

## Transcript

### Episode 6.5

#### Book 6, Chapter 5: An Excess of Phlegm

**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 Five: An Excess of Phlegm.

**Lorrie:** An Excess of Phlegm. Harry rejoins his loved ones at the Burrow, where the Weasleys are adjusting to Bill's engagement to Fleur. Harry tells Ron and Hermione about the prophecy, and they receive their O.W.L. results. Ah, Harry is getting the warm welcome somewhere that he deserves after the incredibly long night he's had.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh. I love that he's back at the Burrow. With the exception of potentially the next book, he goes to the Burrow and good things happen.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He gets to be with friends and people treat him like family, and they feed him and they're happy to see him. It's nice.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and he gets to be one of a bunch of people. I realized on this read that possibly every chapter that came before this took place on the same night simultaneously.

**JC:** Ooh!

**Lorrie:** We know that the Minister's visits happened at the same time as Narcissa and Bellatrix going to Spinner's End, and there's no reason to think that that wasn't the same time as Dumbledore heading over to Privet Drive.

**JC:** Right, yeah. Oh, that's interesting. We're still on the same night.

**Lorrie:** Aye, aye, aye. Yeah.

**JC:** That's cool.

**Lorrie:** So that night is finally wrapping up. Oof!

**JC:** Wow! In the fifth chapter...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Okay, that's cool, though. I like the idea that all those things happened at the same time. That's interesting.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** But we walk in, and Tonks is there...

**Lorrie:** Who we barely recognize, yes.

**JC:** Very downtrodden, and Molly's trying to comfort her over tea. If I recall correctly, this is that Tonks is sad because Remus won't go out with her?

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** Okay, and that's all this is about?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** That's the mystery, yes. This is being set up as one of those mysteries where, at the beginning of one of these novels, you don't know if it's going to turn out to be something huge or if it's going to be something everyday. Yeah. There's no telling at this point, but yeah, this sad description: "A young witch with a pale, heart-shaped face and mousy brown hair..." Wait, is that Tonks? Yeah.

**JC:** Do we ever get any more of the backstory of this? How, in the last few weeks, did Tonks decide... Or has this been brewing for a long time? At some point, Tonks completely fell for Remus, and then Remus is like, "No, I'm a werewolf" or whatever. All the reasons are bad -- I can't remember exactly -- but has this been going... I can't remember. Has this been going on for a long time, or is this relatively new?

**Lorrie:** I think we are meant to understand that the change in hair color signals when it happened.

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** At the end of the previous book when she was at the Ministry doing the battle, she was still pink-haired Tonks, so it must have happened extremely recently.

**JC:** Okay. She fell for Remus, and Remus is saying no.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Aww... Also, though, Tonks is a lot younger than Remus, too.

**Lorrie:** Yes, yes.

**JC:** That's interesting.

**Lorrie:** She's, I guess, in her early, early twenties.

**JC:** Yeah. I'm thinking he's at least ten years older than her, if not more.

**Lorrie:** Right, yeah. No, yeah, more like fifteen, maybe.

**JC:** Okay, yeah, and for all the reasons, it makes sense that Remus is like, 'Okay, this is probably not the best time to explore this.'

**Hosts:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Meanwhile, Tonks has an excellent point, which is that she is not a normal, average person. Saying "No, you deserve a normal, average relationship" is not actually a very good argument, but at this point, we don't know. All we know is that Tonks is having trouble with her metamorphosing, so that's setting the stage for understanding how much effect your mood has on your powers. Meanwhile,

she sees them coming, and she just leaves as fast as possible. Harry gets, in short order, a cat on his lap and hot onion soup in front of his face.

**JC:** Yes. I love that it's instant comfort.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Also, it's interesting that when Dumbledore... Going back to Tonks for a minute, Tonks doesn't make eye contact with Dumbledore, so it's clear that everybody knows this is going on.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God. Ouch!

**JC:** That's got to be mortifying, on top of this, and triple for poor Tonks... Molly was the one that she thought she'd come and talk to who would understand, and then, 'Oh, no, here comes Dumbledore. I've got to get out of here. And Harry... okay.' Right, so that's funny. Also then, when Dumbledore leaves, I love that he says goodbye to Molly in this very old-fashioned way -- "Molly, your servant," which makes me think of *Hamilton* -- but it's such an interesting little reminder that Dumbledore is that old also.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He has been around for a long time, and there are some ways of speaking that he has retained that none of these kids will do. There's one more thing that I think is interesting here: Harry notices that when Dumbledore leaves, he Apparates away at the exact same spot that Tonks did. I guess I was thinking about the anti-Apparition wards around the house. Is that the extent of them, and as soon as you're across them, now you can leave?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, I guess so.

**JC:** I thought that was interesting. Okay, why the same spot?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, I guess you can feel it.

**JC:** Yeah. Then you cross it, and then you're like, 'Okay, now I'm good to go,' and there's no reason to linger in these dark times, right?

**Lorrie:** No. Yeah, which makes me think (near the end of this book) when Snape is dragging Draco along with him toward the perimeter of the Hogwarts grounds to

where you can Apparate out of; he must be really focused on the spot where you can finally get away. There's Harry... I love onion soup. I do love onion soup and just how mouth-watering and comforting and aromatic that must be at such a terrible time.

**JC:** And bread. I'm imagining this homemade bread and it spills over... All of the cooking and the kitchen spells...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I think about the contrast to Aunt Petunia.

**Lorrie:** Spotless kitchen.

**JC:** The spotless kitchen... Who will then just slave away at making these fancy things that we never get the impression that they're very good. She's worked at them, but they're not great; Molly has mastered all of this kitchen magic, and everything she makes is just so good and so satisfying.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and it's not about how it looks.

**JC:** Right. I like that she remarks that he's grown, and I'm like, 'Didn't she just see him a few weeks ago?' I guess she didn't really get a good look, probably, because he certainly hasn't grown in a few weeks -- well, maybe not -- but there's that reminder again that our kids are growing up and they're almost adults. I thought that was really sweet, but then Crookshanks jumps on Harry's lap and Harry's like, "Oh, Hermione's here." "Oh, yeah, she arrived the day before yesterday." I had this moment: Hermione doesn't see her family much anymore. She went home for just a few weeks, and now she's going to spend the rest of the summer... Ugh, that hurts.

**Lorrie:** If she stayed there any longer, they might say, "What are all those scars?"

**JC:** Yeah. Becoming part of the magical community has put a barrier between her and her parents. They will never understand her life.

**Lorrie:** And she can't tell them. If you were the parents who found out that your daughter has just been one of the most injured people in a really huge battle, where can you go? You can't outrun these wizards. You can't outrun your daughter's gifts. What are you going to do? She just has to make sure that they don't find out.

**JC:** Yeah, but it just made me sad that this is something... And it makes me think this happens to people, obviously, in the real world all the time where, in order to fulfill your potential, you have to leave your family and go somewhere else and you can't ever really go back. You could go back and visit, but you're always going to be very different from them to the extent that you can't really even explain your life.

**Lorrie:** Actually, telling them might endanger them.

**JC:** Yeah. It's sad.

**Lorrie:** Well, here's the thing that is current and quite angering for the people whose undergrad students are international students and this is their first year in the U.S.: you don't know (when you're sending your child abroad to the U.S. to go to college) when you're going to see them again because the laws might change so erratically that if they leave the U.S., they might not be allowed to return. Saying goodbye to your seventeen-year-old or eighteen-year-old to an environment that is hostile possibly, and the kinds of horrendous things that Hermione has faced... They actually are happening a bit here and there to some unfortunate young people who the claw of fate decides that they're the ones that ICE is going to make an example of today. That is quite real. Until now, what I was accustomed to with international students coming to the U.S. is that when they could afford to (if they could), they would go back during vacations to their home countries to see their families and fill them in on how things are going and bring presents back and forth. That is something that you have to commit to now that you're not going to be able to do. This is quite real, but really, it's the responsibility that Hermione is taking for not exposing her parents to danger by telling them, "Oh, by the way, there were curses I just survived that nobody's even heard of."

**JC:** Yes. Yes to all of that. As the parent of a seventeen-year-old high school senior, I think about how much Hermione's parents have missed, and she's their only child. The idea of sending your eleven-year-old off to boarding school, I can't even wrap my brain around anyway.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, I can't, either.

**JC:** I know people who have to make the choice to send a child who is deaf or blind, obviously, to boarding school from kindergarten on because that's the best place for them.

**Lorrie:** That's the only place that they're going to get to be themselves.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Sometimes, you cannot be the person who provides that.

**JC:** And how gut-punching that would be (well, maybe not for every parent) for me to think, 'I can't provide what this child needs, my child.'

**Lorrie:** I know.

**JC:** Oh, God.

**Lorrie:** I know. This is really the point at which I start thinking it's safer not to have children. Really. Once you commit to it, you don't know what you're going to have to do, but that person wouldn't exist if you hadn't made that choice for them, so you have made your Unbreakable Vow.

**JC:** Right, yeah.

**Lorrie:** You're going to have to fulfill it. 'Or what?' Or you're not ever going to be okay with yourself, really.

**JC:** That is an interesting perspective on choosing to have children: you're making an Unbreakable Vow. That brings up all kinds of interesting questions, like 'what if you didn't get to choose?'

**Hosts:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But the other thing, too, is these sixteen-year-olds who take a Dark Mark: was that really their choice? Are they young or old enough to really know? It's too damn late either way, and that has always reminded me of people deciding to have children when they're very young. 'Well, that's going to shape your life forever, and there are some things that you may be permanently closing off for yourself. Are you sure you want to do this?' Because even if you're not sure, it's too late now.

**JC:** Right. I think this is a theme that's going to stick with me throughout this book because this is, for all intents and purposes, Harry's senior year. This is it. He

doesn't come back to Hogwarts after this year. At the same time that I have a kid (and you also have a kid) who's finishing up school this year and thinking about what comes next, I think that theme is going to hit me a lot in this volume.

**Lorrie:** And that's the specific moment that Harry and Draco are in: that liminal space between being old enough in many ways to be an adult, but still technically young enough so that they're still a bit malleable. There's still a chance to turn back. They can still be influenced away from the terrible permanent choices that their elders made, and that's the battle between Bellatrix and Snape for Draco's soul. Is there still time to save Draco? A little bit. Not very much, but go ahead because the fight is on. People are fighting for that. This is a moment where, even if it's too late for some things, it's not too late for everything; it's still worth doing. Meanwhile, the growing up that Hermione is doing is that she realizes that even making the choice is something that she can't inform her parents about without endangering them.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So yeah, there she is at the Burrow, where they know about the scars that nearly killed her and how there were many hours there when Neville had to say, "I'm sure she's got a pulse." Yeah, I often think of her parents. Wow, imagine maybe finding out -- maybe never finding out -- that that happened to your child and you just don't know, and it's not that you don't care. But no, I respect her parents for letting her go because her gifts are not to be denied, and there actually isn't any place safe for her. It comes down to my golden rule about being a parent: parent the child you have. Well, what would you do if you had Hermione? Oh, boy... "Be normal." Yeah, no. Well, Hermione's asleep right now, so we don't have to worry about her this second.

**JC:** Later.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Yeah. Back to Molly and Harry having the conversation over the food: Molly knows who Slughorn is and that he was her teacher back at Hogwarts. She does not say what he taught, which is interesting -- we haven't hit that yet -- but she also notes that he might have started teaching at Hogwarts around the same time Dumbledore did, so he's also old.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** One of the Old Guard, or whatever you want to call them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And then we also learn that apparently Slughorn never thought that Arthur Weasley was worth collecting.

**Lorrie:** He clearly was never worth collecting, not for a status-seeking hypocrite like Slughorn.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is another case... Molly Weasley has always said to Harry, "*Professor* Snape, dear," and she has none of that around Slughorn. She doesn't make Harry pretend to like Slughorn, either. A very good and refreshing change.

**JC:** Yeah, because when she says, "Did you like him?" Harry gives this non-committal response and she's like, "Yeah, that sounds about right."

**Lorrie:** "Yeah, I remember him."

**JC:** Yeah. It's also nice that in the past, Molly has really treated Harry like a child, and I feel like after everything that happened at the end of the last book, all the other Order members are treating Harry much closer to an adult now. I think everybody realizes, "Okay, yeah." He's about to turn sixteen, so yeah.

**Lorrie:** Also...

**JC:** No, wait. Did he have his birthday yet?

**Lorrie:** No. He's about to.

**JC:** Not yet.

**Lorrie:** This time last year at the beginning of the fifth book, the huge emphasis on treating him like a child and not telling him more than he needs to know was because they were afraid for his mind; all of that is done now. That controversy about which way would be better to protect him... That's all over, so they don't have to worry about that anymore. And Mr. Weasley's been promoted!

**JC:** And to this very specific, interesting... That stood out to me again on this read for a lot of reasons. It's the Office for the Detection and Confiscation of Counterfeit Defensive Spells and Protective Objects, which is incredibly specific and it says a lot. It's only been, what, two, three weeks since the Ministry admitted that Voldemort is back, and they put out this list of guidelines on how to protect yourself, and that's how quickly this happened. I thought, 'That's how people are. That's exactly what would happen. The charlatans will come out.'

**Lorrie:** This is proactive of them.

**JC:** It made me think about all the weird government offices that have popped up during the Trump administration, and then would get dissolved and it was clear that they're not doing shit. They're wasting resources...

**Lorrie:** Or an embarrassment.

**JC:** Yeah. I was just like, 'Oh, Arthur...'

**Lorrie:** Actually --

**JC:** I think Arthur's doing good work here.

**Lorrie:** Oh, no, there's nothing negative about this move. It's actually a necessary office, and he is the right person for it. They've stopped underusing him, and unlike some people who are newly appointed to hastily assembled jobs, he is a career bureaucrat and knows what he's doing and isn't going to make rookie mistakes, like "Where do we keep the papers to sign?" This reminded me: right now, this is mid-December of 2025. We have two and a half weeks to go before Mamdani becomes mayor of New York. During the transition between the election of Mamdani and his January 1st inauguration-to-be, there has been a stampede of job applications submitted to his administration for people who are ready to hit the ground running transforming New York to something that's going to better serve New Yorkers because during the past several years, there have been a lot of New York City government jobs that have just gone empty. It's not even that they were filled by bad appointees; they were just empty. The fact that there have been 70,000 resumes for this incoming transition team to sort through has been its own phenomenon. It's not that there isn't real work to do; there really is. Not only is there work to do when you hit the ground running, but people are looking to them already as though

they're already in office almost. It's good. It's not that people don't know what's necessary. It's not that people aren't ready to jump on it; they are. It's really nice that Mr. Weasley is finally in a position that's a good match for his knowledge base.

**JC:** And working really wild, long hours, too. The fact that he's getting home at midnight...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I'm sure that getting this department up and running and actually being on the ground and doing a lot of work has just been incredibly thrilling for him, but also stressful.

**Lorrie:** Then we get the most objective, blunt instrument indication of the change to times, because Molly's clock has everybody's hands on 'Mortal Peril' all the time.

**JC:** Oh, my God. That really stood out to me this time in particular.

**Lorrie:** I wonder... Yes.

**JC:** Yeah, because it seemed like hyperbole the first time. 'What's wrong with this clock? How does it know?' This time, I don't know... It just felt like, 'Oh, yeah. Yeah, that sounds about right,' but it also made me think about the fact that this is set in the nineties and this is the Wizarding World. They don't have the same kind of technology. Molly also mentions that she doesn't know anyone else who has a clock like this -- it's a family heirloom or something -- so I'm imagining that every time they had another child, they had to add another hand.

**Lorrie:** It just magically appears like in Arthurian legend. Yeah.

**JC:** With their little name on it or whatever. It made me think about the fact that in the nineties, if your family members were out in the world, you just had to hope they would call you...

**Lorrie:** There wasn't a cell phone.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. In the late nineties, I had a cell phone, but it wasn't like it is now. Now, everybody in my little family... I can just look on my phone and I can see where they are in the world. It doesn't indicate if they're in mortal danger, but at least I know where they are physically. That's a thing that I'm so used to now, just being able to know. If my partner and my kid are off doing something, I'm like, 'I wonder when they're going to get home.' I can just open up my phone, I can look at where they are, and go, 'Oh, okay, they're on their way home. They have about fifteen minutes.' Molly does have the little hand that moves to 'traveling', but it's that function of, 'Where are my people?'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** At the time this was written, that was a lot of fantasy to have, and now we have it. Everyone lives in fear of opening their phone and looking where that little dot is and seeing the dot in a place that does not sound like a good place to be.

**Lorrie:** By the side of the road, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. In a hospital... Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is a good reminder that they're at a level of constant dread that's going to affect everything they do, which is something that feels exactly like the mood now to me. Is Arthur in 'mortal peril' at that exact moment? No. I don't think there's somebody with a knife standing over him at that moment. It just means no, in general. Just in general mortal peril.

**JC:** Just a general state of being at this point. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God... When Arthur shows up at the house and Harry has to overhear this mortifying intimacy question between the Weasleys, I wanted to crawl under the table. I was mortified.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh. It's actually really funny.

**Lorrie:** Ugh...

**JC:** It's really funny that he insists that she asks the security question. She has already let Tonks in, she's let in Dumbledore and Harry. She didn't question anybody up to that point in the sense that she thinks this is horseshit, but she's like,

"Okay, fine." The question she asks him is hilarious to me: his dearest ambition is to learn how airplanes stay in the air.

**Lorrie:** Which is...

**JC:** Kids learn this in the fifth grade. It's such basic physics. 'How do airplanes fly? Well... look, kids...'

**Lorrie:** It seems like it doesn't work, and yet...

**JC:** My God, I just thought that was hilarious. This man... I get the impression that he's in his fifties at this point. He's clearly very accomplished, he's been fascinated by Muggle ideas... This would not be hard to open a book and figure out, but yet it's a dream. It made me laugh. Oh, my God. Harry could explain this if he asked Harry.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. But the Arthur Weasley point of view on this is there's finding out how it happens, but then there's finding out through history what it must have been like to be Muggles, millennium after millennium, wishing for this and not knowing how to do it; then there came a point when Muggles made it happen. "What was that?!" From that point of view, I can really see why it would be impossibly romantic and sweep ages of history all in this one story. 'Look at them. Look at those dear creatures and the miracles they've been able to produce out of nothing.'

**JC:** That's funny, and then, of course, the 'Mollywobbles' is really funny.

**Lorrie:** Oh my God, kill me now.

**JC:** But I actually love the implication, though, that they still love each other very much and that they are still having sex. I love that. They have all these grown kids. Look, I'm taking inspiration from that as the person who's probably about the same age as Molly Weasley in real life. I'm like, "Yeah, get it, Molly!"

**Lorrie:** Well, I think part of the reason why I'm crawling under the table right this second is that 'Mollywobbles' is such an unsexy name to be called during those moments.

**JC:** Oh, my God. Apparently, that's the name she likes him to call her.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Oh... It's silly.

**Lorrie:** And poor Harry is doing his damndest. There's no magic strong enough to shut out this awful moment that he has to be witness to.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh... Oh, my God. 'Ron will never know...'

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God. Harry busily shoving this into the back of his brain... But that is a theme in this chapter: romantic relationships as a major sustaining part of life. We've seen Tonks with her brown hair, and now we see this really enduring relationship that's produced so many children and a really significant household. Anyway, that theme is a major part of life that's being affected.

**JC:** We get a little bit of interaction between Arthur and Harry.

**Lorrie:** They sent Harry to bed, finally, where he richly deserves to get some rest.

**JC:** Oh, and this one, too: he's sleeping in Fred and George's old room because they have moved out now. They're basically adults. Their joke shop is so successful that they're using their old bedroom at home as a warehouse to store products and things.

**Lorrie:** That's exciting.

**JC:** Yeah. Oh, my gosh, that was also pretty quick because they left -- it's probably been...It was the middle of the spring semester, or was it towards exams? I can't remember when they left, but they really worked fast.

**Lorrie:** They were ready.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** For them to have this much inventory now, they must have turned a profit really quickly, so good for them.

**JC:** Even Molly is impressed. 'Okay. Maybe I was wrong about that, but all right.'

**Lorrie:** 'Look at that...'

**Hosts:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It also shows that a lot of her crankiness around them being so irresponsible was she was worried they would starve. 'Oh, I guess you can do it this way, too. Awesome.'

**JC:** This also brings up for me, though, that Fred and George have been so successful in the climate that they're living in.

**Lorrie:** Exactly.

**JC:** When you think about all of us who work with young adults and who have young adults, it's a terrifying time to imagine how your children or how these young adults around me are going to live.

**Lorrie:** And that is what this chapter is completely about. From poor Tonks to Hermione giving up her family, to Fred and George making a profit instead of having to board up their shop... That's what this is. To me, the one that stood out the most: the next morning, Harry gets breakfast brought to him by a quarter veela. Is this really a time, when you're a young adult starting your career, to be moving *toward* where Voldemort has just reappeared? If you lived in a foreign country, and you had just graduated from school and you were looking to start your career, would you be moving to the U.S. right now?

**JC:** But for love...

**Lorrie:** Well, also, as Harry points out, she's not stupid; she was good enough to enter the Triwizard Tournament. She's a warrior. There's work to do. Fleur is an interesting character in that some parts of her characterization are highly developed (very skillfully) and others are oddly underdeveloped, and this contradiction between her being presented as just annoying versus her being clearly a really qualified witch... I don't think it's really canon, but to me, it's super evocative that she's this talented -- obviously, a standout star in her age group in France -- and that there's this newly unstable regime in England and she has come toward it.

**JC:** Yeah, no, that's interesting. [She] seems to be doing an internship at Gringotts, which is how I would frame it as a new school grad. No, I guess she's two years out of school; that was fourth year, and she was a seventh year then. Yeah, a semester abroad in a place that seems dangerous... Okay.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** But yeah, there's then a lot to be said about that. She thinks, 'That's where I need to be.' Yeah. People go towards the trouble, for whatever reason.

**Lorrie:** And that brings us to what Molly is saying. She is saying, "It's all this uncertainty with You-Know-Who coming back, people think they might be dead tomorrow, so they're rushing all sorts of decisions they'd normally take time over."

**JC:** At which then I think it's... It's either Ginny or Ron. One of them says, "Yeah, that's basically what you did, isn't it, mom?"

**Lorrie:** Ginny. Oh, that's totally Ginny.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** To which Molly says, with maddening hypocrisy, "Well, we were made for each other, so what was the point in waiting?" Ugh... It may not be that Fleur and Bill are a bad match; it may be just that Fleur is annoying as hell.

**JC:** I think Fleur eventually wins Molly over, doesn't she?

**Lorrie:** We will see that. That's a big reveal, yeah.

**JC:** Okay, yeah. I feel it's in my memory, but yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Very interesting. Very interesting.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Really, truly, there's nothing they can do about it.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** She's there, she's annoying, she's superior, she's insensitive. She doesn't seem to understand how offensive she is.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** She also probably doesn't care, but I think she genuinely, in some way, doesn't get it. The way she's standing there, insulting cooking and chickens... "Yeah, you're welcome for us putting you up." Then there's the phenomenon that you can't do a darn thing about, which is [that] some people really are that beautiful, so beautiful that it's intrusive. There's no choice about it; you can't turn it off. They can't and the people being affected by it can't, and it's awful.

**JC:** Also, interesting that Ron is still very much affected by it, but Harry... It's just, 'Nah.'

**Lorrie:** Well, no, he still gets it. When she kisses his cheeks, he feels it burning.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He's trying to resist.

**JC:** I think that if any girl walked in and kissed his cheeks, he would have that response.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I think it's not -- I guess what I'm saying is I feel like something happened during the Triwizard tournament where Harry sees Fleur as a person and not as a part-veela beautiful girl. There's something about the humanity of her that he is reacting to more than the veela part.

**Lorrie:** Right. Meanwhile, Ron, of course... She's just impossibly unreachable.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Ginny... I really love the way Ginny and Hermione just hate this. Would it be more mature of them to understand, 'Okay, that's just going to be uncomfortable'? I don't know. Is anybody ever that mature? I don't think I would be. I think I would be like, 'Goddamn it, I can't believe how threatened I am. Am I not beyond this? I guess not.'

**JC:** Yeah. It reminds me a bit of the way that the girls jump on Harry, then, after she leaves.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** It reminds me a bit of the interactions between Cho and Harry around Cho being jealous of Hermione.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "Oh, you, too?" and Harry's like, "What did I do?"

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "I was just sitting here."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Harry immediately has this reaction of, 'I'm just going to shut up because I have nothing to say here...' and the hand went up. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** 'I wish I had never opened my mouth.' But yeah, there's no winning here. When that has happened to me, when I have been around people who are so beautiful that I can't control my reactions, I've been so ashamed. I hate it, it's embarrassing, it's mortifying. I feel as though I ought to be above it, and when there's somebody whose attention I want turning into an idiot over somebody who's threateningly attractive [and] standing there next to me, I'm dying on the inside. Absolutely dying.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. I'm trying to remember if I've ever had that experience. I'm not sure that I have.

**Lorrie:** Oh, God, it's horrible.

**JC:** I've been paired up for my entire life, so I don't really remember. One more thing that I think is interesting about the veela phenomenon: I keep waiting to see one of the women in the books have a response to Fleur that is similar to the ones men have, and I've not seen it.

**Lorrie:** No.

**JC:** I'm a little disappointed in that.

**Lorrie:** No.

**JC:** I would like to see that there's a little bit of... Maybe there are some queer kids in this school. Come on, there must be.

**Lorrie:** There's got to be some.

**JC:** There's got to be some girls that are longingly looking after Fleur as she's drifting through the school during the Tri-Wizard Tournament, or some boys who are like, "Yeah, I don't see it. What?"

**Lorrie:** Right. Well, I think I've mentioned this before. This is one of the things remedied by the *Fantastic Beasts* series, because the characterization of Fleur as attractive and hateful... There's all of this raised-hackle feeling about the way she's

portrayed in this series. She is impossibly beautiful and it causes misery and jealousy, and she's also a kind of female character that I'm familiar with where they're really not a woman's woman. They don't want to be friends with other women. They are just securely superior to other women and think, 'What do I care? I beat them all,' don't have a lot of female friends and take their position at the head of the food chain.

**JC:** Regina George? Is that what you're thinking?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It's a contradiction in this character that you can tell that she was also meant to have depth, but the characterization of her, as she's written, doesn't always reach it. Okay, she was the best student at Beauxbatons. We don't see that; we just see her coming in last in everything. But then we have Queenie Goldstein in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies, who is another person who's so beautiful that you can't control your responses to her, and there's this tiny moment where this one man (who she ends up marrying) goes pale when he realizes that she can read thoughts, and she says, "Oh, don't worry, honey. Most men think those things when they look at me." It's most, but not all. Part of her gift (because she is a Legilimens) is that 'Yeah, there are gay people out there and I know that.' That's a more mature, more equalizing feeling to me. That is more of what I was hoping for, I think, around the characterization of a woman who's this attractive. Fanfic has tried. Fanfic has tried to pair Fleur up with women and to explore that, and who's to say that might not have been happening, but it's not happening in canon on the page. No.

**JC:** Just as an aside, now I'm thinking about Queenie and how much I loved her as a character.

**Lorrie:** I love Queenie. Yes.

**JC:** She's one of my favorites, she and Newt. They're my favorite characters in this.

**Lorrie:** Well, Queenie is where I go to soothe my feelings when I'm not sure what to do with so much of the annoyingness that Fleur brings to the table. She shows up, the room becomes airless because she's so beautiful that nobody can control

their reaction to it, and then she's contrasted so painfully with Tonks (who was not bad to begin with, and is now painfully plain and depressed). Hermione has decided incorrectly that she must be grieving over Sirius, and Harry's like, "Oh, God, no. Let's not even think about Sirius." Then Hermione gets shut up with a punching telescope.

**JC:** What's even better about that, though, is that Ron and Hermione have clearly been talking about 'Dumbledore came to get Harry and then have him run some errand.' It's like they spun this story in their head about what might have been happening, and I love that Harry takes the opportunity to tell them... He takes Dumbledore's advice and tells them about the prophecy. There's this incredible moment of tension and they're staring at him, and he's thinking, 'Are they going to support me? Are they going to back away? What's going to happen next?' The tension is broken by this comic moment of Hermione getting punched in the face by this toy, and it's a funny and very effective way to break that tension of the moment.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, right. She's trying to be calm, but she's obviously squeezed that telescope beyond its capacity. This is worded so carefully to show that Harry thinks he has to kill Voldemort, but the text doesn't commit to that where he is explaining to them, "From what it said, it looks like I'm the one who's got to finish off Voldemort..." which is not the same as 'kill'. "At least, it said neither of us could live while the other survives."

**JC:** He says that, and I think Hermione is going to be thinking about what that means for the next two years. Oh, my God.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, so that's very carefully worded. The way that Ron and Hermione respond... They're textbook allies. They do exactly what Harry needs from them where Ron immediately says, "He wouldn't be giving you lessons if he thought you were a goner, wouldn't waste his time -- he must think you've got a chance!" Which is not only heartening, but also true.

**JC:** And it's a little bit clumsy in the way that you would expect someone -- That sounds like something Ron would say. It feels very blunt. "Well, sounds like Dumbledore thinks you could outlive..."

**Lorrie:** Right, which makes it stronger.

**JC:** Yeah. It's very honest.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and Hermione is already fantasizing. "I wonder what he'll teach you, Harry? Really advanced defensive magic, probably... powerful countercurses... anti-jinxes..." Harry is being warmed through and through: "The mere fact that they were still there on either side of him, speaking bracing words of comfort, not shrinking from him as though he were contaminated or dangerous, was worth more than he could ever tell them." It's directly contrasting how he felt six months earlier over Christmas when he had been Voldemort and the snake, but it also very strongly reminded me of December 2019 when Rowling did her first major TERFpocalypse tweet. She had been silent on Twitter for ages, and then she did the big transphobic tweet about supporting Maya Forstater and within that day, all the major U.S. *Harry Potter* fan groups disavowed her instantly -- did not take a day to think about it -- including the ones that had built up really strong collaborations with her over years and had collaborated with her on things, saying, "Oh, no, you don't do that."

**JC:** As did several of the actors involved in the films very quickly. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That's being an ally. "We're sticking with the people that we know and love and have been with for ages." This is good. This is a good, solid foundation for the enormous troubles that they're about to have to tackle. In many ways, the beginning of this book is a corrective to the horror of all of *Order of the Phoenix*.

**JC:** Ah, yeah. From there, we move into something that you and I are very highly connected to right now.

**Lorrie:** I can barely even acknowledge it.

**JC:** Harry lets Ron and Hermione know... The idea of "We should be getting our O.W.L.s for school anytime now," and Harry's like, "Oh, yeah, they're supposed to come today," and that sends everyone into this... AAAAHHHH! "When are the O.W.L.s coming?!" Okay, for context, it's December 2025. Both of us have high school seniors who are waiting to hear about college acceptance at various levels. In the case of my kid, in the next week, he is going to find out if he passed the initial screenings. He's interested in going to music programs, so there's this big, long process. If he passed the initial screenings at several of the universities, then

he will be invited for an audition and an interview in January. He's going to find out several of those in the next week, and your situation is even more like this.

**Lorrie:** I'm not even going to talk about it, except to do a little dance of panic like Hermione is right now and flap my hands and scream "Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't!"

**JC:** That anxiety is so relatable. Oh, wow... They can see the owls flying toward them, and then they have trouble getting the note off of the leg.

**Lorrie:** Hermione is making her entire owl tremble, that poor thing.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Oh, and these owls line up in alphabetical order. Harry's is in the middle.

**JC:** Wow!

**Lorrie:** While Hermione's waiting for her results, she remembers every single error she's made on all of her exams.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Hermione's actually correct to be this worried. We know that if she is not worried about an error that she made, she probably got a completely 100% correct grade on all the exams that she's not worrying about, but she's like, "Oh, I know this isn't good and that wasn't good." In areas like Defense Against the Dark Arts, if she doesn't have perfect defenses, she may die, just like Snape, for example, cannot let his Occlumency slip in front of Voldemort; that would endanger not only Snape's life, but everybody's. That's Hermione's position as a Muggle-born in this school: always on the verge of being thrown out or killed somehow.

**JC:** I think that with Hermione, though, there's also been all along this kind of tokenism. She is Muggle-born; everyone knows.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** She cannot be anything less than perfect, because if she's not perfect, it's like, "Oh, well, you're Muggle-born." That's also been hanging over her head this whole time, and it doesn't matter how many times she's proven; that is still always going to be there.

**Lorrie:** And just the way that she's regressing in this scene... Oh, yeah.

**JC:** Poor kid.

**Lorrie:** I love this detail: she was so worried that she went and talked to McGonagall about what happens if you fail, and then that's how we learn if you do, then you discuss your options with your Head of House. That ends up being a really good important detail in the plot later. Not that Hermione was ever at risk, but it does make sense that Hermione is the one who would go and find out.

**JC:** I could really identify with McGonagall in this situation and being like, "Oh, honey..." It'd be really hard not to just go, "Yeah, don't worry about this, you're going to be fine," but also recognizing she needs this information. "Okay, here's what would happen, just so you know, and with this knowledge, hopefully you can go out and not freak out." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But there's also this relationship that Hermione has with McGonagall where she's almost like a colleague sometimes with McGonagall, where they talk about the way things work together. This is the person where McGonagall went and got a Time-Turner for her, and when Harry understands Umbridge's speech the previous year, McGonagall is surprised for a second until she realizes where Harry got that from. It's a little bit, too, like, 'You're somebody who would want to know. This is how we handle that.' I love reading the result report, looking over the actual grades.

**JC:** That's the kind of world-building that I really like.

**Lorrie:** I love it, yeah.

**JC:** I love it. The key for what the grades mean... The students know, but they need to put it on the report, and then all the subjects and the grades that they got. I love the contrast that Harry got one O for Outstanding, and everything else was basically Es, except for a couple of things that he knew, "I wasn't going to do great on those." He got an E in potions, which is "Exceeds Expectations" or something like that. We never really hear what Ron got in this detail, but Hermione got Os in everything except for Defense.

**Lorrie:** Right. She got an F, basically.

**JC:** Interesting that it was Defense. I think back to the conversations that we had what feels like years ago now (was years ago for these kids) about how Hermione never really learned how to deal with a boggart and things like that. I thought, 'Oh, yeah. That was part of their exam, wasn't it?'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Also, that Patronuses are not easy for her because she is more insecure. She is more directly under threat, and this is where she needs to be strong if she's going to survive in this political atmosphere that's hunting her.

**JC:** And she does do that, by the way.

**Lorrie:** Oh, she does.

**JC:** Oh, man. A year from now, Hermione's going to be the one who knows all the defensive spells and has prepared for the work that they have to do. The fact that Hermione starts listing these spells off earlier in this chapter -- "Oh, here's all the things that I'm thinking..." Now she's going to go learn them all. She's listing off all the things that she's like, "Wait, we all need to know this."

**Lorrie:** That's the thing that creates this kind of over-anxiety in humans: there is a way in which these are things you need to know for your survival. Unfortunately for anxiety disorders, that level of alarm sometimes carries over vestigially when we don't need it, but the thing about Hermione is that when she gets something wrong (usually in Defense), that's the thing she'll never forget later.

**JC:** Oh, and the little stomach punch for Harry that he got an Excellent (Exceeds Expectations) in Potions, and now, he thinks, 'Oh, well, there. I can't be an Auror now because Snape won't take me into the class.'

**Lorrie:** And he knew that was going to happen.

**JC:** But it also says something, too, about the fact that he did get an Excellent in Potions...

**Lorrie:** I know!

**JC:** Because Snape was not the proctor of the exam.

**Lorrie:** Between Snape's teaching and Harry's abilities, somehow he's gotten enough potion knowledge in him to do that. Well, good for that! It does show that even with absolutely the worst classroom conditions, humans sometimes will find

a way to learn something. That's so nice. I guess, yeah, one way or another, they managed to get a little bit of learning into him. Great!

**JC:** Not just a little. He didn't even get an Acceptable.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That's basically a B.

**Lorrie:** You can trust this wizard to make you a potion. Later on as an adult when he needs to make one, he's going to be able to gather his ingredients and brew one up. That's so nice.

**JC:** This whole thing, though, makes me think about high stakes testing, which I think has been a bigger thing outside the U.S. than in because in the U.S., we have this idea (that we have always held very dear) that at any point in your life (if you want), you could just go back and retrain for something else. Over the years, we've had many kinds of government programs to do that for people, though there was de facto a sense of, "Well, you do [well] in school, then you're going to have this future."

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** But there was always this story (this myth, maybe) told that at any point, you could just change your life by working harder. "Pull yourself up by your own damn bootstraps." There's always been that myth about the American experience, and in many countries outside the U.S., that story was never there. It was more like this. I remember years ago, when I was a college-age student myself, talking to a friend from Belgium who had taken the school test at the age of twelve at the end of elementary experience. How you did on that test determined what kind of high school you got to go to, and he had not been a very good student; he got into the vocational high school, but not the college/university-bound track. This was ten years later, and he was still angry about the fact that at the age of twelve, he had to take a test that determined the rest of his life. He was really trying to figure out what to do differently and how to take a different path because he didn't get the opportunity to go to university, and that really stuck with me.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'Oh.' It was the first time I really met anyone who had lived in a different system for whom the high stakes test had absolutely... When we were kids, there wasn't really high stakes testing like there is now, so that wasn't my experience at all, but that's making me think this is what the old O-levels and A-levels were like. You had this test you had to do really well on in order to go on to the next level and get the next opportunity because those opportunities were considered a scarcity, so you had to make sure they were going to the people who were whatever. That's at least the story in our country; even if the reality doesn't match up to that, that's not the story we tell ourselves about education and who gets to have it, so it's just fascinating to me. This idea that Harry would say, "Oh, well, I didn't get this score on this test at the age of fifteen; therefore, I will never be an Auror..." As someone who grew up with this American story, "Well, of course, you could be an Auror, Harry. You can do anything you set your mind to."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The way that a test score at that age can result in the entire society telling you, "You don't even deserve to dream. You're not good enough..." This is a really well-written moment where he should be really proud of himself for doing much better than could be expected, given the very, very personal circumstances.

**JC:** Given what was happening to him. Geez...

**Lorrie:** And yet, it is a moment of disappointment instead. Then that beautiful moment where he thinks, "It was odd, really, seeing that it had been a Death Eater in disguise who had first told Harry he would make a good Auror..." That should have made it not good advice, but no. If you're well-suited to something, you are. You are well suited. Huh... Then he thinks (continuing the misdirection of this author), "Wouldn't he be living up to the prophecy, and giving himself the best chance of survival, if he joined those highly trained wizards whose job it was to find and kill Voldemort?" Meanwhile, I'm reading this, going, 'I don't think it says anywhere in their job description that their job is to kill anyone,' but that's where his mind is going. For now, it serves the author's purposes to misdirect the reader; whether or not we believe that that's Harry's mission, at least we're being shown that Harry thinks that.

**JC:** There's a layer of this that I did not read into this the first time I read through: I've seen a lot of people who are very critical of this series -- especially after J.K.R. revealed her TERFiness -- people who want to go in and pick apart all the things

that they think are bad about the series, and the thing that keeps coming up is, "Wow, Harry Potter became a cop," and that that was his big dream. I can't help but think about that now, though it's a highly skilled profession in the Wizarding World -- you need to know a lot of magic -- but yeah. 'Oh, yeah, Harry's big dream is to become a cop,' and somehow that sums up the series.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's not one of the most annoying things to me, but it does annoy me. First of all, the classism against/ what's wrong with becoming a cop... The reason that has sway as a punch line is because 'Haha, that's not a very high-up place to end up,' but also, what do you mean by 'cop'? Intelligence work (like being an Auror) is super specialized and, by nature, designed to be invisible to the average citizen, but keeps a lot of people really, really safe. When things happen to make that level of intelligence and security visible to the general population, that's a bad thing. It's supposed to be invisible; that's how you know it's working. The training that you go through and the importance of the work is so sensitive, and for Harry to think correctly that this is where his combination of weird life circumstances and skills and interests should lead him... He's right. That is exactly who you would want doing this kind of super sensitive work that most of us never have to worry about. Nothing happens in this chapter, but it's just reassessing the emotional background of what life is like now that everything has become more dangerous. Part of that is that we now have to put up with Fleur Delacour, with her hair whipping Mrs. Weasley in the face.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, there's one more thing that I want to say here that we have talked about personally (about our kids and thinking about their futures) that stood out to me, too, on reading this. The kids get their test results and they really are thinking about what this means for their future, and they haven't yet hit the point of realizing that a year from now, they're not going to be in school, and that school has fundamentally changed.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** This is the last normal year -- they think it's going to continue -- and that is just a little reality check for the world that we live in right now. We've talked about this a lot: what do you do when you're not sure? Will you just proceed as if everything's going to be normal because there's no... We want our kids to be able to think about the future, and if you really buckle down too much into all the awful ways that it

can go, then it becomes hard even to think past that. I don't know what the adults are thinking here, but the kids aren't thinking about that yet.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, the next chapter is called Draco's Detour.

**JC:** Draco! Draco!

**Lorrie:** He's got quite a lot to think about, and he is, in fact, thinking differently. He is, in fact, already thinking that he's not going to be there next year.

**JC:** Yeah. Very interesting. Okay, I'll have lots of thoughts about this next time.

**Lorrie:** I know, I know!

**JC:** I'm excited!

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