



Transcript

Episode 6.19

Book 6, Chapter 19: Elf Tails

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 Nineteen: Elf Tails.

Lorrie: Elf Tails. Ron survives being poisoned and the Weasleys visit him in the hospital wing. Hagrid tells Harry that Dumbledore is angry with Snape. Harry is so obsessed with tailing Draco that he can't even focus on Quidditch; then he realizes he can order Kreacher to tail Draco. Whoo! This chapter has so much respect from me. So many changes are cataloged in this chapter.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: So many layers. Layers upon layers... It's also a standout example of ring composition. Sometimes very closely -- sometimes pretty loosely -- J.K. Rowling mirrors... uses the center of *Goblet of Fire* as the center of the series and then balances chapters against each other, like the first book against the seventh book and very much *Half-Blood Prince* against *Chamber of Secrets*; that's the strongest in this chapter, because the whole Weasley family gathering around their child who nearly died is so reminiscent of when Ginny was rescued from the Chamber, and the school being at risk of being shut down is also a direct echo to that. The

helpless way that everyone assumes Dumbledore knows everything that's going on or ought to know how to stop this... He doesn't; he's quite desperate. Hagrid sums it up: Hagrid, in this chapter, says to Harry, "Chamber of Secrets all over again, isn't it?" These two volumes that are about books from the past are connected here, I think, the most deeply, and that gives us the opportunity to reflect on all the things that have changed since then, all the growing up that all these characters have done.

JC: And they have. There's a lot of moments in here where you can really see that they're all nearly adults or are adults in many cases. It's so interesting, just the maturity with which conversations are held and with which magic is used. I hadn't thought about how the comparison to *Chamber of Secrets* really makes you pay more attention to that, but that's true. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's a good thing that these characters have matured and learned things along the way, because life is worse and scarier now than it was then. Fred and George operate to remind the reader how dangerous things have gotten because -- this is such a cool little plot point -- Ginny doesn't even realize they had been right there in Hogsmeade, and they say, "Oh, yeah, we were looking into buying Zonko's, but now that things are so dangerous that students aren't allowed into Hogsmeade, what's the point?" That felt very contemporary.

JC: Also interesting that they're doing that well that they could buy out their major competitor.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I guess Zonko's is boarded up anyway, but wow...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Because they've only been in business this year, right?

Lorrie: But they're very much like Gen Z entrepreneurs who are flexible and know how to handle the compromised new economy, because Zonko's wasn't going to be doing anything whatsoever if they hadn't come along. Oof... They're all appalled and standing around looking at the nearly dead Ron, and George says, "It was lucky that Harry thought of a bezoar," and Harry keeps turning cold at the thought of what would have happened if there hadn't been one and he hadn't thought of it.

This is setting us up with a baseline. Just like, of course, Lily gave up her life for her baby (because naturally, a mom would care what happened to her infant), naturally Harry cares that his best friend almost died; that's his baseline, and we're going to be able to use that to compare soon how it feels when it's his worst enemy going through the same thing. Meanwhile, Hermione's too busy to be her usual correct self, so Ginny gets the honor from the author of giving the correct guess when the Weasleys and Harry and Hermione are trying to figure out, "Who sent the poison? Who are they targeting?" Ginny turns out to be right; meanwhile, Hermione and the unconscious Ron are busy recalibrating their perspective on everything now that there's been a near-death experience. Oops! All right.

JC: Yeah. Hermione's silence... She's just in shock. Her silence through this scene is so interesting. She's just sitting there and really thinking hard about how 'We've been feuding all this time, and what if something had happened?' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Who is this person to me? How important is this person to me?' There isn't really time for these kinds of shenanigans.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Wow... Yeah, so perspective, and we'll see that happen a number of times (from now through the end of the series) that things that are medium-sized or even fairly large suddenly recede when your true perspective is just smacking you in the face. Hagrid shows up...

JC: Hagrid shows up, and I have to say that this quote (that he burst in "leaving dolphin-sized footprints all over the floor")... Weren't they initially baby dolphin-sized feet? That just stood out to me. I was like, 'Did his feet get bigger?' The reference back to the dolphins from the first book just made me go, 'AAAAHHH!' because I really find that a strange description.

Lorrie: Yeah, and there we go again, calling back to the beginning of the series. He talks to Harry and Hermione about how kids are still getting hurt despite the greatly increased security. Oof...

JC: I think it's interesting that Hermione points out here that in both attacks, the attack did not reach the intended victim, but it's clear that the person behind them does not care about any casualties along the way.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's not what's important. That person, whoever is behind this, is desperate, which is true. That's right.

Lorrie: Yeah, and is just aiming wildly. Hagrid says, "Dumbledore's worried sick." That I found really useful to get me reconsidering Dumbledore in *Chamber of Secrets* when his omniscience was much more assumed in the series ("Oh, well, of course Dumbledore knows everything"), and it was puzzling and frightening in *Chamber of Secrets* to see him say, "I have no idea how this is happening. I know who's doing it, I think, but how?" His powerlessness and desperation are much more realistic now to the reader, and Hermione points that out, too, and says, "Hasn't he got any ideas, Hagrid?" Hagrid says, with flawed logic, "He doesn't know who sent that necklace nor put poison in that wine, or they'd've bin caught, wouldn't they?" We wish... No, Dumbledore is actually no better off than Harry at this point. They know exactly who's doing it; they have no idea how. Oof... Obviously, meanwhile, the stakes are getting higher. It's clear that even if Dumbledore was just as worried in *Chamber of Secrets*, we know now that he's desperate and losing power and Harry is very nearly an adult, so that sets up the background for Harry needing to figure things out here, especially since in this light, that puts a different light on the way that Harry has been right this whole volume, and Ron and Hermione at first didn't believe him at all and then had been so difficult to convince. That isolation... Harry could understand better how isolated Dumbledore feels.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Skeptics all around me,' but Harry has never stopped being worried, no matter how much he's been dismissed.

JC: Another thing that stands out to me, too (and we haven't gotten to what Hagrid overheard between Dumbledore and Snape yet): Dumbledore knows his time is limited at this point, and I feel part of his desperation here is making sure that he's leaving the school, leaving everything in as good a place as he can. He's got to make sure that Harry's prepared for what's to come.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We have talked about this a lot when our kids were younger: this fear of leaving my kids alone...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The fear of leaving before your kids are grown was pretty terrifying, and it was a thing that (when my child was young) drove me to take my health much more seriously than I ever had before, right? I went to the doctor and got things checked out in ways that in my thirties (early thirties before my kid was born), I'd be like, 'Yeah, I'll be fine'; now I'm like, 'Oh, my God, no. I need to make sure that I'm here.' I kind of see that in Dumbledore here, and I don't think that's a thing I would have recognized on a first reading. Also, knowing what's coming, I really feel for Dumbledore here because he knows his time is limited, and he's got to do everything he can to set everyone up for some kind of success or hope in the future before he inevitably goes. Yeah.

Lorrie: Take care of them a little bit. From another angle, that is the good thing that Narcissa Malfoy has done for Snape by making him somebody who matters so much to a whole other family. When you don't have anybody counting on you like that, you don't have to take care of yourself. You can think, 'Oh, well, it's just me. I've noticed that I have health issues, but I can put that off until next month' -- tell yourself that for five years, ten years -- but whether you like it or not, when there's somebody depending on you, then, 'Oh, I guess my life matters. I guess I better go get myself checked out.' That was one of the difficulties of being Snape before: nobody loved him. Who cares if he's overworked and sleep-deprived? Well, now, it really matters. Yeah, no, you take care of yourself when other people are counting on you, and that's why it's so hard to not be loved. [For] People who have that network of people who, if not love them, at least need them, there's more motivation to feel like it matters what happens to you.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

Lorrie: So yeah, whatever Snape had in place for self-care before is more important now that he's made this promise about Draco.

JC: It also strikes me that this is something that Tom Riddle never had.

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: Yeah, Tom Riddle never had that.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's what he was so angry about when he returned in *Goblet of Fire* and he faced the Death Eaters who swore they cared about him. He said, "Well, you sure didn't move to look for me when I was gone. The only person who kept me alive was me. You were supposed to make it easier for me by caring and you didn't, except for Barty Crouch Jr., so I'm going to treat him better than I treat you guys." Ugh, yeah. For Voldemort to get into Harry's brain at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* and know that Harry misses Sirius (who cared about nothing more than Harry; Harry's well-being was the only important thing in Sirius's life)... Ouch! Ow, that's intolerable. No jealousy is worse than that. Ugh... Here's Dumbledore desperately having the perspective that nothing is more important than what he's focused on right now, and then Hagrid has to stop talking because "the ghost of a long-haired woman drifted serenely past."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You know who that is...

JC: I was like, 'Oh... oh, I think I know who that ghost is. Yeah, this unnamed ghost.'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: There's only four ghosts in the castle. Yeah.

Lorrie: This is the second-ever appearance of this nameless, voiceless, faceless ghost that is the house ghost of Ravenclaw. Oh, somebody has got issues.

JC: Is it a good time to go back to when the Weasleys come in?

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Oh, my God, that hit me harder this time, I think, than it did the first time that I read this twenty years ago. Both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley can say that Harry has now saved the lives of three people in their family. What?! Wow... Mr. Weasley says, "It was a lucky day for the Weasleys when Ron decided to sit in your compartment on the Hogwarts Express, Harry." I can't even fathom what that would feel like as a parent to have this friend of your kid's be the person who has saved the lives of multiple people in your family. Oh, my gosh!

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Harry feels vague guilt about all things because he vaguely feels like if it weren't for him, the Weasleys would be much safer in general.

JC: Yeah. That's the thing [about] Harry: that guilt. 'Everyone who is in my circle is in danger. Everyone.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Would they have been in danger anyway? Probably. I think Ginny would have wound up with that diary even if Harry wasn't friends with Ron. Mr. Weasley probably would have wound up in the Department of Mysteries that night, right? All of these things probably would have happened without Harry necessarily if Harry was friends with Zacharias Smith instead or whatever. I get that, too, that feeling of, 'But I kind of was the cause of it.'

Lorrie: They turn their whole house inside out for increased security for Harry, they drag him out of the clutches of the Dursleys every summer. They go to all this trouble for him and they're thanking him, and the little sixteen-year-old is standing there going, "No, don't. Really, don't."

JC: They're going to be his in-laws one day anyway. It's all good.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But yeah, that was just like, 'Oh, God.' Yeah. We'll get there later in this book, but I'm sure that when Mr. and Mrs. Weasley found out that Harry and Ginny were dating, they were both like, "Yes! He's ours now. He's one of us!"

Lorrie: That's the long game that you have to just shut your mouth about. They must have seen this coming from the beginning, and what good would it do for either of them to do anything other than let it play out?

JC: Yeah, right.

Lorrie: Just leave them alone.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, all throughout this chapter, there's all this meta humor. The author's tone in this chapter feels so confident to me and it's funny; there's a humorous tone throughout the whole chapter, because there's this point where the

author indirectly uses Hagrid to address the whole fandom joke. 'Wow, Hogwarts is not really very safe for students, isn't it?' Hagrid is saying, with a totally naive straight face, "I mean, it's always bin a bit of a risk sendin' a kid ter Hogwarts, hasn' it?" You could say... He's the mouthpiece for that. Generally, we're getting a sense in this chapter of summary, I think, taking stock of where this series is and where it's gearing up to go, tying up loose ends because the end game is about to be unleashed.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then there's the thing he hears. Do you want to say what Hagrid blurts out in front of Harry?

JC: Oh, yeah. He overheard Dumbledore and Snape having an argument. He lets slip that Dumbledore's angry with Snape and he overheard them having this argument in which Snape told Dumbledore that he took too much for granted and maybe Snape didn't want to do it anymore. Then Dumbledore replied that he'd agreed to do it and that's all there was to it, and then Dumbledore told Snape he should spend some time investigating the Slytherins in his own house.

Lorrie: Oh, boy...

JC: All this is filtered through Hagrid, but this is probably the first time that I can recall of Hagrid doing this kind of gossiping about stuff happening between teachers with Harry and Hermione.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's a bit like when you get to be a senior in high school and the teachers will start complaining about other teachers in ways that they wouldn't have when you were younger; you're starting to see behind the curtain a little bit. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, which is mostly, I think, because Harry is older, but a little bit because they're under so much stress, too. There are two plot devices in this series when there's no other way to get the info dump: either Harry overhears something through eavesdropping or Hagrid's inherent inability to maintain boundaries results in him saying something he shouldn't, so yeah.

JC: He doesn't even do the thing here. In the past, he would think, 'Oh, I shouldn't have said that. Nope, nope, I'm not going to tell you about that. It's not for kids' ears.' He doesn't even do that this time. He's just letting it out.

Lorrie: He tries. He tries. He has this look, like, 'Oh, shit,' but Harry is on the information so quickly and fiercely. Then Hagrid tries to backpedal and distract Harry by making him feel guilty, and Harry has been a boss for several months this year already at this point...

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: And just says, "Don't try and make me feel guilty. It won't work." Whatever power dynamic there ever was between Harry and Hagrid, Harry is definitely a boss now, but then Harry goes right into being a teenager and jumps to the conclusion and says, "What's Snape done?" We find out later Snape hadn't really done anything; it's just Snape and Dumbledore trying to deal. God, they're stressed. It's really fascinating how Hagrid... The main thing he's reporting is that it was a heated discussion and then he hilariously spends all this time trying to downplay it, but there's no downplaying it. He says, "I know what yeh're like about Snape, Harry, an' I don' want yeh ter go readin' more inter this than there is," which is hilarious. There's so much to read into it.

JC: There's so much to read into, yeah.

Lorrie: Also, Hagrid tries to explain this way by saying, "It sounded like Snape was feelin' a bit overworked, tha's all --" Yeah, it sounds like a really terrible day at work, a really, really bad day at work.

JC: Snape is pretty overworked in reality, yeah. He's got a lot going on right now.

Lorrie: That's more meta humor, right?

JC: Right, exactly.

Lorrie: And trying to downplay what he has just told Harry: that Snape should be making investigations in his house. Meanwhile, it's exactly what Harry thinks it is.

JC: Yeah, right.

Lorrie: Oh, God... That's a major point in this series, right? We get this real behind-the-curtains look at these two overworked, frantic, desperate wizards and

how they're sniping at each other. Whatever's going on, it must be such a heavy burden. While Hagrid is regretting this and Harry's mind is going some correct and some incorrect places, Filch and Mrs. Norris and Peeves show up and at that point, it's like a roll call. This is one of those moments where the author deliberately sends out these super evocative hints and readers are left going, 'Okay, we know that whatever is behind this, it's going to take a lot of theorizing. This is going to keep us busy during the hiatus before the next book is out.' Mysterious, well done, fascinating, suspenseful. What could Snape have agreed to do for Dumbledore that he's now threatening to take back? Jeez... With, of course, the evergreen doubt about whether Snape can be trusted or whether he's on Dumbledore's side or not. Although, to me, this was in favor of Snape being genuinely with Dumbledore because if he was just faking it, why would he be expressing this kind of irritation?

JC: Right.

Lorrie: This is only the kind of fight you have with somebody that you're really close with.

JC: Yeah. Absolutely, yeah. It's so interesting, because I never doubted that Snape wasn't on the side of Dumbledore and Harry and all. That was never a question for me, and I was always a bit confused about why people weren't sure about that. It just seemed very clear to me, and I think that that example of that conversation that you just mentioned... That's an incredible clue, right? No, if Snape was really sneaking around, he would not be arguing with Dumbledore. He would be telling him what he wanted to hear.

Lorrie: Can you imagine him sniping with Voldemort this way? "No, my Lord, I don't want to do that."

JC: Right, exactly.

Lorrie: "What if I said no to you, my Lord?"

JC: Yeah. "I don't want to do it anymore." Yeah.

Lorrie: This is the point at which Harry enters his Dumbledore rumination era. He makes the leap; we see him begin to be much more sophisticated about this, and he has this series of thoughts that are quite respectable. Some of them are more childish, some of them are right on the money, but we see him gaining maturity

and he thinks, "Was it because Dumbledore did not want Harry to do anything foolish, to take matters into his own hands, that he had pretended there was nothing in Harry's suspicions?" That's quite a mature guess. Or is it that Dumbledore doesn't want Harry to be distracted from his lessons or from going after Slughorn's memory? Maybe. Dumbledore certainly has said just as much: "Nothing's as important as this." Or is it that Dumbledore doesn't confide in students about his staff? That's undoubtedly true. Here's Harry starting to be more capable of thinking the way he's always seen Dumbledore think about these larger questions, and it's during this moment of increased maturity that he gets this horrible jump scare.

JC: Oh, before we do that, he's in the common room at this point, right? I wanted to go back to when they were in the hall with Hagrid, and Filch comes out and immediately says, "Oh, I'm going to give detention to these two students who are out, I guess, too late or whatever," despite the fact that they're literally standing there with a teacher, and Hagrid's "What am I, chopped liver?" response. [Hagrid] does this thing by insulting Filch using basically a slur and then whispers to Harry and Hermione, "Leave now," and has an argument. That's really interesting behavior from Hagrid.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But also, Filch coming in and just completely ignoring Hagrid's authority as a teacher is also pretty insulting.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The adult dynamics that they spent so much time trying to keep the kids from seeing before... They're not worried about it now. Yeah.

Lorrie: While Harry is having serious heavy thoughts about what is genuinely the most important thing happening in his life at Hogwarts at the moment, the most mundane, horrible demand on his attention attacks him in the common room in the form of giant Cormac McLaggen, who's going on and on about something that it takes Harry ages to remember.

JC: "What are you talking about?" Yeah.

Lorrie: "Uh... Oh, yeah. Uh, Quidditch..."

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: This is so Dumbledore, too, with his staffing problems, where Dumbledore's thinking about the biggest problems in the Wizarding world and then some irate teacher comes pounding down on his door. Now Harry knows how that feels.

JC: Yeah. 'Here comes Gilderoy Lockhart.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "I don't have enough mirrors." Yeah. So yeah, he's got this whole thing worked out that Harry's got about half of a brain for.

JC: And this is also the point at which I realized what a bullet was dodged by Hermione Confunding this guy.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: We only have him in one game, and it's like, 'No.'

Lorrie: Oh, my God, what a mess.

JC: "No, no, this isn't going to work." The level of mansplaining that this character is engaged in... We didn't even have that word twenty years ago, but it's such a classic example. It's just like, 'Oh, my God, so obnoxious.'

Lorrie: 'What a not-team player.' Yeah.

JC: So not a team player.

Lorrie: And it also reminds me: I love the line when Cormac McLaggen says, "So obviously, I'm going to be stepping in for Ron, right?" and Harry could not think of an argument against it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then there's this further fascinating development where when Harry finds out, 'how do people take it that Ron has been almost killed with this poison?' He finds that people seem to think that it might have been an accident -- it's not as big of a deal as Katie's was -- and that they figure, 'Well, he was in the Potion Master's room, so yeah, maybe it was an accident. Besides, there was no real harm done.' That's a super important setup, too, right? If you have a near-miss, your intention matters; what people end up thinking about you determines also if you're going to get away with it or not. It's a callback to what Dumbledore said to Ginny at the end

of *Chamber of Secrets*: that no lasting damage was done. These are all going to lead up to some things that Harry is going to discover about how it feels to nearly be responsible for somebody's death coming up soon.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: All of these things... They're not really fair, are they? But when you have a near-miss, there are a lot of factors at play, and are you going to be able to carry on with your life? Are you going to be able to recover from your guilt? Ron's near poisoning is not considered frightening. It's okay.

JC: I also think that no one saw it but Harry and Slughorn.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They don't know... We were given this really visceral, almost body horror description of it and nobody saw that. Actually, it made me think about how I think sexual assault survivors might feel when their experience is dismissed.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's like if you cannot put yourself in the position of what that would be like, you're just like, "Oh, you're okay." Really? It made me think about anybody who's been in any kind of traumatic situation where they came out on the other side, yes, physically okay -- physically whole -- but that trauma... Ron is going to have some serious trauma around this, or I think he should. That does leave a mark. That whole thing of, "Oh, no lasting harm, done..." Well, is that really true? I don't know.

Lorrie: Then we get the line that an entire mammoth AO3 ship lives and dies on.

JC: Oh, yes. Yes, we do. "Harry, however, had never been less interested in Quidditch; he was rapidly becoming obsessed with Draco Malfoy." I'm pretty sure people had that tattooed on their bodies at some point.

Lorrie: Yeah, and there's that semicolon that's doing so much work in that sentence...

JC: Oh, my gosh, yes.

Lorrie: And Quidditch being very much the kind of thing that nothing would have dissuaded Harry from focusing on, except for something this all-encompassing.

JC: Yes. I think the other thing that I love about this is that we've talked before about how Draco Malfoy wanted to be the main character of this story for all these volumes and was so frustrated that no matter what he did, he wasn't; now, he's becoming a main character and he no longer cares.

Lorrie: Oh, he's got worse problems than that.

JC: Yeah. He's finally got Harry's attention; he's wanted Harry's attention forever.

Lorrie: He has been obsessed with Harry Potter all this time until now, when he's got something worse to obsess over.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: And now Harry notices, so it's a really interesting flip of that dynamic. Now, Harry's like, 'Wait, what is he up to? I'm going to even stop playing Quidditch to figure this out.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, can't even remember Quidditch... So yeah, it's taken a few years, but we've gotten there: he now has centered Draco in his concerns and wishes he could spend all day and all night tracking Draco, but darn it! Quidditch practice, homework, Cormac McLaggen, Lavender Brown...

JC: It is a shipper's dream online, that is for sure.

Lorrie: And it's so that feeling when people say, "I can't believe my life and my job and school get in the way of me indulging my obsessions."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "This is an outrage." It also shows us 'well, no wonder Dumbledore has been so preoccupied all year. Yes, there is something super, super important happening. Oh, what are all these other duties?' Wow, Cormac has this whole campaign that he's hammering away at to replace Ron and he keeps crossing lines with Harry, and Harry needs to keep putting him back in his place.

JC: I love that Harry has the confidence to do that, too. This is something that maybe it's the Gryffindor thing or it's just an element of Harry's personality: he's

been in the position of making decisions that have a big impact. This is not new to him, so this is almost trivial at this point. "Okay, I'm the captain. Stop!" Like you were saying, he's been a boss for a while, but there's a lot of things in his life that have led up to giving him the confidence to go, "Nope, nope. Not your job. Stop talking."

Lorrie: Yeah. He's really very good.

JC: He's very good at it, yeah.

Lorrie: And people twice his age... It's normal to not know what to do when somebody is flouting authority that badly, but I bet dealing with Zacharias Smith during...

JC: Oh, during the D.A. time?

Lorrie: Yeah. "Excuse me, Zacharias Smith, have you survived fighting the Dark Lord? Then shut up." But no, Cormac... Oh, he's a lot, he's a handful. Then on the other hand... This is totally Scylla and Charybdis. On the other hand, we have Lavender, the eternal energy suck.

JC: Oh, my gosh. I love the description of her asking Harry questions about Ron and Ron's feelings, and Harry is like, 'This is the last thing that I even care to talk to anyone [about].' He wouldn't want to talk to Ron about Ron's feelings.

Lorrie: Oh, my God...

JC: It's like, "No, thank you."

Lorrie: Aside from the fact that if Harry were to give a direct response, it would be, "Lavender, you're correct that you're losing him. Your desperation is warranted. Aside from that, no, we're all just waiting for him to dump you."

JC: Yeah. "It's coming. We all know it's coming."

Lorrie: Oh...

JC: I love that he says, "Why don't you just ask Ron about it?" and Lavender says, "Well, every time I'm in the hospital wing, he's asleep," and Harry's like, "Huh, is he now?"

Lorrie: "I'm going to have to punch him in the nose for that one."

JC: What a coward Ron is, but also that's a very typical behavior at that age, too. 'I'm just going to avoid the hard conversation.'

Lorrie: 'So that's why I'm suffering like this, is it, Ron? Oh, no, no, do whatever you want with Lavender, but you put me in this position? Oh, no.' God, I love when this author does this: she uses inanimate objects to tell us indirectly what characters are feeling. Lavender wants to talk about Ron's feelings, and Harry escapes first by invoking Cormac, which is a total lie -- he just says, "Oh, I see Cormac McLaggen coming" -- and then he dashes sideways through a door pretending to be solid wall. Just the escape... Oh, my God, you know what I would love right now? He goes through that door and he sprints.

JC: A door pretending to be solid wall... Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, the tone in the narrator's voice feels so masterful and confident to me in this chapter. Harry's having a miserable time, but we readers are quite amused.

JC: I also like that Lavender is jealous of Hermione here, because she knows that Hermione has been visiting in the hospital wing, too, and she can... Yeah.

Lorrie: No, her anxieties are warranted.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, it's so touching, the jealousy and insecurity that have been a fact of life throughout this whole volume... Ron is so nervous about how Cormac McLaggen is going to do as his replacement, and Harry is so good about saying, "Listen, it doesn't matter how good or bad of a Quidditch player he is. He's a terrible team player. We don't want him. He's horrible."

JC: Yeah, and that idea that "Even if you couldn't come back, I wouldn't want him on the team."

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: Which I hope helped Ron a little bit. Then we get a super uncomfortable moment where Harry runs into Malfoy "accompanied by two girls, both of whom looked sulky and resentful." Ooh, what consent issues are happening here? Draco stops short to be caught by Harry, but then gives "a short, humorless laugh..."

Exactly as you were saying before, he would have been thrilled in other years to be the focus of Harry's attention, but right now, he's got other things on his mind. Wow... Considering what this author has to say about people pretending to present as some other gender, it's super uncomfortable to see that one of these girls gives "an unwilling giggle," and Harry stares at the girl and she blushes. The whole feeling of trying to pass as a particular gender and not passing... Oh, God.

JC: That's interesting. Yeah, I didn't pick up on that. I've never known what to think about that scene, because... Do we find out what they were up to later?

Lorrie: Yes. Yes, we do.

JC: Okay, I don't remember. Okay, yeah, but I remember reading that the first time and going, 'What? What's going on here? What is this?' and then Harry later refers to him as "Malfoy with two girlfriends." Yeah, I didn't pick up on that particular aspect of it, but that's interesting.

Lorrie: Whatever's going on, obviously it's something suspicious.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Nobody's happy to be there, nobody's having a good time. This is like, "Act natural." So here's Harry watching an opportunity to trail Draco walk away from him. If only he could skip out on Quidditch... And he spends several seconds almost doing that. Wow! Then he has this thought that I recognize so well. This is a thought that comes right before disaster: he's in the Quidditch game and he thinks if he could catch the Snitch good and early, there might be a chance he could get back up to the castle. Oh... Oh, that's not going to go well. I've had that feeling many times in life where, 'Oh, God, there's something super important I have to do but my mind is elsewhere.' That just never goes well.

JC: Yeah. He's usually so focused on Quidditch, and that's so interesting that he gets there late and Ginny's like, "Where have you been?"

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: It's so interesting that his brain isn't even on it.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's made his Beaters really nervous. They're all waiting, like, 'Is he going to even show up?' No, Quidditch is not just a footnote in his life.

JC: I think we get the fantastic experience of having Luna do the commentary for the Quidditch, which feels again like the author making a joke here. Here's a character who would not take it all that seriously and wouldn't...

Lorrie: It was just pure fun, I think. A purely fun writing exercise. What would be the funniest possible sports commentator?

JC: 'Who could that be?' Yeah.

Lorrie: Luna said serenely, "And Harry Potter's now having an argument with his Keeper." I thought, 'Oh, she's the totally benign version of Peeves.' "Shut up! Don't look at me!"

JC: Oh, and McLaggen... This is the height of the mansplain-y part where in the middle of the game he's trying to show the Beaters how to do their job.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Are you kidding me? Oh, my God...

Lorrie: And in case anybody was wondering if this was going to bother the team captain or not, his mansplaining cracks Harry's skull open.

JC: Yeah. I like the description of that. He goes from blinding pain to looking up at a light in the hospital bed...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: With nothing in between. Okay, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's feeling so warm and cozy. I also love that Luna... She's looking all airy; maybe she doesn't have an agenda, but I think she kind of does because she speculates that Zacharias Smith suffers from "Loser's Lurgy."

JC: Okay, that's great. "Loser's Lurgy" is amazing.

Lorrie: And that's kind of vengeful of her, because whoa, that's going to stick.

JC: Loser's Lurgy...

Lorrie: He's been having a bad game anyway, but hearing that... Can you imagine if you're not having a great game, and then you hear that?

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: So yeah, these are all our least favorite people, McLaggen and Smith. Yeah, Cormac McLaggen ends his run on the Gryffindor Quidditch team by bashing in the captain's head when he really shouldn't have been.

JC: Yep. Oh, my God. It couldn't have gone worse for McLaggen or for Harry, or the whole team, really. They lose the game.

Lorrie: And to continue the humorous tone of this chapter, in the hospital wing Harry says, "I don't want to stay here overnight. I want to find McLaggen and kill him." Okay, yeah, maybe don't do that, Harry... And Ron's badly suppressed glee....

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: When Ron tells Harry what a rout the final score was, that's actually helpful to Ron.

JC: Right. Ron is just so vindictively happy that this is how it turned out, right?

Lorrie: It wasn't close.

JC: His best friend is in the hospital with him... Oh, Madam Pomfrey can fix bones. It's fine. He'll be fine.

Lorrie: So yeah, that brings up the image: the whole time before Harry regained consciousness, Ron's lying there being told. He obviously knows what the final score was and what happened to Harry, and he's just been waiting for Harry to wake up.

JC: Oh, my gosh!

Lorrie: Meanwhile, laughing over Luna's commentary.

JC: I wonder if he could hear it from the hospital wing.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

JC: He'd lay there and he could hear it, and then there's this, "Oh, no!" Whatever was said and then the crowd, and then Harry gets hauled in on a stretcher. He's like, 'Huh...'

Lorrie: 'What do you know...'

JC: 'What happened there?' He says that Ginny came by to visit, and I love that Harry briefly spins out this fantasy of Ginny weeping at his bedside.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't even think about it; it just springs into his head.

Lorrie: It just starts up. That's part of the layering of this chapter: that's something that is normal in humans, right? Okay, if you want somebody, this is going to be an overriding concern, but that could turn very easily into Romilda Vane poisoning the Chocolate Cauldrons, which in turn is only not that many steps away from whoever put the poison in the mead. Even in its most natural, most contained form of uncontrollable fantasies about your love object maybe melodramatically returning your feelings, there's no form in which this is safe. This is just something that we have to deal with. There's so many ways in this chapter that those kinds of layers just keep being one on top of the other, and Harry has to snap back out of it.

JC: It's interesting, too, just thinking back to the last chapter. If the mead had not been poisoned, I wonder if Romilda Vane would have gotten in any trouble for this.

Lorrie: Oh, good point.

JC: But we just kept on going because that was worse.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But I often thought... The thing about dosing someone with an illegal love potion is that it's obvious who did it.

Lorrie: Yes. Yeah!

JC: Yeah. It's obvious who did it and who her intended target was. Again, we've got the intended target, and it missed that target and it was collateral damage. Does she ever get reprimanded for that, or did it just slide under the bridge? It didn't even matter at that point.

Lorrie: No, this is such a good point. This is very much like Sirius never getting punished for Snape almost getting killed. It's also that Harry never gets any consequences for sneaking out to Hogsmeade in third year because Snape and Lupin are fighting instead, and Harry just gets away with it; he totally should not have. So yeah, Romilda gets spared a scene where she has to gasp and open her

eyes all wide and say, "I had no idea those Chocolate Cauldrons were poisoned with a love potion that makes people fall in love with me."

JC: "When I gave that to Harry, I was just giving him a gift." Yeah.

Lorrie: But never mind that; Harry is obsessed with Draco Malfoy.

JC: This is true.

Lorrie: The match went so badly that he says he might as well have followed Draco, which Ron can't even believe Harry is saying. "You're the captain!"

JC: "You're the captain! Quidditch is your life! Uh..."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. The fact that Harry's losing interest in Quidditch here is so... It's a sign that he's growing up, in a way. Not that people who continue playing the sport they love have not grown up, but for some people, you move on from a thing, a thing that you really loved as a teenager and it was really obsessive and it took up a lot of your time, and then you hit a point in your life when something else is more important, and that's growing up. I like that in this volume, we see Harry [is] always going to love Quidditch. He might play pickup games when he's an Auror in some kind of a Beer League. Beer League Quidditch... That's a whole thing, I can imagine, but the obsession with Quidditch that he had as a teenager is kind of waning.

Lorrie: There's something more important.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry says, "I want to catch him at it." He knows it's Malfoy, he has no proof, and that is more or less the same position Dumbledore's in.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry obsesses over... "I want to tail him, I want to tail him..." *GASPS* and then he realizes he has the resources.

JC: "I know what to do."

Lorrie: So Harry takes the leap. He does own another being; this being is bound to follow his orders with or without consent. He goes ahead and takes the leap and puts that into action and he crosses the line into being the Dumbledore-style person who will sometimes do unethical things, like coerce memories out of people, set people up. Dumbledore notoriously has spies for him all over the place. This is Harry's first time becoming a spymaster, so he calls Kreacher. Kreacher, very much against his will, shows up; Dobby comes as well. They're having a really scary, vicious fistfight, and it is like a minor version of Dumbledore having to deal with Sirius and Snape when they first joined the Order. It's like, "Would you guys stop fighting? There's serious business here." "Fine, whatever." Harry's looking at these two mortal enemies and thinking, 'Well, okay.' He just goes smoothly into Dumbledore-level ability to get lots of people to spy for him, even though they hate each other and he has something different on each of them. Yeah, we can tell that the hero's journey is about to reach that point. He's not far from there.

JC: Yeah. Peeves pops in with them, egging them on for their fight, and the fact that Harry gets rid of Peeves just with a hex, a quick hex that he's got from the book. First of all, it's a very badass move, because he just fires it off *BOOM* and it works; it also foreshadows a much more dangerous hex that he's going to similarly fire off soon, but it's such a badass move. He's like, 'Okay, Peeves is not a problem for me.'

Lorrie: He's so capable.

JC: Yeah, and wow! Was it early on that Peeves was afraid of the Weasley twins? The Weasley twins could tell him what to do.

Lorrie: It wasn't that Peeves is afraid; he respects them.

JC: Yeah. It's making me think, 'Is Harry going to go into this category now?'

Lorrie: Yeah, Harry is somebody.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It makes so much sense that Snape would have invented some spell to shut people up because he was probably taunted so much. Aside from Snape, we know him (as a teacher) as somebody who very much wants to shut people up, but when

he invented it, he was a bullied schoolkid. Can you just imagine some fifteen-year-old bullied schoolkid... 'You know what I wish I could do?'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'I wish I had a magic spell that could just shut people up.' Harry uses *Muffliato* as soon as the house-elves show up to escape Madam Pomfrey's notice.

JC: Also masterful. Wow! And he does it without thinking. He goes *BOOM, BOOM* Done.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even Ron's like, "Whoa, nice one!"

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: *Muffliato* and *Langlock* are both Half-Blood Prince inventions, so this is spycraft. Here Harry is putting two spies to work for him and using these tools that he has completely mastered -- he's learned through the Half-Blood Prince, who of course was born to be a spy -- and tells them, "I've got a job for you," which strikes me as basically, actually, really a good idea if you get past the premise of house-elves in general. Oy... Sure, if these two have such different perspectives, then getting them both to tail Draco and report back would yield much more accurate results.

JC: Kind of triangulating them.

Lorrie: Yeah, and telling them, "No, you're not allowed to fight each other, you're not allowed to alert Draco," knowing what limits to set.

JC: Also, he does that all so... It's like he turns something on in his brain that is like, 'Here are all the things I need to do,' and he just does them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's really cool.

Lorrie: So then this chapter ends with Dobby, just like *Chamber of Secrets*.

JC: Yeah. Something else that strikes me about Harry's masterful... You're calling it 'spycraft,' which it absolutely is, but I cannot help... From my teacher educator

perspective, there are times when I've been able to observe a teacher early in their undergraduate program and then again later in their graduate program, and the difference later feels like this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This leap that he has made to being in charge of a situation and knowing, 'What are all the ways that the kids in this room are going to weasel out of things or try to do shit behind my back?' The teacher later will know what limits to set and how to set them, what to take care of and how to quiet the class down. Watching that transition -- which can happen really quickly, like within a year -- that's what it felt like to me, too. I was like, 'Oh, Harry...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'You're at the end of your student teaching semester. You're about to go out in the world.'

Lorrie: I'm picturing a teacher saying, "And before you even think about cheating this way or that way, know that I've already..."

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: And students like, 'How did she know that was going to be my next thought?'

JC: Oh, my gosh. Yeah, when you said he's almost at that part of the hero's journey, I kind of went, 'Oh, no...'

Lorrie: 'Oh, no...' Yeah.

JC: Oh, no, but yeah.

Lorrie: Well, yeah.

JC: Yeah, we have about ten more chapters in this book. Eleven more chapters, I think.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Hagrid already showed up warning everybody, "Look, Dumbledore's really worried." Harry, it's good. You're growing up right on time.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But Harry is quite trustworthy.

JC: And very competent.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dobby and Kreacher Disapparate off to do their jobs.

JC: Off to do their jobs... I don't remember what happens, so I'm looking forward to learning.

Lorrie: All right. The next chapter is called Lord Voldemort's Request.

JC: Oh, boy...

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'll 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.