

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, 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.

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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."

"Don't 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."