



Transcript

Episode 4.22

Book 4, Chapter 22: The Unexpected Task

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 Four, Chapter Twenty-Two: The Unexpected Task.

Lorrie: The Unexpected Task. A disapproving McGonagall tells an unprepared Harry that along with competing like a 17-year-old, he's also expected as a Triwizard Champion to have a date and open the dancing at the Yule Ball like a 17-year-old. Harry would rather face a dragon again (understandably), and now all the fourth-years have to find themselves dates. Mayhem ensues.

JC: The humor and relatable awkwardness of this section is such a nice coda to what we just experienced in the previous chapter. I also have to say that this section -- this chapter -- is probably one of my favorite movie sequences in the entire Harry Potter series. Everything that happens in this chapter is just so beautifully portrayed in the movie with all the teen awkwardness and the hilarity of the teachers trying to explain, "Here's what you're going to have to do." Oh, my God, the horror of high school dances... That section of the movie is in my head, and this chapter reminded me of how much fun -- it's funny...

Lorrie: It is funny.

JC: And torturous at the same time.

Lorrie: Yes, I love that it starts out this chapter with showing us that Ron and Harry are firmly on the immature side of adolescence with the sword fight with the rubber toys -- the parrot and the haddock that they're fighting with -- and the way, when Harry gets called out by McGonagall, the head of his haddock slowly droops and falls off. The

timing is so perfect, which made me wonder: is 'haddock' the funniest name for a fish? Is that the funniest species? Because I think it might be.

JC: I think a blobfish is funnier in some ways, but I don't know. 'Haddock' is a weird word, isn't it?

Lorrie: But if Harry was fighting with Ron with a blobfish, that might have been a little obvious. But 'haddock', I've heard it be used as a punchline before, so this shows up here and I think yeah, it is a funny word.

JC: It is. There's something very Monty Python-esque about that word here. I guess that's part of it, too.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Yeah. 'A haddock?' is what I hear in my head, yeah, and the parrot.

Lorrie: Yeah, the slow droop and the fall.

JC: Yeah. There's some very classic humor there. I also really like the opening scene of the Transfiguration class. There's a lot of things going on here that are fun. One is the discussion: there's a brief window into the level of theory that the kids are having to do to think about this magic of transforming one kind of animal to another, and I love that little hint that they're really learning a lot of stuff here. Being good at magic is more than just having a natural talent and waving a wand and making your intent known. There's a lot of intellectual stuff going on there, and we know that that's true because of everything that we know about Hermione, but I love just seeing little hints of it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's something that I enjoy. Whenever I'm reading a fantasy story of any kind, it's some world-building and that's why I like it, probably. But the theory of why this happens and how and if it's connected to other things that we know about this world, if there's an eternal logic and science to it?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I love that, so I just ate up that little bit. Oh, yes. And then the fact that Harry and Ron, who are basically high school freshmen at this point, were having a sword fight in the back of this class. Yeah. Yeah, no, having recently been in classes with high school freshmen, I'm like, 'Yeah, that tracks.'

Lorrie: It does.

JC: And it's a really nice way to start the chapter, considering where we're headed.

Lorrie: Oh, God, the nightmare. I love that during this time, Lavender and Parvati give us the first sign that Harry is going to be expected by other people to be boyfriend material from now on, whether or not anyone has warned him about this ahead of time - obviously without his consent or knowledge. But as soon as McGonagall mentions the Yule Ball, Lavender and Parvati giggle, and they both turn to look at Harry.

JC: Poor Harry, and he's clueless.

Lorrie: And Harry's, like, 'What? What?'

JC: No idea why they're looking at him. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's like, oh, God, he's been anointed, and McGonagall does not disappoint in this scene. Everything a reader could have wanted her to be for the scene, she is exactly that. So reliable, she's so disapproving... She touches the subject gingerly. 'Ew. It's my duty to tell you about the Yule Ball.' Yeah, she's very satisfying.

JC: It's so funny. Oh, my gosh. Again, going back to the movie sequence, I always imagine Maggie Smith with her lips pursed in a certain way and holding herself this way. Oh, my God, yeah. It's hard for me not to have that image of McGonagall during this scene.

Lorrie: Perfect. And I do love the title, The Unexpected Task, making it clear that this is equivalent. This is part of the Triwizard Tournament. It is equivalent to a dragon.

JC: Yes. Especially for -- Oh, my gosh. I think I was definitely one of these kids who was completely inept at the idea of relationships. I remember school dances happening when I was this age -- freshman, sophomore in high school -- and the awkwardness of thinking, 'Am I going to go to this dance? I could go with my friends and that would be comfortable, but then is it weird that I'm not going with a date?' And then having some boy ask me who I don't even know... we're in a class together, but we've never spoken...

Lorrie: Oh, no...

JC: 'I don't even know you, what the hell...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I had this horrific memory -- and this is what I think of in this scene -- when there's groups of girls going down the hall and Harry goes, "What do I do?"

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: There was a boy who was in my freshman biology class in high school who apparently liked me and wanted to ask me to the homecoming dance, but every time he talked to me, I was just like, "Oh, got to go!" I was like, "Why is this person talking to

me? Stop!" He sent me a flower or something. There was something that you could do...

Lorrie: Some classroom thing...

JC: You could send people flowers through student council...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: And he sent the flower as a way to ask me to go to the homecoming dance with him, and I completely freaked out because I was like, "I don't know this -- I don't want to go to the homecoming dance at all, let alone with this guy," and every time he tried to talk to me, I just turned around and ran away.

Lorrie: Aww, this is so sad.

JC: It's so awful, and I was fourteen. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't handle it, so I was just like, "Nope, nope, nope, I'm leaving." The same time, there were kids who had been dating people for two years at that point, right?

Lorrie: Yeah, and they had it so easy.

JC: Yeah. The range of what kids can handle emotionally at that point is just... so I completely understand Harry's like... This is like taming a dragon.

Lorrie: Oh, this is so awful.

JC: I can't, and I was not in the position of having to ask anyone. I was in the position of having to deal with being asked, right? I feel for Harry so much here, because I couldn't handle that at that age either.

Lorrie: Well, nobody was going to ask me ever. That was not a concern I ever had, but I definitely identified with Harry's agony that he did want somebody a lot, and it's someone who's way more popular than he is and socially sought after. He's thinking, 'I have to ask her,' and meanwhile I'm thinking, 'Harry, ask her now. Ask her now! There's nothing to be gained by waiting, by trying to get up your nerve, and somebody will ask her before if you don't. If you don't ask for what you want, you won't get it,' unless you're one of those mysterious people who exists and were around me that I didn't understand who always has somebody interested in them and is always dating people.

JC: That was a mystery to me, too, at that age.

Lorrie: Or there's somebody where you ask them and they say, "Oh, yeah, you can tell someone's interested in you because they're smiling at you and they're paying attention to what you're saying." I'm like, "Really?! Huh... That's not relatable to me, but I am happy for you, and you do not perhaps understand how humiliating this whole thing is for most of us..."

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Because if you really care -- if there's somebody that you want -- you can't help the pain when you watch them be with other people. And then there's the chance that well, if you ask them, maybe they'll say yes. Everyone has to do something for the first time, right? Are we supposed to be asking each other out? Umm... Just the range of horrible results in humiliation that can happen, that is just limitless... Ouch.

JC: It's so painful... Ugh. I'm grateful that they limit it to fourth-years and up, which is high school age, right? We've excluded the middle school kids, that's great.

Lorrie: Oh, God. Unless --

JC: However, it's possible for a high schooler to invite a middle schooler, which I'm like, 'Oh, my God.'

Lorrie: Yeah. Which is fair.

JC: Which is fair because that happens, but oh, wow. I don't know. This whole thing was just like... man, it took me back.

Lorrie: The agony.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh... I like that Harry does get a little bit of solace when he finds, to his shock, that he is suddenly considered desirable; people that he's never thought of in his life are asking him out.

JC: Oh, yeah. Girls are coming up to him...

Lorrie: Yeah. 'I don't even know you', but it's also accurate that even though that does make you feel better in some way, it doesn't really affect your life on a personal level. It doesn't solve the problem of him still being awkward, still wanting a certain person, and being doomed about it.

JC: Yeah, and the whole awkwardness at that age, too... You like someone from afar, but you don't really know them or vice versa, that whole bit. There's a moment where someone asks him and he's like, "I don't even know who this person is. Why would I go to the dance with someone that I don't even know?" I really identify with that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. That was part of my big problem as a high schooler was, "I don't know. I don't like any of these people."

Lorrie: Right.

JC: "I don't want to spend any more time with them than I have to."

Lorrie: Gosh.

JC: Oh... okay, yeah. So Harry, after having been treated like a pariah, is suddenly... everybody -- yeah, all these girls are interested in him.

Lorrie: And they've all been talking about this or this is all part of a culture that they've all been aware of, and he's been blissfully ignorant until suddenly now he's being written into their story and nobody told him about this. It also horrified me as I'm reading this, and memories that I didn't even like the first time going around are coming back to me.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: When they say, "Hagrid, are you coming?" and Hagrid's like yeah, he's planning to go, too, oh, God. Then there's that layer of mortifying witness every once in a while to the grown-ups -- to teachers -- playing out their own sad little dramas in front of the teenagers and having to witness it.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: And the lack of dignity there...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oooh... mortifying.

JC: Yeah. Especially in this context, where it's a boarding school, right, so no one can escape.

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: And kids in schools... Having been a high school teacher -- kids are very gossipy about their teachers and there's all this, "Oh, this teacher likes that teacher," or whatever.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: God forbid that two teachers are having an affair, because the kids will eat that up.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But it's got to be ten times worse in a boarding school, where everyone's trapped there, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the kids are -- oh, God, to be the adult in that situation... Ugh.

Lorrie: Yeah, there's very few ways that this can go well, and a lot of ways it can go badly.

JC: For sure. For sure. Oh.

Lorrie: Oh...

JC: But it's funny, right? It brings up awful stuff, but at the same time it's like... It's mortifying, but also funny.

Lorrie: It's reminding me of stuff.

JC: Yeah. For sure.

Lorrie: One thing for sure, if you're an adult being watched by adolescents: if you don't behave with a lot of integrity, they're going to be mortified by you and for you.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: So yeah, we've had fair warning in this chapter that the kids are going to have to withstand watching Hagrid be vulnerable about dating. Yikes!

JC: And he also tells them here that... We find out that he had his interview with Rita Skeeter and that she spent most of it trying to get him to say shit about Harry, basically...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that moment where Harry's like, "Okay, well, you know, Snape would have been happy to give her all kinds of awful things." But Hagrid seemed disappointed that she wasn't interested in learning about magical creatures.

Lorrie: Aww. We go through some of the other teachers, too, who all are reliably themselves, and that's delicious as a reader, thinking, 'Okay, here's the situation. Oh, no, the school dance...' These characters, whom we've come to know, are each going to play their part, so they all act according to character, where Binns, of course, just keeps lecturing. This is a bit of world-building that I really love: Binns lectures on bloody and vicious goblin riots. We never get that explored, but that's not the only time that there's reference to really bloody goblin rebellions.

JC: Yeah. It seems like that's what we get a lot of. Whenever it's mentioned what they're learning in History of Magic...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's always about goblin rebellions or something similar.

Lorrie: Whatever position goblins are in in the magical world, they do not appreciate being subordinate to wizards. It's not what they would have wanted. They're being subjugated, and it made me think, 'Okay, so this story is coming from the point of view of the wizards in this magical society, and it's parallel to reading this international bestseller that's written by an English woman culturally, where English literature and other colonial exports are considered the thing that everybody has access to whether you want it or not.' It reminded me of that meme that says that the holiday that is independence from British colonial rule is the most commonly celebrated secular holiday anywhere in the world; so many countries have that holiday.

JC: Yeah. That's funny.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry and all of the other wizards are in that dominant position and they're learning about the other magical races, and the history that they're learning about is how much the other races don't like how the wizards keep them subjugated.

JC: It's very interesting, isn't it?

Lorrie: And then, obviously, Snape is, like McGonagall, completely satisfying by being exactly himself. He has no sense of humor or understanding about the Ball because he is bitter and prematurely old. When I was first getting to know the series, I thought this is the archetypal teacher who needs to get laid. That is totally his problem.

JC: I think fanfiction authors probably will help with that, or have helped with that.

Lorrie: Yes. In fanfiction, yeah, he needs to take a break. But when you're in high school and you're a kid, and you think, 'What is wrong with this teacher? That's what they need,' and it's true and it's patently obvious and sad. That's not an easy thing to witness, either. He's so prematurely old. He obviously was not successful at this kind of task what he was their age, which wasn't that long ago; now he's a teacher and every year the students get younger and younger, and they're going through this ritual that was torment to him then and probably still is.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: This is not going to be good.

JC: Watching the... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's funny, too, because the discussion of... there's some teachers who've just given up. It reminds me of being a high school teacher in the days leading up to prom -- or in Texas, in the days leading up to homecoming, especially the Friday of homecoming when the whole day is about everyone wearing their mums and the mums are loud and they're distracting; things are getting delivered to the classroom because people are

getting... "Oh, you're on the homecoming court, you're getting a flower delivery." There are just so many options, teachers are like -- especially the higher up you go; with juniors and seniors, it's like, 'Okay, we're not going to get anything done that day.' Some teachers are like, 'I'm just going to plan that we're not getting anything done that day. It'll just be something inconsequential.' Other teachers are like, 'Fuck no! Fuck this noise, we're doing calculus,' or whatever. I see the same pattern here with these teachers. Some of them are just excited, and others are like, 'Nope, we're on track.'

Lorrie: There's no hoping. Yeah.

JC: 'We've got a test, in fact, on that day,' because they're bitter and angry. Yeah, exactly. That felt very real, too.

Lorrie: Yes. Oh, then we had Hermione reminding Harry, "You should be working on your egg..."

JC: In the middle of all this.

Lorrie: Right. Then that made me think, 'Wow, what if Hermione had been the surprise Fourth-year Triwizard Champion? How would she have done?'

JC: Wow. Someone's written that fic, surely.

Lorrie: I'm sure. And then I thought that's actually what she was in the seventh book. The way that she is meeting all the challenges reminded me of when there's that amazing moment... It's peak Hermione when she gets them all out of Xenophilius Lovegood's house. She times it so that she protects absolutely everybody, and she comes to this plan in about three seconds. She doesn't even have time to explain it. She just tells everybody their part and then executes, and I thought, 'Oh, she as a Triwizard Champion would have made sure that her dragon didn't trample its eggs.' She's amazing.

JC: Yeah. I want to read that story now, where Hermione is the...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: If anyone listening knows of such a fanfiction, let us know.

Lorrie: Yes. Please tell us!

JC: I really want that story now.

Lorrie: Oh, and in class, this is the one mention of a bezoar in fourth year, which that's going to become a plot point in the sixth book...

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Where Harry has no recollection of bezoars at all, and Hermione says, "He taught us about them in fourth year." This is a great plant of that payoff later. Yes, it's been antidotes. The whole Potions curriculum that Harry has been flaking on this whole semester has been about antidotes and bezoars, and we just get this little clue like, 'Meanwhile...'

JC: Yeah, and it's going to be very important in about a year and a half or two years.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is the key ingredient that Harry forgets in his winter finals and... oops.

JC: Yeah. Were bezoars mentioned in the first book?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Yeah? Okay, so this is the second ever mention, maybe?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And it's going to come up again. Wow.

Lorrie: Right. But yeah, coming from Snape, Harry has... Snape may as well be talking like those teachers in *Peanuts* that just make these human adult noises.

JC: All of the stuff that happens around asking people to the ball in this... I love how we're starting to see this tension between Ron and Hermione here. Ron doesn't really consider Hermione a girl...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which is what comes out of this chapter. "Oh, you finally have noticed that I'm a girl," is one of the big things that happens here. The older kids are not seeming to struggle with this as much as the younger ones, obviously. This beautiful moment of Fred... "So yeah, I'm going with Angelina." "Have you asked her?" "Oh, yeah..."

Lorrie: "Oh, yeah..."

JC: "Hey, Angelina!" That whole scene...

Lorrie: The effortlessness...

JC: The effortlessness of it, and how they're both kind of grinning about it. I love how that was... We're not talking about the movies, I know, but the way that that was done in the movie was *perfect*. It was exactly what this is in my head. Reading this, I was like, 'Yes, yes, Yes!' I remember loving that moment in the movie, but how much easier it is for kids who are just a little bit older...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's like yeah, that's what it's like to be a teenager.

Lorrie: Well, they're also confident.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: They're also more confident people.

JC: You're right. Yeah. But just that little bit of maturity and what a difference it makes. And that's what I think... You talk a lot about the fact that Hermione is basically a year older, but then also at least another year more mature. Hermione is much more on the level of Fred and George as far as maturity goes, and is having to deal with these 14-year-old boys.

Lorrie: Oh, God.

JC: And Ron is being a dick to her, honestly.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So much of this chapter, Ron's just being a little shit, and Hermione just has to like... Oh, my God.

Lorrie: I find Ron's portrayal in this scene really interesting and relatable, because this is such an awful shift in the social economy. When they're not thinking about dating, the kids feel like they all know their place in a certain way, but then suddenly when you're looking at each other as potential dates, people who you weren't even thinking about are suddenly stars and people who thought there was nothing wrong with them before are suddenly zeros. I remember that. I remember being so bewildered: 'Why is that girl suddenly so popular? I never even thought about her before, and now it turns out that half the boys all want her attention. I don't know.' Those girls kind of knew it -- they knew to expect it coming -- and I just didn't know. I hadn't thought about it. Rearranging of the social order... It's disorienting, it's brutal, and it cannot be denied or glossed over. Attempts to rationalize it and think, 'Oh, just be yourself and I'm sure people will like you.' Total bullshit! That never works; being someone else also doesn't work. But just be yourself and people will like you? No!

JC: Nothing works. It's all shit.

Lorrie: That's not going to help anything. But Ron also recognizes the harsh realities of this marketplace, because he doesn't see anything wrong when Hermione says, "Wait, so you're just going to go with the best-looking of any girl who will have you?" and he's like, "Yeah." Hermione is revolted and finds this repellent, and Ron is like, "That's how this works. Yes, that's exactly what I'm planning to do." Not that Ron has any idea how, but Ron is correct: that is how this economy works, whether you manage to find a

workaround or not. Poor Eloise Midgen, whom we never meet... All we know is that she is at the very, very bottom of this status.

JC: Poor thing has terrible acne.

Lorrie: Yeah, and her nose is off-center and Neville is her male counterpart of being at the very bottom. I love Cho; bless her. She never laughs at Harry.

JC: She's very nice to Harry. Yeah.

Lorrie: When he threw a tantrum about Rita Skeeter's article, she wasn't laughing at him. She never put on one of those badges, she never referred to those badges, and then when he asks her for a private word and all her friends start being really annoying and giggling, she doesn't laugh. There was a moment when I thought, 'God, she's really all right'. A moment when I thought maybe she wouldn't have been such a bad match if it weren't for Cedric's death... Then I came to my senses. 'No, she's a year older than Harry by age and two years in maturity, and he would not have ever understood a single thing she wanted from a romance. No, it would have been terrible. What am I thinking? What am I thinking?' When I thought of it that way, I thought, 'Well, actually, Harry got so much out of this encounter.' He came out of it really well in that she turned just as red, and if he hadn't spoken up, he would never have known that the crush is mutual and she's genuinely sorry not to be able to say yes. He has done it. He's gotten it out there that he likes somebody, and the answer he got back wasn't a rebuff. If he were a little older and more experienced, he would know that, 'Okay, that means something good for the future if I come back and ask her when she's available.'

JC: Yeah, and she will be available in the future for sad reasons.

Lorrie: Ooh, ouch... But it really could have been presumptuous for a fourth-year to ask out this pretty girl who's so popular that she's Cedric's date, and it could have been like, "How dare you," and it wasn't. It didn't turn out that way at all. That... he did okay. He did quite well.

JC: This whole thing where Ron and Harry make this agreement -- "We're going to get dates today!" -- and then it doesn't go well for either of them that day, but it gets worse for Ron...

Lorrie: It does.

JC: In this wonderfully humiliating way. It's presented as an exaggeration of how this could go wrong.

Lorrie: It's not that exaggerated.

JC: It's not that exaggerated actually, but it's what it feels like, I'm sure.

Lorrie: Yeah. When Fleur looked at him like he was a sea slug...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I identified 'pure sea slug'. Oooh... Because it's not only, "How dare you ask," it's not only, "How dare you think that you could even say such a request," but it's even, "How dare you want. Don't you just know that you're so unworthy? You don't even have the right to desire." Ooh. ouch. Then we have Ginny trying her best not to smile at the very, very funny thing that just happened to her one-year-older brother.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, God... Which is frankly hilarious.

JC: Yeah. She's being a very good sister right now.

Lorrie: She really is... until she hears that Harry asked out Cho and she stopped smiling. Oh, no...

JC: Ohhhh... So yeah, there it is again, the person that you like, and she had already agreed to go to the dance with someone else because she didn't think Harry would invite her. But then to hear that he didn't...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, how awful... Although, when that works out that way, if she had gone with Harry as his 'Oh, my brother just set them up' date, it would have been miserable in a different way because Harry wouldn't even have been thinking that.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: So there's no winning for Ginny at this point. I just thought how really well-written it was that when Ron was laughing that Neville asked out Hermione and got turned down and it shows Ginny saying, "No, don't laugh at...", the payoff comes several paragraphs later when we find out oh, actually, Ginny said yes to Neville. That's well written. When Ginny objects, we don't know what she's objecting to yet, and it was a pleasant surprise to me, like, 'Oh, great.' It's well-handled and it's accurate, and just the way Ginny wretchedly just slumps away after that...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, ouch.

JC: But something I've always loved in this scene is that Neville had the courage to ask people and had thought, 'Who would I just like to go to this dance with?' His reasons for asking Hermione were really genuinely sweet and thoughtful.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And he is positioned as the opposite of Ron, who's like, 'I will go with the best-looking girl I can get to go with me.' Neville, on the other hand, is thinking, 'Who would I actually like to spend time with at this dance?' You get the sense it's not even that Neville has a crush on Hermione. It's more he's like, 'Who would I really genuinely like to go with that I would have fun with?'

Lorrie: 'Who's a decent person?'

JC: Yeah, and it's also a level of maturity that Ron and Harry seem not to have.

Lorrie: Neville is thinking, 'Who would not laugh at me?' That's something that's so good about Hermione and Ginny and Cho in this chapter: you could laugh at people brutally for having the same awkwardness that you in turn also have, or you could just not make life harder and let people have some dignity. So yeah, good for Neville. Neville has good taste.

JC: Oh, my gosh, this is dredging up memories. Okay, so I have this memory suddenly: I was a freshman in high school and in the same zone as Ron and Hermione were in, where I just had -- 'How are people just getting together?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'How are people dating? What?!'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And I remember I was in marching band, and there was this boy who was probably, in my high school experience, the equivalent of Neville: just completely awkward and not conventionally attractive in almost any way. He ended up dating this girl who was, let's say, the equivalent of Eloise Midgen here, and the two of them on the band bus would make out on the way to the band meet and the entire way back. It was just heavy making out on the bus across the aisle from me...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I remember people would just sit there and stare at them and think, 'Wow. Why are we not successful when they are,' right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But at the time, I remember thinking, 'What have they figured out that I haven't?' I think part of it was that it's this economy that you were talking about: somehow you're not supposed to connect with somebody in a way that's not about attractiveness. I'm not saying that they weren't attractive or didn't find each other attractive, but that was the perception at the time. This is bringing up a lot of shit I haven't thought about in a while.

Lorrie: Doesn't it?

JC: Goddamn. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. Well, there was also an element there of performative, angry sexuality. If they both have that feeling, like, 'Oh, you think that only the best-looking people have the right to have sexuality and desire? Well, we're going to be as loser as possible in your face and show you that we figured this out in a way that you shallow people haven't.'

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: It's angry, and we get that from Hermione toward Ron. When Ron, despite all evidence, just can't stop laughing at the thought that, 'No, of course Hermione hasn't crossed over into the land of sexual viability either. I'm not there, Harry's not there, and if we're not, nobody would ever think of Hermione that way.' Hermione knows exactly what Ron's thinking and is angry and hurt and knew that was going on ahead of time and just didn't share it with Harry or Ron, because they're so very not there yet; just going about her business, becoming an adolescent without them, because what use would they be? Then to see this -- this conviction that she's a sexual nothing -- I recognize that anger.

JC: And the fact that we know. She says she has a date; Ron doesn't believe her, and the fact that we know who she's going with is someone that Ron would actually also like to go with.

Lorrie: And that Ginny knows...

JC: Yeah. And that Ginny knows, and they're just like, "We're not even going to tell him because he's going to be so freaking jealous that it would just not be good."

Lorrie: This is a good insight into the gender divide that Ron and Harry are so bewildered. Wait, suddenly, this Yule Ball is announced and then there's all this reality that we don't even know about, but the girls somehow knew about beforehand. Ginny and Hermione... When Ginny's like, "No, I'm not telling you," how does she know the rules that you're not supposed to tell? Whoa! And the way that Hermione has kept quiet about her own business is, to me, another example of this character being the wish fulfillment character about maturity I wish I'd had at that age, because of course she's going to have vulnerabilities about being asked out for the first time ever, and she knows better than to let Ron anywhere near her vulnerabilities, so she's just kept quiet about it. That's amazing.

JC: There's also this sense -- and I'm just thinking of what's coming -- that there's other reasons to keep this quiet, not just from Harry and Ron but probably also from general knowledge of the school, because girls are going to be cruel to her...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That she was chosen, and then the discussion of, "Why would he pick her?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that does happen later, but that would just make it miserable up until the moment, so that idea, too, of keeping it quiet for a lot of reasons.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Hermione understands that, and the boys just have no clue.

Lorrie: I love that... I mentioned it in the previous episode that my friend Lokifan wrote a meta (which I found and I will link) about how Rowling writes friendship as romance and romance as mystery, because we don't know at this point who Hermione is going with and it's written very much as a mystery. Parvati saying, "Really? Hermione?! Who is she going with?!" It's really set up like, "Okay, reader, you don't know yet. You can start taking your guesses now." Yes, romance is written as a mystery, and she's very much not a writer who builds up the reader's anticipation and then gives you fulfillment with, "Ah, then they got together." She's not a romance writer at all, deliberately, by choice. She saves all that for friendship. When friends are separated, their misery is how we consider romance difficulties to feel, and when friends are happy together, that's the great fulfillment that you get in a romance from the couple getting together. Ginny saying quietly, "No, Hermione is not lying." This is going to be a rude awakening for Ron. He is not having a very good time with adolescence so far. That, plus Ginny having to turn down a date with Harry, is just excellently plotted for maximum misery. This is like Shakespearean comedy misery.

JC: Yeah, true. True. Then we have the moment when Harry finally is like, "You know what? Fuck it. The next two girls that walk in the door, I'm going to ask," basically.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "There they come. Okay." I find it interesting that it's Parvati and Lavender, and interesting that Lavender is the girl that he says, "Will you go with Ron?" because Lavender and Ron do end up dating later.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But not yet.

Lorrie: Thank goodness Harry got practical with that...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Because let's all be put out of our misery. Harry, do something!

JC: Yeah. I'm thinking about the fact that Harry almost just picks a girl at random to ask, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is also very adolescent, very teenager, and then there's this stretch between that and the actual dance. Well, is there a relationship in the meantime?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Are they just ignoring each other and giggling when they see each other? Does Parvati think that Harry is her boyfriend now? What's happening here?

Lorrie: What is this?

JC: What's going to happen?

Lorrie: Does he like me?

JC: Yeah. Does Harry have any idea what kind of a can of worms he's opened for Parvati?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Probably not, right? He's just like, 'Oh, fine, I got a date. There, the task is over.'

Lorrie: Yeah. Actually, that's bringing up some memories for me, too.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Do not send me back there.

JC: Oh, God, yeah. We earned our way into middle age. We don't have to go back again.

Lorrie: Awful, awful, awful. Mercifully, this chapter comes to an end.

JC: Yes, after taking us all on a ride back through our own awkward adolescence.

Lorrie: And then the next chapter, for better and for worse, is the Yule Ball.

JC: I just remember the movie version of what happens, so I'm actually looking forward to reading what actually happens.

Lorrie: So much happens.

JC: The Yule Ball! Okay, yeah, let's do 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

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