



Transcript

Episode 6.18

Book 6, Chapter 18: Birthday Surprises

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 Eighteen: Birthday Surprises.

Lorrie: Birthday Surprises. Harry tries and fails to get Slughorn to tell him about Horcruxes. Apparition lessons begin. Ron learns what it's like when someone tampers with your drink.

JC: Ugh...

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: So a lot happens in this chapter.

JC: A lot happens in this chapter, yeah.

Lorrie: And some of my absolute favorite things happen in this chapter, which I'm just going to list right now, even though I know we haven't gotten to them yet, but I love these things. Golpalott's Law (LOVE!); Harry having imposter syndrome; poor Hermione being super competent and yet super threatened and smug and petty all in the same class; the single Snape-iest sentence ever...

JC: Oh, goodness.

Lorrie: Consequences; the very nuanced issue of censorship not being black and white here; and then, of course, the ending: the up-close look at how scary love potions actually are, even if they're not Dark Magic. But, wow, what a lot for one chapter.

JC: Absolutely.

Lorrie: Yeah. That doesn't even cover that they have to learn to Apparate.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. That, too. Yeah, there's a lot going on here. Oh... It's interesting that the chapter opens, too, with Ron and Hermione separately having very different opinions about how Harry should approach Slughorn...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And Ron's like, "He loves you. Just ask him." Hermione is like, "You're going to have to be really thoughtful about this," and Hermione turns out to be right.

Lorrie: And the revelation that Hermione has never heard of Horcruxes. What?!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Uh-oh...

JC: Right, right. I'll bring this up again later. I think there's a mention of it a little later, but this idea (which you've already touched on) about censorship. Hmm.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: How did this get so heavily censored? Yeah. When did that happen? There's some questions to be asked there. But then we have Golpalott's Third Law, which I love how mathematical this is. It's basically like a triangle, right? It's the idea that if you take any one side of a triangle, it has to be less than the sum of the two other sides; otherwise, you don't have a triangle. It's the same thing, so it just made sense to me immediately in my head.

Lorrie: I know. I love it.

JC: And then it goes on and no one else understands but Hermione, and I'm like, 'How do you not understand?'

Lorrie: 'How did you not? That's so thrilling. That's the key to everything.'

JC: It's just geometry. What? I had a moment of 'Why are none of them understanding this?' Anyway...

Lorrie: So as we speak, my high school senior is taking an AP exam.

JC: Ooh! What subject?

Lorrie: AP U.S. Gov.

JC: Ah, that's today.

Lorrie: But what I love is that the way that Slughorn and Hermione are talking in this chapter (and the way they're just running away with it fluently while all the other students are just standing there, like, 'What are they talking about?') kind of is that AP feeling of, 'Okay, you're going to be expected to just jump right in at an adult level, whether or not you're up for it.' Yeah, the schooling at that level is no joke.

JC: I really like the task that Slughorn sets them.

Lorrie: Love it.

JC: I've had a lot of criticism of Hogwarts over the years that we've been doing this podcast, but I think from a teaching perspective, this is a beautiful scientific inquiry that he has set them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's like, "I'm giving you a poison, you have no idea what it is. You have to construct an antidote for it. Go." Oh, my God. Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah, and everyone gets a different one.

JC: Everyone gets a different one, yeah.

Lorrie: Love.

JC: Yeah, and then also, there's even a little mention of lab safety, which made me happy.

Lorrie: I know. Aww...

JC: I'm just feeling like Slughorn is a really good teacher.

Lorrie: This is so good.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The thing that I especially love right now is that your way of loving Golpalott's Third Law is completely different from my way.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. We are walking in from completely different directions on the compass.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: I'm going to state it now. "Golpalott's-Third-Law-states-that-the-antidote-for-a-blended-poison-will-be-equal-to-more-than-the-sum-of-the-antidotes-for-each-of-the-separate-components." Oh, that's so brilliant! To me, this is the key to how to counter Dark magic because yeah, if you just have the exact equal sum action and reaction, it's not going to be enough to overcome the intention. The extra bit that you need is what accounts for the strength to overpower the initial bad destructive intention of the Dark magic, because you can't just bring equal force; it's not going to overcome it. It might counter it the way that Snape was able to contain Dumbledore's cursed hand for a while, but it's not going to cure it. But if you have an antidote or a response that is equal to more than the sum of every little bit of damage done by that Dark magic, then you will be able to feel how the damage was done in the first place, understand everything that went into committing all that damage, and then your extra power is that you have that extra magic of wanting to undo the harm, feeling bad about it and wanting to go back and do it. You have to know everything that the Dark magic curse wizard knew. You have to have all of that power, and you have to have this other greater power of wanting to repair.

JC: Okay, that's interesting. Yeah, you're right. There are elements... I feel like my understanding is a subset of your understanding.

Lorrie: It's so similar.

JC: Because I'm not thinking about intention at all. I'm just thinking you have two potions that have been blended, so you have to account for all the things that the one potion did, all the things that the other potion did, and then you also have to

account for (when they interact chemically) what other damage are they going to do. I was just thinking of it from that perspective; I wasn't thinking about the intentions of the person who created it or anything.

Lorrie: But it is the same thing. It's taking it into metaphorical fiction realm -- it's allegorical -- but this is why alchemy is both scientific and not scientific. At least as far as I know, you cannot make lead into gold, but the whole point was, even if there's a formula or a process, you can only do it if you're the magician who knows how to purify or transform yourself at the same time that you're trying to create this change in the matter. There's definitely an element of alchemy where you have to submit your own ego to trying to become more pure, and if you don't do that, then it's just like Muggles running around saying *Expelliarmus*: nothing's going to happen. You have to be in touch with something extra. What Slughorn says: "Our primary aim is not the relatively simple one of selecting antidotes to these ingredients in and of themselves, but to find that added component that will, by an almost alchemical process, transform these disparate elements --" It has to do with a personal investment of the person performing the magic. Hermione's there, nodding along like, 'Yes, yes. Obviously, yes.'

JC: That's so interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. To me, this is the explanation for why Snape is the one who's always called for Dark magic. He totally knows how all of that Dark magic was cast and he could do it. If you don't really mean it, you can't do it. A really, truly good, innocent person could read the instructions to Dark magic and not be able to cast it; he has all that darkness. He totally can, and he's gone through the horror of understanding how much damage he unleashed on the world when he did that, and he's so sorry and he wants to make up for it. That is the phenomenon that Snape has that people who are uncomplicated Death Eaters who have never felt regret wouldn't be able to withstand. That's why my guy is my champion, despite him being quite an unpleasant human. There's Slughorn explaining, in what seems very clear language to me, the entire solution to the mystery of this book.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, and everyone but Hermione is tuning him out at this point.

Lorrie: And Hermione's racing ahead.

JC: Oh, my gosh. It felt a little bit to me.... I've sat in a lot of high school classrooms observing my student teachers and watching them give an explanation that I'm like, 'Okay, yeah, that makes sense,' and then looking at the students and seeing that look on their face... They've checked out.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're not listening. 'Everything that you just said was a waste of time. You're going to have to do something else now,' yeah, is kind of what it felt like. One student will be like, 'I know what to do.' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Oh, that's brilliant!' Right.

JC: Yeah. It was very high-school-classroom feeling to me, yeah.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Hermione (being petty because she's so threatened) is thrilled that Harry can't possibly cheat his way into this one. The only way to succeed here is if you actually understand it, so bye, Harry!

JC: And that made me think about how hard teachers work these days to come up with tasks or to present students with tasks that AI won't help you do.

Lorrie: Aha, yes.

JC: That you cannot shortcut them, and that was where my brain went right away because I talk to teachers about this all the time. I talked to someone about this yesterday.

Lorrie: So true. Yeah.

JC: This idea that yeah, he can't just use the AI textbook cheat code to do this; he has to actually understand the principles to do this task, which is what makes it a good task -- what we call a 'high cognitive demand task' in the Ed Biz. It's interesting, the answer that he comes up with (which he does get from the book and which turns out to be very useful later in the chapter), and even Harry has to acknowledge, 'I didn't really do the problem. This is cheating.' Even Harry knows this is cheating, but it's the only option he feels like he has and he decides to take a risk. It's really an interesting little moment of yeah, you didn't actually understand what you were doing, and now you're in this desperation mode where you're going

to end up using ChatGPT to do your homework after all, even though you swore you wouldn't. Yeah.

Lorrie: Although, of course in this case, it's really useful that there are times in life when you're not going to have time to do all the other things.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You really are going to have to find the thing that has the best chance.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: That was useful, too.

JC: It's a great little bit of foreshadowing, and also sets him up for what's going to happen next.

Lorrie: It's also a good life lesson, too.

JC: To know what all the options are...

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: And you can't always solve the problem that you need to solve methodically and perfectly. Sometimes you just have to take your best guess and run with it. Sometimes, that's how it works.

Lorrie: You're not always going to have a cauldron.

JC: Yeah, and all the ingredients at your fingertips. Right, right.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry, bewildered, notices that not only Hermione but the Prince also had apparently no difficulty understanding Golpalott's Third Law.

JC: No notes. Ten out of ten, no notes. Oh, my God. He's like, "Yeah, duh!"

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry and Ron can't copy off the Prince either, and this made my horrible little snooty heart so happy that they can't copy off Hermione anymore "because she was now so good at nonverbal incantations that she did not need to say the words aloud." What a fantasy!

JC: Oh, my gosh. 'Yeah, you can no longer copy off of me.' Yes. I think that anybody who has ever been that person, like Hermione in any kind of situation like that where someone copied out of you, has felt that kind of bitterness. Okay, so my

story: I think I was a freshman in high school and I was in biology. I was sitting right in the front center of the room, which is my preferred spot, but there was a boy sitting next to me who later asked me to a school dance (I said no because I was mad at him about the situation). [He] Copied off of my tests; he did it every time and I knew he was doing it, and I never said anything to him directly because I was too shy, but I was unhappy about it. Finally, there was a test where I said, 'You know what? I'm going to fix it this time.' It was a multiple-choice test and I just put everything one letter off on my paper; I finished the test and I sat there and stared at it and stared at it and he kept waiting for me to turn it in, but we had ten minutes left in the class. Finally, he seemed to give up and he turned it in. Then I waited for him to sit down, I erased every single answer and fixed it, and then I turned it in. I never even looked at him, but I could sense the despair coming off of him from my left side.

Lorrie: The outrage, yes.

JC: He never said a word, but he didn't copy off of me anymore after that. That was my Hermione revenge moment in high school.

Lorrie: Well, he had more character than this kid in my high school, who just didn't grasp what was wrong with his indignation that some kid had done that to him, and actually went up to the teacher, saying, "He put the wrong answer on purpose to mess me up," and did not understand why we were all laughing at him.

JC: Oh, my gosh... Wow, yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness. But yeah, no, the kids that I remember sitting in a circle around me during test time were kids who had committed violent crimes. They had probation officers and they weren't above being threatening, so it was not funny.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I would have loved to be able to do my incantations in my head. They could threaten me, but it wouldn't get them anywhere.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I liked them, but they were scary during test time, and there was absolutely no question of them learning this on their own because they didn't really speak

English. It's not like Hermione, who is completely justified in thinking Harry and Ron should figure it out for themselves. They actually couldn't.

JC: Right. That's a little bit like Hermione being surrounded by the children of Death Eaters in a sixth-year class. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, isn't that just exactly in the mood of this chapter: things from high school that are hilarious and deathly serious at the same time?

JC: True. That is true.

Lorrie: And Hermione's not a saint either, right? So there's Hermione having her difficult sixth year, and Harry desperately riffles through all the pages. 'Come on, Prince. Come on, Prince. You have to have something.' "And there..." such a gift, "...Scrawled right across a long list of antidotes: *Just shove a bezoar down their throats.*" That is my candidate for most Snape-y sentence ever.

JC: Oh, yeah. Okay.

Lorrie: It is only seven words long, but in those seven words, he manages to combine his personal hostility (*Just shove...*), his impersonal sense of needing to rescue humanity... because he feels urgent about this. He wouldn't say "shove" if he didn't feel urgent. 'Come on, come on!' My favorite bit that ties it all up in a Snape-y bow is his chronically aggrieved impatience. 'Why doesn't anyone else see this? Why are we bothering with this long list of antidotes to save the unworthy necks of these...?' That conjunction of feelings... There you have my guy.

JC: I think that knowing it's the Prince this time through really helps me process; not on the level that you're doing, obviously (because you spent so much time thinking about this), but everything that is scrawled in the margins I'm reading so differently than I did the first time through knowing that it's young Snape. It's so interesting, so yeah, you almost hear it in Snape's voice, in Alan Rickman's voice. Yeah.

Lorrie: You don't even care if these people's... 'Okay, fine, nobody deserves to die like this. Fine, fine. Even those unworthy, horrible people.'

JC: Yeah. 'I'm not going to spend the effort to concoct the antidote. Oh, my God, just shove a bezoar down their throats.' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'And why doesn't everybody know this?' Then we even get Harry having a distant, distant memory of Snape having mentioned this during his first day of Potions class, so it's not that Snape isn't trying to teach these unworthy little children. First day. First day! That's how important he thinks this is. Are they listening? Apparently not.

JC: I love that he does dredge it up from his memory, though, that he does recognize, 'Oh, yeah, Snape said something about this.' It's like the meme with the dots. 'I'm connecting the dots.' 'You've connected nothing.' Yeah.

Lorrie: On the other hand...

JC: He made no connections.

Lorrie: In Harry's defense, if I were teaching a class and I said this useful thing on the first day and then treated people the way Snape treated Harry, how would that student remember anything either, except, 'Wow, just my luck to get this guy, this miserable...'

JC: For sure, true. Even if you're the best teacher in the world, whatever you say on the first day, you can't assume that anyone's going to remember it on the last day. That's not how humans work, so yeah.

Lorrie: Now, it's easy to imagine that Snape has mentioned bezoars a lot since then and Harry has been too busy trying to survive his classes...

JC: This is true.

Lorrie: But especially in fourth year, the whole Potions curriculum was about antidotes because there was some Death Eater wandering around. Hermione yells at Harry in *Goblet of Fire*, "Why aren't you studying your antidotes?" and he's, like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, Snape. Whatever."

JC: Yeah, so it is very likely that it's come up multiple times. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. But finally, because it's the Half-Blood Prince and not Snape mentioning bezoars, there's finally a way to deliver this idea into Harry's brain. Whatever way is good, it's better than not, so he goes and he finds himself a bezoar, and this is his best chance at not getting a zero on this assignment. Worse than that, this is his best chance at not being exposed as the fake that he really is.

JC: As the fraud that he knows that he is deep down, yeah. Yeah, because there's that moment when Slughorn comes by expecting to be delighted by what's in Harry's cauldron, and then backs away, like, 'Oh, no.'

Lorrie: 'This isn't right.' Oh, and Harry would have richly deserved that, but no. Then, when Slughorn sees the bezoar and he looks at it for a full ten seconds, that is scary. Ten seconds is an eternity.

JC: That is a long time to stand and stare at something in someone's hand.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: It's a lot of silence.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: I do love also that Hermione, who is only halfway through in her antidote, had included a chunk of her own hair.

JC: Yeah, and some incredible number of ingredients.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: And I thought the hair... That's going back to how alchemy requires a part of you, the magician. She understood that.

JC: That's great.

Lorrie: I love, love, love. Yeah, Harry the cheat is standing for ten seconds, wondering which way the axe is going to fall.

JC: And even Draco Malfoy is over there glaring at him, because it's interesting [how] the tables have turned here in Potions. In Potions, Draco has been used to... For the past five years, no matter how good Harry did, it was never good enough and it would always be insulted or whatever, and it's flipped. Harry's going to do this thing, which is one hundred percent not solving the task they were given, and Draco just knows that Harry's going to get away with it because he's Harry. Slughorn has decided that Harry is someone important and therefore Harry gets to get away with shit, which is what Draco has thought Harry was all this time.

Lorrie: And now look...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'See? See?! SEE?!'

JC: And now the one place where Draco felt safe, Potions...

Lorrie: And Draco is genuinely a good potion-maker.

JC: Yeah, he's actually a good student.

Lorrie: Yeah, so this maddening spectacle is in front of all of the outraged other students. Harry's undeserving ass is saved once again.

JC: By the way, when you said ten seconds, I wonder what was going through Slughorn's head for ten seconds. Okay, so there's this thing called 'wait time' in teaching where we recommend that teachers wait three seconds. You ask a question, and you wait; you count to yourself 'one, two, three' before you expect anyone to answer, and you establish early on that after asking a question, there's going to be a little bit of thinking time. Even if hands come up, I'm not going to call on anybody yet because I want to give everyone time to think. There's this thing. Ten seconds... Three seconds feels interminable when you're inside of a classroom.

Lorrie: Gosh, yes.

JC: Ten seconds? I don't... When ten seconds have gone by and no hands have gone up, that's when I teach teachers to recalibrate.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's a lot of think time, and if their faces look blank, that's when you stop and you go, 'Okay, let's rephrase the question, or let's come at this from another direction.' Ten seconds... What was going through Slughorn's head?

Lorrie: What do you think might have been?

JC: My first thought was, "The nerve of this little shit," but this is Harry.

Lorrie: Uh-huh.

JC: How am I going to respond? Was he first annoyed? Was he shocked? He ends up laughing and going, "Oh-ho-ho, just like your mother." Did it take him back in a memory? I don't know. I think there's a lot of ways it could've gone, and I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, with ten seconds, it could have gone all of those places. There's plenty of time.

JC: All of those places... Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: I think there was definitely memory, because he does mention that right after. I was wondering if he was thinking, 'Well, I should grade him zero because this wasn't the assignment, but is this actually an important thing to be learning on this topic?' If I were him as a teacher, I would accept that modification to my lesson. 'Oh, you know what? Actually...'

JC: And it's the kind of thing where you would, in the future, preface this lesson by saying, "Now, a simple solution would be if you had a bezoar on hand, da da da da. However, let's assume that you don't," and proceed from there. That's one of those things where this has happened to me as a teacher. This happens to all teachers where a student comes up with a smart-ass solution to a problem.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And you're like, 'Okay, I have to accept that because I didn't tell you you couldn't do that, but I'm making a note from my next class.' So yeah, that's probably it.

Lorrie: Yeah. We see, definitely, the extra lesson that Slughorn realizes he's going to have to add into this year's curriculum of exceptions to the bezoar.

JC: Hmm... yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, he's got plenty to think about in those ten seconds.

JC: That's true, yeah. Yeah, I think you're right. I think from a teacher perspective, he probably was thinking about the lesson and what to do next, and there was a lot of things to think about there. For sure. But still, ten seconds...

Lorrie: Yeah. Meanwhile, here's the Chosen One in front of him. "Uh, uh..." He also has to save face because he's been drooling over Harry all this time. Does he

yell at Harry now, or does he just continue with the narrative that Harry is the Golden Boy?

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: Oh, so much going on.

JC: And then the class ends and Slughorn never even gets to Hermione's cauldron. AAAHHH!

Lorrie: That's so true. Oh, my God...

JC: Hermione worked so hard, and she doesn't get the credit that she really genuinely deserves in front of everybody else.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: It was her one chance to be praised for being the top of the class, and the bell rang.

Lorrie: She was doing the actual work! Yes. Presumably, nobody else was going in that correct direction.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Ugh... So yeah, Slughorn says, "Just like his mother, she had the same intuitive grasp of potion-making, it's undoubtedly from Lily he gets it..." As the reader, you're thinking, 'Well, it's not. It's not from Lily; it's from the Half-Blood Prince.' Then, of course, we are meant as readers to wonder: well, did Lily have the intuitive grasp, or was she also getting it from the Half-Blood Prince because they were friends? Then I thought to myself, 'Well, no. Probably, I would guess that no, she really did have the intuitive grasp, because Slughorn got to observe her in class over years.

At some point, it would have been clear that something was genuinely her idea.' Even though he's been fooled by Harry all this year, I think over the years and years he probably did see something quite real from Lily.

JC: And that actually raises another question, then: is there some of Lily's work in the book?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Is some of what's scribbled in the margins ideas that Snape got from Lily?

Lorrie: Right. Yeah. I really do love the way that there are all these ghosts from decades ago and we just can't know, and how well that illustrates anybody's life at Harry's age trying to come of age in a world that was created and defined by other people, some of whom aren't even there and some of whom are there and are not about to tell you anything helpful and who aren't the same people now that they were then.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: J.K. Rowling...

JC: Yes. For sure.

Lorrie: Harry gets his extra points for cheek. Of course, Snape would also be siding with the Hermione people thinking you have to understand the theory, but on the other hand, Snape's approach is, 'Yes, but always teach the magic that's accessible.' You cannot trust everybody to make it to sixth-year Potions, but you can trust people to memorize "get a bezoar"; that might help. That is much more Snape's approach to teaching the unwashed masses, whom he so does not respect but looks after anyway.

JC: And a reason to keep a bezoar in your first aid kit.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry, to the rage of Draco and Hermione, is completely the Golden Boy still. He rides that high to go ask Slughorn about Horcruxes and repeat word-for-word what Tom asked decades ago about Horcruxes, because that'll work, right? Everything works for Harry.

JC: Yeah, not today.

Lorrie: No, and the change that this question creates in Slughorn is really startling. Suddenly, he froze: "His round face seemed to sink in upon itself..." and he looked shocked and terrified. This is so visceral, and he says, "Dumbledore put you up to this." This is operating on a level of terror that is so far removed from everyday Slughorn, and this reaction from him here makes me think, 'Okay, definitely then, Dumbledore had not yet talked to Slughorn about Horcruxes at the time that he came to hire him over the summer if we're getting just the mention of it to change Slughorn's entire body.' Then Slughorn demands, "Dumbledore's shown you that --

that memory. Well, hasn't he?" It's no use. He's not even trying to deny it; he's giving himself up right away, and the image of Slughorn undergoing this to me is such an accurate picture of the terror that people can feel when there's a secret, a really terrible secret from really long ago in your past, and your best bet was to just hope it never comes up again. Are you going to be able to get away with this? Can you bring it to your grave? Or maybe it wasn't as bad as you thought. Oh, come on, maybe you can justify it. Wouldn't you have done this in the same position? And then no, it comes up and it actually was just as bad as you thought, and there's no getting away from it. Wow... No, you're not going to be able to get away with it. No, just putting all of your bet on people never having noticed is not going to work out. Yeah, I've seen that a couple times in life; it's not fun. Then his only recourse is just pure denial: "...I don't know anything -- *anything* -- about Horcruxes," and he slams the door in Harry's face because there's no other way. There's no way out for him. After Harry comes back to his friends from that, Hermione of course resents that he won the whole challenge without doing work; Ron resents that Harry hadn't given him one, too.

JC: Which makes no sense, Ron, but okay, yeah. All right.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's a really good way to balance out the chapter. Then Harry figures, 'All right, I'll just give Slughorn time to forget, and then I'll try again.' Yeah, no, that's not going to work, Harry. No, Slughorn is going to go right back to acting like nothing ever happened, but this window is permanently closed. I just really like how accurate that is, about how it feels to live every day with a secret fear.

JC: And that Slughorn goes back to playing the role of being [an] affectionate teacher, but he also then stops having his parties and stops exposing himself and pulls in.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: Clearly pretending everything's fine when... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this is something that is true of so many people who go through life decade after decade like nothing's wrong, and then inside, there's something that's eating away at them. Sometimes it is really horrible and scary; sometimes it's not even that bad, but it damages them from the inside anyway and the feeling of it

is so awful. The contrast between the exterior smiling and the interior fear and the dread that someday you're going to be found out... Slughorn's not having a very good time, and then Hermione is shocked to discover that the library has exactly one mention of Horcruxes from *Magick Moste Evile*: "Of the Horcrux, wickedest of magical inventions, we shall not speak nor give direction..." Wow. Let's talk about censorship. What do you think? What's your reaction to this?

JC: That is really interesting to me, because it feels very of the time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even before the time, let's be honest, because by the time this book -- this book is set in the late 90s, so in a world where wizards had access to the internet, this information would be out there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The Wizarding World is not online, at least at this point in time, so it's hard for me to wrap my head around now that idea of information being that tightly controlled, because it feels like even top secret government documents are not necessarily that secure now. There's always opportunities for things to be leaked and rumors. "Oh, I saw the document and it said this," and a lot of that is the way that we access information now. This is the relic of a time when you could just pull every book out of a library that had that in it and say, "No, we're not going to give anybody access to that information," to the point where it's not even a rumor. There's not even rumors about it, which really for me raises the question: when did that happen, and how did Tom Riddle find out about it? Yeah. How?

Lorrie: Well, one thing that had made me think, because I quite approve of the censorship of Horcruxes, even though I would normally think of myself as anti-censorship: I've seen that de-platforming works, and sometimes there's a self-defeating fear that all information is out there; it cannot be controlled, so there's no point in trying to counter the torrents of poison being pumped into the information economy. No, actually, there is, and if you can cast way, way back in your mind to the Biden administration, do you remember when Trump was censored off of Twitter?

JC: Mm-hmm.

Lorrie: That made a difference, and then having Elon Musk buy it and get him back on... De-platforming works. It actually does, and when bad faith influencers are de-platformed, their organizations actually do lose money. Also, when people that I like who are writing autobiographies about what it's like to be queer or trans... When those books are censored, it's not true that being censored helps your sales. No, it doesn't! It totally cuts down on your sales. Are there things that human nature can't be trusted to know? That's, of course, the big Dumbledore conundrum. The answer in the abstract is definitely yes. The whole argument of 'should guns be freely available?' Well, the human impulse to be angry at each other and to lash out... That is eternal, but if you have easy access to a gun, then you can do stuff that's irreversible that you didn't actually really mean. If the access is restricted and some alternatives are put into place, you have a better chance of doing something with your life that you really meant to do, not making an irreversible mistake in a moment. In Dumbledore's position of being very, very powerful, in general the answer is yes, there are some things that human nature in general can't be trusted with, but in specific, what are those things and who gets to make the choice? Well, if Dumbledore were a god, things would be easier, but he's not; he's just another person with bad judgment.

JC: We're very human, yeah.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, there is some knowledge that's too powerful in general for humans to withstand. This is incredibly annoying and it annoys Hermione, and she ends up bossing around the super scary book, she's so annoyed at it.

JC: Which is very badass of her. I also like the implication that if anyone could have this knowledge, "It would be me," from Hermione. "I would not do evil with this." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of course, this is the volume where we've seen her mess with Cormac McLaggen in a way that she really shouldn't have and she would think that she's above it. No, you're not, and if Harry popped up to say, "You know, Hermione..." she would just say, "Shut up."

JC: I still have my question about 'How did Tom Riddle find out about them even to ask?' These kids have gotten all the way to sixth year, and the only reason it's a word that they now know is because Dumbledore told it to Harry.

Lorrie: So here's my guess. This is totally post-canonical because of the *Fantastic Beasts* movies and because of timeline. He was born in 1926, so it would have been the year after he graduated from Hogwarts that Dumbledore and Grindelwald would have had their big showdown. Now, we learn that Voldemort is the first person to ever make more than one Horcrux. Well, I'm guessing (based on where the *Fantastic Beasts* movie series was going) that Grindelwald ended up making one. The whole frustration of Grindelwald is that he wants to control other people's minds to unleash this super destructive power, but how annoying is it that other people have free will of their own and they don't want to do what you want to make them do? Well, maybe the only solution will be if you divide yourself, so we see Grindelwald trying to work with how you can create beings that have agency without independent will. 'Well, do I have to do everything myself around here? I guess I do.' My guess is that Grindelwald did that; it was apparent that he had done something like that (something that was truly dark). Voldemort was old enough to take note of it and was well-versed in Dark magic enough so that he had heard some sort of rumor about it, but I'm guessing Dumbledore censored all reference to Horcruxes after Grindelwald made a Horcrux. Tom Riddle might have seen what Grindelwald was doing and might have been able to find something before the censorship, or it might have been that he was hanging out around so many Dark wizards that he found or heard whispers, because surely there's some long lineage of Dark magic knowledge being passed down.

JC: For sure, yeah. I guess the fact that he went to Slughorn to ask tells me that he looked in the library, too. I think he does say that, maybe in the memory, that he went to the library and looked and there wasn't anything there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So he goes to a teacher that he thinks will tell him something and flatters him.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: Okay, that makes sense that he heard about it through some other... Because he was maybe, what, fifteen, sixteen at the time?

Lorrie: Right. This was when Grindelwald had already done a whole lot of destructive things, but Dumbledore was still running away from the inevitable showdown. I think Voldemort would have been able to see that Grindelwald had done something.

JC: Are we ready for Apparition lessons?

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: Oh, my God, it's the Driver's Ed of the magical world...

Lorrie: Yes, it is!

JC: Except with very little direction.

Lorrie: McGonagall is snapping at Draco because whatever is happening in Draco's life is so preoccupying him that he's not even paying attention to Apparition.

JC: Yeah. I really like that little hint. He's arguing with Crabbe, and then a few minutes later, Harry overhears what he's saying. I like this little hint of the parallel between Draco and Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry has this impossible task...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Draco has an impossible task, but Harry has the support of his friends and Draco's trying to order his friends around without telling them what he's doing. It's just an interesting parallel.

Lorrie: Yeah, and when McGonagall scolds Draco for talking during this lesson, Snape looks annoyed. "Harry strongly suspected that this was less because of Malfoy's rudeness than the fact that McGonagall had reprimanded one of his House," and I'm thinking, 'I don't know, Harry. I think, maybe...'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I think maybe it's that conversation that Harry overheard where Snape was trying to tell Draco, "If you're going to be doing this stupid stuff, at least put on a better show," and here's Draco, putting on a terrible show.

JC: Yeah, yeah. "Been there, done that, did it better than you. Come on, kid, catch up!"

Lorrie: Wow, Harry does such a jump scare to Draco. It's very satisfying where he stands right behind and overhears whatever he wants to hear, and then says something right in Draco's ear. He does a Snape.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Who's the last person Draco wants around at that moment?

JC: And he's talking about it in public. Come on, Draco. Yeah.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: You're not doing a very good job of being a sneaky Death Eater here.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Harry's right in his ear. Wow, Harry is completely in ascendancy here. He is so dominant.

JC: Yes. It's hot, actually, to the extent that it's appropriate to say that about Harry Potter at this point in his life. It's like, 'Wow. Damn, kid.' He stepped up.

Lorrie: "I tell my friends what I'm up to, if I want them to keep a lookout for me." He's totally taunting Draco.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: "I have better minions than you."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "My friends like me."

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: "I can trust them with secrets."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Who do you have?" I got the feeling, reading how this author wrote the first Apparition lesson, that she must have been waiting for years to write this lesson.

JC: I love how the 'Destination, Determination, Deliberation' thing is so vague and...

Lorrie: Unhelpful.

JC: It makes no sense. "Just try. Just try really hard." What? What?! I love how it's just very meaningless instructions, that it's just a thing that you apparently have to feel your way through. It reminded me of the lessons that Harry took with Snape in the previous book where it was, "Just try harder. Just try harder." It's a little bit like that, but also it's darkly funny to me that they don't even warn them about Splinching until someone loses a limb, and they're like, "Oh, yeah, that can happen if you don't try hard enough." It's like, 'Oh, shit...'

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh. That's scary.

JC: That's not going to help.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and then no one makes any more progress after that.

Lorrie: And they didn't expect it.

JC: Yeah. That's... yeah.

Lorrie: This is hard, yeah.

JC: The other thing about this is that they can't practice because they have, for one hour, lifted (just in this one room) the ban on Apparition, and then they can't even practice until the next lesson because you can't Apparate on the grounds. How are they going to learn this? What the hell? Yeah.

Lorrie: It's so much like driving. I'm thinking about the people I know who've grown up in cities where you can't learn to drive, because whose car are you going to borrow and where are you going to go practice? You cannot simulate this; you have to just get... Yeah. For a thing that everyone's expected to know how to do, it sure is dangerous and complicated.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Really, the only way you can learn it is to get it into your muscle memory.

JC: So very much like driving.

Lorrie: Yeah. After this, Harry keeps tracking Crabbe and Goyle, but he can't find any evidence of where Draco is. Yep, there's Crabbe and Goyle standing, keeping a lookout... for who? Where? Can't figure that one out. In a sign of the times, the next Hogsmeade weekend is canceled; that feels extremely current and relevant because for the past year, ever since ICE was formed, ethnic festivals where a lot of immigrant communities come out to celebrate have been canceled for people's safety. 'Yeah, it's not safe anymore. Don't do those things. You can't have fun. It's not going to be fun.' Meanwhile, Katie Bell is still at St. Mungo's (poor thing), which, compared to the news right now, just made me think, 'Well, at least they know where she is. She's not being held in some prison where they're denying it,' but further disappearances have been reported in the *Daily Prophet*, including several relatives of students at Hogwarts. This is a point when the fictional *Harry Potter* world is starting to catch up to the level of fascism that we have in May 2026 U.S. Nice...

Life is hard.

JC: I think -- by the time we get to the last book -- we will see that the *Harry Potter* world's fascism is going to... I don't know. Will it surpass, or --

Lorrie: We don't know yet.

JC: We don't know. We're going to find out.

Lorrie: But yeah, as of this point, we are still worse off, but they're starting to be within sight. Against that backdrop, Ron comes of age.

JC: Wow, and has a really shitty birthday.

Lorrie: But his parents do get him a gold watch, which is awesome.

JC: Which is really awesome. He gets a really special gift. It's also interesting to me that he wakes up with a pile of presents, and Harry notes that they must have been delivered by the house-elves in the night. Finally, an answer to how that gift-giving works that I think I asked about earlier in this volume.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You said, "Oh, we're going to get the answer," and here it is.

Lorrie: And yeah, this is quite similar to how you and I are going through the joy, the celebration, of our kids graduating from high school and going off to college in this time.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, yeah, no, we're still celebrating. Let's see.

JC: Yeah, still celebrating. Yeah, we're going to celebrate.

Lorrie: And in the pile of Ron's gifts, he accidentally gets the Romilda Vane-spiked poisoned Chocolate Cauldrons and starts shoving them in his face.

JC: Oh, and while he's doing this, Harry's like, "Yeah, cool, it's your birthday! Happy birthday! Great, enjoy your presents," and he's looking at the Marauder's Map trying to figure out why Malfoy has completely disappeared from it. It's so interesting that he's like, 'Hmm, every time I look for Malfoy, sometimes I'll see Crabbe and Goyle hanging out in a deserted corridor, but Malfoy's nowhere on the map.' I don't think that I put it together the first time I read it, but it just seems so obvious now what's happening and it's surprising. Considering how much time Harry spent in the Room of Requirement in the previous book, it's a little surprising to me that he hasn't noticed or hasn't figured it out, but yeah. I didn't either as a reader.

Lorrie: I didn't either. Partly now, it's closed canon, but at the time we were first reading, we didn't know what new things the author was going to introduce into this world that we had never heard of...

JC: True.

Lorrie: So it's a different experience now, knowing that you have a finite number of clues to work with.

JC: Okay, yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry has no idea what's happening with Ron because he has his own obsession happening here, and wow, Ron under the influence of a love

potion... We get to see how frightening love potions are. Yes, it is incredibly funny; at the same time, totally terrifying. He becomes completely delusional and obsessive. It's completely artificial, but it scares me and it awes me because the real thing (when you actually have these feelings) is just as powerful as the artificial thing that Ron is going through and it's just as miserable. It's so fake what Ron is feeling, but actually it looks exactly like that when it's for real and it really does happen. When you have these kinds of feelings for somebody (like Ron is superficially gone through here), it does overpower hunger. It does make you physically ill. Geez... This naturally occurring human phenomenon is nothing to take lightly. God, it's scary.

JC: It is. It's dark even as it's funny, but it takes Harry a little while to figure out what the heck is going on and he thinks that Ron is just joking for a little while, which is a really natural reaction to be like, "Why are you talking like this all of a sudden?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not until he realizes and he looks at the Chocolate Cauldrons and goes, "Oh," because he knew they were spiked with love potion. He knew, and Ron ate three of them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, boy... Oh, and then Ron punches him, which is even more like, 'What the hell?!' Yeah.

Lorrie: God... So that's what we see: Harry has internalized the nonverbal spells that he learned from the Half-Blood Prince and he reflexively, without thinking, casts a nonverbal *Levicorpus*, which totally works. I like this moment where Harry has an internal struggle where he considers letting Ron just live with the consequences, and then his better nature prevails and he thinks, 'No, we're supposed to be friends.' "Harry thought that he would deserve another punching if he permitted Ron to declare undying love for Romilda Vane." The way that he doesn't know that for sure and has to work this way through it is quite parallel to the way people are thinking. Is lack of consent... How important is that? Some people are like, 'No, it's super important,' and others are like, 'But is it really?'

That's so real, and if you care about the person involved, yeah, then it's much easier to see why you don't want that to happen to anybody.

JC: Yeah. I think it's terrifying here that the Weasleys made this, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Again, really, really talented wizards, and this is what they were selling to teenage girls.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Wow, right? I want to know how... I know that the school banned them and was testing for them coming in (very rightfully so), but hundreds of stories like this have happened because they put this product on the market, which says something... They're just pure capitalists here. They're just like, "Yeah, it's going to make us money. We can do it, so let's just do it." There's no reason not to, from their perspective; it's going to be a money maker, and this is what it does to people. It's just like, Ugh... Ugh, it's really dark.

Lorrie: That's also the whole self-justifying thread that is in human nature. "Well, other people are selling it; ours are better. If we were so noble and we refused to sell them, other people would just be raking in the money."

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. This gives us a whole second opportunity to consider the way that Tom Riddle, Sr.'s life had been ruined.

JC: Ooh, uh-huh.

Lorrie: It also brings up the question in the reader's mind: Snape and James and Lily... When they were this age and they were such clever students, did they ever brew love potions? Huh... We know that all of them had the ability. They were so bright, and Harry had worried in *Order of the Phoenix*: how did James get Lily to change her mind about him? Meanwhile, this story has Hermione miserable about Ron and Harry miserable about Ginny, grappling with the feeling of the powerlessness when you really long for someone and it may or may not be requited; you can't control them and it's just ruining your life, the misery of it. This is such a good way to bring all of these parts of the story into the mind of the

reader, sometimes not even on the surface, but all these tiny little references to how Snape and Lily were at the same age do make you think. Everybody at this age has to consider these ethical questions. It was super smart of Harry to bring Ron directly to Slughorn. I was so relieved.

JC: Yeah, that's a really good choice. It's also really... He does a good job of talking Ron into it. It just reminded me a lot of the way that you deal with drunk friends, drunk friends who really just need to go and lie down. "Yeah, yeah, the party is going to continue over here. Come on, let's go!" It's where you're manipulating them, but for their own good kind of a thing.

Lorrie: Bring them to safety. Tell them whatever they need to hear. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, bring them to a safe place, tell them whatever. Yeah, exactly, so it reminded me a lot of that. Oh, poor Lavender...

Lorrie: Oh, that hurt.

JC: I feel for her here.

Lorrie: Yeah. Can you imagine? It's the birthday of the boy you're crazy about, and she's standing there with this birthday present. Can you just imagine how beautifully wrapped that thing must have been?

JC: And how long she's been standing there, hoping that someone will let her in the common room... Oh.

Lorrie: And how much thought she must have put into what present exactly would be the most romantic...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The most likely to make him realize that he wanted to be with her forever. Ouch! No, she just gets elbowed aside.

JC: Yeah. He just basically breaks it off with her accidentally along the way and says, "No, Harry's going to go introduce me to Romilda Vane." What?

Lorrie: What?!

JC: Who? What? Yeah.

Lorrie: That's so confusing. Harry heartlessly laughs inside, and I can't blame Harry for that, after all he's had to put up with from them.

JC: This is true, and Harry knows that Ron is not that interested in Lavender. He does know, so it is pretty callous, but also Harry's main concern here is Ron. Yeah, got to get Ron to the Potions Master.

Lorrie: Yeah, and anyone can see where the Ron/Lavender romance is headed anyway, so all right. Oops, I guess the timeline has been moved up a bit. He drags Ron over to Slughorn, and Slughorn takes his time. He's not awake at all, and maddeningly while Harry's trying to holler, time is of the essence here. Slughorn's like, "Oh, was this potion within date?" Can we talk about that later? He says, "They can strengthen, you know, the longer they're kept," and that thrilled my nerdy little heart, because that's more of this series theme coming up. It's a clue that love potions really are Dark magic, and they should be categorized that way because that is one of the things that characterizes Dark magic: with time, their negative influence becomes greater, more destructive. It's not one and done; no, it continues. It poisons generation after generation, and this is the clue that I found from *The Prince* by Machiavelli that years and years and years ago, when I was trying to think, 'what makes magic Dark?' Oh, Machiavelli will tell you. Obviously, this is the Half-Blood Prince volume, so anything Machiavelli said is relevant here. This quote from *The Prince* goes: "Those cruelties are well used (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and then are not continued, but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects. Those cruelties are badly used that, although few at the outset, increase with the passing of time instead of disappearing. Those who follow the first method can remedy their standing, both with God and with men; the others cannot possibly maintain their positions." It's like, 'Well, do you have to do bad things sometimes?' Yeah. Intention matters. Who are you going to hurt with it? Are you going to take care to hurt not that many people? Are you going to take care to stop it as soon as you can? So yeah, Slughorn's saying that love potions can strengthen once they pass their expiration date. It's not that they stop working; they just become more dangerous.

JC: Yikes. Yikes!

Lorrie: Yeah, this is Dark magic, and we find out in the next volume Snape says the same thing about Dumbledore's cursed hand: "There is no halting such a spell forever. It will spread eventually, it is the sort of curse that strengthens over time."

JC: And now that I think about it in other areas (other genres or other media properties) where curses have been involved, that is a theme. I haven't put that together before, but the sooner you can reverse a curse, the better, and then as time goes on, it gets worse and worse until eventually it will kill the person often. Yeah, that's a theme I hadn't thought about, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the longer it's around, the more it spreads, the more likely it is that it'll have consequences you didn't ever intend. It escapes your control, and people that you hurt with it will go on to hurt other people with it. The thing that Snape says about Dumbledore's cursed hand (what enabled him to halt it at all) is exactly what we learned from Golpalott's Third Law. Snape understood what kind of destruction went into the curse that damaged Dumbledore's hand and then he had the intention to understand and heal it as best as possible, and that was the extra element he had: the added component that can transform all of the power into at least trapping it for a bit. In Harry's case here, we just saw him overcome the urge to get mild revenge on Ron and let this poison play out, but he let himself be loyal and mature and get Ron to safety.

JC: So Slughorn again triggers Harry's imposter syndrome here. "Why didn't you just brew up an antidote?" Clearly, it's not hard because he does it so fast, and Harry's like, "Ugh..."

Lorrie: "Yeah, let's talk about that later."

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: 'Hopefully never.'

JC: I also love that Slughorn really smoothly steps into the same game that Harry's playing with Ron. He doesn't ask questions, and this is clearly not his first rodeo. He's seen this a lot. He knows what you have to say and everything.

Hosts: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: And hopefully, Harry watching Slughorn make the antidote will make up for the lack of education that Harry got by taking the bezoar route. Hopefully, after

being in this terrible situation, Harry will remember how Slughorn did it and he'll know how to do antidotes in the future -- I hope, I hope -- as well as carry bezoars. Like Hermione... Every time Hermione misses a test question, you know that she'll never get that thing wrong again. 'Oh, maybe... Maybe Harry will be okay with antidotes, I hope.' Here's a horrible thing that this whole scene reminds me of that I haven't read: Ron's mind clears because of the antidote, and when he gets back into his right mind, he's devastated. I have not read *Know My Name* by Chanel Miller. Have you read it?

JC: No.

Lorrie: This is the woman who survived the assault by Brock Turner, the Stanford undergrad, who there were judges who advocated for a lesser sentence for him because he had been such a promising swimmer. I don't know if I could withstand reading her supposedly incredibly good memoir, *Know My Name*, but it's about what happens after you've been in a position where your consent was not humanly considered at all. If you're in a state where you can't consent, hopefully there are people around you who won't let other people abuse this because it will not be okay. It's not okay. That's a difference I've seen in our lifetimes, a change in the popular culture. Between the time that this book was first written and now, I've seen consent culture become much more widespread and better understood. That's only a good thing. Even on a relatively harmless level, I remember there were times when I thought someone liked me, and then later they said, "Oh, no, I was just under the influence, so it didn't mean anything." Well, it had to me. It meant a lot to me, and it felt really empty later to find out, 'Oh, you didn't?' If you know that's what it's going to be like, then that really shows you how desperate Merope Gaunt had been, thinking, 'I know that's what I'm doing to this guy, but I'm going to drug him anyway and impose my fantasy on him over someone else's autonomous will to play-act, because the thing that I want I can't get for real.' You can't force people to feel these things on their own; drugging them this way means that you've resigned yourself to that.

JC: Yeah. That feeling of knowing that you were incapacitated and that you did things that you wish you had not...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And other people saw it, and now you have to live with that... That's in a case where, for the most part, you have done that to yourself. You made choices.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Not always, but most of the time, you made choices that led to this, but the idea that Ron did not choose this just adds this huge oppressive layer of awfulness on top of it.

Lorrie: Poor Ron has regained his senses, and Slughorn tries to hearten him back up with some alcohol, calls Ron 'Ralph'...

JC: Which is... He calls him 'Ralph', but also the fact that he's like, "Oh, here, I've got wine, I've got this, I've got that. A drink of that will cheer you up!" The idea of going to the teacher's room and getting a drink is just like, 'Oh, my God,' but I guess Ron technically is of age now, so hey.

Lorrie: That's true. It's his birthday!

JC: Yeah. Not that I would take my 18-year-old or 21-year-old students out and buy them drinks. No, that's a bad, bad idea, but it's Hogwarts.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's Slughorn.

JC: Oh, so yeah. This is very interesting because it's a bottle of mead that he had been saving to give to Dumbledore. He pours out three glasses, and before Slughorn can even make this toast or whatever he was going to say, Ron just chugs the glass and it's immediate that this is not okay, that something's wrong.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah, and it's happened so fast that Slughorn doesn't even realize it. I really like this choice by this author because Ron was fine after the antidote, but this poisoning episode right after... In the reader's mind, you still get the feeling, like, 'Oh, no, this happened to Ron,' and then it was mortal danger. I do like that she has this way of driving home that there was mortal danger for Ron. Also, maybe he didn't give Dumbledore the mead because Dumbledore confronted him about that memory, and then he just tried not to talk to Dumbledore ever again.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, that's actually, probably, exactly what happened.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh. There's Slughorn paralyzed by shock. That makes me feel a lot of sympathy for him. Imagine being a teacher and you give somebody a drink -- a kid -- and then, 'What did I just do? I didn't mean to do it.'

JC: Yeah, and the description of what Ron is experiencing physically is pretty horrific. It's very graphic, what it might look like for someone who ingests a poison like this.

Lorrie: Yeah. Gryffindor Harry, faced with a crisis, is able to bolt over furniture; Slughorn, being not a Gryffindor, is standing there paralyzed. Yeah, he thinks about the bezoar that he knows is in Slughorn's Potions kit because it was the one that Harry had produced in class and, thank goodness, he saves Ron's life. Or we don't know that yet, actually.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's a cliffhanger! It's written like dying.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Ron gave a great shutter, a rattling gasp, and his body became limp and still."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, thank goodness the next chapter tells you right away, presuming that people like me read that and immediately have to look at the next chapter. 'Okay, no, no, he didn't die. He didn't die.' Oh, boy.

JC: It's really interesting to me that Harry knew the bezoar would be there in that bag, that it didn't get put back into the little box in the cabinet.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's there. I found that very interesting, because I can't think of any reason why it would necessarily be in the bag, so I'm glad that it was.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's convenient that it was, but yeah.

Lorrie: I guess he saw Slughorn tuck it in there in class.

JC: Maybe he must have, because my thought at the beginning of the chapter was, 'Oh, Harry knows where the bezoars are and he knows that there are more, so if he needs one in a pinch, he knows where to get it.' I kind of had misremembered the ending of the chapter and I thought he had to run back and get one, but no, it was just right there. It sounds like Ron wouldn't have had time for anything else anyway.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. That was an end of a chapter. Whoo!

JC: So Ron's birthday is off to a great start.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness, and the next chapter is called Elf Tails.

JC: Tails. Tails spelled like an animal tail, which has me going, 'What? Tails?!'

Lorrie: Tails.

JC: 'They have tails? What?' Okay.

Lorrie: All right.

JC: Okay. More to come!

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.