

Transcript

Episode 6.4

Book 6, Chapter 4: Horace Slughorn

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 Four: Horace Slughorn.

Lorrie: Horace Slughorn. Dumbledore takes Harry with him to persuade a retired teacher to return to Hogwarts. All right, we have here Harry's first ever conversation with Dumbledore outside of Hogwarts. He is being initiated to a new level of importance. He's going to have to get used to it; we see adjustments throughout the chapter. He seems to have been forgiven for shouting at Dumbledore and smashing a lot of objects the last time they were face-to-face, so he's sort of in the inner circle now.

JC: I love his awkwardness there, too, and he's just very, 'Okay, we're not going to talk about all the bad things that happened last time, right?' Yeah. The way things were left at the end of the last book, it's just like, 'Nope.' I think Dumbledore is great about that. That's one of the things, when I read this, that I can think, 'Okay, that is a good teacher and a good adult.' You can say, "Okay, I recognize that all of that weird behavior last time that we weren't together was not personally about me. It was about you working through some shit, and we're just going to move on now."

Lorrie: Yeah. Dumbledore cried in front of Harry that last time, so it was both ways.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "All right, we're here. We've got work to do." Possibly my favorite through-line of this volume gets set up here, where Harry's worried and Dumbledore says, "I do not think you need worry about being attacked tonight." 'Why not, sir?' 'You are with me,' said Dumbledore simply." That is so resonant in so many ways, and it's going to pay off so amazingly by the end of this book. Oh... Throughout this chapter especially, Dumbledore really shows up. Every way that he wasn't present in the previous book, he really is solidly here and his power is truly awe-inspiring. He's magnificent.

JC: One of the things that I love about this chapter, too, is that (like you said) it really establishes that Dumbledore's here and he's going to guide Harry. That's the clear message we get right from the beginning. It shows how powerful he is (that's another thing), but the whimsy of it throughout... All of this chapter is his humor and the way that he moves in the world is such a good example of it, and that everyone around him just acknowledges, "Oh, yeah, Dumbledore... He's just super powerful and wise." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Just accept it." Oh, I love it.

Lorrie: And if Dumbledore comes to work on you, you're just going to have to accept defeat. You don't have to like it, but it's going to happen.

JC: He demonstrates, too, here, that he has such a good understanding of human nature and what people need in the moment to help them make a decision or guessing what people's motivations are. He's really good at that. I guess he's been around for a long time and he's known a lot of people, and he's done a lot of self-reflection. He's done all the work to get to the point where he can do this well, but that's another quality that he shows here that I like.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's interesting how much manipulation he does in this chapter, and the reader, just like the characters, has to figure out he is being manipulative. What's his agenda? He does have an agenda. Do we trust it? And in the end, after I

think through all the layers of manipulation from him, I end up trusting him completely.

JC: Oh, me, too.

Lorrie: But it's not obvious, and if he had even the slightest personal agenda flavoring it, what could you do about it if he did?

JC: Maybe this is just me, but it does not come across as creepy to me at all. He's very clearly manipulating Slughorn into doing what he wants him to do, and Slughorn's clearly very afraid. Maybe it's because I know who Slughorn is, but I don't think this is bad for Slughorn at all; I think this is the best thing for Slughorn to do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I totally trust Dumbledore's judgment here. He does know what's best for the people around him, and if he has to do a little bit of manipulation to get them to agree to do something and think it was their idea, that's how the world works.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think about the number of people in my daily life who do that (who use this kind of emotional manipulation at work and whatever, or I think about politics) to get what they want, and I don't trust their agenda; to have someone whose agenda I do trust do it feels completely different to me.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. So the mighty wizard has a very obvious weakness here: he says to Harry, "My wand arm is a little fragile at the moment," and it's so hard to not just stare at this sickened, blackened stump -- this horrible, scary-looking wound -- and no explanation is forthcoming. That is an amazingly confident move from the author that I'm in awe of. It's such a long setup, and the suspense keeps building and building. What happened that it just keeps being highlit and then not talked about? Is the payoff going to be worth it? It really is, so that is impressive. Then Dumbledore does all these special treatment things; Harry's not quite old enough to Apparate, he's not quite old enough to do all this underage drinking, but Dumbledore is authorizing it. At that age (almost sixteen), that special treatment feels so good, right? Harry's special; he's getting a hall pass.

JC: I remember reading this for the first time, and the description of Apparating really stood out to me. I think it's because you think, 'Oh, teleporting sounds like a great thing we could do. We could just pop across town or whatever.' I like the fact that magic in this universe comes with a price.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC : You can't just pop across to wherever; people do, but there's a little bit of a physical discomfort that goes with it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You're not getting beamed down. Maybe beaming hurts, I don't know, but this idea that it's not comfortable... It's not really a natural state for your body to experience.

Lorrie: Yeah. You don't just wish it...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And some people just never like it and don't do it, so it's good that Harry has the best guide for his first ever experience. Then we have this super important moment where Dumbledore asks how his scar has been feeling; Harry says he had expected to be feeling the scar burning all the time now because Voldemort's getting more and more powerful, but no. Dumbledore is satisfied; he saw this coming and said, "Lord Voldemort has finally realized the dangerous access to his thoughts and feelings you've been enjoying. It appears that he is now employing Occlumency against you." Oh, thank heavens! Yay for Harry that he's not being tormented like this. This is like, 'Wow, Voldemort has found a boundary!'

JC: It's also interesting that Occlumency is this thing that you use against powerful people to keep them from getting into your head, and Voldemort is treating Harry like that. That's really interesting, too. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't like Harry in his head. He knows that Harry getting in his head is dangerous to him. Wow!

Lorrie: There are things in there he doesn't want Harry to see. Yeah, he doesn't want Harry to see how he's feeling...

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: And he himself is terrified to go back into Harry's mind in case he experiences love again, which was intolerably dangerous to him. So yeah, Voldemort finds the need for a boundary, and that is going to hold true for the rest of the series. We don't know -- there's no guarantee and certainly Dumbledore and Harry are right not to take it for granted -- but from now until the end of the series, Voldemort does not ever go back into Harry's mind. So yeah, right now Harry is very nearly sixteen years old, and Voldemort is not in his scar because Voldemort nearly died of the pain of that when he was agonized in the basement of the Ministry. But we're going to see in Book Seven, even though Voldemort stays far away, Harry gets involuntary flashes of Voldemort's thoughts again, so Voldemort's power of Occlumency starts to fade and Voldemort is unaware of this. Eventually by the middle and end of Book Seven, Harry learns to block Voldemort out and at the same time to go into Voldemort's mind at will, so the power balance there shifts gradually and decisively.

JC: There's some other world-building that we get here from Dumbledore, too. He really confirms that Scrimgeour is on their side, despite the fact that Harry was concerned, reading the paper about the fact that they weren't necessarily in agreement on things in the past. Dumbledore's making it very clear: "Okay, no, there's Voldemort's side, and then there's everybody else, and that's where we're at," which I think is really interesting here, too. Also, we just met Scrimgeour a couple of chapters back.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And it's good for us to hear that, too.

Lorrie: Well, I'm not sure that he confirms that Scrimgeour's on their side. I read it as him not thinking of it as either/or, because Harry says, "Is he... Do you think he's good?" and Dumbledore says, "That's an interesting question," and he doesn't answer it. He doesn't answer 'does he think Scrimgeour is good or not?' Instead, he answers with information, which he expects Harry to take and understand without simplifying it to a good or not good thing. He says "he's able," he's more "decisive and forceful..." In that sense, he's not Fudge, and unlike Fudge, he doesn't underestimate Voldemort, so these are useful things to know about him. Is he an

ally? Well, Harry wants to, but doesn't have the nerve to, ask Dumbledore about what was in the paper that wrote about Scrimgeour and Dumbledore having an argument. We don't find out for a long time what that argument is about, but we will eventually later find out that the argument is that Scrimgeour wants the regime (the Ministry) to be able to use Harry in a PR sort of way in the fight against Voldemort, and Dumbledore adamantly refused and does not want him to be manipulated and exploited that way. That's what their disagreement is about.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: So is that on their side? Not exactly, no. Scrimgeour is still a politician with his own agenda. Does he want what's best, or does he want what's best for the Ministry? And if he sacrifices individual people or students at a school on the way to getting what's best for the Ministry, will he lose any sleep over it? No. Dumbledore still has the job of protecting his students, and if that means that they're going to have such a big fight that it shows up in the paper, yeah, okay.

JC: I'm trying to remember: did Scrimgeour last this entire book?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Okay, yeah, so it's the next book (or at the beginning of the next book). At least at this point, it's still an independent Ministry, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: The Death Eaters don't own the Ministry now like they will in the future. Okay. I think that's how I read Harry's question. 'Can we trust that this guy is not going to be like Fudge?' That was how I read that.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'What manner of animal is Scrimgeour?' 'Well, this manner of animal.' Yeah. It's not a bad move to get him instead of Fudge. Is he somebody where they think, 'Great, we've got one of our own?' No. No, it's not like that, but that whole, very nuanced conversation is a great example of the way in which Harry's being promoted right now. This is so much the opposite of the kind of age line that was around the dining table at Grimmauld Place in the previous book, where the whole argument was, "Should we let the kids even hear this kind of discussion?" and unanimously, it was like, "No, no." Being in on these discussions means that you've accepted that they are subject to an adult level of danger and

burden, and that was such a conflict. Here, it's done. It's over. Harry has definitely crossed -- he's been taken over the age line. He is being told all of these very complicated things because, as much of a burden as it is to keep these things in mind, he's going to have to.

JC: And considering everything that he experienced in the previous volume...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, I think it's pretty clear that if they don't bring him in, it would not be good for anyone.

Lorrie: Yeah, So yeah, they're on this mysterious Dumbledore-style mission. Harry has to ask, "Why are we in this village? -- looking around at this place -- and Dumbledore again (as often happens) doesn't really tell him anything useful, is maddeningly vague, and says they're persuading an old colleague to help because Hogwarts is, again, short of staff. Harry's like, "What am I supposed to be doing?" How can you be in good faith and do well for your headmaster if you don't know what you're supposed to be doing?

JC: I love that there's this feeling -- and I think this is not the first time it's happened -- that, Dumbledore's like, "Just be yourself, Harry, and that's all I need."

Lorrie: What?!

JC: He's not going to tell Harry what to do. He's like, "Just your presence."

Lorrie: Which is such bullshit, because there are obviously things that he could do wrong. He could screw this up really, really badly. This is obviously super important. AAAHHHH!!!

JC: But again, that's Dumbledore's style, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Sort of whimsical... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You just trust that everything's going to work out, or he knows it's going to. He knows it will, I guess. I don't know.

Lorrie: Whether he trusts or not, he knows what kind of pressure this is putting on Harry; he's not going to lift it, and you just have to take it. I think the clearest and starkest example is in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when he tells Harry and Hermione, "You have to go back in time. You can't change anything. You can't be seen. You're going to save some people. You'll know what to do when it happens." "What is it that we have to do?" "Oh, you'll know." "We won't! What are you talking about?" Ugh...

JC: Oh, the paradox of time travel... He knows that they will because he knows they've already done it.

Lorrie: Oh, my God... So yeah, no stress, no pressure. Yeah. Dumbledore's there saying, "I think we'll find a use for you," and then the clock chimes midnight, which in Cinderella fashion means that you're turning into a pumpkin or whatever.

JC: Okay, there's a couple things here that's interesting. First of all, Dumbledore knows exactly where Slughorn is and where to find him.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: There's a whole question I have here: if Slughorn's moving around a lot and trying to hide from the Death Eaters, he can't seem to hide from Dumbledore. I find that interesting.

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: So that says something about how powerful Dumbledore is, but also we see another little hint here of Dumbledore (at least surface level) paying attention to social norms. With the Dursleys, he's like, "Let's assume you have invited me in. Let's assume you've offered me a refreshment." Yeah, and in this case, he's like, "Oh, well." Harry's like, "If we can just Apparate anywhere, why don't we just Apparate right in?" He's like, "Oh, that would be rude."

Lorrie: Oh, yeah, you don't want to be rude.

JC: But also, we learn that most wizard houses have anti-Apparition Charms on them, and I thought, 'Okay, that makes sense. That's a security measure.'

Lorrie: Oh, Harry's asking to be filled in by Dumbledore on what exactly are they doing here, and then he also brings up the death of Madam Bones.

JC: Ooh, yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore is, of course, really heavily grieving that. It just shows that there are several levels going on about information, and Dumbledore lets Harry completely in on some, partially in on some, and some not at all. That's this entire chapter; there are levels going on all the time, and some of them Harry has to trust that he's at least not going to overstep. Harry's afraid that he has overstepped when he asks about Dumbledore's injury, and Dumbledore says, "Oh, yeah, not now," but then he smiles at Harry to let him know, "but you didn't overstep. You're not in trouble with me."

JC: I love that moment. Because Harry was shut out so much in the last book, this to me is a signal of 'ask your questions. You're going to have them, and if it's within my power or wisdom to answer them, I will, but ask them.' That's great. I love that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I also love Dumbledore's reply there, implying, "I will tell you later, but it is such a thrilling tale that I really want to do it justice." That quote... I love it. I was like, 'I need to tuck that away' and say, "I really do want to answer your question. However, we need to be sitting down over a drink when I do, so let's put that off for a while." That's great.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'It is important, and you will know.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Then they laugh together at the Ministry sending out those leaflets with security advice, which is another variation on this theme of people being one way on the surface, but then there's a truth hiding underneath where, on the one hand, some of the Ministry's advice is so useless, right? Then at the very end, they're saying things like, "If you see an Inferius, let us know!" There's genuine panic underneath there, so everyone is operating on all these levels.

JC: I do like here that Dumbledore pokes at Harry and says, "You didn't ask me the security question," which is funny because the security question becomes an issue later on as people are --

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But it's funny, and Harry has a moment of, "Oh, shit, I didn't."

Lorrie: "Uh, is that bad?"

JC: And then Dumbledore makes... As if anyone could truly impersonate Dumbledore.

Lorrie: Yeah. Nobody else would be pounding on the Dursleys' head with oak-matured mead. It's clearly Dumbledore. Oh, Dumbledore also models calm for Harry. "What's an Inferius?" "Oh, they are bewitched corpses." Harry is freaking out, and Dumbledore just looks really calm about it and says that Voldemort "killed enough people to make an army of them, of course," which becomes relevant later. We find out, at the end of *Deathly Hallows*, that that's what Grindelwald wanted with the Resurrection Stone, because if you are authoritarian and you want an army to back you up, the most inconvenient thing is that those people have free will. You don't want that. You want the people; you don't want their free will.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: What do you do with that problem?

JC: You just go full Elon Musk and make a robot army.

Lorrie: Well, that becomes the theme of the *Fantastic Beasts* film series. Yeah. Inferi are one of the solutions to this. "Well, you could kill them and reanimate them. It's not ideal, but you make do."

JC: It is interesting that this is this introduction of necromancy into the *Harry Potter* series. It's like, "Wow, okay, there's a whole other level of disturbing magic here. Okay."

Lorrie: Well, they do call themselves the Death Eaters. "WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So Dumbledore's just casually talking about this and Harry is going, 'Okay...' and they're walking down the garden path and here's the front door hanging off its hinges. What did you think of the scene of total devastation?

JC: I think the first time I read this, it was like oooh, very suspenseful. 'What's happened?' It wasn't obvious to me on the first read that this had been staged, and then on the second read (because I knew it was coming), you see that everything's a little too perfect.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, which is kind of fun. Dumbledore's confident that, 'Oh, he's hiding for me.' Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Right. It's like a former theater kid going wild with the props. I'm about to change the mood: it felt like an ICE raid...

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: ...to me, the ostentatious devastation, because ICE raids are theater. The real terrorizing they do, that's real -- the way they take citizens and rip kids away from parents and torment them -- that's real, but it's also theater. They are citizens. What they're doing on purpose is trying to create a certain theatrical effect for really awful reasons.

JC: We're really going to see that, I think, in the next book even more.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, man, yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah, the wrecked piano... Really? Who are you expecting to find in the piano? Did you really need the piano keys strewn all over the floor? "Eh, but it looked good." The chandelier's all over the place.

JC: "The Phantom of the Opera was in here," yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dumbledore looks around and he figures out which thing is Slughorn. Him forcing Slughorn to show himself is one of those iconic moments. I was impressed with Dumbledore for that.

JC: Oh, yeah. I remember on a first read, especially, he just goes over to this arm chair and he goes, "Poke!"

Lorrie: AAAAHHHH!!!!

JC: Yeah, yeah. UUUUHHHH... It's so interesting because Slughorn is so calm about it.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: He knew it was Dumbledore, I think. Didn't he? No. 'Is Dumbledore coming?' Or he just thought, 'Yeah, someone's coming'? Or did he know it was Dumbledore specifically?

Lorrie: I don't think he knew.

JC: Okay. That's unclear to me, but okay, yeah. But the fact that he makes it look like the house has been completely ransacked... Why not disguise himself as an armchair and let whoever comes in -- or are they going to come in and go "Well, they've already hit this house. Guess we should move on to the next one." Yeah. It's interesting that he staged all of that, yeah, and then when he realizes it's Dumbledore, he gives up very quickly.

Lorrie: Oh, he probably had no choice about that.

JC: Yeah. Well, yeah. He's like, 'Oh, shit. Caught. Okay.'

Lorrie: Yeah. So we meet Slughorn, and there's the fat shaming. The author did not fat shame Dudley, did some fat shaming of Vernon, and now with Slughorn, it's back in full force. His body size is portrayed as part of his character. He's portrayed as a shameless hedonist; the fat is meant to be part of it, and it's gratuitous. He's described: "a pudgy hand to his vast forehead." That's not necessary, but it is included, so here we are. Oh, wow... Yeah.

JC: Yeah. I had forgotten that, partly because again, it's been so long since I've read the book and I've seen the film since, and the actor who portrays him is this middle-aged man size and not like...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So his size isn't a feature in the movie. It's not pointed out, so to point it out here was a bit... Not like it was with Dudley in the early movies, where Dudley is portrayed as very pig-like in the film.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He wasn't portrayed that way in the film, this actor, so that really caught me off guard.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was like, 'Wait, what?' That is so clearly unnecessary.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I like the lilac silk pajamas. There's a lot about the characterization of this extreme man that's fun.

JC: And wherever he travels, he carries his photos of his favorite people.

Lorrie: I know, and the piano... The piano is his!

JC: And the piano, right. It's like, 'Wow, wow.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He has one of Hermione's bags that he shoves everything into and travels with, I guess.

Lorrie: Because the photos are his trophies.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Right? 'Oh, look how important I am.'

JC: But it's the idea of having a go-bag, where if I have to run from the Death Eaters, what would be in my go-bag? What is in his?

Lorrie: Toothbrush, photos...

JC: A grand piano. What?!

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Does he just sit in these houses and play the grand piano? Does he play the piano?

Lorrie: Yeah, I think so.

JC: Wow, amazing.

Lorrie: Well, like Lockhart, his go-bag had all those magnificent self-portraits...

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: And his biggest quills.

JC: Yeah. He's like the anti-Lockhart, in a sense. He's like Lockhart in a lot of ways, but it's not about him; it's about the people he can collect around him and people he could claim to have connections to. Yeah, I find it very Lockhart-like in that way.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's a character, a well-done character, and the great thing about the characterization in this chapter is how unabashed he is about the subterfuge. That's so funny. The moment Dumbledore catches him out, he's not even the slightest bit embarrassed. He says, "Well, what gave it away?" and Dumbledore says, "You forgot the Dark Mark." "Oh, yeah..."

JC: He's like, "Oh, yeah..." Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah. Couldn't have been the Death Eaters. They would have left their trademark. Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Usually, if I get caught out having tried to fool somebody, I'm a little more embarrassed. Nope, no shame.

JC: He's not embarrassed at all, yeah. It's also interesting, too, that when they put the room back together very quickly... I think Dumbledore does it for him. I can't remember how now.

Lorrie: The two of them stand back-to-back and they each do half.

JC: They stand back-to-back, they do it, and it's interesting. First of all, okay, he's also a very powerful wizard, but I love the detail of him having to go and get the dragon blood off the wall; even though it's a little dusty, it's too valuable to leave it. Yeah. "Oh, no, I need to take that. I need to try to save it."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I can't even vanish it. It's got to go back in the bottle."

Lorrie: So yeah, he doesn't hide in the least that he is sorry Dumbledore is there and would love Dumbledore to leave right this second. This is obviously a continuation of a conversation that they had started, because Slughorn sees Harry as, "So, that's how you thought you'd persuade me, is it? Well, the answer's no, Albus." But Dumbledore didn't ask a question. Okay, that question and answer had been going on for a while; this is Dumbledore not taking no for an answer.

JC: I like that Harry, too, understands, 'Oh, that's why I'm here. I'm being used as bait, and not for the first time.'

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Dumbledore seems to be positioning me right in Slughorn's line of sight. Okay, all right.'

JC: 'I just have to stand here and smile, apparently, and look pretty. Okay.'

Lorrie: Dumbledore continues to be completely dominant, amused by Slughorn's hints that they should leave. So yeah, there's that question: is Harry being used? We get an answer later this chapter, but the way the question is opened up and left hanging here is really well done. If he is being used, does he mind or is he going along? Well, he's going along where he's keeping an open mind about what's happening; he's observing still. Then Slughorn and Dumbledore enter into this amazing dance where Slughorn is really prickly and saying, "Oh, I'm so old and tired, and I deserve to be left alone." Also at the same time, he's needling Dumbledore about his hand. He's being super unpleasant. "Oh, what's wrong with your hand? You're getting old, you should retire, too," and Dumbledore plays along with all of this; meanwhile, on this other level, he very deliberately and wordlessly displays a ring. That does not in any way enter on the surface dance that the two of them are doing, but Dumbledore displays it, Slughorn notices it, he frowns, and they never mention it.

JC: Okay. First of all, that was the other moment I thought, 'Oh, wow, all three Deathly Hallows are right here in this one little tiny, confined space. Isn't that amazing!'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And Dumbledore is the only person in the room who knows that -- which is amazing -- but does Slughorn know what the ring is, or does he just see it as a fancy ring?

Lorrie: It reminds him of something that he knew decades ago, but the thing he's afraid of (that that ring is reminding him of)... He will be safe if nobody else in the entire world that's living right now remembers that he knows anything about it.

JC: Ah... Oh, okay. Right.

Lorrie: But if anyone does, then he is so thoroughly screwed. He doesn't have evidence that Dumbledore knows for sure about the connection there, and he's not stupid enough to tell Dumbledore; this is Dumbledore's way of letting him know, 'Yes, I do, and your fantasy that the world has sort of forgotten and that you're safe... No, I think you should be worried.'

JC: Okay, so Dumbledore knows that Slughorn knows this is a Horcrux...

Lorrie: Or that this has to do with all of that.

JC: Yeah, that has to do with all that. Slughorn looks at the ring and there's a message there of, 'Oh, okay.'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And a big part of this book is Dumbledore wants Harry to get Slughorn to confess that he's the one who told Tom Riddle about Horcruxes. Dumbledore... that's his big suspicion, but he just doesn't have proof. But he has tried to destroy this already, right? That's what happened with his hand, correct? He suspected it was a Horcrux, he did destroy it...

Lorrie: Yes. The Horcrux is destroyed because it is the ring that Slughorn remembers from decades ago, but now it has a giant crack running down it, which wasn't there before. That was Dumbledore having destroyed the Horcrux, but there is no reason Dumbledore would have this particular ring in any form unless the terrible, worst case scenario that Slughorn thinks, 'Oh, come on, it's surely not that...' Unless that really had happened and Dumbledore knows about it, and it's very real and very serious. Why would Dumbledore even have this ring unless... 'That thing you're afraid of, Horace? No, it's real, and this is my way of telling you.' The kind thing... This is the thing where I end up trusting Dumbledore: he

makes the announcement to Slughorn this way without ever forcing Slughorn to articulate the thing that he's so scared of. Slughorn does not want to say it out loud. What if Slughorn is wrong and everybody did forget about it? That would be great! Then it would be terrible for Slughorn to bring it up and bring it to anyone's attention. Dumbledore doesn't make Slughorn dredge it all up. It's kind -- he's just showing -- and all of this is happening on one level while the two of them are complaining and bantering back and forth on this completely other level. Harry's noticing the ring: "It was large, rather clumsily made of what looked like gold, and was set with a heavy black stone that had cracked down the middle." Yeah, when Slughorn sees it, "a tiny frown momentarily creased his wide forehead." Oh, it's happening. Meanwhile, back to the cover story (the banter that Dumbledore and Slughorn are engaging in), Dumbledore then poses the question, knowing that he has Slughorn trapped so he can't lie: "So, all these precautions against intruders, Horace... are they for the Death Eaters' benefit, or mine?" He's brought this to the surface, because really, if it was for Dumbledore, this is all a bit extreme, right? Plus, as has just been demonstrated, Dumbledore is not deterred, so he's giving Slughorn an opening to come clean. It does not add up that Slughorn would have done this all for the lost cause of putting off Dumbledore. At first, Slughorn tries to get out of it and he doesn't answer, and he says, "What would the Death Eaters want with a poor broken-down old buffer like me?" He's still pretending that he has no reason to be trying to run away from Death Eaters, at which point Dumbledore tells an outright lie, knowing that Slughorn can't refute it because neither of them is going to talk about what the Death Eaters actually want out of Slughorn. "I imagine that they would want you to turn your considerable talents to coercion, torture, and murder." This is a cover story that Slughorn has not thought to use. 'Oh, that's a good way to say the three Unforgivables: coercion, torture, and murder. Okay.'

JC: Okay, yeah. I hadn't thought of that. Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, okay, so that's what Slughorn should be claiming to try to avoid: that he doesn't want to be recruited for these things. I love this: "Slughorn eyed Dumbledore balefully for a moment, then muttered, 'I haven't given them the chance.'" That's Slughorn giving up; Dumbledore won. What can Slughorn do in response to Dumbledore's suggestion that maybe the Death Eaters want to recruit him? Can he deny it? Can he say, "Oh, I didn't think..."? No, Dumbledore's right. He's not going to pretend that he's not running away from the Death Eaters, and he

just gives up and says, "I haven't given them the chance." That's when he says, "Uh, yeah, I've been staying everywhere for one week or less." This is a really rough life in refuge.

JC: Absolutely, especially because this is a guy who is accustomed to a particular lifestyle.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: At least he's doing this Airbnb tour of nice houses, but yeah.

Lorrie: He's running scared.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's not how he wants to live his life, for sure.

Lorrie: No, and that was merciful of Dumbledore, right? He's won the argument that forced Slughorn to admit yes, he's on the run from Death Eaters without ever forcing Slughorn to say what it is that's driving his fear. But they continue their conversation on the same wavelengths as though they just agreed on it, and they are both talking on the surface level and they're both also deliberately not talking on the deeper level. Dumbledore suggests that perhaps staying in one place at Hogwarts would be a little less tiring. Undeniably true. This is terrible. You see Dumbledore coming, you know you've already lost the argument; you don't even know what the argument is. He brings up, "Well, you could stay at Hogwarts, and you wouldn't have to move around," and Slughorn continues, takes him up on that level, and then he brings up Umbridge and says, "Well, if that's how you treat teachers these days --" And oh, I love that he calls Hogwarts "that pestilential school". That's quite a lot of work to just have a hideaway. I think this author is taking this opportunity to weigh in on the debate and say, "No, it wasn't centaur rape" where Dumbledore says, "I think you, Horace, would have known better than to stride into the forest and call a horde of angry centaurs 'filthy half-breeds'." She committed a diplomatic offense. Then Horace goes, "Oh, is that what she did... Idiotic woman. Never liked her." They're not acting in a way that you would act if sexual assault is what happened. Again, this is so refreshing for Harry. They're not

acting like he has to respect teachers; they're talking about her in this very recognizable way, so he laughs out loud and then they both turn and look at him.

JC: "Oh, you're still here."

Lorrie: How refreshing for Harry that they're saying "Idiotic woman." Yes, she is.

JC: Yeah. Harry's going to have that scar on his hand for the rest of his life.

Lorrie: Yep. When they turn to look at Harry, then Dumbledore abruptly says, "Okay, got to go to the bathroom!" I love that Slughorn is totally not hiding it; he says, "Are you leaving?" No. Then Slughorn grumbles to Harry, "Don't think I don't know why he's brought you," but Harry doesn't know. At this point, I, the reader, don't know -- and I don't think Slughorn knows either -- but there's a surface reason why we're all being led to think that Dumbledore's brought him, which is that Slughorn... If you put an important student in front of him, he will be unable to help himself for wanting to...

JC: Add him to his collection.

Lorrie: Yeah. We see Slughorn unable to resist the temptation, and he starts to reminisce about Harry's mom. Oh, this is more information than we have gotten about her before, where he says, "Oh, she's one of the brightest I ever taught. Vivacious, charming, cheeky." This is finally a little bit of the mother's story entering the narrative. Then Slughorn proceeds to make Harry really mad. He puts his foot in it with Harry: over and over again, he mentions Sirius, and Harry... Oh. Ouch, the pain. He says he was head of Slytherin, and he says, "Oh, you shouldn't think that I was prejudiced just because I was surprised about your mom's talent." He keeps bragging about all the people he's influencing and impressing Harry less and less and less...

JC: Right, which is the opposite of the way to impress Harry. He's doing everything wrong, but what's interesting is that Harry is just sitting there disapproving, and Slughorn wants to impress Harry already. He fell right into Dumbledore's trap.

Lorrie: And when he's been bragging in a particularly greasy way about how he gets free tickets to stuff and Harry says, "How do you get the free tickets if you're on the run?" Slughorn is surprised and remembers, "Oh, yeah. Actually, life sucks

right now." He's in self-imposed exile, and it's been a really long year for him. He's been in hiding ever since Voldemort came back. Hmm...

JC: Interesting that he, despite the Ministry's misinformation campaign, is a person who knew that was the truth.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He was like, 'Oh, it must be real, if the Ministry's fighting this hard against it. Time for me to dip out.' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'It's time to go underground.' Then he makes Harry angriest of all by saying, as though everybody would agree with him, "Taking up a post at Hogwarts just now would be tantamount to declaring my public allegiance to the Order of the Phoenix!" Harry is so disgusted. Harry punishes Slughorn by deliberately mentioning Voldemort's name and then sitting back to watch him wince, and then very distinctly, Harry says, "I reckon the staff are safer than most people while Dumbledore is headmaster; he's supposed to be the only one Voldemort ever feared, isn't he?" That contempt, thinking about real people, brave people and what they've sacrificed... All right. There, he's done it. Harry has done what Dumbledore wanted him to do. Slughorn has to admit that his fantasy of flying under the radar is a fantasy, and no, it's not feasible. He says, "I might well be safer a little closer to Albus." Yeah, actually, things really are that bad. Then the narrative says that Dumbledore re-entered the room. Not that Dumbledore's done in the bathroom, but that's the moment Dumbledore comes back into the room and starts saying, "Well, I guess we'll be leaving. I think I know a lost cause when I see one. Come, Harry," and they start packing up.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, it's hilarious.

Lorrie: Oh, and the beautiful, beautiful line: "I do love knitting patterns." You're a knitter. Do you love knitting patterns?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I do, too.

JC: I love looking at the possibilities.

Lorrie: I love how they're a whole secret code, and there's the added detail that it's, at least in current western society, considered more a feminine domain. It's an encrypted language that is seen as beneath notice. Of course, Dumbledore would be somebody who would know to give respect to a domestic art like knitting. Dumbledore employs all of his reverse psychology and says, "Our greatly increased security notwithstanding, you will always be welcome to visit..."

JC: I love that. That was even in the letter that went out to the Hogwarts parents, right? "Our greatly increased security..."

Lorrie: There's Slughorn having to face the fact that he is being played exactly as he knew he would the moment he saw Dumbledore coming, and then Dumbledore is acting like Slughorn's security is walking away out the door, right now walking out the door! The ungracious way that Slughorn admits defeat is by yelling, "I'll want a pay rise, Dumbledore!" which Dumbledore laughs at out loud. On their way out, Dumbledore continues to talk on a different level and says, "Well done, Harry." Poor Harry... What just happened?

JC: "All I did was react." I don't know.

Lorrie: Harry says, "I didn't do anything." "Oh, yes, you did. You showed Horace exactly how much he stands to gain by returning to Hogwarts." It is not obvious to Harry what Slughorn stands to gain. Okay, Dumbledore... Dumbledore asks him the question that's just as fraught as earlier when Harry asks if Scrimgeour's good: he says, "Did you like him?" And it's just as unanswerable, right? Dumbledore follows that up with the very informative, very complicated description of the kind of person that Slughorn is and what he likes to do, none of which make the case for either liking or disliking him, although you certainly don't want to become close to him after all that. But is he evil? No. Then Dumbledore explains, "I tell you all this not to turn you against him... but to put you on your guard. He will undoubtedly try to collect you, Harry." So there, that is the evidence that Slughorn was wrong about why Dumbledore brought Harry. Dumbledore did not bring Harry there to be collected or to use him as bait; Dumbledore was not trying to exploit Harry for that. This is reinforced when we find out later that that was what Dumbledore and Scrimgeour argued about, too. "No, you don't get to use Harry Potter." "But Harry, when we expose you to Slughorn, this thing of Slughorn's will be activated, just know that. I don't want you to get hurt by it, but it will happen." That's when

Dumbledore uses that phrase "The Chosen One," which reminds Harry, who had been distracted for a while, 'Oh, yeah, I'm supposed to die. Great!'

JC: So the reason that Dumbledore wants Slughorn to come to Hogwarts is complicated, but there's the base reason of Slughorn knows about the Horcruxes. That's Dumbledore's suspicion (that this is where Voldemort got the idea), so there's this dance between the two of them. "I know that's what you are afraid of: that Voldemort knows this idea came from you and Voldemort is going after all the little weak links out in the world. You can come and be safe here, but there's a price. You may have to admit the thing that you did that you're very worried about." All of that is happening on a level that Harry is not aware of, and that's really interesting. And because we're in Harry's POV, it's not obvious to us either.

Lorrie: It's just part of the incredibly complicated, competent setup of the power dynamics in this part of the book. What Dumbledore is bringing Harry along to do is to say to Slughorn, "You didn't have the evidence to know whether you should definitely be scared or whether there's a hope that you're still flying under the radar, and I'm bringing you Harry Potter to let you know (without making you say anything) that no, actually, it's pretty bad. When you conclude that you need to upgrade your security, I am right here with the offer that you've already turned down once. It's maybe not your favorite, but you're going to need it. Yes, of course he's going to try to track down and kill anybody who knows anything about Horcruxes." The thing that Dumbledore turns out to want from Slughorn is not confirmation that he's the one who told Voldemort about Horcruxes, because Dumbledore already knows that. What it turns out that Slughorn is hiding is the extent to which he let his own flaw of wanting influence give too much information and power. He should have stopped Tom Riddle. He should have been aware of the danger and spoken up, but he didn't. He pretended that, 'Oh, maybe it's just fine,' and oh, it really wasn't fine. He's ashamed, but somewhere in there, the information that Dumbledore wants (that only Slughorn can give, if he can get over his shame) is the limit.

JC: Like the number seven.

Lorrie: Yeah, because that's what Voldemort wants in life. He wants a limit. He wants a limit to his power, he wants a limit to the world's indifference to him. He wants to know: at what point is he safe? At what point can he stop? That's why he

wants Harry: because Harry is a limit. Harry's a limit on his power. "Oh, there's a baby who can stop me? That's a limit. Oh, my God... The thing that I've never had, the thing that I want." Dumbledore suspects that Voldemort has been chasing the knowledge of a limit and holding it close, and he needs to know what that limit is because he needs to go retrace it all; that's already a hard enough task without knowing what exactly it is that he's trying to track down, but he can't get Slughorn to cough up that information if Slughorn is so ashamed that he would almost rather die than divulge it. He wants that, Slughorn doesn't want to give it. Is it in Slughorn's interest to hold on to it? No, because shame is just not good for a person. The thing that Dumbledore wants to force Slughorn to do against Slughorn's will... Dumbledore actually has Slughorn's best interests at heart. That's the greatness of this character: he will go against your will and he'll be right. After he's done with you and you do what he made you do against your will, will you be thankful? Yeah, kind of. 'Ugh, goddamn it...' Dumbledore, being great the way he is, rigs it so that at every point, he shows you just enough so that you end up volunteering, agreeing, giving your consent. At no point did you want any of this, right? The distance with which Dumbledore outstrips everybody else... Ah, it's incredibly satisfying and thrilling, I find... and maddening, and makes you understand why Dumbledore would be scared of his own power, because who's going to tell him if he is using it for good or evil? How can anyone be enough at his level to consider this question? He is the only person who can control himself, and he's flawed, as we all are; he's just one person and therefore could be wrong, but there's nobody to check him. He could opt out, but then he sees all these terrible things happening that he could help if he were brave enough to just do it. To exist as Dumbledore is to go ahead and be brave and just do the best he can, and know that sometimes he will fuck up so badly that Sirius Black will be killed and this fifteen-year-old is going to have to be shrieking and throwing things in his office, and it'll be all his fault. I find Dumbledore a great character. I do not resent him. I don't think he was manipulative in a bad way, but he could have been. I think he generally did right to accept the responsibility that comes with that, and he didn't have a choice. He didn't give up anything to become this smart or anything; that's just how he is. Then they Apparate to the Burrow.

JC: Where they immediately go into a shed full of spiders. Okay, what was the point of the spider-ridden shed? I guess they want to stay out of view, but couldn't they have Apparated further out? 'Why are we talking in here?'

Lorrie: Even though Harry is in the middle of thinking how he's the Chosen One and he's going to have to die or whatever, he still feels better because they're at the Burrow.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then Harry thinks that heartbreaking thing about the loss of Sirius, "... the fact that he had someone outside Hogwarts who cared about him, almost like a parent, had been one of the best things about discovering his godfather..." and Harry is feeling safe and intimate enough with this very protective figure, Dumbledore, to tell him, "I may not have very much time left, but I'm determined to use it to fight." Then we get one of those author clues where Harry says, "Now everyone knows that I'm the one --" and Dumbledore interrupts him. Harry was about to say, "I'm the one who's supposed to kill Voldemort"; Dumbledore can't agree to that because no, Harry is not going to be killing anybody, but he can't give that away yet, so he just interrupts and says, "No, they do not." That's the way the author postpones that suspense for the reader also. Dumbledore makes this huge policy decision: he tells Harry to tell Ron and Hermione, which is so different from the previous year when no kids were supposed to be told anything. He has decided he's condemning Ron and Hermione to have these big targets put on them, the same as Harry, because it's too late, anyway; they're committed. Doing that will help Harry's chance of survival. Then he tells Harry, "We're having private lessons."

JC: Which is very exciting.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was like, 'YAY!'

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: But also, 'Oh, no! I know how the hero's journey works.'

Lorrie: Harry says, "I'm not going to have to do Occlumency anymore, am I? With Snape?" and wonders if he's allowed to be honest about those, and yes, he is.

JC: He also gets, "*Professor Snape*." "That's *Professor Snape* to you." Yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore calls them a "fiasco," which they were. This is a plot point that strikes me as brilliant and satisfying every time -- I love it so much -- where Harry perks up and says, "Well, I'm not going to ever have to take any classes from Snape again because he won't take you into N.E.W.T. Potions unless you got an Outstanding," and Dumbledore says, "Don't count your owls before they are delivered." WHAT COULD THAT MEAN?! The cleverness of that plot setup...

JC: Yeah, yeah. It is really well done. It is.

Lorrie: ...blows me away. Then he says that mood-setting thing for this whole volume: "From this point on, keep your Invisibility Cloak with you at all times."

JC: That's just a little bit ominous.

Lorrie: The setup for this endgame is so solid and good.

JC: Also, at the end here, he tells Harry that the Weasleys' house has had a lot of extra layers of magical protection added to it, basically for his sake, and scolds him, "Don't do anything to put them in any more danger."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't remember where that goes, so I had this, 'Oh, dear, the Weasleys, by taking him in for the summer, are absolutely putting themselves at risk.' But also, when Dumbledore says, "Now, I think you should tell Ron and Hermione," [there's] that idea of 'there are other people who are perfectly willing to put themselves on the line to support you and to help keep you safe. Don't think that you're being a hero by telling them no and doing it by yourself. Take that help when it's offered.' I feel like that's a really important message.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'This isn't just about you.' The next chapter is called An Excess of Phlegm.

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