



Transcript

Episode 6.23

Book 6, Chapter 23: Horcruxes

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 Twenty-Three: Horcruxes.

Lorrie: Horcruxes. Harry brings Dumbledore the memory from Slughorn. Dumbledore explains Horcruxes. Harry commits to finishing Voldemort. So, JC, what was your response to this chapter?

JC: I think the big thing that stands out to me here is that this is one of the first times when Harry feels like he's being treated like an adult. He gets some adult privileges here that he hasn't necessarily gotten in the past, and he's not afraid to do things as an adult would do them. As the parent of an 18-year-old, who is about to go off to college, I recognize that, the ways that he's acting; he's acting as an adult in ways that I see my own child doing, taking responsibility for things, and then doing things and just saying, "No, I accept the consequences if this doesn't go the way I expected." That's very adult behavior, and I'm seeing it in Harry here. It's just so interesting to see the parallel between him in this chapter and my kid in real life.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. This is not in training anymore; you're doing the real thing now, and he's ready. He's actually ready. I feel like this chapter contains some of

the core concepts of the series. A lot of the things that I rely on to understand what I think the series is about come from things said specifically in this chapter, so it's really important to me.

JC: I can't wait to hear what those are.

Lorrie: Yeah. Parts of this chapter I don't even register and they're background, and then parts are like, 'Oh, this is such a central concept.'

JC: Oh, that's interesting. Okay.

Lorrie: So we start off with Harry making his way to run to Dumbledore with the memory that he has finally gotten.

JC: I love that...so, the portrait.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Every time I have to say "the Fat Lady in the portrait," I'm like, 'Oh, my God. Why, why, why, J.K. Rowling, why?' But she's teasing him because she's mad, and I thought it was interesting; it didn't really register with me before that the portraits can do that, that's they'll lie to you. Okay.

Lorrie: They'll just be petty, yeah.

JC: They'll be petty. That's interesting. There's this idea that the Felix Felicis has worn off, so he almost gets caught here and he always gets caught there, and then the Fat Lady won't let him in, but then Nearly Headless Nick comes and tells him Dumbledore's back, and Harry just instantly goes, 'Oh...' The realization of 'I can take this memory to him right now,' and that that's the right thing to do, and that's what Dumbledore would want him to do...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And that even if he gets in trouble on the way, it's still more important, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's one of those adult decisions that he makes. He doesn't think, 'Oh, I need the Invisibility Cloak.' Nothing; he just goes. Yeah, I like that.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, he understands exactly how important this is, and when Dumbledore sees him: "For a moment or two, the headmaster looked stunned. Then his face split into a wide smile." Oh, he really needed Harry's help. It's not one of those things where it's like, "You, small child, what do you think?" and the child is terrified. "I don't know... You're the guy with the beard." No. This time, he genuinely needed Harry's help.

JC: My impression was that he was just so genuinely impressed...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that Harry brought it to him at midnight. I don't know... That whole scenario, I can just see Dumbledore like, "What are you doing here? What's going on, Harry? Are you going to come in to complain to me about Draco Malfoy some more?" And then he's like, "No, I got the memory," and Dumbledore's like, "Oh, it's all happening."

Lorrie: Wow... Yeah, and it was a risk. He did not have a guarantee that they would ever find this, and it really was important. I love that this chapter very consistently writes Dumbledore as being in an incredible rush this whole time. He is racing against the clock before he dies. He is described not only as stunned, but as injured (very injured) and he's agitated. He loses it a number of times in this chapter just because it's so important; it's so urgent and he really might not have time to pass on everything, so when Harry shows up with the memory, Dumbledore hurries around his desk. Probably, five seconds won't kill anything, but no, no, no.

JC: It's like, "Let's go, let's go. In the Pensieve, now." Yeah.

Lorrie: And he says, "Now, at last, we shall see. Harry, quickly..."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay. Okay, he's really been nervous, and that makes me think part of it is that he has a little tiny bit of an advantage and that he's pretty sure Voldemort doesn't know he's onto this Horcrux hunt, and that could change at any moment.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They return to the memory that they saw in the adulterated version earlier, and we see Slughorn start off by wagging his finger reprovably at Riddle, though winking at the same time. That just kind of filled me with rage, as it was supposed to. Slughorn is conditioning these young men of his choice, initiating them into this toxic old boy network feeling that the rules don't really apply to you. 'Yes, we are breaking rules.' Why is he, on the one hand, encouraging them to stay out late and then, on the other hand, reminding them, "If you don't turn in your homework, I have to give you detention"? *Wink.*

JC: *Wink.* Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: As has been true for a while, because contemporary U.S. and world politics have been so painful, this has resonated so much with me seeing politicians thinking, 'Oh, I don't really believe in supporting this very damaging policy, but it's going to get me so much money or support my district in this particular, very effective bribe, so they wouldn't really do that, right? Oh, come on... I understand that this is the extreme danger, but they're not really going to do that, right?' Then at the point when they realize, 'Oh, I thought that these people were like me and had some limits to their evil and really wouldn't go there, and now they're going there. But now, if I register my disapproval, I'm too implicated.'

JC: 'I'm already complicit.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'I've already sold away some of my ability to object.'

JC: I really want to believe that there are people like that. I want to believe that; lately, I'm having a hard time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Lately, it feels like everyone's just in it for themselves and all those politicians don't care that women are dying of sepsis because they couldn't get the D and C they needed. They don't care, or it doesn't register with them that they're connected with that at all. God, I want to believe that they feel bad. I don't know if I do.

Lorrie: What I've seen is that there were people who did care, and then when they're faced with the consequences if they stand up and object now, it's so scary that they have changed themselves to be less sensitive so that things that they used

to be bothered by... They've made it so that they're like, "We can't think of that right now."

JC: Yeah. It's interesting for me because Slughorn... I'm trying to decide what bucket Slughorn is in, I guess. He was hiding this memory from Dumbledore and he gave Harry the true one finally, and then said, "Don't think less of me," so he does feel really bad about his own role in this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That puts him in a different category than Mitch McConnell to me.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. Slughorn was ashamed because he knew that he was appalled and that he had made the wrong choice, but he's so afraid because of the real dangers. There are so very many contemporary politicians who are complicit that I'm sure we can find people along the entire spectrum.

JC: Yeah, yeah, for sure. But the parallel that you point out here to our current politics in the U.S. is just right on the nose.

Lorrie: It's depressing, yes. The first thing we find out that Slughorn hid when he tampered with his memory out of shame was that he said to Tom, "I confidently expect you to rise to Minister of Magic..."

JC: Within 20 years.

Lorrie: Yeah, which I think he was absolutely correct. Yes, Slughorn was correctly identifying a certain degree of stardom. Yeah, I agree, and he's right there with offers to help with contacts because this might be the biggest get of Slughorn's career as an influencer. 'Wow, this is how I'm going to get to be a star. Get him now.' That's the big, tasty bait that is setting up his internal conflict here, and then he gets the conflict right away when Tom asks about Horcruxes: "Slughorn stared at him, his thick fingers absentmindedly caressing the stem of his wine glass. 'Project for Defense Against the Dark Arts, is it?' But Harry could tell that Slughorn knew perfectly well that this was not schoolwork." Wishful thinking... There are the warning signs, and they're completely at odds with his self-interest. Oh, this is a real clever knowledge of Slughorn's desires. Tom Riddle knew exactly what Slughorn would want so much that it could cloud his thinking.

JC: Backing up just a moment, the part that he had erased: another line that was in that that stood out to me was, "I've never been wrong about a student yet." That made me think, "Okay, why did he delete that from the memory?" because in the first one he gave to Dumbledore, it was, "You'll go wrong, mark my words."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But he took out the "I've never been wrong about a student yet," so that was new here and I thought, 'That's interesting. Why would he take that out?' Yeah.

Lorrie: We'll see with not only Slughorn, but a number of characters (including later, we'll find out, Dumbledore) the shame that comes when you saw the warning signs and you ignored them because your greed was greater.

JC: I also love when he says, "Sir, I wonder what you know about... about Horcruxes?" and Harry instantly recognizes the mastery of his manipulation. Harry's like, 'Oh, damn, he's good.' I like that he's... Yeah, yeah. This quote: "He had had too much experience of trying to wheedle information out of reluctant people not to recognize a master at work. That just struck me as... Yeah.

Lorrie: Been there.

JC: Yeah. The fact that you can see someone up to no good and you're like, 'Oh, but damn, they're good at it,' grudging respect. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Skill level unsurpassed.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Voldemort/Tom Riddle gives Slughorn a chance to back out.

JC: He does.

Lorrie: He says, "Not exactly, sir. I came across the term while reading and I didn't fully understand it." Slughorn could have backed out; no, he did it to himself, and then he's like, "Oh, but obviously, you know all about them, a wizard like you. I just knew if anyone could tell me, you could."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "You could be my favorite influencer." When Harry does that thing that you were talking about (where he sees, instantly, exactly how hard Tom Riddle is laying on the strategy), I can see him as an Auror.

JC: Oh, that's a good point.

Lorrie: Okay, Harry has the experience. He is qualified to recognize what he's looking at. All right, he's a young adult. Meanwhile, Slughorn has sold himself down. He won't look at Tom, and he rationalizes: "It can't hurt to give you an overview, of course. Just so that you understand the term." Horace... Then he commits and he explains: "A Horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul." This is a device that I've always liked, like Gawain and the Green Knight, when there's this knight... The knight has some sort of terrifying magic where you can cut off his head, and yet he's just alive, he picks up his head and he puts it back on. What is this? What magic are we looking at? This is really scary. The mortality of this being is held somewhere other than in his body, and then this being offers the temptation: you want to see the secret? Gawain is tempted to get himself a similar talisman against death, because (as is the issue in this series) can you or can you not face the inevitability of your own death? If you can't, what kind of truly catastrophic things are you willing to do in order to stay in denial, in order to think that you can win over this? This is a thing that Dumbledore is afraid of for Harry that we'll see a lot in the next book: Oh, no, what if Harry, faced as he will be with the option to give in... 'If I just do this, if I just do that, maybe I won't have to deal with this terrifying death eventuality the way Voldemort was committing.' Dumbledore is, it turns out later, more afraid on Harry's behalf about this than he needed to be because Harry is more grounded about this than Dumbledore was, but you don't know that until it happens, right? You don't know, and it is a real fear. This super cool, mythical, legendary concept of your mortality being somewhere outside your body is introduced, and Slughorn explains: "You split your soul... and hide part of it in an object outside the body. ...Part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged..." even if the rest of you gets killed. "But of course, existence in such a form..." Slughorn is speaking as a normal person who assumes that most people know, 'Oh, there's some kinds of existence that are so uncomfortable and unnatural and wrong... That's not how it's supposed to be. You don't want this. You really, really don't want this,' and Tom has

had such a difficult life, he doesn't have that. Tom's everyday discomfort of existing is so great.

JC: 'What if we transferred your consciousness into a jar?' 'Great! Okay.' 'Who would want that?' and he raises his hand, yeah.

Lorrie: "Is it going to feel worse than I feel every day?" "I don't know. How do you feel every day?" "Nobody knows how bad I feel every day." This is true. This description that Slughorn gives of splitting your soul and hiding it away from the rest of yourself so that that part remains unchanged... This is self-harm, and I think that reading of it holds true on a practical level. It's consistently true. This is a form of self-harm when there's something in yourself that causes you so much misery, so much discomfort, that a way of coping is that you disown part of yourself. You refuse it. The opportunity to reintegrate with your whole being and to heal... It's not clear that you could withstand the pain of having it be part of yourself. It's definitely something that happens in extreme pain when there's too much difficulty for a person to handle in their own being.

JC: I have this memory when this book first came out that there was a certain segment of the fandom who just thought the whole concept of Horcruxes was stupid and lazy or whatever and didn't like it. I remember some discussions from that time, and I think that the thing that really stood out to me was this idea that in order for a person to do something as horrible as kill another person intentionally, you would have to break yourself in a way. You would have to break off all the parts of you that know this is bad, that would feel guilty about it, that would feel remorse about it and just bury them. I thought that's such an interesting metaphor. I don't even know if it's a metaphor, but it's an interesting way of thinking about what that would actually do to you to do something like that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I like the way that you were talking about it, too: you have to hurt yourself to do that as well. You cause irreparable damage to yourself, because putting yourself back together is so painful that people are probably not going to do it, not without a lot of help.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, we saw when Harry was pushed to this extreme the morning after Sirius died, when Dumbledore said, "This pain you're feeling is part of being

human," and Harry is screaming, "Then I don't want to be human!" That degree of pain... What do you do when you contain so much pain that you're not even capable of feeling it and it's beyond what you can feel? Well, one way of numbing it would be to break some of it off and separate it from yourself so much that you don't feel that and that doesn't feel you anymore. If you experience pain and growth later, that part of your soul stays the way it was here, but if you heal later, that part of your soul remains unhealed. You have to compartmentalize to a very tragic degree, and then this is helping us understand what Voldemort was saying about what happened to him when he failed to kill baby Harry. *"I was ripped from my body, I was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost... but still, I was alive."* Wow... You're not enough of an integrated whole person to be able to move on; you're so compartmentalized. Then Slughorn states as fact the thing that Voldemort doesn't have what it takes to comprehend. Slughorn says, "...Few would want it... Death would be preferable," and Voldemort genuinely does not know what they're talking about when they say these things. But Slughorn states it as fact and Tom doesn't understand that, but he is fixated on stuff that does speak to him: "Riddle's hunger was now apparent; his expression was greedy, he could no longer hide his longing." In this series, those words "hunger" and "greedy" again signal that a person is moving from desire to imbalance, imbalance to desire, and all he wants is to know, 'How do you do this? How do I get that?'

JC: Yeah. He even interrupts Slughorn a couple times to say, "How do you do it? What's the spell?"

Lorrie: Yeah, and Slughorn explains something that I feel is one of the keys to understanding this series' worldview, where he says, "You must understand that the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an active violation; it is against nature." When I read this, I think, 'Oh, okay. How that operates in this plot is, left to its own devices, people's souls want to reintegrate. That's the natural tendency. With or without you putting that into motion, you have to do something deliberate and extreme. You have to do some sort of spell to make a container that is so powerful that it prevents this natural healing.' This is why Harry's scar hurts so much: when Voldemort is nearby or other Horcruxes are nearby, Harry was not made intentionally as a Horcrux; he received part of Voldemort's soul, but there was no spell to put that part of his soul completely walled off. Unlike the other parts of Voldemort's soul that he successfully sealed into Horcruxes, the part of

himself that's in Harry still feels -- has more connection to present-day living Voldemort, not just who he was at the time -- and it takes Harry in pain right along with it. Harry's poor scar pain is really unprotected against Voldemort's proximity. Meanwhile, the soul fragments themselves sense each other. They want to be whole; they want to heal. Voldemort himself, no matter what, would really like to heal, and the part of him that wants to heal most found this loved baby and is clinging to this loved baby, saying, "Take me with you."

JC: Well, that's interesting. Okay.

Lorrie: No matter how much Voldemort thinks, "I don't want to heal, I'm not like other -- I don't need that..." No, part of him does.

JC: "Not like other girls."

Lorrie: Yeah. No, part of him does. That's why it's in Harry.

JC: Okay, that's interesting.

Lorrie: How hard does Voldemort have to work to prevent himself from admitting that he craves healing and love? Well, he found Dark magic that was powerful enough so that he doesn't feel what those parts of his soul feel anymore. Slughorn explains that murder is the "supreme act of evil", that "killing rips the soul apart." My reading of this series is that that's meant to be true, whether you commit actual evil like murder or whether you completely, innocently, accidentally do something that results in someone dying. Knowing that you're connected to somebody dying, that's going to rip your soul apart out of pain and love and empathy, even when it's not intentional. Then he explains: "The wizard intent upon creating a Horcrux would use the damage to his advantage: He would encase the torn portion --" And that's when craving Tom Riddle howls, "How do you do that?"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Slughorn goes, "There's a spell, I don't know..." Oh, God...

JC: It's interesting that Tom can't stop himself from interrupting there. Who knows what Slughorn was going to say next, right? He was going to give him more information, and Tom's like, "Just tell me how to do it!"

Lorrie: "Show me!" Yeah, and he doesn't have what it takes to understand why Slughorn is so offended. 'What do you take me for? You think I've done this? Nobody would do this. Nobody on earth would do this. Uh...' Tom, without understanding, sees, 'Oh, okay. Backtracking, backtracking immediately,' and I confess to having some sympathy for Tom here. There are times when something about my background has made me be really puzzled. "Why does everybody else seem to know..." "Oh, no, no, this is the right way to be." "It is? I didn't know that. I've been going around hurting people? Explain this to me so I don't do it again." Tom's been following along: "Okay, so if you want this result, this is the process," and he totally lost the bit where you're supposed to be horrified. Then Slughorn totally makes up excuses for Tom that Tom didn't even ask for: "It's natural to feel some curiosity about these things... Wizards of a certain caliber have always been drawn to that aspect of magic..." Slughorn seriously needs Hermione to come kick him.

JC: "It's all right. I know you're curious about evil."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Everyone is." Yeah.

Lorrie: "I totally don't see anything in your face to cause me concern right now."

JC: "I'm just going to give you the benefit of the doubt, Tom Riddle."

Lorrie: Yeah. "You deserve this benefit, right?" and he just gives Tom permission to continue on to his real point. This is what he is really asking: "Would one Horcrux be of much use?" and that is a stunner. Use... wow! Wow, Tom, 'use.' Whoa! Okay, so the part where you have to kill several people is just another step in the process. Wow!

While Slughorn is digesting this, "Can you only split your soul once?" Okay, now we're seeing that Tom has already studied an instance of somebody doing it once and found it inadequate. Chronologically, at this point, he has already made the diary Horcrux and the ring Horcrux, so he's doing that thing where you've gone and done a thing and then you ask, "What would happen if I did a thing?"

JC: "What would happen if I did it again?"

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. But he's talking theoretically like someone who hasn't even done it once and he's actually moved beyond, but he needs some guidance.

JC: Okay, so both of those Horcruxes were accidental, then?

Lorrie: No. No, he knew what he was doing.

JC: Okay, because he's asking, "How do you encase it? How do you do it?" My assumption, I think at that point, was that he just went out thinking or he did it instinctively and he wants to make sure he can recreate it in future because he's heading towards seven pieces of his soul, but you think that he already knew how to do it?

Lorrie: I think he wanted to hear a larger understanding of what he did because he's been going off of whatever instructions he could download off the internet.

JC: He made the bomb; he wants to make sure... Yeah.

Lorrie: "Yeah, but now I want to make a bigger bomb." Slughorn saying you can't really find resources on this... Tom knows. He has read everything. He has understood everything he could find enough to do this successfully twice, but if you're going to go, ask the one teacher you trust the most about this thing that you're making up as you go along. Yeah, you're going to want to say, "So, just theoretically speaking, hypothetically..." So yeah, knowing that he's already made two gives us context for the way Tom is presenting this whole interrogation. "Wouldn't it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces...?" I really like how the use of the word 'stronger' here represents an entire way of thinking. We've noticed that there's a personality that thinks the word 'strongman' is a compliment; what that means is somebody who imposes their will on an entire people by randomly killing or otherwise terrorizing people according to their own whims, but it sounds so positive. People are like, "Oh, yeah, I want to be a strong man. This is strong." This also reminds me of Snape using this concept where Snape, during Occlumency, is hissing at Harry, "Weak people wear their hearts on their sleeves," or he is picking on Tonks and saying, "Your Patronus looks weak." This whole definition of 'strong'... Being vulnerable feels like weakness to people who have this tendency.

JC: It's interesting, because I've always thought -- and I don't know if this plays in -- of the way that the word 'strong' is used, certainly in our culture, in a very gendered way. For men to be strong means they can impose their will (as you said, other people using whatever means they want).

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: For women to be strong, it means that in the face of really horrible things, they can take care of other people and keep them together or they can keep themselves together enough to take care of other people in horrible circumstances. When women are described as strong, it means something very different from when men are described as strong.

Lorrie: It means that you can survive somebody who is strong at you in this destructive way.

JC: Yeah. There you go, yeah. There you go.

Lorrie: Yeah. I've certainly seen women who believe in strength the same way that Voldemort is saying here and I have met men who don't believe in this strength, but there is some correlation to gender.

JC: Interesting. I guess I'm just thinking... This happened to me, it happened to my sister. When you are in a situation where your child is fighting for their life, and you're holding it all together -- you're making sure that everything happens that needs to happen and you're not breaking down, and you're not freaking out; you're very calm -- people are like, "How are you so strong?" That's the way that I personally have experienced that word being applied to me. It's always at a time of crisis when... Yeah, yeah, when I'm not falling apart under pressure, and I can't think of a time that I've heard anyone describe men that way. I don't know. Anyway, not sure if that really applies here, but yeah.

Lorrie: No, it does. We're about to see Snape embody that.

JC: Okay. Oh, you're right. Oh... now, that's interesting. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, and we don't know -- it's not stated explicitly, and it's one of the most difficult things to tease out about this series -- that there are ways in which Dumbledore is doing that. For example, his refusal to ever be Minister of Magic is part of that. How do you hold it together to help the most people? You put yourself

at a school and you resist calls to temptation that would make you act recklessly. But yeah, Snape is about to be truly tested.

JC: Okay, yeah, this is true.

Lorrie: This is the kind of strength that is not celebrated. It's not considered masculine.

JC: It's considered weakness by a certain group of people.

Lorrie: Yeah, and being criticized for being weak that way is very punishing. It's hard to stand meekly and accept being criticized that way, and better people than Snape have a hard time with it; Snape, in particular, is not so good at accepting criticism, so yeah, this is rough. Then we get the thing that Dumbledore had been looking for, the thing that he set Harry to find: "Isn't seven the most powerfully magical number?" Tom wants a limit. Tom is asking the closest thing he has to a daddy, "When can I feel safe at last? What I'm doing... Somebody somewhere has understood this before, right? There are rules, there are laws... Someone has figured this out before. Someone can have advice for me, right? It's really tiring, being a lone god all the time. Dad, when do I get to stop?" Meanwhile, Slughorn is having a fit. "Isn't it bad enough to think of killing one person?" Of course, by this time, Tom Riddle has already killed four people.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: He killed Moaning Myrtle, and he killed his dad and grandparents.

JC: Yeah, okay.

Lorrie: And Slughorn is really losing it: "...Bad enough to divide the soul... but to rip it into seven pieces..." and Tom is completely not comprehending. "Slughorn looked deeply troubled now: He was gazing at Riddle as though he had never seen him plainly before, and Harry could tell that he was regretting entering into the conversation..." So from this point, Slughorn has to start denial that he let this happen. Slughorn is like, "This is all hypothetical, right?" "Of course." "Keep it quiet."

JC: "Oh, yes, of course. Of course, sir."

Lorrie: Yeah. And then we see the wording of him starting to evade responsibility; he says, "Keep it quiet, what I've told -- that's to say, what we've discussed." Oh, boy, oh, boy... He's scared. Then when he warns Tom that Horcruxes are "a banned subject at Hogwarts" and "Dumbledore's particularly fierce about it," that's what makes me think, 'Oh, I see.' I'm thinking that Grindelwald must have made one already.

JC: I was thinking that when I read that part, because I feel like we'd had that conversation before.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Why is information about Horcruxes banned at Hogwarts? You had said at the time that because Grindelwald had made one and Dumbledore had seen what happens when that... Yeah.

Lorrie: That's my guess. I'm just guessing because the *Fantastic Beasts* movies that we got before that series was another victim of TERFpocalypse...

JC: Oh, right.

Lorrie: ...was heading toward Grindelwald trying to figure out how to solve the problem of gaining power over people without their will getting in the way. "Oh, well, I'm the perfect being. If I split myself, then I'll have more of me." That's my guess. There's no textual evidence. Then we get that phenomenon that this series mentions a few times where there's a specific expression that Voldemort gets of wild happiness that makes him look less human, and Harry remembers seeing that expression when Voldemort first found out that he was a wizard. It's when he finds out he's going to have more power, but he's going to be more isolated; he's not going to be any closer to comfort. Yes, you're even more of a lone god than you thought. Isn't that great? Eh... Dumbledore says that hearing the word 'seven' here shows them how very far there is still to go, but summarizes to Harry: this is what we're looking at. Tom Riddle was finding out how to make himself immortal "at your age. As far as I know -- as far, I am sure, as Voldemort knew -- no wizard had ever done more than tear his soul in two." Okay, Dumbledore... He's read all the literature. He knows of everyone who's done this. Tom Riddle has already gone further than anyone else has ever gone.

JC: I like that Dumbledore says here that it confirms the theory that he's been working from all this time and tells him that he's been right, and that's a relief to Dumbledore that he hasn't been going down the wrong path this whole time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's both a relief and terrifying to know that okay, this is really happening. Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay. Well, it definitely helps to know that some of the effort you've put in already has done some good and yeah, we're already down two.

JC: I also love the detail that every single portrait in the room is awake and listening. Carefully listening...

Lorrie: *gasps* I know. Oh, my God...

JC: Harry looks around and he's like, 'What?!' Normally, they're all asleep, and they're all going, *gasps*

Lorrie: Nobody has ever known these things. So yeah, Dumbledore demonstrates how he got put onto this line of thinking because of the way that the diary Horcrux had behaved when Harry was twelve. "A mere memory starting to act and think for itself?" That this had been weaponized? Voldemort had weaponized a part of his soul to be disposable, not kept hidden and safe? Uh-oh...

JC: Reading this again, it really stood out to me, because what I remembered from this chapter was that he put it in the diary and he gave the diary to Lucius expecting Lucius to guard it carefully, but that line I had forgotten about. 'Oh, okay, that's how Dumbledore knew that he must have made more than one, because that part was disposable.' The part that he could spare a few...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'If they're going to go do evil for me, I can spare it.' Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: How many are there? That is the question. That was exactly the question. If you were Voldemort, how many would you aim to have? I do appreciate, in a literary sense, the way this shows that one way you can deal with pain that you carry from your past is first you compartmentalize it, and then you use that pain to inflict pain on other people. If you were to deal with it yourself -- if you were to

take responsibility for the pain and do the work that it takes to heal -- then you're not going to be using that pain to hurt other people the same way, but there is a possibility of feeling, 'Well, if I just externalize this pain and spread it around, then at least I can feel good enjoying that I'm hurting other people.' There's some --

JC: You're not alone. If other people are suffering too, you're not alone.

Lorrie: Yeah, and there's some sort of relief or at least distraction from the relentless pain. So yeah, Voldemort... Here he is, cutting off parts of himself to hurt other people with, and Dumbledore remembers this is what Voldemort was talking about when he tells his Death Eaters, '*I, who have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality.*' Yeah, okay, confirmed. Then we get the introduction of this theme in this series that there's something about the Horcrux process that makes you look physically less human and you deteriorate.

JC: I'm sorry. I just got an image of Mar-a-Lago face, and I just needed to say that out loud.

Lorrie: That is an inescapable comparison, is it not?

JC: Yes. You've got a Horcrux hidden somewhere if you look like that and you're sucking up to Trump. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. We get so many reminders in this chapter of Dumbledore's dead hand during the past two years when it's been unavoidable to see that there's something going on with Trump's hand.

JC: Oh, yeah. Wow.

Lorrie: What kind of unicorn blood...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What kind of half-life has he committed to, having unicorns slaughtered to keep that blackened hand from... I don't know.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Oh, my...

Lorrie: Yeah. This is what happens when a very detailed, rich piece of popular culture becomes so embedded in everybody's consciousness. This is an image that we have, and then you see... That happened to Mitch McConnell a few years back,

too. There was something where one of his hands was completely black, and people were like, "Oh, hello, cursed hand." This series is in the popular imagination. You can yell at people to Obliviate it from your minds, but it is actually in the popular imagination.

JC: True. Very true.

Lorrie: So yeah... "Lord Voldemort has seemed to grow less human with the passing years, and the transformation he has undergone seemed to me to be only explicable if his soul was mutilated beyond the realms of what we might call 'usual evil'..." Okay, there's some sort of connection between Horcrux magic and body parts.

JC: I really like the fact that as Dumbledore tells this story, we can see the long game Dumbledore's been playing. 'Game', to me, is the wrong word, but the fact that Dumbledore has been working on this for a long time in all these moments in the previous books when something was said and Dumbledore's eyes sparkled or he noticed... It's like, 'Ooh, why did that stand out to Dumbledore?' It's really interesting to see all those pieces put together here. Yeah, it's very satisfying.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's big. It's ambitious as a piece of writing.

JC: Also, the fact that three books back, that was planted.

Lorrie: That's impressive, isn't it?

JC: Yeah, it really is.

Lorrie: I always come back to this: you can be rightfully as horrified as you want by J.K. Rowling, TERF extraordinaire, but it's not correct to say that she's a hack writer.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She pulled off something that is... I'm impressed. I am impressed.

JC: Woody Allen made good movies, too.

Lorrie: They're not bad movies.

JC: Et cetera...

Lorrie: Yeah, although it must be said that it was J.K. Rowling of twenty years ago who pulled off this amazing feat, and whatever she's writing now suffers the same flaws where there's a certain point of omnipotence that humans aren't supposed to surpass because you're supposed to have some guardrails.

JC: That's interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: These thousand-page Cormoran Strike books are what happens when you're too powerful to be edited.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: You can see the talent is still there, but anyway... Going back to something she wrote twenty years ago, I am now going to say my conjecture about how the Horcrux spell involves a physical element of rejecting part of the self. This is purely my conjecture: I'm identifying an urge, a human urge, to reject part of yourself as unwanted and unloved and uncared for and not welcome to return to rejoin your whole self as an act of self-hatred, internalizing on yourself the way an unwanted baby or person has been made to feel. Nobody wants you. How dare you want to be loved! You're disgusting for wanting to be loved, for existing, for needing care. An orphan who was born into circumstances like Voldemort -- obviously the world has no time for you and would prefer it if you ceased to exist. You inhale that knowledge all the time. How are you going to exhale it? Who can you hurt? Nobody cares enough for you to tell them how much this is hurting you. You can turn that on yourself or on parts of yourself; that you have control over, so any feelings of punishment that you get because you continue to want when you're not wanted -- any desire to express your anger about that toward more powerful people (which you can't do because they don't care) -- you're not powerful enough to make them care. If an abandoned child is unable to reject and hurt others back, they can turn that onto part of themselves, which is why I call it self-harm. That's purely my conjecture. That's my reading, my understanding of why a Horcrux is expressed as physical deterioration: you have one self, you have one body. You can turn it on yourself. "You! This part of me... How dare you exist? You don't have the right; I disown you. I'm going to hurt you." I can imagine that some backlash against the concept of Horcruxes when this book was first published might have been because the concept of self-harm in this fashion is so real and so horrifying that people didn't want to have that reading. "You can't say this in a children's

book!" "Why not? Don't real children go through this?" "You're sick!" But enough real children go through it that I think this series was a valuable thing to have around for people to read. That's one of the things that I was most hesitant to say because that's my true reading of it, but it's so dark. Dark, not because the book is dark, but dark because life is dark.

JC: Yeah, that's interesting. I don't think I'd ever thought about it that way. I was thinking much more surface-y reading of evil characters who are almost always made ugly, especially if they're irredeemable. The hot villain is still a thing, obviously. I'm thinking of Moriarty -- the way Moriarty was cast in the *Sherlock* series, and there's lots of examples of that -- but there are villains who are just unattractive and ugly and gross to the point that that's how we're signaled that they're irredeemable, so I was kind of thinking of it more along... Is that allegorical, the way that you sometimes use that term? I think I was thinking it's more symbolic of the fact that he's not redeemable. If he was hot (back when he was Tom Riddle and he was really good-looking), maybe there was still a chance. Well, now there's no chance, because look at him. I was reading it more on that level, but that's interesting.

Lorrie: A lot of people read that because there's some reason to feel not quite trusting of this author and looks, but in this case, I don't agree with that reading. I go with what Grace Candido-Beecher says in her book about Voldemort, which is that Voldemort deliberately chose this because he was against the privilege of being read as 'good' because you're physically attractive.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: That that was a lie, a hypocrisy, that he loathed and was happy to get away from, to completely destroy. We definitely see him getting privilege from looking like such a good-looking boy. That wasn't him; that wasn't his real self. There was nothing he wanted that he was getting by being so good-looking. He was more comfortable showing, 'This is who I really am. This is what I really look like.' He could have stayed the extraordinarily good-looking man that he was, and certainly that's a well-documented path to villainy. In a way, it's like he didn't want any superpower that he didn't earn. "I don't want people to like me because they think they can date me. I want them to be afraid of me because I can push them around."

JC: Yeah. And I guess, also, his good looks are something he got from his Muggle father, so that'd be another reason for him to reject it.

Lorrie: Yeah, but definitely, the change in his appearance from good-looking human young man to half-reptilian monster was chosen by him. I don't think he was upset about it. If he didn't welcome it, he had no problem with it, at the least. Harry asks Dumbledore, "Why not a Sorcerer's Stone?" and Dumbledore explains, in that world-building sense, "Okay, no, he wouldn't want something that you have to depend on externally. He wants to be self-sufficient because you can't trust people and things. They let you down," and I look at Lucius Malfoy. Dumbledore says, "Yeah. From that point of view, yes, I think the idea of a seven-part soul would greatly appeal to Lord Voldemort." This is Dumbledore providing Harry with a handy field guide to Voldemort and his father issues. Okay... Then we get to this super painful point in the chapter where Dumbledore enters into the lie; he makes this elaborate, completely intentional lie. Harry says, "He made *seven* Horcruxes?" "Not seven Horcruxes: six. The seventh part of his soul, however maimed, resides inside his regenerated body." Dumbledore is and is not telling the truth. Obviously, we'll find out later that there is an eighth part, and he didn't deliberately make seven Horcruxes. Seven were made; he didn't make them. What Dumbledore is doing is he is limited in his truth-telling to Harry by what Voldemort already knows. What Dumbledore and Harry are working on (trying to catch up to Voldemort and fight him)... In case somebody Legilimises somebody somehow and Voldemort finds out what they know, he can only find out things that Voldemort already knows. There's stuff that Voldemort doesn't know, and that's one of their very, very few tiny advantages. Dumbledore cannot tell Harry something that Voldemort doesn't know about Voldemort for Voldemort to find out, and the part of Voldemort's soul that's in Harry is more volatile. Not only does Voldemort not know about it, but it can move in and out of its container more freely because it wasn't secured, so it's more dangerous. He can't tell Harry anything where it's a risk for Voldemort to see it in Harry's mind; he has to lie. This is the thing: I think it is intentional to see that Dumbledore is doing what he has to do, but it can very easily be misconstrued (including by Harry, canonically, in book seven) as Dumbledore just being an asshole about this and setting Harry up to die or something.

JC: It's interesting because I'm reading this and thinking, 'Okay, he's lying here. He's starting to lie to him.' I had just watched Tom Hanks's World War II

documentary series; before I read this chapter, the last episode of that I had watched was the one in which it's about to be D-Day. The story is told of Eisenhower going down to talk to the troops right before D-Day; I think maybe it was even the 82nd Airborne, so these people are going to parachute into occupied France. He's walking amongst them and just looking at them, looking them in the eye and shaking their hands and telling them they're heroes and they're going to do great things and "we're going to save the world," knowing that most of them are going to die tomorrow. He knew it, but he couldn't say that to them. He had to pump them up, and the fact that he had to go back and live with the fact that he was sending most of those men to their deaths was so poignant. When I read this, I was like, 'Oh, my God, Dumbledore.' Yeah. I used to think, 'Oh, Dumbledore never told Harry the truth,' but now I'm like, 'Nah, Dumbledore's the general here. He has to... he can't.' For the reasons that you articulated as well, he can't do that. He's got to do what generals always do when they know that they're sending people into these situations where death is pretty certain. Yeah.

Lorrie: And Dumbledore is correct that in the alternate universe, where he could explain every single last detail to Harry and why he has to do this, Harry would say, "Yes, I see. Out of all the possibilities, this path has the best chance of restoring good to the world, which I'm totally for." That's adulting, right? 'Wow, I really wish I could explain this. I can't. I wish I could complain about this burden to somebody... I can't. I could be wrong... Yeah, I know.' This is adulting. With the version of truth that he can cobble together, Dumbledore teaches Harry that the six Horcruxes must be destroyed before attacking Voldemort and that final, supposedly seventh part of his soul; he does not mention that he's teaching Harry a decoy version of the real plan. Harry is getting the decoy that assumes seven parts. This decoy version, as Dumbledore is outlining it: if Harry follows the decoy version exactly, then that would miss an eighth part and is doomed to failure unless Dumbledore can get, somehow, the correct real plan to Harry so Harry won't go after the real final part of Voldemort's soul until all the other parts have been destroyed. What could possibly go wrong? Oh, God...

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: Their advantage, if they have one, is so very slight. And now, it's time to reveal what happened to Dumbledore's hand. Oh, God...

JC: Finally. When Dumbledore basically says, "Yeah, there's six Horcruxes," Harry is like, immediately, "But they could be anywhere in the world. What the hell?" Dumbledore reminds him, "We've already destroyed two, so we're a third of the way there," and then he goes into the story about Marvolo's ring. Even though I've read this book and I know how it all turns out, I had the same reaction as Harry: "Oh, my God, there's six Horcruxes," and Dumbledore says, "Yeah, no, there's really just four." Harry's like, "Oh, okay, that's right. That feels better." Yeah.

Lorrie: I know. Just like you and Harry, I want to say to Dumbledore, "But do you realize the enormity and the lack of guidance here? But that would mean that this is a really big task."

"Yes." Dumbledore explains, "Okay, so that happened to my hand. Had it not been -- forgive me the lack of seemingly modesty -- for my own prodigious skill, and for Professor Snape's timely action when I returned to Hogwarts, desperately injured..." -- okay, enter Snape into this conversation -- and then Dumbledore does the same thing where he says, "A withered hand does not seem an unreasonable exchange for a seventh of Voldemort's soul." Dumbledore, too, is in this whole body parts... and it feels like sacrificing pieces in chess, right? Well, why can't Dumbledore come up with a plan where they lose nothing and Voldemort loses everything? Yeah, no.

JC: That's not how intricate plots work, but yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I have a question here, actually. Dumbledore says he found the ring hidden in the ruins of the Gaunts' house, and he says, "Once Voldemort had succeeded in putting a piece of his soul in this, he didn't want to wear it anymore, so he hid it, protected by many powerful enchantments." In the memory, we see Tom Riddle wearing the ring, and I think that was why I assumed he didn't know it was Horcruxed because he was still wearing it. That was my confusion around that.

Lorrie: Oh, you know what? No. I guess the piece that I find missing here is when you've generated energy by splitting your soul by killing somebody, how long is that good for? Okay, he killed his father, and the damage from splitting his soul with that murder is what he used to create enough energy to make the ring into a

Horcrux, so by the time he's having this memory conversation with Slughorn, Tom Riddle Sr. is dead, but he's wearing the ring. Has he not made it into a Horcrux yet? How long does that damage last? I don't know. No, you're right, he is walking around with a ring on his hand; he has not buried it.

JC: But I guess another way of thinking about it is that he's wearing it. It's already a Horcrux, but then the conversation with Slughorn makes him think, 'Oh, okay, the way this is done is that you secrete that away somewhere safe, so if I'm just walking around with it, that's maybe not... I want this piece of my soul far away from me and safe.' Maybe that was it.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Having gone to the trouble of making it, now I'm going to secure it.' Yeah. My allegorical read of it is when there's stuff about yourself or your past that you just can't handle thinking about ever, you compartmentalize it away and just never, ever, ever want to think about it again and hopefully nobody will come across any evidence. Dumbledore explains that the ring is no longer a Horcrux, and this is the beginning of the payoff in *Deathly Hallows* where we'll discover that it was once (and still is) something else, though. By cracking it open as he did, Dumbledore restored it to its original meaning; he won that fight over Voldemort and lost his hand, but no, he won that one. Good job, Albus. Tough one.

JC: Harry's first response is, "Okay, there's four Horcruxes left. They could be anything," and Dumbledore says, "No, let's think through all the things I've already shown you."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. "Voldemort, he liked to collect trophies. He was really interested in special objects that had magical history. He would have made these special." Harry says, "The diary wasn't special," and Dumbledore's like, "Actually, it kind of was."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But yeah, I think it's interesting that it's nicely set up for the treasures of the Founders here.

Lorrie: Something that John Granger says in his Christian read that I found really useful was that this is a way of saying that it's not good to put your faith in material possessions as opposed to the value of your soul. No, Voldemort's totally all about

the material possessions here. Tacky, gold-sprayed decorations from Home Depot glued onto --

JC: The White House walls? Yeah.

Lorrie: The White House. Yep.

JC: Yeah, this is also -- okay, yes. That, and then that also makes me think about the third *Indiana Jones* movie where they're looking for the Holy Grail, and it turns out to be a simple wooden cup and not all of these grandiose, gold, jewel-infested cups. Yeah.

Lorrie: Actually, this makes Voldemort better than some politicians we know currently, because Voldemort went for the real thing.

JC: Right, yeah. This is true.

Lorrie: That's the real Hufflepuff's cup. He wanted it because it had true magic in it, and he would not have preferred a larger, gaudier cup.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Voldemort has some standards here.

JC: Oh, another thing that stood out to me about this is Dumbledore saying that what he really wanted was to have an object from each of the Founders, and he points at the Gryffindor sword behind him and says, "But he didn't get one from Gryffindor," and I was like, 'No, he did. He got Harry. Harry is the relic.'

Lorrie: Yeah. That's such a nice, neat Easter egg, kind of. Yeah. No, I always love how that worked. So yeah, with Voldemort's affection for trophies, that's another connection to apparently serial killers who keep trophies to remind themselves of the time that they felt powerful and in control from committing a crime.

JC: Normal people just collect enamel pins of cool places they went to. What the hell?

Lorrie: Yeah, you've got to understand the mentality that's so different. Then we get an example in this chapter of just how much Harry and Dumbledore are honestly just guessing; all they can really do is guess. Harry says, "Dumbledore, do you think Voldemort came back to Hogwarts (at the time he asked for a job) to find

another object?" and Dumbledore says, "Yeah, I think so," but he thinks Voldemort was turned away before he got a chance to search.

Later on, Harry will realize that they were both totally wrong about this. They're just guessing. Dumbledore does not have all the answers. Then they go on to a guess that turns out to be correct, where Dumbledore's like, "I think Nagini is number six," and then says, "To confide a part of your soul to something that can think and move for itself is obviously a very risky business." This is totally putting my mind ahead in time to Grindelwald in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies wishing so much that he could harness the power of Obscurials and trying to figure out how he can solve the problem: that Obscurials come attached to a person that has their own will. Grindelwald uses the same word that Voldemort uses here that's so freaky, where he says, "Well, the Obscurus isn't useful without a toast," and they're like, "What are you talking about?" Just give yourself away there.

JC: It's also interesting that the fact that you can put a Horcrux into a living being is a nice little foreshadowing of Harry being one, too.

Lorrie: You might want to put this knowledge away, Harry, that it is possible. There are problems involved. It's not easy, but can be done. Then we get the author signaling that this is a guess of Dumbledore's that we're supposed to take as true: "I am sure that he was intending to make his final Horcrux with your death. As we know, he failed." That's the author promising us that we're not going to find out, "No, actually, he made fourteen." No, no, no, we are meant to believe that Dumbledore was correct to think that Voldemort craved and found a limit that he then adopted. Okay, so that was his intention, and then we get a detail that is contradicted extra-canonically: Dumbledore is guessing that Voldemort made Nagini a Horcrux using the murder of Frank Bryce; in an extra-canonical interview, Rowling said it was Bertha Jorkins. It doesn't change the story either way... I guess I'm just saying that I do think extra-canonical information is interesting and useful and has a place.

JC: Okay. Nagini and Bertha Jorkins... When did he kill Bertha Jorkins, then? I thought she didn't die until the seventh book.

Lorrie: No, Bertha Jorkins died --

JC: Sorry, I'm mixing her up with somebody else. Okay.

Lorrie: Oh, with Charity Burbage. Yeah.

JC: Okay, yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, no, it was within a couple months...

JC: Okay, okay.

Lorrie: So it was roughly the same time.

JC: So in book four, when Nagini is curled up by the fireplace, Nagini's not yet a Horcrux.

Lorrie: No, she is.

JC: She is by then, okay. The timeline... Oh, my God. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, no, that's exactly what Dumbledore is thinking. When Nagini is slithering around saying, "There's a Muggle, listen to this conversation," is Nagini a Horcrux yet? Dumbledore is thinking, 'No, not yet,' but actually, yes, she just got made into one. It's the same summer.

JC: Okay. Also then, at this point, Dumbledore knows that Harry is a Horcrux, but Dumbledore also seems to know that Voldemort doesn't know, because why would he create an eighth one...

Lorrie: Correct.

JC: If seven was the limit he set? Okay, and that's how Dumbledore knows that Voldemort does not know about Harry?

Lorrie: Yeah. Also, if Voldemort had known, then he wouldn't have spent so much of Book Five trying to figure out, "How does this mind-scar connection thing work?" If he had done it on purpose, he would have known.

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: Yeah, because it doesn't work exactly the same as it does with the other Horcruxes. So yeah, knowing extra-canonically that Dumbledore's guess about the murder that made Nagini a Horcrux was wrong is like, 'Okay, Dumbledore, this is what it feels like in life to be somebody who knows a lot, but still has to guess a lot.' Dumbledore says, correctly, "He seems to have an unusual amount of control

over her, even for a Parselmouth." Okay. Ah, Dumbledore then confirms the mystery that's been hinted at for several volumes: What does Dumbledore do when he's not at Hogwarts? He's looking for Horcruxes. In other words, he's looking for traces of Voldemort's past that Voldemort has put away from himself unexamined. Then he says, "Yes, Harry, you can come help me get rid of the one that I think I found."

JC: Oh, I really like that Harry asks, "Well, can I come?" and he's not expecting a yes; then Dumbledore says yes, and Harry's like, 'Oh, it's the first time that they're not treating me like a child. What?! I can -- Okay, yeah, great. When do we go?' Yeah.

Lorrie: "Yes? Did you say yes?" "Yes." "Did you say -- Wow!" Oh, yeah, okay. Everything's gotten so serious.

JC: But yeah, also because at this point, Dumbledore needs to train him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Dumbledore doesn't have much time left, and he's going to need Harry... Yeah, Harry needs to start learning how to do this. That's the most important thing.

Lorrie: "Tick-tock, Harry. We don't know how much longer my hand's going to hold out. Tick-tock... We don't know when Voldemort's going to discover what we know and come end it all. If not now, when?" So then, Harry asks the super important question: does Voldemort know when a Horcrux is destroyed? Can he feel it? Dumbledore says, "Well, he didn't feel it when the diary got destroyed." Oh, I love that he says, "I'm told that he was really angry when he found that the diary was destroyed," and I thought, 'Oh, that was Snape who told him.' That's a whole unwritten scene: Snape watching Voldemort lose it on Lucius Malfoy and then preparing the report to deliver to Dumbledore.

JC: Oh, yeah, that's interesting. I hadn't thought about that, yeah.

Lorrie: Ho, ho, ho...

JC: I also really like this idea that Lucius Malfoy just fucked up big time...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yes!

JC: To the point where Dumbledore even says, "He's probably glad he's in Azkaban right now."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "He's a little more safe than he would have been," and he didn't fuck up once; he fucked up twice. Yeah.

Lorrie: So bad. So bad.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Undeniable. Yeah, we will find out in the next volume no, Voldemort absolutely does not feel it when parts of his soul that he has rejected get destroyed; the containers work really well. We also get in the next volume that Voldemort is surprised. 'Surely I would know if I felt it...' No, you did the spell yourself, you jerk. Even Voldemort's like, "Oh, yeah, but nobody would really go that far."

JC: "No one would ever figure this out, my brilliant evil plan. Nobody would figure it out, find them all, could possibly guess what objects..." Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: But this is the loneliness of being an unsurpassed genius, right? You don't have anyone to talk about these things with.

JC: And no expectation that anyone will ever figure it out. Yeah.

Lorrie: "Nobody understands me..." So yeah, Dumbledore gets across to Harry: "Once all the Horcruxes are destroyed, Voldemort can be killed" -- which is another way to say, "returned to mortality, returned to being a human, returned to be whole enough to die and move on" -- and warns Harry that he's a mortal man with a maimed and diminished soul, but he's still smart and he still has magic. Yeah, that is a dangerous combination in humans that is real. Then, with or without Horcruxes, Voldemort's not easy to kill. Then Dumbledore and Harry have their usual battle about whether love is or is not really all that powerful. Yeah, it's powerful. Against this, though? The truth, which is beautifully written and good, is that it's not obviously more powerful; it is not a slam dunk, and as Fudge says so beautifully at the beginning of this volume, "The other side can do magic, too." If it were that easy, we wouldn't be in this situation, would we?

JC: Yeah. Wow, that seems like a long time ago now that Fudge said that. Wow, a lot's happened.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It is really interesting here that Harry is just focused on "one of us has to kill the other" -- a "What's love got to do with it?" kind of a thing -- and I think Dumbledore does a pretty good job of explaining why his ability to love is such a superpower for him. The fact that he says, "Despite everything you've experienced, despite all the trauma you've experienced, you still love other people." He said, "I don't know if you realize how special that makes you," which was such a pleasant thing to read because one of the things that always stuck out to me reading these books is "How is Harry not traumatized to hell? How is he not completely messed up?" The fact that he's as well-adjusted as he is is a miracle, and Dumbledore basically says that.

Lorrie: Yeah. Because it is a thing for people to respond to trauma by saying, "Well, I'm going to turn around and do it to other people now," Harry is very much like, "I'm going to do what I can to minimize this kind of pain for other people." Then Dumbledore has such a tightrope to walk because he cannot let on that Harry is not supposed to ever try to kill Voldemort, but he has to let Harry continue to believe that and he has to get this across to Harry without jeopardizing things. He says, "Never forget that what the prophecy says is only significant because Voldemort made it so." He's trying to say it without saying it. "Your power over Voldemort is that Voldemort identifies with you, and you're the only person that he's ever seen as a human being. Voldemort singled you out as the person who would be most dangerous to him -- and in doing so, he *made* you the person who would be most dangerous to him!" Okay, did that transfer some powers to Harry? Yeah, that, too. Then, oh, Dumbledore has this Ron Weasley moment, "pointing at Harry with his black, withered hand" like Ron pointing sausages at Hermione. He said, "You are setting too much store by the prophecy!" What?! And he's yelling. Dumbledore is really... He doesn't have a lot of energy left. He's not calm, and he has to convince Harry of this. Yeah, he just can't let on that it's Voldemort's fixation on Harry -- that's what's going to defeat Voldemort -- and Harry quite understandably says in bewilderment, "But last year, you said one of us would have to kill the other --" Okay, that's carefully worded. That is true, okay, and poor

Dumbledore is continuing to yell. "Voldemort himself created his own worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do! Have you any idea how much tyrants fear the people they oppress?" Okay, Harry, it's important for you to understand guilt and projection. Okay, this is super important for you to put in your arsenal: "All of them realize that, one day, amongst their many victims, there is sure to be one who rises against them and strikes back! Voldemort is no different!" Little asterisk here: there is only one playbook. It's the same method every time. "Always he was on the lookout for the one who would challenge him," and during this speech to Harry, Dumbledore's super careful not to use the word 'kill.' He's always talking about Voldemort being afraid of being finished, of Harry having to finish him, not kill. Dumbledore continues yelling: "...He handed him uniquely deadly weapons! It is Voldemort's fault that you were able to see into his thoughts, his ambitions, that you even understand Parseltongue." Voldemort wants Harry to understand him. Voldemort wants connection, and Dumbledore is completely agitated. "You are protected, in short, by your ability to love! The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's!" Okay, so now Voldemort knows that if he possesses Harry, he will feel mortal agony. "...He never paused to understand the incomparable power of a soul that's untarnished and whole." And I have to say, given the circumstances of his life, how on earth was he supposed to understand that? It hurt too much, and Harry says, "I've got to try and kill him or -" and Dumbledore lets that one go because Voldemort would expect that's what Harry thinks. Dumbledore says, "Of course you've got to!" and then going back to the language that is correct, Harry thinks of loved ones that Voldemort has killed and says, "I'd want him finished, and I want to do it." Yeah. Dumbledore is succeeding and getting across to Harry, "You don't have to do anything. ...The prophecy caused Lord Voldemort to *mark you as his equal*... and he's going to continue to hunt you, which makes it certain, really, that --" And Harry says, "That one of us is going to end up killing the other." Yeah, yeah. Yep. Yeah. Under extreme pressure, Dumbledore has succeeded in this conversation and getting across to Harry everything he can about understanding Horcruxes without telling him anything that Voldemort doesn't already think he knows.

JC: This whole conversation about the prophecy and all is interesting, because I feel like Dumbledore is trying really hard to remind Harry that "you have free will here and you were not doomed by the prophecy. The prophecy was there and then

Voldemort acted on it, and that set things in motion. Yeah, he's going to keep coming after you, so in reality, the words of the prophecy are kind of true, but the truth is not in the prophecy. It's still your choice."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I thought that was an interesting way to come at it.

Lorrie: And it does reinforce Dumbledore's largest project concerning Harry, which is trying to say, "Harry, you are allowed to be yourself. That is your birthright: just be yourself. Understand how Voldemort thinks. Voldemort heard the prophecy, and therefore in his mind, this is what he's doing. You be you. You are not Voldemort. You don't have to be what Voldemort says you are. You don't have to be what the prophecy says you are. You be you."

JC: It's worked for Harry Potter so far...

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, and that is one of the most major themes of this series: that's your birthright. There are, in fact, people who want to take it away from you. You're going to want to fight for it and it's your right.

JC: And isn't that ironic, author.

Lorrie: Nobody should be a billionaire.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Limits are good.

JC: Limits are good, yeah.

Lorrie: We are designed to function better when we have the comfort of a limit or two.

JC: Yeah, and this raised an interesting question: Voldemort went past the limit he set for himself. Maybe not knowingly, but is that part of his downfall? No, that is his downfall, then, isn't it?

Lorrie: Yes. Oops!

JC: He went past the limit, yeah.

Lorrie: Oops!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The more his soul was divided, the less control he had. That's one of the risks. You're not just value-free, infinitely divisible; he does have a head start because he's so much smarter and more powerful than other humans, but at some point, it catches up to him. What point is that? Well, nobody's smart enough to tell him. Nobody's done this before. The only person who presumably is supposed to be powerful in some way enough to be his equal is this Harry Potter kid. "Bring me Harry Potter. Not his head; the whole Harry Potter!"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Child, explain this to me."

JC: This sets us up for the rest of the series. Here we go.

Lorrie: It's a big chapter, and I hope I have successfully shown why it is that I don't think Dumbledore was setting up Harry as a sacrifice and that he did want Harry to survive, and that he lied and withheld information because telling it to Harry would have endangered all of them a lot more in a way that Harry would not have wanted.

JC: I can see that. Also, I think the other way I'm reading that is that Dumbledore is still hoping to find a solution that allows Harry to survive. Why tell him where it's at right now when there's hope that it'll get better, when there's hope that he'll figure something out?

Lorrie: Yeah, and if he tells Harry now, that increases the chance that Voldemort will discover it and then go do something else totally unhinged that'll set them back to zero.

JC: Yeah. Right now, Voldemort not knowing Harry is a Horcrux is actually helping them.

Lorrie: It's one of their tools.

JC: Harry can't know because that's the easiest way for Voldemort to find out.

Lorrie: Right?

JC: So yeah.

Lorrie: And if Voldemort thought that seven was a safe number, then he has stopped that, but if he finds out that Dumbledore is on a Horcrux hunt and they've already gotten rid of them, then what's to stop him from just "Okay, I'll just make a whole dozen more"? Yeah, no, we don't... That would be bad, so he really can't find out. As much as this is an advantage that Dumbledore and now Harry have over Voldemort, it's a not very secure advantage.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: At any rate, it's never bad to stick with, "Harry, you have the right to be yourself. In every scenario, that helps, and it's really good that you want other people to be spared pain. That is beautiful."

JC: I'm just like, 'Here we go.' I'm like, 'The ride starts now.'

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: That ominous moment when the ratcheting noise of the roller coaster stops and we're about to gooooo... Yep.

JC: That's what it feels like, yeah.

Lorrie: The next chapter is called Sectumsempra.

JC: Oh, boy... Oh, boy...

Lorrie: Yeah, and there's no way to prepare for it. It's just going to happen.

JC: Yep, yep.

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 in 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.