



Transcript

Episode 4.23

Book 4, Chapter 23: The Yule Ball

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-Three: The Yule Ball.

Lorrie: It's the one formal dinner dance of the series. Harry would rather not be there at all, but he manages to open the dancing along with the other Triwizard Champions and then spends the rest of the evening learning a lot about the other people at the Ball.

JC: Harry's experience reminds me a lot of the single prom I went to as a high schooler in a lot of ways. I felt obligated to go and had to scrounge up a date, and I ended up going with a guy I'd only gone out with a few times and didn't really know very well. By the end of the night, it was very clear that this was not going anywhere, and it was awkward...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. All of it -- I was like, yeah, yeah... There's so many people that I remember went back to school the next week and they were like, "It was the best night in my life!" I was like, 'Oh, my God...'

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: 'I'm never doing this again.' I did not go to my senior prom.

Lorrie: Oi, yai yai. Yeah, so it gave you intense memories, this chapter...

JC: Here's the funny thing: I don't remember the name of the guy I went with. I have no clue what his name was. I see a picture of his face -- I've seen the photo...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And even in the photo, the expression on my face is very much like, 'Get me the fuck out of here!' The look on my face...

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: My mother reports that I came back home that night and slammed the door and said, "That was the worst night of my life!" My mother had been waiting up to hear how her baby's prom went, right?

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: She watched me stomp down the hall and slam the door, and she was like, 'Okay.' I don't remember being that dramatic, but I'm sure I was because I was sixteen. Yeah. Anyway, the Yule Ball just reminded me of all of the awkwardness, and poor Harry's two years younger than that.

Lorrie: Yeah. I thought it really did well, this chapter, in capturing the full scope of how some people are just effortlessly having a good time, and for some people it's a struggle and it's a relief when it's over. And then for some people, they absolutely lose at this game and it's incredibly painful.

JC: Yeah. All of that is wrapped up in here, and I feel like...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, so in the fandom, having a Yule Ball has become a thing, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And I feel, in many circles, there was this attempt to reclaim this dance experience that maybe many folks didn't get to have, in the sense that there are queer balls and there are things like queer prom. If you didn't get to have that prom experience, let's have it now.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And I haven't been to any of those kinds of things as an adult, and I don't feel like I missed out on anything. Maybe that's why I haven't been motivated to go, but I find it interesting that this is something that fandom has kind of drawn together. 'Okay, we're going to have a ball, we're going to make it about us, and it's going to be fun.' I don't know. Have you participated in any of those?

Lorrie: I've been to some of the Yule Balls at Harry Potter cons, and there was a con where one year they said, "Okay, we're not having a Yule Ball," and there was such an outcry that very quickly they said, "Okay, okay, we heard you."

JC: This is actually a good point. I have been to some Harry Potter conferences as well, years ago, and they did have a big... I don't think they called it a Yule Ball, but it was a big dance party at the end. Is that unique to Harry Potter conventions -- they always have a big dance party at the end? I wonder if other...

Lorrie: Um... The non-Harry Potter cons I've gone to have also had an evening where you get to wear your geeky finery as you define it, and you get to dance and enjoy yourself without being laughed at, because a lot of the geeks that get together are people who are not popular -- who didn't have a lot of social status in the way that we see it demonstrated in this chapter -- and would like to just not be laughed at. That's been an important thing. There was a while when I thought, 'Well, I don't really know why I would go to one of the Yule Balls at these events, because I'm older and I don't feel the need.' Then I thought, 'No, the thing that I want to do is walk around and just enjoy how guilelessly happy a lot of the people look.' And when I realized, 'No, that's how I enjoy it,' it's great, I love them. People look so happy and people admire each other's outfits, and if you want to be really unembarrassed about whatever geekiness and creativity you have, go for it. People will enjoy it. The more extra you are, the more people will applaud you. Yeah, and they don't always get called Yule Balls. For one thing, these things take place all times of year.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: But people call it that without even thinking. It's become a generic term for 'geeky dance party'.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, so the Yule Ball is a thing and I love that this chapter is a major genre change, because when this story is about fighting dragons or defeating dark lords, Harry is totally the main character. This is about romances and fairy tales, so Harry is totally not the main character in this chapter; he just kind of watches. He just barely fulfills his duties, and then he's greatly relieved and just becomes a bystander; Hermione, for once, gets to be the main character.

JC: She gets to be the Cinderella, fairy-tale princess.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is her second fairy-tale moment in the series. The first was when she was Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, when she was Petrified in the second book. That's menarche -- that's her initiation into puberty -- and this is her becoming initiated into successful adolescence. Ron and Harry.... You can tell, from how they are in this chapter, they have not passed that initiation yet. They're not going to do badly in the future; you can tell that someday they will manage, but they're just too young here...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And they know it. They are not in the position of some people in this chapter who will never do okay in this genre, and that will always hurt no matter how much you did not sign up to be in this competition. You can say, "I did not put my name in the Goblet," but somebody else did, and yeah, you don't get a choice about this one.

JC: Wow. So a lot of stuff happens before we get to the Yule Ball. There's a lot of little details in the beginning of the chapter that are getting us to the Yule Ball; it feels like we're rushed very quickly up to all this, and we get a lot of information about a lot of little points of the plot very fast. For example, Fred and George are moving forward. They're in their food prank era...

Lorrie: They are.

JC: And they're just creating all these -- to the extent that everyone's starting to be skeptical of any food that appears around them.

Lorrie: It's totally, "Do not accept any food or drink from a magical being."

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: "Just don't!"

JC: "Don't do it!" But I love that we see that they're making progress toward their dream; they hassle Bagman later on in this chapter. We get a little more of Fleur complaining about Hogwarts. She complains about the decorations later on, she complains about food, that it's too heavy and all this stuff. We get this Fleur update (she's still complaining), and then we get this wonderful little moment where Hermione just completely brushes off Draco.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Draco's trying to say something snarky, and she's just like, 'Yeah...' Oh, my God, and she does it so casually and so effortlessly and then they just move right along, and it's back to that wish fulfillment thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And knowing that in this chapter, she's going to have her moment. It just felt really good to see her wish fulfillment.

Lorrie: Yeah. In this genre, Draco does okay in this adolescent economy, but he's so very much not the main character.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Hermione maybe, but Draco still has to be stuck on the sidelines.

JC: Yeah. Poor Draco. There's so much fun stuff. Oh, then we find out -- we get an update on Hermione's teeth...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That she actually got her teeth fixed when she went to the hospital ward. It feels like the teeth thing happened a long time ago, but maybe it wasn't that bad.

Lorrie: It did. It did, but Harry hasn't noticed...

JC: Yeah, the boys haven't noticed.

Lorrie: And so she's just kept it to herself.

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: And she even briefly tries to pretend that she didn't do anything until she sees no, they really have noticed, and she's like, yeah.

JC: They finally noticed, yeah, but I love that idea that she got around her parents' skepticism about fixing teeth with magic by just letting Madam Pomfrey continue the spell. "It wasn't me."

Lorrie: "Well, I didn't do it." Yeah. But also, it's her moment of differentiation that she used to ask her parents' permission, and this is part of her getting older: you know what? She doesn't have to ask anybody's permission. She's fifteen. She's going to do this, nobody's going to care, and honestly, it's not going to hurt anything.

JC: Right, yeah. Exactly. It is interesting, though, that she doesn't go home for winter break, so her parents aren't going to know till next summer. They're going to look at her and be like... But then they haven't seen her in a long time, so hey, maybe she just grew up a little bit.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of all the things that they don't know about her...

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah. Yeah, poor Hermione's parents. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: They can forbid her to do stuff, but none of what they have to say is applicable to her life at all, and it's very much the immigrant first gen/second gen experience. Maybe in your world that matters, but in mine, I'm the authority here. You don't know.

JC: Also, just the fact... It's true for all the kids that they have this whole other life that their parents don't have access to, and as a parent, that blows my mind. I can't imagine sending my 11-year-old off to boarding school and then not being a part of their life anymore, except at breaks. I just can't imagine what that would feel like, and I know that there are people who do that all the time; boarding schools are a thing. But it's interesting to me. This is harking back to [where] there was a time in Britain when it was

really important for people of a certain social class to send their sons off to boarding school, and it was intentionally splitting families apart, pulling kids away so they could be indoctrinated into what the country needed for them to go out and be colonizers, right?

Lorrie: Oof.

JC: There's this awful history of that...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it's hard for me not to read too much into that with Hogwarts, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Hermione has this whole life that her parents (as we know in the future) will genuinely never have access to. She loses her family in the end completely...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which is sad.

Lorrie: But that's also something that you could see happening from the moment that she was born and obviously had these extraordinary gifts that her parents were not equipped to parent.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, that's how it goes, and you let your child go if the child belongs to a world that you're not a part of.

JC: Yes. Yeah.

Lorrie: What are you going to do, keeping the child in your world where they don't fit?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Where none of their dreams have any outlet.

JC: Yeah. This actually reminds me, too: I have a friend who has a son who's deaf and lived hours away from the state school for the deaf and had to make the decision to send her kindergartner up to boarding school (and just how hard that was to send a kindergartner to boarding school), but she had seen him in preschool with hearing kids and seeing things not progressing and how isolated he was.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I just thought, Oh, God, what a hard choice to make, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah. Then there are other families where they get excited knowing that they have to send their kid with dress robes, because they know what that means and that's something that they've experienced and they're excited for their children to experience it. Even Molly Weasley has some of that, even though she knows that she's going to be sending Ron so ill-equipped...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that there's no way around the pain he's going to feel.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But still, she's thinking, though. "You're not going to want to miss this..." That section that you mentioned, including Draco trying to insult Hermione and Hermione brushing it off: I could not have identified more with what Hermione's fending off here. First of all, the way that she's not telling Ron who she's going with and he keeps trying to...

JC: Spring it on her.

Lorrie: Jump out at her to pop it out of her. "Who are you going with?" That just made me laugh, because I had a friend who did that, who was always trying to casually spring it on me like I'm going to forget that I didn't want to share some information, which I never did. But I really felt it when she said she's not telling him because she doesn't want to get made fun of. I thought, 'That's it.' There's so much where that was why I thought, 'I don't want to be made fun of. Nothing good can happen. I'm just not going to say.' And then the outdated taunt that Draco uses is, "You're not telling me someone's asked *that* to the ball? Not the long-molared Mudblood?" That really brought me back, because that was something that I heard a lot when I was pre-teen and in middle-school age: that I was really ugly and undesirable and nobody would ever want to date me. I was kind of puzzled, because as far as I could tell, I didn't look any better or worse than most people, but it was a reaction against the kind of student I was. It left its mark on me and I believed it, and I still to some extent do. It was a joke -- "Nobody would ever want her" -- and used as a punchline.

JC: Ugh. Yeah.

Lorrie: Or somebody really horrible... Yeah. Anyway... Moving away helped, but if I wanted to reclaim any dignity and the right to consider myself a citizen of romance and dating land, then I had to just be really quiet and try to salvage my dignity alone or not say about it, because that dominant narrative was so amusing to people who weren't that invested in it. They didn't know me that well or whatever, but that narrative was out there and it was so damn funny to other people.

JC: Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah, no, I still believe it.

JC: That's miserable.

Lorrie: Yeah. I still have the assumption that unless I go out in private and arrange things really secretly, the prevailing narrative is going to be, "Oh, when the call went out for people to date each other, that didn't mean you."

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: So ugh, yeah.

JC: I feel like there's so many ways that this harms people. This whole adolescent experience -- which no one can avoid... we all have to go through that gauntlet.

Lorrie: "Did you put your name in?"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "No!"

JC: No one can. Then there's people, like you said, who don't want anything to do with it and don't have a choice, but they're still being subjected to it. There are people who desperately would like to be part of it and who are getting rejected for reasons that are beyond their control. There are people who seem to have an easy time with it, and there's everything in between, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it's miserable and nobody comes out of it unscathed, and that's... Ugh!

Lorrie: There's a book that made a huge impact on me in the late 90s. It's called *The Power of Beauty*, and it's by Nancy Friday. It's a flawed book, and a lot of people hate it quite rightly because it has some major flaws, but it does point out that a lot of people deny to themselves that they're in this contest for beauty and for desirability because it's so incredibly painful to lose this contest. The stakes are life and death. What it comes from... She cites studies where infants who are attractive -- and as much as we can say attractiveness is relative, actually no. Cross-cultural studies show that no, we do have an idea of who's attractive and who isn't, and yeah, the infants who are seen as attractive by their caregivers get better care. That's a horrible thing that is painfully true for survival. When I was reading this book, the intro -- which just thunderstruck me at the time, because it felt very taboo to admit how painful it is to lose the competition for beauty and attractiveness. You're not supposed to care. It's supposed to be about who you are on the inside or... 'As long as you're yourself, other things are more important' or 'don't be trivial,' which really discounts the pain of it. What got me about the intro was

when she said, "You might think this story isn't about you, but it is. You might think you buried it so long ago that you don't have it anymore, but you do." I thought, 'Wow!' That was quite a relief to read, to have that pain be acknowledged. Crabbe and Goyle, obviously, they are going to lose in this economy. Is that going to be fine for them? It probably isn't. We'll see that Snape is the poster child for somebody who was never going to win at this competition, continues to fail at it; it never gets any less painful and it's humiliating as hell, and everybody knows it. It makes you bitter, it makes you mean... There's also this option (which is only open to a privileged few) where you have a choice, and you can choose to participate and do well and hold your own in this game, and you can choose to say "This is not important to me" and withdraw. The opposite of that is Fleur, where Fleur wins and it's important to her, but we see later that Voldemort exercised the option -- where Voldemort was just as attractive in his way as Fleur is in hers -- and he voluntarily abdicated, but it was completely his choice. It's not like if Snape said, "Well, I didn't even want anyone to think that I was good-looking." Yeah, you did, or at least not as much of a laughingstock as you are. That's kind of where Hermione is in this chapter: she makes her statement that she's exercising her privilege to withdraw from the competition, but if she wanted to, she could put everyone in their place...

JC: I see.

Lorrie: And it's so satisfying.

JC: Yeah, it is very satisfying.

Lorrie: It's greatly wish fulfillment, and to me, emotionally, this is the center of the series, the midpoint.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Suddenly, it's a series for girls. Normally, it's a fantasy series for children with a boy protagonist, but this moment, the Cinderella moment of Hermione just being, "HA!"... To me, I think that's part of the reason this series was so successful and has a lot of female or femme-identified fans: the revenge fantasy in Hermione's Cinderella moment.

JC: Oh, yeah. I also remember how upset a lot of people in the fandom were about how it was portrayed in the movie. I think they didn't like the fact that her dress wasn't blue and there were other things that people didn't like about it, and I actually can't remember them all now. That moment was so important that people were upset it wasn't portrayed the way they wanted it to be.

Lorrie: Yeah. What that tells me is that it mattered and people cared.

JC: It mattered. Yeah. No one got mad about the way the spiders were depicted in the second movie. I don't think so, anyway...

Lorrie: Ron's terrible dress robes were depicted perfectly.

JC: Oh, yeah, that is true. The whole thing with Ron's dress robes just hits different this time around. It always was like, "Hmm," a little bit in that there's this moment, and the narration says, there was no way of getting around it. Ron's robes --

Lorrie: It looked girly.

JC: Looked like a dress. It looked girly, and that was what he --

Lorrie: Actually, not girly. It looked 'old lady'.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That it looked like a dress (I think it was in the book) and he spent a lot of time trying to make it not look like a dress, and that just hits different now than it did before.

Lorrie: Yeah, there is that. And I liked that... We don't get shown, but it's clear that she's practiced. First of all, if you got the letter in the summer that you need dress robes, then she obviously had to go shopping for this dress. That's kind of a pleasurable fantasy: imagining fifteen -- well, at that time, 14-year-old Hermione picking out something that she thought would flatter her and being happy because she looks good, but also that she knows how long she's going to need to prepare.

JC: Yeah. There's a moment where Ron's like, "You need three hours?!" Oh, my God, you're such a boy.

Lorrie: She's practiced because she knows that it's important that you get one chance to get it right, this first impression when you declare your eligibility to be a successful adolescent.

JC: Right. When she steps out on Viktor Krum's arm, she gets one chance to look the way she wants to look.

Lorrie: One chance, so you know she's practiced.

JC: She's got the hair spells and the makeup, all the stuff. Yeah. I'm sure there's fun fanfiction somewhere in there about how all that works.

Lorrie: And there's no sign that she has a fairy godmother of any sort. She did this herself.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: We know that she's not talking to Lavender and Parvati about it, who know everything there is to know about hair and makeup. She's not practicing in front of them either, because they would make fun of her worse than Ron.

JC: Yeah, that's true. I hadn't thought about that before, but yeah, she had to figure all that out on her own.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: And she had opportunities to have her mom help her with this stuff before, but you do get the sense that she did the research. She looked up the beauty spells, she tried them out, and she spent some time thinking about how she wants to present herself.

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't know who she could have gotten to help. Not Ginny; Ginny's younger. Not Mrs. Weasley. She just figured it out on her own.

JC: She figured it out, yeah. Yeah, there's a lot of great fantasy fulfillment here.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That idea of if you could go back in time knowing what you know, how would you do these things? You get a sense of yeah, Hermione's doing that. That's nice.

Lorrie: She shuts up her critics once and for all.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: And one thing that I learned from that book I mentioned, *The Power of Beauty*, is how important it is to take the moment when you are that age. One of the things that Nancy Friday (the author) criticizes is women who had to be good girls and they followed the rules and restricted their lives and their beauty when they were young -- and then they get older and they regret it so painfully, but now they have teen daughters -- they have unresolved issues, like the middle-aged mom who's trying to dress like a teenager and how mortifying that is to watch, and how you really, really shouldn't do that to your teenager. Let them be their age; don't be unresolved and pathetic in front of them. Take care of your issues first. That was something... Fortunately, when I read this, I was years away from having children and I had that time to take in the message and take it seriously. Do this stuff when you're young and you can, because it'll fix your self-image for life. If you can have the moments where you're satisfied -- yes, I got to be the way I wanted and I got to feel myself, the way I am -- if you get that at the right point, then you can age and feel okay. Yes, everything's appropriate. If you miss that window -- if you're 40, thinking, 'Why did 20-year-old me not wear a bikini? I could've' -- that can hurt. Well, you could be a 40-year-old in a bikini (that might or might not work), but if you have the strength to do it at the age when your self-image is being fixed, that can take you so far, and Hermione has hit it right in the bullseye. This is going to fix her

self-image forever, and I found it such a profound, good message. Don't let your parents say, "No, you can't fix your teeth." Don't let the hair and makeup roommates ridicule you out of practicing and making an effort, because there's also -- not only in this, but just in life -- the anxiety around looking like you made an effort in case you fail, and then people laugh at you extra because, "Oh, look, so-and-so... Not only did they fail as usual, but that they even tried." Okay, that's harsh, but she dealt with that, too. And yeah, I just find this to be a really gorgeous, symbolic moment of something that you should aim for when the time is right. Don't let rules about being a good girl or being stereotypically not socially successful stand in the way of you saying, "No, I'm going to do it until I'm satisfied." I love, too, that when she shows up and she has her moment, she's slightly nervous and that's really endearing, too.

JC: It's the big moment, yeah, so how are people going to react? Before we get into the Yule Ball, a couple of other things that were standing out to me from the stuff that happened before: first of all, we got a little update on Sirius.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: We got a letter from Sirius and we find out what his suggestion is going to be, which was apparently exactly what Krum did. I thought that was kind of fun to get that little... And he was saying, "Yeah, keep telling me what's happening." It feels so anti-climactic after everything that actually happened with the dragon that it's like, "Okay," but it's nice to hear from him and that he's okay.

Lorrie: I like that it establishes that Barty Crouch Jr. is smarter than Sirius and Karkaroff, who, if he had thought of it, would have told Viktor Krum to do the flying. No, Barty Crouch Jr. is smarter than them all.

JC: Interesting. Yeah, that's really interesting.

Lorrie: And Sirius is mysterious (hint), particularly when the person we discussed is around. Okay, we're building intrigue around Karkaroff. Lots of plot moving forward.

JC: Right. Didn't put that in writing, which is very, very interesting. And then the other moment we get -- there's two other moments I'm thinking about -- the second one is when Dobby shows up on Christmas morning, and there's a couple of things there. First of all, it's so sweet. Dobby comes to exchange presents with Harry and Ron gives him presents, but also when people are like, "What's going on?" Harry is startled and he goes, "It's just Dobby." It's interesting that everybody in the dorm --

Lorrie: They're used to this!

JC: Knows Dobby now. They know who he is. They know why a house-elf is visiting Harry, so it's like we missed something here, but everybody's like, "Yeah, okay, it's just Dobby. Cool."

Lorrie: Or "Harry, are you okay or is the Dark Lord coming? Or is there a mass murderer?"

JC: Exactly. "Oh, it's your house-elf friend who's come to visit you," so that's fun. I also love that Dobby has started knitting his own socks here, and he gives Harry the mismatched socks, which are such a fandom thing now.

Lorrie: They're a treasure. Yes.

JC: Yes. Mismatched socks with little Snitches on them that Harry ends up wearing to the Yule Ball, which I think is amazing that Harry wears Dobby's socks.

Lorrie: So loving.

JC: Oh, my God. Under his dress robes are Dobby's socks, and that... oh, it's amazing.

Lorrie: As far as we know, they're the first socks Harry's ever gotten that were just for him and not cast-offs from the Dursleys.

JC: Oh, yeah. Could well be.

Lorrie: Somebody who loves him made him these socks, and the fact that they are red and green Quidditch socks... You know how you said they're thinking, 'Oh, I want to give somebody a present, but it has to be exactly the right present. It has to be the present that shows that I really care,' and that he paid for the yarn himself...

JC: Out of his meager wages!

Lorrie: And then how he's so happy when Harry and Ron give him back socks and a sweater, and I thought, 'No' -- Harry first thinks, "Oh, no, I didn't buy Dobby a present." but no. Giving him a present is so much better than going out and purchasing something. "Yeah, you're part of the family, you're included." Then we get the single tissue in contrast, the bare minimum that the Dursleys put in.

JC: What does that even mean? A single tissue...

Lorrie: It's really like, 'What is the absolute least that we can do to acknowledge that you're related to us in any way at all?' And then I love... This is also the haul where he gets the penknife from Sirius that can unlock any lock and undo any knot. I remember the first time I read that, thinking, 'Oh, that's going to be really useful,' and I was all primed to have it be a big plot point in the future, and it turns out actually that the plot point it proves is what it can't open. But yeah, it does turn out to be important.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: What a cool gift from his godfather.

JC: For sure, yeah, especially because he knows what Harry gets up to.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'Harry, you're going to want this.'

JC: He's like, 'Harry could probably use this.' The other thing that I feel I see in this chapter, too, is that Ron's immaturity really jumps out at me. Almost every moment in the chapter when Ron's doing something, he's been really showing his immaturity compared even to Harry. There's a moment in the beginning of the chapter when Pigwidgeon is delivering Sirius' letter, and these girls are like, "Oh, he's so cute," and Ron is so embarrassed. *Grumbles* "Get the freak out of here," right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's so funny, because it made me think about older guys who will walk cute dogs in a park just to attract... Wanting you to come over and say, "Oh, cute dog. Can I pet your dog?" and they say, "Don't even dare." There's no, "Ooohhh," so there's that. Then there's just his reactions to Hermione throughout this, obviously (which we'll get more to later), but there's this moment when Dean says, "How did you get the two best-looking girls in our whole year to come to the Ball with you?" and Ron's just like, "What?" Despite his comments to Hermione in the previous chapter, clueless.

Lorrie: Well, I like his reply to Dean is, "Animal magnetism." That just... That makes me laugh every time. They just haven't cracked the code. Well, they may be the two best-looking girls, but it hadn't occurred to anybody to ask either of them out.

JC: Yeah. They still didn't have dates at that point either, right.

Lorrie: Although I am thrilled at how kind the author is to both Parvati and Padma in this chapter, because they both have to suffer, but she makes them suffer as little as possible.

JC: Oh, God...

Lorrie: They both end up having great evenings.

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: And Parvati, she gets what she wants. She gets to be the date of a champion. She doesn't even have any suffering in her acquaintance with Harry; their being classmates doesn't even have any repercussions from this. She gets to be that. Padma suffers some, but she ends up being very popular with boys who know how to appreciate a beautiful girl.

JC: Yeah. I love that they end up spending the night with these boys from Beauxbatons who seem like they really appreciate them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. So even though they have a little bit of "UGH!" at the beginning, it comes across as, "UGH, Hogwarts boys just don't know how to have a good time," or whatever. It kind of comes across as, "Okay, yeah."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're going to be fine.

Lorrie: They are there as plot points, but they've been spared. Crabbe and Goyle are not spared. Ouch. Malfoy and Pansy do fine...

JC: I love the fact that Harry looks at Draco and says he looks like a vicar.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Which is really funny. Oh, my gosh. Also, the decorations for the Yule Ball... you can tell that everyone's gone completely out. I love the detail that the fairy lights are made of actual fairy.

Lorrie: Of fairies!

JC: Actual fairy. Yeah, it's just so much fun. Even though Fleur turns her nose up at the decorations, it's clear that everyone's really, really put a lot of effort into this.

Lorrie: You know what? I didn't even realize until just now that this totally reminded me of figure skating again, because every autumn, there's a series of international competitions that's the figure skating Grand Prix; the one that they used to have in France every year was Trophée Lalique because it was sponsored by Lalique Crystal, and they had ice sculptures exactly like what she was saying. These competitions would be decorated nicely, but then you would get to Trophée Lalique and it would be so much more beautiful than any other by an order of magnitude, and there would be crystals and ice sculptures. Okay, now we're in France.

JC: That's funny.

Lorrie: They have this superiority complex for a reason. I liked, too, when Hermione takes three hours to go get ready, and most of it is on doing her hair. I heard from a bunch of folks saying, "Oh, that's how we knew Hermione is Black. All of our sisters always took three hours before any party." They're like, "Oh, that's just what you do."

JC: Interesting, yeah.

Lorrie: Whereas the boys are throwing snowballs at each other until the moment before...

JC: Until like 7 p.m. or something crazy. What, they just go up and throw on... They didn't even shave!

Lorrie: Get a towel...

JC: They just put on their robes. Ron has... This is so 14-year-old boy, though. Ron had months and months to figure out what to do about his dress robes, and at the last minute, he's slicing the lace off.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I was like, 'That is very 14-year-old boy.' He could have done what Hermione did, right? He could have looked up some Transfiguration spells. He could've worked on this. No, no, he didn't do it.

Lorrie: No.

JC: And then we get, I guess, the beautiful moment finally when Hermione steps out on Viktor Krum's arm, and that line from the book: "Krum was at the front of the party, accompanied by a pretty girl in blue robes Harry didn't know."

Lorrie: Love it. That just makes it so much sweeter.

JC: Yeah. It's like it's Cinderella. It takes a little while for him to notice her; there's little moments when everyone starts noticing and their jaws are dropping, and Ron doesn't notice for a while.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: Doesn't see her. Oh...

Lorrie: This was so satisfying: "Parvati was gazing at Hermione in unflattering disbelief."

JC: "Unflattering."

Lorrie: That is totally wish fulfillment.

JC: They're like, "Wow. Didn't know you could look like that."

Lorrie: And Hermione was quite right not to tell anybody, because the Viktor Krum fan club now hates her.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But I love -- she has a good night with Viktor.

Lorrie: They have... Oh...

JC: Oh, my gosh. He likes her so much, and he likes her for who she is.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: He likes her for the right reasons. Ron and Harry are her best friends, but they don't listen to her in the way that Viktor does this night of the party.

Lorrie: They have the sweetest first date.

JC: They do.

Lorrie: They are really interested in each other. They're both quite sophisticated. They're hitting it off. He is totally my favorite boyfriend in the whole series, because what kind of a fantasy is this that this superstar international jock gets a crush on the nerdiest girl in school?

JC: But I love all these little hints that every time Hermione went to the library, she's like, "Why is he here with his fan club again?"

Lorrie: "What is he doing here?"

JC: "What is he doing here?"

Lorrie: "He's not with anybody."

JC: He's waiting to talk to you.

Lorrie: Because that's where you go for the hottest girl in school: the library.

JC: The library. I love it. I love it!

Lorrie: If he's not put off by the fact that she's always with these two losers...

JC: True. And I love that this whole scene gives the impression that there was a moment when Hermione was alone in the library and he was able to come over and talk to her, and what would that moment have been like. You can kind of imagine it.

Lorrie: And that she turns red when she says he hadn't been able to pluck up the courage, and that is a vulnerable moment. She didn't have to tell Ron that, but that was something more that I identified with. When Ron... He doesn't know how jealous he is, so he's just wildly saying stuff, but when he's saying, "Oh, no, he doesn't really like you for yourself, he's just trying to use you to win over Harry," that really stings Hermione. That was a narrative that I had in my life at this age a lot: "No, no one could want to be friends with you for you; they're just trying to use you," which I knew wasn't true. But to know that there were people, honestly, who would even think that... That was hard.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And so that really lands when Ron says that to her.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She knows it's not true.

JC: Yeah. But it's like, "That's what you think of me? Really?" Yeah. Yeah, ugh. There's so much happening here. I'm sitting here looking at my notes.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: There's so much. We have Percy being here giving us a little bit of updates on Barty Crouch, and being pompous and everything else.

Lorrie: The least date-like person, the person you most don't want sitting next to you at this event. Ugh.

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah, he makes Harry sit next to him, so there's all of that. There's this conversation between Dumbledore and Karkaroff, and I love the line where Dumbledore says, "I would never dream of assuming I know all Hogwarts' secrets." I think what it reminds me of, something I love about Dumbledore, is the genuine humility that he displays a lot, and it's a humility born of making mistakes. It's born of his real experience, that way that you stumble through a lot of things in life and you're overconfident but you fail and you do these things, and then there's a point where you have the respect of peers and you're at a point in your life where you feel like, 'Okay, I'm finally where I want to be,' but you also know where you fit. The humility when people get there and they're humble about it, and they're like, "You know what? Yeah, I've been successful in this and that, but there's so much that I don't know, and I know how hard this was." Yeah, all of that, but Dumbledore displays this humility about magic and what he does know and what he's capable of, and I just love people who do that. It's a trait I love in people, so it really endears me to Dumbledore.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, he's smart enough to know how little he knows, and that's not something that's apparent unless you've gotten to a certain point where you can see the bigger picture and where you are in it. Also, it's a hostile thing to say to Karkaroff. It's something to put him back in his place.

JC: For sure. I liked that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah, but that's totally what he's doing. "Oh, well, I don't know about you, but I don't know everything."

JC: Yeah, and you have to have a certain sort of... yeah. There's a certain level you have to be at before you can say that and have it hit the way that it does there.

Lorrie: It shuts Karkaroff up.

JC: It sure does. Oh, I also love that in this moment, Dumbledore tells Harry about the existence of the Room of Requirement.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: And later... I remember coming back and reading this book again after I read the fifth book and going, 'It's the Room of Requirement!' I don't think I had noticed that he winks at Harry at the end of it. I was like, 'Oh, okay.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Going back to the issue of beauty: one of the things that we've seen so far in this book is that when you're jealous because other people are winning (or beating you) in the beauty and desirability game, you can sometimes try to minimize your defeat by telling yourself, 'Well, they're attractive, but they're just empty-headed.' We see Harry quite unfairly -- and he knows he's being unfair -- decide that Cedric is just a useless pretty boy. The author does that to Fleur. Yeah, she's unbearable, but she's more talented than you're giving her credit for.

JC: She's the champion. Yeah.

Lorrie: Exactly, and that's a problem that Ron is having right now: he cannot pretend that Viktor Krum is just a pretty boy with no substance. As Hermione irrefutably points out, Ron is the one who hero-worshipped Viktor Krum for his substance and not because he's whatever. But yeah, that is a human response to jealousy: to try to discount, try to do something to cushion the absolute humiliation of losing at this game.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: Oh, good for Padma. I love when she just asks Ron directly, "So, are you going to dance with me or not?" and he's like, "No." And she just... Great. She asks, she finds out, she does what she needs to do, and that's Hermione's spirit, too. "Can I get my teeth fixed?" "No." Well, she does anyway, and who cares? Who does it hurt? Nobody.

JC: They're being 14-year-old immature boys. To me, it just reminded me of being that age and just looking around at the boys around me and going, 'Oh, God... I don't want anything to do with these people.' They're just so bad at this at this point, and they're not thinking about the fact that they're effectively on a date with other human beings who are excited and who spent time getting ready for this and have probably thought, 'Oh, I'm going to the dance.' Then they get there and their dates just ignore them, because they're pissed off about other things. It's just like 'Ugh, yeah,' but then they get on with it. You're right. They are like, 'Okay, cut our losses, let's go have fun,' and that's great. I'm glad that they're able to do that.

Lorrie: It's not fair. Ron and Harry didn't present himself as excellent dates either, and surely Parvati and Padma had some inkling of this beforehand.

JC: I do love the fact that twenty years from now, Parvati and Padma have a story to tell.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Parvati can say, "I went to the Yule Ball with Harry Potter."

Lorrie: "I opened the dancing."

JC: And he was just --

Lorrie: "The last party that Cedric Diggory ever attended." Oh, God...

JC: Oh, bless. So a couple of other things I wanted to say: we were talking about Fleur a moment ago and the way the author treats her. There's this interesting moment where it's clear that Roger Davies, her date, is just completely in her thrall and just staring at her and nodding along with whatever she's saying. In that moment, I really felt bad for Fleur, because I thought -- and this is maybe... I wouldn't know, but the curse of being a really, really attractive person. The bad side of it is that you probably never really believe anyone values you for you, right? He's just nodding along and she's just going to hear what she wants to hear and see what she wants to see from people, and he's not going to be able to be honest or real with her because of the veela piece of it. But also, I think that really does happen to people, so that made me feel bad for her there, too.

Lorrie: Well, I don't know if I brought this up before, but I love (about the Fantastic Beasts movies) that they solve the problem of Fleur.

JC: Oh, I think we have talked about this before. It's familiar.

Lorrie: Because Queenie Goldstein, she is exceptionally beautiful and breathtaking the way Fleur is, but she's not treated poorly as Fleur is. The movies don't hate her for being beautiful the way this book hates Fleur for being beautiful, and Queenie gets a boyfriend (later husband) who -- Queenie has Legilimency. She can tell why people like her. She can read everyone's mind, so she knows that this guy likes her for her and not because she's pretty, and that's such a blessing. It solves the problem.

JC: Yeah, that's great. I do love that character.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We've gone way off topic here, but --

Lorrie: No, it's not though. It's about beauty.

JC: Okay, yeah, you're right. That's a big theme.

Lorrie: It's about beauty and about the incredible misery that is the high school formal.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Gosh.

JC: Okay, well speaking of misery... If we shift a little forward in the chapter to the fact that Snape is patrolling and shaking the bushes to get the couples who are making out in them out while having this really intense conversation with Karkaroff that gets overheard by Harry... Just the image of Snape being on make-out duty, where he has to walk around and shake the bushes...

Lorrie: Well, it's not shaking. The verb here is 'blasting'. It's way more violent.

JC: Yeah, that's what he would do: just aim that wand at a bush and just --

Lorrie: To me, Snape blasting rosebushes is the most iconic Snape moment. I know people really justifiably fixate on him torturing Neville (which yeah, okay, that's iconic too), but what is the core of what is wrong with this guy and the kind of pain he causes by being a teacher in school? He's just bitter. Rosebushes are beautiful, so what's his attitude toward them? "His expression most ill-natured..." I kind of love it, because you cannot ignore the fact that it hurts to be considered undesirable to the extent that he is. Is he dignified enough to be over it as an adult? Totally not. No, it never stops hurting, and then to be cursed to watch high schoolers continue the same ritual at which you lost as a teen and continue to lose as an adult, to have it play out every single year... Oh, it just never goes away. But these rosebushes solved a mystery for me: way, way back when I first finished the series along with a lot of other fans and readers, we were trying to figure out the series and understand the characters and who was Snape, really? One of the mysteries for me was, 'Did his mother love him?' and then I realized, 'Oh, yes, she did.' The reason we know this is because of the rosebushes, because when Snape sees teenagers making out, he can't stand it, right? He's just going to be really bitter and his worst self, and he will blast those rose bushes. But when Narcissa Malfoy comes to him and she is life-or-death begging him to do anything possible for her son, he does not look away. It's not too much for him, he doesn't make fun of her, he doesn't give into any of his baser impulses; he can match her, look for look. He looks right into her eyes and he totally says, "I will do it." He can tolerate that, and that's more emotion than a lot of people could tolerate. That's such a heightened emotion. He can't stand Fleur and Roger Davies in the rosebushes. He can't. Does he rise above? No! No, this man does not rise above, but he can match Narcissa Malfoy. Somebody loved him. His mother loved him. I thought, 'Wow, I would not have been able to conclude that without this rosebush scene.'

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: But yeah, the embarrassment of being a younger person watching a teacher act this way... Ugh, that's incurable. Although the rosebushes takes place while he's talking to Karkaroff, and that's when Harry and Ron... Harry and Ron are kind of each other's dates. They're wandering out in the rosebushes with each other, because thank God they're free of the pretty girls that they came with.

JC: Of the pretty girls, yeah.

Lorrie: So they're walking around, duh, just seeing what there is to see, and whoa, Snape and Karkaroff are calling each other Igor and Severus, which is kind of like, 'Are they each other's dates?' Not in a romance slash way, but in a completely failing in the romance economy way. Look, if you don't become a good person as a teenager -- if you choose the path of Death Eater evil -- then in the morality of this series, this is what you get. At the Yule Ball, your date has to be this horrible Igor Karkaroff cowardly traitor person who's whining to you about something that's getting on his nerves, and Snape is like, "You loser. If it bothers you so much, go cry to somebody else." The way that Harry can't wait to be free of Percy, Snape is like, "Igor, just stop! Stop talking to me."

JC: Oh, right, right. Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, this is the inexorable march toward finding out the really dark reveals in Snape's past. Hmm, why is Igor calling him Severus? Hmm... And then Harry and Ron stumble upon Hagrid and Madame Maxime... Ooh, yeah.

JC: Also out in the romantic rosebush garden, and over here, a really painful conversation.

Lorrie: Wow, yeah, and both of them -- Hagrid and Madame Maxime -- have maximum pain in different ways. Ouch.

JC: It's interesting, too, that Harry doesn't understand what he's hearing in the way that Ron does, so once again, Harry is the outsider and Ron has to go and fill him in. Here's all of the cultural knowledge that you don't have to help you make sense of what's happening here.

Lorrie: How incredibly stigmatized this is.

JC: And also, I think it's probably the first time in this series... We've always known that Hagrid was different, but it's one of the first times in the series, I think, that there's more of a systemic...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What's the word? There's an explanation that it's part of the society. 'Here's why Hagrid has been especially treated badly: because he's considered subhuman and in this particular way by most of society.'

Lorrie: And yeah, just like being a werewolf, there are good reasons to stay closeted. You're not just making it up; people actually will view you with fear. But yeah, I like that there's a certain lack of judgment toward Madame Maxime for being so freaked out that she's just turning on Hagrid. Yeah. Obviously, she's not facing up to some truth or other, but you could totally see why. She has managed to do so well for herself. She has so

much respect and she's so beautiful and proven herself on her merits. Yeah. Oh, yes, and we get the beetle. We get the first appearance of a mysterious little beetle.

JC: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Many, many plot points are set into motion.

JC: I keep thinking, 'How would things have been different if someone had just squashed it?' Oh, but yeah.

Lorrie: Mercifully, eventually midnight comes and the evening comes to an end, and Harry has to endure Cedric and Cho looking all cheerful because they're going to say good night -- oh, boy -- and then Cedric takes a moment away to seek out Harry and give him a hint. He gives him the password to the prefect's bathroom, which is a little bit like initiation into this more grown-up world. "You are a Champion. You can come into this older person's space." Then Harry has to deal with his own feelings as Cedric grins and rushes off to say good night to the pretty girl. Oi...

JC: Yeah, to Harry's crush. Aww...

Lorrie: And having dealt with that, then Harry walks into the common room and finds Ron and Hermione... Oh...

JC: Screaming at each other, and it's so interesting that even Harry understands that Ron is jealous at this point. Ron is the only one who is oblivious to why he feels this way. Everyone in that common room who quickly made for the exits... Everybody knows, and when Hermione calls him out on it, again, it's a boss move. It's fantasy fulfillment where she could just say, "You should've just asked me out yourself." That... Oh...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Who could say that in that moment? Wow, it's amazing.

Lorrie: She says, "Next time there's a ball, ask me before someone else does, and not as a last resort!" and she could not have phrased that any more perfectly. She gets across that she would have said yes. So yeah, poor Harry has to witness that. I feel sorry for everyone who is in the common room at the moment. Yeah.

JC: The one thing I didn't like about the movie version of this is that you get the sense in the movie that this argument that Hermione has with Ron ruins her whole night. She had been having this beautiful night, and this just ruined it and now she's heartbroken, and in the book, it doesn't feel that way. It feels like no, she had a great night and Ron's getting what he deserved, and now she's just walking away. "Go deal with your own feelings."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I had a great time." That's so much better.

Lorrie: Yeah, and she knew this was happening the whole time, but how long would she have to be around for? If he's still at the maturity point where he doesn't even know what's going on with his feelings, well, she's got this date that's all interested in what she has to say.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So much happened in this chapter. So much, and... yeah. So where do we go from here?

Lorrie: The next chapter is called Rita Skeeter's Scoop.

JC: Oh, God. Okay. Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, for better or for worse, the Yule Ball has finally ended.

JC: Yes. Prom night is over, and then we go back to whatever's coming next. We go back to school.

Lorrie: Now Harry can procrastinate on his egg for real.

JC: The egg! We go back to the fact that we're in the middle of the Triwizard Tournament. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Snape doesn't have a date, will never have a date.

JC: Aww...

Lorrie: All right, so we'll take some recovery time, and then reconvene after the Ball.

JC: All right!

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.