



Transcript

Episode 6.14

Book 6, Chapter 14: Felix Felicis

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 Fourteen: Felix Felicis.

Lorrie: Felix Felicis. In Herbology class, Harry, Ron, and Hermione talk about the Christmas party Slughorn is planning. Ron is a nervous wreck about playing Keeper in the upcoming match against Slytherin; Harry has a plan to help Ron out. So here we are after that super intense chapter about Voldemort's origins. This chapter gives us an account of teen social life at Hogwarts.

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: Yeah. Even with the war going on -- even with Harry being 'the Chosen One' -- they're still teenagers.

JC: It feels like a different genre than the previous chapter. This feels like a teen drama, like an episode of one of those things that would be on the CW.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a high school.

JC: Yeah. It's like, 'Whoa!' A little bit of, 'Uh, hello...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But yeah, a lot of fun.

Lorrie: And because I respect the unity of the author's vision in this book so much, I think she does an incredibly skillful job of weaving in the themes that we saw in the Voldemort storyline as they would play out in a normal teen's development here. It's beautifully harmonized, I find. I really love it. Yeah, we get one of those delightful passages where there's a Trio conversation, and we get a slice-of-life scene in a class where they're wrestling with the Snargaluff stumps; it's hazardous as always and they are no more successful than anybody else, and they're worse for it after class.

JC: It is so interesting that of all the classes they take, Herbology is the one where it's just messy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's no way around it. It doesn't matter how good you are at magic, you've got to put on the safety gear, you've got to suit up, and you just have to be prepared for unpleasantness. It's so interesting that this is the one subject that just stays messy somehow.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was trying to think, 'What is an equivalent of that in school?' and I can't really think of anything that's like that. I have no idea. Maybe some kind of what we now call CTE -- what we used to call Voc Ed -- where you're doing a real job, basically, learning how to do something real and it's really hands-on, like learning how to be a plumber or something. I don't know...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's like, 'Oh, wow.' Yeah, this is just messy, but I do love that they're having normal conversations while they're putting on all this equipment.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I like the phrase 'gum shield,' that Harry has to insert a gum shield. That's the least romantic thing you can imagine.

JC: What is a gum shield?

Lorrie: It's like a mouth guard.

JC: Oh, okay. There you go. All right, they're really... I imagine almost beekeeper outfits here, everything completely covered.

Lorrie: This is the safety equipment that you always bemoan they're not using during Potions.

JC: That is true. Something about it's either the subject itself or it's Professor Sprout, one or the other.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I can imagine Snape being like, "You're not necessarily going to have a vent hood when you're trying to brew a potion or this safety equipment."

Lorrie: Or "If you do it properly, you wouldn't need one."

JC: Yeah. That could be it, too, right? Yeah, but no, Professor Sprout's like, "Suit up, kids."

Lorrie: Yeah. There's no controlling some of these plants. It's very humbling and equalizing, which is a good thing about Hufflepuffs in general.

JC: This is true. Now, before they get into the teen drama, at the beginning Harry is telling Hermione and Ron about what he learned from Dumbledore. I like that little reminder that Dumbledore didn't want it to be kept a secret from the people that Harry trusts and from the people that Dumbledore knows Harry's going to need to be relying on in the future, so I like that little reminder that Hermione and Ron are in on the lessons, getting the information from Harry.

Lorrie: They are the team.

JC: And that team is about to have some trouble.

Lorrie: God... Yeah. Here they are talking, and Professor Sprout scolds them because you're not supposed to be talking in class. Ron says, "Should have used Muffliato," and as always, whenever the Half-Blood Prince is mentioned, Hermione is in a terrible mood and says, "No, we shouldn't have," and she looks

grumpy. Hermione can be counted upon to be miserably envious and uncomfortable and threatened at any mention of the Half-Blood Prince.

JC: There's a lot of that going around in this chapter.

Lorrie: There is.

JC: Everybody's jealous of something or someone.

Lorrie: Oh, it's painful. Yeah. So as they are struggling with this very stubborn-sounding plant, they're talking about how Slughorn is planning a Christmas party and how there's no way Harry's going to be able to avoid it because Slughorn cornered Hermione to say that he was going to schedule it around Harry.

JC: Yeah. Also interesting to find that Hermione has been going to these parties, which, yeah, is interesting.

Lorrie: And she doesn't hate them.

JC: Yeah, she doesn't hate them, even though she complains about how Slughorn's always... I think it's Cormac McLaggen who has all of Slughorn's attention.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Ron is, of course, as miserable and excluded as anybody would be. There's just no solving the issue of envy. It is miserable, and that's all there is to that. Ron is, in his jealousy, suggesting that she hook up with McLaggen, and that's when he hits so close to home that Hermione reveals something. She says, "We were allowed dates. I was going to ask you."

JC: Yeah. The really awkward asking-out of Ron, and then Harry immediately is like, 'I'm going to go over here.'

Lorrie: 'I wish I could be very far away. I'm going to go as far as I can, which is not nearly far enough,' and as soon as Hermione says that, she's turned completely red. There's none of this, 'Oh, as a friend'; no, no, no, she's turning red. Everything about Ron changes. "You were going to ask...? Oh, shit..." Of course, she only revealed this because he already was scornful, and he's like, "No, no, I take it all back!" Poor Harry is just astral-projecting somewhere, and his overriding worry is, 'Suppose they start dating. Is that going to ruin their friendship dynamic?' He's worried about that for himself and Ginny, as well as for these two. Obviously, their lives are all on the line, so he's not wrong to be worried, but even any normal 16-

year-olds with nothing on the line except everyday friendship would have the same worries, and it's really bad. If things go even normally wrong, you could lose your whole support system, of course.

JC: Yeah, and if they go well, then you're a third wheel.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Both extremes of that, as he reflects, are unpleasant or not great, so yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you never know, when they cross over from being school kids without relationships into having their first physical relationship, who's going to turn out to be super libidinous and making out in public all over the place. You don't know who that's going to be, and maybe that person doesn't know themselves until it happens. 'Ugh, how are we going to deal with that?' There's that window of a few years during middle to high school where people cross over from never having had a physical relationship into gradually being initiated into that knowledge, and that competition... It's a competitiveness and an innocence versus experience thing. It is unavoidably wracked in envy. There's the envy if you have feelings for somebody and they don't like you back -- you're awkward -- and then there are some people (which I just would watch and marvel) that effortlessly, anytime they feel like dating somebody, there's somebody suitable right there and it just always works for them. Okay, I don't get it... Then there's the pain if there's you and a friend who want the same person who likes one of you and not the -- Oh, my God, the pain is so horrible. Then there's also, around this age, the dynamic where there's people who have a lot of physical romantic experience, and they go around all special and they needle the ones who have never done anything. Oh, my God, it's rough. Here's poor Ron struggling... Meanwhile, while they're all dealing with this kind of competitiveness as they are at their own paces struggling through adolescence, Katie is so injured: she's still in St. Mungo's, and Harry needs a new Chaser, so he gets Dean (who he's jealous of because Dean's dating Ginny). When he taps Dean, who is thrilled to be on the team now, Seamus is jealous because Seamus tried out for the same position and he came in just behind Dean; while Seamus is unhappy about this, one of the birds that Hermione has conjured poops on his head. Oh, I'm so glad I'm not that age anymore. Oh, God...

JC: It is funny that the conjured bird is like a real bird. Somehow in my head, if you conjure up something that's an illusion, the fact that it poops on his head was kind of a surprise to me.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I thought, 'Huh, I didn't think there were real birds. What? Okay.'

Lorrie: Maybe the birds aren't real, but the poop is definitely real, Seamus.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: These kids don't have the terrible, deprived past that Tom Riddle had, and even their normal envy and desire and yearning and emotional starvation is intolerable. That is the nature of it no matter what, but we've just seen what it does to Tom Riddle. All of these kids had some sort of love starting out in their lives. They were loved by family; even Harry got a good year and a half of that. If this degree of normal growing into adulthood and romance is making them crawl out of their skins, then it's unimaginable how much worse it is for Tom Riddle.

JC: Also, I can't help but think about Merope as well here.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Just how awful...

Lorrie: And completely hopeless, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Just because nobody would ever look at her, just because she had zero prospects ever, doesn't mean she wasn't wracked with the same kind of yearnings as everybody else, and worse because she didn't even have normal family support. Here are all these comparatively normal kids and they're just miserable. Oh, God... except Dean at this moment.

JC: Yeah. Dean's on top of the world.

Lorrie: At the moment, yeah.

JC: At the moment. The other thing that happens here I think is interesting is when Harry's thinking through the pressure that he's feeling as the leader of the Quidditch team, right? He's the captain, but he's also the coach, right?

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: He's in charge of all of this, so everybody expects him to do a great job and he knows that no matter what he does, people are going to be upset about it and he comments, "Well, I'm used to that. I know I'm not going to make everybody happy." He thinks about how important it is to win this (because otherwise, everybody in Gryffindor will be mad at him), but then he reflects on the fact that, 'Well, it'd still be better than all the other times that they all hated me.' It made me think about the amount of resilience that Harry has compared to a lot of kids his age in this story, but also in the real world. Damn, this kid's been through a lot.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The kind of pressure that would make some kids fold completely is nothing at this point compared to other things he's been through.

Lorrie: He is experienced; in the previous book, when Susan Bones's family was going through a lot of trauma and violence, she says, "Okay, now I see what you've been through, Harry." There's that equalizing, but no, he has perspective that he would have preferred not to have.

JC: Yeah. It doesn't say this in so many words, but the feeling I get after that little internal monologue is, 'You know, that's not a terrible problem to have, to be the captain of a Quidditch team and to have all this pressure.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He can take it, and this is leadership. When you know that whoever is the leader is going to be scapegoated if anything natural and normal goes wrong, well... Can you handle it? Some people can't. Ron, of course, is having first-time jitters in a really bad way; Harry... It's not first-time for anything. 'All right, I could be a leader, then. I'll take that on. Great!' When there are people who involuntarily have really, really terrible lives (worse than their peers) and suffer trauma and have so much more struggle, this is one of the compensations. You

wouldn't prefer it, but it is true that, well, there are some things that you end up being stronger about that you can work with better than somebody who's never faced it before. It's not great -- it's a very small consolation prize -- but it is real. Ron's nerves...

JC: Poor Ron.

Lorrie: Wreck his playing.

JC: I feel for Ron here.

Lorrie: It's so understandable.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Most people manage not to be as devastated as Ron, but it happens, and you can totally see how it would happen.

JC: Yeah, and he's there because Hermione cheated. That's why he's there, but also he can be really good (as he proves later in this chapter), so he's definitely having an off day. But Harry... I like that Harry is such a leader here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry recognizes that Ron's getting in his own head, that his problem is confidence; if he's just confident, he can do it. That's great. There's also this moment when Ron accidentally injures one of the other players and Harry knows how to fix that, and I think it's the same spell that Tonks used on him at the beginning of the book when he had the broken nose. He could just fire that off. Wow, there's a lot of jobs that the Quidditch captain has to take on here, like first aid and psychoanalyzing the players and providing them emotional support and giving them physical support. He's doing a lot here, and he has to go and give Ron a big pep talk afterwards, because Ron is like, "I'm going to quit the team."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry's... Wow, he's really taking on a lot of responsibility in this, but he shows that he's very capable of handling it.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, he is the right person for this position. It's part of his showing in this volume, 'You know what? He's not a kid anymore. He's quite impressive, actually.'

JC: Very much so, yeah. It's like, 'Wow, really competent.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And in ways that we've seen previous Quidditch captains that were starting to fold under the pressure, right? I think the last two Quidditch captains we've seen are people who would just get kind of crazy, for lack of a better word. When the matches got closer and closer, they would just be muttering to themselves and snapping at people, and Harry's not doing that. He's got it together. He's calm. He's thinking through everything. It's really... yeah. It says a lot about... He's already had to be calm under life-threatening pressure before; he's good at this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, yeah, he has been forced to develop perspective, and it is actually helping.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: So there's Ron illustrating how competitive sports are half mental, and if you only focus on the physical training, that can leave you wide open unless you also accompany it with a mental training (which Harry is stepping in to provide), and then whatever headway he makes with Ron in the pep talk gets destroyed instantly -- Oops! -- as they walk in on Dean and Ginny in some secluded corner, having what seems to be a particularly heated makeout session.

JC: This scene is... Okay, so it's interesting in a lot of ways. First of all, this triggers Harry's really intense jealousy, and at this point in the story, he doesn't really understand that he's jealous. He just feels *rawr*

Lorrie: 'Wow, what's that feeling?' Yeah.

JC: 'What is this feeling?' Yeah, which is weird to me. I always thought that was a fictional thing, but I'm not sure. This whole not understanding that the feeling that you feel for someone is romantic in nature, and then feeling jealous and feeling

angry and feeling all these things, and then suddenly realizing it... I've never experienced that in my life. I don't know if that's a true thing that happens or not, but it happens so often in stories that it must be a part of the human experience that I just don't know.

Lorrie: I'm with you in that that's not how I am either, but so many people operate this way that I guess it's just one major way that people can be wired.

JC: Man... It's like the italicized *Oh* moment in the story, right? It's like that. Harry has one of those.

Lorrie: Right, and also the intensity of it is at a scale he's never experienced before, so he's surprised. That I am familiar with, where you think you know a feeling but then some circumstance happens, and you think just how much I feel I'm not prepared for. I do know the kind of intolerable conflagration of jealousy that is being described here: 'I cannot believe anything could hurt this much.' Rowling describes it as, "Something large and scaly erupted into life in Harry's stomach, clawing at his insides."

JC: The chest monster.

Lorrie: Yeah, the chest monster, the famous chest monster. This is one of the areas where I think it's so brilliantly done because it's showing how, if you're a normal kid -- the normal teen and adult life that Harry Potter longs for (that he wishes he could have, that he's fighting Voldemort over)... Voldemort wants Harry to just be a character in the Voldemort life story, and Harry and Dumbledore are fighting for Harry to have the right to have his own normal life. Of course, non-consensually, Harry's had these huge, horrible, volatile emotions that Voldemort ordered him to have, and it's always been his unenviable job to sort through, 'How much of this is genuinely me? How much of this is the reaction to trauma? How much of this no other kid has,' and lucky Harry gets to suffer through it because of Voldemort. How much of this is genuinely Harry? How can he tell? He's one person. Here, this out-of-control feeling (which we are all suspecting, including Harry) is actually just the way it is; even though it's almost intolerable in its intensity, apparently, everyone has to go through this. Is this natural, or is this Voldemort? Certainly, it's just as painful as some of the stuff that Harry only experiences because of Voldemort, but they're all going through it, so he has to be a pretty secure person to be able to

withstand sorting through all these confusing things as well as suffering in the moment. I love -- love, love, love -- the way that this is illustrating that natural libido at this age is, by nature, genuinely monstrous. It's not tame. It's not civilized. We don't control it. We can do our damndest to try to contain it and not hurt other people, but the feeling itself is wild. Humans are more or less rational in different areas; this is, by nature, not rational. The monstrosity, if you civilize it entirely, then you cut yourself off; it's not good for you. You have to face the uncontrollable, irrational monstrosity of it in yourself if you're going to claim a full-on, healthy life. It's humbling, and the pain of it... One of the instant desires that comes with it is the desire to control other people so you can moderate this pain. It would be lovely to make your crush want you back. It would be great to stop them looking at some other person that way instead because you're dying, right? The emotion is so, so, so awful, you could be like Merope and do it by magic. Is that ever a good idea with this great power that wizards and humans have? To take the obvious and terrible example, humans can get rape drugs and administer them to other humans and do, and they're easy enough to get that it's your choice. 'I have that power; I can choose not to use it.' Suppose you make the other decision and you take that power and you do choose to use it; what is it going to bring you? Is it going to give you what you want? These are all completely non-magical but Voldemort-level emotional struggles that are native to this age group, especially in their degree of inexperience in feeling for the first time at this degree of intensity, and it's time. It's not like you have a crush and you just have to deal with it; it's like no, this is the time when you're supposed to enact where these feelings are taking you and learn how to be in the world and exist with other humans, incorporating these feelings and growing into them. It's such a tall order and, compared to this normal, healthy situation and how much of a burden it is on these kids, then you think about where Voldemort's coming from. How could he not have become monstrous? Meanwhile, Harry is just a normal sixteen-year-old watching his crush make out with someone else and there's a monster in him. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JC: I guess the other dimension of the scene, then, is Ron's reaction to it. Harry's reaction is very much coming from his own jealousy and the fact that he really likes Ginny, and he's just about to figure that out. Ron's reaction is part protective older brother, part horrifically sexist, and part jealous that even his baby sister is more experienced in this area than he is.

Lorrie: It is... Yeah, it's envy. It's the life and death nature of sexual competition and the way that you just never know, when you're on the inexperienced side of it as a teen, maybe you'll turn out to be like Snape and live into a very embittered early middle age and you'll never get this. Sometimes that happens -- you don't know what your future is going to be -- or maybe you'll turn out to have Hermione's life, where nobody wanted her and then somebody did, and then she turns out to have a really beautiful, fulfilling love history in adulthood. But at the beginning, when she's all frizzy hair and teeth, there's no telling. Ron is still on the 'Well, no one's ever wanted him' end of things. You don't know what you're facing; all you know is that at this moment, everything is really miserable.

JC: Yeah. Ron has still not had a good day.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Snape is very much the example in this book -- Snape and Filch: nobody wants them, nobody ever has, nobody ever will. Does it mean that they don't wish? No! Who knows what they feel on the inside, but nobody wants that combination of ridicule and pity that these merciless teenage kids must feel when they look at these adults that might be their future, too. Ugh... So yeah, no, Ginny, as usual, is always completely, devastatingly correct and puts her finger on it and says, "If you didn't have that inexperience and that jealousy, you wouldn't be having this problem. Leave me alone. Stop projecting."

JC: Yeah, yeah, and she doesn't even let him finish the sentence when he basically is about to slut-shame his sister.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She's like, "No!" I like that, too. We've talked a little bit about how Ginny is a little bit of a Mary Sue here in the series, but I actually really like that character a lot, and I like how she gets to be that way. It's just nice to see a girl get to be that way. But yeah, pointing out that even Harry and Hermione have both kissed someone and Ron hasn't...

Lorrie: And Ron's dying on the inside as she says these completely true things.

JC: Yeah. You think about the fact that she had a crush on Harry and she knew that Harry was briefly dating Cho, so she's dealt with that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah. She has the unenviable reason to have some perspective on this, and poor Ron (who I identified with so much) tries to lie and says, "Well, I've done it too, just not in public," and she just laughs in his face. Oh, dear...

JC: Even Harry knows that's a lie.

Lorrie: Everybody knows. Yeah. Nice try, Ron. There are many examples. There's the ongoing eternal debate about YA fiction: do authors have the responsibility to show healthy examples of how to have relationships? Should it be allowed that fiction writers should show the bad, destructive, not-good examples that are in real life, or should they always be like, 'This is how you put on a condom'? 'Never do this without a condom,' even though (if you're going to be recording real life) sometimes people do, sometimes whatever. In this case, it's very much doing the good example thing where Ron is trying to say a bunch of negative things to Ginny that are completely typical. These are absolutely things that would come up in any sibling -- This is very typical, and Ginny's stopping him before he can get any further, and that is the virtuous manual. 'Oh, no, that argument will be in the air and it's bullshit. Don't even try.' We see that a number of times in this chapter; when these terrible feelings occur, you're not going to enjoy it, but there are things you shouldn't do that are bad. There are a lot of things Hermione could have said or done later on in this chapter when she's in terrible pain, and she doesn't do them. You can pick fights with people, you can try to control them, you can try to get in the way; no, you just have to suffer through this. Don't do those things. Ginny, I think, stopping Ron as he voices all this stuff from his pain is a beautiful example of, 'No one's going to enjoy this, but here. If you do it this way, it's the least harmful way.' Ouch. I'm sure -- positive -- that when I was that age and in painful situations, I did not behave as commendably as Ginny and Hermione. I'm sure I could've used some of this advice.

JC: So I guess they make it back to the dorm room. This is the point at which Harry starts to really understand what he's feeling and he figures it out really quickly, which is kind of nice. He's like, 'Okay, that's what I'm feeling,' and then feels conflicted about it.

Lorrie: Well, no denying that, yeah. Oh, this is also the first instance that we see that they pass a first-year student in the seventh-floor corridor who jumps and then drops something. Here they are, having this loud argument, and this little first-year

is carrying a bottle of toad spawn and it shatters audibly. There's nothing unusual about that. Yeah, these very large people are shouting very loudly. Okay, that's a detail we will clock later.

JC: Oh, okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, Harry is afraid that if he moves on his feelings for Ginny, Ron is going to feel betrayed and that is possible. Oh, gosh, after all of that jealousy, the next day (after Ron has been brooding over how Harry has made out with people and Hermione has made out with people) Ron is "treating a hurt and bewildered Hermione with an icy, sneering indifference." Yeah, that is so real. I have definitely felt envy about something that happened years before that I can't control, but I can't control the envy; there's nothing the person could do about it. That was in the past, but oh, I remember that ache so well, and Ron is not choosing to behave this way. His feelings are just so pained. Oof.

JC: Yeah. He really is taking out that jealousy that Hermione, apparently two years ago, kissed Viktor Krum...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's taking this out on everybody around him. Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I have to say I understand. I've been there, and of course that means his Quidditch playing is hitting rock bottom. Oh, boy... The team hates him.

JC: Yeah. There's that moment where the rest of the team are huddled somewhere shooting dirty looks at Ron.

Lorrie: Looking at him and talking. Oh, jeez... and Harry refuses to let Ron resign. This is the moment where Harry gets an inspiration. Will you take us through what he does?

JC: Yeah, and interesting. I remember the first time through reading this thinking that it was real because of the way that it's written and everything works out, but yeah, he has the Felix Felicis potion and he pretends to dose Ron's pumpkin juice with it; he does it in sight of Hermione because he knows that Hermione will react by pointing out what Harry just did and how wrong it is, and he knows that Ron will gain confidence from this. The amount of manipulation of his friends' emotions that he's doing here is a little terrifying, actually. Ron needed a dose of

confidence. Ron needed something. He needed to be raised back up again, but this also has the impact of really hurting Hermione, and this puts a cleaver in the relationship between Hermione and Ron. This pushes off their romance for a really long time. They're not going to get over this.

Lorrie: Harry got so far and was so insightful with some, and then immediately realized, 'Oh, this is one of the prices to pay for being a manipulation master. Oh, I didn't see that coming. Oh, shoot.' It's very Dumbledore, right? You know that the nature of Hermione is to react a certain way; you know that this student, Ron, has not yet learned the power of mental reframing or that you do challenging things by somehow making yourself believe that you already done them, which is what happened to Harry casting the Patronus at the end of the *Prisoner of Azkaban* because when he realized, 'Oh, if I don't cast it, no one's going to. Oh, but I've done it before.' That's mental reframing; he had never done it before, but now he knows. He's using these Dumbledore tactics and he's really growing into them. It's really well done. It's very clever; it's a beautiful way to teach Ron that whole lesson of, 'Yes, it's taking place in your head, but that doesn't mean it's not real.' You can learn to do things in life without having to go through them while you are able to think yourself into knowing how to do things. You're not helpless that way; you can make it happen. So yeah, this is Harry moving into his baby Dumbledore era.

JC: That's great.

Lorrie: The wording is a parallel to what Umbridge did to him, because when Umbridge tries to give him Veritaserum, she says, "Tea? Coffee? Pumpkin juice?" Here, Harry, in that order, offers Ron tea, coffee or pumpkin juice, and then he says the same words that Umbridge says: he says, "Drink up."

JC: I didn't notice that. Whoa, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Right? Having survived Umbridge's attempt knowledgeably -- faking her out successfully -- now he's repeating that in a different kind of fake-out. Hermione does what Hermione does and accuses him of spiking the drink. The author plays the trick on us where she shows us Harry saying, "I don't know what you're talking about," ostentatiously hiding his bottle. Definitely the author committing to playing her little joke on us for a few pages, and I enjoy how smug it is that the author has Harry thinking (omniscient narrator): "Hermione had never really understood how

important Quidditch is." 'Okay, we're just going to have to be here reading this until you decide to tell us what's happening,' playing with the reader, like, 'Wait, is our perfect hero cheating? What?! Um...?'

JC: Yeah. Also, it's believable that Harry would use the Felix Felicis for another person.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Knowing how he actually uses it later on, it's like, 'Okay, he would never use it for this purpose. It's just a game, right?'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Not because it's against the rules, but because he has genuine things that he is going to need this for in the future, and he would not sacrifice that incredible bit of magic for a game...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But he's absolutely going to let everybody believe that he did for a little while.

Lorrie: Yeah. This thing that they were explicitly told is against the law -- 'You're not supposed to do this' -- but this is just another aspect of 'You could make your crush drink a love potion. You could... No, you're not supposed to. You're just going to have to suffer through it, like a Muggle or something.' And yeah, then they find out that suddenly conditions are ideal and all these little plot details fall into line to support the supposition that it really was lucky potion. That does happen, too, if you have bias and you look at things and you're like, 'Maybe it's true. Maybe it's all coming true!'

JC: Yeah, we had this conversation -- I don't know, a while back, didn't we? -- that I do tend to look at my own life as being very lucky in situations where other people wouldn't necessarily, so yeah. Yeah, that happens here where the weather is great, and then two of the Slytherin players are down. One person is a new Seeker, even.

Lorrie: Yeah. Their top Chaser has an injury that (as far as we can tell) is genuine, but then Malfoy is out sick and has gotten a very not-good player to be his substitute. Harry knows Malfoy would fake, but he doesn't fake and then let

someone else take his spot. Something's up; as usual, Harry has zero proof and is completely correct about Draco.

JC: Right. It's interesting, too, because I think this is another moment (referring back to the whole Draco subplot that's happening) that we haven't talked about in a little bit: this reminder that Draco has moved on.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't care about school anymore. He doesn't care about his schoolboy rivalry with Harry. He doesn't want to beat Harry at Quidditch. That is just so different for where he is in his life; it just doesn't matter anymore. It's whatever the Hogwarts equivalent of senioritis is. Draco has moved on.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's moved on. Yeah.

Lorrie: He's got bigger worries, which Harry does too. Hermione, of course, has completely compromised herself because when she tries to lecture Harry about cheating, Harry is completely prepared to say, "Hark who's talking. Confunded anyone lately?" That takes care of Hermione.

JC: Really, it's like, "Okay, we're in this situation because you cheated in the first place."

Lorrie: 'Hypocrisy is going to get you.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Ron plays brilliantly. The whole mental aspect of it... Yes. If you are competing, you're going to have to figure out a way to hack yourself so that your mind doesn't get in the way. He is his best Quidditch self.

JC: Yeah. He saves everything and he's getting into it and the crowd is cheering for him. And then we have a new commentator...

Lorrie: Oh, my God!

JC: In Zacharias Smith, who is being a complete asshole.

Lorrie: He's so horrible.

JC: But it's also funny, because the previous commentator was a Gryffindor; from the Gryffindors' perspective, he was great, but I'm sure from the Slytherins' perspective, he was not great. It's like, 'Okay, well, they're passing around the duty here.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then Ginny pretends that it was an accident -- everybody knows that it's not -- that she crashes into his podium.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Really?! This is lawless.

JC: Yeah, very much.

Lorrie: Nobody is being fair in the slightest in any aspect.

JC: Yeah. Even Harry has to be a little manipulative, even, to distract his opponent from the Snitch. People do this all the time in competitive sports. It's not like it's... Normally, Harry just relies on his ability to get to the Snitch first and to fly faster, and this time he has to pull a little trick.

Lorrie: He was wrong. He shouldn't have let this other person get closer to the Snitch, but unlike this first-time player, he has a whole bag of tricks, which he came by honestly. It's one of those Harry instinct moments in the plot where he says, "How much did Malfoy pay you to come on instead of him?" and he didn't even plan it; it was a shot in the dark, and Harper is so shocked to have been read completely correctly that Harry moves in and gets it right. Yeah, there are a few places in this plot where Harry acts on instinct, and that's just how the plot advances. But that is also the way... When you understand conspiracy and you have to work on it and you're not going to get a lot of confirmation, you do have to develop that skill and Harry has it. All of Harry's hunches about Draco are correct; he has known Draco for several years. He's had the pleasure.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yikes! So they win! Hermione bravely gathers up her courage, knowing how much they're going to be mad at her, and she confronts Harry and lays out her

evidence that the Slytherin players went missing and Ron saved everything. Oops! Harry, with enormous satisfaction, reveals that he had engineered this placebo effect and the author reveals, too. I don't know about you, but I was pleased to have been duped.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I was like, 'Oh, that was enjoyable. Thank you!' Harry has 0.5 seconds to be smug about his really sophisticated triumph and to say, "You saved everything because you felt lucky. You did it all yourself..." Such a good way for him to pass on what he learned in *Prisoner of Azkaban* about the Patronus. Yes, that is the benefit of being best friends with The Boy Who Lived: you actually learn these really valuable things. Then 0.5 seconds later, Ron turns on Hermione and says, "You thought I couldn't save these things on my own?" and she's in a no-win position. Oh, poor thing... It's good writing, huh?

JC: Yeah, yeah. Then Ron and Hermione are going to be fighting for a long time now.

Lorrie: Ouchie, ouchie.

JC: It's going to be unpleasant, yeah.

Lorrie: Harry says the obvious to himself: "He did not see how he could possibly explain to Hermione that what she had done to offend Ron was kiss Viktor Krum, not when the offense had occurred so long ago." What are you going to do about this? Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So with all of these difficult-to-control emotions running rampant, there's a party in the common room because Gryffindor has won. Oh boy...

JC: Yep, yep.

Lorrie: I don't even want to say what we find in that party. Do you have it in you?

JC: Yeah, yeah. Sure. Yeah. They get back there (and I guess Harry is one of the last ones to come back), and then Ginny comes over to him and points out that Ron is being a hypocrite by making out with Lavender Brown over in the corner.

Lorrie: In front of everybody.

JC: In front of everybody, and then Harry sees Hermione leaving the common room, so yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. What Ron and Lavender lack in finesse, they make up for in enthusiasm.

JC: Wow, yeah.

Lorrie: We discover (and they discover) that they enjoy exhibitionism. Ginny and Dean found a nice, secluded corner; Ron and Lavender... No, no, no, no, they want to prove something.

JC: Yeah. I remember the movie version of this, too, is Lavender pretty much launches herself at Ron, but she's kind of been flirting with him for a while and he just hasn't noticed, right?

Lorrie: No, he has.

JC: Okay, yeah, you're right. He has, yeah, but we don't see the moment when it happens; we just come in and it's happening, but it's maybe the first moment where he's had the confidence to be like, 'Yeah, okay.' They're both kind of high on what's happened and yeah, it feels like a good moment to kick things off.

Lorrie: In my identifying with Ron's position here, he has noticed... She has been really successful at telegraphing her interest to him and he's noticed, and that's made him feel flattered, even if it's not personal toward Lavender. He might not be interested in her, but yes, how wonderful and flattering. Then there was a while, shortly before this chapter, when he's broodingly staring at Lavender: 'Well, should I move on this?' Then with the turmoil that he's just been in -- where, 'Well, somebody wanted Harry, somebody wanted Hermione; it worked for them, and if you keep on being inexperienced, then you're going to embarrass yourself like you just did with Ginny' -- 'Well, someone wants me, too!' It's that defensiveness and jealousy that's motivating him. Not that he's any more interested in Lavender the person than he was, but she's been asking, 'Please, I'm inviting you to be interested back. Are you interested?' Maybe not in her personally, but yeah, he's now interested. The whole thing is, 'See, someone likes me, too,' so everyone has to watch them learn how to make out from Ground Zero. Yeah.

JC: Having not been to a boarding school, I could only imagine that this is... The only experience that I have that's even close to that is the band bus, where there's all kinds of making out going on, but that's because there's no privacy.

Lorrie: Well, if you're somebody who wants privacy, you can at least do some gesture toward it. Some people don't want privacy. These people...

JC: Though they do. They do shortly, to poor Hermione's disadvantage.

Lorrie: Ohhhh.... Oh, yeah. Hermione has sought refuge in an abandoned classroom where she's listlessly conjuring birds, trying to handle her feelings and speaking unnaturally when Harry comes across this classroom. It didn't take much to find her -- she was really in a hurry to go hide -- and when Ron and Lavender are all giggling and high on new romance and they burst into the room, then Lavender sees Hermione and goes, "Oops!" That took me back so sharply to a moment I had in middle school that was very similar, and I remember at the time thinking, 'I cannot believe anything in the world could hurt this much.' I just couldn't believe how painful that could be. It was shocking. Nothing in my life before had prepared me for that quality of pain. The fact that Lavender is Hermione's roommate and knows perfectly well that she has just triumphed and that Hermione has been her competition the whole time... Oh, my God. Yeah. Everyone's like, "Uh-oh, what's Hermione going to do?" Here, she's being a good role model. There are a lot of things girls in that painful position might be unable to stop themselves from doing with so much pain, and she's trying to keep herself under control. She doesn't say vicious things... She does say *Oppugno*, and she does the spell where her birds attack Ron. I love that scene, and I find it really thrilling because Hermione is a witch; she is actually the most powerful witch of her generation. Aren't we all very fortunate that she has an internal moral code? If she didn't, what could she do to someone who hurt her romantically? What's stopping her from ruining Ron's life forever in an instant? It's self-control, it's respect for other humans' feelings, it's boundaries... Very, very Muggle things. These are all things that the young adult reader of this novel could do well to emulate, but imagine how scary it would be. Imagine being the doofus teenage boy who would be the first person to break her heart, and then you're standing there

with your skinny new height and your too-large feet, like, 'Oh, no! What is she going to do to me?! Oh, no, oh, no!'

JC: Hexes that you've never even heard of. Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Have I just sacrificed the entire rest of my life? Oh, shit!' Whatever she's going to do to you, you know you've never even heard of it, you know you have no defenses; you're at her mercy. It's up to Hermione what punishment is doled out to Ronald Bilius Weasley at this moment.

JC: Now, I remember the bird thing being a little controversial when this book came out. I don't remember the details of it, but I remember people really thinking that was out of character for Hermione, which surprised me that people felt that way because I thought not. It seemed right on target to take her frustrations out that way.

Lorrie: Well, one way or another, she has feelings and she's communicating them.

JC: And poor Harry... He's gone through this whole thing of, 'What would happen if Ron and Hermione got together? What if they broke up?' and then we speed ran that. Oh, my God, here we are at the unpleasant part of it.

Lorrie: Here we are... Oh, no. Harry's like, 'Ugh, I know how it goes when these two are fighting. Oh, great...'

JC: And he played a role.

Lorrie: Oh, wow... Yeah, but I think Harry knows that there's really only so much you can control in all this, because there's the part earlier in this chapter in the greenhouse when Harry thinks: He "supposed that all he could do is wait to see what happened under the influence of butterbeer..." and that's true. None of them know. None of them can plan. So yeah, that was the exhausting glimpse of teen social life that we get, and the next chapter is called The Unbreakable Vow.

JC: Wow, so right back into some dark stuff.

Lorrie: Some stuff that is not your everyday teen life, yep.

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