HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020
with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 6.27

Book 6, Chapter 27: The Lightning-Struck Tower

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-Seven: The Lightning-Struck Tower.

Lorrie: The Lightning-Struck Tower. Draco gets Death Eaters into Hogwarts; he disarms Dumbledore but doesn't attack him. Dumbledore immobilizes the invisible Harry, so Harry has to overhear their long conversation. Snape arrives. Dumbledore pleads to him; Snape kills Dumbledore. So, JC, as a Draco fan, what was it like for you to read this chapter?

JC: Oh, really… What's the word? 'Affirming,' I guess? I remember getting to this point, and when Draco appeared, it was like, 'Oh, my God, what's going to happen?' The fact that Dumbledore reads Draco really well and knows how to talk to him and treats him like a human… Everything was just really good. This is what I thought was happening behind the scenes with Draco, and then basically saves Draco's soul. [He] Doesn't allow him to be forced into doing something that he knows he doesn't want to do and he knows that will harm him, so it's one of the last things that Dumbledore teaches on the way out, right? That's really great. It's great that Draco gets this moment because I think that it sets us up for… Gosh, it sets us up for *Cursed Child*, doesn't it? It sets us up for a lot of things, but then I think it

also set up the fandom for... There was a lot of talk about Draco being redeemed, and it was more like not that he was 'redeemed' but went back to the core of who he really is. It's like, 'Who were you? Were you this lost boy this whole time? Were you lost, or had you really gone bad?' and it's like, 'No, you were lost. Let's get you back on the right path,' and then he eventually does get himself back on the right path. That's really good. That's one of those stories that at the very beginning of this podcast, we talked about our favorite characters, and I talked about one of the reasons I like Draco was that I like that hopefulness of the idea that someone can be brought back from potentially going down a wrong path and that it's not too late, even for a sixteen-, seventeen-year-old boy. It's not too late; you can still be turned back, and Draco is just a good example of that.

Lorrie: Yeah. This was a really nourishing and resonant chapter for you, huh?

JC: Yeah. In some ways, yeah; in other ways, it's a big one.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: After everything that happened in the last one, I knew this was coming when I opened the chapter, and I was still surprised when they landed in Hogsmeade and Madam Rosmerta comes up to them and says, "Don't you know what's happened?" I was, like, 'Oh…'

Lorrie: 'Oh…'

JC: Even though I knew it was coming, I had forgotten, so that's just a testament to how intense the writing in the last chapter was.

Lorrie: When you say that you had forgotten about that, that was a similar experience I had. By this point, I have forgotten that in any other context, it would have been a life-changing thing that Harry learned that it was Snape who told Voldemort…

JC: What the prophecy said, yeah.

Lorrie: That turned his entire world inside out, and that was a few hours ago.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But at this point, I have forgotten and Harry has almost forgotten.

JC: Yeah. There's so much happening, so many big things that are happening in the now that we don't have time to think about the past.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We're dealing with what's happening right now.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dumbledore gave Harry what seemed at first the impossible task of putting that away from his mind to tend to something more urgent. "Really?" "Yes, really, actually."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Speaking of the last chapter, I have been so happy and delighted and thankful. I do always say that, no matter how many times I reread the series (which is a lot), every single time, I find something new, something that I missed that was there the whole time. This was something that you pointed out, you asked a question: after Dumbledore says in the previous chapter, "The protection was well designed, one person alone couldn't have done it," what had been going on in the minds of Voldemort and Dumbledore about this? I just had never seen. 'Oh, okay, the loophole that Dumbledore found was that Voldemort would never have imagined that instead of one wizard and one victim, it could be one self-sacrificing wizard and his loving accomplice.' He just didn't know that self-sacrifice was a thing.

JC: Yeah, and we're about to get more self-sacrifice.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: When Dumbledore goes on and on about how "Harry, you may not be as magically powerful or as experienced as Voldemort, but you have strengths that he doesn't know," this actually turns out not to be empty. It sounds empty, right? It sounds like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. What can I do against him?" Well, if you think hard enough, you'll find something. You will. I never thought that that's what that meant, that 'one person alone couldn't have done it.' Okay, all right!

JC: Yay! That's really cool. I like that.

Lorrie: Yeah, so thank you for pointing me -- No, you're right. That line has been there the whole time, and I've never thought about it until now.

JC: This experience you're describing… I've had every single time we've recorded this. 'Oh, I never thought about that. Oh, I never thought about that.' What's been sticking with me from the last episode was that idea that Dumbledore drinking the potion was like the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. I was just like, 'What?!' My mind was kind of blown like that. It never occurred to me. It wouldn't have occurred to me in a hundred years -- just would not have -- and that, again, is the way that Christian theology just permeates Western literature. It's something that I think was always a block for me. I just didn't know enough about it, and I would sit in literature classes and people would bring up all of these things from the Bible, and it would be me and the Jewish kid looking at each other, shrugging. 'What are they talking about?' That's one of the things that turned me off to Western lit, honestly, as a teenager.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was just like, 'Okay, this is just for people who go to church, basically.' I grew up in the South; every conversation in English class was about that, and this is the irony of Texas now bringing in these new laws that say we have to study the Bible in school, and it's like, 'You think we don't already? Great. Where have you been?' But yeah, again, it was funny that it was that, and I thought, 'Of course, I didn't recognize it because I never do.' Again, you pointed out that it was a Christian scholar that made that observation, but yeah, very interesting to think how that would strike someone reading it from that perspective. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a really deep, familiar knowledge from Rowling about this rich tradition and how she can manipulate it easily because she's so in it. This is actually part of my argument for why it was doomed for her to write the scripts for the *Fantastic Beasts* movie series that were set in other cultures. The thing that makes *Harry Potter* such an astonishingly magical achievement is that she's drawing from story traditions and cultural traditions that she deeply, deeply knows, so when she manipulates the story lines to build on her points, then you can feel it. She feels it, we feel it, and a writer cannot do that entering a new culture and then studying for the first time, 'What are the deep myths here?' You just don't know what's going to strike the same core as a story that a person has known from childhood.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Nobody can write equally resonant stories about cultures that they know and cultures that they've just learned, but here she is doing it with something that she deeply knows, and the way she finishes it off feels to me like when you hit the very center of a really deep bell.

JC: Ooh.

Lorrie: She got it. She really got it, and I am happy to give full credit to even the person that she has become now. Whoever she ever becomes, she did achieve this, and I'm not taking away from that achievement. Horrible people can write great books, too.

JC: Yeah, yeah, and many have throughout history.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: So here we are at the beginning of this chapter, and Harry has been so brave. This sixteen-year-old kid, who doesn't even have his Apparition license yet, has succeeded in Side-Along Apparition with very sick Dumbledore.

JC: That's incredible.

Lorrie: Yeah. So much pressure, so good for you, Harry.

JC: It reminds me of the moment in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when he casts the Patronus…

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Except this time, he doesn't know he's already done it…

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: But he believes that he can, and he also knows that he has to.

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: Oh, man, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is how his previous strong experience has made him into a person who… Under pressure, I know how that feels because he had no guarantee.

JC: It's a miracle he got them back to where they needed to go, that he didn't Splinch either one of them.

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, carrying the world's most precious cargo. We get one half of a moment. We get Harry saying to Dumbledore, "We did it! We got the Horcrux!" and then that thought cuts off before we get any reaction from Dumbledore about that. That's been pinned to the board and left there for now, and then Harry, of course, puts his full attention on the fact that Dumbledore is pale and sweating, and he's starting to crack jokes that are deathbed humor.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Uh-oh… Of course, Harry defaults to the thing he knows: "Madam Pomfrey… We have to get you to Madam Pomfrey," and that starts the end-game insistence that is super clear from Dumbledore: "No, I need Snape." But at this early point in the chapter, there's still the possibility that calling Snape might result in him healing *Sectumsempra* for Draco or trapping the curse in Dumbledore's hand. What we've seen Snape do so far is like the duct tape fix.

JC: That is still also miraculous and incredible, right?

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: So can this happen? We don't know yet, and of course, that's all we've seen so far.

JC: Going into this chapter as a first-time reader, did you think this was the chapter where we were… You knew we were going to lose Dumbledore, because you said you had looked at the last chapter and saw the White Tomb.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Or did you know what was going to happen in this chapter when you started reading it for the first time?

Lorrie: I'm still mad about that. I'm so mad.

JC: I had no idea, no idea what was going to happen in this chapter when I read it for the first time. I read it looking through my fingers.

Lorrie: I didn't know who was going to do it. I didn't know how it was going to happen. All I knew was that the titles in sequence went: The Cave, Lightning-Struck Tower, Phoenix Lament, White Tomb.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: Okay, they were going to go through some huge ordeal and then someone was going to die or something was going to be destroyed, a point of no return. Who is that person? Oh, come on. Okay. Goddamn it!

JC: Yeah. The Phoenix Lament does kind of give it away.

Lorrie: I knew the murder was going to happen here or something was going to happen here, but I had no inkling who or how.

JC: Yeah. I didn't know because I did not look ahead at the chapter titles, and even if I had, I'm not sure it would have clued me in the way that it did you. This was a complete shock to me.

Lorrie: I'm never doing that again.

JC: Oh, my God. I learned my lesson.

Lorrie: So, like you said, there's Rosmerta doing her act: she finds them, she points at the Dark Mark and it's over the Astronomy Tower. Dumbledore borrows the two brooms…

JC: That whole sequence was really amazing because it's very clear that Harry is in charge there and Rosmerta keeps deferring to Dumbledore, but Harry is the one who's in charge. When she says, "I have brooms you can borrow," Harry just Summons them and they come. It's like, 'Wow!' That was a boss move. That was just like, 'Holy crap, Harry!' Harry's super OP at this point, but he's just Apparated Dumbledore back from this cave God knows where. He sees the Dark Mark over the Astronomy Tower. A little bit of a side note here: back in the day, FictionAlley -- which was one of the big fanfiction sites for *Harry Potter* a long time ago -- their romance section of their site was called 'The Astronomy Tower' and that's where all the romance stories would get posted. This is --

Lorrie: Where the kids would go to make out.

JC: Where kids would go to make out, right? That was the Tower. I remember, at the time of reading this, thinking, 'Wow, this is going to ruin the whole vibe of the Astronomy Tower. There's a Dark Mark hanging over it.'

Lorrie: Because that department of FictionAlley was established long before Book Six had come out.

JC: Yeah. Long before Book Five came out, I think, yeah. Way back… Yeah, so Harry Summons them, and then we see Dumbledore riding a broom here.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Of course, he knows how to ride a broom. Of course, he probably does it really well -- he probably played Quidditch back in the day -- but I'm so used to seeing him taking more dignified forms of magical transportation.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The idea of Dumbledore riding a broom is almost comical at this moment.

Lorrie: It is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It is. 'Broom? Really? They don't have seats.' Anyway, we get that beautiful little repetition of the theme that people can get extra strength from protective love: “the sight of the Dark Mark seemed to have acted upon Dumbledore as a stimulant.” This nearly-dead wizard sees the Dark Mark… Oh, no, he's going to go there.

JC: Adrenaline.

Lorrie: Yeah. Throughout this whole chapter, there's that haunting question: Has someone died? Who's died? And at no point in this chapter do we find out. We're just nervous about it the whole time, and Harry's a wreck.

JC: Because he knows that he sent his friends right into danger here, and that his anxiety as he's flying back: 'Someone I know is probably dead. Who is it? I told them to go and do this. It's probably my fault.'

Lorrie: Again.

JC: 'They wouldn't be there if it wasn't for me,' which has kind of been a theme for a long time, but it made me think that's going to be a big theme in the next book, too, this whole 'how many people have to die because of Harry?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That guilt…

Lorrie: Leadership.

JC: Yeah. He's about to become the General.

Lorrie: Yeah. Once again, Dumbledore's muttering in a strange language and he is undoing Headmaster enchantments around the castle so they can enter. I'm not even bothering to try to figure out what he's saying; I don't know. I don't know that language.

JC: 'Open sesame!' I don't know.

Lorrie: Yeah. I guess it's the code to your home alarm system.

JC: Yeah, yeah. No, that's actually… yeah. Right. That idea of magical wards that surround a thing…

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's so many kinds of media or stories that have that, and I didn't even stop and blink. I'm like, 'Yeah, that's what you would do because if you have a magical thing, you have a ward around it. You have a token that allows you through or you have a spell that you say that allows you through.' Anyway, yeah…

Lorrie: So 'ward' is one of the words all throughout *Harry Potter* fanfic that just is not used. Rowling never uses it.

JC: Isn't that interesting… Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Pulling from every other property that does this kind of thing, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's just easier. Everyone knows what you mean by 'ward.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay.

Caroline: Producer Caroline here with another excerpt from a later episode recording where Lorrie and JC had further thoughts about this bit of language that Dumbledore uses that Harry doesn't understand. So here's that snippet, and I'll be back just to return you to the present conversation.

Lorrie: When I was watching Snape be motivated by grief and be protective this way, that was one of those moments reading this chapter this time when I realized, 'Oh, now I can hear what Dumbledore was saying in the previous chapter when he was speaking a language that Harry didn't know and he was undoing the enchantments as they were flying to the Astronomy Tower,' because Snape's motivations are all… He is working for the Order -- he's being protective -- and Dumbledore is saying something the castle recognizes. This series mentions a few times that the castle is sentient enough to recognize legitimate Headmasters, so when Umbridge is Headmistress, the room won't open for her, but McGonagall and Snape do get access to the Head Office as soon as they become the Head. But then in *Deathly Hallows*, we'll find out that there's a moment when Snape stops defending Hogwarts and makes his only priority delivering a message to Harry in particular, and that's the moment (extra-canonically in interview) that the author said that's the moment that the castle decided Snape had abandoned his post as Headmaster, and that's why he was not given a portrait the moment he died.

JC: Oh, uh-huh.

Lorrie: But also extra-canonically, McGonagall, finding out what was going on, successfully got his portrait in once she saw what he was actually doing, but he had succeeded in pulling off his act so convincingly that even the castle believed that he had abandoned Hogwarts. Reading this is what made me think, 'Okay, the language Harry didn't understand (that Dumbledore was speaking when he was undoing the enchantments) is whatever language people speak when they are the Headmaster or in charge of a family, or even if you're the parent chaperone on a school trip.' If you're the person that said, "I will put my protectiveness toward these people before anything else," then that's a language Harry has not yet had to learn. Anyway, that's what made me think, because I was thinking, 'What is this language that Dumbledore is speaking? Why doesn't Harry recognize it?' But we see Snape operating from the same protective motivation here.

Caroline: And now, back to the present and your regularly scheduled podcast.

Lorrie: So then they arrive, and Dumbledore is clutching at his chest with his blackened hand. Okay, that's the moment when we know: no, he knows he's dying. That's the hand he uses to commune with cursed things, so his heart is on its way out.

JC: I don't think I picked that up on the first reading at all.

Lorrie: I picked that up yesterday.

JC: The fact that he was dying here… I love that connection to the blackened hand.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I don't think I believed he was dying really until he was dead.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It just seemed like he was getting weaker and weaker, and the whole thing about 'he asked for Snape. Maybe when Snape comes, something will happen.' I didn't expect that to happen, but to watch him knowing that he's going to die here and to see how he's declining and how these bursts of adrenaline give him a little more energy to do one more thing he needs to do, but he's literally slipping towards the end the entire time…

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my gosh. That read so differently to me this time, knowing what's happening. Again, I read this once twenty years ago.

Lorrie: Right, right.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: And he gives a super clear instruction to Harry: "Go and wake Severus. Tell him what has happened and bring him to me. Do nothing else, speak to nobody else, and do not remove your cloak." As a Snape fan, I read this going, 'Oh, as if Snape is asleep…'

JC: Yeah, no, that was a thing I thought, too, because the castle is under attack. Didn't Rosmerta tell them that it was under attack? Who would be the first person who would be there to figure out what was going on? Of course, it would be Snape. Snape is not asleep. Why would you think he is?

Lorrie: No, he's not.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Snape hasn't slept in a year. Are you kidding? Harry's about to go do that, and then you know what happens.

JC: Oh, my gosh, this moment… This is a detail I had missed before. We hear *Expelliarmus*, and at the same time Harry is slammed against the wall and his Invisibility Cloak completely immobilized; he can't speak, he can't move, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry realizes -- and I guess this is true -- that Dumbledore used his last bit of power to immobilize Harry, and then he was unable to defend himself against the *Expelliarmus*. I had not picked that up before.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's a plot detail that the author had to write extremely carefully because it's really important to her worldview, to the worldview of this story. Here we have the moment. Everything that they've been preparing for… it's happening. Seventeen-year-old Draco has managed to get everything lined up so that he is alone, bursting through the door and surprising Dumbledore, and the spell that he comes up with (which totally works) is *Expelliarmus*.

JC: Yes, yes. There's so many things to love about that. Loving the fact that Snape set this in motion years ago, right? "I want the first thing these kids do under pressure to be to disarm each other," and here we are. Draco could have come out and just done the Killing Curse, but no, that was the first thing that he did. Obviously, the importance of Draco disarming Dumbledore at this point -- and everything going forward -- kind of hinges on that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, man, and it's just beautiful. The fact that Draco, the first thing he does is disarm Dumbledore tells Dumbledore this kid is savable, and then Dumbledore spends the rest of his life, literally, saving Draco, which is beautiful.

Lorrie: And it so drives home the point: Why disarm? Why is that stronger than just killing? Because then you can talk.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Okay, Draco cast *Expelliarmus*. He needs to talk. Got it,' and it's so successful. There goes Dumbledore's wand off the tower; it's gone. This is the first setup of the last bookend that it is Draco's wand defeating the Elder Wand, and this little humble, much ridiculed spell, *Expelliarmus* (that the twelve-year-olds learned), is all it takes for a sixteen-year-old to disarm the most powerful wizard currently alive. At the end of the next book, it'll be the same wand with the same spell with, at that time, the most powerful wizard currently alive. That is the setup, so we'll get the bookend. I've often wondered, 'Okay, so Draco pulls *Expelliarmus* out now when we've just seen the bathroom scene where he was trying *Crucio* and Harry did *Sectumsempra*. What happened during that fight in which it would have been great if either or both of the boys had remembered the Dueling Club and just used *Expelliarmus* on each other?'

JC: Sure.

Lorrie: What changed between then and now for Draco to come out with *Expelliarmus* at this moment? It's not like he's been casting it. What changed is that Snape and Narcissa's love and genuine care have changed him. They saved his life.

JC: Ooooh….

Lorrie: His blood has now circulated through his entire body, knowing that his life was saved by the combination of the mom that he's been rebelling against and the teacher he's been pushing away, and they did not punish him for being rebellious and antagonistic. They came and they did what they wanted to do: provide care and love as his guardians, and it saved his life. That changed him. He's a changed person.

JC: I really like that reading of it. In my head, it was: he's been thinking about this moment for so long and he's terrified, and *Expelliarmus* buys him some time to

pull his shit together. I was thinking about it more like that, but I really like that idea that that moment solidified the fact that he's not a killer and he wasn't one all along. Yeah, there's something about the fact that he was protected by love there that really pushed him firmly into the camp of "You're not a killer." I like that.

Lorrie: If he does what they want him to -- if he goes forward with the killer route -- there's no good way out. Is there hope here? Well, maybe. Maybe is a way better deal than zero, zip. This beautiful moment when Dumbledore has the either/or choice, Harry is there realizing, 'Oh, this was an either/or choice that Dumbledore made: immobilize Harry instead of defending himself against *Expelliarmus*.' That sets us up later to appreciate that Snape does the same thing, giving Harry memories instead of attending to his snake bite to survive. It also sets us up a little after that for Harry choosing not to defend himself when he knows Voldemort's coming at him with a *Avada Kedavra*. It's like, 'No, I choose this other thing, instead of protecting myself, that is going to save someone else.' The beautiful immobilization spell that Dumbledore casts means that this volume's 'Dumbledore Explains It All' chapter has this really masterful twist that Dumbledore is explaining it all to two different students and the same words from him are teaching two totally different lessons, so we get the student getting healed. For once, finally, Draco gets the much, much needed healing and enlightenment that Harry has been getting from Dumbledore every year, and Draco being treated a certain way by Dumbledore… Dumbledore is doing everything to demonstrate… this is his final master class. 'Harry, watch and learn.' In the last, final moments of Dumbledore's life, ‘Watch this. I'm not going to teach you. I can't teach you anything more after this. You have to watch.'

JC: Right, yeah. It's this beautiful lesson that he's teaching both of them here. I like the fact that he immobilizes Harry here because he knows that Harry would do something dumb, right?

Lorrie: Oh, God, yes.

JC: But also, it's important, so Harry… he has said a lot, in the last couple chapters, Harry is important.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He knows how important Harry is. Harry needs to not sacrifice himself here, which Dumbledore knows he would do, and that would ruin the chances of everything that needs to happen. He also wants Harry to, first of all, understand Draco and know that Dumbledore has been completely aware of everything that's happening this whole time, but also (as you were just saying) he wants Harry to see an example of what you do when faced with someone like this. How do you help someone come back from this darkness? He goes down teaching, which is just incredible to me.

Lorrie: Yeah. Both of them. Both of them. Yeah. He died doing what he loves.

JC: Yeah, absolutely.

Lorrie: So Draco coming at him with *Expelliarmus* has totally ruined Dumbledore's end-game in a good way.

JC: Right, because Dumbledore intended for Snape to Disarm him, right?

Lorrie: Right. All sorts of things go not according to plan because Draco did so much better than they expected. They were hoping; they never closed off the possibility. Anyone can surprise you. Anyone can be saved, or at least it's worth giving them that possibility, but they were betting that he probably was going to go the bad way. No, look at that. This is the kind of teacher reward moment that makes Dumbledore cry. "I wanted -- I wished -- but I didn't expect that you would come to this." "Oh, we didn't count on Draco being the person great enough to choose disarmament over attack. Would you look at that!"

JC: Yeah, so he's not acting when he's kind and reaches out. Dumbledore would have done that anyway, but he recognizes here that Draco is really struggling and that there's hope, and he's going to do everything he can to save this kid with the minutes he has left. That's incredible.

Lorrie: Yeah, which he's been hoping, possibly, that is going to be a wasted effort. You definitely do not successfully save everybody you want to in life, but wow, that's so moving. Then we see Dumbledore choose his strategy, which is gambling correctly that what Draco has been starving for is somebody to talk to. "Tell me what's been going on, Draco. What's been going on with Draco Malfoy?" Is that

more urgent for Draco than avoiding being killed by Voldemort? Yeah. Actually, right now, it is.

JC: Draco has not had anybody to talk to, except one ghost.

Lorrie: Myrtle tries. There's only so much she can do.

JC: Yeah, and the fact that Dumbledore is in front of him being kind and trying to help him or understand him…

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Draco just jumps at the chance to pour out. It's like a monologuing villain here; he just jumps at the chance. "Somebody listen to me and my side of it!" Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, he's been starved. We'll see, especially in the next coming year, that Snape has to fight against this because Snape is, of course, about to have a whole horrible year of absolutely being unable to tell anybody what's really going on with him, but Snape is a grown-up. Draco is sixteen; he cannot handle that. This is his first rodeo, so no, he's been starved and Dumbledore deliberately emphasizes the kindness and the relationship, and he is manipulating Draco in a way that I'm sure Draco can see. Okay, I'm sure it was there that Draco's like, 'I can't kill him,' but Dumbledore's saying it repeatedly. Even being manipulative that way is reassuring, because it's like, 'Oh, my God, a grown-up.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Somebody who is way more powerful than me who's not Voldemort.'

JC: Right, and there's something that Dumbledore is doing here that I recognize as a teacher. We talk a lot about trauma-informed instruction (and I've talked about it on this podcast a while back), but this idea that connection and recognizing what people are struggling with and when people are being influenced by their trauma, how to handle that as a teacher…

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Dumbledore's just doing all the things. I could go down the list. That's making me think this will be very interesting. If *Harry Potter* weren't so charged -- if it was a different timeline and the author hadn't become a horrific transphobe -- it'd be really great to have my students read this scene and then go through and pick out

all the places where we see trauma-informed instructional moves here, because I think that would be really an interesting conversation. Alas, I ain't going to do that.

Lorrie: Alas, it's now been muddied.

JC: It's too late. I can't do it now, but yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah, that is the whole point of literature: if you encode the lesson in a story, it has a much more direct route to our memory and we know how to use it. You can memorize all the principles and that works, but put it in a story? Oh, now the feeling keeps the facts there for you. Dumbledore is exuding maturity and kindness, and the thing that I kept thinking was Dumbledore is being Draco's Headmaster. He's not only the Headmaster for good kids. It's not like Draco has some other, better Headmaster that is on his side all the time; this is supposed to be the one Headmaster, including for Slytherins, and he's being Draco's Headmaster. If you're going to go into education, you can't just only teach the kids you like.

JC: This is true. This is true. Yes.

Lorrie: They don't have some other teacher.

JC: Right, and that is the point of preparing teachers with things like trauma-informed instruction and emphasizing classroom management that is inclusive. The whole point is that you're not just there for the kids who clearly want to be there and are enjoying being there; you're also there for the kids who are struggling for whatever reason because they deserve a good teacher and they deserve the chance to be educated, too. That's one of the difficulties is balancing it all, and just watching Dumbledore in this scene reminds me that we see Dumbledore through Harry's very limited POV through the entire series, so we just don't know other ways that Dumbledore has done this, right? He's done this for kids forever, and we have this impression that Dumbledore favors the Gryffindors because that's what we see, but the reality is probably much more complex than that.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a big job.

JC: And good teachers (and I imagine good Headmasters, good high school principals, people who are in these roles) make everyone they talk to feel special. A really good school principal, when you go to talk to her about your kid, will make you feel like she's listening to you, that your kid is important, and that we're going

to find a solution together; I get a feeling Dumbledore is just exactly like that. When Lucius Malfoy comes to Dumbledore, Dumbledore probably is able to have a good conversation with him and be like, "Yeah, I understand what you're saying, and yeah." All of that and then Lucius Malfoy runs for the school board, but that happens, too. Just seeing good examples of what should be happening in education at Hogwarts is really refreshing for me, because we've also seen a lot of things that should not be happening in education going on at Hogwarts.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh…

JC: So it's nice to see a bit of a balance here.

Lorrie: Yeah. When they say that he's the greatest Headmaster that Hogwarts ever had, this is what it means.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: There is no other purpose for a school than to make sure the kids matter.

JC: Yes, absolutely.

Lorrie: And not all schools remember this.

JC: This is true. This is true.

Lorrie: Draco notices the second broom and asks about it. We know that he's clocked it, but Dumbledore immediately gets him back off track by saying, "Yeah. Are you alone, Draco?" and of course, Draco has to talk about himself. Then he says, "No, I'm not alone, I have back-up," and he boasts that he's gotten Death Eaters in, and then (oh, little baby) he says, "But I've got a job to do." He's like five years old, and this is a beautiful pattern that gets established in Draco's dialogue of this chapter where, in speaking to Dumbledore, he leads with aggression, hostility, and then he follows up with vulnerability; Dumbledore just keeps the rhythm going so that Draco can keep doing that.

JC: Yeah. Again, that's a trauma-informed instruction. It's just beautiful. Yeah, really well done.

Lorrie: So here's Draco going, "I've got a job to do!" and Dumbledore saying, "Well, then, you must get on and do it, my dear boy." I don't believe that Dumbledore is afraid at all during any of this, even though he has no wand. He can

do wandless magic. I don't think he remotely thinks that Draco can kill him if Dumbledore doesn't want it to happen. He just doesn't sound nervous in the least.

JC: The feeling throughout this scene is that Dumbledore [is] praising Draco for his cleverness and for thinking of things that surprise Dumbledore. When he mentions the Vanishing Cabinets, there's that moment where Dumbledore just goes, "Oh…" Draco found a weakness in the castle's defenses that Dumbledore didn't even know existed, and there's a little moment where Dumbledore's like, "Damn, son, I've got to give that to you."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's genuine when he's like, "Wow, yeah, you did it. You defeated me all right." He's giving him everything that Draco needs to hear while also giving him time to process what he's about to do, and reminding him over and over again, "This isn't you." Obviously, he's stalling until Snape can get there, because at this point, he probably realizes Snape is going to get here at some point and he just has to make it last as long as he can.

Lorrie: Buy time to keep teaching Draco as much as he can before he croaks, which is imminent.

JC: As far as Dumbledore knows, he might die in the middle of this conversation of Voldemort-based causes, and if he can just keep Draco talking -- no matter who shows up -- he can be pretty sure that Draco is not the one who's going to have to kill him, and that's what he wants. He knows he's going to die, 'but I just don't want Draco to do it,' right? I love that part of this scene.

Lorrie: Yeah. Draco, of course, cannot stop himself from having feelings in response to Dumbledore's kindness. This kid, who's just had his life saved by all the love healing *Sectumsempra*, is now being treated with understanding and kindness by an elder for the first time all year. He can't stop his feelings from healing him, so he's standing there doing nothing but staring, and then "Albus Dumbledore, incredibly, smiled." Here's Harry, unable to even blink, watching Dumbledore say to Draco 'asshole' Malfoy, "Draco, Draco, you're not a killer." What?! Draco cannot stop himself from properly settling into his position as a nurtured child and saying, "How do you know?" He's admitting he wants a grown-up. He needs a grown-up. He's not getting in his own way, Draco, here; he is

following that lead, even though he doesn't think he should be doing that right now. Dumbledore gets to have the moment where Harry witnesses yes, Dumbledore knew all along all the stuff that Harry has been trying to say. "You have to know that Draco Malfoy's doing this!" Yes, yes, Dumbledore knew. Then Dumbledore points out, "You can go ahead and do it. I don't have a wand," which to me is disingenuous -- yeah, you have other backups -- but then this thing that's simultaneously so antagonistic and so loving at the same time: "'I see,' said Dumbledore kindly, when Malfoy neither moved nor spoke. 'You are afraid to act until they join you.'" How that can be so totally like, 'We're fighting and I'm winning and disarming you,' and also so gentle… This is good writing. This is good characterization.

JC: I like that we get the story of all the things that Draco has done this year. It's a nice little reveal of what's been happening. It's like the villain monologue in a sense, but it's done really nicely. And all the ways that Draco has been pulling ideas from other people, in particular borrowing ideas from Hermione and from Harry… He's been paying attention to what made them successful and thinking, 'Okay, I wasn't part of that group, but if they can do it, I can do it, too.' I like that a lot, because there's been this idea of, 'Oh, but I'm a Pureblood and we have these magic ways of doing things, and your lower-class way of doing things is not acceptable,' but Draco didn't do that this year. He said, 'I'm going to use what I can, and I'm going to listen. They've been successful, so let me do what they did, and then maybe I'll be successful, too.' That's such a break from the culture that I think he was raised in. He's not making a house-elf do his work for him, right?

Lorrie: And he's just saying, "Fine, I admit it, Potter's team is better." It is. Just like Harry's been obsessed with Draco Malfoy all year, no, Draco has been tailing Harry, too, and he's been hearing some stuff that Harry wouldn't have wanted him to overhear. I love Dumbledore's line, "I don't think you will kill me, Draco. Killing is not nearly as easy as the innocent believe…" which is his way of granting onto Draco the status of being innocent. Is Draco still innocent at this point? He's done some things, but he hasn't succeeded in killing anyone, so this chapter is drawing that line and reinforcing it. Dumbledore has not written off this child. It is still worth doing anything possible to keep Draco from going further down the wrong path. He's still worth dying for, which is something that Draco surely -- and anybody in his position -- would think, 'I'm probably too rotten. It's

probably too late for me. Who would bother saving me? I've already crossed the line.' When Draco explains to Dumbledore (and the invisible Harry) how he figured out that the Vanishing Cabinet would work, his account of Montague spending all that time trapped is truly terrifying to me. He says, "He nearly died doing it. Everyone thought it was a really good story…" That totally reminded me of you saying, "Wait a minute. How can all Hogwarts be gossiping that Harry is dating Ginny? Have they forgotten that Harry just nearly killed Draco?" Yeah, they have. Hermione was the only person saying into the void, "Shouldn't we actually think about what Montague just went through?" and everyone's like, "Nah." Draco was the only one who followed up on that. That's something that Dumbledore and Snape know and are trying to use in their favor: for better or for worse, if you don't actually succeed in killing somebody, for some reason people forget and there's still room to go in and save the kid. Katie did not die from the necklace and Ron didn't die from the poison mead and Draco didn't die from *Sectumsempra*, so there's still room. If you don't save these kids and you don't prevent the death -- if somebody actually does die -- that changes your story and fixes it, perhaps unfairly, forever. Did that line get crossed? Okay, there's room.

JC: So it's always worth investing in a human being, even when you think they're lost, even if you think it's too late. If they haven't done irreversible damage in the form of killing someone, it's not too late. That's a really powerful message.

Lorrie: As we're going to be finding out later in this series, Dumbledore and Snape both did cross that line, and then you discover that even after you cross that line, in some ways, it's not too late. There are things you can still do; they're just infinitely harder. They are trying to prevent Harry and Draco from having to go to that much harder, less rewarding route. 'You're not even a lost cause then, but you really don't want to do that. Trust me, trust me.' Dumbledore and Snape have both put their own lives on the line because they think it might prevent Harry and Draco from crossing over into that really miserable way of living. Dumbledore tries to gently explain to Draco, "Professor Snape has been keeping watch over you on my orders," and then teenager Draco interrupts him and says, "He haven't been doing *your* orders, he promised my mother --" Dumbledore says, "Of course, that is what he would tell you, Draco, but --" I guess that means that Snape never told Dumbledore about the Unbreakable Vow. It didn't change anything that he had

already promised Dumbledore, but he kept that to himself. It's not firm evidence; if somebody were to argue, "No, I think Snape did," yeah, okay.

JC: So a question of timing, then: in the next book when we see the memory where Dumbledore basically tells Snape that "You're going to have to kill me instead of Draco because I don't want to damage Draco's soul," and Snape says something like, "What about my soul?" When did that happen during the course of this year?

Lorrie: When Narcissa came and asked Snape, "Could you die in Draco's stead?" Snape has to think, 'How does that track with what Dumbledore has already gotten me to promise?' and then he realizes it doesn't change anything. "Okay, yes, I can promise you, Narcissa."

JC: Okay, so the conversation with Dumbledore happened before the Unbreakable Vow?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, okay.

Lorrie: By the time Narcissa comes to Spinner's End, Dumbledore's hand has already been injured, and he has gotten Snape to promise this right after Snape has halted the damage to his hand. Narcissa is not asking anything of Snape that Snape has not already pledged to Dumbledore.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: When Dumbledore and Draco have this disagreement about Snape's motivations, this is a really good reminder that Dumbledore knows Harry's listening, so he's performing this for Harry. Draco says, "You stupid old man, Snape is a double agent," and Dumbledore says, "It so happens that I trust Professor Snape --" Okay, so we're totally setting up the end of the chapter, and Draco's not wrong that he's a double agent.

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: Then there's that sad moment when Dumbledore realizes, 'Oh, Rosmerta…" She's been Imperiused to cast an Unforgivable. Does that mean that under old laws that are now no longer going to be enforced, Draco gets the lifetime

in Azkaban but Rosmerta doesn't because she did it under -- Anyway… Obviously, the rule of law is dead.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: That was a long year for Rosmerta. Aye…

JC: Yeah, and also the fact that Draco was powerful enough to do that and to keep her under that spell for that long. That's a grown adult, right? Wow.

Lorrie: How galling. How just disgusting she must have felt.

JC: It's absolutely a violation.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It does raise the question, 'What happens next?' Because obviously, Draco's not going to get punished for this.

Lorrie: Right.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: We know from early in this series that the first time that Death Eaters fell out of power (right after baby Harry defeated Voldemort), there were Death Eaters falsely claiming that all the bad stuff they had done was under Imperius. There were real people correctly getting excused for that, and then there were Lucius Malfoy-type people saying, "Oh, I wasn't myself."

JC: "I didn't mean to storm the Capitol."

Lorrie: Yeah. Oh, my God… When Draco talks about getting ideas from Hermione and he calls her 'mudblood,' Dumbledore doles out his last breaths to say, "Please do not use that offensive word in front of me." Not only is he demonstrating to both Harry and Draco this is worth dying for, he's setting up the series for Snape to do the same thing at the end of *Deathly Hallows*. Dumbledore's thinking that this is one of the last lessons it's worth teaching Draco before dying.

JC: It's really powerful that in that moment, "No, you're not going to use this racist slur, even in this moment," Draco's like, "Really? You're going to argue about this now?" and he's like, "Yeah, it's that important."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's really powerful.

Lorrie: "Yes, I am."

JC: Coming from a TERF. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Ay, yai, yai… And then, again, Dumbledore asks, "So nobody's been murdered?" and Draco is like, "Uh, I think someone has." That tension is unresolved, still. Poor Harry…

JC: Yeah, and then Harry is like, 'Who could it be?' and he's going down the list, and I don't remember. I have no idea, so I'm in the same place.

Lorrie: Yeah, there's no relief in this chapter from that fear. Dumbledore knows that it's time, and he proposes that they discuss Draco's options. It's time. He gives Draco that same room. Draco first is defiant and says, "*My* options!" and then he breaks down and says, "I haven't got any options! I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!" Okay, Draco, you're really not losing anything by confessing this to Dumbledore. He's in such a terrible spot. Dumbledore's response to Draco saying that is something that I didn't understand how important this line was really until this reading: he says, "Why else do you think I have not confronted you before now? Because I knew that you would have been murdered if Lord Voldemort realized that I suspected you. I did not dare speak to you of the mission with which I knew you had been entrusted, in case he used Legilimency against you." I had been misreading this series the whole time not giving that enough importance, and I was thinking that a major reason why Dumbledore wasn't directly trying to interfere with Draco all year is because why would Draco trust him? The bonds of genuine affection and trust between him and Snape would be a lot more effective, but no; actually, what Dumbledore is saying here, he worked backwards from "I cannot put anything in the minds of Voldemort's victims that would cause Voldemort to kill them because of this." That explains why he keeps the truth from Harry, which is a thing that is so enraging, and a lot of readers just can't believe he kept such secrets from Harry about his own fate. Yeah, because if he had told Harry, Voldemort could have read it in his mind, and that is why he ordered Snape around while keeping him in the dark. Snape is yelling at him, like,

"Why do you trust Harry and not me? Why do you confide all this stuff in Harry and not me? You don't have faith in me," and Dumbledore's like, "That's not it."

JC: "Daddy doesn't love me best!"

Lorrie: It's true, and Dumbledore can't relieve Snape's jealousy; that would jeopardize Snape, so all he can do is go, "It's not that I don't trust you…" Just that parental feeling of "I am doing this for your own good. There's no way I can explain this to you. You are going to hate me. I'm not going to stop. Wow! I'm never going to get credit for this, and I still know it's the right thing to do."

JC: Yeah. Because of the introduction of the ability of Voldemort to read people's minds, basically, that adds this whole other layer in there. It's hard for me to think about a real world example in ordinary life; not like an extraordinary circumstance -- you're a spy or something -- but an ordinary life. I can't come up with an example where even communicating something like, "I can't explain to you the whole truth, but I will, and I promise you that everything is going to be fine." Even not being able to say that because of the danger of Voldemort reading people's minds, it does help to explain why Dumbledore keeps so many things very close to the chest; he doesn't explain himself very often to anybody in his life, just because he understands the danger of that information being taken from someone without their will and all the damage that that could do, so it does put him in this position of being very alone. Dumbledore has no one to confide in; he's very lonely.

Lorrie: That's the loneliness of genius, right? So here's Dumbledore, before he dies, getting to explain to one person why he couldn't help them more directly.

JC: Two people, really.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: I like that Harry hears all this, too. Not only because then we get to hear it, but I think it's very instructive. All this is very instructive for Harry. All this time, Dumbledore knew Harry was right and just couldn't tell him that he knew that he was right, so it's affirming at the same time as it's exhausting. What…

Lorrie: And it's "Watch and learn, Harry, because you're sure going to have to do this yourself." It's bitterly, mildly satisfying to see that Draco winces at the sound of Voldemort's name. 'Finally! We tried to tell you he's not just like this cool guy.'

Dumbledore says something that is not actually quite true, but he's making a point here: he's telling Draco "No harm has been done, you have hurt nobody, though you are very lucky that your unintentional victims survived..." No, he's totally hurt people. Harm has been done, but it's like, 'Think of yourself as savable.' Then, this astonishing, incredible, generous thing: Dumbledore says, "We have ability to protect you, your mom, and then (when he gets out of prison) your dad." This is the kind of thing that Death Eaters (and a lot of people) think is weakness. What kind of person extends the same protection to people who have tried to kill them -- are still trying to kill them -- as they would to a friend? Is that weakness? Some people will never do that. It is the hardest thing, right? The most natural thing is Lily Potter trying to protect her baby. It's natural to protect your friends or your loved ones; it's harder to protect people that are neutral to you. Protecting the people who would kill you in a second because they have rights, too? Okay, this is Dumbledore demonstrating, 'Harry, watch and learn.' It cannot help but change Draco to hear this offer. It's not like he doesn't know that Lucius has been trying to kill and destroy Dumbledore all this time. "You would hide me and my parents?"

"Yes, I would. Just say the word."

JC: I think that's a really important life lesson on so many levels, and it's reminding me of even a conversation I had with my own kid recently about how important it is to respect people as human beings even if you disagree with them. Even if you disagree with them violently.

Lorrie: Even if they're about to kill you.

JC: Yeah. Even if they're horrible human beings, listening to someone's story and their lived experience is always worth it. It's always worth asking people questions about how they got to where they are, and then listening and understanding them. Even if you disagree -- even if you would never have done that, even if you think they've made horrible decisions -- stopping and listening is a gift. It's the only way that you can maintain your own humanity and offer someone the chance to maintain theirs. We talk about that a lot in our household. It's always worth listening to someone, because if nothing else, you're extending humanity. You're reaching out to someone, but also from a selfish perspective, you're going to learn, and that doesn't harm anyone; that only benefits you, and you're allowing that person to tell their story in a way that maybe makes a little bit of a human

connection with them. We talk. We've had multiple conversations about how important it is to do that, and I don't think I ever connected it back to this before, but that is kind of what Dumbledore's doing here. He's like, "Draco, tell me your story and how you got here and what you want and what you need," and he's listening in a way that says, "I'm genuinely listening to you, and I believe that this is your experience and what you believe." That's really powerful to do as a human for another human.

Lorrie: And he's saying that they already had the plan in place. It's not like Draco has to make the case to Dumbledore that Lucius and Narcissa are human beings and deserve to be considered as people; they already foresaw that. This is the way we think on this side of things. Thinking about the humanity of the person who's trying to kill you doesn't mean that you have to surrender to them or just stop defending yourself, because, as we see, Dumbledore had planned, assuming that Draco would just try to kill him. Dumbledore is surprised that Draco went the *Expelliarmus* route, so know that they are human; don't stop defending yourself. It doesn't mean you have to let them do whatever, but if you are able to (and I think this is a tall order)... I don't expect all humans at all times to be able to see the humanity in the person who is actively trying to kill you. Dumbledore's beyond most of us at most points…

JC: Right.

Lorrie: But the understanding that you can have, if you can manage it, will enrich your strength. It doesn't mean you have to give in to them.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, and I say all that recognizing that I'm probably coming from a position of extreme privilege here and that I'm always making assumptions about my own positionality compared to the people I'd be arguing with. It's been a really long time since I've been in a position where someone was physically threatening me and had a lot of power over me and that's a different situation, but the fact that Dumbledore can do that, even in this position of being very vulnerable, says a lot about him as a human being for sure.

Lorrie: So Draco, quite rightly, tests Dumbledore by saying, "I'm the one with the wand… You're at my mercy..." Dumbledore's grown-up response to Draco just

silences me with so much peace, it's astonishing: he says, "No, Draco. It is my mercy, and not yours, that matters now." That's incredible.

JC: Tell me more about that.

Lorrie: He's being realistic. You can have bravado, but the fact that you have a gun and I don't is not the only thing. There are other ways to be great. If we call something saving a person's soul, that can sound grandiose or hyperspecific to religion, but in a secular sense, that's what Dumbledore is appealing to here and Draco can't contradict this, so he lowers his wand.

JC: Oh, beautiful moment.

Lorrie: Poor kid.

JC: I love that he starts to lower his wand and then the Death Eaters burst in, but we get that moment of Draco getting pulled back from the edge.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And as a person who really likes Draco, that meant so much to me when I read this. It was like, 'Oh, he wasn't going to do it. In the end, he wasn't going to do it,' and at that point, it's done. It's very clear that Draco is not going to do it from there on out.

Lorrie: Yeah. The change has happened in him. Even if he wanted to go back now, he couldn't. It's happened, and Harry has been magically forced to witness this and is going to have to understand it. Unfortunately, we then get rudely interrupted by this nasty foursome: the Carrows, Fenrir Greyback the werewolf, and a Death Eater who in the last volume is going to be named Yaxley.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: He's the most grown-up of this mortifying foursome, and they bust in and they start to cackle and congratulate Draco that he's gotten Dumbledore cornered. The tone of what was happening in that room before they burst in and then how much they lower the tone just by existing is so disgusting, there is no chance Draco's going to have any appetite to kill Dumbledore. These are your people, Draco?

JC: Yeah, that's really true.

Lorrie: This is your backup? You're going to kill Dumbledore, who just talked about the inner worth of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, and you're going to go off with these people? No. Yuck. Meanwhile, can you read about Greyback in this scene without picturing Jeffrey Epstein?

JC: No. No, that's very… that whole bit is pretty… Yeah. Obviously, it's very horrifying, and the fact that Dumbledore really pushes on that and is like, "Oh, yeah, you're here, and you've got blood all over your face. It's not even a full moon! You can't even blame the werewolf part," and Fenrir says, "But you know how much I like kids, Dumbledore." Ugh… Yeah, and even Draco was horrified.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I say "Even Draco." Draco is especially horrified.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's a good follow-up to Draco at the beginning of this book threatening Mr. Borgin. "Oh, I'm friends with Fenrir Greyback. If you don't do what I say, I'll have him come visit," and he's totally bullshiting. When Dumbledore says, "I am a little shocked that Draco here invited you, of all people, into the school where his friends live," I'm not thinking about werewolves. I'm thinking about Jeffrey Epstein, right? Draco is so scared, he can't even look at Fenrir; he just kind of stammers, "I didn't know he was going to come." This is my headcanon: Draco's Boggart is a werewolf. In the first volume when he has to go do detention in the Forbidden Forest, he's like, "There are werewolves in there!"

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: He knows to be afraid.

JC: It brings up really interesting questions. Draco's father has been in prison all this time. What has Greyback threatened Draco with in a dark corner of Malfoy Mansion when it was just the two of them?

Lorrie: Oh, God, so gross.

JC: What has Draco endured from Greyback?

Lorrie: Yuck.

JC: Yeah. He's been a victim, he's been threatened… Maybe Greyback's had him in a corner. It could have been really bad, and the fact that Draco has this reaction to

him -- won't even look at him -- that's what tells me something has happened between the two of them, and Draco can't even look at him.

Lorrie: Yuck.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is like Hermione leading Umbridge to the centaurs and then realizing, 'I have unleashed something that I can't control.' Draco opens up the school to Death Eaters to come, thinking, 'Okay, great, I'm going to get back-up,' and then this is who comes? Draco has zero authority. He has zero control, and now that these four are here, they're saying, "Come on, Draco, do the thing so we can get on with being our disgusting selves." His big, big, big moment where he's going to prove himself to Voldemort by killing Dumbledore is just now this "Come on, Draco!" This little, irrelevant footnote is not going to get Draco in the mood to do the thing. "Malfoy was showing less resolution than ever." Oh, yeah? You don't say… In the middle of this really yucky situation, the Death Eaters start arguing amongst themselves -- Great, I hope they take each other out -- and then Harry… Yay, here's somebody breaking through the barrier that the Death Eaters set up! Maybe someone's coming, maybe things will get better. Yaxley attacks Fenrir (because Fenrir is not listening) and he's lunging at Dumbledore to kill him, and the Carrows are screeching.

JC: They're like hyenas on a kill.

Lorrie: And Yaxley, being relatively grown up, saying, "You know this isn't our orders. Cut it out!" In the middle of this mess, Snape bursts through, and here we have Snape showing up exactly when you need him. There's the line, "... his black eyes swept the scene," and the HP scholar Susan Sipal points out that the word 'swept' is the tiniest message to the reader to remember that there are two brooms and that Snape now knows that Harry's there, invisible. He sees the Death Eaters (including the enraged werewolf) and Draco standing there. At this point, me being a Snape-perspective reader, I'm just overwhelmed.

JC: Yeah. This is the question I've had for you: when Snape came in on your first read, what did you think was going to happen? What did you think was going on here?

Lorrie: I love the moment that he takes just a split second to understand everything about what's happening. He takes it in, and then I know he's making a plan right away; whatever he's going to do next is going to somehow solve it in a way that nobody else could do, and that without him, there was no solution possible and he will be the miracle man that finds the one and only one way out. 'Oh, good, he's here. Oh, thank goodness!' Then Dumbledore gives Harry the scare of his life by begging: "Severus…"

JC: And then Snape pushes Draco out of the way and he walks toward him, and then his expression is described by Harry as being “twisted with hatred and revulsion." That's an interesting bit, and I later on heard people talking about the hatred and revulsion: we're meant to think that it's towards Dumbledore or we're meant to think it's an act that he's putting on, but it was actually (as people later said) that it was directed very much inwards; then Dumbledore says, "Severus, please…" Later, we know what he's saying, but right here, it seems like Dumbledore's asking for mercy from Snape or help from Snape in a way that would not end with him dying, and that's certainly how Harry is taking it.

Lorrie: Yeah. I loved how when Snape walked forward, the Death Eaters (who were also big on their own power) just fell back. This is real power, and it just made me have so much faith in Snape. Then I went through a process: I totally fell for it in the sequence that was most obvious and most satisfying. On first read, I was completely shocked (and I totally fell for it) that Snape was looking at Dumbledore and his true hatred of Dumbledore that he'd successfully hidden for six books was like, "now finally, the truth," and he's ripping off the mask and he's just really been Voldemort's man this whole time. I totally fell for it -- I was shocked -- and then when I heard from fandom and then I went back and read it, I thought, 'You know what? They're right.' "...There was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face" is a deliberate echo of Harry in the previous chapter; Harry “hating himself, repulsed by what he was doing,” forces himself to help Dumbledore and cooperate with him by hurting Dumbledore. He's doing this out of love, it's all for good reason, and it won't work if you don't go through with it. It's just awful to make yourself do that. When that was pointed out, I thought that's got to be it.

JC: Yeah. That idea that Snape is now doing the same thing Harry did in the last chapter… I hadn't thought about that before. That's really interesting.

Lorrie: I felt minorly stupid that I fell for it at first, but I was really glad to have enjoyed that ride. The thing that then showed up for me was "...There was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face…" 'Harsh lines' – that's not ugly. In previous books, when we saw Snape being a terrible classroom bully, Harry is sitting there thinking, 'Wow, he's so ugly. His hair is so greasy, his nose is so big.' From this point in this series, Snape is never described as ugly; he's described in ways that make you understand what a rough job he has. Whether you think he's Voldemort's man or Dumbledore's man or something else, it's undeniable that he's got a really heavy burden. He might not be attractive, but he's not ugly anymore. On second and third reading, I saw that Snape has to not only force himself to do this, but we've been hearing over and over and over again that Unforgivables don't work unless you mean them. If he does a half-hearted *Avada Kedavra* (but not really because I really love you), they are so screwed.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: Just like Harry never having done Side-Along Apparition leading somebody before, but he has to get Dumbledore back to Hogsmeade first try, only try, no practice, this is Snape's one shot. I think we're meant to know that Snape has never cast *Avada Kedavra* before because we have this setup at the opposite of Harry doing the Side-Along Apparition, and also because he probably would have been caught and tried for it.

JC: Even back when he was a Death Eater during the war time, you don't think he ever killed anyone?

Lorrie: Well, that was in a time when it was enforced that using an Unforgivable meant a life sentence in Azkaban, and Snape (we know from *Goblet of Fire*) went through all the trials; he was tried. It also works with the story, as we'll see later, that Dumbledore is asking Snape to do something; if Snape agrees to do it, he's agreeing to split his own soul. "Yeah. Okay, old man, here goes," and he cannot miss. If he messes this up, Greyback is right there, ready to turn Dumbledore into a werewolf, so he cannot miss and he doesn't.

JC: I can see that a bit of the hatred there is 'I hate you for making me do this.'

Lorrie: Worst day at the job ever, or as Dumbledore in the previous chapter was, "take this cup from me." So the words are Harry was "forced to watch" as Dumbledore gets killed, and this poor child has witnessed (in front of his face) Cedric, Sirius, now Dumbledore…

JC: His parents, his mother, I guess. Yeah.

Lorrie: Right in front of his face. Oh, too much, too much.

JC: The Muggle in the beginning of *Goblet of Fire*.

Lorrie: Yeah. Oh, gosh. But really, after Sirius and now Dumbledore, the way those two strike home… Oof. That's what Harry sees, and with this heart-stopping, brilliant plot twist, the fan and media machine around this series just had an almost joyful explosion of "Snape killed Dumbledore" spoilers.

JC: Oh, my gosh, I remember that, yeah. Weren't there banners? People hung up banners in public places.

Lorrie: Which was enraging, but also thrilling that people cared about fiction enough for this to be a major news item. There was the Borders bookstore campaign. Right before the publication of *Deathly Hallows*, you could choose a sticker: 'Trust in Snape' or 'Snape is a very bad man.' I gleefully took both! Before the publication of *Deathly Hallows*, I attended a conference called Phoenix Rising, where the big event was called The Great Snape Debate that Borders bookstore sponsored. Our friend, Rachel, who was the head of SnapeCast at the time, was on that panel. The motivation behind Snape killing Dumbledore was a huge matter of enormous, unresolved debate. It was a frenzy. It was astonishing that fiction had set it up to be so arguable with passion for arguments on many different sides.

JC: So at this point, you've read this chapter, you've maybe paused… I don't know, you probably plowed forward, but --

Lorrie: I was shocked.

JC: You were shocked.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Did you have the theory at the time about why Snape did this? What were you thinking? Or even by the end of this book, maybe, but what were you thinking back then, twenty years ago?

Lorrie: On first reading of this chapter, I was shocked, and I thought his true hatred that he'd hidden successfully from Dumbledore was finally free to come out. I just was shocked and dazed as I zipped through the remaining pages. Then I got to the last chapter of this book where Harry was wondering, 'I wonder where Snape is now and what he's doing,' and then that just gripped my heart. I thought, 'Wow, he has no allies. He has nowhere to hide. Everywhere he goes, he's the most hated, most hunted man in their world. What kind of lonely life did he just sign up for? Lonely, stressful, high stakes.' I thought, 'He hadn't slept all year? Wow, he's really not going to sleep ever again.' Thinking about his voluntarily taking on that life… That just felled me, and that's when I really felt myself entering *Harry Potter* fandom and, instead of immediately making *Deathly Hallows* appear, all I could do was read every bit of fanfiction I could.

JC: Is that the point when you got into fandom, or were you already there?

Lorrie: I enjoyed *Harry Potter* enough to really be excited about *Half-Blood Prince* coming out -- and I had a baby at the time, so I didn't go to a midnight release, but I did get the book the next day and then hire a babysitter -- but it was thinking about what kind of life Snape has now entered after killing Dumbledore and what that would mean. What's his life like now? That's when I crossed over from being a fan to **A Fan**. It was a really satisfying, hugely detailed bunch of questions that were set-up and set in motion by this really, really meticulously drawn, complicated character.

JC: When I read this, yeah, I was shocked that Snape actually killed Dumbledore, but I completely trusted Dumbledore at this point as a reader. I know that I kept plowing on. I probably didn't think too hard. I kept thinking, 'We're going to get more information. I got to keep going,' and the fact that the other adults in Harry's life were just as like, 'What?! No, that doesn't make any sense…' I was convinced at the end of the book that Snape had a reason and that there was something that we were just going to learn later, and I completely believed that Snape was still on the right side. It didn't even occur to me that he wasn't, even though I wasn't a Snape fan, really, and I didn't pursue that part of fandom at all; I was much more

interested in Harry's story and Draco's story and Ron and Hermione. I think I just trusted Dumbledore, but I'm a very trusting person. I was like, 'No, Dumbledore has to be right. Dumbledore can't be wrong. I won't accept it!'

Lorrie: I think I was trusting in the narrative and totally fell for it, or maybe it was just that I was gullible. No, I totally fell for it, and it was during the hiatus when I thought, 'What would a writer want to do with a story to make it satisfying and to pay off? Oh, okay, he can't possibly just be Voldemort's guy and evil. That's not a satisfying use of this writer's setup: the long, long, long game. No, it wouldn't make any sense.'

JC: It is interesting to read this and remember that time when we didn't know the full story of how Dumbledore and Snape… what their teamwork really was and why Dumbledore really trusted him, that Snape was actually trustworthy. It's interesting to go back and look at it now.

Lorrie: Yeah, and how different the experience is for people who finish this book and then just can immediately reach for *Deathly Hallows* instead of waiting for so long.

JC: I think it was two years, right? Yeah, because it was 2007, yeah. Two years of speculating and lots of fanfiction. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I craved the end of the story. I know people can say the author is not an authority, Death of the Author. No, there is something in us that wants to know the person who wrote the story up till now intends to finish it.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: You can make up your own and a lot of people did, and fandom often claimed (and occasionally was even correct) that some of the alternate fanfics were even better. Yeah, some of them were, but I am not convinced by anyone who argues that there's nothing to hearing the end from the person who made it up in the first place. No, I think that's real…

JC: Yeah, absolutely.

Lorrie: And I was craving it.

JC: Yeah, and that's this time of… It was a really amazing time in the fandom because there was just so much stuff to talk about.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So much debate about Snape and about how the Horcrux hunt was going to go… I remember that time as being really amazing, and I think that one of the things that is beautiful about having read it at the time is that you had all that space in between the books to do all the theorizing and thinking and really dig in. It's like watching a TV series that you're really into, watching it one episode at a time, spread out over a week versus ten years later, just sucking the whole thing up at once.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: If you weren't there at the time, it's hard to wrap your brain around what it was really like to have been part of that community trying to figure all this out, so having the rest of the story was exciting, but also it was the end of an era because this was really the end. I remember going into the last book already grieving that this was it. Now, we were going to know the whole story, and that changed the way that… Maybe not for you, but for me, it was like I wanted to know the end, but I also didn't want it to be over.

Lorrie: I treasured it.

JC: So I read that last book. Every page I turned, it was like, 'I'm getting closer to the end with every page.' Yeah.

Lorrie: I know. It's very much like 'treasure the ending, savor it.' It's going to be satisfying. You totally want it -- you want to know the end -- but if you go faster, you might miss some of the exquisite, sad joy.

JC: Yeah. This is the point at which everything changes. Again, to your point earlier about how once someone has died, then the options have been limited; there's only so many things that can happen, and now that Snape's life.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's taken that on.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And I am grateful to have been a participant in a beautifully, robustly constructed, worldwide reader experience.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. Okay, here's where I'm going to sound really old. A lot of people who have completely rejected the series (and for very good, personal reasons) were there, but a lot were not, so I think that among younger folks, I see the sentiment online a lot of "Oh, come on. It was just a book, and it wasn't even that good of a book. How come you can't just let it go? The author is so awful. How come?" Blah blah blah… I think that just being part of that communal experience of the entire world reading this book at the same time… That is not something I want to let go of. I will never have that again. That will never happen again in my life.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I knew at the time that it was special, and I appreciated being in that moment and being able to participate in that huge community of people who went and bought the book the moment it came out and then stayed up all night reading it. Oh, my God, that's incredible, so the fact that the author is a horrible person (and is doing horrible things with the money that she earned from all of us) is terrible, but I'm still happy that I got that experience and I still value that, and it's a huge important thing in my life that I was there in that moment and got to feel that.

Lorrie: Well, the counter-argument that I hear constantly (and is true) is that there are people who went through it just as much, who put it away from themselves anyway, and then follow it up with, "And if I did it, you can and should, too."

JC: Right. "I'm more pure than you." Yeah.

Lorrie: There are people who were more involved with *Harry Potter* and this was a bigger part of their lives than it was for me, and they turned their back; they also (a lot of them) will say, "Yes, I fully acknowledge that what I give up by turning my back on it hurts. Yes, I know I'm saying goodbye to it. Don't think it's easy for me. All of that emotion is an enormous loss."

JC: And this is hard. This is hard. I think about this a lot. I think it is very likely that I will never read these books again, that this is my goodbye, this podcast. I'm not a rereader anyway, really, so I may not have ever read them again if not for us

doing this project together, but I feel like this is a goodbye for me and I will be satisfied. I'll be okay at the end of it. I'll be able to say, "Yeah, yeah," and I'll still be able to hold the good parts in my heart, but I don't think I can engage more. I may not watch the movies ever again. All these little things that were important… There's just so many other things in my life that are also important, but I want to be able to hold the time in my life where this was so important to me. I want to be able to hold that and keep that pure. This is me saying goodbye to this thing that meant a lot to me, and I feel like I get that. I deserve that chance to say goodbye to this thing that was a really big part of my life, and it will always have been. Maybe there's an extent to which this is the divorce for me, personally. The fact that people can love someone so much and have a family with them and have a life with them, and then they can end it and they can move on, but now I look back and I can remember the good times… That's how I want it to be with *Harry Potter*. I want to be able to look back and remember the parts that were good and then say, "And then I left for a really good reason, but gosh, it was great while it was good."

Lorrie: It's good for me to be able to go back and find out: What did I see twenty years ago? What was it that I saw? Was it what I remember? And it's worthwhile to find out everything, all the way from possibly, "Oh, no, actually, it wasn't even that good. It was just the hype," which that's not true for me.

JC: Right. I agree with you one hundred percent. It's not true, and now whenever I see people going, "Oh, it's not that good," I'm like, "Yeah, no, I disagree."

Lorrie: And on my experience, on my end of it, it's not only "No." That's why the break is so devastating: because it was that effective, and I'm still finding new readings. There are still things that I'm seeing in the series for the first time that I find thrilling and rewarding as a reader, and it's not that I wasn't paying attention on the other million rereads I've done. No, it's quite robustly and rewardingly written. Whatever her destructive prejudice and campaign against people now, she wrote something good. Okay, that's why this is upsetting.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: I'm going to go back to *The Prince* by Machiavelli…

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: The book that this entire volume is named after. I've said earlier on the podcast when I thought, 'What is Dark magic?' and then in *The Prince* by Machiavelli, he distinguishes between different ways to use Dark magic. Here is the quote that I found super relevant to the single curse that Snape cast to kill Dumbledore: "Those cruelties are well used (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and then are not continued, but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects. Those cruelties are badly used that, although few at the outset, increase with the passing of time instead of disappearing. Those who follow the first method can remedy their standing, both with God and with men; the others cannot possibly maintain their positions." In Snape and Dumbledore together getting Snape to split his soul by casting an Unforgivable Curse and taking another human being's life… If he's going to do what they intended from this point forward, he's going to immediately have to convert the reverberations around this one act into the greatest possible benefits for as many people as possible and then do whatever it takes to remedy his standing, both with God and with men. Or, in the case of a double agent, just with God. It was very secure to have in the *Half-Blood Prince*, in that title, such a solid pointer to Machiavelli as a way to read whatever was happening in this book. The next chapter, which is one of my absolute favorites, is called Flight of the Prince.

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