

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 Three, Chapter Four: The Leaky Cauldron.

Lorrie: The Leaky Cauldron. Harry gets three blissful weeks to wander around Diagon Alley on his own with no adult oversight, comfortable lodgings, and plenty of money. What a fantasy! It's now time for some world-building. Your favorite thing, JC!

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: Or one of your many favorite things.

JC: Many favorite things. That's on the list, though, for sure. Yeah, that opening paragraph is so much fun to read. I'm Gen X, so I was home alone a lot or home alone with my sister, but it reminds me of that freedom of summer vacation. When you wake up, it's just you and maybe you have a sibling in the house, and you have all day ahead of you and there's nothing you have to do except maybe some chores. You've got to forage your own food, but you can go out and explore your neighborhood. Oh, that took me back. That was really fun. For Harry to have that in a positive way... I guess he does get to roam around a bit in the summer, but that freedom... ah. I'm just happy for him.

Lorrie: And he has money!

JC: And he has money to spend -- oh, my gosh -- and to explore the Wizarding World. I think that's another thing that I love about this: he gets to go and spend time in Diagon Alley. This is a kid, obviously, who didn't grow up in the Wizarding World at all, so he's not going to get to go to -- Well, he doesn't think he's going to be able to go to Hogsmeade this year, so the fact that he can just go out and explore Diagon Alley every day and learn more about the Wizarding World and interact with people, like that image of him sitting in the cafe outside under an umbrella doing his homework.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: That's the dream.

Lorrie: Oh, it's heavenly.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's so great. Oh.

Lorrie: And no one's going to expect him back by a certain time.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: No one's going to ask where he was.

JC: I also really enjoy the little bits of maturity in here, where he's having to exercise financial restraint.

Lorrie: I know, I know.

JC: That's really well done. He's like, "Oh, I would really like that cool thing, but no, no, I have to get through all these more years of school. I need to save all this money." Yeah.

Lorrie: Imagine, he has more than enough and he can make decisions about it. It's so different from whatever he had before.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love how there are little bits of maturity all throughout this chapter where you see, okay, he's definitely grown, aside from the fact that he needs new robes. He is being exposed to more dangers at more levels than he was before, he's being trusted with more independence. Yeah, we see him making more decisions, and the scale of the Wizarding World that is now his concern is greater. I think the stakes are higher. He's heard of Azkaban before, but now he's learning more seriously. He's old enough to know more about it now.

JC: Yeah, that's true. It's also interesting that he's considered old enough to be on his own in this way. There's this murderer loose, and it's interesting to me that the Wizarding World is really not concerned about this guy who apparently could kill thirteen people with a curse showing up in Diagon Alley. They're like, "Oh, he's crazy, but he won't come to Diagon Alley." Really?! Okay.

Lorrie: Or if he does, there will be people who can fight him.

JC: Yeah, apparently. But this idea that "Harry will be fine as long as he stays in this area; let him run loose:" it's much more like a 80s/90s attitude about teenagers. 'Contain them slightly and eh, they'll be fine. Just tell them to come back by dark,' that kind of thing where I feel it's a different feeling about kids that age now. It feels like if this series was written now, he might not have gotten that same amount of freedom somehow.

Lorrie: Well, nobody's texting him.

JC: That's true. Yeah, there's also no way of... Well, I guess technically they can find him if they really want to, but yeah, it's a different time when kids could just kind of roam around. Ah, it's amazing.

Lorrie: I love the name of the Leaky Cauldron. It's something that I'm used to because it's so iconic.

JC: Ah, for sure.

Lorrie: But when I think about it, that is a brilliant name for a Wizarding pub, and I love, of course, the catalog of the other guests there. There are "raucous dwarfs." Do you think those are Tolkien dwarfs?

JC: That's a good question.

Lorrie: Maybe they're just showing up here.

JC: Oh, that'd be a fun crossover.

Lorrie: Yeah, and there's a hag wearing a balaclava. That word, 'balaclava', that's a J.K. Rowling tell.

JC: Really?

Lorrie: Yeah. She uses that word frequently. I think she thinks it's funny. It is funny, but it's one of those things where when you see it, you think, okay, I know who that author is.

JC: I'm not sure I know what a balaclava is. I've never lived in a cold place. I think it's associated with cold places, but...

Lorrie: If you see a knitted ski mask that people use to rob banks in...

JC: All right, okay.

Lorrie: That's it.

JC: Oh, it's just the -- oh, it's not a hat. It's like a helmet.

Lorrie: No. It's a thing that keeps you warm but there's a place for you to look out of, but the rest of your face is not freezing.

JC: Wow, okay. Okay, that's interesting. All right, that's different than I would have guessed. I don't know why I thought it would be like a big furry hat, because it sounds Russian to me. Maybe that's what I was imagining.

Lorrie: Well, yeah, and it's named after a battle that took place in a place called Balaclava that was cold. Yeah.

JC: Wow, and the soldiers had to wear stuff on their faces or whatever.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Wow. Okay, that's interesting. Oh, well, there, I learned a thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That completely changes my imagination of that scene, then. I envisioned something very different for that. Cool. So in the case of this particular character, though, it sounds like it's not that the character was cold so much as they wanted to hide their face.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Okay. Wow. All right.

Lorrie: So yeah. Anyway, that's a Rowling word. And then when Harry's done with breakfast, he taps the third brick from the left and the archway to Diagon Alley opens up. I realized in my head I'm smiling, and I'm picturing entering one of the theme parks and picturing the entrance at Universal Studios, where they have you walk through the brick walls. It's plain, and then suddenly there's all this color and life and imagination, and that's the degree to which they've so successfully recreated the same feel, even though it's not the same magic exactly. Yeah, it has replaced this in my mind. Hats off to Minalima. It's not an easy thing to create a theme park that lives up to and surpasses the expectations of some of the world's pickiest fans.

JC: Oh, for sure. Is it the one in Orlando where you can ride the train between the two parks? Okay, yeah. And that's really cool, too. That's really fun.

Lorrie: Yeah. Since they're the ones who created the world -- the graphic world and the material world in the films -- they have such a deep knowledge of it that they can invent new things and know that they're going to hit the same note. Amazing. So then Harry goes to do his homework at Floean Fortescue's, the ice cream parlor. I don't know why this had never occurred to me before, but Floean Fortescue is my new crush. What a man! Wow! He knows a lot about medieval witch burnings and he runs an ice cream parlor. He's so erudite and he's so kind, and I just thought he totally sounds like one of those people who was very educated and had a high pressure job and said, "You know what? Life is too short, I'm going to do what I love." I thought, oh, I bet he has some really good books at home, I bet he's welcoming and good-looking, and I bet he comes up with his ice cream flavors himself. I thought, 'I want to go on a date with Floean Fortescue. My goodness!'

JC: That's funny, because I was like, 'I want to eat there.'

Lorrie: Yeah, well, that too.

JC: I didn't even think about the... yeah, that's funny.

Lorrie: And yeah, he's a serious thinker, so if he knows a lot about medieval witch burnings, he's aware of political dangers that threaten the magical community. That's a good thing to keep in mind at the start of this chapter.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: Harry has homework about witch burnings, and we know that one of the many problems with the actual historical witch burnings is that they burned innocent people. They were an

excuse to go after people who didn't deserve to be executed, and that's the reminder that this is historic. This is fantasy, but it's also something that happened in our timeline, just like Sirius Black being on the loose is not only a wizard, but even the Muggle world is afraid of and aware of him. This is one of those escalations in Harry's responsibility and awareness, but yeah, he's got this marvelous ice cream guy helping him out kindly.

JC: Yeah. Oh, that is fun. Thinking about the witch burnings again: that idea of a witch hunt as a theme for this chapter in the sense of... Sirius Black is being hunted for this entire book and obviously is innocent, we find out at the end. That's an interesting theme. I hadn't put that together before, but that's really something to think about. Also, when I think about witch burnings, I always think of them in a very gendered way. Maybe I have the history wrong, but I always think of it as being a tool to suppress women.

Lorrie: Yeah, it was.

JC: Yeah, and from that perspective also, I'm thinking it was the way that a relatively powerless group was oppressed. We've talked about that before, too, about that idea that the Wizarding World is in hiding, views themselves as an oppressed minority, even though the Muggle world generally doesn't know that they exist at this point. Yeah, there's a lot of really interesting themes running through there, too.

Lorrie: Yeah. They don't know that wizards exist because they've been hiding, because they've been trying not to get executed, so they have that heightened anxiety about wizards who break the code of secrecy and expose them all. Then there is the urge to scapegoat those people and punish them to purge their collective anxiety, because we will find out later that, I believe, Sirius was imprisoned without a trial.

JC: Oh, wow. I forgot that detail.

Lorrie: And I think that's true, anyway. We haven't gotten to it yet, but we have been seeing the building of the big theme in Harry's life: the one thing that matters most to him is his own story, and how awful it is to have other people make up stories and put them on him like how the Dursleys do. When he can't fight back by saying, "That's not true, I know my own story; what you're saying is a lie, this is my true story," he doesn't have his true story so he can't fight it, or that's one of the problems with trying to fight it, and he wants that more than anything. Knowing your own story and being able to tell it and have it be considered on the record is so important to this concept of jury trials, of punishing people, maybe for reasons that were made up.

JC: Okay, right. There's this really interesting parallel between the way that Sirius was sentenced and the witch trials that Harry's reading about. "Yeah, look how horrible they were in the past. Oh wait, we're still doing it today, basically."

Lorrie: Because yeah, free-floating fear. People have a tendency -- a wish -- to just put the fear at rest, to scapegoat somebody and say, "Okay, well, we took care of the scapegoat, so we're fine now." That urge can overpower the necessity of knowing what the actual story is. We saw that at the end of the last book with Fudge when he was trying to persuade Hagrid: "You see

how important it is to send you to Azkaban, even though we know you're innocent. Surely you can see that having you be a scapegoat is more important than telling your truth."

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. Yeah, and I guess the fact that Harry is thirteen in this book is really significant, too, because that's typically the age at which kids start to understand that the adults in their lives are not infallible. Many kids understand that a lot earlier for a lot of reasons that are not great, but thirteen is the point in the brain development when you realize the adults don't actually really know what they're doing and they make horrible mistakes, and the world is actually not fair and not just. Harry's going to see a lot of that this year.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry has already processed the ways in which Fudge is flawed and not even missed a step. He sees Fudge being the hypocrite and goes, "Mm-hmm," and doesn't let his guard down. He's, at this point, too mature for Fudge to take in in quite that way. So, here we are. We're in Diagon Alley, and we see the Firebolt.

JC: The Firebolt!

Lorrie: Oh! Here's something that I found to my great delight. A couple years ago when I needed to buy a broom to sweep my house with, I went online to look for brooms. All broom ad copy now reads to me like Wizarding copy. Okay, here is a real-life ad for a broom that I was considering buying: "The brush fiber is made of only the highest quality 100-percent broom corn. The handles are kiln-dried hardwoods from Oregon; the raw materials, tools and techniques used date back hundreds of years. We do every aspect of the work from harvesting the raw materials out of nature to the finished piece. A balance between function, decor, and the sacred is our purpose."

JC: Wow. That's heavy for a broom.

Lorrie: I know. This is, but all brooms do the same thing. You have to make yours sound good, right? And yeah, every broom description made me feel like I was thinking about whether I was a Seeker or a Chaser. I wonder how the braking action is.

JC: This is a detail I really do love about these books: that the Firebolt or the Nimbus 2000 and the Cleansweeps... All the brooms are, I don't know, not quite like cars but something between a bike and a motorcycle or a skateboard. It's a really cool thing that can get you around. I love that detail, that you have these coveted... it's like a bike or a skateboard or a scooter or whatever. What are the things? The hoverboards that kids ride around on now... To have this really cool way of getting around that is completely different from anything in the Muggle world, but yet we recognize it. We recognize the way it's marketed and the way that kids are into it, and yeah, it's so fun.

Lorrie: And how you don't *need* the expensive stuff. It's just desirable. It's so wonderful.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And it's not just that it's expensive for no reason. When you get it, oh, that's so nice.

JC: For sure. Oh, my gosh. There's so many wonderful things that he sees hanging around in Diagon Alley, and I think the Monster Book of Monsters is another hilarious detail of this year. The poor bedraggled manager of the bookstore has to put on the big gloves and come out with the tongs. "Okay."

Lorrie: "I'm ready!"

JC: "If you need a copy of this book..." and the books are fighting each other in the cage and they're having to poke them with sticks. You see the poor bookstore manager seeing the book list coming from Hogwarts and is like, "Oh, no, we've got to set up." What would you have to do to set up to prepare for that? You'd probably have to hire extra staff, you'd have to get extra equipment. That'd be a big deal, and then you have to deal with it for however long -- the two months or whatever -- that you have to have it in stock. Oh, what a nightmare.

Lorrie: Yeah, so we have some book jokes. And then in the bookshop, there's this ominous moment -- literally ominous -- where Harry sees the book 'Death Omens: What to Do When You Know the Worst Is Coming' because it has the giant black dog on the cover. The manager sees Harry noticing it and says, "Yeah, it's enough to frighten anyone to death," and advises Harry not to even read it because then you'll see signs everywhere.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: That's another warning about the theme of fear that Harry is going to live with through this book. You know that there's vague, undefined threats out there coming from you don't even know what directions. You have to be on guard against letting your imagination be affected by the fear; he mustn't let himself jump to conclusions. This escaped convict... we're going to find out that everyone assumes incorrectly that he's after Harry. When you're that scared, then you make these leaps of logic and that could end up being fatal in a heartbreaking way.

JC: It's also our first hint that the divination theme in this chapter... this idea that there are areas of magical study that people are not sure about or don't really think are good, academic or valid, let's say: this is the first hint of, "Yeah, don't get into that divination stuff, because then you're just going to start seeing conspiracies everywhere" or whatever. It's the first hint that there's going to be an introduction to academic arguments or academic disagreements in the Wizarding World.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not like, 'Oh, here's a thousand things you can study.' No, some people consider some of it crap.

Lorrie: Yeah, you have to be careful because they do exist. These things are real and they are historical, and you've got to know what you're doing. Oh, then he finally sees the people he's been longing to see all summer. He finally runs into Ron and Hermione, and this is one of the very few mentions of Hermione's skin tone. Hermione is "very brown." Now, she could be any race and just tanned from the summer, but Hermione is, I believe, very deliberately written with very little physical description because we're supposed to be able to imagine her. I think she's

meant to be an identification character: we know she has bushy hair, we know she has big teeth. We don't know her body size, we don't know if she's really considered 'pretty'. We have the big reveal later, but she's supposed to be an Everygirl, so when the whole headcanon started, that's been so important and such a movement, to read Hermione as a Black girl: when people went around looking for evidence that would either support or contradict this, well, there's not that much about whether she's actually Black or not, but there is this line. Huh. It's not closing the door; it's leaving it quite, quite open. So yeah, Black Hermione: that's one of the fandom beloved headcanons that's now been canonized by making sure that the *Cursed Child* Hermione is always played by a Black actress.

JC: Yeah. When I read that, that popped out at me too, and I thought, oh. I wondered then what other clues did I miss along the way, because having not read the books in a long time and having heard all of the fan discussion around that, I just assumed, okay, that must have been a lot of things that I missed. This is the first one I'd seen, but it's interesting that you're saying that there's not many of them. There's not many physical descriptions of her. That's interesting.

Lorrie: And later in this volume, we'll see that she looks very pale. Is that pale 'white girl pale'? Is she mixed-race and pale when she's scared and brown after a long summer vacation? There's room.

JC: And I think, too, it's interesting to get into those ideas of what did the author intend. What did the author intentionally leave space for versus how is the author imagining this character? Then, as we've discussed quite a lot, there's segments of fandom who are like, "I don't care what she intended or what she wanted us to think. Here, I've got my own headcanon for it." Yeah.

Lorrie: I thought all along on every read that Hermione was left undescribed so that people could see more into her, because Ron, for example, is obviously white. He's got the red hair, he's got the freckles, he's got the blue eyes; Hermione does not have race indicators so much in her physical description. So we see Ron and Hermione, and Ron has a 14-inch wand. Whoa.

JC: Yeah. It's like when those boys come back from the eighth grade or come back to start high school, it's like, "Wow, you finally grew." That's a freaking big wand. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "You waited a long time; here it is." And Hermione gets a cat, so they too have entered a new stage. They have more power. They're older now.

JC: That whole scene I had forgotten about, where Hermione gets Crookshanks, I think, and I had forgotten that she had intended to go in to buy an owl.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then there was all this fascinating interaction between Scabbers and Crookshanks, but this scene where we're reminded of how abnormal Scabbers is, which is interesting. But also, the pet shop owner saying, "What powers does he have?"

Lorrie: None.

JC: Just completely normal, right? "It's a magical pet, so what powers does it have?" And I thought, whoa, that idea that your pets would also have magical powers. I have a cat that is right now making me crazy as I sit here recording, and I'm like, 'If this cat had magical powers, oh, man, my whole life would be a lot harder.' I'm like, oh, that would be interesting. What kinds of magic can these pets do? Does that mean that in the natural world, there's subsets of every species that are magical?

Lorrie: Exceptional.

JC: Yeah. That's an interesting thought, and then they all find each other somehow.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: The magic cockroaches come to your house if you're a wizard.

Lorrie: Yeah. The squirrels outside, some of them are magical. How do you know which ones?

JC: The ones that can get into any bird feeder, no matter what.

Lorrie: Oh, God, there was the one that opened up the wrapper of a Halloween candy once in my house. Came in through my window, opened the wrapper, ate the candy and left the wrapper. It was one of those fun size Three Musketeers. I will never forget.

JC: Oh, my gosh, wow. That does sound like a magical squirrel, for sure.

Lorrie: Oi, yai yai.

JC: Well...

Lorrie: So yeah, so much is being set up here. We have the first hint of Hermione's overly full schedule, which she leaves unexplained. We realized that Scabbers the rat is a total freeloader. What does he give in exchange for being carted around and fed and cared for? Nothing. He does nothing. And this sentence that I love just for the writing, in the Menagerie: "A pair of enormous purple toads sat gulping wetly and feasting on dead blowflies."

JC. "Gulping wetly."

Lorrie: That is so atmospheric. It's got color in there, it's got the grossness. Amazing.

JC: Yeah, definitely. All of your senses are engaged here.

Lorrie: Love the writing. So there they are, and after it's been established that Scabbers is the least impressive rat ever except for his bizarrely long life, the witch says, "Well, if you don't want a replacement, you can try this rat tonic." That stood out to me because of a time jump; that was a Time-Turner moment for me into the future, because Replacement is a concept in J.K. Rowling's book *The Christmas Pig*. Most people who were Harry Potter fans before TERFpocalypse have not read *The Christmas Pig*, may not even have heard of it, because it

was published right as people were grappling with the first huge wave of her transphobic statements. But yeah, it was published after *The Ickabog*, which I did make myself read and I wasn't crazy about, and that was published right around the time that she was making really transphobic statements in the summer of 2020. Then *The Christmas Pig* was published after and I made myself read that, and I love it. It's really good. Does not mean that anyone has to go out and read it -- you don't have to go spend money on J.K. Rowling's writing -- but it was one of those things where I thought, 'You know what? I still see the person whose writing made me fall in love. She can still write.' In *The Christmas Pig*, there's a little boy who loses his stuffed animal that he's grown up with and he gets a replacement that's the same brand of toy, but of course he doesn't love the new pig. It's a replacement. Then we learn that there's this whole place where lost things go and they all have personalities and they'll talk to each other. One category of things in the lost things land is shiny, beautiful, brand-new toys. They weren't loved. They look at each other and say, "Oh, you were a Replacement. You were made with so much love, you come pre-loaded with all this love to give a human, and they just reject it because you're not what they wanted." That's the central relationship in *The Christmas Pig*: the one between the little boy and the replacement pig. It's intense.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, this witch is offering Ron a replacement. "Well, that rat's no good. Why don't you get a real one?" And Ron has loyalty. Why doesn't he? He can afford -- instead of buying rat tonic, he could have bought a new rat, but no, he didn't want to.

JC: Yeah. He has this protective... Even though he recognizes that Scabbers is a worthless rat, it's still his rat. It's like, "Don't insult my sister. Only I can do that." It's that... Yeah.

Lorrie: Ron has a bond with his rat.

JC: And that's going to end well.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love that Hermione finds an animal soulmate. They find each other, and I love that she's described as 'glowing' when she comes out holding Crookshanks, because when a person meets their animal for the first time, 'glowing' is exactly right. She says, "He's gorgeous!" He's hideous.

JC: He's described as one of those cats with a really squashed face and everything, and she's like, "Oh, he's the most beautiful cat." Yeah.

Lorrie: And you think, wow, he must be special to be right for Hermione because she's so powerful.

JC: Right, but they also said that no one else wanted him, that he was a cat that had been there for a while.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So that, too, that idea of the two of them finding each other, that's really cool.

Lorrie: That's a love story that means a lot to me with any two beings that are compatible but are unusual. "Well, most people don't want you; it's going to be lonely for a long time. But if you meet somebody who's right for you, that is going to feel special." So yeah, obviously Hermione was the only witch for this extremely gifted cat. Then we have Mr. Weasley explaining that there are going to be cars provided by the Ministry, and the kids are saying, "Why?" and then he hems and haws. When adults can't reveal the truth, you start realizing, okay, something's happening.

JC: A question that came up for me during that conversation about how they were getting to King's Cross was: how do wizards normally get to King's Cross? Okay, so Mrs. Weasley makes a comment: "Well, we can't just go on the Underground," and I'm thinking, Mr. Weasley, despite working in the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts office, seems to know very little about how the Muggle world works, so the idea of that family knowing how to work the Underground and going on the Underground doesn't make sense to me. And then I kept thinking about that: how do all these wizards get to King's Cross? What's happening? Then I went down one of those little spirals of 'Okay, make it make sense'. I'm actually really not sure, but I thought it's interesting that it was really important to the author to have the Wizarding World really meshed with the real world, that idea that you could be walking at any time past a portal into the magical world. I get that part of it. That's the same thing with Diagon Alley: there's this little pub that you can't see, but if you go through the back, you can get into this whole big world. But yeah, do most wizards actually spend more time in the Muggle world than we get the impression that the Weasleys do? I don't know. It's just a question that came up for me.

Lorrie: Also, they're harder to hide because there are so many of them.

JC: True.

Lorrie: If it was going to be just you and your one teenager, it would be easier to blend in.

JC: Yeah, there's probably not that many families with seven kids in the U.K. Maybe. I don't know. In our country, here it's a whole thing. Having seven kids is a thing that certain groups of people are really into.

Lorrie: But also, to me, the Weasleys are coded Irish. It's a Catholic having a lot of children who all have red hair.

JC: There's also an interesting moment when Harry, I think, comes back to the Leaky Cauldron after spending a day out in Diagon Alley -- I guess even before he runs into Ron and Hermione -- where he can both hear people talking in Diagon Alley and hear the traffic on Charing Cross Road at the same time from his room.

Lorrie: Good catch!

JC: And it's so interesting, that idea that the Leaky Cauldron is in the middle of these two places.

Lorrie: That's so exciting.

JC: But that idea that you could be in the Leaky Cauldron and you could hear both worlds. I thought, 'Wow, that's really fun.'

Lorrie: Oh, thank you for pointing that out. That's beautiful. Exciting. Mrs. Weasley also, for me, was somebody in this chapter where I wanted things to make sense, because there were some contradictions. She is, as she frequently is in this series, set up as the person who strongly advocates for children not being allowed to fight before they're of age, not being told certain things, and she's arguing with Arthur saying, "For heaven's sake, he's happy not knowing!" I was at first confused, because wait a minute: this is the woman whose daughter just got almost killed. She knows perfectly well that Harry is not safe at Hogwarts and that even if Albus Dumbledore is there, bad things can happen, so why is she suddenly arguing, "It's fine, don't tell him anything, nothing will happen to him"? This is the first reading — like yesterday, today — that I finally made it make sense to myself. At first I thought it was just the flaw in the plan, which is a big recurring theme in this series that when you care about somebody, then that can override what you should know is best for them -- the desire to protect. But then I thought, 'Oh, no, Molly is the proponent of a certain kind of strength,' which is that if you take a child and you nurture them and you make them feel secure and loved and provided for, that will build their inner strength in a way that, if you are deprived of it, is just going to leave you a lot less defended in life. She is arguing for every possible second that Harry can soak that in. Not in a logical way, perhaps, because when she says, "He's not dead, he's fine, so what's the point--" Okay, Molly, you are not making sense. But she knows that every minute for Harry that he's nurtured is going straight into his emotional bank, and he needs all of it to do all the fighting that he has to do, and it feels very much to me like she is trying to take up where things left off when he lost Lily and James. He got fifteen solid months of pure parental love, the way every living being is entitled to feel, and then it was gone, so he still had that foundation. Every time she gets her hands on him and she's trying to feed him third helpings and buying him clothes, she's trying to build on that. Meanwhile, they're saying, "No, no, you have to let him know that he's in mortal danger again," and she's kind of horrified. "You can't do that. We're not done feeding him," and that's when I understood, okay, she is not just being overprotective. She is speaking for one of the two competing, very necessary ways to take care of Harry Potter, the 13-year-old: to tell him what he's up against and also to build him up as a person. Then I thought that actually parallels what I feel like the author does with Harry sometimes at the beginning of each novel, which this chapter is all about: give him some happiness. It's about to get really scary this year.

JC: It's about to get dark again, as it does.

Lorrie: And I feel a little of the author guilt. "Oh, I'm sorry, my creation. I'm about to put you through so much. Here, have some ice cream."

JC: "Have some ice cream on a sunny day."

Lorrie: "Yeah, you're allowed to have some fun before I do all these things to you." So yeah, me realizing that Molly is fiercely keeping an eye on that particular way of strengthening Harry for the fight in his life: oh, I see. Okay. She's not just misguided. She's not just overprotective.

JC: Interesting. Yeah, it's interesting. I didn't think that much into that because that just felt like something that a mom would say, in the sense of there's people that I've known who have gotten bad news about their own health and then not told their children about it until they absolutely had to. "I don't want to worry them. I don't want to put them in this position where they have to worry about is their parent going to die, or something like that. I don't want them to have to feel that until it's absolutely necessary." That's kind of how I was reading it.

Lorrie: Which is there, too. Then, of course, on the other hand, the people who find out later that this information has been kept from them are universally outraged.

JC: Yeah, because "you didn't trust me to be able to handle it." Yeah. Exactly.

Lorrie: Or "that's my story" again. The fact that everybody knows things about Harry except Harry drives him crazy because that makes it -- There's no other way to put it: this is a conspiracy. Everybody knows; everybody's agreed to keep him in the dark. "Well, thank you very much. That's *my* story. Give it to me." Aside from the very practical reason that if he knows what's coming and he's suddenly face-to-face with it, he does need to be able to defend himself.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: So when Molly and Arthur have this argument, she ends up saying, "Well, Arthur, you must do what you think is right," and that is always what happens when Molly and Arthur have a serious disagreement. It makes me nuts when people laugh and say, "Oh, Molly Weasley, she's the real head of the family." No, she's not. When Arthur says, "I don't always do this, but I'm putting my foot down, I'm making a statement," she does not override it. She doesn't go behind his back, either.

JC: There's an interesting little line in there, too -- I think this is before Harry overhears their conversation -- where they're talking about Sirius Black all together, and Mr. Weasley says to Ron, "Don't be ridiculous. Black's not going to be caught by a 13-year-old wizard," which is deliciously ironic if you know where the book is going.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: So yeah. There was a conversation earlier, so Harry's reminded that everybody knows about Sirius Black. But you also get the sense that even in that scene, too, that there are things that no one wants to talk about around Harry, that they don't want to say too much, and how frustrating that is as a kid when the adults are all talking about a thing and they're like, "No, no, no, no." The kid's like, "But I have questions about this thing!" "No, no, I don't want to talk about it." Ugh.

Lorrie: And then it's awful. Then you hear something that makes you realize, "Oh, my God, they're talking about me," and then that's enraging. My God, I'm still mad.

JC: And in my own family, that's the thing that I've tried to be really conscious about not doing to my own kid. Sometimes when my partner and I are talking about something in the news that

made us really upset, and our kiddo will come in and be like, "What? Tell me all the details." He's missed half the conversation, but he sees that we're upset about something and he wants to know, and my partner's inclination is to go, "No, no, it's not important. Don't worry about it." Okay, no, that's not helpful. Okay, I can take you through this if you want. Come sit down, kiddo. Let me tell you what we're upset about." But I think my partner sees my kid getting spun up by the same thing and is like, 'Oh, no, we're going to talk about this even longer; that's going to make me miserable.' But yeah.

Lorrie: In 2016, there was a big change.

JC: Ugh.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Can you believe that was almost eight years ago?

Lorrie: Well, when I think about how young my daughters were then -- because by now, at 19 and 16, talking about these things would be matter of fact. But then, when they were in third grade and seventh grade, I didn't want to talk to them about rape in the news, about sexual predators.

JC: Children getting ripped out of their parents' arms and... Yeah.

Lorrie: I didn't use the word 'pussy', and then suddenly we have the Access Hollywood tape where Trump is saying "grab 'em by the pussy", and this is electoral news.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: This was weeks before the actual election. There's no saying, "No, no, this doesn't affect you." There was a mass effect at that time, which I remember talking to some therapists about, where the constant coverage of male-on-female sexual assault in the news was really triggering for people because you couldn't get away from it, and that continued with the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. That was a time when I thought, 'Well, I guess I'm talking about this with my eight-year-old, because what am I going to do, not talk about current events?' That was also around the time that my kids started hearing me swear for the first time, which — I had never sworn in front of them. Then, when they started hearing me swear, then they were relieved that they could now swear in front of me and stop protecting my delicate sensibilities.

JC: Right, exactly. Yeah, I think that was almost the same timeline in my family. That was a point at which I realized everyone in this house swears and there's no going back. Okay. Yeah.

Lorrie: And I had been so horrified by the whole pussy thing. I'm a knitter, as are you, I know.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: And that was the amazing moment in the U.S. economy when -- this is literally true -- you could not find pink yarn in ANY store.

JC: Yeah, I remember.

Lorrie: Because everybody's stock of pink yarn had run out for the making of pussyhats. I would knit them when my kids were asleep because I didn't want to explain what they were. Then I had one, and then my little eight-year-old is like, "Mommy's wearing the vagina hat," and my snooty 12-year-old says, "It's 'vulva'." I'm sitting there going --

JC: Which is a Hermione thing to say. That's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That would be the Hermione line. I love it.

Lorrie: I'm like, "Both of you, shut up. Leave me alone. I'm in a bad mood. Do you want to come to the protest?"

JC: Yeah, and they're like, "Yeah, we do! We do!" Oh, gosh. Okay, well, speaking of politics and interesting things -- I put this in the category of politics, but it probably doesn't completely belong -- but Percy.

Lorrie: Oh, God, Percy.

JC: Percy at the end of this chapter. Okay, there's a lot of things that I find almost charming in there around Percy, but the way that Percy is presenting himself in complete contrast to the rest of his family is so 'teenager' to me. I think I probably did this as a teenager, too. I went through a phase where I was like, 'I have a horrific, southern accent. I'm going to speak more eloquently, and I'm going to change the way I talk and I'm going to change the way I dress. I am not associated with those people.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So seeing Percy do that, he's bettering himself above his family and they all take it in stride. "Yeah, that's Percy." Yeah, and his brothers mocking him.

Lorrie: Well, Fred and George are actively trying to torment him about it.

JC: They are tormenting him. That's been there their whole lives.

Lorrie: That's what they do.

JC: Yeah. I'm imagining Mr. and Mrs. Weasley going, "Mm-hmm." That experience of having your child, having your teenager, start explaining things to you as if you don't know anything.

Lorrie: 'It's developmentally appropriate; I will just nod.'

JC: It is, and you're like, 'Okay, yeah, here we are. We've reached this point. This is great.'

Lorrie: 'Someday, they'll be old enough to discover that I actually invented that thing.'

JC: Yeah. 'That I actually know what I'm talking about here. Yeah. Oh, today is not that day,' yeah. It's really interesting, and Fred and George constantly trying to pull Percy back down a peg. Oh, it's interesting to watch. I didn't grow up in a huge family. I had one sibling, so that idea that there'd be multiple kids that could torment each other, the spider web of who torments whom is massive and really fascinating.

Lorrie: There are alliances, too. Oof. So the final hint of real-world fear and threat that stood out to me in this chapter was when Arthur is talking to Molly about the Azkaban guards stationing themselves around the entrance to the school grounds. She's being law and order about this, thinking, "Well, sure, that's going to help," and Arthur is saying, "Uh, Dumbledore doesn't think so." This is something that read so differently to me after the 2020 riots against police violence, even though in my own history, I have reason to know that violence from people in authority -- from law enforcement -- that's a whole human urge that I think is a constant, that humans always have to be careful about if you're in that position and you're primed. Sometimes that urge runs away with you even when it's not appropriate, and if you have a human prejudice or two, oh, boy. It's a human constant that Dumbledore is well aware of: who is drawn to law enforcement. Their desire to police the kids may be unconnected to whether it's actually necessary or not.

JC: Right. Now, this is actually a really good point, and the fact that at this point, on a first read, you still are making some assumptions about who the guards are. What the guards turn out to be is so completely horrifying that the idea that this was considered a solution is mind-blowing to me. You have these evil creatures that what they really want to do is suck the happiness out of you and then suck out your soul; that's what they live on, is this human energy, and you're going to put that around the school to keep it safe? Wow.

Lorrie: Well, it's not to keep the *school* safe. It's externally imposed governmental decree to satisfy their own peace of mind about Sirius Black, and they really couldn't care less what this is doing to the students.

JC: Okay, that's real.

Lorrie: Yeah. Isn't it?

JC: That's very real.

Lorrie: As we live in a country that gets repeated evidence that a good guy with a gun is not going to stop a bad guy with a gun, actually. If that evidence doesn't stop you from putting armed guards around schools, there may be another reason why you're so into putting armed guards around schools. This is the U.S. This is our reality, and this is about to be Harry's year.

JC: Yeah. Oh, and that's something I hadn't really thought about: that idea of the larger government imposing what they think is a protective measure on a school to protect it from this very particular kind of threat, and then that protection having the great potential of doing much

more harm than good. This is what the children have to live under and have to learn under. They don't feel safe. This is a pretty horrible situation to be in, and then it doesn't even work.

Lorrie: No, it doesn't.

JC: That idea that this is the world that we live in. We all know that there's really no way of stopping... Okay, there is a way, but the society doesn't want to do it. Okay. In the society we live in, people are going to do this and somehow, horrifically, we just have to live with the possibility that someone may come in and shoot up the school that our kids are in. We are supposed to live with that, and the measures that the government puts forth to make school safer are not actually doing the thing that would make the school safer.

Lorrie: Right, because that's not even their concern.

JC: Yeah, exactly. Because if that was the concern... Yeah, if they really were going to dig down... Oh, my God, yeah, we could talk about lots of social problems that work that way. So yeah, I hadn't thought about that, but that's a really interesting angle to take on having the dementors stationed around the school this entire school year.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Dumbledore being very not crazy about this.

JC: Yeah. Dumbledore knowing this isn't going to...

Lorrie: What could possibly go wrong?

JC: Does Dumbledore know the truth about Sirius Black?

Lorrie: No.

JC: No one knows at this point, okay, except for Sirius and Peter Pettigrew. Not even Lupin, right? Not even Lupin.

Lorrie: No. Lupin is grappling with this huge thing that ruined his life. We're going to be meeting Lupin in the next chapter, but at this point in this chapter, the only thing thirteen-year-old Harry is thinking is how badly he wants to go to Hogsmeade this year.

JC: It's so 'teenager', isn't it?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I love the fact that his reaction to the news that there's this mass murderer out there that just really wants to kill him, and he's like, 'All right.' He's not actually that bothered by it, because it's like, 'Okay, it's another year at Hogwarts. Someone's trying to kill me. It's not Voldemort this time. That's new.'

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Basilisk's still dead.'

JC: 'All right. I wish I could go to Hogsmeade.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Exactly. It's perfectly that young teenager. It's just perfect.

Lorrie: And then his indignation, too, when he thinks: did they think he couldn't look after himself?

JC: Oh, my gosh. 'Really?! Look what I've done!'

Lorrie: Seriously, give the kid some credit.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: It is.

JC: He's not being... Yeah. He's not overestimating his own capabilities there. Look what the kid has actually done.

Lorrie: "Have any of you killed the basilisk? No! You didn't even know what it was."

JC: "Any of you go to open the Chamber of Secrets? No!" Yeah, exactly. Then the last two lines of this book are just golden: "'I'm *not* going to be murdered,' Harry said out loud. 'That's the spirit, dear,' his mirror said sleepily." I love that. I love the mirror; that little detail in the Wizarding World that you look in the mirror, and the mirror would give you tips on how to improve your looks for the day or whatever or can be encouraging.

Lorrie: Yeah. The mirror has opinions.

JC: Yeah. Could you buy the mirror that's going to be encouraging or the mirror that's going to be honest, or do you just get the mirror you get and then you're stuck with it?

Lorrie: Yes. I think you get the one you get, and the mirror's comments are never helpful.

JC: Yeah. "Oh, yeah, that makeup does not make you look younger."

Lorrie: "Thank you. Shut up."

JC: "Thanks. Thanks, mirror. Thanks."

Lorrie: So yeah. Next up: The Dementor.

JC: We finally meet a dementor. Yes. I know it's a narrative trick, but they've been the Azkaban guards up to this point and now the language will totally change because now we're going to know what they are. But the possibility that they were human and some kind of militia or

government police force that happens to have a lot of power: that's been a possibility up till now, that they're some elite police force or something.

Lorrie: Like Dark wizards, but still human.

JC: Yeah. And then the next chapter is when we'll realize, 'oh, they're not human,' and that just adds this whole other dimension of 'holy shit' to it. And the fact that they let -- well, we're going to get there next chapter, okay? I'm not going to get ahead of myself. Okay. Not going to get ahead of myself.

Lorrie: It's heating up, yeah?

JC: For sure, for sure.

Lorrie: Okay. Well, I will talk to you then.

JC: All right, looking forward to it.

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.