [that Snape] did not want Harry to see if he broke through Snape's defenses accidentally...." Of course, Harry has had information kept from him his whole life, but this year in particular, he wonders if this is about the Department of Mysteries. Harry hates when people keep information from him, because in his experience that information might be crucial. It's not just that he's a curious little bastard; it's that this has happened to him. Sometimes, that information is going to keep him alive, so he goes for it. Oh, boy...

**JC:** He also notes that he's in a no-fucks-left-to-give mode, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, he's reckless.

**JC:** He's just feeling reckless, and he recognizes that. He kind of recognizes this is probably a mistake, but you know what? 'I'm so mad right now that I don't care,' and I'm like, 'That's relatable, actually.'

**Lorrie:** And so much weird stuff has gone wrong lately, who cares?! Yeah, it would have been better if he hadn't, but you kind of see where he's coming from. Then he -- WE -- get this massively complicated (almost) overdose of new dynamics, new information, something so intense. All of these emotions... Wow.

**JC:** A feeling that I had... Obviously, I'd read this scene before, and something that I don't think I thought about in the first read was how reliable is this memory. Knowing

how brains work, your memory is not a video recording of an event; this memory gives a very specific impression of James Potter and a very specific impression of all the characters, but they're all filtered through Snape's perspective. Harry's really shaken by what he sees from the Marauders and from his dad in particular, but how realistic was it? It was a question that I came away with that I hadn't really asked myself before. That's the way that Snape saw James Potter. Is that really what James Potter was like?

**Lorrie:** Well, the impression I'm getting from how the scene was written is that in this fictional universe, a Pensieve memory is more objective. It's not about what Snape perceives and how he experienced it, because you can be in the memory and go around and look at things that Snape didn't pay attention to. Snape was certainly not looking down lovingly at the face of fifteen-year-old James Potter, scanning his face for resemblances to Harry. Snape was not looking at Sirius Black, marveling at how sexy and elegant he was. Snape was not looking at himself with really greasy hair and a greasy nose, writing in this miserable cramped handwriting one inch from the paper. That's not Snape's perspective. That's what we're being presented with: you can go into somebody else's memory and find things there that they did not know about.

**JC:** Okay, that's interesting.

**Lorrie:** Or they can go into their own memory and find things that they hadn't noticed the first time.

**JC:** Okay. I can accept that as that's the way that this particular world is presenting the nature of human memory, which is not how brains work and that's not how memories work. I just have to set aside....

**Lorrie:** This is magic.

**JC:** I have to suspend my disbelief. It's okay. I have no problem with all the magic, but I'm like, 'Wait, that's not how brains work.' Okay.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, no. We Muggles don't have Pensieves, although cameraphones have helped a lot.

**JC:** True, and that's kind of what it's like. You took a video of an event, and then you didn't notice that, off in the back corner, a murder was happening or something until you're like, "Oh, wait. Look, guys, zoom in right here." Okay, so the author intends for us to take the behavior of these characters as this is how they really were and not as filtered through Snape's perspective. Okay.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is what was happening. How you perceive it is still your individual human way, but wizards have this record that captures what was happening without commentary.

**JC:** Okay. Good to know.

**Lorrie:** So Harry gets the parallel time of his parents' generation at the age that he is now, which in one sense is just age-appropriate. At this age, Harry's growing up and being able to get a more mature view of his parents. Now, all of this information he's sorting through... The first thing I noticed is that this passage introduces a new layer of privilege. We know that blood status is privilege and wealth is privilege; this introduces beauty, which there's some taboo about naming as privilege, but it's really shown to us how incredibly unattractive Snape was as a teenager. He's unattractive as an adult, but as a teenager, there's a specific way to be miserably unhappy, and he has "that stringy, pallid look": "Round-shouldered yet angular, he walked in a twitchy manner that recalled a spider, his oily hair swinging about his face." I love how evocative that is. That tells you so much: the twitchiness really conveys to me how jumpy you can be if you're hypervigilant (because you've been shouted at or abused a lot, and you don't want to get noticed) and you're not confident about the space you take up in the world. The oily hair is like if you've been trained to have self-disgust about your body and it's difficult to have self-care.

**JC:** The other thing I want to add there: knowing kids (the kids that I've worked with throughout my life), kids who are not neurotypical are so much more likely to fall into all of those categories, but especially that personal hygiene one.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It's not that they don't care about their bodies or that they've learned not to take care of themselves; it's that their brains are so busy doing shit that they literally forget to take care of themselves, and it doesn't occur to them that it's affecting the way other people see them because they just don't see it.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** This is my first indication of, 'Oh, wow! Snape is really not neurotypical.'

**Lorrie:** No, he's not.

**JC:** It never occurred to me until I read this, and I was like, 'I know those kids that look like that and act like that.' Yeah, there's all kinds of shit going on in their lives, but also they tend to be not neurotypical.

**Lorrie:** Yes, and we do know that John Nettleship, the chemistry teacher that was one of the inspirations for Snape, very much was on the spectrum. We see Snape. "Harry stopped in front of the desk and gazed down at his fifteen-year-old father. Excitement exploded in the pit of his stomach." What a treasure to get to see this!

**JC:** Yeah. This is what Harry wanted from the Mirror back in Book One, to get to see his parents and get to know them. He's hoarded these little... Like a dragon, he's hoarded these little scraps of information that anyone has been able to get him. This is the most insight... To get to see a video of them, basically.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God.

**JC:** At this point for Harry, it's a gift.

**Lorrie:** What a treasure, and he gets to stay there and he gets to... "Wow! I came from him! He looks like me..." That was really emotional.

**JC:** Yeah. That little line, "It was like looking at a reflection of him, but with some errors" or something like that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, deliberate. Oh, for this memory alone, this whole scene is so packed, and then Harry realizes, 'Oh, wait, if dad's here... Yep, there's Sirius. Wow, he's good-looking!'

**JC:** I love the constant mentions of "Wow, Sirius is really hot!" throughout this memory.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. There's Lupin, looking all pale. Wormtail clearly suffers from constant anxiety.

**JC:** Aww... I also like that James is doodling Lily's initials on his paper, which doesn't strike me as a thing that most teenage boys would do.

**Lorrie:** It's a very teenage girl thing to do, yeah.

**JC:** It's a very teenage girl thing to do, and Harry doesn't recognize what the initials are. 'L.E. What could that possibly mean?'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. They finish their exam...

**JC:** The fact that Flitwick uses a spell to take all their papers away at once... "Put your pencils down, put your pencils down. PUT YOUR PENCILS DOWN!" He was just going, "Nope, done." As a teacher, I was going, 'Holy shit!' Okay, you're done when the paper gets ripped out of your hand.

**Lorrie:** Then we see James being kind of mean where he is putting down Wormtail: "How thick are you, Wormtail? You run round with a werewolf once a month --" but Wormtail wasn't sure if he got that question right, so he's putting down Wormtail and he's also loudly disregarding another friend's need for confidentiality. There you go: Lupin and Wormtail are people who chose relationships with people who harm them somewhat, and they are asking themselves for sympathy for excusing this behavior from their friends. This is a setup to create anger and self-loathing, so you can see how the Marauders might have suspected Lupin and how Wormtail did end up being the

traitor. The deal you make with yourself for putting up with this creates a lot of stress inside. Meanwhile, Sirius is an uber-asshole: "I'll be surprised if I don't get Outstanding on it, at least." I'm like, 'At least? Is there a grade better than Outstanding that I don't know about?' I'm sure he's correct. I'm sure he is going to get top grades. Meanwhile, James is showing off that he stole a Snitch.

**JC:** Yeah. That description of James playing with the Snitch, and Wormtail staring at him and then applauding when he catches it in a tricky way... That bit of their dynamic is really interesting. Wow, why was Wormtail hanging around? Why was Peter in the group? Was it because they wanted someone to fawn over them all the time? It raises a lot of questions about the dynamics of that group, doesn't it?

**Lorrie:** And then they put down Wormtail with a sexual insult and say, "Put that away before Wormtail wets himself." From Wormtail's name to every way that they put him down is all sexual insults. So far, from what we've seen, I'd rather be friends with Snape. I don't want to be hanging out with any of these boys.

**JC:** It's very uncomfortable, but also teenage boys are like that. I remember being that age and just finding groups of boys like that really uncomfortable...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And it was this kind of behavior.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It was this showing off and looking for attention and flexing whatever power they had or thought they should have. All of that, I see that here and it's such a realistic depiction of kids that age. Even as a young high school teacher, that was a thing I had to grit my teeth and go, 'Okay, they're just kids.'

**Lorrie:** Then Sirius says the fateful words: "I'm bored."

**JC:** Oh, dear... What could possibly go wrong?

**Lorrie:** "I wish it was full moon."

**JC:** Oh, God, what a dick. Why would you say that? Ugh...

**Lorrie:** And then James says, "This'll liven you up, Padfoot," and they see Snape meandering by, not looking at anything. Sirius "had become very still, like a dog that has scented a rabbit." Oh, boy... Oh, no. "Excellent. *Snivellus*," and Sirius and James stood up. I got nervous reading that.

**JC:** Again, they're the kind of people who get their jollies from picking on people they perceive as weaker than them. That's awful, because at this point Harry's not

responding to it yet, but as an adult especially, it's like, 'Oh, God... Yeah, that's what kind of person your dad was.'

**Lorrie:** And then Lupin can't concentrate anymore. He's got a frown between his eyebrows, and he can't move -- he has total bystander angst now -- and Wormtail has avid anticipation... Oh, what a parasite; he's a voyeur and a sadist. "Snape reacted so fast it was as though he had been expecting an attack." That hypervigilance I recognize so well, and when Sirius and James team up to bully him, then we have to go back to the beginning of this book where Dudley's three friends hold a ten-year-old so Dudley can punch him in the stomach. Unlike the Montague episode earlier in this chapter (where Fred and George say, "Oh, yeah, he was trying to take points from us"), here the good guy/bad guy distinction, as far as Harry's life and connections are concerned, is completely thoroughly confused for him now. "Students all around had turned to watch." Oh, my God, Harry totally knows this, and then the reader has to think, 'Okay, this is the kind of shared history that Lupin had with Snape when he was prompting third-years in *Prisoner of Azkaban* to imagine Snape in grandmother clothing and mock him." If you think back to the beginning of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, where you don't know why hideous Snape is openly loathing the nice new teacher who's so pleasant and humble and intelligent.... Oh, this is why, because at the time that you first see that, you don't know what Snape's problem is; new guy is great! Sirius saying, "There will be great grease marks all over the paper, his nose was so..." Oh, gosh. Yes, he was clearly unpopular, he's profoundly unattractive, and there's a slight tantalization: "Snape let out a stream of mixed swear words and hexes, but his wand being ten feet away nothing happened." I kind of want to know what he was saying, but I understand that what he was saying was too profane to be captured in print.

**JC:** You also get the impression that he's very used to this kind of treatment from them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** This is just normal. I know that for the sake of the memory, they have to be in close proximity, but the fact that he was that close to them all the time shows again it's not neurotypical Snape. He's really wrapped up in whatever he was doing and didn't even notice where he was until it was too late.

**Lorrie:** He just ran right into them. What James does to Snape is scary because he's so cold (*Scourgify!*), and of course, the soap bubbles in Snape's mouth have to be pink to make it even more humiliating. He's torturing him.

**JC:** It also brings back the image of... There was a pink soap, right? I'm remembering a soap that was really pink. That feels like a very specific brand of soap to me that feels old-fashioned, like my grandmother had it. I felt like that was setting us back in time. I

wasn't thinking about the gendered thing; it felt like that's putting us in a very particular time.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, with a kind of old-school approach to discipline. Yes.

**JC:** Yeah. Right, right. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "Back in my day..." Yes.

**JC:** Washing your mouth out.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. In case this memory wasn't intense enough already, Lily (Harry's mother with Harry's eyes) shows up and she displays Gryffindor chivalry. She puts herself at risk to protect someone else, and she says, "Leave him ALONE!" Harry, whose feelings are already massively overwrought, looks at his mom. She says, "What's he done to you?" and then James says the really loathsome thing, "It's more the fact that he *exists*, if you know what I mean," which could not be more accurately representing what Rowling and other TERFs are doing to trans people's right to just exist and have jobs and go to work and have their own names.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And the smugness from James just makes you know, 'Okay, this is enmity. There's no middle ground here.' Lupin's not laughing; he is implicated because he knows that he has just begged James to keep his voice down about Lupin being a werewolf (Lupin is somebody that gets tortured just for existing). Then to get even grosser, James tries to bargain with Lily: he will stop bullying Snape if Lily goes out with him. Wow, that's gross. Um...

**JC:** And in the manner of fifteen-year-old boys, he somehow thinks that will work.

**Lorrie:** Um...

**JC:** Yeah. It really paints James in a very bad, bad, bad, bad light. You can go down the line of 'what are all the bad things about a young guy who thinks he's powerful? What are all the worst characteristics?' They're all here.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Clearly, he has asked her out many times before and she has said no before, and he thinks he still has a case. We know that they do go on to get married, so maybe he actually was detecting something for real. Ugh, yeah. Anyway, James wants something. He's bargaining with Lily and that has distracted him, and that's when Snape sees the distraction and manages to get to his wand and draw blood.

**JC:** My first thought reading it this time was that he's working on *Sectumsempra* and that that's maybe a preliminary version of the curse; maybe it is the curse and he just misses a little bit, but that's was my... I hadn't noticed that -- I haven't read it since I

read the sixth book, but on this reading, that's something I was like, 'Oh, he's already working on really vicious curses to defend himself from people like this.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and then what does James do to him?

**JC:** And then James does... We get the greying underpants moment.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Which answers the question: what do wizards wear under their robes?

**Lorrie:** Yes, and it's a sexual assault, right? It's a sexual assault to humiliate. It reveals "skinny, pallid legs and a pair of greying underpants." You really, really, really don't want to be laughed at by your peers for being so sexually invalid and mockable. Of course, 'greying' here... What that really means is that the underpants were white but they're really old and they've been laundered a lot, but in the fandom, they have been turned into grey underpants to go with the grey nightshirt that he wore in *Goblet of Fire*.

**JC:** I missed this completely. What?! Wow!

**Lorrie:** It's canon! In *Goblet of Fire*, when he is roused out of bed and Harry has the egg and he's been in the prefect's bathroom, Snape comes out and he's wearing a grey nightshirt, so what color underwear is Snape wearing? Grey, obviously. There's a wrock song (and I laugh) called *Lily's Worst Memory*, and the refrain goes, "Grey underpants."

**JC:** Oh, my God... Wow! Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The sexual humiliation here is intense.

**JC:** And the memory cuts off later before we find out if James took the underpants off, as he threatened to do.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, we don't know what he does after that. Lily almost laughs when this happens, but she says, "Let him down," and then James does so in a really cruel way. Lily confronts him; she's ready to do battle. She points her wand at him and he relents. He says, "You're lucky Evans was here, Snivellus," and that's when Snape says the thing: "'I don't need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!' Lily blinked. 'Fine,' she said coolly. 'I won't bother in future. And I'd wash your pants if I were you, *Snivellus*.'" Oh... What's your response to this?

**JC:** Yeah. This is the answer to the question of 'Why is it Snape's worst memory?' When I think to myself, 'what are my worst memories?' they all center around things I'm ashamed of, so I think on a first read I took a very surface view of this scene and that Snape was ashamed of being so humiliated by Harry's dad and all these people and even Harry's mom, blah, blah, blah. But on a second read, obviously what really stood out is this is the moment he really betrayed Lily in a way that she was not going to

forgive. After she stood up for him and tried to help him, he called her a 'Mudblood'. We all have things in our past, things at three in the morning when you're lying away will come back to you. 'Oh, remember this time that you were a really awful human being? Let's just relive that now.'

**Lorrie:** 'I wish I could go back in time and undo it.'

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** This is one of the things he's the most ashamed of: in this moment, he said this to Lily, the person that he absolutely cared for very deeply, and he lashed out at her in a way that had a big impact on the way she saw him from there on out. That's the moment. That's the worst memory he did not want Harry to see. I don't think he really cared about Harry... If that moment had not been there, I think he would have been fine with Harry seeing it. The shame was not coming from the way that he was bullied and humiliated; he would actually not mind for Harry to see that reality of his dad. The shame comes from the way he responded to Lily. That's my impression.

**Lorrie:** That is a really good point about him not minding at all Harry seeing the evidence of what Snape has been trying to say about James all this time.

**JC:** "My dad didn't strut!" Well, actually, honey, he did.

**Lorrie:** And seeing this memory, we actually can appreciate that Snape was being quite restrained and not regaling Harry with some evidence. I'm really painfully moved in a sad way that once Snape asserts his race privilege over Lily, that's a privilege that is life or death. That puts her in mortal danger. She tries to get back at him; she tries to hurt him back in ways that it's not going to be equal in power. She aligns with his opponents, she names the difference in their beauty privilege ("I'd wash your pants if I were you")... We don't know at this point that they had been friends, but later on you can tell that she had never made that an issue in their friendship before. One of them is unusually unattractive and one of them is noticeably pretty. She is asserting her own lesser form of privilege, because what can she do to get back her own after he has aligned himself with people who are trying to exterminate her? Well, he's broken something there, and that's when James thinks that now he and Lily are aligned, and she says, "You're as bad as he is..." James is indignant because apparently in James Potter's worldview, racism is worse than ganging up on someone to torture them.

**JC:** Right. "I never call you... that!"

**Lorrie:** Ugh...

**JC:** He won't even say it.

**Lorrie:** She tells off James and she leaves.

**JC:** Her telling off of him is on point. She says: "Messing up your hair because you think it looks cool to look like you've just got off your broomstick, showing off with that stupid Snitch, walking down corridors and hexing anyone that annoys you just because you can -- I'm surprised your broomstick can get off the ground with that fat head on it. You make me SICK." She nails it really, and what she is saying corroborates what Snape has been saying to Harry over the years about what his father was like.

**Lorrie:** Yes, and what Harry has just seen with his own eyes.

**JC:** Yeah. Then he plays it off, like, "Ugh, girls," basically. "What's wrong with her?" Then Sirius has a cute little remark: "Well, let's look at the subtext of what she said, which is not subtext." Then James is starting to get pissed off, and then he takes it out on...

**Lorrie:** On the guy who's right there for it. Well, the author cutting it off before we find out if James actually does that... Okay, that's a really authoritative move from her. Whatever makes this memory the worst memory in Snape's life, nothing after this is relevant.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Okay, that is what fandom is left with, and you described exactly the process that the reader has. First, obviously nobody would want to be bullied like this and humiliated -- that would be a bad memory for anyone, and then being bullied in front of Lily would be bad -- but then you start thinking (and fandom did start thinking): group bullying is grueling, but this is a person who's been a Death Eater. Is that really his worst memory? Huh... Fandom had many a year to puzzle over this. As I recall in the time leading up to *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows* being published, fandom did definitely include the possibility that Snape had felt awful about this being a commitment to being the wizard equivalent of a white supremacist, especially toward someone who had shown courage in defending him, and I do recall people combining that with Petunia mentioning an awful boy and hypothesizing, 'Oh, I think they knew each other.' This scene... I find it almost overwhelming with how much it adds to Harry's feelings. Imagine going from being starved for information about your parents and then getting all of this in one.

**JC:** It's like, 'But not like that! I didn't want it like that.'

**Lorrie:** And the intensity of what he's just witnessed is just as intense as all the crap that he and his fellow students are living through right now, and it includes the same tension over dating that he's been going through, power, and protecting others or betraying them (mortal danger). Again, as with *Prisoner of Azkaban*, this is doing something that I

really love about this series: it's showing how things that happened twenty years ago are shaping Harry's life now and how he can't really know most of it, although he's getting some glimpses.

**JC:** It's also interesting that what Harry... He's not going to understand what he just saw for a long time and it's given him a lot to think about, so much that he's probably very overwhelmed. It's a major shift in his worldview about his parents, but it's interesting to me that through the Occlumency lessons, Harry sees this part of Snape. Snape has also gotten many a glimpse into Harry's childhood, and they both now kind of understand that they understand each other better than they did before. Snape now knows that Harry did not have any kind of privileged childhood where he was treated like a little prince.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Not at all, and how much that shaped him.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Snape sees eleven-year-old Harry Potter come to school and he thinks that Harry's going to be just like James; actually, Harry had lived through the Snape position of being circled and tormented and unable to defend himself. Then we get possibly the single scariest Snape jump scare. You know how he's always where you don't want him to be? This is the ultimate: "A hand with a pincerlike grip." I feel that on my shoulder. "A thrill of horror, a fully grown, adult-sized Snape... white with rage...." Oh, gosh, and Harry totally has no defense. You totally have the feeling in this scene that everybody, including Harry, is like, 'Oh, Harry deserves this.'

**JC:** He has no excuses, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Snape goes: "Having fun?" Harry's arm is going numb. God...

**JC:** And he's genuinely scared by Snape here.

**Lorrie:** Oh, God, yes.

**JC:** That's the other thing that's interesting. He was shaken anyway by what he was seeing, but then Snape's anger actually scares him.

**Lorrie:** "Snape's lips were shaking, his face was white, his teeth were bared." Yeah, he's never seen Snape like this... and then Snape is shaking Harry just like Umbridge was shaking Marietta. Okay, he's lost it. He throws Harry "from himself with all his might" -- it must've hurt -- and then he bellows, "You will not tell anybody what you saw!" That's such a good piece of writing that hides the truth perfectly behind the possibility that Snape is humiliated that somebody saw him being bullied, but the coda that I always have in my mind is 'You especially will not tell Hermione what you saw, because she's so brilliant in putting things together.' He says, "Get out, get out, I don't want to

see you in this office ever again!" He absolutely has to end this, and this is punctuated by the jar of dead cockroaches.

**JC:** Yeah, that's pretty gross. The jar of dead cockroaches exploded over his head, so he gets them rained down on him, which is... Oh, Lord.

**Lorrie:** Yes. This is not an ambiguous message. As the reader, you get the immediate interpretation that Snape is reacting with trauma and shame from the memory of being bullied or sexual humiliation, but then you get the next reading coming up, 'Oh, it's not that he's angry; it's that he's afraid. That's the shaking.' Meanwhile, Harry has so much to process before he gets there. "What was making Harry feel so horrified and unhappy was not being shouted at or having jars thrown at him -- it was that he knew how it felt to be humiliated in the middle of a circle of onlookers, knew exactly how Snape had felt as his father had taunted him, and that judging from what he had just seen, his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him." Oh, wow... Harry's world has just been upended -- his sense of identity, of pride, has just been upended -- and this is a direct connection to Harry at the end of the last book with Voldemort taunting him while all the Death Eaters jeered at him and he knew he was about to die. In the most brutal way, Harry is now feeling empathy for Snape, which is exactly why Snape has to throw him out of the office forever. Harry is able to make too many connections, connections that Voldemort is not capable of making; Harry, if he sees this and he sees too many other things, could and let Voldemort know; not only does Snape have to throw him out for good measure, but from this point on Snape is going to have to intentionally redouble the animosity between him and Harry because he has to cauterize this growing empathy. Their safety depends on it, on Harry and Snape not understanding each other. Meanwhile, Harry is a little distracted by the experience of identifying more with the victims of his father than with his idealized father. Snape identifying Lily as someone that's okay to sacrifice comes right after Marietta betrayed Cho and all the other D.A. members to the Ministry. Harry has to figure out who are the bad guys: Fred and George shoving Montague into the Vanishing Cabinet to stop him bullying, not caring how dangerous that was or what becomes of him later, which Snape has now gone to deal with; Snape was bigoted, but Sirius and James outnumbered him and bullied him to make a spectacle. If you are in Harry's position and you're fighting against Umbridge and the Ministry, what would be going too far? Oh, you've got to feel for Harry here.

**JC:** Oh, yeah. No, definitely.

**Lorrie:** This to me leads to the possibility that if Snape's worst memory is that he regrets betraying Lily by referring to her hunted status and reinforcing it, that supports the notion that Hermione did a sort of favor for Marietta by preventing her from having the same guilt on her conscience. If Marietta later had to think about her murdered friend

Cho and exactly what it was that led Cho to be found and punished, this stopping people from going there is a form of protectiveness without affection. It's a limit. Cho saying, "Well, we all got away, didn't we?" Yeah, it's better if you can manage not to be dependent on that.

**JC:** And part of the reason that they got away was because of what Hermione did, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Marietta was so horrified by the jinx. If there had not been a consequence, there's no telling what would have happened there.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. She saw herself in Umbridge's mirror. She sees who she is on the inside is now visible on the outside. She stops.

**JC:** At the end of this chapter, I'm imagining Harry reeling with all the revelations (these things that he's seen). That idea that your venerated dead (you could think about this in terms of ancestors or grandparents that moved on or whatever), learning that some historical figure was even worse than you could possibly have imagined or just someone you idolize... I think people learning that experience -- But with the rise of all these DNA testing kits you can do at home, people learning that their families are much more complicated than they originally knew and how for a lot of people, it shakes up their identity and their idea of who they are and the people they thought they knew (and it turns out they didn't). Harry is going to have a lot of stuff to sort through here, because he has based his identity in a large part in the wizarding world on being the son of Lily and James Potter (what war heroes they were and what great things they did) and it turns out that when they were fifteen, they weren't so great. Who was?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Feeling like you're justified in doing anything to an enemy because they deserve it... Oh, that has just been turned around. What does it feel like to be the victim of this kind of thing? Oh, it feels just as bad, no matter who you are. Huh... Ouch! This moment of Snape identifying as his worst memory -- the moment he turned against the minority -- has parallels in stories from people who were formerly white supremacists who then realized how much they were hurting people (including their own loved ones) and then they renounced those politics. It was Derek Black and Christian Picciolini in particular, two activists where I read their memoirs about how this happened, and it so closely paralleled the emotions that we see Snape going through here and how hard it is to keep holding yourself to this reality because it's so awful and you so cannot go back in time and undo it. It's a lot to carry with you and a lot to live with.

**JC:** Yeah. When I think about my own moments like that (big moments of regret), they were awful and they would still haunt me when they come up in my head at 3AM, but they didn't contribute to genocide or cause anyone's death. I don't know what it would be like to live with that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Sometimes it's just an accident that prevented anything terrible from happening, and sometimes it leads to a person's death by just a really dumb accident, but when that happens, that fixes your story permanently that way. That relief that Cho can experience -- "Well, we all got away" -- that's great if you can luck into it, but you can't guarantee it. Often, the people who have to pay for the rest of their lives... They didn't do anything better or worse than all the other people who do mean things every day, but fortunately, nothing terrible happened. If you can see it coming (especially as an older person who has regretted things and started living trying not to hurt people, and you can see people possibly making a future for themselves where they're going to have to pay for this kind of prejudice), you do want to stop them. You do want to say, "Even if you don't understand right now why it's bad to oppress people, let me just stop you from doing anything that you're going to be sorry about later because you deserve to have a life." Living with this kind of regret is really a burden. I don't think Snape has that much problem with Harry seeing this memory on its own; it's that Voldemort doesn't understand how much Snape regrets this. So far, Snape is probably safe because Harry has only seen one of the three memories that he put in the Pensieve, and if Voldemort accesses this memory in Harry's mind, all he sees is that James and Sirius used to bully him, and Voldemort already knows that. Probably, what Voldemort might learn from this (from what Harry has seen so far) is not going to hurt them more, but Harry had better not see other memories Snape has hidden and he'd better not make any more progress in feeling empathy for Snape, because then he might start to put more things together. This memory is where the author shows us, finally, why it's significant that Harry looks like James but with his mother's eyes: Harry sees himself reflected in James's face (that's like looking at himself, but with deliberate mistakes), but then he sees Lily and the wording is different here. "She had... startlingly green almond-shaped eyes -- Harry's eyes." That's an inversion of the usual wording we hear that Harry has Lily's eyes; it's meant to draw our attention. We have seen that Harry is a Legilimens where Snape is concerned; Snape can Occlude Voldemort, but when Harry looks at Snape's memories, Harry can understand him because Harry has his mother's eyes. From this point on until Snape's dying moment, the two of them cannot make any further progress in understanding each other as human beings. They can't do it.

**JC:** Interesting.

**Lorrie:** It will destroy Dumbledore's side's best chance at fighting Voldemort if Harry understands Snape any better. Harry has just put all of them at mortal risk. If you can imagine how Snape feels thinking that Voldemort is going to understand that Snape had felt true remorse and was fighting against him all this time and that this is because Harry has looked at it, you can see why he would be so white and shaking. "You have to get out of here right now!" And where is Dumbledore? Help! I don't know what else Snape

could have done. If only he hadn't cared so much about Montague that he rushed off without securing those memories...

**JC:** He could have just kicked Harry out of his office. Yeah, there's lots of things he could have done.

**Lorrie:** But that's what makes humans so beautiful and so flawed: when we care, it changes our behavior. I'm glad Montague got some help. The right person went to help Montague.

**JC:** That is true. The right person went to help Montague.

**Lorrie:** Earlier in this series, it was a little bit of a mystery. Why do we keep getting this Snape character shoved in our faces when he's not that important and he's very immature and un compelling, but he's most definitely the key to everything now? So yeah, Snape's Worst Memory, there you go. That was intense.

**JC:** It is really interesting to me, though (and this is what I love about good writing) is that knowing where the story is going adds so many layers to everything that you see here. You were saying before that people were starting to put it together at the time; it's very interesting to me that people thought that hard about it. "This is the key to the mystery, we know it is. We just don't have all the information," and how interesting it is that when you come back and read it again, you see all these different... That's something that I really like about any piece of media: when it's so layered, multiple readings keep yielding new treasure...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And this series really does do that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's designed for that. I think it is not possible to understand it on only one reading; it's designed to send you back and to promise you that further readings will give you more rewards. It held up. She was raising the stakes on this mystery and it paid off. The next chapter is called Career Advice.

**JC:** So what are you going to do with the rest of your life, kid, now that your worldview has been completely turned upside-down? Let's think about the future, a future which is increasingly...

**Lorrie:** Is changing every day for the worse.

**JC:** Yeah. Wow. Oh, that's going to be timely.

**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](http://HPAfter2020.com). There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts and more. If you like what you

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