



Transcript

Episode 6.13

Book 6, Chapter 13: The Secret Riddle

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 Thirteen: The Secret Riddle.

Lorrie: The Secret Riddle. Dumbledore shows Harry his memories of meeting eleven-year-old Tom Riddle. This is a huge chapter, and it starts off with Dumbledore coming back from wherever he's been; he looks exhausted and his hand is as dead as ever, but he looks happy to see Harry, so his plans are going well, then.

JC: We also get a little bit of an update on the Katie Bell situation...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it's interesting. She's been moved to St. Mungo's and Dumbledore says that they're sending hourly reports about her status, which I'm like, 'That's not good.' He's like, 'Oh, she's probably going to make a recovery,' but I'm like, 'Hourly reports?'

Lorrie: 'Hourly,' I know. That really stood out.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: It made me wonder if the curse on the necklace was the same as the one that took his hand out.

JC: Oh... Interesting.

Lorrie: It seems about as destructive. 'Are you going to live? Probably.'

JC: Yeah. When he tells Harry that Snape did enough to prevent the curse from spreading too quickly, Harry is surprised, but this is not the first time that Snape has done this. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and of course Harry wants to know, as always, why Snape? Why couldn't Madam Pomfrey do it? And as usual, Dumbledore explains: "Professor Snape knows much more about the Dark Arts than Madame Pomfrey, Harry." As usual, that's setting up the whole notion that if you're somebody who has done Dark Arts, there's a role for you that people who've never gone there can't fill. Harry says, basically, "Where were you?" and then, to Harry's great surprise, Dumbledore says he will tell him "in due course" where he went. Whoa, that's not what Harry expected, so Harry's promotion to adulthood continues. I remember being surprised when I read that. 'Huh!' Usually, you ask that kind of question and you get shut down.

JC: Yeah. This whole book, Dumbledore is not shutting Harry down whenever Harry asks for these things. He just says, "When the time is right, you're going to know. It's just not quite right yet."

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, so we get the strong sense that Dumbledore has an urgent plan and that order is important to this plan, but then Dumbledore does shut Harry down about suspecting Draco, the one area where, of course, Harry will eventually turn out to be right and Dumbledore is still taking on that risk. "No, I'm the grown-up. I set the rules here," and that includes finding out later if you were wrong to shut Harry down, you'll take the responsibility.

JC: So what I was reading there was that Dumbledore still firmly, firmly believes that Draco can be saved here, because Dumbledore knows. Dumbledore and Snape have talked about this at this point, so Dumbledore knows that Draco has been recruited. To prevent Harry from speculating and getting involved in that and maybe making the situation worse, there's this idea of, "We're not going to go

there. It's going to be handled. Everything is going to be fine." Not that he says that, but that was how I read that. He's confident that Draco is not going to end up damaging himself or others.

Lorrie: I don't think Dumbledore is confident of that, and the reason I think that is because Draco messes up Dumbledore's plan. Dumbledore expected Snape to end up with the Elder Wand and not Draco because he did not think that Draco was going to do everyone proud by casting *Expelliarmus* on Dumbledore instead of trying to kill him. I think the impression I'm getting (based on the desperation that we see from Dumbledore in the next book and a half) is that he has no idea if it's going to work or not, but you have to try. He is Draco's headmaster just as much as he is Harry's headmaster, and whether or not this works -- because of course, we see lots and lots of examples in this universe and in history where you do everything possible to save somebody and then it doesn't work -- letting another kid think that he can talk to you about this... There's no upside to that at all. We have the deliberate parallel between how Dumbledore handled young Tom Riddle going bad and the fact that he has Draco on the same path now, and that, after all these decades and after some different examples of Tom Riddle and also Snape, Dumbledore has to approach this differently. Will it work? I don't know, but you have to try.

JC: Dumbledore is also aware that Harry ran into Mundungus Fletcher and what Mundungus Fletcher has been doing. I thought that was the opposite of the Draco moment, where Dumbledore's like, "Yeah. He's gone into hiding because he probably doesn't want to face me." That's a very different reaction.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, and I guess Tonks referred Mundungus to Dumbledore, and when Tonks is like, "Yes, Harry, I know exactly what Mundungus is doing, just leave it," then she went and reported to Dumbledore, who's the only person who can control Mundungus. "Whatever privileges we give you, Mundungus, can be revoked, you know."

JC: Another thing that surprised me here was the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black as very active and listening in and interrupting. Very interesting in the proceedings. That felt like a little clue there that I didn't spend too much time thinking about, honestly, but I thought that feels like something that we're

supposed to notice. Normally when Harry is in the office with Dumbledore, the portraits are not paying attention much.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, this one gets to be a bit more of a character. So yeah, it is showing us the breadth of what Dumbledore has to worry about as headmaster to all four Houses.

JC: One other thing before we move into the memories is that this is a school where... At the beginning of the chapter, we're talking about how this awful thing has happened to one student and the student is in the hospital and no one really knows what's going on. In the real world, it is the beginning of March 2026 and I live in Austin, Texas. There was just a mass shooting here that had a really tremendous impact on a lot of people that I know. I had multiple students who were either there that night or had good friends who were there that night. One of the students who died went to my kid's high school, so that part of it hit home a little bit, too. We've had a traumatic thing happen outside of the school to a student in the school, and everyone's kind of reeling from that, so that part... I guess this didn't predate the time of school shootings, this book didn't, but the way that schools have to deal with that kind of violence -- the way that communities have to deal with that kind of violence...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's hard for me not to see all of those connections now when it's something that is still very much on the minds of the people in the community that I live in.

Lorrie: Well, the author was in England or Scotland writing this, so the American timeline of the increase in school shootings since the beginning of the 21st century wouldn't have had as much impact on her. But yeah, any tension within a school community that expands to the whole network (the community around it), especially when there's political and racial unrest... Yeah, everyone's going to be affected, and yeah, that strange disjunction between people who do and people who don't know exactly what happened, but everybody's unsettled. Well, I really can't imagine the people who were eyewitnesses, the survivors who were there during, what they are going through. Yeah. Well, that is about where this chapter is emotionally...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What happens when humans are this desperate. Dumbledore takes Harry to before Voldemort was born, when Merope Riddle was pregnant, and he shows Caractacus Burke of Borgin and Burke -- presumably quite a long-ago memory -- boasting that this very impoverished witch came in about to have a baby and that he managed to give her only ten Galleons for Slytherin's locket. That tears at my heart.

JC: Yeah. It's so cruel, it's so cruel.

Lorrie: And he's so happy to have cheated her.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. She's not like the most saintly person, but she needed it and that's all she had.

JC: Ugh, yeah. It's just awful. Yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore guesses that Merope probably stopped using magic because she didn't want to be a witch anymore, or else that "unrequited love and... despair sapped her of her powers." I'm not really sure what that would mean (that she doesn't want to be a witch); I'm firmly in the camp that thinks depression will just do that to you.

JC: Yeah, yeah, because we also see that, at least, in the example of Tonks throughout this book.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Your emotional state has an impact on your ability to do magic, and that makes sense because your emotional state has an impact on your ability to do many things in your life, so imagine: why would magic be different? It's just another body system that you can access. Yeah, that idea that being that despondent... She lost her husband, who she had magicked into loving her all this time; she's about to have a baby. She's basically homeless at this point with nothing. Yeah, I can see how that would be about as low as she's been in her life, and yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Even before all of this, she was living with her father, who criticized her magic, so it wasn't good and that is something I totally understand. But then she temporarily created -- falsely created -- a fantasy of having a partner's love to

try to build something in her mind and then realized that wasn't tenable, so she lost that fantasy and without any sustaining love, she had no reason. No reason for being. Dumbledore explains: "In any case... Merope refused to raise her wand even to save her own life." I read that, and I'm not sure what that means, and I couldn't find more clues in the text. 'Why? What did she die of? How could magic have prevented her death?' To me, that's not clearly written. Wizards and witches are mortal. You can't always just magic yourself into being alive.

JC: Yeah. I think I had read that because the part before that, Harry had said something like, "She's a witch. Why couldn't she have used magic to get herself some food?" Because she's starving and stuff.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Dumbledore's like, "Yeah, no, not even to do that," is kind of how I read that, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I also love that Harry has this moment of indignance for Voldemort here. She wouldn't even try to survive for her baby?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Because Harry's the one example of motherhood that he has as his own of his mom who gave her life for him, and Dumbledore has to tell him, "First of all, are you feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?" Harry's like, "No!"

Lorrie: "No," said Harry quickly."

JC: He did say it quickly, but he was like... Yeah. In my head, it felt a little bit more like a "No, I don't think so." But yeah, that was a very interesting moment, because I have a lot of sympathy for Tom Riddle in this chapter. Not that every child who was in that environment would have turned out that way, but he had a lot going against him, this kid.

Lorrie: Yes, he did. Well, yeah, how was she supposed to stay alive for him? Because the wording doesn't make it sound like Merope committed suicide; it sounds more passive than that. It sounds like complete, utter depletion of a human being, and that makes a lot of sense, too. Why couldn't she get food for herself?

The more depleted you are, the more effort all of that takes and the less motivation you have to make that effort. When Harry says 'no' quickly, that whole exchange ("Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. 'Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?' 'No,' said Harry quickly.") is like, 'Well, the teacher is telling you what the correct answer is, and whatever your true feelings were, you better give the correct answer right now.' Normally, this teacher who is more interested in your various thoughts is informing you what to think here that it seems like a power move from him.

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: Well, it doesn't seem like Harry feels free to say, "Yeah, actually I was," which was my response as a reader. "Yeah, I did feel sorry for Voldemort, actually." Then Harry goes, "But she had a choice, didn't she? Not like my mother -" I think the best sense that I can make of this is: is Dumbledore trying to stop Harry from identifying with Voldemort? Does that damage the boundaries that Harry needs to set up against Voldemort (who is, as we all know, trying to take over Harry's head)?

JC: Yeah, I didn't read it that way at all. I could have read it the other way around completely, that Voldemort was like, 'Oh. Okay, you're going to...' Thinking about what a complex story Tom Riddle has...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that he was, at one point, a human being and that reconnecting him with that humanity is maybe the one way that Voldemort could still possibly not destroy everything. 'Be saved' is the wrong word, but I read that a little differently. In my head, it was more Dumbledore going. 'Oh, interesting, interesting. Are we starting to see that Tom Riddle was a human being in terrible circumstances?' Yeah. Then his comment about choice after that: "No, your mother did have a choice and that we are always making choices, and we're about to see choices that Tom Riddle made."

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh, yeah. Dumbledore says it gently ("Your mother had a choice, too") and that was a good reminder. Lily could have chosen her own life over Harry's, even though it's impossible to imagine Lily doing that, but that opens up the reality that Merope chose a way out for herself, and she maybe wasn't equipped

with what it would have taken to stay in it. That's sort of taboo (suicidal ideation) to think of it as a bit of a relief, but she really was a person that hadn't been strengthened with the basics enough to handle this, maybe.

JC: She was in labor at this point when she shows up at the orphanage, and we don't know if she went somewhere before that. All we know is that she shows up minutes from giving birth on the steps of an orphanage, which implies that this was her plan for her baby being safe. Otherwise, she would have just had the baby in a gutter somewhere and then they would maybe have both died. This is the last thing she's going to do: make sure that her baby is in a safe place before she, herself, expires because she clearly has nothing left.

Lorrie: She's at the end, yeah, and whatever this place can do for her baby is more than she would have been able to provide, in her belief. Dumbledore says, "Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage." There is, in the fandom, some mother-blaming of Merope (that Voldemort turned out evil because she wouldn't stay alive for him), and/or there is some criticism of the author for, in some people's view, writing mother-blaming into or onto the character of Merope, which is tricky. From my reading -- from the way I read this -- I don't think that was the author's intention. My best guess is that she under-wrote her intention; she didn't get it across clearly, from what I can tell. I would have checked with her about maybe writing another draft with different wording to make it clearer that Merope is a demonstration of what happens when you oppress women for generations (just more and more and more depletion), and you cannot give women nothing from birth and then expect them to manufacture mothering out of that. That's my best guess at what I think this author was trying to get at, but I do agree with readers who see that it's not written to support that as much. If you want to read this as, 'Oh, it was Merope's fault,' the writing doesn't argue against that strongly enough, in my opinion.

JC: That's so interesting, because I don't see the mother-blaming in this. I don't even have that read at all. That seems so foreign to me, and I believe you that people have argued about that fact for decades, but I'm like, 'No.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She was severely depressed.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She'd been traumatized and she did the best she could. She literally crawled up the steps of an orphanage and gave birth there to give her child the best...

Lorrie: Ouch! Yeah.

JC: That's the choice she made, knowing that she didn't have much left in her. For me, it's about the mental health. She was traumatized, she was severely depressed. This is at a time when Tom Riddle later in the chapter mentions an asylum, but people didn't... I'm thinking this is, what, the 1930s, 1940s, mid 20th century at the latest.

Lorrie: Yeah. Let's see. It was the thirties, yes.

JC: Okay. Oh, yeah, the thirties, okay. That's a time where there's big economic downturn in the world...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's a time before we had a lot of social safety nets. She was not the only woman who had crawled to that orphanage and died; that was not an uncommon occurrence in that particular time, at least according to novels that I've read, maybe. I'm not a historian about that particular part of England, but that doesn't feel like that unusual a thing. Even the matron of the orphanage doesn't...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Doesn't she even say, "Oh, yeah, that happened."

Lorrie: "Not the first."

JC: Yeah. "Not the first." She's just another one of these young women who was beaten down by life and her circumstances, so I don't get the mother-blaming here for me. It's more like, 'Wow, she had a really rough life and she had a terrible end and how terrible, but the last thing she did was put her baby in a safe place.' How is that mother-bashing? I don't understand that at all.

Lorrie: Well, it should be noted that when this book was published, I had given birth and you were trying to become a mother; we were not, for example, fourteen

years old and reading this when the reader would be identifying with teenage Harry trying to understand the circumstances around infant Tom Riddle. That's where I start with the difference in perspective between me reading this as Merope showing what happens when you give women nothing versus readers being dissatisfied with the author for saying, 'Is she saying this is Merope's fault that Tom Riddle turned out like this?' Not exactly, but mothering takes so much, even if you have all the resources. How can you do it if nobody loved you enough for you to want to live?

JC: She's also physically...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We don't know when she ate last.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: She could have been really sick. There's a lot of things that could have been going on that we just don't know there. It's just interesting that I did not get even the hint of mother-blaming here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You just read a really sad circumstance to me in a little bit of the Tom Hiddleston way of, "Very sad. Anyway... Okay, now let's move on to talk about..." I feel like that's the worst interpretation I have of this scene: Dumbledore going, "Very sad. Anyway..." But yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I just remember reading this, thinking about the many people in life that actually have this kind of really bad situation and finding it pretty natural.

JC: Agreed.

Lorrie: So the orphanage is described as "shabby but spotlessly clean." That is such a respectful thing to write about an orphanage.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And it reminded me of when we first meet Lupin: his luggage is worn out, but it's described as "tied neatly with string." You may not have enough resources, but you have dignity.

JC: And comparing that to the shack that Merope grew up in (where her father spit on the floor and stuff), if you don't have much but you keep it in as good of order as you can, that says something about pride. You're like, "I'm proud of what I do have, and I'm going to take good care of it." That dignity... dignity is the word I'm looking for. There's a lot of dignity in that, and that's kind of what I see here; even the children are described as...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It looks like it would be a grim place to grow up, but the children look well cared for.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This isn't like the orphanage that Annie grew up in in New York City, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: No, the kids... they're well fed, and they're dressed and they're clean, and they're taken care of.

Lorrie: Yeah. Their problem is that they're understaffed and underfunded, not that people don't understand what the mission is. The Lumos website... Lumos is the foundation where I believe most of JKR's charity money goes to, and it's a foundation that works on getting children out of large orphanage institutions into, if not private homes with relatives, then at least smaller group living situations because it's unanimous that studies show that even with a lot of negative influences (such as living with Dursleys), even with that, people/human beings/children have better outcomes living in smaller, more home-like situations and not in these really large institutions where it is not possible to provide. No matter how good you are at this, you cannot provide the nurturing that kids need. The quote from the website I saw was, "Even when run with the best efforts and intentions, institutional systems and settings struggle to provide what children really need: consistent love, responsive caregiving, and protection." Yeah, the responsive thing? You cannot be responsive if you're understaffed. Knowing that Rowling funds this institution, Lumos (where the stated objective is to get children out of large institutions and into smaller homes), really guides my reading of her plot choices in this series because, for example, it's saying even in an abusive household like the Dursleys,

that's still a better situation for Harry than a huge institution would have been. Strange to say, which is not to say that the Dursleys were not monstrously abusive; just that being in this kind of institution is that bleak. Part of the eternal, very painful reader question, "Why would Dumbledore leave a defenseless toddler with the Dursleys?" Well, sometimes in life, there are options that are even worse. The story is not ignoring that. I love Mrs. Cole, the matron.

JC: She's a character, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. This author writes minor characters amazingly, and Dumbledore observes that Mrs. Cole was "an inconveniently sharp woman."

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. Before we talk about Mrs. Cole, though, can we just talk briefly about Dumbledore's suit?

Lorrie: Oh, yes. "Nice suit, sir."

JC: "Nice suit, sir." I think about the time (if it was the 1930s), thinking about what men's fashion looked like at the time. I only have the American reference to the 1930s, but I'm thinking about the guys in the zoot suits going out on the town or whatever. That's kind of what it made me think of, but also with the added layer of knowing that Dumbledore is queer...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That there's another layer there of, 'Okay,' and he knew... He was smart enough to have been amongst Muggles enough to know how to dress, so it's not that he's doing what we see some of the wizards doing in other books where they don't know how to dress. It's a very intentional statement, and I'm like, 'Wow, okay.' Even Harry's like, "Nice suit, sir."

Lorrie: And Dumbledore is pleased with himself. He laughs.

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: And Mrs. Cole looks at him. Dumbledore realizes that he's going to have to be unethical, confront her, and then get her drunk. I guess he's used Legilimency to realize, 'Oh, she's addicted to gin. All right, here we go.'

JC: She's immediately very suspicious about his motives, which also tells me this is a good place for kids to be.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even though it's an orphanage and institution. Even a kid she doesn't like, she's not just going to ship him off to something nefarious, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She wants to make sure that this is not shady in any way.

Lorrie: Yeah. I really like how the author sets it up to make it clear it is not the fault of the institution, of this particular institution or the individuals who run it. They don't have what it takes to do well by these kids. They do the best they can. Whatever created the damage that Tom Riddle was born into and grew up in, it's the state of being loveless, not anything that these people or this place did to him.

JC: For sure, and that Tom Riddle is just a kid that they don't have the tools to handle either.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? They don't have the tools to handle a wizard who has this much control over his powers at this age. Yeah.

Lorrie: So by the time this episode airs, the book *Voldemort* by Grace Candido-Beecher will have been published; that's a book that I did the developmental editing for, although I have not seen the final version. I'm just going to say that a lot of Grace's takes on this chapter are different from mine, so I'm going to continue to give my take, but I encourage anyone who's interested in this extremely complicated and fascinating topic, go find Grace's book and see all the different takes she's had on it, including the historical one setting Tom Riddle and his childhood and young adulthood in the historical context of that time in Britain. Mrs. Cole is only thirty years old, give or take. That always shocks me, because she comes off so much older.

JC: She really does, yeah.

Lorrie: But she says that Tom's mother came on New Year's Eve "not much older than I was myself at the time..." Subtract eleven years, wow.

JC: Yeah. The whole situation where Dumbledore goes, "Hmm," and he picks up a blank piece of paper and does something to it to make it look like, "Here's a

document about... Oh, everything is in order," and then suddenly there's gin on the table. That little bit of magic is very powerful.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ooh. Even Harry is impressed by this at the time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But the drinking of the gin... Gin is so specific, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not like whiskey. It's a very specific drink of a very specific group of people in that time, so there's just something about it being gin that I found very interesting and the two glasses. The more she drinks, the more she is happy to tell Dumbledore everything that she knows. It's charming, but also it shows what Dumbledore is really capable of and that he was very powerful, and he could have gone in many directions in his life; he used his power generally for good things and to make the world a better place, but he made choices, too.

Lorrie: He always had to be thinking, 'What do I do with my power? Is this a time to go unethical, and how far should I go with it and to what purpose?' Here he is, demonstrating it to Harry (who is, in the next volume, going to have to do some unethical things himself), and we will see also tries to curb as much as possible. 'Just do it for this reason, and then stop as soon as you can.'

JC: Yeah. Well, in the next chapter, I think he's going to do some things like that.

Lorrie: That's true. Yeah.

JC: So yeah. Anyway, I love this display of young Dumbledore being very powerful and doing the same thing we see him doing later where it's not entirely ethical what he's doing, but he's doing it for the right reasons or what he believes are the right reasons.

Lorrie: He does have to get Tom Riddle out of there.

JC: True.

Lorrie: She says that the baby was born within the hour and that Merope died within another hour; the last thing she says is, "I hope he looks like his father," and

she names the baby after the baby's father and after her own father, so she erases her name entirely. It takes one generation to erase the mother's history and name, which, as we're going to see, matters too with the Half-Blood Prince, but that's very deliberately done. It's as though she doesn't want to harm the baby by putting any of herself into him.

JC: There's also... This makes him legitimate, right? Legitimacy was like a much bigger thing a century ago (or even fifty years ago, probably) than it is now, but he's legitimate if he's named after his father and after another man because it's a very patriarchal kind of system.

Lorrie: Yeah. He comes from landed gentry on one side and wizard nobility on the other.

JC: Yeah, so name him after Albus Severus Potter.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh. And then -- this is just too painful for words -- where Mrs. Cole says, "No one ever came for this baby," and the intolerable thing as a reader that you have to know as you read this story of his infancy is knowing that this infant could not have been held or talked to or, in any way, co-regulated. Co-regulation from a newborn being held and kept warm by another body and communicated with and listened to (if the baby cries, does the environment, including the human, seem to notice that something's wrong and respond to the baby?)... That's where you start to develop any sense of self and of sympathy for others (of empathy, of understanding); he was never wanted and he could not be made a priority in any human being's life, and therefore he could form no attachments. Reading this volume as the mother of a baby is not an easy thing to do.

JC: I do feel sorry for Voldemort in this chapter.

Lorrie: Yes, I do.

JC: Right? It's like at the beginning, "Are you starting to feel sorry for him?" Well, yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Damn, I am.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then she says, as Dumbledore knew she would, "He was a funny boy... odd... he hardly ever cried." And there you go. What is the use of crying if there's no responsive care? Why do people cry? It's to try to communicate, "I'm hurting. Could you help me?" If no one's ever going to help you, why bother? Who's going to hear you?

JC: Yeah. The image of a newborn baby just lying in a crib and crying and no one coming...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's really unimaginable, but at the same time, it's like --

Lorrie: It happens.

JC: Yeah, it happens.

Lorrie: And that's one of those universally steady findings of children who were born into orphanages. Even that they grow up into people who have trouble focusing visually, because that's part of how you grow: having a caregiver look at you or interact with you, give you something to focus on. If you're profoundly understimulated, this is something that, even if you're a genius like Voldemort, you can't make this happen for yourself; the magic has to come from the human interaction. I do love the way this is written, where Mrs. Cole triple-checks Dumbledore. "You're going to take him to matter what I'm telling you, right?" Can you imagine? She's had nobody to talk to about all of these weird fears and suspicions all this time. This creepy orphan making all this damage happen and nobody else knows any more than she does about why and you can't prove it.

JC: And she's very careful still how she talks about it. She's very fair about it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She could have just been like, "Yeah, bad things happen when that kid's around. I don't like that kid." No, not at all. She's very much like, "Well, weird things happen around him and the other children seem frightened of him. I can name off things that have happened, but there's no proof that he did anything." She's very, very thoughtful about it. Very careful.

Lorrie: Yeah. She's not condemning him. She's not stereotyping; she says he's not noticeably a bully, and yet he scares the other children. Then we get one of the symptoms (one of the warning signs of possible anti-social personality disorder here) that he was cruel to animals, and she says he hanged Billy Stubbs's rabbit. Ow... This cruelty to animals: early warning sign of emotional neglect and failure of empathy. Apparently, if you're suffering from these things, then sometimes harming an animal gives the child a temporary sense of control. It's also a *Wuthering Heights* reference. *Wuthering Heights* -- a book that I let myself never read again because I really did not enjoy the feeling of sitting through somebody else's very, very bad family therapy session -- but at the beginning of *Wuthering Heights*, there's this pile of dead rabbits, and one of the narrators mistakes it for a happy pile of sleeping cats. No, it's a pile of rabbit corpses, and then later on in the book one of the characters, Heathcliff, hangs his wife's dog. It's just so awful, and when I saw the hanging of Billy Stubbs's rabbit, I thought, 'Yeah, it's about like that.' Then we get her description -- her terrifyingly vague description -- that "Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop were never quite right afterwards" on the seaside outing that the orphans all went on. "...All we ever got out of them was that they'd gone into a cave with Tom Riddle. He swore they'd just gone exploring, but *something* happened in there, I'm sure of it." Yeow!

JC: Yeah, we're going to see that cave again.

Lorrie: Oh! What did you think of this left-open interpretation description after you read it?

JC: Well, knowing what is in that cave now all this time later (or at the point of the story, what, it would have been like sixty, seventy years later?), it made me wonder what was in there then. They came out again, so what was in there that they saw that frightened them so much that they were never quite the same again? Did he do something? It's so unclear, because at that time he doesn't have the skills to do too many things, but he does have this ability to control other people; we see later that he can just put a bit of magic into his voice and compel people. He's doing the Imperius Curse without knowing that he's doing it, so did he make them do something? There's a lot of really ugly possibilities that are all very unclear.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's meant to be haunting. It's meant to bring unease and terror into the reader. We get a very few more clues later in this chapter, but yeah, we are

meant to just think, 'Who is this? What is this child and what is he capable of doing?' These are early victims of his. Then Dumbledore says to Mrs. Cole, "He will have to return here, at the very least, every summer." There we have that parallel to Harry having to go back to the Dursleys, but this is so much worse. God... Harry, as horrible as the Dursleys are, he's returning to a place that reminds him that he once had family. Tom is not, and when you think at eleven, he's already too big for this extremely depressing threadbare room, can you imagine -- he spent all year at Hogwarts, he wins every prize. He's the most brilliant student, he's loved and popular, and then he has to come back to this room.

JC: Or knowing he can't really tell anyone what he did or what he accomplished, and even if he did, they wouldn't care.

Lorrie: And the bed is smaller and smaller every year.

JC: I'm impressed that he has his own room.

Lorrie: Yes. Yes.

JC: But also, I kind of see that no one else would want to be in a room with him.

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh, yes.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. As bad as you feel for Harry having to go from winning the Quidditch Cup to summer with the Dursleys, this is worse. Are you ready to meet the kid?

JC: Let's do it. Let's go.

Lorrie: So Mrs. Cole says, "I'm sure you want to meet him." "Oh, yes." Oh, God... Dumbledore walks in. He's obviously ready for anything; these "Hi, you're a wizard, Welcome to Hogwarts" meetings... you would have to be ready for anything anyway. Dumbledore shows up, and eleven-year-old Tom gives himself away from the beginning; he says, "'Professor'? Is that like 'doctor'? Tell the truth!" Wow.

JC: You walk into a room and this kid tries to use the Imperius Curse on you immediately, and Dumbledore's going, 'Okay, then. I have my work cut out for me here.'

Lorrie: And it tells you what his life has been like up until now. It's like, 'Oh, no, not another one.' He has reason to be this jumpy and to have developed these defense mechanisms. He says, "'Tell the truth!' He spoke the last three words with a ringing force that was almost shocking. It was a command, and it sounded as though he had given it many times before." Jeez, he's scary. That must have worked always before, too, huh? "...He was glaring at Dumbledore, who made no response except to continue smiling pleasantly."

JC: Very interesting to see Tom Riddle realize through this chapter, 'Oh, this is a person that... This is different.' This person is the first boundary he's ever hit.

Lorrie: Ever.

JC: Ever. Yeah, it's very interesting to watch.

Lorrie: 'I've never felt this before.' This is, at age eleven, what he's experiencing that you're supposed to get from birth as a human. You're supposed to get adults who are powerful enough to withstand your full range of emotions, including your aggression. The adult should be powerful enough to contain your aggression and to continue to be an adult for you without even breaking a sweat. That is apparently the birthright of every infant, because we humans do so poorly when we don't get it. So yeah, this is new for him, and the author chooses to write Tom's reaction as utter fury. He's convinced he's being hoodwinked, so that again tells you so much about how his life has been in the orphanage, and he is only eleven. Without being accused of anything, he blurts out, "I never did anything to Little Amy Benson or Dennis Bishop, and you can ask them, they'll tell you!" So yeah, he's been waiting to be punished for that one, but that's a clue. Okay, whatever he did, he was careful not to leave any marks. He knew that going in. Nothing he did was an identifiable action, and it does call back a bit to Umbridge coming out of the forest and there's no evidence of physical damage, but something clearly had changed for her, or Dudley after he was demented; it's not like he's scarred anywhere, but we are meant to wonder. What are you thinking when you find out that the thing on his conscience left no identifiable trace?

JC: For him personally?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that's scary. He's... Yeah.

Lorrie: He really knows what he's doing.

JC: Yeah, and he comes right out and says that he can use magic to make people and animals bend to his will.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He does the thing that kids do when they find a boundary, which is to start throwing things at it and see what will happen.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's like, 'How awful can I be? Are you still going to accept me? Let me tell you. Let me give you little hints as to just how horrible I am.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'What do you think now?' and he keeps doing it. Dumbledore stops smiling at some point, but Dumbledore takes him seriously...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And also sets some boundaries.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "You're going to call me 'Professor' or 'sir'," and then he does.

Lorrie: Right. I had no idea what to guess that Tom Riddle did to those kids until after I read *Deathly Hallows*. The thing that made me think, 'Oh, I think I know what he did': he's face-to-face with Harry Potter, about to try to kill him -- one-and-a-half-year-old Harry Potter -- and he has a flashback to how much he used to hate in the orphanage when the little ones cried. Oh, I see. He never cried because he had never had anyone to hear him and respond, but not everyone in the orphanage was born there. There are children in there who cry because they might once have been heard in their lives before they lost their families. They had had love, and therefore they can grieve; they do grieve. They used to get a response to their crying. And I think Tom made them more like himself. I think he removed their memories and experiences of love so that they would no longer grieve and wouldn't cry anymore, and that would make them more like him because, as we see

from him creating Horcruxes and then not being able to feel it when anything happens to those Horcruxes, he is unable to feel loss. He never had any affection to lose and can't feel it when he loses something, and I think that's what he did to those kids.

JC: So somehow modified their memories?

Lorrie: Yeah, whatever they were given in infancy that formed connections that enabled them to cry when they were hoping for some response to help them, which he just found annoying. As anybody knows, no matter how much you love a baby, at some point their crying just makes you go, 'Oh, oh, I can't handle it,' and how much worse would it have been for him because it would have just been an annoying noise. He would not have been able to connect it with any of his experience of being comforted. 'Just make them shut up.' The more he can make people loveless, then maybe the less alone he would be. Maybe? At any rate, he would have exerted some control. That's my best guess about what this kid might have done to these small children so that they came out of there completely altered, and yet no one could have any idea what happened to them. Surely they're not harmed in any way, but this is an extreme example of if you say to somebody, "Well, why aren't you grateful? You have food, you have shelter, you have money, you have everything." No, if you're not cared for, there's only so grateful you can be. Dumbledore tries to explain to him that this is a school for people with special abilities, and Tom yells, "I'm not mad!" Yeah, I felt that. People do get punished for having innate traits that are different. Dumbledore's patient, "Yeah, I know you're not mad," and then he introduces the concept of magic. Yeah, even Tom Riddle has that moment, the magic moment: "It's magic, what I can do? There are other people who have heard of it? It's a thing?" Yes, and I could cry, this is so sad. This is that dream come true for kids in really bad situations. 'Maybe I have real people somewhere, and someday, my real people will come for me.'

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: 'Somebody somewhere knows about you already and knows that you were not meant to just rot away like this.' We see Harry get that when the letters come to "the kid under the stairs." "You're better than this. We're taking you away." And yet, Voldemort's moment like this... You would think that he might respond similarly to Harry, but he doesn't; there's all sorts of complication and subterfuge

already for him that makes this way more complicated. Dumbledore is the first chance he has to ask a grown-up, to ask anybody. All these things come rushing out of Tom: "I can make things move without touching them." Okay, so that's neutral. That's just magic. "I can make animals do what I want." Okay, starting to be alarming. "I can make bad things happen to people who annoy me." Uh-oh. "I can make them hurt if I want to." Oh, that is just scary and cruel, because what makes this scary? A child who grew up like him has every reason in the world to want to hurt people. I can't fault him for being angry.

JC: And kids, like you've said several times now, normally would have had that boundary put on them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: All children feel this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're angry, they lash out, and they have to learn that "you can't do that and I'm not going to let you do that." No one has ever been able to stop Tom from doing that.

Lorrie: Yeah, and most people don't have as much reason to want to hurt others as eleven-year-old Tom has gathered already. Most people, if you're in a protected enough situation so that there's an adult who can handle your anger and comfort you and show you alternatives to just lashing out, then you probably don't have as much reason to hate people as Tom does.

JC: But even if you had a child who had that much anger -- I'm trying to imagine Tom in a family situation (even if it was relatives or something, like where Harry grew up) and what kind of person it takes to connect with a kid like that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm thinking about people that I know who work with kids with emotional disturbances and things like that, and it takes a very special kind of person to be able to deal with, work with, support kids who do that. It's all the damage that he's taken, all the trauma that he suffered and whatever else is in there, but it's making me think of seeing teachers dealing with kids in classrooms who are just lashing

out and being abusive and being horrible little shits in a way, but they're also children.

Lorrie: Being very destructive, yeah.

JC: Very destructive, but they're children, and there are ways that you can work with them and bring them around. They deserve a chance. They deserve to be able to be in a school and to be able to learn, so I'm looking at Tom and thinking, 'Yeah, this is a hundred years ago, so none of that would have been happening.' Clearly, they've tried to get him help, and the help at that time would have been locking him somewhere.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, wow, just watching this made me think there were a lot of kids who ended up institutionalized instead of getting the help they needed. Tom is in some ways better off than he could have been, and he probably only did not end up in an institution because of his magic.

Lorrie: Right, and knowing how to defend himself and get himself under the radar that way. Even now, the potential outcomes for kids with really severe anti-social personality disorder... They're not great.

JC: True.

Lorrie: There is so much training and research that people can learn. It doesn't have to be this bad, but I don't know of a happily-ever-after kind of forecast.

JC: It doesn't help that we don't pay these people very much either.

Lorrie: Right. Like Mrs. Cole, they're very, very understaffed and underresourced...

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: And she is really doing not a bad job. She's holding back from judging him and she's observing, but also he's quite a formidable adversary...

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: And that feels realistic, too, because there certainly are people who, in order to survive, maybe don't have any emotional regulation but they do still have

smarts. Tom... This is the first time he can talk to somebody who is going to have what it takes to understand what he's talking about; his legs are trembling, and he's confirming yes, he is different, he is special. He has never been seen, though, until this moment (seen for that); he's never been limited or contained or made to feel safe, given any reason at all not to want to hurt people, and at this point, a little bit of Tom's dream has come true in that Dumbledore is no longer smiling. "Yes. Yes, you are correct. You are in a much worse situation than most people," and this is one of those moments that the author writes where Tom/Voldemort is happy, but it doesn't make him look happy; he looks bestial. He may be getting answers or he may be getting confirmation of the self-image he wants, but he's not getting comfort. "Well, yeah, you are special." I do love that Dumbledore is so confident that we can just see him making up his own rules as he goes along, because Tom commands him to prove that he's a wizard; yeah, as you mentioned, that's when Dumbledore says, "Oh, I get to set the terms. You don't talk to me like that." It's one of those cases in which it's a power move and it's a confrontation, but it's also a comfort. It's providing grown-up guardrails. I'm sure Tom doesn't enjoy it, but it's more than he had before.

JC: And he responds to it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's tested this out. 'Okay, don't mess with this person.' "Riddle's expression hardened for the most fleeting moment..." Yeah, I kind of sympathize with him being angry here. "...Before he said, in an unrecognizably polite voice..." Right. Okay, so he's full of hate, he's full of anger, but he's conceding and he lets loose a microexpression, that "fleeting, hardened moment." This series, this author, is good at writing how not everyone catches microexpressions. Even in a Trio moment, you'll always see that Hermione catches microexpressions, Harry often does, and Ron never does; that's just a human range. Then Harry is very surprised that instead of brushing off Tom, Dumbledore does prove that he's a wizard. Huh, okay.

JC: In very dramatic fashion. I'm fascinated by the choice here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He could have done anything. He sets his wardrobe on *fire*.

Lorrie: I know!

JC: My read of that is this is something that Tom wishes he could do (set things on fire with his powers). Dumbledore... It's a little bit of a move of showing him something that he knows Tom would like to do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Just set things on fire. It's a little bit dangerous, but it also gets his attention. I think it's really interesting, and what I love is that he sets it on fire and then the flames go out, and then Tom is looking at the wand and says, "Where can I get one of them?" It's like he's looking at the Elder Wand, right?

Lorrie: Oh, my God, ouch!

JC: Later on, he's really going to want -- In whichever existence it is, he becomes obsessed with obtaining that wand.

Lorrie: Greedy, yeah. Dumbledore is putting Tom in his place with that fire trick, which to me feels both kind (in that he's providing grown-upness) and very hostile. In my reading, as a teacher, Dumbledore has to prove right away that this new world that he's inviting Tom into is bigger than Tom, and that there's room for Tom to grow into it. Obviously, Tom way outmatches anything the orphanage can offer him. Why would he want to go to this place? Okay, there's more power than he has at the moment. "You can come." I will note: Grace Candido-Beecher does not like *at all* Dumbledore's choice to set this kid's few possessions on fire and do that to him; no wonder he howls with rage at that. So yeah, "Where can I get one of them?" He is sold. That objective succeeded, and then what Dumbledore does to him after that is so much more.

JC: I love it so much, because that idea of, "Yes, I'm powerful. I'm more powerful than you even know. I'm in control here, I'm the one who sets the boundaries. Try me, kid. Look, you didn't get very far," all of that, "but also I have something you want and I know what you did..."

Lorrie: *dramatic gasp*

JC: "And I'm going to make you undo it." That level of omniscience is such a power move. I feel like he comes in... I don't know what he knows before he shows up at this orphanage. Is this pre-Hogwarts letter days? Do they go out and find the kids, or whenever they have a kid in this situation, they make sure to send someone personally? Why did they send Dumbledore in particular?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's a lot of backstory that we don't have. I don't know if he knows what he's going to get when he shows up here, but as soon as he recognizes that he knows what to do...

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh, yes.

JC: To show this kid this is the way things are... It's really masterful, actually.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: It's like I'm cheering for Dumbledore so hard here.

Lorrie: He's very impressive.

JC: Dare I say, 'hot.'

Lorrie: Yeah, it's... Yeah.

JC: Competence kink activated, yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness! The "faint rattling" from inside the wardrobe... This child has never been seen before, and now he is being seen and known despite his extraordinary powers of deception. Wow! New concepts, new experiences for Tom. Oversight. Conscience. Accountability. Wow! What is all this? These are all things that you're supposed to have gotten in childhood by this age. Guess what, Tom? You cannot just do limitless damage. Somebody will know and stop you, and then the thing that he really has never had the opportunity to know is, 'After that, life will go on.' "What? Will they kill me?" "No." "Will they take me away to the asylum?" "No. Life will go on." Becoming a human is really hard and complicated, and he has not had any of that. Of course, we have already seen Dumbledore do this to the Dursleys, where they thought they could just treat Harry any way they wanted, and then once in a while, he sends them reminders ("You know somebody is watching") and that puts the fear in them. The argument people sometimes have

of discounting change, discounting improvements in people's behavior, if they improve out of fear of punishment instead of out of genuine reform? I don't think that's a bad reason for people to improve their behavior. That's humans; that's part of the whole picture. You wait around for people to genuinely reform. A lot of damage is going to happen; you have to stop it before then. Stop the damage. You perform triage, and then go do the healing and the conversion. Let it take the time it takes, but you can't wait until then to stop the damage.

JC: I think this is a thing that I think about a lot in the context of our larger world and in the context of other things. Obviously, there's a lot of complexity in everything that we're dealing with, and the idea that you could be pure about the way you deal with it is just a fantasy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's no pure way where one hundred percent of the people get what they need.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? That idea that you have to put limits on people and punish people sometimes in order to prevent them from doing further harm... That's the first step.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's the triage moment, and that to do it differently would be to allow more harm to come to other people. You have to weigh that, and that's so complicated. It's such a complicated thing, and I think that it's really easy for us to forget that.

Lorrie: Yeah. I'm thinking about conflict resolution tactics where if there's a fight, the first thing you do is separate the fighters. What if there's already a black eye and a broken bone? Well, if you don't separate them, then there will be more. Sort out who's to blame and what has to be done and how to calm down later; first, stop the damage where it is. Is that ideal? No, but how much more damage are you willing to accept before you realize, 'Oh, my God, somebody do something.'

JC: I think it's interesting here, the box of things in the closet that was rattling...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: So interesting. Whatever Dumbledore did, it's amazing that these little box of objects is like, 'Show me your deception,' and then *Decepto Revelio* or whatever, and the little box shakes and Tom is going, 'What the fuck?!' You can see in his little head, he's like, 'What's happening?' There's a harmonica in there, and there's some -- I didn't ping it until Dumbledore says at the end of the chapter, "I had forgotten that they're the trophies that he's kept from his victims."

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: 'Oh, that's dark,' and Dumbledore realizes immediately what it is. He knows what it is and says, "You're going to give these things back, and I will know if you haven't. I'll know."

Lorrie: "You're going to apologize."

JC: "You're going to apologize, and I will know when you've done it." Wow!

Lorrie: How the hell?! Yes.

JC: Yeah. It's badass. I love it. I think that sometimes as a parent or as a teacher, I've wished I had that power.

Lorrie: I know. Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's a fantasy, right?

JC: Yeah, but also, it's a fantasy here for Tom. We talked again and again about how Tom has never had these boundaries. Here is finally an adult who can set a boundary that Tom can't cross, and it makes sense then that later on, people say, "Oh, Dumbledore was the only one he was ever afraid of." I was like, "Well, yeah, he imprinted on that."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Dumbledore appeared, and it was like, yeah, for the rest of Voldemort's existence, 'Oh, that's the brick wall I could never get past.' It's like, 'Oh, wow.'

Lorrie: Well, yeah. The question in Tom Riddle's mind until now is 'What am I? Am I human like the others, or can I just do anything I want and nobody can stop

me? Am I a God? Am I a monster?' Dumbledore coming to do this to him is like, "No, you're not a God or a monster. You're a person.' Huh.

JC: "And a child who has a lot of learning to do."

Lorrie: "Well, make me. Stop me, then."

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, it's a draw for much of the time. They're very evenly matched, but at this moment, Tom is only eleven and he totally recognizes that he's been bested, and he gives Dumbledore "a long, clear, and calculating look." There we go. That sets the tone for their relationship forever. And the contents... Apparently this whole notion of taking trophies from people who you have hurt is their reminders of times you were able to exert control over others. If you're going to relive that... I'm just reading stuff on the internet.

JC: Okay, it's also very like the stereotype of a serial killer, right? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, like the warning signs of how you can tell that someone is suffering from failure of empathy, from lack of nurturing. To me, it was really striking when Dumbledore says to Tom, "You will apologize," because that's something we're going to see later with Snape.

Snape, also as a child, did not know how to apologize -- was not taught how, was never rewarded for learning how -- but that's an essential part of not being afraid of yourself if you do actually harm somebody, knowing how to return from that. Then for Dumbledore to add, "Be warned: Thieving is not tolerated at Hogwarts." All right, better late than never from Tom to start having some structure, and that's a great foundation for Dumbledore to introduce the concept that at Hogwarts, they teach you not only to use magic but to control it. Oh... Yeah, it's time to learn to internalize some limits. 'Huh, okay.' Then he says words like 'expulsion' and 'Ministry' and 'laws'. What the heck? So, JC, as a teaching professional, what kind of things would you recommend to someone in Dumbledore's position if you encounter an admitted student that has just confessed to you that they have committed crimes against their peers? What do you do if you're Dumbledore and you're meeting this kid?

JC: Concerning that it's 1930, I don't know. Today, it'd be like, "Let's go and let's get a social worker involved. Let's get this kid in some therapy. Let's think about the psychiatric evaluation and some behavioral therapy." There would be a lot of tools that we have now to start to sort out what's going on here. Yeah, I don't know what they did. He's just going to send him to Hogwarts and hope that he makes some friends, that it will all sort itself out, I guess. I don't know. Yeah, I don't know. He didn't have the tools that we have now. Could we do a better job now? I don't honestly know, if Tom Riddle popped up in 2026, what would whoever's the headmaster of Hogwarts now do? I don't know.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: If they have learned anything. Well, what they would do differently, but...

Lorrie: In addition to activating the social network (the social services that people have researched), what about comforting the scared kid? It's easier for me to see the ways people could rush in to say, "Oh, my God, you're dangerous, let's neutralize that," but what about also, "Yeah, this is going to be your school. The things that you've just told me, I believe you. I'm taking them in." Or even -- and this might be just pie-in-the-sky, my fantasy of somebody in Tom's position hearing -- "Those things that you've just told me, they must have really scared you. It must be really frightening to be able to hurt people and animals and have nothing happen."

JC: Is that what therapy would be where one would hear that, considering all the other circumstances where there's no adults in this kid's life? I'm just thinking from the perspective of 'teachers can't be that person for him.'

Lorrie: No. There's so much being demanded of a teacher who has twenty, thirty other kids.

JC: And teachers... Our part of the profession is setting up emotional boundaries. You cannot be too emotionally involved with kids for a variety of reasons; part of it is the numbers and part of it is just the ethics of the profession. You're not a parent and that's not your role, but you can refer them to people who could be that role, who could support that. When teachers get too emotionally entangled with kids, bad things happen over and over and over.

Lorrie: Oh, it's not good. Yeah.

JC: It's not good. At Hogwarts, unless there's a counselor, he's not going to get that at Hogwarts.

Lorrie: And we'll see that he didn't. Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, I don't know that we're better now than they were then. I think we know a lot more, but it's not always up to people to be able to provide as much help as you wish.

JC: Yeah. I was in a classroom just a couple days ago and watched one of my student teachers trying to deal with a kid; not knowing anything about this kid's diagnosis or issues, but the kid read very autism spectrum to me. I'm obviously not saying any names or any locations, but watching my student teacher trying to interact with this kid, the kid was just hostile and angry and frustrated, and my student teacher was trying to be patient and had to just say, "Okay, I'm going to come back in a few minutes and walk away and collect yourself," which is the right thing to do and come back. Watching that interaction and watching it continue to go nowhere over the course of about an hour... Our students are not trained. This is not their role in this classroom at this point, but it made me think about, 'What is the school doing to support this kid?' It's hard.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. There's not a good answer there when they're understaffed and they're underpaid, and the school district is laying off teachers because we can't seem to get our legislature to put money into schools because they want to shift everything off to sending our public money to private schools. Kids like that are getting nothing that they need, despite the efforts of all the humans who care in the space, so I think about Tom Riddle almost a hundred years ago; it would have been even less recognition of the issues or what he struggled with or any of that. Everyone's doing their best, but it's not going to go well for him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Well, it will go well for him in some ways, from his perspective.

Lorrie: Well, we know that no matter how well things go, there's that eternal issue for him of looking happy but not comforted. Looking happy, but bestial. Okay, there are separate issues; there's the desolation and fear aside from whether or not things are going his way. That's the irreducible thing about this character of Tom Riddle who becomes Voldemort: you cannot say, "Well, why didn't Dumbledore just do this or that? Why didn't they just do right by him? Why didn't people step in to turn him into not a raging, genocidal monster?" I don't know what those things would be for people who are at that kind of risk right now.

JC: Yeah, and young Tom Riddle is very good at masking it all and projecting what he knows people want to see. He's not going to be knocking on Dumbledore's door and crying.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's not going to be lashing out in very public ways; he's very good at hiding what he's doing, and that's not going to change because he learned the hard way. Even at Hogwarts, he's going to learn he can't be himself. There's still no space for him, even at Hogwarts.

Lorrie: Yeah, and even somebody who is comparatively as innocuous as Harry, we've seen him keep secrets and not tell Dumbledore when he should have. If you have that situation and you have as much to hide as Tom, plus you are smarter than everybody in the entire world (except this one old guy with a beard), yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But at this point, obviously, this is a major step up in Tom's life, so he decides this is all going to be worth it and he will learn whatever there is to learn, and then he just says, "I haven't got any money." He's like, okay, not so charming. He interrupts people, he doesn't say thank you. He can't wait to lose Dumbledore and get started.

JC: I love that Dumbledore just hands him a bag of money and he's like, "Yeah, that's not a problem." Tom, he's lived in, I assume, poverty his entire life. He just pulls out a Galleon and looks at it, like, 'Huh.' No reaction, so money is not what he's greedy for.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That was very interesting to me. You hand an orphan a bag of money, and they're just like, "All right," which is interesting.

Lorrie: Well, it'll get him a wand (which is what he wants), and Dumbledore just goes with it when Tom says, "No, I don't want you coming with me." That's weird, right? Any other eleven-year-old would be like, "What the heck? I don't know what I'm doing. You have to come with me." But Dumbledore observes and he notes that this kid twitches at the name 'Tom' because it's too common, and that leads right into him being a kid again with the painful questions and saying, "Was my father a wizard?" Here, that's something that he has to behave about because Dumbledore here might have his story. He might have some answers, so there's good reasons for Tom to behave if some of that might come from Dumbledore. Dumbledore says, his voice gentle, "I'm afraid I don't know." To me, that's the one spot in this chapter where Dumbledore talks to Tom as I think you would to an eleven-year-old orphan. Just like Harry: "Can you tell me the thing that's really important?" "I wish I could." Then we get this weird child-like logic: "My mother can't have been magic, or she wouldn't have died." That's so kid-like. 'Okay, you're trying to make sense of how badly you've been abandoned. You want to be able to construct some narrative that's an alternative to just there being no explanation. I don't know. Life is just really hard. Life is unfair. Life is miserable.' 'But why, why, why? Was there a reason?' It's this weirdly magical thinking. "Well, okay, she died."

JC: But it's also a little scary because he seems to already have this idea that if you're just powerful enough, you won't die.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Hmm, where is that going to lead him? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's had eleven years alone in this orphanage to send his mind down who knows what paths. Then we see his final bid to impress Dumbledore, which does work: "I can speak to snakes. I found out when we've been to the country on trips -- they find me, they whisper to me. Is that normal for a wizard?" He saved up for this, huh? He's trying to regain some ground and yeah, he gets back that answer. "Yes, you are special, even for a wizard." Okay. So, much, much later, when the movie *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* was released, that movie takes place the year after Voldemort was born...

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: And we meet Nagini when she was mostly a woman only starting to turn into a snake. Obviously, we know that later on, Nagini becomes a big part of Voldemort's life, but at this point when we meet her, they haven't met, and it made me wonder: how did they come to know each other? I wondered, 'I wonder if she came to him because she heard a baby crying in Parseltongue.' I don't know. Sadly, for many reasons -- some of which are the fault of the author's transphobia -- we're never going to find out because that story is never going to be finished.

JC: I remember the movie version of this, Dumbledore looks kind of shocked and haunted by this, "I can speak to snakes."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But in this chapter, he tells Harry, "No, that wasn't the most shocking thing that happened in this memory," which is interesting. It stood out to me just because I think the movie version was more recent in my head than this version. Interesting that the movie version played that up a bit more, but Dumbledore's like, "No."

Lorrie: I like the book version better. What abilities you're born with, that's one thing, but how your personality has grown (possibly in response to some really damaging things), that can be scary.

JC: Something that I like that I think comes back around here is that just as they're about to go into this memory at the beginning, Dumbledore says that they're going to enter one of his own memories, and I love this quote. He says, "I think you will find it both rich in detail and satisfyingly accurate," which is this great little Dumbledore fluffing his own feathers.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But there it is, which is great.

Lorrie: Yeah. That turns out to be such an understatement.

JC: Yeah, it really is, and you can tell that this is a memory that Dumbledore has revisited a lot and has thought about a lot...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And he's very curious to know what Harry's response to it is, but yeah. I love that little, "Of course it's my memory, so it's superior." Yeah. Love it.

Lorrie: Yeah. However much you expect to be blown away, this is going to be bigger than that. So yeah, they exit the memory and Harry has a lot to think about now. Oh, my God...

JC: And it's interesting that Harry immediately connects Voldemort's story to his own. Immediately, he's like, "Wow, he kind of accepted the fact that he was a wizard a lot more quickly than I did." It's hard not to think Harry also got the surprise visit from someone who said "You're a wizard." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, "And I've come to take you out of this hell."

JC: And Harry also asked him, "Did you know?" and Dumbledore says no. "No, I just thought, 'Oh, this kid has already got a lot of powers. That's very interesting, and we're going to have to help him move this in the right direction,'" but he didn't know that he was going to become this genocidal maniac kind of character that he did, which again at this point in the story, you can look back and think, 'Okay, this kid wasn't damned, right?'"

Lorrie: Yes, exactly.

JC: He wasn't fated to become this; he had choices at this time. The kid had choices.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's not foreordained. There are people in life who are born into just as many impossible difficulties as Tom Riddle was. Are they doomed to become like him? No. In fact, almost nobody born into this kind of terrible situation turns out to be Tom Riddle...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But they do have a lot to struggle against, and none of it is a simple, easy way out. Dumbledore tries to point out to Harry, "Okay, there are a few things I want you to pay attention to: see how he had contempt for the name 'Tom' because it was too ordinary." That makes me think, 'Okay, Voldemort wants to be exempt from anything ordinary, because if he is extraordinary, that might justify his pain. That might give him some narrative other than just life is unfair to some people.'

JC: Ooh, yeah. That's kind of a popular idea, like the tortured artist or something, or people who suffered and then they've overcome it and gone on to do great things. That's such a myth that we all kind of buy into, and I can see how a young Tom Riddle would be like, 'Okay, I'm suffering all this for a reason. There's a reason. I'm destined for something bigger than this.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Or in some basic way, it's like, 'I'm going to be exempt from penalties later because I already paid, right?' No, you're not exempt. Then Dumbledore wants Harry to know that Tom operated alone: "You will hear many of his Death Eaters claiming they are in his confidence, that they alone are close to him, even understand him. They are deluded." That's just a flat fact out of Dumbledore. This is the evidence for me that Snape learned to fly not from Voldemort. I think it would be out of character for Voldemort to share something that's so rare of a skill that sets him apart and makes him special, especially not with an underling. This is one of the areas where Grace Candido-Beecher and I disagree, because she thinks that it was from Voldemort. Yeah, Dumbledore calls attention to the souvenirs of particularly unpleasant bits of magic.

JC: That's going to be important later.

Lorrie: Yeah. Speaking of which, Marvolo Gaunt's ring is no longer there. Yay, observant Harry! Dumbledore beams at Harry for this. Yes! And that brings us right back to the beginning of this chapter when, no matter how tired and ill he is, Dumbledore is so happy to see Harry because whatever Dumbledore is working on, this is the answer to what he was doing. We know we will find out in *Deathly Hallows* that there was some point at which Dumbledore charmed the Resurrection Stone into a Snitch and changed his will.

JC: Ooh, yeah. That's another thing about that moment that really stood out to me. He stops, he sees the ring's not there, and Dumbledore says, "'Yes, Harry?'... for Harry had come to a halt. 'The ring's gone,' said Harry looking around. 'But I thought you might have the mouth organ or something.'" Then Dumbledore beams at him, and he says, "Very astute, Harry, but the mouth organ was only ever a mouth organ." The ring was not just a ring?! Okay, thank you. Harry just goes, 'Huh' and walks on, but me the reader is going, 'Oh, my God!'

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry has had to deal with this from Dumbledore for years, and knows there's no point. When he drops one of these things on you, you just... "All right, fine. Obviously, I'm not going to understand that this year."

JC: The whole chapter... Getting Voldemort's backstory is really interesting.

Lorrie: So intense. It's so irreducibly painful.

JC: Right. I think, too, the idea that he didn't spring forth from the ground evil, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He was a troubled kid with a traumatic past, and he made certain choices that took him down this path. I think it's a really important thing about his backstory. Hitler wanted to go to art school, right? It's like those kinds of stories. Okay, people make choices.

Lorrie: I do like the picture this gives me of Dumbledore's life arc: this was a student that Dumbledore failed with. In this chapter, Dumbledore's middle-aged and he's not inexperienced, but this is a big challenge, and I'm sure that in his position, he might have thought, 'Oh, I wonder if I had done something or other differently...' Well, for one thing, he had another chance with Snape and kind of did fail there before turning that around with a second chance for both Snape and for him as somebody who could reach Snape; now he's being faced again with that with Draco, so we do see him handling Draco differently and knowing more about how to try to intervene. But we also see that Dumbledore hasn't given up on Voldemort; Dumbledore will never be able to reach Voldemort, but Harry can, so he's going to try to arm Harry. 'Okay, this is who we're dealing with. Maybe somebody can reach -- maybe you can't spare Voldemort pain, but maybe still some connection can happen for him.'

JC: Right. It's really important that Harry understands Voldemort's story.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We know that for Harry, understanding his own story is important and getting pieces of his story is important, but that idea that you really need to know the story of the person? I think that's a really cool feature here. It's not enough to just say, "This person's evil; they need to be destroyed." We need to know more.

Lorrie: And it'll help you form your own interval boundaries against that person. Knowing where Voldemort is coming from, Harry can see, 'Well, these things in my life and his life were similar, but I'm still me. All of his attempts to subsume my identity... No, no.' You can see the fear that gave rise to all of that damage.

JC: I have one more question here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Timing-wise... I said earlier when we were talking that I thought Dumbledore had the Elder Wand here, but is that true? Did this happen? Was Grindelwald defeated before this or... What's the timeline?

Lorrie: Grindelwald was defeated in 1945. Let's see... Ah. No, it's not the Elder Wand.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Voldemort was born in 1926.

JC: So this would have been 1937-ish.

Lorrie: 1938, yeah.

JC: Okay, yeah. Okay, so it was not the Elder Wand. Dumbledore has not had that famous throwdown with Grindelwald yet.

Lorrie: No.

JC: That hasn't happened, and that happened... Would that have happened then while -- No, Tom Riddle would have been out of Hogwarts by then. I guess I'm wondering about the overlap between young Tom Riddle/Lord Voldemort and Grindelwald's attempt to take over the world. They would have been at the same time.

Lorrie: Yep, yeah. He would have been in power during Tom Riddle's formative years.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that whole World War II situation created an orphanage economy in England. It was one of the things that shaped the first half of the 20th century in

England and the various poverty and disruption and trauma. But yeah, the *Harry Potter* series is very much dealing with World War II and post-World War II England, right? Frank Bryce's story coming back from the war and the village trying to handle the brokenness that came after the war, but to have a terrifying connection to current events... That's what we have to prepare for during any time of increased violence and war: it's going to warp people in this way, and we're going to need to call on any resource we can to try to combat that and try to provide connectedness and comfort and nurturing to people.

JC: Well, speaking of providing comfort...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think the next chapter, we're going to see a little bit of that, aren't we?

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, some mercy coming our way. The next chapter is called Felix Felicis.

JC: Nice! I'm excited to read that one.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I remember really enjoying that chapter.

Lorrie: It's pretty inventive.

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