

Transcript

Episode 6.24

Book 6, Chapter 24: Sectumsempra

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-Four: Sectumsempra.

Lorrie: Sectumsempra. Harry nearly kills Draco with a spell he doesn't understand. Snape saves Draco's life and gives Harry detention. Gryffindor wins the Quidditch House Cup. Harry and Ginny get together. JC, this is quite the chapter for you to come back to after you spent quite a long time sick and not able to record, huh?

JC: Yes. If you're listening to this, folks, you will hear it in my voice. Apologies for sounding a little bit like a lawnmower here or chainsaw, but I haven't really been able to speak much for the last two weeks and you don't want to hear me sing right now; it's really terrible, but I have enough voice to come back and start talking about this really big chapter. I have to say that when this book came out... In the previous book, Sirius had died, and I remember that there was this buzz in the fandom, like, "Oh, my God, major characters could die."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Maybe we knew a major character... Maybe we had been spoiled for a major character who was going to die in this book, didn't really know who it was going to

be... I was really afraid that it might be Draco, because Draco had suddenly become an important character.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Harry suddenly noticed him, which is, in a lot of cases, like, ‘Oh, no, that’s bad,’ right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I really thought there was a good chance that Draco was going to die, so I read this entire chapter with my heart in my throat because I was like, ‘Oh, no.’ Draco had always been a character I had a soft spot for, so I was very relieved that he didn’t die at the end of this, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That’s something I was thinking about the first time I read this.

Lorrie: My goodness... so this is your second time reading it. How was that experience?

JC: Yeah. Well, I knew he wasn’t going to die, so I could focus on other things. I told (I’m going to call him my ‘kiddo’ forever, even though he’s a grown ass adult now) my kiddo that we were going to record this episode, and the first thing he said was, “Oh, I remember that scene from the movie,” because he’s never read the Harry Potter books and he never will because of JKR.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think he’s read half of the first one a long time ago, but yeah, he’s never going to read them. But yeah, we were talking about the spell and he got really excited about looking up what the spell meant and everything. I was like, “I know what it means, but go for it,” so he looked it all up and and he ended up translating it as “forever cutting.”

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I thought, ‘Okay, that’s a pretty cool translation,’ and also made me think about what it would feel like to experience that, because I think I hadn’t really thought about the translation of it for a while. When we get to that point, you can think

about what is this spell doing. Then the other thing that he said: “Why don’t they teach Latin at Hogwarts?”

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: “An awful lot of problems could have been solved if the kids learned Latin,” which I was like, “You know, you have a point.” Yeah, I thought more about what the spell was doing to Draco, [which was] the difference this time around.

Lorrie: This chapter starts off as a normal high school story. That's the narrative that is trying to assert itself here. We have: Ginny and Dean broke up; Harry has hope. Ron and Lavender broke up; now Hermione has hope. They're taking a class. They're training for the Quidditch final. Oh, Katie Bell comes back from St. Mungo's and Harry runs over saying, “Do you remember who gave you the necklace?” and she said, “No. I wish I could, but whoever it was must have Imperiused me from behind the door of the women's bathroom.”

JC: And cue... Yeah, exactly. Again, that's not a thing that would have stood out to me on a first reading. Every time, ooh, bad things happen when people go into women's bathrooms who some people think shouldn't be there. It's just like, ‘Ugh...’

Lorrie: My goodness, yeah. As of recording, this is early August 2026. It was last week that Rowling and her J.K. Rowling Women's Fund bankrolled a campaign to bully Amnesty International into retracting a report that had nothing wrong with it; they issued not only a retraction but a groveling apology because the report was on anti-rights movements and it included organizations that provides services to women that specifically exclude trans women, and that includes a sexual assault support center that Rowling funds. It is even more sickening because Amnesty International is a place that Rowling worked at as a young woman and a lot of the things she learned there inform a lot of the values in the *Harry Potter* series, and yet this is now an organization that (through just having more money and richer lawyers and the ability to fund people who agree with her) have strong-armed Amnesty International into apologizing to them personally, to the organization that Rowling funds. She used her money to force them to cave, but also this organization depends on their reputation for integrity; that's what makes them effective, so it really struck there. It's not, for me, possible to read about a plot

point of somebody going into a women's bathroom who might not belong there without overlaying all of this very current, very real-world influence that Rowling is actively purveying. Maybe there are still people in *Harry Potter* studies arguing that it's possible and even morally or intellectually superior to separate the artist from the art. I don't know if there still are because I haven't heard it around much lately, but I'm hazarding the theory that it's pretty dead (this theory that it's possible to read the *Harry Potter* series without being influenced by knowledge of what 2026 J.K. Rowling is doing politically).

JC: Yeah. Yeah... On the one hand, it's like, UGH, but on the other hand, I actually appreciate that the reading reminds me of her in that way. I don't want to forget, while I'm reading this, that she's a horrific TERF and an awful person now.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't want to forget that a horrible human being twenty years ago produced this, because I think that's something that's important for me to keep in mind.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And when I am enjoying this, I want to be reminded of the person who created it. Maybe that's stupid in the sense that 'is it alleviating my guilt or something about enjoying this thing?' I don't know, but humans are complicated, and I think that it's really interesting to see those little notes in the text that would not have rung a bell for me at all in the past that now remind me, 'Oh, my God, the author...' Who knows where she was twenty years ago on these issues that remind me of where she is now... The text does not let me forget. I think that's good.

Lorrie: I think it's unequivocally good. There might be a fantasy of shutting out awareness to retreat to childhood fantasy and this won't let that happen, which keeps us accountable as readers. It also sheds light on how this works in general for all reading, even when the stakes aren't so high. This is noticeable because the stakes are so high and she's so in the news, but it works this way on a smaller level in general when you know anything about an author decades after they wrote something. I think it takes artificial labor. There are good reasons to try to do it, but if you want to separate out your awareness of the present-day author, it takes some labor. I think [the] default is that all knowledge that you have swirls together in your mind. Here, Hermione (thinking about what Katie said) is saying, "So it must

have been a girl or a woman who gave Katie the necklace to be the ladies' bathroom," and then Harry says, "Or someone who looked like a girl or a woman." "In his mind's eye, he watched a parade of Crabbes and Goyles prance past, all transformed into girls." You have said before, JC, that this is what it sounds like Rowling thinks trans women are: Crabbe and Goyle in disguise with malicious intent. When you listen to what she thinks she's protecting against, it's this internal image that she has instead of any reality. It's fear-mongering in the most depressing way.

JC: Which really does suggest that she's always felt this way about trans women in particular; it just didn't have a chance to rear its head and become so public until more recently.

Lorrie: This leads me into 'no one should be a billionaire,' because every human has some sort of weird projection that's inaccurate about other people, but we don't go around funding strangers to go then hurt masses of people because we think that our projection is the truth. Yeah, nobody should be so rich that checks and balances don't affect them when they go off the rails.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: Harry sees in his textbook *Sectumsempra*. This is a spell that the Half-Blood Prince wrote in his textbook that had the heading "For Enemies," and he's been thinking of finding out what this spell does by testing it out on Cormac McLaggen, who is annoying.

JC: Oh, my God...

Lorrie: Can you imagine what would have happened if he had punished a person for being annoying by doing this spell on them?

JC: Honestly, on a first reading, I didn't pick that up, but on a second reading that was really horrifying, but it made me realize, 'God, Harry's naive.' He has no idea. He knows about Dark magic -- it's not like he doesn't -- but he so trusts the Half-Blood Prince that he can't imagine that anything, even something labeled "For Enemies," would be... He can't imagine what that would be like.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It doesn't even occur to him. Oh...

Lorrie: Yeah, Harry has enemies. What does Harry think is appropriate to do to them? Surely the Half-Blood Prince wouldn't have something a lot darker in mind... Oh, yes. Harry, who has grown up so fast, still has new frontiers of naivete. Yikes! So yes, Cormac McLaggen is spared being the test case for this, and Harry's still going on with his normal high school concerns: "Somehow, the game had become inextricably linked in Harry's mind with success or failure in his plans for Ginny." He's still just a Quidditch captain at this point in the chapter.

JC: Thinking about the girl he likes and everything, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, about the game coming up until he sees on the Marauder's Map that Draco is in a boys' bathroom with Moaning Myrtle. Well, he's got to go check this out. Okay... And then there's that image. It's an indelible image to me: "Draco Malfoy was standing with his back to the door, his hands clutching either side of the sink, his white-blond head bowed." Draco is so afraid he is shaking with terrified sobs and he's saying, "No one can help me. I can't do it... I can't... It won't work... and unless I do it soon... he says he'll kill me..." which is exactly what Narcissa and Snape knew from the beginning was going to happen to this kid. Just the image of seeing him from the back in this moment of pure terror... Oof.

JC: Yeah. That was the moment when I, on the first read, was terrified what was going to happen.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Now it's become clear that this is the boy that Myrtle's been talking about (that Myrtle's been trying to comfort him), and the only person Draco can talk to about this is a ghost.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's pushed away... Earlier in the text, Harry pokes at Draco, "Well, when I'm up to something, I make sure my friends know," so yeah, he hasn't told Crabbe and Goyle; no one knows. He's hinted at his friends that Voldemort has a big job for him, but he hasn't told anyone what it is, he won't confide in Snape... He has no one to talk to. He's completely alone and he's a kid, really. They're all kids; they're sixteen at this point.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Draco's younger than Harry, right? Yeah.

Lorrie: Draco is one month and three weeks older than Harry.

JC: Oh, he's older! I've got it backwards, okay. Basically, yeah. By adult standards, the same age, right? They're sixteen.

Lorrie: Yeah, no, there's still sixteen and the people that he thought he was using to replace Crabbe and Goyle as his smarter, better allies are all just as subject to Voldemort as he is. Either they agree with Voldemort about putting Draco under all this pressure, or there's nothing they could do about it anyway. This guy actually really controls their world.

JC: Another thing that I've thought about on this reading is that we always just see the Death Eaters as evil and doing the Dark Lord's bidding and stuff, but behind the scenes, they're terrified of him and they know what he can do to them and they have made a 'deal with the devil,' so to speak. They can't get out of it, so there's probably been a lot of this happening behind the scenes. I'm sure Lucius Malfoy has had a moment where he looked into a mirror and sobbed, maybe with Narcissa there or maybe not. This other side of the Death Eaters, that they're really trapped in this -- they stepped into the trap, and now they're in it and they're terrified -- that humanizes, for me a bit, the people. It did Draco, anyway, but...

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: I'm fond of Draco, but I like that when we show that people who are on the wrong side of whatever (people who are doing bad things) are also human beings with complex emotions, and maybe their emotions are influencing what they're doing. It's not just two-dimensional evil.

Lorrie: Yeah. That trapped feeling, and the way that Snape tried so hard to prevent Draco from entering into this because he knows what happens once you cross that line... Well, then Draco crossed that line, and Snape hasn't given up on him yet. This is one of the major mirror moments of this series: Draco is crying and gasping and shuddering, and then his eyes meet Harry's eyes. These two kids, who are as big enemies as people can be... They're being threatened by the same serial killer. This mirror is cracked; that is, they can't see each other clearly, but they cannot

deny each other's humanity. It's such an intrusive, unexpected moment for Draco; of course he's going to respond as wildly, defensively as anybody would.

JC: But also, that idea that they're reflections of each other in some way...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I love that. It's a very obvious reading, but I love it.

Lorrie: It's the fact that their eyes meet. It's one thing for them to individually realize, 'Oh, yuck, that person I can't stand is actually going through it the same way I am.' But when their eyes meet, the immediacy of that is so... It just turns you inside out from the gut. It's too much emotion. It's awful. Of course, Draco, being caught in this moment of mortal vulnerability, lashes out in defense reflexively. None of the fight that is about to happen was premeditated. Draco sends out some hexes; we don't even know what they are, but they miss. He's just panicked, and Harry's first spells in response are defensive spells. They are to halt or contain Draco's aggressions; they're not to attack. The first one he cast is the nonverbal *Levicorpus* and it misses, but of course, the tension escalates very quickly. The next spell that Draco sends out wildly explodes a bin and the Leg-Locker curse that Harry sends back smashes a cistern, so all this water is now pouring all over the floor and Harry slips and falls on it. This is all happening really quickly, and then Draco begins to casts (or he tries to) *Crucio*. What did you think of that?

JC: Yeah. This scene becomes a little bit of a 'Han Shot First' moment (to connect it to another popular property). This idea of who's the bad guy here... Is Harry the baddie because he's the one who cast this "For Enemies" spell that he didn't even know what it did? But Draco cast an Unforgivable first. It's really interesting that Draco was that upset that he was willing to cast an Unforgivable. You can say Harry was going to shoot right back not with an Unforgivable, but something that should be an Unforgivable, basically. They both raised the game there, but I think that if Draco hadn't cast that, it would have made what Harry did even worse. If Harry had cast that just thinking, 'Oh, it's like the Leg-Locker spell...' He shouldn't have used it, but he did in response to an Unforgivable, which... I don't know. Could he block? I know he can throw off one of the Unforgivables, but I don't think he could do anything with *Crucio*, right?

Lorrie: I think with *Crucio*, you have to just dodge it.

JC: Yeah, okay.

Lorrie: I don't think there's anything you can do except hope that they miss. When I read this, I thought, 'Oh, *Crucio*...' Draco is just throwing out whatever's been on his mind. At first, I thought, 'I guess with all the Death Eater stuff he's been attending, he's seen Voldemort use it.' It wasn't until this reread where it hit me: Oh... No, no, no, no, that's what Voldemort used on Draco to drive home the point that Draco has to do this or Draco's going to get killed. Oh, that's why it's on his mind. To take it allegorically, the most recent way that Draco has been hurt becomes the way he reflexively attacks someone else, because I don't know how thought out any of this is. It's so quick. The boys are just desperately throwing stuff out -- they're not even aiming very well -- but then I thought the way that we see Draco physically shaken at the beginning of the scene and the way that he suddenly comes out of nowhere with *Crucio*, this is not really a spell (if you thought about it) that you would use to just get somebody out of your face. *Crucio* is for torturing them, and it makes more sense to me (from the nervous system angle of it) if it's because it's just the most recent thing that he's experienced.

JC: I like that. I don't like that for Draco, but I like that reading and that makes a lot of sense. Yeah.

Lorrie: It matches up with what I know of human beings, because Harry basically does the same thing. He lashes out with what's been on his mind. He's had *Sectumsempra* on his mind, so that comes right out; then we all get to discover what that spell does, and he has immediately slashed Draco all over with a completely life-threatening wound.

JC: The description of Draco's physical response to the spell is really genuinely horrifying.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's visceral, it's terrifying; Harry experiences immediate, immediate regret and horror at what he's done.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then, if you go back and think about what the name of the spell implies that it's doing, it's just going to keep going until he's dead, basically. This is a

killing curse, and Harry's never killed anyone at this point in the series. I don't think he has, but this is the closest he's really come...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I think that his immediate response to realizing what he's done also shows how good of a human being he is. He would never have been able to do this in the same way that Voldemort did.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's immediately... This would harm him -- harm his soul -- but not in the way that Voldemort would have taken it, I guess, if that makes sense.

Lorrie: We don't actually know that Voldemort even knows this spell.

JC: True, yeah, because this is one that's just Snape's alone.

Lorrie: Yeah. It does kill, but unlike *Avada Kedavra* (which doesn't cause pain; it causes just instant death), this is designed to really punish.

JC: 'You're going to die, and you're going to hurt the whole time you're dying' kind of a thing.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. The hatred in this is personal.

JC: Right. If Voldemort knew this spell... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So that raises an interesting question which will come up later. Okay, so did Snape actually invent this spell?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Has Snape ever cast it?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Okay. Well, those are good questions to ask then. Is Harry the second person ever to cast this spell?

Lorrie: Possibly.

JC: Possibly. So when Snape sees Draco (which Snape is going to come in shortly), that's a secret that only Snape knows, and if Harry knows it, Snape knows exactly where he got it. I like that...

Lorrie: There's only one place...

JC: There's only one place he could have gotten it, and it's almost like a trope. It is a trope that there's some secret that if I realize that you know it, then I know we're connected in this way. I find that kind of a trope very interesting, even though it's done in a very dark way here.

Lorrie: So when Harry sees what *Sectumsempra* does, he immediately gasps “No -” and he immediately staggers toward Draco, slipping the whole way. “No -- I didn't --” That moment is one that repeats a few times in this series: the moment that somebody realizes they don't want their enemy dead, at which point the question becomes, ‘Did they realize that too late?’ That automatically switches the question. Are they going to be able to stop this, or is it just too late? It reminded me so strongly of what we read about the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton: Burr shot Hamilton, and the moment he realized he had shot him, apparently he immediately rushed toward Hamilton with regret. Apparently, he realized he wished he could take it back and Hamilton’s seconds wouldn't let Burr anywhere near him, but then Burr is standing there going, “If this person dies, that reality is going to overwhelm every other reality.” No other narrative stands a chance of having its real place. It's going to be all overwritten by the one fact that this person died. Whatever feelings Aaron Burr has are barely going to matter after this, which is so similar to what Snape has gone through about trying to explain that James Potter was not some sort of saint, but the fact that James is dead overwrote any subtlety. If Harry is the person who casts the curse that kills Draco Malfoy, that's about to happen to Harry.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: Which means that even though she's not accurate, thank goodness for Myrtle screaming “MURDER IN THE BATHROOM!” because it's a good alarm. It's not true, but it's necessary.

JC: Snape was very close by and was able to arrive really quickly, which made me wonder if Snape was already out looking for Draco. It's a big castle and you can't

Apparate inside of it; the fact that he was basically there instantly didn't seem like too much of a coincidence to me. Is he wandering around the castle looking for Draco? Did he know that Draco had just gone away and come back and had seen the Dark Lord? There was just something about him being close that made me think that that wasn't an accident.

Lorrie: I just read that as 'If you were a kid's parent or guardian and you had promised to look out for him when you knew the stakes were this high...' Snape's been in this mode all year. If Snape doesn't catch Draco before something terrible happens, they're all going to die. This is the primary thing his senses have been attuned to all year. Oh, thank goodness, he bursts into the room; his face is livid, which is now the first time that Snape shows up when you do most need him...

JC: Oh, that's true.

Lorrie: Even though he's the last person you want to see, but no, this is who you need. It's this overwhelming feeling to me of 'a grown-up is here and he knows what to do. Everybody out of the way. Just do everything he says.'

JC: This is also the second time in this book that we are told that Snape knows some powerful healing magic...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: And that he is the only person... Actually, maybe even the third time. He's the only person who can handle injuries that result from Dark magic.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: How did he learn that skill?

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, my reading has always been 'only somebody who has cast Dark magic and then regretted it can heal that wound.' You have to know what it takes to cast Dark magic (which, as we know, if you don't mean it, it's not going to work, so you have to know what it is), but then you have to be more powerful than that because you have experienced regret. He can heal this spell because he invented it and he has cast it; he knows what it takes to cast it and he's extremely sorry. This is the moment Snape has been waiting for and dreading all year. The first moment he thought this might have happened was on the Hogwarts Express when Draco broke Harry's nose and Harry doesn't show up; Snape is thinking, 'Oh,

my God, is he here already? We haven't even started pudding.' No, it wasn't then, and all year he's been waiting. This feels to me like agreeing to be a parent; when you make a decision to go from not having children to being somebody's parent, it's like taking a Unbreakable Vow that you might have to fulfill at any moment, so this is Snape fulfilling his oath to Narcissa. "Pushing Harry roughly aside, he knelt over Malfoy, drew his wand, and traced it over the deeper wounds Harry's curse had made, muttering an incantation that sounded almost like song. The flow of blood seemed to ease; Snape wiped the residue from Malfoy's face and repeated his spell. Now the wounds seemed to be knitting." As a Snape fan, that passage made such tremendous impact on me. You are not particularly a Snape fan; how did that passage strike you when you read it?

JC: It made me think about other magical properties or media, worlds where someone has healing magic where they can close up mortal wounds. I don't know... I guess it made me put Snape into a completely different category of character than I typically would. He's not the antagonist in this moment; he's the magical healer or someone like that, so it's been interesting to see that the complexity of this character is here, that he can do that, that he has that kind of power. It also made me think he's done this before; he's healed people before, certainly people he cared about. He has healed people after they've suffered something horrible in the past, and this is a role that he can just step right into. Again, wow, the complexity of this character.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is the guy that Dumbledore insists on whenever there's Dark magic or an injury, and any time Harry suggests, "Can we get maybe somebody else?" No.

JC: No, this is the person. Yeah.

Lorrie: This is what Dumbledore knows that Snape can do.

JC: And what about you?

Lorrie: To me, this moment is the moment that Snape is almost beautiful. It's one of the times in this series that we see his true self. He's not hiding; he's not thinking about how he's going to appear to support his various guises. This is his real self. He's putting everything into being his real self. Harry and Draco, at this point, are almost adults, and yet Snape's magic seems impossibly more advanced than

anything they could ever do. He knows exactly what to do. He was called to this spot through loyalty and he showed up quickly enough, and he has the power to prevent what's almost a certain death, and that makes me think, 'Wow, that's like Fawkes with the Basilisk venom.' He's an agent of second chances, and it took me a long time. What I wondered was, 'What was he saying in this incantation that's almost like singing?' At first when I read this, I thought there would be no way to figure out what he was saying, and it almost felt like, 'Oh, we don't get to find out what he said. It's just mysterious grown-up stuff. It'll never be explained. We'll never get any clues.' I thought, 'Are we never going to learn what he said?' Then on a subsequent read, I tried to figure out how could we possibly know what this incantation was, and then I was so surprised to realize, 'Oh, I can hear the words. Geez... I learned the language that he's speaking when I became a parent. Oh...' The words that I heard when I tried to listen to his song go something like, "I was supposed to protect you. I am sorry my past sins that I committed before you were even born now come back to hurt you. I don't do that anymore. I'm not like that anymore, but I can't change the past. Now, you are suffering for it. You didn't deserve this. I came as soon as I could. I'm here. I've got you. Thank goodness it's not too late."

JC: Your point (that didn't even occur to me until you just said it) is that Snape knows what the spell is and it's his spell.

Lorrie: Yep. He did that.

JC: 'And it's my fault.'

Lorrie: Nobody else did it.

JC: 'If I hadn't have invented this, no one else would have come across it, this wouldn't have happened...'

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: Yeah. The immediate guilt of 'I created a thing, and now that thing is about to kill you...' Yeah. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah. 'I told Voldemort that there were some people with a baby, and then he went and killed Lily Potter.' Whatever you do that's damaging, you don't know who it's going to hurt; you don't know who that you care about is going to be hurt

by it. Sometimes, when you're so bitter and you've been so hurt by the world that you want to put hurt back out there, having it strike at somebody that you care about might be the only way to get through. I know... There is an attitude you shouldn't have to think 'What if this happened to your own daughter?' to have sympathy. Well, maybe you shouldn't have to, but let's be real.

JC: Yeah. Humans are social creatures, and when something happens to someone we know, that makes it real in a way that it's just theoretical otherwise. So yeah, it gets very human, and this is also how humans grow and become better.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's plenty of research that says that in the last thirty years as Americans in particular started to know people who were queer and understand, 'Oh, these are human beings,' and they became much more accepting of LGBTQ+ people existing in public and having rights, so it works both directions. Yeah. Another thing here that I think that the singing made me think about: I said a really ridiculously naive thing in one of our very early episodes...

Lorrie: Oh, that's right.

JC: Which was: "Why is music? He says music is the most powerful thing. Why? Do we ever see that?" and you were, like, "Oh, yeah, we do," and here's another example.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yes, the music! There's something about him singing the words that imbues it with more power, and I like that a lot as a person who appreciates music in a lot of different ways. I like that idea that you can also sing spells and that imbues them with more power.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is a human revelation of what Fawkes's phoenix song might be operating on when it heals.

JC: Ooh, yeah.

Lorrie: This is the healing of second chances, if you put your human regrets and your human desire to have second chances.

JC: And that music is an incredibly powerful medium for humans. Across all cultures, we have songs that do a lot of different things. I think that most American kids learned that fifty states song at some point and can just sing it. There are things that music... Music does have power in a lot of different ways. It's a reflection of the humanity of Snape here, the humanity of the readers, and everyone that is connecting into this really deep, very real magic that we all have access to.

Lorrie: One argument that people who really can't stand Snape say is, "He's not a good person; he only changed because somebody he cared about got hurt. He only changed because it was Lily being targeted. Here, he's only caring because Draco, whom he likes, is being injured," and my answer to that is yes, that's the point. That's right, because there are people who (for one reason or another) are strong enough to care about people that they don't like or don't know, but the world has people in it who create damage -- who don't have that kind of capacity for sympathy -- until it gets awakened in them, and that is something that we should all be hoping for. However that connection happens, the more people who can feel that much emotion, the better for all of us, for them and for us. So yeah, I do not think that 'wow, he's such a great person that he changed when Lily Potter was threatened'; no, that's the point. That change can happen, even for somebody who was committed to a life of harming others.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So here he is and it's happening. He went through so many pains to not be like this anymore, and here's Draco paying for something he made up twenty years ago. Ugh, you can't... Nothing is ever truly gone on the internet.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, for real.

Lorrie: You think you've erased all the things; you can't ever be sure.

JC: So do you think that the argument that folks would make is that if it wasn't Draco, Snape would have just let the kid die?

Lorrie: I don't usually hear that about Draco, but about Lily Potter... If it had been Alice Longbottom, Snape would have just gone on being a happy little Death Eater, and yeah. Yeah, that's true.

JC: Yeah. Okay, sure.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: No argument here, yeah.

Lorrie: Is that what it took to get him to take a second look at his life? Yeah, that is.

JC: Yeah, that does seem to be the story.

Lorrie: And that happens in real life. There are well-documented cases of people finally making the connection when they realize that the pain they feel for their own loved ones is the same as the pain that people they have dehumanized are also feeling. ‘Oh, I see...’ That moment...

JC: It’s the leopards eating people’s faces. That makes light of it, but it’s really true. Yeah.

Lorrie: Or Harry and Draco seeing each other in the cracked mirror. ‘Your fear, your terror is like my fear and my terror. Oh... Well, now what? Ugh...’ So when Snape was stopping the bleeding and knitting the wounds from this spell that means ‘cut forever,’ this is sort of a form of blood magic because he's putting protective love into a child so that this love is going to be in Draco's blood and circulate through Draco’s body, and it’ll help him grow and heal. This is incredibly powerful healing magic he's putting into Draco's blood; this is going to change Draco.

JC: Oh... Is it a little bit like Lily dying for Harry? Is there that kind of magic? Not that Snape is sacrificing something for Draco, but the idea that Harry's mother's love is kind of in his blood... Is it kind of like that?

Lorrie: Snape did sacrifice something for Draco. Snape sacrificed whatever his death was going to be to the certainty that he would give his life if he failed to protect Draco. That's what he did: he sacrificed that control over his own life by taking an Unbreakable Vow, by agreeing. This is the protection that Narcissa brought to Draco. Draco doesn't know this because Draco does not know the full terms of the Unbreakable Vow; this insufferable little asshole interrupted Snape. At Slughorn’s Christmas party, Snape is trying to tell him, “I swore to your mother I would protect you. I made the Unbreakable Vow, Draco,” and then Draco interrupts

and says, “Looks like you'll have to break it, then, because I don't need your protection! It's my job, he gave it to me, and I'm doing it, I've got a plan, and it's going to work...!” Draco has cut himself off from learning that Snape promised more than just to keep an eye out for him; he swore that if Draco wasn't able to do whatever Voldemort commanded him to do -- if Draco fails -- Snape would step in and do it for him. Draco doesn't know, but the reader knows at this point that Snape is probably trying to think of a way to do this and then save Draco's life, somehow stop Voldemort from killing Draco, or, as he swore, die trying. So yeah, Narcissa brought this protection into Draco's life.

JC: Okay, so going forward, I'm going to be thinking a lot about how Draco has this kind of protective magic in him from here on out.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, very interesting.

Lorrie: Somebody promised to die if they couldn't protect him because his mother asked. His mother, in other words, got somebody to cast their own life as a shield between Voldemort and Draco, and Draco's about to spend a lot of time in the hospital wing with an opportunity to mull this over.

JC: True.

Lorrie: Oh, God...

JC: Oh, man... Yeah. When Snape takes him away, he mentions, “You'll have some scars, but you're going to take essence of dittany right away and it should be fine.” Just to lighten the mood of it, I should say that Draco's scars make many, many appearances in many fanfics from here on out. It becomes this piece of his character that he has these scars; he has this reminder of what Harry did, but also what Snape did for the rest of his life.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Harry's got a scar, too, so it's this really interesting parallel.

Lorrie: And it's not visible in every day; they're under his clothes.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: You have to be intimate enough to know him for him to trust you to see them.

JC: Yeah. It's not like Harry's, which is worn on his face.

Lorrie: Yeah, that's true. As Snape takes Draco (with completely convincing healing authority) to the hospital wing: "In a voice of cold fury, 'And you, Potter... You wait here for me.' It did not occur to Harry for a second to disobey."

JC: Yeah. The fact that Harry is horrified at what he's done... He knows he's done something terrible.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: He knows he deserves whatever is coming. He's like, 'Yeah, yeah...' Actually - and we'll go forward from here -- Harry gets off really light here, in my opinion.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: Yeah. This is an example of Draco saying, "Oh, Golden Boy can do anything he wants." Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: He's in over his head on this one; thank goodness there's a grown-up who actually seems to know what just happened, because Harry sure doesn't. This reminds me of a personal incident in my own life that I told you about at the time, JC -- this was way more than ten years ago -- when some kids I knew had gotten into some pretty bad trouble and I had to intervene and be a grown-up, and what those kids needed at the time was to feel like there was a grown-up who recognized the crisis and knew exactly what everyone should do. Setting that authority was as important as the actual details, because there's that moment of fear when you realize you're a kid and you're in over your head. Snape comes back from the hospital wing, and Harry just immediately stumbles out with, "I didn't mean it to happen. I didn't know what that spell does!" Even though Snape makes no acknowledgment of this, I get the feeling he believes Harry.

JC: Yeah. Honestly, Snape doesn't have a super high opinion of Harry's intellectual abilities. He's like, 'Yeah, I bet you didn't, you little shit.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That shocked reaction is not faked, and then we find out from what Snape says that *Sectumsempra* is Dark magic and that Harry has now crossed over.

He is now somebody who has successfully cast Dark magic; he has what it takes, and Snape is now wrestling with the knowledge that it was Dumbledore's Golden Boy, who was supposedly so pure of heart. That's the kid that Snape was going to have to intervene with because of Dark magic. He was preparing for this; he didn't think it was going to be Golden Boy. As we see throughout, it's only someone who has cast Dark magic and then regretted it who can reverse it; this also changes Harry's abilities in that direction, because he's going to know how it felt to cast this and he has already fully regretted it. Yeah. We knew Snape was the exact person we want in this moment -- even before we knew that he was the one who invented it -- but now we have Snape standing there, knowing that there's one place and only one place Harry could have learned this spell. Back in second year, when he tried to prevent this moment by training Draco and Harry when they're really upset with each other to cast *Expelliarmus* on each other, he tried; this other thing that Snape put out into the world a long time ago is so damaging that of course, kids pick it up more easily. Dark stuff is just easier to spread, and Harry hadn't known what this thing did; it's just that the Half-Blood Prince had marked it "For Enemies." Now, Harry knows, with the Half-Blood Prince (he'll later find out who it was), what kind of person he was on the inside at that age, that he knew what this spell did and he wanted it for enemies. It's a very first-hand quick trip to the past to understand, 'Yes, I was gross inside, and now somebody else knows.' This is Dark magic that Snape already put into the world before he renounced it, so he did what he could to contain it. He thought he had contained it, but like with the internet, you cannot trace every bit of it that you put out there. You can try; you can do your best, which is much better than not trying. It reduces a lot of harm to get rid of as much as you can and track it down and own it. This is the opposite of what Voldemort does when he hides Dark stuff out in the world by not owning it. I recently had the harrowing experience of reading *On Repentance and Repair* by Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, and she talks about how repenting is finding all the harm you've caused and doing what you can to own it and then to make amends in a way that doesn't burden the victims. Snape had left this book at the bottom of a cabinet. He wasn't hiding it; it wasn't Voldemort levels of hiding it, but he wasn't proud of it and he didn't want to think about it, and he wasn't thinking of the things he had put into that book at age sixteen as part of who he is now. Yeah, we do things in our past that we've regretted; we don't really want to carry that around with us all the

time. It is desirable to push it away. Now he has to be in the feeling of knowing how it feels to be sorry you almost killed somebody you hate and also knowing that James felt that way when Sirius sent Snape toward Lupin as a werewolf, and knowing that how he felt after his actions led to James's death; once James died, Snape was never able to talk to anybody about what a petty bully James had been. Nobody wanted to hear that. Now, he's also in the position of doing something with the knowledge of how Dumbledore never followed up with the Marauders when they almost killed Snape. The Marauders were never held accountable, they were never rehabilitated, and they were never taught to process what they had done and make amends. We know this from the way that Lupin and Sirius talk in *Prisoner of Azkaban*; they talk like people who haven't processed it. Sirius is in his arrested development, still saying, "Oh, yeah, would've served Snape right," and Lupin is still stammering, "Uh, this is complicated." They weren't handled responsibly there. Snape was traumatized by receiving no support after, and then on top of that, being sworn to secrecy in order to protect Lupin. He didn't get the kind of support that might have helped him going forward to resist the lure to use Dark magic for vengeance. He wasn't supported as someone who was nearly killed by bullies. This is what Snape has as background coming into this moment, and that's when it becomes super clear to me that there's no Dumbledore in this chapter.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: He has stepped aside. He's forfeited. This is Snape's to do better. We hear later in this chapter that Snape told the entire staff what happened; that would have certainly included Dumbledore. Dumbledore has nothing to say on this. He messed up. Yeah, Snape nearly got killed; he messed it up, he stepped aside.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: Snape is going to learn from the past and do better for Draco and even for Harry, whom he does not like and who is the person who used Dark magic. Snape's going to do this better. None of this is fun, but for this year, where Snape's past and present are just continually crashing into each other, here we are. Here it is.

JC: Right. Everything that you've been saying is really pointing to the fact that this chapter is a huge turning point not only in this book, but in Harry's story.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It feels that way when you're reading it, but all the stuff you've been talking about just now really emphasizes that everything changes right here in this moment, like the fact that Harry now knows how to cast Dark magic -- has cast Dark magic -- against another person. Snape's going to see Harry in a different light from here on out, the fact that Dumbledore wasn't present and let all that history collide without getting involved... All of that stuff. Yeah, because Dumbledore's not going to be around and he knows that, so yeah. All of that... Shit's about to change, and it does change from here on out, so yeah.

Lorrie: It's rough with parenting that it brings up flashbacks of when a person was that age, but it does mean that if you do it better the second time around, it does help.

JC: That's something we talk about a lot offline here.

Lorrie: Snape orders Harry to bring his textbooks, all of them.

JC: Right. Oh, the moment where Snape uses Legilimency against him and it's not even sneaky...

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: He already suspects... He knows where this is coming from, and he just pushes inside of Harry's head.

Lorrie: And Harry's like, "Uh, I read it in a book," and Snape is just like, "Yeah." There's no pretending.

JC: Yeah. "I know," though we don't actually know. On a first read, you don't actually know at this point.

Lorrie: But the dynamic is unmistakable, the dynamic of a parent or a teacher looking at a small child making up wildly transparent lies and both of them standing there, like, "Uh-huh."

JC: Yeah. "Sure, you did, yeah. Sure, it was the dog."

Lorrie: And while lying, Harry, of course, has the image in his mind of what book it was, which Snape just drags out of him and there's no contest. Harry can't Occlude him, and part of that is because Harry is thoroughly aware of how guilty he is. I find how dominant Snape is here, actually, pretty hot, but the combination

of that dominance and Harry contributing by being thoroughly guilty gives us a feel for what Snape has to overcome when Voldemort uses Legilimency on him. As infinitely stronger than Harry Snape is, [with] Voldemort, the stakes are higher. Nobody's arguing that Voldemort is powerful, so whatever Harry is failing to protect against here, it's so much worse. As Harry knows: "There was no point arguing."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, God...

JC: It is interesting here that Harry has been snarky and defiant to Snape for years now, and this is the point at which he knows... He doesn't even bother.

Lorrie: No.

JC: And I think that's something that really makes Harry stand out as a teenager, because the teenage response (even if you know you're guilty) is to push back and be defensive, and it doesn't even register with Harry. Granted, he's done something really awful, but he...

Lorrie: He needs a grown-up.

JC: Yeah. He knows.

Lorrie: This is awful. He needs a grown-up; Snape is there, Snape is right. Draco... the same; Draco's been so rude to Snape all year. Snape shows up here and Draco's like, 'Okay, you're saving my life. Okay, I no longer argue.' As Harry is running to get and hide the Half-Blood Prince's textbook so he doesn't have to hand it in to Snape, "He felt stunned; it was as though a beloved pet had turned suddenly savage; what had the Prince been thinking to copy such a spell into his book?" And then he's afraid about what Snape's going to do: "Would he confiscate or destroy the book that had taught Harry so much... the book that had become a kind of guide and friend?" How could we be any more transparently parallel to the moment in 2019 when TERFpocalypse started? When Rowling first went full-out and stopped hiding and really launched her campaign against trans rights, the fandom at first was so confused. I remember I felt this way, and a lot of people, I think, had this response: 'What?! How can she really feel this way deep down?' That whole "We trusted her so much..." And then the conflict between Harry and

Hermione over the Half-Blood Prince's book... Ever since TERFpocalypse started, there's this debate within fandom: some people insisting that other fans must destroy the series or renounce it. These passions were so foreseen; the exact same passions that are tearing apart *Harry Potter* fandom ever since Rowling started TERFpocalypse [are] being written about here as Harry is so confused and betrayed, grappling with the introduction of textual evidence against the relationship he had built up in his own mind -- the trust that he had built up one-sidedly as a reader who was not in dialogue with the author. This phrase "guide and friend" -- that this book had become a kind of guiding friend -- is, of course, the thing that makes long-time *Harry Potter* fans feel so betrayed because we had happily, eagerly embraced this book as "guide and friend."

This wording is also similar to what Harry lost when Sirius died: partly a father figure, partly a brother figure. This state Harry's in -- to be an orphan to begin with, but then so recently he lost Sirius, and then this book comes into his life -- he's particularly vulnerable to wanting a father figure or some sort of companion to give advice and support, which is overt when he has this fantasy that his pureblood dad might have somehow been the Half-Blood Prince; he's so starved for this. This sheds light on teen Snape, who did not have a good relationship with his father, being particularly hungry for the kind of guidance that Voldemort was offering and (in the present time of the book) why Snape has been so worried about the Slytherin boys whose dads are now in prison. They're more vulnerable. Can he actually counter the influence of whatever "guide and friend" Voldemort is presenting himself to be? It's a tall order.

JC: It's also making me think in the real world, there have been so many examples of men who wound up in prison because of gang activity and awful things that they did or being Neo-Nazis, and then found their way back from that and then devote their lives to helping others also get out of those situations. It's making me think about that as well.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry takes Ron's book to be the decoy and he, for once, manages to open the Room of Requirement because Draco... We know where Draco is right now, and it's not in the Room of Requirement. We get the unforgettable introduction to the dump -- the wizard hoarder's dump -- of every single disorderly

thing that anybody has ever wanted to forget or hide. Oh, humans are a mess! Oh, my goodness.

JC: The centuries of stuff that Hogwarts students and staff have needed to hide... It's like, 'Oh, wow.' I love that he runs right past the Vanishing Cabinet; it had been there before. I think we had seen it before.

Lorrie: But it was funny. 'Oh, hey, yeah, we know that.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's just the kind of thing you might want to hide. Yeah.

JC: But also the fact that he has no idea that this is exactly the room he's been trying to get into all this time, which is funny.

Lorrie: All of... Yeah, this is such a room of collective shame and stuff that's less proud about human nature. Then we get the confrontation where he brings the book.

JC: Before we go into that, though, he finds Ravenclaw's diadem, right?

Lorrie: Yes, he does.

JC: Isn't that what he finds there? Which is so interesting to read (on a subsequent read) that Voldemort himself apparently placed there. There's all these little... 'Easter egg' is the wrong word, but nuggets of stuff that on a second read, you're like, 'Oh, dang, look at this. It's right there. Aaahhh!' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The Horcrux locket was the same; it was just a piece of trash in a sack of other trash, and here's another different piece of Voldemort's soul.

JC: Right, and interesting that because Harry's in a panic here, a part of me wonders: at this point, he knows about the Horcruxes. If he had been just calm... I don't know. Would you ever be in this room if you were just calm? I don't know, but under other circumstances, would he have recognized what he had in his hands? Would it have called to him or touched him in some way? Right now, he's so panicked, so there's no way, but it's a little bit of an 'Oh, wow.'

Lorrie: I know. Well, here's the thing that we'll get to when we're in this portion of *Deathly Hallows*. It actually seems significant to me that, unlike Hufflepuff's cup,

this tiara is just a piece of crap. Hufflepuff's cup is beautiful; it's glowing, it's treasured, you can see the engravings on it. This is just like, "Eh, what is this?" The tarnished tiara... It sounds like someone had a birthday party, and this is leftover, which I think is significant in showing us what this author thinks of Ravenclaw.

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: I think Ravenclaw is her shadow house, the parts of herself she's not proud of.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: I don't think Slytherin is. Slytherin is obviously a villain house for her, but I don't think she identifies herself as having traits that she's ashamed of that are Slytherin; I think it's Ravenclaw. So yeah, Ravenclaw's tiara is just not worth that much.

JC: It's also been there for sixty years because Voldemort hid it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: No one has been able to lovingly polish it so that it's not tarnished, yeah.

Lorrie: But there's other goblin-made stuff that's just always beautiful. Not this, nope; this is just corroded. Snape saves the Potions book for last, carefully opens it and looks at it, and we get the most amazing comic payoff.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: "This book belongs to Roonil Wazlib." Oh, my God!

JC: Roonil Wazlib... It is hilarious that it didn't say Ron Weasley, yeah. That's really funny.

Lorrie: All of this throwaway comedy about what the self-correcting quills do once they run out of magic shows up in this way that I did not expect. Absurdity is very welcome in this chapter at this point, but it also calls back to the moment in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Snape catches Harry with the Marauder's Map, and things just get worse and worse and worse as the Marauder's Map starts taunting Snape for being unpopular and Harry just wants to sink through the floor. Harry tells this transparent lie and says, "That's my nickname. That's what my friends call

me,” and Snape says, “I understand what a nickname is.” It's just this little insinuation that Harry has unintentionally said that Snape has no friends; it's just the same feeling of awfulness upon awfulness. Yeah, when the Marauder's Map showdown happened in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, it was finally ended by Ron skidding in, panting, to claim that he had bought the parchment for Harry as a gift. If this is what it takes to bring this part of this standoff to an end, okay, okay. Then Snape says, “I think that you are a liar and a cheat and that you deserve detention with me every Saturday until the end of term.” Wow, that is inarguable.

JC: Yeah, and Harry immediately realizes that means he's going to miss the last and most important Quidditch match because this is the one for the House Cup and everyone's been obsessed with it, but I feel like that's the least of what he deserves after this. If he had been allowed to play Quidditch, I would have been protesting personally. No, this kid... It's a wonder he's not being arrested and sent off somewhere. He assaulted another student in a way that almost killed that student. Granted, Hogwarts has a history of just letting people do this, but detention every Saturday for the rest of term is the least that he deserves at this point.

Lorrie: Now, Snape, of course (being the delightfully cruel, petty jerk that he is) says, “Poor Gryffindor... fourth place this year, I fear...” which I think is hilarious, but it's part of the way this character is written where it gives you enough to wonder if he is punishing Harry this way out of sadism, but he's totally not. This taunting is just extra -- it's a bonus that Snape gets to collect to grimly amuse himself -- but the point that he's making is that the normal high school life Harry had been trying to live in this chapter (where he gets to be Quidditch captain and gets to think about a girlfriend)... That's exactly what he will forfeit if this kind of thing happens. If you go down the path of Dark magic, you're not going to have Quidditch, you're not going to have romance... Draco all year has not been doing anything like Quidditch or romance; Snape is an embarrassing spinster guy. This is exactly what is on the line, and it's not fun. We get, finally, a more trustworthy reporter than Rita Skeeter: Myrtle tells everybody what happened. Thank you, Myrtle. That is quite accurate. Then we get this line that is more about plot: “Snape had told the staff precisely what happened.” Now, practically speaking, that can't be true because I don't think Snape said, “And then Harry Potter used a textbook that he's been using to cheat with all year.” It's a plot point to tell us that this is a corrective to the way Dumbledore had hushed up Sirius trying to kill Snape. The

point is that secrecy is destructive; being transparent -- as much risk as that carries, as undesirable as that would be for several players in this incident -- helps people process and it helps everybody move on together. Snape is going to tell the staff precisely what happened, and then we the reader get confirmation that this is the right thing to do because we hear that McGonagall talked to Harry.

JC: Oh, yeah. The fact that he gets chewed out by McGonagall... Yeah. Actually, the consequences that he faces here... I'm just really glad that he had some consequences.

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: He knew it was coming and he knew he deserved it, but everybody just let him have it.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness. Fifteen minutes, she told him how lucky he was that it wasn't worse and that she wholeheartedly supported Snape's detentions. Okay, reader, this is our clue: you can hate Snape, you can think he's vengeful and petty, but no. There's something that's going to be good for Harry if he completes this course of detention. Hermione continues to be the voice of frustrating, painful fan discourse: "I told you there was something wrong with that Prince person," said Hermione, evidently unable to stop herself. 'And I was right, wasn't I?'" Okay, guilty. I have been that person. I am frequently that person. It's not helpful. For example, there's fandom discourse that 'we should never have liked *Harry Potter* because it had been racist and anti-Semitic from the beginning.' Yeah, it had been. 'It was never good, and you should give it up out of peer pressure,' and that's where this line of reasoning doesn't actually work, because peer pressure -- telling people to give up something instead of their own reasons to give it up -- makes it more about the fan discourse and conflict than about the issue at hand, and it's real. I don't say that to dismiss how important it is because that discourse is loaded and passionate on all sides, in real life and here in Hermione. Yeah, there was actually something wrong with that Prince person, and Harry illustrates more of this exact precise dynamic when he says, "Will you stop harping on about the book! The Prince only copied it out! It's not like he was advising anyone to use it!" Oh, that's quite recognizable from real life. That's uncomfortable. Harry has no idea if the Prince only copied it out; he's making that up because he wants to believe that, because it fits with what he needed the Prince to be, what he had projected into his

idea of who the Prince was. Yeah, actually, the Prince had written “For Enemies.” That was, in fact, an enticement to use it. He's making up this person and defending him against the textual evidence. It's his own projections and his own wishes.

JC: Oh, wow. Yeah.

Lorrie: Any temptation to, say, back in 2018 when J.K. Rowling liked some transphobic tweets, there were many temptations from many people to believe it when her PR team said, “Oh, that was just a mistake. She was having a middle-aged moment.” There was a lot of temptations to believe that; it would fit much better with who we had wanted J.K. Rowling to be instead of, as we now know, where she was headed as a person. The prescience of this chapter, and how high-stakes everything is and just how much grief and damage there is... The stakes really are this high and it's just a bad time. Ginny snaps at Hermione... It's a bad evening for everyone. This is exactly what I mean when I say that TERFpocalypse is just joyless.

JC: Yeah, though it is interesting that Ginny is very much coming to Harry's defense here in a way that makes Harry immediately take notice.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's cute in some ways, but it's disturbing in others because it's that idea of ‘Wow, who are his true friends?’

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: ‘Who's going to tell him the truth and who is going to defend him to get on his good side?’

Lorrie: Well, when I think about all the interpersonal fights within fandom between fans who respond to TERFpocalypse in different ways and disagreeing with how other people are responding to it, even though everyone is against transphobia, there's all of this very uncomfortable ill will and unhappiness caused by some sort of original harm. They're all in a bad mood. Malfoy's seriously injured (having had one of many scares of his life recently in this terrible year of his), and we get to find out what detention with Snape is like when he's mad at Harry for almost committing murder. Oh, God...

JC: I don't know. Part of me thought this is not that bad of a punishment.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Oh, I want you to copy the discipline records that show all the bad things that your dad and Sirius did," and they're all stupid, little Fred-and-George level of crap, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't know. I had this weird reaction to that of 'yeah, Harry's going to copy all this, but Harry's going to get more of his story through this.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's going to learn more about the stuff that his dad and Sirius got up to.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't know. That didn't feel like that much of a punishment to me, because you're giving him some of his story back. I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, that's the story of the Harry and Draco hatred that Harry would have been forfeiting if Draco had died. "Let me tell you about Draco Malfoy. Not only was he evil -- not only was he a Nazi, not only was he committing crimes for Voldemort -- he was also just a jerk. He was also just this nasty loser. Did I tell you about the time he was a ferret?" Any of that... I'm not entirely sorry that bad things happened to him, but all of that subtlety would have been gone instantly for Harry if Draco had died; similarly for my least favorite person, Marietta Edgecombe, if her ratting out the D.A. had resulted in Cho being killed. Any excuse, like, "Oh, but Marietta's mother worked for the Ministry. She had pressure on her..." No one's going to stop to listen to that if things change that way, and the stupid, embarrassing little torments that the high school boys are doing to each other... Snape is admitting a parallel here. I have quite a fondness for the petty genius and tediousness of this completely unnecessary punishment, because in *Cursed Child*, there's a moment where we see that the generation that is Albus and Scorpius revere both Harry and Snape as total heroes, and one of the lessons of the play is that legends totally cannot capture the feeling of what it was like to actually know somebody as a real person and be there with them. If you didn't know Harry and Snape as they were here, 'Okay, they won the war together. People say they hated

each other. Did they really hate each other?’ This particular scene is so funny -- ‘Oh, they hated each other’ -- and I just like to imagine being a Hogwarts student doing a paper where you realize you can physically go and find the actual detention records in Harry Potter’s handwriting that Severus Snape made him copy over the time he nearly killed Draco Malfoy.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: There they are...

JC: The historical record here, yeah.

Lorrie: In the boxes with his handwriting that’s getting messier and messier as the time goes on. Oh, this detention that Harry is serving also fleshes out more: no wonder Snape hated when Harry got away with breaking rules, because that’s what James and Sirius were doing. They are also acting like Tom Riddle and his friends in the Slug Club, where Slughorn is winking at them and having them break rules; these are all privileged jerks who know that they can do anything they want and get away with it because rules don’t really apply to them. James is in detention all the time, and yet he becomes Head Boy; had Snape been in detention for this, it wouldn’t have been the same. Snape is telling Harry yeah, he hated the Marauders, but none of them deserved to die. All of this year, when Snape has been holding back whatever memories must have come up for him about his own terrible school years, now it’s not only okay but actually necessary for Snape to actually tell Harry some details about his own school past. Harry needs to be told that these normal, everyday realities are genuine enmities, what happens when they nearly turn fatal, and that is something that Harry is going to need going forward as a soldier in a war.

JC: So all of this that you said is making me come back to my point even more strongly. This is not a punishment; this is a teaching moment.

Lorrie: He’s being the grown-up.

JC: Snape has something to teach him. He wants him to learn something from this, so it’s not like “Scrub these gross containers, and I’m not going to let you have gloves.” It’s not that. It’s like, “You’re going to learn something from this,” because I think that that’s not something I would have thought Snape would do, I guess.

Lorrie: Right, because Snape is such an asshole and he is saying these petty little goading things, and nobody really wants to think that Snape would do anything good for this kid (whom he clearly and unfairly hates), but he is actually being a grown-up here. What he's doing is he is teaching Harry how to apologize, which is the thing that we know nobody ever taught Snape. A lot of people in life don't get taught how to repent, how to apologize, how to admit that what you did was damaging. A lot of times, any sort of apology or repentance is interpreted as weakness and it invites punishment. Of course you can't apologize if as soon as you do, people say, "Oh, you're sorry," and then they go and make things worse for you. Nobody taught Snape how to walk back the harm he did by joining the Death Eaters. Nobody made Sirius apologize. He's teaching Harry repentance and repair. When you cast some spells, they are Unforgivables; by setting Harry detention, and then once Harry serves the detention, he is free. He's free to walk. This is forgivable, but it might not have been. Snape is making it forgivable instead of having -- Snape has gone through the rest of his life... He's not the person who killed Lily and James. Did he commit an Unforgivable? Unclear, but he feels terrible for the rest of his life, and he's going around trying to make up for it. He is doing something for Harry here. He is teaching him something, and it doesn't have to be out of love. It's clearly not out of love, but it's real. I love that the detention is another reference to *To Kill a Mockingbird* where Harry is wondering if Snape has bewitched the clock to go extra slowly. I thought at first that I was just reading into this, but the next chapter also refers to it more strongly. There is a penance that the two main characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* have to do after they misbehave and nobody explains to them why this is happening, but they have to stay later and later every day; it's just hell. So yeah, that amused me. It's part of the punishment; they don't know how much longer every day, nobody's saying why, and they're not in a position to ask, either. This way that Snape creates a punishment that Harry can fulfill and then go be free is, for once, Snape treating Harry like any other student; after this, Harry sure as hell is never going to do this again. Then the logic of this series reasserts itself, because by the end of the chapter, he is restored to the normal high school life he wanted, his House wins the House Cup, and his chest monster gets the girl. That is being positioned as a direct result of him being helped to find a way out of the awful, awful damage that he was just saved from committing, and if Draco were dead at this point, I don't know what Quidditch or girlfriends would

have meant to Harry in his life. But no, as Dumbledore says to Ginny at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*, “No lasting harm has been done,” which is in some ways not true, but in the most important way, you get a second chance. You're welcome.

JC: Yeah. That idea that it came really close to the story shifting, this other timeline where Harry would have been out of the...

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: He couldn't have done all the things that he went on to do. It would have ended; Voldemort would have won at that point.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: Yeah. It came really close.

Lorrie: Just... yeah. When you think about real life things where high school conflicts get out of hand and people's lives are ruined forever, the pain is just unimaginable. Snape was the man for the moment. He had a rough few days at work there, but he is going to do things better than they had been done for him.

JC: Yeah. The absence of Dumbledore in all of this is really striking.

Lorrie: What other thoughts are coming up for you about this extraordinary chapter?

JC: Well, I guess, back to the ending where Harry gets his life back. He goes back to the common room not knowing how the Quidditch match went without him, and the fact that they won without him is also interesting because he didn't have to be the hero.

Lorrie: No.

JC: It wasn't like everything fell apart without him. No, the world went on. He wasn't there; they were great. He captained them enough that they could just do it or whatever; they all had it within them, so Harry doesn't have to do this alone again. It's that message of he's not the savior necessarily; he's not the hero. He has an important role to play, but it's not all up to him. It's that little moment of ‘Gryffindor didn't collapse because Harry wasn't there.’

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Then we have... I really love the moment where Ginny and Harry look at each other across the room and it's like, 'Okay, it's time.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'It's time to admit what we feel for each other.' I really love the sentence, "After several long moments -- or it might have been half an hour -- or possibly several [sunlit] days" of the kiss. I like that it's just a really sweet way of conveying that that kiss was really meaningful to both of them and they kind of lost themselves in it. Oh, that was really sweet.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Also, one of the things that the movie did differently was they put the kiss in a different place and it changed the whole dynamic of hiding the book. Because I'd seen the film several times since I last read the book, it was nice to go back, and I feel like those moments both work so much better in the book. As usual, the movie changed some things for whatever reason, but I really like this post-Quidditch victory kiss because it feels like it's Ginny making the choice here. Harry's been waiting until she was ready, really, so Ginny's the one who's like, 'It's time.' I like that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Poor Dean and Romilda...

Lorrie: Oh, God...

JC: Glaring... Ugh, though I think anybody with eyes could see that this was going to happen at some point. Hermione, even Ron, are both like, 'All right, here we go.'

Lorrie: 'There's nothing we can do about this.'

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: And even that they approve, yeah. Ron has been wanting...

Lorrie: Hermione's happy, yeah.

JC: Yeah, Hermione's happy. Hermione, on both ends, has known about how they felt about each other. Ron has kind of been hinting for a while that Harry would be

good for Ginny and vice versa, right? He's like, "If anybody's going to be with my sister, it should be this person," so yeah. There's a lot of that idea of yes, all the high school drama things have worked out here. I think that comes home really clearly in the ending. It's like the happy ending of the teen movie.

Lorrie: They get to switch genres back because Harry was able to pay for what he did.

JC: Or start paying. He's got a lot of detentions left.

Lorrie: Yeah. The next chapter is called The Seer Overheard.

JC: Oooh...

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