CHAPTER ONE

THE BOY WHO LIVED

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say

that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last

people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious,

because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mr. Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made

drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did

have a very large mustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had

nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she

spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the

neighbors. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their

opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and

their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't

think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs.

Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years;

in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her

sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was

possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbors would

say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the

Potters had a small son, too, but they had never even seen him. This boy

was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want

Dudley mixing with a child like that.

When Mr. and Mrs. Dursley woke up on the dull, gray Tuesday our story

starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that

strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the

country. Mr. Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for

work, and Mrs. Dursley gossiped away happily as she wrestled a screaming

Dudley into his high chair.

None of them noticed a large, tawny owl flutter past the window.

At half past eight, Mr. Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked Mrs.

Dursley on the cheek, and tried to kiss Dudley good-bye but missed,

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because Dudley was now having a tantrum and throwing his cereal at the

walls. "Little tyke," chortled Mr. Dursley as he left the house. He got

into his car and backed out of number four's drive.

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of

something peculiar -- a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr. Dursley

didn't realize what he had seen -- then he jerked his head around to

look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet

Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. What could he have been thinking

of? It must have been a trick of the light. Mr. Dursley blinked and

stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr. Dursley drove around the

corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now

reading the sign that said Privet Drive -- no, looking at the sign; cats

couldn't read maps or signs. Mr. Dursley gave himself a little shake and

put the cat out of his mind. As he drove toward town he thought of

nothing except a large order of drills he was hoping to get that day.

But on the edge of town, drills were driven out of his mind by something

else. As he sat in the usual morning traffic jam, he couldn't help

noticing that there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people

about. People in cloaks. Mr. Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in

funny clothes -- the getups you saw on young people! He supposed this

was some stupid new fashion. He drummed his fingers on the steering

wheel and his eyes fell on a huddle of these weirdos standing quite

close by. They were whispering excitedly together. Mr. Dursley was

enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all; why, that man

had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The

nerve of him! But then it struck Mr. Dursley that this was probably some

silly stunt -- these people were obviously collecting for something...

yes, that would be it. The traffic moved on and a few minutes later, Mr.

Dursley arrived in the Grunnings parking lot, his mind back on drills.

Mr. Dursley always sat with his back to the window in his office on the

ninth floor. If he hadn't, he might have found it harder to concentrate

on drills that morning. He didn't see the owls swoop ing past in broad

daylight, though people down in the street did; they pointed and gazed

open- mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead. Most of them had never

seen an owl even at nighttime. Mr. Dursley, however, had a perfectly

normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at five different people. He made

several important telephone calls and shouted a bit more. He was in a

very good mood until lunchtime, when he thought he'd stretch his legs

and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the bakery.

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He'd forgotten all about the people in cloaks until he passed a group of

them next to the baker's. He eyed them angrily as he passed. He didn't

know why, but they made him uneasy. This bunch were whispering

excitedly, too, and he couldn't see a single collecting tin. It was on

his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he

caught a few words of what they were saying.

"The Potters, that's right, that's what I heard yes, their son, Harry"

Mr. Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. He looked back at the

whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but thought better

of it.

He dashed back across the road, hurried up to his office, snapped at his

secretary not to disturb him, seized his telephone, and had almost

finished dialing his home number when he changed his mind. He put the

receiver back down and stroked his mustache, thinking... no, he was

being stupid. Potter wasn't such an unusual name. He was sure there were

lots of people called Potter who had a son called Harry. Come to think

of it, he wasn't even sure his nephew was called Harry. He'd never even

seen the boy. It might have been Harvey. Or Harold. There was no point

in worrying Mrs. Dursley; she always got so upset at any mention of her

sister. He didn't blame her -- if he'd had a sister like that... but all

the same, those people in cloaks...

He found it a lot harder to concentrate on drills that afternoon and

when he left the building at five o'clock, he was still so worried that

he walked straight into someone just outside the door.

"Sorry," he grunted, as the tiny old man stumbled and almost fell. It

was a few seconds before Mr. Dursley realized that the man was wearing a

violet cloak. He didn't seem at all upset at being almost knocked to the

ground. On the contrary, his face split into a wide smile and he said in

a squeaky voice that made passersby stare, "Don't be sorry, my dear sir,

for nothing could upset me today! Rejoice, for You-Know-Who has gone at

last! Even Muggles like yourself should be celebrating, this happy,

happy day!"

And the old man hugged Mr. Dursley around the middle and walked off.

Mr. Dursley stood rooted to the spot. He had been hugged by a complete

stranger. He also thought he had been called a Muggle, whatever that

was. He was rattled. He hurried to his car and set off for home, hoping

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he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he

didn't approve of imagination.

As he pulled into the driveway of number four, the first thing he saw --

and it didn't improve his mood -- was the tabby cat he'd spotted that

morning. It was now sitting on his garden wall. He was sure it was the

same one; it had the same markings around its eyes.

"Shoo!" said Mr. Dursley loudly. The cat didn't move. It just gave him a

stern look. Was this normal cat behavior? Mr. Dursley wondered. Trying

to pull himself together, he let himself into the house. He was still

determined not to mention anything to his wife.

Mrs. Dursley had had a nice, normal day. She told him over dinner all

about Mrs. Next Door's problems with her daughter and how Dudley had

learned a new word ("Won't!"). Mr. Dursley tried to act normally. When

Dudley had been put to bed, he went into the living room in time to

catch the last report on the evening news:

"And finally, bird-watchers everywhere have reported that the nation's

owls have been behaving very unusually today. Although owls normally

hunt at night and are hardly ever seen in daylight, there have been

hundreds of sightings of these birds flying in every direction since

sunrise. Experts are unable to explain why the owls have suddenly

changed their sleeping pattern." The newscaster allowed himself a grin.

"Most mysterious. And now, over to Jim McGuffin with the weather. Going

to be any more showers of owls tonight, Jim?"

"Well, Ted," said the weatherman, "I don't know about that, but it's not

only the owls that have been acting oddly today. Viewers as far apart as

Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead

of the rain I promised yesterday, they've had a downpour of shooting

stars! Perhaps people have been celebrating Bonfire Night early -- it's

not until next week, folks! But I can promise a wet night tonight."

Mr. Dursley sat frozen in his armchair. Shooting stars all over Britain?

Owls flying by daylight? Mysterious people in cloaks all over the place?

And a whisper, a whisper about the Potters...

Mrs. Dursley came into the living room carrying two cups of tea. It was

no good. He'd have to say something to her. He cleared his throat

nervously. "Er -- Petunia, dear -- you haven't heard from your sister

lately, have you?"

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As he had expected, Mrs. Dursley looked shocked and angry. After all,

they normally pretended she didn't have a sister.

"No," she said sharply. "Why?"

"Funny stuff on the news," Mr. Dursley mumbled. "Owls... shooting

stars... and there were a lot of funny-looking people in town today..."

"So?" snapped Mrs. Dursley.

"Well, I just thought... maybe... it was something to do with... you

know... her crowd."

Mrs. Dursley sipped her tea through pursed lips. Mr. Dursley wondered

whether he dared tell her he'd heard the name "Potter." He decided he

didn't dare. Instead he said, as casually as he could, "Their son --

he'd be about Dudley's age now, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Dursley stiffly.

"What's his name again? Howard, isn't it?"

"Harry. Nasty, common name, if you ask me."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Dursley, his heart sinking horribly. "Yes, I quite

agree."

He didn't say another word on the subject as they went upstairs to bed.

While Mrs. Dursley was in the bathroom, Mr. Dursley crept to the bedroom

window and peered down into the front garden. The cat was still there.

It was staring down Privet Drive as though it were waiting for

something.

Was he imagining things? Could all this have anything to do with the

Potters? If it did... if it got out that they were related to a pair of

-- well, he didn't think he could bear it.

The Dursleys got into bed. Mrs. Dursley fell asleep quickly but Mr.

Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last, comforting

thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters were

involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs.

Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about

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them and their kind.... He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get

mixed up in anything that might be going on -- he yawned and turned over

-- it couldn't affect them....

How very wrong he was.

Mr. Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat

on the wall outside was showing no sign of sleepiness. It was sitting as

still as a statue, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of

Privet Drive. It didn't so much as quiver when a car door slammed on the

next street, nor when two owls swooped overhead. In fact, it was nearly

midnight before the cat moved at all.

A man appeared on the corner the cat had been watching, appeared so

suddenly and silently you'd have thought he'd just popped out of the

ground. The cat's tail twitched and its eyes narrowed.

Nothing like this man had ever been seen on Privet Drive. He was tall,

thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which

were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes,

a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots.

His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon

spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been

broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realize that he had just arrived in a

street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was

busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to

realize he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat,

which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For

some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and

muttered, "I should have known."

He found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It seemed to be a

silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and

clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop. He

clicked it again -- the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times

he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left on the whole street

were two tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat

watching him. If anyone looked out of their window now, even beady-eyed

Mrs. Dursley, they wouldn't be able to see anything that was happening

down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside his

cloak and set off down the street toward number four, where he sat down

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on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he

spoke to it.

"Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall."

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling

at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly

the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was

wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight

bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

"How did you know it was me?" she asked.

"My dear Professor, I 've never seen a cat sit so stiffly."

"You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day," said

Professor McGonagall.

"All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a

dozen feasts and parties on my way here."

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

"Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right," she said impatiently.

"You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no -- even the Muggles

have noticed something's going on. It was on their news." She jerked her

head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window. "I heard it. Flocks

of owls... shooting stars.... Well, they're not completely stupid. They

were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent -- I'll bet

that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."

"You can't blame them," said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious

little to celebrate for eleven years."

"I know that," said Professor McGonagall irritably. "But that's no

reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on

the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes,

swapping rumors."

She threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping

he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on. "A

fine thing it would be if, on the very day YouKnow-Who seems to have

disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he

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really has gone, Dumbledore?"

"It certainly seems so," said Dumbledore. "We have much to be thankful

for. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A what?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of"

"No, thank you," said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn't

think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if

You-Know-Who has gone -"

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him

by his name? All this 'You- Know-Who' nonsense -- for eleven years I

have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name:

Voldemort." Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was

unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice. "It all gets so

confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason

to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name.

"I know you haven 't, said Professor McGonagall, sounding half

exasperated, half admiring. "But you're different. Everyone knows you're

the only one You-Know- oh, all right, Voldemort, was frightened of."

"You flatter me," said Dumbledore calmly. "Voldemort had powers I will

never have."

"Only because you're too -- well -- noble to use them."

"It's lucky it's dark. I haven't blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey

told me she liked my new earmuffs."

Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, "The owls

are nothing next to the rumors that are flying around. You know what

everyone's saying? About why he's disappeared? About what finally

stopped him?"

It seemed that Professor McGonagall had reached the point she was most

anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on a cold, hard

wall all day, for neither as a cat nor as a woman had she fixed

Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that

whatever "everyone" was saying, she was not going to believe it until

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Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing

another lemon drop and did not answer.

"What they're saying," she pressed on, "is that last night Voldemort

turned up in Godric's Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumor is

that Lily and James Potter are -- are -- that they're -- dead. "

Dumbledore bowed his head. Professor McGonagall gasped.

"Lily and James... I can't believe it... I didn't want to believe it...

Oh, Albus..."

Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder. "I know... I

know..." he said heavily.

Professor McGonagall's voice trembled as she went on. "That's not all.

They're saying he tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry. But -- he

couldn't. He couldn't kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how,

but they're saying that when he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's

power somehow broke -- and that's why he's gone.

Dumbledore nodded glumly.

"It's -- it's true?" faltered Professor McGonagall. "After all he's

done... all the people he's killed... he couldn't kill a little boy?

It's just astounding... of all the things to stop him... but how in the

name of heaven did Harry survive?"

"We can only guess," said Dumbledore. "We may never know."

Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her

eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a

golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch.

It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving

around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because

he put it back in his pocket and said, "Hagrid's late. I suppose it was

he who told you I'd be here, by the way?"

"Yes," said Professor McGonagall. "And I don't suppose you're going to

tell me why you're here, of all places?"

"I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They're the only family

he has left now."

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"You don't mean -- you can't mean the people who live here?" cried

Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at number four.

"Dumbledore -- you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't

find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son -- I saw

him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets.

Harry Potter come and live here!"

"It's the best place for him," said Dumbledore firmly. "His aunt and

uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've

written them a letter."

"A letter?" repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on

the wall. "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a

letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous -- a

legend -- I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day

in the future -- there will be books written about Harry -- every child

in our world will know his name!"

"Exactly," said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his

half-moon glasses. "It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous

before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even

remember! CarA you see how much better off he'll be, growing up away

from all that until he's ready to take it?"

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and

then said, "Yes -- yes, you're right, of course. But how is the boy

getting here, Dumbledore?" She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she

thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

"Hagrid's bringing him."

"You think it -- wise -- to trust Hagrid with something as important as

this?"

I would trust Hagrid with my life," said Dumbledore.

"I'm not saying his heart isn't in the right place," said Professor

McGonagall grudgingly, "but you can't pretend he's not careless. He does

tend to -- what was that?"

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew

steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a

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headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky -- and

a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of

them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride

it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times

as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild - long

tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands

the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were

like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle

of blankets.

"Hagrid," said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. "At last. And where did

you get that motorcycle?"

"Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sit," said the giant, climbing

carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke. "Young Sirius Black lent it to

me. I've got him, sir."

"No problems, were there?"

"No, sir -- house was almost destroyed, but I got him out all right

before the Muggles started swarmin' around. He fell asleep as we was

flyin' over Bristol."

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of

blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a

tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously

shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

"Is that where -?" whispered Professor McGonagall.

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "He'll have that scar forever."

"Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore?"

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. Scars can come in handy. I have one myself

above my left knee that is a perfect map of the London Underground. Well

-- give him here, Hagrid -- we'd better get this over with."

Dumbledore took Harry in his arms and turned toward the Dursleys' house.

"Could I -- could I say good-bye to him, sir?" asked Hagrid. He bent his

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great, shaggy head over Harry and gave him what must have been a very

scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a

wounded dog.

"Shhh!" hissed Professor McGonagall, "you'll wake the Muggles!"

"S-s-sorry," sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large, spotted handkerchief and

burying his face in it. "But I c-c-can't stand it -- Lily an' James dead

-- an' poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles -"

"Yes, yes, it's all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or

we'll be found," Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly

on the arm as Dumbledore stepped over the low garden wall and walked to

the front door. He laid Harry gently on the doorstep, took a letter out

of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry's blankets, and then came back to

the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at

the little bundle; Hagrid's shoulders shook, Professor McGonagall

blinked furiously, and the twinkling light that usually shone from

Dumbledore's eyes seemed to have gone out.

"Well," said Dumbledore finally, "that's that. We've no business staying

here. We may as well go and join the celebrations."

"Yeah," said Hagrid in a very muffled voice, "I'll be takin' Sirius his

bike back. G'night, Professor McGonagall -- Professor Dumbledore, sir."

Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself

onto the motorcycle and kicked the engine into life; with a roar it rose

into the air and off into the night.

"I shall see you soon, I expect, Professor McGonagall," said Dumbledore,

nodding to her. Professor McGonagall blew her nose in reply.

Dumbledore turned and walked back down the street. On the corner he

stopped and took out the silver Put-Outer. He clicked it once, and

twelve balls of light sped back to their street lamps so that Privet

Drive glowed suddenly orange and he could make out a tabby cat slinking

around the corner at the other end of the street. He could just see the

bundle of blankets on the step of number four.

"Good luck, Harry," he murmured. He turned on his heel and with a swish

of his cloak, he was gone.

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A breeze ruffled the neat hedges of Privet Drive, which lay silent and

tidy under the inky sky, the very last place you would expect

astonishing things to happen. Harry Potter rolled over inside his

blankets without waking up. One small hand closed on the letter beside

him and he slept on, not knowing he was special, not knowing he was

famous, not knowing he would be woken in a few hours' time by Mrs.

Dursley's scream as she opened the front door to put out the milk

bottles, nor that he would spend the next few weeks being prodded and

pinched by his cousin Dudley... He couldn't know that at this very

moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up

their glasses and saying in hushed voices: "To Harry Potter -- the boy

who lived!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE VANISHING GLASS

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find

their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at

all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass

number four on the Dursleys' front door; it crept into their living

room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when

Mr. Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the

photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed.

Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a

large pink beach ball wearing different-colored bonnets -- but Dudley

Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large

blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a carousel at the fair, playing a

computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother.

The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too.

Yet Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for

long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice that made

the first noise of the day.

"Up! Get up! Now!"

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again.

"Up!" she screeched. Harry heard her walking toward the kitchen and then

the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. He rolled onto his

back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a

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good one. There had been a flying motorcycle in it. He had a funny

feeling he'd had the same dream before.

His aunt was back outside the door.

"Are you up yet?" she demanded.

"Nearly," said Harry.

"Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon. And don't you

dare let it burn, I want everything perfect on Duddy's birthday."

Harry groaned.

"What did you say?" his aunt snapped through the door.

"Nothing, nothing..."

Dudley's birthday -- how could he have forgotten? Harry got slowly out

of bed and started looking for socks. He found a pair under his bed and,

after pulling a spider off one of them, put them on. Harry was used to

spiders, because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and

that was where he slept.

When he was dressed he went down the hall into the kitchen. The table

was almost hidden beneath all Dudley's birthday presents. It looked as

though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the

second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a

racing bike was a mystery to Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated

exercise -- unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley's

favorite punching bag was Harry, but he couldn't often catch him. Harry

didn't look it, but he was very fast.

Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry

had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and

skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes

of Dudley's, and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry

had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. He

wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of

all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry

liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that

was shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could

remember, and the first question he could ever remember asking his Aunt

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Petunia was how he had gotten it.

"In the car crash when your parents died," she had said. "And don't ask

questions."

Don't ask questions -- that was the first rule for a quiet life with the

Dursleys.

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon.

"Comb your hair!" he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and

shouted that Harry needed a haircut. Harry must have had more haircuts

than the rest of the boys in his class put

together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way --

all over the place.

Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his

mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face,

not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay

smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley

looked like a baby angel -- Harry often said that Dudley looked like a

pig in a wig.

Harry put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was difficult

as there wasn't much room. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents.

His face fell.

"Thirty-six," he said, looking up at his mother and father. "That's two

less than last year."

"Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, it's here

under this big one from Mommy and Daddy."

"All right, thirty-seven then," said Dudley, going red in the face.

Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down

his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger, too, because she said quickly,

"And we'll buy you another two presents while we're out today. How's

that, popkin? Two more presents. Is that all right''

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Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said

slowly, "So I'll have thirty ... thirty..."

"Thirty-nine, sweetums," said Aunt Petunia.

"Oh." Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. "All right

then."

Uncle Vernon chuckled. "Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like

his father. 'Atta boy, Dudley!" He ruffled Dudley's hair.

At that moment the telephone rang and Aunt Petunia went to answer it

while Harry and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap the racing bike, a

video camera, a remote control airplane, sixteen new computer games, and

a VCR. He was ripping the paper off a gold wristwatch when Aunt Petunia

came back from the telephone looking both angry and worried.

"Bad news, Vernon," she said. "Mrs. Figg's broken her leg. She can't

take him." She jerked her head in Harry's direction.

Dudley's mouth fell open in horror, but Harry's heart gave a leap. Every

year on Dudley's birthday, his parents took him and a friend out for the

day, to adventure parks, hamburger restaurants, or the movies. Every

year, Harry was left behind with Mrs. Figg, a mad old lady who lived two

streets away. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled of cabbage

and Mrs. Figg made him look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever

owned.

"Now what?" said Aunt Petunia, looking furiously at Harry as though he'd

planned this. Harry knew he ought to feel sorry that Mrs. Figg had

broken her leg, but it wasn't easy when he reminded himself it would be

a whole year before he had to look at Tibbles, Snowy, Mr. Paws, and

Tufty again.

"We could phone Marge," Uncle Vernon suggested.

"Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy."

The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't

there -- or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't

understand them, like a slug.

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"What about what's-her-name, your friend -- Yvonne?"

"On vacation in Majorca," snapped Aunt Petunia.

"You could just leave me here," Harry put in hopefully (he'd be able to

watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go

on Dudley's computer).

Aunt Petunia looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon.

"And come back and find the house in ruins?" she snarled.

"I won't blow up the house," said Harry, but they weren't listening.

"I suppose we could take him to the zoo," said Aunt Petunia slowly, "...

and leave him in the car...."

"That car's new, he's not sitting in it alone...."

Dudley began to cry loudly. In fact, he wasn't really crying -- it had

been years since he'd really cried -- but he knew that if he screwed up

his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted.

"Dinky Duddydums, don't cry, Mummy won't let him spoil your special

day!" she cried, flinging her arms around him.

"I... don't... want... him... t-t-to come!" Dudley yelled between huge,

pretend sobs. "He always sp- spoils everything!" He shot Harry a nasty

grin through the gap in his mother's arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang -- "Oh, good Lord, they're here!" said Aunt

Petunia frantically -- and a moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers

Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face

like a rat. He was usually the one who held people's arms behind their

backs while Dudley hit them. Dudley stopped pretending to cry at once.

Half an hour later, Harry, who couldn't believe his luck, was sitting in

the back of the Dursleys' car with Piers and Dudley, on the way to the

zoo for the first time in his life. His aunt and uncle hadn't been able

to think of anything else to do with him, but before they'd left, Uncle

Vernon had taken Harry aside.

"I'm warning you," he had said, putting his large purple face right up

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close to Harry's, "I'm warning you now, boy -- any funny business,

anything at all -- and you'll be in that cupboard from now until

Christmas."

"I'm not going to do anything," said Harry, "honestly..

But Uncle Vernon didn't believe him. No one ever did.

The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry and it was

just no good telling the Dursleys he didn't make them happen.

Once, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry coming back from the barbers looking

as though he hadn't been at all, had taken a pair of kitchen scissors

and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his bangs, which

she left "to hide that horrible scar." Dudley had laughed himself silly

at Harry, who spent a sleepless night imagining school the next day,

where he was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and taped glasses.

Next morning, however, he had gotten up to find his hair exactly as it

had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off He had been given a week

in his cupboard for this, even though he had tried to explain that he

couldn't explain how it had grown back so quickly.

Another time, Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting

old sweater of Dudley's (brown with orange puff balls) -- The harder she

tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until

finally it might have fitted a hand puppet, but certainly wouldn't fit

Harry. Aunt Petunia had decided it must have shrunk in the wash and, to

his great relief, Harry wasn't punished.

On the other hand, he'd gotten into terrible trouble for being found on

the roof of the school kitchens. Dudley's gang had been chasing him as

usual when, as much to Harry's surprise as anyone else's, there he was

sitting on the chimney. The Dursleys had received a very angry letter

from Harry's headmistress telling them Harry had been climbing school

buildings. But all he'd tried to do (as he shouted at Uncle Vernon

through the locked door of his cupboard) was jump behind the big trash

cans outside the kitchen doors. Harry supposed that the wind must have

caught him in mid- jump.

But today, nothing was going to go wrong. It was even worth being with

Dudley and Piers to be spending the day somewhere that wasn't school,

his cupboard, or Mrs. Figg's cabbage-smelling living room.

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While he drove, Uncle Vernon complained to Aunt Petunia. He liked to

complain about things: people at work, Harry, the council, Harry, the

bank, and Harry were just a few of his favorite subjects. This morning,

it was motorcycles.

"... roaring along like maniacs, the young hoodlums," he said, as a

motorcycle overtook them.

I had a dream about a motorcycle," said Harry, remembering suddenly. "It

was flying."

Uncle Vernon nearly crashed into the car in front. He turned right

around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beet

with a mustache: "MOTORCYCLES DON'T FLY!"

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

I know they don't," said Harry. "It was only a dream."

But he wished he hadn't said anything. If there was one thing the

Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking

about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a

dream or even a cartoon -- they seemed to think he might get dangerous

ideas.

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The

Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice creams at the

entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry

what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap

lemon ice pop. It wasn't bad, either, Harry thought, licking it as they

watched a gorilla scratching its head who looked remarkably like Dudley,

except that it wasn't blond.

Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. He was careful to

walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who

were starting to get bored with the animals by lunchtime, wouldn't fall

back on their favorite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo

restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker

glory didn't have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him

another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterward, that he should have known it was all too good to

last.

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After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in

there, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts

of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and

stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick,

man-crushing pythons. Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the

place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car

and crushed it into a trash can -- but at the moment it didn't look in

the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep.

Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the

glistening brown coils.

"Make it move," he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the

glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly

with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

"This is boring," Dudley moaned. He shuffled away.

Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He

wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself -- no

company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying

to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a

bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door

to wake you up; at least he got to visit the rest of the house.

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised

its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

It winked.

Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was

watching. They weren't. He looked back at the snake and winked, too.

The snake jerked its head toward Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised

its eyes to the ceiling. It gave Harry a look that said quite plainly:

"I get that all the time.

"I know," Harry murmured through the glass, though he wasn't sure the

snake could hear him. "It must be really annoying."

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The snake nodded vigorously.

"Where do you come from, anyway?" Harry asked.

The snake jabbed its tail at a little sign next to the glass. Harry

peered at it.

Boa Constrictor, Brazil.

"Was it nice there?"

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on:

This specimen was bred in the zoo. "Oh, I see -- so you've never been to

Brazil?"

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Harry made both of

them jump.

"DUDLEY! MR. DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU

WON'T BELIEVE

WHAT IT'S DOING!"

Dudley came waddling toward them as fast as he could.

"Out of the way, you," he said, punching Harry in the ribs. Caught by

surprise, Harry fell hard on the concrete floor. What came next happened

so fast no one saw how it happened -- one second, Piers and Dudley were

leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with

howls of horror.

Harry sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor's tank

had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering

out onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and

started running for the exits.

As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have sworn a low,

hissing voice said, "Brazil, here I come.... Thanksss, amigo."

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glass," he kept saying, "where did the glass go?"

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The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong, sweet tea

while he apologized over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only

gibber. As far as Harry had seen, the snake hadn't done anything except

snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were

all back in Uncle Vernon's car, Dudley was telling them how it had

nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to

squeeze him to death. But worst of all, for Harry at least, was Piers

calming down enough to say, "Harry was talking to it, weren't you,

Harry?"

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before

starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to

say, "Go -- cupboard -- stay -- no meals," before he collapsed into a

chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a large brandy.

Harry lay in his dark cupboard much later, wishing he had a watch. He

didn't know what time it was and he couldn't be sure the Dursleys were

asleep yet. Until they were, he couldn't risk sneaking to the kitchen

for some food.

He'd lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years, as

long as he could remember, ever since he'd been a baby and his parents

had died in that car crash. He couldn't remember being in the car when

his parents had died. Sometimes, when he strained his memory during long

hours in his cupboard, he came up with a strange vision: a blinding

flash of green light and a burn- ing pain on his forehead. This, he

supposed, was the crash, though he couldn't imagine where all the green

light came from. He couldn't remember his parents at all. His aunt and

uncle never spoke about them, and of course he was forbidden to ask

questions. There were no photographs of them in the house.

When he had been younger, Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown

relation coming to take him away, but it had never happened; the

Dursleys were his only family. Yet sometimes he thought (or maybe hoped)

that strangers in the street seemed to know him. Very strange strangers

they were, too. A tiny man in a violet top hat had bowed to him once

while out shopping with Aunt Petunia and Dudley. After asking Harry

furiously if he knew the man, Aunt Petunia had rushed them out of the

shop without buying anything. A wild-looking old woman dressed all in

green had waved merrily at him once on a bus. A bald man in a very long

purple coat had actually shaken his hand in the street the other day and

then walked away without a word. The weirdest thing about all these

people was the way they seemed to vanish the second Harry tried to get a

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closer look.

At school, Harry had no one. Everybody knew that Dudley's gang hated

that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses, and

nobody liked to disagree with Dudley's gang.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LETTERS FROM NO ONE

The escape of the Brazilian boa constrictor earned Harry his

longest-ever punishment. By the time he was allowed out of his cupboard

again, the summer holidays had started and Dudley had already broken his

new video camera, crashed his remote control airplane, and, first time

out on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Privet

Drive on her crutches.

Harry was glad school was over, but there was no escaping Dudley's gang,

who visited the house every single day. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm, and

Gordon were all big and stupid, but as Dudley was the biggest and

stupidest of the lot, he was the leader. The rest of them were all quite

happy to join in Dudley's favorite sport: Harry Hunting.

This was why Harry spent as much time as possible out of the house,

wandering around and thinking about the end of the holidays, where he

could see a tiny ray of hope. When September came he would be going off

to secondary school and, for the first time in his life, he wouldn't be

with Dudley. Dudley had been accepted at Uncle Vernon's old private

school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there too. Harry, on the

other hand, was going to Stonewall High, the local public school. Dudley

thought this was very funny.

"They stuff people's heads down the toilet the first day at Stonewall,"

he told Harry. "Want to come upstairs and practice?"

"No, thanks," said Harry. "The poor toilet's never had anything as

horrible as your head down it -- it might be sick." Then he ran, before

Dudley could work out what he'd said.

One day in July, Aunt Petunia took Dudley to London to buy his Smeltings

uniform, leaving Harry at Mrs. Figg's. Mrs. Figg wasn 't as bad as

usual. It turned out she'd broken her leg tripping over one of her cats,

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and she didn't seem quite as fond of them as before. She let Harry watch

television and gave him a bit of chocolate cake that tasted as though

she'd had it for several years.

That evening, Dudley paraded around the living room for the family in

his brand-new uniform. Smeltings' boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange

knickerbockers, and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried

knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't

looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life.

As he looked at Dudley in his new knickerbockers, Uncle Vernon said

gruffly that it was the proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst

into tears and said she couldn't believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he

looked so handsome and grown-up. Harry didn't trust himself to speak. He

thought two of his ribs might already have cracked from trying not to

laugh.

There was a horrible smell in the kitchen the next morning when Harry

went in for breakfast. It seemed to be coming from a large metal tub in

the sink. He went to have a look. The tub was full of what looked like

dirty rags swimming in gray water.

"What's this?" he asked Aunt Petunia. Her lips tightened as they always

did if he dared to ask a question.

"Your new school uniform," she said.

Harry looked in the bowl again.

"Oh," he said, "I didn't realize it had to be so wet."

"DotA be stupid," snapped Aunt Petunia. "I'm dyeing some of Dudley's old

things gray for you. It'll look just like everyone else's when I've

finished."

Harry seriously doubted this, but thought it best not to argue. He sat

down at the table and tried not to think about how he was going to look

on his first day at Stonewall High -- like he was wearing bits of old

elephant skin, probably.

Dudley and Uncle Vernon came in, both with wrinkled noses because of the

smell from Harry's new uniform. Uncle Vernon opened his newspaper as

usual and Dudley banged his Smelting stick, which he carried everywhere,

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on the table.

They heard the click of the mail slot and flop of letters on the

doormat.

"Get the mail, Dudley," said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

"Make Harry get it."

"Get the mail, Harry."

"Make Dudley get it."

"Poke him with your Smelting stick, Dudley."

Harry dodged the Smelting stick and went to get the mail. Three things

lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon's sister Marge, who was

vacationing on the Isle of Wight, a brown envelope that looked like a

bill, and -- a letter for Harry.

Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like a giant

elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who

would? He had no friends, no other relatives -- he didn't belong to the

library, so he'd never even got rude notes asking for books back. Yet

here it was, a letter, addressed so plainly there could be no mistake:

Mr. H. Potter

The Cupboard under the Stairs

4 Privet Drive

Little Whinging

Surrey

The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the

address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp.

Turning the envelope over, his hand trembling, Harry saw a purple wax

seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake

surrounding a large letter H.

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"Hurry up, boy!" shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. "What are you

doing, checking for letter bombs?" He chuckled at his own joke.

Harry went back to the kitchen, still staring at his letter. He handed

Uncle Vernon the bill and the postcard, sat down, and slowly began to

open the yellow envelope.

Uncle Vernon ripped open the bill, snorted in disgust, and flipped over

the postcard.

"Marge's ill," he informed Aunt Petunia. "Ate a funny whelk. --."

"Dad!" said Dudley suddenly. "Dad, Harry's got something!"

Harry was on the point of unfolding his letter, which was written on the

same heavy parchment as the envelope, when it was jerked sharply out of

his hand by Uncle Vernon.

"That's mine!" said Harry, trying to snatch it back.

"Who'd be writing to you?" sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open

with one hand and glancing at it. His face went from red to green faster

than a set of traffic lights. And it didn't stop there. Within seconds

it was the grayish white of old porridge.

"P-P-Petunia!" he gasped.

Dudley tried to grab the letter to read it, but Uncle Vernon held it

high out of his reach. Aunt Petunia took it curiously and read the first

line. For a moment it looked as though she might faint. She clutched her

throat and made a choking noise.

"Vernon! Oh my goodness -- Vernon!"

They stared at each other, seeming to have forgotten that Harry and

Dudley were still in the room. Dudley wasn't used to being ignored. He

gave his father a sharp tap on the head with his Smelting stick.

"I want to read that letter," he said loudly. want to read it," said

Harry furiously, "as it's mine."

"Get out, both of you," croaked Uncle Vernon, stuffing the letter back

inside its envelope.

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Harry didn't move.

I WANT MY LETTER!" he shouted.

"Let me see it!" demanded Dudley.

"OUT!" roared Uncle Vernon, and he took both Harry and Dudley by the

scruffs of their necks and threw them into the hall, slamming the

kitchen door behind them. Harry and Dudley promptly had a furious but

silent fight over who would listen at the keyhole; Dudley won, so Harry,

his glasses dangling from one ear, lay flat on his stomach to listen at

the crack between door and floor.

"Vernon," Aunt Petunia was saying in a quivering voice, "look at the

address -- how could they possibly know where he sleeps? You don't think

they're watching the house?"

"Watching -- spying -- might be following us," muttered Uncle Vernon

wildly.

"But what should we do, Vernon? Should we write back? Tell them we don't

want --"

Harry could see Uncle Vernon's shiny black shoes pacing up and down the

kitchen.

"No," he said finally. "No, we'll ignore it. If they don't get an

answer... Yes, that's best... we won't do anything....

"But --"

"I'm not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn't we swear when we took

him in we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense?"

That evening when he got back from work, Uncle Vernon did something he'd

never done before; he visited Harry in his cupboard.

"Where's my letter?" said Harry, the moment Uncle Vernon had squeezed

through the door. "Who's writing to me?"

"No one. it was addressed to you by mistake," said Uncle Vernon shortly.

"I have burned it."

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"It was not a mistake," said Harry angrily, "it had my cupboard on it."

"SILENCE!" yelled Uncle Vernon, and a couple of spiders fell from the

ceiling. He took a few deep breaths and then forced his face into a

smile, which looked quite painful.

"Er -- yes, Harry -- about this cupboard. Your aunt and I have been

thinking... you're really getting a bit big for it... we think it might

be nice if you moved into Dudley's second bedroom.

"Why?" said Harry.

"Don't ask questions!" snapped his uncle. "Take this stuff upstairs,

now."

The Dursleys' house had four bedrooms: one for Uncle Vernon and Aunt

Petunia, one for visitors (usually Uncle Vernon's sister, Marge), one

where Dudley slept, and one where Dudley kept all the toys and things

that wouldn't fit into his first bedroom. It only took Harry one trip

upstairs to move everything he owned from the cupboard to this room. He

sat down on the bed and stared around him. Nearly everything in here was

broken. The month-old video camera was lying on top of a small, working

tank Dudley had once driven over the next door neighbor's dog; in the

corner was Dudley's first-ever television set, which he'd put his foot

through when his favorite program had been canceled; there was a large

birdcage, which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school

for a real air rifle, which was up on a shelf with the end all bent

because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books. They

were the only things in the room that looked as though they'd never been

touched.

From downstairs came the sound of Dudley bawling at his mother, I don't

want him in there... I need that room... make him get out...."

Harry sighed and stretched out on the bed. Yesterday he'd have given

anything to be up here. Today he'd rather be back in his cupboard with

that letter than up here without it.

Next morning at breakfast, everyone was rather quiet. Dudley was in

shock. He'd screamed, whacked his father with his Smelting stick, been

sick on purpose, kicked his mother, and thrown his tortoise through the

greenhouse roof, and he still didn't have his room back. Harry was

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thinking about this time yesterday and bitterly wishing he'd opened the

letter in the hall. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia kept looking at each

other darkly.

When the mail arrived, Uncle Vernon, who seemed to be trying to be nice

to Harry, made Dudley go and get it. They heard him banging things with

his Smelting stick all the way down the hall. Then he shouted, "There's

another one! 'Mr. H. Potter, The Smallest Bedroom, 4 Privet Drive --'"

With a strangled cry, Uncle Vernon leapt from his seat and ran down the

hall, Harry right behind him. Uncle Vernon had to wrestle Dudley to the

ground to get the letter from him, which was made difficult by the fact

that Harry had grabbed Uncle Vernon around the neck from behind. After a

minute of confused fighting, in which everyone got hit a lot by the

Smelting stick, Uncle Vernon straightened up, gasping for breath, with

Harry's letter clutched in his hand.

"Go to your cupboard -- I mean, your bedroom," he wheezed at Harry.

"Dudley -- go -- just go."

Harry walked round and round his new room. Someone knew he had moved out

of his cupboard and they seemed to know he hadn't received his first

letter. Surely that meant they'd try again? And this time he'd make sure

they didn't fail. He had a plan.