

Transcript

Episode 4.3

Book 4, Chapter 3: The Invitation

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read podcast wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults revisit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*, and JC, an educator and long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book Four, Chapter Three: The Invitation.

Lorrie: The Invitation. Dudley gets put on a diet. The Muggle postman delivers Molly Weasley's letter inviting Harry to the Quidditch World Cup. Harry's friends sent him four birthday cakes by owl post. So, JC, it's the third chapter and not the first, but here we have the obligatory fatphobic chapter at the beginning of the novel.

JC: Yes. Wow, and the author went out of her way to mock Dudley in ways that she hasn't before. It leveled up somehow, or maybe down, depending on how we're framing this. Yeah. Apparently he's now the size of a killer whale, or he's as wide as he is tall; there's all these awful things that are intended to be funny. And then on top of that, we have Dudley going on a diet because the school reached out to his parents and said, "You have to do something about this fat kid." The whole idea of a school doing that is beyond the pale. Um, no. I can't. Yeah, but there's that. Now, Dudley's on this diet, where apparently he gets to eat a quarter of a grapefruit for breakfast. It's the most extreme...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Everything about it is extreme and supposed to be funny, and it's not.

Lorrie: Sigh.

JC: But what else is new? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, and we even get a little dash of homophobia in there, too, so yay.

Lorrie: Which part is that, because I'm skipping over...

JC: Oh, with Mr. Dursley; it's in the second paragraph. Oh, it's in the third paragraph. It says: "Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia had managed to find excuses for his bad marks as usual (him being Dudley): Aunt Petunia always insisted that Dudley was a very gifted boy whose teachers didn't understand him, while Uncle Vernon maintained that 'he didn't want some swotty little nancy boy for a son anyway.'" It goes on from there to talk about how he is totally not a bully; his teachers are just being mean to him. I get, too, that she's parodying here -- the author is -- it's a parody of parents who think that their child's shit doesn't stink. "My precious little kid couldn't possibly be the bully. My kid didn't do anything wrong. It must be all the teachers and all the other kids in the school that just don't understand him," or, "My kid is gifted. Why isn't he in the gifted program?" "Oh, your test just doesn't measure right." You could go on and on. Clearly, the Dursleys are this kind of people, and we're supposed to hate Dudley and think that he's a bully and an asshole and everything else, which he is.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But then we have the whole layer of, "Oh, it's because he's fat," or the fatness is the outer sign of how awful he is.

Lorrie: I think me going, "Where was the homophobia?" really indicates how much I just skim over the bullying from the narrator in these chapters. It's the reading equivalent of holding my breath when there's something that smells bad. I try to rush through it.

JC: That's true. It's like, "Oh, I'm just going to go really quickly over these words." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's actually sort of a parallel to Harry dreading, "Oh, no. I have to spend summer with the Dursleys." When I delve into one of these books, I think, 'Oh, no,' and that's the beginning part. We have to go through the body-shaming ritual.

JC: Yes, we do. It is funny, though, that Harry is hoarding... Funny in this freaky way. Harry's hoarding all this food that everyone is sending to him, because he had told everyone, "Oh, my cousin's on a diet. They're not letting me eat anything but slices of grapefruit." I'm imagining raw broccoli and grilled chicken or whatever the heck he gets to eat; it's tiny little portions because he gets less than Dudley, because the only thing that makes Dudley possibly feel better is he's still getting more food than Harry, so then everyone just sends Harry food. He's got this hoard of food in his room that nobody else knows about. That's funny in that sad way that if you've ever experienced food insecurity, hoarding food is a thing that you'll do. Oh, I just made myself sad.

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: Yeah. Okay, I tried to spin that as funny, but maybe it's not as funny as...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, nothing about Harry at the Dursleys is really funny.

JC: Well, okay, we're coming up to something that is kind of funny.

Lorrie: Okay. Well, the other thing, too, is that I don't think it's Dudley who feels better when he gets a tiny bit more grapefruit than Harry. It's Petunia. It's Petunia; she seems to think that, at least, she can give Dudley a bigger portion.

JC: Okay, that makes sense actually. Even thinking about all of the stuff... We even talked about this in the last episode about Petunia getting a new baby, which is not anything that anyone would want.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And this idea of her wanting to make sure that Dudley is first. Yeah.

Lorrie: Because the extreme diet that Dudley's on... I don't know that an extra sliver of grapefruit would make -- it wouldn't make me feel any better. Oi.

JC: Yeah, that's a great point actually.

Lorrie: So yeah, it is awesome that Harry gets four superb birthday cakes. He is important to Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, and Sirius. I like imagining what kinds of cakes they are. And then the doorbell rings with a special delivery.

JC: And what I love about this whole scene -- the letter with all the stamps on it -- is that it's this really interesting revisit of, in the first book, all the letters coming.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This time there's only one, and Mr. Dursley knows not to fuck with this, right? It's from these magical people. It's like the way that the letter scene could have gone in the first book, so it's interesting to look at it as a bookend of that in some way.

Lorrie: I like that, of course, the stationery has to be purple, and that the part of the envelope that's not covered in stamps is a square inch, which is tiny; that's where Molly Weasley has squeezed the address in. Okay, this looks grand, actually.

JC: Oh, wow. That'd make a great desktop background, all the stamps around the address of the Dursleys. That'd be funny. This would be a fun cosplay.

Lorrie: Ooh, yes, it would.

JC: You know how people do funky cosplays?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You could be the letter, the invitation.

Lorrie: The letter, yeah, with Privet Drive written on your belly button or something.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, I like that Harry presses his advantage with Vernon by mentioning, "It's a sport played on broomsticks," and, "Normal post for us is owl post, and I have a godfather."

JC: I love, too, how it builds up. When he first gets the letter, Harry knows what the letter is. He knows that it's the Weasleys asking permission, so at the very beginning of that scene he is not going to say or do anything to upset Uncle Vernon, because he tries to avoid saying anything. By the end, when he sees that he's got Vernon, then Vernon can't do anything about it. This whole thing that gets set up: He doesn't want to do something that's going to make Harry happy. On the other hand, he can get rid of Harry really easily.

Lorrie: Yeah. Trapped.

JC: Oh! He's like, 'Which one should I...!' Yeah. When Harry realizes that that's happening, then he twists it a little bit.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And by the end of the scene, Harry is not at all worried about pissing off Uncle Vernon, and Uncle Vernon's the one who's scared of Harry. It's really wild to watch that change happen over the course of this one scene.

Lorrie: And I realized this is actually Harry's version of "My father will hear about this." "My godfather will hear about this." I laugh at Draco for saying that, because it's the first thing Draco whips out, and he does it even when it's not appropriate or just silly. We see this in *Cursed Child* later, when Draco and Harry are middle-aged fathers. Having somebody always in his corner really did make a huge difference for Draco, and this is the first time we see Harry having that experience.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: The first time he can actually say, "I have someone who will hear about this, who is powerful and has my back." He's never been able to do that with Vernon before.

JC: Yeah, and it's interesting how even just the specter of Sirius...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's not going to come there -- there's no way -- but just the idea of him is enough to give Harry this confidence and this feeling of "somebody's in my corner."

Lorrie: Yeah. I think that's really important in this chapter. The difference it makes in a person's life, especially a kid's, to know, "No, there is somebody -- somebody bigger than I am -- who cares."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah, there's a kernel of something really amazing amidst all this fatphobia and everything. And then I loved that the Weasleys are unanimous. Of course, Harry can't miss the World Cup.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Ron thinks this, the twins think this, and the legitimate parents who go through proper channels all think this. They're completely united, and I love that it's not charity. It's like, "Of course, this is such an amazing thing. You've got to go. Of course you have to go!"

JC: Right. That line in Ron's letter -- something about how "if they like it, we're coming at five to pick you up. If they don't like it, we're coming at five to pick you up."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's a statement, but the Weasleys are the only people who understand how Harry gets treated by the Dursleys. Was it two summers ago that Harry got rescued in the flying car and everything?

Lorrie: The flying car, yeah.

JC: They know that Harry got basically trapped in his room with bars on the window and wasn't allowed out. They know that, so they're like, "Kid, we're going to come and get you and then you're going to stay with us for the rest of the summer." It's really interesting to me that they've got his back, too, in that way.

Lorrie: Yeah. And I just love that they know that this child in particular belongs at the Quidditch World Cup.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's not just that it's a big wizard party. This is his thing. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. We talked... I think it was the last episode about how I really enjoy the world-building around the Quidditch World Cup, so I love that even the Weasleys are like, "No, this is important. Harry needs to learn more about what it means to live in our world." Yeah.

Lorrie: And I also like, too, that we see how Mr. Weasley [is] cash-poor, but he does have some status. Yeah, it's great. I'm so glad he got these tickets.

JC: Oh, I'm excited for the World Cup. I'm like, yay. I'm looking forward to that part. The other interesting thing, too, about this chapter is that it's very short and it's probably, in some ways, the best depiction of Harry's summer at the Dursleys ever. Maybe in future book scenes, we'll... I can't remember how it's portrayed in the next few books, but the Dursleys are leaving him alone. Not necessarily in the 'ignoring and pretending he doesn't exist' way, like how they've done in the past, but he's eating cake in his room. He seems like he's happier than he has been in the past being at the Dursleys, and that's really good.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Considering everything that's about to come in this book, it feels like his summer hasn't been as shitty as it often is.

Lorrie: Well, he definitely has a place to go. He belongs to this world. That was the issue at the beginning of the second book: because Dobby was holding back the letters, he was afraid, "Maybe I don't mean as much to my friends as they mean to me." And then at the beginning of the third book, when they said that he was expelled, does he even belong in this world? But right now, he's got a godfather, his favorite sport is having a big festival. He belongs.

JC: Yeah, and there are people who are doing everything they can to make sure that he gets to experience this cool thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And they would be disappointed without him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And his guardians can't really do anything to stop him from going. I just love the disdain for the Dursleys that comes through Ron's letter. It's really funny.

Lorrie: And confident.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah, I love this sentence. Okay, so here's Harry with his godfather; he has Hermione and Hagrid and all the Weasleys on his side. Pigwidgeon and Hedwig have flown in to bring him things, because the second summer in the second book, he was literally starving. "He sat there on the floor eating [his birthday cake], savoring the happiness that was flooding through him."

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: That is not a sentence we usually get to hear about Harry at the Dursleys.

JC: Yes. Yeah. I think that's why this stood out to me so much, what you just read right there. He's at the Dursleys and he's happy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? It's like, 'Oh, wow. How bad is it going to get in this book if he's happy at the Dursleys?'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: Well, that's exactly what I sense coming, right? Here's the quote that really made me feel doom. "It was a bright summer's day, he would be leaving Privet Drive tomorrow, his scar felt perfectly normal again, and he was going to watch the Quidditch World Cup." That feels to me like an apology.

JC: Knock wood, kid. Knock wood.

Lorrie: Yeah. I think the author is apologizing in advance because it's her last chance to give him everything she can, because she's about to put him through it. This volume is where the terror starts, and from this point on, it only builds and it doesn't let up until the end of the series.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: This is his last chance to have any happiness without that, and it's the last summer he gets to be a child.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Now, given what Harry Potter's childhood has been like, it's not like he's so, so sorry to see that go, but it's the last time that we get to squeeze some in before he starts having to be a soldier.

JC: Yeah, that's true. That's true. You're right. After this book, he is a soldier for the rest of the series, and he knows that it's him versus Voldemort for the rest of the series.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think he really senses that he's the only one who's going to be able to take Voldemort out.

Lorrie: Yeah, there's nothing he can do about it.

JC: Yeah, there's nothing he can do about it. He's fourteen, fifteen, and this is his destiny. Oh, yeah, yeah. You're right. There's a sense in which him sitting on his bedroom floor -- excited about the World Cup, the Dursleys are going to let him go, eating his birthday cake, his friends are sending him things via owl -- yeah. It's the last little bit of summer before a really bad school year, when you're like, "Maybe it won't be as bad this time. Wow, I'm really happy right now. Things are going great!" And then... yeah.

Lorrie: Well, give that kid four birthday cakes.

JC: For sure. Yeah.

Lorrie: This is when he gets to eat them.

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah. We have Pigwidgeon and Hedwig. I like the interaction between these two owls a lot.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I love the idea of Pigwidgeon as this very tiny and very young owl that's really excited and trying so hard to prove itself, and Hedwig is like, "Do you know who I am? I am Harry Potter's owl. Back away, you ruffian! Please!"

Lorrie: "That's not how you do things, you know!"

JC: Exactly. She puffs up. "Hmph!"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I'm doing very important work here. Settle down!" Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Fortunately, Pigwidgeon is too excited to either notice or care.

JC: Yeah. Pigwidgeon is the little socially awkward kid who's just so excited to tell you about their favorite video game for 30 minutes. You're walking around doing shit, and they're like, "But, but, but then..." It doesn't matter what you're doing; they're going to be right there at your side, tugging on your shirt. "Let me tell you about what happened next!"

Lorrie: And he's cute.

JC: It's like, "Oh, God, why did I become a teacher?"

Lorrie: Oh, no.

JC: That's what it reminded me of.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, he did manage to bring a message correctly.

JC: For sure, for sure.

Lorrie: Good for him.

JC: This is a little bit of world-building with the owls here that I really appreciate. We talked about this before, but this idea that the owls are sentient...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry talks to Hedwig as if she's a person. He asks her questions, he tells her things, he treats her as a friend and not as a pet. Now, I have cats. I talk to my cats, but I don't have the sense that they really understand what I'm saying. He's conversing with Hedwig in a very different way than I converse with my pets, and I really like the fact that that's how this series seems to treat a lot of magical creatures. Even in the last book, when Sirius sent Pigwidgeon... I think there was a line about how he seemed really happy to have a job or something. He was very enthusiastic to take on the job. Sirius had a conversation with Pigwidgeon, and yeah, I really like that. I think it's so interesting.

Lorrie: It's respectful.

JC: Yeah, it's very respectful. Unlike the way fat people are treated, it's very respectful.

Lorrie: That's true.

JC: The contrast between the fact that a lot of pets are treated as very sentient; you can have conversations with them, and there's a language barrier, even between Hermione's cat and other animals we've seen. I find that part of the series really interesting, and it ties into the fairy tale aspect of it where you can talk to the animals. If you had some magic, of course you would want to talk to animals. I like that. I'm going to take on my mission of looking at world-building very seriously.

Lorrie: And the next chapter is called Back to the Burrow.

JC: Back to the Burrow.

Lorrie: And we get to see that even though the Weasleys do know that the Dursleys treat Harry badly, they don't really have any idea of it until they see it for themselves.

JC: Oh, yeah. They're going to meet the Dursleys. That's right. I'd forgotten about that part.

Lorrie: Is Harry exaggerating? No, in fact.

JC: Was Ron exaggerating? No, Ron was not exaggerating.

Lorrie: Not at all.

JC: Oh, that's going to be fun.

Lorrie: All right. That fun confrontation is... I'm going to be there for that, watching, and I'll see you there then.

JC: Right! Super short episode this time... can make up for the last one being really long.

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.