

Transcript

Episode 2.8

Book 2, Chapter 8: The Deathday Party

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read 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 2, Chapter 8: The Deathday Party.

Lorrie: Halloween, the night big scary things happen in this series. Harry learns a secret about Filch. He, Ron, and Hermione attend Nearly Headless Nick's Deathday party, and then they stumble onto something scary. Ooh! Hello, JC.

JC: Hello!

Lorrie: So, how did this time reading this chapter feel to you, and what did you notice?

JC: Well, I think the first thing is that I'd completely forgotten about this chapter. There are highlights in the chapter that I remember because they're in the film, and I've seen the film version multiple times since I last read this book. But I had forgotten about the Deathday Party. There's lots of little things in there, lots of little details, that popped out at me that I was like, 'Oh, wow!' But I think that the chapter opens with the mention that a lot of kids have colds. Apparently there's a potion; I don't know if it cures colds or just covers up your symptoms, I'm not sure which one it does. But the mention of Ginny looking 'peaked': I thought, 'Oh, there's our first little clue that you wouldn't notice on the first read.'

Lorrie: Yeah, I think this might be the only time the kids are shown being sick in the usual way. It's October. It's all damp and chilly inside the castle.

JC: Yeah, and the weather's described as being cold and gross and rainy. Something that I find interesting about this: things just feel very different now, but pre-pandemic -- or even just maybe going back to when I was a kid in the 80s -- the idea of a cure for the common cold was something that floated around. "Oh, there's no cure for this. They'll never be able to find a cure for the common cold. That's something that's beyond our ability as humans, just because of the nature of the cold virus and the way it mutates and all." The idea that, 'Oh, in the Wizarding world they have a cure for the common cold,' I think, is just an interesting little bit of world building.

Lorrie: Hmm. Pepper-up Potion works instantly.

JC: Yeah. It's like some super version of Nyquil or DayQuil where it powered through. Yeah, the image of smoke coming out of people's ears is kind of funny. The opposite of cold, right? Hot.

Lorrie: Harry runs into Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost who is despondent because, as he does every year, he has applied to take part in the Headless Hunt and he's been rejected again. He takes it really hard, even though he really doesn't qualify since his head is technically still attached.

JC: Yeah, you can't just toss your head around. Yeah, it's true. Yeah, it sounds like he applies every year, and every year they say the same thing. It's sad, but also it's interesting that drama continues after death. Ghosts have drama; there are bullies and there are popular people in cliques, and they exclude people. Oh, my God, even in death, they're not any better. It's kind of depressing.

Lorrie: I know. Surely, they could think of some way to include him. And then things get worse for Harry because he runs into Filch and gets in trouble with him for tracking mud on the floor. Filch is portrayed to be the bargain version of Snape: he is also hapless and unattractive, but without the power, he's a Dickensian, grotesque version of manhood. He has a cold, too, like the students, and there's "a drip shivering unpleasantly at the end of his bulbous nose." There's a moth-eaten chair in his office. Things that seem tragic or intimidating in Snape just look more pitiful when we see them in Filch.

JC: He was interesting. I love how you describe Filch as Snape if you bought him on Wish, because it says something about the attractiveness of power. You're right. Filch is a generation older than Snape, I believe, but even though Snape is described as being unattractive in all these ways, he's a character that has a lot of power. He's a very powerful wizard, he's got this mysterious past; there's all these things about him that make him attractive to a large segment of fandom in ways that Filch is never going to have access to, and I find that really interesting. Probably, also, Alan Rickman has something to do with it, but even before Alan Rickman people really loved Snape.

Lorrie: Yeah, it wasn't Alan Rickman for me. It was the character.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: One of my favorite things I ever read about Filch in a fanfic was when he went into the Muggle world, he discovered that all the things he knows how to do in his job as Hogwarts caretaker make him highly skilled, and he can earn a lot of money. He is so underappreciated at Hogwarts.

JC: Yeah, just the description of him here: first of all, Nick says, "Oh, he has the flu and he's mad because he's been cleaning up frog brains or something," and I was like, "Wow, that's very American of him to keep working even though he's clearly very sick." But I don't know if the man sleeps. He's always somewhere. He's always prowling the castle; he's always doing something. He's always cleaning up some awful mess or prowling around at night looking for kids out of bed. For someone who has no magical power, no magical abilities, he's carved out a niche for himself at the school that's quite powerful. Anyone who's ever worked in a school knows that the most powerful person in a school is the head janitor. That's just how it is. As a teacher, you do not piss off the janitor. You are respectful and kind, and if you are not, you're going to pay for it.

It's important. These are people who are very important in the school, so it's interesting. I find Filch interesting as a character in that way, because he represents that to me: that idea of this grizzled old janitor who, if 'you piss him off, you're going to pay for it' kind of a thing. But the job that he does is really important and really valued (clearly) by the school and he's doing it without magic, and that's just fascinating to me. Who is this guy? What happens to Squibs in this society? What role do they end up having? Are they in the role that we might put people with developmental disabilities? Are they considered disabled in this world? There's a lot of things that I think the character of Filch brings to the story, lots of interesting ways of thinking about how disability is portrayed and lots of other things. Okay, the other fun things about Filch's office: you mentioned the moth-eaten chair. The fact that he's got these torture implements hanging on the walls that he's lovingly polished; he's taking good care of them, just in case. I was never sure if it was true or just him telling a story that at one point he was able to use these. Apparently, he's been caretaker of the school since the early 70s, according to the Harry Potter Wiki. Does that mean that there was a time in the 70s when he actually did string students up by their wrists or their toes, or whatever? I find that whole -- that's a really interesting backstory. The other thing that I love here is that he has an entire drawer dedicated to the Weasley twins and all the shit that they've given him over the years. They're, what, fourth-, fifth-years at this point? They haven't been there that long. How could they possibly have accumulated an entire drawer in four years? What the hell have they been up to? But also, he is that good at record-keeping, right? He has recorded every referral he's ever written, every infraction a student has committed, everything. He's recorded all of it. That's also fascinating to me. Wow, the paper trail.

Lorrie: Filch is adding Harry's crime to his extremely thorough files. Harry is trying to protest that it was just a bit of mud, but Filch says, "...it's an extra hour scrubbing! Crime... befouling the castle...."

JC: Yes, that's really interesting to me, this character and the function that he plays in the school is one thing. I love how he's basically writing a referral on Harry here, and every teacher has had to write a referral at some point on a student. What he's describing as he's writing is... yeah, he's writing a referral, which means it's going to go to McGonagall and McGonagall's the one who decides what's going to happen. At least, that's the impression that I'm getting from this. I find that really interesting, because that means he's got to build his case. Something about all these files; every time you say, 'I had to build a case' to one of the Heads of House or even to the Headmaster about why the student should be punished, that's fun. But I think the other thing that we see here is, again, the continual war between Filch and Peeves gets a little nod here, too, and there's such a history there. Peeves is kind of the perfect foil for Filch in a lot of ways. It's exactly what would piss Filch off the most, is the concept of Peeves.

Lorrie: The concept of Peeves, yeah. A poltergeist who gets energy off the turmoil of adolescence.

JC: Yes. Which is maybe why Filch never sleeps. I don't know.

Lorrie: And who has just crashed a Vanishing Cabinet right over Filch's office, so Filch has to run and confront him.

JC: Right. Yeah. Filch goes chasing off after Peeves, leaving Harry alone in his office, and then there's this interesting little moment where Harry's like, 'Yeah, I have got to stay here because it'll be worse if I leave. You didn't tell me to stay, but I'd better.' Harry's been conditioned after a lifetime of living with the Dursleys. 'Okay, I'm about to get punished. The quickest thing to do is

just sit here and wait for it, and then it'll be over.' Ugh. When Harry's in the office, he finds the Kwikspell Correspondence Course and he flips through it. The writing of that is very funny; the spelling of Kwikspell (as far away from the actual word 'quick' as you can get) and then the testimonials. You get the sense of, 'Oh, this is a waste of money. This is a scam, Filch.' But poor Filch. He's desperate to try anything, and I'm sure this isn't the first time he's tried one of these. That lesson one is "How to Hold Your Wand: Helpful Hints and Tips," or something like that. How hard is it to hold a wand? Well, maybe it is, because there's 'swish and flick,' but yeah. That whole thing, I think, is also a little bit of humor in the middle of an otherwise dark chapter.

Lorrie: And then we have one of those moments that lets us understand just how long of a game this author has been playing, because Peeves has just smashed a Vanishing Cabinet. It's described as black and gold. The one we saw earlier in the beginning of this book was just described as black (the one in Borgin and Burkes), but this is the pair of cabinets that Draco spends all of book six repairing so he can get Death Eaters into the castle.

JC: Yes. I went *gasp* when I read that. I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I totally had no idea that it was going to be mentioned here." I'd forgotten. And then that idea of, okay, where is it? It's still functioning at this point; it hasn't broken yet, so is it being kept in the Room of Requirement? Is it being kept somewhere else? Does that mean that Peeves came out in... was it Borgin & Burkes, and did they shut him right back in? There's lots of questions that this raises. It also makes me think about the fact that in the very beginning of this book, Harry jumped into the Vanishing Cabinet in Borgin and Burkes, and it's very clearly stated that he didn't close the door all the way. At the time that I read that, I thought, well, he didn't close the door all the way, so he's not going to go, but the fact that he would have been shot straight to Hogwarts if that had happened.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. I never thought of that. You're right!

JC: "Oh!" But it is interesting that that means the author had already worked out at this point how these things work, and like you were just saying, it's a long game. That's a very long game, because that's a really critical detail, that he left the door open a crack.

Lorrie: So Harry wants to repay Nick for distracting Filch, and Nick invites Harry to his Deathday Party. Nick wanting Harry's celebrity endorsement, it's a funny version of the way Lockhart keeps wanting to exploit Harry.

JC: But something I find interesting about that, too: Harry says, "Is there anything I can do for you?" and Nick says, "Well, as a matter of fact..." and Harry agrees. For someone who spent most of his childhood being treated pretty horribly, he has so much empathy for other people, and we see that over and over in the text. We've talked about this before, but it made me think, again, about this idea of that first year of his life: he had so much love from his parents. We were both into attachment parenting as parents with our kids, and the whole idea of that is that you provide this unconditional love and support to your kids, and you make sure that all of their needs are met, including their emotional needs, to the best of your ability. You show them empathy; the idea is that you're modeling that for them, and that sets them up for this really good foundation, and you see that in Harry here. I love this idea that, even though he suffered a lot in his childhood, that that first year that he had with his parents really gave him this incredible foundation.

Lorrie: Plus, Harry really owes Nick.

JC: Yeah, that, too. And I love that Hermione is enthusiastic, too. She's like, "I bet no living people have been to one of these." Yeah.

Lorrie: So we get to see the Deathday Party, which is quite a social event, and we see Nick's cake with his death date of October 31st, 1492, 500 years earlier. This is the first piece of evidence we get that lets us date this series.

JC: I didn't realize this was the one... That's amazing. So yeah, this is 1992.

Lorrie: Oh, and this party is the first time we meet Moaning Myrtle.

JC: I had forgotten that this is where we are first introduced to Myrtle. Again, the films take over when I am thinking about this particular story in the series. The whole Deathday Party reminded me a lot of the Haunted Mansion ride at Disney in the sense that there were grotesque and horrible things, but they're presented in a fun way. The image of all these people dancing to the music is like that one part of the Haunted Mansion when you go through and the holograms are dancing, swirling, on the floor. It made me think about that, and then you go down through the graveyard and all the ghosts are singing.

Lorrie: I know. Yeah, they're having a good time.

JC: I just thought, oh, it's like the Haunted Mansion. That's what it felt like.

Lorrie: And the rotting feast is such a clever detail; it just goes on and on. It's really participatory; as a reader, you can so easily reproduce this for your own fun Halloween party.

JC: Oh, man. Yeah, this theme of feasting in this book I find really interesting, because this is the second big feast of the year that Harry and Ron have missed. Feasting is... every human culture has feasting days, right? They're about building community, they're about sharing bounty, they're about bringing people together, they're about celebrating. During the year that we were on lockdown, that was a thing that I tried really hard to do to lift my family's spirits, and I know I'm not the only person.

Lorrie: True.

JC: "When can we just have a feast for some reason?" Thanksgiving that year, I made food for twelve people (even though there's three of us, and it took us a week to eat at all) but it was great, so all of these kinds of feasting days we do. The feasts have this purpose at Hogwarts of bringing everybody together, all the houses. We're going to celebrate, we're going to eat this incredible, ridiculous bounty of every possible food you can imagine. Everyone looks forward to it. The fact that Harry and Ron have been excluded from both of the big feasts so far this year... Harry, in particular, is going to be excluded from the community in this book, I'm seeing that there. But also the fact that even the Deathday Party had a feast: we're still using that to bring people together, even though the ghosts can't eat it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And there's that really poignant scene of that one ghost walking through the table with his mouth open; one of the characters says, "Could you taste it?" and he said, "Almost."

Lorrie: "Almost."

JC: It's even important to have a feast, even though they can't eat the food. I just find that theme of feasting really interesting. If you can't participate in the feast because you're excluded or because you're not able to taste or touch the food anymore, that's really sad and you're being excluded from this really human experience.

Lorrie: Yeah, to be joyful, and Harry gave it up on purpose, out of loyalty.

JC: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I'm also trying to imagine the house elves, I'm sure, prepared this feast as they prepare all the feasts. It almost has this feeling of, "Okay, what have we got laying around that we would otherwise throw out? Okay, great. Here you go." I'm just imagining the house elves putting this together with little clothespins on their noses and bringing up all the rotten food.

Lorrie: But then the house elves can do magic, though. They can prepare the whole feast and then magic it to be rotted.

JC: That's true. Yeah.

Lorrie: Or are there ghost house elves, and they're the ones who...

JC: Are there ghost house elves that work? Oh.

Lorrie: Is it like a catering company?

JC: That's an interesting question. But that theme of exclusion and pettiness and all that stuff. We see Myrtle being...

Lorrie: Poor Myrtle.

JC: Peeves is just cruel to Myrtle. He's like, "Oh, you're talking about Myrtle," and Hermione's like, "No, no, no, no." She tries to soothe it over, and then Peeves just ruins it.

Lorrie: That's what he does.

JC: That's what he does. Imagine eternally being a young, teenage girl.

Lorrie: No.

JC: And all the insecurities and hatred of yourself. Oh, my God, being stuck in that forever. That's pretty awful.

Lorrie: Myrtle and Nick, they're both part of this theme of the book of trying to fit in, and they're stuck always with that discomfort. And there's the haplessness of when Harry tries to vouch for Nick and say how intimidating he is.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: And he just says, "Ha! Bet he asked you to say that." It's so transparent. I guess everything about a ghost is transparent.

JC: Yeah, that's true. The fact that the Headless Hunt crashes Nick's party, though.

Lorrie: It's so insensitive!

JC: And then upstages everything. It's ghost drama. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Oh, God. Yeah, that's when you realize, no, Nick really does have a legitimate complaint here.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: So yeah, that's the same feeling that Harry and Draco have been working off of each other this whole time, the whole Schadenfreude feel of *Chamber of Secrets*, and how even when you're the one that it's being done to, you have to admit that it is kind of funny. 'Oh, no, not again.'

JC: I love how Harry, Hermione, and Ron just kind of quietly back away from the party at that point. Poor Ron's like, "Surely, there'll be some food left. Let's just go to the feast."

Lorrie: "I'm cold." Yeah. I am so glad that when they walk out of there, Harry has witnesses with him when he hears that voice. Even though they can't hear it, it's such a frightening thing that's happening to him. "Look, I'm not crazy. It's happening again. You guys can't hear it, right?" "No, we can't hear it, but we believe you." And then it's so good that he says, "Wait, it's going up here," and then immediately they see that he was on to something; he's picking up on something real. That's merciful.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: Ron and Hermione didn't have the evidence right away that he was onto something real. That would have just added to his stress so much. And then we have the mystery: we have the setting of these still-wet, shimmering words that are a foot high with that terrible ominous warning. We have a large puddle on the floor, and then we have a hanging cat. Wow.

JC: The literal writing on the wall.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Does it say in the book that it was written in blood? I didn't find that.

Lorrie: It doesn't say in this chapter.

JC: Okay. It says it... okay.

Lorrie: I looked to see if it even had color, and I don't think in this chapter it even says what color the letters are. Just that they're still wet.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: So whoever's doing this was just there. The hanging cat, Mrs. Norris, hanging by her tail: again, it's a comical, ridiculous version of something that's really scary. Have you read *Wuthering Heights*?

JC: Uh, I think I read the Cliffs Notes once.

Lorrie: Right. I think I read it once when I was in high school and once in college, and that was two times too many for me just because oh, my God, they're so dysfunctional. It's really just Jerry Springer kind of generations of people who all need to learn to communicate. But one of the horrifying things -- this happens so early on -- it's a repeated motif in *Wuthering Heights* where you see something that you think is a nice furry animal, but no, it's a dead animal that's

been hanged. Heathcliff marries Isabella Linton, the neighbor that he should never have married that he treats terribly; on their wedding day, he hangs her dog.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Yeah. See, this is why I have not gone back to re-read *Wuthering Heights* and why it's not my first thought when I think about romantic books, and that's not even the only horrifying animal death in *Wuthering Heights*. But that's what I think of when I see Mrs. Norris hanging by her tail: it's like that horrifying moment, but it's also funny because it's not fatal this time. Isabella Linton, of course, has to deal with the realization that she's just married somebody who would do this to her. But the horror and betrayal of Filch being upset about his cat that nobody likes: it's portrayed as comedy. Then you get a scarier version of this in the sixth book, when we learn that in the orphanage, Tom Riddle hanged Billy Stubbs's rabbit. There's a younger, more innocent orphan in the same orphanage, and I think rabbits were the animal in *Wuthering Heights* where you at first think, 'Oh, what a furry -- Oh, my God, it's dead!' There's an innocence and a haplessness to it, so yeah.

JC: We also know that Ginny did all of this, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. We don't know yet, but yes.

JC: We don't know that yet, but in a trance. Does that mean then that... Okay, so Mrs. Norris is there, gets Petrified because of the reflection of the whatever thing looking in the water. I think I remember how that worked. So then, that means that Ginny was the one who picked up Mrs. Norris and somehow hung her tail up.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I guess. Or Tom Riddle via Ginny.

Lorrie: Or maybe by magic. Yeah, because she probably has greater strength than she would without being possessed. I imagine if Voldemort is possessing you, he can make you do things by magic. She might not have had to physically pick up the cat.

JC: Right. The first time that you read this, you have no idea what's going on, but now the second time through (or whatever time through this is for me) the image of Ginny doing that, all of this stuff, and then slipping away before the entire school converges on the hall and sees Harry, Ron, and Hermione standing there, looking guilty.

Lorrie: Yeah, as usual.

JC: As usual. Oh, God. And then Ron has that ominous line about, "This is not the place we want to get caught, y'all."

Lorrie: Ron is correct. Ron's instincts are so good. Too late.

JC: Too late.

Lorrie: So they all come thundering through, catch these small children looking guilty, and then we have what I find is a truly scary, sinister moment from Draco, where he pushes forward: "...his cold eyes alive, his usually bloodless face flushed, as he grinned at the sight of the hanging, immobile cat," and he yells, "Enemies of the heir, beware. You'll be next, Mudbloods." He's being an opportunist here. He had nothing to do with this, but he's excited. He sees

"enemies of the heir, beware." The writing on the wall doesn't have that threat; he pushes the threat farther. He takes it and runs with it, and it's giving him life. Also, the way that his face is described as 'usually bloodless': it's a little similar to the coldness of the ghosts in this chapter. He's not quite canny here. Sometimes -- especially after fanfic, because I know that Drarry (Harry and Draco) is such a huge juggernaut ship for fanfic readers -- people love to think of them as being meant for each other and being a romantic couple, and in order to make that happen, you have to delve into the character of Draco Malfoy and you have to develop it. We do see, in canon, signs that he is a fully complex and realistic character, but I know I've encountered people who read a lot of Drarry fanfic, and then they reread this part and they have sort of forgotten Draco is scary. Draco is not nice; Draco's a little shit, and whenever they say that to me, I say, "Yep, he's a little Nazi."

JC: Right. And that's what strikes me about that way that he jumped on that here. It's the same way that post-2016, a lot of Trump supporters jumped on opportunities to be racist, to be antisemitic, homophobic, we'll go down the list. It's very similar. 'Oh, if this is happening, then I can say this. There's not going to be a consequence.'

Lorrie: It's a feast in itself, because there was a phenomenon: when migrants at the border were politicized in a theatrical way during the Trump Administration -- where people were deliberately being made an example of, being deliberately held in cages and tortured and punished so that they would feel like whatever they had been running away from at home was better than what would happen to you at the U.S border -- there was an influx of U.S. citizens who excitedly traveled there to apply for the jobs of processing the immigrants caught at the border in order to be sadistic. This was covered in the news, and I also knew about it because I talked to doctors and trauma therapists who -- through their friends, through their networks -- were hearing what it was like to treat the migrants of the border who had made it out, had been somehow bused to New York or something after they finished being treated in a subhuman way at Texas border facilities. Yeah, what they saw was really grim. This opportunity... We'll find out later that's how Voldemort gets his followers loyal, is that he can identify the sadism that drives each person and feed it, promise it in exchange. So, yeah, here we have little Draco Malfoy, and it's more chilling in him because we know he's so little he hasn't even hit puberty yet. He's just a kid, and it's just as cold and frightening in him as it would be coming from an adult.

JC: And at the same time, I think, yeah, he's taking advantage of the opportunity. He's being his little racist, Nazi self. But also, I think that it's clear he doesn't know what's happening, really. He doesn't know what the Chamber of Secrets is. He thinks this is a prank that someone has pulled, and he's just going to take advantage of the opportunity to jump on and go, "Yeah, blah, blah, blah, Mudbloods." That line at the end when he comes out and does this: yes, he's being a scary little shit, but also this is what convinced me very early on the first time I read this through -- or maybe not the first time because I didn't know what this Chamber of Secrets was, but maybe on the second reading -- that he doesn't know what he's cheering on. If he really knew what it was, he'd probably be just as scared as everybody else; but he doesn't know what he's cheering on here, which is typical for kids who get sucked up in that stuff. They're repeating stuff, they're high on the power that it gives them, but they haven't really thought through the consequences of what they're saying or what they're doing in many cases.

Lorrie: I'm not sure I agree. I don't know that he thinks it's a prank, because the Petrified cat hanging there is really scary. That's undeniable, but also he feels so safe; because it says "enemies of the heir, beware," he is all in, betting everything, correctly, on his privilege. I think

he feels, "Oh, there are going to be fatalities and I'm protected," but that's been on their minds this whole volume so far. If we think about the climate: the day after the 2016 elections were called, my kids at the time were going to an elementary school, a neighborhood elementary school, that was one-quarter Muslim. It was a really cold, grim day at that school. There were lots of people for lots of reasons who were really scared, but the Muslim kids in particular were ashen, and the teachers were all dealing with them all day. And when there were signs of hatred -- people might put up threatening graffiti or refer to some new policy that was being floated and threatened -- that atmosphere, a lot of the fear does the work for you. That day, there were kids coming in crying, not sure what was going to happen. And even not Muslim kids; my second-grader that year, that day, was upset because as she was going to school, she literally thought that her best friend was going to be moving to Canada that week because they had heard the parents saying, "Oh, if Trump wins, we're going to move to Canada," and she thought that they were starting to pack already.

JC: Yeah, I remember that day so well, too, because that was the week that I had students who were out teaching; the school that they're teaching in is an 80 percent Latine school. Walking to the school that day and the kids in this high school, the ashen, every single kid in that school knew someone who's undocumented. It could be someone in their family, a neighbor, and they were all talking about it and they were terrified. My students who were teaching that day came back and recorded that it was hard to actually teach the lesson they had gone out intending to teach because the students were just shaken by the possibility of what was going to happen. Yeah, yeah. That fear here -- definitely, this is a situation where Draco was capitalizing on the fear. I guess the one thing I'm thinking is that at this point, nobody except for the teachers knows what the Chamber of Secrets is. The kids don't know.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: When it says the Chamber of Secrets has been opened...

Lorrie: What's that?

JC: None of the kids have any idea what that is. I think that's why I read it as Draco probably thinks it's a prank, because what is that? So, yeah.

Lorrie: But he also knows that at home, his father has been involved in larger, darker stuff that he hasn't told Draco about. He knows, also, that his dad joined the school board, has given brooms, that there's this conflict between rich purebloods like Lucius Malfoy and Ministry people like Arthur Weasley. This is in the air. Yeah. Before 2016, when I read this chapter, I really did read them as 12-year-olds, and I had a hard time taking it seriously until 2016 when I realized, no, this was happening in my kids' classrooms, in second grade classrooms where somebody would taunt somebody else and say, "Oh, yeah, your father's going to get sent back." The terror that this would strike in a second-grader who then, of course, couldn't do their homework and had, in fact, come from terror at home because also ICE was doing a lot of raids at that time. Where I live, the neighborhood groups would warn each other, "Oh, ICE is doing this block. Everybody be warned. Don't be out; if they come to your door, don't open it, or you don't have to answer these questions," but it was quite real, the terror.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And also, that people in law enforcement who were racist were feeling empowered to bully and physically attack, knowing that there would be no consequences. That had really been hyped up. Then, the kids of these families would be going to school, and then to be taunted about it by kids whose families were not vulnerable -- who were enjoying being a protected class in this conflict: that was untenable in a way that I had not really understood before, what it means that you have to go to school and sit next to a kid whose family is trying to make sure that something really, really bad happens to your family; if you get hurt or killed in that process, they like it. That's their aim, because they somehow think that if people know that bad things like that can happen, then they'll just go away. That's what they're after.

JC: Right, or they'll go back in the closet or they'll de-transition. Or yeah, go down the list.

Lorrie: Or die.

JC: Or just die, yeah.

Lorrie: The anti-trans rhetoric that was especially bad then and has only gotten worse made me think: What is their end game here? Their end game is not to take rights away or to just make sure that you live your life as a second-class citizen. Their end game is to make sure that you can't actually live. "Okay, that's nice." So yeah. Just knowing that that happened in class and there was a kid -- my older kid, who was in sixth grade at the time, came back and was talking about what the atmosphere was like in their classroom. There was one kid who the teacher said -- somehow it came up -- "Well, we have to make sure. We can't assume that everybody here has the same views. There might be people here who are Trump supporters." And this one kid, very diffidently, whispered that yeah, he is. He's a Trump supporter. And all these kids who are people of color or queer or female all turned and looked at him and they said, "You are?" and he just went, "Yeah." People will think what they think, whether you let them say it or not. Is it better to know? Is he still a class student? Does he still have rights to come to class and be taught like everybody else? Yes, of course. Does he know that means that 90 percent of his classmates are under direct attack? He must. Which part of Trump does he support? Do they really want to know? Is it safe for him? Anyway, that was a changing point for me in understanding this series, even though the words in this series had been exactly the same every year, every time I read it. I just hadn't taken it as seriously before and that's because of where I live, and where I live changed. Since this is an international series that is read in almost every country, the way it was newly reading to me was the way it had always read to a whole lot of people before. But yeah, sometimes everybody goes to school together. The people who are trying to survive and the people who are trying to kill them go sit next to each other, just like in Congress now. The Congresspeople who have been targeted for death are sitting right next to the people who literally threaten their lives, and they're voting on the same bills.

JC: Well, on that happy note...

Lorrie: Yeah, it's a grim book.

JC: For sure, for sure.

Lorrie: This explains why we need the comedy notes of Filch and Myrtle, because when you're living this -- when you're scared for your life like this -- you still do have to laugh. You still have to go, "Oh, God, that asshole that tried to kill me? He just fell flat on his face in a puddle of mud. Haha." Yeah, and to be a teacher and know, "Oh, that 12-year-old just did that. What are we

going to do?" Because it's still one class that you have to teach, and you have to teach all the kids in it. "What are we going to do? Meanwhile, what the hell? The Chamber of Secrets? What the hell? Oh, no." So yeah, this is quite a lot for the teachers to deal with right now.

JC: Right, so you think about the teachers. Dumbledore, certainly McGonagall, they're on the list of the ones who would have been there, maybe, when it opened before. They know what that means, and what's possibly about to happen, yeah. I think that the next chapter (because I couldn't help reading ahead a little bit) starts with the teachers conversing about a little bit... not about what's happening, but you're aware that the teachers know what this means, certainly.

Lorrie: Oi yai yai, and how to reassure the students when actually it's quite dangerous. So yeah, that's the next chapter. It's called The Writing on the Wall.

JC: Yup.

Lorrie: Yeah. Gear up!

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