



Transcript

Episode 6.17

Book 6, Chapter 17: A Sluggish Memory

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread podcast wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults revisit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*, and JC, an educator and long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book Six, Chapter Seventeen: A Sluggish Memory.

Lorrie: A Sluggish Memory. Dumbledore tells Harry the most important memory he has collected so far and gives Harry homework. So here we are starting the second half of their school year, and we see all of this reconfiguration of where they are, possibly the biggest change being that Hermione reluctantly has to admit that Harry has been on the right track all along about suspecting Draco.

JC: Yeah, that's fun. Ooh! Before we get there, though, here's a question: at the opening of this chapter, they're at the Burrow and they're Flooing -- I guess that's how you say that -- back to Hogwarts, and this was a special exception to get them all back safely, and I had this moment of, 'Wait, how do they get back and forth at the holiday break? Do they take the Hogwarts Express back at Christmas? How do they travel at the break?'

Lorrie: I think they do.

JC: And it's never mentioned, is it?

Lorrie: No.

JC: We only see the Hogwarts Express at the beginning and the end, but they must take the train back for the holiday break.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Uh...

Lorrie: Okay!

JC: It's never been mentioned, and I just had a moment of, 'What?!' Anyway...

Lorrie: Yeah. The way that the Ministry provided one-time emergency access to the Floo to get the students there safely... that was another 2026 pang for me. Imagine if the government could help keep you safe from the dangers of travel instead of being the source of the dangers of travel.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That hurt...

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Because it reminded me, in the summer of 2025, when the Trump Administration kept making all sorts of rule changes about whether or not international students would be even allowed in this country or if they would be deported, or if they would only be allowed from certain countries and if they would be subject to search. At every point by the week they were changing laws, and it was obvious that international students who were expecting to travel home for the summer and then re-enter for the fall semester maybe should just stay put if they expected to continue their educations. I knew of a number of colleges who, on their own expense, opened up dorms for the summer and gave free room and board to their international students so that they wouldn't have to risk this. The colleges were doing independently what the Ministry is doing now here.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Of course, in Potterverse, sometimes the Ministry is helping and is being your ally and sometimes they are the ones that you have to escape.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: In this moment, Scrimgeour's Ministry is helping, but that danger of students traveling is something that is real for us now in our world.

JC: Yeah. Absolutely. It feels like every day, there's a story about someone -- not even traveling -- walking down the street and getting snatched off the street by government officials (by ICE or whatever) and then held for an interminable amount of time. American citizens, even... Oh, my God, this is the world, and then a year in this book series, we're going to be in a world where there're gangs of Snatchers that go in to grab people and take them off. We're heading toward that darkness in this story and we're kind of already there in our world, so that's part of the emotions that I know I have frequently when I'm reading this these days. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. The dystopic situation in this series is better than where we're living now.

JC: Which is just wild.

Lorrie: Yeah, and because we've been dealing with the Stan Shunpike storyline, that is so relevant. Once Stan Shunpike is pressed into service as a scapegoat, they're going to need to keep punishing him to the extent that by the end of this series, Stan really is a Death Eater because he's just been manipulated so many times. Unfortunately, we see that in the news in the U.S. everywhere when people are abducted -- people who are citizens or who are here legally -- and then held mistakenly; then they get further punished and further scapegoated just because the administration doesn't want to admit that they made a mistake. It's so surreal.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "What did you do to cause this in your life?" Nothing. You were living your life. Stan Shunpike is a much more relevant storyline now; it was more theoretical some other times that I've read this series, but right now, it's... yeah.

JC: Yeah. I paid so much more attention to that storyline this time. It felt a bit of a throwaway, honestly, but now it's like, 'That's Stan Shunpike!' I really feel it in a way this time that I don't think I did before, twenty years ago.

Lorrie: Yeah. Stan Shunpike, who was just not a danger to anyone...

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: And who wasn't considered important enough to care about. So yeah, the students are traveling back to Hogwarts through this one-time Floo exception, and then we get the account of different ways that they're adjusting to the second semester when they all get back, starting with the immortal nickname "Won-Won."

JC: Oh, Lord... I love how this is the beginning of the end for Ron and Lavender's relationship. That image of her running up and going, "Guess who, Won-Won?" and all of this. Ron's reaction... something about that necklace he got at Christmas broke something in him. 'No amount of making-out sessions I'm getting is worth this. I can't. No, no. This is not okay.' Yeah.

Lorrie: He has to go straight to making out because it'll shut her up.

JC: Oh, my gosh...

Lorrie: And yes, this immortal nickname Won-Won... They are making it easy for Hermione to stick to her resolve to just ignore them entirely.

JC: Yeah. I love that we get the feeling that Hermione has had time to think and process and be away from it over the winter break and can now go back with a clearer head and just be like, 'Yeah, okay. I've set that, I've compartmentalized that. I'm not going to give that any of my energy and attention.'

Lorrie: 'Just let it play out.'

JC: "Don't ask me to, Harry. Don't ask me. I will not engage."

Lorrie: 'The best course of action is for me to do nothing.'

JC: Yeah. 'Just let it roll. He's making himself miserable and I can see it.'

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, yes. By Hermione doing nothing, Lavender is making her look better and better.

JC: Yeah, this is true. This is true.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Ginny is getting tired of Dean.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay...

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: And we see that Apparition lessons are announced.

JC: The Apparition lessons... It's fun because I like the fact that it's... Well, I guess this is the same in the U.K. as it is in the U.S. Probably more in the U.S., we're so much more car-centric, but it's analogous to getting your driver's license.

Lorrie: Yeah, absolutely.

JC: You take the classes from the government official or whatever -- they're some official thing -- and then they test you and you have to pay extra for it, all this stuff. Everyone's excited about it, but something that's interesting to me is that so many kids have never done the Side-Along Apparition that Harry's done, so the fact that he has experienced this is like, 'Ooh,' and so many people are coming up to ask him. This didn't stick with me before the first time I read this book twenty years ago, but that Side-Along Apparition must be really complex magic if people don't just tote their kids around that way.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: If kids have not experienced it, it's because it's too dangerous to do on a regular basis.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So yeah, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you have to be so good at it that you can trust yourself not to lose your kids somewhere in the magic.

JC: Or Splinch them. Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Hermione brings another invitation from Dumbledore saying that Harry has one of these lessons the next night. That meeting starts with Harry catching up Dumbledore on Scrimgeour's visit and saying that Scrimgeour accused him of being "Dumbledore's man through and through", confirming to Dumbledore, "Yes, I am," and Dumbledore gets tears in his eyes. Then we get the line, "Behind Harry, Fawkes the phoenix let out a low, soft, musical cry. To Harry's intense embarrassment, he suddenly realized that Dumbledore's bright blue eyes looked rather watery..." There's a big clue planted for the end of the chapter. We know that

Fawkes cries at loyalty to Dumbledore -- he really honors anyone who's loyal to Dumbledore -- but also that Fawkes being a phoenix is about second chances, and that's what Dumbledore is getting here. After the misery and self-blame of the end of *Order of the Phoenix* and Harry being justified at being angry with Dumbledore, he's getting a second chance. This reminded me of the concept which you probably encountered a lot as a parent: the concept of 'the good-enough parent.' If you are trying to do well by your kid and let them down as little as possible, of course you're going to sometimes let them down because you're human. You go into it thinking that, but when you actually do wrong by them and let them down, it feels terrible.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Maybe it averages out so that generally speaking, you're okay in their eyes. Yeah, you may have screwed up something and they're legitimately angry at you, but in the bigger picture, you've been there for them enough. You have shown good faith enough; you have respected their needs over your own enough so that you're good enough.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is a concept that was really hard for me to get my head around, but you need it because if you try to never let someone down, you're going to fail.

JC: Yeah. To me, this is the antithesis of purity culture. This is how we live; this is how we have our relationships with other people in general. Your intentions are always to be there for a person and to be supportive and to give them things that you can. You can't always be perfect and you're going to make mistakes, and then how you handle your mistakes is important.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Being able to apologize and say, "I've learned from this and I'm going to do better," and then to do better, all of those things. This is, I think, one of the things that... I've not read the *Dumbledore* book that your friend wrote -- I'm not an expert on Dumbledore at all -- but I remember there being a lot of anger at Dumbledore in fandom circles back in the day where people were so angry about whatever Dumbledore did (that he wasn't perfect enough to lead the Wizarding

World or prepare Harry or whatever), and I think that's a good way of thinking about it. Dumbledore really did do the best he could with the information he had. He wasn't all-powerful or all-knowing; he was just a wizard with a lot of life experience and a lot of knowledge and a lot of magic, and he was not operating on any kind of different level than everybody else. He was just working really hard and trying to protect the people he could, and he couldn't always do it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's a lot of what it feels like to be a parent, often, and you feel like, 'I should be able to protect my kids from all these things and I should be able to foresee all the stuff that could be happening, and I should be able to get help,' and sometimes, that's just not possible. We see Dumbledore, honestly, really being very parent-like here in a lot of ways.

Lorrie: Yeah. To get the confirmation, after he genuinely screwed up the previous year, that Harry not only seems to have forgiven him but has judged him generally to be worthy of complete loyalty... Wow! It also reminds me of this one line in the musical *Hamilton* that makes me cry more than any other. If you're familiar with *Hamilton*, it's in the second act after their son dies, and it's a song where the chorus sings, "Forgiveness." We see Hamilton's wife take his hand again after both of them being heartbroken that his mistakes have led to their son's death because it's not required of her; it's not necessary and it can't be mandated, and it's not like you plan or decide, "I'm going to forgive today." You can decide that, but if your emotions aren't there, then your decision means nothing. If your emotions really do come and you genuinely do forgive, then even if that's against your will and you wish you could stay vengeful or angry, you don't control it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore has been forgiven, which is great because he's going to need that.

JC: He's going to need that going forward. I love that in this whole section, there's a lot of really great lines from Dumbledore. They're very quippy and funny...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And my favorite one is when Harry says that the Minister of Magic is not happy with him right now, and Dumbledore basically says, "Yeah, me either." Then he says, "We must try not to sink beneath our anguish, Harry, but battle on." It's just really funny lines from Dumbledore throughout this first part of this section.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Just very dry... Oh, so great.

Lorrie: Maybe a couple years ago, Harry would have wondered what on earth he was talking about, but Harry is now jaded in so many of the same ways at age sixteen. He's just like, "Uh-huh."

JC: That is true.

Lorrie: "Yep."

JC: And Harry's sense of humor is really similar to Dumbledore's.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry also does these little dry quips throughout this book, and it's like, 'Okay, they're really on the same page here.'

Lorrie: Yeah. "It seemed to Harry that the Minister was not that impressive." Yeah.

JC: Despite the lion's mane thing he had going on.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, less of an idiot than Fudge. That's something.

JC: Yeah. This sums up a lot of my feelings about particular Presidents over the last decade.

Lorrie: Yeah. The chapter also reminds us of some of the revelations that are to come in this second half of the year: that we very much would like to find out how Dumbledore hurt his hand, and we very much want to know 'where does he go when he's not at Hogwarts?' It's just sort of a recap. 'Okay, we are dying to find out.'

JC: Here are the mysteries. Also, 'Why does Dumbledore trust Snape?' is another one that's mentioned here.

Lorrie: That's the big one, yeah. Everything turns on that. Harry tells Dumbledore what he overheard at Slughorn's party about Draco and Snape and the Unbreakable Vow. It's obviously an important thing he's overheard, and Dumbledore has nothing better than "Put it out of your mind."

JC: Which is like, 'Okay...?!'

Lorrie: 'What?!' He doesn't have anything better for Harry than "I do not think that it is of great importance." Oh?! Okay, is that really going to be very persuasive?

JC: It's interesting that he says that instead of "I'm aware."

Lorrie: Right. "I've got it under control," yeah.

JC: Or anything else. "I've got it under control." It's just, "No, don't think about that." Okay, that's not going to work for Harry.

Lorrie: Um... yeah.

JC: Harry's not going to be able to do that.

Lorrie: Yes. Whatever is going on with Dumbledore, that was the wrong thing to say because Harry immediately pushes back -- of course! -- and Dumbledore gets sharp with him. I guess Dumbledore doesn't have any really good options for replying to this. He's not going to lie and say, "Oh, no, no, that was nothing," and Harry does not let up and says, "So you definitely still trust --" Yes, that's everything. Everything is being gambled on that trust in Snape, and Dumbledore then orders him to change the subject. He's got nothing.

JC: Yep. We just had this really warm moment, and then it just gets a little bit chilly again. Okay.

Lorrie: Yes, this is the real issue. Harry saw something, it was big, it was important. Dumbledore cannot deny it, but does.

JC: But does anyway. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: And the only way Dumbledore can get out of this is by pulling rank and saying, "We're going to talk about something else now." I love this line: "Harry sat there feeling mutinous." Yeah, Harry, you are quite right. You are onto something, and you're going to lose because he's more powerful than you, so that's tense and

important. Dumbledore, fortunately, has something important to say that really will distract Harry because it is genuinely urgent and says, "All right, now we're going to talk about Tom Riddle again. Okay?" "Okay, fine." He brings them back to the point in the story where Tom starts at Hogwarts as an eleven-year-old and describes Tom as "an unusually talented and very good-looking orphan," so yeah, of course everyone's super interested and he totally knows how to play the game. "He seemed polite, quiet, and thirsty for knowledge," so whatever you need to do to get 'good boy' privilege, he totally has mastered that, which is, of course, in itself creepy. Then we get this beautiful moment where Harry says, "Didn't you tell them all the strong impressions you got of him at the orphanage?" and Dumbledore says no, on purpose. "[Though] He had shown no hint of remorse, it was possible that he felt sorry for how he had behaved before and was resolved to turn over a fresh leaf. I chose to give him that chance." That is such a callback to this moment in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Snape does the thing that maybe scandalizes me more than anything else he did as a teacher: he goes to Lupin, who has never met Neville before, and says, "Oh, this is Neville Longbottom. He's a terrible student." That shocks me every time. You can't do that!

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: Dumbledore's deliberately doing the opposite here. Huh...

JC: Right. This is absolutely the right thing to do as a teacher, but just as Harry is thinking, 'Wow, Dumbledore trusts people too easily,' Dumbledore goes on to basically say that he did keep an eye on it. In the back of his head, he was like, 'This kid freaked me out. I have a sense I know what this kid is capable of,' and he was watching for signs that he was quietly doing the same things, and even though later on weird things happened whenever Tom Riddle and his group/gang were around, they could never really prove anything, but it wasn't that he was being naive about it. The moral thing as a teacher is to not misrepresent or gossip about students; it's to only provide information when it seems like it's really relevant about a student.

Lorrie: And give them room.

JC: And it's about their safety and their well-being, and then give them room to grow and change because these are children.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think people can point at the example of Tom Riddle as, 'Oh, he totally shouldn't have done that.' Okay, Tom Riddle is the one in a million. 99.99% of kids who have problems in elementary school with the right support will grow up to be decent people.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's always going to be a few that are little assholes.

Lorrie: Even at that age, things happen to make people thoughtful that make them think, 'You know what? I should change my way.' I know kids who, if they always were the way they were at a younger age, they would be total psycho criminals by now, and sometimes it's their own judgment that a year or two later, they just behave differently and they don't become the psychos that you're afraid they will.

JC: Yeah. We've been talking a lot about college lately because we each have a child about to go off to college in the fall, but I think this is one of the things that's nice about moving from high school on to college and then meeting a completely new group of people. The person that you were in high school? You can leave that behind and have a clean slate. 'The little insecure things that I'm embarrassed and mortified about that I did when I was in the ninth grade... No one here knows that stuff. I can just move on with my life.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and Tom got that. There's a way in which Tom's had this incredible chance to go to Hogwarts and become a new person and to be in this community where people would get him, but he had other issues that got in the way.

Lorrie: He does have a lot to hide. Dumbledore states to Harry as a fact that Tom Riddle undoubtedly felt no affection for the whole group of friends that he gathered at school. Now, Grace Candido-Beecher, the author of the *Voldemort* book, disagrees with Dumbledore and she says there's no evidence of that. As far as she can tell from how the story is written, no, they were really his friends, and what a weird thing to say about somebody to say, "Oh, yeah, he had all these friends, but he didn't like any of them." I totally see where she's coming from. I think we're meant to take Dumbledore's interpretation as the truth. Playing 'If I

Were Her Beta,' for this I would have asked the author, "Are you trying to say that Dumbledore's take is the correct one, because if so, you might want to put in a few more words to show that," because right now as it's written, I can see Grace's point that we only have Dumbledore's word for this. Based on the textual evidence, if somebody else wanted to argue, "No, of course he liked them, of course they were his friends, Dumbledore's just biased against him," there's no way to disprove that. I do, however, think that we're meant to take Dumbledore's interpretation as the real one.

JC: If you take the theme that you've been talking about all along ("He's been looking his entire life to find someone to connect with"), it wouldn't make sense that he had connected with anyone at that age because that human connection is the thing that would have prevented him from becoming what he became later on.

Lorrie: Yeah. Also, compared to how dire his situation was at the orphanage, even just having people to hang out with was a major improvement.

JC: I do like the idea that he's so charismatic, and he draws people to him and they follow him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's such a natural leader. It's all the things when you think about all the worst leaders in history that gathered people to them who would just do their bidding; he's being presented as one of those.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. The pattern is really clear, and certainly there are people who follow that. Dumbledore describes -- diagnoses -- the kind of people who will fall into this orbit: "the weak seeking protection, the ambitious seeking some shared glory, and the thuggish gravitating toward a leader who could show them more refined forms of cruelty." So he says yes, the group of people that hung around Tom Riddle then did become the first Death Eaters. Yuck. We shall leave behind the parallels that are so obvious that we don't even want to say them out loud.

JC: It's so true. Yeah, there's memes that go around where the meme is like, "On that day, we'll celebrate this," and everyone just knows what it's about and you don't.

Lorrie: "What day?" Yes. Nobody even has to --

JC: No one even has to say it. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's the air we're breathing these days. Now, Dumbledore says these fascinating things to give us insight into what he's been assigning himself. He says that there are very few memories of Tom Riddle at Hogwarts that he could find because people who still remember him are too terrified to talk about him.

JC: Boy...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That aligns with some people who live in our world right now.

Lorrie: Yeah. What kind of threats? What would happen to them if they said what they remember? Why do they comply with silence? Dumbledore says he took painstaking effort to trace those few who could be tricked into speaking, which is, of course, kind of scandalous. 'Oh, he's just saying right out he is being coercive, he's being unethical,' and then he also mentioned "those whom I could persuade to talk." Okay, he obviously would like to start with being persuasive and for it to be consensual, so that's one end of the spectrum, and he'll eventually go to whatever he needs to do to get the memories.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay. Harry is just being let in on this, and we will see in the next volume that Harry... Not only does he do the same and just go ahead and do unethical things because he needs to, but I believe both of them are right to do this. Oof... Then Dumbledore says Riddle was obsessed with his parentage at school; there we have the too-obvious-to-mention parallel to what Harry had to go through. Of course you would be obsessed with your parentage... For whatever lifelong struggle Harry has had to claw his way back to owning a little bit more of his own story, compared to Tom Riddle, what Harry had was enormous wealth.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: My goodness! Tom Riddle can't find a single trace of Tom Riddle, Sr. at Hogwarts or in the Wizarding literature anywhere; not like Harry, who finds evidence of his parents everywhere he turns.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: And nobody is afraid to tell him, "Oh, yeah, I knew your father, I knew your mother." Nobody's life is being threatened by bringing this up.

JC: Right. That idea that he was in this orphanage and he had all these powers, and he didn't know who he was -- very lost, couldn't connect with other people -- and then this person sweeps in and says, "I'm going to change your life. It turns out that you're very special, and you're going to go to this special school," all this stuff...

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh...

JC: I can imagine that he spent all that time spinning stories about how 'Maybe now I'm going to get the answers...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then he gets there and there just aren't any.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Nope. You know nothing more than you knew before. AAAAHHHH! Yeah.

Lorrie: And it's not that he's not looking hard; he's looking really hard.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The awful contrast that Harry lives with the Dursleys... He has so much more knowledge. Dumbledore's decision to keep Harry with the Dursleys keeps that contrast alive. It prevents Voldemort from being able to claim Harry. If Voldemort thought, 'Oh, yeah, Harry Potter, he's exactly the same as me' (like how Fenrir Greyback wants to make other werewolves so that they can be allies)... For Voldemort to say, "Hey, Harry, you're exactly like me. You have a powerful story, but nobody ever gave it to you, so let me into your mind, become my minion..." He can't. He knows Harry's different and that difference really hurts, and that's part of the magic spell that Dumbledore invokes by having Harry cross the threshold into the Dursley household: preventing Voldemort from thinking that Harry is just a subset of his own identity. 'No, he's not. He is a separate person; he is not you. Maybe in a lot of ways he is -- and in a lot of ways, yes, you can possess him and you can get into his head -- but not when he's living with the Dursleys.' He had a family, and as much as Harry probably at times thought that the Dursleys could use to be killed a little, he hasn't actually killed them.

JC: True, true. Just a little killing, just a little.

Lorrie: Yeah. They haven't denied that they're related to him. They've wanted to, but they haven't done it.

JC: And they at least tell him things about his parents, even though they're always said through gritted teeth.

Lorrie: Yeah, or they're lies, but they don't say that it wasn't real. Dumbledore tells Harry that he figures once Voldemort realized, 'Okay, there's no Tom Riddle Sr. in the Wizarding World,' that's when he probably dropped the name and he made up Lord Voldemort for himself and then he started looking into his despised mother's background.

JC: The mother he thought could not possibly be a witch because she died.

Lorrie: Yeah. That brings up one of those themes of this volume of matronymics. In a patriarchal society where the mom's name gets obscured after one generation, that introduces so much disconnection between a person and half of their lineage. 'Okay, he's got the name 'Marvolo.' That's what he's got to go on. All right, let's see what that turns up.' Very fortunately... It must have been very hard to find but he does dig up, finally, Slytherin's surviving line. That's a really good distant bell ringing in the reader's mind that this should be making us think about the issue of the Half-Blood Prince and the mother's name, and also that Harry knows so much more about his father's story than his mother's story.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore tells him, "In the summer of his sixteenth year, he left the orphanage to which he returned annually," so that would be exactly the same age that Harry is at this moment, sixteen-and-a-half, right?

JC: Uh-huh.

Lorrie: Ah, and what a way to contrast the person Harry is, Harry having connected to quite a bit of his true lineage at this point with quite a lot of support and with friends around him whom he genuinely loves, as opposed to this perfect, perfect model student with this weird uneasiness underneath the surface. Tom Riddle leaves the orphanage... That kills me every time. How depressing. Is there something worse than going back to the Dursleys? There is. Oh, my goodness!

Tom Riddle leaves the orphanage and goes to look for this Marvolo connection and finds the most disgusting hovel in the entire world.

JC: Right. How depressing would that have been to think, 'I'm finally going to find this long-lost family,' and that's what you find.

Lorrie: 'This is me?!'

JC: Oh, wow. 'This is what I came from? Really? Really?!' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Eww... I've never seen anything so gross in my life. Eww!'

JC: Right. Right.

Lorrie: The orphanage is depressing, but they do what they can there.

JC: Yeah. The descriptions earlier of it being worn down but clean and orderly... Yeah. This is anything but that.

Lorrie: Yes. There's cobwebs, there's rotting food, there are empty bottles, and somewhere underneath a lot of hair, there's his uncle Morfin armed with a wand and a knife and Marvolo's ring, like he has anything left to defend. Oh, gosh...

JC: And still talks about his sister betraying them by going off with this Muggle filth, which is so interesting. The idea that, even through all this, he still thinks he's better than the people who live in the big house on the hill.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, that's... Wow. Not that I'm saying that he is wrong, but at the same time, it's like, 'Really? Really?!' Wow, the belief in my superiority...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Even though I cannot manifest anything in my life that demonstrates it, I'm still superior.' Wow, what's that like?

Lorrie: Yeah. The cognitive dissonance, the complete break with reality, is so unsettling. It also made me think that the hovel and the state of Morfin at the moment... It's a fantasy. It's a fantasy that has occurred to me (and, I think, occurs naturally to a lot of people): 'what would this place look like if you didn't have my work to exploit? This place would fall apart without me.' This is a fantasy that I

recall looking at sexist men who exist because they subjugate women and expect labor from them and keep them in their place by putting them down all the time, and me thinking, 'Geez, if they left, what would become of you? How quickly would you fall apart? You've never washed a sock.'

JC: 'Can't even cook for yourself.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Right. Did you know that food doesn't cook itself? Or people have that fantasy about their places of employment as well, because sometimes places exploit employees' work without recognizing them or some people get recognized and others don't. This does not always bear any relation to who deserves recognition and people thinking, 'Well, if I up and quit, they would be in such trouble.' "Can I have a raise?" "No." Umm-kay... That was a fantasy that I read in this.

JC: I see, yeah.

Lorrie: So here is Morfin, proud of nothing and so mentally confused that the only way Voldemort can cut through his brain fog is by yelling at him in Parseltongue.

JC: Which is a brilliant move on his part, honestly.

Lorrie: It is!

JC: Does he do that? Because Morfin doesn't speak first, or does he? I can't remember who speaks first.

Lorrie: No. Morfin just threatens him with the knife and the wand; Voldemort says "*Stop*," and that wakes him up. That wakes up Morfin, who is shocked and says, "*You speak it?*" "*Oh, yes, I do*," and suddenly I'm on Voldemort's side, right?

JC: Yeah. Yeah, the empathy that I feel is a little bit rooting for Voldemort here, which is like, 'Damn. Wow, wow.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Harry's right there.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Harry could not help but feel a resentful admiration for Voldemort's complete lack of fear. His face merely expressed disgust and, perhaps, disappointment." My goodness... You think you're going to find out something about yourself... Eww. Ugh...

JC: Yeah, and he's already going to burn it to the ground.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh. Yuck.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And addled Morfin saying, "*I thought you was that Muggle*," and struggling to put his brain cells together. No, no, that Muggle would be older now. "*He come back, see*." What? Who? What?! Of course, sharply, Voldemort says, "*Riddle came back?*" and that actually took me a couple reads to understand, because at first, maybe I was hoping that it meant that Tom Riddle Sr. came to look for his child. Voldemort here is asking, "Is that what happened?" but no, that is not what happened. No, no, no, he came back to his parents' house...

JC: To the village, yeah.

Lorrie: "*Ar, he left her, and serve her right, marrying filth! Robbed us, mind, before she ran off! Where's the locket, eh, where's Slytherin's locket?*" Now, I'm rooting for Merope. 'You go! That was admirable of you!' Whatever her issues were, she's better than Morfin. Ugh...

JC: He knows his sister's dead, or does he not know?

Lorrie: He's written it all off, I guess.

JC: And he's not recognizing that the boy in front of him is his nephew. He's just like, "Oh, you can speak Parseltongue. Anyway, let me tell you how much I hate..."

Lorrie: His brain isn't really functioning.

JC: Yeah, not really. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, so all he can do is recite his grievances. He says, "*Dishonored us, she did, that little slut*," which in its own way also has a positive feeling for me in that whatever happened, Merope's story centers female desire. She terribly abused

and exploited Tom Riddle Sr. and the fantasy that she was pursuing was completely unrealistic; she had this fantasy that she could at least make the trappings of a romance for herself. Coming from a background as abused as she did, I don't know how realistic her fantasies could have been, but it wasn't like she was pursuing status or security or anything; she was pursuing her desire. Huh...

JC: That's interesting. I hadn't thought about it that way. I just remember being surprised to see the word 'slut' in this book.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was like, 'Wow.' It almost felt like a swear coming out of... Yeah. The way it's used is so vile.

Lorrie: Yeah, but it's also true. Not the judgmental part, but that what she did was because she wanted to have sex. Yes, actually, she did. She saw a beautiful, attractive man, she had no prospects at home. She was wrong to do it and that's what she went and did, which brings up the whole issue around patriarchy is that it's about policing the sexual desire of girls and women. This whole volume is so much about the unruliness of desire.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: That's the mess that we get out of Morfin, and then he is aggrieved that this intruder is bringing all this ancient history up again. He says, "It's over, isn't it? Why are you making me relive all that crap?" I guess that was Voldemort's cue that he had gotten everything he was going to get out of this not very impressive remnant of humanity. Oh, gosh... That's as far as we get from this memory before we discover that the next morning, Morfin's found lying on the floor without the ring; meanwhile, Tom Riddle, Sr. and his two parents have been killed up on the hill with no sign of how, something that we readers saw at the beginning of *Goblet of Fire*.

JC: In the same house, I think.

Lorrie: Yep. Dumbledore's spelling out just how easy it was for Voldemort to frame Morfin, because he was completely willing and excited to claim credit for the kind of crimes that Voldemort had planted in his head. This is the kind of thing he would have done if he'd had the wherewithal to do it, and he was boasting: "Oh,

yeah, that was me. I did all that." All that disturbed him was the fact that his father's ring had disappeared: "He'll kill me for losing it." He has forgotten again that his dad is dead.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Marvolo's pride in that ring outlived him. It was stronger than life itself.

JC: I also like that in retrospect... Obviously, I haven't reread this book since the first time I read it. In retrospect, it's like, 'Oh, and he created his second Horcrux that night.' He took the ring from Morfin and he went and he killed three people, he created another Horcrux, perhaps -- definitely accidentally, maybe, probably, at this point, his second one -- and then that leads us to the memory that's coming up. But that idea that all these little things are being planted here, the importance of the locket and the importance of the ring...

Lorrie: Yep. This is the origin of the serial killer; symbolic trophies are super important.

JC: But also, he came there to get part of his story, and that's what he left with.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: The only thing that was valuable in that entire house to him was a ring that had apparently belonged to his grandfather.

Lorrie: And that he managed to punish these people, Morfin for being disgusting and his Muggle family for not wanting him.

JC: He also knows that somewhere out there, there's a locket, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's next on the list.

Lorrie: Yes, yes. Yeah, of course the story of Morfin is incredibly tragic, where we hear Dumbledore say, "He lived out the remainder of his life in Azkaban... and is buried beside the prison, alongside the other poor souls who have expired within its walls," so we're going to find out in the next book that Dumbledore's father might be buried there the same way. That hurts so much more. It's painful enough thinking, 'Wow, Dumbledore visited Morfin in Azkaban before he died.' You can

just imagine he didn't have very much mental capacity left to begin with, and then after being in Azkaban the whole time... Oof. We don't know when that was, but that Dumbledore tried to get him released because he was falsely arrested and didn't manage; Morfin died before that happened, but wow. If you can imagine, had Dumbledore succeeded, he would have gone public with this whole evidence of Voldemort's ancient crimes.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oof.

JC: I spent a little time after that thinking, 'Okay, how did Dumbledore find him in the first place?' I guess he was already researching Tom Riddle. They don't say when all this happened, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: So then it's pretty easy to go, 'Oh, okay, Tom Riddle, according to the wizard records, was killed by this other wizard named Morfin Gaunt. Oh, we can look into that. We can figure this out. We can figure out what are all the relationships here.' It wouldn't have been that hard to go dig it up, probably.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: You just had to connect the dots.

Lorrie: If you cared.

JC: If you cared, which raises the question: has no one connected these dots before?

Lorrie: Well, he tells Harry no one ever had any reason to because Morfin eagerly confessed to all the crimes. It's an open and shut case, and it's not like there were any survivors who were trying to find justice. There was absolutely no reason for anyone to be interested.

JC: No true crime podcasters in the Wizarding World investigating this stuff.

Lorrie: And Tom Jr. had succeeded. He had obliterated the last of the unworthy Riddle line and revenged himself upon the father who had never wanted him. Harry is asking the right questions for someone hearing about all this kind of

magic for the first time and saying, "But he had this real memory in him all the time," and Dumbledore explaining, "It took a great deal of skilled Legilimency to coax it out of him." I can feel the effort.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Wow!

JC: Right. A guy who was that far gone before he went to Azkaban -- was in Azkaban for who knows how long -- and Dumbledore's basically rifling through his brain like a Rolodex, I'm guessing. How else would you find it?

Lorrie: Oh, gosh, yeah.

JC: Which is, very clearly, not ethical.

Lorrie: No.

JC: Yeah, but it's a prisoner, and in the Wizarding World, prisoners seem to have no rights, so if you want to come in and do some freaky mind magic on somebody who's a convicted murderer, I can see how --

Lorrie: Who's going to -- Yeah.

JC: Yeah, no one was going to stop him.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness. It is beautiful to me that Dumbledore, having found the truth (even though it mattered not at all to Morfin), tried to get Morfin released. That would have been fair.

JC: But in order to prove that, all of it would have been like, "This was actually Voldemort to blame for this murder." Depending on the time in which this all happened, that might have been easier to do or might have been more political difficulties. I find that interesting. "When did it happen?" seems like it would explain a lot about why that did or didn't happen at the time, or why he wouldn't have been released. Maybe it got slowed down or whatever, but that's another story.

Lorrie: And it's the whole question: 'Well, why bother? Is the world going to benefit from Morfin being released? He has no idea why he's being released, and how long would Morfin survive on the outside and who cares?' The answer is,

well, he's still a person. Justice is still based on the truth. It's not for others to judge if he is good enough to know what to do with his freedom. It all hurts quite a lot to think about.

JC: Oh, and speaking of things that hurt, Harry is very resentful that Voldemort was able to murder people as an underage wizard and didn't get caught when Harry got punished with somebody else using magic. Yeah.

Lorrie: Dobby!!! Oh! Back in 1992, Dobby...

JC: Exactly, and I like the fact that Dumbledore does acknowledge here it's not a great system. They can't tell who did the magic; they just know that magic was done, and if the only person they know of is an underage wizard, they know the law was broken. Yeah, they trust that parents are going to keep their kids in line, which no, it ain't happening.

Lorrie: Oh, well.

JC: Right. Yeah. It's a nice little clearing-up of questions from earlier volumes. It felt like a little bit of a clean-up to me.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. So after that incredibly lose-lose-lose situation, Dumbledore then says, "Okay, now, here's the memory that I think is the most important one I've collected so far." I don't know about you, but I was like, 'What? What could it be?' It had congealed a bit, and Harry thought, 'Do memories go bad?' Yes, of course memories go bad -- whoa! -- introducing doubt, because so far in this series, we've been shown Pensieve memories as being objective. Okay, wait, no, we're reintroducing doubt, decay. This memory brings them into the office of a younger Slughorn, and he's there with his admiring students. Yuck.

JC: Sitting on his comfy chair, eating the pineapple that he likes (the pineapple candy) and drinking a little tiny glass of wine. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and making sure that all these students are arranged at his knee lower than him -- human folly being embarrassing to witness as always -- and there's Voldemort. "His right hand lay negligently upon the arm of his chair; ...Harry saw that he was wearing Marvolo's gold-and-black ring; he had already killed his father." At this point, Voldemort is slightly older than Harry is and he's showing off; he's showing off a trophy. This is the point at which the author reveals

what Dumbledore was really getting at when he brought Harry to the Muggle house over the summer to recruit Slughorn. No matter what the cover story was, Dumbledore was going 'yammer, yammer, yammer,' but the real story was he was showing the ring, Slughorn was seeing it and it was jogging something in his memory. That is a really subtle bit of plot from the author that I admire. She's not making a huge deal of it; it's just that yes, somebody with the psychological profile of the Voldemort character who is a sociopath and is following their own agenda... Yes, this trophy would be important and they would want the world to know. Okay.

JC: And it seems like the kind of thing that Slughorn would notice in his memory.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that he's super casually letting people notice it. Yuck, scary. Then he shows off by saying, "Oh, is Professor Merrythought retiring?" which we know is the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. No, we don't; we don't know yet.

JC: Oh, okay.

Lorrie: Okay. Yeah, that comes up in a soon-to-come chapter. Slughorn is amused and he is indulgent about how Tom always knows things that half the staff don't know, and he praises how Tom knows how to flatter people and which people to flatter. This is being treated as a virtue, and then he says, "Thank you for the crystallized pineapple."

JC: "You know how to bribe people and get information out of them."

Lorrie: Yeah. That is, of course, a forerunner to the way he is bribing Greyback now by saying, "You can have victims." Then we get that moment that's so startling, where suddenly the memory changes and there's this thick white fog and this super fake voiceover from Slughorn where he's saying, "Oh, Tom, with all these skills, you'll go wrong, boy. Mark my words." Harry's like, 'What am I watching? What?'

JC: Right. It's crude editing, but also the fact that that's what he says means that what he really said was the opposite, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: "You're going to go far! With these skills you have, you're destined for greatness," or whatever. That's what he really said, and it's so interesting that he felt like he needed to mask that. Really? Because what he masks later is genuinely something to hide, but that is interesting to me, that this is something he felt like he needed to mask.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Because everybody probably thought that of Tom. That wouldn't have been an unusual sentiment at the time.

Lorrie: Right, and here's Slughorn deliberately cultivating it; not only admiring him for it, but building him up, doing his best to further Tom's agenda and not heeding any warning signs because he let himself be flattered. It's the shame of... We all have things that we're ashamed of in our own natures, our weak spots, and it's really awful when bad things happen because of those. Here, we see the very crude kind of denial that Slughorn is in about that. He wishes he could be revisionist about this; he's hiding. Then we see he tells Lestrage and Avery that even though they're in his inner circle right now, they have to turn in essays or they'll get detentions. We're meant to remember Snape with Crabbe and Goyle and how Snape is not doing what Slughorn is doing here. As much as we would think that Snape is playing favorites with Draco and Crabbe and Goyle, he's not collecting them and telling them how they're so great and whatever; no, he still has to watch out for them. This is the point at which Tom Riddle waits for all the other students to leave and then cashes in all of his 'good-boy privilege' and says, "Sir, I wondered what you know about... about Horcruxes," and then we get the huge, dense fog again and the fake voiceover with Slughorn saying, *"I don't know anything about Horcruxes and I wouldn't tell you if I did! Now get out of here at once, and don't let me catch you mentioning them again!"* Oh, boy...

JC: Right. I love that we've established the pattern that he edits it with the opposite of what actually happened, so then we know, 'Okay, he does know something about Horcruxes and he did tell him something. Hmm...'

Lorrie: And he feels so terrible about this. This is a great example of what Hermione does the opposite of: the Hermione character does the good things that people wish they had done at that age. Doesn't it sound like this "I know nothing

about Horcruxes and I'm not going to tell you" is like the kind of goody-goody route that Hermione keeps telling Harry he should be taking about the Half-Blood Prince's textbook? "You should be above this. No, don't give into your curiosity. Don't think, 'Well, what could it hurt to just find out a little more?' No, no, you should always stick to the Ministry plan." Well, is Hermione always right? No, but boy, Slughorn would really love to be able to say that he acted more like her in this situation. He didn't; he gave in. There were warning signs and he didn't heed them, and this is making poor Hermione crazy that there are warning signs from the Half-Blood Prince, and telling Harry and Ron to heed them... They don't want to give up all the stuff they're getting from this.

JC: Yeah. Take that on a broader scale, and I think that describes a lot of people in the United States right now. There have been warning signs...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the people who grudgingly support the current administration have been ignoring them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. The people who aren't the crazy right-wing folks -- the ones who voted a particular way for their own or whatever reasons -- and... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "I don't want to hear it." Yeah.

JC: Yeah, exactly. Right. It feels very similar, but also the revisionist bit...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: My partner reads a lot of biographies. It's a genre that he loves -- he loves watching biographical movies and he likes biographies -- and he gets very frustrated when he can tell that the biography has been edited in that way, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is the number one complaint he has about a biography: he'll say, "They just weren't honest about this one thing, and it was very clear about it. I've read this other biography by this other person who gives a very different account." It's like comparing the memories that are in the Pensieve...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So that's what I was thinking about here: how crudely the things that he was ashamed about were edited out. Yeah. That's human nature, right? Who wants to spill their guts on the table when the stakes are so high?

Lorrie: Yeah. The places in biography and autobiography where these ruptures occur are the whole point of that genre. How do our emotions affect the story that we believe about ourselves? Apparently, it's necessary for us to have a story about ourselves.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: How do we live with it? Harry asked Dumbledore what's going on here, and Dumbledore explains that this is what it looks like when someone has tampered with a memory. Dumbledore just spells it right out and says, "He's ashamed of what he remembers." That shame is the thing that will lead us to twist our own truth because we can't endure it, and somehow it's so necessary for us to have a coherent narrative about ourselves that we will change the truth in our own mind in order to fit the narrative.

JC: I like the fact, though, that it's easy to tell with the Pensieve memories. Something about the way that you extract these memories for the Pensieve means you can tell when it's been tampered with.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You can tell when it's not the truth. That's really interesting.

Lorrie: And that's my experience of dealing with either myself or other people doing this: 'Oh, I don't want to talk about it. Yeah, no, I did fine, right? It's okay that I did that, right?' Why are you asking me? Ask yourself. Dumbledore says, "He has tried to rework the memory to show himself in a better light, obliterating those parts which he does not wish me to see." Oh, this was done quickly on the spot for Dumbledore. Oh... When they walked in on Slughorn over the summer and Slughorn very quickly ruined that Muggle home... 'Oh, oh, Dumbledore's invading my mind. Uh, uh... Here, this is what I said.' Partly, it was crudely done because he had moments to deal with his guilt as he was being non-consensually mentally invaded.

JC: It also makes me think about AI slop, that whole thing where you look at the AI-generated image and you can see the parts where it's not right.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It feels a little bit like that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, the last thing he said... Did Dumbledore take this memory from him without his consent, or was this a moment where he was just very persuasive? "I'm collecting everything I can about Voldemort. This is important. Give me whatever memories you've got." 'How did Dumbledore get this memory about Voldemort from Slughorn?' is the question I have.

Lorrie: My guess -- because I wondered the same thing. I'm wondering if this is what Dumbledore did over his Christmas vacation.

JC: Oh, so you think this is a recent memory, that he extracted this one pretty recently.

Lorrie: I don't know. It could have been a while ago.

JC: Ah, interesting.

Lorrie: Would Slughorn have accepted the position at Hogwarts if this had taken place before?

JC: Oh, that's a good point.

Lorrie: Was one of Dumbledore's reasons for hiring Slughorn and keeping him nearby at Hogwarts so that he could regain enough connection with Slughorn and demonstrate to Slughorn just what dangers they were all living through enough to give some context and some weight to his persuasiveness?

JC: And then when he got the memory, it was not what he wanted. I was connecting it back to the very beginning when Dumbledore introduced Harry to Slughorn and said, "Slughorn likes to collect things, and he's going to try to collect you and you should let him." I think I had been reading that as Dumbledore already knew about this memory, and knew that the only chance of getting the real memory

was through Harry, but it sounds like your suspicion is that at that point, he didn't know what Slughorn had said at all.

Lorrie: I'm thinking that that's more recent, but we don't know for sure. What the author is doing here in these chapters (which I really admire) is she's very deftly and subtly handling guilt in how gingerly you have to approach somebody when you want them to deal with/confront something that's very much present and on their conscience that is hard for them to think about (that they're hurting other people with) but is so intolerable for them to think about that you might lose them. I've certainly seen this happen with myself and with other people where they can almost get close to this uncomfortable truth and sometimes they can make the breakthrough, and other times they just clam up and say, "No, no, I'm not talking about it. You can ask me, but get out of my face." That's very much a risk that Dumbledore is running at this moment about Slughorn. Supposing that this whole interaction (this memory retrieval) happened after Slughorn's Christmas party but before the beginning of the semester... If that happened, then I can imagine Dumbledore approaching Slughorn and talking to him and saying, "Well, we're halfway through the year. What do you think? These are some of my concerns. When you were Tom's teacher, did this subject ever come up?" That would combine with what Slughorn had noticed over the summer when he saw Dumbledore briefly flash that ring.

That's the headcanon I'm building at the moment.

JC: That makes sense. Yeah, headcanon accepted. That does make sense, yeah, that that was the goal of getting Slughorn there was to learn... He has his suspicions about what Voldemort has done. Where would he have gotten this information (because it's very, very restricted at Hogwarts)? Who was he close to? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and here's Slughorn still with the same personality flaw now that he had then, where he was so foolish and easily flattered that he would overlook whatever. It's such a vice with such negative consequences for everybody. Is it a crime? No, but should he have been wiser about this? Yeah, yeah. Could it actually hurt people? Oh, interesting! Funny, you should ask. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's also interesting to me that Dumbledore tells Harry, "This is your task now. You have to try to get the true memory from him. He won't give it to me. This

is the best I could do. Now you need to get it from him." Harry doesn't know what a Horcrux is, and neither do we the readers. He doesn't understand why this memory is important, and my memory of this is in the next few chapters, he's not going to work too hard at it.

Lorrie: He doesn't have very much to go on.

JC: He doesn't have much to go on. Right, exactly.

Lorrie: Yes. Yeah. As often happens when you get an assignment from Dumbledore, you don't get any instructions and no idea how on earth you, with your little incompetent childishness, could possibly do better than this super powerful wizard.

JC: I guess a question that I ask at this point is... From a narrative perspective, it makes sense not to tell us what Horcruxes are, but from a realistic perspective, if Harry gets this memory, he's going to know what Horcruxes are and why they're important in this part of the story. What is the real reason for Dumbledore not telling him at this point? Dumbledore is pretty sure this is true. We're gathering more data just to verify, but also what we're going to see is we're going to find out the number of them, and that turns out to be the key piece of information for what they have to do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So why is Dumbledore not giving more information, other than that it was much more convenient for the narrative for him not to?

Lorrie: Aside from that -- I'm happy to give that the primary place as a reason -- but also the concept of Horcruxes is so big and so fundamental to understanding what Harry's up against that I approve of Dumbledore saying, "Okay, this is a concept. Keep this in mind, but understand these things that led up to it, and then we're going to have to have a whole separate conversation about Horcruxes."

JC: He tells Harry this is the most important memory, but Harry walks away with no idea as to why.

Lorrie: No clue.

JC: No clue. Is it a case of it's just so obvious to Dumbledore... This is a mistake that we as teachers make all the time: it's obvious to me why this is important, and the students have no clue. 'Why is this important? We don't know.' Is it an expert blind spot there, or is he really withholding something from Harry about why this is important?

Lorrie: My feeling (but it might be just that I'm too credulous a reader) is that Dumbledore's first imparting the importance of the emotions around this. The concept of Horcruxes is so huge, it is definitely too much for one of these sessions. You have to give Harry time to process. What Dumbledore is conveying to Harry with each of these private lessons is so worldview-changing. Understanding them on an emotional level is the most important thing for Harry to be able to do, and seeing the whole concept of Slughorn having one of the pieces of the answer and having this really obvious and enormous emotional reaction causing this very ineffective, obvious defense... Okay, that's important to this somehow. Later on, I think, 'Oh, I see...' The importance of this memory -- the reason why Dumbledore says this might be the most important one of all -- is because what Voldemort craved was limits, and what Slughorn could tell us (if he were not so ashamed) would be 'was there a point at which Voldemort sought limits from your knowledge and got something from you about it?'

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Because this is after Voldemort has decided, 'You know what? I'm going to just go kill a bunch of people.' He just walked right in, he killed a bunch of people, he framed a guy, he robbed them, he walked right back out, and then he was still a shiny, good-looking sixteen-year-old Head student. If he could do that, that's terrifying. Is anything going to stop him? At what point can he stop? At what point is he powerful enough? Isn't anyone going to stop him? We find out later these are all important things that would have been on the mind of a sixteen-year-old serial killer, but we don't know yet. Anyway, Harry still has to process that Voldemort met his uncle.

JC: Yeah. I guess I'm still a little bit hung up on the fact that there is a kid at Hogwarts named Tom Riddle, and a man also named Tom Riddle was murdered by a wizard and that no one thought, 'Are they related? Should we maybe go tell that kid that someone with his name... Should we see if there's a connection?'

Lorrie: No. Nothing that Muggles do is important.

JC: No, guess not. Guess not.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Yes. Harry now has to do this thing that Dumbledore got close to, but now I keep thinking about fishing and how there's a certain point when you've got a fish on the line and you can either capture it and reel it in, or if you do that somehow incorrectly, then the fish will escape. It's really a war of wills and skill, but now Slughorn is spooked. If Dumbledore does anything more, he's only going to push this information away forever, and they can't let that happen. It's that important.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry is trying to wrap his brain around this assignment and says, "Legilimency, Veritaserum..." and Dumbledore says, "I would be astonished if he has not carried an antidote to Veritaserum with him ever since I coerced him into giving me this travesty of a recollection." First of all, he's totally owning up to how unethical this was, how very non-consensual. To me, one of the important things about this quote is that it's slight, but it supports whatever thoughts I have that Snape was carrying an antidote to Nagini's venom. I would have if I were him... After Arthur Weasley's near-death experience, if I were the best potioneer around, I believe Snape had an antidote on him and that he chose not to take it at the moment that he was giving Harry the memories. He could have held on to life, and I believe that's what he would have done if Harry hadn't shown up at that precise moment; he wouldn't have let himself die until he had conveyed those memories to Harry first, and that Harry showing up when he did and Snape being able to convey the memories meant, 'Okay. Yeah, I could take the antivenin, but why? I'm done. I'm done.'

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Anyway, I do believe that, but the evidence for that is hovering around thirty percent, maybe. Anyone who disagrees with me is on perfectly solid ground to disagree with me. I don't think the case is there to be made, although, like I said, if I were Snape, that's what I would have done. Yeah, we have Dumbledore saying

any more force on Slughorn will drive him away, and he says to Harry, "I believe that you are the one person who might be able to penetrate his defenses." This is one of those annoying Dumbledore things where he could explain that further, but he's not going to. What do you think these defenses are? Right, he's not telling. Then he says to Harry, "We're only going to know how important this memory is when we see the real thing." Harry's, as usual, leaving this going, 'Oh, thanks,' and then we get to the part of the chapter that I didn't understand. It took me so many reads to understand this and I hated it at first, and then once I read it a certain way, I really, really loved this and I'm wondering what you made of it. After Harry stumbles out of Dumbledore's office, the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black says to Dumbledore, "I can't see why the boy should be able to do it better than you, Dumbledore," and Dumbledore responds, "'I wouldn't expect you to, Phineas...'" and Fawkes gave another low, musical cry." What do you make of that exchange between Dumbledore and the portrait?

JC: Phineas Black, a very different person from who Dumbledore was... I read that as Dumbledore is Harry's man just as much as Harry's Dumbledore's man. Dumbledore completely has his faith in Harry Potter here, and Fawkes's little hum is backing that up.

Lorrie: Huh...

JC: I think that's what it said to me, was that's basically what Dumbledore's... "Yeah, you wouldn't, but you don't trust Harry the way that I do or you don't see Harry the way that I do." Yeah, I felt like that was a complementary moment to "I'm Dumbledore's man." Now I'm really curious to know what you thought.

Lorrie: Right, because I find your reading very persuasive. Of course, thinking that this is why Dumbledore is doing it just adds to my sympathy for poor sixteen-year-old Harry going, "You want me to do what? You think I have what in me? Could you explain a little bit more about this, about how great I am?" Oh, God...

JC: "Why are you so convinced I'm capable of this?" Yeah.

Lorrie: "What is it that you think I can do?" Yeah. Ay, yai, yai, that's such a tall order. At first, I was very repelled by this exchange because it felt to me like it was another example of Slytherins being insulted. That "I wouldn't expect you to, Phineas..." that it's like, "Oh, no, we Gryffindors are so deep and we understand

some things, and I'm not even going to bother to explain it to you because you wouldn't get it." That's how it read to me at first, and I do know that there were other people who identified as Slytherins who felt that this was another example of the author's prejudice against them.

JC: Interesting. Okay... Did I just reveal how much of a Hufflepuff I am by maybe having *that* be my interpretation?

Lorrie: Um...

JC: Is that the most Hufflepuff way I could have interpreted that? I kind of feel like it is.

Lorrie: Maybe, but it's also quite real. I found it very persuasive, what you said, because Fawkes and loyalty... We aren't given that many tenets about Fawkes, but the loyalty is a major one, and we do know that Fawkes's colors involve the same kind of gold that are fundamental to Hufflepuffs and what Hufflepuffs find important in life. I do think you might be revealing that, but only in a way that's completely in keeping with all these characterizations and these values. What I was reading from my Snape-centric perspective about regret and second chances (because that's another thing about Fawkes: he represents second chances) is that I'm thinking Dumbledore is identifying with the horrible guilt that Slughorn is feeling and how that is preventing him from being able to face up to the truth; his shame at his own internal flaws that caused him to behave in this way had disastrous consequences. Slughorn never wanted this horrible fascist state to come about; all he wanted was to indulge his own sense of self-flattery. He just wanted to have these students look up at him. That's all he wanted, and look what an idiot he was -- how despicable and how incapable of recognizing warning signs, how predisposed to ignore them for the silly momentary pleasures that he wanted -- and I was imagining that Dumbledore identified with that. He also had chosen to disregard warning signs because there was something he didn't want to give up. Much as Hermione's trying to yell at Harry about, "Yes, yes, it's great being top student, isn't it? Could you give up that book? Because there are warning signs from the Prince," and Harry going, "What warning signs? You're just jealous," which is also true. Do these follies that we all have lead to catastrophe or not? Usually not. There are so many humans in the world, and we each have so many follies that they cannot most of the time lead to catastrophe. Often, whether by

dumb luck or whatever, we get to have our follies and bumble along and not hurt other people too much with them, but there's no telling which ones of these will suddenly escalate. I'm thinking that Dumbledore knows why Slughorn could be so ashamed of himself that he would lie and why it's still important to coerce this memory very non-consensually out of Slughorn, violating everything. It's like, 'Yes, yes, it's violating all sorts of boundaries. I don't care. The mission is more urgent than that.' What is stronger than a person's sense of shame? What are the things in me -- in you, in all of us -- that we're so ashamed of that we cannot face them, that we would continue to sacrifice others a lot rather than face? If you think about people who are now impoverished because they voted for Trump, 'Will you admit now, now that you've lost your business and whatever?' 'No, no, I won't.' Why not? What shame is there that you can't bring out into the light? Why would you rather keep letting other people suffer? Sometimes people will say, "Don't make me do this. I can't. I can't. I know what you're getting at, and I'm not saying you're wrong, but I can't." There's some of that going on from Slughorn. There's something Dumbledore thinks can happen if Harry approaches him, and my reading is that he doesn't believe Phineas Nigellus Black has ever done anything as awful as Dumbledore himself has. Whatever it is in Dumbledore's own past that makes him look at Slughorn's shame and the way he lies to himself and says, "I get it. I get it, Slughorn gets it," we will find out later Snape gets it, and he just doesn't think that Phineas Nigellus has ever hurt anyone that badly. He doesn't have anything to be ashamed of to that degree.

JC: Yeah. So that's why Harry has a better chance of getting the memory than Dumbledore has at this point. Okay, yeah, that makes sense.

Lorrie: Yeah. There's something about Harry approaching Slughorn that will give good, positive reason for Slughorn to be able to overcome his shame and release the true memory, and Dumbledore is not it. I was coming at it from a place of frustration about vilified Slytherins. Phineas Nigellus Black is not the greatest human being. He wasn't anyone's favorite anything -- not particularly known for his honor -- but I guess he never did anything as bad as Dumbledore did.

JC: Interesting. Correspondingly huge.

Lorrie: Yeah. When I gave myself that reading, then that struck me as quite beautiful and it set the tone for me to read what was coming up to be about shame

and about what it does inside people to run away from their own shame and how they lie to themselves, and how important it is anyway to keep trying. I would think that because I think everything's all about Snape.

JC: This is also making me think about how one of the things that makes Voldemort not fully human is that he can't experience shame, and that makes me think about other people in our world who seem not to be able to experience shame...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Including the author of this book, someone I'm putting in that category right now.

Lorrie: Very much. Yeah. Yeah, and how we can fantasize. This is a fantasy that I think her readership and former readership [have] given up on more and more as TERFpocalypse has droned on and worsened, because at first it was hard to believe. There was such a fantasy. "Couldn't we get her to see the shame of knowing the importance of equality and empathy, and then deciding that it's okay to have prejudice against someone...?" Yeah, that was a nice fantasy a few years ago, and at this point, whether or not there's anybody who could reach her that way, it's not like that can be part of our strategy.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: Maybe there's somebody in the world who can reach her, but it's not something I can foresee.

JC: Right, not without some magic that doesn't really apply in our world.

Lorrie: The next chapter is called Birthday Surprises.

JC: Oh-ho! I don't really remember what this is about, so I guess I'll find out.

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