HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020
with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 6.28

Book 6, Chapter 28: Flight of the Prince

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-Eight: Flight of the Prince.

Lorrie: Flight of the Prince. Snape rushes Draco out of the castle. Harry attacks Snape. Snape reveals that he is the Half-Blood Prince. The Horcrux turns out to be fake. This is a really special chapter to me. This is where the mystery and complexity of Snape's character are at their peak. Every time I read this series, I see something different; this time, I got a new interpretation that makes me think I have to go back and rewrite this chapter in the Snape book I wrote in 2022.

JC: Wow!

Lorrie: And I even understood new things about Dumbledore that had puzzled me in the previous two chapters, but yeah, I have not reached the point where I can say that I understand this series and I no longer have new readings. No, they're still coming.

JC: That is so interesting, because I think I spent this entire chapter one hundred percent in Harry's head, and when we got to the Snape part, of course it read… I don't know if it read differently.

Obviously, I know more now, but I trusted Snape the first time I read it. I was like, 'Snape is doing something.' I noticed that he was protecting Harry and teaching Harry in that scene -- I noticed that the first time through -- but I was so in Harry's experience here that I… It's so interesting. I can't wait to hear what you have to say about Snape in this chapter and new things that you have taken from this reading.

Lorrie: I'm feeling so fortunate that I get to do this with you and we get to work off of each other's perspectives.

JC: Absolutely, yeah. That's great.

Lorrie: So I'm going to rhapsodize about the Snape mindset for a bit here in this chapter.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: This is Snape living out some second chances. He is protecting a boy Voldemort wants to kill, which he failed to do last time; he's helping a teenager who took the Dark Mark, which is something he did not get when he was at that age. At this point, he is Dumbledore's murderer, therefore the most hated man in his world. He's about to be profoundly alone because he has just killed the only person in the world who knew his true self. He has just split his soul through murder; from now on, he's going to have to do what it takes to put himself back together after that (which we're going to find out later requires remorse), but it is completely important that he maintain his ability to Occlude Voldemort, so he has to bury any remorse or any sympathy for Harry so deep that Voldemort can never see it, which means he's going to have to keep the animosity between himself and Harry foremost.

If sympathy or remorse are about to break through, he's going to have to reinvoke that hatred. Meanwhile, Draco has completed his transformation (finally) into being Harry's equal and counterpart in this story after five volumes of the indignity of being a side character, because in the previous chapter, Dumbledore delivered the same valediction to both boys at the same time. Draco has now activated the *Expelliarmus* lesson that Snape taught the two boys in second year because he just used his hawthorn wand to disarm the Elder Wand, so from this point in the story, there are going to be many senses in which the magic of these two boys is going to be interchangeable. The chapter opens right after Dumbledore falls from the tower

and Snape says, "Out of here, quickly," and he grabs Malfoy by the scruff of the neck, so Malfoy is now a puppy. I got a feel for where Draco is right now, because he had just been on the verge of getting protection for his whole family -- a solution to this horrible mess -- when Dumbledore died, and then Snape just takes right over, guiding him. Yes, Draco, go with Snape. I think Draco is completely correct at this point; he's going to entrust himself to any grown-up who has protectiveness toward him. It does not matter what side they're on. This is a true lesson he will never unlearn, and I'm guessing Snape intends to take Draco back to his mother.

JC: Or at least to safety away from the Death Eaters. That was the sense that I had, too: he's like, "You go ahead, I'm going to find you," but he doesn't want Draco to go with the Death Eaters, was the sense that I had. He's going to make sure he gets somewhere safe.

Lorrie: Oh, goodness.

JC: But Draco can't stay in the castle after everything that's happened, either. That's not safe, either.

Lorrie: Yep. Castle's not safe, these Death Eaters are not safe. Who is safe? Adults who have protectiveness towards Draco. Those people are safe. We get many pages of Hogwarts being invaded…

JC: Right.

Lorrie: There's a battle, and Harry cares about one thing only: he is intent on catching Snape.

JC: Yeah. The way that the chapter opens with Harry realizing that he's not immobilized because of the spell that Dumbledore put on him, which is now gone; he's immobilized because he's so horrified by his own fear. That recognition... He realizes this before all the Death Eaters have left, so he immediately immobilizes the last one on the way out and jumps over him. That's interesting to me, because what we see him doing (until he meets Snape later on) is he is just using very defensive spells that don't cause harm, and I think it's so fascinating that his brain has gone back to the initial thing that Snape taught him, right? Snape, as the Half-Blood Prince, taught him some Dark magic, and he's rejecting that now; he's not

using it. He's just using the stuff that Snape taught him way back in the early years, which was just to disarm and immobilize, and he's using spells he would have used in his first and second year, like prank jinxes. His brain goes back to, 'What do I know works?' It's so interesting to me that even while he's hyper focused and courageous and jumping right into this fight and fearless, he's using kids' spells, but he has so much anger -- he's putting so much force into them -- that they're working. That whole sequence is fascinating to me. He's able to defend himself from Greyback, who's about to rip his throat out.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's able to get really advanced, evil, powerful Death Eaters off of his trail using sixth grade spells, but because he has so much power and so much focus and so much anger that he's putting into it -- so much intent, I guess is the way to say it… That whole scene, he is so intent on getting to Snape. He's going to get there, even knocking other kids out of the way. "Get out of my way!" That image of kids coming out of their towers in their pajamas and going, "What's happening?! Oh, my God!" And here comes Harry Potter, bloody, wand out, "Get out of the way!" That has to be a story that people are going to be telling later on. That image is pretty fun, but Harry's focus… He hasn't had a chance to process or grieve yet; the only thing he can think about is getting to Snape.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't even think he knows what he'll do when he gets there. He just has to get there.

Lorrie: He has to get there.

JC: All the description of the bodies on the floor that he has to jump over and his sneakers slipping in blood…

Lorrie: Ooh, yeah…

JC: It's very visceral, and this is Hogwarts. This is a place that's been…not safe, but not like this. This is new.

Lorrie: This is invasion.

JC: Yeah, and the destruction and the chaos are just so out of the norm of anything we've seen before. Even Harry will fall down, get hurt. When he falls down and Neville is on the floor… Neville's clearly not okay, but says, "I'm fine." Clearly, he's not fine, but it's good enough and Harry's like, "Great. Which way did they go?" His focus here is just really interesting to me, like the way that you get when you're just a hundred percent adrenaline, anger, fear, and he won't have a chance to process Dumbledore's death for a while. Not until the end of this chapter.

Lorrie: Yeah. The moment you talked about -- when there are bewildered students in their pajamas -- makes it so much funnier that they're all Hufflepuffs. Then I realized, 'I wonder if this is the moment from canon that eventually turned into the off-Broadway parody play *Puffs*.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Let me see… What's the full title? "*Puffs, or Seven Increasingly Eventful Years at a Certain School of Magic and Magic*."

JC: "Magic and Magic." Yeah.

Lorrie: Right? This is the ultimate moment of Hufflepuffs going, "What's going on?"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Oh, hi, Harry."

JC: "Wow. What's happening? Oh, here comes Harry. Oh, there he goes. Wow." Yeah.

Lorrie: No time to explain.

JC: Oh, there's one more moment where his focus, I think, is really highlighted, and that's where it mentions that he remembered to jump over the Vanishing Step as he was chasing Death Eaters down the stairs. That's how focused he is.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Every detail is there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I have been that focused in my life. There have been events when the adrenaline has been high and I have been one hundred in the moment, so just seeing that he's there now… The fact that he can call on that feels like a superpower. Yeah.

Lorrie: Wow. Hagrid is a really big part of this chapter, and I think it's because he is the guardian of boundaries between different spaces and different states in this series. Here's Snape and the other Death Eaters racing toward the boundaries of Hogwarts so they can Disapparate; also, Snape is crossing over. He has just crossed the line that has been the issue in this whole book: what happens when you cause somebody's death and you become a murderer? We've seen people repeatedly fall on the safe side of that line; he has just crossed over, so he's going to be a murderer from now on.

JC: Hagrid here… Harry is at first worried about Hagrid because he thinks, 'Oh, no… Not Hagrid too. They're going to kill Hagrid, too,' but Hagrid hasn't been weakened in the way that Dumbledore was. I like the mention of the fact that a lot of the jinxes or curses the Death Eaters are hurtling at Hagrid just bounce off.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's part of the protection he gets from his mother, again, who was a giant. Again, that idea of the protection that your mother's love gave you -- in this case of giants -- I guess still works in genetics, maybe, and then that's such a relief to Harry. 'Okay, I'm not going to lose another important adult tonight, probably.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then he can actually turn back and look at Snape again, because at first he's like, 'Am I going to have to go and protect this other important adult in my life? Then it's like, 'Actually, no, he's got it. He can do it himself.' I liked that moment. Again, I'm in Harry's head here, but Harry's just panicking about the fact that he's losing security that he's had for six years.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh, yes.

JC: The important people that he knew, 'As long as these people are around, I'm safe,' and the most important one… He hasn't processed it, but he has this understanding that the most important one is gone. 'Now what? Am I left on my

own? Am I going to protect everybody else in my life? I'm already doing a crappy job of it, because look, there's a Dark Mark and look, one of them is'...

Lorrie: 'I'm not ready.' Yeah.

JC: 'I'm not ready.' Yeah, so he's also on this boundary of being mentored by an elder and then not having that mentor anymore and being on his own.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's hard. That's a hard place to be.

Lorrie: Yeah. Before he can grieve, he has to fill those shoes.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: It reminds me… I've been a *Star Wars* fan for my entire life (I saw it in the theater when I was five or six), but the moment when Luke and Leia and Han are escaping on the Millennium Falcon from the Death Star and Luke watches Obi-Wan Kenobi be cut down, he just stands there and screams; there are laser bolts flying past him and none of them hit him because apparently Stormtroopers just can't hit people, but he stands there and he screams and he just starts firing back. That kind of image of 'I can't process this, but I'm angry and I need to do something…'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's Luke there… I'm obviously with the hero's journey. There's a lot of parallels between Harry and Luke in a lot of ways, but that moment made me think of Luke in *A New Hope*.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry manages to catch up to Snape close enough to fire a *Stupefy* at him, but he misses.

JC: Again, kind of a childish jinx in a way. Yeah. He hasn't gotten to the Dark ones yet.

Lorrie: Yeah. Then Snape shouts, "*Run, Draco*!" and he turns to face Harry. He could have run with Draco, but apparently Professor Snape has something to say to Harry Potter, and as readers do, 'Oh, no, what is it going to be? What is Snape going to do?' The reading that I didn't see until yesterday was, 'Oh, what he does

now is his version of Dumbledore's valediction to Draco on the Astronomy Tower.' He has to deliver Harry's final Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson (or as much of it as he can manage under the circumstances), and that's what he does. That's why he has sent Draco on: to turn around and come back to the angriest Harry's ever been and to go toward that with something to say. After that *Stupefy* that misses, Harry then attempts to cast seven more curses at Snape; Snape blocks every single one of them before Harry can even finish the incantation, including the non-verbal one. He can totally read Harry's mind. The way he blocks those curses costs Snape no effort, but they knock Harry off his feet. Snape is vastly more powerful.

JC: I like that he does it so easily, and it's the first hint that we've seen that this guy is a lot more powerful than we've ever been shown.

Lorrie: We've never had to see it.

JC: Yeah, we've never had to see it.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: Again, that contrasts a couple chapters back with Dumbledore being able to work out how to get into the cave and all the incredible magic that he did… The difference between adults who have lived through a lot and fought wars and have all of these skills that the kids just can't even imagine? I like that we see that here as well.

Lorrie: And we also see that part of the difference in power. Harry is operating, like you said, like how Luke Skywalker was at the moment of loss: out of shock and rage and grief and deprivation. Meanwhile, Snape is acting out of protectiveness and sorrow over Dumbledore. He's grieving Dumbledore, and that is a greater power than the kind of vengeance that's fueling Harry, even taking into account their differences in age and power. What Snape is doing, in my reading this time around, is being a grown-up for Harry. The difference between Harry throwing everything he has at Snape and Snape barely flicking them away before he can even finish the words, to me, is like a grown-up containing the full-strength attacks of a very small, extremely angry child and the grown-up doesn't get hurt and the grown-up does not attack back. This is the thing that Tom Riddle never got as a child, and it also parallels what Dumbledore was doing in that chapter where he was able to take all of Draco's hostility and not even lose his calm.

JC: Yeah. I talked about trauma-informed teaching practices then, and it's another example of that, just to bring that point back around. Yeah, those things just don't hit you and they don't affect you because as the adult in the situation, you understand where it's coming from and that it's not really even personal. Probably, it is personal, really, between Harry and Snape, but it's more than that, right? I can't think about it as a personal thing right now. I have to think about it as -- Now, Harry does get under his skin a little bit, but flicking those things away is like, 'Nope, nope, nope, that's not going to work. No, no, nope. Nope, we're not going to do that right now.'

Lorrie: Yeah. You could take it personally if you weren't in the position of being the grown-up to this person who is a child or otherwise somehow in your protection, but once you decide that you're going to be the grown-up here, then that changes your mindset. Maybe you do take it personally later… Not now. This is a really valuable thing that both Draco and Harry are getting on this night from these two. Harry tries twice to cast *Crucio* on Snape; at the same time, there's a Death Eater setting Hagrid's cabin on fire and Fang is inside. Fang is one of three animals who appear in this chapter. They don't speak human language; their suffering is this pure attestation to how tragic this battle is and how innocent everybody is at some level. It's just frightening. Snape is sneering -- recognizably sneering -- and then he teaches Harry, "'No Unforgivable Curses from you, Potter!' he shouted over the rushing of the flames, Hagrid's yells, and the wild yelping of the trapped Fang. 'You haven't got the nerve or the ability --'" So in this case (and a couple other times in this chapter), I think we readers are meant to pay attention to the narration that is interspersed between the two separate parts of Snape's dialog here. He says, "No Unforgivable Curses from you, Potter!" and then there's narration showing us the atmosphere that this conflict is taking place in. Then when he says, "You haven't got the nerve…" Okay, that's familiar, right? That's the kind of taunt or contempt from Snape that we're used to; that's a writer's choice to present this character this way when we readers are supposed to be spending time trying to figure out just exactly where his loyalties lie. We get his teaching moment, Snape pausing, us taking in the atmosphere, and then the taunt. Meanwhile, the teaching moment works: Harry stops with the Unforgivables during this fight, which reminded me of Dumbledore using that suggestive power with Draco ("Draco, we both know you're not going to attack me") before Draco himself had really made

up his mind about that. No, okay. The way I read it: the taunt is definitely true to Snape's nature. He's not a pleasant person and of course, the author is trying to balance out his characterization, but actually, my ultimate reading of it is that Snape is covering his tracks on purpose after teaching Harry something that was helpful because he has to re-invoke their genuine mutual hostility. He has to sound like a Death Eater because Snape (the true Snape) does not want Harry to cast an Unforgivable because it would damage Harry's soul. He knows that because Snape, having just cast an Unforgivable, is just about to die from the pain of it because we know *Avada Kedavra* -- if you cast it successfully -- rips your soul apart. He's just killed Dumbledore; his soul has been ripped apart, it's incredibly painful. 'No, Harry Potter, don't cast an Unforgivable,' but he has to sound like a Death Eater. Death Eaters think that Unforgivables are a show of strength, so this is how he has to package the lesson he's delivering. Harry tries *Incarcerous*; Snape deflects "with an almost lazy flick of his arm," which leads to the absurd, angry response from Harry. Harry's trying to provoke him, calling Snape cowardly for not fighting back -- you're looking at how much Snape overpowers him -- and of course, Snape is being so brave this night. Snape replies, "Coward, did you call me, Potter? Your father would never attack me unless it was four on one, what would you call him, I wonder?" Again, Snape is bringing up James because that's one of the fail-safe ways to reinforce how much he and Harry hate each other. Harry tries *Stupefy* again; Snape teaches him again: "'Blocked again and again and again until you learn to keep your mouth shut and your mind closed, Potter!' sneered Snape, deflecting the curse once more." This time, he does not even follow that up with a snarky comment. He does not bother to obscure his agenda. He's just giving these final instructions in Defense Against the Dark Arts to Harry: avoid Unforgivables, use non-verbal spells, practice your Occlumency. Then he sees the attack on Hagrid and he gets the Death Eater to stop attacking Hagrid by coming up with something: by saying, "It's time to leave!" Harry tries *Impedimenta* on Snape; this time, he's struck by *Crucio*. Harry is on the ground, agonized by *Crucio* that he assumes was from Snape, but then we readers hear that Snape is yelling, "No!" and then the pain stops and Snape makes up a reason. He tells the Death Eaters to stop torturing Harry because they're supposed to save Harry for Voldemort.

JC: Yeah. It's like, "Have you forgotten our orders? Potter belongs to the Dark Lord. We are to leave him. Go, go!" Yeah, I like that line.

Lorrie: So the Death Eaters obey Snape and they leave.

JC: Something that's interesting is that I remember, on my first read of this, it was clear to me -- Okay, first of all, I thought Snape was on the right side through this right. It wasn't until I finished the book and then went and looked online that I realized that other people didn't think that. I was like, 'Oh, that's not what I read.'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: So in all of this, it wasn't nearly as deep as what you're talking about here, but it just seemed like Snape was being very careful in protecting Harry throughout this, even when he yelled "No!" and got the *Crucio*… There's no reason for him to stop the Cruciatus Curse unless he's protecting Harry. It doesn't even make sense, right? "Yeah, sure, let's torture him on the way out. Let's go."

Lorrie: "Who cares?"

JC: Yeah. "Who cares?" No, he did care, and he made it stop. It's so interesting that this entire scene -- on that first read, it never even occurred to me that Snape wasn't on Harry's side in some way, and then I thought, 'All will be revealed. I just have to keep reading!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I still remember that moment of realizing, 'Oh, not everyone thinks that. Oh, dear, here we go.'

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, whatever he made up, the Death Eaters buy it and they leave, and Harry is overcome with rage; knowing exactly what he's doing, he tries *Sectumsempra* on Snape, which Snape flicks away. Now the Death Eaters are gone, actually Snape can drop some of the act because it's only Snape and Harry now, and Harry can see that Snape does not have any sneering, jeering face on; he also has rage. Harry tries the non-verbal *Levicorpus* and Snape can read his mind so clearly that he interrupts Harry mid-word. He can't even hear the word and he stops it.

JC: But it's interesting that Harry learned. He learned half of the lesson, right? "Keep your mouth shut!"

Lorrie: And then his block knocks Harry off his feet and the wand out of his hand, so now Harry is wandless and defenseless as Dumbledore had been and Snape now comes closer. Oh, no. Why? What's he going to do? Well, you disarm if you're going to talk, right? If you're just going to kill someone, you don't disarm them. Snape approaches: "Snape's pale face, illuminated by the flaming cabin, was suffused with hatred just as it had been before he had cursed Dumbledore." First of all, Snape is again, here, described as pale; not as ugly, not as greasy, it's not stringy. It's not that he's ugly here; he's somebody under stress. Their world is on fire ("illuminated by the flaming cabin"), and the specific invocation of the hatred on his face being like the hatred before he cursed Dumbledore… Okay, so this is the hatred of knowing that you have to hurt someone when you don't want to in order to do whatever it is you need to do and you can't explain it. He has to convince Harry (and the rest of the world) that he killed Dumbledore and wants Harry destroyed because he's truly with Voldemort, and that is the loathsome false narrative that he and Dumbledore have painstakingly built up over years and years and years: that Snape is so susceptible to the Dark Arts that he has sworn off of them, but you can't let him near them because he will just enjoy them so much he's going to turn again, and Dumbledore for some strange, inexplicable reason is sure that this won't happen, but apparently not sure enough to give him the Defense Against the Dark Arts job… until this year, and now look. What?! Meanwhile, Snape has been watching incompetent, vile people like Gilderoy Lockhart come in and out of this job that's apparently too good for Snape, so yeah. He has to make everybody believe that that narrative is true (at the time) that he is ripped up inside from having lost Dumbledore as well as killed Dumbledore. He knows that whatever life is ahead of him, he has no idea what's going to work -- how it's going to be -- but it's going to be a hard life. Ooh… All of the things happening as he faces Harry, knowing he's going to have to do or say some things to leave a certain impression on Harry. Snape, having disarmed Harry… turns out he has something to say about *Sectumsempra* and *Levicorpus*. "You dare use my own spells against me, Potter? It was I who invented them -- I, the Half-Blood Prince!"

JC: Dun dun DUUUN!

Lorrie: I know! "And you'd turn my inventions on me, like your filthy father, would you?" which partly, the author had to get that in somewhere, right? Who is

this Half-Blood Prince? Is he just going to have to say it like no one's going to figure it out?

JC: Yeah, no, I hadn't figured it out. I remember that was a gasp moment for me as a reader. I was like, 'What?! It was Snape the whole time?!' After the fact, I was like, 'Oh, of course it was,' but it just did not occur to me until it came out of his mouth. Did not suspect.

Lorrie: Hermione was on the verge. She had the surname, and then she said she was going to look in Potions records for people who won Potions prizes (for people who made a hobby of inventing dark spells), so she had very nearly profiled Snape correctly at this point. She was nearly there, but yeah, this is a terrible, terrible night in Snape's life, and this is one truth about himself that he doesn't have to hide. Harry dives for his wand and Snape says, "I don't think so… *no*! No, no, no, we're still talking." He hexes the wand away, keeps Harry disarmed… He's trying to prevent escalation, and at no point does he attack Harry. Harry mistakes Snape's intention when Snape hexes his wand away: "'Kill me then,' panted Harry, who felt no fear at all, but only rage and contempt. 'Kill me like you killed him, you coward --'" So at this point, by "him," Harry means James because Snape has just said, "Like your filthy father."

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: Right? "You'd turn my inventions on me, like your filthy father, would you?" "Kill me then. Kill me like you killed him, you coward --" Because it was just a few hours ago that Harry learned that Snape was the one who sent Voldemort to kill James and Lily. Snape does not know that Harry knows this, and I am not sure that Snape could figure that out from what Harry just said.

JC: Yeah. Okay, I'm going to have to think about that one, because I don't know if I agree. Harry is so focused on the fact that Snape killed Dumbledore, I don't think he's thinking about anything else. I don't know. Snape definitely takes "him" as Dumbledore.

Lorrie: Snape does, yeah.

JC: Yeah, and I'm not convinced that Harry is talking about anyone but Dumbledore there because I don't know if he has the brain space for it right now.

Lorrie: I think the *Sectumsempra*/*Levicorpus*/Half-Blood Prince/"You turn my inventions on me, like your filthy father?" I think Harry is saying, "You want to fight about my father? At a moment like this, you're going to bring up my father? Fine. You killed him; kill me, too. That's not a very good argument, Snape."

JC: It is interesting, though. The use of the word "him" there and not Dumbledore does open up the door for it to be… Yeah.

Lorrie: It's supposed to be both.

JC: Yeah, it could be. Yeah. It's vague intentionally.

Lorrie: No, Snape has been able to invoke James to keep the animosity between himself and Harry prominent enough so that it can protect him if Voldemort does Legilimency on him. It's a safe button to push to give camouflage, and here it's backfiring on Snape because Harry now knows something. "Kill me like you killed him." But of course, Harry, Snape actually didn't kill James; he only killed Dumbledore, and this is when Snape screams, "DON'T --" This night has been about preventing young men from becoming murderers. Dumbledore and Snape both pledged their lives to keep Draco and Harry from becoming murderers, and this is absolutely connected to what Harry learned after *Sectumsempra*. Snape also learned about James: you hate your enemy, but it turns out you didn't want him to die. Many readers remember Snape's response to Harry at this point as "DON'T CALL ME COWARD" as though the word "coward" is the thing that sets him off, but here is the paragraph as it was written: "'DON'T --' screamed Snape, and his face was suddenly demented, inhuman, as though he was in as much pain as the yelping, howling dog stuck in the burning house behind them -- 'CALL ME COWARD!'" Again, the author is interjecting narration between two different parts of Snape's dialogue and she's showing us the emotional context. This word, 'demented' ("His face was suddenly demented, inhuman…") tells us Snape is being tortured by his worst feelings. He has just killed somebody; it's ripping his soul apart. The word 'inhuman' is a connection to when Harry is at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* and says he doesn't want to be human anymore because the grief over losing Sirius is unbearable; it also connects to the way Voldemort has made himself less and less human in an attempt to numb himself to the pain. He has killed so many times -- he has ripped his own soul apart so many times -- how can he withstand this? He has to become less than human or other than human. That's

what the choice of these two words is telling us about Snape, but Snape cannot -- and absolutely must not -- articulate that this is what he's going through. I'm reading this line as Snape bursting out with "DON'T --" because he couldn't bear that he has killed Dumbledore, and then the pause is Snape realizing he has to stop himself before he lets anything else slip. I'm reading "CALL ME COWARD!" as the thing he thought of to cover up how he almost let his true emotion slip. I don't think he particularly -- I'm sure he doesn't want to be called a coward after he's just done something that took so much nerve and will continue to, but I think that's the work that the interjection of the narration is doing: telling us that there's something going on between the two parts of that sentence, and that's something has to do with Snape feeling demented and inhuman.

JC: Yeah. Snape doesn't seem like the kind of person who would particularly care that Harry thinks he's a coward. Harry has thought and said much worse things about Snape than that; I don't feel like that's the one that's going to make him freak out, so yeah, that seems really reasonable to me. People have called Snape worse things to his face than "coward."

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Why would that one piss him off? Yeah.

Lorrie: Right. There's been a lot going on this night; calling him "coward" is not going to be the thing that sets him off, but he does have to shut up before he lets his emotions slip. When Snape screamed, "DON'T --" he might have felt bad about leading to James's death, but the next logical person to then talk about would be Lily, and he does feel like he was responsible for Lily dying and he is never going to think that that was a forgivable thing. It's unbearable and he doesn't talk about it, and now is not the time that he feels like having Lily's orphan bring it up. I could really see that having Harry start to blame him for the death of his parents would be enough for him to momentarily panic and then there would be a break in his façade so that he would scream "DON'T --" and then he would have to scramble to cover up for himself. Until now, I always read Snape responding with "a white-hot, whiplike something that hit [Harry] across the face…" as the one moment that he loses control on this extraordinarily controlled awful night; this time, that is not at all how I read it. I want to go back and revise my book.

JC: Wow!

Lorrie: I think it was a controlled move (on Snape's part) making a deliberate choice to escalate just enough to cover up for his slip. It is reminding me of the moment in *Order of the Phoenix* when Harry has read Snape's worst memory and the two of them cannot help but have some empathy for each other (which is incredibly dangerous because their enmity is what protects them from Voldemort's Legilimency), so Snape does something that deliberately is even worse than his usual pettiness: he deliberately pushes Harry's glass Potions assignment so that it shatters on the floor and then says, "Whoops" and gives him a zero. It's so deliberate, so petty, and of course it's infuriating; it infuriates me as a reader. Harry can't believe… That's low, even for Snape, right? I feel that here because there were a lot of points in this night when, if Snape were going to lose control, he would have. This is, I think, calculated, because he just gave himself away a little bit. He absolutely cannot afford that. While that's happening -- this hurts me so much to read -- Snape has to be convincing in his attack; he is. Buckbeak, an animal, sees this and he has to defend Harry; on this night, when Snape has to put up with so much, now he's got these razor-sharp claws attacking him. This is the most thankless job ever. What a long night he's had, and it is just starting! After this, he's going to have to go to Voldemort and convince Voldemort not to kill Draco for failing to kill Dumbledore. We know that somehow, Draco survives this, so Snape thinks of some reason why Voldemort shouldn't kill him. That whole thing is ahead of him. He's still on Hogwarts grounds, and now the hippogriff sees him being mean to Harry and is attacking him. Oh, gosh, so he's successful; the whole world thinks he's evil. Great.

JC: Even the Hogwarts animals.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. He cannot explain to Buckbeak, "It's okay, it's okay. I'm not really going to hurt him." He cannot explain to anyone. One of my descriptions of Snape as a character and how he functions in this series is the word 'thankless.' He does a lot. He does not get thanked. So yeah… Fortunately, eventually, Snape gets away from the very sharp claws of the animal who wants to defend Harry Potter and he Disapparates. Ugh… I have a whole thing about the title here, but I'm going to take a pause and maybe a sip of water and hear what you have to say, because

you've been so patient and generous letting me just go on and on and on about my guy and how much he means to me.

JC: Yeah. I don't need convincing that all the stuff that Snape is doing here is for the reasons that you said. Yeah, I'm right there. It is really interesting to think about what lies ahead of Snape, because again, I was in Harry's mindset here and just in this moment, and I did not pause to think about what happens next for Snape. Everybody is going to know that Snape did this, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Here's the other interesting thing: in the last chapter, you said Snape sees the two brooms and he knows Harry must be there. He may even have known that Dumbledore was taking Harry off that night or something. I don't know if he did or not, but he knows Harry has an Invisibility Cloak, he sees the two brooms, right? Who could it be? It has to be Harry. In addition, there was one Death Eater that saw Harry on the tower, so there's another witness that knows that Harry was there. There are two people who know Harry witnessed that, which I think is important. Later on, when Harry starts telling people this is what happened, they don't want to believe it, but they have to accept it because Harry is the only witness, basically.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So there's that piece of it. Snape knows that Harry was there and that Harry saw, and that Harry's anger here is going to turn everybody else that Snape knows and has worked with in the last decade against him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So he has that to look forward to, in addition to making sure he stays in Voldemort's good graces and making sure that Draco is still protected and all those things. Not that Snape probably put too much stock in being friends with these people, but all of that is gone in one night. I don't think I had spent a heck of a lot of time thinking about what happens to Snape next, so that is really interesting for me to process a little bit and think about.

Lorrie: Year after year, working with these genuinely good people, I think it did mean a lot to Snape, knowing he was going to have to create self-doubt in them. They had worked with him congenially for real, and now he's going to have to

make them think something was wrong with their judgment. That hurts, especially the contrast between their competence and goodness with these clowns. Why? Why would he want to even be near these Death Eater people? They're so bumbling.

JC: Right, in comparison. Oh, my God, we could be laughing about Quidditch or complaining about students, right?

Lorrie: He knows that Professor Sprout -- not a mean bone in her body -- totally knows plants, has worked with him on Potions for all this time. Flitwick! Expert, good person, clever, funny… To make these people think that they were all idiots for being duped by his act this whole time… That's what he's going to have to do to them.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's the kind of discouraging thing he has to force himself to do that makes his face suffused with hatred. 'I hate that I have to do this,' and the more they believe that he's a piece of crap, the more that he's succeeding. That is what he wants in order to pull off this thing that's actually to help them and protect them. Not that he can ever tell them that; he will probably go to his grave with everyone thinking he is the evil person that he used to be a really long time ago and would never be again.

JC: The irony of all this is that at the end, Harry is the only person who sees this, and then it's up to Harry to tell the rest of the world.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that's a gift.

JC: Damn.

Lorrie: That's a gift that the author gives Snape, because in real life, there are double agents who do this stuff and there is not that little saving grace. That's what makes *Harry Potter* a children's series, because there are definitely -- especially this volume and the next volume -- things that are so rough that they would come with trigger warnings no matter what your age is. Why is this a children's series? Because there are grown-ups, and this gets brought home in the *Fantastic Beasts* movie series, which was always presented as an adult series of movies not marketed toward children. *Fantastic Beasts* deals with all of the same issues,

including wars and orphans and evil, but there are no grown-ups. Nobody's coming to save you. Here, you have Dumbledore and Snape giving their own lives to make sure that somebody can be a grown-up for Harry and for Draco. I want to talk about the chapter title.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Flight of the Prince. 'Prince,' obviously, is an important word for this whole volume and we find out that it's a matronymic; it's Snape's mother's name, and obviously that means that we are supposed to look for the hidden story of the mother. That's important. That tells us who the Half-Blood Prince was; that's eventually going to tell us more about Harry. Then I think it is worth understanding -- it's worth delving into -- the author's personal history, because it turns out that this chapter is named after mothers twice. 'Flight' is named after Rowling's mother's surname, which was Volant, and 'volant' is French for 'flying'. I know that there are people (whom I disagree with) who believe that there's some virtue in refusing to consider an author's individuality when you interpret a text. I think it is worth it. I don't want to give that up. I think this is a way to tell us to look for Lily's story without mentioning Lily. We're going to see at the end of *Deathly Hallows* that flying was the signature magic of Harry's mother, and we also know that the word 'flight' has the double meaning of soaring through the air or fleeing (that Snape is doing here). Fleeing is something that can make you look like a coward in the judgment of other people. Fleeing is something that Rowling talked about, having to endure the judgment of other people; because she failed in her marriage, she had to take her newborn and flee from her husband to protect them from his violence. Snape is doing something brave by accepting the judgment of other people. He is accepting that and fleeing because he needs to protect somebody who's under his care, and I do think it is the same strength. The same thing that's empowering him to do this is the same kind of flight as abused women fleeing with their children from an abuser. Rowling, when she fled with her newborn, fled first to a house that was kept secret from her abusive husband as though it were under a Fidelius Charm, and then after she got away, they went through poverty; she struggled through near-fatal depression and, of course, the judgment of others being on welfare, but the important thing is she got them away. That is something about the author's biography that, to me, enriches the story and my experience reading it, and I wouldn't want to block out that knowledge.

JC: That's interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: This chapter is very close to my heart.

JC: Okay, this is going to sound a little bizarre, but my take on the title: the first thing I thought was Flight of the Bumblebee, which is from an orchestra piece. It's from an opera called *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, which was written around the turn of the 20th century, and that music happens in this scene where the Prince, in order to go visit his father, is transformed into a bumblebee so that he can escape and fly off to where his father is. I don't know. That was just the reference that struck me, and I didn't make the connection to 'flight.' He's literally leaving. He's turning into something else because he has to go, and it's this frantic pace and all this stuff, so that was kind of where I was making the connection with the title. It's completely different than what you're thinking about.

Lorrie: I think that kind of connection was absolutely intended also, which is reinforced in *Deathly Hallows* when Snape does fly and there's, in addition to how stirring and selfless and brave his action is, also the ridiculous about it. There's how little respect he gets and there's the comedic aspect of just what an unattractive person he is, and when he flies out of the Hogwarts window in *Deathly Hallows*, they look out of "the Snape-shaped hole."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That is absolutely absurd. Is he majestic? Does he inspire awe? Kind of. He's also completely ridiculous, and that's part of him flying here. 'What's this little speck running away, holding this little puppy by the scuff of the neck and shouting, and bangs and colors and wands and he's yelling about something, and the cabin is on fire and there's a dog barking.' There's just no dignity to being Snape.

JC: Okay, the dignity piece there is making me laugh, because apparently in the original opera when the prince turns into a bumblebee, he is either replaced on stage by something or someone in a bumblebee suit who dances, right?

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: That's ridiculous. What?! A human-sized bumblebee is just going to dance around the stage to this bizarrely fast-paced, chaotic sounding music? Anyway, yeah, I'm stuck on Flight of the Bumblebee, but yeah.

Lorrie: This is the point at which if you don't know what the music of Flight of the Bumblebee sounds like, often when there are small children like toddlers or kindergartners who have some sort of dance recital, this is the music that they use, and they put on their Halloween costume that's large and round and yellow and black striped like a Hufflepuff.

JC: They hop around chaotically and it doesn't look like a dance, but it's cute and parents take videos. Yeah, sure.

Lorrie: And there's no rhythm to it, so no matter what they do, it's no more of us to the music than anything else.

JC: Right. Yeah. it's one of those pieces that the high school marching band can play, and even if they get it wrong, no one really knows.

Lorrie: And then the piece just ends. God…

JC: Flight of the Snape.

Lorrie: Yeah. The fact that his rage-filled screaming -- the duel that was truly not a duel with Harry -- ends with a hippogriff screeching at him, and he has to like hold his arms over his head and make for the boundaries. Oh, you can't even feel dignified while you're doing this. You just can't care. You cannot care what people think of you; you have to save somebody, and if that means they're going to think the lowest opinion of you that's possible to have, you're just going to have to find a way to live with it. This is Snape and everything about Snape's life is like this, so it's going to be the most galling, the most insulting, unbearable loathsome story about himself that he really can't stand, and he cannot tell anyone how untrue it is. So yeah, he's just going to have to find a way. Death Eaters are gone, everyone's gone; Harry can look for Hagrid. There's Hagrid, oh, thank goodness. There's Fang, oh, thank goodness. *Aguamenti* did nothing in the cave, but at least it can put out Hagrid's hut.

JC: Yeah. This part… I love that Hagrid's just staring at his house on fire, and Harry's like, "We have a spell for that," and it's really powerful. 'Oh, you could just put out a fire… Wow. You put out a house fire with two wizards with this spell. Wow!' That's really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. It didn't help save Dumbledore, but all right. They're standing there… It's over for the moment. Again, with the animals, Hagrid has this pure sorrow for those poor, innocent bowtruckles who did not deserve to be burnt to death. It's pure.

JC: I feel for the bowtruckles, too, to be honest.

Lorrie: No, because that purity is what we have to hang on to. All of this -- all of this conflict, all of this meanness and cruelty and waste of life -- it's just sad. Nobody deserves this. Underneath all the complications, it's just sad that Dumbledore died. This makes me so relieved that the author doesn't force us to watch Snape have to disillusion Hagrid. Hagrid spent this whole battle fighting the Death Eaters but just assumed Snape was on their side and doing something good, which, of course, actually turns out to be correct because, like the bowtruckles and Buckbeak and Fang, there's a purity to Hagrid that is true. He actually recognizes the truth, and I really didn't want to see Snape have to kill Hagrid's innocence by doing something so horrible that Hagrid would think, 'No, I was wrong about Snape all this time.' Hagrid and Snape never actually have any bad blood.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Snape and Molly Weasley never have any conflict. There's just something essential about Hagrid understanding things or Molly Weasley being a mother that works with Snape's values. They don't hate him. The other thing about Hagrid being the guardian of boundaries is that this is the second example -- or actually, chronologically, the first; we'll find out the second in the next chapter -- that is so gorgeous to me. Yeah, he let Snape and Draco pass because they are from Hogwarts. They totally have the right. They're not intruders like Death Eaters the same way that we're going to find out Death Eaters put up a barrier to the Astronomy Tower; Snape and Draco were able to cross that barrier because they had Dark Marks. Draco is in this position where he can cross back and forth between these worlds, and he has the incredible gift of Snape who can cross back and forth with him so that when Draco took the Dark Mark it wasn't just a one-way ticket to hell. Someone else could go there, haul him out, and bring him back. That thing that Snape has devoted his entire life and year to doing for Draco, I find that really moving, because absolutely Snape could have used that and didn't get it.

JC: Oh, that moment when Hagrid just mentions Dumbledore, and then Harry gets -- Aaah…

Lorrie: Oh, no… Oh…

JC: Now that --

Lorrie: Too huge.

JC: And he starts to realize, 'Now I have to deal with this and I have to watch other people deal with it, and I have to be the one to tell them,' because as of this moment, Harry is one of the only people on Hogwarts grounds who knows. We haven't found out yet, and it's… Oh, man, that's a lot, but he tries to tell Hagrid and Hagrid's just, "No… No."

Lorrie: It's just too much.

JC: "No, that's not what happened." Yeah.

Lorrie: "Can't be."

JC: "That can't be what happened."

Lorrie: I love this. This is so true to human nature: Hagrid is a little bit angry at Harry for even saying such a thing. Hagrid says the thing that we're supposed to think now is naive, but turns out to be true: "What musta happened was, Dumbledore musta told Snape ter go with them Death Eaters. I suppose he's gotta keep his cover." Yeah, actually. That is, in fact, exactly what's happening. That's the pain of Snape having to do this to his colleagues: somehow tell them that their correct read of everything was wrong. They can't trust their own judgement. Well, it's time to approach the school where we know what's a broken thing at the bottom of the Astronomy Tower, and there's a small crowd that's gathering around there. At least… at least Harry doesn't have to tell people to even go look.

JC: This was also a relief to me. I remember the first time I read this that Harry wasn't the first one there, so there was no chance that anybody was going to make this Harry's fault or connect it. I don't know why my brain went there, but I remember that feeling. 'Okay, there's already people there, they've already seen,' and now Harry's coming as a grieving relative.

Lorrie: Well, that kept happening to him during *Chamber of Secrets*. He would accidentally be at the crime scene and people would say, "Aha, you did it!" Well, he's spared that here.

JC: He's spared that. That was a relief, I remember, but this moment when he walks over, everybody else is keeping their distance, but not Harry. He walks over, and there's this beautiful little… He straightens up Dumbledore's glasses and cleans something off of his face. It's very loving and comforting, and it's like [what] you would do for a grandparent.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh. Dumbledore was treated as this untouchable God-like figure by so many people, but to Harry, he was more than that. To Harry, he was like a mentor, like a grandfather kind of a figure, and he treats them like that. I love that that's portrayed here.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's the relationship. He's not a body. It's Dumbledore. Then the writer does something that I really appreciate: "There was still no preparation for seeing him here, spread-eagled, broken: the greatest wizard Harry had ever, or would ever, meet." 'Would ever'? The narrator is speaking from a position of omniscience; the narrator, with those two words, slips into elegiac mode. The rest of this chapter is in the moment. It's telling us what's happening as it's happening. It's an immediate past tense. Those two words, 'would ever,' is a declarative statement about the future. That comforted me the way that the author switched modes just there. I found that a comforting tribute to who Dumbledore had been to Harry.

JC: Uh-huh.

Lorrie: Harry finds out that the locket they retrieved is a decoy.

JC: I like that he picks it up and he already knows something's wrong.

Lorrie: It's so wrong.

JC: And the thing is that he didn't grab it. He never even looked at it back in the cave, he was so focused on Dumbledore.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it makes me wonder: Dumbledore did pick it up now. No, Dumbledore wasn't completely in his right mind. Did Dumbledore notice? Did Dumbledore know that everything they had gone through was to find a fake? I don't know if Dumbledore knew or not, and that was a thing that I was thinking about here, but the famous note from Regulus… This was a funny thing, too.

Lorrie: Uh-huh. Oh, you're not supposed to know that!

JC: You're not supposed to know that, except that I remember reading this and I was like, 'Oh, Regulus A. Black. Yeah, of course.' I remember, after reading this book, all the people going, "Who is R.A.B?" and I'm like, "Duh! What, like it's hard?"

Lorrie: I didn't know that was a mystery.

JC: I didn't know that was a mystery. I was so surprised.

Lorrie: I figure if you write enough words, you can hide any detail in those words and assume that people have not committed all of those words to memory.

JC: But something that is interesting about this is that on a first read, it wasn't until I reflected on it later, or maybe not even till the next book. Maybe… On a first read, this note and the fake locket… What a waste. It was like the broken mirror in Book Five.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, it was. Yeah.

JC: What a waste, right? But then later on, I remember going, 'Oh, that was a gift…'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Because that means that Harry and Dumbledore weren't the only ones who knew and somebody else found a Horcrux that a) it's doable, b) other people have learned the secret. Maybe there's some more information out there that someone has… It was a bit of hope.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not just Harry now without Dumbledore doing this. There's somebody else out there who knows something; we just have to figure who it is. I also like the meme-iness of it.

Lorrie: The meme-iness of it?

JC: The meme-iness of this note, which is like that meme, "Tell Voldemort it was me. I want him to know it was me." That's kind of what it felt like, and I had to laugh a little bit.

Lorrie: When you were saying, "Did Dumbledore notice that it was wrong?" I love that uncanny feeling when you know a thing is wrong. I can imagine that Dumbledore might have registered, 'Oh, this isn't the locket, but whatever it is is still important' and taking it. Yeah, it does feel at this moment like Dumbledore died for nothing. I'm going to read the incredible note that R.A.B. left.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "*To the Dark Lord, I know I will be dead long before you read this, but I want you to know that it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and intend to destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in the hope that when you meet your match, you will be mortal once more. R.A.B*." This really defines the task that Harry has to set out to do. R.A.B. was correct: Voldemort is going to have to be returned to mortality before Harry can be the match that ends him. Okay. This message from R.A.B… Is it just emphasizing what a horrible tragedy and mistake this all was, or is it going to help them later? Well, this depends on where Harry is in his process of grieving this incredible loss, but yeah, I agree. It's a tremendous gift.

JC: And then the chapter ends on this really sad note where Harry finally cries and Fang is howling, and people are all gathered around.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it was really hard not to turn the page and keep reading. It was so hard, but I made myself stop.

Lorrie: Well, there will be some comfort because the next chapter is called The Phoenix Lament.

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