

Transcript

Episode 6.12

Book 6, Chapter 12: Silver and Opals

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 Six, Chapter Twelve: Silver and Opals.

Lorrie: Silver and Opals. Dumbledore is away on constant, urgent business. On a Hogsmeade weekend, a cursed necklace almost kills Katie Bell; Harry thinks he knows who's behind it. This chapter takes place on so many levels, and none of them reach any resolution. It starts with that reference to the deepest level, which is Harry noticing that he's only glimpsed Dumbledore once or twice during the next few weeks. Wow! Dumbledore is doing something mysterious. That's all any of us readers (or characters) get to know about that. Then there's a mid-October Hogsmeade trip, and Harry is pleasantly surprised: "Harry had wondered whether these trips would still be allowed, given the increasingly tight security measures around the school..." and wow, I so understood that feeling. Are we still allowed to travel? Is it safe? Which states and countries are we allowed to travel to? Who's allowed in? How long is that going to be true?

JC: It feels like this has been going on for his entire experience at Hogwarts and it just subtly ramps up a little bit every year (the danger gets worse or whoever's in charge makes a different decision), and that also feels a lot like the world we live

in, where it's easy to be a frog in a pot, so to speak. It's just like, "Oh, remember, three years ago when it was only like that? Gosh, I didn't know how good I had it then. Remember, we have just dementors outside the gates, guarding them. Wow, those were the days."

Lorrie: Although there are signs, like that Zonko's is boarded up.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's like, 'Hmmm... this is different.' So yeah, this constant assessment of where the danger level is... that felt so familiar.

JC: Also, I feel like I need to say it's been a month since we last recorded; it's currently the end of February 2026, and a lot happened in the last month. It's been quite a month in the United States and in many places in the world, but wow, yeah. It took me a little bit to get my head back into where we were in this series after all that.

Lorrie: Well, let's see... A temperature check of where we are in the world: the Supreme Court just ruled that all the tariff nonsense is completely ridiculous and can't be done, so we don't even know what kind of tantrum that's going to end up stimulating.

JC: I love that they did it on a Friday, too.

Lorrie: Oh, boy...

JC: Yeah, because then nothing can really happen. People can just stew about it over the weekend. Well, in theory. We've had a lot of, I believe... Gosh, I think all of the escalation with ICE in Minnesota, in particular. All of that has happened since we last recorded. The entire Olympics happened since we last recorded. It's just a lot going on.

Lorrie: Yeah. Closing ceremonies will be tomorrow, and this U.S. administration is making weird noises about attacking Iran, but they know not to do it until after the Olympics, which is the same thing that happened in the previous Olympiad when Russia announced, "As soon as the Olympics are over, we're going to invade Ukraine." You saw these Ukrainian athletes competing, looking so confused and threatened. 'Can you just do that?' Yeah, apparently. Anyway, I don't even know. Meanwhile, South Korea solved its tinpot dictator problem. The guy who, in

December of 2024, decided to try to institute martial law for his own inscrutable ego purposes will not be executed; he has been sentenced to life in prison, and the everyday protesters who filled the streets and waved their K-pop lightsticks and made up songs about how he had to be impeached have been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

JC: That's amazing.

Lorrie: So yeah... I don't know. I don't even know. Then, of course... I don't even know exactly what's been happening here, but the whole anti-DEI directive cannot be enforced now. I don't even know how that's going to play out, but we'll see.

JC: Yeah. Definitely in higher ed, we're just going to wait and see.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We haven't changed what we're doing. We're still doing the same thing we always did. Now, it's a slightly different kind of wait to see who's going to tell us what we can and can't do, but we're still waiting.

Lorrie: So yeah, can we go into Hogsmeade? I guess we can. Okay, here we go.

JC: I do like that Harry woke up that morning a little early and decided to read his Potions textbook, which is just amazing. When has Harry ever gotten up and thought, 'You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to crack open a textbook.' We learned a lot, I think, about the Half-Blood Prince from this little bit of him reading.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of course, this is funny, right? Harry James Potter, is that you? But he's not reading the textbook; he's reading the co-authored companion book that is the Prince's notes. That's what he's waking up early for, and he's fascinated. He's compelled.

JC: He's reading the fanfic that was written in the margins, in a way.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I understand that.

Lorrie: This soothes my soul. This feeds my soul in the deepest way. Any literary stance that the author doesn't matter -- the author doesn't exist, that there is no

meaning except what occurs between the reader and the text -- is something that I've always been so saddened and confused by because it's so clearly untrue to me, and this is exactly what Harry is pursuing. The Prince is a person; the author may or may not be dead, but in the text, the author's very much a living presence, and Harry wants to meet and get to know this author. The meaning is not only made between the text and the reader; it's not just that these words exist of themselves and have no say in how the reader encounters them. There's somebody there. It's a person.

JC: Harry will eventually have to reconcile the fact that this person that he spent this time getting to know is Snape, who he hates and comes later to learn that he did not know enough about, but what does that say for us as readers of this series with this particular author?

Lorrie: Precisely. Yeah. It's not exactly that this author (the Prince) is Snape, whom Harry hates. This is a different era of that person, someone who hasn't done or gone through all the things that adult Snape has. Not only is this person pre-hating Harry Potter; it's also this person before he realized what kind of terrible decisions he made that led to some people being killed and that led to him trying to make up for it. There's all sorts of things that created the adult Snape that Harry knows. That's not this person yet.

JC: And isn't that interesting, that version. It takes us back to Tom Riddle's diary, too, that we have this and interact with this version of this person that doesn't exist anymore, like the Ship of Theseus.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: All the parts have been replaced, and yeah.

Lorrie: And how much can you hold the earlier, younger, more naive persona accountable for things that that person is going to have done in the future? Are you accountable for being able to somehow discern the seeds of what was going to happen? Are you to blame if you don't automatically think, 'Oh, I know what this person is going to become, and if I don't catch that now, that means that I'm wrong, I'm deficient, or secretly also evil'?

JC: Right, right. Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, how much do you know for sure, at any point in your life, who you're going to be in twenty years? Is it completely all foreordained, or were there ever any choices involved? How do you know?

JC: It's an interesting point to think, when you're interacting with the author or the creator of any text, that you are interacting with a past version of them that hadn't yet become the person they are now...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Even for actors in movies and things like that.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's such an interesting thought: one of the things that art maybe does is that it preserves you in time as a creator, so the person that created this work would not create the same work a decade down the line. I had never thought about that before, but that's interesting. Thinking about that for myself, too, at different points in my life I was a very different person...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And thinking about things that I have done or created and what they say about who I was in that moment versus who I am now.

Lorrie: And sometimes, there are actual discoveries that mean your conclusions from something that you published before are factually wrong. Do you have the right to go back and update and say, "I take it back. I didn't know at the time, but this is what I think now"? Even if your original, now disproven conclusion caused harm (turned out to be wrong in a harmful way), do you get to say, "I disavow it"? The person who invented Mother's Day to be a really sincere, not commercial, not cynical holiday (and was horrified that it became commodified) tried to say later, "No, no, no, don't, don't, don't," but by then, it was too late. Out of her hands. The time gap here is the same: we're currently in 2026 and the final *Harry Potter* novel was published in 2007, and that's about the gap that we're looking at here between Snape who was the Half-Blood Prince scrawling in his textbook and Snape the mean teacher who's making Harry miserable now. A lot can change in twenty years, but the person who wrote the thing twenty years ago is coming across in their words so vividly. It's not honest to deny their individuality leaping off the

page, and it's material as well as just verbal. It's not just that the words mean something, but the way they were written -- the way that the Prince had to cram his experiments into little corners of the page turned sideways, and Harry turns the book around -- he's literally looking at things through Snape's eyes, twenty years ago Snape. The reality of the author as an individual... I'm so glad to see somebody speaking up for that element of the reading experience, because to me, it's really important. It's why we have favorite books and favorite authors at all.

JC: Also, for me, I try not to interact with anybody around anything about *Harry Potter* except, honestly, for you. People have been saying for a long time, "Oh, she was always this awful person, you just didn't notice," which is easy to say, and for many people in the world, it is true that you can see maybe they were always an awful person all along and they just hid it really well, and then suddenly they couldn't hide it anymore. I obviously don't want to hypothesize too much about what happened to this author, but it felt like she was a different person when she wrote this book than she is now.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And almost, like Snape, very different.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And if I really, truly thought that she was exactly the same person then as she is now, I don't think I would be able to read this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I would reject it completely. I wouldn't connect with it at all, so I don't know. I still think about that. Every time I pick up the book, I think about how much damage the author has done and what an awful person she is, and then have to reconcile that every single time I read a chapter.

Lorrie: That's right.

JC: Ugh... Yeah.

Lorrie: Here we have this sentence that enchants me. Harry's reading what the Prince wrote: "...Not only the handy hints and shortcuts on potions that were earning him such a glowing reputation with Slughorn, but also the imaginative

little jinxes and hexes scribbled in the margins, which Harry was sure, judging by the crossings-out and revisions, that the Prince had invented himself." Oh, that is one of my favorite passages in this series. The word 'imaginative'... When this series first started, we didn't have global search function on ebooks. We couldn't just do what we do now, where we do a search for specific words. Back before the series was actually finished (and even shortly thereafter), if we wanted to know these things, we had to do a manual concordance like we would if we thought, 'Does the word "imaginative" appear anywhere else in this series?' We would have to go back to the Dursleys living on Privet Drive and look through every single page. Now, we can just do a search, and I found no "imaginative." That word does not appear anywhere else in this series.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: That's the only time, and it is the hugest compliment. It is an honor to bestow that compliment onto somebody else whose work you're reading, because you've thought about them and their mental process. Harry has never been so interested in somebody else's thought process before, following the procedure. Wow, how did this person work through from their initial curiosity to their various trials to concluding that this works? Huh... Okay. Imaginative. That is a word that, no matter how grief-stricken we are about Rowling's politics now and how damaging they are, I would have to give 'imaginative' to her for this series that she wrote twenty years ago, whatever her agenda is now.

JC: It's interesting that Snape is credited with *Muffliato* and potentially *Levicorpus*...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Though there's a little bit of confusion later. They've seen other people use it, but *Muffliato* becomes a spell that the trio uses, as I recall, quite a bit moving forward. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. So good, and they even said earlier in this novel, in this volume, that they needed such a thing.

JC: And now they have it.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a privacy spell, and you can see why Snape (who had to cram all this writing into tiny little pages) needed a privacy spell, so he made one up. *Levicorpus*... I think what we're supposed to take from whether or not Snape invented it is that a lot of things get invented independently more than once in different eras, different parts of the world, but *Muffliato* seems to be... The way that the trio ends up using it, they take it directly from his invention. At this point, Hermione... I love the documentary precision of this depiction: Hermione boycotts *Muffliato* dogmatically in a way that is so familiar to me from fandom purity wars.

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: "Well, you can't have anything to do with that because it's tainted by something or other that almost nobody knows about, but now you do, so you can't even go near it or that proves that you're something really evil." Hermione won't do anything with it, but as we see bearing out in the rest of this story, it turns out that no, it is perfectly fine to use it, even if the person who invented it turns out to have been really scary, awful, a Death Eater, and the cause of two of their parents' deaths. Does it harm their souls to use *Muffliato*? Turns out no, it doesn't. Even though they know where it came from? No, it's really useful. What if somebody else learned it from them and just used it, not knowing that a Death Eater made it up? No, it would have been fine. It's not actually hurting your soul. How pure is this? How can this be? Shouldn't it be more pure than this? This is an example in this chapter of how no, there are actually no resolutions to any of these questions. But yeah, right now Hermione is in the 'no, everything has to be pure' stage, which, to her credit, sometimes turns out to be correct. You do have to test it out a bit before you know; you don't know what you're committing to yet. Just how accurate that is...

JC: Yeah, yeah, and that at twenty years later, it still feels accurate, if not more accurate than it did at the time when I first read it. I think one of my favorite statements in this chapter is just a funny one, which is "The Prince had proved a much more effective teacher than Snape so far," which is just funny.

Lorrie: Beautiful. Yes, and that Harry is still, in the present, real-life current day Snape's class, "having difficulty with nonverbal spells, something Snape had been quick to comment on in every D.A.D.A. class." Of course, thirty-something Snape

is trying to teach him and can't reach him on this, but he's going to learn it off of the Prince.

JC: Sixteen-year-old Snape is a much better teacher for Harry somehow.

Lorrie: His somehow contemporary classmate (not really), and that could not be more precisely the feeling that I have of trusting the J.K. Rowling who wrote this story and not the present-day J.K. Rowling and what she thinks we ought to believe.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But also, Snape is trying to teach. He's deliberately trying to impose teaching and his ill will on current-day Harry, whereas Harry reading the Prince's textbook is being driven by his own curiosity. He wants to come to it. The Prince is not trying to teach him anything; Harry is compelled on his own, and there's nobody grading him on how well he's doing or not. They are very different modes of reading, and that also brings up the phenomenon that was often noted during the publication of this series: the children who would rather die than read a textbook, you couldn't keep them away from *Harry Potter* novels. "But it's nine hundred pages long." "I know. Hand it over." The reader does bring something to it, but can you regulate how somebody intakes information? The impetus, the desire coming from the reader, is everything.

JC: I think this is something that we think about in education a lot: how do you harness that in a classroom? If you're a teacher, you have a curriculum that you have to teach, you have standards that were set by the state, you have things that you're expected to do so that students are prepared for the next grade level. How do you harness this kind of energy of loving to learn to help kids learn this material that it is your job to help them learn?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think that at different points in my career, I've tried to engage students in different ways, trying to tap into what are the things that they're really interested in, and it's just hard. I hear stories of teachers who have great success bringing fanfiction into their classrooms as writing exercise and having kids create their own video games and do these kinds of things (and kids do learn a lot from that),

but that's, for me, the eternal question: what's the line between getting them to the point where they will go and learn it on their own because they're so interested versus having to walk them through everything they have to learn? Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, here Harry has connected to what he can sense of somebody else involved in these words and he's pursuing that connection, and he's seeing it as very relevant to him because he's also learning. Nobody is mocking him or telling him that he's encountering and processing these new ideas in the wrong way. Well, Hermione --

JC: Except for Hermione, yeah.

Lorrie: Yes, and she does have a point.

JC: Yeah. The scene that we're heading into is an example of that. She has a point where he's just trying out a nonverbal spell, and he yanks Ron out of bed, out of a dead sleep.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is why you're supposed to know what you're doing before you do it. "Hmm, what does this thing do?"

JC: Yeah. What if that spell had done something other than just lift you up, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, which Harry finds out later in the book.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is super super dark, but when he desperately flips through thinking, 'Did the Prince notate a counterspell? Oh, thank goodness, it's this one.' He's flipping through desperately while Ron is dangling, and then he (yay!) manages to bring off the countercurse, but the dark thing this reminded me of is Elaine Chao's sister, the multi-multimillionaire who died in a Tesla. Do you remember this?

JC: Vaguely.

Lorrie: This was a few years ago where it's part of the ruling class that's filthy rich. She and her friends were having a super luxurious retreat weekend and her Tesla malfunctioned; she ended up in a lake, and you can't unlock the door from the inside unless you go find the manual and do something. They had smart car'd this way into this woman's death. All the pro Tesla tech people who are like, "Well,

read the fucking manual." Well, first of all, your car is filling up with water. Okay, you find the manual, and then the override to manually open it turned out to be really absurd and not the kind of thing you do when you have seconds to live.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So she drowned in her smart car. Jeez... Anyway, it's very fortunate for Harry that yes, he found the override.

JC: And recognized it for what it was.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that he was able to bring off a nonverbal spell that he's not so good at.

JC: Yeah, so he did those nonverbally twice, which is like, 'Oh, wow.'

Lorrie: 'Okay, then.'

JC: For someone who just said he was struggling with nonverbal spells, that's actually quite impressive.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He did it under pressure.

Lorrie: Yeah. Hermione hears the story, and with some justification gets very stony-faced about it and she says, in the most prudish, intolerable way, "It's probably not Ministry of Magic-approved. And also, because I'm starting to think this Prince character was a bit dodgy." First of all, that's a lot of credit to give to the Ministry of Magic.

JC: Yeah, that struck me, too. I don't think that would have hit me the same way the first time in this book, and I'm like, 'Oh, it's Ministry-approved. Okay.'

Lorrie: But that reminds me: I didn't know how much I believed in the FDA...

JC: Oh, Jesus, yeah.

Lorrie: Until I heard about their authority being taken away or their staffing being cut. I didn't know how much I believed in the CDC, especially coming from ACT UP in the nineties where the CDC was the enemy, but the point a couple years ago, when if you wondered what the current best practices are about COVID, you know

that you can't look up what the CDC is saying. You have to go find out whatever alternative press looks the most reputable.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that's a similar moment that this brought up to me: no matter how cynical these kids understandably are about the Ministry, "Ministry of Magic-approved" does actually still mean something. Hermione does have reason to trust that when they approve a spell, it's because they went through some tests.

Whatever career Ministry official tested out a spell, I can feel her faith that they had a procedure that they followed, that they did it a few different times, that they found that it was safe, and yes, anyone is allowed to learn this. You'll be fine. I felt all that. Meanwhile, the second half of that comment she says, "Because I'm starting to think this Prince character was a bit dodgy," that is so interesting, super sensitive of her, very suspect because of course she's extremely personally threatened by how much smarter than her this Prince was, and annoyed as hell that it's giving Harry a higher rank in class than she has for completely undeserved reasons.

JC: It's like Harry's using AI, basically, to do potions, and Hermione's really mad about it.

Lorrie: So yeah, her suspicions are obviously not to be trusted, but she is on to something, too, and she's so, so sensitive. How does she know that he's dodgy? I wouldn't have picked up on that at this point yet, but she does turn out to be onto something. They're all operating on this super deep, mysterious level because there aren't any answers. What is Dumbledore doing leaving school? Is it safe to go to Hogsmeade? What is this nonverbal spell? Is or is not the Prince dodgy? They're all working off of feelings and it's hard not to have the guidance here, but in further evidence of this chapter being an almost documentary-like expression of exactly the kind of miserable, no-resolution debates we've all been having, Ron and Harry then jump on Hermione and start rationalizing things, and none of their rationalizations hold water either. "Just a laugh. Oh, come on, Hermione, it's just -- Um..." Right, like the 'Obama as a social media thing' was just a laugh. Right, okay. Them saying, "Well, who would make up a spell like that?" "Fred and George would." Okay, that's not very reassuring... Then Harry remembers James used it... Okay, and then he goes right into that pocket of secrecy because he's not

allowed to tell anybody how he knows this. He swore to Snape that he wouldn't. Mike Godwin (who invented Godwin's law in 1990) said that eventually, all bad internet discussions lead to comparisons to Nazis or Hitler, and that's when you know it's no longer valid and it's over. Mike Godwin himself said, during the first Trump Administration, that Godwin's law no longer applies, and since we are actually talking about for-real Nazis, what are you going to do? That's what you're going to talk about.

JC: I remember Godwin's Law being such a part of early internet discourse.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Yeah, you're right, ten years ago. I do remember that now, when he said, "Yeah, that no longer applies," and it's like, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "I, Mike Godwin..."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. So when they all remember that the Death Eaters used the spell to torture Muggles at the Quidditch World Cup, that shuts them all up for a bit. "Mmmm..." Well, we don't know if this was originally intended for that kind of torture purpose, but it certainly has been used that way, and Ron is trying to argue that intent matters. He tries to say, "Yeah, well, that's not how some people use it. Some people were just using it to be funny." But yeah, they're all facing this answerless question: 'Is it okay to use something if the lineage is not pure or if it's been used to commit true evil? Does using it for any reason, even the best of reasons, somehow reinforce the original evil agenda?' Which is an argument used for even saying something like, "Oh, that's like *Avada Kedavra*," and people saying, "If you even say it, you just reinforced J.K. Rowling's transphobic agenda by adding to the cultural capital of what she wrote." 'Okay, what if somebody says it who didn't know? Does it still...?' and there are people who will say, "Yes, it does. It all does." Okay, how are these ideals going to actually work out in real life? We have these three teenagers, over breakfast, living through how difficult it is to get livable, real answers to these questions. Meanwhile, Harry is now secretly, privately going off in a completely different, so authentic direction, which is now, he wants to think that the Half-Blood Prince was his dad. He's so hungry to connect more with his dad that he ignores incredibly compelling evidence, such as

‘James was not a half-blood.’ ‘Wait, do you want this to have been your dad?’ He just ignores all of it; he would very readily give up real evidence to the contrary because the fantasy is so strong. That -- ugh, ouch -- reminded me of something that just happened a couple weeks ago. Who knows where we’re going to be on this by the time this episode airs, but as we’re recording, a couple weeks ago more Epstein files were released and people noticed that J.K. Rowling’s name came up a few times in the Epstein files. The rapidity with which people with legitimate anger against Rowling for transphobia turned this into evidence that she is part of the Epstein pedophilia ring... “Well, we know that she’s evil in these ways, so of course, she’s evil in that way, too,” and I was really pretty annoyed by that. That, to me, was a pretty clear instance of people’s desires and fantasies completely overriding evidence. First of all, I didn’t think -- despite knowing some of the real damage and evil that Rowling is capable of, I couldn’t picture her being buddy-buddy with Jeffrey Epstein. ‘Okay, let’s see...’ and then what it turned out to have been was that he had asked her for favors. It didn’t say anything about her knowing him. People ask billionaires for things all the time, and that’s what people turned instantly into evidence that this is part of her moral degeneration. No, we do still have to do a little bit of research. The truth isn’t *that* malleable. Please, people, do your research, and it did lead to people digging a little further and saying, “Yeah, he did ask to be let into the super-exclusive *Cursed Child* party, and he was turned away at the door.” How much did J.K. Rowling herself have to do with it? As far as I can tell, knowing how billionaires and staff work, she probably was unaware of any of this. Not to say that she’s above it all or an angel or whatever; it’s just that’s not how these things work, but people wanted it to be true.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They’re so horrified by the daily struggle against the kind of damage that Rowling and her transphobic agenda are doing that it just felt like this would be true, too.

JC: And when that happened, I also had that feeling of it would be so easy for all of us to lose sight of the goal of all of that, which is to make sure that the people who were victimized get to tell their stories and get some justice. That feels like that’s the goal to me, and if it turns into an opportunity to take down people that you don’t like for other reasons than when they didn’t actually do the things that

you're insinuating that they did, it's like, "Well, all right, we have to be careful here. We have to be cautious. We have to investigate. We have to look at the evidence. We have to really think about it." You can't just jump to these conclusions, so it's always disappointing to me when I see people on the left and the right jumping to those kinds of conclusions without stopping to actually look at what's happening.

Lorrie: Yeah. So here's Harry wanting to believe that James was the person making all these scribbly notes, and Ron scoring a giant hit on Hermione, even though it's not entirely accurate: "'You don't like the Prince, Hermione,' he said, pointing a sausage at her sternly, 'because he's better than you at Potions --'" Yeah, that's true, but she is also sincerely worried.

JC: I do like, though, that Ron took it all very well. I guess there's a couple of ways you can look at that (the whole thing where he's the one who got yanked out of a dead sleep and everyone's laughing at him), and by the time they get to breakfast, he's telling the story like it's the funniest thing that ever happened to him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's very interesting. It shows a lot of loyalty on Ron's part. Also, Ron feels very secure in his friendship with Harry that he knows that Harry wouldn't have done anything to hurt him on purpose. I find that whole part of it very interesting. Ron just decides, 'Okay, yeah, this is a funny thing that happened to me, and I'm going to claim it as such.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, he's a good sport.

JC: I'm not sure that he would have been a few years back.

Lorrie: Well, also, Fred and George have been doing stuff like that his whole life. You have to eventually get over it.

JC: That is true.

Lorrie: It's not like they're ever going to be punished for being so reckless.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: Hermione is further irritated that Harry is calling this guy the Prince, and she says, "'It's just a stupid nickname.' 'I don't see where you get that from,' said Harry heatedly. 'If he'd been a budding Death Eater he wouldn't have been boasting about being 'half-blood,' would he?'" They are doing another thing that's so incredibly horribly recognizable: they are arguing about the motives of someone they don't know. They're defending their positions based on their own projections only.

JC: Yeah. Right.

Lorrie: Okay, we do that. I've done that. Then Hermione continues to argue very badly and incorrectly, "No, Death Eaters only hate Muggle-borns, they would let you and Harry join," which is so, so, so wrong. This conversation is a master class in how purity politics is no win for anyone; Ron and Harry look at her like she's nuts, which she is, in this particular case. "Oh, yeah... Oh, yeah, they're rushing to recruit us." But at least, fortunately, we get an end to this painfully accurate scene because Harry gets another lesson invitation from Dumbledore, so even if he's gone, he hasn't forgotten Harry. All right, that's good to know.

JC: I like the way it was phrased that "distraction arrived in the form of Ginny."

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Now he's noticing Ginny all the time. He even invites her to come to Hogsmeade with them, and she's like, "No, I'm already going with Dean."

Lorrie: "No, I have a boyfriend." This Hogsmeade trip turns out to be unrewarding in every way. It's so cold!

JC: It's funny because I was just in New York a few weeks ago, and then before that I was in Pittsburgh, and those two weekends were some of the coldest I've been in my life.

Lorrie: They were cold.

JC: The wind chill was below zero, and I live in Texas. I'm not used to the cold. Oh, my God, that was... I could feel this cold as I was reading it. I was like, 'I know what this feels like.'

Lorrie: Well, I live in these climates, and those weekends were cold.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: That's not just from being from Texas.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They were cold. Yeah. These kids live in Scotland. No, this was cold. Then all this everyday yuckiness happens; Slughorn is doing the favoritism thing again and ignoring Ron like he's not even there. Once again, we have a reference to the Hog's Head barman...

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Which, as the reader, we know that's Aberforth, but the narration sees it through Harry's eyes. 'Who's that man again?' Every time Harry sees him, he's like, 'I think I know him. Who is that?' That bar man is doing business with Mundungus Fletcher, and Harry is kind of hot in this scene.

JC: Yeah. Holy crap! This is a moment where it's like, 'Oh, damn, Harry.'

Lorrie: He's an athlete. He pins Mundungus to the wall by the throat with one hand because he has seen that Mundungus has been stealing Sirius's stuff. You don't hit Harry Potter there. No, you don't.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah, Harry is a man. Oops! Mundungus would have lost some air if Tonks hadn't released him; showed up out of nowhere and, in her subdued, dissociated way this year, just says to Harry, "Yeah, yeah, I know he was stealing Sirius's stuff. Bye." What?!

JC: Yeah. It's so interesting because Harry's really justifiably angry about this and he definitely overreacts, but he also knows that Mundungus being part of the Order means that Mundungus gets away with all of this stuff, so he's just getting away with it again. Tonks appears, makes sure Mundungus gets away, and then disappears again back into the snow.

Lorrie: And I do love that it doesn't occur to Harry, 'Oh, yeah, that was *my* stuff he was stealing.' Harry is starting to come into his own as a man of property.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He's now big enough to do things like pin petty thieves to the wall and oh... Oh, he owns stuff. Huh!

JC: And people steal it from him. Wait a minute...

Lorrie: Yeah, so he is in, very much, that in-between place. Can he do nonverbal spells or can't he? Is he on to something or isn't he? Should all of his suspicions be dismissed as just an overactive imagination of a teen boy, or does he actually know what's happening? It's this very unresolved place that he's living in.

JC: The Alice Cooper song just came into my head. "I'm eighteen, and I don't know what I want."

Lorrie: Oh, dear...

JC: That whole song is about what you just described, so I was like, 'Oh, wow.'

Lorrie: It's so true. It's so true. Well, what Harry does know is that he's really angry, and Sirius is still dead.

JC: Something that I wanted to say before we go on that I realized that we skipped past: when Slughorn intercepts them in Honeydukes and says that he's had three parties that Harry has missed, internally Harry reveals that he's been scheduling Quidditch practice on the same nights, but partly because he doesn't want Ron to be left alone.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I thought, 'That's really sweet.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry doesn't want to go, but he doesn't want Ron to have to sit around by himself knowing that his two best friends are at this party he didn't get invited to. I like that.

Lorrie: Yeah. You have to fight this kind of toxic favoritism environment. The fact that the figure skating in the Olympics has just concluded has that kind of thing on my mind a lot, because there are emotionally healthy and emotionally unhealthy training centers -- rinks where champions go to be coached by the most technically advanced coaches -- and you can tell the atmosphere when you walk into a place

that works on favoritism and backbiting and it's just really negative versus a place where no, it's based on equality and consideration. I like that Harry knows how to do something preventative like that, because wow, the poison that Slughorn introduces is not even the worst kind. He's not really trying to manipulate or to ruin anyone's life, but it makes so much damage. Oh, we get more trauma for poor Katie Bell. Oh, God... Undoubtedly the worst of the many bad things that happen to her.

JC: Before we go to that, there's one more thing I wanted to say. I really like this little moment where we see all the jealousy that everyone has, where Hermione is jealous of Ron's crush on Madam Rosmerta and Harry's jealous of Ginny being on a date with Dean and thinks darkly, 'They're probably snuggling in that dumb cafe,' and doesn't really think about what that means yet, but I like that we see all three of them throughout this text really struggling with that. It's a nice little moment reminding us of the relationships with each other.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this all after Ron points out that no one can trust what Hermione says about the Half-Blood Prince because she's the one who's jealous of not being tops at her class. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Meanwhile, poor Harry is not able to talk about how this might have been James as the Half-Blood Prince because he can't tell his friends how he knows what James did. Yeah, these internal checks on what we can say and share... Oof. Then they see Katie Bell with her friend Leanne, and Katie is acting really weird. They're fighting, and poor Katie ends up touching a cursed necklace and it really punishes her. She ends up rising several feet into the air, screaming in torment. This is really scary. Poor thing... Ugh.

JC: And Harry's immediate thought is, 'I need to go find somebody to help.' I thought, 'Wow, that's incredibly mature.' He immediately recognizes, 'I've never seen this before, and I've seen a lot of shit.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'I've never seen this before. I don't know what to do. I need to go find someone who can.' I was like, 'Oh, thank you, Harry! Thank you! Finally!' It's very mature of him.

Lorrie: And he runs to the castle, which is not close, but it's still the right thing to do. Fortunately, he runs smack into Hagrid (thank goodness) who has the same

response of assessing the situation and instantly know, 'Okay, this is serious.' They do know to recognize true Dark magic. Leanne, poor thing, is completely upset and realizes Katie must have been Imperiused in -- all together, now -- the girls' bathroom. Seriously? There's just no way to trust this author on girls' and boys' bathrooms anymore. Whatever.

JC: Yeah, this is true. "But she was in the girls' bathroom! It couldn't have been Malfoy." Yeah, etcetera.

Lorrie: So yeah, she must have been Imperiused by somebody who was in the bathroom so that she felt compelled to deliver this opal necklace to somebody at Hogwarts, and nobody knows who did it. Harry freaks out Hermione (and also me a little bit) but it turns out to be the right thing, where just wrapping the necklace in his scarf is enough to keep it safe, and he physically brings it to Madam Pomfrey, so he knows exactly what to do and where to go with this. Then, more of that stuff happens that is happening all throughout this chapter, where with zero evidence, Harry's brain makes the connections for him and he knows instantly, "Draco bought it. Draco's behind this," and of course he is completely correct, and there's no way to prove it and no reason for anyone to believe him or be anything but acutely embarrassed.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But that's the level that they're all working on right now. Everything's so convoluted, and whatever you authored -- whatever words or spells or schemes you authored -- there are several steps between that and what kind of harm it actually releases on the world. Can it be traced back to you? Are you still connected to it? Of course, we get that; my Snape-loving heart appreciates that we get the little hint as always, when McGonagall says, "Filch, take the necklace to Snape." Okay, if it has to do with Dark magic, we know who to take it to, we know who knows how to undo Dark magic. Automatic. Then Harry runs to McGonagall and explains what happened and demands to see Dumbledore, and when she says Dumbledore's away, Harry is angry at her about this. She's a little like, "Okay, Harry. Yes, he has the right to be away when he needs to be," and he just says straight out, "I think Draco Malfoy gave Katie that necklace, Professor." Oh, God, how ouchie that he's completely right.

JC: And it's also interesting, too, because there have been so many other years when, if Harry had just told someone what he knew when he knew it, maybe the story would have gone differently, but this one is telling us nah, it probably wouldn't have gone differently.

Lorrie: Oh, that's so true.

JC: People always tell you "tell someone" or "if you see something, say something," and yeah, it doesn't make a difference here.

Lorrie: Because people always believe kids, of course. Oh... Yeah, no, you're so right. Everybody tells Harry why he's wrong, and then Harry tells McGonagall what he does and doesn't know about Draco wanting Borgin and Burkes to fix something or someone... Okay, admittedly, his evidence seems pretty sparse.

JC: True, yeah.

Lorrie: And then McGonagall gives the death blow to this actually correct theory where she says, "Draco was with me in detention because he missed two assignments in a row."

JC: So he had an alibi. Draco was very clever in how he made this all happen.

Lorrie: Although how clever is it when the plan that he enacts is, first of all, super expensive?

JC: That is true. That is true. It's definitely a rich kid's... 'How can I make this happen? I know: I'll throw money at the problem.'

Lorrie: Right, and then there has to be three intermediate steps before possibly it gets to where it's headed. Oh, I guess he did want to make sure that no one could trace it back to him. Oh, my goodness, this whole chapter is so stressful. This tells us that Draco is having the same life that Dumbledore and Harry are having: operating on desperation, knowing that the real deep story is happening, keeping secrets...His performance in school is totally suffering.

JC: Right. His grades are dropping. Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: He probably doesn't look very good right now; he probably looks like the weight of the world is on him. All right, Draco is also completely stressed out and not knowing what to do, and Harry is arguing with a completely uncooperative

Ron and Hermione: "He must have used an accomplice, then. Crabbe or Goyle -- or, come to think of it, another Death Eater, he'll have loads of better cronies than Crabbe and Goyle now that he's joined up --" He is, of course, correct. Oh, gosh...

JC: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Lorrie: But I can't really blame Ron and Hermione. They don't have anything to go on. Fortunately, at least Hermione's there to stop Ron from bullying first-years and abusing his prefect position. God, him making a first-year give up a comfortable chair is one of the least likable things Ron does.

JC: Yeah, yeah. It's like, 'Oh, come on, Ron.' Yeah.

Lorrie: That's so like, 'I don't know if I can respect you.'

JC: So the story with the necklace was that Katie was Imperiused and that she had to give the necklace directly to someone at the castle, so they're hypothesizing about who it could be; Harry figures it was either Dumbledore or Slughorn (and again, correct), and Hermione points out, "Well, it could have been you." Harry says, "No, because then she would have just turned around and given it to me when she saw me," which is --

Lorrie: Yeah, totally worse.

JC: That's really good thinking, Harry. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, wow, I'm impressed.

Lorrie: Yeah, he would have been a logical target, but no; apparently, it wasn't him. So yeah, at the end of the chapter, everything feels pretty yucky. Nothing's been resolved and they're living in tense times, and there's going to be a lesson coming up. The next chapter is called The Secret Riddle.

JC: Ooh! Actually, before we close it up, way back when they were leaving and going to Hogsmeade, Filch is checking them all with the Sneak-o-scope or whatever it is. The Super Sneak Sensor, Sneak Sensor thing...

Lorrie: Secrecy Sensors, yeah.

JC: And Ron makes the comment, "Why are you checking us on the way out? Shouldn't you be checking us on the way back in?" and that makes me wonder: suppose that Katie Bell and Leanne had gotten all the way to the castle with that package intact. Would it have made it to its destination?

Lorrie: Probably not.

JC: Would Filch have stopped it on the way in.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. Draco's desperation is palpable. On the other hand, if this was part of his plan, he could have Imperiused Katie to feel like she had to find a way around it, which seems like that was part of the mind control because Leanne was trying to interfere with her and Katie wasn't having it at all. So yeah, being Imperiused sounds really unpleasant, and the fact that Draco had to Imperius somebody to Imperius her...

JC: Multiple layers of the Imperius Curse here. That's pretty impressive.

Lorrie: Impressive, and also the opposite.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Impressive that you could do it, but also... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. All of them throughout this whole chapter, including Dumbledore racing around doing goodness knows what.

JC: Dark times... Dark times.

Lorrie: Yeah. Actually, I guess -- no, Hagrid. Hagrid comes off without anything reproachable.

JC: He's been happily off having conversations with Grawp.

Lorrie: Yeah, and then when he sees an emergency, he does exactly what he needed to do. Nobody else could have done it better.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And as much as students have been dubious about Hagrid, when something like this happens, no, that's who you want. He picks up Katie and runs with her;

nobody says, "Can we trust him?" No, no, you can trust him. Thank goodness he was there.

JC: And presumably can run really fast...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: With his very long legs, all the way up to the castle to hand her off.

Lorrie: Oh, poor Katie... At least she was safe during those moments. It's going to be fascinating to see what answers we get from The Secret Riddle.

JC: Ooh, that's coming up next.

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